DANSE MACABRE AND OTHER STORIES

A Psychoanalytic Perspective on Global Dynamics

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and
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We dedicate this book with loving memories to our husbands
Robert Brunning and Eric Miller

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Why this book now?

In creating this book, our primary task was to consider how psychodynamic and systemic perspectives, theories, and concepts might be utilised in seeking to explain certain global phenomena. The practical and primary aim of this book is to stimulate wider reflection and discussion amongst active citizens on the issues raised, rather than to achieve merely a critical deconstruction of the psychoanalytical framework. In order to do this we broadened our own perspective by inviting other writers to contribute to each theme and in so doing they created a story within each of the stories that we wrote. In this way we aimed to introduce different perspectives in order to help us grapple with the complexity of our contemporary world, where these global phenomena seem to be in constant flux, reconfiguring and rearranging themselves, as if in a frantic kaleidoscope, with inevitable, unavoidable, and inescapable turbulence.

As in our previous work, we attempt to create a coherent framework in order to conceptualise global dynamics and to achieve this we use a matrix form. The matrix, a classic two-by-two table, contains dialectic dynamic forces for both good and evil, love and hate, creation and destruction. We take a closer look at the plethora of phenomena which

we see arising within the matrix. Using a socioanalytic and psychoanalytic approach we attempt to analyse them, to look at their antecedents, and to offer some tentative hypotheses. Each story that we have written addresses a particular theme—but not every theme—that is currently a preoccupation in contemporary society and beyond. With each story we try to elucidate what is going on at a conscious level and to understand from a system psychodynamic perspective what might be going on beneath the surface.

Yiannis Gabriel, in his introduction to *Storytelling in Organizations*, states:

> It is now widely agreed that stories are part of sensemaking process that can be researched in situ, without that burdensome requirement of social science research—the need to establish validity of claims, the facts behind allegations, the truth behind the tales. For, as it has been widely argued, the truth of a story lies not in the facts, but in the meaning. (2000, p. 4)

The framework used in our book combines psychoanalytic thinking with system psychodynamics. It therefore integrates the group relations approach with psychoanalytic and open systems perspectives. These are drawn from the work of Eric Miller, Eric Trist, Ken Rice, Pierre Turquet, David Armstrong, and many other original thinkers from the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations who developed the open systems concepts originating with the work of Kurt Lewin (1947a, 1947b), and who had recognised the importance of studying groups as a whole. Developing this idea further provided a perspective for understanding questions of task, authority, role, boundaries, systems, the structure and functioning of organisations as well as of larger systems, and formed a basis for helping them to change.

Gould, in the introduction to a book honouring the contributions of Eric Miller to this field (Gould, Stapley, & Stein, 2001, p. 3), clarified that the "psychodynamic" designation refers to *psychoanalytic perspectives* on individual experiences and mental processes (e.g. transference, resistances, object relations, fantasy, etc.) as well as on the experiences of unconscious group and social processes, which are simultaneously both a source and a consequence of unresolved or unrecognised organisational difficulties.

The work of Isabel Menzies Lyth (1960) on how the existence of primitive anxieties in some systems mobilises social defence systems against them, is a crucial part of system psychodynamic understanding. Her work on social defences as analogous to the notion of individual defence mechanisms, such as splitting and projection, which are central to psychoanalytic theory and practice, enabled the possibility of applying psychoanalytic theory to much wider systems. These defences, as with psychological functioning, can impede or facilitate task performance and the capacity to change and adapt to different needs.

Beyond organisational dynamics, however, Eric Miller, in his role as policy adviser to OPUS (Organisation for Promoting the Understanding of Society) went on to consider applying a system psychodynamic perspective to the understanding of society (Khaleelee & Miller, 1985). In thinking about society as an intelligible field of study, they widened the framework for considering whether, as with other systems—individual, group, and organisation—society could be considered to be an understandable system. "'Society' … is clearly not synonymous with 'nation' or 'state'. It is a more formless notion, though occasionally given a boundary by being equated with 'country'" (p. 378). The evidence that society can be studied as a system is the way in which society is used as a projective container. "Bits of the self are projected into bits of society; yet at the same time the individual acknowledges that he is part of society." The paper argues that in contrast to our membership of other groups, the inescapable group is society, a system in which all of us participate actively or passively, even hermits.

In contrast to other group memberships the nature and quality of splitting and projection is different. Whereas in corporate settings, such as manufacturing business, projection into such systems leads to a confirmation of role and identity through introjecting a sense of knowing one's place, in society, such splitting and projection has different outcomes. This is because the combination of size and physical dispersion permits projection into whole categories of people or whole groups of institutions, such as big business, the rich, or even into an ideology such as capitalism, but the common characteristic is that the category being utilised is one with which the individual has very little contact. Those who are personally known are often seen as exceptions to the rule. This enables positive personal relationship to be maintained while rejecting and keeping at a distance whole categories of otherness.

At the extreme,

> The use of societal containers for negative projections may have a function in enabling organizations to hold together despite deep internal conflicts. Splits can be limited by projection into an ultimate societal "them" … and even into an abstraction such as "the recession" or "changing society". (Ibid.)

Underpinning these considerations is the notion or question: does society have an unconscious in the same way that we think about individuals, groups, and organisations? And does society use the defence mechanisms (A. Freud, 1936) of splitting, projection, displacement, regression, and so on at large system level? Many of our stories use this way of thinking to try to offer a perspective on what is happening in our contemporary, fast-moving, and changing world.

Another strong influence on the book is Gordon Lawrence. His definition of enquiry separates the "politics of salvation" from the "politics of revelation" and it seems especially relevant here. He saw these two positions as such:

> Politics of salvation is characterized by the belief that for all difficulties there is a solution that transcends the skill or experience of those needing help, and this can be supplied by a higher power in the case of religious issues or, in other cases, by experts-therapists, physicians, consultants—who possess knowledge that can help them "cure" or solve the problem presented by the client. The complications of modern life and the rapid rate of change makes the politics of salvation obsolete. Everyone, not just the sufferer or client, is in need of new knowledge. This requires a politics of revelation in which expert and supplicant must collaborate to discern new paths of action. (2000, p. 165)

Why is this definition important? First of all, Lawrence alludes to the problem of making absolute statements as opposed to making hypothetical statements; he differentiates between the authority imposed from above, as opposed to the authority emerging from below;

and finally, he removes the mantle of truth from the singular authority in favour of a multiverse authority developed through and as a result of a process of collaborative co-creation that takes into account new possibilities and novel solutions.

It is our desire to offer this book from a position that might lead to developing a hypothetical and a co-created endeavour. This means that we are at the same time both *the supplicants* (in this case those affected by unpredictable global dynamics) and *the experts* (in this case psychodynamically informed psychologists). This book is a result of an inner dialogue, oscillation, and interaction between these two positions that reside within each one of us and between the two of us as a pair of co-authors. Perhaps this process is also a symbolic microcosm of society?

At this very point in our history, we also see a spectre of something else: the medieval danse macabre. It is looming over us, reminding us that we are being perilously positioned somewhere between Eros and Thanatos, life and death, with Thanatos appearing to be gaining the upper hand.

For the book cover, we chose a painting by Edvard Munch called *Dance of Life* (painted in 1899–1890). Art historians see this as a symbolic struggle between life and death represented by the pairing of a man and a woman engaged in an erotic, engulfing dance. The woman wraps her red dress around the man's feet, an act which is potentially unsettling for his rigid upright form. The central pair is symmetrically framed by the figure of a young woman in white on the left and a much older woman in black on the right. These figures respectively represent purity, youth, opening of life and love on the left, and old age, knowledge, wisdom, but also sorrow and death on the right. The Norwegian seashore, upon which the annual dance during the feast of St John the Baptist is held, symbolises stillness and timelessness. The horizontal line pushes the boundaries away from the horizon and frames the human drama exclusively within the earthly realm. The phallic-shaped moon hangs over the flat horizon of the seashore but fails to illuminate the human group engaged in the dance. The same dance is repeated from background to foreground and back again, replicating the pairing of black and white elements of the two women, thus indicating that life and death go on in perpetuity. In this still and understated image, we have

presented the three crucial elements: Eros, Thanatos, and the dance that slowly morphs into a danse macabre due to its inescapable nature that is simultaneously imprisoning, repetitious, tormenting, and sorrowful. What better to illustrate the main theme of this book than a painting which shows that under the observed surface there is a much deeper layer of meaning alive with interpretation. (See "Edvard Munch Dance of Life", 2016.)

We cannot satisfy all projections, nor meet everyone's interpretations. We can only attempt to adopt and keep a meta-perspective rather than a party political or an ideological position from which we offer our own scope upon the world. We structured the book into several stories, each offering a stand-alone analysis of a theme, all interconnected by a desire to find a binding envelope of meaning. Each story ends on a "story within a story", where we invited other contributors to offer their own take on a specific aspect of the theme linked to the particular chapter. This is an aspect which we felt essential to consider, but one in which our own expertise was insufficient. In so doing we reconceptualised the entire project as an extended storytelling exercise.

As we were preparing to send the manuscript to be produced in March 2020 the world was woken up by the shock of an epidemic caused by a new pathogen, a coronavirus which soon morphed into a global pandemic. We could not have allowed the book to be released without incorporating this paradigm-shifting moment in our history. We have tried to weave the theme of pandemic through the book, describing its antecedents and its impact on the globalised interconnected world, asking what long-term changes will it bring to the world.

Bearing in mind a fast-moving and unpredictable global scenario it seems relevant to mention that this book was sent to the publisher for processing in late May 2020, in other words, well before all the consequences of the pandemic became apparent, which are still emerging. We subsequently inserted additional relevant information as the printing process developed to keep the volume up to date. Let us end by quoting Eric Erikson (1950), that "we have nothing to offer except a way of looking at things".

Introduction

Richard Morgan-Jones

"Memoir of the Future"

Thus the dancers move,
Forward,
… and … then back.
From where do they come?
To where do they go?
Movement across the senses;
Sense across the moves;
Thus, the memoir of the future
Ends with the dawn of oblivion and
… as the music and the dance close
With unfolding memories
Of living and dying.
(see Bion, 1990)

Dear Reader

Look, I don't know how you came to open this book and at this particular page. You may have picked it up in a bookshop or a bookstall.

You may have downloaded a sample from the publisher. You may not have opened this page first. Why should you? Many people's curiosity is aroused first by the contents. Others search the references or the index for familiar or unfamiliar possibilities. Others still search the back cover for the words of appreciation by experts. You may know something about the field where this book has been shelved awaiting your attention. Yes, *your* attention.

Now every book has a beginning and a past. What is at stake is: "Will it have a future in your thinking?" How you approach this book will surely have had antecedent pasts of your history linked to the contemporary events this book records. These the authors describe as the "volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous" societal and emotional currents shaping our world. But whether they have a future and of what possible kind they explore in the last chapter after a deep and wide survey of key tensions and trends across global dynamics. But I am getting ahead of myself and anticipating the final and in my view most exciting and creative of chapters, and therefore risk colluding with you in avoiding the life lived through unfolding experience.

American philosopher William James (1890) wrote: "My experience is what I agree to attend to." This book attends to creating links, as does the psychoanalyst in seeking patterns in a patient's free associations. It is through such associations that what is unconscious or traumatised in the mind can be freed and connections made that are otherwise hidden or blinded from sight. But first we must pay attention to what our senses tell us both from within and from outside ourselves. This is the essence of the method of this book. It moves between the internal workings of minds and the vast canvas of current and recent changes in the affairs of the world.

I have begun with a focus on your experience as a reader of this book, to open what is to be revealed within its covers. James' suggestion is that we pay attention to our experience, receive it, reflect on it, think hard about the shapes it makes in us and then use it as a beginning point in forging new thoughts that we don't yet know, nor understand. I can promise you at this point, reader, that if you follow the chains and links of thought in this book you are in for an experience that will open your eyes and your mind to new thoughts and new ideas that you will be able to add to. This is because, above all, this book is a creative endeavour between two creative minds, you and the world around us.

The book begins

Creativity is a process that demands different stages, evoking different moods in the creative mind. Some involve loss and letting go, which evokes the core theme in this book about life and death as the key forces that shape our destinies. There is a saying that "you can't tell a book from its cover". With this book I think you can, or at least a lot about it. The cover picture is a first clue about the authors' creativity. There is a sombre mood of threatening weather hanging over the dance. Some people have partners, some not. Some seem to be moving, others not, one in the foreground is in a clinch, but others seem to swirl on their own, unfettered by what is going on, lost perhaps in their own experience of the music. Joy, intimacy, loneliness, anticipation, and the rhythms of the music echo the lifelong dance of life and death. Such moods echo the accompanying stages of creativity, albeit different for different people at different stages.

Gordon (1978) describes five stages of creativity:

1. First insight—
2. Preparation—with its immersion in data and method
3. Incubation—awaiting further intuition and maybe sleep or dreaming
4. Illumination—the discovery of a new dream or thought
5. Verification—conscious planned development and testing.

I don't know what your preferred experience and pace of reading might be as you explore this book. My own echoed one of the implicit themes in the book about the sheer pace of living and newscasting 24/7 that risks flooding and bombarding. Any book doing justice to the range of material covered here will need to be as thorough as this one. However, just as in the process of creativity there is a time for thinking and a time for waiting, a time for gathering and a time for detailed analysis, so it may be for you the reader, as you rove across this maybe sometimes surprising landscape. What is startling, at least in my experience, is the combination of range of material and depth of thinking formulated in a series of hypotheses, each one of which worth pausing to take in, digest, and test its truth.

In teamwork, members may specialise in one creative stage over another. It was Halina Brunning who "dreamt the book up". While both

authors are soaked in the depth and range of approaches and evidence for systems psychoanalytic thinking across several decades, Halina Brunning has a particular gift for dreaming up the shape of things and seeing an overview of the range of emerging issues in society (see Brunning & Perini, 2010; Brunning, 2012, 2014). Olya Khaleelee shares this overview "spirit of the times" but also has a particular eye for relevant evidence and a capacity to arrange and organise in a shape that makes it accessible and ring true. Additionally, both authors have a keen eye for the testable hypotheses of others in the field, as with the generous inclusion of "story" material from six other authors.

So, where did this book begin? Well, it was in Warsaw, Poland in 2014. I had been invited by Halina Brunning to join her fellow author Olya Khaleelee in a workshop venture organised by her with Anna Zajenkowska, under the title "Poland on the Couch" (see Zajenkowska, 2016). The aim was to "psychoanalyse" Poland in a conference that drew on the experience of a range of mainly Polish presenters along with ourselves. The task was to gather a whole range of perspectives about experiences and meanings from the past and current history of Poland. Additionally, we were to design a couple of experience-based group learning events from the group relations tradition in order to provide some psychological and emotional processing space and to make sense of the workshop experience as a whole. Halina Brunning was to assist her Polish colleague in hosting a Social Dreaming matrix and I persuaded the others that I would run two sessions of what is now called a "Trilogy Event" designed to make links between:

1. Individual experience and perception
2. Group and societal dynamics
3. Contextual experiences from the present, past, and future, social, economic, political, and cultural.

To explore these three dimensions, members sat in three concentric circles and listened while each circle focused on one dimension and related it to the others (Morgan-Jones, in press). In Warsaw, in this conference, the focus was on Poland as a nation and the experience of being Polish among its citizens represented in the conference.

The day before the conference, Halina Brunning had taken Olya Khaleelee and me on a tour around Warsaw. We saw the remains of the

Jewish ghetto, watched a film about the devastating bombardment by the Nazi German army and the siege of Warsaw. We witnessed the history of Poland, a state traumatised by having been erased from the map of Europe for 146 years by the German, Russian, and Austro-Hungarian empires. It was Poland where Hitler launched an invasion early in the Second World War and it was Poland where he initiated the Holocaust with the extermination camps, primarily, for the Jews. We also witnessed the extraordinary resilience of the Polish people, for their language and culture in the teeth of centuries-long onslaught. Yet they survived and now thrive in being the fastest growing economy in Europe.

The following morning, on the walk to the venue, Halina Brunning announced that she had woken with a dream that was to change what it was that she was going to present … and so this group received her inspiring initial model that her unconscious mind had produced for us to consider and think with. This model is expanded in Chapter 1, building on previous writings by the two main authors on the life and death, power and vulnerability themes, all consequences of working through this dream and this model of thinking (Brunning & Khaleelee, 2015, 2018a).

Now if there is one key theory in use that walks across each and every page of this book, it is that the actions and thoughts, even the dreams of individuals can be thought of as representing something of the whole story. The part for the whole. The leader voicing something embedded in the culture revealing an edge seeking expression, the group dynamic that reveals what is really going on beneath the surface of a social or political phenomenon. Halina Brunning began an act of leadership in her dreaming that day and this book followed, as now are you.

To launch this journey for you the reader, in whatever way you may choose to read this book, I have surveyed six themes to explore.

1. Life and death

To Sabina Spielrein, a woman in a man's world, and a controversial Russian figure in Freud's "Psychological Wednesday Society" in Vienna of 1911, may be attributed the founding of the phrase and analysis of "the death instinct". In 1904 she was Jung's first analytic patient. It was only later after her discharge and an affair with Jung (that may have also contributed to the split between Jung and Freud), that she distanced herself

from him and joined Freud's inner circle. She clearly had an influence on the thinking of both men, Freud with his developing of an understanding of human destructiveness, Jung with his views on polarities (Cronenberg, 2011; Rice, 1993).

In her paper "Destruction as cause of becoming", she explored the nature of the contradictory sexual complex with "the destructive instinct" as part of a sexual complex. For her this involved "the transformation instinct which every isolated complex possesses". She also described the destructive component of the sexual drive as "an expression of a sexual wish for dissolution" (Spielrein, 2012). For her, destruction was a necessary experience for transformation from an original position into a new one. Consequently, she can be seen as one of the key contributors to psychoanalytic as well as organisational and political theories of transformation, echoing, no doubt, the growing surge in Russia for revolutionary change in its cruelly over-stratified society.

Tempting as it is to see Spielrein's work as unique and original, Britton (2003) has noted that her original fusing of Thanatos with Eros was born of a romantic fascination with merger and self-sacrifice that hid a sexual and unresolved Oedipus complex. It was this, he suggests, that was hysterically enacted with Jung who preferred to see a more spiritual meaning in her transference towards him. This unresolved, frustrated Oedipal wish for one parent's exclusive sexuality and love was to be replayed in the intimacy of the psychoanalytic consulting room in a fantasied love affair with the attentive analyst. What Jung enacted with Spielrein robbed her of her treatment and insight, even if it heralded such a vital aspect of the relationship between Eros and Thanatos that needed Freud's and Klein's clinical acumen to unpack. What Britton points to is the instinct in a person for death-dealing destructiveness. It is as if, even beyond romantic fascination "half in love with easeful death" (Keats, 1819), the drive towards repression of vital parts of the self as a means of surviving them demands either blindness or exporting the destructiveness elsewhere through blame, projection, and projective identification.

Followers of Melanie Klein develop Freud's articulation of the death drive as the Nirvana principle, drawing the mind towards entropy and annihilation (Segal, 1993). This heralds a desperate defence and retreat against the "too muchness" of invading and overloading sensations of lived experience as traumatising experiences. It becomes key to understanding the expression of aggressiveness

and defences against it, that proliferate attempts at power relations described in this book. Such dynamics are both conscious and unconscious. They are both part of the political and economic forces that wilfully and deliberately exploit power for competitive advantage and political ambition. The authors define these as "power over …" rather than "power to …". The fact that they form part of the *chosen innocence* of citizens who are implicated in these plots and plans makes this a book that is intersubjective and circular in its exploration of the dynamics of society. Throughout the authors seek to see both the motives and the actions of leaders as well as the collusions of citizens within a human-created culture that is denied and treated like a monstrous inexorable machine.

The theme of our own collusion in a political system Halina Brunning introduced into systems psychoanalytic thinking through the third of her edited collections of diverse "Psychoanalytic Essays" (Brunning & Perini, 2010; Brunning 2012, 2014), under the theme of "Power and Vulnerability". As the second named author of this book wrote in the introduction to the last of those volumes:

> This fascinating book … provides a powerful way of analysing and understanding how the inner world of the individual is mobilised in relation to the group, the organisation, society and globally, from the perspective of the close interconnection between power and vulnerability. (Khaleelee, 2014, p. xxiii)

Throughout this book the themes of self and other destructiveness, lies and deceptions appear on almost each and every page.

So, if forces of life and death are key themes, how do these show up in the truths of history and the history of truths?

2. History and interpretation: truths and falsehoods

Is this book an account of historical events? It certainly produces aspects of a critique to explore what events mean and how they are being interpreted, and to this extent it provides a critical appreciation of interpretations currently trending. However, it goes further. By providing a clear set of lenses from psychosocial perspectives, it creates a meta-framework through which to interpret contemporary history.

Twentieth-century novelist and philosopher Aldous Huxley wrote: "Men do not learn much from the lessons of history and that is the most important of all the lessons of history" (1959). Against such a background, the authors enable the lessons of history through the interactional patterning of emotions and psychological dynamics conscious and unconscious.

Nevertheless, historians continue to disagree. Historian Walter Benjamin (1940) wrote: "To articulate what is past does not mean to recognize 'how it really was'. It means to take control of a memory, as it flashes in a moment of danger." This depends on the writer's interpretative stance.

This view does not just represent a postmodern view of history, but one that is close to the psychoanalytic approach adopted by the authors. History is the *past presented* (Bion, 1977). For the psychoanalytic clinician what the patient speaks is modified by memory and subsequent experience, as well as by the current stage of the emerging relationship between themselves and the therapist in the light of what that relationship, the therapeutic setting, and their current internal emotional state is creating. To that extent, a patient's history is like a dream, reworking the past in the present. This then leads to the attempt to produce evidence to be worked into an interpretation.

From a psychoanalytic stance, it could be argued therefore that history is, like psychoanalysis, a reconstruction. But what if there were no witnesses at original events who were enabled to find a voice, through broadcasting or publication. Likewise, supposing, as with many experiences surfacing in therapeutic work, the trauma was so much a body blow to the system that it was necessary for the person or even the group to dissociate. As one patient who had been tortured once told me, "It was vital to get away, as far as I could, from my own body and my own mind. I must survive by not letting myself know what was happening to me, even after the event." In this sense then the work of psychoanalysis, like the telling of history, can be seen not as reconstruction, but as "construction"—a telling for the first time of a narrative hitherto not even entered into as an experience and so denied relevance.

A vivid example of such witness testimony from history can be read in the work of Belarussian researcher Svetlana Alexievich whose powerful collections of witness memory in *Last Witnesses* (1985) and *Secondhand Time* (2013), demonstrate the serial traumatisation, of the

"Great Patriotic War" (1939–1940) and of a nation through the Stalin years. It is often assumed by nations that the aggressor in warfare is not traumatised. European wars, like other wars, tell a different story, as does the comparative silence of the experience of soldiers and citizens after the two world wars of the past century, in the Vietnam, Iraq, and Syrian conflicts.

If this book is a construction of new thinking, this leads us to another critical question: does this mean then that a psychosocial perspective of these authors is a kind of fiction, a work of imagination? One response might be, "Yes, but are not all histories of this sort?" and "How much has psychoanalytic thinking now pervaded culture within the work of the contemporary historian?"

Russia: object of anxiety or source of divisiveness

In *The Russia Anxiety: And How History Can Resolve It*, Mark Smith (2019) argues that, "From the nineteenth century, the international press saw Russia as a furious bear, shaking its paws … waiting to be unleashed on its neighbours." He writes of Vladimir Putin under whose leadership, "Russia emerged from the chaos and misery of the 1990s. He established a stable economy that was more flexible and open than before, and that raised living standards, at least in metropolitan centres" (loc. 459). This, he notes, argues against the view most often expressed by his students and reinforced by Western press, that Russia is a kleptocratic state with a nationalistic leadership focused on expansion with a thin veneer of democracy.

Against this popular view he produces convincing evidence that could well fit with the psychoanalytic perceptiveness of the authors of this book, namely that there has grown up a vicious and unwarranted projective identification into the nation that is Russia and its leadership where Western leaders deposit their unwanted aspirations and colonialism onto Russia as if they were the innocent party and Russia always the actual or potential aggressor, breaking rules others keep. He suggests, in discussing the 2014 Russian annexation of the Crimea, that Russia might hold legitimate cultural, linguistic, and political as well as strategic claims over Eastern Ukraine whatever the ruthlessness of the disguised and aggressive invasion of the Donetsk.

In this light we can reconsider whether the post-1990 perception in the West that the ideological battle between communism and capitalism had been won for good (Fukuyama, 1992). Yet to the dismay of Mikhail Gorbachev (2013), a key author of rapprochement with the West, this triumph of capitalism was treated as a victory rather than an opportunity for open dialogue and real appreciation of what a new partnership might bring between East and West. In this light, NATO bringing nuclear weapons up to the boundaries of Russia in Eastern Europe and the encouragement of exclusively pro-European leadership in Ukraine was an expansionist colonialism that drew from Russian leadership approaches to politics that legitimised their motives. To the Russians, Smith argues, NATO and EU power politics were humiliating insults. These, along with the licence to invade another sovereign country by American and British and other Western forces in Iraq, provided more than enough provocation for the Ukrainian war in defence of maintaining a protective barrier around its borders upon which the West was encroaching. And, as far as a hybrid war is concerned, Russia was doing no more but no less than America had done for years in Latin America to further its interests by resourcing guerrilla warfare by groups seeking to undermine or overthrow the sitting government.

By contrast Timothy Snyder paints a different view of modern Russian history (2017). He explores the use of propaganda and disinformation by Putin's leadership that attempted to disguise the mobilisation of non-uniformed troops in Ukraine and resourced local freedom fighters against the democratically elected regime to annexe Eastern Ukraine and create a civil war between the Russian speaking part of Ukraine and the Western orientated government.

In analysing Russian propaganda, Snyder suggests that it was the "politics of inevitability" that were used to create a narrative for Russians at home that Russia was the innocent party who had been robbed of part of its rightful empire that only through righting the truths of justice and Russian culture in the Donetsk region could history fulfil its destiny in finding a home in the Russian Empire; denying that in fact Russian president Khrushchev had given them away in his post-Stalin modernisation programme in 1954. Snyder describes this as a form of *sado-fascism*, techniques for splitting cruelly and deliberately extremist

a Holocaust denier had defamed him. He argued that he could not be a Holocaust denier because there was no Holocaust to deny.

The experience of witnessing and reporting on this bizarre case in which truth and lies of huge significance were at stake led Freedland under the pseudonym of Sam Bourne (2019) to write a novel, *To Kill the Truth*, set in the USA, in which there was a legal case to deny that slavery had been a fact.

The exposure of the relationship societally, historically, and politically between truth and lies, the exposure of the experience of fake news, and the political regression to the right and white supremacy are key themes in the novel.

Joost Merloo was a Jewish psychiatrist and psychoanalyst working in the Netherlands during the Second World War. He escaped to the USA in 1943. His account in *The Rape of the Mind: The Psychology of Thought Control, Menticide, and Brainwashing* (1956) describes in detail the conscious attempt by totalitarian leaders in Nazi Germany and in Korea, Soviet Russia, and elsewhere to use their armies of occupation, and secret police, to create a reign of terror.

He describes techniques of torture, physical and mental, abuse of medication, psychological warfare, mental blackmail, the creation of mass delusion. These were in the twentieth century part of the all too familiar "playbook" of the dictator, but with the culture wars and battle for mass populist movements to fill the void of uncertainty about the future, they have returned as legitimised aspects of the political will to power. He describes these techniques as seeking the robotisation of the masses through "verbocracy" and technology.

But if these are the conscious dynamics of truth and lies, what might be those that are unconscious and the consequence of mass trauma and denial in the consciousness of society and international relations?

Humiliation trauma

Historian Walter Benjamin (1940) wrote that "When the angel of history cannot perform his or her duty the process of history produces unsolved conflicts and losses that are not yet mourned, which, as we know, is what ghosts are made of."

popular movements away from compromising liberal democracy and towards undermining political institutions in the West, including in the European Union.

These conflicted attempts at *power over others* link to a key theme in Chapter 2 about disappearing containers, while Chapter 3 examines the failure of institutional and political centrist diplomacy. Additionally, he observes what he calls the "politics of eternity" being used as a religious phrase to confirm the god-given and Orthodox Church blessed right of Russia to fulfil its mission to control as much as possible of its one-time great empire stretching from Eastern Asia to the edge of Europe. Chapter 4 takes up this theme of religious motivations and appeals for leadership.

By illustrating the way history and historians can diverge so markedly, I wish not just to ask the question of the reader of this book, what sort of history conveys truthful interpretations, but to ask what sort of history is the retelling of the global aspects of contemporary society as portrayed in the chapters in this book, particularly in becoming psychoanalytic?

The approach in this book includes taking a long hard look at many sides of complex political interactions from a psychosocial stance. This involves seeking to understand the projective mechanisms evacuated from citizens, movements of thought and leaders in the direction of others, and also how these mechanisms are being used in the modern world, not least with the control and support of the internet and the press to create situations where power over citizens and other countries compromises democracy.

This is nowhere better illustrated than in Chapter 4 on leadership that asks the question, "What creates a leader?" Is it their personality so that we may psychoanalyse them from their researched history, or is it, using the idea from group relations thinking, that they are mobilised by forces that are unconscious and relate to projections from wider political agents, culture, and economic circumstances?

3. Contested truth and propaganda

Jonathan Freedland, London *Guardian* columnist reported on the David Irving trial. Irving had taken American academic Deborah Lipstadt and her publisher Penguin Books to court for libel, insisting that calling him

In reflecting on research from ten months travelling in ten Eurozone countries, running workshops with different groups of professionals and citizens from different countries, I proposed the following hypothesis:

> That the shaming and humiliating consequences of the 20th century warfare has left the nation states of Europe in a psychological state of post-traumatic stress which has been undigested emotionally. This has created a ghost of history that continues to visit itself on relations between states in the form of economic warfare and competition over market domination that undermines attempts to resolve the current economic crisis. This dynamic I explored in terms of the after-effects of both invading wars in central Europe and civil wars in Spain and Greece. This I conceptualised as humiliation trauma. (Morgan-Jones, 2013, p. 195)

This repeats its suffering and risks becoming a fixated *chosen trauma* (Volkan, 2010) that empowers a sense of grudge and entitlement, when in reality there could be a wider force of history that is shaping the fate of the European nation state and its interrelations.

This idea suggests first that it is the humiliations of war and the invasions and the experience of nations in Europe being occupied by military forces and regimes that has created the need for peaceful settlements. Yet it is worth asking whether there is evidence that the attempts at peace and economic co-operation in fact resolve such trauma or only mask such humiliations. Are they then denied as unconscious emotional disturbances and so are repeated?

But how is loss associated with failure to resolve past trauma? Freud distinguished between mourning and melancholia (1917e). On the face of it they appear similar with dejection, loss of libido and vitality, and an important attachment figure. What differentiates melancholia is that the person or people are tormented by a shameless self-hatred that also aggressively alienates others. Freud suggests that this is the consequence of a taboo on hating the lost person or way of life, resulting in an internal split that precludes the possibility of moving on through grieving and integrating learning from losses.

This creates what Bollas describes as a borderline psychotic state of mind where:

> The borderline split allows no communication between the opposing parts. The dissociative self … is distanced from a traumatized part of the personality, but this is not out of sight—indeed, it is in full view. Unlike the borderline, the dissociated self is walking hand-in-hand with its traumatized other half, like a soldier rescuing a comrade in the field of battle. However, the net effect will be a lack of communication between the two sides; the observing self is strangely indifferent to the self that is wounded. (2018, p. 37)

This book suggests that the dynamics of psychological splitting is key to understanding many current events as is explored particularly in Chapter 3. But first I want to explore the manipulation of this splitting dynamic through *espoused innocence*.

4. The politics of espoused innocence

Developing Freud's concept of denial from the interpsychic and individual to the wider society with its range of group dynamics, Stanley Cohen, a sociology researcher and professor develops an account of the range of ways in which mankind protects a sense of his/her own innocence. His work traces the "states of denial" (2001) used in the avoidance of knowing about atrocities and suffering inflicted through war, imperialist colonialism, and genocide. His list of the all too human capacity to turn a blind eye to what is known is captured in the list of phrases we use to describe such commonplace experience:

> … burying your head in the sand, ignorance is bliss, living a lie, being economical with the truth, there's nothing I can do about it, the plan called for maximum deniability ….

This society-wide denial is nowhere more true than in the history of the Holocaust and anti-Semitism described in Chapter 7, with the use and abuse of Jewish peoples as a target of blame for society's ills, treating

them, as did Hitler, as an infection to be exterminated. But Cohen (2001), despite resistance within Israel, also pioneered Israeli academics collecting data to support organisations seeking to protest against Israeli colonial expansion into Palestinian territory and torture of Palestinians.

What is striking in this shocking list of denials is not just the dynamics of splitting illustrated throughout this book, but also the sense of people's need to protect themselves from the trauma of emotional infection through excessive damage to their own way of life. Evidence for these "politics of innocence" is provided by historian Timothy Snyder (2017, 2018) who develops examples ranging from USA after 9/11 to Russia. It is clearly a dynamic that adds to what Vamık Volkan (2002, 2004, 2010, 2018) has described as the *chosen glory* and *chosen trauma* through which nation states follow leaders who create a national narrative to protect any sense of humiliation when history has been traumatising.

In describing the espoused innocence of Americans following the 9/11 attacks on the New York Trade Centre, Bollas explores how,

> American innocence had been built upon the house of cards of self-idealization. Vulnerable ultimately to incontestable evidence of its capacity for grievous wrongdoing, the Vietnam era opened a fissure in American identity that has never been healed. The nation would be forever divided between those who believed in the war, and may have fought in Vietnam, and those who refused to take part in what they considered to be a war crime. Not a year goes by without the country glorifying the soldiers who took part in that war; about the young people who refused to fight on moral grounds there is complete silence. (2018, p. 37)

5. Trauma and skin for grouping

In describing learning available from the experiential framework of group relations conferences, Pierre Turquet wrote (1975) of "Threats to Identity in the Large Group". He describes the struggle of the individual to join a large group and make a contribution. The experience is "essentially one of search" and "Essential to this joining process is that the singleton should find a boundary or skin which both limits and defines

him" (p. 96). He goes on to suggest that there are two skins, "One is external, the skin of my neighbour, the other internal (my own skin)." This theme is deeply explored around disputed territories of identity politics, racism, and political correctness in Chapter 7.

The coronavirus pandemic

As I write this introduction, the world is shaken by another "world war". The enemy is not an alliance fighting an opposing axis in battles, but rather the uncontrolled health risk to the global population of an unknown incurable virus that attacks the most vulnerable in societies across the world. In the attempted epidemiological cures, nations have locked down their citizens and closed borders to prevent the spread of the disease that could overwhelm health services. In consequence the global economy is at risk of profound recession. Many have now been laid off work and governments have been stretched to provide rescue packages to sustain economic life and exchange as well as keeping vital flows of food and medical supplies available.

This is described creatively in Chapter 8 in an imagined interview with a speaking coronavirus. Here I wanted to link this global traumatisation with another medical crisis, the outbreak of HIV across many societies in the 1980s and particularly, but not exclusively around the gay communities. Social anthropologist Mary Douglas (1992) describes individual and grouped responses to this threat. She outlines four approaches to the experience of being a body in an epidemic:

1. Body as porous—open to unpredictable invasion
2. Body as strong—with efficient immune system that copes with infections
3. Body protected by personal immune "skin" as well as by a community "social skin"
4. Body as a machine with its own protective envelope that is assisted by medical technology.

These are subgroup "social skins" (Turner, 2007) for responses to the virus, each with a different shaping to its internal and external boundaries. She points to four stances in relation to the large group

dynamics of society: the isolate, the individualist, the dissenting enclave, and the central community and explores the dynamics between them as they relate to the distribution of four stances on the body. This analysis provides a development of the kind of thinking that Turquet pioneered in large group dynamics. It suggests how people move between being over-socialised and being isolated and how hard it is to work with different sources of authority and be both an individual but also a member of a large group. Such processes with their inter-group projections provide the key used in these chapters to unlock the dynamics of current affairs.

6. Past, present, and future

Poet T. S. Eliot, writing in the middle of the tumultuous twentieth century of wars and economic depression, records the links between past and present time that are each present in future time. This book collects this project in Chapter 8 in the search for paying attention to antecedents to current events in the good hope that by paying attention to the flow of time, future students of contemporary history might be able to foresee and seek to prevent the dominion of Thanatos beckoning humanity into destruction.

Bion echoes this task, towards the end of his life returning to thinking again about group life through a trilogy of writings reflecting on the many characters he had internalised across a lifetime, as if the script of a group's dialogue. His *Memoir of the Future* begins with *The Dream* (1975), moves through *The Past Presented* (1977), and ends with *The Dawn of Oblivion* (1979). See *The Becoming Room* by Meg Harris Williams (2015).

Having experienced great difficulty in reading this work, I decided to form a group of psychoanalytically minded colleagues to read the third volume as a play, each taking different roles in the read-in. This brought out, quite surprisingly, Bion's dry wit that clearly helped him in surviving the extremes of trauma and tragedy in his life, from his boarding school experiences and being exiled from his much-loved India where he was brought up, from being an officer in the trenches in the First World War to losing his first wife to childbirth, to working as a psychiatrist dealing with shell-shocked patients and helping select officers in the Second World War.

What comes across in the reading is the depth of his understanding of the violence with which the human mind and the human group shut off experience. This brings twin risks. One is that it will be the body that suffers through what existential philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (1849) called "sickness unto death", for its somatic body blows. This is vividly explored through self-damaging addictions in Chapter 6. The other risk is that it will be the body of mankind that will suffer and destroy the Earth's resources and the conditions for each to live. Bion's account of what he calls a "soma-psychotic" madness is paralleled by the way the body of society risks losing containment, the theme of Chapter 2.

It is this task of seeking to account for the movements backwards and forwards as history unfolds across the dance floor of life and death in contemporary society, that this book elaborates. Through this dance of destructiveness and creativity the authors of this book have gathered for us what can be a painful read, yet to do so is to be inspired by their courage and diligent determination to seek truths.

Reader, I wish you well with this unfolding experience.