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group analysis

Book Review

Friedman, Robi and Doron, Yael *Group Analysis in the Land of Milk and Honey (New International Library of Group Analysis)*. Karnac, 2017.

I was asked to review *Group Analysis in the Land of Milk and Honey* shortly after having returned from a trip to Israel where I had attended the 4th International Israeli Institute of Group Analysis Workshop (IIGA). A few days before this workshop, I organized a tour with the Israeli writer, Noga Kadman, around her book, *Erased from Space and Consciousness: Israel and the Depopulated Palestinian Villages of 1948.* Walking through the crumbling remains of the former Palestinian village of Lifta, just west of Jerusalem, haunts the idea of a land of milk and honey. Participating in the IIGA workshop a few days later immersed me in the richness and courage our Israeli colleagues bring to the world of group analysis.

This juxtaposition of Palestinian and Israeli worlds clearly raises the question of the land of milk and honey for whom? The paralysis that occurs around whose side to take in the Israeli Palestinian conflict may make you hesitate to pick up this book. I would encourage you to resist this hesitation as there is a depth, richness, and courage to be found here that will contribute to your practice and teaching. The authors of this book are all Israeli. They are acutely aware that there is often a shortage of milk and honey for some. Earl Hopper, the series editor, mentions this shortage in his forward. I wonder in reading through the traumatic background to the development of group analysis in Israel whether the title of the book isn't ironic in that it has been far from the land of milk and honey for both Israelis and Palestinians, but in very different ways.

The book covers a wide range of topics by 20 authors across theory, practice, and application. The final chapter on the co-creation and history of the Israeli Institute of Group Analysis (IIGA) in some ways could have been the first. The story of the conception and birth traumas of the IIGA is as harrowing as it is inspiring to anyone thinking to start a training programme. The way in which they became a cohesive work group in the face of failed dependency, the shadow of two Intifadas, the assassination of a beloved Prime Minister, the fallout from the Gulf War, and all the conflicts that arise from differences around training requirements, is truly amazing. This book illustrates the accomplishments and the promise coming from the IIGA and challenges those of us working in more peaceful contexts.

The book engages Foulkes and individual psychoanalytic writers in significant ways and creatively brings forward issues that touch on areas for all group therapists.

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The authors bring a depth to the integration of psychoanalytic and group analytic ways of thinking. An example, and there are many, is Llana Laor's chapter where she uses Ghent's ideas about surrender and Bromberg's multiple and not-me states to help the group progress from states of destruction to recognition. This type of integration occurs throughout the book; catalysing creative thought but making it hard to cover 20 diverse chapters in a short review. Even though space limits commentary on every chapter, I found each one challenging me to think in new and useful ways about my work.

The book's first eight chapters are focused on theory. It opens with a chapter by Miriam Berger demonstrating that democratic values are implicit in group analysis. They convey reciprocity, justice, fairness and caring. They lay a foundation for acknowledging 'our differences without domination, coercion, subjugation, or exclusion' (p.6). These values are not only important in the analytic group but in society. Hanni Biran in her chapter, 'Leader, society, sacrifice' develops the type of leader needed for these democratic values to flourish. She uses Bion's reading of the Oedipus myth as a desire to know the truth to discuss three types of knowing: omniscient, professed, and emotional. She sees a deep connection between social processes and the emergence of the leader. Her hope is for a society that can foster an emotional knowing that can hold the suffering of both the Israelis and Palestinian people instead of an 'arrogant knowing which strives for a single exclusive truth' (p. 45). She mentions Anwar Sadat and Yitzhak Rabin as leaders who had a 'profound recognition of social suffering' (p. 41) and the capacity to do the transformative work of mourning to heal an agonized society. 'Women Wage Peace' (Women Wage Peace - Women Wage Peace) and 'Breaking the Silence' (Breaking the Silence) are organizations she mentions that do this kind of reparative work in Israel today. Her hope is for a moderate leader who can find a path between the aggregation of the left and the massification of the right.

Joshua Lavie takes us beyond Oedipus in his theory chapter: 'Beyond Oedipus in group analysis': the sacrifice of boys in the social unconscious of the Israeli people. He sees Israeli society binding their young to the altar of wars and is hopeful that the group analytic tradition in the spirit of Israel's prophets will influence Israeli society to beat their swords into ploughshares. In the Biblical story of Abraham binding his son Isaac to the altar, Lavie points us towards the Kabbalah's reading that pictures Isaac responding to the trauma brought on by his father by forming a new family with Rebekah. He sees Kabbalah as placing the feminine at the centre in a horizontal network akin to what we have in group analysis. This is quite different than the vertical structure that places God on top. He moves us beyond Oedipus through dialogue with the rich textual tradition of Judaism. It is interesting to note that in Islam the Qur'an (37: 102) has Abraham telling his son he has had a dream telling him to sacrifice him and asks his son what he thinks, thus offering a model of dialogue.

Robi Friedman makes use of the Abraham and Isaac story to illustrate what he refers to as the scapegoating position where there is an absence of shame and guilt much as there was in the Biblical interaction between Abraham and Isaac. When this occurs in a group, it is up to the conductor to make sure the two sides of the dialogue reach the group's awareness. This promotes mutual containment, an opportunity for healing and lessons in the possibility of scapegoating.

In Yael Doron's chapter on theory, she uses the concept of the black hole to help her understand herself and her group when a military veteran joins the group. She sees the black hole as a defence against shared anxieties. The man who joined had been

injured through friendly fire. She explains how difficult it is for Israeli society to acknowledge the idea of friendly fire. Her group had difficulty welcoming the veteran and it was months before his story unfolded. His revelations resulted in the group becoming an unsafe place where the group began to attack one another, and the conductor attacked the group. Becoming aware of the denial, shame, and grief around friendly fire helped the group to become a safer place and illustrated how black holes in the foundation matrix can be recapitulated in the dynamic matrix of the group.

The second section of the book is focused on practice. Marit Milstein has a chapter on arrivals and departure in a slow-open group. Slow-open groups provide a space to experience the role of newcomer, the abandoned, and finally the abandoner across the life of one's group membership. These roles resonate with the individual's development. Milstein movingly integrates her own emotional reactions with her patients' arrivals and departures and names the panic and sense of fragmentation anxiety she experienced as a conductor. These anxieties frequently keep many therapists from exploring group as a form of treatment for themselves or others. Her willingness to illustrate how her group's struggle paralleled her own development will be helpful in getting us all to face the insecurities that arise with our own arrivals and departures. Milstein connects her own group's anxieties with the deep existential insecurity experienced by Israeli society and the ways in which 'being a conquering society not only failed to provide the promised security, but intensified insecurity . . .' (p.132). The slow open group makes it an ideal context for patients to explore their development with a conductor that has the courage to make use of her own issues related to insecurity in service of the group and its members.

Sushi Shoshani continues with a wider angle lens on the theme of arrivals and departures. She focuses on Jewish cultural identity, using herself as an example, departing from her motherland of Romania and arriving in her homeland of Israel. Beginning with Abraham, she tells us, 'leaving the motherland and yearning for the Promised Land became an ideal and appears prominently in stories of survival, heroism, and victories of the Jewish people' (p. 205). Shoshani describes the alienation she experienced in Romania as one of rejection and in Israel more like exclusion but in both places, she was a stranger. She uses her personal experience to help her group navigate the us/them dilemma and the superior/inferior dynamic that is often necessary in reworking issues related to cultural identity.

The remaining chapters in the practice section take up age, aggression, combined therapy, and boundary issues. Each brings needed understanding to these areas of group work and stimulate the thinking of any group therapist. Hagit Zohn's chapter on boundaries illustrates the role boundaries play in the need for security and the need for belonging. She wrote the chapter during one of the violent battles on Israel's borders and during a time when one of her groups had an Israeli Arab as a member. The external struggle that emerged in the group made it impossible to provide the security and belonging needed to do the work. Zohn draws a parallel to the security barrier that separates Israelis from a large portion of the Arab population. This wall, she points out, was built for defensive purposes 'Yet, this barrier blocks us from seeing the suffering and need for freedom of others' (p. 145). This is one of the many examples throughout the book where the authors illustrate the difficulties in providing group therapy in a war-torn country. The courage needed to provide empathy to all sides in violent circumstances is exemplary and an inspiration to all who work in contexts where the journey of healing for individuals and society is ongoing. An additional complexity in finding empathy for all sides is that Arabs living in Israel experience

their life very differently than Arabs living in Palestine, that is the West Bank and Gaza.

Applications of group analysis make up the third section of the book covering group analysis in academia, in times of war, in supervision, with children of the Holocaust, and dreams. I will discuss a couple of these in more detail below.

Gila Ofer's chapter presents us with a creative treatment of dreams and dream telling. The fact that dreams are told to someone highlights their interpersonal nature. She provides examples from her groups illustrating the personal level, the group level, and the social level of dreams. She then imaginatively creates a virtual group across time with Freud's Irma dream as a starting point. Erickson, Anzieu, and Blum are all members of this virtual group and offer interpretations focused on the personal, group, and social levels. She concludes her chapter with the focus on the social meaning of dreams as they are worked on within the context of the social dreaming matrix (SDM). Ofer offers an extended example of working with dreams in this manner which encourages play and an openness to mystery and the enigmatic, rather than a search for one precise meaning. Ofer has successfully invited us to listen to dreams on many levels to harvest the richness they offer individuals, groups, and society.

Ravit Raufman and Haim Weinberg contribute a chapter focused on a multi-cultural group in the time of war. Using the metaphor of movement they state, 'One task of the group conductor is to enable the group mobility, to set it in motion' (p. 236). They discuss a training group during a time of war. Half of the group were Israelis (including three Muslims) and the rest came to Israel from different countries. At one point one of the Muslim members told the group she defined herself as Israeli, not Palestinian. This silenced another Muslim member of the group who felt abandoned by her friend. Near the end of the group, she could finally speak and said she felt she had no place in the group. Once she could voice this concern the dynamic shifted. The authors use this to illustrate movement in/out or inclusion/exclusion. The excluded one feels frozen and unable to move until they can find their voice and move forward. They give other examples using movement metaphors and the ways in which the play space in the group is easily collapsed by external events like war, which stops the movement and connection between members.

One might ask, but I do not practice in a time of war or in the Land of Milk and Honey, does this book really deserve my attention? While this may be true, we all work in specific cultures where external events impact our groups. I found this book, growing out of the Israeli context, was easy to apply to my own context.

To date, I believe *Group Analysis in the Land of Milk and Honey* is the only volume originating in a single country. What would a volume entitled Group Analysis in Serbia, or Germany, or Rwanda, or any other country look like?

The fact that this book emerges from the ethos of Jewish culture makes me wonder why there are not more links to the Talmud or Yiddish literature and theatre. This is not an easy task as illustrated by a recent article by Weimer (2022) and discussion by Tubert-Oklander about the seeming disappearance of the Talmudic influence. When I think of the relationship between Talmud and group analysis I think of lines from Pirkei Avot like: 'Who is wise? The one who learns from every person'. Or 'Who is rich? The one who rejoices in their portion'. These resonate well within the foundational matrix of group analysis. Sefaria (https://www.sefaria.org/texts) with its 3000 years of Jewish texts can be seen as a precursor of group analysis and the broad foundational matrix. Is it the anxiety of influence that restrains the authors from making

more connections? As mentioned, Bible and Kabbalah are referenced in meaningful ways, but there are more riches to be mined. I can imagine another volume in the works.

Although clearly not its purpose, it was disappointing that this volume did not solve the Palestinian–Israeli conflict. One can only demand so much from group analysis. I am sure my disappointment pales compared to that of Israelis and Palestinians. There was some mention of the Women who Wage Peace and Breaking the Silence. Besod Siach (The Enigma of Dialogue), whose co-founder is Avi Berman, and Robi Friedman's sandwich model certainly deserve more attention. I was wishing for further exploration of these courageous efforts and their understanding within the context of group analysis. There may be a need for a third volume focusing on these ideas. Some of these issues are covered in other group analytic writing such as Sa'ed Tali's (2017) work on the Palestinian social unconscious and Weegmann's (2017) chapter on Palestine, Palestinians, and social memory. However, there is room for more work to be done. Ravit and Weinberg mention the role of the Holocaust and the Nakba in the social unconscious, but in my reading the role of the 'occupation' or 'disputed territories' in the social unconscious of Israelis and Palestinians was not explored. It would be interesting to have authors from Wahat al-Salam–Neve Shalom contribute to a future volume. This is a village of Jews and Arabs living between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, which has the first bilingual and binational primary school as well as a thriving community of Jewish and Arab families living together and working for peace and justice. We are told in the final chapter that in 2006 Pnina Rappaport and Susz Shoshani co-chaired a conference with the IIGA in which Jews and Arabs met. It was called 'Imagine' and among the 350 participants there were 60 Palestinians. Among the few hundred at the 4th IIGA meeting I attended in 2019, there were two Palestinians. One from within Israel and one from Palestine. It might be easy to see the participation of minority groups as a problem for Israel and Palestine to work out. But every nation faces the problem of meaningful minority participation. In the US, the recent book, *The Enduring, Invisible, and Ubiquitous Centrality of Whiteness* faces head on the problems the US has in fostering useful dialogue about race. A further exploration of the dynamics of 'whiteness' and the 'occupation' in the social unconscious could be useful to group therapists everywhere.

Group Analysis in the Land of Milk and Honey provides us with valuable contributions to our work as group therapists. It does not solve all our problems, but it does show us what can be done with hard work and courage. In the context of internal and external stress and uncertainty, the authors have persevered and created a group analytic environment worthy of admiration. They write in the acknowledgement section that the book is a present to 'friends, colleagues, and partners' (p. x). I think it will be a gift that will keep on giving and one that reminds us of the words of Rabbi Tarphon:

> It is not necessary for you to complete the work, but neither are you free to desist from it. (Pirke Avot, 2:21)

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