

COLONIAL DOMINATION AND THE STRUGGLE FOR IDENTITY:

A Socio-Analytic Perspective

Published in: **Socio-Analysis**, Vol 1 (1) pp34-47 June 1999

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In August 1993 the Australian Institute of Social Analysis sponsored an International Group Relations and Scientific Conference with the task of exploring global social dynamics. The Directorate¹ of the Conference comprised an international cohort of senior Group Relations Consultants trained and experienced in the theories and methodologies that have developed from what has become known as the Tavistock tradition of group relations conferences. Participants in the Conference were for the most part members of organisations around the world which work in this framework.²

The Conference comprised a number of events designed to take up aspects of the primary task of global social analysis. These included among others, a Global Event, a Social Dreaming Matrix, and a Dialogues & Scientific Event.

The primary task of the "Global Event" was "to transact and negotiate the *imagos* held in the mind of world relatedness from the perspective of participating national groups in the event" (Conference Brochure). The territory of the event was geographically-oriented spaces based only on participating national groups from which members were free to engage in the task. Thus there was a space allocated to "Australia", one to the "United States of America", to "Germany", to "Scandinavia" (one space) etc. Two examples of the emergence of international dynamics in this structural arrangement were: the location of "Ireland" in a small room next to the "United Kingdom" and "Israel" and "India" in a shared space.

This paper contains a version within a version. The contained version is the original paper. The containing version includes a commentary on the original paper. I have selected this structure because review of the original paper revealed (thanks to Helen Costello, AISA) the re-enactment *in the writing process* of the very mechanisms which are the subject of the paper - namely submergence of my own thoughts and experience beneath the perceived value of a dominant epistemological culture. The re-discovery of this process pointed out my valency for adopting such a position while illustrating the perceived power of the dominant culture. Whilst reference to a guiding theoretical framework is a valuable if not essential principle in presenting one's thinking, in reviewing the original paper it became obvious that the paper referred so substantially to and quoted so extensively from the work of colleagues that my personal contribution was submerged. An important question which emerged while considering this matter

¹ The Directorate comprised: Alastair Bain (Director) (Australian Institute of Social Analysis- AISA), Susan Long (AISA), Gordon Lawrence (Imago East West), Laurence Gould (A.K. Rice Institute), Kathleen White (A.K. Rice Institute), Siv Boalt Boethius (xxx), Alan Soutar (Administrator) (AISA).

² Countries which were represented in the Conference membership: Australia, Denmark, Eire, Finland, Germany, India, Israel, Norway, Sweden, United Kingdom, United States of America.

(and which seems to me worth pursuing) relates to how identity may be *enhanced* rather than *submerged* by a dominant culture.

In working on the task of the Global Event I found myself at various times in only three of the possible spaces. I chose to begin the event in "Australia" (my adopted country since 1987). When "Africa" (my birthplace) was 'discovered' to be 'on the map'. I moved there quickly (too quickly?). Later I was in "Israel/India".

In "Australia" I did not feel at home. I tried to identify with the work and the concerns with which the "locals" (predominantly from the Eastern States of Australia) were painfully involved but to my disappointment I felt bored, even irritated. In "Africa" I felt nourished by the undoubtedly romanticised telling of tribal tales - all moving, painful, deeply rooted in personal and ethnic histories. I felt achingly at home but knew that my visit was temporary: "my" Africa (as an expatriate South African) no longer existed other than in my mind. I visited "Israel/India" to participate in the exploration of common Jewish origins. There I colluded in ignoring the presence of the other legitimate occupant of the space - the only "Black" man at the conference (Gouranga Chattopadhyay from India), as if it were *only* "Israel".

I felt an inexplicable bond with my fellows. Until the group began to explore issues associated with current marital relationships and the maintenance of Jewishness.

Filled with dread and barely able to breathe I offered the information that my partner was not Jewish, and was a man. Two great taboos of "orthodox" Judaism. My acute anxiety about revealing the latter aspect of my personal identity undoubtedly particularly sensitised me to an heightened awareness of the struggle for identity and the achievement of selfhood in the face of a dominant culture, ethnicity or national identity. My experience of the *actual* group with which I was working was - to my surprise - one of overt legitimation (not at all the traditional and exclusive "Jewishness" I held in my mind).

My experience of the conference as a whole was coloured by this and led to increasingly challenging observations about the nature of identity on a group and individual scale. And of the **particular illusions and deceptions which collusively become one's "identity"** when as an individual or as a group there is an experience of significant difference from the perceived dominant culture.

I began to gain a glimmer of understanding about why "Ireland" was in a little room off the United Kingdom and why "Israel" and "India" could have been collapsed into one. But to me the most striking aspect of my observation was **about the nature of illusion and the collaborative processes** in which both dominant and subordinate cultures can be engaged in order to maintain (or appear to maintain) the power of the 'colonising' culture. I then noted with much interest the contents of another event in the programme - the "Dialogues & Scientific Event".

Of the ten dialogues, four contained themes which seemed related to the issue of illusion and identity: : "The Invisible is Becoming Visible" (Margit Winckler, William Alanson White Institute, USA); "Boundaries and Their Legitimacy" (Gouranga Chattopadhyay, Chattopadhyay & Associates, India); "The Legitimation and Illegitimation of the Other" (Hanni Biran, I.C.S., Israel); and "The Challenge to Recognise both Visible and Invisible Boundaries" (Renate Gr nvoid Bugge, Norstig, Norway). The latter dialogue raised questions about the legal representation of stateless people, asylum seekers and indigenous people who cross national borders, as represented in group relations conferences.

These experiences raised questions about how individuals and groups take up roles when the dominant culture de-authorises their legitimacy or devalues or denies their existence. And what is the impact on group or individual identity?

While thinking about these issues at the conference some early hypotheses began to form:

* The splitting of identity (polarisation into either/or, black/white, male/female, heterosexual/homosexual, Australian/non-Australian, Jew/Christian etc) has a number of socially defensive functions:

- to provide containers for the unacceptable aspects of the primary group
- to disguise other differences which produce anxiety and
- to prevent real engagement with difference and hence with the anxiety of re-discovered projections

* Adoption of the dominant culture transpires partly by mutual projective & introjective identification whereby an internal colonisation of the self occurs

* The devaluation the subordinate "other" or "not-me" is supported either overtly, or covertly by the **illusion of patronage**. (Which also increases the valence of the dominant culture for receiving positive and bestowing negative projections).

To assist in further exploring these hypotheses I refer to the writings of colleagues whose socio-analytic work is informed by a "Bion/Tavistock" framework (in itself a potentially colonising influence). Firstly I draw from work about the "Large Group" in the Group Relations Training context; then from some thinking and application to the wider context, and briefly from ideas about personal authority. The nature of collaborative illusion in the development of false group (and individual) identity is then considered.

The Large Group

The 1993 International Conference was not a traditional Group Relations Training Conference. However the particular experience of group relations and group processes provided opportunities for extending the understanding of large (indeed very large) group or social dynamics, as enacted in the national representations of the conference membership. And in particular issues of identity (including national identity and other aspects of cultural, ethnic and community belongings) could be thought about. The particular focus of this paper is on the dissolution of minority group identity (and individual identity) in groups which are under the domination of colonising cultures.

Turquet (1975) in his seminal paper on threats to identity in the large group, described the impact of the large group on the struggle of the individual to take up individual membership (I.M.) of the group. The I.M. is under constant threat of being converted into either becoming a membership individual (M.I.) where group membership predominates over individual self-definition with its associated loss of identity, or withdrawal into the singleton state of isolation, "to survive being an important emergent aim" (p91). The group is involved in a process of conversion. As the consultant experiences it "the aim is to make me

into something other...there are powerful forces at work, no respecters of persons, seeking to change my role and status as that of every other member of the large group...it is a case of who will dominate whom; only withdrawal can lessen the struggle for the individual. But for a consultant, withdrawal is a destruction of skills and role...Participation and self-exposure is the only way to survive...**The major large-group defence against such forces is homogenisation, that is survival by all being alike**" (p92) (my emphasis). Turquet goes on to describe the need for finding a boundary or skin to limit and define the individual, to avoid being "caught up in the process of becoming other than himself...the tool of the group or the consultant's puppet or zombie...of being in some way altered, pressurised, even diminished, is for the singleton an ever present experience". (p96) Turquet describes the processes of fusion which support these phenomena and refers to "fusion words" with which the large group creates broad categories which aggravate the struggle to find individual identity, and indeed which then can be used to label individuality as eccentricity. The large social distances of the large group increase the difficulty in finding what Turquet calls "skin-of-my-neighbour" boundaries which establish the sense of self, and the individual is forced to self-refer. In the extreme state the individual is alienated from the group although still part of its dynamic. This large social distance increases the difficulty of **familiarity** which "by facilitating differentiation, can thus help the I.M. in his struggle against homogenisation which ...encourages fusion, fosters the M.I. state."(p109) Turquet adds that such "silence" or the absence of such reference by other individual members "has not only the meaning of being ignored but also through the concreteness of the situation, of being eliminated, rendered non-existent" (p111.) He describes how at the group level, these threats of annihilation are durably defended against by **institutionalisation** and in the large group institutionalised roles acquire a hierarchical determination - "but part of the servant/master contract is that the master will protect his servants"(p136). This phenomena will be considered later. Turquet emphasises that preservation of I.M. status is dependent on "differentiating others" being **available** for boundary establishment:

"It is not only the fact of difference but also the nature of the difference. ...The neighbour has first to be located, and then differentiated. Broad classifications - doctors, care-givers, industrialists, teachers - by obliterating discrete boundaries rather than discriminating and focusing on differences, inevitably hamper, even actively prevent this act of creation" (p139).

In a similar context Main (19) emphasises the importance of opportunities for reality testing of externalised boundary contacts as a means of self-confirmation in the external world. He adds that general class statements also disguise individual origins of hostility.

A final point from Turquet's paper relates to the processes of projection in large groups whereby an I.M. becomes endowed with a fixed role. "This role-fixation is strengthened by the presence of a **collusive relationship** between the I.M. and the group [my emphasis]. The process is on occasion overt and implies endowment fit: that is the recipient 'other' I.M. has already within himself, whether he is aware of it or nor not, an equivalent to the endowment which he receives" (p141). Main (19) notes that roles are "collusively required to be *absolute* ...one party is content to notice its differences from the other, but uneasy at recognising the similarities" (p62) and explains that "*Absolute states seem preferable because integrated ones contain unbearable conflict and pain*" (p63). Main (19) notes that such "generalising thought-models" provide a means of escape from human complexity into generalisation and simplification.

Gosling (1979) describes a similar notion to Turquet's "institutionalisation" concept. He refers to three realms of reality for a group member: the incommunicable private realm; the ordinary world of common sense; and "a world

of shared creations of the mind, fantasies, attitudes, values, assumptions, and misgivings, that have little that is conclusive to show for themselves objectively, **but by virtue of 'being held in common' have a great influence on the life of the group members and are in that sense real**" (my emphasis) (p81). Main (19) makes the point that when the projections which construct such a shared system are massive, they are difficult to reverse or question. In such "malignant projective identification" there is impoverishment of the ego and consequent defective reality testing giving rise to: "unchecked and uncheckable pathological judgements" (p63). He adds that the failure to recognise the other for what he is leads to relations that are "unreal and narcissistically intense up to the point of insanity"(p64). He describes the psychic and moral impoverishment among the German people in an example of the Nazi leaders at Nuremberg who by the projection of their capacity for moral judgement into Hitler "had lost the capacity to know that they had behaved viciously...They were psychically impoverished, morally blinded, by projective processes".(p58-9)

Chattopadhyay (1987) describes an associated phenomenon:

"...two of the basic assumptions described by Bion [Ba Dependence and Ba Fight/Flight], which are psychotic phenomena that block progress and development, seem to be very much present in India. Those who act out these psychotic phenomena, instead of going through the painful work-through process, **appear as sane because these phenomena are widely present** (my emphasis)...The nature of these psychotic phenomena...that the average "sane" Indian acts out today, appears to stem from his efforts to live in the present by relating to a mythical past. It is like trying to live up to a false identity. This false identity has several facets which are likely to be defences against examining the reality of present day Indian identity" (p260).

While the ideas of Turquet and others refer primarily to such contexts as the Conference Large Group Event, they seem to closely fit experience of the "large group" of the community.

The Large Social/Cultural Group

In applying the ideas drawn primarily from Group Relations Conference experience to the wider social context, the work of Gordon Lawrence, Susan Long, Gouranga Chattopadhyay, and Olya Khaleelee and Eric Miller (all participants in the 1993 International Conference) has been valuable.

An assumption which I apply and which I believe to be valid is that there are similar dynamics in the individual/large group relationship as exist in the minority group/societal context.

A core concept about the intra- and inter-group relations of a dominant cultural/colonising group is held in the minds of the subordinated peoples which Chattopadhyay (1987) derived from Gordon Lawrence, is "the invader in the mind". In the context of the Indian subordination to British colonialism this picture was "one in which power is the major determinant of the nature of any relationship and not the demands of the task or such feelings as love."

Chattopadhyay's(1987) writings about the impact of British colonialism on India support the notions previously described above. He describes how the Indian psyche has an extended history of invasion and of accepting the superiority of the exploiter. "The entire framework of the *Brahminical* hierarchic system, **accepted even by the Untouchables**, is based on this notion of superiority of the exploiter" (my emphasis)(p253) Indeed in his reference to an influential Indian mythology Chattopadhyay presents a fine example of the difficulty - entrenched in

mythology - of either questioning the superiority of the dominators (the institutionalised servant-master contract) or of reality-testing pathological projections:

“The *devas* (gods) retained their power not only through having, it seems, more advanced technology, but also by creating mystery about themselves. This they did by not allowing more than a handful of selected “human beings” (*manushya*) to enter heaven and **see for themselves what is happening**” (*my italics*) (p255).

Closely related to this Chattopadhyay (1987) describes both the “technique” for sustaining the belief in the superiority of the invader, as well the crucial, I believe, **illusion of patronage** which was part of this, and serves as a means of disguising the envious exploitation of the invaded peoples.

“the actual White invaders from the West have almost always justified their invasion and exploitation with the rationalisation that they were bringing a ‘higher form of civilisation’ to the invaded natives. This ‘higher form of civilisation’ was represented by more sophisticated technologies that included superior means of killing people who offered resistance and the idea of saving the souls of the so-called pagans through conversion into Christianity. People of the invaded countries, and India in particular, seem to have internalised this rationalisation of the invaders in order to justify passive acceptance of and active collaboration with the invaders, once the invasion was completed” (p246).

Chattopadhyay notes the manner in which the British sustained their illusory and collusive belief in the superiority of their position. He notes the way in which the projection of unwanted parts into the “natives” was supported by this, in quotation from Bazalgette (1984):

“Our duty was to ensure peace and tranquillity so that ...the people (could) live in the security granted by British justice under the Union Jack. I learned of the ‘white man’s burden’, which the Almighty in his wisdom had placed particularly on the British, endowing them not only with the zeal and spirit of service, but with the expertise, and the economic wealth and means to bear the burden”. (p246)

The reliance on the ‘wisdom of the Almighty’ (and its use as an illusion) has been used as a powerful vehicle in other similar conquests - organised and proselytising religion:

“While all these religions preach love for mankind and the unity of mankind, uphold value systems that underscore conflict resolution and peace, perhaps the most vicious genocidal activities have been going on from before history began in the name of upholding the values of those very religions” (Chattopadhyay, 19)

In another paper Chattopadhyay & Malhotra (19) explain Bazalgette’s claim:

“This belief was floated in order to defend themselves from actually experiencing how the well-being and affluence, the so-called humanitarian values, of the British were built upon wealth ruthlessly extracted from the natives of the colonies, who died by the thousands from bullets, hunger and disease.” (p572)

These authors further suggest that dominance/subservience as a cultural and organisational structure is sustained because it is entrenched in a social system which stresses dependency and hierarchy.

In understanding the psycho-spatial context in which these processes are maintained Turquet’s concept of “skin-of-my-neighbour” is useful. Khaleelee and

Miller (19) add to the understanding of how the fantasied and actual space contributes:

“In society, the combination of size and physical dispersion permits projection into whole categories of people - the young, blacks, Jews, the disabled - or whole institutions - the church, the unions - and their common characteristic for the individual is that he is personally acquainted with only a minuscule sample from them. Paradoxically, he may regard these as exceptions; but the paradox disappears if we realise that a satisfactory societal container for negative projections has to be distant and anonymous” (p378)

Khaleelee and Miller further suggest that the function of using negative societal containers for projection may be to facilitate “organisations to hold together despite deep internal conflicts” - as Main previously suggested, that *“Absolute states seem preferable because integrated ones contain unbearable conflict and pain”*.

Chattopadhyay (1994) offers a way of grappling with a related difficulty in his paper on “Managing Illusion” :

“Our struggle then must begin with learning to live with the paradox of managing the illusory boundary of roles, which can perhaps best be done by first experiencing the reality of rolelessness.” (p32)

Personal Authority

The “right to fully exist and to be-oneself-in-the-world”(Gould, 19) - the individual equivalent of organisational plenipotentiary authority - is a core feature of the developed and mature sense of self or identity. Gould adds that “the state, and culture of the family system also provide the crucial contextual determinants of the experience of one’s authority” (p5). If the parallel process of individual/group to minority-group/societal context is further developed, it can be understood that the experience of colonised peoples as a group (and as individuals) is thus one of de-authorisation and the associated loss of a sense of self.

Susan Long (1993) in a paper on different gender cultural discourses provides an illuminating explanation of the processes of subordination and of the adoption of a false identity by the subordinated culture:

“Such relations may range between friendly co-existence, as in multi-culturalist societies, through hostile separateness, as in occupation, to a situation where the peoples of the submerged culture are abused and the culture deteriorates, as in colonisation. Fanon describes the French colonisation of Algeria and the consequent loss of identity and sometimes sanity of the Algerian people. The French came to regard the Algerians as intellectually, morally and emotionally inferior, and Fanon demonstrates how **the process of colonisation brought about behaviours in the Algerians that on the surface seemed to support such judgements**” (my emphasis). In analysing the discourses - “symbolic systems of signifiers” - which may characterise particular cultures, Long argues that there may be legitimating styles of conversing in each cultural discourse. In order to be an agent of a cultural discourse, one needs to be legitimated as such. In cultures submerged under colonisation, according to Long, such roles are closed to members of the submerged culture. Illegitimate roles may flourish.

In conclusion, I would offer the argument that groups and individual members of submerged, colonised cultures, through the process of de-

authorisation experience a loss of identity or a failure to sustain an historical identity. In order to acquire an identity, a false identity is developed through the collusive and illusory process of introjecting and adopting the discourses and identity of the invader. The maintenance of such a false identity may seem expedient at the group and individual level, but the cost - inappropriate and unnecessary psychic pain, and enormous psychic impoverishment and loss of creativity for all - is incalculable. As the illegitimacy of such a position gradually becomes apparent the split and introjected identity cannot be indefinitely sustained against an increasing discovery of the sense of self. A shift occurs during which there is a decreasing capacity to sustain the false identity and its eruption may take various forms from violent attack, descent into psychosis or widespread acting-out or hopefully to the healthier position which Turquet describes for the consultant in the large group:

“participation and self-exposure is the only way to survive”.

The personal experience of dread which preceded my own participation and self-exposure highlighted this difficulty for me. The discovery of a supportive group revealed the extent of my own collusive phantasies. Such phantasies were also derived, undoubtedly, from inherited and actual knowledge of a **real** world. One which tolerated Jewish persecution and the persecution of homosexuals and others in Nazi Germany; and British colonialism with its consequences for indigenous people in South Africa and Australia (inter alia). Where even in the context of an experiential learning conference my presence in “Australia”, “Africa” and “Israel/India” (sic) could induce the real discomfort of participating in and colluding with an illusion.

In learning from the experience of the writing of this paper I have found it helpful to acknowledge the “invader in the mind” which intruded upon my capacity to articulate my **personal experience of learning and thinking**. Although this appears implicit in the writing of a paper per se, the structure of the original paper demonstrates the extent to which space was allocated to the thinking of valued colleagues and the way in which I squeezed myself out. It also revealed the “audience in the mind” whose power and judgement - representing a colonising culture - were permitted to censor the work-in-progress.

The discovery of this re-enactment highlighted for me the sometimes subtle and unobtrusive manner in which such processes are insinuated into experience. They also drew a parallel for me about the difficulties faced globally by those stateless people, asylum seekers, indigenous peoples dominated by colonising imperialists; masses under the control of organised religion; citizens whose consent is manufactured by governments; masculine power over women; homosexuals de-legitimised by heterosexuals; children abused by parental power; in finding a voice and an identity when the capacity to find such a voice is in itself damaged by submergence under a colonising force.