
Original Article

Beyond recognition: The politics of encounter

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Abstract The context for this paper is an attempt to think through the possibilities and challenges of nonviolent resistance, with the shadow of the Israel-Palestine conflict looming over it. Drawing on the work of Jessica Benjamin, I outline how a theory of recognition becomes one of acknowledgement through the inclusion of a notion of a witnessing 'third'. This third is actively implicated in the injury caused by oppression and is called upon to do something about it. I go on to use Judith Butler's account of the challenge of nonviolence to draw out some lessons on issues of vulnerability, cohabitation and justice. Finally, I return to the question of the kind of witnessing third that might make a difference.

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Disclaimers

The context for this paper is an attempt to think through the possibilities and challenges of nonviolent resistance, under the shadow of the Israel-Palestine conflict. It is prompted by the ongoing violence, erupting at the time of writing this piece as another assault by Israel on Gaza, and by the passion this aroused not only in Israel and Palestine, but around the world. It is easy to be drawn into silence in response to this passion, to decide that it is easier to leave the scene. I don't really have any answer to this: 'I would prefer not to know' is an effective form of denial used by those who should be able to see what is happening: not

exactly refusing to acknowledge that the destructive thing exists or even reinterpreting it (*literal* and *interpretive denial* in Cohen's (2001) typology), but consciously turning away out of confusion or resignation. There is a kind of wishfulness implicit here: maybe, if I don't recognise it, it will go away. In this context, my preferred *professional* reaction, which is to turn to theory to help make sense of things, is an ambiguous move. Theory can aid the process of denial; it can be a means of further distancing, a way of recovering control when events and investments threaten to topple us, to make it impossible to stay out of the fray. On the other hand, the right kind of theory – theory that challenges us to confront our own position in violence – might be a way of engaging, of turning back to face the thing itself. This paper is an attempt to use some such critical theory in the service of a 'turning back towards', on the grounds that it is essential for witnesses to be engaged in the struggle against violence, however tempting it may be to withdraw. But the danger still stands: theory tends to move us into the position of one who knows, who can make sense, and as such is potentially a defensive psychic and political strategy.

In Zionist circles, Golda Meir is still quoted for her wisdom and wit. Here is one famous saying of hers that shows neither attribute: 'When peace comes, we will perhaps in time be able to forgive the Arabs for killing our sons, but it will be harder for us to forgive them for having forced us to kill their sons' (Meir, 1973, p. 242). Well, perhaps not quite neither: there is something in here that recognises how the perpetrators of violence are corrupted by what they do. But this idea – 'you made me hit you, it is your fault' – is one we might be familiar with from situations of domestic violence, the abusive partner berating his victim for what she has 'made' him do, as if he has no choice, as if there is no agency involved, as if there could be no way to rein himself in. Of course, the Israel-Palestine situation is of another order, a political conflict and not a battle between individuals. Nevertheless, there is a parallel; it *is* a kind of domestic scenario – two peoples locked together in an inescapable embrace, tied to the same place, absolutely and irrevocably needing to find ways to cohabit. One says to the other, 'you are making me kill you, by your demands and your provocations'. Surely we can hear the resonance: where is the compulsion and where the choice; whose exactly is the violence on display; and at what point does the perpetrator – and those who witness the perpetrator's actions – understand that it has to stop?

This sets up at least four points that need to be held in mind to frame the following discussion, in case they get lost in what is predominantly a psychosocial argument. First, it is not the case that violence is something that is produced without will, that we cannot avoid it: there is always a choice, and whether violence is the right choice or not (combatting Nazism is the common example) is an ethical as well as a political issue. Second, the stakes are not the same for everyone and power imbalances matter: the utter 'imbalance' between, for example, Israeli and Palestinian casualties is a scandal. Third, there are many kinds of violence, and both the similarities and the differences between them are relevant to the understanding of violence and to the struggle for nonviolence.

Recognising the reality of violence also means noting that violent acts do not all have the same origins or consequences. And fourth, whilst this paper focuses on the question of resistance to violence, it is also fundamentally concerned with the role and significance of the ‘third’ – the witness – in recognising injustice and attempting to do something to remedy it.

Recognition

Recognition is a popular term in much current writing, and as with many such terms it has various meanings. In the previous sentence, as ‘recognising injustice’, it means something like ‘facing up to the reality of what is happening’. This is somewhat distinct from what is being referred to when the same word is used in what might be called a ‘psychosocial’ register by writers such as Jessica Benjamin (2004) or Judith Butler (2005), even though, as we shall see, there is an ethical requirement to pursue truthfulness that is shared across these situations. There are differences between Benjamin’s and Butler’s models, which have been commented on by both participants (e.g. Butler, 2000), as well as by myself and others (Frosh, 2010, 2011). Nevertheless, they share a lot of ground. This includes political commitment from the standpoint of a secular Jewish perspective that acknowledges responsibility even when one is not directly implicated in oppressive acts; that is, to paraphrase Benjamin, a perspective from which the active involvement of an engaged *witness*, one called upon to take a stand, is an ethical imperative. Put simply, as Nancy Hollander (2010) has also noted, a ‘bystander’ will not have initiated the original injury suffered by a victim, but nevertheless *becomes* implicated in it if she or he fails to take up an active witnessing stance in which injustice and suffering is acknowledged. This applies even more strongly when the witness is *already* implicated in the original injury, for instance benefitting from it in some way, or simply because of alignment and association with the oppressor (as, for example, in colonialism). Benjamin’s (2004) use of a structure of ‘thirdness’ is crucial here. For her, this ‘third’ can come in various forms, relating to different modes of intra- and intersubjective mental space. However, alongside this, it has a kind of ‘post-Oedipal’ regulating function that links it with the achievement of justice and truth. Benjamin (2011) comments, ‘An underlying meaning of being part of an exchange of recognition—I use this term to emphasize recognition, or the specific modality of witnessing, as being given and received, part of an intersubjective connection—is that the individuals involved reconnect with what I call the moral third’ (p. 208). This ‘moral third’, she explains elsewhere, is a vital part of establishing the contours of a just world.

I use this to designate the essential component principles of the *lawfulness* involved in repair – lawfulness begins ‘primordially’ with the sense that the

world offers recognition, accommodation and predictable expectations, and develops into truthfulness, respect for the other, and faith in the process of recognition.

(Benjamin, 2009, p. 442)

Whilst Benjamin pays a considerable amount of attention to the two-person relationship, often in the form of exploration of ways out of a rigid 'doer-done to' dynamic, it is apparent here that she is also underpinning the relational moment with an appeal to a thirdness that gives it shape, predictability and ethical coherence. For her, this runs into a powerful account of witnessing as both what is required of the participants in an exchange and also as what comes from outside as the backdrop or necessary condition for recognition to occur in conditions of oppression and suffering. The external witness is inevitably involved in holding in place the 'perpetrator-victim' or 'oppressor-oppressed' relationship, just as the third point of a triangle welds the whole geometric edifice together. If the witness just sits there, nothing happens; if the witness shifts position, if the third point moves, then the triangle changes its shape. This applies to any witness, including states – Benjamin has explicitly named Germany and the United States in the structure, for example; but it also applies forcefully to the Jewish witness, who is called on to respond.

Recognition here means being mobilised by the situation to turn towards it rather than away from it; it is also a first step towards *acknowledgement* in the sense of taking responsibility for harm one might have done, or been implicated in. In the end, the two partners to a relationship have to see each other and find a way to acknowledge the hurt and damage they might have caused. Nevertheless, as the reference to the moral third makes clear, no-one is let off the hook: the third person or community or institution or country is part of the system, indissolubly so. Benjamin's approach, more clearly perhaps than some other relational work, does not reduce to two-person psychology; there is always something outside the apparently primary relationship that is essential for keeping it in place. One might say critically about this that the place of the third in the structure is not fully articulated – this is not a Lacanian or sociological theory, and the slippage from politics to psychology is a danger that is present in any approach that is couched in the language of subject-other or subject-subject consciousness. Nevertheless, Benjamin's third has agency, it is not a fantasy; and perhaps it is also invested in by the other two elements as a possible source for something new to happen. Its potentially transformative power may be one reason, incidentally, why so much effort is often put into *blocking* the activities of this witnessing third, especially by the oppressor in the oppressor-oppressed relationship. In the case of Israel, we have seen this in a number of recent events: for example, the energy that has gone into opposing moves by the European Union to take a more assertive role in advancing Palestinian statehood; denigration of the International Criminal Court for attempting to launch a full

investigation into the Gaza conflict; and lobbying against Jewish activists who oppose the actions of the Israeli state.

Violent Formations of Nonviolence in the Work of Judith Butler

Judith Butler's writings on violence, precarity and ethics have provided a powerful and coherent set of ideas to offer leverage on the conditions for nonviolence. She has done this by evoking something tough and unsentimental, grounded in the world of political activity, whilst also presenting a kind of utopian perspective – or perhaps just a glimmer of hope – as to where the struggle against violence might lead. She sets the scene for her analysis of nonviolence with the observation that 'We are at least partially formed through violence' (2009, p. 167). The normative violence of any society operates on us through the manner in which we are 'given genders or social categories, against our will' (p. 167) and subjectivised in the context of the repetition of insistencies that construct us according to the dictates of power. Yet this normative construction does not in itself condemn us to repeat the norms into which we are constructed; or, to put this less repetitively, it is precisely the violence that makes us that gives us the possibility, and the incentive, to formulate a *nonviolent* response. In simple terms, we should learn from experience not to repeat what has been done to us, but to challenge it, to produce what elsewhere have been called 'reparative scripts' (Byng Hall, 1996). Butler has commented on this often, including in the opening chapter of *The Psychic Life of Power* (1997). Acceptance of the idea that people are structured by forces over which they do not have control, and that their ongoing engagement with the world is constantly impacted upon by those forces (both 'external' and 'internal'), is not the same thing as proposing that people have no agency or capacity to try to understand, resist or rebel. Subjects are produced by and in power; that is, they are constituted by social forces that lie outside them, in the workings of the world. But subjects still have agency; their agentic status is *what they are produced with*, and it enables them to take hold of power and use it. This does not mean that they are freed from the external operations of power, but it does endow them with subjectivity, with a richness of imagination, if one wishes to think of it that way. It means that they engage with power and are not merely its dupes or its obedient and loyal 'subjects'.

This analysis of power is almost exactly that which, a decade later, is applied by Butler (2009) to violence: 'it may be', she writes, 'that precisely because one is formed through violence, the responsibility not to repeat the violence of one's formation is all the more pressing and important' (p. 167). We know about violence in our very formation, in the fundamental depths of our lives, just as we

know about vulnerability and dependency through the earliest and most deeply-rooted neediness of infantile experience. Butler (2009) accepts here that we are all 'mired' in violence; the question is, what do we do with it? She writes,

It is crucial to distinguish between (a) that injured and rageful subject who gives moral legitimacy to rageful and injurious conduct, thus transmuted aggression into virtue, and (b) that injured and rageful subject who nevertheless seeks to limit the injury that she or he causes, and can do so only through an active struggle with and against aggression. The first involves a moralization of the subject that disavows the violence it inflicts, while the latter necessitates a moral struggle with the idea of non-violence in the midst of an encounter with social violence as well as with one's own aggression. (p. 172)

Each of us has violence in our history; that much is clear. It arises from the 'injuries' that we all suffer as an unavoidable aspect of the dependency we have on others; but in principle this could be offset by the experiences of care that Butler (2004) also works on in her explorations of vulnerability. In that context she is keen to emphasise how much the foundational experience of infantile dependency makes us 'vulnerable to another range of touch, a range that includes the eradication of our being at the one end, and the physical support for our lives at the other' (p. 31). As she is writing here about communities of feeling – of loss and support when grieving – there is some sign that her focus on the effects of violence might be counterbalanced with an articulation of the possibility that there could be a fundamental impulse towards care, arising from what she names as 'a more general conception of the human...in which we are, from the start, given over to the other' (p. 31). That is to say, there is an echo here of Winnicott's (1975) famous slogan, 'there is no such thing as a baby' (p. 99), but only a couple or a field, someone who is caring before the baby can even be fully aware of the need to be cared for, someone who can look after the child prior to it being able to act for itself. This experience might generate an impulse towards reparative and generous reaching out towards others, what elsewhere might be called relationships of trust. One hopes that this 'reading out' from Butler's work offers the germ of a prospect for ameliorative recognition and a kind of proactive acknowledgment of what others need from us.

But the violence of the social is also an iterative one, expressed as norms that are constantly repeated in order to counter the subject's intrinsic capacity to resist. What makes violence closer to the norm is the repetitive violence – both explicit and implicit – of an external social world that is saturated with domination and inequality (a perception that in some ways links with Benjamin's (1988) analysis of gender dominance). Our own dependency and the vulnerability of others then becomes a kind of threat, or at least a spur to defensive hitting-out. Each of us becomes tempted, faced with violence, to

reiterate it, to enact the norm in the invitation to ‘murder’ the other, and we have very many mechanisms available to us to justify this, to ‘transmute aggression into virtue’, as Butler puts it. These mechanisms are psychic and social. We can justify violence to ourselves by saying we were hurt by others, done to, and now need to assert ourselves through doing back. We can justify it to our families and communities – revenge, honour, self-esteem, retribution – and we can justify it to our society and nation: it is time, we deserve it, they did this, we must fight. It is not even that these mechanisms of rationalisation are *available*, it is also that they are at times *irresistible*: the world turns round them, violence is the draw, and the technique, and the moral virtue; without it, we are trodden into the ground, we cannot feel satisfied. That is to say, one link between the intersubjective level at which much of this theory is couched and the social level at which the violence we are talking about operates, is that each level of violence draws the other into its service. Historical, colonial and political violence – used in racialised and gendered forms – feeds off and into the violence in which subjects are ‘mired’, and the violence in which subjects are mired is incited to support the ends of those who advance historical, colonial and political violence. How, then, to resist this and move to Butler’s position (b), becoming the ‘injured and rageful subject who nevertheless seeks to limit the injury that she or he causes’? Butler suggests it is a struggle against social and personal violence that is at issue here – that is, that nonviolence is an extremely active process of aggressive contestation of the normative position. If the pull towards violence is a social norm, then nonviolence is by far the harder option, requiring an aggressive assertion of resistance that itself has a ‘violent’ component; only this is of another kind, the violence that opposes violence is here not symmetrical, but extinguishing, the action of one who throws a blanket on the fire, using all that person’s strength. Still, how do we distinguish between the blanket and the fire, between the violence of destruction and that of what Butler calls ‘a moral struggle’?

If it is the case that we are mired in violence in this way, then the most pressing question is how it might be possible for the subject to *become* an ethical one, given the strong pull towards murder. Using his now familiar if still demanding vocabulary of Face and Other, Emmanuel Levinas (1991) states that there is

in the Face of the Other always the death of the Other and thus, in some way, an incitement to murder, the temptation to go to the extreme, to completely neglect the other – and at the same time (and this is the paradoxical thing) the Face is also the ‘Thou Shalt not Kill.’ A Thou-Shalt-not-Kill that can also be explicated much further: it is the fact that I cannot let the other die alone, it is like a calling out to me.

(p. 104)

Perhaps we are on the cusp of something here. The Face, which I take to be, in this instance, recognition of the existence of the other (the not-self rather than

necessarily the abjected) incites one to murder because of its dependence and its need; *at the same time*, for precisely the same reason, it challenges us through a lawful prohibition, a ‘Thou shalt not’, producing an instance of hesitation, a crack into which the ‘calling out to me’ appears. Here is where recognition becomes action built out of care: ‘I cannot let the other die alone’. For Butler, in her 2012 book *Parting Ways*, this element of Levinas’ thinking is crucial for the formulation of an ethics of nonviolence. What she stresses is how nonviolence is not peaceable, or derived from peacefulness: it is a kind of violent act itself, imposed on the subject and demanding a response, even in the face of extreme provocation. This operates in at least two related ways. First, there is the recognition already noted, that the vulnerability of the other that calls out to the subject to take responsibility is also an invitation to violence – it evokes the dependency we all feel, a dependency that to a considerable degree we resent and fear. Butler (2012) comments, ‘Thus, in the face of the other, one is aware of the vulnerability of that other, that the other’s life is precarious, exposed, and subject to death; but one is *also* aware of one’s own violence, one’s own capacity to cause the death of the other, to be the agent who could expose the Other to his dissolution’ (p. 56). This is the violence drawn out in the subject by the precariousness of the other. Why does it occur? In part because of the reciprocal vulnerability of each one of us when we actually look seriously at what and who it is that we need to help us to survive. This means that there is something *elemental*, in the sense of foundational and therefore shared, both in precariousness and in violence.

Second, there is something here that Butler works on at length in relation to what she calls, drawing on Hannah Arendt, ‘cohabitation’. In the larger scheme, cohabitation means literally the enforced situation of having to share the earth with others. For Butler, this is the foundation of an ethics of plurality and acceptance that is the necessary condition for formation as an *ethical subject*. Meditating on Arendt’s (1963) account in *Eichmann in Jerusalem* of why, despite all her criticisms of the Israeli judicial process that condemned him, she thought Eichmann deserved to die, Butler makes central the charge that Eichmann attempted to assert proprietary rights over the earth. He refused a fundamental fact of existence, that we cannot choose with whom to share the earth, and hence that we cannot choose whom to define as human, in so doing relegating whole classes of others (but one other would have been enough, by this logic) to non-existence. This is the extreme case, no doubt, in which the subject who refuses multiplicity is himself refused, on his own behalf, and on behalf of all the others implicated in this refusal. It has its difficulties, as Butler clearly avows, around issues of state violence and the logic of retribution; after all, one point of law – again this is Butler, here working with the containing functions of the ‘third’ – is precisely to regulate the social order by agreed principles and away from the potentially endless talion cycle of retributive justice. Nevertheless, even in this extreme and negative case form, the Eichmann case advances a very clear ethical principle. This is that we cannot choose with whom we live, but must allow for

the presence of others who have the same rights of subjecthood as we do, the same entitlement to be here. There are political claims that follow from this. In Butler's case, these have to do specifically with Israel-Palestine, a situation that has the pronounced poignancy that comes from applying a type of 'Jewish' ethics to this 'normal' state of 'pathology', this endless-seeming violence and oppression. The central point here is that the tolerance of cohabitation – or perhaps the welcoming of it – is a kind of post-Levinasian marker of what it means to be an ethical subject and hence to have a human 'identity' at all. 'Post'-Levinasian, because, for Levinas (1991), the key construct is *hospitality* and the terminology of hospitality implies *owning* something that one might share with others – inviting the other in, giving the other precedence, or finding something in oneself that can be presented to that other as a kind of gift. Cohabitation, by contrast, destabilises the situation, makes it nomadic. It is not that I own something that I can, out of an ethical impulse, share with you; it is that we both find ourselves temporarily in the same place ('sojourning' there, as the Bible would have it), and need to live alongside one another in mutual recognition. Though, of course, one might have to note about this that not all 'sojourning' is the same: the Israeli settlers, for example, cannot claim just to be 'cohabiting' in the precise piece of land they choose to colonise, especially as their occupation of it involves the displacement of those who were already there. This highlights one issue that might trouble Butler's perhaps too universalistic account, which seems to promote a kind of symmetry that may be untenable, marginalising the question of settler colonialism, and more broadly of imbalances of power.

Earlier in *Parting Ways*, Butler deals with this issue specifically in relation to the ethics of nonviolence. Reading Levinas – and, in the background, one assumes Laplanche, who is an important psychoanalytic influence on Butler's thinking (see Butler, 2005) – we arrive at a vision of the human subject as always displaced from its centre by the presence of the other. That is, as Butler explicitly frames it, the subject always lives on occupied ground. Where we find ourselves, others have always been before; and where we stand, so do they. The fact of this 'occupation' – and the terminology itself is quite obviously and explicitly chosen – places an ethical demand for cohabitation at the heart of both political and psychic life. Her version of this is relentless, perhaps even austere, taking the form of an absolute requirement that defines ethical subjecthood as a continuing struggle towards nonviolence, whatever the face of the other might present us with.

To exist in any place is already to be interrupted and defined by the others who are in that place... This would imply that whatever 'nation' grounds itself on the place of the other would be bound to that other, and would be in an infinite responsibility toward that other [...] If the other persecutes that self, that national subject, it does not in any way relieve the national subject of responsibility: on the contrary, a responsibility is born precisely from that persecution. What that responsibility entails is precisely a struggle

for nonviolence, that is, a struggle against the ethics of revenge, a struggle not to kill the other, a struggle to encounter and honor the face of the other.
(Butler, 2012, p. 61)

Although there is a way in which the ‘nation’ is personified here, the ‘nation’ is a supra-individual entity, and so might invoke a space in which the two-person focus of Levinasian ethics, and perhaps of much of the psychology of recognition, meshes with the three-person requirements of a *political* vision. Butler seems to see this is a necessary move, when she writes, ‘The political involves numerous people and not just the ethical dyad, the “I” and the “you”. That dyad is broken up by the “third” – an abbreviated way of referring to those who would be referred to in the third person, those whose faces we do not see but with whom we are bound to live under contractual conditions that render us substitutable’ (p. 55). Butler ensures here that attention is paid to those who stand outside the immediate bond or antagonism between subject and other: her reference to ‘numerous people’ foregrounds the others whom we do not know directly, yet still have an engagement with and a responsibility towards. There is resonance here with the idea of an external ‘third’ which, as we saw early on, is also familiar, in a different form, from the intersubjectivist approach of Jessica Benjamin. In this, the third is the *witness*, functioning as a necessary process of holding in mind, but also of taking responsibility. As witness, the one who is not obviously involved is still called to account, perhaps on the grounds of the necessity of cohabitation, and has to take a stand. This call to justice can perhaps also alleviate the difficulties with Butler’s evocative reference to ‘occupation’, which shares in the universalising tendency mentioned above: it seems to allow the occupation to occur and then demand responsibility and ‘a struggle for nonviolence’ on the part of occupied and occupier alike. There is such a thing as justice, after all, that alerts us to the radical difference between these two positions in power.

Is the kind of violence identified in this work, founded in dependency and vulnerability, the same kind of violence that we are dealing with in the Israel-Palestine situation? Clearly not exactly, yet there are parallels. For example, it might be argued that the justification for Israeli violence is often given in terms of Israel’s vulnerability, yet actually involves a denial of that vulnerability, while projecting it into the other. So, Gaza is pulverised as a way of ensuring that vulnerability belongs to the ‘enemy’ other, a process that is doomed to continual escalation. Moreover, despite the differences in the kinds of violence being discussed, some things can still be learnt. First, that the temptation to react to violence with violence is immense; consequently, nonviolent resistance is significantly the harder path, because not only does it mean adopting tactics that leave one vulnerable to the other’s continuing violence, but it also involves a struggle against one’s own impulses. And again, another simple and familiar yet somehow hard to learn lesson is that recognition of the other and

acknowledgement of hurts received and hurt done is a necessary component of nonviolent resistance, even if it is nowhere near enough on its own.

Resistance

What kind of political engagement might follow? For Butler, it seems that the difficulty of tolerating dependency and weakness is primary, and that violence derives from projection of one's individual and collective vulnerability. There is, however, an oppositional prospect that derives from the fact that vulnerability and dependency also promote an experience of care and of concern about the damage one might do to others and to oneself – a kind of pre-emptive reparation. Butler also offers a way to think about the contradictions in the social order that might allow movement away from the coercive norm. For her, it seems to be that the way norms are continually reiterated reveals their weakness, making it possible to find the gaps or moments of potential breakage in which something else can happen. 'The normative production is an iterable process,' she writes (2009), 'the norm is repeated, and in this sense is constantly "breaking" with the contexts delimited as the "conditions of production"' (p. 168). It is as if the constant iteration reveals a lack of sureness; after all, as psychoanalysts always claim, the more one has to assert a supposed truth, the less securely rooted it is, the less taken for granted it can be that others have accepted it. Over and over the social insists on its norms, its desire – what it lacks – invoking, 'do this, do that, you must do that'. Despite Butler's own distance from Lacanian thinking, I hear an echo of that moment in which the lack in the Big Other makes the subject wonder about its own agency, stirring a kind of impulse towards freedom (Lacan, 1973, p. 214). If the Other needs us, if there is a gap that has to be filled – if, for instance, the militarised nation can only preserve itself in its violence through its subjects accepting that this is necessary – then there is some prospect of refusing to fill that gap, or filling it in some other way than was expected. This is to suggest, for instance, that resistance starts with a small withdrawal of support, a moment at which what is expected of us is not quite what we do.

This might allow us a route into the idea of 'nonviolent resistance'. There is a generative tension in the idea of resistance as it is expressed in political versus psychoanalytical forms. In progressive political discourse, resistance is often a term used to convey a pressure *towards* change – the resistance is to oppression, and a resistance movement is one that is not so much trying to reinstate a previous situation, but to articulate a version of freedom. This is not of course the case when we are talking about the resistance of a government to its people's demands; but even here it tends to be the people who are seen as resisting and the government that is trying to impose its version of power. In psychoanalysis, resistance is somewhat different. It does evoke a certain opposition to power – here,

that of the analyst – but in a context in which progressive change is the object of that power; which is to say, resistance means closing down, refusing to think, blocking insight, turning away. Jacqueline Rose (2007) summarises this with acuity:

If in political vocabularies, resistance is the passage to freedom, for psychoanalysis, it is repetition, blockage, blind obeisance to crushing internal constraint. ... In this vocabulary, then, resistance is not the action of the freedom fighter, the struggle against tyranny, the first stirring of the oppressed; it is the mind at war with itself, blocking the path to its own freedom and, with it, its ability to make the world a better, less tyrannical, place.

(p. 21)

‘Blocking the path to its own freedom’ is possibly the most relevant phrase here, though ‘the mind at war with itself’ is also cogent. They both relate closely to the question of how to respond to a violent situation, to the temptation to engage in oblitative violence, through the struggle towards nonviolence. We have seen how hard that is, how much of it relies on acceptance of an ethical injunction that is by no means obvious or easy to adopt. ‘The mind at war with itself, blocking the path to its own freedom’ is also an exact description of the ambivalence present in both psychological and political resistance, the way in which what is wished for is also resisted, and of how the location of resistance reveals what is most precious and desired. Rose notes how, for Freud, resistance became the key to analytic progress. Spot the area of resistance and one knows what is most defended against, and hence not only what is most threatening, but also what is most significant in a person’s psychic life. The situation is similar in the political context we are considering: nonviolent resolution of conflict is supposedly desired, yet it is also deeply feared because of the vulnerability that it brings to the fore and the intimate dependency on the other that it requires to make it work, and because of what might have to be given up if it were to succeed. Conversely, violence is intensely invested in as a symbolic as well as material structure of ‘security’; yet it is precisely in the manufacture of violence that security is undermined, both politically and psychologically, and suffering and vulnerability are made most apparent. We cannot *think*, it seems, about the damage that this position produces (the mind at war with itself); and this failure to think blocks the path to our freedom. To become emancipatory, resistance has to involve an opening as well as a refusal. The refusal is of the structures of power as they are naturalised in their self-presentation (‘it has to be like this; you are called on to assent and comply’); the opening is the turn towards the reality of the other and of the situation, however alarming and threatening it may be.

This account is still couched in dyadic terms, paralleling the psychoanalytic system with the political one. Witnessing, as Benjamin (2009) asserts, is crucial to

the triangulation of this process, which in turn is essential if it is to occur at all – and which is what necessitates the commitment to witnessing that requires overcoming the temptation to look away. Long ago, in her study of abjection, Julia Kristeva (1987) gave a gendered account of the role of the ‘father of individual prehistory’ in protecting the infant against falling into a kind of psychic abyss. This account has its problems, including its tendency to feed off, and into, classical stereotypes of the devouring mother and protective ‘reality’ of the father. Nevertheless, it captures an important idea about the role of the third in offering a place to look *away* from the other in order to find a means of living *with* that other. Here, for example, is Kristeva’s argument concerning the way the use of symbols (a talking cure, perhaps) promotes the ‘triumph over sadness’ necessary for recovery from depression. What makes this possible, she writes, is the ability of the individual to identify with something other than the lost object. Unlike what happens in the classical Oedipal scenario, this outside figure or ‘Third Party’ is enabling rather than prohibitive in preventing the subject from being engulfed by the lost object. As such, the third party is akin to the ‘imaginary father’ who creates a space for the infant’s subjectivity by his loving presence and attraction for the mother. The mother turns away from the infant, towards this father, thus freeing the infant from her all-absorbing presence. Nevertheless, writes Kristeva (1987),

it is imperative that this father in individual prehistory be capable of playing his part as oedipal father in symbolic Law, for it is on the basis of that harmonious blending of the two facets of fatherhood that the abstract and arbitrary signs of communication may be fortunate enough to be tied to the affective meaning of prehistorical identifications, and the dead language of the potentially depressive person can arrive at a live meaning in the bond with others.

(pp. 23–24)

This can be seen as a plea for a reinstatement of a different notion of fathering from that defined solely by domination, yet retaining some of the regulatory elements of that Oedipal position. The ‘third’ here goes further than being a space for encounter between subject and object, as can be found in some contemporary relational psychoanalysis. The ‘third’ is an active drawer of the two protagonists’ gaze, and reciprocates both by the Oedipal process (‘do not do this’) and by its loving *participation* that makes it possible for these protagonists to move into a triangulated space. That is, the third’s *involvement* in the triangular scenario allows the other participants to turn away from the intense presence of one another, giving each of them space to breathe. Translated back into the terms being deployed here, the turning-towards-reality of the witness is a necessary move in order to allow a space for retreat from the violent abjection of otherness that feels necessary when one is too close, when the only way of dealing with the

‘occupying’ presence of the other in the space that one wants to claim as one’s own, is by destroying that other. The witness, as third, has to declare both an active ethical prohibitive engagement (‘no more of this violence’) and a participatory ethical attachment (‘this is my responsibility too’).

This leads us back to the specific question of Israel-Palestine, where the depressing truth seems to be that every opportunity for nonviolent resolution of differences and the advancement of cohabitation is spurned to produce more violence and oppression. We can understand this politically in terms of the interests it serves. Psychosocially and psychodynamically, we can also understand it in part as the reciprocal automatic violence that hurt produces, the suffering of two peoples that binds them together but offers insufficient distance for the creation of dependency and trust. Nonviolent resistance in such circumstances is a huge gamble – each party lays itself open to the risk of being abused, and there is little in the history to indicate that that risk can be overcome. Nevertheless, it is a necessary gamble, one that forges the only route towards ethical subjectivity and relationality, and also, in the most practical way, makes cohabitation a possibility. In pushing towards this, the third as witness is crucial: without its active engagement, the collapse of the two ‘subjects’ into violence seems almost inevitable. Yet the temptation of the witness is to withdraw; it is always easier to give in to this temptation than to resist it and become involved in the struggle towards nonviolence from the dual position of active ethical prohibitive engagement and participatory ethical attachment.

Who is the witness here that might be called on to facilitate this process? Benjamin, amongst others, identifies the state players – the USA, Germany, the West and so on – and this is clearly correct. But each of us comes at it from our own specific location, and whether or not anyone cares what we think, we have to grab hold of the situation and state, wherever we are, however precarious our position in our communities or families or countries, that this cannot be allowed to go on; that the damage is too great, now and in the past and in the future. Who do we say this to? In the first instance, our own communities, which in many respects can be the hardest place of all, as, for example, Butler has found in being accused of antisemitism for her political stance (Butler, 2004). In the second, there is a necessary reciprocal movement between the act of speaking out of the witness and the act of listening to the oppressed; that is to say, the kind of rigorous engagement with the other advocated by the theorists drawn on here involves opening oneself to the other’s voice as it speaks things that may be very difficult to hear. The difficulties of speaking and listening in these ways are notoriously great. For example, I experienced a small illustration of the two strands – speaking within ‘my’ Jewish community and hearing the voice of the Palestinian ‘other’ – when I went on two consecutive evenings in the autumn of 2014 to events in London around Israel and Palestine. Both of these events, despite the skilful work of the chairs and the resilience and even-temperedness of the speakers, at times descended into raucous shouting matches. In both cases, the

set-up was supposed to be one of *listening*: in the first instance, to diverse views on antisemitism in Britain; in the second, to the experiences of a Palestinian psychiatrist and psychotherapist working in the occupied territories. The shouting on the first evening was amongst a huge and apparently almost entirely Jewish audience; in the second, it was directed partly at the speaker, but spread quickly in a relatively small audience that was reduced to ‘for-and-against’ yelling and applause, transforming what had been billed as a ‘thinking space’ in a psychotherapeutic institution into a fight. Much of the viciousness was inter-necine; that is, it was located within and between members of the Jewish community. Sometimes we don’t need antagonism from outside to tear ourselves apart. Like several other people present, I felt despair spread over me. It was all so boring and predictable; I felt that my whole life has been infected by this shouting and yelling, by bitterness and accusations of treachery and hypocrisy. Few people, it seems, go to these events to hear another view from the one they already have; advocacy and self-justification is what dominates them, and bitter hatred.

Put bluntly, I am aware that, in the exposition of this challenging theoretical material, and in drawing a lesson about speaking out from within the Jewish community, the emotional challenge of being responsive to the demand for justice that comes from Palestinian suffering may be avoided. Rose (2007) quotes Edward Said, as she often does: ‘There is suffering and injustice enough for everyone’ (p. 195). Currently, this seems vastly over-generous; there certainly is, exactly, suffering and injustice enough for everyone; but in the situation being discussed here, it is very concentrated in the Palestinian territories. Rose goes on, trying to think through the implications of this statement for understanding the effects of Zionism: ‘We have entered the most stubborn and self-defeating psychic terrain, where a people can be loving and lethal, and their most exultant acts towards – and triumph over – an indigenous people expose them to the dangers they most fear’ (p. 197). Witnessing this, as we cannot fail to do (even Jewish religious leaders devoted to Israel have begun to notice the corrosive effects of the occupation on Jewish Israeli morality, as have most progressive Zionists), it is about time we spoke out, even those of us who would rather turn away in shame and despair: this cannot go on, however relentlessly and interminably it seems so to do.

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