

Silenced Knowings, Forgotten Springs: Paths to Healing in the Wake of Colonialism¹

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Abstract

We have each been educated in a system that grew out of, and reflects, 500 years of colonialism, and are struggling for awareness in a new era of globalization that leaves increasing numbers of people hungry and disenfranchised. Our cultural legacy is profoundly imprinted by the often silenced after-effects of the genocidal war against Native Americans, the dislocation and forced slavery of Africans in America, and the oppressive labor conditions of the poor. But how do we carry these kinds of knowing inside ourselves and in our relations to others and the world? When the dictionary describes colonialism as "the practice or manner of things colonial," what does this mean personally, psychologically and culturally? How has colonialism left its wounding imprint on our individual psyches, on the ways we imagine and interpret our life experiences? What are the paths to awareness and healing of these wounds?

Our very means of trying to understand ourselves--the discipline of psychology--arose as colonialism was stretching to its fullest reach. Psychology's development in the last 100 years coincides with the rise of national liberation movements and the ending of the colonial era. While it often recorded psychological effects of colonialism, it hardly ever understood them in the context of colonialism. We must begin to inquire how colonialism has effected our ways of theorizing about and working with individuals and groups. What kinds of suffering have we learned to avoid knowing in ourselves and others because they are so widespread we have learned to accept them as normal and natural? How have we learned to silence not only many of our own feelings and insights, but also the wellsprings of imagination that have the potential to create alternative visions?

In this paper we hope to clarify what some of the psychic corollaries of colonialism are and what some of the psychological methods are that can address the suffering that issues from them. Through the provision of small group exercises we hope to quicken an experiential sense of how our silenced knowings are linked to dynamics of oppression; how what we experience as most personal and intimate reflect culture and connect us to work in the world where individual development and cultural liberation coincide.

Silenced Knowings

Many silenced knowings can exist within apparently ordinary lives and communities, the lives of others and our own lives. By silenced knowings we mean understandings that we each

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carry that take refuge in silence, as it feels dangerous to speak them to ourselves and to others. The sanctions against them in the family, community or wider culture render them mute and increasingly inaccessible. Once silenced, these knowings are no longer available to inform our lives, to strengthen our moral discernment. Once pushed to the side, these knowings require our energy to sustain their dissociation, and our numbing to evade their pain.

Some silenced knowings require metabolizing over generations, so difficult are they to listen to and bear, to act in the light of. We want to wonder with you what habits of silenced knowing from the past 500 years of colonialism have been passed on to us? What pieces of our cultural history seek to find voice through us and our lives? In what ways is our personal individuation inextricably linked with responding to the silenced knowings that exist within our own biographies? How might they inform our work and our relationships?

As a first and obvious example of this process of metabolizing silenced knowings over generations, we will share a story from Austrian journalist, Peter Sichrovsky (1988), who interviewed dozens of children and grandchildren of former Nazis for his book Born Guilty: The Children of Nazis. Sichrovsky spoke with a woman named Suzanne who had grown up knowing her father was involved with the Nazi party, though she had never independently developed any curiosity or interest in the war. Suzanne resisted when her son Dieter came home from school with an assignment to research the effects of the Holocaust on their home community.

But like many others in the third generation after the war, Dieter wanted to know. His coming to know and the healing of his cultural legacy were intertwined. After examining archives and writing to survivors, Dieter made a surprising discovery. The house in which both he and his mother, Suzanne, had been raised was confiscated from a Jewish family. Dieter read the document to his parents: "Here lived Martha Kolleg, age 2, Anna Kolleg, age 6, Ferdi Kolleg age 12, Harry Kolleg, age 42, Susanne Kolleg, age 38. Arrested on November 10, 1941, deported on November 12, 1941. Official date of death of the children and mother, January 14, 1944. Father officially missing. Place of death: Auschwitz." Dieter's grandparents, Suzanne's mother and father, had

taken over the apartment on the day the Kolleg family was deported in 1941. Dieter's grandfather, Suzanne's father, was a guard at Auschwitz.

The information uncovered by Dieter began a process of memory and mourning in Suzanne. For the first time she felt rage over what had happened and how it had been covered over. It wasn't that she was unaware of the history of the war. Suzanne remembered that her father had taken her to Auschwitz when she was 16. But he presented his involvement in the war as if he himself was the victim. There had been an unconscious family script in such environments through which children learned what questions not to ask. Later she commented:

In retrospect, the terrifying thing about [my father] was his objectivity. His reports and descriptions, his careful recapitulation of events. I never saw him shed a tear, never heard him break off in the middle, halt, unable to continue talking. Only those monotonous litanies, almost as though he were reading from a script.

Dieter, a member of the Holocaust's third generation, opened up a process of healing that began with curiosity about the intersection of his life with his culture's history. He gave voice to the silenced knowing, to the secret on top of which his family had lived, literally and metaphorically: that the very home that sustained them was shrouded in racism and genocide. Only with this re-remembering could the affect dissociated from the grandfather's narratives be found and worked with. As the cultural-historical context they had been living in was seen more clearly, their own individual lines of development clarified.

This story raises three difficult questions on a broad scale for those concerned with both ethics and individual development. First, we have all seen examples of small children acting out of affection, love, and concern for the people around them. What has to occur for these empathic feelings to fail to develop beyond one's family and the familiar groups to which one belongs? What ways of being and knowing make it possible for ordinary people to exploit, brutalize and murder their neighbors; or for others to live alongside such terror and abuse and treat it as normal, not to be questioned?

The 500 years of colonialism is in reality a history of multiple genocides in Africa, Asia, and the Americas. In addition, the evolution of worldwide globalization after World War II has unleashed further localized violence between ethnic, class, and religious groups in its wake. In the twentieth -century there were over 500 civil wars in which this type of violence occurred. At present, according to UN statistics, there are nearly 50 such wars in progress. How should we live in such a world, and how does it affect how we are as individuals?

Secondly, when we live in an environment where violence, hatred, and exclusion are the rule, what losses does each individual sustain in the realm of spontaneity, openness, and creativity? Writing about the "dirty war" in Argentina, Diana Taylor (1997) coined the term "percepticide" for the effects of violence on individuals, the erasure of one's own perceptions and knowledge. What happens to our consciousness when our lives are flooded with everyday things whose cheap creation has required savage and unfair working conditions, thoughtless and conscienceless degradation of the environment? When parts of the personality close down and grow numb, when certain topics are silenced and questions are forbidden or socially punished, what kind of maimed individual personality emerges?

Thirdly, how can a community heal after a violent historical period? In Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, Bosnia, Macedonia, Rwanda, Korea, Vietnam, South Africa, and many other countries, there are national debates going on about how to publicly account for painful histories. In our own country we have not yet had truly national, public discussion about the legacies of our history. If every violent and abusive moment in the past yields amnesia on one side and simmering rage on the other -- a scenario that can only lead to escalating cycles of hatred and violence -- the contemporary world will spin out of control. Some process of dialogue and reconciliation must take place among the descendents of genocidal wars in order to break the cycle. Such dialogues can only occur among individuals. Yet it seems that after trauma, a kind of numbness and amnesia are the norm even in the most personal encounters, while what is needed is affective memory and a working-through of the past at both a community and individual level.

How is amnesia developed and supported? How can individuals formed in environments of amnesia about suffering learn to remember to regain lost feeling?

For over 100 years, depth psychology--Freudian, post-Freudian, Jungian, post-Jungian, Lacanian psychology, phenomenological psychology--has developed practices of recollecting, working-through, symbolizing, and healing trauma at an individual level. Unfortunately, many depth psychologists have treated the individual personality as if it were unrelated to a historical and cultural environment. In the last quarter century, some practitioners have been influenced by social psychologies, medical anthropology, and social constructivist theorizing as well as by liberation theology, especially in its concerns for the poor and marginalized. Out of this confluence is developing a critical or liberation psychology focusing on both individuals and communities --now conceived as interdependent. This liberation psychology is evolving practices of restorative justice involving dialogue, memory, mourning, and re-imagining. It is this psychology of the future that we want to participate in creating. It insists that personal development should not be considered independent of the psychological work required by the cultural context in which we live. Personal individuation and social liberation are seen as dependent upon each other.

We see these insights enacted in the work of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Their difficult work represents a "third way" toward the future, between, on the one hand, blanket amnesty and amnesia, and on the other hand, the Nuremberg trials, which left the majority of the population that participated in or allowed violence untouched. Bishop Tutu has been an important voice in the search for methods of community dialogue that might lead to a third way through a liberation psychology. This psychology of the future will not be founded exclusively on Western notions of individualism, competition, and self-sufficiency that have provided such a successful educational basis for corporate capitalism and globalization. Rather, Bishop Tutu (1999) suggests, the African concept of *ubuntu* or community-building will also need to be a key value: "A person with *ubuntu* is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able or good, for he or she has a proper self-assurance that

comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed, or treated as if they were less than who they are"(p.31). In the concept of *ubuntu* one's own self-assurance—yours, mine—is created through how the Other is treated. The positive development of the self is inextricably linked to treating the Other in a respectful, affirming manner—free of abuse, exploitation, and diminishment.

Of course it is easy to look at problems far from home and imagine solutions, to see the mote in the other's eye and fail to see the beam in one's own. But our interest is in looking deeply at what is happening close to home in American cities, our own organizations, in our community lives. It is here that we must closely examine our own processes of normalization that cause us to miss truncations of feeling and amnesias. By this we mean our unquestioning acceptance of everyday reality as normal and inevitable that perpetuates our myopia and failure of imagination.

Looking at us from a distance, Bishop Tutu (1999) had this to say about race-relations in the United States:

If we are going to build a new kind of world community, there must be a way in which we can deal with our sordid past. The most effective way would be for the perpetrators or their descendants to acknowledge the awfulness of what happened and the descendants of the victims to respond by granting forgiveness, providing something can be done, even symbolically, to compensate for the anguish experience, whose consequences are still being lived through us today. It may be, for instance, that race relations in the United States will not significantly improve until Native-Americans and African-Americans get the opportunity to tell their stories and reveal the pain that sits in their stomachs as a baneful legacy of dispossession and slavery. True forgiveness deals with the past, all of the past, to make the future possible. (p. 279)

Recently we saw efforts of a new type of community building in the United States in the dissertation work of one of our graduate students, Anne Shine (2001). Shine researched the dialogue currently under way at the Monticello Association in Virginia, of which she is a member. As many people now know, White descendents of Thomas Jefferson have been confronted with DNA evidence that Sally Hemings, a Black slave, was Jefferson's lover and the mother of several of his children. Association members are beginning to meet both Black and White descendents of Jefferson and Hemings. Generations of White descendants have been coming to yearly meetings at Monticello, and at their death have been buried in the Monticello graveyard. Many of the

current members of the Association were not enthusiastic about new claims for membership. Looking in from the outside, as the research developed, we could witness a whole range of strategies of denial: the DNA evidence wasn't certain; they could come but not vote; they could vote but not be buried in the graveyard.

Two years ago, Hemings' descendants came to the annual meeting for the first time. They found a variety of responses ranging from brutal rejection, to inept or suspicious attempts at dialogue across difference, to troubled meditations, to friendly welcome. During the previous year, a large African-American community group came and did a memorial ceremony for the slaves of Monticello. Only Anne Shine attended from the White community. Dr. Diane Swann-Wright facilitated the ceremony, opening with the following poem by West African poet Birago Diop (in Stanton & Swann-Wright, 1999, p.181):

Those who are dead are never gone;
They are there in the thickening shadow.
The dead are not under the earth;
They are in the tree that rustles,
They are in the wood that groans,
They are in the hut,
They are in the crowd,
The dead are not dead.

But these dead had been denied and disrespected from the point of view of African traditions which require annual remembrance and ceremonies. During the century that followed the end of slavery, the Monticello Association along with most of the American education system silenced Black history, made no memorials for either Native Americans or Africans who had suffered and died on the land, and glossed over the inequities and privileges that were the outcome of that forgetting. This history, and many other silenced histories, still haunts us. When Shine started her research she dreamed a Black woman with a terrible condition of low-blood sugar came to tell her she had a responsibility. In the dream Shine came to understand that part of her work was to help find the place where her ancestors were buried so she could be healed. Another participant in the research dreamed a Black man called to her: "We will not rest until you find out."

Of course everyone involved had always known there were slaves at Monticello, but it was a silenced knowing, separated off from the kind of knowing that requires feeling and caring. As with the second generation of Germans after the war, there was a kind of socially enforced agreement not to question, not to know. Recently, as a result of a new interest in the history of the Hemings, many people began asking after the location of the graveyard where slaves were buried. This March it was located under a parking lot at Monticello. Several of the people involved in the research we are citing are now discussing the possibility of a public yearly memorial that both white and black descendants of Jefferson would plan together and attend.

As psychologists the problem we are addressing here is not so much about history itself, about what happened in the past. It is rather about how to learn and practice a capacity for deep, respectful, and empathic witnessing in the present to the ancestral narratives and life experience of all those in our communities, in our workplaces. This is particularly important in relation to those whom we classify as Other, whether that Otherness is marked by differences of race, or gender, or class, or sexuality, or ancestry. It is especially true if we are walking in on a long history of oppression and discrimination that we are privileged by even if we are not responsible for it. In order truly to heal our histories and communities, this deep listening needs to be followed by care, an intention to understand and support, and by gestures of reparation. But this listening will not be possible unless we are also willing to break with social codes of silence that have been enforced for generations. That would involve finding unknown and marginalized voices in us and creating another kind of discourse where these voices would be welcomed.

Jung (1969) saw this confluence in this way:

The present day shows with appalling clarity how little able people are to let the other man's argument count, although this capacity is a fundamental and indispensable condition for any human community. Everyone who proposes to come to terms with himself must reckon with this basic problem. For, to the degree that he does not admit the validity of the other person, he denies the 'other' within himself the right to exist—and vice versa. The capacity for inner dialogue is a touchstone for outer objectivity. (par. 187)

In other words, listening to what has been silenced within the self is a crucial psychological task that may be able to open to a deeper hosting of the Other.

The silencing of multiple voices in one's self and in one's community is not a problem limited to specific ethnic or national groups in the current era. Drawing on the experience of difficult race relations in Trinidad between African and Indian communities, University of the West Indies' professor Gordon Rolehr (1997), has suggested four possible ways we might interact with the Other as individuals: (1) hostility and overt violence; (2) covert hostility with public cooperation; (3) negative tolerance, in which the Other exists to serve the needs of the self, with indifference to issues affecting the Other if they do not affect the self; (4) in-group concern for out-group well being.

It is deeply distressing that many of the academic and organizational environments in which we have participated have managed only to reach the level of negative tolerance. During the years since the Civil Rights Movement in the South much has changed in American society, but there has also been a deep retrenchment of reaction. Many organizations are locked in conflict about whose point of view, whose literature, whose history, whose sensibilities are important enough to be included and valued.

We need to focus on why it has been so difficult for people to move beyond a comfort zone where new ways of thinking and being can be encountered with curiosity and even celebration. British post-colonial writer Homi Bhabha (1990) has called this needed space in-between individuals "Third Space," a difficult location where what we already know and are sure of may come into question and be revised, and where what has been silenced within and among us can find voice. Healing amnesia requires a period of disorientation and recollection in Third Space. But what holds us back? What is the threat? We think this resistance to change is a phenomenon toward which the experience of depth psychology can be useful. Our utopian imagining is that it is possible for us to live-into Rolehr's fourth option, to care about the well-being not only of our own tribes, however we define them, but also about Others. From the point of view of depth psychology, this would require coming face-to-face with a forgotten Other within our own personalities that we have learned to disown. It would need our courage to be in relationship with all those disowned parts of ourselves connected with shame, humiliation,

degradation, and sadness left over from both a personal and a cultural past that we have never learned to mourn. Depth psychology makes a direct link between what we cannot bear to know about ourselves and what we cannot bear to acknowledge about the Other: that there is suffering, loss, and need to be met.

All forms of depth psychology share the idea that human beings live possibilities of dissociation within their personalities. They have all noticed that there is a widespread survival strategy to avoid painful emotional states at times when they cannot be handled, creating a multiplicity of part-selves within any one personality. In Western psychology these states of splitting and amnesia have been named in a variety of ways: conscious and unconscious by Freud, paranoid-schizoid positions by Klein, ego and shadow by Jung, imaginary and symbolic by Lacan. In contemporary cross-cultural medical anthropology (Peters, 1998) similar strategies have been located all over the world under the heading of "culture-bound reactive syndromes." These are variations of dissociative strategies, or negative possession states, which are commonly observed and treated in specific local cultures: *koro* or impotence panic in China; *latah*, a startle reaction, in Indonesia; *susto*, a fright or soul loss in Central America; *wiitiko* a frenzy in First Nations Canadians. Our thesis is that the dissociative strategy encountered in many distinct cultural locations, has been hardened into an extremely rigid, destructive, and pathological complex, affecting both individual personalities and whole communities in the United States, during 500 years of colonialism. This cultural complex organizes our educational institutions and social discourse in ways that prevent the working-through and mourning of the painful past. That tens of thousands of Americans ensure their daily survival through addiction to psychiatric drugs, to street drugs or alcohol, is a mute testimony to pathologies of dissociated feeling in our environment.

"Working-Through" Culture

When Freud spoke of "working-through," he was referring to the process of psychological work required by us to understand something that has been repressed, and thus be

able to free ourselves from the grip of repetitively re-enacting its patterns (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1967, p. 488). Repressed memories resist our consciousness of them, taking shelter in autonomous and dissociated re-enactment.

Part of the psychological work we are each called to do as we create the tapestry of our life is to become conscious of the cultural roles, thoughts, and patterns that have come to inhabit our existence from our particular culture and historical period. Just as a small child precociously complies to the psychological landscape of the mother, so do each of us compliantly and unconsciously internalize the roles and structures of relations prevalent in our times. We need to work-through cultural complexes and habits in the same way individual complexes and habits are worked through in individual therapy. This is a task that may take a whole lifetime, and undoubtedly requires dialogue with those marginalized by our own cultural complexes. It is a task that requires sensitivity to how culture and psyche co-create each other. It is through this process of "working-through" culture in the intimacy of our thoughts, feelings, images and relations that we can begin to discern and improvise upon the roles, ideas, and structures of our time. To hear this calling, to try to see through our blind and habitual identifications with collective norms, is to prepare the ground for being more open and permeable. Then we are more able to create cultural change through our own more conscious participation in our relations within our homes, neighborhoods, and work groups.

Today we live in a globalized economic system that has rapidly exported production jobs to poorer countries where working people produce the consumer goods we buy for unbelievably low wages, often less than a dollar a day. On the whole, North Americans live in a material world suffused with commodities whose newness, or at times even beauty, obscures the suffering in their very creation. This was brought home to Mary Watkins last summer when she traveled to China with her 9-year-old daughter, adopted from China:

We were surprised to find the streets of Beijing teeming with American businesses. But the image that moved us both the most was a visit to a silk factory. Once inside the massive set of structures, we found ourselves in a deafening roar of hundreds of looms tended by young girls in a temperature of about 110 degrees. We had been told that many work twelve-hour days, others actually sleep beside their looms, living in this

wholly inhospitable environment. Even very poor families struggle hard to keep their daughters from this fate of the silk mills. Many of the girls come from the countryside, where living conditions are very poor. What money is available for school tuition is most often given to sons, leaving millions of rural girls outside the gates of education, available to factories that export the fruits of their toil to the United States.

Off their looms flowed beautiful multi-colored, intricate silks, worthy of royalty. I began to cry overwhelmed by the human tragedy involved. But there were also tears at seeing what is usually sundered as a whole, the silk and the girls' sad labor. Back home as I walk in the shopping mall with my daughters, the tidy, bright, trendy offerings of each store stretch within me to connect with what is hidden away from our view: the *maquiladoras*, a girl's long hours becoming a life within factories that do not serve her or her people.

What responsibility for this system of production belongs to us if most of the clothing we are wearing came out of it? How do we hold the enjoyment of consumption side by side with the knowledge of the suffering that goes into its production?

The Psychological Woundings of Colonialism

As Gandhi was to so clearly formulate through his own life, freedom is indivisible, not only in the popular sense that the oppressed of the world are one, but also in the unpopular sense that the oppressor too is caught in the culture of oppression.

Nandy, 1983, p. 63

Let us open up our lens to the last 500 years of history that has been marked by the rise of colonialism, its defeat through liberation struggles in the last century, and its current transmutation into exploitative forms of transnational capitalism. We propose that it is this wider historical landscape in which our individual personalities have been formed. While many of those oppressed by the cultural genocides perpetuated by colonialism have worked hard to elaborate the internal wounds that colonialism bred, those who have profited from colonialism have had disincentives to reflect on the psychological correlates of being involved in oppressive structures. For those in colonizing cultures, colonial ideologies have contributed to dissociating the personal from the cultural, lending us a sense of interiority that is strangely disconnected from context, historical and cultural. When we have sought to understand ourselves most often in colonial psychologies, we have turned to intrapsychic, biological, and familial explanations for our

thoughts and behaviors. Working to make the cultural unconscious visible in our identities has been addressed only sporadically and inadequately within the history of depth psychology.

Without looking in detail at the kind of consciousness that has been structured through participation with oppressive relations, we cannot know the psychological toll and disfiguration oppression causes those involved in it. And we are all involved in it. It is as though there is a sickness of which we are unaware. To heal it, we must begin to experience it. Yet it is this very difficulty in experiencing it that is part of the illness. It is only by looking compassionately at ourselves--not through the prism of guilt--that we can begin to make out the contours of the landscape we are living in. Even if we don't express it, the multiplicity of the world is assimilated by the self, giving rise to a multiplicity within each of us. We see this multiplicity displayed in the many characters of our nightly dreams. If we reflect on everyday thought, we can see the multiple and often contradictory internal dialogues that arise as we think situations through or respond internally to events and experiences. Self and community are reflections of each other. Using this framework, we can ask how the dissociated world that is the legacy of colonialism impacts our psychological organization and well being, our paths of development.

The Severed Self

One of the most pervasive determinants of our everyday psychological life has to do with the individualistic mode of selfhood that became developed during the eras of colonialism, industrialization, and urbanization. As Kurt Lewin (in Marrow, 1969) described:

The American cultural ideal of the self-made man, of everyone standing on his own feet, is as tragic a picture as the initiative destroying dependence on a benevolent despot. We all need each other. This type of interdependence is the greatest challenge to the maturity of individual and group functioning. (pp. 225-226)

To conceive ourselves in terms of individualism has distinctive implications for mental health and for developmental theorizing (Watkins, 1992). When we are thinking within an individualistic paradigm, development entails a progressive differentiation of self from other, and a corresponding strengthening of ego boundary between self and other. Independence and self-sufficiency become laudable states, pushing interdependency and reliance on others into the light

of pathology. In the individualistic paradigm of the self each of us is responsible for our own successes and failures. That one side of the playing field has Himalayan-size cliffs and another tilts one way toward success is not thematized. Failure to succeed that has a context of lack of adequate access to resources is seen nevertheless as personal failure; just as success in a context of privilege is lauded as wholly personal and "deserved."

The boundary that is marked between self and other is joined by boundaries between self and culture, self and nature. When the self's boundaries are experienced as fixed and firm, nature becomes a domain to pass through on the way to where one is going. It becomes a resource to be used, not a landscape of potential relations. Sadly, the same becomes true of one's neighborhood, where anonymity can remain after years of residence.

The ego of this kind of individualistic self strives for mastery and control. Control is achieved through the creation and scaling of hierarchy, providing access to resources to those on top. This kind of ego judges self in relation to other, and engages in competition to separate the self from other in a vertical fashion. Our language of corporate ladders and glass ceilings reflects this aspect of the enactment of individualism.

Let us pause here and begin to feel within ourselves the price of this configuration of the individualistic self. See if you can recognize its existence in your daily life. Such a self may be involved in a "comparative neurosis." Throughout the day some may be self-assessing themselves in relation to others: who is smarter, more or less attractive, who holds more power. Such comparative practices pull us from the possibility of authentic relation to one another. The other is something to be outdone, or is the one who has outdone us. Any security gained by fighting one's way to an elevated position vis-a-vis the other may be paid for by isolation and loneliness. The workplace may become a site of potential self-elevation, rather than a potential community of unfolding relations. This autonomous individualistic self that is intent on amassing resources for itself, on aggrandizing the self, paradoxically at the very same moment impoverishes one through cutting the self off from multiple kinds of relations with self, others, and nature. The self that strives as it construes its well being to be dependent on its own efforts

alone, finds itself in a cycle of exhausting pursuits and almost frantic efforts at recuperation. The holding, containing, restorative potentialities within interdependent relations--internal and external--are rarely experienced.

The Degrading of the Other, the Splitting of the Self

The self that relates to "otherness" in an instrumental way, in terms of how the other can serve the self, must necessarily be involved in a set of serious dissociations. Lifton (1986), in his work on Nazi doctors, describes how the self doubles in order to perpetuate violence against others without experiencing it as such. In exchange for the material and psychological benefits conferred on them for helping with "racial cleansing," i.e., genocide, Nazi doctors underwent a splitting of themselves into two functioning wholes. The Auschwitz self allowed him to adapt to and accomplish his genocidal tasks, while his prior self allowed him to see himself as a caring physician, husband, and father. Such a doubling protected him from feelings of guilt associated with the violation of the ethical principles he was originally committed to. In this state of psychic division, murder was seen as "cleansing," medical tortures as "research," the other as "vermin."

In globalization, we have an analogous situation where practices that undermine local economies and their sustainability, that have led to increasing poverty and massive dislocations of populations, are called "development." Colonialism's story of the Other as inferior, backward, and primitive mitigates against direct perceptions of violence perpetrated against that other. This causes a dissociation within the self between the dominant cultural narrative and any other empathetic feelings or transgressive knowings that must now be defended against. It is in this way that dissociations within cultural history become translated into psychic dissociations. Such dissociations require energy to be sustained. This is why psychological dissociation is a state that is connected with neurotic suffering and symptoms as well as compromises in vitality, creativity, eros, and compassion. The projective field that reduces the personhood of the Other acts as an

obscuring cloud, allowing one not to experience human suffering. The work of healing requires asking what of our own suffering, thoughts, feelings and perceptions have been "disappeared" in this process.

To see the self in terms of multiplicity has further implications. Once the ego splits in terms of claimed superior and disowned inferior parts, two processes result. What is designated as inferior is projected onto others--seen as belonging to others --if one identifies with the superior position. Secondly, what is seen as inferior is also a possibility within the self; that is, once split, and even projected, it threatens the self internally by being a position into which one can always fall. Psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva (1982) calls this part of our personality "the abject" (p. 51) and suggests that we live in fear of owning it. Thus the individualistic self must be controlling even in relationship to its own feelings. When theorists describe our time as one of narcissism they are describing this precarious psychological situation which we must navigate given our propensity to split experiences into binary opposites of superiority and inferiority.

Not only is the multiplicity of relations in the world denied, but so too are relations amongst the multiplicity of the self. The individualistic paradigm of the self attempts to imagine selfhood as unitary. It does not encourage listening-in to our own ambivalence, to discern the multiplicity of voices that are internalized through our unfolding relations. Not only is the other treated as an object, but in so far as others become internalized through the course of our development, we are capable of turning a deaf ear to some emerging inner dialogues and exploiting other dialogues to serve the aggrandizement of the ego.

In her novel A Model Childhood, Krista Wolf (1980) explores the psychological dynamics of this self in the making. The child Nellie has witnessed Kristallnacht in her hometown. Wolf writes:

Nellie couldn't help it: the charred building made her sad, because she wasn't supposed to feel sad. She had long ago begun to cheat herself out of her true feelings. ...Gone, forever gone, is the beautiful free association between emotions and events. That too, if you think of it, is a reason for sadness....It wouldn't have taken much for Nellie to have succumbed to an improper emotion: compassion. But healthy German common sense built a barrier against it: anxiety. (p.158)

The narrator of the novel, who has suffered chronic anxiety attacks, sleeplessness, tension, and headaches, along with many members of her family, suggests that there are difficulties "regarding compassion for one's own person, the difficulties experienced by a person who was forced as a child to turn compassion for the weak and the losers into hate and anxiety" (p.158). The novel suggests that beneath the dominant cultural narrative, bodily symptoms are expressing non-verbal protests to a constrictive imaginal frame. We could begin to take this protest seriously, to see in our symptoms and felt discomforts the seeds of alternative tellings of our personal and social histories.

The colonial self, profiting from the oppression of others, has created a view of others that justifies oppression. The other is inferior, impulsive, underdeveloped, unable to abstract, superstitious. The other needs colonial stewardship to contribute to their minimal survival. Colonial superiority, intelligence, disciplined work ethic, logical thought, resourcefulness, scientific thinking elevate the colonial self and justify control of the "cake." But this colonial self must also split-off its own inferior, underdeveloped, impulsive, and vulnerable aspects. This binary splitting, whereby one pole is lauded and the other degraded, falls into the psyches of both colonizer and colonized, creating caricatures of identity, and mis-readings of history. Intelligence becomes severed from feeling, intuition, imagination. Work becomes disassociated from spontaneity, vitality, generativity.

To begin to face the legacy of a rigid dissociative complex requires a defeat of a striving, individualistic ego with its attempts to control history, and to avoid painful memories. It is only in the recovery of cultural memory, in the listening to previously unheard feelings, symptoms, and narratives that the internal dissociations can begin to heal. To hold our history in ways that can inform our present we must nurture our capacities for grief and mourning, for truth and reconciliation. We know that mourning requires the availability of support and rapport. Part of the sadness that must be faced is how we may have prevented some of our deepest knowings from informing the major choices in our life.

Dreaming the Self Differently

We can feel the suffering created by the individualistic paradigm of the self: the isolation and loneliness, the internal self-doubt and criticism, the narcissistic oscillation between poles of inferior and superior assessment of self and other, the remove from and objectification of nature and others, the resultant shrinking of compassion, the consumptive frenzy occasioned by an empty self. The liberatory post-colonial alternative we are seeking is to live into the self's capacity for interdependence, its thirst for relation and connection. To do so is to mitigate against the dissociations that have been practiced internally, as well as those externally. How we treat the other must be understood as the stuff from which the self is made. Habermas calls the self that can reflect on and disidentify from identifications with injurious cultural norms as having a "postconventional identity." Santner(1990) describes such a self as follows:

[It] feels entitled to play with its own boundaries (rather than denying them or reifying them), and it will be a self more consistently able to experience the vitality of that 'free association between emotions and events' which ultimately grounds the human capacity to bear witness to history and to claim solidarity with the oppressed of history, past and present. (p. 162)

Only with the creation of more permeable membranes between self and other can we register the narratives of suffering that awaken our ethics and our compassion, an awakening which is needed to re-imagine the structures we are a part of. This requires an awareness of "the Other" to as important a category as "the self," bringing otherness into our view from beyond the margins where it has been pushed in colonialism and now in global capitalism.

Once we stretch past the falsely constructed boundaries we are met by awareness of great sufferings created by the individualistic self, awareness that has itself been dissociated. In cultural trauma work, as in trauma work generally, the path to healing entails allowing bits and pieces of disconnected feeling and memory to surface, to be experienced for the first time, in an environment of care. The key is to be able to create dialogical containers for this work and to enter them with the intention of sharing. These dialogues need more space, patience and silence, and more capacity for ambivalence to emerge than the ordinary rapid-fire give-and-take of English-language discussions. Our time is necessarily one for the work of hearing into being the

narratives that might arise from silenced post-colonial margins in our communities as well as silenced feelings and symptoms at the margins of personal consciousness. This work entails insight into the larger cultural forces that have split communities and individuals into oppressed/oppressor identities.

The self attempting to experience its interdependence with all being can not do so without membership in groups that welcome discord from the margin, that open toward dialogue with the unknown in us and in the world, that make room for the grief that comes as dissociations are healed. Research conducted by an expert who keeps those he is learning from at a distance needs to be supplanted by participatory action approaches to research, where self and others collect together bits and pieces of knowing in order to transform shared situations in the light of mutual desires. These kinds of groups, these kinds of relations, reveal springs of renewal and imagination that have been forgotten, that have been thirsted for without awareness. Such groups must make space for forms of creative dialogue to be improvised, practiced, and brought into increasingly resistant settings. If individuation is seen through the lens of liberation, we become aware that each of our individuations also includes something for the culture, something we become able to see through, to become conscious of, to dream differently. At the same time, if we accept the idea that important parts of our own personality have become forgotten and dissociated, each voice from the margin represents the potential for an encounter with lost parts of ourselves.

Hidden Springs

The method of recollection we are proposing builds on many successful models of restorative justice. Depth psychology suggests that participants in such dialogue practices may feel discomforts with themselves and the group that they cannot articulate and do not yet fully feel or know. The knowing is not yet present but still absent. The work done in depth psychological therapy begins with the notion that many images, experiences, and knowings crucial to the client are not available to consciousness. Instead they exist as losses of pressure, ruptures of narrative, symptoms, unexplained feelings, and dream images. Helen Cixous (1993) says it this way:

I'll tell you frankly, that I haven't the faintest idea who I am, but at least I know I don't know....We have extremely strong identifications, which found our house. An identity card doesn't allow for confusion, torment, or bewilderment. It asserts the simplified and clear-cut images of conjugality. If the truth about loving and hateful choices were revealed it would break open the earth's crust. Which is why we live in a legalized and general delusion. Fiction takes the place of reality. This is why simply naming one of these turns of the unconscious that are part of our strange human adventure engenders such upsets (which are at once intimate, individual, and political); why consciously or unconsciously we constantly try to save ourselves from this naming. (p.51)

One way to think about the work of recollection both in individual and group work is that it is done through the principle of metonymy. Unlike metaphor, where two already known things are compared, metonymy functions when something we are trying to feel and think about is still relatively unknown. All we can do in such a situation is name what is nearby, what seems connected, without yet knowing how the whole will emerge from the parts.

Poet Mary Oliver (1986), writing of the effects of rage on a survivor of childhood sexual abuse gives us this image: "in your dreams she's a watch/ you dropped on the dark stones/ till no one could gather the fragments." To reconstitute the whole out of a crater of lost stories we have to lovingly take-up the pieces of the watch in our hands like bits of a puzzle whose outline is only just beginning to emerge. This requires new types of dialogue: more listening than speaking, more wondering than knowing, more imaginal than goal-oriented. We can't assume we know what meaning is being reached for, because all of our knowledge comes from the dissociative past where the watch was broken. Even if we can name the parts - spring, gear, disc - we still can't know the moment in advance when the hidden springs of spontaneity, joy, and creativity return to the lost center in a new image of wholeness. Each voice and story contributes to the outcome.

Wynton Marsalis (in Burns, 2000) has suggested that jazz could be a metonymy for a democracy that we have not yet been able to create in America. In his vision, jazz begins to experiment with the kind of democratic dialogue that is needed, where in the spirit of improvisational creation each voice in turn is invited to surge forth, supported in its rhythms and breakthroughs by the other instrumental voices. Each voice improvising its own melody intends to create something whole and beautiful, together with all the members of the group. Marsalis (in Burns, 2000) says,

In order for you to play jazz, you've got to listen to [each other]. The music forces you at all times to address what other people are thinking, and for you to interact with them with empathy and to deal with the process of working things out. That's how our music really could teach about what the meaning of American democracy is. The thing in jazz that would get Bix Beiderbeck up out of his bed at 2 o'clock in the morning, to pick that cornet up and practice into the pillow for another two or three hours; or that would make Louis Armstrong travel around the world for 50 something years, just non-stop, to get up out of his sickbed and crawl up on the bandstand and play; the thing that would make Duke Ellington, the thing that would make Thelonius Monk, Miles Davis, Charlie Parker, Mary Lou Williams, the thing that would make all these people give their lives for it...and they did give their lives for it...is that it gives us a glimpse into what America is going to be when it becomes itself...and this music tells you that it will become itself. And when you get a taste of that, there is just nothing else you are going to taste that is as sweet...that's a sweet taste, man.

In this spirit, our work together, our conversation loses the chains of pragmatism, critique, and complaint and moves toward grace.

You might argue that time for improvisation, for the voicing of missing narratives, for the holding together of stories that have been forcibly separated is not pertinent to the kind of efficiency we have been taught to work on behalf of. We caution that what is sacrificed for this kind of efficiency will not only rise up to threaten from the outside, but will twist and turn within us, smoldering, decomposing, sabotaging, taking refuge in symptom until voice is found.

When Adolf Harash went to Chernobyl after the nuclear accident as a trauma psychologist, he worked with many of the nuclear plant's workers and engineers. A frightening number of them confessed with tragic dismay that prior to the accident they had been beset by nightmares about the plant's possible malfunction, given their familiarity with its difficulties and bad repair. Rarely, were any of these knowings given voice, even within one's family. Such knowings felt forbidden in the workplace. Yet these forbidden knowings could have prevented the worst nuclear accident in history, the effects of which stretch far, far into our shared future. Here the personal suffering of individuals and the collective danger to the community coincided and interpenetrated completely. If there had been a possibility to share personally disowned voices in dialogue, the surrounding community might have been able to prevent disaster in time.

We are convinced that from the psyches of its members, communities of all kinds could have access to crucial knowings that have long been silenced; knowings that if listened to could restore a sense of wholeness to what is now fractured, denied, and dismissed. It is itself a moral

choice to open our hearts and minds to hear the pieces of story that have been depotentiated by their dissociation. From the liberation of these silenced knowings a deepened sense of ethics can emerge; individual development and ecological survival can coincide. No truly sustainable development can develop out of the repression of silenced knowings.

We invite you into the experiential work that will bring forth the pieces of knowing that you have access to. By listening deeply to the pieces of melody your neighbors and colleagues offer, there may be ways to re-imagine how such alternating voicing and listening could be incorporated into the places where you work and live. Everywhere around you there are invisible unspoken narratives waiting to emerge, stories from which we could learn much about our environment and ourselves. Breaking the normalization of silence is a crucial first step.

* * *

Experiential small group work to accompany “Silenced Knowings, Forgotten Springs: Paths to Healing in the Wake of Colonialism,” by Helene Shulman Lorenz and Mary Watkins

Seeking to see, to know, to take in all that is, as it is. To meet all that exists. It is by such a sacrament that wounds will heal us. Any healing will require us to witness all our histories where they converge, the history of empires and emancipations, of slave ships as well as underground railroads; it requires us to listen back into the muted cries of the beaten, burned, forgotten, and also to hear the ring of speech among us, meeting the miracle of that.

Griffin, 1995, pp. 152-153

Participants should divide into groups of 6-8 for the small group work.

Small group convenors should read the following introduction:

This work will be conducted in the manner and spirit of council (Zimmerman & Coyle, 1996). Council is a method of dialogue that allows for deep listening to self and other. It is a method of shared leadership. By using a “talking piece” (a stone, branch, picture, or any other object that can be passed around) the opportunity to share is evenly available to each participant. When it is your turn to hold the talking piece, it is also your turn to share. At other times you are asked to listen attentively to try to discern what narratives are emerging. Do not interrupt, ask questions, or comment; listen as deeply as you can. If a person chooses they may decide not to share and simply pass the talking piece to the next person. Please keep in mind, however, that the complexity of thought that is possibly increases as each member of the group stretches to share his/her piece of the mosaic. In the work we will be doing this morning there will be several opportunities to share, and many more to listen deeply. In this council format we will not be engaged in debate or discussion.

I, as the convenor, will initiate each round by asking a question. We will take several moments of silence to allow a response to arise within us. Please also pause between speakers, so that we have the time to really absorb what has been shared before another person begins to speak. It will deepen our process if we can each keep in mind the four intentions of council:

- Speak from the heart
- Listen from the heart
- Be of “lean expression”
- Speak spontaneously

First Round of Council

As you think about it now, where has or does your life intersect with the history and issues of colonialism and globalization? What are the pieces of our collective story or mosaic that you are in a position to see and to know about from your own autobiography. It is tempting to think that colonialism and globalism are far too big for us each to address with our beings. Yet, we are each given particular pieces in our history, and in our current contexts. It is here we must begin.

Take a few minutes and write out the thoughts, feelings, and images that come to you. Focus on the pieces of this knowing that resist sharing, perhaps even with yourself.

(Allow 8 minutes for reflection and writing.)

[Using the talking piece, invite participants to share what they wish to, with the hope of seeing more of the whole mosaic by listening deeply to the pieces each of the participants brings.]

Second Round of Council

Convenor reads aloud: You have described how your own life has intersected with the issues of colonialism and globalization. What is the legacy—positive and negative--of this intersection in your life currently? How does it affect your thoughts, your relations to others, and/or your experience in the workplace? You may find yourself extending what you have already reflected on or you may find that new intersections arise with this question. We will take five minutes to reflect on this, before sharing. Feel free to make notes for yourself.

Third Round

In this round we will explore the experience of silenced knowings in your workplace, community, or family group and the provision of contexts for their voicing. Try to sense something(s) that you know deeply about from your own work or community experience that may be difficult to admit fully to yourself and even more difficult to express to others in your community.

- Have you ever been able to express this to anyone?
- If so, what was the context like that welcomed this knowing into words?
- If you haven't, what are the dynamics that make speaking about this difficult or impossible; what silences your knowing?
- What kind of context would be needed within your workplace, community, or family group to welcome this knowing into voice; that would release the hidden spring of creativity within this knowing?
- Can you feel any ways in which this silencing has ramifications for you in your family life, in your relationship to yourself?

[Convenor should provide 10 minutes for reflection, and then ask people to share in council any things they would like to about their exploration that they sense could be useful to the group. If after this initial sharing time remains, place the talking piece in the center of the circle. Let participants know that they may share additional thoughts by getting the talking piece. When

they have finished, they should replace the piece in the center. It is customary for a person who has already spoken to not take the piece again until others have been given ample time to speak. Should people begin to speak without the talking piece, please remind them to get it. Using the talking piece in this manner will help the group resist a usual free-for-all discussion and will allow more thoughtful space to be available between speakers in which deep listening can occur.]

Further Explorations

These exercises are intended to help you locate the interior landscapes that mirror colonialism and its recent manifestation in globalization. How has colonialism and its present equivalents mapped themselves onto your psyche, your psychological experience?

The accumulation and depletion of resources; sustainability

1. What are the resources that sustain you on a deep level from day-to-day?
2. In what ways are these resources currently being depleted?
3. In what ways do resources run in your direction? Which of these involve the depletion of resources for another or others? When you look deeply at this, what is your feeling response?
- 4) Who inside you knows about this dynamic? What does he or she have to say to you about it?

Emptiness

The plethora available in the marketplace creates a cavernous internal emptiness that corresponds to it. Consuming fills this space and soothes the feelings that arise in it. How do you experience emptiness? What are the strategies you use with regard to inner feelings of emptiness? If you associate these feelings as in part produced by the marketplace, what might be your alternate strategies for dealing with feelings of emptiness?

Inferiority/Superiority

How do you experience the inferior-superior poles within yourself that are internalized from the culture?

Fold a paper in half lengthwise. You will not need to share the content of this exercise with others. Write on the left side ways in which you generally feel superior to many others. On the right side list the ways you ordinarily feel inferior.

Chose one or two of the ways in which you feel superior. Write down any thoughts and/or feelings you may have around the fear of slipping from this place of relative superiority. Note any familiar interior dynamics between the ideas of superiority and the feelings and ideas of possibly slipping downwards. Share anything interesting you have noted with a partner.

Restorative spaces

Describe a situation at work where you felt most fully engaged, alive, in a transformative process. What were the conditions that enabled that to be possible?

What would maximize the conditions at your workplace for an experience of aliveness?

What would be your utopian vision of how to create conditions where people in the workplace (the community) feel most alive?

Premise: the springs of energy, creativity, and eros are increasingly released as one's calling, one's bits and pieces, overlap with the mission of the workplace, and where one's ethics overlap with the ethics of the workplace.

Reconciliation

Where in your daily life are there opportunities for the work of reconciliation between oppressor and oppressed, internally and in relation with others? Do you engage with these opportunities or evade them? Study the internal and group dynamics related to this.

Solidarity

In what ways might you show solidarity with the oppressed in your day-to-day life, internally and externally?

Profit

Fromm speaks of how the idea of profit changed with the rise of capitalism and industrialism from meaning "profit for the soul" to monetary profit. What would profit for the soul look and feel like in a context in which you work/live? What changes would it require over a ten year period to move toward this vision? What changes could begin to be made in the present to begin movement toward this end?

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