

# Group Work and Therapy in Israel: Mirroring a Regressed–Traumatized Society

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## Abstract

This paper summarizes the developments of group psychotherapy practice and training in Israel as a reflection of society. It describes the main relevant characteristics of the Israeli society, focusing on its being a regressed–traumatized large group, the accelerated development of group psychotherapy in Israel, exhibited by the spread of training programmes, and groups that are more unique to Israel, such as groups dealing with loss and trauma and dialogue groups. On the surface, the expansion of training programmes and openness to new approaches is a sign of multicultural awakening in Israel. Deeper exploration reveals a covert encapsulation according to Hopper's fourth basic assumption (Hopper, 1997).

## INTRODUCTION

Since the year 2000, the Israeli society has passed through many socio-political changes affecting relationships between groups in Israel and between Israel and the world around it. The second half of 2000 shattered the illusion of a peace treaty between Israelis and Palestinians and collapsed the vision of creating a new Middle East. An open and aggressive conflict between the Jewish citizens of Israel and its Arabic citizens broke out for the first time, following the support of the Israeli Arabs of their Palestinian brothers. Numerous terror attacks in city centres and main roads in Israel followed the El-Aqsa Intifada. Anxieties around personal safety and feelings of insecurity heightened. The deterioration of the economic situation in Israel had its impact on society, too, through closing of factories, a high unemployment rate, and increasing poverty.

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This article reviews the developments of group therapy and group leadership arising out of the current situation of Israeli society, by connecting the social changes with new directions in training group leaders and group analysts, and with common group interventions and group therapies. The article considers these trends as expressions of the social unconscious and as ways of dealing with the new socio-political situation.

Before describing the Israeli society and its specific characteristics, it is important to stress that the authors of this paper are two Israeli group analysts. We are aware of the drawbacks of an analysis made by participant-observers who belong to the culture they describe, and hope that we have developed some 'outsider's lens' to the Israeli society.

### ISRAELI SOCIETY

For years the vision of the Israeli society has been based on the 'redemption myth' and the 'return of the Israeli sons to their land'. The state of Israel was born as 'a national home for the Jewish people' and was built through battles and struggles from its establishment. The metaphor of the Israeli 'Sabra' was used in order to create a unified social identity out of the different peoples of the Diaspora. The Sabra portrays a heroic character standing against all pressures, in contrast to the image of the weak and victimized Jew of the Holocaust (Gretz, 1995; Almog, 1997). It resulted in minimizing the identity of the Arab minority living in the country and emphasizing an outside Arab enemy, thus creating a strong experience of 'Us and Them' (Berman *et al.*, 2000).

The identity of the Israeli State was crystallized as a strong people leaning heavily on their military power and protecting themselves from a hostile outside world. The Holocaust had a central part in moulding this identity on top of centuries of persecution. Volkan's term 'chosen trauma' is relevant here (Volkan, 1999). It refers to the shared mental representation of a massive trauma that the group's ancestors suffered. Chosen trauma describes the collective memory of a disaster, the echoes of which become a paradigm that keeps the existential threat in the national memory in order to ward off potential complacency. We can say that in Israel every act of terror revives a primary threat to Jewish survival from the destruction of the second temple, exile from Spain in 1492, the Holocaust, etc.

The image of the strong, heroic, but still enlightened Israeli Sabra with humanistic social norms, was enhanced after the Six Day War (1967). Many Israelis believed that this victory would persuade their

enemies of Israeli strength and would lead to peace. This belief was strongly shattered after the Yom Kippur War (1973) and later in the Lebanon War (1982). The illusion that power would lead to a peaceful solution was broken to pieces, as well as the belief in strong, omnipotent leadership. Expressions in the Israeli society of weakness and failure followed. Breaking the social dream and massive splitting in the Israeli society created instability and insecurity and inter- and intra-group diversity increased. A right-wing government came into power in order to support the myth of unity, but social splitting and disagreement only intensified. Extremists raised their voices daily resulting finally in the murder of Prime Minister Rabin (1995). This assassination resembled an earthquake whose aftershocks are still felt. It terminated the dream of a peace treaty with the Palestinians, created an immediate threat to security, undermined stability and, in the long run, fragmented Israel into subgroups along the lines of politics, culture, national identity, religion, country of origin, and economic status.

In the past four years, the security situation has deteriorated dramatically and the relationship with the Israeli Arabs and the Palestinians has become the focus of public discourse. Existential anxieties and paranoid feelings have returned to the centre of attention. Concerns about security have taken priority over questions of humanity. The more Israelis try to defend themselves from threats of terror, the more insensitive to injustice they become. Only recently have new voices tried to break through the frozen political status quo and new ideas for peace with the Palestinians are being heard.

In summary, Israel is a traumatized society with the long shadow of the Holocaust and centuries of persecution of Jews, and the recent past of ever-present wars and conflicts. It is a multi-cultural polarized society, conflicted internally and externally, struggling with difficult questions of social and national identity. Issues of territory, identity, security, rigid outside boundaries and blurred inner boundaries contribute to its current situation and are reflected in large and small groups.

### **ISRAEL AS A REGRESSED TRAUMATIZED LARGE GROUP**

Looking at a society as a group and applying group processes to understanding society is too much of an oversimplification except in the case of a traumatized society. Societies with traumatic experiences tend to regress along with the organizations and groups within it (Hopper, 2003). As discussed above, Israel is traumatized both by its past and by its present. We will now examine the characteristics of a regressed and traumatized society, look at how Israel exhibits them, and describe the consequences.

Laplanche and Pontalis define regression as, 'a return from a point already reached to an early one' (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1974, p. 386). Volkan writes, 'In general terms, regression in an individual involves a return to some of the psychological expectations, wishes, fears, and associated mental defense mechanisms from an earlier stage of human development' (Volkan, 2002, p. 456).

To understand the intrapsychic mechanism in times of distress we rely on Mahler et al.'s (1975) assumption that the infant's ego must be protected from stress. The infant needs to be protected from internal and external traumas, which is accomplished by a symbiotic 'delusion'. The delusion of a common boundary reduces anxiety and that 'even if infants could distinguish self from other very early in life on perceptual grounds, they would not do so for protective or defensive reasons' (Stern, 1983, p. 55). The persistence and redevelopment of these states of mind in response to annihilation anxiety, fragmentation of identity and confusion between self and other, are ubiquitous, even for those who have not been severely traumatized (Billow, 2001). In addition, continuous exposure to anxiety creates concretization and restricts the ability for symbolic thinking [an attack on linking in Bion's (1959) terms].

Volkan (1999) states that individuals faced with the real possibility of annihilation need to feel a part of a large and protective 'tent' and tend to see their personal identity in terms of a social identity, as being part of a large group. They then sense a 'we-ness'. This phenomenon is common in a time of existential threat. The individual and the society endeavour to protect the integrity of each by blurring the boundaries between the self and the society. He also describes 'large group regression' that occurs after a society has faced a massive trauma. It occurs when a majority of people belonging to that society share anxieties, behaviours, and thoughts typical of regression, and its purpose is to maintain or repair the shared social identity.

Volkan offers a list of signs of social regression, among them: group members lose their individuality, rally blindly around the leader, become divided into 'good' and 'bad' segments inside society, and create a sharp 'us' and 'them' division with 'enemy' groups (Volkan, 2002, p. 458). More than half of the signs he enumerates can be observed in Israel with a high degree of intensity and with dreadful consequences. The use of massive splitting was described earlier in regard to the Israeli Sabra standing as a heroic force against the eternal enemy of the Arab states. This type of splitting has delayed the possibility of serious peace talks for decades. Also, the tendency to perceive the Palestinians as people insensitive to the sacredness of life, especially after suicide bombings, prevents the option of any

reconciliation nowadays. We can also see the same pattern of splitting inside Israel as in-group processes. Intolerance to internal differences is one of the worse flaws of the Israeli society. For example, left-wing people consider the Jewish settlers who inhabit territories in the West Bank enemies of peace, while people with left-wing ideology are named criminals and terrorists' friends by right-wing people. The assassination of Prime Minister Rabin only showed where this polarization could lead.

Worth noting is how the public mood in Israel changes dramatically from depression and feelings of helplessness, especially after terror attacks, to euphoria and manic feelings, especially after victories or successful military actions (Hadari, 2002). This phenomenon fits well with Volkan's description of regressed societies' use of extensive introjective and projective mechanisms accompanied by massive mood swings (Volkan, 2002). At the same time, this oscillation can be seen as a coping mechanism enabling Israelis to continue living under ongoing existential threats.

Hopper claims that a regressed traumatized society manifests behaviours stemming from the fourth basic assumption (Hopper, 1997). This assumption is an extension of Bion's original three basic assumptions (Bion, 1961). According to Hopper the fourth basic assumption is expressed in bi-polar forms of incohesion (Hopper, 1997). When this assumption is activated, groups and group-like social systems oscillate between Aggregation and Massification. In the aggregative polarity, people feel alienated from one another. Indifference, hostility, and withdrawal from relationships are prevalent. In its extreme form each sub-group is against each other sub-group. In the massification polarity, merger with the 'group mother' (Scheidlinger, 1974), denial of differences and an illusion of togetherness and sameness prevails. Israel swings between periods of hot conflicts between sub-groups (right-wing and left-wing ideologies, Ashkenazim and Sephardim Jews, religious and secular Jews) especially lately, and periods of unquestioned consensus and illusion of united solidarity, especially during wartime or terror attacks.

Having suffered from massive and continuous traumas (national and individual), recent research shows that the Israeli society manifests a limited sense of safety and substantial distress. However, most Israelis reported adapting to the situation without substantial mental health symptoms and impairment, and most sought various ways of coping with terrorism and its ongoing threats. This may be related to the processes of adaptation and accommodation (Bleich *et al.*, 2003). Even though we cannot define the Israeli society as suffering from a clinical post-traumatic stress syndrome, it still manifests the

never-ending pendulum movement between hyper-vigilance and numbing of responsiveness typical of PTSD (*DSM-IV*, 1994). Herman describes the dialectic of those contrasting mental states as the most typical feature of post-traumatic symptoms (Herman, 1992). Intrusive symptoms alternating with emotional anaesthesia become the playground of this disorder. This dialectic is clearly seen in reactions to terror threats and attacks. Israeli citizens may over-react to threats of suicide bombings, leaving mothers anxious whenever their children go out, or avoiding malls and restaurants. But sometimes the opposite reaction prevails and they seem indifferent to the horrors of terrorism, ignoring dreadful scenes on the TV and continuing their daily life as if nothing has happened.

The impact of this emotional pendulum on life in Israel is enormous but subtle. The diminished responsiveness to the external world, known as 'psychic numbing', originally built up as a defence against penetration of too painful experiences, can explain the avoidance and encapsulation many Israelis develop. Hopper (2003) claims:

In the same way that traumatized people may be able to encapsulate the entire traumatogenic process, including both memories and affects, and, thus, protect themselves from the full weight of the fear of annihilation and its associated phenomena, traumatized people may also be able to encapsulate their good experiences and sense of hope for survival and recreation in order to protect themselves from overwhelming helplessness. (pp. 203–204)

This process is clearly evident in Israel. The need of building a new country and going to war impeded the working through of emotional issues such as mourning the loss of families in the Holocaust and elaborating guilt feelings. The denial and avoidance involved in this encapsulation created blindness to the consequences of ruling another people for a long period. Some of these consequences are freedom deprivation, restriction of transportation, and acts of humiliation, justified by security considerations. This insensitivity does not stop on the borders and can be seen lately in how people ignore social injustices and the inequities of huge gaps between rich and poor in Israel itself.

#### *Training programmes*

As group therapists our challenge is to explore how does the political and social situation described above reflected in training for group psychotherapists in Israel, and what can we learn from training programmes about the Israeli social unconscious?

Until lately training programmes in Israel did not differentiate between group therapy and other forms of group work. For years the Classical British group theories were the primary models used in training group leaders, especially Bion's theory of group. The Israelis interpreted Bion's theory to support the need for an authoritarian omnipotent group leader. Such a leader suits the Israeli myths of leadership based on authoritarian military models as well as the yearning for a big father protecting from fear of annihilation that is part of the Israeli existence. This rigidity fitted well the need to be strong, fight the wars, and keep the heroic stance, but it also contributed to more withdrawal and encapsulation, giving up an analytic exploration that intertwines self and others.

Many of the Israeli group leaders started their career as organization consultants in the army and were trained to lead groups in the military School of Leadership, leaning heavily on Bion's approach as interpreted in the army. But, as Dahan (2005) states, contrary to Bion, who worked with soldiers 'that failed' (i.e., had combat reactions), the Israeli army consultants worked with those 'who succeeded': officers and officer cadets. Applying the Tavistock tradition to the military setting involved rigid boundaries and an authoritarian leadership approach. In addition some of the influential supervisors were immigrants from South America (especially Argentina) applying the psychodynamic model quite strictly. As a result, most of the training programmes focused on psychodynamic and process groups coloured by the Bionian approach, more than any other type such as task-orientated, short-term, or support groups. Even the programmes dealing with task-orientated groups emphasized the psychodynamic understanding of the group (Nuttman-Shwartz and Shay, 1998; Davidson-Arad *et al.*, 2002). Dahan (2005) also claims that because the Bionian approach was 'orally' conveyed in Israel from one generation of group experts to another (meaning without a written interpretation or practical manual), as time passed by this unique concrete interpretation of his theory (adjusted to the Israel climate) became the formal one, shielding Israelis from learning about innovations in Bion's work.

In the past ten years, training for group leading in Israel opened to new theoreticians and influences from the USA and the UK, such as Yalom and Foulkes. Despite the major differences between these theories, they both lean on a more humanistic ideology and on dialogue. The focus on psychodynamic and process groups has continued while incorporating these new theories. The expansion of training and openness to new approaches seems at first as another sign of pluralism awakening in Israel as well as a sign of hope and peacefulness.

Two events signify the recent progress of training programmes in Israel: the opening of a training programme for group leaders in a multicultural society at Beit Berl College (2002), and the establishment of the Israeli Institute of Group Analysis (IIGA) (2001). These developments seem to reflect a focus on social pluralism, diversity, and cultural inclusion on one hand (the Beit Berl programme), but also the creation of a social-cultural isolated elite on the other hand (the IIGA), reflective of the two polarities in Israeli society.

The training programme for group leaders in a multi-cultural society deals with the ever-existing civil-social agenda of a multi-cultural state with many inner and outer conflicts. As microcosms of Israeli society, almost all groups encounter one or more of these intercultural issues; so it is important that facilitators be experienced and skilled in handling them. However, while there are groups and courses that deal with specific conflicts (e.g., the Arab-Jewish conflict), until the opening of this programme there were no Israeli training programmes for group facilitators that supported a broader view of the multi-cultural society and taught a culturally sensitive group facilitation. Strange enough, despite the efforts of its director, this programme's faculty failed to represent enough diversity, at least in terms of the ethnic origin of the teachers and the students.

The IIGA is a private enterprise of senior group therapists who wanted to deepen the knowledge and training of group psychotherapists and to establish group analysis as a leading modality in Israel. After a prior failed attempt to set up a diploma course through the Institute of Group Analysis in London, Israeli senior group therapists opened a training course for a group analysis diploma along the guidelines of the European Group Analysis Training Institutes Network (EGATIN). The institute was established in 2001 and includes seventy members. Introducing the group analysis modality to Israel shows a desire for a softer approach and a wish to belong to the European Union. The group analytic approach suits well the preoccupation of Israelis with social issues, because it incorporates strong social focus (see Dalal, 1998).

At first glance these two projects signify development and expansion of group work and training in Israel, but deeper exploration shows that they express well the social-traumatic situation. The first programme is focused on the self and 'the other' in the Israeli society, but maintains its subgroups: we find very few Arab students, and the staff belongs to the Askenazim elite. The second programme creates an illusion that Israel is the same as all other peoples, but it was directed by a local board that decided about leaderless sessions when the European staff failed to appear in times of heightened danger. Themes



of power, authority, and boundaries remained problematic in the IGA. It seems that the change could not be incorporated yet.

#### *Group work and therapy groups*

Group Psychotherapy in Israel has been described in previous papers by the authors (Weinberg, 2000; Nuttman-Shwartz & Weinberg, 2002). Most of the groups led in Israel (including therapy groups) are similar to those commonly found in the western world. The frame of reference in most of these groups is psychodynamic, relying heavily still on the common paradigm in Israel which is Bion's theory. It seems that the new theories being added to training have yet to trickle down into practice. Teplitz (2005) claims that the central issues developed in England at the Tavistock/Leicester conferences in the 1950s (Rioch, 1981), are still relevant to the Israeli Society: these are issues of authority, role, and boundaries. Regarding authority, he adds that despite the modern models of team-work and synergy applied into Israeli organizations, there is still a deep yearning and longing for a centralistic-strong leadership. Talking about boundaries, he mentions that keeping the time boundaries by Israeli group leaders has been associated at first with military regimes or European culture.

In order to analyse how Israeli society is mirrored through group work, we chose to describe two types of groups that are unique to Israel and reflect its social dynamics: groups dealing with loss and trauma related to the security situation, and dialogue groups. The model for groups dealing with loss and trauma was developed by the Rehabilitation Department of the Ministry of Defence after the Yom Kippur war in 1973, owing to the many casualties, and adopted by the National Insurance Institute to offer psychosocial interventions to people injured in terror attacks. These groups express the traumatic-regressive situation in Israel that has not been worked through yet.

The defined goal of the group is 'to prevent and/or change pathological conditions and processes stemming from loss and bereavement' (Granot, 1978, p. 8). The basic assumption is that the participants in these groups consist mainly of mentally healthy people experiencing difficulties following loss. The difficulties caused by the loss are viewed as normal and normative, and the participants in the group are thus treated as clients of a support service and not as 'patients' or as 'emotionally disturbed'.

The group model used is of a long-term support group with a therapeutic component aimed at connecting the particular ways in which group members mourned their losses and their unresolved emotional conflicts. As in most support groups, especially in traumatic situations

(Weinberg *et al.*, 2005) anxiety is defused, regression is discouraged, transference is uninterpreted, and confrontation is minimized. The emphasis is on the "here and now". The rationale for the long-term model lies with the belief that the normative bereavement process is long and contains different stages. In addition, it reflects the intense and long-term commitment of the military system, in the name of the Israeli society, to those who lost their son or daughter during their military service, defending their home and country. Since the year 2000, about a thousand Israelis have been killed in terror attacks and about the same number were wounded or impacted by being close to the event. The participation in these groups is free of charge, as the psychological services to the bereaved families are provided by the Ministry of Defence by law (Malkinson and Witztum, 2000). These unique groups strengthen the Israeli identity but may also distance the survivors and families from reintegration into 'healthy' society and leave them as living memorials to Israeli traumas (Malkinson and Witztum, 2000; Volkan, 1988).

The homogeneity and cohesion in groups of trauma victims serve to support the victims' weakened egos. At the same time they make it extremely difficult, if not impossible, for the individual group members to go on to the separation-individuation that is essential to working through the traumatic experience. The more homogeneous and cohesive the group is, the less room allowed for individual expression and the more pressure for denial, repression, and projection of anything outside the group consensus (Weinberg *et al.*, 2005).

Other unique groups in Israel are conflict and dialogue groups. Their basic assumption is that the Israeli society includes subgroups with different and contrasting world views. An authentic dialogue between social groups based on the true acceptance of the other is crucial to the healthy development of a society and its resilience. These groups are primarily arranged by volunteer organizations that focus on the development of models and methods for dialogue enhancement in conflict situations and encouraging communication processes at community and national levels. They deal with splits between Israelis and Arabs, religious and secular people, left-wing and right-wing political views, and people from different ethnic groups. The process in these groups suits the model of identity exploration: the task of the group is to reach a differentiation of the self and others representations, while, at the same time, diffusing the individual identity for the collective one (Sagy, 2002).

Two approaches compete in the area of intercultural groups, both stemming from Tajfel's (1978) social identity theory, but reaching different solutions. The first approach, titled decategorization contact

(Brewer and Miller, 1984) is based on reducing the saliency of intergroup boundaries, making the encounter more interpersonal than intercultural. The second approach (Hewstone and Brown, 1986) supports keeping the intercultural boundaries because real changes in society will happen only through contact between social groups and not between individuals. Both approaches can be found in Israel, but do they really contribute to social dialogue and change in the social basic assumptions?

It might seem that in some points it is not clear about what type of groups or leaders we are talking of. Are we talking only about group facilitators, group leaders in health or non-profit organizations, leaders in general and also profit organizations, or about group therapists? Actually, we are talking about all of these levels. Most group experts in Israel do not restrict themselves only to one type of group leading. We can find the same people doing group psychotherapy, consulting organizations through group work, or facilitating groups in non-profit organizations. The sort of blurring of boundaries among the different levels and roles is typical to Israel and is part of the culture we were trying to describe.

### DISCUSSION

The State of Israel was established with the background of the Holocaust and a history of persecution, and is still dealing with an existential threat. The world of groups in Israel is influenced by the social atmosphere and unconscious, coping with the price of living in the shadow of war and terror and with multi-cultural dilemmas. Israel seems to be in an everlasting inner and outer conflict, preoccupied with questions of territory, borders and in-group and intergroup identity.

Does all of the above have its impact on group therapy in Israel, and how? Do Israeli group therapists and members have the same group space as their colleagues from abroad? Is it possible to stay in the 'here and now' in the group when life events are so powerful and ever penetrate the group skin and boundaries? Is it possible in the Israeli reality to recognize the metaphoric and symbolic value of group interactions and contents, or are life events so powerful and emotionally laden that they cannot be used symbolically in the group? These are some of the dilemmas that an Israeli group leader faces.

The exposure to trauma events, such as frequent terror attacks, missiles dropping, etc., restricts the possibility of symbolization and working through social defences to anxiety. Exposure to trauma is not unique to Israel, but the description of the Israeli society raises the

question of whether there is any chance for change or whether we are doomed to an everlasting re-enactment of traumatic and conflictual situations in the small and large group. Can the knowledge acquired and accumulated in groups help to create a more healthy and normal society, enhancing dialogue and diminishing splits? Can we make use of group interventions to influence and change society? As mentioned above, the new training programmes and the development of the Foulkesian approach bring a new climate and some hope for integration between the individual, community, and culture. But close examination reveals that this development is only on the surface.

When the group analytic training course opened in 1995, it included Arab psychotherapists and professionals representing not only mainstream. Those were days of hope for peace and resolution of the conflict. The assassination of Rabin during the course was traumatic indeed for its members. The crisis in the course, causing its premature termination, only echoed this social trauma (Hadar and Offer, 2001). When the group analysis diploma course reopened in 2001, after the burst of the second Intifada, its population no longer reflected Israeli multi-cultural society. Examining closely the composition of members of the new IIGA, we find that they represent the elite of group psychotherapists in Israel. They are composed mostly of Ashkenazim secular Jews; no Arabs, no religious, and probably no right-wing political thinking are included. As Volkan (1997) described it, chosen trauma causes seclusion and withdrawal. As described earlier, the same phenomena occurred among the staff and students of the multi-cultural programme in Beit Berl.

So, although the first impression might be that the entrance of the Yalomian and Foulksian approaches signify development, the people who apply them seem to reflect more of the encapsulation phenomenon according to the Aggregation polarity of the fourth basic assumption (Hopper, 1997).

Examining therapy and support groups in Israel reveals the same picture. Many authors suggest that the homogeneity of trauma victims' groups may block progress beyond the initial stages of the treatment because it undermines the emotional support and understanding required for the group members to grapple with their individual problems (Berman and Weinberg, 1998; Johnson *et al.*, 1999; Nuttman-Shwartz *et al.*, 2002). The homogenous-cohesive group of victims might keep the members from interacting with society around their problems and thus encapsulate them in a bubble out of involvement with community. Again we can see at the same time signs of development and regression in these groups, reflecting a similar ambivalent situation in the Israeli society.

Dialogue groups manifest the same question. Contact groups, where the focus is on interpersonal relationship, function well in reducing stereotypes between group members from different social groups in Israel, but their impact on society is minimal. They might serve to continue the illusion that social tensions between minority and majority groups are lessened. On the other hand, focusing on the contact between groups while keeping their boundaries only intensifies the tensions and the dialogue becomes political and hopeless. What is needed is an approach integrating between the two kinds of groups.

Israeli group leaders are in the same boat with their group members and can have difficulty keeping an appropriate distance from the group. When a terror attack occurs, the anxiety is overwhelming for everybody. When conflicts between Palestinians and Israelis arise in a dialogue group, the leader is either an Israeli or Palestinian, is deeply involved in this conflict, and has an opinion of his/her own about it.

The conductor's countertransference might prevent the groups from working on conflict issues. The group members might perceive the leaders as vulnerable and in order to protect them from potential disaster, avoid dealing with heterogeneity or develop pluralistic dialogues. This kind of countertransference is common for group therapists in societies in conflicts (Benson, Moore & Kapur, 2005).

In the introduction for this paper we mentioned the fact that as Israelis we might have difficulty observing the social phenomena in Israel from the outside. We think that writing this paper involved a process of 'stepping out of the Israeli bubble'. Actually, talking about encapsulation, our keen awareness of this mechanism helped us not to become trapped in the bubble. We can only hope that we achieved this goal.

Time will tell whether group leaders and therapists might become social change agents to improve the situation within the conflicted Israeli society. The complicated situation reveals both signs of encapsulation and attempts to avoid social involvement among Israeli group therapists, together with attempts to break boundaries, examine the social implications of group psychotherapy and relate to the traumatic social and political situation, along with becoming involved in the global community of group therapists.

This paper clearly intertwines political and social issues with professional and group activity. Any examination of group therapy training and techniques in Israel cannot be understood outside of this complex social climate. We hope we have demonstrated this intricate web of relationships and enlightened the reader about the multifaceted consequences.

### Notes

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