

PEER-REVIEWED ARTICLE

Speaking to silence: Palestine, psychotherapy, and transactional analysis

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ABSTRACT

This article, written by members of the group ‘Transactional Analysis and Palestine’, offers seven individual but related reflections on psychotherapy—the field, its practice, and its practitioners—in the context of the genocide in Gaza, and the work of the group to date. It discusses silence, colonisation, decolonising psychotherapy, dissociation, and power, and ends with some reflections on the purpose, structure, and process of the group, and on allyship.

KEYWORDS: Palestine; silence; colonisation; language; genocide; power

WHO DO WE STAND WITH? REFLECTIONS ON PALESTINE, SILENCE, AND DECOLONISING PSYCHOTHERAPY: A MEMOIR—NADA KHADER

‘And do not mix the truth with falsehood or conceal the truth while you know [it].’

Surah Al-Baqarah (2:42)

—A verse of the Qu’ran which warns against the silence and distortion of the truth.

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‘And We wanted to confer favor upon those who were oppressed in the land and make them leaders and make them inheritors.’

Surah Al-Qasas (28:5)

—A verse which affirms the wisdom and eventual leadership of the oppressed.

In the midst of what has unfolded in Gaza over the past two years, I find myself sitting in a place of deep disappointment, grief, and rage. As a Palestinian, an intersectional and relational psychotherapist, and an activist, I feel marginalised not only by the wider world but also within my own professional community—a community that speaks of liberation, empathy, ethics, justice and belonging, and finding intersubjective meaning in the therapeutic encounter. Yet, on Palestine, there was silence. This silence felt hypocritical and profoundly unjust. Paulo Freire (1970/2005) reminds us that silence is never neutral; it is an enactment of oppression when dialogue is denied. In this way, the absence of voices on Palestine in psychotherapy has become complicit in maintaining injustice.

By chance, I was invited to join a group whose purpose was to explore and challenge this silence around Palestine within the psychotherapy profession, and, specifically in transactional analysis. I felt hopeful—perhaps this would be a place to find my voice. Meeting the group was a relief, though I also noticed that the majority of its members were white Europeans. In the early sessions, I became acutely aware of my somatic responses: my body held tension, confusion, and the co-existence of anger, rage, compassion, and curiosity. Frantz Fanon (1961/2004) writes powerfully about how colonialism inscribes itself on the body, producing rage, alienation, and despair that are both personal and political. My own bodily experience in those rooms echoed Fanon’s insights, where silence and avoidance reproduce the colonial wound in the here-and-now. I asked myself, is this another ‘khiana’, or treason. The Palestinian diaspora has been established as the result of a systemic seizing, assault, and thuggery with violence.

What I encountered in the group was, at times, a tendency to intellectualise or to turn towards individual interests. The group discussion centred around fundraising at a time when it was unclear how funds could be efficiently and securely transferred into Gaza, which distracted from the urgency of collective justice. The refusal to engage head on with the core issue of silence around the systematic erasure of the Palestinian people is one that intersects with whiteness, privilege, and what Dajani (2022) calls the social unconscious: the collective and often unspoken histories, cultural assumptions, and traumas that shape what can and cannot be spoken in professional spaces. When I raised questions about this, some members withdrew, offering polite reasons for leaving. Yet those who stayed remained committed, and the group continued. Still, I found myself questioning: are we at risk of turning suffering into another site of capitalisation, another way of appropriating pain into individual or institutional agendas?

These questions also entered my supervision. Session after session, I brought into the room the pain of what was happening in Gaza; the silence I was encountering in the profession; and the challenge of carrying both my role as a therapist and my identity as a Palestinian. I was witnessing not only my clients' struggles but also my own: re-traumatisation through global events; ancestral trauma passed through my mother's and father's story of being displaced from Jaffa and al-Ludd in 1948; and the pain of seeing history repeat itself. In my supervision groups, in which most participants were white British, I often wondered if others were bored or tired of hearing me speak about Palestine. Yet I could not stop speaking. This was my lived experience. This was the intergenerational trauma of my family, narrated repeatedly through my mother's tears as she recalled the النكبة, Nakba, the Catastrophe, which refers to the mass displacement and dispossession of over 750,000 Palestinians in 1948 during the creation of the State of Israel, marking the beginning of ongoing exile, occupation, and denial of return, and it was unfolding once more in front of the world's eyes.

Over time, I came to see that belonging does not come through silence or through accommodating others' comfort. Belonging comes through insistence: insisting on my voice, insisting on my authority, and refusing to collude with erasure. For me, activism in psychotherapy means disrupting silence, speaking loudly, and continuing to witness—even when it feels uncomfortable for those around me. At one point, I asked my colleagues and supervisors what it would take for them to meet me halfway. For two years I had been bringing my pain into the room—had they not seen it? Did I need to keep working harder for them to acknowledge it? This revealed a profound parallel process: my struggle in supervision mirrored what it means to exist in the world as a Palestinian, where recognition often comes only when one insists, resists, and refuses to disappear: 'Sumod'—steadfastness.

This parallel process was present again when, in August 2025, I attended the International Transactional Analysis Association's (ITAA) World Conference in Montpellier, France. I went with a strong determination to show up as a Palestinian: in what I wore, in what I carried somatically, and in how I represented myself within my professional community. Yet, once again, I was confronted with silence. Some people approached me privately to say they were sorry for what was happening to my people. Others, even colleagues who knew me well, ignored the fact that I was there, choosing not to engage. Gaza was mentioned three times during the conference—briefly, in the opening ceremony—and, while I welcomed those acknowledgments, they felt faint compared to the loud mobilisations we witnessed for Ukraine. When war broke out there, psychotherapy organisations rallied immediately: letters were written, fundraising launched, voluntary networks activated. Yet, for Palestine, facing not war but ethnic cleansing, apartheid, colonisation, and genocide, the silence persisted.

There were moments of hope. It meant a great deal to me when one member of this group spoke in Arabic and named the situation clearly, refusing to sidestep it as politics but instead recognising it as a profound human and professional reality. Still, I left the conference with sadness and disillusionment. Why is silence maintained here? Is it fear? Is it a privilege? Is it

a deliberate avoidance? Or is that what we call cowardice? Part of me cannot believe it is naivety alone. What I began to realise is how much effort it takes to break silence in our professional world, and how fragile the ethics of our organisations feel when they fail to name the violence that is unfolding before our eyes.

Silence, I have come to see, is not passive. In psychoanalytic terms, silence is viewed and functions as a narcissistic defence—a withdrawal into self-interest that reflects the wider logics of capitalism. As Marcuse (1964) argues, capitalist societies cultivate forms of one-dimensional thinking in which dissent is absorbed or neutralised; silence becomes one such form of absorption. In transactional analysis (TA), Hargaden and Sills (2002) describe how narcissistic processes are sustained by projection: unwanted truths are disavowed and located in the Other. In this sense, the silence of psychotherapy around Palestine projects discomfort, rage, and complicity outward, while maintaining the image of neutrality and care. To me, this equates to the violence of what I see as the business impact analysis standard of our profession. As Bollas (1987) reminds us, the culture of narcissism thrives by prioritising self-preservation over encounter, a dynamic I recognise in the profession's selective mobilisations—loud for Ukraine, muted for Palestine.

Non-Eurocentric perspectives deepen this understanding. Palestinian psychiatrist Samah Jabr (2022) describes silence not as absence but as an active political weapon: in psychiatry, the refusal to name oppression is itself a form of institutional violence. Similarly, Lara Sheehi and Stephen Sheehi (2022) shows how silence functions under settler colonialism as a demand for legibility: Palestinians are permitted to speak only when their voices fit within Western frames of acceptability. Edward Said (1978) named this dynamic decades earlier as the erasure that underpins Orientalism, whereby silence is enforced upon the colonised through systems of knowledge. Islamic scholars such as Al-Ghazālī (1200/2013) warn against confusing *ṣabr* (patience) with collusion; silence, when it shields injustice, becomes complicity rather than virtue. Taken together, these perspectives show that silence is never neutral: it is a projection of power, a weapon of domination, and a betrayal of justice.

Kareem Dajani's work on social unconsciousness helps me make sense of these dynamics. The silence I encountered, whether in groups, supervision, or international conferences, was not simply personal avoidance, but the weight of collective histories shaping what could and could not be spoken. The social unconscious, as Dajani (2022) argues, is saturated with privilege, power, and histories of colonisation. Intersectionality, here, is not just a theoretical concept, but a lived experience, where identities of race, culture, gender, and faith converge to shape both oppression and resilience.

The Palestinian struggle has been ongoing for more than a century, since the *Balfour Declaration* of 1917 (House of Commons Library, 1917/2016), marked by displacement, ethnic cleansing, apartheid, and now a genocide being witnessed in real time. Yet, I notice that interest in Palestine often surfaces only when it touches personal identity, heritage, or

intellectual pursuits. Freire's (1970/2005) concept of critical consciousness reminds us of that awareness without action risks becoming another form of appropriation. If psychotherapy is to have integrity, it cannot intellectualise oppression while refusing to engage with its realities.

For me, these questions go to the heart of psychotherapy's political stance. What does it mean to sit with clients who come as the oppressed, while the therapist may—consciously or unconsciously—embody the position of the coloniser? What does it mean for our profession to claim values of empathy and ethics, yet remain silent in the face of colonisation and genocide? How far are we willing to disrupt, deconstruct, and decolonise not only our practices but also our own minds, our spirits, and our collective silences? Also, I started to question: what does solidarity mean? What does activism mean? What does allyship mean?

These are not abstract concerns. They are political, ethical, and spiritual imperatives. Silence, in this context, is not neutral. It is an enactment of violence. To decolonise psychotherapy requires more than theoretical discussion: it requires courage, disruption, and the willingness to confront our complicity. From my supervision to the conferences I attend to the therapy rooms in which I sit, I have learned that the wisdom of oppression lies in its insistence—the demand that we speak, that we refuse silence, and that we claim belonging not through comfort but through truth. As therapists, supervisors, and trainers, we must ask ourselves—who do we stand with, and what do we remain silent about?

In reflecting on all of this, I have also come to see that what is unfolding is not simply political or psychological, but spiritual. Like Gaza itself, what is called a 'war' is not a war; it's a genocide, a systematic assault on bodies, on land, and on our capacity to think critically and feel deeply. Oppression works by forcing us into binaries of good and evil, right and wrong, friend and enemy, binaries that anaesthetise critical thinking and fracture our humanity. In my own practice, and in my faith as a Muslim, I have come to understand that this is the most insidious violence of all: the violence that numbs discernment. The wisdom of oppression, then, is also spiritual wisdom—the refusal to surrender to these binaries, the insistence on complexity, and the courage to hold suffering and compassion together without erasing truth. This, for me, is the deepest form of decolonisation: not only to reclaim our land and our voices, but also to decolonise our spirits, our souls, our capacity to think, to feel, and to act with a heart that remains awake, to which I say—the collective liberation.

Free Palestine, Free World!

SPEECHLESS—JINAN JOUDEH

Having been offered the opportunity to say something about Palestine, about our group, in solidarity with my colleagues and friends, among them: Julia, who opened up a space for us to meet, without knowing where it would head but holding fast even when the membership waned and shifted; and Nada, my kinswoman, whose father and mine were once neighbours in al-Lydd, Palestine—a surprising discovery which even as I write it now brings tears to my eyes, a poignant punctuation mark to the narrative of forced displacement—I find myself in a strange state of speechlessness. Even in the context of assured camaraderie, I find myself speechless, which is different than the sort of silence to which Nada refers.

Since spending a month in the country of my birth, the dissociated and dissociating United States of America, where everything, even the most brutal of genocides, is spun and homogenised by American exceptionalism, candy-coated with layers of corporate interest and Trump-isms, so the truth doesn't even melt in your mouth let alone your hand, I have felt increasingly disoriented and unable to think, know what to think, even as I know, more than ever, exactly where I stand. I take some comfort in Lara Sheehi's concept of 'symptomatic steadfastness'. She writes:

I hear people over and over again saying, 'I feel like I'm going crazy.' This is not because they don't understand what is happening. If you talk to people, they can locate the source of violence. They know with extreme preciseness what is actually happening and, in many ways, what needs to be done to eliminate it, politically and socially. (cited in Nahhas, 2024, para. 6)

She goes on to explain how really this 'craziness' is a sign of psychological warfare where media, Western governments, institutions, and the powers that be make good old-fashioned reality testing irrelevant and insufficient. I understand Sheehi here to be referring not just to mainstream news or capitalist ideology but also to a more subtly pervasive avoidance, denial, or disavowal manifested in the non-response of others, a silence (such as the silence of our training and accrediting institutions) or silencing (from discouraging certain positions to outright censorship). It can even happen in the therapy room, where historical and social realities are often imperceptibly side-stepped or pathologised and passed through what Sheehi and Sheehi (2022) name as 'the prism of an imposed universal psyche' (p. 163).

I think my speechlessness largely comes down to the way in which words will always fail to communicate the real agony and suffering happening as I type. When I refer to the genocide, the tearing apart of bodies, the burying, crushing, mutilating, burning, starving, torturing, bleeding that is actually happening (and in which we are complicit), words do nothing to stop it. Anyone can see it simply by tuning into their social media feed. There is a material, flesh-and-bones reality behind every reference to and naming of genocide, and I do not know if there is anything else to say.

Of course, there is more to say and plenty of others have offered much that is important, vital, and elucidating. As writer and activist Susan Abulhawa says in a recent podcast:

The whole world feels like a lie outside of Gaza... and I've said this before... I'm still at a loss for words to really capture the enormity of what's happening, the depravity of what's happening, the moral abyss of allowing this to continue. The just unbearable inhumanity, the sadism. To call them demonic is not enough. To call them sadistic is not enough. To call this a holocaust is not big enough... this isn't just a major moment in our lifetimes in geopolitical history. This is a hinge, a real pivot, a turning point that's going to determine not just Palestine's fate, but the fate of humanity. The president of Colombia said it that this is rich nations teaching us, showing us what they're going to do to us if and when we step out of line... it's not the totality of the West. It is a ruling elite of Westerners who are developing a new model, a model that is going to subjugate people around the world. (Abulhawa, 2025, 2:29–3:44)

Maybe certain governments and media outlets want to make it more complicated than it is, to obfuscate and prevaricate, but it is really no longer difficult to see right through the settler colonial logic of the Zionist entity, funded and driven by Western elites. That institutions and colleagues stay silent is not a surprise to me. That much of the population of the West remains unmoved (or not sufficiently moved) to act against this sadistic and tortuous entity is not surprising either. We have been conditioned to believe, first of all, that those of us in the West are somehow more civilised, superior, or more deserving than those who are not; and, second, that, even if we are upset or outraged, there is nothing we can do or say, that we are helpless and can only be despairing.

There comes a time when things cannot go on as they are and maybe we are approaching that time. Abulhawa suggests that we are at that pivot point. Western liberals are seemingly surprised and outraged that their freedoms to speak, protest, and dissent are being slowly (or not so slowly) taken away in their ostensibly democratic homelands. I try to be patient with their indignation but the writing was written on the wall long ago. The inevitable consequence of the systems which underpin our so-called democracies have always depended, at their margins, on the subjugation, suppression, and oppression of others. That this generally happened outside the borders of the imperial core—though ask any brown, black, queer, trans, or differently abled body and they will tell you a different story—only means it could be denied and repressed by those inside.

There is, for me, a growing dissonance working in the psychotherapy field, which, at the same time, presents a potential avenue for further awakening and change. Psychotherapy as practiced throughout most of the Western world is interested primarily in the individual: individual suffering, individual change. However, there has been a lot of work outside the West which challenges this. For example, psychiatrist Frantz Fanon intertwined decolonisation, politics, and collective struggle in his clinical practice as well as his more overtly political works, recognising, in particular, that the first step to reducing individual human suffering is psychological liberation from colonised introjects (Fanon, 1961/2004). Ultimately for Fanon this could never be an individual undertaking alone but would involve collective struggle and resistance. In his writings on liberation psychology, Ignacio Martín-Baró (1994), vis à vis the work of French philosopher Didier Deleule, explains:

[traditional] psychology offers an alternative solution to conflicts; it tries to change the individual while preserving the social order, or in, the best of cases, generating the illusion that, perhaps, as the individual changes, so will the social order—as if society were a summation of individuals. (Martín-Baró, 1994, p. 37)

Part of the process to resist or move counter to this individualisation, Martín-Baró suggests, might be engaging in an emancipatory praxis, wherein *conscientisation*, as explicated by Freire (1970/2005), plays a central role in the therapeutic encounter. Therapy could be a place where people develop a critical consciousness and an understanding of their social and political reality that then leads to collective action against oppression. Ibrahim Makkawi (2015) describes how Palestinians have been engaged in this sort of work particularly since the first Intifada but not without interference from Western interests, which depoliticises and atomises Palestinian suffering and oppression. Makkawi describes the way in which concepts such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), trauma, and victimisation, which were ushered into Palestine post-1993 Oslo, created more distress and worse outcomes for Palestinians. Interventions based on these concepts also undermined an already existing and growing community psychology movement grounded in community organising and activism, a movement which recognised that relief from a great deal of individual suffering would occur only with political change and national liberation. From this community psychology movement, concepts, ideas, and practices arose which emphasised ‘social justice, contextual relevance, and social appropriateness and resistance to oppression’ (Makkawi, 2015, p. 67). For example, Meari (2015) explains how the Palestinian practice of *sumud*, which gives meaning to and changes the perception of the experience of occupation, interrogation, and torture for Palestinians, proves a much more helpful stance than interventions organised around the unreflexive discourses of trauma and human rights. To return to Abulhawa’s (2025) invocation of the pivot point, we might now need to imagine that the contributions of global majority clinicians and thinkers are not fringe techniques or applicable only to the obviously oppressed but, in fact, critical to everyone.

There is another way of being in the world, including another way of practicing psychotherapy, which decentres individual experience and prioritises the collective. I think this position is shared by many of us now wanting to contribute in whatever way possible to the resistance. This includes finding ways of working in solidarity with others and engaging in small acts of what Palestinian psychiatrist Samah Jabr (2025) calls ‘revolutionary love’ (p. 263). Maybe more than anything, such love is what this group has generated with me.

THE INHERITANCE OF SILENCE—JULIA POOL

The past two years have made me question on numerous occasions the profession I spent five years training to be part of, incurring a debt I will be paying off until I retire. I have failed time and again to understand how, as practitioners trained to sit with intense and

destabilising feelings in our clients and ourselves, we have done such a poor job of addressing the situation in Palestine. I believe we are in prime positions as therapists (particularly those of us who work relationally) to cope with the very strong feelings that conversations around inherently challenging subjects like Israel and Palestine evoke. As Sheehi (2025b) says: 'I work in a profession that largely relies on the practice of having words to distil and describe experience as the supreme indicator of psychic health—the talking cure' (p. 2). The power dynamics underlying the dissociation have been hiding in plain sight. If there was ever any doubt that racialised systems of power run through the veins of our profession, we need look no further than the silence around Palestine. The immediate rallying around—both required and absolutely necessary—after the invasion of Ukraine in contrast sends, I believe, a strong ulterior transaction (Berne, 1964) about whose lives are worth rallying for and whose not, a parallel process to the global response to the genocide in Gaza.

As the deliberate and horrific destruction of Gaza continued: the pointed destruction of hospitals, health care workers, journalists, universities, ancient olive tree groves, and entire generations being wiped out, I found myself wondering about my recently found community of therapists: were others not outraged, too? Where had all the loud, confident voices about Ukraine gone? El Akkad's (2025) term 'ethical double-jointedness' comes to mind and, as Jinan mentions in her piece, it was crazy-making; so, in April 2024, I decided to post a message on an online forum with a large reach of practitioners which generated a handful of replies. A longer piece of writing published in *The Script* in July 2024 (Pool, 2024) generated a bit more interest, an article in response by Aldridge (2024), and a group 'TA and Palestine' formed and has been running ever since. It has reduced in size and now has a small but regular number of participants (see Keith's contribution below).

The group is a monthly holding space without an agenda; a place to bring our reactions to the horrors we see unfolding, live streamed to our phones, day in, day out. How I experience the group has its roots in my intersectional and relational narratives, and it is from this meeting place I write the following piece.

Before each meeting, I found myself becoming anxious, turning to my ever patient and politically minded supervisor to deeply question my intention in setting up this space. I frequently turned and continue to turn to Reid's (2022) important questions to self-interrogate: am I serving the cause right now or am I trying to prove I am one of the good ones? Am I operating from a place of self-righteousness? I would add to this: is this a defence against my racialised anxiety? My mediterranean and Levantine heritage are not visible from the outside, yet my insides were hurting every time I watched the carnage. Did I have a right to this somatic reaction when I benefit from the privilege of a White-enough skin never to be the projection of racism? This all needed and needs regular reflection: checking in with myself and which parts of myself are being activated and defended against. That the group could somehow be immune to systems of oppression was a fantasy my white, cis body fell to repeatedly. As I sank into my own layers—in my reading and writing—of how I am implicated

in these systems, I hoped I could show up to the group in a more accountable way. It was hard not to spot how unconscious racialised enactments played out at the beginning—whose emails were replied to, who spoke over whom, and whose words were dismissed. As in my final year of therapy training, I found myself turning to Black feminist writings and ethics of care to try to find a different way—‘remaining attentive to the needs of the community’ rather than a ‘white feminist neo-liberal politics which focuses on the self as vehicle for self-improvement and personal gain at the expense of others.’ (Olufemi, 2020, p. 4).

We all hold cavernous internal contradictions, capable of love and wounding and everything in between. We are both vulnerable and responsible (Kabasakalian-Mckay & Mark, 2023), perpetrators and victims, in our intersectional narratives; and holding these internal conflicting truths can be extraordinarily challenging. ‘How do we grapple with implication when the fabric of the memories and longings that make us who we are, are associated with injury to others, not only accidental but viewed as acceptable or deliberately invisible?’ (Kabasakalian-Mckay & Mark, 2023, p. 5). This is confronting, painful, and acutely challenging work that needs a robust commitment to self-interrogation with holding and grace.

The different ways we, as practitioners, think about how political and systemic forces operate within the therapeutic relationship perhaps affects how we turn to global events. When I have challenged colleagues’ silences, I am often met with the same answers: I don’t know enough; it’s too political for my work as a therapist. I question all these responses, and wonder whether ‘I don’t know enough’ can be an excuse for ‘I don’t *want* to know enough’ revealing unconscious racialised systems that silently weave through all our psyches in different ways.

Gaztambide (2024) does a meticulous job in his book *Putting Freud on Fanon’s Couch* to show how the origins of psychoanalysis were always located in the social and political, a perspective that is echoed in Tudor’s work in transactional analysis (Tudor, 2025).

I think there is now a new generation of therapists picking up the mantle and questioning what ‘doing’ therapy involves and urging a return to social and political ways of thinking about our work, resulting in more expansive subjectivities in therapy rooms. As Orange (2020) puts it:

In each geographical and cultural location, other manifestations appear, but every clinician, as long as we live in a world of war and violence, must learn to pick up and hear these indicators—first in ourselves, and then in our patients. (p. 37)

Challenges to the concept of the unconscious (Freud, 1912) central to the groundwork of psychotherapy and psychoanalysis have moved to what Layton (2020) describes as the ‘normative unconscious’ and Dajani (2025) refers to as the ‘social unconscious’, a term originally coined by Trigant Burrow (see Drury & Tudor, 2022). Sheehi (2025a) pushes even further to say that our natural default when working relationally to often explain things away to an unconscious process can become: ‘an escape valve for innocence.’ (3:14)

This year I have found solace in the writings of Hemphill (2025) who advocates for us working on ourselves in tandem with doing activist work. They write: ‘We can’t change the world if we do not heal what has become embodied in us, and we cannot truly heal if the conditions that break and isolate us don’t change, too.’ (Hemphill, 2025, p. 98).

The deep systemic wounds we all carry have been the work of insidious, silent forces for generations; these systemic forces both demand and thrive on our silence. To learn to hear them, begin to undo them, and forge a different world will take decades and the effects are unlikely to be seen in our lifetime. This can be a hard truth to bear. I believe we need to first start with ourselves, how we show up with our intimate others, and then, in combination, set to work to make this world a fairer place for every person in it:

For all the work that we can, and in this case that I can do, in reading the right texts, in approaching people the right way, in understanding the writings of feminists, LGBTQ theorists and disability theorists, and so on, ultimately if I had not approached and addressed this core part of myself, then all my work would have floundered on the shores of my internalised coloniser. (Turner, 2025, p. 136)

To aspire to reclaim our power and become assertive without tipping into behaving oppressively can be delicate work. This is echoed in Arundati Roy’s (2025) memoir *Mother Mary Comes to Me*—a parent she describes as being ‘her storm and her shelter’ capable of ‘thorny love and savage grace’ (p. 5). Her mother achieved extraordinary things in her activist life in India—notably that Syrian Christian women in Kerala had the same inheritance rights as male siblings which ‘ultimately turned her into a minor legend’ (p. 52)—yet could also be abusive to her own children. My own mother, though loving, was deeply committed to a lifetime of activism from places of commitment and courage but also locked away unhealed relational and systemic traumas which cast its own troublesome shadows over my childhood.

I believe to re-imagine a different world where nobody is left behind (Olufemi, 2020), we need smaller, gentler spaces where ambivalence can be held with deep-rooted ethics of care. I would hope that the TA and Palestine group can aim to be one such place. However, for it not to tip into a harmful space for our Palestinian colleagues and other members holding multiple marginalised identities, is something that those of us who are racialised as White must hold at the forefront of our minds. When ruptures inevitability happen, it is important that the repair process doesn’t require unconscious adaptation (Saketopoulou, 2024) but commits to witnessing each other’s pain and holding ourselves accountable; to keep a close track of *why* we all hold the group and what our intentions are. I think the rarely voiced potential overlap between mentalisation (Fonagy et al., 2002), and psychic colonisation (Bollas, 1987; Fanon, 1952; Minikin, 2024) is a slippery and elusive expanse that needs thoughtful and sensitive attention. Perhaps this way of being together helps to bridge the gap from decolonisation as an intellectual pursuit to an embodied practice.

Once we begin the never-ending, lifelong work of knowing our own self states, those parts that hold implication and those that hold oppression, when we befriend them, know them, hold the shame with grace (DeYoung, 2025) and uncertainty, perhaps then we can begin to enter radical open dialogue (Hart, 2017) and learn to hear (Orange, 2020) the Other. This is often what we do with clients, so we are surely well placed to try to do it as practitioners in community:

We must find the courage to speak up against racism and oppression, even when it is uncomfortable. Our voices have the power to challenge the status quo, hold institutions accountable and create meaningful change. Let us not be silenced by fear but emboldened by the truth we carry within. (Turnbull-Roberts, 2023, para. 17)

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON AND GRATITUDE FOR OUR TA AND PALESTINE GROUP—ZAYNAB BUNSIE

I have experienced the TA and Palestine group as a container for witnessing one another, processing complex feelings, and coming together in the face of an ongoing genocide in Gaza. Fairly early on, using the group as a space to organise a fundraiser was put to one side in favour of prioritising intimacy and care. This felt even more vital with Palestinian group members.

I am grateful for the ways that the group has practised showing up without a plan and acknowledging not knowing what to do. I am grateful for being embraced in all of my process, including absences that signalled dissociation, and always being treated as a friend. I am grateful for each time someone in the group has shared the contents of their heart. It's simple stuff, and always feels like an inadequate response to what we are witnessing in Palestine but being with the group in this way is a windscreen wiper for the mystification that continues to blur my vision, not because I am confused about what I know is happening in Palestine but because I am confused about how to stay with the horror. I think my struggle to be with what I see and how I feel in this way feeds on and reinforces the alienation Minikin (2024) formulates in *Radical-Relational Perspectives in Transactional Analysis: Oppression, Alienation, Reclamation*. Being in a group together has been like getting small shots of an alienation antidote; and it has been a place where resources, information, and actions are shared.

TA has its roots in group psychotherapy and experiencing ourselves in groups is a powerful way to learn about ourselves, but groups can also be a place where societal codes which include hierarchies founded on colonial violence and racism are enacted. The processes of avoidance, attack, obfuscation, and dismissal that happen in many psychotherapy group processes, conferences, and training, when truth is spoken to power, reflect what we are and are not willing to see. I am always curious and pained to see these processes morph within

myself in connection to the matrix of oppression and power I embody as a light skin Black woman born in the UK who has the option to look away, and who often does, both from fear of harm and fear of losing comfort. In our group I have continued to encounter these processes, to notice when I shut down or move to shut down another, lose my words, withdraw, feel deep connection, or subtle aversion. It feels indulgent to share such personal reflections in the face of so much atrocity, but I do so in the spirit of understanding how the personal and the political are intertwined. I speak to my process because I have no idea how to speak to anything else. I do not have the words.

The global capitalist script continues with increasing intensity and blood curdling predictability, and we continue to take our places on stage. The TA and Palestine group helps to pull the curtain off how I play my part.

BYSTANDER TO GENOCIDE—NICOLE TURNER

I have been struggling with what to contribute to this piece and sometimes to our group. Others have direct experience and Levantine heritage, and academic chops that I cannot match, in whose wake I am often traveling when we speak of Palestine and the theories of liberation. These members of the group have gifted me a direct relationship to ideas that I have long held silently about Israel's occupation and violent oppression of the Palestinian people, ideas often muted by the phrase, 'It's complicated'. Leaning into the terms of radical psychiatry (as expressed by Minikin, 2024), I have found demystification not just about the Palestinian occupation, but about the wider historical and contemporary colonial and capitalist structures and how those colonial introjects shape how I think, feel, and move in the world.

Addressing the silence around Gaza brought me to this group, and I have stayed because the experience has been more than what we say or don't say aloud. It continues to loosen the binds around the internalised oppressive systems that dictate that silencing. I look at the long arc of the colonial and capitalist project in which race and white supremacy were conceived and deployed to define social hierarchies and dictate whose lives have value and whose are expendable. I hear its echoes in our field of psychotherapy, where, though we specialise in naming relational dynamics, we too often remain blind and deaf to these particular social dynamics because they support our own internalised and unconscious beliefs in white supremacy. We can believe in equity at the social level but when challenged to actualise equality, we too often revert to the hierarchies of white supremacy and the script of the capitalist system, no matter our skin colour.

Staying in relationship with this group helps ground me in the reality of these structures and the damage they wreak along the spectrum of humanity. Witnessing the immediate and historical pain of my Palestinian colleagues, holding my own present and historical pain as a

Black woman, whilst owning my own guilt and implication, helplessness and horror as we watch this genocide play out in double-time, is a small act that we are together shaping into new ways of understanding, relating, and being in a worldview that has committed itself to our subjugation and control for the ends of economic hegemony.

As a transactional analyst in training, one of the questions I ask myself is, who is allowed to define the Adult ego state (Berne, 1961)? Thinking about the silence around the Palestinian genocide, I wonder how silencing limits our ability to inhabit spontaneity, one of the defining qualities of the Adult ego state. When aspects of our experience are denied—racism, homophobia, sexism, etc.—we are pulled to see our experience as a contamination *of* our Adult rather than it being an exclusion *from* Adult, dictated by a capitalist and colonised worldview. Coming together in this group feels expansive to my Adult, where the myth of ‘It’s complicated’ is broken down and I can speak freely about the effects of my/our colonial introjects. In being together, we refute the dominant messages that the state violence descended from the racialised colonial systems that we see playing out in Gaza, in the USA, in Sudan, and beyond, is somehow protective and necessary. This ‘protection’ casts the perpetrators of state violence as victims and allows us to shield ourselves from our own implication in said violence. In this group, we step into this complexity and, in so doing, I find my Adult spontaneity is less inhibited.

As I try to bring my thoughts together, I am grappling with how to legitimise my contribution—mainly a phenomenological reflection—without discounting it. In these times when expertise and knowledge are rejected over personal facts, I am wary of becoming another uninformed voice amongst the noise. However, legitimacy is not only ratified by academic degrees, and tuning into other ways of knowing is part of the deconstruction of my colonial introjects. I suppose it reflects a long-held desire to make the personal political and the political personal, in the words of Angela Davis. As well, to step into a fuller sense of intra- and interpersonal congruence with myself and people I want to feel more in solidarity with. So, while I hold insecurity about being educated enough, legitimate enough, I know that this much is true and genuine and a break from the silence and that is good enough.

VOICE MEMO—SOPHIE FONG CLARKE

What was my process for writing something to contribute to this article? The brief to ‘write something’ seemed too open-ended and vague, creating unease. My impasse probably began when I was feeling overwhelmed, so I experienced very childlike processes in which writing ‘something’ was too vague. Also, considering the gravity of what we are writing on and speaking to... Maybe I feel very unable, I guess, to do it justice, to do it honour? What is it ‘to honour’? I guess, honouring people who are in Gaza, and Palestinians, both those living in Palestine and in the diaspora, and feeling like nothing I write will be good enough—and I guess

by extension of that, nothing I do is good enough. Taking out good or bad, nothing I DO is enough. Nothing anyone is doing is enough. So, I keep staying in that Child place of feeling helpless, overwhelmed. The impasse created in that, in me, is very paralyzing.

On one level, I am surrounded by amazing peers who, from my perspective, have a lot more experience in mental health and specifically in TA, so I have that sense of not being on that level or their equal. Despite having the reassurance from all of them, and my Adult knowing that I deserve to be there and be in that community, and to feel that I have a responsibility to write and to honour this commitment, I still feel extremely unprepared and unqualified. Perhaps that's a message as well for anyone who might be feeling this way—and reading this.

I think as well that there is a very real threat to speaking up about Palestine, and I think that touches on a professional and existential threat, where there will be an impact. For instance, there will be impacts on my career, and knowing this and accepting it, and almost craving it in a sort of rebellious way, but also, in a way that just has to happen as well, because the silence in our community has gone on for too long, and because every little action helps. Yes, there is going to be a risk to you speaking out about Palestine, but so what? As I say this I am getting emotional. It is imperative that all of us speak up in any way that we know how, even if it's just to comment on how hard it is to speak up, because what does solidarity mean? What is taking action? What is activism? For me, a big part of it is getting out of my head. Pushing through this childlike impasse of feeling like it's not enough, or I'm not good enough, or I can't do justice to the situation, because so many of us feel this way, and that kind of paralysis is exactly what the systems want: to keep us quiet by creating these overwhelming narratives and overwhelming propaganda and situations. For myself, it's kept me in a state of dysregulation, and so moving through that and remembering that, yeah, okay, I am overwhelmed, how do I create enough momentum to inch out of this state of feeling shut down? In a recent meeting, Nada expressed her genuine, heartfelt feelings around how the group has and hasn't shown up. Specifically, with regard to writing something for this article, some of us, including myself, hadn't yet contributed or hadn't reviewed what was written, and she expressed disappointment. This expression really spoke to my Child, and it was the catalyst for moving out of my state of overwhelm and despair and hopelessness, because in hearing how much my contribution could impact her, no matter how small, was enough for me to want to contribute and to want to write something.

So, find what speaks to your Child. Find what speaks to that hopeless, helpless, lost person within and really figure out how to how to take action and how to allow that child to be seen and heard. Because by doing this, by writing something here, I am showing up for Palestinians, for my peers, my colleagues. I am showing up for myself, and I am also reminding myself that I have a voice, and that I can write more and continue to raise awareness about Palestine and continue to challenge the bullshit that is being fed to us, and continue to challenge Zionist narratives, which absolutely need challenging. So how can we as a community really make

space for these little children within us, who have so much energy, so much inertia, so much sacred rage, so that we do speak up, and do something? Somehow, we are just stuck—and need to get unstuck.

BEING AN ALLY: SUPPORTING—AND BEING SUPPORTED—KEITH TUDOR

My first contact with what became the group TA and Palestine was with Julia who, following an initial contact in 2023, wrote to me in June 2024 about the article she was writing for publication in *The Script*, and the idea of forming an online group, the purpose of which would be ‘to be together during the unrelenting horrors happening in Gaza.’ (J. Pool, personal communication, 1st June, 2024). I responded the following day:

I appreciate you reaching out about Palestine. Coincidentally, I received your e-mail as I was packing my [keffiyeh] to take to a weekend I have just spent on a marae (a Māori meeting place), which was, as usual both inspiring and humbling. I, too, have been concerned about the silence in the TA community about Gaza and hope that we will address this in the next ITAA Webinar organising by the Social Engagement Committee, but that’s not until September.

In the time between this exchange and the first meeting of the group, Julia circulated links to resources, including the powerful film *Where Olive Trees Weep* (Benazzo & Benazzo, 2024).

I had been very affected by Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, not least as I have met and know a number of Ukrainian colleagues and have continued to work with them online. I was upset by the attitudes of some Russian colleagues regarding what they referred to as the ‘war’ and to Ukrainians, which was certainly not ‘OK’; and was concerned by the response—or lack of response—from other TA colleagues, which, in my view, represented Bystanding (Clarkson, 1987), and, under the guise of maintaining an ‘everyone’s OK’ attitude, a distinct lack of analysis (transactional or otherwise) of history, power, and oppression.

However, when it came to Palestine, the silence was deafening, a phenomenon and a process that was called out, initially by Julia, to whom I and others are profoundly grateful. As a coda to this, just as we were submitting this article to *PPI*, another TA colleague, Beren Aldridge, had an article on the genocide of the Palestine people published in *The Script* (Aldridge, 2025). It is a short but powerful article in which Aldridge challenges mystification, Othering—including ignoring and/or persecuting others—and passivity. He concludes that:

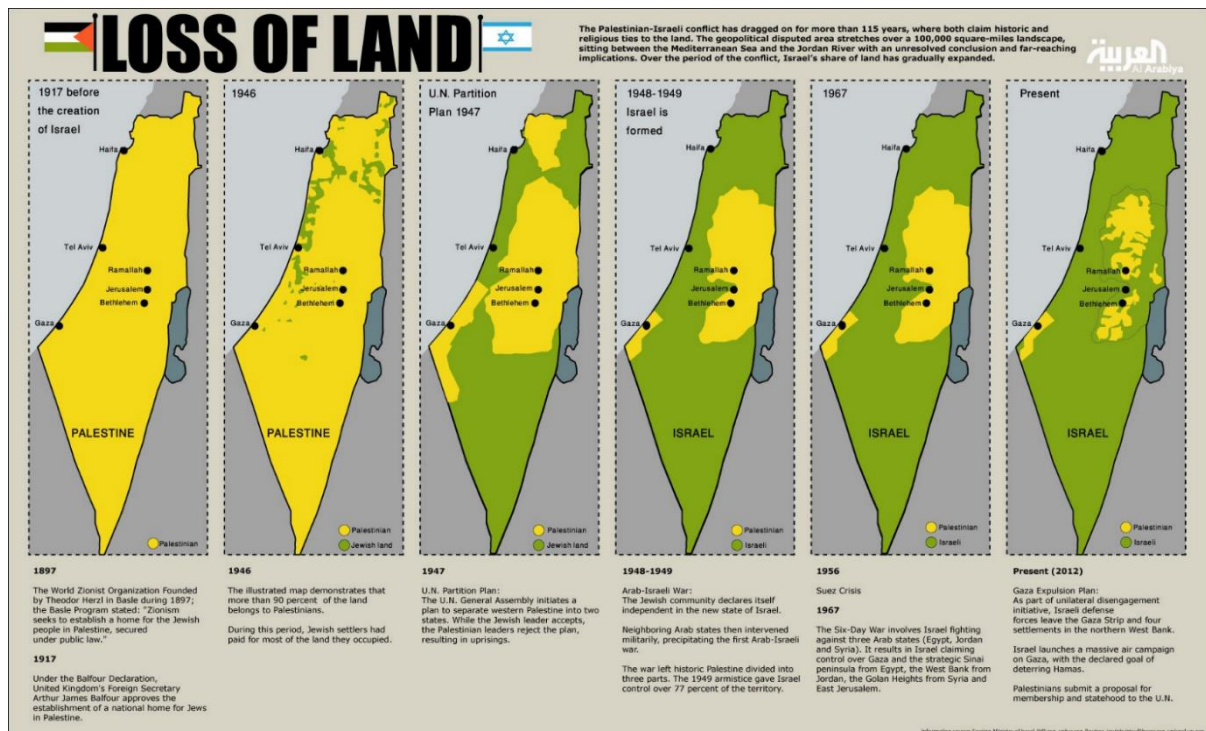
As transactional analysts we may not be able to halt arms sales or stop wars. But we can do something: We can call out mystification in practice rooms, classrooms, and organizations. We can say what might be wrong and what might be right. We can have opinions and political positions, and we can use them potently to support change. (p. 6)

The first online meeting of our group took place on 4th July 2024 and has met monthly ever since. Initially, the group was based on a circulation list of some 15 members, though a

number of these did not attend the meetings, some of whom sent apologies. Although the group remained open for some four months, those of us attending regularly decided that we wanted a group with greater consistency and, therefore, commitment. Inviting people to make this commitment (which we did in December 2024) resulted in a smaller group of eight, which early in 2025, became seven, a group that has met monthly throughout 2025.

One of the first things we addressed was a process around the letter Julia had written to *The Script*, the monthly publication of the International Transactional Analysis Association. When it was published (in July 2024) it appeared alongside another letter, written by the editor, albeit writing in a personal capacity (Hawkes, 2024). The problem, as I and others saw this process, was that, unlike letters and contributions that had been published about the invasion of Ukraine in successive issues of *The Script* in 2022, the editor had used privileged information (of knowing about the letter) to publish something that attempted to be even-handed about Hamas and the Israeli government. Even-handedness in the face of uneven and inequitable relationships between people and groups is, drawing on the language of radical psychiatry (Steiner, 1975), a mystification of alienation and oppression that encourages further isolation—and is one of the problems of TA's heritage and naïve insistence on promoting 'I'm OK, You're OK—and They're OK' relationships (for a critique of which, see Cornell, 2024).

My own political position regarding Palestine is that the present situation is a result of the colonisation of Palestine—from 1516 by the Ottoman Empire; from 1920 to 1948 by the League of Nations through British rule, the British Mandate for Palestine; and (from 1948) by the establishment of the State of Israel (see Figure 1). As a British Left-wing activist (though now living and settled in Aotearoa New Zealand), I was—and still am—particularly mindful of the continuing impact of British colonisation and colonialism, not least in Palestine. However, for much of the Left, both in and beyond Britain, it appears difficult to be clear about this analysis for fear of being accused of antisemitism. Nevertheless, I think it's crucial to assert that considering the State of Israel as a colonial state whose existence is based on the genocide of the indigenous people of Palestine, is a political statement, not a religious, ethnic, or cultural one. The other issue that arises when supporting indigenous, anti-colonial, and other liberation struggles is that of the nature of the struggle. From 1979 to 1985, I was a member of Big Flame (Big Flame, 2025; Farrar & McDonald, 2024) which took a position of unconditional support for liberation on the basis that it is for the people who are oppressed to determine the nature of the struggle, a position I still hold.

Figure 1. *Loss of Palestinian Land.*

Note: Sourced from Palestine Portal (2025). Images are provided in accordance with the 'Fair Use' provision of the Copyright Act of 1976, which allows for the use of copyrighted material for purposes such as news reporting, criticism, and education.

While the initial purpose of the TA and Palestine group was, in Julia's words, 'to be together'—and we were—we were also drawn to wanting to have an impact. We discussed holding an online event, possibly a fundraiser, similar to that which had been held about Ukraine (Onlinevents, 2023/2024). Some of us were involved in discussions about contributing to a webinar series run by the European Association for Transactional Analysis (EATA). We also discussed various publishing projects, including this one. However, we quickly realised that, while valuable, these initiatives were also something of a distraction. As Julia remembers: 'I think the feeling at the time was that these events were resulting from anxiety around our helplessness and were distracting from the witnessing/really paying attention to what Nada was saying and bringing to the group.' (J. Pool, personal communication, 27th September, 2025). So, we regrouped as a closed (fixed membership) support group in which we can be and are personal and vulnerable, despairing and frustrated, agonised and angry. I remember one meeting in which Nada started by saying, 'I want to be angry with you, and angry at you—and for you to be angry with me.' I was blown away by the authenticity, honesty, trust, intimacy, and invitation in this statement.

In this group, I am an ally—an old(er), white guy who has been involved in various forms of political activism for over 45 years—and, inevitably still making mistakes, but still learning. Allyship is something I have thought a lot about over the years and written a little (e.g., Tudor, 2024). What I hadn't expected from the group was the extent to which I also feel seen and

supported. While I am relatively known in the TA world, primarily through my writing and teaching, I have felt quite isolated, mainly due to my politics and some of the positions I have taken. At the TA World Conference in Montpellier, where I met Julia and Nada in person for the first time, I had a sense of Julia, Nada, and Nicole being my home group, for which I was—and continue to be—both touched and grateful.

As we have discussed in the group, being an activist involves showing up. I for one, am delighted that we have found the right time and form in which to write this as a form of showing up. I'm also delighted that this article is being published in *Psychotherapy and Politics International*, a journal with which I have had an association since its inception, in the same year that the journal has changed its statement about politics, stating that:

This is a journal for radical psychotherapy and for reflection on the subjective experience of different forms of injustice, inequality, and domination. We welcome contributions informed by experiences of oppression and resistance, including, for example, by anti-racist, queer, feminist, indigenous, decolonial, and radical disability theories, learning from our collective experiences in theoretical application. This means, for instance, that we adhere to Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions of Israeli state institutions, and take this stance as an indication of how we respond to other global issues. (*Psychotherapy and Politics International*, 2025, para. 1)

Ka whawhai tonu mātou | we will fight on. Kia kaha | stay strong.

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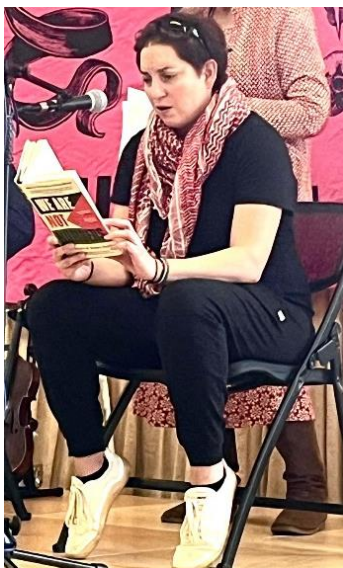
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Our group acknowledges the continued resistance of the people of Gaza.

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