

# DISCUSSION OF JOSEPH FERNANDO'S PROCESSES OF DEFENSE<sup>1</sup>

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## INTRODUCTION

Research into defence, one of the central topoi in the theoretical edifice of psychoanalysis, no longer constitutes the core of theoretical discussion, if it ever did, to say nothing of the concept of splitting and the more recent discourse on dissociation. What has barely been tackled since Anna Freud is a synthesis of the various defence mechanisms. One such attempt has been undertaken by Joseph Fernando, who puts forward a comprehensive theory of defences in his book. Fernando seeks less a critical discussion of existing literature on the subject than to position himself in familiar debates; his “main thrust is to develop certain new ideas, to make some important conceptual distinctions and to show how these various ideas—new and old—elate to each other and help us to comprehend clinical data” (p. 3). However, Fernando is concerned not only with new ideas of defence processes, but also with the integration of our ideas on the basic dynamics at play in the most diverse forms of defences—a task that in psychoanalysis “has not really been attempted or certainly not thought through in detail and depth” (p. 5).

Fernando is concerned that his theoretical conception will be criticized as outmoded and superseded by other concepts. He requests that readers refrain from prematurely rejecting his conception of psychic drive energy, which can be displaced and neutralized to varying degrees, and that

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his focus on intrapsychic processes not be dismissed as outdated, but to instead engage in his argument, to consider his ideas on their own merits with an open mind, and to test their cogency themselves. However, a peculiar feeling creeps over one when reading the work. Fernando establishes a direct link to Freud's metapsychology and Heinz Hartmann's ego psychology. Initially, this seems surprising, especially since he neglects to enlighten us about his reasons for drawing directly on these two latter positions, or what he finds dissatisfactory about the concepts that have meanwhile been formulated, or why he considers them worthy of criticism. Fernando rather skips over all this and requests that we refrain from judging his argument as outmoded. Granting him this request would then entail shelving knowledge gleaned from the foregoing 40 years of debates in and around psychoanalytic theory; further, that we must consistently resist activating it when reading the text and instead allow it to rest dormant in the back of our minds. Fernando considers his theory of defence to be revolutionary. Hence, our curiosity having been prompted, we may now follow the author on his path through the book.

#### **CLASSIFICATION OF DEFENCES**

For considerable time the interest of psychoanalysis turned on drives and their defence, whereas the ego's endeavours of defence against reality was either relegated to secondary importance or its significance was played down. Fernando points out a certain ambivalence here, which has to do with an unexplained position of psychoanalytical theory towards external reality. In short, while object-relations theories and self psychology had contributed new insights in the defence against reality by way of the concept of splitting, projective identification, and the description of reactions to deprivations during early childhood, there had been no attempt to connect these forms of defence to the defences against drives or even to develop a general model of defence. A bifurcation of theories of defence remained, frequently connected to a "reluctance to accord defenses against reality equal status" (p. 15). Fernando attempts to overcome this dissatisfactory circumstance and to develop a new theory of defences with an aim to comprehensively systematize them. He distinguishes three basic types: counterforce defences, attentional defences, and zero process defences. Each of them has a predominant mode of mental functioning: counterforce defences function with the primary process; the attentional defences function with the secondary process; and the zero process defences use zero process functioning.

### COUNTERFORCE DEFENCES: REPRESSION

There are many papers in psychoanalysis on repression, but only a few on primal repression. Whereas, for Freud, repression proper is possible only when preceded by a primal repression, his concept of primal repression itself remains opaque and unclear as a consequence of contradictory descriptions. I wish to go into some detail here, because Fernando derived from it some of his basic decisions regarding his systematization of defence processes. Firstly, I will follow Frank and Muslin (1967), who have traced the evolution of the concept in Freud. Fernando likewise deals with their arguments.

In Freud's earlier conception (until 1915), primal repression is directed at early infant memories and desires that are not ideationally represented in the preconscious. They are exclusively formed by the primary process and have yet to be registered verbally. Primal repression is an inhibition in the development of infant wishful impulses or derivatives. Thus, there is similarly no withdrawal of a preconscious cathexis. Consequently, Frank and Muslin characterize this conception as "passive primal repression." However, when this kind of repression has occurred, the preconscious protects itself by an anti-cathexis from the pressure exerted on it by the unconscious idea.

In 1926, Freud pointed out that we still know far too little to be able to draw a demarcation line between a primal repression and repression proper.

We cannot at present say whether it is perhaps the emergence of the superego which provides the line of demarcation between primal repression and after-pressure. At any rate, the earliest outbreaks of anxiety, which are of a very intensive kind, occur before the superego has become differentiated. It is highly probable that the immediate precipitating causes of primal repressions are quantitative factors such as an excessive degree of excitation and the breaking through of the protective shield against stimuli. (1926, p. 94)

Freud now presents us with an entirely different conception. Here we have a traumatic situation that triggers an automatic anxiety, which threatens the ego with a sense of helplessness and results in a primal repression. Frank and Muslin refer to this conception as an "active defensive primal repression," since an active defence process should now prevent a flooding of excessive stimuli and thus the emergence of unpleasure. They connect this conception with the first, understood as an addition, since the effect of the passive primal repression is limited to a very early developmental

phase in the psyche, whereby, as a result of the deferred development of the secondary process, certain early impressions and forces lag behind.

Cohen and Kinston (1984; Kinston & Cohen, 1986) integrate both Freudian conceptions in a slightly different way. For them, primal repression is a state the roots of which are to be found in trauma. In contrast to repression proper, in which the already formed wishes are rejected by the ego, primal repression is a failure to develop a wish. As the result of an environmental failure, the primary needs of the child remain unsatisfied, and the desire is not represented mentally. Expressed metaphorically, primal repression generates a hole in the child's psychic texture. Should this hole be activated later during a psychoanalytic treatment, for the relationship, this may unfold in a catastrophic dynamic.

My short discussion of different conceptions of primal repression forms the background for showing how Fernando positions himself in this field. He complains of confusion in the conception of primal repression. He is resolutely against connecting repression with maturational processes, and he rejects the first Freudian theory, which has as its object "most very early memories not being connected with language and not being integrated with other declarative and autobiographical memories" (p. 33). He also dissolves the reference of primal repression to trauma. He does agree with Freud that the formation of the superego represents the line of demarcation between primal repression and repression proper (after-repression). Whereas Freud had in mind the earliest outbreaks of very intense anxiety and the excessive degree of excitation as reason for primal repression, with Fernando, the Oedipal desires and conflicts form the object of primal repression. After-repressions occur once the Oedipal phase has subsided, above all during the period of adolescence, but also during adult life. In Fernando's system, the primal repression and the after- and secondary repressions are placed on the one side, and the zero process defences as a result of a traumatic experience on the other. The motif for primal repression no longer lies, as is the case in Freud, in the automatic, traumatic effect of anxiety, but in a pervasive anxiety. The decisive distinction between both forms of repression lies in the functioning ego. In the case of primal and after-repression, it is indeed the ego with its facility to repress that is at work, whereas in the traumatic situation the ego is numbed, and the incoming stimuli are not registered.

The essence of repression lies in the "active counterforce that bars the forward movement of a drive and the feelings and ideas to which it is attached" (p. 34). But from whence does counterforce derive? Here, we detect another essential feature of Fernando's conception of repression: its relationship to

aggressive drives. As “raw aggression” in the form of Oedipal death wishes, for example, they are the reason for the repression, but the ego draws its strength concurrently from raw aggression partially transforming it into a neutralized aggression. In this way, it then becomes a counterforce in the service of the ego, which impedes the reappearance of what is repressed. Should the repression now be removed during the analytic treatment by interpretation of the Oedipal desires, the transformed and neutralized aggression is then once again set free and transforms itself back into an aggression in a more raw and non-neutralized form. Fernando bases this theory on his clinical experience. He is convinced that specific clinical phenomena “that are quite puzzling” (p. 44) can be explained only when one assumes that the counterforce used in repression derives from aggression. When, in the case of his patient D., ideas related to childhood sexuality came to mind spontaneously or when the death wishes against his father were directly interpreted, the patient reacted towards his analyst with a severe outburst of anger and accused the analyst of putting ideas such as these into his head. Thus, for Fernando, the direct anger at the therapist triggered by the interpretations or the stirred up aggression infiltrating existing transference reactions is the clinical phenomenon from which he then infers the nature of the counterforce in repression as being formed by partially neutralized aggressive drive energy. He understands the neutralization of aggression as a form of displacement. In spite of all the criticism to which this concept has been subject, he still considers it a “useful tool that helps us to think about certain types of transformations that drives go through” (p. 48). He vehemently defends the energetic hypothesis and the libido theory. Only with these is it possible to explain “the quite striking properties of displaceability and malleability” (p. 49). For him, more modern theories that see psychoanalysis as a hermeneutic theory, or that construct them on the affects, fall short of providing a satisfactory explanation of these properties.

Fernando provided a comprehensive presentation of the clinical material, and thus created the possibility of keeping track of the bases on which his interpretations and theories derive. For the reader, alternative interpretive options present themselves; the constraints of the present discussion do not permit a more detailed discussion of his cases, however fruitful this would be. I will also refrain from a critical discussion of his line of argument, which would otherwise entail the debate on metapsychology that has been underway since the 1970s. I merely wish to point out that we do, by all means, require a metapsychology, which cannot simply be a hermeneutics of meaning, since we would otherwise not be in a position

to provide sufficient explanations of the power and force of some psychic phenomena. Today, however, we cannot exclusively draw on an energetic libido theory to explain this kind of psychic force.

The more recent treatment theories concentrate almost exclusively on the analysis of transference and counter-transference in the here-and-now of the analytic relationship. The removal of repression is no longer understood to be central for therapeutic action and has been marginalized. By contrast, following the tradition of ego psychology, Fernando emphasizes the significance of memory recovery and the reconstruction of the past for the analytic processes. The interpretation of every defence requires the interpretation of the content defended against, namely, a reconstruction of memories, phantasies, and emotions. As is well known, a reconstruction of the past has to struggle with the difficulty that the repressed childhood memories reappearing from the unconscious are distorted through the influences of the primary process. Beyond that, for Fernando, it is also of central clinical and theoretical importance that transference deals with the malleable, displaceable aggressive drives. Released after the removal of repression, they can aggressively recharge transference—and can lead to the patient's reinforced resistance. Fernando considers it imperative to bring the angry response to the patient's attention.

I think the technique should certainly not be admonishing or accusatory, but should consist of pointing out to the patient the surprising extent of the anger, and linking it to possible repressive defences . . . Some sort of confrontation of the patient with the content of the repressed is necessary in order to mobilize, and allow the analysis of, these responses. (p. 65)

The theoretical horizon in which Fernando understands and interprets the clinical material becomes clear. Underlying this is a causal model of explanation. The point of departure is the removal of repression through reconstructive interpretations, and the severe anger directed towards the analyst, which emerges immediately afterwards. In a process of inference, Fernando explains this anger in the transference as a release of neutralized aggressive energy, which is no longer required by the patient for the maintenance of the repression, but which is now discharged against the analyst. Hence, the aggressive reactions are not triggered directly through the person of the analyst or his behaviour in the therapeutic relationship, but are merely attached to it. The explanatory frame of reference is purely intrapsychic; the entire material of the analytic session is interpreted at the internal world of the patient.

**ATTENTIONAL DEFENCES: DENIAL**

The concept of denial is a fixed element of the theoretical edifice of psychoanalysis. Fernando defines its sphere of influence as defence against reality. He introduces a clear distinction. If repression works as a counterforce to drive derivatives, then the mechanism of denial is directed against the awareness of unpleasant realities. At the heart of the process of denial is an attentional shift. What has been denied is withdrawn from the perception of external and inner reality. The primary difficulty we have with this form of defence lies in the fact that a denied reality, “unlike the drives or strong feelings, does not have a very strong push towards awareness” (p. 71). This is why a substantial and repeated therapeutic activity in the analysis of denial is required, since in it there is no compulsion inherent in the denied content to become conscious, which is the case with the drive derivatives.

For Fernando, the main distinction between repression as a counterforce defence and denial as an attentional defence is that, in terms of structural theory, both forms of defence are to be anchored differently and work with different sources of energy. Repression takes place between the ego and the id and uses partially neutralized aggressive drive energy as well as primary process mechanisms as displacement and condensation. The denial takes place within one system, the ego, and it works with the neutral energy of the ego, and the mental content is kept within the sphere of the secondary process. It is a shifting of attention rather than a withdrawal. Like a blind eye, the ego turns away from perception of an unpleasant or intolerable reality and blocks access to it. What is of importance here is the fact that denial does not interfere directly in the process of perception and its storage in memory, but only in the retrieval of the memory and in the subsequent formation of judgement as to its meaning.

Analogous to primal repression and after-repression is the distinction that Fernando makes between primal denial and denial. Primal denial is a stable, powerful defence against an unpleasant reality motivated by pervasive affects. Unlike repression, the range of pervasive affects that motivate primal denials is quite broad, including pervasive anxiety, pervasive psychic pain, and pervasive sadness.

I limit myself in my presentation to primal denials. As we know, for a young child denials have an adaptative function. With matured ego abilities the child is then in the position to recognize denied realities. In the case of pathologically evolving childhood developments, the unpleasant or traumatic realities compromise the development to a far greater degree. Fernando gives a detailed account of his patient E, who was sexually abused by her father during her childhood and who had a cold mother

who was in denial about the abuse. The patient had denied this aspect of her mother for a long time. I consider the concept of primal denial to be extraordinarily important, especially in the treatment of patients who experienced sexual abuse, an ongoing emotional neglect, or maltreatment during childhood. In all these cases, for the child it is of vital importance for survival to maintain a positive image, above all, of the mother, which compels it to make excessive use of the denial of perception. In many cases, this denial or distortion of parental reality remains very persistent and stable. As adults, they are then frequently drawn to objects of love that either neglect or abuse them. If it is possible to dissolve these denials therapeutically, then frequently astonishing psychic improvements occur.

### **ZERO PROCESS DEFENCES**

For Fernando the zero process is a basic and raw form of mental processing. It is a consequence of trauma and is to be contrasted with both the primary process and the secondary process. "In the zero process there is . . . no symbolic processing of any sort, as well as a lack of integration and coordination between elements" (p. 170). In traumatic experience, the individual's defence structures collapse. Above all, the attentional processes and their defensive purposes begin to shut down. A re-somatization and de-verbalization of affects and a shutdown in the basic integrating function of the ego set in. These shut-down processes lead to unintegrated perceptual fragments being stored in the memory. They form the basis for the dissociation of the traumatic experience from normal memory processes.

Fernando conceives the traumatic organization of memory as "zero process." He thus places it in a series along with the primary and the secondary process. In such a series, contradictions begin to emerge. He discusses one of these. Freud combines the primary and secondary processes with the development of the child. With his beta and alpha elements, Bion proceeds in a similar fashion. By contrast, Fernando emphasizes that zero process functioning has nothing to do with developmental processes. "Zero process is a product of environmental impacts." I hold such a definition of the trauma to have an external cause to be very important. Only in this way is it possible to grasp the peculiar function and experience structure of traumatic occurrences, and not to mix them with normal developmental processes, as is often to be found, for example, in French psychoanalysis when the discussion turns on normal developmental traumas, which everyone experiences. Unfortunately, Fernando does not maintain this clear allocation, but instead claims that we all have a store of this form of functioning from early childhood and often from later times as well. "It is just that



we each acquire these through environmental impingements” (p. 151). This would mean that a zero process organized itself in all of us at some point and that we have all gone through traumatization. This makes no sense to me, unless we again introduce a so-called normal developmental trauma.

But to turn now to the zero process itself. How does this separate trauma-related form of processing function?

At the core of the zero process, there is precious little processing of the raw bits of sensory data, which are then encoded into memory in a similar raw, unprocessed form. The outcome is a set of bits of memory with little relation to each other, with little categorization with regard to the content, time, theme, etc., and with no verbal or other symbolic processing. (p. 150)

Beyond a very rudimentary stage of registration of bits of memory and some rudimentary sequencing of these bits, there is no more processing. Fernando therefore considers it more appropriate to refer to proto-memories than to memories. They once again emerge as an intrusive, completely present experience in consciousness and as an immediate perceptual experience that intrudes into the person’s present life. This means that these traumatic proto-memories do not have a memory character; they do not belong to the past and are not subject to a re-transcription and an associative connection with other memories.

According to Fernando, the traumatic sensory data go through “precious little processing” but not through verbal processing. Such an assumption contradicts the results of empirical research, which show that memories of extremely stressful and traumatic events are predominantly very detailed and very constant and, so far as can be observed, are also relatively reliable. Here, central aspects of the event and the experience are better retained, whereas details that are not related to the core of the experience are not so well retained. The fact that a traumatized psyche functions by the zero process must, as a result of this circumstance, limit itself to very severe trauma in which the ego is no longer able to maintain its observing function; it collapses and only a quasi-automatic perceptual registration of the event occurs, accompanied by a simultaneous flood of pain and fear of death. Thus, ego-distant memory fragments (Laub & Auerhahn, 1993) are all that result. However, this does not represent the rule for all forms of traumatization.

In spite of the fact that in his systematization of psychic defence processes Fernando only partially does justice to the processing of traumatic

experience, his attempt to acknowledge a comprehensive integration is an important achievement and is worth further discussion.

1

Fernando emphasizes that “precious little processing” takes place during zero process. It is a processing in which the ego, along with its functions, appears not to participate. He maintains that a “pure zero process” lies at the core of the traumatic experience. At this juncture the question presents itself as to whether we are able to at all imagine the matter such that at the core of the dissociated traumatic experience there is no psychic processing, but only the pure perceptual image of what has occurred as unprocessed raw data, like a snapshot of the events, visually, as smell, or as sounds. A similar view is maintained by the trauma researcher Bessel van der Kolk (van der Kolk, McFarlane, & Weisaeth, 1996), who contends that extreme excitation splits the memory into various isolated, somato-sensory elements, into images, affective states, and somatic sensations, as well as into smells and sounds. Van der Kolk assumes that these implicit memories tally with actual experience, though they cannot be integrated initially into a narrative memory and hence do not form a unified whole. Even though it may be possible to process the sensations, feelings, and elements of memory narratively later, the actual traumatic experience remains indelibly engraved or etched in the psyche. For van der Kolk, traumatic memories are “timeless and ego-alien” (p. 295).

However, on the basis of our psychoanalytic experience, can we agree with such conceptions? I do not think so. They are too one-sided. What speaks against them, for example, is what today we know about flashbacks. For a long time, the assumption was that through a traumatic experience, flashbacks can abruptly and suddenly once again break into consciousness and are to be evaluated much like photographically accurate replicas of the event. However, new research has shown that they are often mixtures of real memory images and visualized anxieties, in which the worst fears can express themselves (Schacter, 1996). For this reason, we must pose the question as to whether traumatic events not only trigger an automatic, object-less anxiety already in the moment of the event, as Freud (1926) had assumed, but are experienced as confirmation of the deepest anxiety. Thus, victims of trauma, for example, report that in the moment of the traumatized experience, a long-existing, repressed, threatening phantasy, an inner conviction or a central state of anxiety appears and is literally fused with the traumatic material of experience (Garland, 1988; Laub & Auerhahn, 1993). As one further characteristic, I would also like to mention that the

paralyzed psychic activity of the traumatized ego freezes the mental sense of time and produces an internal temporal standstill. It is often described as a sensation that a part of the self has been left behind and stays more or less the same, because it can no longer be exposed to life.

Such observations suggest that the integrative functions of memory are disengaged by the excessive excitation in the traumatic situation, giving rise to a dissociated self-state. But the dissociated memories are not completely excluded from the associative stream of psychic material, or from any transformation, by conscious and unconscious fantasies. Traumatic memories unfold their own dynamics. Fernando, indeed, also refers to the fact that the further one distances oneself from the traumatic core experience, the more one tends to find an overlapping of the zero process with the primary and secondary process. However, in his opinion, the core is shaped by the pure zero process.

## 2

All analysts who work with traumatized patients know that, triggered by certain stimuli, memories of the trauma can once again break into consciousness and paralyze the ego. Here, Freud refers to the compulsion to repeat and understands this as the ego's attempt to heal. The ego seeks to attribute meaning to the event, to integrate it into a comprehensible causal system of action, and to thereby regain its agency. We know from trauma research that the compulsion to repeat—during which these intrusions continue to appear—increasingly loses this function of an attempt to heal. The intrusions become chronic and are experienced as entirely overpowering, to which the ego is passively subject. In this way, they take on a re-traumatizing quality. The ego feels disempowered, and often all that remains open to it is a phobic attitude by which it attempts to elude all associative connections with the traumatic core.

With his concept of *contrast defences*, Fernando seeks to further explain this clinically difficult problem of the compulsion to repeat.

All traumatized individuals avoid situations that contrast with that of their trauma. In fact they walk a very fine line between the dual dangers of anything that too closely resembles the trauma and threatens to evoke zero process memories of it, and anything that too sharply contrasts with aspects of the trauma and threatens to do the same thing. (p. 163)

With his concept of the contrast defences, Fernando attempts to explain the perfectly paradox circumstance, that traumatized persons seek just

those situations they so longingly desire—for patient E, the relationship with a quite warm, caring boyfriend—while at the same time seek to avoid it. Fernando's concept of contrast defences throws new light on the very complex problem of the compulsion to repeat and enriches our clinical knowledge. At the same time, however, I indeed find him too optimistic with respect to this tricky problem of treatment, namely, how a traumatically paralyzed ego can regain agency. In his interpretations, which rest on the concept of the contrast defences, he treats the traumatized patient like a neurotic, whereby an improvement shows itself only if the defences are sufficiently interpreted. In one example, Fernando makes reference to the difficult problem of trust in the case of traumatized patients. As is known, they experience great difficulty in rebuilding trust in relationships. For Fernando, one important cause of this difficulty with trust lies in the operation of contrast defences. "In other words, the person avoids situations of warmth and human connection, and minimizes or denies their importance when they occur, so as not to experience through contrast a revival of the intense feelings of being completely abandoned." For Fernando the direct interpretation of the contrast defence brings to consciousness the painful feelings of aloneness, and once these feelings are worked through, the person is better able to engage in close relationships, and their feelings of separation from others lessens (p. 165).

### 3

My impression is that Fernando underestimates the consequences of a traumatization. Traumas generate an irreversible break with the trust in a predictable and secure environment. The break no longer heals. We cannot treat a traumatized person like a neurotic patient with whom it may be sufficient to actualize the conflict scenarios and structures as well as her defences and to work them through. In the case of traumatized persons, by contrast, the traumatic intrusion of the external world that causes the inner catastrophe creates another situation. Naturally, the severity of the trauma also counts here. But also lighter forms of traumatization do not remediate the problem, which Fernando sees entirely: "Even in accidental traumas such as a car crash, the feeling of being abandoned by the superior powers of fate . . . is overwhelming. In situations of abuse this feeling is much magnified" (p. 165). The core of the traumatized experience is formed by the destruction of the sense of basic trust. Jean Amery, who was tortured in Belgian prisons by the Gestapo, expresses the core of this experience in the following manner: "But with the first strike of the police fist to which there is no defence and for which there is no helping hand capable

of parrying it, a part of our life is terminated and can never be revived" (1965, p. 507). Naturally, what Amery experienced was extreme traumatization. But several of my patients who have endured massive traumatization in early childhood have formulated something similar. They expressed a feeling of having fallen out of the world. Or else they hyperactively sought to prove that they have a place in the world and are not insignificant. We remain blind to these aspects of a destroyed sense of basic trust if we only have to sufficiently interpret it from the perspective of the defences to once again restore it. The trauma has to do with an existentially deeply anchored meaningfulness of life that has been destroyed. Here, the meaning itself is put into question. What remains is a "too-much," an excess, a massive surplus that breaks through the psychic structure and cannot be "contained" by meaning.

#### 4

To turn now to some remarks on dissociation. In this respect, and in accordance with his system, Fernando also distinguishes between primal dissociation and a secondary dissociation. Primal dissociation is "the specific splitting off of a portion of the psyche that happens as a consequence of trauma." It is an outcome of the particular mental (and neurophysiological) state that characterizes true trauma (p. 142), but Fernando also qualifies it as the basic defence related to trauma (p. 94). If the ego once has the ability to dissociate, it can apply it for "active imitation of this situation for defensive purposes" (p. 142). Fernando classifies it as a "secondary dissociation." I concentrate here on "primal dissociation." With respect to dissociation, Fernando's view is directed entirely on the character of the split-off memories. The changes of consciousness—which, already in Freud, stood at the centre of the dissociative processes of hysterical patients—he dismisses as non-specific. Hence, dissociated self-states, which are described by patients as "not-me" self-experiences, disappear from view. Should we concentrate too much on the traumatically dissociated memories, the traumatized self-state involved can no longer be seen. I would like to elaborate.

In psychoanalytic treatment we encounter adult patients who have undergone a trauma in childhood, though this may not be readily apparent in their symptoms. In treatment one inevitably meets with parts of the psyche that are like split-off states of the self, which, when activated, give rise to a severely altered state of consciousness in the patient. The way in which patients describe these states varies, but they all refer to the loss of their previously familiar sense of self. The inner affective relationship to

themselves and to objects is lost, leaving them feeling alienated, frozen, petrified, and in extreme cases, even outside of themselves. Descriptions of this feeling point to the existence of dissociated unintegrated states of the self, which are often found unbearable. Such patients can neither gain control of the situation through self-reflection nor dissolve this self-state. A psychic reorganization is often characterized by the way in which it suddenly appears, as if in a switch process with a pronounced "on/off" quality. In psychoanalysis, the phenomenon of dissociation has been insufficiently investigated. In my view, it is not enough to concentrate, as does Fernando, on the split-off memories and to view the ego as an instance that has no access to them, but rather, in order to understand these phenomena of dissociation we require a concept of the self, of its states and an explanation of the changes of consciousness.

#### **THE PSYCHOANALYTIC TREATMENT OF TRAUMATIZED PATIENTS**

Analyzing the core of a trauma, for Fernando, means analyzing the core of the person's zero process functioning. In accordance with the one-person paradigm and focusing on the intrapsychic dynamic of the patient, Fernando applies various technical manoeuvres and considers them as tools and less as "determinants of the entire relationship or patient/analyst interaction." As one such example, I would like to briefly discuss his attitude towards actively asking questions on points in which the trauma begins to emerge in dreams, physical reactions, dissociated transferences, and intrusive memories and thoughts. By actively asking questions he seeks to push the therapeutic process to the core of the zero process memories. For him it is necessary to take the patient "through a reliving of the trauma, which at first exists only in unintegrated bits, then provide verbal narrative and working towards an understanding of the trauma that allows an integrated memory to emerge." As an example, Fernando describes the analysis of patient E, who was severely sexually abused by her father during her childhood. During the phase in her analysis when she began acting out some of the feelings of her abuse in the analysis, she experienced the attitude of the analyst as "relentlessly repeating the same thing over and over" (p. 159). She seemed quite distressed when mentioning this, and Fernando wondered if this was a sort of memory of the repeated abuse, "reliving the rhythmic thrusting of her father's penis in her mouth." "This particular interpretation seemed to make sense to her, but she began to get sleepier and sleepier as the session wore on." Fernando understands this when occurring in the analysis as a transference repetition of the trauma.

The analysis of this was crucial in reconnecting E with what had occurred with her father.

Here, I would simply like to emphasize one point. We have learned in the treatment of traumatized patients that, in most cases, unsymbolized parts of the traumatic experience can be relived only in enactments in the analytic relationship. It seems to me, therefore, that it was a counter-transference enactment that forced Fernando to point out again and again how his patient had trouble directly referring to the sexual abuse. But to think in enactments is a more intersubjective point of view. Enactments occur when a patient's behaviour or words stimulate an unconscious conflict in the analyst, leading to an interaction that has unconscious meaning to both. In my view, it is not enough to work with an intrapsychic point of view only. We also need a more intersubjective paradigm to understand the dynamic of such important situations in the analytic treatment when the core of the trauma is relived. In such a view the analyst should not attempt "to be active asking questions and pushing forward the process to further the work to the core of the zero process memories" and to regulate the process by being active or slowing it down. Instead, I find it necessary to take an attitude of role responsiveness (Sandler) and to monitor one's counter-transference in being attentive to enactments.

I am in full agreement when Fernando emphasizes "the therapeutic benefit patients derive from knowledge about the reality of what happened, whether gained through this sort of active remembering in therapy or through outside sources." Similarly, Fernando underscores the significance of the reconstruction and construction of the reality of the suffered trauma, whereby "we bring a portion of the zero process at least to some extent under the dominion of the secondary process" (p. 161). Regarding the patient E, he writes, "For E the eventual ability to clarify, with regard to the sexual abuse, what had and what had not happened was an enormous help to her. The world lost its vague and hard to pin down quality, a feeling that had generalized as a defense against acknowledging the reality of what she had lived through" (p. 161). I can only but endorse this. The disclosure of the reality of the trauma—its historicization—however fragmentary or approximate it may be, is of key therapeutic significance. The narrative of such a reconstruction must conform to the reality of the trauma and include the reality that caused the traumatization. Central to this narrative is that it is tied to an awareness that something has, *in fact*, occurred, no matter how fragmentary its reconstruction may have been. This can provide patients with a sense of truth and security with which to

understand their traumatic transformations of the self, their object relationships, and their affects, instead of processing them in terms of guilt.

I dedicate the last section to addressing several, more general problems central to an understanding of Fernando's way of thinking and theorizing psychoanalytically.

#### **THE SCIENTIFIC STATUS OF PSYCHOANALYSIS**

Fernando criticizes the Wallersteinian distinction between experience-near clinical theory and experience-distant abstract theories. As is known, Wallerstein considers the latter to be metaphors possessing mere heuristic value.

In his method, what strikes one as surprising is that Fernando does not distinguish between a psychic reality and a material reality.

As one moves from resistance to defense to the inner workings of the defense such as a counterforce, I do not believe that one is moving from the concrete to the abstract, but rather along a chain of inference beginning with what is more readily observable. Each of these concepts refers to a real thing; it is just that some of these things we can observe, while others we cannot. (p. 291)

For Fernando, psychology is situated at the same level methodologically as physics or chemistry.

Interestingly, in other sciences we are usually willing to experience distant concepts as referring to real things. For instance, the conceptualization of atoms and molecules as making up matter is certainly distant from direct experience, and has been arrived at through long chains of inference from observed data. (p. 291)

Here, Fernando argues entirely along the same lines as Hartmann's conception of psychoanalysis as being a nomothetic natural science of the psyche (1964).

Consequently, for him concepts are no "purely abstract or constructed hypothetical entities." As an example, Fernando draws on the concept of the "neutralized aggression" and his analysis of patient D. I have already provided a comprehensive presentation of his argument and so will not repeat it here. He seeks to prove with this argument that the concept of neutralized aggression refers to a real thing.

I merely mean that it can have the same reality as mental phenomena we can more directly observe—such as memories—and as physical realities



that we take for granted as real but the knowledge of which also involves these complex inferences – such as black holes or electrons. (p. 294)

Fernando conceives of psychoanalysis as a (natural scientific) conceptual science with a unified scientific method. As critical realist, he represents a correspondence theory of reality and consequently, as opposed to all forms of constructivism, holds fast to the objectivity of scientific knowledge. He sees the natural sciences and the humanities as being on the same scientific level and thus harks back to a period prior to the valid distinction between the natural sciences and humanities commonly acknowledged since Dilthey. He negates the complex debates on methodologies as well as the currently widely accepted position that we have many sciences, each of which must elaborate its own appropriate methodology, so as not to miss their object. Fernando levels out these complex distinctions. For him, for example, there is no sharp boundary between the mathematical and the conceptual sciences. As conceptual science, psychoanalysis has its own method, but the clinical psychoanalytic investigation is as fully fledged a scientific method as any other.

Although the constraints of the present paper prevent a more detailed discussion on the debates on scientific method, I will add that I consider theories to be models supported by scientific observation and empirical evidence that must be intrinsically coherent. However, it is not possible to fill the gap between our theorizing and reality. I am aware that a pure coherence theory, especially in its radical constructivist form, conceals a number of problems such that, today, the discussion also turns on the fact that we cannot entirely cast overboard the search for objective knowledge, and that we require a certain surety that our theories have a “hook” in reality (on this subject, see also the panel on intersubjectivity IPAC 2004, and especially the paper by Joel Whitebook). We can no less negate the hermeneutic narrative turn or the intersubjective turn of almost all theoretical directions in psychoanalysis that criticize a purely intrapsychic perspective with weighty arguments, and that have introduced a paradigm change in psychoanalysis. On the other hand, this does not mean that an intrapsychic perspective has become entirely obsolete. Today, however, we no longer have a general theory, as was demanded during the period of ego psychology. Because of the different underlying fundamental postulates and basic psychoanalytic assumptions, different analysts’ perspectives on the same phenomenon will lead to different versions of theories. A single perspective cannot encompass all aspects and explain them in a comprehensive way. We have to acknowledge the plurality of theories. It constituted

a liberating advance within the analytic community, but it also had the potential to inhibit attempts to integrate concepts.<sup>2</sup>

#### ASPECTS OF A GENERAL THEORY

Against these theoretical developments, I have just mentioned, Fernando upholds the claim that psychoanalysis must have a general theory. His general theory rests on several basic theoretical postulates deriving from Freudian metapsychology, and from the various additions introduced by ego psychologists. Here, he draws above all on Heinz Hartmann. He starts out from the idea of two basic drives, the aggressive and the sexual. He is convinced that there is a good deal of observational as well as psychoanalytic evidence for an aggressive drive. Fernando understands the human mind to be a product of a long evolutionary development in which the programmed instinctual coupling of the drive with specific perceptions was loosened.

Thus the evaluation of the environment and control of behaviour was partially freed from an instinctual tie, and from this developed various ego functions, such as attention and various forms of thought . . . I suggested that the nature and functions of the various defenses we find in humans can be understood as one of the number of methods of interaction between the now partially autonomous ego and the drives and reality which it now confronts without as many preset responses. (p. 319)

This is, indeed, a bold conception that the defences put into the horizon of evolutionary development.

I would just like to mention two critical points of this general theory:

1. In his book Fernando seeks to demonstrate the dynamic potential of the theories of ego psychology “that see mental functioning as a product of a number of independent factors: ego functions, the drives and the primary process, and the zero process and its particular contents and mode of functioning” (p. 318).

I have found that treating each of these factors as something that enters as an independent variable into symptoms, behaviour, and mental functioning in general, as well as dealing with each of these factors on its own terms, leads to a much more robust explanatory theory. (p. 5)

What is missing in his theory is the concept of the self or, in more contemporary parlance, the subject, as the agent, that steers the defensive

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2. On the initiative of the president of the IPA, Charles Hanly, the IPA Project Committee on Conceptual Integration has worked on these problems.

processes. Naturally, the subject is not master in the house, but, with the aid of defence processes, attempts to ward off the dynamic of drive derivatives, as well as the consequential effects of traumatization. But we cannot conceptualize these defensive operations as independent factors. We must always think of them in connection with an agent who, although perhaps helpless, paralyzed and overwhelmed, always remains the subject who experiences these states and tries to master them.

2. Fernando is convinced that intrapsychic processes often have a good deal of independence from the interpersonal world (p. 5). I do not fundamentally doubt this. Current radical intersubjective theories involve a mounting risk of watering down the individual subject conceptually and ultimately resolving or dissolving it in the intersubjective context. I think we must adhere to a subject altogether capable of grappling with its intersubjective having become—in an internal dialogue and reflexively—and thereby attaining a certain degree of freedom from integration into the intersubjectively structured relational world. Fernando, by contrast, entirely masks the intersubjective development of the human being. His frame of reference is an ego confronted with an environment to which it has to adapt. He thereby ignores all research in development over the last 40 years that has shown the way in which mental development has been increasingly located within an interpersonal matrix. From infancy onwards, interactive or intersubjective regulations and self-regulating processes remain linked throughout our entire lives.

## CONCLUSION

Fernando's book represents an extraordinary intellectual and psychoanalytic achievement with which, on the basis of ego-psychology, he synthesizes an entire range of aspects of defensive processes in an integrative overview. He is a precise observer of clinical phenomena and psychic manifestations. He describes them in a detailed manner, breaks them down into their dynamic elements, and conceptualizes them as part of a total model of defence. He also sees the danger that his theory could become a closed system. However, reassuringly, he adds that "one can open things up quite quickly with the proper questions" (p. 323). I have sought to pose a number of such questions in order to open up his closed system, which overlooks more recent developments in psychoanalysis. One reason for this most likely lies in the fact that he classifies them as partial theories, such as the internal object relations, or the influence of very early mothering. For Fernando these theories are valid within their specific range, but they are frequently overextended in order to engulf and supersede other aspects of

psychoanalytic theory. This is “not only invalid but extremely detrimental to the development of psychoanalysis” (p. 303). Fernando argues, therefore, that both object-relations theory and intersubjective theories are incapable of developing a general theory. It is this disqualification I find it difficult to agree with and that I consider important to discuss.

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