

Report on the Visit by Dr. Eran Rolnik of Tel Aviv, to the Association for
Psychoanalytic Medicine in New York City.

**“History and Theory: The Case of Psychoanalysis Coming to
Palestine/Pre-State Israel”**

Supported by a grant from the IPA/CAPSA Inter-Regional Visiting Scholar’s
Fund

February 4, 2014

Reporter: Nathan Szajnberg, MD

Hesitantly, I review Rolnik’s APM presentation on Feb 4, *Freud in Zion*: I hope to transmit its intellectual heft, while maintaining its style of a historical thriller. Given his time limit, Rolnik was limited to giving an overview of his work. I will try to summarize both his talk and relevant parts of the book.

During my five years in Israel, I was impressed with the depth of knowledge of my fellow members of the Israel Psychoanalytic Society, one of the largest of the IPA component societies. The Eitingon Institute -- yes, that Eitingon, a member of the Secret Committee and a two time guest at the Wednesday meetings (its first guest from abroad), who founded and funded the Berlin Institute mostly from his family’s furrier funds, who then escaped the Nazis to found the Israel Institute over seventy-five years ago - - the Israeli Eitingon Institute fills its classes every year with perhaps a dozen candidates. As a member and training analyst, I would hear colleagues such as Eliahu Feldman (trained in Brazil) in an hour give the clearest account of Bion I have ever heard; Yolanda Gampel, in her private study group on Klein, give a sensitive, thoughtful and carefully critical reading of the Richard case; Yoram Hazan (who died far too young) describe evenly hovering attention and *apres coup* (*b’de’avad* in Hebrew) with the accent of a knowledgable self-psychology (via Chicago’s Jim Fisch); or Emanuel Berman, author of the magnificent socio-historical study of the Israel Psychoanalytic Institute’s transformation, *Impossible Education*, speak authoritatively in his rolling basso on almost any subject psychoanalytic — in Hebrew, English or Polish no less.

Why should we be surprised at the acuity of Rolnik’s history?

Let me give some flavor of the overall themes in Rolnik’s book and his talk, keeping my comments brief, yet encouraging you to read the book to

understand much about not only the history of psychoanalysis in Zion, but also its cheek-by-jowl pre-history in Vienna, where Herzl and Freud lives but blocks from each other. *Freud in Zion* is a challenging account of how ideology infuses psychoanalytic thinking and technique — at times for the better, at times not for the betterment of our patients.

We are almost half-way through this story before psychoanalysts truly take root in the desolate soil of Zion in the 1930's, that decade of desperation for European Jews. Some 90,000 German Jews come to Israel (20% of new arrivals); Edith Jacobson is imprisoned; Richard Sterba escapes with his analysand through an office window, the S.S. on their heels; Bettelheim, not so fortunate, an officer in the underground army, is captured at the Czech border and becomes a guest of the S.S. in Dachau. Rolnik spends the first half of the book tilling the historical soil, before he sows the seeds of Freud in Zion.

Freud's 1921 *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* was his first work translated into Hebrew (1928), reflecting the early immigrants' sense that they needed to grasp group psychology to understand what they were doing, would be doing as strangers in this strange land. The early Zionists did not seem to let themselves realize that psychoanalysis's "critical, interpretative and individual" perspective, might be at odds with the constructivist and collectivist conception, particularly amongst the kibbutzniks, that tiny portion of the population (perhaps three percent) who nevertheless grounded the ideology and became leaders of the land for decades.

In 1905, Otto Rank (nee Rosenfeld) insists that psychoanalysis could become a Jewish science. Imagine Freud's dismay. In contrapuntal style, Freud (1923d) insists in his talk before the B'nai Brith (the only organization outside psychoanalysis to which he proudly belonged) that the historical fate of the Jews provided them with the capacity for *free thought, willingness to fight and quest for truth* — components necessary for a psychoanalytic science (and perhaps any true discipline).

Rolnik asks: what was it about that *fin-de-siecle* Vienna -- a society that seemed addicted to fatigue and convalescence, led by a monarch for many decades, whose son suicides and whose daughter-in-law travels the rails of Europe with packed steamer trunks yet allegedly without wearing underwear — this center of an empire collapsing on itself, what was in the Viennese soil or air that produced psychoanalysis and Zionism? This turn-

of-the-century produced several disciplines that focused on the universals of nature and mankind: Einstein's theories of the universe; *socio-logie*, that science of how we live together; anthropology, that thing that humankind produces called culture that seems to rule over us, and so on. Even as the political world of Europe imploded, its intellectual life generated creative endeavors that remain with us until today, disciplines that continue to endure.

For instance, Russian-Jewish psychoanalysts -- in 1922-3, an eighth of the IPA membership -- escaping Stalin, emigrated to Germany, then, escaping Hitler, many ultimately to Israel, becoming a nucleus for psychoanalysis. Moshe Wulff, for instance, a member of the Vienna Society, hailed from Russia and emigrated to Israel (to become a foil for Eitingen). Back in Russia, these analysts pursued experimental psychoanalytic boarding schools; even one of Stalin's children attended.

From the Heidelberg school, which tried to integrate psychoanalysis and Orthodox Judaism led by Frieda (Fromm)-Reichman's, came Akiva Ernst Simon (later the director of the Hebrew University School of Education), Erich Fromm, and Leo Lowenthal, later head of sociology at UC Berkeley. Delicious details of our early history.

Early on, institutional tides change the course of this the vessel, psychoanalysis. Martin Buber, the philosopher who became head of sociology at the Hebrew University, opposed Freud's ideas and ultimately the presence of psychoanalysis at the University where Freud was on the Board of Governors. Buber fashioned himself as a developmental psychologist, postulating that everyone is born with an "originator" instinct that must be channeled by educators into communion "instinct." It was an era when a philosopher thought he could make developmental theories and critique a discipline in which he had no training. (A tableau of the main lobby on Mt. Scopus offers some restitution: it shows all the members of the Board of Governors present at the opening of the then-barren Mt. Scopus listening to Magnes' opening remarks. While Freud and Einstein were not present, the artist took liberty to paint them into the scene, a form of politicized time travel, if you will. While Buber could block psychoanalysis at this great Jewish university, he couldn't influence this creative artist from inserting Freud (and Einstein).)

The Hebrew University's animosity towards psychoanalysis came early and endured, but was hardly the end of the story. Einstein, a member of its

founding Board of Governors, weighed in on the University when he wrote to discourage Eitingen from moving there (1934):

“As for the university in Jerusalem, I am sorry to say that this institution, whose importance for the entire Jewish intellectual world is so great, and whose realization I myself worked so hard for, *is not exactly in good hands*. I have been fighting to replace the administration for years, but have yet to see results. While I have managed to get a Committee of Inquiry convened I have little faith in the ability of the current power that be to bring about real change for the better. So far, the university’s best have also been the ones to turn their backs on the place in bitter anger. Why would you want to put yourself through that?” (Author’s italics.)

Unfortunately, after the first Freud Chair at the Hebrew University was established in the late 1970’s (and funded mostly by American psychoanalysts, who insisted that the funds be held in New York, not Jerusalem), Joseph Sandler came and left within five years. Anne Marie Sandler recounts that her husband said that had he been treated as well in the first four years as he was in his fifth, he might have stayed (personal communication). As best I know currently, this selection committee for this chair has not met in many years.

Meanwhile, other early psychoanalysts involved themselves in social issues. The emigre Israeli, Siegfried Bernfeld (later a founder of the San Francisco Institute) was an adviser to a socialist youth movement in Israel. Feigenbaum, appointed the head of psychiatry of the first hospital in Jerusalem, studied the epidemic of suicides among early settlers — some ten percent of all pioneer deaths in the second decade of the century.

The 1930’s, that era of *Schrecklichkeit* for European Jews, brought refugees, some reluctant, to Palestine, including Eitingen. This is the foundational beginning of psychoanalysis in Palestine. Rolnik tells of the personalities (and the tensions) amongst these founders. But, he presses us to think more systematically about the relationship between era and psychoanalytic theory and technique. Rolnik says that the pre-State needs of the community tended towards collectivist thinking, optimism, highly ideological and anti-intellectual, particularly amongst the kibbutznicks. (Shimon Peres, when asked about his hope for the future, responded that without hope there would have been no Israel. The national anthem, Hatikvah, means, “The Hope.”) Yet, Freud’s psychoanalysis is fundamentally individualistic, non-political and imbued with a social

pessimism, particular after the wholesale slaughter of World War I, after which Freud elaborated his death drive ideas. How to resolve the tensions between these two states of mind?

Matters get more complicated; this is psychoanalysis after all. Freud's views of analysis arose primarily from his work with adults. Yet, psychoanalytic interest in early education arose at least with Ferenczi's precocious 1908 paper on education. That is, while psychoanalysis in the office is one matter, its application to early development and childhood education gives it the kind of societal optimism, a manner of applying principles to improve at least the lives of children, if not of society. Therefore, one can see how early settlers were prepared to start kibbutzim with Marx in one fist and Freud in the other.

Rolnik, a fine historian, combs through correspondence, brings the dark corners of our history to light. Such histories make us squint in pain. But psychoanalysts believe that such light (of truth) cleanses.

Rolnik states clearly his view of psychoanalysis: "...a science of subjectivity....based on universal ...mechanisms.. behind.. differences and diversity...." That is, within psychoanalysis is both what is universally deeply human and what makes us different (including the small narcissistic differences or Erikson's pseudo-speciation).

Rolnik also ventures into the early application of psychoanalysis to literature and literary criticism. Agnon, that Nobel prize winner who read his acceptance speech in Hebrew in Oslo, sent his wife to Eitingen for treatment. Rolnik reviews how carefully at least one of Agnon's novels hews to Freud's Dora case. Mostly, however, analysts engaged in what Freud called pathobiography ("reading" the author's alleged complexes from his work). While popular, it also raised hackles. Bialik thoughtfully zinged back:

"(psychoanalysis's) fundamental purpose...(is to) cure the psyche....few possess...ability to enter...a writer's secrets.. only those of great talent and transcendent purpose..."

Bialik's solution, perhaps typically elitist of analysis, lets only a select few venture into literary dissection.

Rolnik challenges us to inquire *how the political and cultural milieu of Zion affected both psychoanalytic theory and technique*. He persuasively recounts how the pre-State analysts were affected by the circumstances of this raw land (“a land that eats its inhabitants” in the Bible’s words) and also how the early settlers were influenced by psychoanalysis. In the early history of both Zionism and psychoanalysis, there was the tension between the founders and the diaspora, perhaps like that between true and false identity. There was also the Shoah’s (“Holocaust’s”) shadow, which fostered a greater emphasis on corrective emotional experience (recovering from trauma). The psychoanalytic price of this shift — from Freud’s emphasis on the father and law to mother and land, representing fusion, the shift from primary aggression to secondary responses to traumata, from taking responsibility for the maintenance of one’s symptomatic inner life to finding the causes lying in the faults of others — has been overall to deemphasize reflecting on how one maintains one’s misery to how one can achieve a therapeutic experience to overcome the failings of others. (Laplanche might couch this as the difference between the synthetic aspects of psychotherapy versus the dissecting, analyzing aspects of psychoanalysis.)

In his brief account of contemporary Israel, his argument falters. He makes two observations that need not be causally related. First, he notes the impact of the Shoah, the chronic Arab-Israeli conflict (at least since the 1929 Arab riots), and the Israeli occupation of the West Bank (or Yehuda and Shomron). He suggests that this affects how analysts think and practice. Then, he notes that there has been a shift at least among younger analysts to the role of actual trauma, and as well to an emphasis on the “maternal order... whose romanticism and mysticism smacks somewhat of late nineteenth-century German neo-romanticism and Gnosticism. The latter, in turn, is associated with greater interest in “primitive mental states” and a view of the individual as “passive... mostly reactive to his environment and therefore hardly accountable to his interiority and his mind.” This sounds like Kohut’s distinction between Guilty and Tragic Man. This is also ironic in two ways. First, this view of humankind is diametrically opposite to the Zionist construct of building a “New Man.” Second, it undermines Freud’s emphasis on learning how we contribute to continuing our own miseries even after we have left our parental homes.

Despite Rolnik's fascinating constructions of these local psychoanalytic psychologies, Rolnik's description of the Israeli's greater interest in primitive mental states and associated de-emphasis of infantile sexuality and primary aggression (and taking responsibility for one's inner life) also sounds like what we see in contemporary institutes in the United States and possibly in other institutes globally.

What Rolnik tries to do is rich and valid. If only we had more such scholarly attempts to study the evolution of psychoanalytic thinking in various societies. Bobby Paul's address to the IPA on culture and psychoanalysis is a sophisticated initial approach to this kind of study. Kirsner's work in *Unfree Associations* is another, as is Arnold Richards' presentation on the undercurrent of Communism in early psychoanalytic members and how this affected their ideas. Anne Golomb Hoffman, Ph.D., Professor of English and Comparative Literature, Fordham University, discussed the issues of gender in early Palestinian history and its implications for psychoanalysis, adding a further dimension to Rolnik's work.

Rolnik's APM talk was an invitation for thinking, his book a place to think even more. That Eran Rolnik wrote this one book is enough to be proud about. We are fortunate: he has written another forthcoming: "The Whale and the Polar Bear: Psychoanalysis and its Gamekeepers". Buy it. Read it.