Listening to and Exploring Political Subjectivity in Pastoral Counseling

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Abstract In this article, I argue that a person's political subjectivity, which first forms in one's family of origin, is often silently in the background of the counseling relationship. I begin with a depiction of political subjectivity, identifying its sources and explaining what is meant by the political unconscious and political enactments. Using case examples, I discuss some of the stratagems and pitfalls in listening to and exploring political subjectivity in counseling.

Keywords Political, subjectivity, dissociation, rationalization

Introduction

> The analyst and patient are subject to the same repressive forces. There is no personal outside the political; the political is itself a precondition for subjectivity. (Samuels, 1993, p.50).

Years ago, Eva came for counseling because of struggles in her marriage. We addressed these, even as our conversations covered other life experiences. After a number of months, Eva expressed reluctance in sharing her thoughts and feelings about being an American citizen. Her family emigrated from her war-torn country in Central America during the 1980s. While she appreciated being a U.S. citizen, Eva also knew about the long history of U.S. overt and covert operations in Central American nations and how these interventions destabilized countries, leading to violence, unrest, and deep poverty. Her own family had experienced losses as a result of U.S. sponsored and trained death squads. Eva's anxiety about saying anything to me was based, in part, in her belief that I

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would angrily dismiss her as ungrateful or un-American. Later, Eva realized that her reluctance was formed in relation to her very patriotic husband, as well as the current U.S. political atmosphere of patriotic exceptionalism and, correspondingly, the prevalence of equating criticism with disloyalty. In addition, we learned that her anxiety was also rooted in her childhood experiences of state-sanctioned violence toward those who opposed the government.

In general, pastoral counselors are trained to consider how a client's subjectivity is formed in and by family relationships, social structures, culture, religious faith, and internal fantasies and drives. This training includes developing a critical-constructive stance or a hermeneutics of suspicion toward those structures that shape subjectivity. For instance, most pastoral counselors are sensitized to how patriarchal narratives and institutions negatively shape the subjectivity of girls and women. This critical stance is all well and good, yet little attention has been directed to the relation between the political realm and subjectivity or what I call political subjectivity. That is, we frequently overlook how the polis impacts and shapes subjectivity and intersubjectivity. Eva's struggle with me and my work with other clients brings to the foreground the importance of developing a critical, analytical perspective vis-à-vis the political and how it silently shapes subjectivity.

In this article, I argue that a person's political subjectivity, which begins to form first in one's family of origin, is, more often than not, in the background of the counseling relationship. On occasion, the counselor's and client's political subjectivities become important aspects of clinical work. In my view, when appropriate, a client's (and counselor's) political subjectivity is worth exploring because s/he may 1) gain a deeper

understanding of and appreciation for the importance of the sources of his/her political values and beliefs and how they shape behavior; 2) achieve greater accountability and agency vis-à-vis the political realm; 3) heighten awareness of the shared illusions and contradictions that accompany dominant political stories and beliefs; 4) expand his/her capacity to handle ambiguity and complexity when it comes to the political realm; 5) deepen awareness of shared defenses vis-à-vis political beliefs and identity; 6) increase awareness of political enactments and, thus, further differentiation. I begin with a depiction of political subjectivity, identifying its sources and explaining what is meant by the political unconscious and political enactments. Using case examples, I discuss some of the stratagems and pitfalls in listening to and exploring political subjectivity in counseling.

Political Subjectivity

The terms "political" and "subjectivity" have a long history in philosophical discourses and are notoriously slippery when it comes to providing definitions that are free of contention and controversy. My modest and provisional aim is to depict how I understand these concepts and how they are related. This serves as a foundation for discussing a) the sources that give rise to and shape political subjectivity and b) notions of the political unconscious and political enactments.

Before addressing the political vis-à-vis subjectivity, it is important to address briefly how I am using the concept of subjectivity. Modern philosophical and psychological perspectives on subjectivity generally tend to define it in terms of the capacities for self-reflection and consciousness. A sense of me-ness or I-ness is, from this perspective,

contingent upon language. Frie (1997), disputing Lacan's and Habermas' views on the relation between language and subjectivity, argued that "linguistic articulation is a necessary, but not sufficient condition of human subjectivity" (p.14). Put another way, for Frie, subjectivity is not equated either with consciousness or language, yet both are crucial features of it. Indeed, subjectivity is contingent upon the full array of signifying functions, which are largely outside one's consciousness. Muller (1996) argued that the very basis "for the experience of human subjectivity is an effect of semiosis" (p.45; see also, Colapietro, 1989). A person's subjectivity, in other words, is not solely equated with conscious me-ness or I-ness that is derived from the capacity for self-reflection and language, but rather composed of a much more complex and diverse conscious and unconscious semiotic organizations of experience. Nevertheless, we are subjects of and subject to language as we consciously and unconsciously organize experience. This, however, is not quite the whole picture.

The very capacity for organizing experience through language and narrative is contingent on mirroring and attuning others (Hesse & Main, 2000; Sroufe, 1995; Stern, 1985). The baby is subject to and a subject of the mirroring ministrations of his/her parents as they attempt to use language and other signifiers in responding to the infants assertions. Mirroring and attunement, which involve recognition of the Other as a subject, comprise verbal and nonverbal behaviors that shape a child's ability to organize experience and to experience him/herself as a subject at a nascent conscious and unconscious level. Thus, we become subjects and experience ourselves as subjects in relation to mirroring and attuning subjects, which gives rise to diverse forms of subjectivity and intersubjective relations that are not completely conscious (Beebe &

Lachmann, 2002; Beebe, Knoblauch, Rustin & Sorter, 2003). Thus, the actions of the parents are crucial aspects of the baby's organizations of experience, which include but are not identical to consciousness and language. Subjectivity, in short, is much deeper and broader than a conscious, linguistically dependent sense of me-ness or I-ness. It includes organizations of experience that comprise nonverbal signifiers (Peirce, 1991, 1998) and an unconscious sense of me-ness-in-relation to a attuning Other. Thus, subjectivity is embedded in the web of human interactions and concomitant signifiers.

Another important feature of subjectivity is addressed by postmodern perspectives, which challenge the modern philosophic assumption of a unified subject. Benjamin (1995) remarked that subjectivity "refers to such a locus of experience, one that need not be centrally organized, coherent, or unified. Yet it can still allow continuity and awareness of different states of mind" (pp.12-13). Here subjectivity is diverse and shifting conscious and unconscious cognitive-emotional organizations of experience that emerge in relation to an individual's identifications (and renunciations) with other subjects (Aron, 1996). These organizations of experience are joined to an individual's sense of and belief in his/her continuity. The experience and belief of a unified subject, however, is a necessary fiction, Bromberg (1996) noted. This perspective on subjectivity helps explain the various and shifting transference and countertransference features in counseling relationships.

With this view of subjectivity, I shift to the relation between subjectivity and the polis or the political realm, which has long been an interest to philosophers, beginning with Plato and Aristotle. A foundational premise in Aristotle's work, for instance, is that individual human beings are "by nature adapted to life in a polis or city state" (Bambrough, 1963, p.379). He

argued that the polis is prior to the individual and family and these associations, which make up the state, are necessary for human beings to survive and thrive (pp.384-386). The polis, in other words, "comes into existence," Aristotle wrote, "for the sake of the living, but remains in existence for the sake of living well" (in Arendt, 1958, p.183). Aristotle's view that individuals are rooted in the polis and dependent on it for virtue or leading a good life is an idea that permeates political philosophy in the West, though with very diverse formulations (e.g., Buber, 1958; Macmurray, 1957, 1961; Mounier, 1952).

If we accept the notion that an individual is embedded in the socio-political rituals and structures of one's society, then how are we to understand the various aspects and dynamics of this relationship vis-à-vis subjectivity? To answer this question, it is important first to depict the components of the polis and how they shape political subjectivity. Prominent political philosopher Hannah Arendt (1958) stated that the "polis, properly speaking, is not a city-state in its physical location; it is an organization of people as it arises out of acting and speaking together, and its true space lies between people living together for this purpose, no matter where they happen to be" (p.198). For Arendt, stories and storytelling found the polis where courage is "present in a willingness to act and speak at all, to insert one's self into the world" (p.186). Indeed, for Arendt the "organization of the polis…is a kind of organized remembrance" (p.197) that is manifested in the public space of shared narratives and institutions. This communicative space encompasses a complex web of economic, political, and social rules, roles, values, beliefs, fantasies, and expectations/goals that are expressed and lived out in collective rituals, institutions, and narratives, comprising an array of iconic, indexical, and symbolic signifiers (Peirce, 1998). These rituals, structures, narratives, and disciplines inform citizens about whom to trust and where their loyalties lie; they provide a

shared identity that is crucial to making ethical decisions or assigning standards to social practices (Nealon, 1998); they signify and make licit the kinds of authority, power, privilege, and prestige that are meted out in diverse social contexts (Foucault, 1972; Ransom, 1997); they represent the good aims citizens are to pursue and the sanctions that result when one fails (Benhabib, 1992); they shape who we care for and how we care (Hammington, 2004). This intricate economic, social, and cultural web serves as the milieu that gives rise to and shapes the political subjectivities of its members (Samuels, 2004). That is, a person is subject to and of the myriad political beliefs, expectations, and values embedded in public institutions, narratives, and other communicative interactions (e.g., public rituals). Being a subject of and to these communicative spaces means that an individual's conscious and unconscious me-ness or I-ness is inextricably yoked to the larger public space. Put another way, a conscious or unconscious expression of me-ness is joined to the larger we-ness.

The claim that the subject is inextricably yoked to the polis leaves open the question about the process through which a person becomes a subject vis-à-vis the political space. Foucault used the term "subjectification" to point to the procedures "by which one obtains the constitution of a subject" (in Ransom, 1997, p.156). We might think of subjectification, in part, as a process wherein the emergence of subjectivity occurs through shifting multiple identifications, as well as disidentifications, beginning in the crucible of one's family relationships (Benjamin, 1998, p.47). It is the family, Coontz (1991) noted, that reproduces the culture, which includes the political milieu and its notions and depictions of loyalty, identity, power, and authority that are embodied and embedded in a cultures narratives, rituals, and institutions (cf. Mintz & Kellogg, 1988). Consider briefly the political subjectivity of Malcolm X (Haley, 1964). His construction of a personal narrative as an adult begins not

simply with the birth of the hero, but the birth of a child against the background of political violence and the concomitant marginalization of African-Americans from the white-dominated polis. That is, his birth narrative indicates that, even as an infant, he was already unwittingly subject to and of the political forces of racism, which denied and excluded, through various forms of public and political violence, the agency and freedom of African-Americans. The breakup of his family, after his father was killed, was largely due to political policies and programs that marginalized poor black people by way of inadequate forms of social care, all of which shaped Malcolm's subjectivity. Also, Malcolm's early identification with whiteness as "good" and blackness as "inferior" was linked to his experiences within his family, which in turn was related to the polis and how being white was associated with power, privilege, and loyalty. Malcolm carried his white self-identification into school until his encounter with his eighth grade teacher. When asked what he wanted to do when he grew up Malcolm said he wanted to be a lawyer—a symbol of white academic and public success. Mr. Ostrowski, his teacher, replied, "Malcolm, one of life's first needs is for us to be realistic. Don't misunderstand me now. We all here like you, you know that. But you've got to be realistic about being a nigger. You ought to think about something you can be" (p. 36). After this disruptive encounter, Malcolm's identification with a white ethos shifted. Whereas prior to this, his subjectivity was largely comprised of positive white identifications and negative black ones, months after his encounter with his teacher his subjectivity was shaped by his positive, yet conflicted, identifications with black people.

Another example of the political subjectivity is taken from a pastoral counseling venue. Clara, a middle-aged woman, saw a picture of a soldier on the cover of a book on my desk as she moved across the room to sit on the sofa. She remarked that she deeply admired soldiers

who sacrificed to "protect our freedoms and way of life." On Veterans Day, she had soldiers come to class to talk to the children about what they did and how soldiers are trained to defend the U.S. Clara's father, she later proudly revealed, was an Army veteran who fought the Germans during WWII. While her father never really discussed his experiences, Clara grew up identifying with and idealizing her father. We cannot fully understand Clara's idealization without pointing to the public, political narratives, rituals, and institutions that contributed to her idealizations vis-à-vis her father and other veterans. These positive identifications were linked to loyalty to her father, as well as to servicemen and women who "protected" the nation and its values. All of this was joined to the public space wherein political leaders frequently extolled the sacrifice and heroism of American servicemen and women. Also, numerous history books depict the toil and sacrifice of soldiers in WWI and WWII. Veterans Day rituals are played out throughout the country. Car decals that say "Support the Troops" are ubiquitous. So powerful are these public, political discourses and images that to question or critique the military would result in public scorn, dismissal or accusations of disloyalty. What I wish to stress here is that Clara's political subjectivity was shaped in her family relationships and her positive identifications with her father. These relationships and identifications were inextricably joined to the wider public-political narratives and rituals that supported her idealized identifications.

Another illustration of the formation of political subjectivity is seen in David's ambivalence about his family and his wife's family. David grew up on "the wrong side of the tracks." When he was a child, his father worked in the steel mills and was an ardent supporter of the unions and the Democratic Party. David would often accompany him to the meetings, which furthered his identifications with the working class and his disdain for the wealthy.

Both of his parents worked hard to insure David would go to college and have opportunities to succeed them (narratives of the American dream). After college, David worked for two years before earning a law degree from a prestigious university. It was at this university where David met Rachel, who came from an upper middle class family. For the most part, David continued to identify with his working class values, though he often felt uncomfortable and out of place when at home with his parents and extended family. At the same time, he never quite felt at ease with his wealthy in-laws. It could be said that David's college and graduate school experiences resulted in changes vis-à-vis his political subjectivity. During these years, he began to internalize and identify with the values and beliefs of the educated class, which, at times, conflicted with his identifications with the working class of his youth. His political subjectivity, in other words, comprised a complex and distinct array of economic and class experiences, beliefs, and identifications, which gave rise to his ambivalence and his sense of alienation.

Political Subjectivity and the Political Unconscious

A person's political subjectivity is, for the most part, formed outside of awareness, though many people are able to identify some aspect of their political subjectivity (e.g., party identification or disidentification) and its relation to their family roots. Nevertheless, aspects of political subjectivity remain outside awareness in the form of unconscious wishes, illusions, affects, and memories. This political unconscious is analogous to Carl Jung's term "collective unconscious," which refers to shared unconscious archetypes that shape persons' constructions of experience and behavior. In a similar and heuristic vein, I suggest that each of us possesses a political unconscious

that comprises shared wishes, fantasies, illusions, and images, which shapes individual and collective identifications, perceptions, constructions of experience, and behavior.

An excellent illustration of the pervasiveness of the political unconscious is depicted in Bruce Franklin's book, War Stars. Franklin (1988) documents the fascination of the American public and inventors with the development of super-weapons, dating back to the early 19th century. Robert Fulton, he argued, was one of the first to provide the logic for developing super-weapons, namely, peace, security, and prosperity (p. 10). With ever increasing technological know-how in the 19th and 20th centuries, inventors have developed super-weapons with greater catastrophic effects, offering the illusions of peace and prosperity to garner public support for the development and use of the weapons. In brief, the super-weapon is designed to annihilate the enemy or to create so much fear and anxiety in our enemies that they will either submit or decide not to attack. In this logic of madness is an unconscious wish for invulnerability, which naturally screens annihilation anxiety and vulnerability. Collective annihilation anxiety and insecurity are evacuated onto or into the enemy. All of this is accompanied by and supported by political narratives that assure and reassure citizens of the reasonableness and appropriateness of developing and mass producing these weapons. For instance, consider the powerful political narratives that portrayed Germany as being on the brink of developing an atom bomb, which functioned as the inevitable impetus to develop our own super-weapon first. Later, public political narratives portrayed the growing Soviet threat, which, in turn, provided reasons for developing thousands of hydrogen bombs that could target any place in the world. Laing (1959) noted the madness of these narratives, writing:

> A little girl of seventeen in a mental hospital told me she was terrified because the Atom Bomb was inside her. That is delusion. The statesmen of the world who boast and threaten that they have Doomsday weapons are far more dangerous, and far more estranged from 'reality' than many of the people on whom the label 'psychotic' is affixed. (p.12)

Estrangement from "reality" suggests a shared political unconscious wherein annihilation anxiety and the fantasy of invulnerability are rampant.

A clinical example of the political unconscious is seen in Clara's story and her idealization of veterans. Clara's political subjectivity included the unconscious cultural illusion of innocence and the concomitant denial of guilt. The cultural illusion of innocence is linked to U.S. political narratives regarding violent expansionism on this and other continents for the past two centuries (Zinn, 1998). These culturally held narratives, which have largely provided "good patriotic" (e.g., national security) reasons for intervening in other countries and engaging in wars, have shaped the public's perception and experience (Chomsky, 2005; Fish, 1978). For instance, the political narratives that justified U.S. violence against other peoples, from the ethnic cleansing of Native Americans to our most recent attack on Iraq, place blame on the Others and affix innocence to Americans. This split is most clearly seen in the construction of a so-called "good" war and influences how many Americans understand the "enemy" (Japanese or Germans) to hold total responsibility for aggression and to absolve ourselves of any blame and guilt. Consider, for instance, that the public myths about the fire bombings and the atomic bombings during WWII impute guilt solely to the enemy and innocence to the U.S. and its allies. Niebuhr (1942; 1943) sought to challenge this collective innocence

only to uncover a great deal of rage and hostility. These cultural narratives that split off innocence and blame continue to be operative in the U.S. psyche. For example, ten years ago, the Smithsonian sought to exhibit the Enola Gay juxtaposed with the stories of Americans and Japanese who were involved. The Air Force Association (1995) vociferously objected to portraying the Japanese as victims. They wanted them portrayed as "ruthless" aggressors (apparently, then, deserving of fire and atomic bombings). They also objected to using stories from those who had survived the atomic bombings. The Air Force Association, the American Legion, and many members of Congress asked that the exhibit be cancelled. Like Niebuhr, the Smithsonian provided a perspective that challenged the collective illusion of innocence, as well as heightened anxiety regarding guilt. To acknowledge some guilt would have required letting go of the wish for innocence.

Another illustration of the political unconscious is seen in David's struggle. Growing up, David heard stories about how upper-class people exploit the working class and the poor. Stories of people like Mother Jones, Eugene Debs, Emma Goldman, Dorothy Day and other saints of the poor and working-class were told at various times as David grew up. The plot of these narratives paralleled the idealized patriotic narratives regarding U.S. interventions. In other words, upper-class people were constructed as victimizers, while the working class people were both victims and heroes, fighting against formidable odds. One feature of the political unconscious was insecurity. That is, David grew up feeling secretly inferior to those of the upper-class, even though this was never consciously communicated to him by his parents. This illusion of inferiority was buttressed by upper-class narratives and behaviors toward the poor and the working-class. When David began

affiliating with the upper classes, his unconscious sense of inferiority came to the fore. At the same time, he began to internalize the ethos of the upper classes, which, in part, contained both an unconscious wish for invulnerability and unconscious guilt associated with demeaning and depriving others to obtain privileged security (Marris, 1996). Put another way, most upper-class folk would deny feeling insecure, yet their sense of security and identity are linked to social and political power, privilege, and prestige, all of which depend on having the lower classes serve as containers of their projected these negative feelings of insecurity. This unconscious conflict between insecurity and guilt was manifested in David's struggle between identifying with two distinct narratives and classes.

The political unconscious is supported by shared defenses, namely, weak dissociation, rationalization, and denial. Stern (1997), relying principally on the philosopher Herbert Fingarette (1969), coined the term "weak dissociation" to identify individual and intersubjective ways of organizing experience such that one's actions and consequences are narrowly spelled-out or narrated. Inflexible narration, in other words, means that persons omnipotently spell-out or narrate their experience, such that any ideas, meanings, values, and affects that are unconsciously perceived to challenge the dominant story remain unformulated. In weak dissociation, we spell out only what "we believe we can tolerate, or that furthers our purpose, or that promises a feeling of safety, satisfaction, and the good things in life; we dissociate the meanings that we believe we will not be able to tolerate, that frighten us and seem to threaten the fulfillment of our deepest intentions" (Stern, 1997, p.128). As a result "of so insistently turning our attention elsewhere…we never even notice alternative understandings. Focal attention

under these conditions is controlled by the intention to enforce narrative rigidity" (p.132). This selective attention and corresponding narrative rigidity are "not necessarily the need to avoid anxiety about specific content that motivates a story, but the desire to tell a story a particular way, the intention to maintain predictability and not to slip the traces" (p.132).

Stern argued that weak dissociation is also a social phenomenon. In other words, weak dissociation is an intersubjective process whereby persons overlook or leave unformulated and, therefore, unconscious alternative experiences or perspectives that would challenge the dominant shared story and concomitantly shared identity. The political unconscious, I argue, is largely buoyed by and dependent on weak dissociation. In other words, there is rigidity in many cultural narratives, which simplify complex reality. Narratives lauding U.S. exceptionalism, for instance, leave unformulated alternative narratives that might challenge the idealized tales of U.S. involvement in the world and at home. In our educational system and the media (see Loewen, 1996), we tell and retell stories of America's exceptionalism, freedom, power, and largesse, omitting contra-stories of ethnic cleansing of Native Americans, the deliberate wars to gain territory from Spain and Mexico, the torture and killing of at least 200,000 Philippine citizens (1900-1905), the deliberate and illegal targeting of civilians in WWII, government involvement in killing its own citizens, as well as assassinating and torturing people in other countries, etc. Accountability and guilt remain unformulated.

It may be argued that contra-stories are indeed told, yet they are clearly not part of the common narrative or narration in public discourse. When contra-stories are included, they are marginalized by way of rationalization—"those were immoral actions of the

past," "we were required to commit atrocities in order to overcome evil" (e.g., Japanese attacks—Carroll, 2006), or "these actions were necessary to save American lives." That is, when alternative stories confront the rigid narration of weak dissociation, rigidity is buttressed by denial, minimization, and rationalization. The result is that the dominant narrative is unchanged even when these marginalized stories make their appearance.

The cultural examples of defenses that maintain the political unconscious are, at times, encountered in counseling situations. Clara's remarks about how her father and other men (e.g., "they fought to preserve our freedoms," "they are heroes") were linked to cultural narratives that leave unformulated U.S. aggression and accountability for killing hundred of thousands of non-combatants. These and other statements were expressed as matters of fact, leaving no room for curiosity or questions. Indeed, Clara's usual curiosity was absent. When I made this observation, Clara looked puzzled. "What do you mean? I am not sure what curiosity has to do with all of this." I shifted, wondering aloud about her idealization of soldiers, her father, and possibly me[2]. Clara acknowledged that she viewed all of us positively, again leaving me with a sense that she did not wish to take this further. This said, Clara was, on other occasions, realistically critical of her father (and me), but this was absent. When I attempted to probe her idealization about U.S. soldiers, Clara returned to being puzzled, restating comments about people fighting for our freedoms. I later thought that Clara's puzzlement was an understandable response, especially if one considers that weak dissociation leaves unformulated alternative narratives. There was, in other words, no other way to tell the story. The idea that there may have been multiple interpretations or meanings raised her anxiety and increased her

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[2] Perhaps in an effort to evoke a positive transference, the person who referred Clara had told her that I had gone to West Point and had been an Airborne-Ranger.

sense of puzzlement. I imagined that if I had provided alternative perspectives, Clara's weak dissociation would have been challenged. I suspect this would have triggered rationalization and denial, which were readily at hand given the cultural narratives about veterans and their sacrifices. These shared defenses, I suggest, point to the presence of the political unconscious, which in this case may be understood as a wish for invulnerability and the avoidance of accountability and guilt.

Political Enactments

Jung once remarked, "That which we do not bring to consciousness appears in our lives as fate" (in Schwager, 2004, p.354). There is, in other words, a tragic trajectory that often arises when significant motivations, fantasies, memories, and emotions remain unconscious, whether we are talking about an individual, a counseling couple, or a group of people. Recently, some psychoanalysts coined the term "enactment" to capture the process whereby analyst and patient are caught in the throes of "unconscious psychic forces" (Chused, 1997, p.265). Maroda (1998) argued that an "Enactment is an affectively driven repetition of converging emotional scenarios from the patient's and analyst's lives. It is not merely an affectively driven set of behaviors, it is a necessary repetition of past events that have been buried in the unconscious due to unmanageable or unwanted emotions" (p.520). In these situations, the therapist and patient have a sense of being captured by powerful emotions.

The notion of enactment is almost exclusively linked to the consulting room, though I suggest that it can be extended to group actions that are manifestations of the political unconscious. There are, in other words, political enactments and these, on occasion, may

parallel or be connected to clinical enactments. Recognizing that there are challenges when concepts, such as enactment, are torn "from the sphere in which they have originated and evolved" (Freud, 1930, p.144), I wish to suggest that shared unconscious emotions and fantasies vis-à-vis the political realm give rise to actions that appear to us as fate, as inevitable. It is as if the group or the counseling couple is caught in the grips of powerful psychic forces that involve unconscious motivations and emotions. These political enactments involve individuals' actions that are supported and legitimized by shared narratives and group rituals, yet driven by powerful unconscious motivations, fantasies, and emotions. I wish to stress that not all political enactments, like clinical enactments, involve conflict and tension, which may be seen in violent public protests. Some may involve intense emotional agreement and cooperation found, for instance, in public support for war and the corresponding occlusion of critique or alternative perspectives. That is, in political enactments there may be a combination of collusion and conflict.

A recent example of what I would call a political enactment occurred during the months following 9/11. Within two years of 9/11, the U.S. was involved in two wars and was spending hundreds of billions of dollars on national security. The public was overwhelmingly behind both wars—nearly 80%. The public fervor for war was, in my view, a political enactment signifying shared unconscious fantasies and fears. This may be explained as follows. What was disturbing and painful about 9/11 was not simply the deaths of 3,000 people, because there have been other tragedies in U.S. history that involved more deaths. Rather, it was the disruption of two key tenets of American narratives. First, the attacks disrupted the belief that two oceans separated us from the

disorders and violence that plagued other countries (Gaddis, 2005). This belief was linked to the unconscious fantasy of U.S. invulnerability or, more accurately, a wish to be invulnerable or for absolute security. Put another way, shared narratives of the U.S. status as a superpower or the hyperpower permeated public discourse, providing citizens with an illusion of pride and near-absolute security (Bacevich, 2005). The attack on U.S. soil challenged these unconscious wishes and stirred up collective anxiety vis-à-vis vulnerability. It was as if no one was safe anywhere in America. Our physical and psychic boundaries had been violated and the wish for invulnerability or absolute security was threatened. A second and related belief to be challenged was the fantasy of American innocence. A couple of weeks after 9/11, a Newsweek headline read, "Why Do They Hate Us." There was a public sense of incredulousness. How could they hate us, given our beneficence? The very question suggests a belief in (and wish for) innocence. The narratives of innocence had deafened many Americans to the list of complaints about the long history of U.S. (and other Western imperialistic powers, e.g., France, Britain, and Germany) meddling in Middle East affairs—complaints held by many Arabs and not merely terrorist fringe groups.

The fantasies of absolute security and innocence are deeply embedded in the American political psyche. Instead of coming to terms with these illusions, many Americans continued to be captured by them and their concomitant anxiety. Instead of confronting this anxiety, the public, by and large, transformed anxiety into hatred and aggression, which served to maintain unconscious wishes for invulnerability and innocence, while externalizing blame and insecurity. The political enactment, then, was manifested in public support of two wars—support that was fueled by media and

government propaganda that used dominant narratives of U.S. exceptionalism, power, and beneficence. The public was told that we would fight over there, so that security could be restored here and, in so doing, revive and maintain the fantasy of invulnerability by evacuating insecurity onto other peoples. In addition, unconscious guilt and accountability were maintained by first avoiding serious engagement of Middle East Arabs (not just terrorists) and, second, by continuing to narrate the myth of innocence. George W. Bush's phrase, "axis of evil," which was neither the first nor will it be the last presidential simplification of reality, was a public manifestation of this fantasy of innocence, evacuating all accountability on real and imagined enemies.

I would add that the presence of political enactments is revealed in the marginalization, denial, rejection, or attack on perspectives and narratives that are deemed to threaten or call dominant narratives and actions into question. The media buried or minimized stories that contradicted the Administration's claims (Sherman, 2004). Citizens who questioned the Administration and the move toward war were often labeled as un-American, unpatriotic, or disparaged as naïve and weak. It was only after the anxiety abated and the problems in Iraq became impossible to ignore or deny that criticism became more public and alternative narratives were entertained (e.g., narratives of criminal enforcement versus narratives of war).

Political enactments are not limited to the public realm. They may make their appearance in counseling situations. Analysts think of enactments in terms of the analyst and patient caught up in the grips of powerful unconscious forces, which the analyst only later comes to realize once s/he recognizes s/he has departed from usual practice. I also believe that enactments may go completely unrecognized, precisely because both client

and counselor collude in shared fantasies. These silent enactments are unnoticed because it is business as usual. This shared unconscious may be manifested when there is an absence of curiosity regarding a particular topic that may arise. In terms of a political enactment in a counseling situation, both counselor and client unconsciously collude with dominant public narratives and fantasies. More noisy political enactments, by contrast, result when there is a clash of fantasies or the shared fantasies are so powerfully shared and enacted that counseling boundaries bend.

Examples of clinical political enactments will help illustrate what I mean. Weeks after 9/11, I was having lunch with several counselors in a private dining room. The discussion naturally fell to the current war in Afghanistan and fears of another attack. At one point, John, a therapist, mentioned that some of his clients had begun talking about their fears and fantasies vis-à-vis 9/11 and people of Middle Eastern descent. He felt his role was to help them contain their anxiety, in part, by normalizing their experiences. In particular, one client, Larry, talked about his fear of another terrorist attack and his ardent agreement with the war in Afghanistan and the possibility that Saddam Hussein was involved. John was sympathetic to Larry's anxiety and anger, which mirrored his own thoughts and feelings. Indeed, John was one of many who passionately agreed about "taking the fight to the enemy." John rationalized his response to Larry as containment. I, however, would not necessarily interpret John's actions as containment. Instead, I see them as colluding with the larger public actions of transforming anxiety and fear into hatred and hostility, which was accompanied by a shared shoring up of unconscious fantasies concerning security and innocence. In my view, then, this was a silent political enactment where there was a collusion of shared fantasies. The absence of John's

curiosity, questioning, and exploration pointed to the presence of a political enactment and the eclipse of the work of counseling. John, in other words, could have been empathic and explored the client's fantasies, eventually examining the sources (public and private) of these fantasies. Naturally, much of this is contingent upon timing and the client's mental health, but one of the tasks of counseling is identifying sources of powerful emotions and fantasies, not all of which reside simply and solely in the client's past.

By being curious and exploring, I am not suggesting that the counselor necessarily offer alternative narratives or interpret the client's fantasies as rooted in dominant social-political narratives. Neither am I suggesting that John should not have contained or normalized Larry's fears and anxieties. I might have recognized that Larry was anxious about his safety and the safety of others before wondering if his anxiety was rooted in childhood experiences of feeling unprotected (and how he responded) and/or whether it was connected to publicly fueled anxiety. "Larry, I can see that you, like many Americans, are worried and wish to restore the feeling of being protected, instead of feeling vulnerable." Let's imagine that Larry felt understood here. I might then say, "If I understand you correctly, one of the ways you are seeking to deal with your anxiety and vulnerability is to remove any threats, such as Bin Laden and Saddam, by waging war." In my view, this interpretation is a move toward considering alternative methods of handling vulnerability, which does not necessarily suggest that war, in and of itself, is wrong. There are many possible interventions to a) explore Larry's (and the counselor's) anxiety and concomitant narratives and b) consider alternative renderings, which would be aimed at increasing psycho-social flexibility and freedom.

Another illustration of a non-colluding political enactment in session was Clara's comments about soldiers and my response. My initial countertransference to Clara's idealization of soldiers was some discomfort and anxiety. I remember thinking her comments were, to say the least, naïve, but I was not sure how to handle the situation. At first, I passed over her comment, deciding not to explore it, consciously believing that this was merely an aside and not part of our work. I did ask about her father, but I made no interpretations nor did I explore or challenge her idealization. As the session ended and we walked toward the exit, I said something like, "There are other ways to think about soldiers, especially when one considers our long history of foreign wars." Clara looked at me with a puzzled, anxious look on her face and we awkwardly said good-bye. I remember immediately thinking that my behaviors (not exploring and an outside passing comment that had sadistic overtones) were uncharacteristic of my approach. As I reflected on this interaction, I became more aware of my annoyance and desire to disrupt her naïveté.

There is a great deal about each of our subjectivities and, in particular, our respective family histories that would help explain Clara's idealization and my attempt to disillusion her. Nevertheless, I wish to explore and describe this situation in terms of a clash of political subjectivities. As indicated above, the sources of Clara's idealization are manifold given the numerous public narratives and slogans associated with military "service." Soldiers are deemed to be heroes as they serve by sacrificing their very lives to protect the U.S. from foreign enemies. These narratives posit the innocence of U.S. actions, while assigning blame to enemies. The myth of innocence is naturally coupled with the notion of being a victim. That is, in U.S. folklore (see Gibson, 1994), the U.S. is

never a passive, helpless victim. Once “wrongly” attacked, the U.S. gathers its forces to right the wrong. And in defeating their enemies, the U.S. is just and gracious. I found Clara’s comments about soldiers and her unstated innocence annoying, in part, because, after my “service” in the Army, I became more aware of U.S. histories of military conflict. That is, I was aware of alternative renderings of U.S. narratives of exceptionalism, innocence, and benevolence. Yet, this fails to adequately account for my frustration, as well as my attempt to disillusion her at the very moment she was leaving.

One interpretation is that we were caught up in a victim-victimizer dance that is deeply rooted in U.S. political narratives. Clara constructed her experience in terms of the U.S. being a victim of aggression. This is common and manifested throughout U.S. history. Settlers were victimized by First Nations people. Mexicans attacked U.S. citizens (Mexican American War). Spain attacked the U.S. (Spanish American War). Central American countries, the Philippines, or China were seen as unjustly thwarting American commerce. Communists threatened U.S. allies. This is only a partial list in which dominant political narratives are constructed, demonstrating victim-victimizer schema. In this situation, Clara was assuming innocence. My response emerged, in part, out of alternative narratives that were constructed, for the most part, in relation to U.S. victimization of other peoples (foreigners and U.S. citizens). When narratives are constructed in opposition, they often take up the role of confronting and, at times, victimizing the dominant stories. In these narratives, there is a preconscious desire to disillusion those who hold mistaken beliefs about innocence.

I argue that this was an enactment because we were clearly caught in the grips of powerful emotions and their concomitant narratives. Moreover, I claim that this

enactment reflected a clash of political subjectivities that paralleled political enactments extant in U.S. society. These political enactments take the form of one side, often the dominant group, claiming innocence by way of dissociation, denial and rationalization, and the other side agitating to unmask, sometimes violently, these narratives. James Baldwin (1955) reflected this dynamic when he wrote, "(F)or there is a great deal of will power involved in the white man's naïveté. Most people are not naturally reflective any more than they are naturally malicious, and the white man prefers to keep the black man at a certain remove because it is easier for him thus to preserve his simplicity and avoid being called to account for crimes committed by his forefathers, or his neighbors" (p.166). Baldwin, W.E.B. Dubois and many others sought to dispel white claims of innocence that screen overt and covert malicious wishes, beliefs, and behaviors. Zinn (2004) provides a history of how small groups and individuals have attempted to confront the myths and illusions of powerful organizations, groups, and persons, discovering along the way how powerful the wish for innocence is, as well as how the dominant group works to marginalize, dismiss, or attack those who challenge cherished myths. This sets up, more often than not, a victim-victimizer dance between the two groups. In my view, my having the last word with Clara mirrored one step of this dance.

Whether collusion or conflict, political enactments signify the presence of political subjectivities and their attending unconscious fantasies and emotions. Signifiers of these enactments are often very subtle, ranging from lack of subjective and intersubjective exploration, curiosity, and empathy to bending or breaking counseling boundaries. The challenge in counseling is to identify these political enactments and to find ways to explore them vis-à-vis the goals of the client. This is especially true when counseling

covenants contain the aim to talk about and explore whatever is taking place between the counselor and client. In counseling situations where the covenant is more circumscribed, such as working with a couple who ask for help in dealing with their son, identifying and exploring political subjectivities and enactments may not be addressed or explored, because the counselor makes a decision that this is not beneficial to the client's progress. Of course, the decision may attend an unconscious fear of exploring the enactment. Nevertheless, the guiding criterion is whether exploration is for the sake of facilitating the process of counseling toward the client's needs and goals.

Conclusion

Pastoral counselors realize that to care for clients they must begin to understand the complex reality of subjectivity and intersubjectivity. For the most part, this has involved exploring subjectivity in light of faith, gender, sexuality, and culture. Little attention, however, has been directed to the political aspects of subjective and intersubjective life. Political subjectivity, I argued, is an important feature of our life in society. We internalize the polis' narratives, rituals, and institutions, which shape, consciously and unconsciously, our perceptions and how we construct experience and behave. Much of our political subjectivity is unconscious and this is largely maintained by the shared defenses of weak dissociation, rationalization, denial, and minimization. This unconscious aspect of our political subjectivities gives rise to political enactments that may be manifested in the collusion or collision between counselor and client. My hope, in this article, is to shed some light on this aspect of our shared life together and to consider attending to its presence in counseling.

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