This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in the *Transactional Analysis Journal*, Vol.37, #1, 2007, pp.8-16, available at: https://doi.org/10.1177/036215370703700103

The Inevitability of Uncertainty, the Necessity of Doubt, and the Development of Trust

It was nearly a year ago that I came up with the title for this speech. I was under a tight deadline from the ASAM [the Turkish group that helped organize the conference], who were in the early stages of preparing the program and needed a title and descriptive paragraph fast. I came up with "The Inevitability of Uncertainty, the Necessity of Doubt, and the Development of Trust," probably under the influence of either too much coffee or too much wine—I can't recall which. A lot has transpired during the year since, both in my own life and in the world at large, so if I were to title this speech now, it would be "Trust and Distrust/Hope and Hatred."

I have come to Istanbul from Kosovo, where I was visiting my son Seth and daughter-in-law, Ghadah. Seth works for the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) at their headquarters in Pristina. It would seem, in spite of its name, that the OSCE is forced to spend much more of its resources providing security than promoting cooperation. In addition to staying in Pristina, we drove to Prizren, a predominantly Muslim community near Albania. Our route took us to Gracanice, a Serbian enclave and Roma (gypsy) village where Ghadah, a Sunni Muslim, worked for a foundation promoting education for Serbian and Roma children, and to Mitrovice, a Serbian identified city near the Serbian border. On our journey we drove in a white, clearly marked OSCE vehicle, and the welcome—or lack thereof—was palpable as we moved from one area to another. We were welcomed in the Muslim, Kosovarian territories but not in the Serbian/Orthodox Christian communities. We passed war memorials guarded by United Nations tanks, the UN facilities surrounded by bomb walls and razor wire, and the Christian churches surrounded by walls and razor wire, often guarded by UN soldiers and tanks.

Kosovo is relatively stable at the moment, but the tension, distrust, and hatred simmers just below the surface. It was a stark reminder of the compelling need for us to learn to work more effectively with hatred and violence through political, social, economic, educational, and therapeutic means.

I left Kosovo filled with a father's pride and—given the continuing disintegration of Iraq, the renewed destruction of Lebanon, and the obvious tensions in Kosovo—a quiet despair. As I flew to Istanbul, the prime ministers of Serbia and Kosovo were meeting face-to-face for the first time since 1999, when NATO bombed Serbia to bring the ethnic cleansing of ethnic (Muslim) Albanians to an end. The talks ended in a stalemate.

My speech today will be more about hatred than hope, more about distrust than trust, for I believe if we do not learn to face our hatreds, there will be no true hope or trust. We are thrown into deep uncertainty and doubt at times of war and profound cultural conflicts, like those we are now facing throughout the world. We are thrown back to reexamining the nature of our
cultural and social structures. It is probably no accident that the theme of last year's international transactional analysis conference in Edinburgh was "Freedom and Responsibility" and that this year's theme is "Trust and Uncertainty in the 21st Century." The April 2006 issue of the *Transactional Analysis Journal* is devoted to papers from last year's conference, and in my introductory editorial to that journal, I wrote that "these articles bring new meaning and spirit to Berne's vision of transactional analysis as a social psychiatry" (Cornell, 2006, p. 76). As we can see from this year's conference program, Berne's vision continues to inspire us.

Pearl Drego's (1996) article "Cultural Parent Oppression and Regeneration," published a decade ago in the *Transactional Analysis Journal,* is based on her treatment of and research into the oppression of women in India. In the article she observed that

> while the culture of the group requires analysis outside the individual, understanding the Cultural Parent involves introspection and self-awareness. The culture of a group is carried by individuals, and it is possible to become aware of it within the [individual] personality. (p. 59)

Drego's (1983, 1996, 2005) writings on the Cultural Parent build on Berne's (1963) work in *The Structure and Dynamics of Organizations and Groups*. She seeks to provide a means for examining and changing the impact of culture and cultural oppression on the individual's psychology. This morning I will be speaking to intercultural tensions and the necessity of understanding distrust and hatred in the movement toward intergroup and cultural change.

Earlier this year I watched the documentary film by Martin Scorcese (2005) on the beginnings of Bob Dylan's career. Dylan has been a hero of mine since I was a teenager, and Scorcese made a brilliant presentation of Dylan's early years. The film was, however, more than

Dylan's story, as it wove his life into the cultural revolutions of the civil rights and antiwar movements of the 1960s. It was a time in the United States of turmoil, idealism, and hope. As the documentary came to an end, I wept. But mine were not tears of joy or appreciation. They were bitter tears, tears of rage and despair. What has happened to my country? How has my generation created the United States of 2006? How have we elected George W. Bush as president? How have those of my generation allowed these wars, cultural arrogance, unbridled hostility, religious ignorance, and prejudice? Scorsese captured the cultural and political landscape of the 1960s vividly. It was in this cultural spirit that transactional analysis was born. Eric Berne and his rabble-rousing colleagues were part of the heart of the 1960s in the San Francisco Bay Area. It was the era in which I grew up and with which I deeply identify.

At the beginning of this year, I went back into therapy after a very difficult 2005. The man I chose as my therapist is a forensic psychiatrist. I agreed to see him after hours at his office in the African-American center in the midst of one of Pittsburgh's now poorest neighborhoods, an area that was once a vibrant jazz and cultural center in the city. After several weeks, I was leaving a session and found the doors locked. It was late, dark, and I had no idea how to get out. Eventually, a man came up to me and said, "Do you want to get out?" I told him I did. "Well, I'll let you out," he said, "if you look at me." "What do you mean?" I asked. He replied, "You've been coming here for several weeks, and you've never looked at me. You act like I don't exist." I was stunned, filled with shame and mumbled something like, "I'm sorry. I don't really know what you mean. I've been coming to see my therapist, so I'm rather preoccupied when I get here. I don't think I see anybody really." "Maybe, but you walk by me every night and you don't see me, never bother to say hello. So maybe, but you're a white guy, I'm black, and black people are used to white people looking past them. You're not going to look past me. Look me in the eye." I did. "My name is James, what's yours?" James asked. "Bill." "OK, Bill, next week you look me in the eye, say 'Hi James, how's it going?' and we'll start getting to know each other." Now we always greet each other and we are getting to know each other, even as I still arrive preoccupied and often leave even more so.

I have given that encounter with James a great deal of thought. At the end of last year, I
sold my family home in the country and moved into the city into a predominantly poor, African-American neighborhood, one that is beginning to be revived. There is a great deal of tension in this neighborhood. There I do see my neighbors, but I don't know how (or if)

to greet those who are black. I don't know the body language, the social protocol on the street. A few days after the confrontation from James, I was walking to my house and passed two African-American men in a deep, animated conversation. I stepped to the side as I passed them. One of the men turned around and approached me angrily, "We don't bite, you know. You stepped away from us like we scared you. We don't bite, mister." This time, though, I did not feel ashamed. I had consciously stepped aside so as not to intrude on their conversation, as I would with anyone. This time I felt some understanding of the man's reaction, and I was able to talk with the guy comfortably. And yet I knew, here again, was an experience of men accustomed to being avoided, even shunned (Lewin, 2000), so the man's assumption of my avoidance was not ungrounded. We had misread one another, with distrust and tension on both sides.

I tell these stories here because they are everyday examples of uncertainty, of cultural and racial distrust. In these instances we can see both the subtlety and the depth of cultural misunderstandings. I am trying to understand my own racism, my anxieties, my ways of insulating myself from unpleasantness and differentness, and I don't like this process very much.

I am accustomed to welcoming theoretical differences, challenges, and even conflict in my various roles as therapist, professional colleague, trainer, writer, and editor. In these familiar arenas, the experience of differentness and conflict is exciting and enjoyable. In my work as a psychotherapist, I know that conflict—even hatred—is meaningful.

For example, many of my clients have had exceedingly difficult lives, and they are in various ways rather difficult people. Often their work with me is their third or fourth effort at psychotherapy. They have little reason to be hopeful or trusting, little motivation to be pleasant or reasonable. When I sit with a client in the face of hatred or despair, I see a body that is scarred and battered. I can usually feel a link, and I can bring some comprehension to the hostility and distrust. Sometimes I am an effective partner in the face of deeply distressed affect. Sometimes I am not so effective, but together we eventually work things out. I feel a meaning to these disturbances and some confidence that our work will make a difference. But I find it incredibly difficult to feel hope or trust when I cast these issues onto a societal and political scale.

In my recent writing, I have argued for a theoretical and therapeutic attitude that is neither too certain of the therapist's knowing nor too comforting in what is provided to the client. It can be quite seductive and

gratifying to the human relations professional to be seen as the good and understanding parent, the provider of the "secure base" (Bowlby, 1979; Kohlrieser, 2006). Secure base—it is nearly impossible for me to speak this term these days without thinking of the gross injustices carried out by the U.S. government in the name of Homeland Security, a seductive if empty and deceptive promise promulgated by George W. Bush and the current U.S. administration. As a psychotherapist, I can comprehend how so many Americans have been willing to sacrifice their thinking and autonomy, not to mention the rights and autonomy of other peoples, in exchange for the illusion of protection and security. But as a citizen of the United States, I am also frightened and appalled.

A psychologically secure base is a necessary foundation for our work, but I do not think it is a sufficient model for working with distrust, violence, and hatred. As professionals using transactional analysis to promote personal, group, and organizational change, we need to think very carefully when we imagine that we can offer our clients a secure base. What is it we think we are providing? What is it our clients imagine we are offering? I think the ideal of a secure base needs to be changed to that of a "vital base" within which we offer a challenging, experimental, often conflicted, and rather uncomfortable relationship through which both people must shift their familiar frames of reference. Whether the work is between individuals or groups, both parties must shift their frames of reference if trust of any substance is to develop.

I think that as a community, it has often been difficult for transactional analysis practitioners to face squarely the degrees of shame, hatred, and irrationality of which we are all capable. Berne (1972) warned us most bluntly when he wrote of the Little Fascist in each of us:

> If the Little Fascist comes out openly, he is a cripple-kicker, a stomper, and a rapist, sometimes with some excuse or other such as toughness, objectivity, or some justification. But most people suppress these tendencies, pretend they are not there at all, excuse them if they show their colors, or overlay and disguise them with fear. [These] form the basis for third-degree or "tissue" games that draw blood. He who pretends these forces do not exist becomes their victim. His whole script may become a project to demonstrate that he is free of them. But since he is most likely not, this is a denial of himself. . . . The solution is not to say, as many do, "This has nothing to do with me" or "It's too frightening," but rather "What can I do about it and what can I do with it? (pp. 269-270)

We can, perhaps, more easily make arrangements (games) within our dyadic relationships to avoid anxiety, hostility, and differentness, but within and between groups the experience of anxiety, unpredictability, hostility, and differentness is far harder to avoid (Schermer & Pines, 1994). It is probably no accident that Berne addressed the darker side of human relations more frequently and directly in his writings on groups. In *Principles of Group Treatment,* for example, Berne (1966) outlined the satisfaction in groups of the basic human hungers for stimulation, recognition, and structure, stressing that "people will pay almost any price to have time structured for them, as few are capable of structuring their own time autonomously for very long" (p. 230). He warned that a derivative of structure hunger is leadership hunger and that in turning oneself over to a leader, there is enormous compromise in one's willingness to think. Ultimately, all too often, the idealized leader then imposes restrictions or prohibitions on one's right to think for oneself.

It is no accident that it was after World War I that a deeply troubled Sigmund Freud (1921/1955) wrote "Group Psychology and Analysis of the Ego," in which he described the nature of group regression into what he called mobs and hordes. A group's identification with the leader creates a sense of closeness and belonging. Freud warned of the idealized and dependent transferences to The Leader, the subsequent distortions of superego and ego functions, and the dynamics of such groups as the military, the church, and the state. His conclusions are mirrored in Berne's writings on groups. Neither Freud nor Berne were very optimistic men by temperament—their writings were often infused with a deep pessimism and even cynicism—but both were nonetheless often idealistic in their visions for the work they founded.

Freud, for example, was deeply affected by the horrors and utter irrationality of World War I, and he determined that psychoanalysis had a responsibility to its communities. He initiated the creation of free clinics in every major city with a psychoanalytic institute, requiring that all practicing analysts devote at least one day per week to offering free treatment (Danto, 2005). Vienna, Berlin, Frankfurt, Budapest, Paris, and London all witnessed the creation of free psychoanalytic clinics that offered in-depth psychoanalysis, libraries, and mental hygiene classes, a profound expression of Freud's ideals and leadership. All these clinics except those in London were closed down within a few years by the Nazis. Freud was one of the last Jewish analysts to flee Europe for safety elsewhere. I cannot imagine the despair he must have endured in

the last year of his life in England as he witnessed, yet again, his idealism overrun by hatred and irrationality.

It might seem on the surface paradoxical that of the many Jewish psychoanalysts who fled the Nazis and established psychoanalysis in the United States, most turned their backs on the social and political aspects of psychoanalysis. They enshrined ego psychology in the United States, a model that returned to the psychology of the individual and emphasized the rational. Many became deeply conservative in their practice and hungry for the sanction and approval of authorities. Eric Fromm and Erik Erikson (one of Berne's analysts), among a very few, maintained the social and more radical perspective in psychoanalysis in the United States.

I try to imagine the profound despair of those emigrating analysts, fleeing for their lives, often leaving family behind to die. I can understand their inward turning and imagine the subtle cynicism underlying their return to, wish for, and idealization of the rational and the power of the ego.

It was within this socially cleansed psychoanalytic environment that Berne was trained, and it was this he challenged in creating transactional analysis as a social psychiatry, with groups at the heart of his work. In the October 2006 issue of the *TAJ,* Steve Karpman (2006) writes of the spirit of that time in the birth of transactional analysis. Here again, in Berne's work, we witnessed a reestablishment of an ideal, a rebirth of hope. Now nearly half a century later, we struggle with despair, surrounded by hostility and irrationality around the world. How do we hold our values and pursue our ideals, without idealization and without turning our therapeutic values into saccharine but hollow slogans?

I will talk here primarily about racism, but in so doing I ask you to be thinking about misogyny, homophobia, religious fundamentalism, ethnic and nationalistic superiority, and all forms of institutionalized hatred. Race, like culture, is a complex intermingling of psychological and social factors. It is not simply about the color of one's skin any more than culture is about one's country or ethnicity of origin. One's racial or ethnic identity includes such factors as physical characteristics, geographical location, family structure, income, history, and politics as well as economic, educational, and developmental opportunity. Donald Moss (2003) edited *HATING in the First Person Plural*, assembling the essays in this book by sending a group of psychotherapists three words—nigger, cunt, and faggot, among the ugliest words in the English language—and asking each author to write an essay on one of those words. It is a

powerful collection of writings from which I learned a lot, a book that has helped me to think about and work more clearly with the multiple meanings and sources of bias and hatred. Alan Bass (2003), in an essay in *HATING,* speaks to my experience with James and in my new neighborhood as he observes, "When racism is part of the everyday environment, there is a particular tendency to disavow its traumatic effects, while of course peremptorily re-creating a traumatic environment. And there can be the tendency on the part of an allegedly neutral observer . . . to disavow that all these dynamics are at work" (p. 41).

Maurice Apprey, an African-American psychoanalyst, examines the suffering of African-Americans in particular but writes with a voice that echoes among all populations that are oppressed, assaulted, mariginalized, or held in contempt. He uses the image of "transgenerational haunting" (1996a, 1996b, 1998, 2003), by which he means the victim is host to the ghosts of the original aggressors, a haunting passed unconsciously from one generation to the next. He writes that an individual's "interior space is filled with shadows, ghosts, and silhouettes where past and present, inside and outside, are ill-defined . . .. [and so] urgently strives [without conscious awareness] to repeat historical injury, choosing an inappropriate object to attack" (Apprey, 1998, p. 34).

Berne and Drego, in their writings on the deep influences of cultural and group character, repeatedly demonstrate the split—often a total contradiction—between the professed etiquette of the cultural Parent ego state and the emotional and bodily realities of the character of the group. In *The Structure and Dynamics of Organizations and Groups,* Berne (1963) observed that "group character" provides the mechanisms for handling individual anxieties and patterns of emotional expression. Drego (1996) elaborated Berne's concept to include emotionally charged attitudes and deeply inscribed ways of feeling, sensing, expressing, loving, and relating. I would add hating to this list. In describing the dynamics of group cultures, Berne (1963) wrote:

> Character is more "primitive"
> than etiquette. Etiquette
> requires a restraint, and
> understanding and knowledge
> of social behavior. . . .
> Character is a more direct ex-
> pression of instinctual life. The
> group character is chiefly an

> expression of that aspect of the personality which will later be called the Child. (pp. 151-152)

Drego refers to group character as the cultural shadow that envelops and contaminates the Child ego state. The term "character" has its origins in Greek, meaning "branded, cut into the skin"; character cuts deep. Apprey (2003) stresses:

> Into this cut [character], as it were, may be inserted a world of lived experience where the oppressed has lost sight of the original enemy. Influenced by this absence, a people may attack its own, as in Black-on-Black crime. (p. 9)

In transgenerational haunting, then, a contemporary generation is unwittingly possessed by an earlier generation. Such possession preserves history, but in a poisonous, unmetabolized version (p. 12).

For Apprey (2003), "In violent ethnonational conflicts, the pivotal issues are difference and identity" (p. 6), where the dread of differentness—the Other, in his language—is avoided at all costs so as to preserve identity (structure and recognition hungers in Berne's terms). Transgenerational hauntings are drenched in histories of violence, injury, shame, powerlessness, and economic deprivation—the "brandings" of previous generations then carried in the group character (Gilligan, 2000). We must not underestimate the enduring and irrational force of intergenerational injury, hatred, and violence. Uncertainty and doubt inhabit the domain of the tensions between the familiar and the different, between Self and Other. Apprey is not speaking of self and other as we typically do in object relations theory, but of Self and THE OTHER, where the Other represents a threatening, alien identity or way of life. It is a differentness that cannot be explored or made a part of one's own life and identity, so it is rendered inferior, disgusting, evil, or dead. This is the domain of a fundamental experience of differentness in which the experience of "I'm Not OK, You're Not OK" is a very real tension that must be acknowledged. This tension is not to be bridged by some saccharine application of "I'm OK, You're OK" as an unthinking idealization of the human spirit.

In working with distrust, hatred, prejudice, and violence, we must look first at ourselves, honestly. All will not be pretty. If we cannot look honestly at ourselves and our professional and ethnic cultures, we will be of little value to those we wish to help. In working with prejudice and violence, shame and distrust, we need to look together with the person at

both him or her as an individual and the history of that individual and also at the histories of the familial, racial, and ethnic groups to which the individual belongs. As therapists, teachers, trainers, and members of the remarkably international community of transactional analysts, we must face and make room for distrust and dissonance in our work. To develop real trust, we must first acknowledge and express distrust.

In his discussion of the Little Fascist, Berne stated that the answer to these vicious and hateful aspects of ourselves is first to acknowledge them and then ask, "What can I do about it and what can I do with it?" What can we do? In Drego's (1996) article on her work with Indian women, she stresses:

> To bring about a change, the oppressive Cultural Parent and its injunctions, myths, and reinforcements must be cleansed at the individual level as well as at the group level. Therapy with individuals needs to be supported by group discussions among mothers, group support systems among women, retraining programs for families, and new kinds of relationships between mothers and their children—in short, a form of cultural therapy similar to one Erikson (1963) described: " 'group therapy' of a kind which would not aim at psychiatric improvement of the individual participant but at an improvement of the cultural relations of those assembled" (p. 127). (pp. 74-75)

This is transactional analysis as a truly social psychiatry, with group work, education, and counseling at its very foundation.

Drego addresses the cultural oppression of the individual by families and groups. Apprey addresses intercultural conflict and violence. He brings his experiences from African-American communities to work in conflict resolution with various groups faced with ethnonational violence.

He delineates a process necessitating the involvement of outside facilitators through which Self and Other, as individuals and groups, can begin to open up new opportunities.

The first stage of the work, as outlined by Apprey, is the acknowledgment of polarized views and the space for this polarization to be fully expressed. In the polarization phase, each side defines its own identity while demonizing the differentness of the Other. The second phase is one of differentiation within each of the polarized groups, which allows participants to see that even within the group with which they identify, there are a multiplicity of positions. The third phase involves the "crossing of mental borders" (p. 23) through which each side attempts to enter the Other's frame of reference through meaningful dialogue and "propelled by an ethic of responsibility" (p. 23; see also Bond, 2006; Kohlrieser, 2006). The Bush administration and the leaders of many of the regions currently engaged in armed conflict seem completely unwilling to engage in this process. As I said earlier, meaningful trust is possible only when both parties shift their frames of reference. The fourth and most crucial phase is the one within which the emerging ethics are grounded in joint projects of concrete and mutual benefit. There is little evidence on the world stage today of opposing groups undertaking these last two processes, which we have witnessed in our time in the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa. The South African efforts have not eliminated poverty or erased racism, but they have allowed enough healing so that functional social structures based in nonviolence can begin to be established. Apprey outlines a process that I believe is consistent with our process of groupwork in transactional analysis, a process that conveys realistic ideas and ideals that can deepen and enrich our work with cultural and intergroup conflict, violence, and prejudice.

In our work—be it as therapists in individual or group treatment, teachers, trainers, or consultants—we must create the space and the opportunity for the realities of our individual and collective anxieties, shamings, and hatreds to be aired (Nitsun, 1996). We must not avert our gaze. In looking at ourselves and each other within the space of despair, shame, distrust, polarization, and hostility, we create a container, an environment in which interchange, understanding, and informed, quiet trust can gradually develop. This work takes time. It requires great determination and the willingness to remain engaged during periods of doubt, uncertainty, distrust, and polarization.

In conclusion, I turn to the words of two artists. More than any other members of our societies, I think it is our artists who are able to work within their cultural histories and traditions and at the same time stand outside the social and cultural norms in critical reflection and representation. I close with a brief quote from an essay by Adrienne Rich (1979) entitled "Women and Honor: Some Notes on Lying":

> An honorable human
> relationship—that is, one in
> which two people have the
> right to use the word "love"—is
> a process, delicate, violent,
> often terrifying to both persons
> involved, a process of refining
> the truths they can tell each
> other.
> It is important to do this because it breaks down human self-delusion and isolation.
> It is important to do this because in so doing we do justice to our own complexity.
> It is important to do this because we can count on so few to go that hard way with us. (p. 188)

And then there is Dylan (1963/1985), who wrote "With God on Our Side" in 1963:

> Oh my name it is nothin'
> My age it means less
> The country I come from
> Is called the Midwest
> I's taught and brought up there
> The laws to abide
> And the land that I live in
> Has God on its side.

Through the next six stanzas, Dylan outlines the wars of the United States, each carried out "with God on our side." The song ends this way:

> So now as I'm leavin'
> I'm weary as Hell
> The confusion I'm feelin'
> Ain't no tongue can tell
> The words fill my head
> And fall to the floor
> If God's on our side

> He'll stop the next war. (p. 93)

It has been more than 40 years since Dylan wrote those words. Dylan's God did not stop the next war, nor has anyone else's, but in the names of various gods, several wars have been started.

Thank you so much for giving me the opportunity to speak with you today.

Afterward: As I was leaving the conference, Diane Salters (2006) gave me a parting gift, a book, *A Human Being Died that Night* by Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela (2003). She is a clinical psychologist who served on South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Human Rights Violations Committee. The book is Gobodo-Madikizela's complex and moving accounting of her interviews with Eugene de Kock, who is serving 212 years in prison for crimes against humanity in his capacity as the commanding officer of apartheid death squads. She describes the complicity of the Dutch Reformed Church in apartheid policies and the South African Army's killings of enemies of the State, a reminder of Freud's linkage of the group psychology of hordes, the State, and the Church. Soldiers were issued a special edition of the Bible, each of which was inscribed on the first page with a message in Afrikaans by State President P. W. Botha (as cited in Gobodo-Madikizela, 2003):

> This Bible is an important part of your calling to duty. When you are overwhelmed with doubt, pain, or when you find yourself wavering, you must turn to this wonderful book for answers. . . . You are now called to play your part in defending our country. It is my prayer that this Bible will be your comfort so that you can fulfill your duty, and South Africa and her people will forever be proud of you. Of all the weapons you carry, this is the greatest because it is the Weapon of God. (p. 53)

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