



ACADEMIA ENGELBERG

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### **The Recognition of the Other. Psychoanalytic Thoughts on the Criticism of Violence**

My talk will be concerned with the contribution of psychoanalysis to a critique and hence prevention of violence. Taking the psychoanalytic experience as a starting point, I will first define criteria for a classification and evaluation of some – intrapsychic and interpersonal - mechanisms of violence. On an intrapsychic level, violence interferes with the capacity for psychic representation, i.e. it alternates thought processes by creating new – and negative - representations that dominate mental life, are difficult to get rid of and in turn provoke violent actions, and by blocking the ability to self-critically call one's own ideas into question. On an interpersonal level, violence precludes the notion of the fellow human being as someone other and independent. Both levels are linked to each other; in both, violence is directed against "the other", meaning in the first instance the other side(s) of myself, the parts that are unnoticed, unconscious etc., in the second instance meaning the other-ness of the other, the other human being's existence that is independent of mine.

The criteria outlined allow for a differentiation of various forms of violence: implanted violence experienced early in life-time and linked to early traumatisation, which may be unavoidable; traumatic violence in later life; repressive forms of violence that may be very hard to tolerate but have the 'advantage' of being obvious; hidden or denied violence that is difficult to assess and all the more powerful.

From a psychoanalytic point of view, a pre-requisite for stopping violence is to recognize otherness in a twofold way: 1. to recognize intrinsically that "I am an other", 2. to recognize interpersonally that "the fellow human being is an other that cannot be reduced to my ascription and projections." This "unavailability of the other" does not contradict the notion of solidarity with the other, but is complemented by the realisation of familiarity with the other: "I can recognize myself in the other" and "I can realize the imprints the other has made on me". Psychoanalysis helps to identify violence as directed against one's own ability to think and against interpersonal recognition and to create a "potential space" that supports the articulation of otherness.