Being Bushed
multiple personality disorder in a globalized religious flatland

Introduction

To be "bushed" is an Australian expression signifying to be confused or lost out in the "bush" -- also implying the associated state of exhaustion. This seems an appropriate experiential condition to explore in the light of George Bush's framing of the 11th September attack as an attack on civilization itself -- and the nature of the response since then.

The whole crisis -- and especially the response -- has effectively shredded the advances in human rights on which so many have worked and depended in their expectations of a more civilized future within a global community. Democracy has been put on hold -- if not completely discredited -- with the radical shift to bully-boy politics: "vote for us or the terrorists will get you, and so will we".

The approach taken here is to explore the way the dimensionality of civilized discourse has been reduced to the binary limitations of "Them-or-Us" logic -- even for the best and the brightest, from whom more might have been expected. It is possible that this strategy has been deliberately adopted by them in order to simplify the challenges of controlling a complex society -- widely acknowledged to be ungovernable.

But rather than indulge in any blame game, it seems more interesting to explore the ways in which the crisis can be internalized. When external discourse is subject to severe sanction, the full array of issues can be better explored within one's own psyche -- complete with "George Bush", "Osama bin Laden", "carpet bombing", "assassination", and the "Taliban" as part of the dramatis personae.

Being bushed

The 11th September attacks dramatically focused global attention in a way that has not been possible before without the degree of media coverage now available -- especially with plenty of time for cameras to be set up to capture the second plane. All other issues were rendered secondary. The response focused discourse in a similar way. Those who were not whole-heartedly in sympathy with the framing provided by President Bush had to be severely censored in some way -- or defined as part of the problem. There were not two acceptable ways of thinking and behaving -- only one.

Out in the bush -- the Australian outback -- it is relatively easy to be caught unawares and to become disoriented. In such wilderness, the topography may not provide meaningful, unambiguous signals. Or rather, due to the disorientation, one can project meaning and lack of ambiguity onto prominent topographical features -- use them as guidelines -- and then later discover that they were misleading. This is a condition in which there is no perspective or overview. Any structure is provided by projection and assumption. In a group of people without a leader there may be argument about which is the right direction. When there is a leader, the group may be vigorously led in a direction which does not result in getting back to civilization. With or without a leader people may end up walking in circles.

The situation may be significantly complicated if the bush is considered to be dangerous -- wild animals, unfriendly "natives", dehydration, etc. It is further complicated if the leader acts out of a belief system that authorizes him (or her) to make pronouncements about the condition people are in that cannot be challenged without inviting reprimand or severe sanction. There may be strong injunctions about the vital need to "stick together" -- especially to be able to handle the inimical conditions of the environment. These injunctions may slide into evocations of the protection of a deity against the "evil" that surrounds the group.

It is interesting to explore the transition from really knowing about where one is in the bush to that of being deluded in one's belief as to where one is. In the first condition there is a genuine sense of perspective on where one is "on the map" and how the visible topography relates to the map. In the second there is a disconnection between the map and the topography -- which may quickly lead to focusing only on the topography in the hope of getting "somewhere", irrespective of any map. The transition from a larger perspective to a collapsed perspective is the essence of being bushed.

Collapsing frameworks

When one knows where one is, it is in large part due to having a multiplicity of mutually reinforcing signals and points of reference. This might be termed an ecosystem of referents. It can be usefully considered as multi-dimensional. Within this framework, however one
moves, there is a resonant relationship with one's environment -- in effect one is part of that framework and an orientational referent for others that are also part of it. It may take time -- even years -- to build up such awareness, and to be accepted as a resonant part of it, and embedded in it.

This was the situation for many prior to 11th September. Many people and groups had a viable understanding of the framework of civilization -- one that gave them what they assumed to be a "global" perspective in space and time. This perspective had been in large part built up, and sustained, by a pattern of reinforcing communications considerably aided by the media. In a number of respects this global understanding could be considered as somewhat analogous to a large hot air balloon whose viability nobody of significance found it meaningful to question. The collapse of the World Trade Center caused by the action of "others" effectively punctured the balloon -- which could then no longer sail graciously through multi-dimensional space.

From an ability to move in three dimensions, people were reduced to operating in two. Not only were people afraid to fly, they were also afraid to engage in the conceptual aerobatics which had characterized the freedoms of a multi-dimensional perspective. There was massive disorientation. Like birds used to flying, people had to struggle to move around on a conceptual flatland -- like conceptual turkeys!

The situation was much exacerbated by the leadership in the USA whose conceptual dimensionality had collapsed to the same degree. It was "binary" according to Colin Powell -- "Them-or-Us" as repeatedly asserted by George Bush and others. They had been reduced to the conceptual dimensionality of those who attacked them. The media focus on "terror" and its imagery was used to panic American society into removal of any possibility of saying "No" to those presenting the two-dimensional reality and the necessary "positive" direction therein. "Yes" to the President's perspective became the required political and social response -- questioned only at peril of personal harassment and jeopardization of a career. It recalls the threats of desperate parents about "boogy-men" who would come and "get" children if they were not obedient. Media content was systematically "dumbed down" to reduce the subtlety of civilized discourse.

The challenge became how to move and navigate within a two-dimensional framework constrained by this collapsed logic. It is well illustrated in terms of a maze, or a labyrinth, as an essentially two-dimensional experience -- if there are no points of reference above eye level. One is a able to explore it -- but there is no access to the perspective from which one could determine one's position. There is no access "from above" to guide movement out of the maze. This is definitely like the situation of a rat in a laboratory maze. A skilled rat may be able to get out -- but only if there is an exit -- and a sense of the kind of "out" one is seeking. Clearly there is considerable advantage to those aspiring to govern a society if people can be constrained to movement within such a maze -- depriving them of any vertical movement that would make a nonsense of those constraints. Ironically it is in the name of "freedom" that people have had their freedom of movement constrained as a result of the crisis. Johan Galtung has made the point that physical violence is for amateurs -- professionals use what he terms structural violence as typified by systematic injustice and inequality of access to services. The crisis has resulted in use of a conceptual variant -- "conceptual violence"!

The challenges of navigating such a "flatland" have been delightfully explored in a book well-known to mathematicians (Edwin A Abbott. Flatland: a romance of many dimensions, 1884, text: http://www.alkyone.com/max/fl/flatland/) -- that has inspired several sequels (Dionys Burger, Sphereland, 1965; A.K. Dewdney, The Planiverse, 1984, and Ian Stewart, Flatterland, 2001). These are all designed to give a sense of the multi-dimensionality that people lose when trapped in a space of lower dimensionality.

The challenge has been explored with most rigour by Ron Atkin (Multidimensional Man: Can man live in three dimensional space? 1981; see summary at https://www.un-intelligible.org/projects/strategy/141alt.php) -- providing much insight into the conceptual difficulties of escaping from low-dimensionality, whilst incidentally suggesting ways those operating at higher dimensionality can trap people in such collapsed frameworks. His thesis analyzed the nature of academic communication in his own university in this light. It is perhaps no accident that his services were later sought by an appropriate defence department. The memetic wars of the future way well place very strong emphasis on such "non-violent" strategies.

**Numinal dimensions: "good" and "evil"**

The question is how to understand what civilization has lost under the inspired leadership of George Bush in responding to unforeseen dangers of the "global" environment that he has now apparently framed in two-dimensions.

It is indeed curious that the attacks were purportedly inspired by Osama bin Laden, a man of prayer like George Bush. Both the attack and the response have been excessively characterized by two-dimensionality, notably in the political or religious missives used by both sides, and the missiles (or bombs) so dramatically employed. The question is how the spiritual dimension -- so vital to both -- is to be experienced, or accounted for, in the two dimensional world that they both cultivate in their discourse. It is indeed remarkable that both sides place such unusual emphasis on "evil" as a transcendent explanatory factor beyond question -- and as a justification for their respective actions in defence of "good". This is quite exceptional after a century of secularization of discourse within the international community.

In the two dimensional world to which civilized discourse has been reduced by the attacks, "good" is the direction in which Bush demands peremptorily that all should go. As with any leader in the bush, any other direction is definitely "not good". And the direction followed by Osama bin Laden is definitely "evil". However in the bush, as indicated above, attributing "good" or "evil" to parts of the topography is quite problematic. These numinal qualities, invisible to the human senses, can only be attractors of higher dimensionality. The leader names the "good" and the "evil" through inner knowledge -- he "knows". This is open to dispute or to debate only at the peril of those whose views may differ from those of the leader. However, on tribal lands, in the case of indigenous peoples, when topographical features are imbued with "good" or "evil" energies -- the insights of the elders, as communicated to the uninitiated, may be used as disguises for other more ambiguous insights. As clarified by depth psychology, "evil" may hold dangerous but necessary insights -- just as "good" may distract from deeper understanding. Navigating these attractors safely may require considerable skill.
But in the collapsed two-dimensional world, to associate such qualities with a direction in two dimensions is confusing in the extreme. It suggests that, in following the "good" direction, people will progressively approximate to "goodness" and distance themselves from "evilness". Do things indeed get better and better, the further that one goes in the "good" direction, or is there some danger that this progression will not continue? When does further pursuit of this direction raise legitimate questions? In the bush, after struggling vainly in one direction without the situation getting significantly "better", it becomes wise to question the direction. But when one is truly Bushed, there can be no clear answer -- especially if the only valid answer requires understanding from another dimension.

It is curious that those who claim to be spiritually inspired, like George Bush and Osama bin Laden, need to reduce discourse to its two-dimensional limits. But it is clear that this then enables them to call upon their privileged insight into numinal qualities to provide guidance to those who are Bushed by the logical environment so deliberately created. "God" can always be claimed to be on their "side" -- whilst "Satan" is on the "side" of those who speak for any other perspectives. In the two-dimensional world, there can be no other sides or perspectives. Opponents can be much more easily "demonized". Leaders are clearly at a far greater advantage than in a multi-dimensional discourse where they cannot claim such exclusive privilege. In a multi-dimensional discourse there are more points of reference and leaders are more challenged in articulating particular understandings of transcendent numinal qualities in a manner that is credible to a majority.

The crisis suggests that the experience of "being Bushed" should be associated with a new transitive verb to describe how people can be deliberately subjected to that experience -- namely how individuals, or a whole society, can be "Bushed". This would complement the associated concept "to ambush".

Internalizing the dilemmas

It is convenient to be able to project the existential challenges of being Bushed onto such figures as Bush or bin Laden about whom one can rejoice or complain. It is good to have such an inspiring defender of "freedom" and "democracy" in world civilization as George Bush. It is good to have "evil" so neatly packaged in the person of Osama bin Laden whom the forces of light can be marshalled to annihilate. In the Bush we can then move confidently forward. We all know what to do.

The situation becomes much more tricky if "Bush" is an aspect of one's own psyche -- and "bin Laden" is another. If the situation in the outer world is seen to mirror one's own inner dilemmas, confidence is significantly eroded and uncertainties arise. Is this ridiculous? Who empowered these two figures? From where do they derive their power in our individual psychic worlds? Why did the attacks lead to such a rise in depression?

Prior to 11th September it could be said that many -- in the richer parts of the world at least -- were able to lead complex multi-dimensional lives. In particular discourse could freely range over many topics without fear of harassment. Thereafter however psychic lives have been much constrained and subject to severe pressures to conform that are reminiscent of totalitarian societies. The "Bush" within has taken over to a large degree and called for a pattern of conformity -- in defence of the "good" and in the name of "God". The "bin Laden" within has made extraordinary threats against these views -- treated as "Satanic" and requiring a "holy war" to protect the sacred places within one's psyche and to eject those who have improperly sullied them with their presence.

The "Bush" personality perceives itself to be dangerously threatened -- even though it has a bunker to which to retreat. Psychic vigilance is required to guard against attacks by "bin Laden" and his "evil" scheming network. Everything is now a threat. Security is paramount -- and everything must be sacrificed in its name if our psychic well-being is to be sustained. One is afraid of one's own shadow. "Evil" must be stamped out at all costs -- if necessary by "carpet bombing" any resistance to two-dimensionality. All those who fail to recognize this are clearly acting for "evil" -- or at least are naive dupes of those who do.

The "bin Laden" personality in its secret cave claims it is acting in the interests of the down-trodden and neglected. It has seen -- as the epitome of "evil" -- the negligence with which the "Bush" personality selfishly consumes resources, denies the needs of the whole, and desecrates the fundamental bonds to higher dimensionality. The "bin Laden" personality realizes that only by the most subtle means can it out-maneuver such tendencies and cause the "Bush" personality to collapse of its own contradictions. Everything must be sacrificed in this holy task. The infidels must be destroyed without mercy. Those who sacrifice themselves in this process will be instantly transported into multi-dimensionality -- out of two-dimensional flatland.

Being Bushed is having to deal with such multiple personalities -- multiple versions of "I" -- each struggling for dominance in a confusing situation. Each whispers to one's conscience. But is it the voice of "God" or of "Satan"? How should one act? Who speaks the truth? Each makes subtle promises in the moment. Each can be seen as having broken such promises in the past. How is one to navigate such confusion?

Inner dialogue

Where is the integral whole of who I am when I can only experience myself either in the "Bush" mode or in the "bin Laden" mode -- each bent on annihilating the other? How can I integrate myself under such circumstances? Indeed, who am I? How is it that both modes claim to be "fundamental" and grounded on a special bond with "God"?

When I am Bushed in this way, how do I gain a larger sense of perspective to navigate out of the bush? If I am stuck in a kind of religious flatland, how do I gain the global perspective that will reconcile these two archetypically opposed perspectives? How can I increase my dimensionality through cultivating a richer -- and more rounded -- inner dialogue? How can I transform the savage quarrel between these perspectives -- and the refusal to dialogue -- into an exchange of kinds of meaning which their preferred two-dimensionality precludes? How can I stop one or other personality from mutilating the body we share when it gains dominance?

What do my "Bush" and "bin Laden" personalities have to say to each other -- after having cursed each other as the exemplification of the
most absolute evil? Is it possible that it is the very nature of that unexplored discourse that de-linearizes their relationship and is fundamental to the global roundedness of my larger and more integrated self? Is it the enhanced quality of that dialogue that is the essence of my integrity and my relationship to the wider universe -- so profoundly distorted by the collapsed understandings of "fundamental" and "integral" favoured by "Bush" and "bin Laden"?

By implicitly siding with "Bush" or "bin Laden" prior to 11th September have I been preventing myself from recognizing wider truths that are vital to my own well-being and fulfillment -- and reflecting these narrow views into the decisions that I take in the external world?

**Challenge of the Other**

There are some real challenges to living in a two-dimensional world. One of the most dramatic is that it is virtually impossible to recognize when two different things are in fact integral parts of the same larger whole. This is one of the experiences of being bushed -- how to know that a hill is the same from different sides? It is very difficult to recognize that things may be terrifying -- but also a source of food or shelter. Labels are fixed when they need to be flexible for survival -- and to allow one to dance with the environment.

Another challenge is that mirrors do not work in a two-dimensional framework. I cannot see myself reflected back -- as a whole. There is no depth perception possible. I can only see the other -- as a threat.

Another challenge is that "justice" is not possible, because it requires an extra dimension to hold the balance between two differing perspectives. "Justice" then focuses on punishment -- because one already "knows" that someone is guilty. A trial, based on the presumption of innocence in anticipation of proof of guilt, is then meaningless.

Most dramatic is that encountering a multi-dimensional "other" from within a two-dimensional framework has every possibility of being terrifying. The integral globality of the other cannot be understood from conceptual flatland. The other is unpredictable, almost magical in its apparent behaviour. It cannot be fitted into cookie-cutter categories. It is most easily handled by labelling it "evil".

The consequence is that in a "Them-or-Us" world we can never discover the truth of having seen the enemy -- and understood that "Them is Us". I am unable to hold any understanding of the "pattern that connects" between opposing perspectives. With loss of this sense of pattern, all quality is therefore lost -- as pointed out by Gregory Bateson.

In this sense the experience of any "other" is essentially, and most profoundly, a terrifying experience. But this terror might usefully be understood as the consequence of a theological error in reinforcing two-dimensionality at the cost of closing off experience of higher dimensionality except in a chaotic form. With apologies to statisticians, it might be said that this is a "t-error"!

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