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NOT LETTING GO: FROM INDIVIDUAL PERENNIAL MOURNERS TO SOCIETIES WITH ENTITLEMENT IDEOLOGIES

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For three decades my colleagues at the University of Virginia and I conducted a study of hundreds of mourning processes and their various consequences (Volkan, 1972, 1981, 1985, 2004; Volkan, Cillufo and Sarvay, 1975; Volkan and Josephthal, 1980; Volkan and Zintl, 1993; Zuckerman and Volkan, 1989). In this paper I will draw upon our findings,

first by updating and summarizing the psychodynamics involved in an adult's mourning and depression, about which Freud's (1917) conclusions still provide the basics. Second, I will describe a condition that was not touched upon in "Mourning and Melancholia": Some individuals become stuck for years—or even for a lifetime—unable to let the lost person or thing go. They utilize their various ego functions to cope with their losses, primarily to deal with the conflict between "killing" or "bringing back to life" the lost object, and they do this at the expense of using them for more adaptive purposes. They become "perennial mourners" while *not* developing depression. Third, I will focus on societal mourning (Volkan, 1977, 1997, 2006), a concept that is also not mentioned in "Mourning and Melancholia," and ask this question: Can a large group, such as an ethnic or religious group, become a society that suffers from perennial mourning?

UPDATING THE PSYCHODYNAMICS OF GRIEF, MOURNING AND DEPRESSION

In "Mourning and Melancholia" Freud (1917) focused on adults' mourning processes and not those of children who experience significant losses before they are able to keep the mental representation (a collection of many mental images) of the other in their mind—in other words before they can establish object constancy. Obviously, a child without the capacity to have object constancy cannot mourn like an adult. For an adult,

the mourning process refers to the sum of the mental activities the mourner performs in reviewing and psychologically dealing with the mental representation of a lost person or thing. I am in agreement with Wolfenstein (1966, 1969) who saw a parallel between adult mourning and the experience of a youngster going through an adolescent passage. An adolescent “loses” (modifies) many existing childhood self- and object images and “gains” new identifications in order to crystallize a “new” self-representation and “new” object representations (Blos, 1979). As Wolfenstein explains, going through the adolescence passage becomes a model for the adult mourning process. We can state, therefore, that Freud’s model for mourning is the model of adult mourning explained by Wolfenstein, and in this chapter I will only refer to the adult mourning process as Freud did in “Mourning and Melancholia.”

When a significant loss occurs, the initial reaction is “grief,” which should be differentiated from the mourning process. For the mourner, experiencing the grief reaction is like hitting one’s head against a wall, a wall that never opens up to allow the dead person or lost thing to come back. The mourning process—the internal reviewing and dealing with the mental images of the lost item—begins when the individual still exhibits a grief reaction and typically continues for years, until the mourner has enough life experiences with important anniversaries associated with the

lost object before the object was lost. But adults are capable of keeping the mental representation of a significant object in their mind after the object is lost. Accordingly, we can say that adults' mourning processes never end in their lifetime and they can reactivate an internal relationship with various mental images of their lost object, such as during anniversaries of significant events that had been shared with the lost person or thing. A mourning process only comes to a "practical end" when the mourner is no longer preoccupied with the mental images of the lost object and when the mental representation of the lost object ceases to remain "hot." Tähkä (1984) speaks about turning a "hot" mental representation of the lost object into a "cold" one by making it "futureless." This is when the mental representation of the lost item, no longer utilized to respond to the mourner's wishes, has no future, no ongoing or perpetuating influence. A young man stops fantasizing that a wife who had been dead for some years will give him sexual pleasure, or a woman stops wishing to boss around her underlings at a job from which she had been fired years before.

Grief: The initial reaction to a significant loss includes a sense of *shock* which alternates or is accompanied by some physical reactions such as shortness of breath, tightness in the throat, a need to sigh, muscular limpness, and a loss of appetite. As shock and its physical symptoms abate, the mourner experiences a

wish to have the loss reversed. He or she may deny, at least for a while, that the loss actually took place. A more common phenomenon is the mourner's utilization of "splitting" (Freud, 1940). This splitting is not the same as that of borderline individuals who typically split their self-images and/or object images. The mourner utilizes an ego function so that opposing ego perceptions and experiences can take place simultaneously. For example, a man knows that his dead wife is lying in a coffin at a funeral home, but he "hears" her preparing food in the kitchen.

Grief reaction also includes the mourner's bargaining with "God," "Fate," oneself, or others in order to reverse the death of someone or undo the burning of a beloved house, as if such reversals were possible: "If I hadn't been stuck in traffic and had arrived home earlier, I would have prevented the accident that caused the death of my wife or the burning of my house." The mourner may become preoccupied with the idea of taking a different route when driving home and avoiding heavy traffic, as if this could keep his wife alive.

But in reality the lost person or thing never reappears, and the mourner feels guilty, to one degree or another, for not reversing the outcome of the tragedy and/or for continuing to live while someone else is gone or something is destroyed. The mourner's own guilt however, is complicated because—again to one degree or another—the mourner is also angry that someone or something, by being lost, is responsible for his or her narcissistic wound. The mourner's feelings

of guilt and anger may be conscious. Most often, however, such feelings are repressed or displaced onto someone or something else. A mourner may feel anger towards a physician who had taken care of his dead wife, or he may become furious with the manufacturer of the gas stove that originated the fire that burned his house. Most importantly and obviously, a mourner's grieving is accompanied by crying spells, pain, and sorrow which reflect the inability to reverse reality. Slowly a sense of manageable frustration and anger become "healthy" indications that the mourner is beginning to accept the facts.

A typical grief reaction of a "normal" adult takes some months to disappear, and it may reappear for a time at the anniversary of the event when the loss took place. In truth, there is no typical grief reaction, because the circumstances of a loss are varied, and because individuals have differing degrees of internal preparedness to face significant losses.

A grief reaction itself can be complicated. There are adults who spontaneously cry and feel pain and anger whenever something in their environment reminds them of their original loss. Once I had an analysand who spent the first two and half years on my couch crying and exhibiting a grief reaction at almost every session. After grieving for a while she would become interested in other topics that had nothing to do with her loss, until her next session when she would grieve again. She was fixated in grief.

Mourning: As it is an internal phenomenon, reviewing the mental representation of the lost object or thing is a more silent process. It begins when the individual still exhibits a grief reaction and typically continues for years. The mourner obviously carries a mental representation of the lost person or thing in his or her mind before the loss occurs. When the mourning process starts in earnest, the mourner becomes preoccupied with the various images of this representation and accompanying and fitting emotions. The person begins at this point to mentally deal with these images and tame the emotions attached to them. While the physical burial of a dead person is typically performed in one act, “burying” the mental representation of a dead person is performed through many “burials,” “reincarnations,” and “reburials” of various images until such images become “cold” and futureless (Tähkä, 1984).

More significantly, during such mental activities some images, realistic or modified by wishes and defenses against them, are absorbed as *identifications*. In “Mourning and Melancholia” Freud (1917) spoke of “narcissistic identification” in mourning in which “the object-cathexis is abandoned” (p.250). Identifications refer to mourners making the characteristics and/or functions of a lost person or thing their own. For example, a year or so after his father’s death, a footloose young man becomes a serious industrialist just as his dead father used to be. Similarly, an immigrant who has lost a country may create a symbolic representation of her

homeland in a painting or a song, indicating that this mourner has internalized and maintained certain images of the land she lost.

Another process in “normal” mourning that illustrates how mourners deal with the mental representation of lost objects is the depositing of the images of the lost objects into “suitable reservoirs” (Volkan, 1997, Volkan, Ast and Greer, 1997). A mourner finds a person or thing in the external world which is capable of keeping the mourner’s externalization of the images of what is lost in a secure and constant fashion so that these images do not return and induce conflict within the mourner’s psyche. For example, a woman who lost her husband and the ego functions he had provided for her “deposits” her dead husband’s image and ego functions into a political leader or party and becomes a follower of this leader or party. By doing so she withdraws her libidinal cathexis, to use Freud’s term, from the object which was lost and invests it with something alive and permanent. In another example, a mother who lost her son becomes religious and deposits her son’s mental representation into that of the crucified Jesus Christ. Depositing images into “suitable reservoirs” reminds us of what is known in psychoanalysis as “projective identification” (Klein, 1946), although depositing is constant and stable. Furthermore, the “reservoirs” are shared by others within the mourner’s society and the mourner’s emotional investment in them is accepted as “normal.” In the above examples, as long as the political leader and party are in the public eye, and as long as the existence of Jesus Christ is perceived to be timeless, both

mourners can bring their work of mourning to a practical end. For the most part, identifying with the images and functions of the lost object and depositing into “suitable reservoirs” are unconscious processes.

The mourning process is considered “normal” when the mourner identifies with the images and functions of what has been lost or deposits such images and functions in “suitable reservoirs” that are selective and “healthy.” The mourner, after going through the pain of grief and after spending considerable energy reviewing and dealing with the mental representation of the lost person or thing, gains something from these experiences. A year or so after the loss, owning the ego functions provided by the lost person enriches the mourner’s internal world. The woman who uses a political leader and his party as a “suitable reservoir,” for example, may become an important agent in expanding the party’s humane ideology. Pollock (1989) extensively studied such gains and new adaptations to external and internal worlds that followed successful mourning processes.

Depression: “In melancholia the relation to the object is no simple one; it is complicated by conflict due to ambivalence.” This statement of Freud’s (1917, p.256) holds true today. The mourner who related to a lost object with excessive ambivalence is unable to form selective and enriching identifications, and instead, assimilates the representation of the lost item into self-representations “in toto” (Smith, 1975). Accordingly, the love and the hate (ambivalence) that originally

connected the mourner to the lost person or thing now turns the mourner's self-representation into a battleground. The mourner now feels the struggle between love and hate within the self-representation that assimilated the ambivalently related mental representation of the lost item through a total identification with it. This results in depression, which has its own typical physical symptoms such as disturbances in appetite, sleep, sexual desire and the experience of pleasure. The individual feels tired and may experience cardiac arrhythmias. Such physical symptoms may also appear in "normal" mourning, although in much milder forms.

When hate toward the assimilated mental representation of the lost object becomes dominant, some mourners may even attempt to kill themselves (suicide) in order to "kill" the assimilated mental representation. In other words, they want to psychologically blast or choke off the mental representation of the lost object which is located within their self-representations, so accordingly, they shoot or hang themselves. Such psychodynamics can best be observed, of course, if the depressed mourner does not succeed in the suicide attempt and is willing to undergo a psychoanalytic investigation. Some can clearly verbalize who they really wanted to get rid of by trying to kill themselves.

The mourner who is incapable of forming healthy identifications with the mental representation of the lost person or thing is also incapable of finding "suitable reservoirs" for externalization. The mourner who will become depressed

deposits the mental images of the lost person or thing in unstable and maladaptive reservoirs. For example, instead of depositing the lost object's mental representation into a socially acceptable religious organization, the mourner deposits it into a fanatic religious cult, joins this cult, and becomes involved in maladaptive activities while experiencing low self-esteem.

Trauma: Besides relating to the lost object with ambivalence or depositing the mental representation of the lost person or thing in unstable reservoirs, a mourner may encounter other factors that lead to depression following an object loss. Although Freud did not mention it in "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917), trauma also complicates the work of mourning and sometimes turns it into depression. A loss may be traumatic in its own right, especially when it is sudden and unexpected, but the combination of loss with actual trauma associated with the mourner's helplessness, shame, humiliation and survival guilt seriously complicates the mourning process. Imagine a boat accident in which a man loses his wife and child after a failed effort to rescue them. In such a situation the work of mourning is contaminated with the mourner's attempts to reverse helplessness, shame and humiliation and tame survival guilt. The mental representations of the lost ones remain within the mourner as constant reminders of guilt feelings, shame and humiliation causing narcissistic hurt and low self-esteem that result in depression.

When a loss occurs due to murder, suicide or other tragedies where rage was expressed by those who caused the loss, the mourner may also experience depression. In a grief reaction there is a “normal” degree of aggression directed toward the lost object as well as during the work of mourning because, by its very act of disappearing, the lost object initiates a narcissistic wound in the mourner: “How dare you leave me?” During grief the mourner experiences anger because he or she cannot reverse the reality of the loss. During mourning the mourner also experiences anger because he or she is forced to reactivate, to one extent or other, childhood “developmental losses,” especially the “oral” ones (Abraham, 1924) such as losing mother’s breast or mother’s love due to the birth of a sibling (Volkan and Ast, 1997). The mourner also reactivates the childhood “separation-individuation” anxiety (Mahler, 1963). The rage expressed through murder, suicide or other such tragedies may unconsciously become connected with the mourner’s “normal” anger level while grieving or mourning. The struggle with the mental representation of the lost object may then increase, causing depression.

Neurobiology: Since after experiencing a significant loss a person exhibits physical symptoms during grief, mourning or depression, there is a need to understand the meaning of disturbances in many organ functions, especially during depression. Can neurobiological findings concerning depression be integrated with psychoanalysis and give support to Freud’s basic theories on depression? Neurobiologist and psychoanalyst Johannes Lehtonen and his

colleagues at Finland's Kuopio University have made significant contributions to the neurobiology of depression (Lehtonen, 2006; Laasonen-Balk, Viinamäki et al., 2004; Saarinen, Lehtonen, et al., 2005) and have attempted to answer this question. Kuopio studies have illustrated that nursing experiences change the bodily state of the infant (Lehtonen, Kononen, et al., 2002). According to Lehtonen (2006), such experiences create a matrix-like structure within the body ego (body self) where bodily consciousness of emotions—not yet available through verbal communication due to the immaturity of the infant—are present. Lehtonen states that we have an opportunity “to recognize similarities that exist in early ego formation and the psychobiology of symptoms of depression, which concern sleep and appetite regulation, and the capacity to experience affects, which basically consist of feelings of well-being or malaise, regulation of pain-pleasure axis and general vitality versus fatigue and exhaustion.” Thus the Kuopio studies are trying to illustrate a similarity between the “affective cry signal” of an infant that expresses a need for care, and the signs of sadness or feeling of despair experienced by a mourner in grief or depression. Lehtonen concludes: “The pathogenic meaning of object loss and its typical consequences thus have an impact on primordial early oral personality layer that is so intensely connected to the general well-being of the individual, as Karl Abraham (1924) already pointed out in his elaboration of Freud's view of depression as a pathogenic internalization of object loss and mourning.”

PERENNIAL MOURNERS

Complications in one's mourning process do not always lead to depression, but may result in another outcome not described in "Mourning and Melancholia." Some adults, who are unable to bring their mourning to a practical conclusion, become "perennial mourners," a condition that can manifest varying degrees of severity. Some perennial mourners live miserable lives while others express their unending mourning in more creative ways. Even most of these people, however, when not obsessed with their creative work, feel uncomfortable.

A perennial mourner, to a large degree, cannot identify with the enriching aspects of the mental representation of the lost object and the adaptive ego functions associated with this mental representation. This kind of mourner cannot find "suitable reservoirs" for externalizing the representation of the lost person or thing. On the other hand, the mourner does not end up identifying totally with the lost object representation and does not, in other words, go through a "normal" mourning process or develop depression. Instead, these mourners keep the object representation of the lost person or thing within their self-representation as a specific and unassimilated "foreign body." In the psychoanalytic literature such an unassimilated object representation or object image is known as an "introject."

An introject is an object representation or a special object image with which the individual who has it, wishes to identify. But the identification does not take place, and the object representation or the special object image, with its own "boundaries," remains in the individual's self-representation as an unassimilated mental construct. An introject excessively influences the self-representation of the person who has it. A perennial mourner constantly utilizes ego mechanisms to deal with an introject. Although nowadays the term "introject" is seldom used in psychoanalytic writings, I suggest that we keep it as it is most useful in explaining the internal world of a perennial mourner.

A man came to see me complaining that his younger brother had been disturbing him daily and, not knowing how to deal with the situation, he sought treatment in order to free himself from his brother's influence. He explained that while driving to work, his brother constantly talked with him, giving him advice about everything, even when my patient wanted some time for himself or when he wanted to listen to the car radio. For example, the brother made suggestions as to how my patient should behave when meeting his boss or when talking to a particular secretary at work. My patient did not like his brother's advice and occasionally told his brother to shut up, but the younger man continued to talk and irritate him. I also learned that when both men were young my patient experienced considerable sibling rivalry. In my mind, I pictured my patient in his car with his brother sitting next to him. I even imagined that my patient and his

brother lived together in the same house or at least nearby, which would explain their riding together each workday to the downtown business area. Therefore, I was really surprised when my patient, in his sixth therapeutic session, informed me that his younger brother had died in an accident six years earlier. The "brother" with whom he had conversations while driving to work was actually his brother's unassimilated object representation. This patient felt the lost person's mental representation to be lodged in his chest. Sometimes he experienced this object representation as a puppet-sized younger brother sitting on one of his shoulders, literally a symbolized weight on his shoulder. But most of the time, the "brother" was inside my patient's body image.

Having an "introject" of a lost person or thing brings about its own unpleasant consequences for the perennial mourner who is preoccupied with an ambivalent internal struggle with it. This is reflected in the perennial mourner's subjective experience in that the person is torn between a strong yearning for the restored presence of the lost person or thing and an equally deep dread that the lost item might be confronted. The presence of the introject provides an illusion of choice but not a solution. A perennial mourner daily expends energy to "kill" or to "bring back to life" the lost person or thing. The severity of this preoccupation varies from individual to individual, and in severe cases this struggle renders the mourner's adaptation to daily life very difficult. Perennial mourners are compulsive about reading obituary notices, betraying not only anxiety over their own death,

but an attempt to deny the death of the one they mourn because they find no current mention of it in the papers. Some such mourners fancy they recognize their lost ones in someone alive whom they encounter from a distance. For example, a man in his mid-twenties was very well aware that his father had died three years before, but often he would “see” his father walking in front of him on a crowded street. He would run and pass the man whom he considered to be his father and then turn back to be sure that the man was not really his father.

Perennial mourners make daily references to death, tombs, or graveyards in a ritualistic way, and talk about the dead in the present tense. The listener gets the impression that the speaker's daily life includes some actual relationship with the deceased who continues to watch over him or her. If the lost item is a thing, the perennial mourner thinks about scenarios that involve finding and losing this object again and again. Sometimes the preoccupation with “losing” and “finding” become generalized. For example, friends might know the perennial mourner as an individual who very often loses car keys and who then finds them in unexpected places.

Many perennial mourners spontaneously use the term “frozen” when they speak of their dreams. I think that this word reflects their internal sense that they are stuck in their mourning processes. It also reflects lifelessness. Frozen dreams are often composed of what appears to be one slide after another, with no motion taking place upon any of them. Such individuals also typically dream of the one

who has died or is lost as still living or existing, but engaged in a life-and-death struggle. The dreamer then tries to rescue the person or thing—or to finish him, her, or it off. The outcome remains uncertain because the dreamer invariably awakens before the situation in the dream can be resolved. For example, one perennial mourner had repeating dreams of trying to rescue the lost person from a small burning car. Each time he would wake up before learning the outcome of his efforts. The perennial mourner also dreams of seeing the dead body but noticing something about it, like sweat, that denies the reality of death.

The above characteristics of perennial mourning do not make the perennial mourner a psychotic individual. For example, outside of his conversing with his dead younger brother's object representation while driving to work, the patient I described above was simply a neurotic. He did not experience any break with reality except when communicating with his introject. A perennial mourning may imitate a psychotic condition and a clinician needs to be alert and not confuse it with schizophrenia or related, excessively regressed conditions.

LINKING OBJECTS AND PHENOMENA

In order to further study the psychodynamics of individuals I call “perennial mourners,” let us return to the patient who had conversations with the object representation of his dead brother while driving to work. It will be recalled that

sometimes he felt that a little "figure" had been sitting on his shoulder.

This imagined figure was an externalized version of his brother's introject. In 1972 I coined the terms "linking object" and "linking phenomenon" to describe externalized versions of introjects of lost persons or things. My patient "created" this imaginary figure and it was his linking phenomenon. Through experiencing a figure on his shoulder, my patient connected himself with his dead brother. For a perennial mourner, sometimes a song, a hand gesture, or even a certain type of weather condition functions as a linking phenomenon. For example, a mourner notices certain types of clouds during a funeral. Later in life, whenever similarly shaped clouds appear in the sky, the mourner emotionally links to the object representation of the dead person.

Most perennial mourners, however, utilize certain concrete inanimate or animate objects such as a special photograph that symbolizes a meeting ground between the mental representation of a lost person or thing and the mourner's corresponding self-representation. I call such objects "linking objects." Perennial mourners "choose" an inanimate linking object from various items available in their environment. A linking object may be a personal possession of the deceased, often something the deceased wore or used routinely, like a watch. A gift the deceased made to the mourner before death, or a letter written by a soldier in the battlefield before being killed may evolve into a linking object. A realistic representation of the lost person, such as a photograph, can also

function as a linking object. The same is true for what I call "last minute objects," something at hand when a mourner first learned of the death or saw the dead body, objects that relate to the last moment in which the deceased was regarded as a living person.

Sometimes objects that are connected with the psychodynamics of mourning are "selected" soon after the loss occurs, but such items become crystallized as linking objects when the individual who has one becomes a perennial mourner. Once an item truly evolves into a linking object, the perennial mourner experiences it as "magical" and may hide it, while needing to know its whereabouts, as it must be protected and controlled. Since a person can control an inanimate thing more easily than an animate thing, most linking objects are inanimate items. If a linking object is lost, the perennial mourner will experience anxiety, often severe. But there are animate linking objects too, such as a pet. I worked with a refugee family in the Republic of Georgia that used a dog as their linking object. When they were forced from their home, their dog Charlie was left behind, and they later learned of his death. One day in their miserable new location they noticed a dog that looked like Charlie. The family adopted this dog as their new pet, named him "Charlie," and utilized the dog as a linking object, a story I have detailed in other writing (Volkan, 2006).

Through the creation of a linking object or phenomenon, the perennial mourner makes an "adjustment" to the complication within the mourning process; the mourner makes the mourning process "unending" so as not to face their conflicted relationship with the object representation of the deceased or the lost thing. By controlling the linking object, perennial mourners control their wish to "bring back" (love) or "kill" (hate) the lost person, and thus they avoid the psychological consequences of either of these two wishes. If the dead person comes back to life or the lost item is found, the mourner will feel obliged to depend on them forever. If the dead person or the lost thing is "killed," the mourner's existing anger will cause feelings of guilt.

The linking object in the external world contains the tension caused by ambivalence and anger pertaining to the narcissistic hurt the loss has inflicted on the mourner. Since the linking object or phenomenon is "out there," the mourner's mourning process is externalized. When a photograph that has become a linking object is locked up in a drawer, the mourner has, in essence, "hidden" the complicated mourning process in the same drawer. All such a person needs is to know where the photograph is and that it is safely tucked away. The drawer may be unlocked during an anniversary of the loss, the photograph looked at and touched, but as soon as the mourner feels anxious the photograph is locked up again.

Linking objects and phenomena should not be confused with childhood transitional objects and phenomena (Winnicott, 1953) that are reactivated in adulthood. Certainly there are some severely regressed adults, such as some with schizophrenia, who reactivate the transitional relatedness of their childhoods and may "recreate" transitional objects. A transitional object represents the first not-me, but it is never totally not-me. It links not-me with mother-me and it is a temporary construction toward a sense of reality (Greenacre, 1969). Linking objects contain high-level symbolism. They must be thought of as tightly packed symbols whose significance is bound up in the conscious and unconscious nuances of the relationship that preceded the loss. Not every keepsake or memento cherished by a mourner should be considered as a linking object possessing a significant investment of symbolism and magic. A linking object or phenomenon is an external bridge between the representations of the mourner and that of the lost person or thing, just as the introject serves as an internal bridge.

Initially in my decades-long study on grief and mourning, I focused on the pathological aspects of linking objects and linking phenomena and I considered their existence only as a sign of a mourner's "freezing" the mourning process. Later I wrote about the linking object or the linking phenomenon as a source of inspiration that gave direction to creativity in some individuals (Volkan and Zintl, 1993). Complicated mourning still

remains in these people, but now it is expressed in art forms. It is not proper, I think, to refer to someone who created such a thing as the "Taj Mahal" as "pathological."

I also understood that under some favorable conditions linking objects can be used to reactivate a "normal" mourning process long after the loss had occurred. My interviews with over one hundred members of the American Network of World War II Orphans (AWON) now in their fifties or sixties, illustrated this finding. These are individuals who lost their fathers during World War II when they were small children or even before they were born, and as a result, they became perennial mourners. In 1991 they formed AWON and began to share their stories. As they focused on their losses, they restarted their grieving and mourning process as adult mourners by using an existing linking object or by finding or creating linking objects (see: Volkan, 2006). I was with many of them when they participated in the opening of the World War II Memorial in Washington, DC on Memorial Day 2004. This memorial became their shared linking object.

SOCIETAL MOURNING: SHARED LINKING OBJECTS, TRANSGENERATION TRANSMISSIONS AND ENTITLEMENT IDEOLOGIES

An examination of memorials as shared linking objects is one way to begin to understand what is called "societal mourning." Man-made or nature-made

calamities result in major losses and changes which are shared by hundreds, thousands or millions of people, whether they are or are not relatives, or whether or not they ever meet during their lifetimes. Persons living in the same town or country or persons belonging to a particular ethnic, national or religious group may be involved in “societal mourning” or “large-group mourning.” Natural or man-made accidental disasters do not deliberately shame, humiliate, dehumanize, kill, or destroy physical environments. But in wars and war-like conditions losses are accompanied by a shared sense of humiliation and a helpless wish for revenge. A massive trauma at the hands of the enemy can never remain a regional trauma. The feeling of humiliation and helplessness of the people of the affected sector is automatically felt by almost all those who belong to the same large-group identity, such as one defined by ethnicity or nationality. The society then begins behaving like an individual who suffers from perennial mourning. Here I am referring to societies composed of thousands or millions of people who share some deep sentiments and a permanent sense of sameness (Erikson, 1956) and are connected emotionally by a “large-group identity” (Volkan, 2006). Obviously, since such a society is comprised of individuals, large-group processes reflect individual psychology. But shared responses to what enemies have done to a society take on their own specific characteristics by becoming recognizable societal expressions and even political ideologies. In this section I will examine *only three* societal processes (in a sense, symptoms) that may accompany a societal

mourning process: building monuments, the evolution of “chosen traumas” and the establishment of entitlement ideologies.

Monuments: A common societal expression of societal mourning is the building of memorials. Young (1993) treats all memory-sites as memorials. He states that a memorial can be a day or conference, for example, and need not be a monument, but a monument, he adds, is always a kind of memorial. By building a monument, societies—like the individual who finds a “suitable reservoir” to deposit the image of the lost item—create an externalized location that becomes involved in the shared mourning process. Architect Jeffrey Ochsner states: “[W]e do not intend to build linking objects, although objects we do make clearly can serve us in this way. Indeed, the role played by linking objects does not require that they be objects intentionally created to serve this purpose (although they can be) or that they be objects that we personally shared with those remembered (again, they can be)” (p.168).

An examination of a monument that is dedicated to an event that created a disaster in which significant losses took place often gives an indication as to how a society has handled the shared mourning process and its complications. Sometimes a monument as a shared linking object externally absorbs unfinished elements of incomplete mourning and helps the group adjust to its current situation without re-experiencing the impact of the past trauma and its disturbing

emotions. The marble or the metal structure suggests a sense of indestructibility. This makes the monument a “psychological container” in which the remaining unpleasant feelings of a society’s shared mourning can be sealed. For example, many studies show that building the Vietnam Veterans Memorial helped to bring the American shared mourning process from that war to a practical end (Scruggs and Swerdlow, 1967; Campbell, 1983; K. Volkan, 1992; Ochsner, 1997).

A memorial like Yad Vashem in Jerusalem is a place where mourning is “stored” and affects pertaining to it are experienced. Yad Vashem is not associated with a sense of revenge, but with the determination to keep the Jewish state safe. On the other hand, a monument can be built in order to reactivate a society’s perennial mourning in the hope of recovering what was lost, a motivation that fuels feelings of revenge. An illustration of this comes from Serbia under Slobodan Milošević. The shared mental representation of the Battle of Kosovo which took place in 1389 and the losses associated with it have remained influential in the Serbian large-group identity (Volkan, 1997). After the collapse of the former Yugoslavia, a huge monument was built on a hill overlooking the Kosovo battlefield. Made of red stone symbolizing blood, it stands a hundred feet high. On June 28, 1989, the day marking the 600th anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo, Milošević used this monument in a ceremony to reactivate Serbian perennial mourning. I will return to the story of the reactivation of the “memory” of the Battle of Kosovo later.

As decades and centuries pass, a society performs certain rituals around a monument which becomes a shared linking object. The healing power of lapsed time brings changes in the function of monuments. They may become tourist attractions or artistically prized works of art; others come to symbolize a myriad of shared perceptions.

Chosen trauma: A chosen trauma is the shared mental representation of an event in a large group's history in which the group suffered a catastrophic loss, humiliation, and helplessness at the hands of enemies (Volkan, 1991, 2006). When members of a victim group are unable to mourn such losses and reverse their humiliation and helplessness, they pass on to their offspring the images of their injured selves and psychological tasks that need to be completed. These inherited images and tasks contain references to the same historical event, and as decades pass, the mental representation of this event links all the individuals in the large group. This process is known as the "transgenerational transmission of trauma" (Volkan, Ast and Greer, 2001). Although it is beyond the purpose of this chapter to examine how transgenerational transmissions take place, it is relevant to note that the mental representations of such events can emerge as significant large-group identity markers.

A chosen trauma reflects the existence of “perennial mourning’ within the society, whether it is actively experienced or whether it is “hidden.” Sometimes political leaders inflame chosen traumas in order to promote new massive societal movements, some of them deadly and malignant.

For the Serbian people, the Battle of Kosovo is their chosen trauma. On June 28, 1389, Serbian Prince Lazar (Lazar Hrebeljanović) and his army clashed at Kosovo Polje, the Field of Blackbirds, with the army of the Ottoman Turkish sultan, Murat I. Since we have no eyewitness reports, the historical truth about the Battle of Kosovo remains unknown (Emmert, 1990), but what is known is that Lazar was beheaded and Murat also lost his life. About 70 years later Turkey began conquering Serbia, and as Turkish rule settled over the area, many Serbs began migrating north. In 1690 the few remaining monks at the monastery of Ravanica (in Kosovo) where Lazar was originally buried, joined the northern migrations, taking the corpse of Lazar with them. Lazar, reburied at a location in the Fruka Gora region northwest of Belgrade, then became an “exile.” The shared mental representation of the Battle of Kosovo followed the Serbs throughout history, becoming the Serbian chosen trauma.

As time passed, events and characters of this battle mingled with elements and characters of the Christian religion. According to legend, Saint Ilya, in the shape of a gray falcon, appeared before Lazar on the eve of the battle with a message from the Virgin Mary. She gave the prince two choices: he could win the battle and find a kingdom on earth, or he could find a kingdom in heaven through death and martyrdom. Lazar chose the latter and the Serbs subsequently associated his image with the image of Jesus Christ. This chosen trauma, like a “psychological DNA,” passed from generation to generation.

Milošević was already an established political leader in 1989, the time of the 600th anniversary of the battle of Kosovo, and he and his associates were determined to bring Lazar’s body out of “exile.” In preparation for the coming anniversary, Lazar’s remains were placed in a coffin and taken on a year-long tour to every Serb village and town, where they were received by huge crowds of mourners dressed in black. Every night Lazar was symbolically buried and every morning he was reincarnated, and eventually he was taken back to Kosovo Polje for a final burial. This created what I call a “time collapse.” This term denotes the conscious and unconscious connections between a large-group’s historical trauma and contemporary threats, threats that typically emerge when a chosen trauma is dramatically reactivated. The reactivation of shared

anxieties, expectations, fantasies, and defenses associated with the chosen trauma magnifies the image of current enemies and current conflicts. If the large group is now in a powerful position, the sense of revenge may become exaggerated, even ennobled. (If the large group is in a powerless position, a current event may reanimate a shared sense of victimization.) Time collapse may lead to irrational and sadistic or masochistic decision-making by the leaders of a large group; in turn, members of the large group may become psychologically prepared for sadistic or masochistic acts and, in worst case scenarios, perpetrate monstrous cruelty against “others.”

Political “entitlement ideologies”: Another sign of a “perennial mourning” that spans generations in a society is the evolution of political entitlement ideologies. Such ideologies are known by various names such as “irredentism” or the “megali idea” (Volkan, 2006). Simply, they refer to regaining all the lands that a large ethnic, religious or national group considered “lost” and now occupied by others. The inflammation of these ideologies in a society is usually accompanied by the reactivation of a chosen trauma. Milošević and his associates created an entitlement ideology in Serbia by reactivating the chosen trauma of the Battle of Kosovo just before massive atrocities took place in that part of the world (Volkan, 1997). By utilizing an entitlement ideology and propagandizing the desire for a

greater Serbia, the Serbian leadership turned a "memory" of an historical event—associated as it was with losses, inability to mourn, and the difficulty of shared mourning—into a tool of revenge.

LAST REMARKS

"Mourning and Melancholia," one of Freud's most significant contributions to psychoanalysis, furthered his ideas on narcissism and identification and became one of the stepping stones for the evolution of the superego concept. Today we also consider this paper as a forerunner of modern theories on internalized object relations. In this chapter I attempted to add to Freud's thoughts concerning significant losses by describing "perennial mourning" in individuals and societies. When referring to societal mourning we should recall that a society is not a living organism with one brain, but once large-group processes following massive losses associated with humiliation, helplessness and complications in mourning begin, they take on a life of their own, sometimes causing new tragedies and making their marks on history.

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