

Originalarbeit

Vamik D. Volkan

Unending Mourning and its Consequences

Zusammenfassung: Dieser Artikel befasst sich mit der Beobachtung, dass Trauer nie endet, sogar dann nicht, wenn sie durch andere geistige Aktivitäten absorbiert wird. Diese Aktivitäten können von den Individuen selbst oder von ihren Therapeuten, falls sie Hilfe suchen, als gut oder schlecht angepasst beurteilt werden. Wir „töten“ die psychische Repräsentanz einer für uns bedeutungsvollen Person oder Sache nie, bis wir sterben. Der Artikel diskutiert auch ein verwandtes Gebiet und verweist auf die Generationen übergreifende Übertragung der psychischen Repräsentanz einer verstorbenen Person oder einer verlorenen Sache in die sich entwickelnde Selbst-Repräsentanz eines Neugeborenen. Übertragen wird auch das Bild des chronisch Trauernden (perennial mourner) mit den dazu gehörigen Anforderungen an das Ich. Es wird auch kurz die Beziehung zwischen der Generationen übergreifenden Übertragung von Bildern und Aufgaben - verbunden durch Verluste – untersucht, die geteilt werden von Mitgliedern einer Gesellschaft. Behandelt wird ebenfalls das Thema der gesellschaftlichen Trauer und ihrer politischen Konsequenzen.

Schlüsselwörter: Chronisches Trauern, Jahrestagsreaktionen, verbindende Objekte und Phänomene, gewählte Traumata und Anspruchsideologien.

Abstract: This paper focuses on observations that mourning never ends even when this process becomes absorbed in other mental activities that can be judged as adaptive or maladaptive by individuals themselves or, if they seek help, by their therapists. We never “kill” the mental representation of a significant dead person or lost thing until we die. The paper also discusses a related area and refers to transgenerational transmission of the mental representation of a dead person or lost thing as well as the image of a perennial mourner, with associated ego tasks, into a newborn child’s developing self-representation. It also examines briefly, the relationship between transgenerational transmissions of images and tasks connected by losses which are shared by members of a society and societal mourning with its political consequences.

Keywords: Perennial mourning, anniversary reactions, linking objects and phenomena, transgenerational transmissions, chosen traumas and entitlement ideologies

Introduction

A corpse will not come out of its grave, but in order to deal with the fantasy that it might, people from different cultures put tombstones on graves or walls around graveyards. A buried mental representation however, unlike the physical one, is mobile. It can escape from its mental enclosure and continue to have an internal relationship with a mourner. Mourning refers to the process of psychological burial of the mental representation—a collection of images—of a dead person or lost thing. The physical burial of a corpse or the disappearance of a family home by fire does not remove the mental representations of these lost entities from the mourner’s mind. The mourner has to banish such representations to mental enclosures in the mind’s far corners (through repression, denial, dissociation, displacement and/or identification) so as not to be preoccupied with them.

Freud’s (1917) “Mourning and Melancholia” informs us about internal object relations. While sophisticated theories about such relations, such as those described by Kernberg (1976), would develop much later, Freud and many psychoanalysts who followed him, implied that an intense internal relation with images of the lost person or thing that constitutes the “normal” mourning process has a time limit: the mourning process ends when the mourner withdraws his or her psychic investment in the representation of the lost object. Even though we have known that the re-activation of various images or the mental representation of the lost object in the mourner’s mind can occur years after experiencing the loss, such as during the anniversary of a significant event that concerned the lost object before it was lost (anniversary reactions) (Pollock, 1989), the idea that “normal” mourning reaches an end has rarely been questioned.

Psychoanalysts following Freud spoke of “normal” mourning or complicated mourning that turns into melancholia (depression). In 1981, I described another outcome following a significant loss, when I presented cases of people who become perennial mourners, continuing their mourning for years after a significant loss, some even throughout the rest of their lives. I primarily focused on pathological clinical findings in such unending mourning processes (Volkan 1981). Later Elizabeth Zintl and I (Volkan and Zintl 1993) illustrated how some individuals express their perennial mourning through creativity, as Pollock (1989) had also suggested. In this paper I will illustrate that in many cases the border between “normal” mourning and creative perennial mourning is blurred.

Adult-type mourning

Through the ever-increasing research on the infant mind, we now know that the infant is capable of performing many mental functions, including those that involve relating to others. We can picture these primitive functions as unconnected ego nuclei, as the evolution of sophisticated integration, coordination and application of such ego functions requires some years. We cannot say that an infant or small child is capable of maintaining a stable mental representation of the other. Mourning, as studied by Freud and as described above, refers to an intense preoccupation with and the withdrawal from such preoccupation from the mental representation of the lost object. Losses that occur before the child is able to have and maintain stable mental representations result in the child's attempts to find substitute object relations and problems with attachment, issues that in adulthood also can be expressed in adaptive or maladaptive ways. As a child's mind develops, he or she experiences what can be called "developmental losses" as well as gains, such as giving up the mother's breasts and milk and achieving an ability to physically move away from and near to important objects at will.

Blos (1979) illustrated that regression during the adolescence passage "not only is unavoidable, it is obligatory, that is phase-specific" (p. 180). During this obligatory regression, the youngster revisits and reviews object relations with important others from childhood, family history, residuals of early traumas, and gender issues. This leads to the development of a lasting character structure. 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. Wolfenstein (1966) explained that going through the adolescence passage is a model for the adult-type mourning process. The mourning concept I refer to in this paper deals with the "adult type" of mourning.

In an adult, after a significant loss—a concrete one such as losing a person or abstract one such as losing prestige—there is a grief reaction. The grief can be described as a mourner hitting his head against a wall while hoping that the wall will crack open and the lost object will re-materialize. After experiencing pain, when the wall does not crack open, the mourner experiences some kind of narcissistic hurt and anger—consciously but more often unconsciously. This verifies that a loss has taken place and the individual begins to "bury" its mental representation. The mourner divides this mental representation into hundreds of images and deals with them one by one, and often again and again. If there are no complications, the mourner withdraws the mental investment from the lost person's or thing's mental representation slowly, while identifying with some selected non-disturbing images and their functions that lead to a mental enrichment. This process takes months or years. Depression after a loss is understood as a "total" identification with the representation of the lost object to which the mourner had related with great ambivalence. As Fenichel (1945) stated long ago, the mourner's "love" becomes the wish to keep this mental representation, and "hate" becomes the wish to hurt it. Since this ambivalently related mental representation is located within the mourner's mind, the result is an "internal war" within the mourner, a depression.

There are many factors involved in a "normal" or complicated mourning. Those individuals who went through the developmental losses with great conflict, contaminated them with disturbing unconscious fantasies, and had a difficult adolescence passage will be less prepared to mourn as adults. The nature of the mental representation of the lost object in the mourner's mind and conditions in which the loss has occurred influence the mourning process. If the mental representation of the lost object was not only desired but "needed" for the mourner's maintenance of psychic stability, mourning becomes complicated. If the loss occurs unexpectedly and drastically, such as through suicide or homicide, the aggression expressed in such events contaminates the necessary "normal" anger in grief and complicates the mourning process.

Perennial mourning

After a significant loss, some individuals do not go through "normal" mourning or do not develop depression; they become perennial mourners. Perennial mourners, to a large degree, cannot identify with the enriching aspects of the mental representation of the lost object and adaptive ego functions associated with it. On the other hand, they do not end up identifying totally with the ambivalently related lost object representation. Instead, these mourners keep the object representation of the lost person or thing within their self-representation as a specific and unassimilated "foreign body" that excessively influences their self-representation. Such an unassimilated object representation or object image is known as 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 sought treatment in order to free himself from his younger brother's disturbing influence. He explained that while driving to work, his brother constantly talked with him, giving him advice about everything. He occasionally told his brother to shut up. Listening to him I imagined that he 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. Then he 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. Outside of his conversing with his dead younger brother's object representation while driving to work, this man did not experience any break with reality.

Perennial mourners are compulsive about reading obituary notices, making daily references to death, tombs, or graveyards and talking about the dead in the present tense. Some of them "recognize" their lost ones in someone alive whom they encounter from a distance. The listener gets the impression that the speaker's daily life includes some actual current relationship with the deceased. If the lost item is a thing, the perennial mourner thinks about scenarios that involve finding and losing this object again and again. Such individuals also typically dream of the one who has died or the thing that 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. Often they use the term "frozen" when they speak of their dreams, reflecting their internal sense that they are stuck in their mourning process.

To have a "foreign body" within oneself is unpleasant. Therefore, most perennial mourners displace the unassimilated object image or representation of the lost person or thing onto "linking objects" or "linking phenomena" (Volkan 1972, 1981; Volkan and Zintl 1993). A linking object is a physical object such as a special photograph of the deceased or a letter written by a soldier in the battlefield before being killed, or a gift the deceased made to the mourner before death, or it may be an animate object such as the dead person's pet. It symbolizes a meeting ground between the mental representation of a lost person or thing and the mourner's corresponding self-representation. Some individuals use linking phenomena such as a musical tune or a repeating fantasy in order to perpetuate the possibility of contact between themselves and the lost person or thing. Linking objects and linking phenomena are not simple mementoes. They are experienced by perennial mourners as "magical" and under their control.

There are some severely regressed adults, such as those with psychosis, who reactivate the transitional relatedness of their childhood and may recreate transitional objects or phenomena (Winnicott 1953). A transitional object or phenomenon represents the first not-me, but it is never totally not-me. It links not-me with mother-me. Linking objects or phenomena should not be confused with childhood transitional objects and phenomena that are reactivated in adulthood. Linking objects or phenomena 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. Since they are "out there," the mourner's mourning process is externalized. By controlling the linking objects or phenomena perennial mourners control their wish to "bring back" (love) or "kill" (hate) the lost object, and thus they avoid the psychological consequences of either of these two wishes.

Unending "normal" mourning

About 20 years ago I began to realize that I was experiencing an unending mourning process. This realization led me to consider a blurring between "normal" unending mourning and perennial mourning, a place where linking objects or phenomena can be sources for positive behavior patterns, reparative interpersonal relations, creative activities and even scientific inquiries.

I was born in Cyprus to Turkish parents. After completing my high school education there I went to Turkey for my medical education. In the summer of 1956 I graduated and six months later came to America where I remained. During the last two and a half years of my life in Turkey I shared a rather small room in an apartment complex with another Cypriot Turk named Erol. He had come to Turkey, as I had, for his medical education and was two classes below me at the same medical school. I considered him to be my brother. During the time we were roommates ethnic conflict began between the Cypriot Turks and Cypriot Greeks.

Three months after my arrival in the United States I received an envelope from my father in Cyprus. In it there was a newspaper article with Erol's picture describing how he had gone to Cyprus from Turkey to visit his ailing mother. While trying to purchase medicine for her at a pharmacy he was shot by Cypriot Greek terrorists. These people killed Erol in order to terrorize the ethnic group to which he belonged.

After receiving the news of Erol's death I did not cry. I was in a foreign environment in which I was close to no one, so I did not share the news of Erol's murder with any other person. Even when I was undergoing my personal analysis some years later, I did not dwell on losing Erol. My "hidden" mourning process largely remained just that—hidden. Thirty-some years after Erol's death, during a summer visit to Cyprus, one evening at a garden restaurant a friend who knew Erol's story pointed out a bearded man behind the bar and told me that this man was Erol's younger brother. I spontaneously got up from my chair and approached this man and said to him: "My name is Vamik. Does this name mean anything to you?" He began to cry and I found myself also crying out loud, right in the midst of people dining with soothing classical music playing in the background. This event activated my grief and mourning processes which lasted many, many months. This time I was very aware of them.

My awareness of my unending mourning process allowed me to recognize why as a young analyst I felt close to the late William Niederland and thought of him as a mentor. At the time it never occurred to me that my seeking out Dr. Niederland, who had coined the term "survivor syndrome" (Niederland 1961), as a mentor might have something to do with my losing Erol and my own "survival guilt." I also realized that my primary motivation for making complicated mourning my major research area from the early 1970s through the 1980s was connected with my hidden mourning. During this time, with colleagues from the University of Virginia, we studied, as well as treated, around 300 individuals who were experiencing severe reactions to losses. From the 1980s through the present I have been involved in studying and working on international conflicts (Volkan 1997, 2004, 2006a). This also meant focusing on mourning processes in societies traumatized by wars or war-like conditions or in difficult conflicts between enemies. Obviously, other motivations also influenced my involvement in international relations. But I believe a main factor for my pursuing this career path for decades was related to my losing Erol. These efforts stood for my own linking phenomena.

Many elements of my silent and long reaction to losing my friend are included in Kernberg's (2008) description of "normal" unending mourning. He noted that a mourner has no possibility of correcting his or her past shortcomings and failures in relation to the lost person or of obtaining that person's forgiveness. Thus, the mourner's reparative processes evolve as a "mandate," a "moral obligation," to act in accord with the wishes of the dead person. I felt drawn to work on behalf of Erol's wishes. In my mind his main wish was to remain alive and not to induce guilt in me. I wished that people under the influence of ethnic, national, religious or ideological conflicts would not kill others belonging to opposing large groups. Instead, I wanted them to make peace. I co-authored a book on Turkish-Greek relations (Volkan and Itzkowitz 1994). I became fascinated with the realization that I had chosen a Greek-American psychiatrist, Demetrius Julius, as my primary co-worker in our international efforts. I also realized that I was partnering with a Greek in another arena as well: I co-chaired the American Psychoanalytic Association's Sexual Deviations Study Group with the late Charles Socarides, another Greek-American, for ten years. I was not fixated on the past; I was able to find other "brothers" and some of them were Greeks.

The mourner's identification with the lost object, which acts to modify his or her own self-representation, refers to the persistence of internal object relations with the deceased. A mourner also becomes involved in acts that are not simply due to his or her identification with the lost object, but are due to his unending internal relationship with unassimilated object representations or images. A linking object or phenomenon as a source of inspiration can give direction to creativity in some individuals. Complicated mourning still remains in these people, but now it is expressed in art forms. It is not proper to refer to someone who created such a thing as the "Taj Mahal" as "pathological," as it is not proper to call my unending mourning with sublimated activity as "pathological."

Transgenerational transmissions

Mourning is also related to transgenerational transmissions of a variety of mental content, sometimes in enriching and other times in disturbing ways. In "normal" mourning the mourner may feel an obligation to transmit what the lost person knew about his or her world to new generations. This provides support for "generational continuity" and the stability of identity within the members of new generations. In other situations a perennial mourner can experience a child in the next generation as a linking object and deposit in the child's developing self-representation the image of the lost object as well as the corresponding image of the mourner. A child growing up as someone's animate linking object most likely will have psychological difficulties. Some persons with complicated mourning may pass tasks to their children so that the latter become obliged to have a "normal" mourning for their parents and deal with the older generations' complications and trauma associated with the loss. Such "burdens" may also lead to psychological problems if the offspring cannot perform tasks—tasks that originally did not belong to them—in creative ways.

It is beyond the scope of this brief paper to discuss how transgenerational transmissions occur. My colleagues and I have examined such mental activities in detail elsewhere (Volkan, Ast and Greer 2002).

Societal mourning

Societies are made up of individuals and societal processes that reflect individual psychology. But since societies are made up of thousands or millions of people, when they share a mental activity it appears as a social, cultural or political movement. For example, building a memorial to lost persons or land after a trauma at the hands of enemies at first appears to be a cultural custom. A closer look at such memorials reveals that they may function as a shared linking object for a society experiencing mourning (Volkan 2007) as a perennial mourner would. A memorial as a shared linking object is associated with the wish to complete a society's mourning and help its members accept the reality of their losses. On the other hand, it is also associated with the wish to keep mourning active in the hope of recovering what was lost; this latter wish fuels feelings of revenge. Both wishes can co-exist: one wish can be dominant in relation to one memorial, while the other is dominant in relation to another memorial. Often a memorial as a linking object absorbs unfinished elements of incomplete mourning and helps the society adjust to its current situation without re-experiencing the impact of the past losses, trauma and their disturbing emotions (Volkan 2006b).

Observations of various types of transgenerational transmissions give us important clues about other aspects of societal mourning. A 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 2006a). Simply, they refer to regaining all the lands that a large ethnic, religious or national group considers "lost" and now occupied by others. Political entitlement ideologies usually become connected to what I call "chosen traumas" (Volkan 1991, 1997, 2006a). When members of a society (an ethnic, religious or national group) who are victimized at the hand of enemies and are unable to mourn losses of people, land, honor and prestige because they are traumatized, and cannot 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, among them the ability to mourn. These inherited images and tasks contain references to the same historical event, and as decades and centuries pass, the mental representation of this event links all the individuals in the large group. The mental representation of such an event is a "chosen trauma" and it emerges as a most significant large-group identity marker. 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 example, the Serbians' chosen trauma is the shared mental representation of the Battle of Kosovo (1389) and it is connected with an entitlement ideology known as Christoslavism. 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, Slobodan Milošević used this monument in a ceremony—as well as many other activities which I have described elsewhere (Volkan 1997)—to reactivate Serbian perennial mourning which has continued through the centuries. 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 or at least difficulty of shared mourning—into a tool of revenge.

Last words

Since every person and every society experience many significant losses again and again, the psychology of mourning occupies a central position in the study of the human mind and in forming or modifying societal processes. In this brief paper I tried to illustrate how the concept of mourning since Freud's writings about it has required attention from many new angles, and our understanding of the psychology of losses and gains has expanded greatly.

Author

Vamik D. Volkan, M.D., DLFAPA, FACoPsa is an emeritus professor of psychiatry at the University of Virginia School of Medicine, an emeritus training and supervising analyst at the Washington Psychoanalytic Institute and the Senior Erik Erikson Scholar at the Austen Riggs Center in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, USA.

Correspondence

E-Mail: vdv@virginia.edu

References

- Blos, P. (1979): *The Adolescent Passage: Developmental Issues*. New York: International Universities Press.
- Fenichel, O. F. (1945): *The Psychoanalytic Theory of Neurosis*. New York: Norton.
- Freud, S. (1917): *Mourning and Melancholia*, Standard Edition, 14: 237-258. London: Hogarth Press, 1957.
- Kernberg, O. F. (1976): *Object Relations Theory and Clinical Psychoanalysis*. New York: Jason Aronson.
- Kernberg, O. F. (2008): *Some Observations on the Process of Mourning*. Paper presented at Columbia University Center for Psychoanalytic Training and Research, January 8.
- Niederland, W. C. (1961): *The problem of survivor*. *Journal of the Hillside Hospital*, 10: 233-247.
- Pollock, G. H. (1989): *The Mourning-Liberation Process*, Vols. 1 & 2. Madison, CT: International Universities Press.
- Volkan, V. D. (1972): *The "linking objects" of pathological mourners*. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 27:215-221.
- Volkan, V. D. (1981): *Linking Objects and Linking Phenomena: A Study of the Forms, Symptoms, Metapsychology and Therapy of Complicated Mourning*. New York: International Universities Press.
- Volkan, V. D. (1991): *On 'chosen trauma'*. *Mind and Human Interaction*, 3:13.
- Volkan, V. D. (1997): *Bloodlines: From Ethnic Pride to Ethnic Terrorism*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Volkan, V. D. (2004): *Charlottesville, VA: PitcBlind Trust: Large Groups and Their Leaders in Times of Crises and Terror*. hstone Publishing.
- Volkan, V. D. (2006a): *Killing in the Name of Identity: Stories of Bloody Conflicts*. Charlottesville, VA: Pitchstone Publishing.
- Volkan, V. D. (2006b): *What some monuments tell us about mourning and forgiveness*. In *Taking Wrongs Seriously: Apologies and Reconciliation*, eds. Elazar Barkan and Alexander Karn, pp. 115-131. Stanford, CA: Stanford University.
- Volkan, V. D. (2007): *Not letting go: From individual perennial mourners to societies with entitlement ideologies*. On Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia," ed. Leticia Glocer Fiorini, Sergio Lewkowicz and Thierry Bokanowski, pp. 90-109. London: International Psychoanalytic Association.
- Volkan, V. D., G. Ast, and W. Greer (2002): *The Third Reich in the Unconscious: Transgenerational Transmission and its Consequences*. New York: Brunner-Routledge.
- Volkan, V. D., and N. Itzkowitz (1994): *Turks and Greeks: Neighbours in Conflict*. Cambridgeshire, England: Eothen Press.
- Volkan, V. D. and E. Zintl (1993): *Life After Loss: Lessons of Grief*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.
- Winnicott, D. W. (1953): *Transitional objects and transitional phenomena*. *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 3: 89-97.
- Wolfenstein, M. (1966): *How mourning is possible*. *Psychoanalytic Study of the Child*, 21: 93-123.

Originalarbeit (Kurzfassung)

Vamik D. Volkan

Nicht endende Trauer und ihre Folgen

Dieser Artikel befasst sich mit der Beobachtung, dass Trauer nie endet, sogar dann nicht, wenn sie durch andere geistige Aktivitäten absorbiert wird. Diese Aktivitäten können von den Individuen selbst oder von ihren Therapeuten, falls sie Hilfe suchen, als gut oder schlecht angepasst beurteilt werden. Wir „töten“ die psychische Repräsentanz einer für uns bedeutungsvollen Person oder Sache nie, bis wir sterben. Der Artikel diskutiert auch ein verwandtes Gebiet und verweist auf die Generationen übergreifende Übertragung der psychischen Repräsentanz einer verstorbenen Person oder einer verlorenen Sache in die sich entwickelnde Selbst-Repräsentanz eines Neugeborenen. Übertragen auf das Neugeborene wird auch das Bild des chronisch Trauernden (perennial mourner) mit den dazu gehörigen Anforderungen an das Ich. Es wird auch kurz die Beziehung zwischen der Generationen übergreifenden Übertragung von Bildern und Aufgaben – verbunden durch Verluste – untersucht, die geteilt werden von Mitgliedern einer Gesellschaft. Behandelt wird ebenfalls das Thema der gesellschaftlichen Trauer und ihrer politischen Konsequenzen.

Freud und viele Psychoanalytiker, die ihm folgten, meinten, dass eine intensive innere Beziehung mit Bildern der verlorenen Person oder Sache, die den „normalen“ Trauerprozess konstituiert, ein Zeitlimit hat: Der Trauerprozess endet, wenn der Trauernde seine oder ihre psychische Besetzung von der Repräsentanz des verlorenen Objekts zurückzieht. Jedoch werden einige Individuen nach einem bedeutungsvollen Verlust zu „chronisch Trauernden“. Diese Trauernden bewahren die Objekt-Repräsentanz der verlorenen Person oder Sache innerhalb ihrer Selbst-Repräsentanz auf, und zwar als spezifischen und nicht-assimilierten „Fremdkörper“, der ihre Selbst-Repräsentanz sehr stark beeinflusst.

Einen „Fremdkörper“ in sich selbst zu tragen, ist unangenehm. Deshalb verschieben „chronisch Trauernde“ das unassimilierte Objektbild oder die Repräsentanz der verlorenen Person oder Sache in „verbindende Objekte“ oder „verbindende Phänomene“. Ein verbindendes Objekt ist ein physisches Objekt, z.B. eine spezielle Fotografie des Toten, oder ein Brief, geschrieben von einem Soldaten, bevor er auf dem Schlachtfeld getötet worden ist. Es kann sich auch um ein Geschenk handeln, das der Verstorbene vor dem Tod dem Trauernden gemacht hat oder um ein belebtes Objekt, etwa das Lieblingstier des Verstorbenen. Das „verbindende Objekt“ symbolisiert den Ort des Zusammentreffens der psychischen Repräsentanz der verlorenen Person oder Sache und der korrespondierenden Selbst-Repräsentanz des Trauernden. Einige Individuen gebrauchen verbindende Phänomene, wie z.B. eine Melodie oder eine sich wiederholende Fantasie, um die Kontaktmöglichkeit zwischen sich und der verlorenen Person/Sache verewigen zu können. Verbindende Objekte und Phänomene sind nicht einfache Andenken.

Das Trauern ist auch verbunden mit der Generationen übergreifenden Übertragung einer Vielfalt psychischer Inhalte, die manchmal bereichernd wirken, andere Male aber auch störend. Bei der „normalen“ Trauer verspürt der Trauernde vielleicht eine Verpflichtung, den neuen Generationen zu vermitteln, was der Verstorbene über seine/ihre Welt wusste. Dies unterstützt die „Kontinuität zwischen den Generationen“ und die Stabilität der Identität zwischen den Mitgliedern neuer Generationen. In anderen Situationen kann ein „chronisch Trauernder“ ein Kind der nächsten Generation als verbindendes Objekt erfahren und in der sich entwickelnden Selbst-Repräsentanz des Kindes sowohl das Bild des verlorenen Objektes als auch das korrespondierende Bild des Trauernden deponieren. Ein Kind, das als belebtes Verbindungs-Objekt aufwächst, wird mit größter Wahrscheinlichkeit seelische Probleme bekommen. Einige Menschen mit komplizierter Trauer können ihren Kindern Aufgaben übergeben, so dass die Kinder verpflichtet werden, anstelle ihrer Eltern „normal“ zu trauern und sich mit den Verwicklungen und dem Trauma, das mit dem Verlust verbunden ist, auseinanderzusetzen. Solche „Lasten“ können auch zu psychologischen Problemen führen, wenn die Nachkommen die Aufgaben nicht in kreativer Art und Weise bewältigen können – Aufgaben, die ursprünglich nicht zu ihnen gehörten.

Gesellschaften trauern auch. Aber da Gesellschaften aus Tausenden oder Millionen Menschen bestehen, erscheint eine gemeinsam geteilte geistige Aktivität als soziale, kulturelle oder politische Bewegung. Ein Zeichen „chronischen Trauerns“, das Generationen einer Gesellschaft erfasst, ist die Entwicklung einer Anspruchs-Ideologie (entitlement ideology). Solche Ideologien sind bekannt unter Namen wie „Irredentismus“ oder „megali idea“. Einfach ausgedrückt lässt sich sagen: Sie beziehen sich auf den Wunsch, all das Land wieder zu gewinnen, das eine große ethnische, religiöse oder nationale Gruppe als „verloren“ und jetzt durch andere

besetzt erachtet. Gewöhnlich werden politische Anspruchs-Ideologien mit dem verbunden, was ich „gewähltes Trauma“ nenne. Wenn Mitglieder einer Gesellschaft (einer ethnischen, religiösen oder nationalen Gruppe) durch die Hand der Feinde zu Opfern geworden sind und sie nicht imstande sind, den Verlust von Menschen, Land, Ehre und Prestige zu betauern, weil sie traumatisiert sind, und wenn sie ihre Demütigung und ihre Hilflosigkeit nicht umkehren können, dann übertragen sie auf ihre Nachkommen die Bilder ihres verletzten Selbst und die psychologischen Aufgaben, die zu Ende geführt werden sollten, darunter die Fähigkeit zu trauern. Diese vererbten Bilder und Aufgaben beziehen sich auf dasselbe historische Ereignis, und mit dem Vorübergehen von Dekaden und Jahrhunderten verbindet die psychische Repräsentanz dieses Ereignisses alle Individuen in der großen Gruppe. Die psychische Repräsentanz eines solchen Ereignisses ist ein „gewähltes Trauma“ und es taucht auf als sehr signifikantes Kennzeichen einer Großgruppen -Identität. Das Bild z.B. der Schlacht von Kosovo verbindet das serbische Volk, und der Verlust von Konstantinopel ist für die Griechen ein Großgruppen-Kennzeichen.

Article inédit (Synthèse)

Vamik D. Volkan

Le deuil sans fin et ses conséquences

Freud et de nombreux psychanalystes qui l'ont suivi pensaient que la relation psychique intense avec une personne décédée ou une chose perdue – relation qui constitue un processus «normal» de deuil – est limitée dans le temps: le processus est clos une fois que l'individu a réussi à dépasser la représentation psychique qu'il a de l'objet perdu. Pourtant, certains individus tombent dans un «deuil chronique». Ils conservent la représentation d'objet de la personne ou chose disparue au niveau de leur Soi, comme des «corps étrangers» spécifiques qui n'ont pas été assimilés et qui influencent fortement le Soi.

Il n'est pas agréable de porter en soi un «corps étranger». C'est pourquoi les individus concernés déplacent l'image de l'objet ou la représentation de la personne disparue, les transformant en des «objets ou des phénomènes introjectés». Il peut s'agir d'un objet concret, par exemple une photo particulière du défunt, ou une lettre écrite par un soldat avant d'être tué sur le champ de bataille. Il peut également s'agir d'un cadeau qu'avait fait le défunt ou d'un objet animé, comme l'animal favori de la personne décédée. Cet «objet introjecté» symbolise le lieu où se recouvrent la représentation mentale de la personne ou de la chose disparue et sa représentation au niveau du Soi. Certains individus utilisent ces objets ou phénomènes – comme par exemple une mélodie ou un événement imaginaire – pour maintenir le contact avec la personne/chose disparue. Ces objets/phénomènes sont plus que des souvenirs.

Le deuil est également associé à la transmission au travers des générations de contenus psychiques variés qui, parfois, sont un enrichissement mais qui peuvent aussi déranger. Lorsque le deuil est «normal», l'individu va peut-être se faire un devoir de transmettre aux nouvelles générations ce que le défunt savait. Cela permet de renforcer la «continuité entre les générations» et de stabiliser l'identité de leurs membres. Mais il peut arriver que l'individu souffrant d'un «deuil chronique» transforme un enfant appartenant à la génération suivante en un objet du type décrit plus haut; il va alors imposer à l'enfant à la fois l'image de l'objet perdu et l'image qu'il en a dans son propre psychisme. Un enfant qui grandit dans ces conditions va très probablement avoir des problèmes psychiques. Certains individus subissant un deuil compliqué vont charger leurs enfants de tâches les obligeant à faire leur deuil à la place de leurs parents, à s'affronter aux complications et au traumatisme associé à la perte. De telles «obligations» peuvent également provoquer des problèmes psychologiques lorsque la génération suivante ne réussit pas à les gérer de manière créative – il s'agit de tâches qui ne sont en réalité pas les leurs.

Les sociétés font également leur deuil. Mais comme elles se composent de milliers ou de millions de personnes, l'activité mentale partagée se traduira en un mouvement social, culturel ou politique. L'une des manifestations d'un «deuil chronique» affectant plusieurs générations d'une société est l'élaboration d'une idéologie de l'entitlement (idéologie de l'habilitation ou du 'bon-droit'). On a également appelé ce type d'idéologie «irredentismus» ou «megali idea». Pour le formuler simplement: elles sont en rapport avec un souhait de récupérer des territoires «perdus» par un groupe ethnique, religieux ou national et maintenant occupés par d'autres. En général, ce type d'idéologie politique est associé à quelque chose que j'appelle un «traumatisme choisi». Lorsque les membres d'une société (ou d'un groupe ethnique, religieux ou national) sont victimes de leurs ennemis et qu'ils ne sont pas à même de faire le deuil de leurs pertes – y compris l'honneur et le prestige – parce qu'ils sont traumatisés, ils transmettent aux générations suivantes l'image de leur Soi humilié et impotent, ainsi que les tâches qui doivent encore être accomplies, processus de deuil compris. Ces images et devoirs hérités sont associés à un même événement historique et au cours des décennies et des siècles, la représentation psychique qu'en ont les membres de la société constitue un lien entre tous ses membres. Il s'agit d'un «traumatisme choisi» qui constitue un aspect significatif de l'identité d'un large groupe. Par exemple, l'image de la guerre pour le Kosovo relie les membres du peuple serbe et chez les Grecs, la perte de Constantinople en est venue à symboliser en partie l'identité de leur société.