

MEMORY, MOURNING, AND PREVIOUSLY UNIMAGINED FUTURES

Australian Psychoanalytical Society 50th Anniversary Lecture

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I am very happy to be with you on the occasion of the APAS's 50th anniversary. I bring heartfelt congratulations from the IPA officers, Board, and membership for the psychoanalytic tradition you have established. It is deeply scientific as well as clinical, educational, and socially committed. You have much to celebrate and I am thrilled to be here to join in your anniversary celebration.

The title of my talk is a slightly reframed version of the conference theme. My title is *Memory, Mourning, and Previously Unimagined Futures*. Using "unimagined" as opposed to "reimagined" privileges the element of surprise that is contained in a psychoanalytic exploration of unconscious aspects of a person's or a large group's identity. The potential result of this journey is an evolution from a traumatized, fearful state to a previously unimagined cohesive, constructive sense of self or group identity, one that then leads to a previously unimagined future.

I will talk with you first about an analysand in my practice, whom I will call R, an accountant who was born in Argentina who had emigrated with his family to the United States as a teenager. He came to treatment in his 30's after a severe panic attack that followed the death of his paternal grandfather who had emigrated with the family. R had grown up in Argentina. During the Dirty War¹ already existing antisemitism had deepened, and although R minimized the impact of prejudice, it seemed to have motivated the family's move to the United States. His parents had much earlier chosen to adopt his mother's familial name rather than his father's because it sounded less Jewish. When R started kindergarten, he was mocked for the size of his nose and

¹ During the dictatorship in Argentina, 1976-1983, Jews were targeted, and antisemitism was promulgated by the military government. Many Jews were disappeared or had to flee abroad.

given the nickname “bignose” in Spanish. His typical response to criticism later in school and at work was to dissociate, to enter what he called a “daze” and cease to be productive. To me, this seemed a defensive reaction to early life bullying, but it was without conscious meaning to him.

It was four years into his treatment when I learned his first name was linked to the name of a different deceased grandparent. R’s first name was the masculine version of his maternal grandmother’s name. Within the analysis, his episodic experiences of psychic retreat at work and in relationships and his sadistic transference projections onto me became gradually understandable as representing unconscious memories of his mother’s psychic absence (Green & Kittler, 1993) and his identification with her continuing rage toward her dead mother. She had named R for the mother she could not mourn and who had subjected her to maternal abandonment. R could only fail his mother, and by association all the women in his life, including me. His analysis had an unimagined outcome thanks to the mourning process that his paternal grandfather’s death ignited – an outcome neither he nor I could have imagined in the beginning.

The experience of emigration is embedded in this clinical story. My patient and his family emigrated to the United States with optimism and idealized notions of it as the land of social tolerance, civil liberty, and economic promise. The move did introduce opportunities that were not present in their home country, but as you might expect, their lived experience of their new country was far from perfect.

Emigration to a different country is a complex matter. An emigrational move always entails both conscious and unconscious factors, in addition to environmental stressors, all of which make an intentional move to a safer place psychologically difficult and complex. Early and transgenerational experiences of trauma travel with a person no matter the circumstances of literal travel. One’s original culture and one’s history are not left behind.

Typically, emigration involves a choice to leave one's home country. It is often a forced choice to escape violence, poverty, or extreme environmental stressors. When the choice is the result of an idealization of the destination, the flip side of idealization is predictable: the move will involve disappointment and perhaps despair. The new country inevitably turns out to be imperfect as well. Insofar as émigrés remain ambivalent about the move, the mourning of their home country stays incomplete. The original idealization reverses course. Home begins to look better than it did before.

As I started to write my talk for today, I began to feel extremely sad and my mind seemed blank. I had to wonder what this reaction or resistance entailed. My review of the literature had taken me to places I had been before but had not consciously experienced as relevant to me. I reviewed the work of Gabriele Schwab (2010) who wrote *Haunting Legacies, Violent Histories and Transgenerational Trauma*. In her own words, Schwab describes *Haunting Legacies* as:

“what happens to psychic life in the wake of unbearable violence and focuses on irresolvable, impossible, or refused mourning of losses that occurred under catastrophic circumstances. Warfare and genocide, as well as more individual violent acts such as torture and rape, are liminal experiences that bring us to the abyss of human abjection. These acts cause soul murder and social death. No other species tortures or wages war. No other species pursues soul murder for the sake of pleasure” (p.3).

The extremes of traumatizing events that Schwab describes reminded me of the fate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia and indigenous tribes in North America. When the colonial action in our national histories made perfect sense to white European settlers, it resulted in the extermination of indigenous cultural history and values. Can nations meaningfully claim responsibility so many years later for the ways in which humans who first lived on the land were objectified, subjugated, and/or annihilated?

I thought about my friendship as a psychiatric resident and faculty member at Yale University Medical School with Dori Laub, the founder of the Yale Video Archive, now called the Fortunoff

Video Archive, for Holocaust Testimonies. I thought about the impact Dori's humanity had on me and the tenderness he expressed in his clinical, supervisory, and academic pursuits despite his history of being in a concentration camp from ages 5 to 7. He was a person whom one might expect to be frozen in blank mourning (Amir, 2020) and haunted by an intolerable legacy. Instead, he represented resilience and an openness to helping fellow Holocaust survivors speak of their horrors many years later. It was painful and deeply helpful work. How do we understand such resilience in the context of horrifying experience? A psychoanalytic developmental point of view indicates that early life experience of stable and nurturing relationships supports mourning, the gradual processing of intensely charged memories, and the alteration of memories such that decathexis occurs and remembered lost objects and lost futures can be thought of in a more realistic way.

So much of what we experience in life is unconscious, either defensively repressed or lodged in an unrepresented realm of relational experience. Using myself as a quasi-clinical example, it is still unsettling to realize it was not until I went to medical school and rotated through a psychiatry clerkship that I began to see how little I and others knew consciously about our motivations, conflicts, and desires. I, for example, grew up in a conservative, middle class, white neighborhood in the United States where no one in my social surround talked about prejudice, discrimination, or racism, yet those phenomena permeated everyday life. The decidedly odd part of my context centered on my paternal grandparents who had emigrated from Bohemia in 1911 and met and married in the States. They were reclusive. They shared nothing of their internal experience nor their past. They seemed to know English but may have been thinking and operating culturally mainly in Czech, or wishfully in German which was the language of the educated class in Bohemia at that time. Their aspirations for social prominence were reflected in their insistence that my father attend a military college because that is what Catholic people in Bohemia did.

I gradually learned how betrayal characterized their family culture, but I never had the privilege of learning much about their earlier lives in their home country. They were just odd, distant, and

they did injurious things. For example, they sold their stock in my father's business which he founded shortly after WW II without telling him he was losing family control of the enterprise. Maybe they needed the money. Maybe they were envious of his growing success. At some point I learned my paternal grandmother locked my father's younger sister in a barred section of the basement when she misbehaved as a girl. This fact matched my untrained clinical perception of my paternal grandmother as perverse and hostile.

My maternal grandparents were, fortunately, generous constants in our lives. Thanks to them I enjoyed frequent overnight visits and adventurous travel. They put away funds for my future education which covered the costs of my medical training when my father disowned me (financially) because I quit a Ph.D. program in German language and literature to become a doctor. This is a small snapshot of a family history that is troubling in ways I hardly know. I can however say that realizing how the topic of my paper was converging with my own inchoate history helped me return to the topic with interest. I mention this to highlight the usefulness of our continued professional commitment to self-reflection, in the service of discovering the roots of our countertransferences that can lead to unwitting 'othering' of the very persons or projects we undertake as psychoanalysts.

There are so many details about our family histories for which we'll never know the veridical truth. But we do seek to discover the details. Many autobiographical as well as less self-oriented memories are not conscious. They often exist in emotional states that come alive somatically (van der Kolk, 2015). Their meaning can come into conscious awareness through thought associations that produce an *apres-coup*. *Après-coup* is the French term for what Freud named *Nachtraeglichkeit*, a noun he created to capture a dialectical temporal and emotional relationship between past and present experience. It refers to the process through which a traumatizing event in the present connects in a person's mind to an unremembered past experience. The emotional charge of the present experience tends to be transformed while the emotional charge of an earlier unrepresented or repressed experience gains emotional meaning. The French expression for *Nachtraeglichkeit* captures the suddenness with which the

process can occur. The literal translation of “*apres-coup*” is ‘after-blow’ or ‘after-shock’. (Apprey et al., n.d.) In North America the concept is often called “deferred action,” the term Strachey used in his English translation of Freud, and the re-inscription and re-contextualization of memory is emphasized. The nature of memory constitutes an area of growing neurobiological interest. Richard Lane (2015) and colleagues report findings that demonstrate how memories become labile when they are recalled, and a new emotional experience can become incorporated into the original memory in a way that transforms it through what is called memory reconsolidation (Lane et al., 2018).

From a psychoanalytic point of view memory is most often thought about in terms of how unconscious memories result in or underlie human suffering. Clinical symptoms often represent a reemergence of unconscious traces of traumatized states that were originally experienced through cultural and familial exposure and become reactivated by current life. These traces of experiences haunt us, as Gabriele Schwab describes, when rooted in traumatizing experiences that the mind finds too painful to represent or is cognitively not yet developed enough to represent.

In Freud’s thinking, memory and mourning are vitally interrelated. Mourning is a process of remembering the lost object (person, place, or thing) with its intense emotional valence, a remembering that proceeds piece by piece, detail by detail, in its emotional intensity until the object is decathected or no longer invested with the high level of emotion that it once was. When the strong emotional charge is neutralized (Hartmann, 1955), the lost object can be remembered in a tolerable way. Rational thinking about the lost object can occur because it is no longer blocked by intolerable affect.

I will describe the clinical trajectory that allowed R to discover a future neither he nor I could have imagined as the outcome of his psychoanalysis. I will follow with a consideration of the ways in which memory and mourning occur and can be addressed on the societal or large group level.

Clinical case:

When R remembered his early years, they struck him as quiet and enjoyable. It was not until he started kindergarten that he had a conscious experience of adversity. I have mentioned that he was teased for the size of his nose. Although he dismissed my idea of expectable painful feelings, his school experience was recounted in the context of the history of his family's carrying his mother's family surname as their family name rather than his father's because it sounded less Jewish. The narrative of his life rarely emerged in a direct manner. His associations were not consciously connected by him and the affect with which details were mentioned was initially routinely bland. My efforts to show R the mismatch between content and affect fell on deaf ears. Psychoanalytic 'listening to listening' a la Haydee Faimberg (1996) alerted me to the presence of intolerable affects associated with his memories and his sudden entry into mourning.

The loss of R's grandfather had clearly affected him deeply, but he had no words to describe his pain. When I first saw R, he was gangly and disheveled. He was strangely compliant and emotionally remote. For many months I listened quietly, sometimes inquiring about his thoughts, and provided a holding environment in which he slowly began to talk about misery – as it was occurring at work and in his love life – never in conscious connection to the death of his grandfather. It emerged that he had loved his grandfather very much, identified with his social isolation and shyness, respected the fact he had worked in the Argentine resistance, and claimed to know little about him. The only story his grandfather told was about Eastern Europe where he was born and from which he fled to Argentina after WWII started. It was a story about a horse he had rescued during a Friday Shabbat dinner while his family looked for him and feared he had been killed. Over time it became clear that R identified with his grandfather's history of trauma and also with the spiritual depth he had perceived in his grandfather, the man who carried the abandoned Jewish name.

A complex interweaving of names and identifications emerged over time. In retrospect, it pointed toward the unimagined treatment outcome of R's transformation. He evolved from a self-punishing, anxious, isolated, and not religious person to a deeply committed orthodox Jew with a stable, loving, respectful marital relationship and a joyful experience of fatherhood. Success in work was slower to develop. But confidence and success also in the realm of work were underway when he began to terminate his analysis. How in the world did we get to such an unimagined future?

During much of R's analysis there was little mention of his grandfather. There was instead a displacement of the experience of loss to his own history of alternating near success and painful failure in both work and relationships. When the family emigrated to the U.S. – this included R's parents, his younger brother, and his grandfather – R had the best command of English and was able to navigate transportation, rental properties, job applications, and his own success in a local high school. He graduated and attended a nearby university. Things started to deteriorate when he began to work; he would retreat more often than initiate or complete projects. His personal relationships included a few male friends with whom he visited comedy clubs and a few girlfriends who ultimately left him because he made no commitment.

When I first met R, he was involved with women whose existence in his life made his mother frantic and him miserable. They required an immense amount of support and were never satisfied. I gradually learned about his tendency to dissociate when home alone through smoking pot and at work through video games and avoidance of deadlines. His unconscious conflicted yearning for change was reflected in his time-consuming internet searches for flights without any compelling ideas about destination.

Themes of parental empathic failure and abuse, and resulting unconscious guilt and self-punishment were prominent in R's past and current history. As a boy he battled with his mother over his failure to excel in sports. She was a skilled tennis player herself and became his trainer. She claimed he had a lot of talent but no discipline and became very anxious and severe

when he played poorly or refused to try harder. He remembered lying on the tennis court screaming and kicking his feet to fend her off. When he could manage it, he hid in his room and avoided contact altogether. He enraged his parents with antisocial behavior like shoplifting and damage to school property. They were humiliated by contacts from the police, and a family dynamic of paternal support and maternal disgust continued throughout his early schooling, his adolescence, and into his adult years.

When R began to worry about losing his job and started to notice how he undermined himself at every turn he began to draw diagrams of his mind and shared them with me. It was a feature of a surge in curiosity about what he saw as self-sabotage. The complexity of his jagged line drawings briefly sparked some worry in me that he might be psychotic. But in fact, he was deeply confused and worried he might be crazy. An interpretation on my part to that effect was experienced as helpful. Soon after he began to attend temple services regularly and developed an interest in Hasidic philosophy. His intelligent questions sparked the interest of his rabbi and a collaborative investigation of ancient writings developed. He began to feel part of a community at the temple.

His relationships to different girlfriends became the displaced arena in which R started to notice his separation difficulties. He became aware of his sadistic pleasure in displeasing his mother by bringing girls to his parents' home for family events whom he knew his mother would find offensive. As he took distance from one of his girlfriends and she started to collapse, he figured out ways to stay separate from her without lashing out at her or leaving her without support. In this context, explicit mourning for his grandfather began. He remembered him with sadness and yearning as a calm person. He also remembered that his mother had lost her mother when she was pregnant with R. He realized she must still be enraged about her mother's abandoning her. In this context his name as the masculine version of his maternal grandmother's name came to light as did a conscious awareness of his being the target of his mother's rage and the perceived cause for her sense of betrayal. The impact of his grandfather's death and R's difficulty with

mourning became his explicit focus. Words were found to express his pain in not having known more about why there was so much suffering in his and his family members' lives.

In the course of his analysis, R developed a useful adjunct to his psychoanalytic work. He invested in his 4-5 time/week treatment and use of the couch, and simultaneously explored Hasidic philosophy where he discovered an additional framework for understanding the human condition. He also found access to a supportive community of like-minded people. Religious study became another avenue toward both intrapsychic and interpersonal change. It supported his claiming of previously denied or forbidden sociocultural and religious identifications and filled his need for belonging.

Another notable aspect of our work was the role language seemed to play. R felt he would not have been able to speak of himself as he did with me if we had been speaking Spanish. He felt his mind would have closed down through a sense of betrayal had he allowed himself to experience and speak so deeply about his internal suffering in his mother tongue. He would have felt responsible for moral injury and betrayal rather than the subject of it. The previously unimagined religious future that was the outcome of his analysis was an integration of vastly different aspects of his character intrapsychically and in relation to his external objects. He discovered his ability to enjoy intimacy and to trust relationships, internal and external, rooted in the Jewish world he had been denied for complex family and societal reasons.

R's loss of his grandfather began a complex mourning process in which traumatizing internal experiences of loss combined with traumatizing external social realities of Eastern European and Argentine economics, politics, and antisemitic abuse. His mourning was not his alone. It was saturated with antisemitism on all the sociocultural and familial levels of his developmental experience. On each external level there had been silence about inhumane othering. His own resultant silence had been shattered by the loss of his grandfather, who was the silent hero whom he loved and most identified with. His exploration of the meaning of the loss opened the

way for his ability to claim Judaism, live a devoted life with family, and approach the business world with greater confidence and pleasure.

Psychoanalytic approaches to large group conflict and suffering:

Quite a lot has been written about the difficulty in mourning among victims of horrifying trauma and specifically the difficulty Holocaust survivors have in finding words to describe, and the affective capacity to revisit, their experiences of loss of humanity and closeness to death. R is an example of a person whose external situation was traumatizing but less devastating than the Holocaust survivors who perished or survived before his entry into the world. The shock of a current loss opened a process for him that was in its essence a delayed mourning for his cultural past as well as his personal family experience.

I wonder if there might be opportunities to work with other survivors of transgenerational traumatic histories, perhaps your nation's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and my nation's American Indian tribes. Both countries have violent colonial histories and are making current active efforts to take responsibility for the traumatizing actions of the past through projects like Bringing Them Home in Australia and the abolishment of boarding schools for Native American children in the U.S. My hopeful thought is that a continued dialogic approach in which emotional truths can be spoken and heard will facilitate emergence of resilience and promote the ability to mourn past unthinkable abuses and losses that continue to color the present.

The impact of the sociocultural surround on an individual's development, for example that of R, is an entry point to considering memory, mourning and the possibility of a reimagined future on the large group level. Vamik Volkan and others engage psychoanalytically in situations of intractable conflict on the societal level. I have learned through them, and through a Think Tank on Resolution of Intractable Conflict that John Lord Alderdice and I constituted in 2019, that intractable does not mean impossible. It means difficult to control, manage, or direct.

What psychoanalysis can bring to the table is an understanding of the unmourned and unconscious aspects of intractable conflicts. A psychoanalytic understanding of strongly divisive group processes permits the recognition of multiple perspectives and a dialectical approach in which dialogue can develop between arch enemies. In the words of Ed Shapiro (2020), the most valuable single guideline may be: *learn how your opponent is right*. That orientation can open a crack in the door that blocks collaborative thinking and leads to eventual reconciliation of contradictory perceptions about what is fair and doable. Intervention in large group conflicts is not easy. But while large group conflict may be formidable it is not necessarily irresolvable.

Volkan and others have written about group trauma as an unconscious societal organizer for an existing collective of which individuals are a part. The memory of a traumatizing event or series of events is the result either of direct experience of the events or later identification with a defined, traumatized social group. Shared memories of past injury constitute what Volkan calls a group's "chosen trauma." It is a history of horrifying experience that underlies the group identity and organizes present and future group experience and actions (Volkan, 2019a).

In the words of Regine Scholz:

"The past replaces the present and is even projected into the future where it can be fought out again. The familiar order of time collapses. In other words: chosen trauma causes something like a collective memory disorder...The difference between collective memory disorder and Freud's original concept of timelessness is that, with the collective disorder, events that happened at a distinct time and a distinct place are transformed into a myth, which means that they are being treated *as if* they are timeless. That is how *they can contaminate any interaction; they can ground all emotions and every behavior on conscious but above all unconscious levels*" (Scholz, 2023, p. 44).

Scholz's formulation highlights the difficulty of mourning on the large group level and the great need for mourning in order for groups to advance beyond mythical imperatives.

At the recent IPA Congress in Cartagena Colombia, I was the discussant for a panel on toxic polarization. The panelists described the numbing and fragile current state of the world and the power of social media to bring both false and real facts into the minds of all who are listening. They emphasized the fact none of us are separate from the world that surrounds us; we are one with it. How we and our surround relate is variable but there is no question that the nature of that relationship informs our readiness to recognize when and how toxic polarization enters our consulting rooms, our living rooms, and our organizations – our psychoanalytic minds and life experience. Again, the necessary professional discipline of personal reflection is needed to realize the degree to which each of us who aspires to alleviate toxic polarization participates in it, consciously or unconsciously. Big absences of awareness result in our unwitting othering of those we seek to help. Smaller absences lead to the type of block I experienced while starting this talk. The point is: our own conscious and unconscious identifications can pull us into a domain in which helplessness is denied and subjective comfort is sought through defenses that range from denial to projection to dissociation, all of which are active in sociopolitical polarization.

Toxic polarization is currently a pervasive and ominous social reality. In polarization we see a defensive psychic mechanism that alleviates anxiety. It is splitting on a large societal scale. It simplifies complex threatening realities. But it is of course not adaptive because it is static. It resembles the paranoid-schizoid phase of individual development in which integration of difference is not possible. When toxicity enters the field, the defensive position becomes frankly destructive, in fact murderous, and the boundaries that are necessary for survival of civil society are lost.

In *Civilization and its Discontents*, Sigmund Freud (1930) built an argument about primary aggression based on the sadistic side of love relationships. He invoked the history of humankind to characterize the human being as “a savage beast to whom consideration towards his own kind is something alien” (Freud, 1930, p. 112). Decades later Anna Freud (1982) used

observations of toddlers to support the notion that aggression is a primary human trait. It emerges very early in development in ways that have no obvious goals and are not for purposes of defense. She established that the appreciation of the effect of one's aggression on the other is a way station along a developmental line to humanization. John Alderdice emphasizes that when a person loses the capacity to recognize the harm their aggression does to another, both the "other" and the aggressor become less than human (Alderdice, 2023, p.30).

When dehumanization becomes the petri dish for societal experience, it breeds violence. How does widespread dehumanization of the other and of the self get started? For years psychoanalysts including Heinz Kohut (1972), Ernest Wolf (1990), and David Terman (1975) have studied the related phenomena of humiliation and narcissistic rage. A deep experience of shaming or disrespect stirs a primitive wish for justice. The more devastating the humiliation, the more violent the retributive response.

Clearly, intervening in violent cultures of human experience is not for the faint of heart. What psychoanalysts have to offer is our unique professional ability to listen well, to hold different and sometimes opposing thoughts at the same time, and to listen to others and to ourselves without judgement. In the challenging case of toxic polarization, I want to consider how we can manage the deeply disturbing experiences we hear in working with large group conflict and what sort of communication has a constructive impact on those who are listening or telling their story.

I will describe a psychoanalytically informed method that rests on psychoanalytic clinical theory but focuses on groups rather than dyads and on psycho-historical large group conflict as it continues in the present. It engages the potential for dialogue to bridge difference and enhance tolerance for it. It holds promise for the transformative potential of mourning. The method I have in mind is used by a group called IDI which stands for International Dialogue Initiative. IDI was founded by Vamik Volkan and is currently led by Gerard Fromm. They are psychoanalytic

thinkers who have deep experience in the field of intractable conflict. They use dialogue to inform resolution of international conflict.

IDI is a small group that is interdisciplinary and international. Its members are psychoanalysts, diplomats, political scientists, lawyers, historians, and economists from a range of nationalities, generations, and ethnic groups. They focus on the psycho-historical origins of conflict and the possibility of gaining perspective on unmanageable feelings through exploring case examples of traumatic residues (Shapiro, 2023, p.255). The work of Vamik Volkan (2006; 2020) on the organizing dynamics of large groups is in the background. It offers the insight that each large group has an identity that is created through the transmission of narratives, symbols and the residue of chosen traumas and glories. This is what Harald Welzer (2020) calls communicative memory. The members of large groups show through painful affects and subtle cues how they were shaped by the ethnicity, religion, customs, and multigenerational history of their group. Those who were not personally involved in the group history constitute a memorizing community whose knowledge outlives the bodily memories of those directly impacted by horrifying events.

The IDI meets often online and at least once each year in person. The members engage in dialogue with one another about a presentation of societal conflict. They discuss how the presentation affects each of them as well as those described in the presentation. A dialectic develops in which the IDI group becomes an immediate participant in the complexity of a traumatic situation but with enough remove to think and reflect constructively on how multigenerational trauma has been experienced and transmitted. The outcome resembles the experience within the consulting room of a new and deep understanding of a complex conflict, enactment, or unconscious dynamic. The complexity of the issues is experienced, understood, and engenders a deep respect for multilayered traumatic experience and the importance of finding words for it.

To illustrate the vitality of IDI work I will borrow a vignette that Ed Shapiro (2023) includes in a chapter in the recent book edited by Vamik Volkan, Regine Scholz, and Gerard Fromm called: *We Don't Speak of Fear: Large-Group Identity, Societal Conflict and Collective Trauma*. The vignette is about a meeting of the IDI group which began with a general discussion of Germany's bearing the burden of guilt and responsibility of WWII. During the discussion a group member spoke about a Polish woman who had risked her life and saved the lives of many others by functioning as a spy during the war. She was in Britain after the war, and she requested a passport. It was denied. She was later murdered in a British hotel. The story suggested that the burden of guilt for war atrocities was not simply Germany's.

A case presentation followed in which a young Polish psychologist described a group intervention she had initiated to encourage what she termed "reflective citizenship." She invited Polish citizens to explore the controversial topic of whether aspects of WWII Nazi atrocities "belonged" to Poland. The IDI group inquired how the presenter's social commitment related to her own life. Reluctant at first to speak about her own past, she wept as she described her experience of her family's postwar survival and how the terrible things that had happened were never discussed. Her grandmother had given her a book, however, which she treasured, and which contained detailed stories about the soap that was made from the fat of Jewish corpses. Her mother never spoke with her about the war, but her grandmother did. The stories she told were frightening and the films shown at school were horrifying. She woke up screaming at night. No one in the family helped her with her feelings. The presenter recounted that her sense of commitment to social issues had emerged when she had her own children. When she described how she now watched *only* romantic comedy movies, an IDI member inquired what would allow her to watch movies with war images again. She answered: "I might be able to do it if some others watched them with me and held my hand" (Shapiro, 2023, p. 257). The IDI group was moved, as was I on reading the case report, and they returned to their discussion of the shared guilt of war with a deeper awareness of the limits of categorical thinking.

The aspects of the IDI work that intrigue me most are the power of storytelling and the containing potential of dialogue. Personal stories present feelings in immediate terms. When the stories are heard in a way that one's hand is held, figuratively speaking, the feelings that were, in the story, horrifying become, in the telling and the listening, more manageable. This is the essence of mourning.

What draws many of us to psychoanalysis is the privilege of experiencing the emotional history of another and through the process realizing more too about our own conscious and unconscious story. If we dispense with categories like victim and perpetrator, good and bad, and recognize the complex roots of despair on both sides of a polarization, we have a chance of creating a space for challenging but constructive dialogue. It is dialogue in which both sides feel heard that lowers the emotional heat and opens the door to collaborative thinking and creative solutions. It allows for the mourning of losses that the collective and its individual members have continued to endure. The reimagined future is characterized by respectful and realistic modification of past attitudes and assumptions. Mourning permits new identifications and the realization of the richness inherent in difference. Differences come forward as creative contributions to previously unimagined sociopolitical futures.

Conclusion:

Mourning has the power to reshape one's narrative, leading to resolution of internal conflicts and an expanded sense of self. At its core, mourning entails the act of remembering the lost object—be it a person, a place, or an entity—along with the strong emotions attached to that object. Memories are tied to powerful feelings that can manifest somatically or emerge through psychological symptoms. My own experience of familial and personal memories underscores for me the power of the unconscious and reveals how the past can linger in my and others' unspoken and unexplored narratives. My clinical experience has exposed me, as with R, to the profound influence of unconscious memories and collective histories on individual lives.

The task of intervening psychoanalytically in cultures of violence and the painful human conditions that result demands an approach that is rooted in theory and clinical experience and is open to continuous self-reflection. Group efforts like the IDI create a space for constructive engagement and a deep understanding of the complex interplay of trauma, history, and identity. On an individual level, the dynamic of the consulting room mirrors those efforts and enables patients to engage with the emotional histories of their cultural collective while uncovering insights into their own conscious and unconscious story. By embracing storytelling and fostering constructive dialogue, we can secure needed space for the expression of complex emotions, dismantle categorical thinking, and cultivate mutual understanding. Through this process, mourning unfolds, and new identifications emerge, paving the way for previously unimagined futures characterized by empathy, collaboration, and resilience.

In a world marred by toxic polarization and conflict, the lessons from IDI and the application of psychoanalytic principles offer a path forward. As psychoanalysts, we have a unique opportunity to contribute to the transformation of collective experiences of suffering, and in doing so, to facilitate mourning and a realistic experience of past and present. Through dialogue, mourning, and the reimagining of our shared future, we can dismantle the barriers that divide us and forge a path towards collective healing and understanding.

As I stand here with you to celebrate APAS's 50-year journey, I am reminded that the past, present, and future are intricately interconnected. It is my hope that, through our shared commitment to understanding, self-awareness, and psychoanalysis, we can collectively shape a future that embraces the richness of diversity and fosters the growth of a humane international collaboration. Thank you for the privilege of sharing in your celebration and remembrance.

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