

Waking Up: Terrorism and Depth Psychology

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On the morning of 9/11, Americans woke up in a world where what had been in the shadows had violently taken center stage. Like a dream—or rather a nightmare—what had been marginalized burst forth into consciousness. Jungian and archetypal approaches to the dream are equally applicable to the cultural nightmare we are now in, allowing us to do culture work as dream work. In a depth approach, we would proceed with sustained openness, cautious not to reduce elements of a dream to a single reductive interpretation that would close inquiry prematurely. Rather we would allow each image to reveal multiple resonances that sound out in relation to the others—for instance, the World Trade Center towers and the hijacked planes. If 9/11 were a dream, I can imagine Jung wondering about how the attitude of those whom the towers represented constellated such an assault. He was fond of seeing such things as compensatory, as psyche's autonomous taking down of what has been unduly elevated.

We would be asked to listen *into* what the terrorists, or those like them, say. Depth psychology pays particular attention to story, because stories convey the depth of experience. What are, or might be, their stories? We would need to acknowledge that we had not listened closely to them previously and then struggle to change our stance so that we could begin to hear them. Indeed, says Jung, “the unconscious mirrors the face we turn toward it,” having to speak in ever more frightening ways when ignored. What was the face we had turned toward those represented by the terrorists—the face we find mirrored back by their violent and unswaying determination, their martyrdom for what they see as a religious way of life?

This paper was presented at Pacifica Graduate Institute's first alumni homecoming, April 18, 2002. The theme of the day was a depth psychological approach to the events of September 11th.

If we look at the literature in depth psychology, we will find this approach to what is surprising to the ego, to what breaks in unbidden, to forming relation where schism has prevailed. But we will not find the terrorists, or the colonial situation under which their peoples have labored, named as such in our literature. The colonized *are* present in the depth psychology literature, but the phenomenology of their experienced worlds is not described. Rather they are diagnosed and denigrated as “primitive,” “having a childlike mentality,” easily suffering from “*abaissement du niveau mentale*” (a lowering of mental level), unaccustomed to abstract thought, concrete. Amidst these detractions we will find them as spectacles of dying yet romanticized cultures, not up to the demands of the modern. Indeed, such a derogation of those outside of Europe is part of the colonialist shadow in depth psychology itself (see Samuels, 1993).

Although we will not find a phenomenology of the terrorists’ world in Jung, Freud, or Winnicott, a depth psychological approach to their dynamics has existed for five decades. Writers such as Cesaire, Memmi, Fanon, Ahmad, Maalouf, Freire, Martin-Baro, and Juergensmeyer have described the psychological dynamics that have resulted from the world behind the world of depth psychology: colonialism, and now the morph of colonialism into the rapacious and exploitative aspects of globalization.

I turn to these writers to begin to describe the psychological and imaginal world in which those like the terrorists live: the world they find themselves in, the tone and content of the colonized psyche, and the psychodynamics of terrorism. I also turn to these writers to acknowledge them for the depth psychologists they are. All of us who embrace the depth psychological approach would benefit by reaching to them to learn about those whose psyche and experience have been shaped by being the objects of colonialism.

9/11 AS NIGHTMARE

The World Trade Center towers. We can use free association. As targets that Islamic fundamentalists focused on over years, the towers were symbolic of U.S. economic might that exerted its will and power in the Middle East to feed the American voracity for oil; symbolic of the enemy being seen not only as the military, as in the targeting of the Pentagon, but as capitalist, secular society. Perhaps they imagine that all or most Americans are involved in the secular lifestyle that they feel has engulfed their local, religious cultures. Thus it is Americans, and those who support the United States’ economic hegemony, who are the enemy, the “justifiable” targets.

The terrorists. Gene Knudsen Hoffman, the founder of the Compassionate Listening project, says, “an enemy is one whose story has not been heard.” In what follows, I create a montage that begins to suggest some of the story of many in the “Third World” who have turned to terror over these decades, and then, specifically, to those driven by Islamic fundamentalism. Hopefully, their voices will stir our own empathic imagination about others whom we see live in a world quite unlike our own.

Aime Cesaire, poet from Martinique and France, prepares us, saying that we are not discussing a handful of isolated men but millions of people.

I am talking of millions of men who have been skillfully injected with fear, inferiority complexes, trepidation, servility, despair, abasement. . . . [These men feel, individually,] “that I am a brute beast, that my people and I are like a walking dung-heap that disgustingly fertilizes sweet sugar cane and silky cotton, that I have no use in the world. . . .” (quoted in Fanon, 1967, pp. 7, 98)

Frantz Fanon, born in Martinique, a doctor of psychiatry, was one of the most important theorists of Africa’s struggle for liberation. In 1952 he wrote of his own experience being mistaken for an Arab:

Whenever I see an Arab with his hunted look, suspicious, on the run, wrapped in those long ragged robes that seem to have been created especially for him, [I think of the] many times I have been stopped in broad daylight by policemen who mistook me for an Arab; when they discovered my origins, they were obsequious in their apologies: “Of course we know that a Martinican is quite different from an Arab.” (1967, p. 91)

Although Fanon writes predominantly about the complexes of his black brothers and sisters, many of his words can be used to comprehend the inner experiences of Arabs caught in the headlights of colonialism and globalization.

Fanon is clear: “Terror is the weapon of choice of the impotent” (1967, p. 9). To understand the inferiority complex that fuels this sense of impotence, he turns our attention to what he calls a “double process” that begins in economic terms and becomes internalized—or, as he says, “epidermalized”—as inferiority. He argues that we must place a sociogeny next to the ontogenetic approach of Freud to understand the alienation of black people. Were he to use Jung’s words, he would say that liberation must occur on the subjective level as well as the objective

level, and that it would be a grave mistake to think of these as automatically interdependent.

For the black person to become free psychologically, he (or she) must “free himself of the arsenal of complexes that has been developed by the colonial environment” (Fanon, 1967, p. 30). A central weapon in the arsenal is the equation of whiteness with beauty and intelligence. “In the man of color there is a constant effort to run away from his own individuality, to annihilate his own presence” (p. 60). What is needed, says Fanon, “is to hold oneself, like a sliver, to the heart of the world, to interrupt, if necessary, the rhythm of the world, to upset, if necessary, the chain of command, but in any case, and most assuredly, *to stand up to the world*” (p. 78).

Every colonized people—in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality—finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation; that is, with the culture of the mother country. The colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country’s cultural standards. (p. 18)

Fanon is clear that it was the European’s feeling of superiority—now donned by many white Americans—that co-created the feeling of inferiority of the colonized:

I begin to suffer from not being a white man to the degree that the white man imposes discrimination on me, makes me a colonized native, robs me of all worth, all individuality, tells me that I am a parasite on the world, that I must bring myself as quickly as possible into step with the white world. (1967, p. 98)

Further, the colonialist himself (or herself) “reaches the point of no longer being able to imagine a time occurring without [the white man]. His irruption into the history of the colonized people is deified, transformed into absolute necessity” (1969, p. 159).

Albert Memmi, born in Tunisia in 1920, philosopher and novelist, is the author of *The Colonizer and the Colonized*. Memmi describes how colonization disfigures both the colonized and the colonizer. For the colonized, colonialism constitutes a “social and historical mutilation,” severing a people from their own history, culture, and language, substituting the oppressors’ holidays and customs. Both past and future are denied, locking the colonized into a present reality in which they are perceived as

subservient, weak, backward, evil. Indeed, the dehumanizing process is needed to justify the oppressor's dominance and exploitation. There is an illusion created that the colonized can be assimilated into the society of the oppressors, enjoying the rewards of the dominant system. If assimilation is rejected, "the colonized's liberation must be carried out through a recovery of self and of autonomous dignity," ending former attempts at imitation and self-denial. As we witness 9/11, we see the attempt to recover the self happen "with a vengeance."

Eqbal Ahmad, a Moslem whose family suffered from the partition of India and Pakistan, helps us understand how colonialism has changed its façade. Although overt European occupation of many areas in the world has ended, a closer look reveals simply a changing of faces of those in economic control.

The rich in former colonies, says Ahmad, study in and emulate the West, returning to their homes to carry on an apartheid wherein they separate themselves from the poor of their own countries and affiliate with Western power, values, and influence (p. 112). Thus, oppression continues, and economic and social justice remain out of reach for the majority, as markets are controlled by an elite group tied to Euro-American corporate investors. Such worldwide economic apartheid fuels the roots of terrorism, which Ahmad describes as the desire to be finally heard, an expression of long-felt grievances, feelings of anger, helplessness, and alienation, a sense of betrayal, the experience of suffering violence at the hands of others, and a sense of common loss and shared humiliation.

In Afghanistan, as long as the United States enjoyed the slow attrition of Soviet might at the hands of bin Laden and his troops, plane loads of fighters from Algeria, Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, and Palestine were welcomed, "given an ideology, and told that armed struggle was virtuous" (Ahmad, pp. 90-91). Can we actually allow ourselves to hear what Ahmad says: "This whole phenomenon of *jihad* as an international armed struggle never existed in the last five centuries. It was brought into being and pan-Islamicized by the American effort" (p. 79). Ahmad explains that although bin Laden grew up witnessing the plunder of his oil-rich country by Western investors, Saudi Arabia was *not* occupied and the holy sites of Mecca and Medina remained untouched. Once American troops entered near those sites during the Gulf War, the reflex that American policy had encouraged during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan—to fight the foreign intruder—was extended to include U.S. troops and the country they represent. We have stepped right into the shoes of former colonizers of these areas, attaching several hundred years of colonial suffering under European powers to our more recent eco-

conomic exploitation and the political maneuvering that was deemed necessary to protect American economic interests.

Amin Maalouf, a Lebanese Christian and writer, sums up the resistance to Westernization that is part of globalization:

It is all the easier to imagine the reactions of the various non-Western peoples whose every step, for many generations, has already been accompanied by a sense of defeat and self-betrayal. They have had to admit that their ways were out of date, that everything they produced was worthless compared with what was produced by the West, that their attachment to traditional medicine was superstitious, their military glory just a memory, the great men they had been brought up to revere—the poets, scholars, saints and travelers—disregarded by the rest of the world, their religion suspected of barbarism, their language now studied by only a handful of specialists, while they had to learn other people's languages if they wanted to survive and work and remain in contact with the rest of mankind. Whenever they speak with a Westerner it is always in his language, almost never in their own. . . .

Yes, at every turn they meet with disappointment, disillusion or humiliation. How can their personalities fail to be damaged? How can they not feel their identities are threatened? That they are living in a world which belongs to others and obeys rules made by others, a world where they are orphans, strangers, intruders or pariahs. (pp. 74-75)

In his own way, this is just what the Jamaican father of the shoe bomber, Richard Reid, said to the press after the imprisonment of his son, as he described the impact of racist insults on him and his son while living in England.

Religious fanaticism was not the Middle East's initial or prevalent response to modernization. It was not until other paths were blocked, such as democratic rather than authoritarian, corrupt, and inept nationalism, that "beards and veils started to burgeon as signs of protest" in the 1970s (Maalouf, p. 82). Maalouf understands this outbreak as satisfying needs for identity, affiliation, spirituality, action, and revolt.

Close to home, in the federal penitentiary in Lompoc, California, Mark Juergensmeyer, the Director of Global and International Studies at UCSB, listened to the Islamic terrorists' worldview directly, as he visited with Mahmud Abouhalima, who was involved in the first WTC bombing. Abouhalima applies the word *terrorist* to the U.S. government's atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which claimed the

same number of lives, 200,000, as was projected in his attempt to destroy two of the WTC towers. For him, political and economic power that obliterates others' power, that terrorizes citizens, and that may kill indiscriminately is also terrorism. From where he—and millions of others in the world—stands, he is *responding* to terrorism. Reduced to a state of impotence, he claims that the most the dispossessed can do is send a message. His message sent through the initial bombing of the WTC in 1993 was to protest America's role in creating Israel and dispossessing the Palestinians; its support of a secular government in Egypt, his native country; and the deployment of American troops to Kuwait during the Gulf War. The bombings of the American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania took place on the eighth anniversary of our troops' entrance into Saudi Arabia. Abouhalima experienced his own salvation from the fallen ways of the West through Islam. He deeply believes that America's secularism undermines religious life, substituting instead a soulless and Satanic culture. Reclaiming and identifying besieged and weakened aspects of a culture embolden identities disfigured by colonialism and globalization.

What we are apt to see as violence coming out of nowhere is repeatedly described by those whom we call "terrorists" as a response to violence that has been inflicted. Dr. Abdul Rantisi, a Palestinian founder of Hamas, explained to Juergensmeyer that Hamas was attempting to morally educate the Israelis: By actually experiencing the violence themselves, he hoped they would then be able to understand the Palestinian experience of Israeli occupation.

LOOKING AT THE DREAM EGO FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF THE CHARACTERS

Returning to the dream analogy, we can recall Hillman's warning that we are most likely to identify with the dream ego point of view; for many of us, that would be the victims of 9/11. For many others, the dream ego's point of view would be those attempting to send their message of violent protest. Thus we saw jubilant celebrations of the towers' assault in far too many corners of the world. To go beneath or beyond our habitual identifications and see into our blind spot where ego rules, we must inquire into how the dream ego is seen from the terrorists' point of view. This is not to say that the other characters have all the truth about the dream ego, but that their perspectives radically supplement what the ego can see about itself. From the montage above, it is clear that Americans are seen as hostile and aggressive foreign intruders, hungry for the satisfaction of our own material and economic interests, belittling

the cultures we plunder and exhibiting alarming disregard of human lives from these cultures. We are seen as lost in a sea of materialism, immoral, bent on the usurpation of other governments for our own profit. While we can argue against aspects of this dehumanizing and stereotyped portrait, it is exactly such a perspective that has allowed us to become targets. How does it feel from their perspectives? Consider families holding one of the million young children who have died as a direct result of America's intentional destruction of the water system infrastructure in Iraq and subsequent embargo; families holding the millions of children dying from AIDS in the Third World, thanks to an American control of market economy that protects the pharmaceutical profit-taking that precludes making AIDS drugs available to those locked in poverty; or families of those exterminated on the "Highway of Death" during the Gulf War; or those who have grown to adulthood in Palestinian refugee camps, where displacement has been the only reality; or those who have suffered repression and torture at the hands of repressive governments supported by the United States for economic reasons—all these millions experience Americans as Satanic in our disregard for life.

My montage has been taken from far-reaching locations—the Caribbean, Africa, Palestine, Pakistan, Lebanon, Afghanistan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia. Can we generalize at all about peoples so different? Unfortunately, colonization and globalization by Europe and America have molded these distinct locales in very similar ways. We find hundreds of local societies struggling to maintain the remnants of their culture and religion that have been nearly erased by the intrusion of dominant cultures. Ever since the various liberation movements dispelled the yoke of European colonialism, America has been in the forefront of this global monopolization.

REPEATING DREAMS

If we start from a viewpoint of interdependence, then we would recognize that our well-being is ineluctably bound up with the well-being of those living in Third World conditions, those half a world away, and those within our own cities and rural areas. The events of 9/11 attest to this spiritual and practical reality. Suddenly we find enemies we hardly know inside our threshold. While we abhor their tactics, let us listen closely to their "messages." While we may argue our individual innocence, let us understand how we are seen and the peril these perceptions lead to. Let us, as Maalouf advises, examine the way we look at these others: "For it is often the way we look at other people that imprisons them within their own narrowest allegiances, and it is also the way we

look at them that may set them free" (p. 22). May we find means of looking, listening, acting, and responding that do not re-inscribe their representations of us and the trauma of cultural imperialism against which they are fighting. Psychoanalysis would say that we must work through the counterprojective identifications, by surprising the other by acting in ways he or she would not expect, making it difficult and eventually impossible to continue seeing us as the enemy.

Unfortunately, our governmental policy has not responded to 9/11 in this way. We have met outrage at our military presence in the Middle East with a far heightened presence. We have met perceptions of our terrorism toward the Middle East with simple denial and further acts of violence that exacerbate this perception of us. We have met feelings of inferiority and impotence with continued re-inscription of our superiority and might. Jung would say that the dream, the nightmare, can only continue to recur as long as the ego point of view does not shift.

Jung defined individuation as a gradual differentiation from identifications with the collective. He could see the necessity for individuals to find their own moral compass so that movements like fascism could not engulf cultures and continents. We live in a different time, though the necessity to disidentify from taken-for-granted collective norms is every bit as crucial. It is up to each of us to work with the nightmare of 9/11, to listen to the various voices that compose its conflagration.

Dennis Rivers reminds us of the potential task each German faced during the Holocaust to become as aware as possible of what was being done in his or her name by the government of Germany, and afterwards to take a conscious stand in relation to what he or she had come to know. He asks each of us, as Americans, to pose the same task to ourselves: to seek consciousness about what is done in our name, to create a moral relationship to what we come to know, and to act and live out of these knowings.

We are each gifted, by our history and our character, with particular awarenesses that we can carry, share, and act in the light of. Some of us find a way to protest the present U.S. policy to consider the use of nuclear weapons as justifiable in some contexts; others protest the use of violence in the place of the legal justice system, or the misuse of the many for the excessive comforts of the few; some nurture compassion where hatred has prevailed. Whatever our gifts, it is part of our individuation—of living in honest and direct relation to what Jung called our lifeline—to honor our awareness with attention, action, and at times, protest.

If depth psychology is to help promote psychological understanding of the dynamics of terrorism and the psyches of terrorists, we must open our cannon to works such as those I have borrowed from in creat-

ing this montage. Alongside Jung and Winnicott, we need to read about depth psychological experiences and approaches to the psyche of those not addressed by our favorite theorists. This necessity highlights the Euro-American context of the genesis of the theories with which we are familiar, and the circumscribed limits of those theories' applicability. To my mind, 9/11 can serve as a wake-up call for depth psychology, inviting us to understand vast areas of human experience and suffering cast into the shadows by our own discipline. But let us note that while depth psychology has ignored the psychological ground of those we label "terrorists," its methods of working with symptom, dream, and suffering are ideally suited to help with individual and cultural processes of coming to greater consciousness, creating a ground for understanding and compassion, and, hopefully, fostering reconciliation and peace.

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