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## Supervision Groups for Volunteers Working with Victims of War and Terrorism: A Social Defense Perspective<sup>1</sup>

Orit Nuttman-Shwartz,<sup>3,4</sup> Enav Karniel Lauer,<sup>2</sup> and Shlomit Dassa Schindler<sup>2</sup>

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*This paper discusses the alternation of One-Ness (massification) and Me-Ness (aggregation) used by Israeli society as an unconscious defense mechanism in response to the war and terror, which have beset it since before the establishment of the state. In particular, it focuses on the unconscious meanings of this ongoing situation for the Israeli society that uses volunteers to help its many victims of war and terror and on the alternation of One-Ness and Me-Ness reflected in the supervision groups that the authors conduct for these volunteers.*

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**KEY WORDS:** terror; social trauma; social defense mechanisms; Me-Ness; One-Ness.

### INTRODUCTION

In this paper we discuss a social psychoanalytic perspective of coping with terror in Israeli society. This perspective regards society as an independent entity, which, like individuals, has its own history and values and its distinct conscious and unconscious motives. The interaction is perceived as a reflection of both individuals and the society in which they act. It views the developed

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social arrangements to deal with social problems not only as conscious choices but also as the unconscious defense mechanisms of the society.

Israeli society has always lived with war and terror. Since its inception, Israel has known seven full-fledged organized wars, and an endless succession of increasingly violent and deadly terror attacks on civilians in all parts of the country. In the 1990s, with the beginning of suicide bombings, terror hit the large cities more than it had in the past, claimed more casualties, and became objectively more difficult to prevent. The outburst of the second Intifada in September 2000 increased both the deadliness and prevalence of terror. Between September 2000 and the time of the present study (the end of 2002), more than 750 Israelis were killed and more than 2,000 were injured in terror attacks (in proportion to the size of the population in the United States this would be equivalent to some 20,000 killed and over 50,000 injured). The pervasive anxiety created by these attacks and the constant fear of the next strike naturally impinges on our ability to analyze, investigate, explore, and even on our ability to be good therapists. Nonetheless, this reality necessitates that we continue to observe, think, and write.

Recent studies indicate that there is a dispute between researchers regarding the functioning of Israeli society since the beginning of the last Intifada. Brom (2002) argues that the response of Israeli society is irrational, and that a large part of the population adopts an offensive attitude, or seeks repentance or other types of spiritual directions. Bleich, Gelkopf, and Solomon (2003) claim that the Israeli society function is "normal"—only 9% of the population suffers from posttraumatic symptoms, and Bar-On (2002) claims that this pattern of response depends on the victim's point of view. Israeli society is affected by the memory of the Holocaust and perceives the war and terror events as signs that "they intend to annihilate us." Because of the continuous threat, the general feeling is that the world is unsafe, that time is short, and that we will not reach old age. When children are the casualties, all our beliefs in justice and order collapse. The assumption that "it will not happen to me" is also shattered (Solomon, 2002). At the same time, a recent survey by Bleich and colleagues (2003) underscored a persistent sense of invulnerability among Israelis: 83% reported satisfaction from life despite the traumatic events.

The present paper focuses on the analysis of supervision groups conducted by the authors for volunteers who help victims of terror and war. We argue that the dynamic that develops in these groups mimics the unconscious response of society to life in the shadow of these traumas. We have adopted Hopper's (2001) conceptualization of the dynamics of a traumatized society. His approach guided in dealing with victims, volunteers, and therapists in Israel, who unfortunately are all submerged in terror sooner or later. The supervision groups for volunteers have been in operation since the mid-nineties, and the defenses described here date back to this time or even earlier.

## THE ENCOUNTER BETWEEN THE “SELF” AND THE “OTHER”

How does the individual develop the capacity to relate to others and cope with stress? The inner mental construct of self, others, and various self-others develops in a relational context. In infants, maturational processes produce separation distress. These same processes result in an enhanced ability to retrieve and hold a schema of past experience and to generate representations of possible future events. Separation reactions are important to building coping mechanisms in stress conditions. This is a natural process used by infants that leads to a differentiation between the self and other.

What causes the blurring of boundaries between the self and the others? Trauma has been defined as a condition in which the tie to an object is shattered, perhaps irreparably. It is a notion of betrayal, at present and in the future, which hardens the self to further transformation, and it is accompanied by a pervasive sense of imminent devastation. Expectations for control, agency, and self-determination of the individual are replaced by feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, and despair. Dealing with traumatic states requires a mutual interaction with another or others (Stern, 1983).

To understand this intrapsychic mechanism we rely on Mahler's assumption that the infant's ego must be protected from stress. The infant needs to be protected from internal and external traumas, which is accomplished by a symbiotic “delusion.” The delusion of a common boundary reduces anxiety and that “even if infants could distinguish self from other very early in life on perceptual grounds, they would not do so for protective or defensive reasons” (Stern, 1983, p. 55). The persistence and redevelopment of these states of mind in response to annihilation anxiety, fragmentation of identity, and confusion between self and other are ubiquitous, even for those who have not been severely traumatized (Billow, 2001).

Volkan (1999) states that individuals faced with the real possibility of annihilation need to feel a part of a large and protective “tent” and tend to see their personal identity in terms of a social identity, as being part of a large group. They then sense a “we-ness.” This phenomenon is common in a time of existential threat. The individual and the society endeavor to protect the integrity of each by blurring the boundaries between the *self* and the *society*.

## SOCIETY IN THE SHADOW OF TERROR: THE SOCIAL-PSYCHOANALYTIC PERSPECTIVE

Unlike individuals, a society does not have the ability to think, and therefore cannot interpret or understand the impact of the social and cultural forces

that affect it. There are two phases that develop in response to these forces: conscious and unconscious. On the conscious level, they aim to organize and facilitate appropriate social functioning, and on the unconscious level (Hopper, 1996), they serve as a defense mechanism that helps the society to cope with anxiety.

Acts of war and terror do not undergo any transformation, but remain unchanged, and are not affected by time and experience. Thus, each community-wide traumatic event will cause emotional turmoil and long-term feelings of helplessness, from which the community protects itself with unconscious defense mechanisms (Biran, 1997; Malkinson and Witztum, 2000; Volkan, 2001).

Individuals protect themselves from accumulated acts of social or political terror by a mechanism of encapsulation (Hopper, 1991). That is, they wrap all their soft and vulnerable parts in armor and insulate themselves emotionally. This defense creates flat and shallow social discourse. It makes people apathetic and turns them into outside observers of sick and cruel human phenomena that may disrupt the normal routine of their daily lives at any moment (Hopper, 1996).

Based on Bion's theory of groups, the literature describes two opposing mechanisms used by the society to deal with the existential threats posed by war and terrorism. According to Bion (1961), any group of people that meets to carry out a task is divided into two groups, or two configurations of mental activity. One is the sophisticated *work* group, which works, thinks, and carries out the primary task with a modicum of consciousness and self-awareness. The other one is the *basic assumption* group, whose members behave as though they share the same tacit, unconscious assumptions and is oriented toward inner fantasy, not toward external reality. Bion termed three basic assumptions: *dependency*, *fight/flight*, and *pairing*. He claims that the sophisticated work group is "constantly perturbed by influences that come from other groups' mental phenomena" (Bion, 1961, p. 129). His theory was developed to encompass the behavior of large groups and of society as a whole. In 1974, Turquet added a fourth basic assumption, which he termed *One-Ness*. It refers to the desire of individuals to be part of a unified, strong, and omnipotent group. Through passive participation in the group they hope to protect the self and to feel alive, content, and whole. As Turquet phrased it, "the group member is there to be lost in oceanic feelings of unity or, if the One-Ness is filled, to be a part of a Salvationist inclusion" (1975, p. 360). Blurring of boundaries between the individual and the group has a calming effect and bestows a feeling of safety. One-Ness can often be found in nationalist movements.

More recently, Lawrence, Bain, and Gould (1996) termed a fifth basic assumption *Me-Ness*, which they defined as the opposite of One-Ness. Me-Ness is reflected in selfishness and ignoring community interests and, according to

the authors, is another way of coping with existential anxiety. According to their definition, Me-Ness is the defense mechanism of persons who “feel that it has become dangerous to rely on any social structure [and] thus emphasize the ‘I’ and do not recognize the value of the group. [People employing the “Me-Ness” defense] feel that their self is of utmost importance and strive to protect it and fortify themselves within it” (Lawrence et al., 1996, p. 42).

Hopper (1997, 2001) suggests that traumatized societies on the therapeutic group level, and on the societal level as a whole, oscillate between One-Ness, which he terms *massification*, and Me-Ness, which he terms *aggregation*.

The defensive oscillation between these two poles is demonstrated in Israeli society. Contemporary Israeli society is driven by social, ethnic, and political differences. In the mix are social alienation and violence, strong bonds of common history and common fate, as well as a shared sense of isolation and existential threat from hostile neighbors and a hostile world (Bar-On, 2002; Nuttman-Shwartz and Wienberg, 2002).

Oscillation between One-Ness and Me-Ness has been the typical social response to terror attacks in the last decade in Israel. Typically, the attacks, large or small, are followed by a mass immersion, with minute-by-minute TV and radio coverage that shows the casualties and the wreckage, the ambulances, the evacuation of the victims, and the arrival of casualties at the hospitals. The tears, screams, confusion, outrage, and seemingly endless commentary are followed by short biographies of the victims, their funeral announcements, and interviews with the bereaved families and victims’ friends. This coverage is driven by the communal sense of shared threat, but at the same time serves to create a temporary and tenuous sense of solidarity in a common grief—a sense of One-Ness. Yet, already during the immersion process, there is a pulling away from the tragedy into an almost frantic Me-Ness. The authorities rush in to remove the debris and repair the shattered streets and store fronts. Within hours, the cafes and restaurants in the area of the attack reopen, customers return to the shops, and life returns to the briefly emptied streets, as people go about their personal errands. By the next day, if not earlier, the media declares that everything is back to “normal” or “routine.” The victims themselves are soon forgotten, except by those who are close to them.

### ISRAEL’S SOCIAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR COPING WITH TERROR

The oscillation is reflected in the numerous arrangements established by Israeli society to enable it to function in a reality of war and terror that have beset it since its inception. These measures include well-trained and deployed

civil and security guards that protect schools, public buildings, and places of entertainment. In addition, other arrangements include medical units that focus on emergency treatment and physical rehabilitation, financial compensation for the injured and bereaved, and a special department for terror victims in the National Insurance Institute that provides a variety of services, including psychological assistance.

Over the years, various organizations (including the National Insurance Institute, the Ministry of Defense, and a voluntary association for Holocaust survivors) have carefully mobilized selected volunteers to help and befriend trauma victims. The idea was that these volunteers could add a personal touch, help to alleviate some of the victims' distress and reduce their sense of alienation. Each volunteer generally works with one or two families, whom he or she visits at home on a regular weekly or bi-weekly basis for an unlimited period of time. The aid contains long-term emotional problems that accompany bereavement, loss, and mourning, and offers support and company (Avrahami and Dar, 1995; Fisher and Schaffer, 1983; Gidron, 1983). Supervision groups were organized to help the volunteers in their task.

Societal arrangements, according to Hooper (1997), operate on two levels. One is the conscious, instrumental level and the other is at the level of unconscious societal defense against its anxieties. The volunteers and the helping responses to attacks enable Israeli society to comfort itself with the knowledge that the victims are being cared for and, at the same time, to reduce the anxieties provoked by the victims and their traumas. In other words, supervision groups for volunteers that work with trauma victims are a conscious social arrangement, which serves the society, deals with its trauma victims, professionals, and the involved volunteers, and, at the same time, serves as an unconscious societal defense mechanism.

To understand the therapy group, especially groups affected by social traumas, it is essential to understand the societal context in which the group operates. The difficulties of the volunteer groups reflect the unconscious difficulties of Israeli society to come to terms with existential threats.

In the face of the great anxieties evoked by its many terror victims, Israeli society is caught in a perpetual dilemma between two conflicting ways of protecting its integrity. The conflicting responses are the taking care of the victims and distancing itself from their suffering. The first way represents *One-Ness* and the second *Me-Ness*.

To restate the main point of this paper, the processes of *One-Ness*/masification and *Me-Ness*/aggregation, used by the Israeli society to cope with war and terror, occur also in the support and supervision groups for volunteers.

## THE VOLUNTEER GROUPS

Treatment of bereaved families and national terror victims commenced after the Yom Kippur War in 1973. Twenty-five volunteer groups operating under professional supervision were formed in order to treat bereaved families. The volunteers enable the institutional system to continue to cope with the growing number of victims, and may be an expression of either survival or functioning (Bleich et al., 2003) or of distancing (Giron, Ginzburg, and Solomon, 2003; Nuttman-Shwartz, 2003).

The supervision conducted for groups of volunteers generally follows a three-stage process. In the first stage, most of the work is devoted to building up the group and reinforcing the volunteers' readiness to help the victims. In the second stage, the work focuses on developing and maintaining the ability to form a helping bond. In the third stage, the work extends to dealing with the personal problems of the volunteers. The group members are deeply concerned with survival issues of the group, of the often ill and aging families they have to work with, of Israeli society, and of the State of Israel. The issue of survival has become more central as the terrorist threat has mounted. The groups' defense mechanisms are similar to those of the society: splitting, such as division between Western (whose origin is mostly from European and American countries) and Eastern (whose origin is mostly from north Africa and Middle Eastern countries), projection, such as expression of anger toward the therapist/prime minister, disassociation, and acting out, such as breaking the law on the road by driving fast, or in the group as latecomers, as well as repression and identification with the victim.

The two following illustrations are drawn from the same supervision group for volunteers, consisting of 15 married women, 38 to 75 years old, of relatively low socioeconomic status. The members are volunteers who worked with bereaved families that lost a child or a spouse in acts of war or terror, and have also themselves lost a loved one in similar circumstances. The group has been meeting once every two weeks for six years. One-Ness and Me-Ness co-exist throughout the life of the groups, but one or another becomes prominent in the face of different threats. These defenses occurred when the group was in an advanced stage, the helping bond had already been formed, and the women were dealing with their personal problems, in addition to the issues that emerged in their volunteer work.

### ME-NESS/AGGREGATION VIGNETTE

Me-ness/aggregation stood out as the predominant basic assumption throughout the three years of the group's history. At one point, several events



in Israel seemed to upset a previous sense of equilibrium. The Israeli Army left Lebanon (May 24, 2000) in a way that some people viewed as a long overdue measure and others as a shameful act. For many group members the withdrawal contributed to an ongoing erosion in the status of the army and intensified uncertainties about its ability to defend the country. At the same time, the peace talks that were being pursued by Israel's Prime Minister Barak made many group members, who tended to identify with Israel's right wing, anxious. They believed that after returning territories to the Palestinians the country would become dangerously small and vulnerable, that the Palestinians could not be trusted to fulfill their side of the agreement, and that the "national home would be dismantled."

The volunteers tried to cope with their anxieties, as do many in the population, with an exaggerated focus on themselves. They preferred to talk about their personal problems rather than discuss the problems of the bereaved families. Some wondered, "Why does society have to take care of the bereaved families?" Some expressed anger at the demands made by families or blamed the families for taking advantage of the privileges that the government gives them and boasted that they—the volunteers—had coped better with their own traumatic experiences. They also behaved rather selfishly toward one another. Many were late to group meetings, interrupted, and laughed at each other. They were angered easily and impatient and showed less empathy to others. They rejected feedback, both from their peers and their group leader. In addition, group members tended to break into subgroups, each devaluing the others, and also to compete for "a favored group member" status. Me-Ness penetrated into the group, as demonstrated in the following vignette:

*Nati*: "I want to tell about my trip, it was wonderful. I was in Europe, they have so much water, not like in Israel."

While she talks the women chat and do not listen to her. *Nati* turns and looks at the group leader and continues to talk. The group leader says: "The group meeting begins." *Yona* is late; she enters the room, stops in the middle of the room, then smiles, approaches *Tova*, kisses her, and sits down.

*Shoshana* [talks to *Yona*]: "How nice to see you."

*The group leader*: "It seems that each one of you is talking to herself."

*Sara*: "This isn't the objective; maybe we can start working. I am not interested in the trip or the dress, what about the families?"

*Shoshana*: "I am fed up. My problems are bigger. Anyhow, every time we talk here you mention the families, somebody should treat us for a while."

*Ziva*: "What about the pictures? *Sara*, you wedded your daughter, did you bring the pictures?"

*The group leader*: "I would like us to examine what happened here. What prevents us from listening to one another, to relate to what is being said, to listen?"

The work concept of the group leader is that the working atmosphere in the group is conditional to work on the primary task—working on the relationships with and the needs of the families.

Sometime later *Shoshana* says: "I feel that it is so sad here, that we are hopeless, desperate. Maybe we come here to help ourselves and not the families."

*Nati and Yona together:* "What are you talking about, everything is fine."

*Tova:* "I am really desperate and fear that the border will be close to my home, like in the '50s."

Behind these behaviors was the fantasy that if each one looked after herself and ignored the others, she could, somehow, escape being harmed by threats to the larger society. During this period Israeli society was characterized by the same behaviors and governing fantasy.

It seems that on the surface level the unconscious defensive behavior of the group is expressed in resistance to continue to treat the families but, at the same time, we assume that, because of the concrete existential threat, the groups devalue the other, the group, and the society, and rely only on the self (Me-Ness).

### ONE-NESS/MASSIFICATION VIGNETTE

In agreement with Hopper's (2001) claim, we view massification as a masking of feelings of rage and destructiveness. Such feelings give an illusion of power and strengthen the aggressiveness, the rage, and the hostility that the groups feel and tend to act upon.

One-Ness could be seen as the dominant basic assumption in the wake of a terror attack in which a Palestinian bus driver rammed his bus into a group of young Israelis at a bus stop, killing or badly injuring most of them. Five of the fatalities were from the group members' small town. This was only one of many attacks during the same period, but its proximity made it more threatening to the group members.

For some time preceding this event, the group had been pursuing its primary task in an enabling environment, marked by attentive listening and mutual tolerance, problem solving, and help. There was sufficient room for diverse feelings and opinions and for each group member to express her own individuality, without impinging on the individuality of others. Following the attack and the deaths of the young people from their town, the behavior of the group changed radically. The primary task of dealing with the problems that arose in their encounters with the bereaved families was sidelined, and the group became rather a monolithic block. All of them expressed strong anti-Arab opinions and refused to listen to any previously tolerated criticism of the Israeli government, the Ministry of Defense, or Israeli society. They created a rather false image of the group as if all was well, telling one another how warm and altruistic they were, what wonderful work they were doing, how fantastic it was to get together for meetings, as illustrated below:

Nati brings fruit from her farm to the group meeting and asks to play a tape in the meeting. The group listens to Nati's voice telling about her son's death in the war and then she adds: "I am so glad to be in this group. We are all together here, it is so cool."

*Yona joins immediately:* "When you talk my eyes are full with tears. For me this group is like a CD with good music. I am so empowered here. I am glad that we are friends."

*Tova continues:* "The family I am working with says that it would have been impossible without me. I feel that I am contributing. I keep marveling that there are so many good people here."

*Tova says:* "All of us were present at the cemetery yesterday. It really warms the heart. I feel that we are a special nation, a special group."

The group leader invites the group members to relate to Nati. The members continue with the general comments. After a few more reflections on the positive atmosphere and the bond between the group members the group leader suggests they examine what is missing, what is difficult to see or hear, what has been avoided?

*Shirley bursts out:* "The fear that tomorrow it might be my daughter. Look what happened to Simona, it happened to Nati . . . a great fear, don't spoil it." [in anger] "Let us be together, to believe that we will win, that we are a strong nation surrounded by enemies. Don't spoil it for us."

Expression of reservations, not to mention negative feelings, was a taboo. Challenging the consensus was rejected abruptly, and the few members who tried to express a different "voice" were silenced. The frequency of their visits to the bereaved families was increased and they tended to help the newly bereaved (e. g., bringing food, helping with funeral arrangements). These activities were accompanied by statements such as "We must volunteer," "The families gave their blood for the country," "We're all one people," which reflected the strained Israeli myth of being "one large cohesive family." It reflected the attempt of group members to recapture the mythical social unity of the pre-state and early-state periods.

The fantasy behind these behaviors was the strength of unity: if all of them are together, if they act as one, they will be safe from harm.

## DYNAMIC GROUP PROCESSES

The in-group and out-group unconscious reactions in the meetings reflected the transference and the countertransference between the group and the group leader. The group members were reacting intensively to daily events that took place in Israel. They discussed the extensive reports in the media on various issues, especially on those concerned with casualties, loss, and bereavement, but also reports and commentaries on political disputes between the right and left wings and on Western and Eastern social dilemmas. Social issues are very important to them, but they tried to exclude the group leader from their discussions on who is against whom: "You are rich, Ashkenazi (Western)

and undoubtedly vote for the left wing," or "We are poor, we are part of the Israeli people, but we came from Arab countries and therefore we tell you to beware of them (the Palestinians)." The level of pressure among new members, who joined the group recently and lived in an area where missiles fell close to their homes, increased after such events. They expected the therapist to be their savior: "You can tell us, you understand, will there be peace and better times?"

The group leader helped the group to express their anxieties and to understand that the tension within the group was a reaction. However, sometimes the group leader's hands were tied, she too was devastated with the separation and fear, and, like the group members, identified with one side and unconsciously strengthened the fear within the group. The group responded to this countertransference. The group leader was affected by three factors: Israeli society, the treated bereaved families, and the volunteers. Traumatic events intensify the anxiety in the group meetings and the supervision task becomes much more difficult.

On the way to one of the group meetings, the group leader heard a warning that a Kasam missile attack might be imminent in the region. At that moment she was thinking about herself as a person, a parent, the threatened group members, and the bereaved families. The meeting was dedicated to sharing and it was unclear who was treating whom. Similar findings were reported after the Desert Storm War (Kretch, Ben-Yakar, Baruch, and Roth, 1997). The need to leave the danger behind the door and create an isolated bubble was found in other groups in Israel (Nuttman-Shwartz and Shay, 2003).

To generalize from this case example: Frequently, the group leader successfully acts without memory and desire (Bion, 1988) as an exile from another place, which enables the group to discuss and process anxiety and then to move from self-occupation to the primary task. On such occasions the group leader acts as a container for the group. Other times the group helps manage the anxiety level of the group leader and enables her to supervise. Sometimes both the group leader and the group are trapped in defensive avoidance of their primary task—supervision.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This paper portrays three parallel group processes and the interrelations among them: the therapist and the volunteer group; the volunteers and their clients; and Israeli society. In the case illustration, as commonly happens, the volunteer group, mostly composed of previously bereaved women, coped with containing their own unfinished feelings by caring for others in similar situations. The supervision group provided the volunteers an opportunity to vent

their own problems, by caring for others and possibly by distancing from their own problems.

The alternation of One-Ness and Me-Ness in the volunteer group reflected the dialectics between the volunteers' need to blur their personal differences and join in a single unity and the need of each of them to preserve herself by negating the others. The group reflected the dynamics and defensive efforts within the entire Israeli society, and underscored the difficulties inherent in conducting both the group and social interactions in Israel.

Participation in the group already signifies the oscillation between One-Ness and Me-Ness. Concerned about the injured citizens, the society uses the volunteers as "second agents" who have been there, and might be able to treat themselves through the supervision group for volunteers. One-Ness, and belonging to a supervision group for volunteers, enables them to help the bereaved, but at the same time it has a therapeutic effect—Me-Ness.

We are aware of the fact that these defensive maneuvers make them more prone to further trauma, since they become very needy themselves as the group meetings serve as a therapy milieu for them. If the therapist fails to cope sufficiently with group anxieties, individuals might suffer the type of trauma described by Hopper (1997), when an authority figure in a crisis fails to meet and cope with the members' intense need for dependency.

Trauma, as mentioned above, has been defined as a condition in which the tie to the object is shattered, perhaps irreparably. Repairing of traumatic states requires a mutual regulation with another or others (Stern, 1983). We described attempts to repair by means of participation in one or more of the supervision groups for volunteers. As a result of a traumatic event that is followed by imperative dependency needs, the therapist has to encounter an implicit demand to cope with the disarray of the group members. Failure to manage these needs results in impotent rage of the group, and might also result in a "closed system" in the group. The group will oscillate back and forth from being a group of "singletons" (aggregation) to being a group in which fusion of the members blurs their identity (massification), and neither extreme enables authenticity for the therapeutic movement of the group, as described in Bion's basic assumptions (1961). It is as if the group is blindly seeking a way to cope with its own trauma, and fumbles about for relief. The therapist can be "locked out" of such a system for not being able to repair the situation adequately, and it becomes difficult for her to find a way back into the group. Examining parallel processes, one might ask in the supervision group for volunteers, who and what are contained in Israeli society in general and in the volunteer groups in particular?

In this article we illustrated the types of container-contained situations that provide transformation through symbiotic confrontation, both benevolent

and hostile, between container and contained. If this mutual effort is confronted and therapeutically worked through, growth is possible; otherwise it can be destructive for both—container and contained. As can be seen in the supervision group for volunteers, the group displayed aggregation and massification defenses, countertransference duals of the collective basic assumption transference, while at times the group members maintained work group functions.

In conclusion, the volunteer group acts as an unconscious defense mechanism for Israeli society, and also enables it to avoid a confrontation with its own traumatization. This helps Israelis to exist under the threats of terror and war. There has never been any public discussion about how Israeli society should relate to its victims of war and terror, or about the traumatized state of Israeli society. The Israeli traumas have been too great to work through, and the way Israelis cope are affected not only by the constant wars and terror, but also by the World War II trauma of the Nazi Holocaust, which eradicated a large portion of the Jewish population.

On the conscious level the volunteers offer genuine and much needed help to the victims. On the unconscious level, the reliance of Israeli society on volunteers may enable it to preserve the myth of One-Ness needed to maintain a sense of safety in the face of continuous war and terror. This practice may also preserve a defense mechanism that impedes the processes of mourning, internalization, and symbolization essential to working through traumatic events and weaving them into the national narrative (Hopper, 1997; Volkan, 2001).

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