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CHAPTER NINE

Manifestations of psychic retreats in social systems

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Introduction

This chapter will consider the manifestations of "psychic retreats" (Britton, 1998; Grotstein, 2009; Steiner, 1993) in social systems ranging from dyads to societies in the context of traumatogenic processes, especially in connection with the theory and concept of the social unconscious (Hopper, 2003a; Weinberg, 2007). These manifestations are usually troublesome, but obscure, which may be one reason why they have rarely been explored and discussed. However, they underlie much social pathology and social trauma, including their transgenerational repetition, through unconscious co-creation of specific social–psychic formations within social systems, which I call "social–psychic retreats'.

According to Steiner, psychic retreats are internal "pathological organizations" involving highly structured and closely knit systems of defences and object relations. Formed initially out of desperation, these sabotaging, self-protecting, and self-organizing internal subsystems are actually sub-personalities, which provide alternative shelters from human relationships and from reality in general. In their very essence is a paradox: they both protect and

imprison the vital parts of the self. They could be located on the continuum that ranges from taking over almost the whole of the personality (as in the cases of some psychotic and severely borderline patients) to only small parts of it (as in the cases of some slightly neurotic or normal individuals). Discovered first as resistance to treatment, they are found to cause serious difficulties in various interpersonal relations, functioning as obstacles to many life processes, to their free flow and joy.

Since early psychoanalytic writings, phenomena similar to psychic retreats have been described under various names: "internal saboteurs" (Fairbairn, 1952), "fantasizing" (Winnicott, 1971), "internal gang" or "Mafia" (Rosenfeld, 1971) "claustrum" (Meltzer, 1992), "encapsulations" (Hopper, 1991; Klein, 1980; Tustin, 1987), among others. In the post-Kleinian literature, which includes the work of Steiner, such phenomena are always regarded as pathological. However, it still remains debatable whether in certain circumstances, especially in connection with trauma, some of them might be considered as "normal" defensive organizations, which are helpful for survival because they protect the person from greater regression and provide a sort of transient arrest or moratorium to development until the capacities for growth recover. In fact, the work of those who have considered the possibility of "normal" versions of these sets of psychic phenomena may be located in another mainstream of psychoanalytic thinking, in which are those authors who also take into consideration the involvement of the fears of annihilation and autistic anxieties and defences against them arising within a developmental position that is prior to the paranoid–schizoid position, such as Ogden's work on the autistic–contiguous position (1989), various studies on "encapsulations", "autistic features" (Klein, 1980), "autistic retreats" (Barrow, 2008), among others. Hopper (1991) clearly emphasized their positive aspects within his concept of "positive encapsulations" and their positive manifestations in social formations, especially in traumatized societies. Therefore, the links between Hopper's concept of encapsulations and psychic retreats are of particular relevance for this discussion.

"Social–psychic retreats", unconsciously formed within groups, families, organizations, and societies, might also be more positive or more negative, as well as partial or total. Transiently or

permanently, they become properties of the dynamic and foundation matrices of these social systems. The members of these social systems tend to be unconscious of their social-psychic retreats, as they are of their personal psychic retreats. Thus, we may discuss these phenomena in terms of the social unconscious.

Many similarities between intra-psychic pathological organizations and social pathological organizations have been noted, but this has been mainly in order to convey the nature of the internal organization, rather than the other way around. The *locus classicus* of this is Rosenfeld's (1971) description of Mafia-like internal organizations:

> The destructive narcissism of these patients appears (to be) highly organized, as if we are dealing with a powerful gang dominated by a leader, who controls all the members of the gang . . . so that they will not desert the destructive organization and join the positive parts of the self. [p. 175]

It is argued that the life of the Gestapo and other terrorizing organizations tends to reflect this terrifying and life-sabotaging internal drama.

Possibilities for linking these internal prisons with social–psychic formations are offered by Bion's theory of "reversible" and "shifting" perspectives for achieving binocular vision in order to enable the perception of individuals within the context of their groups, and can similarly be found in Foulkes's discussions of the *gestalt* of the figure and ground of an observer's perceptions, and in Pines' (1998) discussion of frames of reference. However, these discussions pertain to the elucidation of psychic life as distinct from its manifestations in social systems in general, and do not pertain to psychic retreats and social–psychic retreats specifically. Neither do they address the aetiology of either. However, in common with many other writers on these subjects, I suggest that the manifestations within the external world of these unconscious psychic phenomena that are beneath symbolization and associated with profound anxieties are a matter of projective and introjective processes, and other forms of internalization and externalization, including projective and introjective identifications. The motives for the recreation of internal life in the external world are many, but the

most important include the compulsion to control, to evacuate, and to attack, and, above all, to enact in the service of communication: that is, to engage in an unconscious narrative process in which people are seduced into the internal drama. Traumatophilia would seem to be central to such processes (Hopper, 2003b).

Unconscious intra-psychic processes are not the only sources of social–psychic retreats, which must be understood within their social, historical, and political context. Social–psychic retreats are recapitulated within component subsystems of larger, more total social systems, and vice versa. In other words, it is necessary to take an open-systems perspective. This phenomenon is often discussed in terms of "parallel processes", but "equivalence" allows for the assignment of importance and priority to various causal processes.

It should be noted at the outset that I am not able to discuss the aetiology of profoundly painful anxieties or of specific defensive processes by which psychic retreats are constructed. Neither am I able to discuss the structures and functions of the social–psychic retreats and how they might, in turn, cause further fear of annihilation. However, I do provide numerous examples of social–psychic retreats, and discuss possibilities for healing processes ranging from psychotherapy to the political activities of citizens.

More about "psychic retreats"

The literature

The roots of the concept of psychic retreats can be traced to many early psychoanalytical studies, mainly in connection with chronic obstacles to treatment, including negative therapeutic reactions. The professional literature on the subject involves an almost infinite network of ideas, as if mirroring the very image of the phenomenon itself, ranging from Abraham's (1927) "narcissistic resistance" and Reich's (1933) "character armour" to the work of Kleinian authors such as Segal, Joseph, and O'Shaughnessy, who have described patients who are trapped in powerful defensive systems. Especially important are Klein's (1980) study of autistic phenomena and Meltzer's (1992) discussion of the "claustrum". Grotstein (2009) holds that psychic retreats are a hidden source of all analytical resistance.

The actual terms "psychic retreat" and "pathological organization" were introduced by Steiner (1993) on the basis of his clinical experience with "borderline patients":

> a psychic retreat provides the patient with an area of relative peace and protection from strain when meaningful contact with the analyst is experienced as threatening . . . serious technical problems arise in patients who turn to a psychic retreat, habitually, excessively, and indiscriminately. [p. 1]

For Steiner, it is a family of defensive systems and object relations, which facilitate the escape from difficult feelings through the avoidance of contact with people and "reality". Such retreats help people to tolerate the pain of the vicissitudes of the paranoid–schizoid and the depressive positions by providing a "slip" into a third, intermediate and default, position. In these asylums, they feel protected, yet often still in pain. According to Britton (1998), regressive movement into this position of non-development and non-object relating may take place from any level of the continuum between the two positions, whereby he distinguishes retreats organized as "quasi-paranoid–schizoid positions" or as "quasi-depressive positions'.

By the term "retreats", Steiner refers to withdawal into states that are often experienced spatially as if they were places in which the patient could hide. They may appear consciously, or, in unconscious fantasy, as literal spaces: a cave, an island, a desert, or take an interpersonal form, usually as an organization of objects or part-objects which offer to provide security and which may be represented as a business organization, a religious sect, a totalitarian government, or a Mafia-like gang.

Thus, the internal pathological organization "contains" the anxiety, offering itself as a protector, but at the same time dominating the personality. The equilibrium is reached at the cost of a developmental stasis. Actually, the person is trapped in an omnipotent organization, from which there is no escape, but in which, in a perverse way, one finds narcissistic and masochistic gratifications. Steiner argues that psychic retreats can be found in both neurotic and more normal persons, although always pathological.

Sisyphus and mimicry of the alternative world

Everything is *difficult* about psychic retreats. Repetitive, endless difficulty is their essence, and Sisyphus might be their logo. First, they were discovered by "difficult patients", and so psychic retreats themselves are difficult to understand, to cope with, and to change. Anyone who tries to help a person who is caught in the throes of a psychic retreat is likely to be sucked into it, and sooner or later is likely to feel stuck, robbed of vitality and a sense of meaningful motivation. This is accurately described in Sartre's *No Exit* and in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. The negative power of these systems is based on perfidious and continuous "attacks on linking" with good external and good internal objects. Psychic retreats may appear to be "transitional spaces" (Winnicott, 1971), which are essential for human development, but actually they are obstacles to progress. Although, they seem to be creative spaces for dreaming, in fact they are fantasizing, static, and energy absorbing. They are spaces for perverse mimicry, tending to distort and misuse good objects, truth, and reality. They are like the rocks on which mermaids appear in an effort to lure lost and starving sailors in *The Odyssey*. Psychic retreats are not ontologically grounded, in that they lack power and energy in their own right, but take their power parasitically from the selfhood of the person. They exist on the edges, margins, and peripheries, from where they convey their repetitive circles of simultaneous acceptances and disavowals, endless agreements and disagreements, back and forth, in and out, fantasizing and in touch with reality, invisible and visible . . . all of which generate vagueness. At best, we see only parts of this internal drama, and only a few of the main roles within it, rarely more than a glimpse of their figurations.

The basic scenes of the internal drama

The basic scenario: the victim, the oppressor, and his terrorizing regime. The central role of the victim is taken by the authentic self, or part of it, unreachable, imprisoned in frozen pain and terror. The *politics of the internal regime* is characterized by expertise in manipulation, especially around barriers and boundaries between

relations inside and outside its territory. Although this "hidden self" may be visible, at least faintly, the "ruling establishment", which organizes the pathological system, is even more invisible. Its Emperor always has new clothes! The primitive internal society sketched by Bion and elaborated by Rosenfeld operates in, and at the depth of, human minds. The drama of the internal world is a political one in which an internal establishment seeks to maintain its control by using lies and, ultimately, violence. The boundaries between the victim and the oppressor are kept blurred by self-regulating aspects of the drama, in that the subjects are always willing to be "taken-in" by the system (Hoggett, 1998).

The role of the superego is significant, because it is likely to be a "destructive superego", and the "bad" object is very often placed there. The dynamics around the "bad" object is certainly especially important: for example, how it conducts its power and organizes its relationships, and the areas in which it operates. Thus, in some cases, the "bad" object might be a destructive omnipotent object that becomes an internal totalitarian dictator. This may also be seen in what appears to be an opposite formation, that is, a figure of a child in a coffin, or a Snow White or Sleeping Beauty who has been anaesthetized or poisoned. When the good objects are unable to contain the self, attachments break down. The self is directly exposed to a "nameless dread", and, left without alpha-functions, the "alpha function in reverse" occurs. An agglomeration of unmetabolized beta-elements and its half products, so-called "balpha-elements" (Ferro, 2005) occur, and form a beta-screen around those split-off contents, thus holding the psychic retreat together (Grotstein, 2009). It is often difficult to distinguish the capsule/screen from the "bad" object itself. "Negative containment" and the "parasitical type of container–contained relationship" (Bion, 1970) keep the imprisoned self inside a totally diverted perspective of the world. −K dominates over the space, turning the logic on its head in often bizarre ways.

Encapsulations and psychic retreats

Following the work of Fairbairn, Bion, Winnicott, and especially Tustin's (1987) elucidation of autistic defences and encapsulations,

Hopper (1991) reformulated a theory of encapsulation in the context of traumatogenic processes, defining them as: "a defence against annihilation anxiety through which a person attempts to enclose, encase and to seal-off the sensations, affects and representations associated with it", such that the entire traumatic experience is encysted or encapsulated, producing "autistic islands of experience". The fears of annihilation are linked to intra-uterine and birth experience, thus, originating before the paranoid–schizoid position takes root. The key parts of the self are trapped in repetitive movements in non-developmental processes within the autistic chamber. This is the basis for their formation as prototypes or moulds for their formations associated with traumatic experience later in life.

They can be "negative", primarily in order to seal off horrendous experience and bad objects, or "positive", primarily in order to seal off the essentially healthy parts of the self and the good object from overwhelmingly bad experiences. Hopper also suggests that negative encapsulations are manifest in various kinds of social formation, especially in traumatized societies, such as enclaves and ghettos, which may be voluntary but which reflect splitting and scapegoating processes in the wider society. Positive encapsulations are also manifest in various kinds of social formation, especially in the social systems of traumatized societies, and this can be seen in the subgroups that attempt to hold more hopeful and resilient possibilities, partly for themselves and partly for the wider society.

In connection with his theory of the fourth basic assumption in the unconscious life of traumatized social systems, which he terms Incohesion: aggregation/massification or (ba) I:A/M, Hopper suggests that massification processes are, in effect, attempts to encapsulate the total social system. This is not only an expression of fusionary and confusionary interpersonal relations, but also an expression of wishes to merge with the hallucinated mind and body of the mother. Such wishful dynamics is based not only on the assumption of original bliss, but also on traumatophilia in search of the original trauma and the compulsion to repeat it.

An integrated version

Integrating these two concepts with my clinical experience, I would suggest that encapsulations, in Hopper's terms, are either a version

of pathological organizations or an integral part of it: as such, existing either on their own, or as part of a larger and more complex pathological organization. The most terrorizing anxieties, the annihilation fears, are lodged and enclosed within the encapsulation, whereas paranoid–schizoid and depressive anxieties are placed more in the wider area of the pathological organization. It is most difficult to reach the contents of the encapsulation. The pain is lodged in the chamber, but not suffered (Bion, 1970; Symington, 2000). There are many variations concerning internal relations of these phenomena, such as the devastating experience of the "black hole" placed either in the self (Tustin, 1987) or in the object (Pecotic, 2002), or the location of the internal barriers, etc. We often discover multiple functions of the barriers: both to keep *in* the trauma and to keep *out* the annihilating persecutor, or to avoid contact and to make adhesive contact with the barrier itself, or a defensive function and a retreat as pleasure. Hopper used a metaphor of a nest of internal Russian dolls in order to convey the sense of encapsulations within encapsulations, some of which are positive and some of which are negative. In such complex cases, to understand empathically the position of "in" and "out" concerning the traumatiz*ing* and traumatiz*ed* parts requires Bion's "shifting" perspective.

As an equivalence phenomenon, we also find that in social encapsulations within social–psychic retreats there are many variations concerning what is kept inside or outside the barrier, the position of the bad (traumatiz*ing*, persecut*ing* or annihilat*ing*) social object, as well including encapsulation within encapsulation. From the open-system perspective, these may be considered as variations of component subsystems of larger systems and complex dynamics between them. In the unconscious life of such a social system ba I:A/M operates, tending to expand and take over whole systems, creating obstacles to mourning and reparation processes, but enforcing traumatophilia as a repetition compulsion.

Examples of social–psychic retreats

Persons who have developed psychic retreats tend unconsciously to externalize them into their relational fields and thereby to engage

other people into sharing these alternative worlds. Such social–psychic retreats are co-constructed within dyads, families, informal and formal groups, organizations, and whole societies.

Dyads and families

Social–psychic retreats are created in dyads, such as partnerships, marriages, parent–child relations, friendships, therapist–client relations, etc., which, of course, always exist within their contextual social systems.

Example 1. A positive partial family social–psychic retreat

In a dysfunctional family, a histrionic mother and an alcoholic father aggressively abused and neglected their children. Three siblings supported and protected each other in practical and emotional matters, and even helped their parents as much as they could. "Once, when we opened the door, two threatening men entered asking for a huge sum of money from us, which our mother had borrowed from them. In a matter of seconds we had to transform into a perfect team of liars, united in holding together all the terror of the situation, although dying from fear at same time." However, this was accomplished with a lot of denial and idealization of the family reality, anaesthetizing themselves against the pain, perhaps as the only possible survival manoeuvre. Images of super-orphans or myths of super-sisters often emerged in their dreams. Later, it was difficult to abandon that idealized retreat, which then became an obstacle for their further individual development. "We were one soul in three bodies, so beautiful, strong and untouchable! I can't imagine anybody between us", said one sister during her therapy for problems that she had in her partnership.

Example 2. Positive whole family social–psychic retreat

A refugee family with rigid, fortress-like family boundaries manifested strong bi-cultural splitting between their inside and outside functioning. The threatening enemy was kept alive in fantasy for years after the threat was over, continuously re-fixing the encapsulation. There was an unconscious agreement never to mention

their burned village in Croatia. One member, after a series of dreams about the lost house from his childhood, decided to travel and visit the village, for which other members indirectly accused him of a betrayal. However, healthy mourning began for him, and then for the whole family, followed by a slow dissolving of the encapsulation.

Example 3. A negative whole family social–psychic retreat

A family in which the father was a militant nationalist with an anti-social personality disorder who abused his anxious wife, her parents, and three children. Terrible ethnic conflicts in their small town enabled him to abuse the situation by exaggerating information and presenting himself as a protector from ethnic enemies. Important contributing factors for the persistence of the retreat included the mother's internal persecutors colluding with her husband's aggression.

Informal and formal groups

Example 1. A positive whole group social–psychic retreat

A transient informal group of neighbours, friends, and relatives, who gathered during the bombing of Belgrade in a "real" sanctuary in the cellar of a building for many weeks, comes to mind. They supported one another to survive huge anxieties in maintaining various primitive defences, such as denial of dangerous reality, group idealization, manic omnipotence, even projection of all weakness paradoxically to enemies. Mothers with small children and the elderly received extra support, which helped them to manage their suffering.

Many of these groups formed during the bombing.

Example 2. A negative whole group social-psychic retreat

During the same period of bombing, another group evinced hypermanic behaviour of dancing and singing on bridges, led by a person who projected his own psychotic pathological organizations on to the whole group, inducing others into transient psychotic states of

mind, as a sort of counter-phobic escape from enormous fears. The fears were, in fact, entirely realistic, as seen in a group of young employees of Belgrade Central TV station who had to go on night duty, expecting that the station might be bombed. It actually was bombed, and they all died.

Organizations

Pioneers in the field of the psychoanalytic work with organizations, Jaques (1955) and Menzies-Lyth (1959), within their concept of "social defences", proposed that organizations function as containers for primitive anxieties, which appear in the organization's structure and culture. Yet, only recently (2005), Armstrong described difficulties caused by psychic retreats in organizations and how they may be mobilized as "illusory containers", serving as structured retreats when the internal or external situation of the organization threatens the limits of its capacity to function. Such retreats are likely to be built into the organization from the very outset of its formation.

Example 1

A positive, whole organizational social–psychic retreat was experienced by the author herself when working as a psychiatrist at the psychotherapy ward in the Psychiatric Day Hospital of the University Clinical Centre, Belgrade, when the regime of Milosevic intruded and diverted even some basic ethical principles of the medical profession, which never had occurred before, even during Tito's regime. The ward encapsulated itself in order to keep alive the therapeutic community, which had been developed at the ward for decades, and ignored the demand to apply some new rules and to participate in many wider staff meetings. It isolated itself from many contacts with other colleagues. The traditional ward setting became a bit rigid, especially in the three-times-a-week large group, which had been run for more than twenty years as a space where different contexts were democratically brought together for joint reflection and insights, and which was especially under attack from the outside.

Example 2. Negative whole organizational social–psychic retreat

At the same time, in other units of the Clinical Centre, there were some wards in which the head identified with, and was corrupted by, the regime. The staff was put in the position of either submitting to the new way of functioning or leaving.

If focusing on these two examples from the perspective of the Clinical Centre, these wards could be perceived as partial organizational social–psychic retreats, serving the whole large health organization to hold opposite aspects: the former encapsulating positive values for protection from external damage, the latter manifesting its immediate threatening environment, which was identified with the corrupted values from the more general environment. Both dynamically influenced the arrangements within the larger organizational matrix, also recreating patterns of wider social dynamics.

Countries and regions

1. *Positive partial societal social–psychic retreats.* Minority groups (ethnic, racial, or other) threatened by majority groups often protect themselves in enclaves and ghettos.
2. *Negative partial societal social–psychic retreats.* Some enclaves and ghettos that were originally formed for self-protection, even if they were for "as-if" protection, can be transformed into formations in which the population stagnates or becomes extinct, like some Indian tribes in reservations in the USA and Canada, or African-American inner city neighbourhoods based on formal or informal real estate laws and customs.
3. *Positive whole societal social–psychic retreat.* In the spring of 1941, the citizens of Serbia decisively rejected any pact with Hitler through huge demonstrations, shouting "Death rather than slavery!", and became an isolated country surrounded with countries that either surrendered or joined with Hitler and his Axis. There are many narratives about the atmosphere of high enthusiasm from this brief period, ended by Hitler's total bombing of the country.
4. *Negative whole societal social–psychic retreats* may be found in totalitarian regimes, which disseminate their perverted patterns throughout the social web. The victimized population,

over time, more or less, submits to the regime, unconsciously enabling its self-maintenance. Psychic retreats, internal and social, are core agencies of such social unconscious processes.

Serbian citizens experienced two totalitarian communist regimes, Tito's after the Second World War until his death, and Slobodan Milosevic's during the 1990s. Both created prominent forms of social–psychic retreats, the latter building on patterns already established by the former. Here, I outline a few characteristic features of the latter.

During the 1990s in the Federation of Yugoslavia (called also Tito's Yugoslavia), there occurred successive secession of its six republics into new independent states through multi-ethnic and religious conflicts and war atrocities. A large part of the international community, especially the Western world, considered the regime of the Serbian leader, Milosevic, to be responsible for those wars, and therefore imposed on Serbia sanctions for many years, which meant severe isolation of the country in economic, political, cultural, traffic, medical, mass media, and other social issues. That isolation of Serbian citizens was amplified and misused by Milosevic's regime in order to stay in power, enabling him to control the media, further disseminate ethnic fears, nationalism, and arguments about the "anti-Serbian politics of the Western world", and thus to continue malignantly to control communications and interactions between people inside and outside of the encapsulated country. Many images of social reality were diverted by propaganda, contributing also to perverse twists towards idealization of the regime with widespread illusions about its protection of the citizens, in spite of its destructiveness and the fact that it was one of the major sources of this. Those traumatic social processes mobilized in people various defence systems, including psychic retreats. Isolation and self-isolation of the population were recursive processes, inducing various sorts of destructive and self-destructive vicious circles in persons, groups, and organizations.

Larger regions

Groups of countries and their governments submitting to a higher regime, like the previous Eastern Bloc set up by Stalin's dictatorship,

were walled off from other parts of the freer world (behind the Iron Curtain). We might consider many aspects of their politics in respect to global social–psychic retreat dynamics contributing to their lasting for decades.

Healing of psychic retreats

Unlike the vast literature about treating patients with individual psychic retreats in one-to-one psychoanalytic settings, there is little literature concerning their healing in human groups. According to Armstrong, "although all groups can function as psychic retreats they have not extensively been drawn on, including group relation practitioners, perhaps because the number of those with direct experience of analytic *and* group work is relatively small" (2005, p. 78, original italic).

It should be said that apart from my roles as a psychiatrist and individual psychoanalytic therapist, my clinical work as a group analyst has led me to believe that group analysis provides a unique space for observing, understanding, and treating both individual and social–psychic retreats, and also for elucidating processes of transformation of one into the other and vice versa. The work in group analytic settings (within ongoing groups and experiential workshops) is useful for understanding the dynamics of social–psychic retreats in larger systems, and for developing skills for engagement in their healing, which includes applying psychoanalytic and group analytic approaches to organizational consultancy, as well as attempts to entangle and remove complex obstacles to democratic social changes (Mojović, 2007a,b).

Through immediate experience, it might be discovered how the processes of equivalence concretely operate: for example, of the characteristic psychic retreat drama of the vital self paralysed under the domination of some dictator and his establishment; how exactly the recreation of such patterns occurs, both horizontally over systems or vertically between levels of systems and their subsystems; how internal dictators lodged within the destructive superego are linked to real dictators and pathological political systems; how they have an impact on personality development, adapting citizens to their images within collectivistic cultures; how totalitarian states

take over the role of symbolic parents from individual parent figures, being perceived by the self as powerless and miserable, etc. Šebek (1996), a psychoanalyst who lived in Communist Czechoslovakia, conceptualized the "totalitarian object" as a highly bullying superego figure. According to Žižek (1984), Kafka's "Castle" is among the best representations of the post-liberal bureaucratic versions of internal and external totalitarianism. Totalitarian aspects of cultures imprisoning and self-imprisoning human relations in such ways are certainly much easier to see within communist regimes than in officially democratic ones, in which attacks on the transitional spaces and true selves of citizens are more sophisticated and invisible (Žižek, 1984; Western, 2008; Amado, 2009).

It might further be learnt that the "emancipation of the ego from the domination of superego" (Britton, 2003), or from its representations in social groups within social–psychic retreats, is very often part of the evolution of the healing process. In my experience, a sort of revolutionary period involving the overthrow of internal or external dictators seems to be inevitable, ideally with minimum wounding and "casualties". Fairbairn's (1952) concept of "divided loyalty" is relevant, as is Grotstein's (2009) notion of the "'double agent', in which the patient fearfully and sometimes collusively and disingenuously maintains an alliance both with the analyst *and* pathological internal objects within the psychic retreat" (p. 195), as if being then put to choice. Such periods of significant choices for persons or social system are important aspects of psychic retreat transformations (Mojović, 2007a). Dissemination of their transference throughout the levels of systems can sometimes be followed.

Analytic groups

The common shared ground of the dynamic matrix of the analytic group is a medium in which such "autistic islands of experience", the persecuting, victimized, and other parts of psychic retreats might be discovered more easily than in dyadic settings, especially with regard to the co-creation of social–psychic retreats in the matrices of their social systems as "collective transference phenomena" (Hopper, 2007). These formations recursively emerge and hide and fluctuate in unpredictable rhythms, being more or less exposed to

shared group experience, mutual mirroring, and various individual and group-as-a-whole reactions. There are indefinite variations and phases in these processes. From time to time, two or more personal psychic retreats merge into complex combinations of partial and/or whole group social–psychic retreats. In clinical work, such processes lead either towards elucidation, more comprehensive understanding and transformative integration, or in the opposite direction, towards greater confusion, group incohesion, fragmentation, and other sorts of group stagnation. Oscillations also occur, as do negative therapeutic reactions, so that it is usually difficult to be sure about the main trends (Mojović, 2007b).

Example 1. Oscillating between a positive and negative whole group social–psychic retreat

In one group, a stiff, paralysed atmosphere lasted for more than a year, culminating in three sessions of almost total group silence. Among the first images to appear was a dream of a group that was crouching for years in a submarine that was floating under water, with the dreamer trying to open its round door, but with the pressure of the water immediately pushing her back. The dream stimulated fantasies and reflections about whether the dream represented collective escape from facing personal problems, hiding from circumstances of war in the group's environment, or a sort of unconscious suicidal submarine journey. "Do we know what kind of a journey this is?"; "The parents of this country were crazy and didn't care at all!"; "Maybe we can learn not to be collectively suicidal!"; "Is it dangerous to break our silence?", were some of the associations. Such group discussion illustrates how the fluctuation between the positive and negative sides of this group retreat became approachable for mentalization for the "work group". The positive side of the submarine (as a protective object from anxieties and pain pouring too fast from internal and external reality), as well as the negative side (as a cold "as-if" protective object keeping the group in an underworld prison) could be considered, putting it also into a position of more mature choice. As the song "Yellow Submarine" was mentioned, unconscious links to the therapist's name and blond hair were probably there, too, offering further options for interpretations.

Example 2. A negative whole group social–psychic retreat

A tortured girl from Kosovo, very inhibited and depressed, revealed through dreams that her "buried self" was fused with mass grave images and centuries-long nations' suffering: in fact, being dominated by a large group of internal dead objects. Merging of personal, family, and societal/social unconscious was revealed, the socio-historic drama as a significant building material for her retreat. For a long time, the group was soothing her pain through its warm presence. However, when the dismantling and abandoning of her morbid retreat started, she cried out, "If I wished to belong to this group, I'd betray them all forever!", meaning her abused/dead family and national objects. Massive projective identification of dead objects on to the group-as-a-whole occurred, transiently transforming it into a "mass-grave-place", shared group state of mind, which could only later be verbalized. It was not experienced by the girl as helpful, requiring her to face her ghosts as a punishment for attempting to escape the rules of the retreat to which she had been adapted for years, and she left the group in psychotic anxiety.

Example 3. A positive whole group social–psychic retreat

A student refugee from Croatia carried massive transgenerational war and concentration camp traumas. He fled his burning home and escaped immediate death in the massacre, together with his father, in their old car. In the group, over the years, his emotionally detached attitude softened. Once, he even shouted, "Please, don't let me stay in this internal concentration camp any longer!" and he finally came to approach his most painful internal zone. For several sessions, he induced others into temporarily shared terror and frozen states: "Don't you all see that we are dead, just simulating life!", and the group was indeed paralysed, impotent for any reflective work. Only later did it become apparent that it was an enclosed-in-the-cellar-waiting-to-die-atmosphere (transferred to the group from his immediate childhood experience when fascists were nearby, coming to massacre the family). During that process, an obsessive older member with a sort of mirror psychic retreat, originating also in family war tortures, was, paradoxically, scapegoated by the group as a cold racist. There was a shared group belief that

the student's infantile tortured self would never be rescued if "the racist" were not exiled from, actually put behind the walls of, the group. This emotional journey of the group inside his retreat was possible due to the group's well-established containing capacities, so that the scapegoating did not provoke a further destructive anti-group.

The following two examples illustrate a high activity of disintegrative forces when healthy needs for dependency on good objects (internal, external, group) are exposed to sarcasm, contempt, envy, toxic diversion of meaning, with preference for addictive or perverse bands. Negative partial group social–psychic retreats (especially their omnipotent bad objects) are striving to defeat the work group, to make it submerge and to give up faith. Sarcasm, social traumas, and merging with external traumatizing bad objects are used for their triumphant propaganda.

Example 4. Negative partial group social–psychic retreat

The official name of NATO operation of bombing Serbia was "The Merciful Angel". The term was used few times in derision, when some beams of faith in humanity would emerge: "In our group we started to believe in the goodness of the Merciful Angel. Don't you all see how we get involved in this seductive play! It's better to be drunk!"

Example 5. Negative and positive partial group social–psychic retreat

Another image, once used for laughing down tendencies to happiness in a group, was a large building in the centre of Belgrade, totally burned out by bombs, which one morning emerged clothed in bright colours with a huge Coca-Cola advertisement, "Cheerful and happy with Coca-Cola!" Then, sudden pain of memories exploded into the matrix, immediately blocking mentalizing processes, even by the conductor for a while. The wounds pulled towards another positive group retreat as a transient arrest. However, as soon as people recovered their capacity to think, this experience actually loosened important knots within the social unconscious.

Analytic family therapy

The family from Example 3 came into therapy. Due to danger of retaliation from the father, the therapist had to be very cautious in his strategy in approaching such a malignant family retreat, which was slowly, step-by-step, elucidated in a presence of a relatively secure institutional setting. The mother decided to consider divorce, but her husband decided to start intensive therapy in the ward for personality disorders. Those processes enabled family members to take back some of the projections they were holding for each other as component parts of the shared family retreat.

Organizational consultancy

Example 1

A professional organization, Group Analytic Society Belgrade, within its study group for understanding organizational and social dynamics, revealed an early "conception trauma" of its own organization, due to war circumstances (Mojović & Despotović, in press). This was helpful in setting up a healing process for the sequels of traumas, which included isolation as an aspect of an organizational social-psychic retreat. The healing process involved coming into contact with deep wounds through large group processes during regular and special trauma workshops, which enabled mourning to begin and develop, as there are indeed so many losses to be mourned.

Healing of society

Healing of a large country social–psychic retreat within totalitarianism, like the one described during Milosevic's regime in Serbia, certainly involves complex democratization processes and changing the relations with the international community. Usually, both are inevitable: long evolutionary and brief revolutionary periods, and, in the aftermath, further struggles with remnants of the old regime, which are often lodged in various negative social–psychic retreats.

Long before the fall of Milosevic, throughout the social web covertly behind the scenes of the regime, the rising up of democracy was going on. Positive social nuclei were kept alive in many areas: positive psychic retreats in persons and social units and democratic

nets between them, which, step-by-step, gathered into larger and more open units: democratic political parties, NGOs, and many other civil-society nuclei. For many months, every day hundreds of thousands of citizens gathered on the streets, blowing their whistles against the regime within the Belgrade Peace Protest, which happened during the 1990s a few times, lasting many months, until the last one finally toppled the dictator.

The fall of the regime happened on the 5th October 2000, often called the day of the Revolution, and was paradoxically peaceful without casualties. This might be linked to the fact that the "bad" object of that retreat, the ruler and his establishment, at that point became so obvious in their malignancy, their manipulation and corruption so vivid to most people, the falsified elections not legitimate in the eyes of the citizens, the whole of the police, the army, and even special forces, together with all their officers, absolutely refused (effectively deserting) Milosevic's order to turn their guns on the citizens in the streets, when on that day the masses were taking over the Parliament. Milosevic admitted losing the elections.

In the following years, complex healing processes developed on the way to a more mature democracy, which permits and encourages dialogue and mature citizenship. Unlike in communist times, when mainly positive social–psychic retreats were walled off from the threatening environment, in the post-communist time, while those slowly dissolve, just the opposite occurs: many social areas remain identified with the previous regime and keep their power by creating negative social–psychic retreats, co-operating with each other by way of hidden and often criminal networks, including international ones, even abusing the positive retreats and creating malignant obstacles to healthy processes. In such fights to regain power and effect retaliation, they attack in many ways. One attack, in 2003, tragically assassinated the new Serbian Prime Minister, Dr Djindjic, who was the proponent of democratic change. Immediately after that, strong government and police action against criminal networks was accomplished, quite successfully, but thereby almost stopping democratic freedom, which was probably one of the aims of the assassination. During transition, the pendulum often oscillates backwards to authoritarian trends, because the disappointments and disillusionments in the new order are open to exploitation by remnants of the old regime.

The development towards "mature citizenship", meaning, among other things, the people's ability and willingness to take risks to change deviant social circumstances and to transcend the limits of their own parochial cultures (Hopper, 2000), inevitably goes through many ebbs and flows, overcoming obdurate obstacles again and again. The analogy of Sisyphus is always present. Civil society networks persistently have to struggle with the hate and contempt of democratic dialogue that are lurking in −K areas of social–psychic retreats, ready to attack and dismantle their meaning.

Concluding remarks

Social–psychic retreats (equivalence phenomena of internal psychic retreats) are specific social–psychic formations taking place below the surface of various social systems co-created by recursive externalization and internalization processes, which occur in both directions: from persons and smaller systems towards larger systems, and vice versa. They involve highly structured systems of social defences and object relations, which create alternative shelters from many macro- and micro-social mainstreams. They covertly influence a lot of arrangements and dynamics of social–political power relations. In their negative versions, they indirectly disseminate totalitarian patterns/styles over social discourses and practices, whereas positive versions may protect from those. The social unconscious operates on a vast scale through them.

Social–psychic retreats are often the "hidden destructive rulers" behind chronic resistances to change and obstacles to various social healing processes, such as the efforts to entangle unconscious patterns of transgenerational transmission of "traumatophilia", "chosen trauma", and other paradoxical human phenomena. It is important to cultivate operational fields in which they can be elucidated and related to systems and cultures through immediate experience. The analytic groups, especially large and median, provide unique spaces for learning about mature citizenship by humanizing and transforming the hate of democratic dialogue, much of which is camouflaged in social–psychic retreats, and in general *making the social unconscious conscious*. Further development of similar psychosocial spaces may bring more hope of ending the absurdities and negative power of much social destructiveness.

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