Rev. Latinoam. Psicopat. Fund., São Paulo, v. 12, n. 1, p. 71-98, março 2009

Weaponization of the body and politicization of death*

Siamak Movahedi

The paper examines the psychology of martyrdom through the analysis of death speeches, the final letters, wills, and testaments left behind by men in the Middle East who undertook suicidal missions in war. The author maintains that the human body is as much a social object as it is a biological entity, and death is as much a social event as it is a physical happening. The biologically living body may be symbolically dead, and the physically dead person may be more powerful than the living. A communication that a person makes while he or she is anticipating an impending death is an overloaded message, comparable to the first or the last dream in psychoanalysis. It may provide important clues not only to the person's immediate psychic experience, but also to one's characteristic mode of encounter with the object world. Final letters, near-death or suicide notes have a particularly demanding, commanding, and pleading quality. The author finds several modes of communication and metacommunication in the notes: disengaged, abstract, and intimate, each differently conveying their thoughts, fantasies, and relatedness to the world, God, justice, vengeance, death, immortality, loved ones, and enemies.

Key words: Psychology of martyrdom, death speeches, suicidal missions, body uses

* This article is an expansion of "The Utopian Pursuit of Death," previously published in *American Imago*, v. 56, n. 1, p. 1-26, 1999, and also appeared both in Piven (Ed.). (2004), *The Psychology of Death in Fantasy and History*. Westport, CT: Praeger, and in J. Piven (Ed.), *Terrorism, Jihad, and Sacred Vengeance*. Giessen, GER: Psychosozial-Verlag., 2007.

Jacques Lacan's (1966) notion of *the pleasures of death*, no matter how macabre it may strike us at first glance, is a profound statement on the symbolic nature of the human body and its destruction or death. The human body is as much a social object as it is a biological entity and death is as much a physical happening as it is a social event. The biologically living body may be symbolically dead, and the physically dead may be more powerful than the living. Mortification of the human soul in an alienated and castrating symbolic order may bring about a "second death" separate from the animal death of the biological body (Ragland, 1995). In the same vein, a self-destructive political act aimed as a challenge to an entropic order of oppression and domination – the genesis of the death drive – might be characterized paradoxically as death in the service of life.

The redefinition of life, the politicization of death, and the utopian pursuit of immortality through the destruction of the biological body as exemplified in the ongoing ritualistic bombing suicides in the Middle East or in America on September 11 are not new phenomena. The "carnival of atrocity," as described by Michel Foucault (Foucault, 1982; Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982), through its use of excessive violence acted against the body with the audience as its cheerleaders has been with us for centuries. What is now running in various power theaters by both the oppressor and the oppressed in the East and in the West under various ideological headlines is an old script written for that carnival. Not a novel political reaction is also the "experts'" practice of objectivizing the subject in their pursuit of "object-ive" knowledge.

The only thing that may strike us as new is the subject's audacity to assume the role of the sovereign in the violent destruction of his or her own body and in its use as a weapon for resistance. This is enough for the subject to gain the experts' trusts in himself or herself as paranoid, psychotic, psychopathic, or perverse.

One method in the study of the economy of power relations is to focus on forms of resistance, i.e. antagonistic strategies against different forms of power. That is, to study sanity, legality and anti-

terrorism, the researcher should try to investigate what is happening in the field of insanity, illegality, terrorism and other forms of resistance (Foucault, 1982). When the two sides reinvent one another in a game of power, how can we study the terrorism of the slave without investigating the terrorism of the master?

Although, the investigation of the subject as an object outside of its historical context – the conceptualized object – has been deemed as "intentionally" confused (Foucault, 1982), I have here undertaken such an analysis by *de fault*. In what follows I have attempted to present a version of a theory of the object relatively devoid of historical contexts. Yet, it is an analysis of some texts similar to what Foucault has called *death-speeches* which exemplify the resistance of subjects in asymmetric equations of power.

These *death speeches* consist of a collection of notes that a Middle Eastern freelance writer had been compiling to edit as an anthology of the human experience of war. These notes were all final letters or wills and testaments of some militant men who had volunteered for dangerous or suicidal missions. These missions involved various regional conflicts in the Middle East between 1980 and 1990. The letters were either sent by the volunteers to their families right before a dangerous mission that took their life or were found in their possession when they later discovered their bodies. The war anthology never took form. A severe depression of the writer hampered the completion of the work. He later committed suicide. Within limits set by confidentiality, I was permitted to study the letters.[1]

I thought I might have stumbled over some symbolically significant psychoanalytic texts. A communication that a person makes while he or she is anticipating an impending death is an overloaded message. It may be comparable to the first or the last dream in psychoanalysis. It may provide important clues not only to the person's immediate psychic experience – needs, feelings, or images – but also to one's characteristic mode of encounter with the object world.

Although one cannot speak of a writer separate from his or her linguistic and cultural forms of self expression, differences in the pattern of such expressions should reveal something about the writer's own psychic voice. For this analysis, I tried to bracket off the notes from external data as much as possible to see whether I could detect any pattern that I could attribute to the individual's characteristic state of "mind." This was not to underestimate the importance of the sociocultural context for the intelligibility of human action. Rather, I wished to focus primarily on a written piece of work to see how much we could legitimately listen to the voice of the writer trapped within a text, i.e. a chain of words.

1. I have intentionally changed or omitted certain details to keep the confidentiality of the people involved. However, it should be emphasized that all these writers had participated in military combat missions, and none had engaged in a "terrorist" attack against a non-military target.

A writer does more than just describe things, make contact or express his or her feelings and desires. Somewhere in that description or contact the writer presents a self. The self resides in the projected consciousness of the object. The internal representation of the object is not separate from that of the self.

Reading, listening, observing, and understanding are all forms of contextual interpretations. A pure phenomenological method is an illusion. We need instructions to observe and understand. A theory serves exactly that function. My focus being the inner dialogues of individuals, rather than the social institutions that structure them, I tried to conduct a psychoanalytic reading of the notes. That is, I tried to read them as though they were clinical process notes, and "listen" to layers of "messages" through a psychoanalytic "ear." Just as in the analytic situation, my intention was to be able to feel myself into the writer's self-experience to pick up his dominant affects, identify his wishes, defenses, unearth his inner representations of self and other, and depict his worldview. For an observational instruction or conceptual lens, I relied on certain psychoanalytic formulations. Works of Bateson (1968) on communication and Shneidman (1993) on suicide notes served as my magnifying glasses.

I began with the assumption that unconscious fantasies structure the person's attitudes and expectancies about the external world. Contact with the world, as articulated in one's writings, should reflect such attitudes and expectancies.

Within the same social-cultural environment, people display a unique pattern of interaction with one another and with things. Through the medium of social-cultural patterns people also express their own characteristic syntax of object relations.[2]

A letter exhibits an object relation event, a communication episode. It represents a ritual of engagement with an audience, a manifestation of a wish for relatedness, an attempt to contact a symbolic world. A letter, as with any other mode of communication, carries what Bateson (1968) terms a "report" and a "command." The report component of a message, or its content, conveys information about the external world. The command aspect, on the other hand, addresses the particular relationship between the communicants. It carries instruction as to how the message is to be taken, i.e., metacommunication. The major function of communication is not to convey some content but to negotiate a particular relationship with internal or projected objects. This is where the psychoanalyst departs from the literary deconstructionist. A psychoanalytic

2. By the term "object," here I refer to a symbolic "other" that is in part a dimension of the "self" as a fantasy.

deconstruction involves a close reading of the metacommunication levels of a text rather than its discursive content.

Final letters, near-death or suicide notes have a particularly demanding, commanding, and pleading quality. They are intended to produce a certain effect on the survivors (Leenaars, 1988). Such notes are not "pointless" accounts of some sort. As for their structure, they strongly exhibit what Brunner (1994) calls the "tell-worthiness" of a narrative. For a narrative to be tell-worthy, it should be about the breach of a human plight, a deviation of a canonical script. Suicide and intentional pursuit of death are tell-worthy events. Jacob's (1967) analysis of suicide notes suggests that many suicidal individuals experience a need verbally to justify their violation of the sacred trust of life. The final dialogue with the object world, in reality or in fantasy, may hold the key to the person's subjective relational script. Yet, we cannot be totally blind to the possibility of dealing with the manifestations of social institutions rather than individual psychic expressions.

Given the political nature of the self-destructive acts to be discussed here, it is plausible that an engulfing and enslaving group identity may masquerade as individual self-expression (Durkheim, 1897). On the other hand, we may argue that the group furnishes only a menu from which the individual may choose a self-destructive course of action.

Previous research on the thematic analysis of near-death notes

The bulk of research that might bear on this topic is in the area of suicide notes. Many writers have undertaken thematic analyses of suicide notes (see Leenaars, 1988 for a comprehensive bibliography on suicide notes research). Shneidman and Farberow's (1957a and 1957b) classic studies of suicide notes are the most notable. They undertook a content analysis of 717 suicide notes to gain some understanding into their writers' cognitive-affective dispositions and attitudes toward life and death. They failed to find what they had expected. The notes sounded "surprisingly commonplace, banal, and even sometimes poignantly pedestrian and dull" (Shneidman, 1993, p. 94). They attributed this to the person's attempt to reinforce the suicide decision by shutting off the field of consciousness.

They then compared those notes with some thirty-two simulated suicide notes written by a group of nondepressed and nonsuicidal graduate students whom they instructed to put themselves emotionally in the place of a person who had reached the point of committing suicide. The difference between the two sets of notes was quite revealing.

The genuine notes were primarily content oriented, whereas the simulated notes were full of processes.[3] The genuine notes often contained specific information, e.g., names of people, places, and things, and instructions concrete enough to be carried out. The simulated notes, in contrast, contained many "thinking" words, suggesting the operation of problem-solving modes. It seemed that the decision to commit suicide was problematic for the graduate students whose notes displayed much thinking, reasoning, or rationalizing.

An entirely different sense of self emerged in the two sets of notes. The simulated notes reflected a self as experienced by the individual himself or herself, i.e., the person's own experience of pain, ache, sensation, and feeling. The genuine notes reflected a self as the individual felt others experienced it. That is, they were frequently concerned with their reputation or with what others might think of them.[4] Other studies (Gottschalk & Gleser, 1960; Darbonne, 1969) all report similar findings. Suicide notes exhibit a truncated vision of the world. However, they convey an overriding preoccupation with making contact or maintaining some tie with a love object. The suicidal person usually wishes to produce some tenacious effect on the object.

Only one researcher (Henken, 1976) has compared the ordinary suicide notes with the notes of those who were either facing forcible death or believed their death would soon be eminent. A preoccupation with self rather than object seemed to reflect the experience of an impending death. The forced-death notes were abstract and exhibited an obsession with nonspecific objects and with political responsibility.

Reviewing over a dozen studies of suicide notes, Shneidman (1993) contends that a person who wants to commit suicide cannot write a "good" note. A person

3. In the analysis of suicide notes, investigators often make references to process and content. For instance, while genuine notes tend to be content-oriented, pseudo notes are highly process-oriented. Process here refers to the dynamic state of change in a system. This also includes communication about an intended change, recurrent pattern or function. Content, on the other hand is a communication about the state of a system at a given time. As such, it is cross-sectional and static. The co-dependence of verb and noun bears on the distinction between process and content. A verb is part of the process language; it expresses function and change. A noun is a content term; it names the person, thing or quality that acts or is subject to action (see, for example, Olinick et al., 1973).
4. The over-emphasis on the self, as is experienced by others, according to Shneidman and Farberow (1957a), is a characteristic feature of cultural or religious suicides. This observation supports Durkheim's (1897) concept of altruistic suicide.

who can write a "good" note will not commit suicide. To write a "good" suicide note, Shneidman contends that the person has to write it in an open frame of mind at least two weeks before the act. He would then prefer to call such a note a journal or diary rather than a suicide note. In a similar vein, the notes to be analyzed in this paper are not really suicide notes. They were not written right before engagement in suicidal acts. Most important, the writers did not commit suicide. They did undertake dangerous missions that may be characterized as suicidal. Yet that is not to say that the writers would have killed themselves if they had survived their missions. Nevertheless, it should be added that a few of the writers had persistently sought additional assignments each time after surviving a dangerous mission.

Toward an analysis of the notes

The preceding studies all involved cases of quantitative content analysis. Written materials always lend themselves to some form of quantitative analysis with fixed groupings. However, when rigid categories such as word counts are automatically imposed on a writing, the outcome will be a "boring" and tortured picture that put the writings in some kind of order while destroying their authors. This was one thing that I consciously tried to avoid. There were 106 notes. I approached them in some phenomenological mode similar to a reading of clinical process notes. My aim was to read between the lines, decode, decipher, and interpret while remaining faithful to the content and structure of the notes. I began this task trying to identify the author, the audience, the message, and the mode of expression in a note. I then tried to see what I could find in and about a note. Notes as texts are open systems that yield many different readings. I found myself making a distinction between the communication of content and communication of relationship. That is, I was looking for what was being communicated and what was being communicated about the communication, i.e., metacommunication. I looked also for themes, patterns, feeling states, self-object modes of encounter, forms of self-object representations, and modes of final engagement or disengagement with the external world. I was cognizant of the following:

a) The audience – the object – of the note: to whom is the writer speaking?
b) The nature of the emotional appeal: what types of self-object experience are being evoked?
c) The nature and the imageries of the enemy (e.g., external, internal, real, imaginary, concrete, abstract, clearly identified or vague).

d) The nature of the discourse (e.g., ideological preaching, emotional connection, expression of the need for affiliation, expression of the need for power, communication about concrete things or events).
e) The style of the discourse (personal, semi-personal, editorial).
f) The level of abstraction of the note.
g) The process versus the static level of the discourse.
h) The length of the note.

Methodologically, these letters are highly selective. They represent the universe of letters that families wanted to share with a stranger or with the public. This excludes the letters that may be addressed to a highly private audience concerning private family issues. In that sense, the letters have certain features of public documents.

Different modes of relatedness to the world

Although these notes were all collected from the same socio-historical context, and belonged to the same political discourse, they did tend to fall into three distinct types: disengaged, abstract, and intimate object relation modes. Differences between these types can be most simply explained by the variation in the quality and intensity of the object relation content of the notes. The three types may each represent a different mode of contact with the world.

Disengaged Mode: These notes (17 out of 106, or 16 percent) display a pattern of resolute disengagement from the world. They are formal, descriptive notes consisting of instructions about the management of property or the settlement of debts. The text is instrumental in that it structures around someone formally asking someone else to do something for the writer. The audience is a moral-legal self that requires the person to settle his affairs before he departs. There is no expression of anxiety, anger, conflict, hope, or regret. There are no emotional or ideological appeals, and no evidence of being a zealot.

> In the Name of God. If I am killed in this mission, I like to be buried next to my father in (...) I have X money in X Bank. Use that fund for my funeral expenses. Give the rest to the needy. Give my house with all the furniture to my mother. Sell my X property and give the proceeds to any family that has lost its breadwinner in the war. Give my car to my brother, X.
>
> In the Name of God. I do believe I will not return alive from this trip. I want Mr. X to serve as the executor of my will. I have several debts. He has the list. He should sell the store to settle all those accounts. The rest should be given to my wife.

> I leave my house and my car for my wife. I seek forgiveness from all my friends and relatives.

The writer gives no justification for his voluntary quest of danger. Nevertheless, the notes convey some sense of fatalism and resignation. The person seems ready to die. The notes are short and parsimonious. The object relation content is somewhat narrow. There is no description of the immediate external world and no reference to its affective ambiance. Little reference is made to the self. The notes are cross-sectionally static. They lack any movement or dynamism. The average writer of this type notes is over thirty-five years of age, married with two or three children and not in the military. There is enough evidence in the notes that the person has volunteered for the mission. However, based on the content of the notes, no plausible inference can be made as to the individual's conscious or unconscious reason for the pursuit of death.

Abstract Mode: These notes (71 out of 106, or 67 percent) represent long philosophical and ideological monologues. The communication mode tends to be cognitive rather than evocative. There is much editorializing about moral principles such as truth, justice, virtue, and religious piety.

> I believe in the creator of the universe, he who has designed the world in perfect harmony, and has under his control every movement of that universe. I believe in the fact that he has made all his faithful followers immune of all deviations from truth and justice. And has asked us to be equally considerate of all the manifestations of his creation, material and spiritual. To insure the realization of his desires, he has sent us prophets to guide us. I believe that after this life, there is a higher level of existence that begins on the judgment day, when and where the ultimate evolution of the mankind will take place. And it is at that time that the reward and punishment that are one's due, and for one reason or another were not awarded in this life, will be administered. It is at that time that you have to give back anything that you have unjustly seized from your fellow man (...)

The private self is hidden behind a public self that is either heroic or undefined.

> We follow the footsteps of great historical heroes. We are responsible to the generations of the past, present, and future…. We cannot be concerned with personal needs and shortcomings.

The object of the address is vague. References are made to abstract entities such as community, society, nation, generation, class, or to some symbolic sociopolitical entity or historical heroes. The spouse, parents, or other family members are not the manifest objects of the notes. They are rarely addressed directly. When there are references to them, they are addressed indirectly in the third person

pronoun, and in formal language. The self is presented as transcendent and beyond need for self-validation. Nevertheless, there is much preoccupation with how the self is viewed. The writer frequently requests that his letter be read during his funeral service or be conveyed to all young people or to all college students.

Death is sought to prove the writer's sense of moral superiority, virtue, religious piety, and his uncompromising sense of justice.

> We are ready to destroy this morally corrupt enemy. We will inflict on it the greatest blow while calling its bluff even if it costs our lives. Hopefully we all will return unharmed. If I do not return, I want you to stay loyal to our leaders. I want you to pursue our sacred cause. I expect you to follow my path since this is the only sincere path to the salvation of our spirit. One day we will all die. Why not die in pursuit of truth and justice?

The enemy is challenged, discounted, and belittled. In contrast, the projected self experiences no fear, no intimidation, and is beyond any seduction and compromise. The writer presents a persona that is unimpressed, unshaken and unmoved by threats and power. By challenging death, the writer attempts to disarm the hostile other of its pride of power. The note is intended as a communication that no venture can induce fear in the heart of the writer. With this nonchalant attitude toward life and death, the writer intends to remain in a superior moral position.

The private audience is asked to present the same front in public. The community is to congratulate the spouse or parents for the writer's self-sacrifice. The spouse and parents are to act proud and happy. They are enjoined against the public cry or expressions of grief since such responses might be interpreted as weakness and delight the enemy. Through their reactions, the family members should save face by impressing the enemy that no degree of death and destruction may cause fear or submission.

> I like you to be proud of me, and pay no attention to the critics' empty commentaries. Do not cry for me. I want all of you to stand united like an invincible pillar. I want you to be dignified rather than the object of others' mercy or sympathy.

Paradoxically, in the notes the enemy similarly remains diffused, abstracted, and undefined. Although the writer is in the midst of a revolutionary or military mission against a clear-cut external power, the enemy is not clearly named. Although there are references to superpowers, they do not seem to represent the psychological object of anger in the notes. The anger is more often expressed against some vague domestic political groups with competing ideological agendas. The dangerous enemy seems most likely to be internal. The external enemy's incentives and moves are predictable. The internal enemy is a wolf in sheep's skin, deceptive and unpredictable.

> All this has generated much worry for the deceitful enemy and its proxies including the liberals that have used all possible schemes to incite war and bloodshed to prey on our innocent brothers and sisters (…) How stupid are those who think they can succeed in fighting the voice of people through coercion and intimidation. And how naive are those liberals, who swallow the rhetoric of this cunning enemy who has no agenda but treachery and exploitation (…)

There is frequently a sense that some close family members are indirectly being attacked for failing to understand the writer's political position. They seem to have disagreed with the writer, opposed his decision to join a suicide brigade, or failed to validate his ideological commitment. In a few notes, there are some angry remarks such as: "You would rather I die like a sick old woman in bed, would you not?"

The self is not experienced as satisfactorily validated. Others are not perceived as responsive. They have not cooperated with the writer in self-validation. They have failed in their understanding of the writer's point of view. There is much anger toward others for their mere "stupidity."

Pursuit of death or suicidal missions seems to function as an ultimate attack on those who did not share the writer's perspective. They now have to be quiet and take notice. The writer's sincerity, piety, and ideological commitment are now beyond reproach. His blood has fortified his position. One who is more interested in preserving his own life or property than in defending his principles has no moral stand to pass judgment on the writer. How could one argue with a view secured by blood?[5]

In the entire note, the writer seeks the audience's undivided attention. He commands certain critical courses of action, demands ideological loyalty, asks for a change in the survivors' life styles, and offers moral advice. The mother and father are asked to act like certain religious and historical legends. They are reminded that they are parents to the writer, himself a historical hero.

These letters all begin with some religious quotations assuring immortality for those who lose their lives in defense of justice. There is a clear affective distinction between getting killed and dying. Getting killed in a just mission is different from death or annihilation. The audience is assured that the writer is not really dead. He is to be assumed as observant on a much higher level of existence.

5. In connection with the working of persecutory objects, the operation of a punitive superego can also be detected. In "Mourning and Melancholia," Freud (1917) wrote that "the ego sees itself deserted by the superego and let itself die." Here, it seems that these writers felt they had to embrace death or they would be deserted by the superego.

> Those who lose their life in the pursuit of truth and justice will never die. They just transcend to a higher level of existence.

These notes, despite their length, contain no description of the "external" reality. They do not allude to the emotional ambiance of the writer's immediate situation. The communication contains quite constricted interactional content between self and object-representations. The object remains precarious. However, compliance with one's cherished wishes is demanded.

Intimate Mode: These notes (18 out of 106, or 17 percent) display a highly romantic rapprochement with the object world. A profound sense of loneliness in the shadow of impending death calls for the most nostalgic reminiscences of the shared experiences between the self and object. The writer struggles to recreate and regenerate a particular feeling state that is familiar to him through his past relationship with the object.

The mother represents the most emotionally intense part of the object field. The letters are mostly addressed to her. Although there are references to others (e.g., the father, brothers and sisters, the wife and children), the mother remains the principal recipient of the communication.

> My Very Dear mother, There is a wet curtain of tears between me and the letter that I am writing you. I can hardly see what I am writing. I am thinking about you while I am trying to look through this wet curtain at these mountains. I see a tired mirage of a dream fading high into infinity too afraid to look back. That is my life, my hopes and fantasies. They are painfully trying to kiss your memory goodbye, and leaving the ruins of the humanity by gently stepping over the tired body of my brothers who are lying everywhere in blood, like red poppies cut so harshly and so soon (...) I am sitting here under a huge rock that may explode anytime without leaving any piece large enough to become my tombstone (...) My dear mother, please forgive me for the blood all over this letter. This is the only gift I can send you. I would like you to keep it forever. These are the blood of my brave brothers whose beautiful bodies were just destroyed by the enemy guns. Yet their spirits are standing tall in front of me cleaning my tears and laughing at the stupidity of those who think their gun can destroy our souls. Please be proud of me. Tell everyone that my son willingly embraced death to defend his homeland (...)

The wish is for the mother to protect the child, to give him reassurance, to make his internal world safe again. The wish is to re-feel the mother's soothing presence. The mother is often requested to pray for the writer's safe return. When the writer visualizes his impending death, the wish is to be missed profoundly by the mother.

> My Dear mother, I am tired. As I am getting ready to take my final nap, I hear your voice singing lullabies for me in those comforting warm summer nights when I was a little boy. Do you remember when you used to read me stories of love and

> hope? But, my dearest mother, here I hear the story of death and destruction, of cruelty and inhumanity. I wish that tonight I could hear one of your stories before I close my eyes permanently.

The writer empathizes with the mother over the death of her dear son. He begins the mother's mourning over such a devastating loss. He then pleads to the mother to be strong and bear this loss. There is a common appeal to the mother not to cry. Yet the writer reminds the mother of all the wonderful times that she had with him as a little boy, and how tragic it would be to lose such a beloved young son to a cruel death. Such passages are often so sad that they may easily bring tears to the eyes of a stranger, let alone the writer's own mother. In this sense, the rendezvous with the object at times feels sadomasochistic. It may be pondered if the mother is being punished for not rescuing the son from an angry father who set him up for self-sacrifice.

These notes read as poetry and engage the reader's passion and strong sense of empathy. The reader may easily emerge in the writer's feeling state and in his representational world. The notes are all in the process mode. They involve feelings, needs, wishes, conflicts, and action. They function to elicit wish-fulfilling responses from the object. They contain little abstract, philosophical, or intellectual content. They convey detailed, emotionally laden descriptions of the immediate external reality of the writer that feels dangerous, cruel, and lonely.

The writers in this category are mostly military officers or draftees. In light of certain information in the notes, some of these writers might have volunteered either out of social or professional obligations or were simply assigned to missions that claimed their lives.[6]

Discussion

On a first reading of the notes we may not discern any marked tendency toward the dominance of a collective identity over the individual identity.

6. There is certain direct and indirect information in the notes on the basis of which the extent to which the writer's decision was voluntary may be inferred. These include information on age, marital status or some indirect reference in the letter such as "the commander said he couldn't do anything about changing my assignment." Married men in their late thirties or forties were more likely to have been volunteers. Letters that signal some tension between the writer and the family over the writer's repeated acceptance of dangerous missions reveal a certain level of choice on the part of the writer.

However, in the notes of the abstract type, the writers' identities share a common boundary with a socio-historical order. On the manifest level, the objects are abstract and social; the audience is a collectivity of some sort; and the self is defined in reference to some public cause. This group comes close to exhibiting some of the features of Durkheim's ideal type of altruistic suicide.

Although this study was a qualitative analysis, contrasting my findings with previous research reveals some interesting similarities. The disengaged group displays a pattern similar to that of genuine suicide notes in previous studies, whereas the intimate object relation group shares many features of the simulated notes. The notes in the disengaged mode represent a discourse of relatively concrete and simple events. They are primarily static, whereas the notes in the intimate mode are quite dynamic. The notes in the abstract mode fall in between, exhibiting certain features of both the genuine and the simulated suicide notes. They come closer to Henken's (1976) forced-death documents.

One marked feature of the abstract type note is a preoccupation with what others may think of the writer. The overemphasis on the self as experienced by others is seen by Shneidman and Farberow (1957a) to be a characteristic feature of cultural and religious suicides. That observation is also consistent with Durkheim's (1897) notion of altruistic suicide. The subjective experience of identity is an established pattern of anticipated responses of others to one's act. This anticipation is confirmed constantly in fantasy. Anticipated responses of others, the voice of the internal objects, may even structure one's will to live, die, kill, or be killed.

In the abstract type, the notes are populated by bad and persecutory objects, which are to be controlled and attacked. The ego is in a retaliatory mode. The enemy is experienced as a diffused toxic entity to be ejected from the personal world.

Our sense of self is always conveyed in a dialogue with the "other." When the "other" is abstract and public, the self will display similar features. That seems to be happening in this group. That is perhaps why it is difficult to empathize with these writers. The notes are lacking the necessary affect for such an object relational engagement. There is plenty of intellectualized anger that might resonate only with an equally angry and intellectualized reader.

Although abstract notes are addressed to a public audience, they are conversations with the self. The long pedantic notes are for the writer's own defensive consumption. He needs to persuade himself that the course of action that he has undertaken is sane, rational, and desirable.

There are strong identifications with certain socio-political heroes who sought martyrdom for similar causes. When the fantasy of one's death actualizes the

person's ideal ego, one may suspect the working of self-destructive drives. However, these fantasies may serve the defensive function of reducing the volunteer's own cognitive dissonance through culturally prepackaged means. Certainly the abstract writers are using many defenses to bolster their denial of death. Their writings all display a tough-minded, rigid, impersonal, distancing, and ritualized mode of object relationship.

In the abstract discourse, the self and object are fully masked to avoid any genuine affective contact. The internal dialogue takes place through some illusory dramaturgical characters that function to shield the writer from the overwhelming reality of death and to separate him from his "flesh and blood self." Hoffer's (1951) comment on a need for a make-believe grandiose self-object world here is quite apt:

> Dying and killing seem easy when they are part of a ritual, ceremonial, dramatic performance or game. There is a need for some kind of make-believe to face death unflinchingly. To our real, naked selves there is not a thing on earth or in heaven worth dying for. It is only when we see ourselves as actors in a staged (and therefore unreal) performance that death loses its frightfulness and finality and becomes an act of make-believe and a theatrical gesture. It is one of the main tasks of a real leader to mask the grim reality of dying and killing by evoking in his followers the illusion that they are participating in a grandiose spectacle, a solemn or lighthearted dramatic performance. (p. 64)

The destructive fantasies in notes of the abstract type may not be explained simply in terms of impulses, urges, or tension reduction mechanisms. The apparent limited mentalization in these cases is partial and defensive. The dynamic is more in line with that of sadism in that the anticipation of the other's suffering is part of the act (Fonagy & Target, 1995). This is particularly true about the cases involving revenge, or missions undertaken on the anniversary of the loss of a loved one. The rehabilitation of an offended sense of dignity fits the puzzle better than the acting out of some impulse. An aggressive act may rehabilitate the ego if and only if the ego can conceive of the alter's reactions, thoughts, and feelings toward the retaliatory act.

Contrary to the moralistic and dry character of the abstract type, the intimate type notes exhibit the fullest spectrum of object relationships. There is a marked tendency to attach oneself to an object experienced as good. One gets the impression that attachment is sought to extend the self, to revitalize the spirit, and to escape annihilation.

The dialogue with the mother is the most striking feature of the notes in the intimate mode. The need for a primary soothing object may be so strong that no other object can replace her in fantasy. Some of these writers speak of holding on

strongly to certain objects that may be considered as transitional, such as the mother's medallion or her last letter.

It is the relationship with the mother that harbors the child's core sense of selfhood. Therefore, it makes sense that in a time of danger, she should be sought to dispel any threat of self-annihilation. The mother is as much a party to the birth of the self as to its death. Lewin (1946) maintains that the wish to die represents the infantile wish to sleep in union with the mother. The fantasy of returning to her body or hiding in it is a common oral fantasy.

The mother seems to play various emotionally powerful roles in the dynamics of most suicides. Tabachnick (1957) cites the disturbance in the interpersonal relationship with the mother as the single most recurring pattern. Patients in his study all reported a strong ambivalent attitude toward the mother. They typically found it impossible to express any dissatisfaction with her. Despite much interpersonal conflict, they never defied her. Suicide was an attempt either to escape the anger toward the mother or to seek punishment for harboring such feelings. Sometimes, suicide represented a kind of symbolic killing of the hateful self-object. In other cases, the destruction of body represented the fantasy of merging with the idealized mother and insuring the survival of the self.

Campbell (1995) similarly observes a pattern of an inner struggle with an image of a mother who is felt to be ungiving, dangerous, and untrustworthy. In the suicidal patient's fantasy, the body comes to symbolize a bad mother. Getting rid of this bad mother becomes the object of attack on the body. The conflict between the wish to merge with the mother and the subsequent primitive anxieties about annihilation of the self is worked through in the suicide fantasies.

In this study, the notes containing intimate dialogue with the mother display the least suicidal themes. They all exhibit a strong will to survive the misadventures. Although in some notes, the pattern of fantasy relationship with the mother has a touch of sadomasochism, the mother is clearly perceived as good and soothing. This is in contrast to the abstract notes in which the mother is absent, and the fantasies as articulated in the notes, rarely contain any soothing or transitional objects.[7]

7. According to Winnicott (1969), a transitional object may be employed only if the internal object is alive and "good enough," i.e., not too persecutory.

Self-destructive behavior as object relationships

Psychoanalysis involves both understanding and explanation. Both tasks involve nothing but interpretation, although on different levels. Using Ricoeur's (1993) language, we understand through our personal engagement with a text, and explain through our disengagement with it by means of the language of cause, functions, structures, or demands.

This analysis began with the intention of understanding the near-death notes. Although the line between understanding and explanation is never clear, I found myself being increasingly engaged in explanation. I became intrigued by the question of possible links between the structure of the note and the writer's personality organization. Since I had analyzed notes rather than characters, I did find myself on quite shaky ground for any strong inference as to such links. Nevertheless, as in any meaningful analysis of this form, I felt the need for all kinds of bold conjectures and interpretations on inter- and intra-psychic levels.

In classical psychoanalytic thinking, there has been much interest in the psychology of heroism. The heroic pursuit of death may be viewed as a manifestation of narcissism (Becker, 1973). On one hand, the narcissistic omnipotent-self image disposes the person to feel immortal and impervious to danger, to march into open fire in wars convinced of his invincibility. On the other hand, the pursuit of danger serves as a defense against the fear of death, the ultimate source of narcissistic injury.

The heroic pursuit of danger may also represent the enactment of Oedipal wishes (Segal, 1990). If we were to follow that theoretical line in this paper, we would have to put the complex in the context of a power relationship in which the son had either to die or be castrated, and usually both. The heroic pursuit of death would then become a symbolic challenge of the authority. Symbolically the hero would become heroic because he dared to challenge the repressive authority. The repression had to be so overwhelming that the father would be disguised as a corrupt and cruel "alien" for whose destruction one had to obey a "benevolent" father. This will always culminate in the hero's death. He is never victorious. The power he achieves relies on his challenge of the oppressive power at the known cost of his life, a symbolic fulfillment of a wish in action. He loses the battle of earthly power, but wins the war of dignity. For Brown (1959), the Oedipus complex is the project of becoming God through flight from death. Flight from death is the flight from helplessness, and obliteration.

There is a widespread belief that those who commit suicide, particularly religious or altruistic suicides, attempt to seek immortality rather than death. It has also been suggested that ritualized homicides and suicides in various societies

throughout time are based on a belief in immortality through union with the departed (Lewin, 1946; Zilboorg, 1936; Pollock, 1975, 1976).

Methodologically, we are not able to decipher the individual writer's unconscious motivations in this study. However, on the manifest level, communications about death or immortality may be understood more plausibly as the expression of the pursuit of power in life rather than the search for immortality through death. Psychically we cannot pursue something of which we have no experience. Fenichel (1945) argues that even the so-called "fear of death" was not about the real death. He contended that since the idea of one's own death is subjectively inconceivable, every fear of death would in all likelihood function as covers for other unconscious ideas.

In this study, I see no direct or disguised allusion to immortality in the disengaged type notes. The individual has psychically prepared himself for death and shows no eagerness to appeal to some symbolic order for self-validation.

In the notes of intimate mode, there are some references to immortality. However, the fear of object loss is so intense that the defense of immortality is not of any use. Death is experienced as a lonely life. The writer pleads to the mother not to forget him if he is killed.

However, every abstract type note is prefaced with a claim to immortality. One might interpret this as a defense against annihilation anxiety. The constricted and impersonal quality of object relations in this group may very well represent a psychic reaction that Hoffer (1951) calls encapsulation. Encapsulation is a psychic strategy of fending off the fear of annihilation by enclosing, encasing, and sealing-off the threatening sensations, affects and internal representations. In abstract type notes, the impersonal and detached representations of self and object protect the ego, particularly against the overwhelming dependency needs that might surface when the security and safety are threatened. Insistence on immortality is part of a dialogue of the self with itself. Such a dialogue is more likely to follow when the self is aware of its own impending destruction and needs reassurance. In intimate type notes, the writer continues to hope for a safe return. He sees the danger, but not the death. However, in the abstract type, there is no hope for a safe return. A safe return on one mission is the occasion for the need to move onto the next potentially fatal encounter. The writer gives lip service to death but not to danger.

The claim to immortality in the abstract type notes cannot be explained away only as a cultural belief or a psychological defense against the fear of annihilation. The claim is also a political communication signifying "object relations politics." On one hand, the claim to immortality is launched as a final attack on the enemy. Its aim is to prove the enemy's ultimate powerlessness in its attempt to destroy the ego. On the other hand, given the self's need to control the object, existence at a

higher level furnishes a sacred source of sanction for enforcing compliance with one's wishes. The writer achieves a status of social, emotional, and metaphysical power. The objects of the internalized relationships are expected to take notice of the force behind the commands. Thus, the communication of belief in immortality is nothing but a disguised object relation fantasy.

One's conception of life and death is always in relation to the self and object. Self-destructive behavior may be based on deeply ingrained religious or cultural beliefs about the nature of life and death. Yet, they represent nothing but a culturally sanctioned form of object relationship. They are forms of engagement with the world of objects rather than the strategies for the annihilation of the self.

Suicide is an act with death as a consequence. The experience of the finality of the outcome is not part of the act. The act is a symbolic ritual that makes sense only within the individual's system of fantasies and beliefs. Although the person may embark on a dangerous act, he might not really want to die. Personal death or annihilation is beyond the human experience. Revival of some sort of relatedness is always behind the suicide fantasies.

Pursuits of death and danger are clearly forms of engagement with the personal or impersonal worlds. They may even be regarded theoretically as fulfillment of certain object relation fantasies. However, the pursuit of death in search of nourishment and affirmation sounds paradoxical. Yet, Sandler (1978) argues even the most distressing and painful of relationships can be safety giving, reassuring, and affirming, as is exemplified by sadomasochistic relationships. Freud (1924) points to similar dynamics in his analysis of moral masochism, where he argues that even self-destruction cannot occur without libidinal satisfaction. He also explains one case of attempted suicide as an instance of the enactment of a wish, an unconscious object-relation fantasy (Freud, 1920).

Constructive or destructive engagements with the world are symbolic expressions of inner struggles that seek resolution in relation to the internal objects. Self-destructive and dangerous acts may be initiated as a form of symbolic dialogue with a universe that has failed to validate the self (Taylor, 1978). Such acts may simultaneously serve as a symbolic ritual for disentanglement from a particular perceived entrapment in the world.

In certain cases of suicide, the wish to destroy the fantasy objects is clearly the motivating force behind the act. Suicide becomes either the outcome of a struggle with bad objects or the point of interruption of a sadomasochistic course of action. To Winnicott (1950), suicide represents the dramatization of ejection of badness. The aim is to destroy the inner world's bad elements, rather than the self.

Although people can experience the death of others, they are incapable of experiencing their own deaths. As Freud (1915) observes, the defining feature of the fantasy of death or suicide is a self that is participating in the individual's own

funeral and mourning. This is again an object relation fantasy involving gratification of some wish or resolution of some conflict.

To Wilhelm Stekel (1910), revenge is the motivating factor behind the suicide act. The destruction of the self is intended to inflict the greatest punishment on the instigator of the person's suffering. Stekel writes about the child's attempt to rob the parents – the real objects – of their most treasured possession, his or her own life. He could have easily argued for the person's attempt to inflict the greatest pain on his or her fantasy objects.

Attachment to primitive love objects who are sadistic and idealize suffering has been suggested to contribute to the formation of social masochistic characters (Asch, 1976). We know that all cultures embody a variety of sadomasochistic symbols that can function as proxies for the primitive objects.

Theodore Reik (1941) similarly discusses the revenge fantasies of the social masochist. According to him, the rehabilitation of an offended self-esteem and the gratification of an unsatisfied pride are the driving forces behind such fantasies and their enactments. Sadistic and revengeful fantasies soothe the pain of defeat and mute the bitterness of being maltreated or wronged. To Reik, "the daydreams of nations maltreated by brutal neighbors, of disdained religious or social minorities living amongst an oppressing people, must be considered as mass-phantasies of the same kind" (p. 322). The social masochist is driven, according to him, by the anticipation of future power, by fantasies of conquering the oppressors and taking revenge on them.

Clearly there is no limit to the kind of interpretations that one may advance. We have to be open to all views, particularly when the data do not warrant a strong inference. Yet some analysts tend to see the world in a much more systematic and ordered form than is presented here. They take an exclusionary theoretical position and claim a privileged status for their own interpretation. That approach is increasingly under attack today. Post-structuralists, similar to the sociologists of knowledge, contend that meaning is not an independent representation of the real world grasped by an independent psychoanalytic observer. It is rather a reflection of a meaning-making system that produces our theories, our world, and the possibility of psychoanalysis.

For instance, my own discourse in this paper is highly context specific. The object relations discourse includes constructs that may represent the cultural fantasy or ideological slant in the West. As an example, the distinction between self and object, the idea of self-object differentiation, the preoccupation with individuation, and the notion of symbiotic relationship with its pathological overtone may themselves reflect a Western Individualistic *Weltanschauung*. Some writers (Chang, 1988) assert that in the West, our notions of self and other – with

their corollaries of self and object representations – are grounded in the ideological dogma of methodological individualism. It is alleged that the Eastern self is of such a nature that it often eludes our grasp, particularly when we try to analyze it with our ideologically tortured spectacles.

Self and object representations are cultural constructs with much cognitive and affective loading. In the East, the traditional mode of explanation of psychosocial phenomena is some form of system analysis. What Western journalists call the Easterner's "conspiracy theory" is primarily a tendency to avoid attribution of agency, responsibility, or blameworthiness to the individual. The enemy is some super structure, super organization or super power (Movahedi, 1996). Perhaps the discovery of the enemy as a well-defined individual awaits the birth of the notion of the individual. That is, it may take an individualistic *Weltanschauung* for the enemy to become individualized.

Thus one may even argue that the writers of the disengaged or abstract type notes represent not less differentiated and mature levels of object relation functioning in a Kleinian sense, but a more traditional form of self-object organization. Actually, there was some indication in the data that the notes clustered together in terms of their writers' social class or level of modernization. It has already been suggested that traditional cultures are more anal, obsessed, paranoid, and likely to engage in action rituals to fight fear and anxiety (Becker, 1973). This may simply speak to the differences is the discourse of self-presentation rather than to the differences in personality organization.

Whether these notes represent a) different levels of object-relation functioning, b) attempts to establish symbolic continuity with a socio-historical order, c) the unfolding of narcissism through heroic pursuits, d) manifestations of social masochism, e) different discourses of death, or f) simply pseudo-rational justifications for the enactments of destructive impulses cannot be empirically settled. In all likelihood, they may represent the working of all these processes. The information contained in the notes does not allow for the choosing of one inference over the other. The typical data that come from the psychoanalytic process by themselves usually do not fare any better. The appreciation of the complexity of human behavior enhances our psychoanalytic understanding and helps us avoid fixation on any one specific interpretation. To refine our theories we should use various approaches to the data and be able to entertain a variety of plausible interpretations.

As a postscript, I admit that bracketing a text from its socio-historical context, the subject of my analysis, is a problematic exercise, particularly, from a poststructuralist perspective. There is noting in a text that can be interpreted outside of its socio-cultural surround. To bracket a text means nothing but an

exclusion of certain interpretive contexts in favor of some others. In one sense it does violence to the text by allowing the analyst's interpretive framework to structure – or to suffocate – the "voice" of the original writer, should we assume that there is such a voice. Any listening to a voice in a text or any close reading of a text is within interpretation and is by definition contextualized. This is particularly true if we jump from a phenomenological analysis of a text to a psychological analysis of its writer. Although analyses of object relations, i.e. power relations, are by themselves political, some are "intentionally" more confused than some others. An analysis in terms of a theory of the object – the conceptualized object outside of its historical context – the "terrorist bomber" as perverse or "sick" – is a confused, albeit a politically powerful conceptualized tool (Foucault, 1982). The analysis of any resistance against domination is itself subject to the vagaries of power in so far as all pursuits of knowledge are in the final analysis nothing but pursuit of power. Strategic power relations may be read not only in the texts of political technology of the body but also in the analyses of "experts'" claims of knowledge on matters of the perversity of individuals who have been subject to the violence of the oppressor. Bracketing the action – taking the action as a text – of a fighter on a suicidal mission against an invading, dominating or occupying force from the socio-political context of the domination, is itself a political move in the service of oppression. Much too often what the sovereign fails to impose on the subject in his/her life, using Foucault's language, its experts try to do in his/her death by imposing a law of psychiatric truth on him/her which he/she must recognize (the experts' wishful fantasy) and others have to recognize in him/her. In that sense, although this analysis may come across as an attempt to "un-situate" action, my intention has not been to present a theory of the object – a psychology of the suicide bomber or "the theorist."

Although psychoanalysis is itself a discourse of power, I believe it should be used to liberate the subject from the shackles, constraints and delusions of the symbolic order. It should not be used in the service of the subject's objectification and moral servitude.

References

AGUINIS, M. A masterpiece of illumination. In: PERSON, E. S.; FONAGY, P.; FIGUEIRA, S. (Ed.). *On Freud's "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming"*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995. p. 17-32.

ARIES, P. *Images of Man and Death*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985.

ASCH, S. Varieties of negative therapeutic reaction and problems of technique. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytical Association*, New York, v. 24, p. 383-407, 1976.

BATESON, G. Information and Codification: A Philosophical Approach. In: RUESCH, J.; BATESON, G. (Ed.). *Communication*: The Social Matrix of Psychiatry. New York: Norton, 1968.

BECKER, E. *The Denial of Death*. New York: The Free Press, 1973.

BROWN, N. *Life Against Death*: The Psychoanalytic Meaning of History. New York: Viking, 1959.

CAMPBELL, D. The Role of the Father in a Pre-Suicide State. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, London, v. 76, p. 315-323, 1995.

CHANG, S. C. The Nature of the self: a transcultural view. *Transcultural Psychiatric Research Review* ,v. 25, p. 189-210, 1988.

DARBONNE, A. Study of Psychological Content in Communications of Suicidal Individuals. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, Washington, DC, v. 33, p. 590-596, 1969.

DEVEREUX, G. *Mohave Ethnopsychiatry and Suicide*: The Psychiatric Knowledge and Psychiatric Disturbances of an Indian Tribe. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institute, Bureau of Ethnology, Bulletin 175, 1961.

DREYFUS, H.; RABINOW, P. *Michel Foucault*: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics. University of Chicago Press, 1982.

DURKHEIM, E. (1897). *Suicide* (J.A. Spaulding & G. Simpson, Trans.). Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1951.

FENICHEL, O. *The Psychoanalytic Theory of Neurosis*. New York: Norton, 1945.

FONAGY, P.; TARGET, M. Understanding the violent patient: the use of the body and the role of the father. *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, London, v. 76,

p. 487-505, 1995.

FOUCAULT, M. The subject and power. In: DREYFUS, H. & RABINOW, P. (Eds.). *Michel Foucault*: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics. University of Chicago Press, 1982.

FREUD, S. (1915). Thoughts for the times on war and death. In: *S.E*. London: The Hogarth Press, 1975. v. 14, p. 289-300.

——. (1917). Mourning and melancholia. In: *S.E*. London: The Hogarth Press, 1975. v. 16, p. 239-258.

——. (1920). The psychogenesis of a case of homosexuality in a woman. In: *S.E*. London: The Hogarth Press, 1975. v. 18, p. 145-172.

——. (1924). The economic problem of masochism. In: *S.E*. London: The Hogarth Press, 1975. v. 19, p. 157-173.

FROMM, E. *Man for Himself*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1947.

GOTTSCHALK, L.; GLESER, G. An analysis of the verbal content of suicide notes. *British Journal of Medical Psychology*, London, v. 33, p. 195-204, 1960.

HENKEN, V. Banality Reinvestigated: A computer-based content analysis of suicidal and forced death documents. *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, Chicago, v. 6, p. 36-43, 1976.

HOFFER, E. *The True Believer*: thoughts on the nature of mass movements. New York: Harper Collins, 1951.

____ . Encapsulation as a defense against the fear of Annihilation. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, London, v. 72, p. 607-624, 1991.

JACOBS, J. Phenomenological study of suicide notes. In: GIDDENS, A. (Ed.). *The Sociology of Suicide*. London: The Whitefriars Press Ltd, 1971.

JOSEPH, B. Addiction to near-death. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, London, v. 63, p. 449-456, 1982.

LACAN, J. *Ecrits*: A Selection (A. Sheridan, Trans.) New York: Norton, 1966.

LEENAARS, A. *Suicide notes*. New York: Human Sciences Press, 1988.

LEWIN, B. Sleep, the mouth, and the dream screen. *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, New York, v. 15, p. 419-434, 1946.

MOVAHEDI, S. Methodological schizophrenia: a problem in the sociology of science. *International Journal of Contemporary Sociology*, Auburn, Alabama, v. 13, p. 79-92, Jan./April.1976.

____ . Metalinguistic analysis of therapeutic discourse. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, New York, v. 44, n. 3, p. 837-862, 1996.

OLINICK, S. L.; POLAND, W. S.; GRIGG K. S.; GRANATIR, W. L. The psychoanalytic work ego: process and interpretation. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, London, v. 54, p. 143-51, 1973.

POLLOCK, G. On mourning, immortality, and utopia. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, New York, v. 23, p. 334-362, 1975.

____ . Mourning, homicide, and suicide. *Annual of Psychoanalysis*, Chicago, v. 4, p. 225-249, 1976.

PULVER, S. The manifest dream in psychoanalysis: a clarification. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, New York, v. 35, p. 99-117, 1987.

RAGLAND, E. *Essays on the Pleasures of Death*. New York: Routledge, 1995.

REIK, T. *Masochism in Modern Man*. New York: Grove Press, 1941.

RICOEUR, P. *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences* (J.B. Thompson, Ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

SANDLER, J.; SANDLER, A. M. On the development of object relationships and affects. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, London, v. 59, p. 285-296, 1978.

SEGAL, R. (Ed.). *In Quest of the Hero*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990.

SHNEIDMAN, E. Suicide notes reconsidered. *Psychiatry*, v. 36, p. 379-394, 1973.

____ . *Suicide as Psychache*. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1993.

____ ; FARBEROW, N. Some comparison between genuine and simulated suicide notes in terms of Mowrer's concepts of discomfort and relief. *The Journal of General Psychology*, Washington, n. 56, p. 251-256, 1957a.

____ ; ____. *Clues to Suicide*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1957b.

STEINER, J. Perverse relationships between parts of the self: a clinical illustration. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, London, v. 62, p. 241-251, 1981.

STEKEL, W. (1910). Symposium on suicide. In: FRIEDMA, P. (Ed.). *On Suicide*. New York: International Universities Press, 1977. p. 33-141.

TABACHNICK, N. Observations on attempted suicide. In: SHNEIDMAN, E.; FARBEROW, N. (Ed.). *Clues to Suicide*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1957. p. 164-169.

TAYLOR, S. The confrontation with death and the renewal of life. *Suicide and Life Threatening Behavior*, Chicago, v. 8, n. 2, p. 89-98, 1978.

WINNICOTT, D.W. (1950). Aggression in relation to emotional development. In: *Collected Papers*: Through Paediatrics to Psycho-Analysis. New York: Basic Books, 1975. p. 204-218.

____ . (1953). Transitional objects and transitional phenomena: a study of the first not-me possession. In: *Collected papers*: Through Paediatrics to Psycho-Analysis. New York: Basic Books, 1975. p. 229-242.

____ . The location of cultural experience. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, London, v. 48, p. 368-372, 1967.

____ . The use of an object. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, London, v. 50, p. 711-16, 1969.

____ . Fear of breakdown. *International Review of Psychoanalysis*, London, v. 1, p. 103-107, 1975.

ZILBOORG, G. Suicide among civilized and primitive races. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, Arlington, VA, v. 92, p. 1347-1369, 1936.

____ . Considerations on suicide, with particular reference to that of the young. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, Washington, v. 7, p. 15-31, 1937.

Resumos

(O corpo como arma e a morte como política)

O artigo investiga a psicologia do martírio através da análise de discursos sobre a morte, cartas finais e testamentos deixados por homens do Oriente Médio que se empenharam em missões de suicídio nas guerras da região. O autor propõe que o corpo humano é tanto um objeto social quanto uma entidade biológica e que a morte é tanto um evento social quanto um acontecimento físico. Um corpo biologicamente vivo pode estar morto simbolicamente enquanto uma pessoa fisicamente morta pode ser mais poderosa do que os vivos. A comunicação que se faz enquanto se prepara para uma morte iminente é uma mensagem pesada comparável ao primeiro ou ao último sonho na psicanálise, pois poderá fornecer pistas valiosas não somente para a experiência psíquica imediata, mas, também, ao modo característico pelo qual se relaciona com o mundo dos objetos. Cartas finais, textos escritos em face de morte iminente, ou notas de suicídio, possuem uma qualidade especialmente exigente, de imploração. O autor encontra modos de comunicação e metacomunicação em tais escritos: podem parecer distantes, abstratos ou íntimos, e cada escritor transmite de modo diferente seus pensamentos, fantasias e relações com o mundo, com Deus, bem como com a justiça, a vingança morte, a imortalidade, os entes queridos e os inimigos.

Palavras-chave: Psicologia do martírio, discursos de morte, missões de suicídio, usos do corpo

(El cuerpo como arma y la muerte como politica)

El trabajo examina la psicología del martirio a través del análisis de lo que se dijo al morir, de las cartas últimas, de las voluntades finales y testamentos legados por hombres en la Edad Media que asumieron misiones suicidas en las guerras. El autor sostiene que el cuerpo humano es más un objeto social que una entidad biológica, y la muerte es más un evento social que un acontecimiento físico. La vida biológica del cuerpo puede ser simbólicamente muerte y la muerte física de una persona puede volverla más poderosa que cuando estaba viva. La comunicación que la persona hace cuando él o ella esta anticipando una muerte inminente es un mensaje sobredeterminado, comparable al primero o al último sueño en psicoanálisis. Puede proveer importantes claves no sólo sobre la experiencia física inmediata de la persona sino también sobre uno de los modos característicos de encuentro con el objeto mundo. Cartas finales, notas hechas poco antes de la muerte o del suicidio tienen una cualidad particular son exigentes, imperativas, suplicantes. El autor encuentra diferentes modos de

comunicación y metacomunicación en las notas: falta de compromisos, abstracción, intimidación, cada una comunica de modos diferentes sus pensamientos, fantasía su desligamiento del mundo, Dios , la justicia , la venganza, la muerte, la inmortalidad, los amigos y los enemigos.

Palabras claves: Psicología del martirio, palabras ultimas, misiones suicidas, usos del cuerpo

(Le corps comme arme et la mort comme politique)

Cet article porte sur la psychologie du martyr analysant les discours de mort, les dernières lettres, volontés et testaments des participants de campagne d'attentats-suicides dans les guerres du Moyen Orient. L'auteur défend que le corps humain n'est pas qu'une entité biologique, mais aussi un objet social et que la mort est un événement autant physique que social. Tout comme le corps biologique vivant peut être mort symboliquement, la personne physiquement morte peut exercer plus de pouvoir que de son vivant. La communication d'une personne qui anticipe sa mort imminente est un message surchargé comparable au premier ou dernier rêve dans la psychanalyse. Il peut fournir d'importantes pistes non seulement sur l'expérience psychique immédiate de la personne, mais aussi sur la façon caractéristique de sa rencontre avec le monde des objets. Les dernières lettres, les billets de mort imminente ou suicidaires sont d'une qualité spécialement exigeante, ordonnante et suppliante. L'auteur y a recueilli plusieurs modes de communication et de métacommunication: détaché, abstrait et intime. Ces modes transmettent de façon différente les pensées des martyrs, leurs fantaisies, leur rapport avec le monde, Dieu, la justice, la vengeance, la mort, l'immortalité, leurs proches et leurs ennemis.

Mots-clés: Psychologie du martyr, derniers discours, missions suicidaires, l'utilisation du corps

Citação/Citation: Movahedi, Siamak. Weaponization of the body and politicization of death. *Revista Latinoamericana de Psicopatologia Fundamental*, São Paulo, v. 12, n. 1, p. 71-98, mar.2009.

Editor do artigo/Editor: Prof. Dr. Manoel Tosta Berlinck.

Recebido/Received: 28.8.2008 / 8.28.2008 **Aceito/Accepted**: 1.10.2008 / 10.1.2008

Financiamento/Funding: O autor declara não ter sido financiado ou apoiado/The author has no support or funding to report.

Conflito de interesses: O autor declara que não há conflito de interesses/The author declares that has no conflict of interest.

Siamak Movahedi, Ph.D.
University of Massachusetts Boston & The Institute for the Study of Psychoanalysis and Culture Boston Graduate School of Psychoanalysis.
252 Waban Ave
Waban, Massachusetts 02468
USA