

The Cultural Complex

By Thomas Singer with Catherine Kaplinsky

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Introduction

On December 3, 1947, Dr. Joseph Henderson wrote the following in an unpublished letter to C. G. Jung:

I am working on an essay, which is possibly going to become a book, called "Protestant Man," in which I am gathering the fundamental attributes of historical development of Protestantism and trying to put them together with the modern *cultural complex* appearing in our Protestant patients on the psychological plane (Henderson 1947).

Some sixty years later in 2007, Joe Henderson, the revered elder of the C. G. Jung Institute of San Francisco, died. He never completed the book, *Protestant Man*, or further elaborate on the notion of the "cultural complex," but he did help

lay the essential groundwork for building a theory of cultural complexes by describing and differentiating out from Jung's notion of the "collective unconscious" the more specific area of unconscious activity and influence that he labelled "the cultural unconscious." One can conceptualize this as closer to the surface of ego-consciousness than the collective unconscious, from which we understand the archetypal patterns to originate.

The notion of cultural complexes was long implicit and even occasionally mentioned in the literature of Analytical Psychology, but it was not until the twenty-first century that Sam Kimbles and Tom Singer put the essential building blocks of Jung's original complex theory and Henderson's work on the cultural unconscious together that the potential impact of this theoretical extension of analytical psychology could begin to be appreciated and more widely applied (Singer and Kimbles 2004).

There are at least two possible reasons that the concept of the cultural complex remained more implicit than explicit in the Jungian tradition until the last few years. Jung's ill-timed foray into discussions about national character and especially the German psyche in the 1930s (Jung 1936/1970) effectively stopped further detailed consideration of differences among groups of people on the basis of race, ethnicity, and tribal/national identities by Jungians, who were deeply wounded and limited by the charges of anti-Semitism against Jung and his followers. After World War II and the Holocaust, few wanted to take up the subject of "national character" or cultural complexes for fear of being tainted by allegations of discrimination or, far worse, of contributing to justification of genocide. From this, Jungians learned very well that stepping on the landmines of cultural complexes can be very painful and destructive. Furthermore, the introverted bias of most Jungian psychoanalysts contributed to an ingrained

distaste for addressing group psychology because group life itself was viewed as the shallow “collective” out of which individuation needed to occur.

Perhaps the willingness of a younger generation of Jungians over the last decade and a half to address more openly the highly charged issues surrounding Jung’s attitude to Jews has freed up a considerable store of bound-up energy from a Jungian cultural complex. Now we can once again, more openly, explore the implication of Jung’s psychology in relation to the group or collective psyche. As a result of the collapse of the Soviet system and the end of a psychological world view dominated primarily by two colliding super powers, all sorts of new tribal, ethnic and racial issues have begun to surface in the startlingly rapid process of globalization. This has made it imperative for the Jungian tradition to begin analyzing the collective psyche with a more flexible and open attitude. This means resisting the typical Jungian temptation to reduce every group conflict to an archetypal motif but instead giving more careful consideration to the uniqueness of different cultures, including their separate cultural complexes. The tools to begin this work lay within the Jungian tradition itself, made available by joining Jung’s early theory of complexes with Henderson’s notion of the cultural unconscious. Most simply, our theory now holds that large scale social complexes form in the layer of the cultural unconscious of groups and become cultural complexes, as Henderson suggested in his 1947 letter to Jung. This new addition to the body of Jungian theory has the two following very important applications, which this paper will spell out using separate examples:

1. It offers a unique perspective for understanding a particular layer of the psyche of individuals who find themselves in conflict around their personal and group identity, which inevitably creates internal and external distress.

2. It also provides a unique perspective for understanding the structure and content of the group psyche and especially for elucidating the nature of conflicts and attitudes among groups towards one another. This perspective focuses on the level of the collective psyche where we can consider the mind and behaviour of the group as a body.

Building Blocks

First a word about the building blocks and characteristics of cultural complexes. There are primarily two: 1). Jung's original complex theory and its relationship to individuation and the life of groups, and 2) Joseph Henderson's theory of the cultural unconscious.

Jung's papers on the Word Association Experiment were published between 1904 and 1909 (Jung 1973, Part 1). Out of those early experiments based on timed responses to lists of words was born Jung's idea of complexes. For many Jungian psychoanalysts today, the theory of complexes remains a cornerstone of their clinical day-to-day work. Others use complex theory less. Like the Freudian theory of defenses, Jung's notion of complexes provides a handle for understanding the nature of intrapsychic and interpersonal conflict.

Through a hundred years of clinical experience, we have come to know well and accept that complexes are a powerful force in the lives of individuals. Most simply, we define a complex as an emotionally charged group of ideas and images that cluster around an archetypal core. Jung wrote:

The complex has a sort of body, a certain amount of its own physiology. It can upset the stomach. It upsets the breathing, it disturbs the heart—in short, it behaves like a partial personality. For instance, when you want to say or do something and unfortunately a complex interferes with this intention, then you say or do something different from what you intended. You are

simply interrupted, and your best intention gets upset by the complex, exactly as if you had been interfered with by a human being or by circumstances from outside.
(Jung 1936/1976, para. 72).

In Jungian psychoanalysis, the goal is to make personal complexes more conscious. In this way, the energy that is contained within them is freed up and made more available for psychological development. Elizabeth Osterman, a senior Jungian psychoanalyst of an earlier generation, liked to say that she had learned that her complexes would never completely disappear, but a lifetime of struggling with them had resulted in their debilitating effects, including foul moods, lasting only five minutes at a time rather than decades.

Today, we could say that some of the cultural complexes that we are currently exploring have caused uninterrupted foul moods in cultures for centuries, if not millennia. The cultural complex can possess the psyche and soma of an individual or a group, causing them to think and feel in ways that might be quite different from what they think they should feel or think. As Jung put it: "We say or do something different from what we intended." (Jung vol. 18: para. 72) In other words, cultural complexes are not always "politically correct," although being "politically correct" might itself be a cultural complex.

The basic premise of our work, then, is that another level of complexes exists within the psyche of the group and within the individual at the group level of their psyche. We call these group complexes "cultural complexes," and they, too, can be defined as emotionally charged aggregates of ideas and images that tend to cluster around an archetypal core and are shared by individuals within an identified collective. When it comes to understanding the psychopathology and emotional entanglements of groups, tribes, and nations, we maintain that Jung

and Jungians have not taken full advantage of Jung's original theory of complexes, and this has left a major gap in analytical psychology.

Just as a level of group or cultural complexes was more implicit than explicit in Jung's psychology, so too the level of a cultural unconscious was more implicit than explicit in Jung's model of the psyche until Joseph Henderson pointed to its distinct sphere of influence. In his paper, "The Cultural Unconscious," Henderson defined the cultural unconscious as:

...an area of historical memory that lies between the collective unconscious and the manifest pattern of the culture. It may include both these modalities, conscious and unconscious, but it has some kind of identity arising from the archetypes of the collective unconscious, which assists in the formation of myth and ritual and also promotes the process of development in individuals (Henderson 1990, 102-113).

Over a period of several decades, Joseph Henderson in his teaching and writing expounded on a "cultural level" of the psyche that he called "the cultural unconscious." He posited this realm as existing between the personal and collective unconscious. For many Jungians, Henderson's work opened the theoretical door on that vast realm of human experience which inhabits the psychic space between our most personal and our most archetypal levels of being in the world. Henderson's elaboration of the cultural level of the psyche has made greater space for the outer world of group life to find a home in the inner world of the individual and has allowed those immersed in the inner world to recognize more fully the deep value the psyche actually accords to the outer world of collective cultural experience. However, the potential role of Jung's complex theory remained undeveloped in Henderson's discussions of the cultural unconscious. Extending Jung's theory of complexes into the territory of the

"cultural level of the psyche," as first described by Joseph Henderson, is the work that we are now addressing. We feel that it is clinically useful to specify how the cultural unconscious influences the psyche of individuals and groups through the development, transmission and manifestation of cultural complexes.

The Theory of Cultural Complexes

It is time now to assemble the building blocks -- Jung's theory of complexes and Henderson's theory of the cultural unconscious -- and make the "cultural complex" an integrated part of the theoretical framework of analytical psychology. The following is an attempt to do just that.

While it must be pointed out that personal complexes and cultural complexes are not the same, they do get mixed together and affect one another. We suggest that personal and cultural complexes *share* the following characteristics:

1. They express themselves in powerful moods and repetitive behaviors. Highly charged emotional or affective reactivity is their calling card.
2. They resist our most heroic efforts to make them conscious and remain, for the most part, unconscious.
3. They accumulate experiences that validate their point of view and create a store-house of self-affirming ancestral memories.
4. Personal and cultural complexes function in an involuntary, autonomous fashion and tend to affirm a simplistic point of view that replaces everyday ambiguity and uncertainty with fixed, often self-righteous, attitudes to the world.
5. In addition, personal and cultural complexes both have archetypal cores; that is, they express typically human attitudes and

are rooted in primordial ideas about what is meaningful, making them very hard to resist, reflect upon, and discriminate.

Attending to the personal, cultural and archetypal levels of complexes requires respect for each of these realms without condensing or telescoping one into the other, as if one realm were more real, true, or fundamental than another. Cultural complexes are based on frequently repeated historical experiences that have taken root in the collective psyche of a group and in the psyches of the individual members of a group, and they express archetypal values for the group. As such, cultural complexes can be thought of as the fundamental building blocks of an inner sociology. But this inner sociology is not objective or scientific in its description of different groups and classes of people. Rather, it is a description of groups and classes as filtered through the psyches of generations of ancestors. It contains an abundance of information and misinformation about the structures of societies—a truly inner sociology—and its essential components are cultural complexes.

An Example of a Cultural Complex in the Psyche of an Individual, by Catherine Kaplinsky

The following is an example of how a cultural complex took shape in the psyche of an individual. This was creatively worked through in relation to his personal complexes, and his story illustrates how these were freed up in a transformative experience.

The individual, now deceased, was an exiled White South African and a professor in a European university. The shape of the cultural complex expressed itself in a recurrent dream that was communicated in a letter to me, his friend,

around the time of South Africa's democratic transition out of the institutionalised racism of Apartheid in 1994:

From the ages of 35 to 40 or so I had a recurrent dream. The dream experience was always pleasant. It was very simple:

A small black boy, who I somehow knew to be Xhosa, sat on a beach. The beach was very long and very beautiful, with heavy surf. If you looked at the surf from the beach it seemed high, with big waves banked up on one another. Above the surf, the air was filled with a light haze. The boy was about 4 years old. He played with a whole lot of cowrie shells, which were "cattle." He was putting these cattle into a kraal (African enclosure) made of sand. He was happy. I was not present in the dream. I could not talk to him, only observe him....

The little boy was a puzzle, and I took a long time to home in on him. Then at one point I had a strong set of feelings about my identity, which was somehow mixed up with being Xhosa. I realised that the little boy was—in a curiously inadmissible way—myself. This I think was why I was not present in the dream except as an observer, unable to talk to the little boy.

Why was I the little boy?... What I found was the following: In early childhood I was with my mother and little sister in the Ciskei where my cousins and uncles were farmers. My father was "up north" in the army. In that time my "relationship" with my mother was terrible. You can say that she was jealous of my childhood because she wanted to be looked after herself and resented having to be a responsible parent. She was, to all intents and purposes, a competitive child... only a grown up one, with great power over me. I have no recollection of meaningful love from her.

On the other hand, I was loved and properly mothered by Rosie Ngwekazi who was a servant-cum-nursemaid in my aunt's house... I depended on her far more than most South African children might depend on their black nursemaids, because of my mother's opting out of her role—and because my mother actually hurt and humiliated me. Rosie on the other hand loved me and was the only source of unconditional loving....

When I discovered this some years ago, I experienced a sort of unbounded joy and freedom. The discovery that I had been loved like that was also my first adult recognition that, like everyone else, I was "lovable" and that it was also OK to love myself.

I came to understand that I had been denied this recognition for so many years (it only came to me at about 40), because after my father's return we went to Cape Town and I was subject at home and at school to extremely strong racist conditioning. I simply could not own a Xhosa woman as my mother ... All the black part of me which had come into being in the Ciskei became inadmissible. I could not allow myself to own the experience with Rosie. And although by the age 25-30, I had disentangled a large amount of the racist shit that was pushed into me in the post-Ciskei years, this critical bit remained. After all, it raised very fundamental questions. At the same time, since Rosie's love was so central to my emotional survival I held on to it in a subconscious way in the dream-sequence.

I saw Rosie at the Feni location when I visited the Ciskei region two weeks ago. It was a wonderful meeting. I was able to thank her for the love she gave me then. She knew perfectly well how important it had been and, very discreetly, made it clear that she knew a great deal about my mother's inabilities. She said that it was important that I had come back because I was Xhosa and because my "navel is buried" in the Ciskei. I know what she means.

So there's your dream. Make whatever use you can of it. I share all the usual reasons for hating Apartheid, but I have my own additional one ... it prevented me from owning the most important experience of childhood by making it inadmissible. I could not own the central Black part of myself. I don't have the dream any more. It must be because I can own the reality (Kaplinsky 2008, 53: 2).

It is clear from the dream and the dreamer's "working through," how the interface between cultural and individuation processes has created conflict and stress for him. The dreamer needed both to "own" his experiences with Rosie in order to be "true" to himself, and he needed to "disown" them in order to be "true" to his family and the white racist culture into which he was born. However, he then came to resent the positive experiences he had had to "disown" with Rosie. This propelled him on his personal journey.

A kind of layering of complexes, splits, and shadow formation developed. Firstly he described his mother as having been “terrible.” His infant self therefore had to set up a defensive structure, a second skin function, to survive (terrible mother complex). But he also sought appropriate responses elsewhere—bodily and emotional—and he found them in Rosie (positive mother complex). Later, since he “belonged” to, and interacted with white reference groups, he learned to “disown” Rosie, giving rise to a sense of betrayal and guilt that resided in the cultural complex. We can see, therefore, how complexes developed out of an intricate network of affect, absorbed via mother, Rosie, and intimate others who, in turn, participated and were embedded in this culture.

Themes of power and dependency run through both the personal and the cultural complexes. The dreamer describes the “great power” his mother had over him, thus necessitating his defensive structure. From the cultural point of view, there was an interesting twist. While the Whites dominated and controlled the Blacks economically, they also depended on them, not only for their labour but also very often for emotional care—as was the case with the dreamer. To keep the status quo, a rigid political structure was required, which fed the cultural complex. Apartheid means “separateness,” thus signifying a rigidification of the us/them dynamics in terms set by skin colour. As we know, all manner of negative projections were aimed by the ruling white population at those with non-white skin. Skin colour triggered emotional reaction and was key to the cultural complex.

The cattle game in the dream was the dreamer’s attempt to disentangle himself from what he called the “racist shit that had been pushed into [him]” and that made up part of the cultural complex in which he lived. This, in turn, affected his personal complexes.

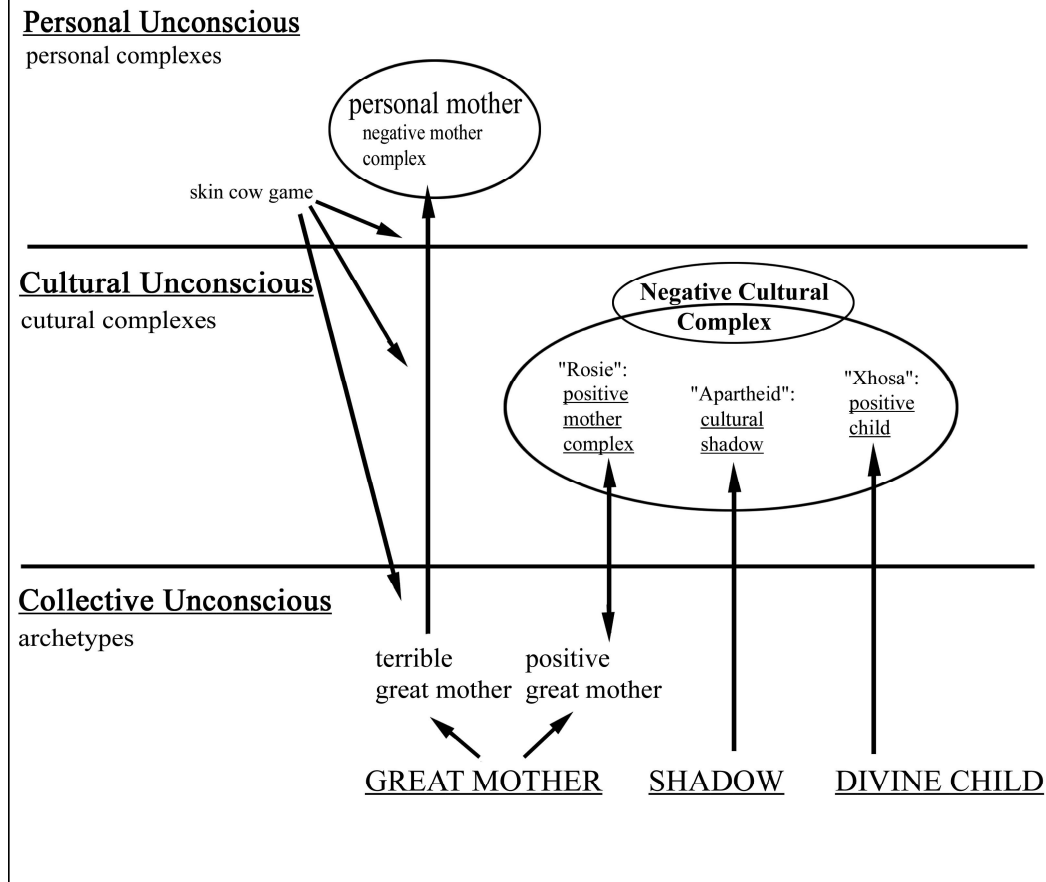
The cowrie shells were pretend cows. The transition from cowrie to cows is particularly inventive. The hard defensive structure of the shells with a feminine underside became softer creatures that interacted with one another, providing milk and nourishment. They also easily evacuated waste, and they had looser skins. So within the cattle game it was as if the cowrie/cow/complexes were being loosened and shifted about, in and out of the kraal/container, allowing for experimentation and exchange. The dreamer was finding a way to reach into his hidden, vulnerable underside.

The coloring of the cowries is particularly significant when addressing the cultural complex of the Apartheid era. Cowrie shells vary in color, but where the dreamer played on the beach they were generally a mixture of white with blotchy brown, black, or caramel markings. Cows have similar coloring, commonly more defined – possibly addressing a firming up of the dreamer’s color consciousness as well as his struggle to loosen his complexes in relation to skin color. He had written: “...all the black part of me ... became inadmissible.” His infant self had assumed that he was black and Xhosa, the same as Rosie. Thus we see the transcendent function at work, producing symbols where the multi-coloring in a single skin—of both cowrie shells and cows—helped disentangle and loosen both personal and cultural complexes.

Commentary on Catherine Kaplinsky’s Example, by Thomas Singer

There are many ways to consider this extraordinary material. Below I have set up a schematic diagram to illustrate how the cultural complex in this case operates with regard to the various levels of the unconscious.

Unconscious Dynamics in a Man with a Cultural Complex



Complexes (personal and cultural) and archetypes (shadow, great mother and divine child) interact in the exiled professor’s recurrent dream and in his subsequent “working through.” The diagram is intended to help understand how a cultural complex shapes itself in the psyche and how the energy trapped within it is released, thus bringing a profound sense of renewal for this individual. This occurred in this case through processes of spontaneous, active imagination (we do not know how much of a role his personal therapy, with the transference and counter transference experiences in it, played in this transformation).

Within the collective unconscious, the archetypal patterns act as preconditions for how a psyche may be shaped and develop. Seeds for polar oppositions originate here, including idealising and denigrating tendencies, as well as shadow energies and the potential for morality. The potentials for extremes—the Great and Terrible Mother, the Divine Child, etc.--are resident here.

Within the personal unconscious of this man, we find the opposites at work when he describes his mother as “terrible” and Rosie as his “only source of unconditional loving.” The “all terrible,” “all powerful” mother in his family resulted in building up a defensive second skin structure, like the cowrie shell. Later, in Rosie he found the “great and positive mother” and she became an essential part of his individuation process—with powerful cultural implications.

The cultural unconscious came into play when the positive experience with Rosie had to be denied. The love of and from Rosie was obscured by the negative cultural complex that was coupled in an unholy marriage with the shadow projections of the Apartheid era.

The cow game—or cowrie game—is the play that facilitated and symbolized the movement of psychic energies from one level of the unconscious to another, eventually leading to a profound transformation in the psyche. The unconscious memory/energy of the “Positive Great Mother” had been obscured for decades by the unholy union with the “Shadow” of Apartheid and was thus housed within the negative cultural complex at the level of the cultural unconscious. This fusion of positive mother and cultural shadow in the cultural complex was finally dissolved, and the energies contained within the negative cultural complex were released and became available to consciousness for other purposes. The repressed experience of Rosie’s love, which could have taken shape as a positive mother complex, now became available to consciousness through the dream

figure of Xhosa boy, and the grip of the personal negative mother complex on the ego was then also further relaxed. Thus a new experience of the ego and its identity became possible, and what is sometimes referred to as the ego-self axis could be restored.

Further Clinical Observations About Cultural Complexes

Although the previous example of a cultural complex in an individual did not unfold in the context of a formal psychotherapeutic framework, it was chosen because the dream and the narrative provided by the dreamer offer such a concise and powerful example of the structure, content, and evolution of a cultural complex in an individual. In *The Cultural Complex* (Singer and Kimbles eds. 2004), Kimbles, Morgan and Beebe have each offered poignant vignettes of the clinical appearance of cultural complexes in the psychotherapeutic container, and the reader is encouraged to read those studies to get a more detailed description of the clinical manifestations of cultural complexes. Here I will briefly outline some of the more important features of cultural complexes when they crop up in clinical work.

Cultural complexes are made conscious in the consulting room in the same way that most other unconscious conflicts become known, i.e., through paying close attention to personal, family and cultural history; through analyzing dream and fantasy material that emerges from the unconscious; through transference/counter transference reactions; through unconscious slip's and through potent moods and/or the break-through of powerful affect. Of this, John Beebe writes:

In Jungian analytic work, which is always about the exploration of complexes, one does not necessarily recognize that the knot

one is trying to untie may be a cultural complex. Like any other complex, the cultural complex creates internal conflict; occasions anxiety, anger, and depression; governs the outer situations that are brought to the therapy for counsel; shapes the transference in the therapeutic interaction; and structures the imagery of the patient's dreams. Since these complexities affect the individual, and any person who comes into the emotional field that surrounds the individual, we often assume that they belong solely to the subjective nature of that individual person. Yet, they can represent culture operating at the level of the individual. By following a careful clinical method, a therapist can unmask the intrusion of a cultural complex into the unconscious life of the patient." (Beebe 2004, 223)

With surgical precision, Beebe dissects the appearance of a cultural complex in the dream of a man who was later to die of HIV-AIDs. In the dream, a lesion on the dreamer's thigh in the shape of a bottle cap from a Coke of the 1950's led dreamer and analyst to uncover a cultural complex that literally marked his body and psyche with a terrible homophobic fear of not being strong enough, of not being masculine enough, of not being heroic enough. The homophobia of the 1950's branded the boy with a crippling cultural complex that left him a scapegoat and an outsider. The cultural complex proclaimed itself in the dream, and through careful analysis it became more conscious in both the analysand and the analyst. While neither was able to heroically overcome the HIV virus, they were able to diminish the virulence of the cultural complex.

Another way in which cultural complexes announce themselves in the consulting room is through the transference-countertransference reactions of analysand and analyst. Helen Morgan describes her discovery of a racial cultural complex in herself, a white woman, and a patient, a black woman, that made itself known through the emergence of a negative emotional reaction to the patient in the analyst and an unconscious slip of the tongue in the patient. The

analyst experienced her patient as a “cuckoo in the nest.” “The cuckoo does not build its own nest but lays its eggs singly in the nests of other bird species. The eggs are then incubated and reared unwittingly by the foster parents.” (Morgan 2004, 214). Morgan had the intrusive, negative, unbidden thought that she did not want her patient in the room, that the patient was a “cuckoo in the nest.” In turn, the patient soon began to express her fears that Morgan wanted to “brainwash” her, but in a slip of the tongue, “brainwash” became “whitewash.” As patient and analyst began to explore the complex attitudes that emerged through the “cuckoo in the nest” that feared being “whitewashed,” the self-loathing and loathing of other at the heart of this cultural complex became conscious—a disparagement of the patient’s own blackness and later a disparagement of the analyst’s whiteness. Morgan writes:

This complex attitude to her self and to me clearly related to her personal story, but this also illustrates something of the dilemma of the black person in the white society. If what is declared to be good is white, then the fairer one can become, the more one may gain acceptance. The stain, the misdemeanour is in the blackness and so must be whitewashed, but by becoming whitened the individual is lost as is the value of blackness. There is a wiping out, an annihilation of the diverse when a blanket layer of white is layered all over. In this game, the black is beaten so decisively by the whitener that “he or she fails to score at all.” (Morgan 2004, 218)

Samuel Kimbles has documented another form in which the cultural complex can appear. He describes a white patient who revealed fantasies and fantasy figures dating back to her childhood that were subsequently projected onto him, a Black analyst. These fantasy figures functioned in her psyche as an alternately “dreaded and desired Other” in a stereotypical way. Kimbles writes:

In her fantasies, starting as early as her preadolescent years, the patient has been utilizing stereotypes to represent anxieties and

conflicts that were active in her early developmental history. That my patient had no actual relationships to the cultural figures of her fantasies and dreams shows the relative autonomy of cultural stereotypes at the level of the cultural unconscious. Her creative use of these stereotypes reveals, however, that a cultural complex may function unconsciously in the individual, just as in the culture, to organize and bind anxiety related to differences. (Kimbles 2004, 210)

As with personal complexes, the making conscious and getting some objectivity about cultural complexes in a psychotherapeutic setting is a long, arduous process of disidentification from contents that emerge from the cultural unconscious as well as the more familiar personal and collective unconscious.

An Example of a Cultural Complex in the Collective Psyche

Even if cultural complexes are not the direct focus of psychotherapy, the clinician would be wise not to underestimate the power and influence of this part of the collective psyche on individuals in the consulting room. Cultural complexes in the unconscious of the group contribute mightily to the barometric pressure of everyday life and can be thought of as part of the psychic environment of all patients. The following is a brief example of how intersecting cultural complexes have infected the collective psyche of citizens throughout the Western and Islamic world.

In his 1936 essay about Nazi Germany, “Wotan,” Jung wrote:

Archetypes are like riverbeds which dry up when the water deserts them, but which it can find again at any time. An archetype is like an old watercourse along which the water of life has flowed for centuries, digging a deep channel for itself. The longer it has flowed in this channel the more likely it is that sooner or later the water will return to its old bed. The life of the individual as a member of society and particularly as part of the State may be regulated like a canal, but the life of nations is a great rushing river which is utterly beyond human control... Thus the life

of nations rolls on unchecked, without guidance, unconscious of where it is going, like a rock crashing down the side of a hill, until it is stopped by an obstacle stronger than itself. Political events move from one impasse to the next, like a torrent caught in gullies, creeks and marshes. All human control comes to an end when the individual is caught up in a mass movement. Then the archetypes begin to function, as happens also in the lives of individuals when they are confronted with situations that cannot be dealt with in any of the familiar ways.

(Jung 1936/1964, para. 395)

What Jung wrote in 1936 resonates all too clearly with our current crisis between Islam and the West. The ancient archetypal riverbed of conflict - among Christians, Jews, and Muslims - is once again overflowing with a rushing torrent that threatens to flood the world. Can we say something about this situation from the perspective of the "cultural complex?"

Cultural complexes can have long memories and very powerful emotions embedded in them. They acquire a strong sense of history with the passage of time from one generation to the next and over multiple generations. They enshrine and encrust themselves in the consciousness and unconscious of groups of people and the individual psyches of members of groups. Simultaneously, they intertwine themselves with the cultural complexes of other groups of peoples. Indeed, these intertwining and affect laden energies of conflicting unconscious cultural complexes can form the pre-conditions for human events to unfold with a fury that can be likened to the natural forces portrayed in a movie of a few years ago called *The Perfect Storm*, when all of the climatic conditions off the eastern seaboard of the United States were uniquely positioned to come together and cause a storm of gigantic proportions.

It is no stretch of the geopolitical, psychological and spiritual imagination to say that we are living in a time when a rare configuration of swirling cultural

complexes have been aligning in just the right combination to unleash massive destructive forces. The best way to know that one is touching a cultural complex—in either a group or an individual—is by the emotional reactivity that certain topics automatically trigger. This is how Jung first came to identify personal complexes—the emotional reactivity of a trigger word caused disturbance in responses. The same can be said about a "cultural complex." A hallmark of a cultural complex is the emotional reactivity of trigger words, such as "George Bush" or "Osama bin Laden" or "war on terror" or "holy jihad" or "colonial empire."

I do not want to be understood as equating the origin of cultural complexes with the geographical expansion and contraction of civilizations, but one can see the late 15th century—especially 1492--as a critical date for the beginning of the rise of the West and the beginning of the decline of Islam. To say that the rise of the West is at the core of one cultural complex and that the decline of Islam is at the core of another is, of course, a gross oversimplification. Currently, for instance, multiple local and regional complexes have become caught up in the clashing mega cultural complexes of Islam and the West. In the West, for instance, old French, German, English, and American rivalries and hatreds have been stirred up, just as in the Islamic world, Sunni, Shiite, Kurdish and other tribal feuds have been activated—and all of these cultural complexes, Western and Islamic—have been thrown together to form the conditions for a global "perfect storm" of colliding cultural complexes. But, if we take 1492 as a turning point in defining the history of Islam and the history of the West and in giving rise to two very different kinds of cultural complexes, we can begin to sketch some of the characteristics of these cultural complexes:

a. On the one hand, 1492 marks the beginning of the ascendancy of the New World with its "discovery" of the Americas. In addition to the New World providing just the right climate for the creation of a set of remarkable values such as democracy, freedom, and the sanctity of the individual, it has also given rise to a particular type of cultural complex characterized—especially in the United States and its relative "newness" on the world stage—by:

1. addiction to heroic achievement,
2. addiction to height,
3. addiction to speed,
4. addiction to youth, newness and progress,
5. addiction to innocence,

6. most importantly, a profound belief in the resilience of the Western—and especially, the American—group spirit which can easily translate itself into arrogance and grandiosity.

b. On the other hand, 1492 also marks the beginning of the retreat of Islam from the West and a long steady decline for the past 500 years of Islam's ability to take creative initiative in the intellectual, economic, and social realms. This decline in Islamic power and influence has led to a cultural complex in the Islamic world and especially in its groups of radical fundamentalists that can be characterized by:

1. adherence to purity,
2. adherence to absolutism,
3. adherence to tradition,
4. adherence to incorruptibility.

These first four characteristics of the cultural complex of Islamic fundamentalism are almost perfectly mirrored in the cultural complex of

Christian fundamentalism in the United States. The next two features I want to highlight are more unique to the cultural complex of Islamic fundamentalism:

5. renunciation of materialism (as so awesomely symbolized and concretized by turning America's addiction to speed, height, and material success against itself in the attack on the World Trade Center);

6. and, most importantly, a profound wound at the center of its group spirit that has given rise to despair and suicidal self-destructiveness. Repeated humiliation is at the heart of much of the Arab world's experience of itself, and the fear of and rage at humiliation constitutes a most dangerous core symptom of the Islamic cultural complex.

I am aware that the description of Islam's 500-year history of decline, resulting in a battered sense of "self" at the collective center of identity, is a gross over-simplification. Cultural complexes, however, collect around and thrive on such oversimplifications that have some truth at the core. Bernard Lewis gives an excellent description of the impact with the West on Islam and the rage of traditional Muslim in the face of the encounter with the West (Lewis 1993, 3-42). If you mix all of these ingredients of the Western and Islamic cultural complexes together, you will see that we have a truly horrific recipe for a witches' brew that has mobilized huge energies in the life of nations and at the group level of the psyche in the individual. These activated cultural complexes, transmitted through the cultural unconscious, set us up for the kinds of archetypal possessions and overflowing of ancient riverbeds that Jung described in his "Wotan" essay (Jung 1936/1964).

Conclusion

About personal complexes, Jung wrote: "Our destinies are as a rule the outcome of our psychological tendencies" (Jung 1913/1967, para. 309). The same can be said of cultural complexes. Our personal and cultural complexes are the hand that fate has dealt us. Jung said rather bluntly in another context: "We all have complexes; it is a highly banal and uninteresting fact.... It is only interesting to know what people do with their complexes; that is the practical question which matters" (Jung 1936/1976, para. 175). How we play the hand that fate has dealt us and what we do with our personal and cultural complexes determines who we become as individuals, groups and societies.

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