

http://www.austenriggs.org/Senior_Erikson_Scholar/

Volkan, Vamik D. 2008. Massive Traumas at the hand of “Others”: Large-group Identity issues, transgenerational transmissions, “Chosen Traumas” and their consequences (in Spanish). Will appear in *Los Laberintos de la Violencia*, ed. Leticia Glocer Fioroni. (Argentina)

May 15, 2007 version

**Massive Traumas at the Hand of “Others”: Large-Group Identity Issues,
Transgenerational Transmissions, “Chosen Traumas” and Their Consequences**

Vamik D. Volkan

Vamik D. Volkan, M. D., Senior Erik Erikson Scholar, Erikson Institute for Research and Education of the Austen Riggs Center, Stockbridge, MA; Professor Emeritus of Psychiatry, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA; and Training and Supervising Analyst Emeritus, Washington Psychoanalytic Institute, Washington, DC.

E-Mail: vdv@virginia.edu

Massive societal catastrophes can occur for any number of reasons, including natural or man-made disasters, political oppression, economic collapse, or death of a leader, but tragedies, deaths, and brutalities that result from the deliberate actions of other ethnic, national, religious or ideological groups called “enemies,” must be differentiated from other types of massive shared trauma. This is because they involve large-group identity issues. When “Others” who possess a different large-group identity than the victims humiliate and oppress a group, the victimized group’s identity is threatened.

This paper studies specific societal processes that are put in motion within the victimized society following a massive trauma at the hand of “Others,” processes that nurture the development of “chosen traumas.” A chosen trauma refers to the shared mental representation of a traumatic historical event that is a significant large-group identity marker. Under certain circumstances political leaders may reactivate a chosen trauma through propaganda and hate speeches that inflame followers’ shared feelings about themselves and their enemy.

Large groups and large-group identity

In the psychoanalytic literature, often the term “large group” refers to 30 to 150 members who meet in order to deal with a given issue (Kernberg 2003 a, b). I have consistently used the term “large group” to describe tens, hundreds of thousands, or millions of individuals—most of whom will never meet during their lifetimes—who share a deep sense of belonging to one another from childhood on (Volkan 1988, 1997, 2004, 2006).

My definition of large groups refers to those characterized by religion, nationality, ethnicity or political ideology such as communism.

What is large-group identity? Freud seldom referred to the term “identity,” and when he did, it was in a colloquial or unsophisticated sense. One well-known reference to identity is found a speech delivered by Freud to B’nai B’rith. In the course of his talk, Freud wondered why he was bound to Jewry since, as a non-believer, he had never been instilled with ethnonational pride or religious faith. Nevertheless, Freud noted a “safe privacy of a common mental construction,” and a clear consciousness of his “inner identity” [as a Jew?] (Freud, 1926, p. 274). It is interesting that Freud’s remarks linked his individual identity with his large-group identity

Although there is no clear description of “identity” in specific psychoanalytic terms, there is a consensus that it refers to a subjective experience. Unlike the terms “character” and “personality,” which are observed and perceived by others, identity refers to an individual’s inner working model -- he or she, not an outsider, senses and experiences it. Erikson, one psychoanalyst who focused on identity, first used the term “ego identity,” and then dropped the word ego and used simply “identity” (Erikson, 1956). He described it as “a persistent sameness within oneself ... [and] a persistent sharing of some kind of essential character with others” (p. 57).

Adapting Erikson's (1956) description of individual identity, I define *large-group identity* as the subjective experience of thousands or millions of people who are linked by a

persistent sense of sameness, while also sharing some characteristics with others who belong to foreign groups. Using an analogy of a large canvas tent helps explain large-group identity. Think in terms of learning to wear two layers of clothing from the time we are children. The first layer, the individual layer, fits each of us snugly. It is one's core personal identity that provides an inner sense of persistent sameness for the individual (Erikson 1956). The second layer is the canvas of the tent which is loose fitting, but allows us to share a sense of sameness with others under a common large-group tent. The canvas of the tent refers to one's core large-group identity. Some common threads, such as identifications with intimate others in one's environment, are used in the construction of the two layers, the individual garment as well as the canvas of the tent. Thus the core individual identity and the core large-group identity, psychologically speaking, are interconnected (Volkan 1988, 2004). While it is the tent pole—the leader—that holds the tent erect, the tent's canvas (large-group identity) protects both the leader and the group.

Under a huge large-group tent there are subgroups and subgroup identities, such as professional identities. A person can change a subgroup identity without much anxiety, unless such a change unconsciously becomes connected with a psychic danger such as losing one's mother or facing castration. But, for practical purposes, an individual cannot change his or her core large-group identity especially after the individual goes through the adolescence passage (Blos, 1979) and his or her core identity is crystallized. I am referring to general and typical situations here and not considering unusual individuals in a society, such as those who may be products of parents from a different ethnic group, or immigrants or dissenters. Think of a man—let's say he is German—who is an amateur

photographer. If he decides to stop practicing photography and take up carpentry, he may call himself a carpenter instead of a photographer, but he cannot stop being a German and become a Frenchman. His Germanness is part of his core large-group identity, which is interconnected with his core individual identity. Both core identities evolve in childhood and become intertwined and crystallized during the adolescent passage (Volkan 1988, 1997). A group may evolve a new large-group identity only through the influence of some long-lasting historical events. For example, a large group of South Slavs became Bosniaks while under the rule of the Ottoman Empire.

The more the members of a large group are traumatized by an enemy group, the more they hold on to their large-group identities at the expense of their investments in their individual identities. They become preoccupied with “we-ness,” the wear and tear on the canvas of their large-group tent, and emotionally become ready to do anything to protect their large-group identity and differentiate it clearly from the “Other’s” identity, even if this necessitates an increased tolerance for shared masochism and sadism. What I described here is easily observable in refugee or internally displaced person’s (IDP’s) camps or settlements (Volkan 2006).

Depositing and transgenerational transmissions

Besides causing problems with large-group identity issues a massive trauma at the hands of enemies, unlike traumas caused by natural or man-made accidental tragedies, is accompanied by shared shame, humiliation, helplessness and even dehumanization, and mourning for its associated losses is difficult or non-existent (Volkan 2006). When the members of an affected group cannot reverse their shame, humiliation, helplessness and dehumanization and cannot mourn their losses, they obligate the subsequent generation(s), through what is known as the *transgenerational transmission of trauma*, to complete these unfinished psychological processes. We have known about this phenomenon for some time, especially due to many psychoanalytic studies on the Holocaust survivors and their descendants. (A list of such studies can be found in Volkan, Ast and Greer 2002.) I will show that the transgenerational transmission of trauma is utilized in the service of strengthening the affected large group's identity.

The concept of depositing self- and object images into the self-representation of a child explains how transgenerational transmission of trauma occurs (Volkan 1987; Volkan, Ast and Greer 2002). "Depositing" is closely related to the well-known concept of "identification" in childhood or it can even be considered a version of identification. But, it is in some ways significantly different than identification. In identification, the child is the primary active partner in taking in and assimilating object images and related ego and superego functions from another person. In depositing, the "other," an adult person, more actively pushes his or her specific self- and internalized object images into the developing self-representation of the child. In other words, the "other" uses the child, mostly unconsciously, as a reservoir for certain self- and object images that belong to that

adult. The experiences that created these mental images in the adult are not “accessible” to the child. Yet those mental images are pushed into the child, but without the experiential/contextual “framework” which created them.

One area where the concept of depositing can be illustrated clearly is the so-called “replacement child phenomenon” (Ainslie and Solyom (1986), Cain and Cain 1964; Green and Solnit 1964; Legg and Sherick (1976), Poznanski 1972; Volkan and Ast 1997). A mother has an internalized formed image of her child who has died. She deposits this image into the developing self-representation of her next-born child, usually born after the first child’s death. The second child, the replacement child, has no actual experience with or image of the dead sibling. The mother, who has an image of the dead child, treats the second one as the reservoir where the dead child can be kept “alive.” Accordingly, the mother gives the second child certain ego tasks, mostly unconsciously, to protect and maintain what is deposited in this child. Obviously, replacement children also develop personal ego functions to deal with what has been pushed into them. For example, replacement children will be preoccupied with the task of integrating the deposited image with the rest of their self-representation. These children may or may not succeed in doing so. Sometimes the assimilated idealized deposited representation may become a motivation for the individual to excel in certain areas of life experiences. If this task is not successful, replacement children may develop an unintegrated self-representation and therefore a borderline or narcissistic personality organization, or even psychotic personality organization (Volkan 1987).

The mother or other caretaker who deposits the mental image of a dead child (or other dead relatives), into the developing self of a child is herself or himself suffering from difficulty of mourning. They are traumatized. In the replacement child phenomenon, there may also be some depositing of the depositor's injured self image into the child's self. Some adults may actively, but mostly unconsciously, push their own traumatized self and traumatized object images, whether they are connected with a concrete loss or not, into developing self-representations of their children. Although the child who becomes a reservoir is not completely a passive partner, nevertheless, the child does not initiate this transfer of images; it is the "other" (the adult) who initiates this process. Kestenberg's term (1982) *transgenerational transportation*, I believe, refers to "depositing" traumatized images. The actual memories of the trauma belong to adults; children have no experience with the trauma. Memories belonging to one person cannot be transmitted to another person, but an adult can deposit traumatized self- and object images as well as others, such as realistic or imagined object images that are formed in the depositor's mind as a response to trauma, into a child's self-representation.

By performing the act of depositing, the depositors externalize their troublesome images into another person in order to become "free" of carrying the troublesome images within themselves, and in order to deal with mental conflicts and anxiety associated with such images. On the other hand, the children who are a reservoir are given, metapsychologically speaking, a *psychological gene* that influences their self-representation, and thus their sense of identity.

When adults who have been a reservoir of deposited images during childhood come to analysis, these people's *resistance* to the analytic process and "getting well" will center, at one time or another, on facing the possibility that they may cease to function as a reservoir, or at least modify this condition, thus changing their existing sense of identity. Discarding or modifying what is deposited into one's self-representation initiates anxiety concerning a change in one's personal identity, losing the libidinal and/or aggressive connection with the representation of a mother or other caretaker who was the depositor, and even psychologically "killing" the depositor. Thus, a "resistance" to "getting well" surfaces. I will illustrate this by a case report.

A case of "deposited" representation

Gregory was an American sailor during World War II who worked in a submarine where he was in charge of the submarine's torpedoes. He was captured by the Japanese when he was stationed in the Philippines and was in the Bataan Death March in the spring of 1942. The American and Filipino prisoners were forced to march 65 miles in the boiling sun, while Japanese beat them with whips and rifle butts. Thousands died. After that, he was in a Japanese prison camp until the end of the war where he was exposed to unbelievable cruelty. He observed the beheadings of fellow prisoners by swords; he buried his dead friends in shallow graves and reburied them when floods brought their corpses to the surface of the earth.

Soon after he returned to the USA, a thin and tired figure, Gregory became friendly with a woman whose husband had left her when their only child, Peter, was three weeks old. Gregory moved in with her, the woman's mother and Peter, who then was under the age of two, traumatized, overfed and obese. During Peter's early childhood, Gregory stayed at home while the women went to work, thereby assuming the major parenting role for Peter. In a few years' time, Gregory married Peter's mother and adopted Peter as his son. He, his wife and stepson moved to a new house, leaving behind the boy's grandmother, who died before Peter reached puberty. Gregory rarely spoke of his horrible experiences during the war and continued to be his stepson's primary caregiver during the boy's developmental years.

“Externalization” and “depositing” were Gregory's main defense mechanisms that helped him live a “normal” life in the U.S.A. following the unspeakable traumas he had experienced in the Philippines. After he and his family moved to their new house, Gregory built a multi-storied purple martin birdhouse in the garden. For decades this birdhouse remained as a permanent fixture there. Gregory took infinite pains to paint (and re-paint when the old paint faded) numbers on each of the many “apartments” the bird families occupied. Every year it was full of birds. When their eggs hatched, the birds fed their fledglings and helped them to fly to freedom when they were ready. Every year Gregory put a band on one leg of each baby bird after it was hatched. Each band was numbered to correspond with the number on its family's “apartment” in the birdhouse. If a baby bird had an untimely fall from the birdhouse, Gregory would know to which “apartment” it belonged and would then return the baby bird to its proper nest. This was

extremely important, because if a baby bird was rescued by a human, but returned to the wrong nest, it would be rejected by the adult birds in that “apartment” and would certainly die.

The purple martin birdhouse symbolically represented Gregory’s Japanese prison camp where he suffered a great deal, and was exposed to the deaths of his comrades almost daily. Gregory saw to it that no baby birds would die while occupying his birdhouse. He changed “the function” of the image of his prison camp; he had created a “camp” where occupants, the baby birds that were reservoirs of Gregory and his comrades’ helpless images, were not allowed to die.

When Peter was in his mid-forties, he sought psychoanalytic treatment for a sadistic narcissistic personality organization and bulimia. In fact, we learned about Gregory’s story from Peter when he was a patient on his analyst’s couch. When Peter started his analysis, Gregory was in his seventies and still seemed to have a “normal” life.

During his analysis Peter realized that his stepfather treated his stepson like he treated his baby birds. Adult Peter described how Gregory had been preoccupied with making little Peter strong. While home with Peter, the stepfather prescribed certain tasks for the boy and taught him how to exercise, lose weight, and develop an athletic body. Gregory introduced young Peter to guns in his early teens and taught him to hunt. Soon, using his contacts, he made sure that Peter enrolled in a military school. After graduation, as a military man, Peter was involved in the war in Viet Nam. Later as a civilian he worked

for the military defense industry and became rich. Adult Peter's hobby was hunting. But he was not a sportsman. Whenever he felt anxious, he would kill many animals. Since he had a great deal of money he could afford to hire a helicopter for his hunting trips, and on many occasions he would shoot from the air at a herd of deer below.

Peter and his analyst slowly began to understand that Gregory had deposited his "hunted" self-image, (injured, humiliated and rendered helpless in the Philippines) into the little boy's developing self-representation. Indeed, there was a nice "fit" between Gregory's deposited injured image and little Peter's own obese helpless image in a home dominated by intrusive women. When Gregory gave tasks to his stepson—indeed acting like his "trainer"— he made him (in fact his own deposited image as well) a "hunter" instead of the "hunted" one, reversing his helplessness and making the boy feel omnipotently powerful.

Peter's understanding of his identification with Gregory, and more than that, his role as a "reservoir" for his stepfather's injured image, became clear when he and his analyst examined the various meanings of one of Peter's major preoccupations as an adult. Gregory had been preoccupied with his birdhouse and its occupants and adult Peter became preoccupied with a special room in his house and its occupants. Peter had built a huge room with trophies of his hunts hung on the walls. He unconsciously repeated the "memories" of the prisoner Gregory surrounded by his dead comrades. His hobby also included one of the tasks Gregory had given to him: to resurrect the dead and change the function of the prison camp, as Gregory had done when he protected the lives of baby

birds. Thus, Peter took pains to make his trophies look “alive” through skillful taxidermy, spending considerable time and money on taxidermists to achieve this illusion.

Throughout his analysis Peter had a repeating dream in which he saw himself walking on water like Jesus Christ. Only towards the termination phase of his analysis did he have a new version of this repeating dream. In it he was not walking on water; he was walking on a submarine which was lying a few inches below the surface of the water. Peter realized that the submarine stood for Gregory who had worked on a submarine just before he was captured by the Japanese. The new version of his repeating dream gave Peter a firm insight into the fact that his omnipotent self-image was supported by Gregory; in fact, he was an extension of Gregory, the older man’s “reservoir.” Peter was in the termination phase of his analysis when he had still another version of his repeating dream. In this one the submarine dived, and Peter fell in the water and had to swim to shore as an “average” individual.

Just when all indications were that Peter would enter into a successful termination phase of his analysis, he presented a very strong resistance to getting well, and his old symptoms such as bulimia and omnipotent fantasies returned. Peter’s analyst was bewildered. As his supervisor, I too, initially could not understand why such a drastic “turn of events” was taking place. Slowly we understood that Peter’s resistance was due to his correct perception that if he got well and stopped being a reservoir for the older man’s traumatized self-image, Gregory would be forced to take back what he had deposited in Peter. This process might literally “kill” Gregory, who was now in his

seventies. Peter was facing a major dilemma: to get well and “kill” Gregory or remain unanalyzed and save Gregory’s life.

Peter came up with an idea. He would lobby his friends in high places and plan for a special ceremony to honor Gregory (and some other Bataan Death March and Japanese prison camp survivors) during the 50th anniversary of the Bataan Death March. At first Peter was pleased that at last Gregory would be recognized for his sacrifices for the country and receive a kind of psychological compensation and indeed, a medal. Slowly, Peter began to notice his unconscious motivations: If his stepfather were honored by the presence of dignitaries, it would mean that the older man would acknowledge that he was taking back his own traumatized self-image. Furthermore, outside observers at the ceremony, such as senators, congressmen, and military top brass, would bear witness to the fact that Gregory was the injured party. Thus, through an official ritual, Peter would turn over the deposited traumatized image to its rightful owner and would no longer need to be an omnipotent sadistic hunter in order to eclipse his (and Gregory’s) helplessness.

Peter succeeded in honoring his stepfather with a huge ceremony. But within a week or so, it became clear that losing Peter as a decades-long reservoir for his traumatized self-image, also weakened the older man’s investment in the birdhouse—besides Peter the most visible reservoir for his externalized injured self- and object images. Gregory dismantled the purple martin “apartment building,” sold his house, and moved to a warmer climate with his wife, Peter’s mother. The week after this move Gregory’s physical health quickly and drastically deteriorated and he became depressed.

When, in analysis, Peter understood that his “giving back” the deposited image of Gregory’s injured self-image to the older man was almost killing Gregory; he also fully comprehended his resistance to analysis. I encouraged Peter’s analyst to tell him that the dilemma he was facing was a real one and that Peter alone could decide what to do with it as his analyst stood by him.

Peter then came up with a solution: He helped his stepfather buy the house next door to his original house and re-erect the purple martin birdhouse in the yard of this second house, not too far away from its original location. Once the birdhouse was re-erected, and Gregory and his wife settled in this new house, the older man’s physical health improved considerably. However, Peter knew that the newly erected birdhouse was not as strong a reservoir for his stepfather’s externalized injured self- and object images as the original one had been. Nevertheless, the older man did not die, and his helplessness and confusion disappeared to a great degree. Peter then reached a successful termination of his analysis.

Peter’s case shows us how an individual’s being a “reservoir” of traumatized images becomes connected with identity issues. Now I will illustrate that transgenerationally transmitted traumatized images and associated psychological tasks at a large-group level play a crucial role in shaping future historical and political processes. In turn, such processes create stubborn *resistance* to peaceful activities for the resolution of ethnic or other large-group conflicts.

Chosen trauma

Gregory was one of over 70,000 Americans and Filipinos who were traumatized by the Bataan Death March and/or other Japanese prison camp experiences. We know that 11,600 Americans and unknown thousands of Filipinos died during the March itself. At its end, there were tens of thousands of survivors and Gregory was only one of them. From written accounts (for example, see: Bocksel 1991 and Stewart 1956), we know that tens of thousands of Americans had traumatized self- and internalized object images, all of which were connected to their experiences in the Philippines.

We can surmise that tens of thousands of Americans were connected within an invisible network: all had traumatized images linked to the same historical event. We can assume that while such people held on to their own particular personality organizations, most likely a great number of them passed their traumatized self- and internalized object images onto younger generations, giving these people similar tasks to deal with deposited images. Thus, we can further assume that the next generation (composed of people whose self-representations were “reservoirs”) also became linked invisibly by receiving traumatized images that stem from the *same historical event* that the people in the previous generation experienced, and by having similar tasks to deal with them.

I have no direct evidence to prove that the images of the Bataan Death March or Japanese prison camps transgenerationally transmitted as images of injured self- and internalized object images and the tasks related to them invisibly connect thousands of Americans. Even if we assume that this is true, the group of people who were invisibly linked to the

similar images and tasks would be rather small when we take the total population of the U.S.A. into account. However, through my involvement in international relations for the last 28 years (Volkan, 1979, 1988, 1997, 2004, 2006), I collected enough evidence to maintain that the processes I described above, as they relate to a large-group response to the mental representation of a massive trauma at the hand of “Others,” affecting many lives and transmissions of traumatized self- and object images, not only occur regularly, but at times on a grand scale.

Because they are unable to complete psychological tasks that were initiated by shared trauma at the hand of “Others,” the members of a traumatized large group deposit their injured self- and object images into the self-representations of children in the next generation. These children are given similar tasks, mainly dealing with intense affects such as reversing helplessness, shame and humiliation. Another task is aimed at replacing passivity with assertion. Still another task that is passed to the next generation relates to completing the shared mourning process. All these images and tasks link the members of the generations that follow. They *unconsciously* “choose” to begin considering the mental representation of the event and the shared psychological tasks connected with this mental representation as significant elements in their large-group identity. If the next generation is not able to perform the tasks that were given to them, such tasks, along with the shared “memory” of the traumatizing historical event, is passed to the future generation(s). The shared mental representation of the ancestor’s trauma slowly evolves as a “chosen trauma” (Volkan, 1991). A chosen trauma refers to a concept that links aspects of world

history with the psychology of large-group identity and, in turn, affects the personal identity.

As decades or even centuries pass, the historical truth about the event is no longer important for the large group, but what is important is the sharing of the chosen trauma through which members of the group affectively are linked. In other words, the chosen trauma becomes a major marker of the large-group's tent's canvas. This marker defines the people under the tent whether they are poor or rich, men or women. Why one traumatizing event becomes a chosen trauma while another one is "forgotten" as decades pass, depends on various factors. The intensity of losses and accompanying shame and helplessness, the nature of symbols which were damaged or destroyed, large group's poets' or folk singers' verses describing the tragedy, and the role of political or military leaders' personalities are among the important factors that elevate the "memory" of an ancestors' trauma to a large-group identity marker.

Often chosen traumas are associated with exaggerated political "entitlement ideologies." Through such ideologies the large group retains hope of regaining what had been lost during the tragedy that their ancestors experienced (Volkan, 2006). For example, *irredentism* is a political entitlement ideology that evolved after an Italian nationalist movement sought annexation of lands referred to as *Italia irredenta* (unredeemed Italy), areas inhabited by an ethnic Italian majority but under Austrian jurisdiction ever since 1866. The Greeks' entitlement ideology is called *Megali Idea* (Great Idea) and is closely

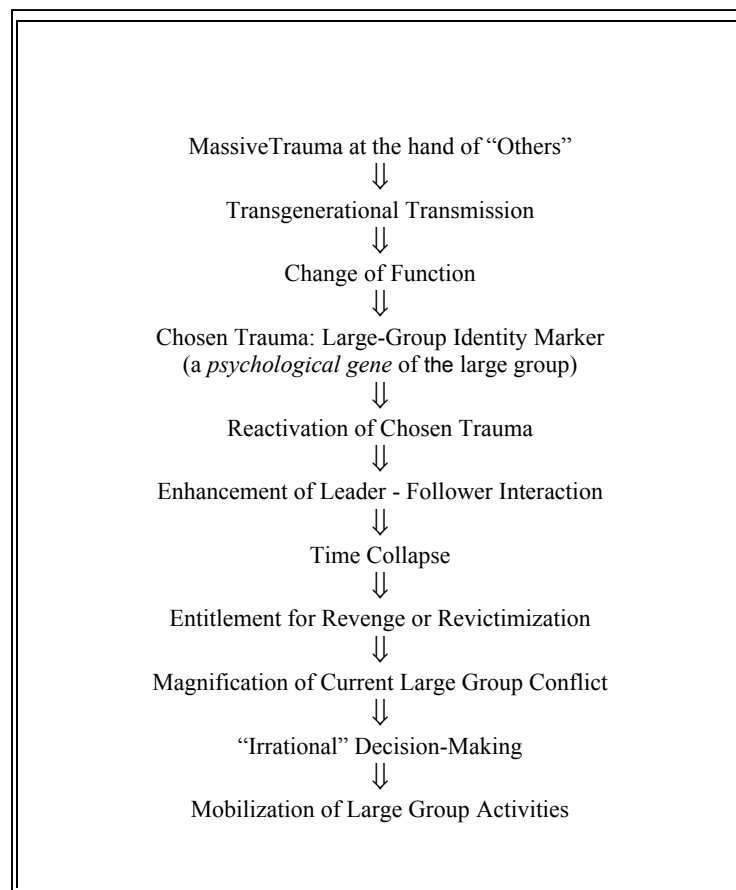
connected with the Greeks' chosen trauma pertaining the fall of Constantinople (today's Istanbul) in 1453 (Markides 1977; Volkan and Itzkowitz 1994).

A large group's chosen trauma may be clearly evident at times; it may lie dormant at other times. After awhile, such "memories" may change function, not unlike what occurred in Peter's daughter's case when the effect of her step-grandfather's trauma led to a more positive outcome. Unlike her father she was not preoccupied with killing animals. She was preoccupied with an opposite task. She became a veterinarian devoted to saving the lives of animals. Yet, under certain circumstances, such as a threat to the group from current enemies, a chosen trauma associated with its original or changed function can be reactivated and exert a powerful psychological force for massive societal and political movements. Leaders often intuitively seem to know how to reactivate a chosen trauma, especially when their large group is involved in an immediate conflict or has gone through a drastic political change and needs to reconfirm or enhance its identity. Political leaders may revive the group's chosen trauma through propaganda and hate speeches, inflaming the group's shared feelings about themselves and their enemy.

The chosen trauma that was critical to understanding the tragedies in Bosnia in 1992 and in Kosovo in 1999 is the Serbian people's defeat at the Battle of Kosovo in 1389. Despite the fact that the leaders of both sides—Ottoman Sultan Murat I and Serbian Prince Lazar—were both killed, and despite the fact that Serbia remained autonomous for some 80 years after the battle, the Battle of Kosovo evolved as the major chosen trauma, marking the end of a glorious period of Serbian power and the beginning of their

subjugation to the Ottoman Empire. In certain periods, Prince Lazar's image was used to cement a shared sense of victimization and martyrdom under Moslem rule; during others, his image became a symbol of the Serbs' desire to reverse the humiliation of the loss by re-conquering Kosovo. Though the province was taken back from the Ottoman Turks in the late nineteenth century, Lazar's "ghost" was still not put to rest. After the collapse of communism, he and the Battle of Kosovo were resurrected by Slobodan Milošević along with some members of the Serbian church, and some members of the Serbian academic community. They made plans to reactivate the 600-year-old "memory" of defeat and humiliation, intense affects associated with the chosen trauma, and the accompanying desire for revenge. Lazar's remains were placed in a coffin and taken on a year-long tour to almost every Serbian village and town where huge crowds of mourners dressed in black received them. Lazar's body symbolically was buried and reincarnated on many, many occasions. The Serbian people began feeling, without being intellectually aware of it, that the defeat at the Battle of Kosovo had occurred only recently, a development made possible by the fact that the chosen trauma had been kept effectively alive, for centuries. Propaganda prepared an atmosphere that allowed the atrocities that would eventually be committed against Bosnian and Kosovar Moslems, whom modern Serbs came to perceive as extensions of the Ottoman enemy of distant history. Thus, the Serbian large-group identity was reinforced and reinvigorated by the lasting emotional power of this ancient event—at terrible cost to non-Serbs.

Reactivation of a group's chosen trauma leads to "time collapse." Feelings, thoughts, wishes and fears stimulated by the shared reactivation of the chosen trauma, collapse into perceptions and affects about a current international conflict and magnify dangers. Reactivated chosen traumas strengthen the people's sense of belonging to the same group, their shared large-group identity. Their reactivation may become a crucial resistance to finding a peaceful solution to the group's problems involving its current enemies. Even though chosen traumas refer to ancestors' victimhood, the current group does not wish to give up its investment in it. To do so would mean giving up a significant aspect of the shared large-group identity, so the group resists making peace with its contemporary enemy.



The need for a “therapeutic space” in international relationships

Psychoanalysis has provided us with a concept called “therapeutic space.”

Consider a patient with a very traumatic childhood. He (or she) comes to analysis as an adult with defenses against shame and humiliation, murderous rage, and a need to be understood and accepted as a human being by fellow human beings.

After a while this person, during his sessions, gives up his defenses and adaptation to his internal conflicts. The analyst becomes a transference figure and the patient experiences the analyst as some important figure from his childhood, such as a person on whom the patient depends and for whom he experiences rage. Such developments are part of analytic treatment, and for it to work properly, a “therapeutic space” has to be formed and maintained in the analyst’s office.

Let us visualize such a space with an imagined effigy representing the analyst sitting in the middle of it. The patient sends verbal missiles to mutilate and kill the effigy and the analyst tolerates the attack. The next day, the analyst-effigy is placed in the therapeutic space again, showing the patient that her childhood rage did not commit a murder. A mental “game” is played in this space until the patient learns how to “kill” a symbol and not a real person, how to relinquish devastating guilt feelings, how to tame other intense emotions, and how to separate fantasy

from reality. The patient also learns to establish a firm continuity of time, but with an ability to restore feelings, thinking, and perceptions to their proper places: the past, the present or the future. In other words, the burdens of the past can be left behind, and a hope for a better future can be maintained.

There should be no damaging intrusions into this space. For example, the patient does not really hit the analyst, but only his or her effigy, and the analyst does not have real sex with the patient who wishes to be loved, but only shows the patient that the latter is “loved” because the analyst has always protected the therapeutic space.

The psychoanalytic technique applied to an individual, Peter, helped this patient to give up his identity as a reservoir for his stepfather’s traumatized self- and object images. We do not yet have a definite technique to help a large group give up the maladaptive large-group identity characteristic that is associated with a chosen trauma. Nevertheless, as far as new diplomatic strategies are concerned, psychoanalytically informed knowledge of chosen trauma offers a beginning. We have begun to experiment with such a strategy, which I named a “Tree Model” (Volkan 1999, 2006). This model can be applied to unofficial diplomacy that brings together influential representatives of enemy large groups for series of negotiations over several years under the guidance of psychoanalytically informed facilitators. After these representatives separate the fantasy from reality and the past from the present in the relationship between the two opposing

large groups they represent, they can suggest psychodynamically informed actions to institutionalize a peaceful co-existence between them (Volkan, 1999, 2006).

Here I do not describe the technique for applying the Tree Model except to say that such a technique creates a “therapeutic space” between warring enemy large groups where they can “play” a serious and deadly game while always killing the effigies rather than one another. This is of course very difficult and perhaps impossible to establish, if enemy groups constantly invade this space with real bullets, missiles, torture, and live bombs—like suicide bombers. Based on our previous experiences with the application of the “Tree Model,” this year I have been involved with the beginnings of interdisciplinary activities to start the process of creating a therapeutic space between the so-called Western and Islamic worlds. In today’s world many extreme political, religious and other destructive issues are creating formidable resistances.

Conclusion

In this paper I illustrated how transgenerational transmission of trauma ends up as a personal resistance against progression in a personal analysis, and as a large-group resistance against progression in international relations. The topic I discuss in this paper is one of the links that connects individual psychology with large-group psychology. As a historian and a psychoanalyst, Loewenberg (1991) observed, “[t]rauma is the theoretical link from individual to group, cohort, population, nation, the world” (p.515). I have

observed during my work in the field of international relations that this link is not only theoretical, but actual.

As I write this paper in 2007, Argentine courts are once again confronting the tragedies of the “Dirty War” period of the Argentinean history and the prosecutors in Argentina are dealing with obstacles in pursuing crimes associated with this period. Perhaps there is both a societal wish and a dread to open up three-decades-old wounds. Massive societal traumas, whether they are inflicted by people who belong to the same identity group but follow a different political ideology or inflicted by “Others,” do not disappear when the large-group’s conditions change and actual trauma no longer exists. Shared memories of the past do not disappear; they keep hunting large groups for generations to come.

Shapiro and Carr (2006) state that the attempt to understand large groups is a daunting prospect, and that it may be “a defense against the experience of despair about the world, a grandiose effort to manage the unmanageable” (p.256). I join them, however, in their suggestion that to make efforts, nonetheless, is essential for large groups’ psychological well-being. I hope that more psychoanalysts will join in such efforts and systematically study large-group processes in their own right.

References

Ainslie, R. C. and Solyom, A. E. (1986). The replacement of fantastical oedipal child: A disruptive effect of sibling loss on the mother-infant relationship. *Psychoanalytic Psychology*, 3: 257-268.

Blos, P. (1979). *Adolescence Passage*. New York: International Universities Press.

Bocksel, A. A. (1991). *Rice, Men and Barbed Wire: A True Epic of Americans as Japanese POWs*. Hauppauge, NY: Michael B. Glass & Associates.

Cain, A. C., and Cain, B. S. (1964). On replacing a child. *Journal of the American Academy of Child Psychiatry*, 3: 443-456.

Erikson, E. H. (1956). The problem of ego identity. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 4: 56-121.

Freud, S. (1926) Address to the Society of B'nai B'rith, Standard Edition, 20; 271-274. London: Hogarth Press, 1961.

Green, N., and Solnit, A. J. (1964). Reactions to the threatened loss of a child: A vulnerable child syndrome. *Pediatrics*, 34: 58-66.

Kernberg, O. F. (2003a). Sanctioned social violence: A psychoanalytic view part 2. *International Journal of Psych-Analysis*, 84: 953-968.

Kernberg, O. F. (2003b). Sanctioned social violence: A psychoanalytic view part 1. *International Journal of Psych-Analysis*, 84: 683-698.

Kestenberg, J. S. (1982). A psychological assessment based on analysis of a survivor's child. In M. S. Bergmann and M. E. Jucovy (Eds.), *Generations of the Holocaust* (pp. 158-177). New York: Columbia University Press.

Legg, C. and Sherick, I. (1976). The replacement child – A developmental tragedy: Some preliminary comments. *Child Psychiatry and Human Development*, 7: 79—97.

Loewenberg, P. (1991). Uses of anxiety. *Partisan Review*, 3: 514-525.

Poznanski, E. O. (1972). The “replacement child”: A saga of unresolved parental grief. *Behavioral Pediatrics*, 81: 1190-1193.

Markides, K. (1977). *The Rise and Fall of the Cyprus Republic*. New Haven, CT.: Yale University Press.

Shapiro, E., and Carr, W. (2006). “Those people were some kind of solution”: Can society in any sense be understood? *Organizational & Social Dynamics*, 6: 241-257.

Stewart, S. (1956). *Give Us This Day*. New York: Avon Books (1990).

Volkan, V. D. (1979). *Cyprus: War and Adaptation*. Charlottesville, VA: The University Press of Virginia.

Volkan, V. D. (1987). *Six Steps in the Treatment of Borderline Personality Organization*. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson.

Volkan, V. D. (1988). *The Need to Have Enemies and Allies: From Clinical Practice to*

International Relationships. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson.

Volkan, V. D. (1991). On chosen trauma. *Mind and Human Interaction*, 4: 3-19.

Volkan, V. D. (1997). *Bloodlines: From Ethnic Pride to Ethnic Terrorism*. New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux.

Volkan, V. D. (1999). The tree model: A comprehensive psychopolitical approach to unofficial diplomacy and the reduction of ethnic tension. *Mind and Human Interaction*, 10: 141-210.

Volkan, V. D. (2004). *Blind Trust: Large Groups and Their Leaders in Times of Crisis and Terror*. Charlottesville, VA: Pitchstone Publishing.

Volkan, V. D. (2006). *Killing in the Name of Identity: Stories of Bloody Conflicts*. Charlottesville, VA: Pitchstone Publishing.

Volkan, V. D., and Ast, G. (1997). *Siblings in the Unconscious and Psychopathology*. Madison, CT: International Universities Press.

Volkan, V. D., Ast, G., and Greer, W. (2002). *The Third Reich in the Unconscious: Transgenerational Transmission and its Consequences*. New York: Brunner-Routledge.

Volkan, V. D. and Itzkowitz, N. (1994). *Turks and Greeks: Neighbours in Conflict*. Cambridgeshire, England: Eothen Press.