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Massive Trauma: The Political Ideology of Entitlement and Violence

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This paper investigates the psychological links between the development of political ideology of exaggerated entitlement such as irredentism and massive trauma that diminishes the affected large group's shared sense of well-being and omnipotence. I use the term "large group" to refer to thousands or millions of individuals, most of whom will never meet in their lifetimes, who experience an intense sense of sameness by belonging to the same ethnicity, nationality or religion. There are various types of massive traumas. Some result from natural causes, such as tropical storms, tsunamis or forest fires. Some occur from accidental man-made disasters, like the 1986 Chernobyl accident. In this paper, by "massive large-group trauma" I refer only to injury deliberately inflicted upon a large group by an enemy group. In this type of tragedy, the victimized group, besides suffering losses and facing helplessness, also experiences shame, humiliation and an inability to assert itself. Members of a large group traumatized by "others" cannot successfully go through a mourning process over their losses or reverse their shame, humiliation and helplessness.

They cannot assert themselves in socially or politically adaptive ways, and may end up internalizing a sense of helpless rage, idealizing masochism, or becoming prone to maladaptive sadistic outbursts—manifestations that are all shared by their greater community. In short, members of a group massively traumatized deliberately by an enemy group cannot successfully complete certain psychological tasks, and they then transmit such tasks to the children of the next generation(s) along with the conscious and unconscious shared wish that the next generation(s) will resolve them.

As such intergenerational transmissions take place, the shared mental representation of the historical traumatic event may evolve into what I call a “chosen trauma.” The chosen trauma becomes a significant marker for the large-group identity. Furthermore, it may create a foundation for the society’s development of an exaggerated entitlement ideology that, under new historical situations such as a threat to the large-group’s identity, can be manipulated by political leaders in order to develop new political programs and /or take new actions supported by this ideology. Exaggerated “entitlement” provides a belief system and a renewed sense of omnipotence that asserts that the large group has a right to own what they wish to have. For example, “irredentism” is a political entitlement ideology. It became a political term after an Italian nationalist movement sought annexation of lands referred to as “Italia irredenta” (unredeemed Italy), areas inhabited by an Italian majority that remained under Austrian jurisdiction after 1866.

Political Ideologies

There has been no detailed and systematic psychoanalytic investigation of how political ideologies, in general, evolve. This paper attempts to study *only* a limited aspect of such group processes by restricting itself to addressing the role of massive large-group traumata at the hands of “others,” usually called “enemies,” and its psychological consequences for subsequent generations. Obviously, political ideologies are formulated and presented by individuals or a group of individuals. But they require a receptive large group to accept and nurture them. I propose that the reactivation of a “chosen trauma” (Volkan, 1991, 1997, Volkan and Itzkowitz, 1993, 1994) prepares a society to welcome an excessive entitlement ideology.

It is believed that the term "ideology" (science of ideas) was coined by a French nobleman Antoine Louis Claude Destutt, Comte de Tracy (or briefly Destutt de Tracy) (1754-1836) in his *Dissertation sur quelques questions d'ideology* (1799), and a series of works entitled *Elements d'ideologie* (from 1801 through 1815) and related papers. This term by Destutt de Tracy was given currency by the rhetoricians (*les ideologues*) of the French Revolution and was read and studied by political leaders such as Thomas Jefferson (Chinard, 1979; Klein, 1985), subsequently influencing political, economic, societal and psychological thinking.

Later the term ideology, as it referred to politics, developed in many different directions. Sometimes it appeared as systematic and all-embracing political doctrine that justified intrusion into societal and personal lives in global ways. At other times it appeared regionally to make an impact on large-group processes and, of course, on the lives of individual members of such groups in only limited geographical areas. For example, Marxism presumed to be a universally applicable theory while Kemalism and Gaullism referred to ideologies in Turkey and France respectively.

As the above examples indicate, political ideologies are sometimes named after persons with whom they are associated. Other times those interested in political science have hearkened back to historical figures in order to explain certain ideologies practiced in the past or even in the present. For example, Calvinism as a political ideology was based on John Calvin's (1509-1564) theological system. Indeed many political ideologies have direct or indirect origins that emerged from religious beliefs and religious understanding of human morality and the rights of people as they relate to divine power. (See for example, Thompson, 1980 and Vasquez, 1986) But this is not always the case. Marxism, for example, is not a religiously contaminated ideology. In fact, Marxism gave the term "ideology" a negative connotation since it perceived itself as reflecting human nature. Nevertheless, for the rest of the world, for the "non-believers" in communism, Marxism remains a political ideology.

Obviously there are many "isms" in political science that do not carry an individual's name, but describe instead universal or regional ideological movements that become the driving force for certain political programs and actions. Besides feudalism,

capitalism and communism mentioned above, there are other examples: royalism, centrism, universalism, isolationism, Hellenism, Zionism, Pan-Islamism, Pan-Turanism (Turan means the land of Turks), Nazism and, of course, the most common conservatism and liberalism.

Psychoanalysts have written psychobiographies of certain leaders, such as Adolf Hitler, who evolved their own political ideologies or practiced politics under the influence of certain ideologies. Usually these psychoanalytic writers' primary emphasis is on attempts to understand leaders' internal motivations for evolving and /or practicing specific ideologies (Volkan and Itzkowitz, 1984). Much less is written on the influence of external historical events in directing the leaders' attention to certain political ideas. There are, however, psychoanalysts who remind us of how the nature of a historical event influences leaders', as well as followers', ideas and actions. Loewenberg (1991) addressed the crucial bridge between massive shared trauma and historical process dominated by collective sadistic activities when he wrote about the Protestant Reformation. He states that, "[It] was a trauma of major proportions...whose effect took centuries to work out to a new and secure equilibrium. One response of European religion, culture, and politics to these traumata was a new piety, flagellation, widespread practice of torture, and epidemics of demonic possession, which seized groups in the late fifteenth century for the first time" (p.515). Loewenberg describes the development of a large-group process and, in a sense, a large-group ideology, that allowed the Bishop of Wurzburg to kill nine hundred people and the Bishop of Bamberg over six hundred. Meanwhile in Savoy eight hundred were burned

during a festival. He also reminds us that in this atmosphere in 1514, three hundred were executed in the small Diocese of Como. Loewenberg (1991, 1995) does not directly examine the dynamics of the link between a trauma of major proportions and tragic events that take place some centuries later. The concept of chosen trauma, I believe, illuminates the dynamics of this link.

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Chosen Trauma

The term *chosen trauma* refers to the shared mental representation of a large group's massive trauma experienced by its ancestors at the hands of an enemy group, and the images of heroes, victims, or both that are connected with it. Of course, large groups do not intend to be victimized and suffer from a diminution of shared omnipotence, but they "choose" to mythologize and psychologize the mental representation of the event. When this occurs the reality of the event no longer matters to societal movements. For example, the 1389 Battle of Kosovo between the Ottoman Turks and the Serbian people was related through 25 different "true" accounts (Emmert, 1990). But the "reality" of what happened during this battle did not matter to the next generations of Serbian people. What mattered to them was the evolution of the mental representation of this battle as a chosen trauma as I described in detail elsewhere (Volkan, 1997). Sells (2002) refers to an ideology connected with this chosen trauma, which he names "Christoslavism." The Serb leader during this battle was Prince Lazar, and his persona held a crucial place in this chosen trauma. According to Sells, during

the nineteenth century the portrayal of Prince Lazar as a Christ-figure by the Serbian large group was made more explicit. Sells writes: "Lazar was portrayed at a "Last Supper" [during the evening preceding the battle] surrounded by twelve knight-disciples, one of whom was a traitor who gave the battle plans to the Turks. His death was entitled the Serbian Golgotha, and his crucifixion was the crucifixion of the Serbian nation. The Lazar story was tied to a revolutionary mixture of romantic nationalism and anti-Islamic polemic. The combination resulted in the ideology I have named Christoslavism (p.63)."

When an event turns into a chosen trauma, what becomes important is the fact that the large group carries the mental representation of the traumatic event—along with associated shared feelings of hurt and shame, as well as mental defenses against perceived shared conflicts that these feelings initiate—from generation to generation. During this transgenerational transmission, the mental representation of the event emerges as a significant large-group marker; the group draws the shared mythologized mental representation of the traumatic event into its very identity. The chosen trauma functions primarily to link the members of the large group together as if it were an invisible spider's web.

A chosen trauma may be dormant for decades in the social consciousness and its influence, according to new external factors, may *change function*. For example, the group may change from accepting an ideology of glorified victimhood to following an ideology of an entitlement for revenge. Certainly the

influence of Serbian chosen trauma on the Serbian people has metamorphosed throughout the centuries from idealizing victimhood into a fervent nationalism (Volkan, 1997; Shatzmiller, 2002).

When a large group's existence—psychologically speaking, when it's identity's existence—is threatened and when its members wonder, "who are we now?" they turn to various methods (Volkan, 2004) to strengthen their belief in the survival of their group and its identity. They are now ready to reactivate their chosen trauma, a trauma whose main function is to link the members of the group and give them a sense of security in order to secure the survival of their shared identity. There is a kind of paradox here: A chosen trauma refers to a traumatic event in the past when ancestors were humiliated, rendered helpless, and lost their omnipotence, but now it is called forth to enhance their descendants' large-group identity and nurture their well-being.

The current group's hold on the mental representations of old traumas, which turned into chosen traumas, is far stronger than is their reactivation of memories concerning old ancestral glories. I have explained the reason for this earlier (Volkan, 1997, 2004). Briefly, old glories (I call them *chosen glories*) do not initiate unfinished psychological tasks that are passed to future generations in order to be completed in the future. When a large group is massively traumatized, the members "deposit" (a specific form of projective identification) their injured selves and internalized object images into the developing self representations of their offspring and direct their offspring consciously—but more importantly unconsciously—as to how they should deal with such images

(Volkan, Ast and Greer, 2002). The tasks given to the next generation(s) are strengthened by their identification with adults of the previous generation. In the evolution of a chosen trauma there are psychological tasks to be performed, such as completing previous generation(s)' mourning processes and reversing shame and helplessness associated with the deposited images. Inclusion of such psychological tasks in chosen traumas makes them crucial large-group markers and strong "motors" for societal and political movements.

In the next section I will examine, based on my joint work with historian Norman Itzkowitz (Volkan and Itzkowitz, 1993, 1994), the birth of a particular entitlement ideology, what the Greeks call "*Megali Idea*" (*Great Idea*) that is associated with a massive trauma, the fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Turks in 1453.

Crusades, the Fall of Constantinople, and the "Megali Idea"

In 1071 A.D., the Turkish Seljuk leader Sultan Alp Arslan defeated the Byzantine forces under Emperor Romanus IV Diogenes near Manzigert in Eastern Anatolia. During the centuries following the Battle of Manzigert, Asia Minor, heartland of today's Turkey, gradually became Turkified. Soon after this battle, a group of Seljuk Turks captured Jerusalem, leading to the Crusades. By the time Crusaders entered Jerusalem, the city was no longer under Turkish occupation, but their perception of the Turks as the occupiers of Christian holy land and as the enemy of Christians prevailed. It was, however, the fall of

Constantinople to the Turks, which came three hundred years after the Battle of Manzigert that became a more obvious chosen trauma for the Christian world. Constantinople was conquered by the successors to Seljuk Turks, the Ottomans, on May 29, 1453. Historically, this marked the end of one era and the beginning of another as the Christian Byzantine Empire was replaced by the Moslem-dominated Ottoman Empire. Since Constantinople was taken on a Tuesday, Christians regarded every Tuesday thereafter as an unpropitious day. The seizure of Constantinople by the Turks was seen to reflect God's judgment upon "the sins of Christians everywhere" (Schwoebel, 1967, p.14). In Europe, during medieval and early modern times, those recording historical events tended to disregard "real" causes and attribute the unfolding of human history to the hand of God. Such sentiments also appear to some extent even now. For example, Christian fundamentalist groups in the USA read the tragedy of September 11, 2001 as divine punishment for the sinful acts of their country's homosexuals, feminists and civil libertarians (Volkan, 2004).

In spite of the fact that Rome had refused to provide support for Constantinople against the Turks, Rome received word of Byzantium's fall with shock and disbelief. Turkish victory was seen as a knife plunged into the heart of Christianity. Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini, a future Pope, wrote to Pope Nicholas V on July 12, 1453, that the Turks had killed Homer and Plato for the second time (Schwoebel, 1967).

The loss of Constantinople was a massive trauma that reopened wounds caused by the fall of Jerusalem, and mourning for this loss could not

take place to the point of resolution or be set aside. Jerusalem had been regained and lost again, but Constantinople's fall only elicited feelings of helplessness, shame and humiliation. The desire to undo this trauma expressed itself in rumblings about organizing another Crusade. Nothing came of such talk, but the idea persisted. Together, Christians in the Ottoman territories sang the refrain, "Again, with years, with time, again they will be ours," in an attempt to deny the changes that had come and undo the losses they engendered. This would be the seed of an excessive entitlement ideology, which would be formulated later (Young, 1969). Denial manifested in other ways as well. If a continuous link between the Turks and the Byzantines could be found, there would be less need for Byzantines and other Christians to feel pain. Many Westerners became preoccupied, sometimes in mystical ways, with the ancient origins of the Turks and attempted to create a shared "linking phenomenon" (Volkan, 1981) between the Turks and the Christians. For example, Giovanni Maria Filelfo, a humanist, declared that the young Turkish Sultan Mehmet II, who had seized Constantinople, was a Trojan. Felix Fabri, a German, studied the idea that Turks descended from Teucher, son of the Greek friend of Hercules, Telemon and the Trojan princess Hesione. Fabri did not claim that Teucer fathered the Turks, but he held that they descended from Turcus, a son of Troyas. (References to Giovanni Maria Filelfo can be found in *Monumenta Hungariae*, XXIII, part 1, no. 9, pp.308, 309, 405 and 453 and to Felix Fabri in *Evagatorium III*, pp.236-239. See: Schwoebel, 1967.)

While these pseudo-historical efforts to find continuity between the two sides continued as a way to make loss and humiliation tolerable, a counter-attempt tried to un-link them so Byzantines could maintain their large-group identity. In Europe this led to stereotyping the Turks. According to Berkes (1964), the Fates played a trick on the Turks because of their seizure of Constantinople, a notion that was condensed with a mental representation of their conquest of Jerusalem (like Seljuk Turks, Ottoman Turks also conquered Jerusalem). The Turks became the unconsciously chosen target of stubborn, systematic, and negative stereotyping by the Europeans and historians throughout the West. Berkes claims that these historians never stereotyped other "strangers" such as Chinese, Arabs, and Japanese in such a way. Of course after September 1, 2001 Arabs have become the main target of stereotyping in the USA. Indeed, after this tragedy President George W. Bush referred to the mental representation of the Crusades, echoing a "time collapse" (Volkan, 1997, 2004) of a Moslem-Christian clash of the past into a Moslem-Christian clash of the present.

Preoccupation with the Turks as conquerors of Jerusalem and Constantinople became globalized as Europeans began discovering new regions of the world and aggressively colonizing them. In 1539, for example, Mexican Indians took part in a dramatic pageant representing the liberation of Jerusalem from the Turks by the armies of the Catholic world joined by those from the New World (Motolinia, 1951). Even now, a variation of this pageant is still performed in Mexico, halfway around the world from Turkey (Harris, 1992). This globalized

stereotyping was even incorporated into old editions of Webster's Dictionary under the definition of "Turk" which read, "one exhibiting any quality attributed to Turks, such as sensuality and brutality." The reference to brutality is easy to understand since battles, such the one that took place when the Turks seized Constantinople, are brutal. Itzkowitz and I (Volkan and Itzkowitz, 1994) also tried to understand the reference to sensuality. We concluded that it had a great deal to do with the youthful and virile image of Mehmet II, whose conquest was perceived as a "rape." Constantinople, which was later named Istanbul, is still experienced by today's poets as a symbol of a fallen and /or grieving woman (Halman, 1992).

To some degree the Greeks, heirs to Byzantium, remained "perennial mourners" unable to resolve the loss of Constantinople. As generations passed, the fall of Constantinople evolved as their major chosen trauma and this influenced the evolution of the Megali Idea, which crystallized in the nineteenth century. Some four decades after the Greek War of Independence (1821-1833), the new Greek identity became a composite of Hellenic (ancient pre-Christian Greek) and Byzantine (Christian Greek) elements (Herzfeld, 1986). The urge to retain the cultural/religious elements of Byzantium was articulated through the words of such influential individuals such as Spyridon Zamblios (1856, 1859) and Nikoloas G. Politis (1876, 1882). Meanwhile as Kitromilides (1990) clearly describes, the nation-building process for the new Greek state gradually took on two dimensions, the first being internal—the gradual development of a nation within the independent kingdom of Greece. The other one was external and

involved the influence of the Megali Idea as a point of reference for the new Greek state involving Greeks living in the Ottoman Empire in places "considered as integral parts of the historical patrimony of Hellenism" (Kitromilides, 1990, p.35). Their Megali Idea is, "a dream shared by Greeks that someday the Byzantine Empire would be restored and all the Greek lands would once again be united into a Greater Greece" (Markides, 1977, p.10). In order to create the Megali Idea and make it one of the emotionally charged societal motivations for Greek foreign policy, modern Greeks revived the fall of Constantinople.

It is beyond the scope of this brief paper to explore fully how the Megali Idea impacted the immediate expansion of the new Greek state and the wars that took place for this purpose. Obviously, during these wars and related conflicts thousands of people were killed, injured and societies experienced terror, helplessness and incredible grief. Also obviously, I do not reduce the causes of these wars only to the influence of the Megali Idea. I simply want to illustrate here how a political ideology of excessive entitlement becomes fuel for various infernos. One of the most recent Greek-Turkish conflicts which was fueled by the influence of the Megali Idea in the late 1950's and early 1960's, this time on the island of Cyprus, is one with which I am most familiar (Volkan, 1979, Volkan and Itzkowitz, 1994). Cypriot Greek Markides (1977) wrote:

One could argue that the "Great Idea" had an internal logic, pressing for realization in every part of the Greek world, which

continued to be under foreign rule. Because the Greeks of Cyprus have considered themselves historically and culturally to be Greeks, the "Great Idea" has had an intense appeal. Thus, when the church fathers called on the Cypriots [Cypriot Greeks] to fight for union with Greece, it did not require much effort to heat up emotions.... *Enosis* [Uniting Cyprus with Greece] did not originate in the church but in the minds of intellectuals in their attempt to revive Greek-Byzantine civilization. However, being the most central and powerful of institutions, the church contributed immensely to its development. The church embraced the movement and for all practical purposes became its guiding nucleus (pp.10-11).

It appears, however, that since Greece became a member of the European Union the impact of the Megali Idea on Greek foreign policy has lost its strong appeal. But it seems to me that it is very difficult for a large group to "forget" a shared political ideology that is connected with a chosen trauma. This is because of the conscious and unconscious shared tasks, mentioned earlier, that chosen traumas incorporate. In April 2004, two referenda took place in Cyprus. Both Greek and Turkish sides voted to accept or reject a kind of "reunification." (Since 1974, the island was divided into northern Turkish and southern Greek sectors.) The Greek side overwhelmingly voted against such a "reunification" under a UN plan before Cyprus would become a member of EU on

May 1, 2004. Since the Cypriot Greeks said “no” to this “reunification” on May 1, 2004, only the Greek side of the island became a member of the EU.

There are many “real politik” causes for Cypriot Greeks’ voting “no”. But their decision was also influenced by the Megali Idea. Before the referendum the Greek Orthodox Church on the island preached that any Cypriot Greek voting “yes” would go to Hell. The Cypriot Greeks’ illusion to possess the whole island (Megali Idea) prevailed over the idea of a kind of “togetherness” with the Cypriot Turks.

My aim in this section was to illustrate the relations between a large group's ancestor's massive traumas and how they create an atmosphere for the development of an exaggerated entitlement ideology. I should repeat: I would by no means want to reduce Greek-Turkish relations to the impact of the Megali Idea alone. I do not wish to give the impression that in international relations only one side's issues cause trouble and violence. Usually reasons for the violence come from both sides. But, for the purpose of this paper I focused only on my theme—the concept of chosen trauma and its relationship to an ideology.

“Acute” and “Hot” Massive Traumas

Until now I have examined the role of chosen traumas on the political process. Now, I will briefly explore the influence of an “acute” or “hot” massive trauma at the hands of others. By *acute trauma* I am referring to an

existing and continuing state of confusion, unbearable grief, chaos, and increased criminality, as well as the traumatized group's search for a leader(s) to act as a repairer or savior. This also includes an effort to reestablish a new sense of large-group identity, which in itself may lead to violent acts, terror and terrorism directed toward others, even toward members of the traumatized group who do not follow the new leader(s). The people in Iraq, without an effective leader of their own who would tame emotions, are now going through an acute trauma.

Many events in the USA after September 11, 2001 also reflect the influence of an acute trauma. Unlike the situation in Iraq however, the USA has a defined political leader and institutions and there is no chaos. An acute trauma also usually unifies the members of a society, but soon other signs and symptoms of a regressed large group appear (Volkan, 2004), including severe societal splits between the loyal followers of the leader and those who oppose the leader.

The acute trauma in the USA led to a political ideology known as the "*Bush Doctrine*". But an acute societal trauma in the long run may not become a large-group identity marker and lasting effects of a political ideology that accompanies an acute trauma are questionable. On the other hand a chosen trauma is a crucial large-group identity sign and a political ideology associated with it lasts for decades and, as described above, even for centuries.

By *hot trauma* I am referring to an event that still emotionally preoccupies those who were traumatized in the past and the next few generations who

followed them. In other words, I speak of the trauma as a "hot" trauma to describe traumatized individuals and their offspring who are still involved in attempting to make sense of what has happened, mourning their losses, and memorializing the tragedy. For example, I consider the Holocaust to still be a hot trauma on its way toward becoming a chosen trauma (Volkan, Ast and Greer, 2002).

When a chosen trauma establishes itself after many decades or centuries following the ancestors' perceived victimization, it becomes a permanent identity marker for the large group. It can then be manipulated by political/religious leaders in positive or negative ways. If it becomes associated with an entitlement ideology, this may itself become a source for further human tragedies.

Summary

On June 1, 2002, about nine months after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, President George W. Bush unveiled new policy guidelines for the United States that included military pre-emption, showing "strength beyond challenge," taking unilateral action, and extending "democracy, liberty, and security *to all* regions." From a psychological point of view it is easy to see that these policy guidelines reflect omnipotence and entitlement, as well as a link between an acute massive shared trauma (the September 11 attacks on American soil) and an ideological response to it. In a few years time we would witness the limits of omnipotence and entitlement.

This paper primarily examines the relationship between a large-group's *ancestors'* massive shared trauma and the development of political entitlement ideologies. Certain

historical tragedies at the hand of enemies are associated with shame, humiliation, dehumanization, helplessness and inability to mourn various losses, such as the loss of persons, land, honor and prestige. These losses can become “mythologized” as decades pass. For members of the affected large group, these shared “memories” of the traumatizing event begin to absorb fantasized elements that respond to psychological wishes and fears and maintenance of self-esteem. Their descendants in the generations to follow utilize the shared mental representation of this historical event, called a “chosen trauma,” to link themselves with one another. The “chosen trauma” evolves as a significant identity marker for the traumatized large-group’s ethnic, national or religious identity. It is usually associated with an entitlement ideology that refers to a wish to overturn the shame and helplessness and regain what has been lost. Such ideologies may remain alive for centuries and play a significant role in international relationships whenever they are inflamed by political and/or religious leaders. The evolution of one such ideology, the Greeks’ political ideology called “Megali Idea” (“Great Idea”), and its role even today in international relations, is presented in this paper as an example of an omnipotent entitlement ideology.

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