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Massive Traumas, their Societal and Political Consequences, and Collective Healing

Abstract: This chapter focuses on massive traumas at the hand of the Other and their societal/political consequences, which always include shared losses, from losing persons and physical properties to self-esteem and prestige. It describes complications in societal mourning and how they lead to transgenerational transmissions of the undigested images of massive trauma to the generations that follow, as well as how such images turn into ethnic, national, religious or political identity markers. The need to protect and maintain large-group identities contaminates political, economic, legal, military and other real-world issues in relationships and creates conflicts between large groups. Lastly, this chapter examines psychoanalytically informed interventions that support collective healing and peaceful co-existence between large enemy groups.

Keywords: Mourning, biosocial regeneration, psychological border, minor differences, chosen trauma, entitlement ideology, Tree Model.

This chapter describes the societal and political consequences of massive traumas for large groups. The term “large group” refers to thousands or millions of individuals who, from childhood, share the same historical sentiments and sense of belonging, even though most never cross paths personally. In our daily life we might reference these identities by using shared, large-group ethnic or idealistic terminology, such as when we say we are Apaches, Lithuanian Jews, Swedes, Sunni Muslims or communists. Because some shared images of ancestors’ traumas *at the hand of enemies*, when they remain undigested, are transmitted from generation to generation, such images may become significant identity markers for ethnic, national, religious or political large groups. Preoccupations with such identity markers create present-day obstacles to finding peaceful solutions for co-existence with an opposing social or political large group, or for

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healing such traumas. This chapter explores psychopolitical concepts that have proven helpful in attempts to enable collective healing.

Types of Massive Traumas

Massive traumas vary in type. Some spring from natural causes, such as earthquakes, tropical storms, tsunamis, floods, forest fires or volcanic eruptions. Some are due to man-made but accidental disasters, such as the 1986 Chernobyl accident that contaminated the atmosphere with tons of radioactive dust. Society may also respond with trauma to the murder or sudden death of a person who functioned as a symbol that unconsciously stood for a parent figure and/or was perceived as a representative of a large-group identity. Assassinations of John F. Kennedy¹ and Martin Luther King, Jr. in the United States, Yitzhak Rabin in Israel,² Prime Minister Olof Palme in Sweden, the National Democratic Party leader Giorgi Chanturia in the Republic of Georgia, former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in Lebanon, or the deaths of the American astronauts, especially teacher Christa McAuliffe, in the 1986 space shuttle Challenger explosion,³ and the death of Diana, Princess of Wales, in a car accident in 1997,⁴ all led to responses that were experienced as shared trauma.

Other massive traumas such as terrorist attacks, wars and even genocide can be ascribed to the *deliberate actions* of an enemy, an outsider. They might spring from a territorial conflict between two neighbouring countries that results in mass atrocities, such as the territorial conflict between India and Pakistan in Kashmir that has led to the disappearance of more than 8,000 persons since 1989, and thousands of extra-judicial killings, torture and rape, with Kashmiri Muslims fearing that they will lose their culture.

Such deliberate catastrophes can also occur within a national boundary when there is chronic mistreatment or oppression of a smaller racial or ethnic group by the dominant Other. One of the best-known examples of this is the history of slavery in the United States and the discrimination towards black Americans

1 Wolfenstein & Kliman (Eds.) (1965). *Children and the death of a president: Multi-disciplinary studies*.

2 Erlich (1998). *Adolescents' reactions to Rabin's assassination: A case of patricide?* Raviv et al. (2000). *Young Israelis' reactions to national trauma: The Rabin assassination and terror attacks*; Moses-Hrushovski (2000). *Grief and grievance: The assassination of Yitzhak Rabin*.

3 Volkan (1997). *Bloodlines: From ethnic pride to ethnic terrorism*.

4 Shapiro (2020). *Finding a place to stand: Developing self-reflective institutions, leaders and citizens*.

that continues today. Not so long ago, an unseen enemy, COVID-19, was threatening human beings everywhere in the world, regardless of their large-group identities. Furthermore, on 25 May 2020 George Floyd, a black American, died in Minneapolis, Minnesota while handcuffed and pinned to the ground by a white police officer who pressed his knee on Floyd's neck. This event became yet another symbol of continuing racism in the United States.

When nature shows its fury and people suffer, victims tend to ultimately accept the event as fate or as the will of God,⁵ but after man-made accidental disasters, survivors blame a small number of individuals or governmental organizations for their neglect or carelessness. Obviously, those suffering severe loss, like the death of a relative, will feel the impact of a trauma more than those in the same large group who are removed from a catastrophic forest fire or an erupting volcano. Such natural or man-made disasters can also evoke societal responses within the traumatized large group, mostly within the communities near the tragedy. If the backbone of the community is not broken, however, the society recovers. A classic example of "biological regeneration" can be seen in Wales, UK. In October 1966, a hill of coal waste collapsed sending around 300,000 cubic yards of coal slurry onto the Welsh village of Aberfan killing 144 people, among them 116 children. For five years following this tragedy there was a significant increase in the birthrate among women who had not themselves lost a child. The "loss" and the "gain" in the number of children were balanced. The community recovered in a process of "biosocial regeneration".⁶ On the other hand, there can also be biosocial degeneration, such as after the Chernobyl accident when women in Belarus, due to their exposure to radiation, feared having children with disabilities. Thus, the birthrate declined and there was no biosocial regeneration during the initial years following the disaster.

Occasionally a natural or man-made accidental trauma is reflected in the traumatized large group's political relationship with a neighbouring large group. Here we can observe two huge earthquakes, one that increased and the other that decreased political tension. In the Armenian earthquake of December 1988, a time when a hot Armenian–Azeri conflict was present, between 25,000 and 50,000 were killed and up to 130,000 injured. Most injured Armenians refused to accept blood donated by Azerbaijanis after the earthquake. This illustrated resistance to "mixing blood" with the enemy. In contrast, in Turkey in August 1999, a massive earthquake killed an estimated 20,000 people. Only a few years earlier, Turkey and Greece had almost gone to war in a dispute over two rocky islets

5 Lifton & Olson (1976). *The human meaning of total disaster: The Buffalo Creek experience*.

6 Williams & Parks (1975, p. 304). *Psychosocial effects of disaster: Birth rate in Aberfan*.

(Kardak/Imia) near the Turkish coast,⁷ and there remained high tension between the two countries. After the earthquake, rescue workers from many nations rushed to Turkey to help, among them Greeks. By publishing pictures and stories of Greek rescue workers, Turkish newspapers helped to “humanize” the Greeks as a large group. The Turkish disaster and an earthquake in Greece the following month initiated a new relationship between the two nations. Many people in diplomatic circles at that time used the term “earthquake diplomacy” to characterize this positive outcome.

When a massive trauma results from deliberate oppression or widespread torture by the Other who has a different large-group identity, narcissistic investment in large-group identity, its symbols and undigested historical images, becomes inflamed. The heavy shadow of large-group identity falls upon individual identities.

Individual and Large-group Identities

Unlike the terms “character” and “personality”, which are observed and perceived by mental health clinicians, *individual identity* refers to a person’s inner working model—he or she, not an outsider, senses and experiences it. Erik Erikson described this as “a persistent sameness within oneself ... [and] a persistent sharing of some kind of essential character with others”.⁸ Individual identity is interconnected with *large-group identity*. 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 personal identity. The second layer is the canvas of the tent, which is loose fitting but allows a person 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, including their prejudices towards Others, are used in the construction of the two layers, the individual garment and the canvas of the tent.⁹ While it is the tent pole—the leader—that holds the

⁷ Volkan (1997).

⁸ Erikson (1956, p. 57). *The problem of ego identity*.

⁹ Volkan (1988). *The need to have enemies and allies: From clinical practice to international relationships*; Volkan (1997); Volkan (2004). *Blind trust: Large groups and leaders in times of crises and terror*; Volkan (2020). *Large-group psychology: Racism, societal divisions, narcissistic leaders and who we are now*.

tent erect, the tent's canvas (large-group identity) protects the psychological state of both the leader and the group.¹⁰

Worldwide, large-group identities develop in childhood and then become fixed after the individual goes through the adolescence passage. 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 but, for practical purposes, cannot change his or her core large-group identity. 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 different ethnic groups, or voluntary immigrants, especially in childhood. Think of a man—let's say he is French—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 French and become German. While a large group's identity may become modified by major historical events, the evolution of a new large-group identity is rare, such as when a substantial group of South Slavs became Bosniaks while under the rule of the Ottoman Empire.

Sometimes new large-group identities develop in adulthood. We see this especially in certain religious cults such as Aum Shinrikyo and the Branch Davidians, guerrilla or terrorist organizations such as Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, FARC) and the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS), as well as organizations with extreme political aims such as white supremacists and neo-Nazis in the United States.¹¹ Members of such large groups exaggerate selected aspects of their childhood large-group identities by holding on to a restricted special nationalistic, religious or political belief. Sometimes they become believers in ideas that were not available in their childhood environments. In short, they give up sharing overall sentiments with people who had the same childhood large-group identity but who have not made such specific new selections.

¹⁰ In this paper I will not focus on large-group leaders and the psychological two-way street between them and their followers. Elsewhere I studied in depth the importance of the tent's pole in steadying the tent canvas—Volkan (1997); Volkan (2020).

¹¹ Volkan (2020); Suistola & Volkan (2017). *Religious knives: Historical and psychological dimensions of international terrorism*.

Initial Reactions to Massive Trauma at the Hand of the Other

We will review two examples of *initial reactions* to a trauma caused by the Other, one from Cyprus and the other from Kuwait.

The first example illustrates a kind of biosocial regeneration. Following a deadly ethnic conflict with Cypriot Greeks that started in 1963, Cypriot Turks were forced to live in enclaves within 3% of the island under subhuman conditions for 11 years until the Turkish army came to the island in 1974 and divided Cyprus into northern Turkish and southern Greek areas. During the first five years of living surrounded by their enemy, until 1968, the Cypriot Turks could not even leave their enclaves. Because they maintained hope that Turkey would save them, their backbone was not broken, and they became involved in a form of regeneration using shared symbols and displacement. During this time they developed a hobby of raising thousands of parakeets. The caged birds represented their imprisoned selves. As long as they could care for the parakeets, and as long as the parakeets survived, produced babies and sang, the Cypriot Turks could tolerate their inhumane conditions.¹²

The second example illustrates a biosocial degeneration. Saddam Hussein's Iraqi forces' occupation of Kuwait started in October 1990 and lasted for seven months. The invading Iraqi soldiers opened the doors of the cages in the Kuwait City Zoo and reportedly raped Kuwaiti women and locked up one or two naked in these emptied cages. Whether this story was true or not did not matter; what mattered was the Kuwaitis' belief that such degrading events took place. Interviews illuminated that young Kuwaiti men generalized the idea of the raped women incidents and thus, for some time, wanted to postpone marriage in the (mostly unconscious) belief that the women they would marry might also have been raped.¹³ Such societal response to the Other in Kuwait brings to our minds the biological degeneration phase in Belarus following the Chernobyl accident.

Besides telling the story of an initial response to a specific massive trauma, it is more important to study the *usual* initial responses when any large group's conflict with an opposing large group becomes inflamed. At such times the relationships between people in each large group become governed by two

¹² Volkan (1979). *Cyprus: War and adaptation: A psychoanalytic history of two ethnic groups in conflict*.

¹³ Volkan (1997).

obligatory principles: (1) keeping the large-group identity separate from the identity of the enemy; and (2) maintaining a *psychological border* between the two large groups at any cost.¹⁴ When people perceive that two large groups are not the same, each side can externalize its own unwanted aspects and project unacceptable thoughts and affects more effectively onto the enemy—sometimes unfortunately escalating to the “*dehumanizing*” of that enemy to varying degrees. Keeping a psychological border between the two large groups is important for controlling the externalizations and projections from returning.

Whether the victimization becomes chronic or not, after the acute phase of the catastrophe ends these two principles may remain operational for years or decades to come. Anything that disturbs them brings massive anxiety, and large groups may feel entitled to do anything to preserve the principles of absolute differentiation, which, in turn, protects their large-group identity. Thus, hostile interactions are perpetuated. *Minor differences* between opposing groups, such as dialect differences between Croats and Serbs—the Croat *mlijeko* (milk) versus the Serb *mleko*—assume significance. Minor differences become major in order to maintain the distinctions between the two large groups and the psychological border that exists. Sinhalese mobs in the Sri Lankan riots of 1958, for example, relied on a variety of subtle indicators—such as the presence of earring holes in the ear or the manner in which a shirt is worn—to identify their enemy Tamils, whom they then attacked or killed.¹⁵

Complications in Mourning, Transgenerational Transmissions, Chosen Traumas, Undigested Past and Entitlement Ideologies

A massive trauma at the hand of the Other is connected with various types of losses, such as losing family members and friends, home, economic resources, pride and self-esteem. Whether a person is fully aware of it or not, every significant loss is mourned. We need to differentiate the mourning process from the acute grief reaction when a mourner is in shock and, in a sense, beats his or her head against a wall and cries until reaching a deep recognition that the lost person or thing will not return. We have a mental image, a “mental double”, of

¹⁴ Volkan (1988); Volkan (1997); Volkan (2006). *Killing in the name of identity: Stories of bloody conflicts*.

¹⁵ Horowitz (1985). *Ethnic groups in conflict*.

persons and things that are important to us. Mourning means being preoccupied and having a relationship with the mental double of a lost person or thing in our minds until this mental double becomes futureless. For example, when a man reaches the practical end of mourning he no longer remains preoccupied with associated emotions, with the image of a lover he had lost; he no longer fantasizes being with her. The nature of the *actual* relationship with a person or thing before they were lost determines if the mourning process will last a year or so or much longer. Sometimes, people may become perennial mourners.¹⁶

Losses after a massive trauma at the hand of the Other are linked to other psychological pressures such as humiliation, helplessness, inability to be assertive, “survivor guilt”¹⁷ and sometimes unwanted unconscious identifications with the oppressor.¹⁸ Shifa Haq noted that decades after the disappearance of their loved ones, Kashmiri mourner-survivors continued to have fantasies that the disappeared individuals may one day return.¹⁹ This prevented them from bringing their mourning process to a practical end.

When members of an affected large group cannot mourn the group's losses or reverse its feelings of helplessness and humiliation, often they psychologically *deposit* their traumatized self-images, accompanied by the mental doubles of Others who played a role in the trauma, into the developing selves of children in their care. This situation is known as “transgenerational transmission”. Psychoanalytic knowledge of transgenerational transmissions of trauma from one generation to the next primarily came from studies of Jewish Holocaust survivors and their offspring. The literature on this topic is vast.²⁰ Without paying attention to their ancestors' traumas, we cannot fully understand some individuals' interpersonal relationships, symptoms and the nature of their adjustment to life.²¹

A child who is a reservoir of depositing is given a *psychological gene* that influences his or her individual and large-group identity. Those in the next generation—when they are not successful in dealing with the psychological

16 Volkan (1981). *Linking objects and linking phenomena: A study of the forms, symptoms, metapsychology and therapy of complicated mourning*; Volkan & Zintl (1993). *Life after loss: Lessons of grief*.

17 Niederland (1968). *Clinical observations of the “survivor syndrome”*.

18 Šebek (1996). *The fate of the totalitarian object*.

19 Haq (2021). *In search of return: Mourning the disappearances in Kashmir*.

20 For references to such studies, see Brenner (2019). *The handbook of psychoanalytic Holocaust studies: International perspectives*; Kogan (1995). *The cry of mute children: A psychoanalytic perspective of the second generation of the Holocaust*; Volkan, Ast & Greer (2002). *The Third Reich in the unconscious: Transgenerational transmission and its consequences*.

21 Volkan (2015). *A Nazi legacy: A study of depositing, transgenerational transmission, dissociation and remembering through action*; Volkan (2019). *A study of ghosts in the human psyche: Story of a Muslim Armenian*.

tasks given to them—in turn will hand down such images with their associated tasks to a newer generation. Through the decades, tasks carried forward, generation after generation, may *change function*. For example, an attempt to reverse humiliation may become an attempt to humiliate the Other. Descendants of victimizers too may experience similar processes, such as difficulty or inability to mourn, as observed among Germans after the Nazi era.²² Among the descendants of perpetrators there is more preoccupation with the consequences of shared feelings of guilt than with the shared feeling of humiliation.

As decades pass and images and tasks included in the transgenerational transmission of massive trauma reference the same historical event, the mental representation of the event links all individuals in the large group. The mental representation of the event may then emerge as a *chosen trauma*.²³ A large group does not choose to be victimized. Its choice is to make the shared representation of the ancestors' massive trauma at the hand of the enemy a most significant large-group identity marker.

In open or in dormant fashion, or in both alternately, chosen traumas can continue to exist for centuries. In “normal” times the chosen traumas can be ritualistically recalled at the anniversary of the original event. Greeks link themselves when they share the “memory” of the fall of Constantinople (Istanbul) to the Turks in 1453, Russians recall the “memory” of the centuries-past Tatar-Mongol invasion, Czechs commemorate the battle of Bila Hora in 1620 that led to their subjugation under the Hapsburg Empire for nearly 300 years, Scots keep alive the story of the battle of Culloden in 1746 and the failure of Bonnie Prince Charlie to restore a Stuart to the British throne, the Dakota Indians of the United States recall the anniversary of their decimation at Wounded Knee in 1890. Some chosen traumas are difficult to detect because they are not simply connected to one well-recognized historical event. For example, Estonians' chosen trauma is not related to one specific event but to their ongoing, almost constant, dominance by Others for thousands of years.

A chosen trauma is not an image of a relatively recent historical event. For example, the Holocaust that links all Jewish persons, whether directly affected by Nazis or not, is not a chosen trauma. Survivors and their descendants still possess photographs and some belongings from that time, and their stories are still “alive”. Those affected by the Holocaust and their offspring are still dealing with their *undigested past*. Only over many generations, when an individual,

²² Mitscherlich & Mitscherlich (1975). *The inability to mourn: Principles of collective behavior*.

²³ Volkan (1991). *On “chosen trauma”*; Volkan (2013). *Enemies on the couch: A psychopolitical journey through war and peace*; Volkan (2020).

that person's parents, grandparents, other relatives and friends have no actual memory of the ancestors' trauma, it may become a chosen trauma.

During the first week of March 2020, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania, in collaboration with other partners, held a meeting in Vilnius called "Dealing with the Trauma of an Undigested Past". The Lithuanians' undigested past is linked to still-remembered tragedies from Soviet times. Meanwhile, Lithuanian Jews are still trying to work through the wounds caused by the murder of an estimated 195,000 to 196,000 of their people in Nazi-occupied Lithuania.²⁴ During this gathering there were no references to chosen traumas. When my team from the Center for the Study of Mind and Human Interaction and I were bringing together influential delegates of opposing large groups for years-long unofficial dialogues we would inevitably see inflammation of chosen traumas. For example, when in the 1990s we worked with people representing Estonians, Russians and Russian-speakers living in Estonia to help Estonia develop its new independent identity in a peaceful fashion, we had to deal with the Russian chosen trauma known as "Mongol-Tatar Yoke". The Russian delegates went back to a 13th century massive trauma and, through a *time collapse*, linked emotions connected to this chosen trauma to problems with the Estonians after the collapse of the Soviet Union. When Greek and Turkish representatives were involved in a series of talks, inevitably the Greeks evoked the image of the Ottoman Turks' capture of Constantinople in 1453.

The inflammation of a chosen trauma that raises obstacles against finding peaceful solutions for a present-day conflict is due to a chosen trauma's link to an *entitlement ideology*. For example, the Greek's chosen trauma is linked to the Greek entitlement ideology known as *Megali Idea* (Great Idea). It refers to a shared wish to recapture land under the rule of Others that is considered lost Greek land.²⁵ A re-activated chosen trauma and the entitlement ideology linked to it increase the large group's narcissistic investment in large-group identity. Then, peculiarly, peace is perceived as a process of withdrawal of such narcissistic investment.

In order to illustrate why we need to pay great attention to chosen traumas and entitlement ideologies, I examined and wrote about the story of the inflammation of the Serbian chosen trauma by Slobodan Milošević and his advisers.²⁶ The Serbian chosen trauma is the shared mental representation of the Battle of

²⁴ Voren (2011). *Undigested past: The Holocaust in Lithuania*.

²⁵ Herzfeld (1986). *Ours once more: Folklore, ideology, and the making of modern Greece*; Markides (1977). *The rise and fall of the Cyprus Republic*; Volkan & Itzkowitz (1994). *Turks and Greeks: Neighbours in conflict*.

²⁶ Volkan (1996). *Bosnia-Herzegovina: Ancient fuel of a modern inferno*; Volkan (2004).

Kosovo on 28 June 1389. The entitlement ideology connected with it is called *Christoslavism*.²⁷ According to the myth that developed among the Serbs some 70 years after the Battle of Kosovo, the event and the Serbian characters of this battle—especially the Serbian leader, Prince Lazar, who was killed during the battle—mingled with elements and characters of Christianity. As decades passed, Prince Lazar became associated with Jesus Christ, and icons showing Lazar's representation decorated many Serbian churches throughout the six centuries following the battle. Even during the communist period, when the government discouraged hero worship, Serbs were able to drink a popular red wine called "Prince Lazar".

During the year preceding the 600th anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo, an elaborate ritual took place with the full permission and encouragement of Milošević. Lazar's 600-year-old remains, which had been kept north of Belgrade, were placed in a coffin and taken to almost every Serb village and town, where they were received by huge crowds of mourners dressed in black. Over and over, Lazar's remains were ritualistically buried and reincarnated, until they were given a final resting place at the original battleground in Kosovo where a huge monument made of red stone symbolizing blood had been built. It was 28 June 1989, the 600th anniversary of the battle. In the mythology, Prince Lazar had chosen the Kingdom of Heaven over the Kingdom of Earth. By design, Milošević arrived by descending from a helicopter, representing Prince Lazar coming to earth to find a new kingdom, a Greater Serbia. Thus, Milošević and his associates, by activating the mental representations of Lazar and the Battle of Kosovo, along with the peak emotions they generated, first encouraged a shared sense of victimization followed by a shared sense of entitlement for revenge. This led to new massive traumas in Europe at the end of the 20th century. Even present-day conflicts that continue in this region cannot be fully understood without paying attention to the Serbian chosen trauma.

I live in Charlottesville, Virginia. On 11 and 12 August 2017 a white supremacist and neo-Nazi rally was conducted in my beautiful city. Marchers, some of whom came from other locations in the United States, chanted racist and anti-Semitic slogans and carried Nazi and neo-Nazi symbols as they opposed removing a statue of Robert E. Lee, the commanding general of the Confederate States Army during the American Civil War, from a park in the city's historical downtown. During the demonstration, a white supremacist deliberately rammed his car into a gathering of counter-protestors, killing a 32-year-old woman and injuring others. The tragic event in my city and other similar events in the United States are linked to

27 Sells (2002). *The construction of Islam in Serbian religious mythology and its consequences*.

American white supremacists and neo-Nazis who belong to large groups with a shared entitlement ideology of establishing a country populated and controlled by pure descendants of selected white Europeans. Their illusionary entitlement ideology is related to losing slavery and racial segregation.²⁸

On Healing

Countless methods have been applied in the effort to achieve the collective healing of undigested pasts and the continuing impact of chosen traumas. Some are well known, such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) work in South Africa under the leadership of Desmond Tutu. Others, even when they bring some interesting ideas to consider, do not lead to changes in societies and do not significantly help to improve peaceful co-existence between opposing large groups. During the last three years I have been present at two series of meetings in the United States attended by both white and black Americans, people with high-level religious positions, historians, political scientists, former diplomats and mental health professionals. It was moving to hear stories related to slavery and racism. Sharing such experiences made all participants feel close to one another and ideas about what could be done emerged. For example, during one meeting an African American participant demanded that whenever a black person is on trial at least three African Americans should be on the jury. In another meeting, participants agreed that erecting a monument in Washington, DC symbolizing both the black and white Americans' traumas during the American Civil War would be helpful in bringing the races together. Such demands or suggestions, even though they may be thoughtful and positive, remain within the conference room. To actually change racist circumstances in a specific area, such dialogues should be followed by some actual, concrete activity.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, after I began isolating from routine activities outside of my house, I started to watch old television series. One was "In the Heat of the Night", which was originally shown between 1988 and 1995. This series dealt with racial tensions and bigotry in the American South in the 1960s. As I watched I realized that artistic expressions viewed by millions were, and are, more influential in healing the scars of slavery and racism than academic gatherings.

In November 2006 at Cape Town University in South Africa I was honoured to give the opening speech for the celebration of Archbishop Desmond Tutu's 75th birthday and the 10th anniversary of the TRC's founding. The work of South Africa's

²⁸ Volkan (2020).

TRC began in the 1990s as a way to deal with atrocities committed during apartheid. It involved victims telling their stories and “forgiving” their victimizers, who apologized for their deeds. During the 2006 anniversary gathering I observed some hostility between individual victims and perpetrators who had appeared at the TRC meetings. I became convinced that the success of the TRC was due to it helping the societal mourning process in South Africa and evolving to serve as a monument that absorbs painful affects.²⁹ I had met Desmond Tutu earlier at the Carter Center after I was invited to join the International Negotiation Network (INN) under the leadership of former US President Jimmy Carter in the late 1980s. Instead of seeing an angry man, I saw in Archbishop Tutu a man full of goodness. He was for me a living symbol of human dignity, and his personality helped South Africans go through a mourning process.

After the South African TRC’s work, the practice of “apology and forgiveness” that exists in many religions also began to be promoted as a diplomatic/political practice for healing massive traumas and finding solutions for large-group conflicts. The problems faced by those attempting to recreate the TRC’s work, and their failures, suggest that a closer examination of when and how reliance on apology and forgiveness is useful, and when it is not, would be helpful. Furthermore, my observations of dialogue series between representatives of “enemy” large groups in the presence of a psychologically informed neutral third party show that parties in conflict cannot reach an agreement on making an apology, accepting it and forgiving the other without controversy; mostly, they cannot reach such an agreement at all.

As we know, attempts in different locations following the example set by the TRC in South Africa did not end in success. A few years ago, when I was in Colombia, the selection of members for a Colombian truth and reconciliation commission was taking place. I sent a message recommending that a Colombian person with extensive knowledge of individual and large-group psychology be included as a member of this future commission. My suggestion fell on deaf ears. Here we should remember once more the importance of the personality organizations of political and community leaders: do they support societal healing and have the capacity to feel empathy for others, or do they focus on personal narcissistic gains?

Members of the Center for the Study of Mind and Human Interaction and I developed a methodology for helping to develop peaceful co-existence between opposing large groups in conflict. We named it the Tree Model. The title of this methodology reflects the slow process of an unofficial diplomatic activity that

29 Volkan (2009). *The next chapter: Consequences of social trauma*.

grows like a tree and develops many branches. It is the only psychoanalytically informed, interdisciplinary methodology for finding peaceful co-existence between enemy groups, and it has three basic phases:

Phase 1. Psychopolitical diagnosis of the situation between the enemy large groups: This phase includes the facilitating team's in-depth psychoanalytically informed interviews with a wide range of members of the large groups involved. This leads to an understanding of the main conscious and unconscious dynamics of the situation that need to be addressed. Sometimes it takes months to understand unconscious shared processes in a large group.

Phase 2. Psychopolitical dialogues between the influential representatives of opposing large groups: When the same influential delegates representing "enemies" come together for a series of dialogues for unofficial negotiations, usually meeting for four days every three months over some years, they evolve as spokespersons of their large group's shared sentiments. The facilitators do not offer advice or their own strategies for conflict resolution but utilize ideas stemming from psychoanalytic techniques in conducting the psychopolitical dialogues. It will be sufficient to state that during the psychopolitical dialogues the facilitating team pays full attention to large-group identity issues mentioned earlier in this chapter. It takes into consideration the importance of threats against large-group identity, notices the importance of the shared mental representations of the large groups' histories, and includes the impact of transgenerational transmission of trauma, images of past historical events and time collapse. One crucial aim of the psychopolitical dialogues is to establish a "time expansion" between more recent problems and past problems belonging to the ancestors so that more realistic negotiations about current issues can take place. This is done by not forgetting or denying ancestors' traumas, but by understanding and feeling how the mental representations of such traumas have become large-group identity markers. Eventually, the opposing large-group participants go through mourning processes, and more realistic communications between the representatives of enemy large groups take place.

Earlier I discussed concepts of apology and forgiveness. These concepts are related to what I have named an "accordion phenomenon",³⁰ which appears during the second phase of the Tree Model. This refers to opposing participants suddenly experiencing a rapprochement that is followed by a sudden withdrawal

³⁰ Volkan (1988); Volkan (1997); Volkan (1999). *The Tree Model: A comprehensive psychopolitical approach to unofficial diplomacy and the reduction of ethnic tension*; Volkan (2020).

from one another. This phenomenon resembles the playing of an accordion, as the groups “squeeze” together and then pull apart.

Derivatives of aggression within the participants from the opposing groups, even when they may be denied, underlie this phenomenon. Initial distancing is thus a defensive manoeuvre to keep aggressive attitudes and feelings in check, as, if the opponents were to come close, they may harm one another—at least in fantasy—or in turn become targets of retaliation. When opposing parties are confined together in a meeting room with a third “neutral” team and are sharing conscious efforts for a civilized negotiation, they tend to deny their aggressive feelings as they press together in a kind of illusory union. After a while, this closeness threatens each side’s large-group identity. The closeness then induces anxiety; it feels dangerous, and as a result, a distancing occurs. It is during times of squeezing together that participants become directly interested in ideas or feelings that can be related to concepts of apology and forgiveness. But, as I stated, when the accordion phenomenon is at work in the dialogue process, giving and accepting apology and forgiveness is illusory. When the accordion pulls apart, preoccupations with such efforts disappear. Realistic negotiations can be carried out when the alternating between distance and togetherness (the accordion action) is no longer extreme and everyone can easily hold on to their group identity. It is at such times that forgiveness and apology also can be considered realistically. However, on their own they have no magical powers; they are useful only when they are part of a multilevel effort towards reconciliation.

Phase 3. Collaborative political/societal actions and governmental and societal institutions that grow out of the dialogue process: In order for the newly gained insights to have an impact on policy makers, as well as on the populace at large, the final phase of the Tree Model, which also lasts for some years, requires the collaborative development of concrete actions and institutions approved directly or indirectly by central governments and regional authorities. In Estonia we were able to build model co-existence projects in two villages where the population is half Estonian and half Russian. We also created a model to promote integration among Estonian and Russian schoolchildren, and influenced the language examination required for Russians to become Estonian citizens. Two persons from our Estonia team ran for the presidency of Estonia, and one of them, Arnold Rüütel, was president of Estonia from 2001 to 2006.

A detailed description of the application of the Tree Model is beyond the scope of this paper, but such details are published elsewhere.³¹ There are limitations to

31 Volkan (1999); Volkan (2006); Volkan (2013); Volkan (2020).

this model. First, it requires that psychoanalysts and other clinicians develop expertise in international relations and collaborate with diplomats, political scientists, historians and others. Building an interdisciplinary team has its own psychodynamic challenges. Second, the tree needs water (funds), and it can be difficult to find sponsors for a process that will take many years before the fruits of the tree can be observed by everyone. Nevertheless, as the world changes there is an increasing need to find serious new methods for preventing conflicts, reducing tensions between opposing groups and helping with collective healing.

In order to increase our knowledge about the collective behaviour of large groups, in 2007 I established the International Dialogue Initiative (IDI), which brings together psychoanalysts, diplomats, sociologists and other professionals from eight countries—Germany, Great Britain, Iran, Israel, Palestine, Russia, Turkey, and United States—once or twice a year.³² For me, the IDI has become a symbol illustrating how human beings with different large-group identities and historical backgrounds can continue to speak with one another and co-exist peacefully. Members bring a psychologically informed perspective to the study and amelioration of societal conflict. Three years ago, the IDI began offering workshops for training in large-group psychology.

From the beginning of history, human beings have humiliated, oppressed and killed the Other. Human nature has not changed. Due to astounding world changes—advances in communication technologies, the evolution of a new type of globalization, massive voluntary and forced migrations, terrorism and related world events, the COVID-19 pandemic, and now more wars—old official diplomatic methods often may not be enough or even applicable to many current international problems. This chapter has examined the psychological obstacles getting in the way of a peaceful world. An understanding of the influence of the psychology of large groups in its own right has become a necessity. We should also continue to search for ways to achieve collective healing and a peaceful world.

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³² See: www.internationaldialogueinitiative.com.

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