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Transgenerational Transmissions and Chosen Traumas: An Aspect of Large-Group Identity¹

Vamik D. Volkan

Large-group (ethnic, national, religious) identity is defined as the subjective experience of thousands or millions of people who are linked by a persistent sense of sameness while also sharing numerous characteristics with others in foreign groups. The main task that members of a large group share is to maintain, protect, and repair their group identity. A 'chosen trauma' is one component of this identity. The term 'chosen trauma' refers to the shared mental representation of a massive trauma that the group's ancestors suffered at the hand of an enemy. When a large group regresses, its chosen trauma is reactivated in order to support the group's threatened identity. This reactivation may have dramatic and destructive consequences.

Key words: chosen trauma, identity, individual identity, large-group identity, personality organization

After colonial powers retracted their direct control over Africa and the Indian subcontinent, as well as over other overseas territories, and after the collapse of the Soviet Union, many large groups became involved in an exaggerated process of defining or redefining their identity. Sometimes bloody struggles of differentiation and independence ensued, and some continue today. Unlike the nation-state wars that characterized much of the 19th and 20th centuries, the wars of today seem to occur increasingly within rather than between states, and involve groups that have many similarities yet insist that they are inherently and irreconcilably different.

Although the recent and current events in the Balkans and the

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horrific clash between Tutsis and Hutus in central Africa captured headlines around the world, they provide only two examples among many. When the Republic of Georgia regained its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, for example, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, two regions within the territory of Georgia, simultaneously declared their own independence. Brutal warfare between Georgians and Abkhazians and Georgians and South Ossetians ensued that remains unresolved and threatens to re-ignite today. People who lived together for decades were quickly transformed into bitter enemies who have fought to the death to preserve what they perceive as their group's threatened identity.

Given this trend of large groups waging war, to greater or lesser degrees, over identity, and the increasing focus on individual identity among many clinicians, now would seem an opportune time for psychoanalysts and psychotherapists to contribute to a better understanding of this topic. Through efforts to understand large-group psychology, a window could be opened between social and behavioral science, useful interdisciplinary cooperation could be pushed forward and valuable theoretical and practical concepts could result.

Identity in Psychoanalytic Theory

The understanding of individual identity has increased in the last few decades through extensive clinical work with those who lack integrated identities such as borderline and narcissistic patients. Clinicians began to evolve theories to understand the inner worlds of such individuals and to develop new techniques for their treatment. But in spite of the widespread use of the term 'identity' within the mental health profession today, it is interesting that it was not used frequently by Freud, and, when he did use it, it was in a colloquial sense. One well-known reference to identity is found in 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 its ethnonational pride or religious faith. Nevertheless, Freud noted a 'safe privacy of a common mental construction', and 'a clear consciousness of inner identity' as a Jew (Freud, 1926: 274). But Freud never fully investigated this link between his individual and large-group identity.

Erikson, one psychoanalyst who focused on identity, first used the term *ego identity*, and then dropped the word 'ego' and simply

used 'identity'. He described it as 'a persistent sameness within oneself . . . [and] a persistent sharing of some kind of essential character with others' (1956: 57). What Erikson was describing is the individual's 'core identity' which is different from their social or professional sub-identities that are condensed in the core identity at a later time. Unlike character and personality, which are observed and perceived by others, core identity refers to an individual's inner working model – he or she, not an outsider, senses and experiences it. Some authors, like Kernberg (1975, 1976, 1984) and the author (Volkan, 1976, 1987, 1995), use the term *personality organization* and differentiate it from the simple word 'personality'. Personality organization refers to the psychoanalyst's theoretical and metapsychological explanation of the inner experience and construction of a patient's self-representation and the nature of this individual's internalized object relationships (person and thing images). Personality organization, which is used to describe whether the self is cohesive or unintegrated, therefore parallels the concept of identity, but again, the former is perceived by an outsider, while the latter is sensed by the individual himself.

Following Erikson's description of individual identity, I define large-group identity – whether it refers to religion, nationality or ethnicity – as the subjective experience of thousands or millions of people who are linked by a persistent sense of sameness while also sharing numerous characteristics with others in foreign groups. Individuals thus collectively define and differentiate themselves as Jewish, French or Kurdish. If a person is born into a family in which parents come from different large groups, or if a person becomes an immigrant voluntarily or is forcibly relocated to a country or region dominated by a different large group, his or her sense of large-group identity may be confused and complicated. But in this article I will focus on typical large-group identity in which an individual perceives him- or herself as belonging to a specific large group. I will not discuss phenomenological divisions between various types of large groups such as national, ethnic or religious entities, but the psychodynamic factors belonging to all of them.

Freud did not refer to the concept of identity in his studies on large-group psychology. Instead of a comprehensive approach to this subject, his well-known theory of group psychology reflects an oedipal theme (Freud, 1921). The members of a group sublimate their aggression against the leader in a way that is similar to the process of a son turning his negative feelings toward his oedipal

father into loyalty. In turn, the members of a group idealize the leader, identify with each other and rally around the leader. What Freud described is not a full explanation of large-group psychology; he was only speaking of regressed groups (Waelder, 1971). Freud's concepts on group psychology are nevertheless relevant, and the behavior he described can be seen in regressed groups today.

In November 1997, for example, Iraq temporarily expelled United States inspectors who were assigned, along with other United Nations experts, to dismantle Iraq's weapons of mass destruction. Saddam Hussein responded to the increased tension and possibility of renewed warfare by creating a 'human shield' around his palaces and other important sites, as he had earlier done during the Gulf War. Iraqis by the hundreds, including many women and children, rushed to various strategic locations to offer themselves as sacrificial protection. Their aim was to deter military attacks since it would be politically damaging to the US if numerous civilians, especially women and children, were among the casualties of a bombing raid. Although coercion and propaganda partly precipitated this activity, most policy analysts also indicated that a majority of the Iraqis genuinely volunteered themselves as human shields. Hussein's efforts to promote group cohesion were successful – his followers were exhibiting, in a literal sense, the ritual of rallying around the leader under stressful conditions.

Nevertheless, during the last decade or so, there clearly has been a shift in psychoanalytic approaches to large groups from an emphasis on the leader as an idealized father to the leader as an idealized, nurturing mother. For example, Anzieu (1971, 1984) and Chasseguet-Smirgel (1984) perceived unstructured and regressed groups as representing to their members an idealized, all-gratifying early mother ('breast-mother') that repairs all narcissistic lesions. The members of such regressed groups, when given an opportunity, choose leaders who promote such illusions of gratification, and the group may become violent and try to destroy external reality that is perceived as interfering with this shared illusion. In between those who emphasize paternal or maternal images are those such as Abse and Jessner (1961), Abse and Ulman (1977) and Volkan and Itzkowitz (1984), who have observed both feminine and masculine qualities in the 'charismatic' individuals who lead such groups.

Kernberg's (1980, 1989) observations on small groups, mobs and large groups led him to consider that the regression in such groups poses a basic threat to the member's personal identity. In group

situations, primitive object relations (i.e. those that pre-date object constancy), primitive defensive operations, and especially primitive aggression appear. In his re-examination of Freud's theories on group psychology, Kernberg states that Freud's description of libidinal ties among the members in a group in fact reflects a defense against pre-oedipal conditions such as conflicts in the dyadic relationship between a child and his or her mother. Furthermore, he says:

... there is always an implicit primitive leadership in the fantasy of small as well as large group formation, a leadership closer to the primitive maternal ego ideal than to the father of the primal horde, but even granting this fantasy structure, it already would seem to defend against the basic threats to identity and from violence in the large group. (Kernberg, 1989)

My own formulations on large-group identity have evolved from my participation as a facilitator for over 20 years, in unofficial psychopolitical dialogues between representatives of large enemy groups such as Arabs and Israelis, Cypriot Turks and Cypriot Greeks, Estonians and Russians, and Croatians and Serbians. Such dialogues take place within small-group settings and the psychodynamics of small groups are present (see Volkan, 1997, 1998a). More importantly, however, I have repeatedly observed that when such representatives come together in a small group and are given the 'task' (Bion, 1961) of discussing the conflictual relationship between their respective large groups, the issues pertaining to each side's ethnic, national or religious identity assume primary importance and their personal identity fades into the background. Each individual participant in the dialogue, regardless of his or her personality organization, professional or social standing, or political orientation, feels that his or her side is under personal attack and is compelled to defend their large group and become its spokesperson. The personal stories that emerge typically reflect what 'others' did to 'us' and additional aspects of large-group conflicts and large-group identity difficulties.

In these dialogue series, the participants from large groups in conflict appear to wear two layers of 'garments'. The first one fits them snugly and is their individual identity – the basis of their inner sense of sustained sameness. The second layer is a loose covering made of the canvas of the large group's tent (the large-group identity) through which the person shares a persistent sense of sameness with others in the large group. Both garments provide

security and protection. but because both are worn every day, the individual hardly notices either one under normal circumstances. When there is a storm, however – that is, during times of collective stress such as economic crisis, drastic political change, social upheaval or war – the garment made of the tent canvas takes on greater importance, and individuals may collectively seek the protection of, and also help defend, their large-group tent.

Individuals also seek to support their tent through their choice of a leader, who helps keep the tent erect like a tent pole. Freud's theory on group psychology described this relationship between leaders and followers, or as I have conceptualized it here, between the tent pole and the people sheltered under the tent. Although leader–follower dynamics are an important aspect of large group processes, I believe the main task of a large group is to protect the canvas of the tent itself – the large-group (i.e. ethnic, national or religious) identity. The more stress the group members perceive or experience, the more they become involved in maintaining and repairing the canvas. Under extreme and threatening conditions, they feel entitled to do anything, whether sadistic or masochistic, to protect their large-group identity, and will seek or rally around a leader who will help in this task, no matter what means he or she may use.

The importance of the tent to the individuals it shelters, and the intertwining of individual and large-group identity, made me curious about the exact composition of the canvas of the large-group tent. As I indicated earlier, some authors such as Anzieu, Chasseguet-Smirgel and Kernberg have implied that the canvas (the large-group identity) is more important than the pole (the leader) – they referred to it as 'breast-mother', 'primitive maternal ego ideal' and other similar terms. But I believe that describing the canvas with such terms is not enough. We should consider the canvas as the outcome of many threads woven together, not only one.

A simple metapsychological explanation that the large group functions as a nurturing mother will not allow us to explain complicated large-group processes, conflicts between neighbors, the role of leaders, warlike conditions and the rituals that accompany such conditions. It will not explain why large groups are different from one another or the impact of the fact that large groups are 'born' in different ways (Loewenberg, 1995) and have different histories. Furthermore, we will have little to offer political analysts, diplomats and social scientists except an abstract metapsychological concept that they cannot use.

Transgenerational Transmissions

Although the metaphor of a canvas tent is useful, it is not a psychoanalytic construct. We therefore need to apply insights gained from psychoanalytic theory, and especially from clinical observations, to describe more accurately various components of this 'canvas'. One aspect of clinical observation that is especially relevant to understanding certain components of large-group identity is the transgenerational transmission of trauma. Through the study of individual responses to trauma, it has been observed that there is a fluidity between a mother's and child's psychic borders and that the mother's anxiety, unconscious fantasies, and perceptions and expectations of the external world, including those relating to her child, can pass into the child's developing sense of self (see, for example, A. Freud and Burlingham, 1942; Sullivan, 1962; Mahler, 1968). It is also known that psychic borders can be permeable in a relationship between a grown child and parent, or between two adult individuals when they relate to one another under drastically regressed or partly regressed states.

Although there are abundant published cases of such phenomena, I would like to offer an example that is more relevant to large-group identity and conflict. In the spring of 1998 I was in a suburb of Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia, called Tbilisi Sea, so named because it is next to a huge man-made lake. Three large resort hotels near the lake now house about 3,000 of the 300,000 Georgian refugees who remain homeless many years after the wars with Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

'Marli', a woman in her forties, is married and has three children. She and her family, who fled Abkhazia during the war, live together in extremely cramped conditions in one of the Tbilisi Sea hotels. Through interviewing Marli, I learned that the most troublesome and anxiety-inducing aspect of her life as a refugee is how she could find enough food every day to feed her family. Her worry was also reflected in her underweight appearance. Her youngest child is a 17-year-old girl, 'Doruna' with whom I also talked for some time on the cluttered hotel balcony that is part of their tiny home. She told me that, as is typical within refugee families, she and her mother keep their worries to themselves. This 'silence' is rarely broken, as if talking about painful things will evoke unbearable affects that will hurt oneself or others and therefore must be avoided. And, like other victims and veterans of war, such traumatized refugees also do not openly talk about their experiences with outsiders since, at one level, they do not believe others will comprehend the impact of such experiences on a person's internal world.

Nevertheless, as again is typical, Doruna knew of her mother's recurring yet unspoken worry about finding enough food to feed her children. But, unlike Marli, Doruna was heavier than she should be. While Doruna was telling me the

story of her awareness of her mother's worry, Marli interrupted us. She came to the balcony and told me to help her do something about her daughter she would not exercise and was getting too fat. 'Please, as a physician, tell her to exercise', Marli pleaded with me.

It seemed evident that mother and daughter were communicating in spite of their silence. Doruna knew of Marli's daily fear, and silently and unconsciously responded to ease her mother's worries. By being overweight, the daughter seemed to be trying to tell her mother, 'Don't worry about finding food for your children. See, I am overfed.' But this was not the best means of exchange since Marli did not seem to 'hear' her daughter's message. I suggested that Doruna was an intelligent 17-year-old and that mother and daughter could share their worries through open and direct communication rather than indirectly and unconsciously through bodily expression.

This simple vignette is an illustration of the intergenerational transmission of a mother's worry to her daughter and the daughter's attempt to 'repair' and reassure her mother. There is still another type of transgenerational transmission that is more directly relevant to identity issues on the individual level, and offers more direct parallels to group identity. This form of transgenerational transmission involves the depositing of an already formed self or object image into the developing self-representation of a child under the premise that there it can be kept safe and the resolution of the conflict with which it is associated can be postponed until a future time. The 'deposited image' (Volkan, 1987, 1997) then becomes like a psychological gene that influences the child's identity.

The best example of this process is seen in so-called 'replacement children' (Cain and Cain, 1964; Green and Solnit, 1964; Poznanski, 1972; Legg and Sherick, 1976). Replacement children's self representations include the image of a dead sibling or other dead or lost relative that is transmitted to them through their interaction with the mother or affected caregiver. This 'foreign' psychological gene influences or modifies the child's developing identity, and manifests in 'tasks' the child is unconsciously impelled to perform, such as conducting the mourning that the mother cannot perform, or repairing the mother so that she will regain psychological health.

Extensive clinical work has also been conducted on transgenerational transmission beyond the level of the individual patient. Through studies of the children and grandchildren of Holocaust survivors (see Kestenberg and Brenner, 1996), it is now widely accepted that traumatic experiences of death camps and genocide were passed down to many thousands of Jewish children. However, when members of a group experience a severe and collective trauma, it is not simply a matter of many individuals of that group

sharing similar symptoms of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder, utilizing similar defense mechanisms or exhibiting symptoms of similar psychological problems. Such traumatic events affect all those under the ethnic or national tent, and often initiate unconscious societal or political processes.

For example, after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, young Kuwaiti men tended to postpone thoughts of marriage, and male youths became active in unprecedented gang-like behavior and car theft. These developments seem directly related to the traumatic impact of the invasion and its lingering effects on individuals, families and society (Howell, 1995; Volkan, 1998a). Since numerous Kuwaiti women were raped during the Iraqi occupation, young men may have generalized the image of 'devalued' women to those they intended to marry, but could not talk about their worries openly. For male Kuwaiti children who had seen their fathers humiliated by Iraqi soldiers, child-father interactions were disturbed, causing some to rebel against identification with such humiliated images and indirectly express the anger and disappointment they invoked.

Chosen Trauma

Similar evidence of the transgenerational transmission of trauma at the large-group level, and its impact on the identity of a large group, can be found when one combines the study of psychoanalysis and history. Through this approach, one can observe processes at the group level that parallel those of individuals described above. Within virtually every large group there exists a shared mental representation of a traumatic past event during which the large group suffered loss and/or experienced helplessness, shame and humiliation in a conflict with another large group. The transgenerational transmission of such a shared traumatic event is linked to the past generation's inability to mourn losses of people, land or prestige, and indicates the large group's failure to reverse narcissistic injury and humiliation inflicted by another large group, usually a neighbor, but in some cases, between ethnic or religious groups within the same country.

While each individual in a traumatized large group has his or her own unique identity and personal reaction to trauma, all members share the mental representations of the tragedies that have befallen the group. Their injured self-images associated with the mental representations of the shared traumatic event are 'deposited' into the developing self-representation of children in the next generation as

if these children will be able to mourn the loss or reverse the humiliation. If the children cannot deal with what is deposited in them, they, as adults, will in turn pass the mental representation of the event to the next generation.

Over generations, such historical events, which I call *chosen traumas* (Volkan, 1991, 1992, 1997, 1998a; Volkan and Itzkowitz 1993, 1994), become more than a memory or shared piece of the past. With time, the chosen trauma changes function. The historical truth about the event is no longer important for the large group, but what is important is that through sharing the chosen trauma, members of the group are linked together. In other words, the chosen trauma becomes woven into the canvas of the ethnic or large-group tent. This component of ethnic, national or religious identity, however, may or may not be readily evident at all times; it may lie dormant for a long period of time, yet can be reactivated and exert a powerful psychological force. Leaders intuitively seem to know how to reactivate a chosen trauma, especially when their large group is in conflict or has gone through a drastic change and needs to reconfirm or enhance its identity. Since a large group does not choose to be victimized or suffer humiliation, some take exception to the term 'chosen' trauma. I believe that it reflects a large group's unconscious 'choice' to add a past generations' mental representation of an event to its own identity, and the fact that, while groups may have experienced any number of traumas in their history, only certain ones remain alive over centuries.

Usually it is succeeding generations of a victim large group that are affected by a chosen trauma. There are, however, occasions when the victimizer also cannot mourn the losses or overcome the shame associated with a past event. In Germany, for example, the shadow of the Nazi era and the German people's complicity in the Holocaust continue to influence how individuals and Germans as a group conceive of themselves today. As the Mitscherlichs (1975) observed, the inability of previous generations of Germans to mourn this period involves a shared defense against identification and association with the Third Reich and feelings of shame for its atrocities. These unresolved issues have passed on to the subsequent generations. This issue was recently examined at a symposium entitled 'The End of Speechlessness?' in Düsseldorf, Germany, in August 1998 (Volkan, 1998b).

Under 'normal' political and social conditions, chosen traumas are recalled during the anniversary of the original event, and the

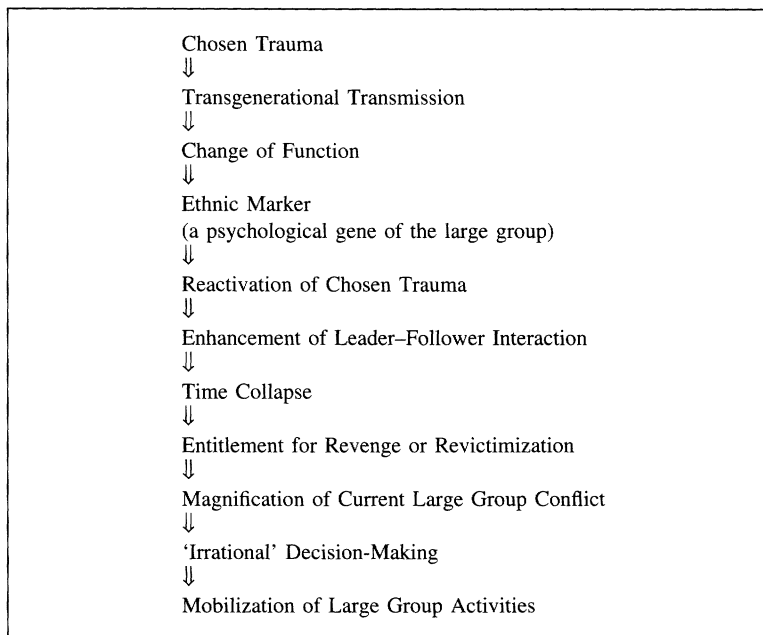
ritualistic commemoration helps bind the members of the large group together. Czechs commemorate the battle of Bila Hora in 1620, which led to their subjugation under the Habsburg Empire for nearly 300 years. Scots keep alive the story of the battle of Culloden in 1746 and the failure of Bonnie Prince Charlie to restore a Stuart to the throne. The Lakota Indians of the United States recall the anniversary of their decimation at Wounded Knee in 1890, Crimean Tatars define themselves by the collective suffering of their deportation from Crimea in 1944, and there are numerous other examples. Although these rituals of remembering may invoke individual and group memories associated with historical events, past and present remain distinct and separate.

But when a chosen trauma is fully reactivated within a large group by stressful and anxiety-inducing circumstances, a *time collapse* typically occurs. This term refers to the fears, expectations, fantasies and defenses associated with a chosen trauma that reappear when both conscious and unconscious connections are made between the mental representation of the past trauma and a contemporary threat. This process magnifies the image of current enemies and current conflicts, and an event that occurred centuries ago will be felt as if it happened yesterday. An ancient enemy will be perceived in a new enemy, and the sense of entitlement to regain what was lost, or to seek revenge against the contemporary enemy, become exaggerated.

Time collapse may lead to irrational and sadistic or masochistic decision-making by the leadership of the large group and, in turn, members of the large group become psychologically prepared for sadistic or masochistic acts; in the worst-case scenario they perpetuate otherwise unthinkable cruelty against others. A schema of the evolution and reactivation of a chosen trauma is shown in Figure 1.

The Serbs' Chosen Trauma

As already noted, virtually every large group has a chosen trauma that is part of its collective identity, and while such traumas may be recollected in various ways, every group does not necessarily fully re-experience its chosen trauma in a malignant or detrimental fashion. The Serbs' chosen trauma concerning the mental representation of the Battle of Kosovo, however, played a major role in the atrocities in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the current conflict in the

FIGURE 1

Yugoslav province of Kosovo. After becoming independent from Byzantium in the 12th century, the kingdom of Serbia thrived and expanded for almost 200 years under the leadership of the Nemanjić dynasty, a period that reached its climax under the beloved Emperor Stefan Dušan. Dušan died in 1355, and the Nemanjić dynasty came to an end a short time thereafter. In 1371, Serb feudal lords elected Lazar Hrebeljanović as leader of Serbia, although he assumed the title of prince rather than tzar. The decline of Serbia that followed is primarily attributed to the expansion of the Ottoman Empire into Serb territory, culminating in the Battle of Kosovo on 28 June 1389 at the Kosovo Polje (the Field of the Black Birds) in the southern part of today's Yugoslav Federation.

There are various versions of the 'historical truth' of the Battle of Kosovo (Emmert, 1990). We know that the Turkish Sultan, Murat I, was fatally wounded by a Serb assassin during or after the battle. We also know that the wounded Sultan or his son Bayezit ordered the execution of Prince Lazar, who had been captured during the battle. Chroniclers have disagreed on other outcomes of the battle;

with heavy losses on both sides, and both leaders dead, the immediate victor is difficult to determine. Lazar's body was then mummified, entombed in a monastery, and he was canonized.

Seventy years after the Battle of Kosovo, as the Ottomans slowly consolidated their control over Serb territory, Lazar's body was moved from its shrine near Kosovo Polje to a safer location in the north near Belgrade. During this same period, the Battle of Kosovo slowly began to evolve into a chosen trauma for the Serb people that distinctly marked the end of Serbia's greatness and the beginning of their sense of victimhood. Mythologized tales of the battle were transmitted from generation to generation through a strong oral and religious tradition in Serbia, perpetuating and reinforcing Serbs' traumatized self-images.

There is ample evidence to support the idea that the 'interpretation' of events at the Battle of Kosovo among the Serbian people went through various transformations over the centuries. I have described these transformations elsewhere in detail (Volkan, 1996, 1997, 1998a), but will give a brief summary here. Under Ottoman rule the Serbs held on to an identity as 'perennial mourners'. The image of Lazar as it appeared in icons and folk songs was Christ-like, and Serbs glorified Lazar as a valiant and deeply religious martyr who had died for his people and beliefs. Serbian victimhood was idealized. With the awakening of nationalism in Europe in the 19th century, Lazar's image was transformed from that of martyr, victim and tragic figure to hero and then ultimately to avenger.

In 1878, after much political scheming as well as several wars, the Serbs (and Montenegrins) were declared independent from the Ottoman Empire by the Treaty of Berlin. The treaty placed them under the control of Austria-Hungary, which in turn tried to suppress Serbia's growing sense of nationalism that was fueled by their mental representations of Kosovo. Serbia soon found itself in the Balkan Wars of 1912–13, through which it was finally able to 'liberate' Kosovo after over 500 years. A young soldier later recalled this liberation:

Each of us created for himself a picture of Kosovo while we were still in the cradle. Our mothers lulled us to sleep with the songs of Kosovo, and in our schools our teachers never ceased in their stories of Lazar and Miloš.

My God, what awaited us! To see a liberated Kosovo. . . . When we arrived on Kosovo . . . the spirits of Lazar, Miloš and all the Kosovo martyrs gaze on us. (From *Vojincki Glasnik*, 28 June 1932, reported in Emmert, 1990: 133–4)

Less than two years after Kosovo's liberation, on the 1914 anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo, a Bosnian Serb named Gavrilo Princip assassinated Archduke Francis Ferdinand and his pregnant wife in Sarajevo, thereby signaling the beginning of the First World War. What is known about Princip is that, as a teenager, he, like most other Serb youngsters, was filled with the transformed images of Lazar as avenger (Emmert, 1990). Although Serbia was now free, the Austro-Hungarian Empire exerted significant influence over much of the region after the Ottomans. In Princip's mind, it is possible that the old and new 'oppressors' were condensed, and the desire for revenge was transferred to the Austro-Hungarian heir apparent.

At the end of the Second World War, Yugoslavia became a Communist state, and the mental representation of the Battle of Kosovo again was suppressed and driven from prominence by Communist leadership who viewed Lazar and Kosovo as 'symbol[s] of reactionary nationalism' (Kaplan, 1993: 39). All Slavs were to be equal and united in a higher brotherhood that was supposed to supplant ethnonationalism. But the power of Kosovo as a marker of Serb identity could not be dispelled.

Reactivation of the Serbs' Chosen Trauma

In April 1987, Slobodan Milošević, then President of the 'new' Yugoslavia (the Serbia-Montenegro federation) and then a Communist bureaucrat, was attending a meeting of 300 party delegates in Kosovo. At the time only 10 percent of the population in Kosovo was Serbian. The majority were Albanian Muslims. During the meeting a crowd of Serbs (and also Montenegrins) tried to force their way into the meeting hall. They wanted to express their grievances about the hardships they were experiencing in Kosovo. The local police blocked and prohibited the crowd's entry into the meeting hall. At that moment, Milošević stepped forward and said 'Nobody, either now or in the future, has the right to beat you.' In a frenzy, the crowd spontaneously began singing 'Hej Sloveni', the national anthem, and shouted 'We want freedom! We will not give up Kosovo!' In turn, Milošević was excited; he stayed in the building for thirteen hours until dawn, listening to the tales of victimization. Serbs living in Kosovo complained that the Muslims of Kosovo were treating the Serbs badly.

Milošević emerged from this experience a transformed person, wearing the armor of Serb nationalism. In a speech, he would later

declare that Serbs in Kosovo are not a minority since 'Kosovo is Serbia and will always be Serbia'. One story in particular illustrates how Milošević and a few others in his circle unleashed Serb nationalism. In 1889, the 500th anniversary of Kosovo, plans for moving Lazar's mummified body back to the Kosovo region were discussed, but these never materialized. As the 600th anniversary approached, Milošević and others in his circle were determined to bring Lazar's body out of 'exile'. Lazar's mummified remains were placed in a coffin and taken 'on tour' to every Serb village and town, where he was received by huge crowds of mourners dressed in black and religious leaders dressed in their religious robes. As a result of the time collapse of 600 years initiated by Serb leadership, Serbs began to feel that the defeat in Kosovo had occurred only yesterday, an outcome made far easier by the fact that the chosen trauma had been kept alive throughout the centuries. As they greeted Lazar's body, they cried and wailed and gave speeches saying that they would never allow such a defeat to occur again.

Milošević apparently reactivated Lazar's image in Serbs' minds so that grieving for his defeat at the Battle of Kosovo could at last be accomplished, and the reversal of helplessness, humiliation and shame could be completed. Affects pertaining to traumatized self-images were felt anew; sharing this invisibly connected all Serbs more closely, and they began to develop similar self-images in which there was a drastic change: a new sense of *entitlement for revenge*, although it is unclear whether this is what Milošević intended.

Nevertheless, Milošević continued to stir nationalist sentiments. For instance, he ordered the building of a huge monument on a hill overlooking the Kosovo battlefield. Made of red stone, representing blood (Kaplan, 1993), it stands 100 feet over the 'grieving' flowers and is surrounded by artillery shell-shaped cement pillars inscribed with a sword and the dates 1389–1989. On the tower is written Lazar's battle cry, summoning every Serb man to the Field of Black Birds to fight the Turks. If a Serb fails to respond to this call, Lazar's words warn: 'He will not have a child, neither male nor female, and he will not have fertile land where crops grow.' By building the monument and linking 1389 with 1989, Milošević was re-transmitting Lazar's ancient message in the present. The message to Serb men was clear: 'Either you fight against the Turks or lose your manliness!'

On 28 June 1989, the 600th anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo, a helicopter brought Milošević to the Field of the Black Birds. He

'took the podium from dancing maidens in traditional folk costume and transported the crowd to heights of frenzied adoration with a simple message: "never again would Islam subjugate the Serbs"' (Vulliamy, 1994: 51). In one photo of this rally, I noted that Lazar's ancient call to battle against the Turks was imprinted on the T-shirts of many of those present. Riding this wave of nationalism, Milošević's prominence increased. In 1990, the six Yugoslav republics held elections in which the Communists were defeated everywhere except Serbia and Montenegro. In Serbia, the Communists were now called the Serb Socialist Party, and Milošević was elected as party head. In 1991, Milošević summoned Radovan Karadžić, then leader of the Bosnian Serbs, and others to meet with him to discuss the future of the Serbs.

In common with Slobodan Milošević, there is not a great deal of information available on Radovan Karadžić. Nevertheless, evidence suggests that Karadžić may have internalized Serbia's past trauma countless generations after it took place. In 1985, Karadžić was convicted of fraud (misuse of public funds) and was put in jail where he remained for eleven months until he was freed by a Serb judge. After his prison experience he published *Crna Bajka (The Black Fable)*, a collection of new poems, in 1990. In one of his poems entitled 'A Man Risen from the Ashes' one can detect the effect of imprisonment on him (Deklava and Post, 1995). In another poem in the same book he refers to Serbs being trapped in a fortress surrounded by advancing Turks and waiting for the tzar (Lazar) to come to their rescue. I suspect that his imprisoned self-image was condensed with the imprisoned self-image of his ancestors which had been transferred down through the generations. Karadžić was not immune from being a carrier of the Serbs' chosen trauma.

Before the ethnic cleansing and systematic rape of Bosnian Muslim women began, Serb propaganda increasingly focused on the idea that the Ottomans, now symbolized by the Bosnian Muslims, would return. Serbs even referred to Bosnian Muslims as Turks. There is, of course, some basis of truth to this perception since Bosnian Muslims played a significant role in Ottoman Turkish history. As part of the Ottoman system of taxes and tribute known as *devsirme*, teenage boys were taken away from their families, indoctrinated as Ottomans and trained as administrators, or, more frequently, became professional soldiers called janissaries. Modern Serbian propaganda warned of a return of janissaries, their rape of Serbian women and propagation of non-Serbs, and their ultimate goal of recapturing

Serbia. This fantasized threat was countered by the Serbs' own tactic of raping Bosnian Muslim women in which a conscious strategy of intimidation was condensed with an unconscious one of reversing the *devsirme* through the underlying assumption that the child produced by the rape of a non-Serb woman would be a Serb, and not carry any of the traits of the mother. Questioning this belief, Allen noted, 'Enforced pregnancy as a method of genocide makes sense only if you are ignorant about genetics. No baby born from such a crime will be only Serb. It will receive half its genetic material from its mother' (1996: 80). This fact hardly seems to need explanation, yet the author clearly was focusing on logical thinking and biological reality, although in the case of inflamed ethnic animosities, it is the 'psychological truth' that is more important. Thus Serbs sought to both kill young Muslim men and replace them with new 'Serb' children and truly avenge the Battle of Kosovo. Fact and fantasy, past and present were intimately and violently intermingled.

I do not mean to reduce what happened in Bosnia-Herzegovina only to the reactivation of a chosen trauma. I simply am providing a more detailed example of a chosen trauma, how it becomes an inseparable ethnic marker and how it can be reactivated. Today the mental representation of the Battle of Kosovo continues to influence Serbian people and their policies toward the Muslim people of Albanian descent who remain in the Yugoslav province of Kosovo. Many of the latter, more than 200,000 so far, have fled the province for fear that they may suffer the same fate as Muslims in other parts of the Balkans.

Conclusion

Awareness of the chosen traumas of large groups in conflict can enlarge our understanding about how such past events may become the fuel to ignite the most horrible human dramas and/or keep the fire going once hostilities start. As political scientists and diplomats struggle to understand this thing called ethnicity – a large group's identity – those who understand the psychodynamics of identity and large-group processes can contribute to mutually interesting and useful discussion on such important interdisciplinary subjects.

Note

1. Opening Address, XIII International Congress, International Association of Group Psychotherapy, London, 23–9 August 1998.

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