

**Blind Trust: Large Groups and Their Leaders in Times of
Crisis and Terror. Vamik Volkan. 2004. Charlottesville,
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This book provides a broad explanation of public support for worldwide violence. Dr. Volkan (Professor Emeritus, Psychiatry, U. of Virginia) is the founder of a widely known conflict resolution center there, and an experienced negotiator in conflicts between groups.

His theory of collective violence begins with *the chosen trauma*. The defeat of Serbs by Turks at the battle of Kosovo in 1396 was the battle cry in the 1990's for ethnic cleansing of the Moslems. Although the defeat occurred six hundred years ago, it lives on in the minds and hearts of Serbians.

The next step is the *failure to mourn* for the losses sustained in the chosen trauma. That is why the trauma lives on. Then comes the feeling of *entitlement to revenge*. Rather than facing the anguish of mourning and self-examination, a group can find distraction in self-righteous hostility and aggression against a purported enemy.

Then there is *collective regression*. Under the pressure of fear/anxiety, a majority regress to early childhood mentality: mixtures of good and bad are unknown. One's parents and leaders are good, and enemies are bad. This mentality views violence as the only alternative, since we are completely good, the enemy is not only bad, but evil.

These four steps are implied in two of Dr. Volkan's earlier books, *The Need for Enemies* (1988), and *Bloodlines* (1997). However, the new book provides a fifth element not explicit in the previous work. The key to the failure to mourn is that the group has experienced the chosen trauma as a humiliation, they are ashamed of their defeat. To avoid feeling shame, a "us-them" world is constructed: we have nothing to be ashamed of, its those bastards. This path leads precipitously to revenge. Even if no enemy is at hand, one can be fabricated in order to avoid one's true feelings.

The addition of the fifth element, humiliation, is a step toward an integrated theory of emotion dynamics. In my own study (1994) of the origins of the Franco-German wars (1870-1945), I proposed that both sides had suppressed shame by hiding their humiliation behind anger. Dr. Volkan's theory implies that my study should have also considered unresolved grief and fear as well.

Recent studies of "terror management" (Pyszczynski, et al. 2003) suggest that fear is an important element in response to violence. Although this work is stated in cognitive

terms, it implies fear as a key element. Indeed, Landau et al (2004) in introducing their study of the terror management underlying support of G.W. Bush, quote Becker (1971, p. 161) to this effect:

It is [fear] that makes people so willing to follow brash, strong-looking demagogues with tight jaws and loud voices...

At the moment, with the exception of the book reviewed here, work on emotional components in violence is compartmentalized. All of Volkan's earlier studies focused on the failure to mourn (grief) and fear/anxiety. Even in his latest book, the role of anger is only implied (in the hostility toward purported enemies). Beck's (1999) book on hatred focuses largely on anger and anxiety. However, a close reading suggests that his model implies shame/humiliation as well, since he proposes that anger responses almost always involve feeling diminishment before anger (p. 31 and passim).

As indicated, my own earlier work on conflict (1994) focused on anger, shame and humiliation. Lindner's work on violence (2002) has been even more specialized, considering only humiliation. The studies in terror management mentioned above have considered only "mortality salience" (fear) as causal.

Each of these studies makes a plausible case for the particular emotions that they emphasize. But we need to integrate all four emotions into a wider consideration of *emotional/relational worlds*. These worlds, although next to invisible in hypercognizing, individualist, modern societies, probably play an important part in generating either public support or opposition to collective violence.

A pertinent example of the virtual invisibility of the emotional/relational world occurs within the social and behavioral sciences themselves. Most studies in the various disciplines elide around emotions and relationships in favor of individual cognition and behavior, even though all four areas are equally important. Compared with their precise knowledge of individual cognition and behavior, neither laypersons nor experts know much about the emotional/relational world.

With integration, it becomes easier to see how social institutions might play a part, as they do in the case of gender. If individuals and/or groups suppress grief, shame and/or fear (the vulnerable emotions), either violence or silent withdrawal and/or depression is likely. Boys and men learn that vulnerable feelings are seen as signs of weakness, but anger, even if faked, shows strength.

In Western cultures, at least, boys and men hide vulnerable feelings, either in silence or anger. That is, young boys learn first in their families, and later, in school, to disappear the vulnerable emotions they feel. They maintain silence unless they explode in anger.

Since men usually dominate state and ethnic nationalism, the theory predicts a future filled with violence unless something can be done about understanding emotions. It would seem to be necessary to study these four emotions both separately and in

interaction. Are there gradations of repression, or is it all or nothing? Can numbing a single emotion, such as fear, lead to silence or violence, or does it take all three? Does repression of one emotion spread to other emotions? None of these questions appear to have been directly addressed in the literature on emotions.

My guess is that the more a person is backed up on one or more of these four emotions, the less they will be able to experience any of them. For example, those who are still suffering from their previous losses (perhaps a majority of adults in modern societies) will be unable to mourn, and won't tolerate mourning in others. This mechanism would create what Volkan calls the transgenerational transmission of trauma, a key feature of his explanation of continuing enmity between groups.

Collective regression of the kind described by Volkan has less direct effect on the conduct of one's daily life than it does on large scale matters at a distance. But with respect to these distant matters, it completely incapacitates judgment. One is the grip of a massive delusion. With complete and unwavering confidence, might as well believe that the earth is flat, or that water flows uphill.

Volkan's theory seems to explain many elements in today's world. For example, the state of Israel has taken the Holocaust as its chosen trauma, and public support for Sharon's destructive policies toward Palestinians is generated by the suppression of grief, shame and fear. In this country, we have 9/11 as our chosen trauma. The failure to collectively mourn our losses and to face our fear and shame has resulted in the completely gratuitous Iraq war. Hidden vulnerable emotions and all too obvious anger may be the matrix from which unnecessary violence arises.

A recent chance encounter at a memorial to our Iraq war dead illustrates some aspects of Volkan's theory. The father of a soldier who died in Iraq was showing me pictures of his son in uniform, a handsome young teenager. After viewing many photos, I began to cry.

Father (surprised): "What's the matter?"

Me: "I was wondering if the war in Iraq is worth the death of your son."

Father: (Again surprised). "But we had to do something."

Me: "Why is that?"

Father: "9/11."

Me: "But Iraq had nothing to do with 9/11."

Father: "Well, they're all Moslems."

The responses of this father suggest the kind of mentality that dominates today's world. Volkan's book provides a first step toward understanding it, and perhaps also further steps toward healing.

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