

Collective Aspects of Mental State, Memory and Psychic Capital: Their Role in Coherent Functioning of a Community

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Abstract: Drawing upon the work of classical and modern writers, notably Le Bon, Freud, Jung, Halbwachs, Boulding and Antonovsky, it is possible to propose a conceptual integration. A *collective mental state* will be influenced by memories, which can also be collective insofar as they are produced by common experiences. The store of good memories has been called *psychic capital*, but there will also be bad memories or *negative psychic capital*. A community can be aided in its survival by a *sense of coherence*. Psychic capital can be drawn upon in the task of maintaining a sense of coherence and therefore survival.

Keywords: collective memory, collective mental state, psychic capital, sense of coherence, community functioning, community survival

Introduction

The life of a community takes place at many levels: the physical, the social, the economic, the political but also a psychological level. This was recognised by Hilberg when he wrote "(t)he Jewish Ghetto...is a state of mind" (Hilberg, 1980: 110). By this statement, Hilberg probably meant that, upon entering a ghetto, no one would be able to prevent the onset of a change of a prevailing mental state, from whatever it had been, to the all-pervasive one of oppression and gloom, to the point of despair.

The condition of the prevailing state of mind at any point in time can be called a *collective mental state*, but the performance of the community in the task of surviving, as will be shown, is a product of *psychic capital*, which exists in memory. It will also be shown that psychic capital has the function of maintaining a *sense of coherence* which is vital to a mental state that permits survival, that is, coherent social functioning, though the difficulty of obtaining and maintaining the sense of coherence can be an almost impossible task.

Mental state is a term used in everyday speech, journalism, literature and legal proceedings and can be assumed to refer to the general condition of someone's mind, as described with whatever language is available. It could refer to mood or mental energy level. More permanent intellectual or moral characteristics of the personality are not normally part of the description of mental state. Medicine has rather more specific descriptors than the general concept of the *mental state*, but psychiatry uses the term *mental state examination* to refer to an extremely important tool in the determining of pathology, but one that is not seen as an end in itself. The examination will assess overall psychiatric condition through history, mood, memory, and abnormality of belief, thought and cognitive state. In psychiatry, the mental state is thus an assessment made in terms of the symptomatology of disorder or disease (Puri, Laking and Treasaden, 1996: 60-72), while in everyday life, it is a much more general description based on whatever analysis (such as *insight*) for whatever purpose the user of the term has chosen. Collective mental state is a quality of a group, and groups can emerge with seemingly a life of their own, and, can it be said, a mind of their own? But having said this, it must also be noted that while a collective mental state can produce unity within one's own group, it can also produce disunity, disintegration, incoherence and insecurity for "the other".

This question was addressed by Le Bon (1841–1931), for whom a crowd is to be distinguished from an agglomeration of people; it is a new phenomenon with a collective mind, which can also be called a *psychological crowd*, with definite characteristics such that individual personalities vanish. In this way, some inoffensive and highly peaceable individuals, who might have been accountants or magistrates in normal times, became savage members of the French Revolution (Le Bon, 1960: 4-5).

The psychological crowd has some characteristics in common with individuals but it also has some that are peculiar to itself. Predating Freud by more than two decades, Le Bon observed that unconscious phenomena preponderate in the functioning of the mind. This is also shared collectively as innumerable common characteristics are passed from generation to generation to form what he called “the genius of the race” (Le Bon, 1960: 7), and in other terminology this could be called *collective memory*, including of course, unretrieved collective memory. The unconscious elements possessed by all members of a group, even those of widely differing intelligence or education, are feelings possibly based on unretrieved or repressed memories, and constitute the common property of the psychological crowd. The power of this common basis of feeling results in the overruling of intellectual restraint so that Le Bon was caused to note that the crowd is often criminal in its behaviour but it could also be heroic (Le Bon, 1960: 14). The crowd does not possess a long-term will, and although its wishes may be frenzied, they will not be durable. Le Bon sees crowds as feminine, and Latin crowds as the most feminine of all, which means, in his understanding, fickle and untrustworthy (Le Bon, 1960: 21). Crowds are also highly suggestible, such that ideas are passed by *contagion* among all the individual minds in contact. As an idea enters the brain, it transforms itself into an action, which could be for example, arson or self-sacrifice. While suggestibility can be a characteristic of an individual, it is more acute in a crowd, which will be “perpetually hovering on the borderland of the unconscious” (Le Bon, 1960: 22). Collective observation is highly erroneous, often being based on collective hallucination as a product of suggestions passed by contagion (Le Bon, 1960: 26). Crowds are capable of violence, especially when heterogeneous, and are subject to influence by orators who use violent affirmation and repetition, which may be devoid of reason (Le Bon, 1960: 36). Even so, there is always an element of unpredictability in the direction of movement of a crowd, as shown by the great difficulty of experienced theatre managers in predicting the reaction of an audience to a theatrical production. The behaviour of crowds is highly variable in relation to moral standards, being sometimes cowardly and sometimes lofty, even loftier than what an individual could achieve (Le Bon, 1960: 43-44).

Le Bon thus presents a theory of collective mental functioning, based on collective memories, linked with thoughts and emotions by the mechanism of contagion, leading to group action as a community functions. Action will be augmented by greatly reduced intellectual capacity, increased suggestibility and fickleness, and modified morality, which can be greater or lesser than individual morality.

Durkheim (1858-1917) noted the existence of a different order of phenomena in society to that of the individual. These phenomena, which he called *social facts*, are shared by individuals but function independently of them. Although external to individuals, they are empowered with great coercive force. Durkheim gives four examples of social fact: the system of signs used for thought, the system of monetary currency, instruments of credit, and codes of professional conduct (Durkheim, 1964: 2).

Social facts are not just a matter of social organization. There are also social currents, which have the same objectivity and power over the individual. These currents can be emotional states of enthusiasm, indignation, pity or cruelty, and led Durkheim to state, “...a group of individuals, most of whom are perfectly inoffensive, may, when gathered in a crowd, be drawn into acts of atrocity.” (Durkheim, 1964: 5). The currents of opinion within society, which are highly variable in intensity, impel large numbers of people towards higher or lower rates of marriage, birth or suicide, so that the resulting statistics express the state of the group (*l'âme collective*), which has

been translated into English as *a certain state of the group mind* (Durkheim, 1964: 8) but which could also be translated as a *collective mental state*.

While a collective sentiment is extremely powerful, because of the "...special energy resident in its collective origin" (Durkheim, 1964: 9), there is a social culture passed to individual members of society by socialisation with collective and ancient beliefs and practices, or in other words, collective memory, although Durkheim does not himself use this term.

Freud (1856-1939) was deeply impressed with Le Bon, describing his work as a "...brilliantly executed picture of the group mind" (Freud, 1955: 81). Freud also asserted the concept of the *collective mind*, which he saw as operating through mental processes just as it does in the mind of an individual (Freud, 1950: 157). Taking Le Bon's concept of the psychological group, Freud noted that a *racial unconscious* emerges, describing it as an archaic heritage of the human mind, which is unconscious, similar to Le Bon's description, to which must be added a *repressed unconscious* (Freud, 1955: 75). The group mind is impulsive, changeable and irritable, and it is led almost exclusively by the unconscious (Freud, 1955: 81). The group mind demands leadership, from which it seeks strength and violence (Freud, 1955: 77). The attraction of the group for the individual is the fear of being alone and here Freud noted that opposition to the herd is essentially separation from it. Thus Freud sees the herd instinct as something primary and indivisible. The fear among small children of being alone is therefore the foundation of the herd instinct. However, it needs qualification in that the child will fear separation from its mother and be very mistrustful of members of the herd who are strangers. Among children a herd instinct or group or community feeling develops later and this group will make, as its first demand, the demand for justice or equal treatment of all. The feeling of equality allows identification of one with another but also recognizes a single person as superior to all, that is, the leader. Each of the many groups that exist will have a group mind, so that each individual will have a share in numerous group minds, be they race, class, religion, nationality or any other. Where memberships are in conflict, mental instability results, leading ultimately to breakdown. Freud saw human libido as a powerful motivating force, not only in individual functioning as either sexual impulsion or hypnosis but also in group functioning (Freud, Group Psychology, 1955: 118-129).

Jung (1875-1961) believed that the personal unconscious, as proposed by Freud, was underlain by a deeper level of the *collective unconscious* "(j)ust as the human body is a museum, so to speak, of its phylogenetic history, so too is the psyche" (Jung, 1959: 287). The collective unconscious provides a second psychic stream, "... a system of a collective, universal, and impersonal nature which is identical in all individuals" (Jung, 1959: 43). This consisted of pre-existent thought forms, patterns or motifs, which Jung called *archetypes*. The archetype concept is similar to Plato's concept of the *Idea*, a primordial disposition that shapes thought. Archetypes create a drive for completion, similar to an instinctual drive, and failure to achieve completion can result in neurosis. Though he does not use the specific term *collective neurosis*, Jung does refer to a *state of lunacy* among a people.

Neuroses are in most cases not just private and individual concerns, but social phenomena, and therefore it can be assumed that archetypes are constellated in these cases too. When the archetype corresponding to a situation is activated, explosive and dangerous forces hidden in the archetype come into action, frequently with unpredictable consequences.

Archetypes are the means of expression of the collective unconscious, and although they are unconscious, they can appear in the form of dreams, or myths, especially in religion. Jung believed that archetypes can be transmitted through tradition, language or migration, but they can also arise spontaneously. Jung saw much of the important concept of the archetype as expressed in gender roles, described as *anima/animus* (female/male), or age or family role such as child or parent, with great implication for individuation. Individuation brings about a harmonisation between conscious and unconscious in a process called *transcendent function*. However, the conscious and the unconscious can be in deep and violent conflict, and when Jung states that when a social group deviates too far from its instinctual foundations so that it experiences the

force of its unconscious forces, he implies that this conflict can also take place at the collective level (Jung, 1959: 3-28),

The unconscious has three levels: that which can be produced voluntarily, that which can be produced involuntarily, and that which can never be produced. The unconscious stores repressed material, it compensates or counterbalances the conscious, and it can create symbols. Jung saw the mechanisms of compensation and symbol-creation at work at the collective level in the decline of the Roman Empire and the French Revolution.

The concept of a *collective mind*, as proposed by Le Bon, developed by Freud, adapted by Durkheim as *collective consciousness*, restated by Jung as the *collective unconsciousness*, has been contested by those who argue for an emergent-norms theory that sees group unanimity as an illusion created by common action based on prevailing norms (Robertson, 1987: 358-9). The psychologist Reber also expresses scepticism when he defines group mind as a "...hypothesized, collective, transcendent spirit or consciousness, which was assumed by some to characterize a group or society" (Reber, 1995: 323). The philosophical difficulty of assessing any concept of group mind has meant that it has been ignored by mainstream English-language social science discussion, with the result that there is very little research currently being undertaken (Varvoglis, 1997: 1). The fact that Marx proposed a concept of group mind in the form of *class-consciousness* might have also played a part in the Anglo-American distaste for this avenue of enquiry (Mitchell, 1968: 31). (It is here that the concept of the collective memory has particular value: by being in part unconscious, it can be accepted as powerfully affecting human thought and behaviour, without being considered to be some kind of a "transcendent spirit").

A recent parallel of Le Bon's contagion mechanism for the passing of mental states from one individual to another is provided by Dawkin's concept of the *meme*. Taking its name from the Greek word for imitation, *mimeme*, the meme is a cultural replicator, a basic unit of cultural transmission, like a gene or a virus

Just as genes propagate themselves in the gene pool by leaping from body to body via sperms or eggs, so memes propagate themselves in the meme pool by leaping from brain to brain via a process, which, in the broad sense, can be called imitation. (Dawkins, 1985: 192).

The actual unit of meme could be a phrase, a melody, an icon, or a scientific or theological concept. Dawkins refers to a statement by a colleague that the meme can be replicated millions of times to become a component of the nervous systems of individuals the world over (Dawkins, 1985: 192).

The concept of the meme also draws attention to the importance of language in the process of collective memory. The construction of memories in language greatly facilitates their manipulation through the medium of language. The novelist Orwell expressed this well when he referred to the "mutability of the past" (Orwell, 1987: 28) in his work *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, where language was constantly being distorted for the purposes of political power.

Collective memory

Collective memory is the memory relating to being part of a community, and presumed universal in all individual members of a community, reflecting earlier experiences. Even so, Reber is somewhat critical of the concept, but also gives it some grudging acceptance: "...phrased in this way (as above) it is a rather empty concept; if one recasts the idea into the framework of species-specific behavioural tendencies, it is not quite so bizarre (parenthesis added) (Reber, 1995: 569). Collective memory is acquired, stored, transmitted and retrieved by three modalities: 1. Genetic (DNA) 2. Mind-stuff (psychological) and 3. Memorabilia (social) (Potschka, 2004). Collective memory provides the linking mechanism between the collective mental state and action. The concept of the collective memory was accepted by Freud, Jung and Halbwachs, but a

methodology for uncovering collective memory has yet to be established and so remains at this stage speculative, but there is much circumstantial evidence that it exists.

Memory is a property of machines and animals. Machines, notably computers, have memory with the ability to store data, which is necessary for programs to be run. Animals can also store data over time with a capability of retrieval that reaches its highest form in humans, whose memory is of great complexity and subtlety including images, symbols, sensations and sequences. Human memory retrieval is very imperfect, as many memories are forgotten and some are repressed or kept in the unconscious. Human memory is believed to reside in molecules, synaptic junctions, whole cells or cellular circuits within the brain, but the search for the *engram* or basic unit of memory, possibly a biochemical change, has proven elusive. In comparison with computer memory, human memory is not all that large, being in one estimate only a few hundred megabytes (Merkle, 1988).

Human memory has at least two types, as suggested by James. The first type of memory defined by James was *primary memory*, or short-term memory, lasting only a matter of seconds. Primary memory consists of successive events in an environment that is taken in by all the senses and result in a continuous experience. Material in primary memory has not yet left consciousness. James defined a second type of memory as *secondary memory*. This consists of long-term memory that is held indefinitely and does not reside in consciousness, but can be brought to consciousness by the effort of remembering. (James, 1901: ch 16).

Halbwachs (1877-1945) presented a detailed analysis of the relationship between individual memory and social or collective aspect that he called *collective memory*. For example, an individual will clearly remember his or her first day at school while a teacher, who was present on the same occasion, may not remember anything of that day. Although an individual may forget a particular remembrance, many remembrances can be recalled by a group, and therefore form a system of interconnected and mutually supporting remembrances (Halbwachs, 1980: 30). As this group will be distinct, it is possible for an individual to be simultaneously a member of a number of groups, each with its own collective memory. An individual's memories are often collective in origin, even though an individual may be completely unaware of their origins, which may be a newspaper, book or conversation. Where an individual is a member of social groups with differing opinions on a particular issue the prevailing view within an individual will reflect the intensity of the respective group views (Halbwachs, 1980: 45). Collective memory is actualised through individuals, but because of the multiplicity of different and often competing sources, the outcome of societal memories will reflect a combination of influences, which may be very complex and be beyond the control of individuals. Collective memories will present themselves as systems of waves, originating from different mental and physical milieus, so that individual consciousness will register as an intersection point in which the flow of individual remembrances, even most personal ones, is always explained by changes occurring in our relationship to various collective milieus (Halbwachs, 1980: 49). The effect of time on collective memory is most important. Here Halbwachs refers to some French citizens who settled in Algeria early in the nineteenth century and whose later ideas and customs were maintained as those current at the time of their settlement. However, many remembrances are reconstructions, often on the basis of false recognitions through stories and testaments. Significant events of national importance help to fix memories, but even so, collective memory and history can be in opposition.

Thus, to Halbwachs, collective memory is of fundamental importance to continued social life, but it is a highly manufactured phenomenon subject to engineering. It always works through individuals, but individuals are subject to the influence of more than one collective memory. Even extinct groups will leave a trace of memory in the collective memory of later groups, the concept of the *trace* being compatible with the concept of the phylogenetic memory, though Halbwachs does not explore the concept of the unconscious memory. His position is contained in the following

In reality, the thoughts and events of individual consciousness can be compared and relocated within a common time because inner duration dissolves into various currents whose source is the group. The individual consciousness is only a passageway for these currents, a point of intersection for collective times. (Halbwachs, 1980: 125).

Collective memory is also shaped by present identity, whereby certain remembrances are selected as an acceptable representation of the past. There can also be an official collective memory: an example of this being the French Communist Party, which, prior to the ending of communism in Eastern Europe, claimed to be capable of promoting and controlling collective memory. Lavarbre defines collective memory as an interaction between memory policy or historical memory and common recollection, or common memory, of common experience. Collective memory involves a homogenization of representations of the past and it can be an effect of the present or an effect of the past. It can also be beyond volitional control, an example of this being the emergence of the concept of the *Vichy syndrome* (Lavarbre, 2001).

Memory is an important activity in human organization because it provides storage and retrieval of information necessary for effective decision making and therefore the continued existence of organizations including communities and whole societies. It also has a psychological function in maintaining those parts of collective memory, which are the basis of identity, which in turn is necessary for health and survival by enabling the formation of psychic capital which is a store of memories of desired past mental states.

Psychic capital

Another factor in the survival of communities, particularly those under extreme threat, is the presence of psychic capital. *Psychic capital* is a term first used by Kenneth E. Boulding (1910-1993) (Boulding, 1950). Capital is an accumulation of wealth, and with psychic capital, the accumulation is one of desirable mental states, which admittedly are highly transitory in nature. The mental states could be memories of pleasure, success, achievement, recognition and tradition, and the desire to add to psychic capital is likely to be a powerful motivating force. Exchanges involving increases or decreases of psychic capital can occur at any time, either through decision or through the turn of events. However, fear, insecurity and terror, through memories of failures, disasters, atrocities, or perceived injustices and indignities (as either recipient or perpetrator) can lead to a depletion of psychic capital, which could also be called negative psychic capital. Negative psychic capital and fear of it can also be a powerful motivating factor.

Boulding linked psychic capital with a sense of identity as one of the determinants of the "morale, legitimacy and the 'nerve' of society" (Boulding, 1966: 5), which is vital to the adaptation of a community and to the keeping of it from falling apart.

A similar and related concept is that of *identity capital*, as proposed by Côté, which is to be distinguished from Becker's *human capital* and Bourdieu's *cultural capital*. Côté concluded that identity capital gave an individual, particularly one possessing a "diversified portfolio", a store of resources enabling the handling of life's vagaries (Côté, 1996: 424). Psychic capital is thus essentially the same concept as identity capital but at the collective level.

As an example of the process of drawing upon psychic capital as a community under extreme threat tries to survive, one can refer a comment about a diary written in the Lodz ghetto, Adelson wrote

Jewish intellectuals in the Nazi ghettos summoned up centuries of literature on Jewish persecution as they interpreted their own experience of the most extreme occurrence of genocide in human history. (Adelson, 1996: 113n).

Language is a fundamental medium of psychic capital, but to it can be added literature, poetry and music, as additional ways of enhancing psychic capital. As one former resident of the Lodz Ghetto stated, "Because of our singing we could spiritually escape the ghetto." (Flam, in Adler, 2006:55). Although psychic capital undoubtedly helped to sustain the ghetto community, it is clear from many testaments, such as that of Oskar Rosenfeld, who referred to negative psychic capital when he wrote "We are lepers, outcasts, common thieves, people without music. without earth, without beds, without a world", it was in severe depletion as the community confronted its destruction (Adelson and Lapides, 1989: xv).

Integrating the Concepts

These concepts can thus be brought together as a *collective mental process* in which actions and events interact with collective memory with resultant outcomes, and collective memory reacts to affect human behaviour. While the mental process is continuous, it could be snapshot at any particular time as a *collective mental state*. The function of attempted collective memory suppression in large-scale social engineering as noted by Lavarbre in relation to the French Communist Party, is an example of this.

As already noted, memory function is a vital part of the psychiatric mental state examination. Assessment of memory is of great concern because amnesia is a disabling state, accompanying for example serious brain injury or dementia. Taking the computer as an analogue, loss of memory is totally disabling to the functioning of the computer. At the level of human organization, loss of collective memory, through for example the loss of key executives in a business corporation, can prove highly dysfunctional. It can be assumed therefore that the collective mental state that is a defining characteristic of a functioning community, will be constantly and intimately interacting with its collective memory in a process of interrogation. Loss of memory at the collective level would lead ultimately to the loss of all mental functions for an organization, in the same way that it does for an individual (Leigh, Pare and Marks, 1977: 235), (Judge, 2001).

Memory traces are likely to concern behavioural codes that could enhance equilibrium or resolution, though not always, if that means continued aggression. Events or personalities that disturb or traumatize that process are the substance of significant traces at individual and collective level, consciously or unconsciously. Memory traces of these diverse sources of trauma are likely to remain in collective memory, especially at the collective species-specific level, despite attempts at suppression or repression (Pennebaker and Banasik, 1997: 10).

The interaction between mental state and human act at collective level is very complex. The organizational theorist Etzioni recognized society as an emergent, that is, a new order of unit greater than its component parts (Etzioni, 1968: 45-47). Etzioni accepted the concept of a societal consciousness which is "self-reviewing and self-correcting" but felt it necessary to stop short of a 'group mind' because of its metaphysical assumption about the latter being able to 'hover above' and forcibly control individual minds (Etzioni, 1968: 225-228).

It has been asserted that a collective mental state can be related to national trauma, as in a shock felt by a very high percentage of a population. One such event is the death of Princess Diana in 1997 (Lincoln, 1997). Other causes of collective trauma are political assassinations, unprovoked acts of terrorism or war, economic depression, and technological disaster (Neal, 1996); or specifically, the 9/11 attack (Mandel, 2002). All of these events can trigger a dramatic change in collective mental state, in either a direct way, or by a more gradual process of incremental accretion that can be transmitted by contagion (Vigil, 1996). The contagion with emotions can also occur in many domains of behaviour. Vigil has investigated the psychological well-being of the Latin American continent and diagnosed a state of *collective depression*, that is, as having actually the same symptomatology as for individual depression: disappointment, loss of self esteem, self accusation, demobilisation, disorientation, depoliticization, escape into spiritualism, loss of memory, withdrawal and psychosomatic problems (Vigil, 2000: 2).

Kiev hypothesised a *collective anxiety neurosis* (Kiev, 1973) and *collective fear* has been isolated as a causal factor in extreme political behaviour (Lake and Rothchild, 1996). The process of contagion can take the collective mental state (the product) in a certain direction, for example that of *cumulative radicalisation* (Heineman, 2002:51).

It would seem comprehensible that a mental state can be passed between individuals by contagion, but does research give any confirmation? Forsyth reviewed the literature and concluded that "the bridge between social psychology and mental health can still not be traversed" (Forsyth, 1996: 5), but suggested some areas of enquiry, such as the causal power of the group to change individuals when they become part of a group. Some of the group processes that require research are leadership, group development, social learning, self-insight, social influence and social provisions (Forsyth, 1996: 5).

The problem of value judgements about behaviour also applies at the individual and collective levels. The precise nature of the link between mental state and behaviour is the age-old philosophical and moral as well as psychological question of responsibility, which is likely to remain unresolved. Another way of looking at the same problem is to say that antisocial behaviour may not be a result of illness '... harm to society...should not be part of the definition of mental illness, because to include it would open the door to saying that, for example, all rapists and all those who oppose society's aims are mentally ill'. (Collier, Longmore and Harvey, 1991: 314). Psychiatry attempts to deal with this problem by making a clear distinction between a clinical disorder (commonly interpreted as a mental illness such as schizophrenia) and a personality disorder, which is defined as "...one or more attributes (traits), causing the individual and/or his family and/or society to suffer." (Puri, Laking and Teasaden, 1996: 271). Therefore, because society does not have a body, it is only possible to speak of a collective illness in a metaphorical way, but it is possible to refer to a social disorder as one or more attributes (traits), causing society and/or societies and individuals to suffer through lack of coherence.

The Sense of Coherence

A theory of health or *salutogenesis* has been put forward by Antonovsky who has proposed that the key casual factor in health maintenance is a *sense of coherence*. This is, a

... global orientation that expresses the extent to which one has a pervasive, enduring though dynamic feeling of confidence that one's internal and external environments are predictable and that there is a high probability that things will work out as well as can be reasonably expected. (Antonovsky, 1980:123).

The sense of coherence concept is, moreover, valid at the group level (Antonovsky, 1987: 171), with the proviso that there must first be a sense of group consciousness or subjectively identifiable collectivity (Antonovsky, 1987: 175). An individual or group with a highly developed sense of coherence will have a high level of generalised resistance resources which are identified as rationality, flexibility and farsightedness (Antonovsky, 1979:112-113), but in the ghetto this component of psychic capital was depleted to an extreme degree. As Bernard Ostrowski wrote in relation to the collapsing sense of coherence among inhabitants of a ghetto

Their quiet despair is profoundly penetrating, so different from the loud laments we are accustomed to hearing at deaths and funerals, but all the more real and sincere for that. It is no surprise that anyone with small children or old parents awaits the days to come with trepidation. The greatest optimists have lost hope. Until now, people had thought that work would maintain the ghetto and the majority of its people without the break up of families. Now it is clear that even this was an illusion. (Ostrowski, in Adelson, in Adelson and Lapides, 1989: 288).

While remaining within the constraint of a non-clinical terminology, it is possible to use plain English descriptors for a collective mental state as either maintaining or losing its sense of

coherence. It is also possible to describe in plain language the collective mental state of a community, both relative to other communities and also in terms of changes to itself at an earlier time, as a condition that is either well-adjusted or disordered, on the same criterion as individual personality disorder: that is, the capacity to harm itself and others, and to withstand harm.

It has been noted that from time to time, human societies enter periods of extreme collective mental disorder which can quickly lead to human catastrophe characterised by large-scale organised violence. Given that there will always be persons of evil intent, a well-adjusted collective mental state can provide some immunity from the extreme forms of behaviour that involve violence. But when a collective mental state is severely disordered, it is possible for persons to seize power and translate their intentions into actions, particularly through fear and panic. The disturbances may already be present in large measure or be augmented from small beginnings. The disturbances which emanate from traces of collective memory may be ones of insecurity, crystallised as fears, or conversely of extreme security in the form of complacency leading to vulnerability, extremes of elation or depression (not unlike the bipolar disorder in individuals), extremes of hyper-realism or cynicism or delusion, extremes of exclusion or inclusion which can quickly become exclusion, or of extreme habituation to violence or a very sheltered non-habituation to violence which can suddenly turn to violence through shock. These patterns seem to be a common feature in the early stages of the Third Reich, the break-up of the former Yugoslavia and the Rwandan genocide.

Thus, the causality of human-produced cataclysmic events can be explained as disturbances to collective mental states, and is often described by a variety of terms such as *collective paranoia*, *collective madness* or *genocidal mania*. This cannot be called a problem of collective mental illness but rather should be interpreted as a disorder of the collective mental state. Here collective memory plays a role, as traces of extremely traumatic events are embedded and then remembered and interpreted as extreme suffering. However, collective memory, as the basis of psychic capital, can also help survival in conditions of extreme adversity.

Conclusion

Drawing upon the work of classical and modern writers, it is possible to propose the following integration. The life of a community at a psychological level is reflected in its mental state whose influence affects all members of a community to a greater or lesser extent. This collective mental state will be influenced by memories, which can also be collective insofar as they are produced by common experiences. The store of positively valued memories has been called psychic capital, but there will also be negatively valued memories or negative psychic capital. As a community functions, it can be aided in its survival by its sense of coherence. Psychic capital provides a reserve of psychic strength, which can be drawn upon in the task of maintaining a sense of coherence and therefore survival. The contribution of the classical and modern theorists who proposed these various concepts is thus acknowledged.

Acknowledgement: The author would like to thank three anonymous reviewers for their invaluable comments.

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