The Psychological Preconditions for Collective Violence: Several Case Studies

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Abstract: When a community enters a period of collective violence, many factors can be causal, particularly a certain type of leadership which can be called pathological. Such leaders need certain pre-existing psychological preconditions to work upon as they manipulate a community. This they do through its collective mental state where there is psychic numbing (Lifton) and extensive negative psychic capital (Boulding). Their leadership can take the form of radically modifying a sense of coherence (Antonovsky), and claims of healing a wounded identity. The collective mental state can be heavily under the influence of fear (Lake and Rothchild). The psychological preconditions of collective violence are thus the raw materials of pathological leadership, specifically mental state, particularly fear, perceived wounded identity, negative psychic capital, occurring in a condition of numbed psyche. Some case studies showing the effects of the interaction of these components will be presented.

1. Introduction

Explanations of episodes of collective violence normally focus on the coming together of many factors including the breakdown of constitutional and legal safeguards, the failure of power sharing democracy, the absence of intervention by bystanders, and a certain type of leadership, (which could be individual or group). But this type of leadership cannot operate without the presence of certain psychological raw materials which are preconditional. Together these psychological preconditions form a collective mental state with which the leader will interact. This type of interaction was well expressed by Langer when he wrote "…(i)t was not only Hitler, the madman, who created German madness, but German madness that created Hitler. "(Langer, 1972: 138).

2. Leadership: Evil or Pathological?

The study of the psychology of individual leaders is rightly placed at the center of many disciplines such as government and history. To *lead* is to direct by going forward, a process which is the subject of an important discipline itself. There are many theories of leadership, and the majority of these are understandably concerned with rational policy, strategy and decision. However there is also a need to be concerned with collective emotions such as identification, fear, hysteria, and other manifestations of the unconscious. Leaders do not operate in vacuums; rather they need a certain mixture of raw materials in order to produce an outcome. These raw materials or psychological preconditions when leading to large-scale violence are the focus of this paper.

When large scale suffering has occurred, it may be valid to blame leadership, particularly where the leader is a despot. However, there is a philosophical problem when the leadership in question is a result of evil intention or mental disorder or psychopathology which is ("...a persistent personality disorder characterized by antisocial behavior.")(Oxford Handbook 1991:364). This dichotomy has been described as the mad/bad problem: is the offender mad and therefore in need of treatment, or bad and therefore in need of punishment? (Puri, Laking and Tresaden, 1996: 359). Many writers have identified the category of *evil leadership*, defined in terms of the destruction of human beings, even where the original intention may not have been to cause evil (Staub, 1992: 25). Another approach is to identify a leader as *toxic*, producing extreme levels of dysfunctional leadership characterized by organizational contamination (Goldman, 2006). Yet another term is *pathological leadership*, or leadership that "...leads to consequences that most people in moments of reasonableness would regard as disastrous." (Cox, 1974: 142). This definition of pathological leadership or leadership which leads to disastrous consequences is adopted in this discussion, as it has the advantage of leaving separate the question of an evaluation of the motives and the mental condition of the pathological leader.

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Here we shall consider three communities for which their leaders have been a disaster: Germany in the 1930s, the People's Temple, and the Tamils of Sri Lanka. These three leaders--(Hitler, Jim Jones, and Velupillai Prabhakaran-- differed greatly in origin, method, style, and objective, but in each case producing a similarity of outcome: suffering and violent death on a disastrous scale, for the followers who brought them to power, (and in the case of the first one, many millions of others). However, in each case, the collective psychological condition of their followers bears striking similarity.

It is possible therefore is to identify a checklist of conditions or symptoms that together create a collective mental state that is conducive to a disastrous level of collective violence, and to seek confirmation by exploring whether these symptoms were present in the several cases mentioned.

3. The Mental State of a Community

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), and this statement could apply to every community. The condition of the prevailing state of mind in any community at any time can therefore be called a *collective mental state*. Psychiatry uses the term *mental state examination* to refer to an extremely important tool in the determining of pathology, but one which 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). In plain language, mental *state* can refer to the general condition of someone's mind, including thought processes, mood and mental energy level. More permanent intellectual or moral characteristics of the personality are not normally part of the description of mental state. 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?

The question of group mind was answered in the affirmative 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, Le Bon observed that 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). Le Bon thus presented 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

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, 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

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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 interaction between mental state and human act at collective level is very complex. The organizational theorist Etzioni recognized society as an *emergent*, or 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). This process can be described as a *collective mental process* in which actions and events interact with collective memory with outcomes that are ordered and peaceful.

4. The Community's Need for a Leader

In Freud's view the group mind demands leadership, from which it seeks strength and violence (Freud, 1955: 77). The attraction of the group for the individual emanates from 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 did refer to a *state of lunacy* among a people. It is therefore reasonable to infer that a community will need a leader, and the leader will work upon the collective unconscious, but in so doing, may drive a community to a state of lunacy.

5.   Collective Memory

Halbwachs (1877-1945) presented a detailed analysis of the relationship between individual memory and social or collective aspect which he called collective *memory.* Collective memory is of fundamental importance to continued social life, but it is a highly manufactured phenomenon subject tomanipulation. 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, though Halbwachs did not elaborate 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).

The concept of a *collective mind*, as proposed by Le Bon, developed by Freud, adapted by Durkheim as *collective consciousness*, added to by Jung as the *collective unconsciousness*, thus operates with Halbwach's *collective memory* at its basis. Collective memory shapes and is shaped by present identity, whereby certain remembrances are selected as an acceptable representation of the past. 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).

The concept of the *collective memory* has particular value here: by being in part unconscious, it can be accepted as powerfully affecting human thought and behaviour, providing the raw material of negative psychic capital from which the leader can fashion the instruments necessary to develop a powerful lock-grip over a community.

6. Psychological Preconditions for Pathological Leadership

Psychic Numbing and Doubling

From time to time, human societies undergo human catastrophe and then enter periods of extreme collective mental disorder that can quickly lead to large-scale

organised violence. Despite the ever-present possibility of risk, a well-adjusted collective mental state has some immunity from the extreme form of behaviour that involves violence. But when a collective mental state is severely disordered, it is possible for some individuals to offer themselves as saviours then consolidate 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 may trigger traces of collective memory which 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 Cambodian and the Rwandan genocides and the break-up of the former Yugoslavia, to name just a few examples.

In his book *The Nazi Doctors*, Lifton asked the question of what were the mechanisms that allowed highly educated, humanistic medical practitioners to carry out the horrors of the concentration camps? The answer to this question is multi layered but must start with an important concept of *psychic numbing*, or a "general category of diminished capacity or inclination to feel." (Lifton 1986, 442). As applied to Nazi doctors working in concentration camps, it was put forward as a description of the mental state necessary for the continued performance of functions in the basic activity of those places.

There is also the concept of *doubling*, first introduced by the psychoanalysis Otto Rank (1884--1939), and revived by Lifton (1986). Doubling is the division of the personality into two functioning wholes that can operate independently, often serving the need for survival, but also allowing a granting of license to commit evil, as it did for the Nazi doctors. Moreover, *doubling* can be a collective phenomenon, and here Lifton identifies a "German vulnerability to

doubling...intensified by the historical dislocations and fragmentations of cultural symbols following the First World War." (Lifton 1986, 429).

Thus psychic numbing on a large scale following human catastrophe can be an important precondition for the often fatal decision to turn to a leader who may offer a radical solution perhaps disguised as hard measures. A community may be forced to turn to the use of doubling as it deals with the moral problems created as the true nature of the hard measures becomes apparent.

Depleted Psychic Capital

Another aspect in the life of communities, particularly those which have undergone under extreme crisis, 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. 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 are likely to 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, while what is left could be called negative psychic capital. Negative psychic capital and the fear of adding to 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 society 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.

In addition, there is suggestive evidence that when psychic capital is severely depleted, pervasive and persistent despair develops and this can be extremely harmful to individuals through a complex psychic and hormonal process which exhausts the cortex of the adrenal glands and probably the ability to adapt to stress (Chatan, 1976:116). Thus it can be hypothesised that the stress following the depletion of psychic capital can set the stage for a willingness to turn to a leader offering a solution.

Distorted Sense of Coherence

Antonovsky proposed that the key casual factor in whether health is maintained 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 also 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). Where the sense of coherence is disrupted or distorted, the wellbeing of a community can be compromised. Moreover, the sense of coherence can be deliberately distorted by suggestion, manipulation and ideology. Some writers have described this distortion as *collective paranoia.* What is paranoia in an individual? It has been defined as

...a delusional state or system of delusions, usually involving the conviction of persecution, in which intelligence and

reasoning capacity, within the context of the delusional system, are unimpaired. (Youngson, 1992: 459).

Where there is a history of real persecution, it is very easy to take a community into a distorted sense of current coherence. Writing on the subject of the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia, the novelist Danilo Kis identified the causal factor as nationalism, which he defined as a state of collective and individual paranoia. C*ollective paranoia* in Kis's view, is a combination of many individual paranoias brought to paroxysm in a group whose goal is "…to solve problems of monumental importance: a survival and prestige of that group's nation." (Kis, 1996: 1).

It is thus possible to state therefore that a collective mental state is either maintaining or losing its sense of coherence, as either *well-adjusted* or *disordered*, on the same criterion as individual personality disorder. The occurrence of human-produced cataclysmic events can lead to disturbances to collective mental states, and has been described by a variety of terms such as *collective paranoia*, *collective madness* or *genocidal mania*. This could be called a problem of collective mental illness but rather, to avoid a philosophical debate, could be described 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.

Wounded Identity

Nationalism, the political expression of collective identity, is often based on real or imaginary wounds for which there must be retribution, in a process that has been described as a "ceaseless reenactment" (Brown, 1993: 403).

The collective memory of real or imaginary wounds serves a psychological function of creating and maintaining a sense of identity. As Searle-White has stated

Being a victim confers upon us a kind of moral authority—a sense that we deserve to be treated specifically. In fact being a victim is so powerful that we would expect people to

assume victim status if they can. ...Being a victim gives us the right to take action against our enemies while blaming them for the violence at the same time. (Searle-White, 2001: 92).

Psychologists have long been concerned to explain aggression or hostility, the forerunners of violence, and many theories have been put forward. However, the motive of revenge, settling of a score or the paying back for an injury through violence, must rank high. Freud recognised a destructively powerful death instinct, and Lorenz (1966) took the view that aggression was a survival-enhancing instinct which is present in human beings as well as other animals, and which can be collective as well as individual. Another approach is the 'frustration-aggression theory' first proposed by Dollard (1939). Here aggression is seen as a response to frustration caused by interference in the pursuit of goals or any other disturbance to the collective mental state. The aggressive response to frustration is seen as a biologically inherent tendency in humans and other animals, and is not incompatible with other approaches. For example, Gurr takes the view that "...the primary source of human capacity for violence appears to be the frustration-aggression mechanism..." (1970, 36), but he goes on to include among the sources of frustration the sense of relative deprivation, which can be infinitely diverse in origin, nature and response. Where a large number of people collectively feel the pain of an injury, supposed healing through aggressive land violent leadership could seem to offer a solution.

Contagious Fear

The state of desire for aggressive and violent solutions can be engineered by the controlled supply of information and interpretation, which is used to generate collective anxiety. Lake and Rothchild expanded on this theme when they wrote

As groups begin to fear for their safety, dangerous and difficult-to-resolve strategic dilemmas arise that contain within them the potential for tremendous violence....Ethnic

activists and political entrepreneurs, operating within groups, build upon these fears of insecurity and polarise society (Lake and Rothchild, 1996: 41).

Most studies of organised violence do not attribute all causality to leadership, as there must be a facilitating followship or at least acquiescent bystanders (Staub, 1989: 23), and very likely a situation where the 'raw material' of collective grievances are present. 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).

Franz Borkenau, himself a target of both Nazi and Stalinist regimes, related the mental state of fear and insecurity to the effect of severe changes to the social and political milieux

Once the carapace of custom is disrupted, the process acquires the characteristics of a chain reaction. Every rift opened by the devaluation of rules widens automatically and produces new rifts in other places….conduct becomes more and more irrational, the area of moral uncertainty is constantly widening, until the typical situation of the "dark ages," a situation of total insecurity and universal crime, is reached. (Borkenau, 1981: 385).

In the light of this discussion, it is possible to hypothesise that the impulse to aggressive behaviours, culminating in homicidal and suicidal acts (the two often being related), is a product of a collective mental state disturbed by generalized fear. Sometimes killing is seen as healing, as in suicide, but killing others can also be seen as an act of healing, as in supposedly benevolently motivated euthanasia

Integrating the Concepts

However, a collective mental state can be profoundly influenced by national trauma, as in a shock felt by a very high percentage of a population. The causes of collective trauma could include political assassination, unprovoked

acts of terrorism or war, economic depression, and technological disaster (Neal, 1996); or specific events such as the 9/11 attack (Mandel, 2002). Any of these events can trigger a dramatic change in collective mental state, either in a direct way, or by a more gradual process of incremental accretion that can be transmitted by contagion (Vigil, 1996). Where there is a sufficient quantum of psychic capital, a strong sense of coherence, a healthy sense of identity free of real or perceived wounds, and no history of psychic numbing, there will be ample immunity against contagion by fear, and no desire to turn to leaders offering violence in the name of healing by attacking assigned enemies. In other words, the psychological preconditions which irresistibly attract a community to a leader who may well turn out to be pathological, and the deliverer of disaster and not salvation through healing, will be averted.

7. Case Studies

Germany in the 1930s

As already noted, Langer saw a correlation between Hitler's madness ("Hitler has many characteristics that border on the schizophrenic.") (Langer, 19773: 21) and Germany's madness. While it was not Langer's brief to explore the latter side of the equation, it is possible to suggest a set of factors which, when consolidated, give Hitler's rise to power and the subsequent catastrophe a degree of inevitability. The humiliation of defeat in World War 1 and the harsh terms of the Treaty of Versailles which followed it, especially the loss of colonies, meant not only a depletion of physical and financial capital but psychic capital as well. The Great Depression of 1929 hit Germany in an already very bad state. The sense of coherence was distorted by the belief that the defeat was caused by a "stab in the back" by internal enemies: Communists, republicans, and Jews (Staub, 1992: 92).

In the view of Langer, Hitler himself refused to accept or adjust to Germany's defeat, which he referred to in his speeches as rape

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...by what wiles the soul of the German nation has been raped...our German pacifists will pass over in silence the most bloody rape of the nation. (Langer, 1973: 156-157).

Hitler's approach to power was to restore depleted psychic capital and heal a wounded identity through a new formulation of a sense of coherence by targeting carefully selected individuals, groups, nations (and later the German nation itself), and ultimately to wreak "...the greatest vengeance on a world he despises". (Langer, 1973: 213). To achieve these aims, Hitler presented himself at first as extremely human, with deep feelings for the problems of ordinary people (Langer, 1973: 50).

As a new sense of coherence became accepted, the process of psychic numbing came into operation, facilitating the program of euthanasia, where two concepts were asserted: "killing as healing", and the notion of a "life unworthy of life" (Staub, 1992:121). Soon after, the widespread existence of psychic numbing supported the program of genocide.

Contagion with fear of economic destitution, homelessness and humiliation existed after the defeat of 1918 and undoubtedly contributed to the rise of Hitler as a solution through the mechanism of transference. As Kets de Vries described it

Followers may endow their leaders with the same magical powers and omniscience that as children they probably attributed to their parents and   other   important persons. (Kets de Vries, 1990: 427).

After achieving power, Hitler consolidated it by using the technique of ever-tightening the grip of terror. The implementation of the policy of genocide required extensive psychic doubling that continued until the final collapse of the regime, ending an episode of the greatest violence the world has ever seen

The People's Temple

The People's Temple was a community created by the Reverend Jim Jones (1931-1978), which was destroyed in a disaster of mass suicide and murder of over 900 of its members (including Jones) and Congressman Leo Ryan and four members of his investigating group at Jonestown, Guyana, in November 1978.

Most witnesses and commentators seem to agree that in the final stages of his rule, Jones was suffering severe drug-induced mental illness of a paranoid type (Ulman and Abse, 1983: 653) (Cain, 1988: 22). Ulman and Abse also refer to the "collective madness" of the community (Ulman and Abse, 1983: 658), and here it is relevant to note that Jung's *state of lunacy* among a people is an appropriate description of Jonestown, 1978. Although it is unlikely that anyone would have accurately predicted the tragic end to Jonestown, many were deeply troubled during the immediately preceding period, leading to the investigatory mission of Congressman Leo Ryan. Among the disturbing indications were the enacting of "white nights" or exercises in simulated mass suicide. (Some accounts give two or three of these simulations, but Nelson only refers to one) (Nelson, 2006).

The members of his church were drawn from disadvantaged groups in American society whom he manipulated through language at the level of emotion, as can be clearly seen in the film *Jonestown, The Life and Death or People's Temple* (Nelson, 2006). Invoking depleted psychic capital through collective memory of the humiliation and suffering of his mostly African-American parishioners, and referring on a number of occasions to the Bible as "the black book used to repress black people", Jones operated a system of suggestion and control to carry out large-scale social engineering in his church. This took the form of a highly distorted sense of coherence backed up with the threat of severe punishment, both psychic and physical, including beatings and non-consensual sex (Harray, 1992: 2).

The contagion with fear was thus a characteristic of life in the People's Temple. Jones accurately diagnosed a state of wounded identity, from which he offered the healing experience of a new life in Jonestown. In this way, Jonestown became an example of a human society that entered a period of extreme collective mental disorder,

undergoing large-scale organised violence which quickly led to major human catastrophe. Given that Jones had become a pathological leader, the previously moderately well adjusted collective mental state of the People's Temple lost its immunity from the extreme forms of behaviour that involved violence.

Jones was able to seize absolute power and translate his intentions into actions, particularly through fear and panic. These patterns of behaviour were also a common feature in the early and later stages of the Third Reich, and the Cambodian and Rwandan genocides, though in the case of Jonestown, the action was probably more mass suicide than mass murder. However, the relative proportions of murder to suicide will never be known because of the failure of the Guyana Government to carry out autopsies on all but a handful of victims.

The Tamils of Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka has a population of 20 million of whom about 75 percent are Sinhala-speaking Buddhist-practicing Sinhalese and 12 percent Tamil-speaking Hindu practicing Tamils, with the rest of the population being Muslim or Christian identifying with either language group. While both great religious traditions of Buddhism and Hinduism preach non-violence, Sri Lanka has for over 25 years suffered a civil war in which some 70,000 have died.

Settled originally by people from Northern India (the ancestors of the present-day Sinhalese) parts of the island were colonised by the Portuguese and later the Dutch. From 1802 to 1948 the whole island was a British Colony during which time English was introduced and became the official and dominant language. Following various expeditions from Southern India, Tamil communities established themselves and became dominant in the northeast over a period of 1,000 years.

In the post-independence period, Sri Lankan Tamil psychic capital has been depleted by a series of events. Sinhalese majority agitation led to a 1956 declaration of Sinhala as the sole official language of the nation. In 1972 in response to protests from Tamils, the Sinhalese-dominated

government changed the constitution. Not only did it reaffirm the dominant position of Sinhala but also gave state blessing to Buddhism. (Edwards, 1985:179)

In 1958 serious riots erupted between Sinhalese and Tamils over the issue of language rights: the Tamils seeking recognition of their language and a Tamil state under a federal system. After considerable agitation Tamil was given official status in 1977 (as was English in 1983). Economic disparities along community lines continued to widen and major bloodshed occurred. In 1981 a State of Emergency was declared and in 1983 a Civil War began between the Liberation Tamil Tigers of Elam (LTTE) and the Sri Lanka State, with various atrocities on both sides. In 1987 an Indo-Lanka Peace Accord was signed under which India would cease to supply the LTTE, in exchange for concessions by the Sri Lankan Government to the Tamils of the North East.

In addition to the depletion of psychic capital, it is possible to interpret the view felt by many Sri Lankan Tamils that the position of the Tamil language and culture there was a wound to identity.

Into this situation came Velupillai Prabhakaran (1954-2009), the founder and leader of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in 1976. Prabhakaran shunned personal publicity but did seem to have the support of the Tamil community. However, his policies have brought disaster to his community, with total military defeat and the death of 20,000 civilians in the last stages of the civil war, and his own death and that of his wife and children (The Australian, May 30-31, 2009: 23-24).

Under Prabhakaran's leadership, the LTTE adopted a strategy of armed conflict, specialising in the deployment of child combatants, suicide bombers, and targeted political assassination, including that of the Indian Prime Minister, Rajiv Ghandi, in 1991, thereby forfeiting Indian sympathy). It also involved the bombing of an Air Ceylon aircraft in 1978 and nearly 200 attacks throughout Sri Lanka and India (Van de Voorde, 2005: 187).

Prabhakaran justified the use of terror by stating the "(t)he LTTE is to Tamil civilians what The Resistance was to European civilians under Nazi occupation. " (LTTE, n.d.: 16). Undoubtedly he was responding to a very brutal regime of state terror (Van de Voorde, 2005: 190), but this response

was a mistake, especially in the new world political climate of the "War on Terror" that followed the September 11 attacks of 2001. Prabhakaran compared the situation of the Sri Lankan Tamils to that of European Jews in World War 2, crystallising specifically as a fear of "....expulsion of the Tamil population from the island of Ceylon." (LTTE, N.D.: 21), and this statement demonstrates the used of generalised fear.

The abandonment of the 2002 ceasefire in 2005 led to the recommencement of the civil war in 2006 and a major defection of Some LTTE members. Moreover, the use of terror tactics, child combatants and ethnic cleansing, resulted in the LTTE being declared a proscribed terrorist organisation by the United States, the United Kingdom and 24 other countries, thus impeding support from members of the worldwide Tamil Diaspora, and damaging Prabhakaran's attempt to win international support for his struggle. Insofar as his leadership has proved disastrous for the cause of the Sri Lankan Tamil community, for the time being anyway, his leadership can only be described as pathological.

8. Conclusion

While pathological leadership generally results in sustained collective violence, participation by followers, which begins at a psychological level, is also necessary. On examining the several episodes presented here, it is clear that while some communities will eschew the appeal of pathological leadership, others will embrace it, with disastrous results, for themselves and possibly many others. There are some preconditions that pathological leadership will exploit, and the three cases presented here give confirmation of these.

	1930s Germany	**People's Temple**	**Sri Lankan Tamils**
Psychic Numbing			
Depleted Psychic Capital			
Distorted Sense of Coherence			
Wounded Identity			
Contagious Fear			

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To summarise, the preconditions are: depleted psychic capital and a sense of wounded identity, which the leader will "heal" with a new but distorted sense of coherence, producing policies and actions that are implemented with contagious fear during conditions of numbed psyche. The promise of healing may well turn out to be a reality of killing, and being killed, during collective violence on a large scale. Therefore, communities presenting evidence of the presence of these preconditions should be recognised as being in a state of extreme vulnerability.

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