Vamik Volkan et al. on “Time Expansion” vs. “Time Collapse” as Key for Transgenerational Trauma Healing

1. A key element in the healing of transgenerational trauma is the inducement of “time expansion,” a term coined by psychologist Vamik Volkan to contrast with its converse, “time collapse.” For Volkan, time collapse is a psycho-social “reactivation” in which memories, stories, feelings, and perceptions about a past event become intertwined with actions and emotions pertaining to the current conflict. This exaggerates the images of the current enemy and blurs the distinction between what is real and what is fantasized in the current conflict.

In turn, maladaptive group behavior and irrational decision-making can emerge, and the potential for violence and desire for revenge or retaliation against the enemy, both real and fantasized, increase.

The passage above is available via Coexist International Magazine at: [www.coexistmag.com/2001/p103-08d.html](http://www.coexistmag.com/2001/p103-08d.html), accessed by the author on 6/23/05. The term is also lucidly introduced in Bloodlines: From Ethnic Pride to Ethnic Terrorism (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997, pp. 34-35. In this excerpt the author applies his theory of “time collapse” to explain the dynamics involved in a series of Arab-Israel meetings sponsored and studied by the American Psychiatric Association during six-years of dialogues.

Elsewhere Volkan elaborates further:

When chosen traumas and their derivatives are reactivated, the emotions and perceptions pertaining to them are felt as if the trauma occurred recently—they become fused with emotions and perceptions pertaining to the present and are even projected into the future. What is remembered from the past, felt now, and expected for the future come together in a time collapse. Understandably, this time collapse complicates attempts to resolve the conflicts at hand. To counteract this phenomenon and to encourage a time expansion, facilitators must allow discussions to take place concerning the chosen trauma itself and participants’ personal traumas pertaining to the large-group conflict. If feelings and issues about the past can be distanced and separated from present problems, then today’s problems can be more realistically discussed.


2. It is also useful here to highlight Alice Miller’s description of mimetic processes in parenting or childrearing. In agonizing detail Miller has described parents perpetrating onto their defenseless children various forms of torment, emotional and physical, related to the abuses which they themselves incurred as children. This cycle Miller aptly called, the ‘repetition syndrome.’¹ Despite critiques of her single-minded elaboration of this one causal factor in violence studies we remain indebted to her isolation of trauma-repetition as a key feature of human experience.²

¹ Mimetic or imitative patterns of reactive behavior have been described in varied terms, in addition to Miller’s “repetition syndrome” (in her seminal work, *For Your Own Good*), such as ‘self-replicating cultural systems’ (Rianne Eisler, *The Chalice and the Blade*), “time collapse” (Vamik Volkan, *Bloodlines*), and “internalized domination” (Sherover-Marcuse, *Emancipation and Consciousness*). Each of these forms of trauma-repetition, whether active or passive, will be elaborated in greater detail below.

Trauma-repetition is precisely this mimetic phenomenon of the reenactment of earlier injuries in our subsequent experiences and relationships to others, whether (a) passively re-experienced due to similarity of circumstances or (b) actively replicated in our agency. When repetition occurs through our own agency in our actions toward others it may be said that we are ‘doing unto others what was done unto us;’ a perverse observance of the Golden Rule—‘do unto others what you would have them do unto you.’ After Miller’s descriptive tour de force we are obliged to recognize the ubiquity of such phenomena in our own experience: from our families of origin to the family of nations, from the classroom to the board room, from the playground to the battlefield, and from gossip to committee meetings where ‘festivals’ of resentment and envy corrupt our decision-making and collective actions.


3. Excerpt: Veronice Miles, “When You’re Among the Invisible: An Analysis of the Victimization of Children through Prostitution In a Dominator Culture,” Monday, May 07, 2001; RLPC 710, Emory Univ. Graduate Division of Religion

“In The Chalice & The Blade: Our History and Our Future," Riane Eisler . . . has developed a theory of cultural evolution, Cultural Transformation Theory, in which she suggest that one of two basic models of society, the dominator model or the partnership model, underlie all human societies or cultures . . .

“Domination of persons based upon race, class, gender and age is evident throughout our culture. This model of domination has seemingly spread throughout most of the world, as is evidenced in part by the number of nations that defend their borders with weapons of mass destruction. There is also ongoing systemic oppression of women, children, and people of color in our society. Eisler reveals the process by which this dominator model replaced the partnership model and replicated itself over thousands of years. Borrowing from the work of Vilmos Csanyi, Eisler characterizes the dominator model as a self-replicating social system.

Csanyi describes how systems form and maintain themselves through the process he calls replication. Essentially a self-copying process, replication can be observed on the biological level, where to continually replace themselves cells carry what Csanyi calls replicative information in their genetic code or DNA. But this process occurs at all levels: molecular, biological and social... The replication of ideas, as Csanyi points out, is essential first in forming and then in maintaining social systems."

“Prior to the invasion of the dominator culture, the replicative information that supported a partnership culture had maintained the social structure. Eisler suggests that replication of the dominator ideology was effected through elimination of ideals and practices related to the partnership model, physically and psychologically. Invasions, wars, enslavement, coercion,quisitions, executions, beatings, indoctrination, subordination and the systemic destruction of ideas, attitudes and practices that did not conform to the dominator model are the tools of the replicative process. The effects of a process that has continued for millennia is evident in Western child-rearing practices, the relegation of women to a subordinate position in the home and in society, racial oppression, and a class system that favors those with
material wealth. Power under the dominator model is understood as the ability to subdue and dominate, and notions of power as re-creative and life sustaining have all but disappeared.”

4. “The arena of a practice of subjectivity [vs. a "therapy"] would include not only explicitly articulated beliefs and values; it would also include the unstated assumptions which are embodied in people's lived experience, as well as the affective underpinnings of oppressive character structures and behavior patterns. . . . Such a practice, undertaken as a form of subversive self-education, would seek to interrupt both sides of the dialectic of domination; it would strive for affective undoing of the introjected 'perpetrator' and the introjected 'victim.' Thus it would address both 'internalized domination' and internalized oppression.” Erica Sherover-Marcuse, *Emancipation and Consciousness* (Blackwell, 1986), p.137.

Cf. a bibliography on the variety of theories of “internalized oppression,” usefully annotated in Erica Sherover-Marcuse, *Emancipation and Consciousness*, pp. 000, note 000, with related references to perpetrators’ “internalized domination.”

5. Cf. this time-related theory of Re-evaluation Counseling (see [www.rc.org](http://www.rc.org)): ‘There is no distress in present time.’

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2 ibid. 83.
3 ibid.