



HISTORICAL TRAUMA THROUGH THE CONTEXTUAL THERAPY LENS: HUNGARY, RUSSIA AND TURKEY CASES

ICCT2018

**Tatiana Glebova (Alliant International University,
USA)**

**Emöke Tarján (Family-Systems Therapy Institute,
Hungary)**

**Ibrahim Keklik and Fatma Arici-Şahin (Hacettepe
University, Turkey)**

DEFINITIONS

- Massive trauma (e.g., Danieli, 2007)
- Collective trauma “constitutes an earth-shattering, threatening episode in a group’s history that affects not only direct victims, but the entire community” (Canetti et al., 2018) of any size, up to an entire society.
- National trauma is one in which the affects of a trauma apply generally to the members of a collective group such as a country or other well-defined group of people.
- Historical trauma (Kirmayer et al., 2014) refers to the cumulative emotional and psychological wounding of an individual or generation caused by a traumatic experience or event
- Definitions were introduced in different disciplines and have different connotations though intersect and overlap
- We may use them interchangeably



TRANSGENERATIONAL/INTERGENERATIONAL TRAUMA

- Trauma that is passed down from one generation to another (Dass-Brailsford, 2007).
- Can be historical, collective, or family-specific (e.g., maltreatment of children).
- Traumatic events can be in the past or continuing.
- Trauma is embedded in complex historical, social and cultural contexts.
- Manifestation of trauma and symptoms may differ in different generations
- Resilience factors (Walsh, 2002) and posttraumatic growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).
- Studies started with the Holocaust but now include many other collective/historical traumas.
- Complex phenomenon that requires integrative approach
- Multidimensional, multidisciplinary integrative (TCMI) framework (Danieli, 2007)



TRANSGENERATIONAL TRANSMISSION OF TRAUMA: SYSTEMIC PERSPECTIVE

- Caution against simplistic and reductionistic understanding
- Effects and manifestations depend on complex interplay of factors and forces:
 - Biological
 - Intrapersonal: denial, projection, etc; cognitive schemas
 - Interpersonal/familial: observation, modeling, communication style, parenting practices, family roles and beliefs, family loyalties
 - Communal: group identity
 - Societal: stigmatization, stereotypes, oppression
 - National: acknowledgement, justice, politization
 - International: acknowledgement, justice

However, some patterns or predispositions can be observed



FAMILY SYSTEM

- Pre-trauma functioning
- The (grand)parents' trauma (type, duration)
- Next generation involvement
- Post trauma adaptation style
- “The conspiracy of silence” (Danieli, 1981)
- parenting practices
- family roles
- values and beliefs
- family loyalties



CONTEXTUAL THERAPY THEORY: SOME GENERAL POINTS

- Multidimensional (Facts, Individual Psychology, Family Transactions, Relational Fairness or Ethical Dimension, Ontic).
- Relational Ethics:
- Experience of relating , giving and receiving from other people is fundamental for humans
- Family relationships are built on trust and fair balance of mutual caring
- Trust, either earned or inherent, is essential as a relational resource
- Trustworthiness is based on actions
- Accountability
- Loyalty to the family or significant others: invisible, split
- Entitlement (ethical “guarantee” of being cared for that arises in a relationship): constructive or destructive



CONTEXTUAL THERAPY: RELEVANT POINTS

- “A knowledge of past events is intrinsically valuable only if it is useful for the future” (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Krasner, 1986).
- “Of universally pervasive significance in human life, these legacies and mandates form a distinctive feature of the contextual approach... The essence of the legacy is the mandate for forward-thrusting care and concern for the future, a use of the assets of the present to enhance benefits rather than detriments from the past” (p. 129, Boszormenyi-Nagy & Krasner, 1986).
- Support for parenting is one of preventive interventions of contextual therapy and should be a goal for societal changes (e.g., p. 13, van Heusden & van den Eerenbeemt, 1986)



TRANSGENERATIONAL HISTORICAL TRAUMA

- Such calamities as wars, persecution, genocide, economic hardship “may function as the destructive delegating factor” (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Krasner, 1986).
- “...at least three generations are involved to complete this repayment: the first that transmits lasting consequences to the second, and the third that is to reap benefits from the concern and redeeming efforts made by the second. No one is ever completely free of transgenerational obligations to care” (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Krasner, 1986).
- “... weighty legacies that impose different burdens on different generations” (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Krasner, 1986).



HISTORICAL TRAUMA THROUGH THE CONTEXTUAL THERAPY LENS: GENERATION 1 “SURVIVORS”

1. Facts: direct experience and impact of wars, persecution, genocide, economic hardship, etc.
2. Individual Psychology: acute trauma and immediate response to trauma, losses, grief, “survivor guilt,” depression, fear of further loss; coping, resilience
3. Family Transactions: disrupted family structure, loss of family members, survival mode, lack of resources to care about children, “silence”*, family secrets, “delegation” and “legacy”
4. Relational Ethics: sense of indebtedness (to those who perished, to posterity), overintitlement/destructive entitlement, loyalty issues.
5. Ontic: “witness for humanity” (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Krasner, 1986), sense of indebtedness, existential guilt, mistrust towards the world, new meanings.



GENERATION 1 “SURVIVORS”

- “If anything, a legacy of survivorship is even more binding on the young than a legacy of emigration. Here persecution, genocide, disease or economic disaster may function as the destructive delegating factor” (p. 185, Boszormenyi-Nagy & Krasner, 1986).
- “Unfair circumstances in life grant entitlement to the person who has suffered from the injustice without his being obliged to give in return. In this respect it is comparable to the inherent entitlement of the newborn, who also is entitled without owing a return” (p. 50, van Heusden & van den Eerenbeemt, 1986). Thus, some degree of parentification of future children is expected. For interventions – to explore parentification and address it.



HISTORICAL TRAUMA THROUGH THE CONTEXTUAL THERAPY LENS: GENERATION 2

- Facts: social and economic context,
- Individual Psychology: parentified child, “burdened by their parents’ actual overentitlement” (p. 391), difficulties with self-identity and self-worth, fear of loss and separation, guilt, depression, anxiety, shame, anger; coping, resilience
- Family Transactions: parentification of children, excessive control or permissiveness; silence and secrecy vs open dialogue; enmeshment or cut-off
- Relational Ethics: mistrust, loyalty issues, perception of unfairness, destructive entitlement, legacy (“to excel; to help unburden their parents; to actively support the survival of their ethnic, racial or religious group; to give the “right” message to humanity” (p. 391) or delegation
- Ontic: “message to humanity” (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Krasner, 1986), new meanings, existential guilt, mistrust towards the world.



HISTORICAL TRAUMA THROUGH THE CONTEXTUAL THERAPY LENS: GENERATION 3

- Facts: societal acknowledgement of historical traumata, social justice
- Individual Psychology: parentified child, confusion, fear of separation, difficulties with self-identity, anger, depression, anxiety, shame, coping, resilience
- Family Transactions: parentification of children, excessive control or permissiveness; silence and secrecy vs open dialogue
- Relational Ethics: mistrust, loyalty issues, perception of unfairness, destructive entitlement, legacy or delegation
- Ontic: existential guilt, mistrust towards the world, new meanings



HUNGARY

- Iván Böszörményi-Nagy and the communist dictatorship.
- Left Hungary at the time of the darkest communist dictatorship
- The deep emotional experiences formed the basis of his theory.
- Through strong blood ties, parents loved and suffered for children, and children for parents. This weakened self-delineation and individuation, and strengthened loyalty.
- Contextual approach helps children to be able to deal with their parents' and grandparents' unprocessed traumas and anxieties.



HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- Tragedies during the last century in Hungary
- World War 1 and the Treaty of Trianon (in 1920 - the population of 18 million was harshly reduced, overnight 5 million Hungarians became foreigners and minorities in their own homes.) Loss of homeland and sense of safety
- World War 2 and the Holocaust.
- 1948- to the late 1950's : Hard dictatorship - prison camps, labor camps
- The 1956 Revolution, followed by cruel retaliation until 1960's
- From the late 1960's - 1990: "Soft" dictatorship
- 1990 Democracy - Change of the Communist Regime.



TRAGEDIES DURING THE LAST CENTURY IN HUNGARY

- Until 1990 families tried to survive. There was silence and secrecy either in war, or under dictatorship.
- Since 1990 we are the very first generation that has the chance to work on the transgenerational historical traumas. We have to process our emotional heritage.
- If we cannot process them our children will continue to suffer the symptoms, mental health problems, difficulty in parenting and in relationships...



FAMILY - SYSTEM THERAPY INSTITUTE (HUNGARY)

- We train family-system therapists and do psychotherapy
- The contextual approach is a genuine guideline to all of us
- Methodological Background: Contextual Therapy and Psychodrama
- practical way to re-enter into old situations
- connect with our long-suppressed feelings and emotions
- truly experience the other person's situation and gain a deeper insight and understanding of their lives
- The integrated experience of physical, emotional and cognitive levels gives opportunity to true understanding, deep insights and thus exoneration.



CASE STUDY: TRANSGENERATIONAL TRANSMISSION OF HISTORICAL TRAUMA – DESCRIPTION OF A THERAPEUTIC PROCESS

- Peter's case study
- In Peter's therapeutical process we worked with individual therapy, family therapy and psychodrama group therapy methods.
- A personal problem revealed a family trauma which led to a historic trauma as the root cause.
- We met in 2009 when he was 25 years old.
- He is depressed with a low level of self esteem.
- Our goal was to re-gain the joy of life, a sense purpose, a sense of desire.
- We have embarked on a road to freedom, which led from a depressed, lonely person with anxiety to a happy, satisfied man with a family.



PETER THROUGH THE 5 DIMENSIONS

- Facts:
- societal acknowledgement of historical trauma, the horrors of communist dictatorship,
- Peter as an 25-year old man
- Individual Psychology:
- confusion, anger, depression, anxiety, shame, difficulties with self-identity, anger his self-esteem increased, courage, life force, freedom
- Family Transactions:
- sexual abuse, silence and secrecy open dialogue

- Relational Ethics:
- mistrust, loyalty issues, perception of unfairness, destructive entitlement merit new entitlement to self-freedom, and the Buberian I-Thou dialogue

- Ontic:
- mistrust towards the world one can find HOME in the World and can have a cosy relationship with GOD



- “...at least three generations are involved to complete this repayment: the first that transmits lasting consequences to the second, and the third that is to reap benefits from the concern and redeeming efforts made by the second. No one is ever completely free of transgenerational obligations to care”
- (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Krasner, 1986)
- Peter’s grandfather, who was the direct survivor, whose loss of homeland and suffering in prison functioned as a destructive delegating factor
- Peter’s father – who by the abuse created the lasting consequences on the basis of the destructive entitlement he himself received from his father
- Peter, who has successfully made the redeeming efforts, and reached exoneration and thus merit
- Peter’s son, who by enjoying a caring father and a safe HOME, fully reaps the benefits made by his father



RUSSIA

- Waves of historical traumas, sometimes overlapping and creating very complex interactions.
- In addition, in many historical events it is very difficult to have an easily identifiable “enemy” or “perpetrator” – internal revolution, civil war, repressions.
- Some historical events such as WWII victory became a part of national identity and pride.
- Other events such as the repressions had only partial societal acknowledgement and still create ambivalence in the society.



SOCIO-POLITICAL & HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND TRAUMA

Russia/Soviet Union	Social & Psychological Impact
1914-1918: <u>World War I</u> . 1.7 million dead & 5 million wounded 2.5 million were captured or missing	Social disaster Economic meltdown Political breakdown Families: men were at war; women were trying to survive
<i>1917:</i> <u>October Revolution</u>	Mass unrest and social upheaval, Breakdown of state and social order.
<i>1918-1922:</i> <u>Russian Civil War</u> . 940 thousand soldiers 8 million civilians 7 million homeless children	Destroyed economy 1 to 2 million people emigrate. Families: torn apart. Physical survival.



SOCIO-POLITICAL & HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND TRAUMA

Russia/Soviet Union	Social & Psychological Impact
1930: <i>GULAG</i> (forced labor camps) (dissolved 1960).	14 million in labor camps; 1 million people died (1929-1953). 6–7 million deported and exiled to remote areas of the USSR Families: destroyed; divided, relocated
1932-33: <u>Holodomor</u> (or “Extermination by Hunger”) in Ukraine.	2 - 8 million Ukrainians died of starvation.
1934: Communist Party political repressions. 1937-38: “the Great Purge” Imprisonment and killings. Number of deaths: from 681,692 to nearly 2 million.	Repression of peasants, Deportations of ethnic minorities, Persecution of unaffiliated persons, Widespread police surveillance, Suspicion of “saboteurs” Fear, mistrust



SOCIO-POLITICAL & HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND TRAUMA: *WORLD WAR II* (1939-1945).

Russia/Soviet Union	Social & Psychological Impact
1941-45: The USSR number of total deaths is 27 million (14% of its population)	Still national pain and pride PTSD Post-war gender imbalance (for age group 20-29 the M to F ratio fell from .96 in 1941 to .70 in 1946) Women – primary workers and breadwinners Orphans



SOME CURRENT SOCIAL ISSUES

- Current economic and demographic crisis: low birth rates and high death rates, male death rate is one of the world's worst.
 - The institution of the family is in a profound structural and functional crisis (Mustaeva, 2010)
 - Gender Inequality Index (UNDP, 2014): # 50-51 out of 188 (US is #8)
 - Low level of generalized trust among Russians: only 20% say that most people can be trusted; Americans were close to 60% (Bahry, 2005)
- Low level of civic activity/engagement (Jakobson, Mersiyanova & Kononykhina, Civil Society Index – CIVICUS” project, 2011)



CONTEXTUAL THERAPY ON SOCIAL ISSUES: SOME POINTS

- “Finally, autocratic political systems may encourage detachment from the family in order to extract loyalty to the government or dominant party” (p. 147, Boszormenyi-Nagy & Spark, 1973).
- “However, the more there is real or suspected tendency towards injustice in society, the more the danger of chaos, alienation, distrust of elected leaders, and desperate political actions” (p. 75, Boszormenyi-Nagy & Spark, 1973).



RESEARCH

- Baker & Gippenreitner's study (1998) of grandchildren of victims of the Purge: importance of the strength and values passed through the knowledge of what had happened to their grandparents and of family connection. "Connected" grandchildren had a firm sense of identity rooted in family experience while "cut-off" grandchildren had difficulties with self-identity.



RESEARCH (CONT'D)

- Cherepanov, E. (2016). Transgenerational Trauma: A Comparative Study of Survival Messages in Russian and American Psychology Students
- “..some messages, such as survival instructions for the Gulag prisoners (Stalin’s labor camps) became a prominent part of Russian cultural heritage.” This pilot study demonstrated that these inherited messages of “do not trust,” “do not show fear, weaknesses or ask for help,” and “do not hope or plan for the distant future” remain potent in Russia so many decades later after the historical events.



RESEARCH (CONT'D)

- Cherepanov, E., Markitantova, O., & Varga, A. (2017). Family survival rules: Messages to children.
- “The social environment in Russia has always been hostile to man and to the family. Collective traumatization creates a certain culture of society”.
- The key historical traumatic event listed by the respondents (women, average age 38 years) was WWII, poverty and hunger.
- Survival messages from the previous generation – “to survive”; to the children – more hope, more ethical concern



CLINICAL CASE

- IP (Generation 3): a 16-year-old female, ethnically Russian-Ukrainian, generalized anxiety, fears of “something tragic will happen”
- Mother (Generation 2): 50-year-old, ethnically Russian-Ukrainian, middle-class, immigrated to the US in 1997, difficulties in parenting and marital relationship, depression, anger at her mother, destructive entitlement
- Grand Mother (Generation 1): a 84-year-old female, ethnically Russian, middle-class, untreated depression, overentitlement



TURKEY

A cultural climate will promote death (thanatos) to same degree it lacks in “life giving” (eros)



TURKEY

1800s

- Continuing decline of the Ottoman Empire
- Beginning of Declarations of Independence by nations within the Ottoman Empire (Greece, etc.)
- Beginning of Nation building process by the Young Turks
- The above events have since be framed in such ways as to promote vigilance in society about “separation” of any ethnic group (or any non mainstream voicing of group rights)



TURKEY

1900s

- The Balkan wars
- World War I
- The Armenian Issue 1915 on
- Emergence of the Republic of Turkey 1920s
- Religious uprisings
- Ethnic uprisings
- The Major Depression
- Dersim events 1938



TURKEY

1900s

- World War II
- Issues with the Greek and “nonmuslim” communities in Turkey 1940s-1960s
- Decades of significant impact of the Cold War and its implications on various aspects of country’s politics & thus societal life
- May 27, 1960 coup d’état
- Late 1960s & conflicts between political groups
- 12 March 1971 coup d’état



TURKEY

1900s

- Major political uprisings and conflicts between ethnic/religious/political groups
- September 12 ,1980 coup d'état
- The rise of Kurdish rebel movement
- Large scale (mostly forced) rural-urban migration
- 1999 Earthquake
- July 15, 2016 attempted coup d'état
- Political & ethnic killings (writers, advocates, regular people)
- Turkey was #1 or 2 in the world for decades in traffic accidents involving deaths



TURKEY

RECENT DECADES

- Continuing cases of women's killings and child abuse cases & lack of fair legal resolution
- Continuing ethnic/political/religious conflicts between communities
- Syrian issue and the resulting migration of 4 million persons and various big-scale bombings in last several years



RESULTS IN THE LARGE-SOCIETAL CONTEXT

- Extreme ethnocentrism
- Extreme nationalism/chauvinism
- Alleviated hostility/aggression/intolerance of all kinds
- An instrumental ethical orientation (i.e., Kohlberg's first 3 stages) in personal and political domains
- Intolerance of diversity and resulting hostility between ethnic/religious and political groups
- Identification with a military history and culture has hindered growth of a culture of peace and dialogue



RESULTS IN THE LARGE-SOCIETAL CONTEXT

- The fact that the state rarely allows or itself clarifies various aspects of traumas -lack of resolution in the public memory
- Suppression of free expression of commemoration of historical events for certain minority groups by the government
- Lack of acknowledgement of major historical traumas of groups and communities in the public/education/official historical discourse



INDIVIDUAL PSYCHOLOGY

- Various “internalization disorders” (anxiety, depression, somatization particularly in children the poor and women)
- Externalization disorders in men and privileged groups (“acting out”, difficulties with laws/rules - for example, as simple as stopping at the red traffic light)
- Hostility, irritability, guilt, shame
- Lifelong difficulties with balancing between one’s needs and those of others (i.e., those of parents, family, kin-“needs of multi-person systems”)
- Ongoing intrapsychic and interpersonal distress



FAMILY TRANSACTIONS

- Entitlement of men and parents (and persons with higher statuses and power including extended family members and elders)
- Transgenerational helplessness/hopelessness of women
- Silencing of women/children and those with lower statuses (marginalized groups)
- Within group/kin marriages resulting from between group hostilities.
- Lack of male participation in parenting.



FAMILY TRANSACTIONS

- Perpetually heightened survival mode by family of underprivileged groups
- Unresolved conflicts, secrets...
- High prevalence of abuse/incest
- Over parentification of children (almost in every family)
- Strict patriarchal gender roles



RELATIONAL ETHICS

- Disrupted relational ethics (mostly determined by power-relations)
- Hindered sense of fairness
- A sense of indebtedness to parents, the State, God, ancestors and all sources of authority
- Legacies of ancestral hardship which in turn limits lives of offspring thus often highly limiting development of a sense of personhood/agency/autonomy in new generations
- Distrust (in societal institutions, in others) causing severe degrees of relational jealousy
- Over entitlement—> thus various ways and degrees of relational abuse (enmeshment and boundary violations)



ONTIC

- A remarkable degree of poverty —spirituality and meaning making

Thus, individuals are either in great doubt about sources of meaning (i.e., religion) or merely passive and fanatic followers of dogmas

- Past is never past, “enmeshment of times” due to unresolved trauma, wounds, losses and grief
- A sense of unsafeness in the world/relationship etc .



CASE

- 22 year old university student, “allowed” to attend to university just because the family was in a serious crisis and could not focus on marrying her to some random relative working in Europe. Living in a religious student house. Wishing to leave the house. Not allowed by the group via religious shame/threats.



HOW COULD THESE CIRCUMSTANCES HEAL?

- Macro level changes such as a more inclusive constitution.
- Installation & diligent application of the law based human rights.
- Protection of all persons (particularly underprivileged persons/groups)
- Establishing numerous community mental health centers
- Increasing family/human services
- Special efforts by the State to promote closure on historical events
- Promoting marriage & family therapy
- Benefiting from international experience of social integration and societal peace (i.e., South Africa)



CLINICAL IMPLICATIONS

- “A knowledge of past events is intrinsically valuable only if it is useful for the future” (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Krasner, 1986).
- “Filial respect for the past is most creatively embodied in a person’s entitlement to take what has been given in the past, assess its merit, and, finally, recast it into more effective modes of offering future care” (p. 146).
- Goals: rejunction, exoneration, earning entitlement, self-delineation, self-validation at the individual, family and societal levels



CLINICAL IMPLICATIONS

- Include transgenerational and historical trauma into traditional assessment
- Become aware of the historical and sociopolitical issues that may have directly impacted a family and indirectly influenced the client.
- If possible, family members can be incorporated into the counseling process in order to make direct connections between the past and present.
- Other sources of support might include siblings, neighbors, and co-workers, especially those demonstrating resilience.
- Social advocacy and activism



DISCUSSION

