

Trans-generational Transmission of Historical Trauma and Attempts for Reconciliation with the Healing the Wounds of History Method

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1. Introduction

As a clinical-psychologist, I have grappled with the problems of violence against women and children such as abuse, sexual and domestic violence for the past twenty years. Gradually, I began to think that the unavoidable roots of these issues might have to do with the way our society has dealt with the history of perpetration in the past war. When I am working with individual cases of abused children, I often discover that the child's parents faced violence from their parents. Then, when I look at one more generation past, we get to the collective violence called "War". When young soldiers returned home after Japan's surrender in WWII, they married in a hurry without dealing with their past. Many children were born as a result of this baby boom. Then the fathers worked frantically to rebuild the nation on fields of burnt rubble. I cannot help but wonder what kind of family could possibly be created by these young men who held unexpressed experiences that are unimaginably inhumane. The next generation was raised within these families and then another generation followed.

Suppressed trauma can cause symptoms such as re-enactment, desensitization, avoidance and hyper-arousal. There is never a shortage of case examples of re-enactment. Many daughters of Japanese soldiers confided in me, "My father moaned and groaned in nightmares almost nightly after coming back home from the war." An elderly lady once whispered into my ear, "Soldiers who came back from battles all turned violent in their homes." Similarly, it is a well-known fact that the problem of alcoholism and domestic violence were prevalent among Vietnam veterans and this contributed to the wide awareness and the acceptance of PTSD as a diagnosis.

Here is another example that is painful even to write. In an interrogation record of a criminal who was executed for serial rape and killing of women, he stated, "Dur-

ing the Shanghai incident, I did a wicked rape.” (Honda, 1997) This is an example of re-enactment in which an individual is disconnected from emotions. This illuminates a striking similarity to the issues in Japanese culture where men are disconnected from their emotions, and thus become avoidant and desensitized, unable to connect to their own family. These men often seemed willing to die of overwork as if to compensate for their displacement from their family, and thus we have a miraculous economic recovery as a result of the nation’s hyper-arousal.

2. “Perpetrator trauma” and transmission of trauma

A single episode of violence has immense destructive power, and it changes the past and the future drastically. When this process is repeated, the fabric woven of the history of violence fashions our lives. This can be noted on a community level. Mass violence destroys community, and negatively impacts the ways communities function. When this impact is left unattended, it may be transmitted from generation to generation, distorting the entire society.

The impact caused by violence can rightly be called trauma, but the impact caused by committing violence should be differentiated from what we call trauma. This is because calling them both traumas feels as though both are being treated equally. I would like to make a clear point here that there are certain kinds of violence in which the perpetrator has absolute responsibility. Sometimes, a perpetrator may also be a victim in another relationship. However, this does not excuse the perpetrator’s responsibility.

The word trauma originally was used to mean physical injury. In 1892, William James stated, “Certain reminiscences of the shock fall into the subliminal consciousness, where they can only be discovered in ‘hypnoid’ states. If left there, they act as permanent ‘psychic traumata,’ thorns in the spirit, so to speak.” The word gradually gained the meaning of the psychological impact thereafter. (Oxford Dictionary of English) According to Lifton’s (1993) study of Nazi perpetrators, a state of inner dissociation called “doubling” occurs in the process of perpetration. This state starts to function as an autonomous self. As this “secondary self” forms, it becomes possible

for an ordinary person to commit evil acts. However, in the aftermath of perpetration, if the psychological work of re-integrating the “secondary self” does not take place, the perpetrator has no choice but to continue to go on living, holding the distortion caused by this dissociation.

If we understand trauma as James suggests, and if an un-integrated thorn left in our sub-consciousness continues to negatively impact our psyche, we could call what the perpetrator holds a trauma as well. However, to avoid confusion and injustice I would differentiate it from a victim’s trauma by calling it “perpetrator trauma” This does not in any way suggest that a perpetrator is a victim of his own perpetration.

Perpetration trauma is also transmitted from generation to generation. Yoshiharu Watanabe, the director of a theatre company IMAGINE 21 is an example of such a case (Muramoto, 2008). Watanabe is a victim of child abuse as well as a former perpetrator of domestic violence. His father was a Japanese military officer in occupied Manchu and was tried as a class C war criminal after the war. Watanabe was born in 1947 and grew up in a home with a violent father and a decadent ambience. Similar to cases stated earlier, Watanabe’s father also re-enacted his perpetration trauma as nightmares and violence towards his family, and his children were raised in this environment. After high school, Watanabe left home as if to run away from it and started devoting himself to theatre. He met Ryoko Yokoi in the theatre community and married her. An incident with his mother triggered his violence towards his wife. His mother later committed suicide. Watanabe states, “I don’t remember exactly how I was able to stop abusing my wife. Perhaps I began to understand the emotions of the victim, the meaning of my wife’s words, as I began to face my own issues.” “Facing his own issues” began in 1989 when he watched a documentary about Japanese orphans left behind in China during WWII. This film triggered him to feel the reality of his father’s crime. He then he wrote a play “Saikai” (Reunion). Together with his wife Yokoi, he toured with this piece for 13 years in Japan and overseas, including China. Since 2006, they have been touring around the country with “December Hell: The Nanjing Sorrow”, their new play about the

Nanjing massacre. As Watanabe describes it, “The structure of Japanese psyche is basically made of decadence and living-for-the-moment attitude. People seek pleasure of the moment and forget about the past. The post war generation is unconscious of this but definitely inherited these qualities. When I look at the recent murder cases, I can’t help but think that these people are consciously becoming murderers in order to escape this reality. If we don’t face ourselves and explore how our psychological structure is contributing to our existence, we will never find the answers we are looking for.”

Looking at it from a psychological standpoint, Watanabe’s struggle is exactly the same as the symptoms I see in children who grow up in violent homes. To ease Watanabe’s anxiety and self-harm, a psychiatrist may prescribe medicine and a psychotherapist may provide therapy. If times were different, Watanabe’s wife might have run to a shelter and Watanabe would have participated in a program for domestic violence perpetrators. But could it have really solved his problems?

Sichrovsky (1987) touches on the fact that there are hardly any studies on the psychological aftereffects of children of Nazis, even though during the psychology boom of 1960’s~1970’s, West Germany produced millions of specialists who helped citizens attain happiness and fulfillment. However, mass violence may have merely turned into mass suppression. Sichrovsky questions; there must have been many patients whose mental disability was caused by the fact that they grew up in a home of Nazi perpetrators, but what kind of treatment was provided for those individuals?

Although the arrival of the psychology boom in Japan was delayed, Japan faced exactly the same issue as Germany above. What happened to our own generationally transmitted, perpetrator trauma, ironically concealed by the psychology boom? I cannot help but relate this issue to the current problems of Japanese youth such as cases of murder that Watanabe points out, and an epidemic of wrist-cutting and overdose.

3. Facing our past ~ Encounter with the Healing the Wounds of History

How can we possibly face these un-dealt-with issues? Holding this question,

I attended a playback theatre performance entitled “Healing the Wounds of History - Post war generation facing the aftermath of WWII in Asia” at Ritsumeikan University by Armand Volkas. There I encountered the Healing the Wounds of History (Volkas, 2009) model for the first time, (HWH will be introduced in detail in later chapters so I will omit the explanation here.) and the encounter made a deep impression on me. Playback theatre is a form of theatre in which a member of the audience tells a story in front of the audience, and then actors improvise a play, acting out the story as a way of sharing.

When the theatre performance began, an audience member openly voiced the fact that the facilitator came from the country that dropped the atomic bomb, and yelled out in a hostile tone, “Japan IS the true victim!” The audience froze for a moment, but Volkas remained calm, took this audience member’s comment seriously, and let the theatre company play it back to the audience. Usually, hearing such a comment would fill me with anger, but as I watched the stage, I cried because I could recognize in my heart the deep hurt and sorrow behind this man’s voice. Usually, when an incident like this happens, a man would be escorted out of the venue for his extreme expression. But when his comment was played back, there was no emotional conflict or quarrel. No one was judged, no one was forced out of the theatre, and in peace, Playback theatre continued on to the next story.

In Playback theatre, actors listen carefully to the story and enact it, making visible the multiple voices that exist within a person, as if to tell us, every voice has a right not to be ignored but to be heard. I began to think that perhaps the murder begins by killing one of many voices within each of us. Perhaps a transformation of any voice is possible when there are the others who listen with heart and soul trying to empathize, and when this process is witnessed.

Haruhiko Murakara organized “Kokoro to karada de rekishi wo kangaeru kai [Healing the Wounds of History Japan]” and produced this event. He recognizes that the history education and peace education in Japan mainly focuses on chronology and the objective facts of historical events and leaves behind emotional aspects in the learning process. This prevents the memory of the war to be transmitted in a

meaningful way, with the result that people feel that the past history has nothing to do with their current lives.

South Africa's "Truth and Reconciliation Commission" suggests that there are four types of truths. 1. Truth as facts and in court, 2. A personal and narrative truth, 3. Social and communicative truth, 4. Truths in healing and recovery. Murakawa especially hopes that Japanese youth engage with youth in other nations in dialogue that is firmly rooted in emotions, and through 2. Personal and narrative truth, and 3. Social and communicative truths, pave a new road for building relationships towards 4. Healing and recovery. (Murakawa, 2009)

In November 2007, the 70th anniversary year of the Nanjing Incident, I attended the international conference "Remembering Nanjing" held at Nanjing Normal University, along with members of Murakawa's group. Based on the philosophy of Murakawa and the group mentioned above, the purpose of this gathering was to encourage participants to express personal views and emotions as well as to listen to each other's voice on the Sino-Japan war and the tragedy of Nanjing with an open heart. Participants from Japan and China as well as other nations gathered to listen to the survivors' stories, visited the memorial site where murder occurred and conducted a memorial service. There were also opportunities between events to gather as a whole group, or at times in smaller groups, to share our feelings, move our bodies, and listen to music, which was an important part of the process.

I cannot recall when I started feeling the longing to go to Nanjing, but I gradually became ready to entrust myself to the process, as if I was led by a mysterious force. My first and foremost purpose is to understand with my heart things that I have only understood with my mind in the past; and by this I mean to resolve any small part of desensitization within myself and to see what happens as a result. My mother is a survivor of Tokyo air-raids and I grew up listening to her stories of hardship. When looking back, I too protected myself by saying, "War is in the past and it has nothing to do with me"; drawing a line between myself and my mother's incomprehensibly horrific stories, so that I would not get overwhelmed and fall apart. It was difficult to grasp and feel the entirety of the war stories. When the right time

came, I opened my heart and went to Nanjing. It is hard to describe what came as a result, but whatever “it” is, it is a very good thing.

The first night after listening to the survivors and watching the exhibit at the Shino-Japan War Memorial Museum, I was overcome by a severe headache and nausea. I had recovered by the next morning but most Japanese participants were also experiencing symptoms of headache, fever, nausea and physical pain. Our bodies were clearly reacting. At the same time, when I looked at the pictures of Japanese soldiers, I understood with my heart that we were truly part of these perpetrators, but as I shed tears with fellow Japanese participants, and expressed deep feeling of apology and sorrow toward the Chinese people, I felt the ice in my heart beginning to melt and that felt like a step toward understanding this part of our history in its “entirety”.

Young Chinese participants welcomed us with such warmth and told us that they would like to “have more interaction with young Japanese people”. I became determined to come back with more young people to Nanjing. In order to do this we needed to prepare ourselves. We held a small study group regularly and to integrate these experiences, we held a 4-day peace education program in July 2008. The program included a non-fiction play, “December Hell: The Nanjing Sorrow” by IMAGINE 21 which I wrote about earlier, and “Healing the Wounds of History - Post war generation facing the aftermath of WWII in Asia” by Armand Volkas which included a playback theatre performance and a two-day workshop. In 2009, we also held another HWH workshop in San Francisco, “Repairing the Broken Bridge: Japanese and Chinese cultures facing their historical legacies”.

Through HWH I continued to dialogue with people in China and in other Asian countries and to process my individual historical trauma. I experienced and understood the meaning of HWH’s goal and its 6 steps. In October 2009, I am finally re-visiting Nanjing this time with more young people.

4. Conclusion

From a psychological perspective, trauma caused by violence destroys relation-

ships and isolates individuals. To resist this, we must reestablish connections: connection between past, present and future, connections with others, openness to the world. Connection between an individual and history may especially be a key. This would mean to look at the connection between violence within the self and violence in our history, and to examine the connection of things that do not seem to be related at first. This is a topic that needs our continuous pursuit trans-disciplinarily as well as international collaboration.

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