

# **LARGE-GROUP PSYCHOLOGY**

Racism, Societal Divisions,  
Narcissistic Leaders and  
Who We Are Now

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**PHOENIX**  
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# Contents

About the author	ix
About this book	xi
<i>CHAPTER ONE</i>	
Personal motivations for studying large-group psychology	1
<i>CHAPTER TWO</i>	
Large-group psychology <i>in its own right</i>	17
<i>CHAPTER THREE</i>	
Large-group identity that develops in adulthood	47
<i>CHAPTER FOUR</i>	
Psychology of decision-making and political leader–follower relationships	51
<i>CHAPTER FIVE</i>	
Political propaganda	57
<i>CHAPTER SIX</i>	
Applying the tree model and large-group consultations	61

viii CONTENTS

*CHAPTER SEVEN*

Cherry hospital: personal observations on racism 71

*CHAPTER EIGHT*

Who are we now? 87

*CHAPTER NINE*

Persons with exaggerated narcissism 101

Last words 113

Addendum 117

References 123

Index 135

## About the author

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He is a recipient of the Nevitt Sanford, Elise Hayman, Bryce Boyer, Hans Strupp, Sigmund Freud (given by the city of Vienna) and Mary Sigourney awards and the Margaret Mahler Literature Prize. He was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize five times; letters of support were sent from twenty-seven countries. Dr. Volkan holds honorary doctorate degrees from Kuopio University (now called the University of Eastern Finland), Finland; Ankara University, Turkey; the Eastern European Psychoanalytic Institute, Russia;

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Dr. Volkan is the author, coauthor, editor or coeditor of more than fifty psychoanalytic and psychopolitical books, some of which have been translated into Chinese, Finnish, German, Greek, Japanese, Russian, Serbian, Spanish, and Turkish. He has written hundreds of published papers and book chapters. He has served on the editorial boards of sixteen national or international professional journals.

## About this book

Charlottesville, Virginia was the home of Thomas Jefferson and James Monroe, two American presidents. The University of Virginia was founded in 1819 by Jefferson who is also the principal author of the Declaration of Independence. I came to Charlottesville in 1963 and became an instructor at the Department of Psychiatry and Neurology at the University of Virginia's School of Medicine. During my long tenure at the university, among several positions I held, I was the medical director of the university's Blue Ridge Hospital for eighteen years. Blue Ridge Hospital was located next to Monticello, the plantation of Thomas Jefferson which was designed and built by him. Millions of tourists come to Charlottesville and visit Monticello which also has slave quarters around the Jefferson mansion. After my retirement from the University of Virginia's School of Medicine in 2002, Blue Ridge Hospital was closed because the university had built a new hospital. I have continued to live in Charlottesville.

From August 11 to 12, 2017, a white supremacist rally occurred in my beautiful city. The ideology of white supremacists in the United States centers upon establishing a country populated and controlled by pure descendants of selected white Europeans. Marchers who were from other locations in the United States chanted racist and anti-Semitic slogans, and carried Nazi and neo-Nazi symbols as they opposed removing a statue of

Robert E. Lee, a commander of the Confederate States Army during the American Civil War, from Lee Park in the historical downtown. A white supremacist, James Alex Fields Jr., from Ohio, deliberately rammed his car into a gathering of counterprotestors killing thirty-two-year-old Heather Heyer and injuring forty other people.

The morning before these terrible events started, I had left Charlottesville and driven to Washington, DC to fly from Dulles Airport to Berlin, Germany where I would attend a professional meeting and give a talk. When I returned to the United States some days later, news about what had happened in my city and Donald Trump's remarks about "very fine people on both sides," racist neo-Nazis and counterprotestors were being discussed on television again and again.

Our house is at a location surrounded by a forest. I can reach downtown Charlottesville by car within thirty minutes. In April when trees put out new leaves my private environment becomes enveloped with different shades of green. Sitting on my porch I hear the sounds of many birds as well as frogs in a man-made small lake. The only man-made noise that mixes with the sound of nature comes from airplanes when they fly over our house. After I returned from Berlin I could not appreciate or enjoy the beauty of nature. I had to go to downtown and touch places where terrible events had taken place and where Heather Heyer, whom I did not know, was murdered.

What had happened in Charlottesville made me think about my life in the United States, starting in 1957 as a voluntary immigrant, my personal observations and experiences of racism, anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim sentiments as well as positive aspects of "American exceptionalism." I wanted to write a book about my observations on the political division in the United States. I considered the American white supremacist movement as a "large group" with its own subdivisions. My term "large group" describes hundreds, thousands, or millions of people—most of whom will never see or even know about each other as individuals, but who share many of the same sentiments. Already I had written several books and many papers describing ethnic, national, religious, and ideological large-group problems. Because of this I hesitated to start working on a new book.

On December 7, 2018, James Alex Fields Jr. was found guilty of first-degree murder and eight counts of malicious wounding. People, including survivors, who were gathered outside the courtroom marched in the streets of downtown Charlottesville expressing their relief. I was told that an African-American woman and her African-American husband were

with Heather Heyer when she was hit by the murderer's car. This African-American gentleman was a witness during the trial. Some months later, I learned that, after the trial, members of the church where his wife's family attends services were threatened by white supremacists.

Little more than three months later new attacks on mosques, churches, and synagogues occurred in different parts of the world. On March 15, 2019, a white supremacist killed many people in the Al Noor mosque during Friday prayers at the Linwood Islamic Centre in Christchurch, New Zealand. Donald Trump attributed this tragedy and similar ones to acts of "a small group of people that have very, very serious problems." This was a simplistic way of looking at what is happening in the present world. The next month many suspects were arrested after a series of church and hotel bombings on Easter Sunday in Sri Lanka, killing 253 persons and wounding 450 others. On April 27, 2019, a shooting in a synagogue near San Diego, California, dominated the news and John T. Earnest, only nineteen years old, was arrested on suspicion of murder and attempted murder. It was suspected that, before he was arrested, he had set a fire at a San Diego county mosque. Two weeks later a fire broke out in the Diyanet Mosque in New Haven, Connecticut. No one was harmed. The authorities believe that the fire was set intentionally.

During late spring 2019, I went to Warsaw as a guest of the Polish Psychoanalytic Society. Members of this society and other mental health workers wanted to explore how they could express their professional opinions about the totalitarianism and paranoia in their country. The governing Law and Justice Party in Poland was against the European Union's promoting a secular vision for the continent. According to the party such a vision would be at odds with the Polish identity. The leaders of the party were also demonizing gays and lesbians as a threat to Poland's soul. The Law and Justice Party greatly benefits from the support of the Catholic Church. Almost 40 percent of the population attends Mass weekly. Church sermons and the Catholic media strongly support the governing party. The board members of the Polish Psychoanalytic Society wanted me to make a presentation at the society's May 18, 2019 meeting and focus on the psychological understanding of political and societal divisions in a national large group.

When I was in Warsaw, the two-hour documentary, "Tell No One," by journalist Tomasz Sekielski and his brother Marek Sekielski, was viewed on YouTube over 18 million times within a couple of days, exposing widespread child sexual abuse by Polish priests. Such scandals have been known in the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and elsewhere.

Now it shook up the population in Poland. One of the abuser priests was identified as the personal chaplain of Lech Walesa, a Nobel Peace Prize winner who had served as president of Poland from 1990 to 1995. The Polish people began to wonder if this documentary would make an impact on the power of the ruling party.

When I returned to the USA after spending a short time in Poland, news about the struggle regarding Brexit in the United Kingdom, elections in India where minorities—from Muslims and Christians to lower castes and liberals—were under pressure, and the possibility of starting an impeachment process against Donald Trump provided other examples of societal divisions. In many countries people are busy asking a metaphorical question, “Who are we now?” and coming up with seemingly opposite answers. My motivation to write a new book and update my findings on large-group psychology returned. I also wanted a chance to describe my *personal observations and experiences* related to this topic.

This book provides a summary of Sigmund Freud’s ideas about large groups. Generally speaking, his and many of his followers’ main focus was to study what a large group means for an individual. I explain what is large-group psychology *in its own right*. This means making formulations about the conscious and unconscious shared past and present historical/psychological experiences that exist within a large group. Making such formulations enlarges our understanding of the emergence of present-day societal–political–religious events, leader–follower relationships, and allows us to look at the interactions between opposing large groups in depth. This is similar to a psychoanalyst making formulations about his or her analysands’ developmental histories associated with various conscious and unconscious fantasies in order to understand what motivates certain behavior patterns, symptoms, and habitual interpersonal relationships.

In this book I describe how a child becomes a member of a large group and how adults sometimes develop a second type of large-group identity. Looking at such phenomena provides background data for an examination of the spread of the metaphorical question, “Who are we now?”, racism, authoritarian regimes, malignant political propaganda, wall building, and interferences with democratic processes and human rights issues. I wish to raise the need to examine the present world affairs also from a psychological angle. I will not use many technical psychoanalytic terms, in order to address a wider audience.