

We Are the Monsters!

Critical Review of the IPA statement “How to End Violence in America“.

By Florian Galler

1 Introduction

After the Newtown shooting, which took place on Dec 14, 2012, the International Psychohistorical Association (IPA) published an official statement on it, called “How to End Violence in America“ which you find on the official IPA-homepage (<http://psychohistory.us/wp-content/uploads/IPA-Statement-on-Violence.pdf>). When I, as a deMausian author, read this statement I was astonished because in important parts it is not related to basic assumptions of the Group Fantasy Analysis by Lloyd DeMause¹ but instead seemed to be led by rather “traditional thinking” (quotation of the IPA statement, p. 2: “war ...is fundamentally an instrument for the accumulation of wealth and power by self-interested elites whose perceptions of self-interest are distorted by psychopathology”).

So let me deliver some critical remarks to it and do this with the help of a paper by Charles Strozier. He is a historian and a psychoanalyst who has lectured many times in the IPA convention. His paper is named „Guns in America“. It was not published but only uploaded to the Google discussion group „Clio’s Psyche“ on Dec 23, 2012. It was written as a reaction to the Newtown shooting. You can download it from <http://www.psychohistory.ch/Guns%20in%20America.pdf>.

But first I want to outline some basic principles of deMause’s Group Fantasy Analysis as I understand them:

2 Remarks on group fantasy analysis

Group processes are explained as the result of a defense against traumas which people experienced during their pre- and postnatal lives. The fetal trauma in group fantasy analysis is regarded as the primal, deepest, most unconscious one, which is confirmed and reinforced by postnatal traumatic experiences. A personality dissociation of people in our societies is a consequence of their traumatic experiences which is regarded as normal (see for example Arno Gruen, *The Insanity of Normality*, 2007 Berkeley). I thus assume people have a reasonable and a dissociated personality part. The latter I call alter ego. The values of the reasonable personality correspond to our commonly accepted explicit value system. The value system of the alter ego is derived from the need to defend against traumatic wishes by the psychological defense mechanism of the unconscious identification with the aggressor. This value system stands in opposition to the one of the reasonable personality and it is not available in an explicit formulation but can only be deduced by its implications. Whereas our reasonable personalities support values like democracy, human rights, welfare of the broad population, our alter egos strive for acting out their feelings of self-hatred. They hate values like equal rights or preservation of the environment and instead they feel best when society is headed for any sorts of apocalyptic developments like wars or economic crises. The urgency of these needs depends on the extent of traumas people experienced during their life-time, most important in their pre-verbal life-time. The extent of traumatization largely depends on the quality of child-rearing. According to the quality of child-rearing people of a society belong to different psycho-classes. Members of new psycho-classes with a better child-rearing can support more humanity and freedom in a society than members of older psycho-classes.

The self-hatred of our alter egos is mainly acted out on a social and less on a personal level, because supporting politics of self-hatred in society does less disturb our reasonable personality parts than acting out feelings of a murderous rage on a personal level. Thus our traumatic feelings are mainly defended by acting them out in groups, as in nations. In order not to get in touch with traumatic feelings of rage, anxiety, guilt and shame people unconsciously identify with the aggressor in society. Agents of the alter ego in politics like Tea Party politicians constantly fight a cultural war. In our days they struggle against attempts to remove the discrimination of immigrants or homosexuals. Influential politicians in Switzerland, where I live, still defend the banking secrecy for patriotic reasons and demonize reasonable politicians who would like to abolish it in order to prevent damage to the Swiss economy. It is interesting that as real agents of our alter egos as they are they even defend the banking secrecy against the will of the bank associations themselves.ⁱⁱ

3 Unconscious apocalyptic wishes of today's gun-rights activists

Strozier puts the Newtown shooting in the historical context of a reinvigoration of the pro-gun movement in the USA after the Vietnam War. In the first quote he names the groups which are most important within the pro-gun movement in our days, namely "survivalists, and right wing, anti tax groups":

America is awash in guns. On the shelves in trailer parks in remote corners of Georgia, to upscale suburban McMansions outside Dallas, and to suburban areas like Newtown, are a host of shotguns, 9 millimeter pistols, hunting rifles with elaborate scopes, and even assault weapons and hand grenades, not to mention knives of various kinds, night vision goggles, and other military gear. Permits are absurdly easy to obtain for such weaponry and, even when not legal, our infrastructure of interstate highways allows for easy transportation of guns across state lines. **Guns** are everywhere in the West and Southwest, spread throughout states like Colorado, and **wildly popular** in remote rural areas of the Northwest **among survivalists and right-wing, anti-tax groups.** (Strozier p. 1).

In his paper Strozier puts today's pro-gun movement in a historical line with a preexisting "myth of triumphant settlement of the land from sea to shining sea by heroic individuals armed with guns and ordained by God to carry out their mission." He traces the reinvigoration of this myth which has led to the emergence of the militia-movement chronologically back to the end of the "war in Vietnam" and a "great humiliation" connected with the loss of that war. Therefore "in that psychohistorical moment emerged the militia movement":

More immediately, America suffered a **survivor disaster** in its **war in Vietnam** that had profound meanings for the current debate about guns. We lost that war in a decade-long struggle in which some 50,000 Americans and a million Vietnamese died. Entire forests and vast stretches of cropland, along with countless villages, were wiped out in a sea of napalm, and yet in battle after battle we were driven back, defeated, a great humiliation that came to be symbolized by the **last helicopter lifting off from the embassy in Saigon in 1975** with desperate people hanging onto the runners. **Almost immediately**, as William Gibson has described in *Warrior Dreams*, **arose a counter myth of stubborn and heroic individualism** that reversed history. The first issue of "**Soldiers of Fortune**" was published in **1975** simultaneously with our final defeat in Vietnam. Its central image is that of the **lone warrior armed to the teeth. In that psychohistorical moment emerged the militia movement...** (Strozier, p. 2:)

Although a strong preference for guns existed in the USA before the war in Vietnam, this preference certainly was revitalized by the militia movement and the accompanying myths as the “lone warrior” (see above), the “gun-shows”, the “steady stream of pulp fiction”, the “propagandistic lies” and the “Rambo movies”:

In that psychohistorical moment emerged the militia movement that surged in the next two decades, mostly unnoticed by intellectuals until **Waco** and **Oklahoma City** in the 1990s, but thriving on the margins, **nurtured in gun shows and war games in the forests, fed by a steady stream of pulp fiction**, outright **propagandistic lies** (with maps) about **concentration camps where true patriots were gathered and thrown into crematoria**, and most of all the **Rambo movies** that made **Sylvester Stallone** famous. **George H. W. Bush** famously (and prematurely) opined after a triumphalist Gulf War in 1991 that we had “**kicked the Vietnam syndrome**” by which he meant a set of symptoms that combined cowardice, defeatism, hopelessness, and introspective despair. (Strozier, p. 2)

I suggest an alternative explanation for the causes leading to the emergence of the militia movement compared to that of Strozier. First I would draw a line from the Civil Rights Movement of the blacks in the 1950s and 1960s together with the Civil Rights Act in 1964 to the Vietnam War. The removal or reduction of the discrimination of the blacks had the consequence that the psychological defense of traumatic feelings within the population became endangered. A **growth panic** arose which led to the Vietnam War 1965 (and probably also to the assassination of J.F. Kennedy in 1963) where murderous and suicidal wishes could be acted out as a compensation for the abolished practices of discrimination against the blacks. The progressive process of humanization of the society however didn't stop during the Vietnam War but in the contrary got boosted by the hippie movement in the 1960 and 70s. Western democracies kept becoming more and more human. Therefore after Vietnam a “ground war” became impossible for a long time, in fact until 2003 when the second Iraq War began. Especially members of older psycho-classes with particular harsh child-rearing conditions got overwhelmed by traumatic feelings, as unbearable feelings of helplessness stemming from traumatic experiences during their life-times. The reduction of the psychic defense against traumatic feelings was caused by the mainstream societies and states becoming more and more reasonable and human. Therefore our dissociated personality parts, especially those of the members of older psycho-classes, perceived the modern peaceful societies and states as purely destructive, as persecutors of “true patriots” who were prisoned in “concentration camps ... and thrown into crematoria”. These states and societies therefore were regarded as Babylon and wild apocalyptic wishes projected on them:

The militia movement that had spawned the new right wing in general after 1975—new in the intensity of its hatreds, its commitments to armed struggle and terrorism, and its wild apocalypticism--soon saw the publication of its *Mein Kampf* in *The Turner Diaries*, published in 1978 by William Pierce, a former physics professor with a literary bent. Turner had an enormous impact (Timothy McVeigh said he slept with it under his pillow). It is a reasonably well-written novel that even has a love story as part of the plot but a book that seethes with anti-Semitic and racist hatreds. Placed in the future, the book opens in 1992 with passage of the Cohen Act in which all guns are being appropriated. Black officers, guided by sinister Jews, lead a **government committed to the oppression of true patriots. There are great battles as the movement gradually takes over, eventually wiping out all Blacks and Jews, then all of Asia and Russia in a paroxysm of**

nuclear violence, as the New Age dawns in 2000. It is a story of ultimate redemption by those deprived of their guns. (Strozier, p. 2)

In my view such a perception of the state as purely negative and sinful and the connected myths, literature, movies is part of a mass-psychological movement which emanated from older psycho-classes but resonated in virtually everybody's alter ego. It was a perfect environment for the implantation of the neoliberal ideology and the connected contempt for the (reasonable) government. So Grover Norquist, who founded "Americans for Tax Reform" in 1985 is quoted saying "I want to get government small enough so that it can be drowned in a bathtub".

On the other hand it becomes visible how painful the about-face of the important conservative ideologue Kristol must be for our alter egos after he said on Nov 11, 2012 on Fox News Sunday: "It won't kill the country if we raise taxes a little bit on millionaires... "It really won't, I don't think. I don't really understand why Republicans don't take Obama's offer."

4. Self-interested elites versus agents of our alter egos

Below some commentated quotes from the IPA statement:

How to End Violence in America

Statement of the International Psychohistorical Association, 1 January 2013

Enough is enough. **In the wake of the December 14, 2012 Sandy Hook massacre in Newtown**, Connecticut, a new moral consensus has finally emerged in America about the need to rein in the country's out-of-control epidemic of gun violence...

To ameliorate and prevent violence, it is necessary to understand it, which in turn requires definitions and classification. Civilian gun violence—such as the mass shootings that have afflicted America in recent decades—can be classified as a form of **individual violence**. It will helpful to begin with a general overview. Violence can be classified into two types—direct and structural. **Direct violence** can be defined as the use of physical force, or threat of use, to hurt or gain power over others. Direct violence can be committed by individuals acting on their own behalf (e.g. physical abuse within families, murders) or by agents of state institutions (e.g. the use of force by police or soldiers). **Structural violence** is preventable suffering, such as poverty, resulting from property relations and other social structures. (IPA-statement, p. 1)

So the IPA-paper differentiates 2 forms of direct violence: individual and state violence. Accordingly Newtown belongs to the direct individual violence. In addition we should be aware however that a shooting rampage per se comprises a social element. In a media report on a mass shooting the mental experience of people was described as "chaos and disbelief" (ABC News, Dec 11 2012: "Gunman kills 2, then self at Oregon mall".) Whatever the individual starting situation of an amok runner may be, finally it will end in his compulsive need to act out feelings of self-hatred within "public, highly symbolically charged institutions"ⁱⁱⁱ and produce an apocalyptic situation of "chaos and disbelief" among the population. Therefore his individual (unconscious) motivations are largely corresponding with the pervasive apocalyptic wishes of the dissociated personality parts among the population or at least among large parts of the population.

What, then, causes individuals to be violently aggressive or self-destructive? In short, such behavior is generally learned from experience. When an infant cries, the **response of care-givers will profoundly shape the personality of the adult that the infant will become.** Persons whose needs were met in infancy and early childhood will generally feel empowered to meet their own needs in non-destructive ways as adults. **Persons who experience love and empathy will in most cases become loving and empathetic...**

The institution of **war** has its origins in the Neolithic period, when towns based on agricultural surplus became vulnerable to raids by armed nomads. The acts of aggression by nomads had clear economic motivations and the earliest warriors of agricultural societies most likely played a defensive role. With increasing class inequality, political elites gained increasing control over resources and used force as an instrument for gaining yet more control. It was in this historical context that the institutions of war, the state, and slavery developed simultaneously and persisted for millennia. While war has always been a complex result of psychological, political, and economic factors, **it is fundamentally an instrument for the accumulation of wealth and power by self-interested elites whose perceptions of self-interest are distorted by psychopathology.** (IPA-statement, p. 1)

Driving force of society in this approach are the “self-interested elites whose perceptions of self-interest are distorted by psychopathology.” The role of psychohistory consists in its awareness of the quality of child-care and the psycho-pathological distortion of self-interest.

In my opinion this approach contains a pervasive illusion that the self-interested abusive elites who abuse their power are the true monsters and the only responsible ones for bad developments in societies. We should be aware that we always find people who will abuse their power if only society gives them the right to do so. Therefore it's the dissociated personality parts of people who again and again give electoral support for policies designed to support abusive behavior by self-interested abusive elites.

In the United States today, **elites use the fear of terrorism to maintain a permanent war economy** that costs middle class taxpayers hundreds of billions of dollars every year... (IPA-statement, p. 1)

The “Benghazi affair” currently is an instrument for the agents of our alter egos in Washington, most notably Sens. John McCain of Arizona, Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, they can use to mob and obstruct the administration when reasonable change becomes too dangerous. I perceive the mental impact of the periodically flaring up of this affair as deafening my mind.^{iv} In such circumstances it is hardly possible to intervene in the distorted public discourse in a reasonable way. This at least tells us that we all are objects of mass-psychological influences. I think we should be more aware of this and practice how to intervene in the public discourse while up-holding a reasonable point of view.

As shown for the case of the popular militia myth policies of self-hatred are very popular among our alter egos. Nevertheless the intellectuals were not able to take note of the militia movement before Waco and Oklahoma City (Strozier, p. 3). I think we assume the illusion of the decisive role of the perpetrators because we cannot admit that we ourselves are part of the problem and say: It's the people, stupid! Loyalists who supported old abusive regimes during the Arab Spring were pervasive in every country during the upheaval. There are always parts of the

population with a particular severe traumatization record who will defend old structures against reasonable change and whose war cries against reasonable change will even find some resonance within the members of the more modern psychoclasses. As an example for the USA just imagine how difficult it would be to repeal “stand your ground-laws” which make it possible to kill people unpunished in several states for unspecified reasons as recently in the case of the seventeen year old Trayvon Martin.^v

Making America significantly less violent will require far-reaching reforms. The **mass shootings** that periodically dominate the country’s attention **are only a small part of a pervasive problem**, discussed above under the categories of individual, state, and **structural violence**. The best way to honor the victims of the Sandy Hill massacre and the thousands of others who die from gun violence in America every year will be a national commitment to reducing and eventually ending violence in all its forms. (IPA-statement, p. 1)

I think it is true that there is more real misery caused by structural violence than by mass shootings. The mass shootings however confirm unconscious certainties that the apocalypse is supposed to be near. And such a certainty might undermine the position of our reasonable personalities and thus strengthen the electoral support for the agents of our alter egos in politics.

Furthermore the public discourse on mass shootings is factually important, since this is a field where politics is actually happening. Reasonable politicians in Washington can only prevail if they can survive in the discourse which is actually taking place. Additionally there is an important issue behind the discussions on gun control namely the one of pervasive unconscious apocalyptic wishes. Only if it is possible to bring down our alter ego’s “wild apocalypticism” (Strozier, p. 2) will our reasonable personalities be able to proceed to the solution of other problems like structural violence.

5. The role of the National Rifle Association (NRA)

Subsequently I want to show that the NRA not only serves as a Lobbyist for the weapons industry but also acts as an agent of the alter egos of the population.

NRA goes on offensive over high-capacity magazine ban

By Liz Goodwin, Yahoo! News / The Ticket – Feb 15, 2013

The same week President Barack Obama used his State of the Union to warn Congress that the victims of gun violence “deserve a vote” on gun legislation, the National Rifle Association has gone on the offensive against attempts to ban high-capacity magazines that carry more than 10 rounds of ammunition.

The **NRA**, the nation's largest gun rights lobby, released an **ad** on Thursday that suggested banning high-capacity magazines will turn the country into a crime-ridden nightmare where only the wealthy are protected from murderers and thieves.

The ad points out that **Secret Service and other law enforcement officers will not be barred from using the high-capacity magazines**, while criminals would still be able to purchase them on the black market. “It’s just

the rest of us, the law-abiding people, who will have to defend our families with limited-capacity magazines," a narrator intones. "Welcome to Barack Obama's middle class."

In this quote we see that the NRA is referring to survivalist ideology, invoking apocalyptic wishes since "Secret Service and other law enforcement officers will not be barred from using the high-capacity magazines". The reasonable state thus is depicted as Babylon, as so dangerous that people need to have the same weapons as the Secret Service and the law enforcement officers. I conclude from this that the NRA plays the part of a true agency for the apocalyptic wishes of our alter egos. I regard it as a confirmation that the presumed perpetrators from the NRA and the gun companies finally act as agents of our alter egos.

N.R.A. Defends Right to Own Politicians

<http://www.newyorker.com> – Jan 30, 2013

In testimony before the Senate Judiciary Committee today, National Rifle Association C.E.O. Wayne LaPierre warned that the N.R.A. would vigorously oppose any legislation that "limits the sale, purchase, or ownership of politicians."

"Politicians pose no danger to the public if used correctly," said Mr. LaPierre, who claims to have over two hundred politicians in his personal collection. "Everyone hears about the bad guys in Congress. Well, the only thing that stops a bad guy with a vote is a good guy with a vote. I'm proud to be the owner of many of those guys."

.. the N.R.A. leader ended his testimony by serving notice that he would "resist any attempt" to take away the hundreds of elected officials he says are legally his.

As if to illustrate that point, he clutched Sen. Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa) close to his chest and bellowed, "From my cold, dead hands."

The NRA is obviously a very powerful association. As we see from the next quote, this power cannot originate from the donations to members of the senate since they amounted to only \$596'000 since 2007. The power is rooted rather in its role as a true agency for the voters' alter egos. This reputation gives them the authority to directly appeal to the voters and give them election recommendations their alter egos can believe in.

NRA ardor, clout overwhelm gun-control groups, for now

By Andy Sullivan | Reuters – Apr 20, 2013

...Gun-rights groups have donated \$596,000 to the sitting members of the Senate since 2007, while gun-control groups have donated only \$5,000...

Final remarks: Mass-shootings do have a social meaning because they express pervasive unconscious apocalyptic wishes. Similarly the NRA does not only act as a lobbyist for the weapons industry but also as an agent of the alter egos of the population. The argument which comes from a left tradition that self-interested elites are in the first place responsible for dysfunctional developments in our societies is regarded as an illusion.

This text is a revised version of my presentation at the 2013 convention of the International Psychohistorical Association (IPA) in New York.

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ⁱ DeMause (1982, 2002, 2011)

ⁱⁱ Das Magazin, Zurich/Switzerland (2013/18): Sehnsucht nach dem guten alten Filz

ⁱⁱⁱ The German media-historian Heiko Christians who wrote a book on Amok (Christians (2008) said in an interview in the Swiss daily "Tages-Anzeiger" on Dec 17 2012 that shootings as the one in Newtown do not happen "in secret but in public, highly symbolically charged institutions like a school, a department, a cinema or a job location. The perpetrator intends with the killing a perverse message."

^{iv} Although it is difficult to capture the mental effects of an intervention in a public discourse without describing a broader political and psychological context I give two examples for a distorted and deafening Benghazi discourse in order to enable the reader to get an idea of it.

Example 1: "'Mr. President, don't think for one minute I don't hold you ultimately responsible for Benghazi. I think you failed as commander in chief before, during and after the attack,' Graham said in a statement released by his office." (Yahoo! News/The Ticket, Nov 14, 2012: Obama warns McCain: Go after U.N. Ambassador Rice? 'You have a problem with me')

Example 2: "Separately on Friday, the Democratic leader in the Senate rejected a request from John McCain and two other senators for a Watergate-style congressional committee to investigate the Benghazi attack. In a letter to McCain, Sen. Harry Reid said several committees in the House and Senate are already investigating and he would not allow the Senate to be used as a 'venue for baseless partisan attacks.' Republican House Speaker John Boehner also said this week that a special committee was not necessary." (Yahoo! News Nov 17, 2012: Petraeus: CIA blamed terrorists for Libya attack)

^v Yahoo! News, Jul 19, 2013: Obama: Trayvon Martin 'could have been me 35 years ago'

Yahoo! News/AP, Jul 21, 2013: Across US, people rally for 'Justice for Trayvon'

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