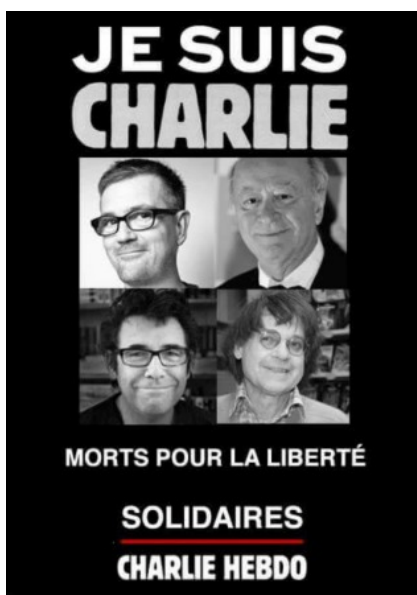


# Psychohistory News

Newsletter of the International Psychohistorical Association

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## *The Paris and Copenhagen Mass Shootings: Where Do We Go From Here?*



Flyer expressing solidarity with the Charlie Hebdo victims.

by Marc-André Cotton

*The Charlie Hebdo and other mass killings by jihadists are fueling a “Clash of Civilizations” discourse in the West. Psychohistorians can refocus the discussion onto underlying causes of public violence and work towards prevention by promoting reform of child rearing throughout the world.*

In September 2005, the Danish daily *Jyllands-Posten* published twelve controversial cartoons of Muhammad, ushering in a period of heightened tension between Europeans and devout Muslims. The debate among the Europeans was initially between uncompromising partisans of press freedom and those  
*continued on page four*

**DON'T MISS OUR CONVENTION!  
June 3-5, New York University, p. 3**

## *Is Psychohistory a Science?*

*In March 2015, a dialogue began in the Clio's Psyche internet discussion group about whether psychohistorical theories are testable. Ted Goertzel gave an example in which he in fact*

*tested a theory proposed by Lloyd deMause in the 1990s. This was followed by a discussion of the role of values in psychohistory and in social  
*continued on page six**

**EDITORIAL ON  
ISLAMIC STATE, p. 2**

**WHERE IS MODI  
TAKING INDIA? p. 8**

## Editorial

### **A Clash of Barbarisms**

Now that ISIL is establishing affiliates in a number of countries in the Middle East, not just Iraq and Syria, the US-led war against the violent Sunni group is likely to drag on for many years. It is by no means assured that the group will actually be defeated, but let's assume for the sake of argument that it is. What, exactly, will be accomplished? This military campaign will do nothing to change the long-term conditions that spawn violent jihadism. New terrorist organizations, just as atrocious but more savvy from learning the lessons of ISIL's mistakes, will soon arise. That is where current policy is headed.

If there is a way out of this endless war, what might it be? To answer this question requires a psychological understanding of the "clash of civilizations," as some misleadingly call it. First, this is *not* a clash between liberal democracy and Islam. As shown in Reza Aslan's classic book *No god but God*, the religion of Muhammad was once a force for cultural and moral progress and is now reforming itself in some quarters to be so again.

The world is witnessing not a clash of civilizations but of barbarisms, specifically a grim contest between Western militarism and violent jihadism. Indeed, ISIL's gruesome executions, as revolting as they are, do merit comparison with the medieval torture of thousands by US-supported dictatorships, and the horrific maiming of thousands more in what the Pentagon euphemistically calls "collateral damage."

Psychohistorians provide a new paradigm for understanding this clash

of barbarisms. According to Robert Jay Lifton, Ernest Becker and some other psychohistorians, the most basic need of human beings is to find meaning for our existence in the face of death. We do this by constructing myriad religions, empires, scientific enterprises, histories, and other projects intended to live on after we die and to bring us "symbolic immortality."



*Research shows that reminders of death heighten ethnocentrism*

Since all of these societal productions function to dampen our anxiety about death, reminders of death, such as ISIL's video-taped killings, cause all of us to cling to our own culture and its immortality systems ever more fiercely. This phenomenon has been demonstrated by replicable scientific research in the "terror management" literature. It can take the form of jingoism and militarism, as is now occurring in the United States. But there is an alternative: by confronting our death anxieties consciously, we have the possibility of promoting more rational policies, as discussed below.

As psychohistorians we also explore "group fantasies" such as the apocalyptic fantasy (and the basis of many digitized games) that *WE* are archetypal heroes and *THEY* are archetypal villains, fit only to be hated and exterminated. Ironically, this is exactly the way jihadis view the world, except that in their moral

universe they are the heroes and we are the villains.

To critique such fantasies is not to endorse moral relativism. Psychohistorical thinking is compatible with the view that torture, wars of aggression, and wanton killing are categorically evil and that democracy, social equality, and human rights are categorically good. But it requires that these standards be applied equally to "us" and to "them." If torture is a heinous crime, it is heinous whether committed by ISIL or by the CIA and dictators allied with the West.

Finally, psychohistorical insight does not necessarily entail pacifism. I would argue that the use of force against ISIL is justified, with the ethical and legal caveats that apply to all armed conflict. But psychohistorians, whether or not we embrace pacifism, see the use of force as at best a stop-gap measure that will only beget more violence in the future if not accompanied by longer term policies of demilitarization and democratization.

Moving beyond apocalyptic fantasy enables us to fashion such policies. This means addressing the long term causes of violent jihadism, including local poverty and the support of Western powers for "friendly" dictators, that is, friendly to Western interests. A case in point is Egypt's El Sisi regime, which receives over a billion dollars of American military aid every year, even as it tortures religious and political dissidents.

A non-apocalyptic, reality-based foreign policy will withdraw military aid from such regimes and redeploy these resources as productive investment, administered in a way that empowers civil society in the Middle East, not corrupt government officials. To be sure, defense con-

tractors, military establishments, and other powerful special interests that benefit from militarism and tyranny constitute formidable obstacles to rational policies of this kind. But apocalyptic group fantasies on the part of elites and the mass public alike uphold the status quo, and dispelling these fantasies can be a political game changer.

The Occupy Movement, Arab Spring, and other awakenings of civil society showed that such far-reaching change in public consciousness can occur, especially in the age of the Internet. A more humane future is possible, but only if awakened publics demand the policies that can create it.

**Brian D'Agostino is Editor of *Psychohistory News* and President of the International Psycho-historical Association. He is the author of peer-reviewed research on the psychology of militarism and of *The Middle Class Fights Back: How Progressive Movements Can Restore Democracy in America* (Praeger 2012). Visit his website at [www.middleclassfightsback.org](http://www.middleclassfightsback.org)**

## **IPA 2015 CONFERENCE, JUNE 3-5, NYU** **Full Program and Registration Info at [www.psychohistory.us](http://www.psychohistory.us)**

### **The False Memory "Debate" Revisited: The Continued Suppression of Childhood Sexual Abuse.**

S. Faye Snyder, PsyD. is Founder and Clinical Director of the Parenting and Relationship Counseling Foundation. Her book *The Politics of Memory: When One is Requested to Shut the Eyes* examines the repression, retrieval, and reality of traumatic memories and the legal war surrounding sexual abuse cases.

### **Roots of Terrorism and War: Economic Interests Meet Machismo.**

Myriam Miedzian, Ph.D. is author of *Boys Will Be Boys: Breaking the Link Between Masculinity and Violence* and co-author of *Generations: A Century of Women Speak about Their Lives*. Her blogs on political, social, and cultural issues appear in several online publications including the Huffington Post.



IPA Keynote Speaker Sue Grand

### **KEYNOTE – RACIAL HISTORY IN AMERICA: COLLECTIVE SHAME AND ABSENT MEMORY.**

Sue Grand, Ph.D. is an instructor and supervisor at the NYU Postdoctoral Program in Psychoanalysis; Associate Editor of *Psychoanalytic Dialogues* and *Psychoanalysis, Culture and Society*; and a psychoanalyst in private practice. She is the author of *The Reproduction of Evil: A Clinical and Cultural Perspective* and *The Hero in the Mirror: From Fear to Fortitude*.

### **PANELS AND PRESENTATIONS ON**

- **Film, Jazz and Poetry;**
- **Politics and Policy;**
- **Trauma and other clinical topics;**
- **And much, much more!**

**Plus, a special screening of Molly Castelloe's "PSEUDO-SPECIES," a documentary in progress about the life and work of VAMIK VOLKAN**

### **The Little Hans Case and the Questionable Foundations of Freudian Oedipal Theory.**

Jerome C. Wakefield, DSW, Ph.D. is Professor of Social Work and Psychiatry and University Professor at New York University. He is the author of *All We Have to Fear: How Psychiatry Transforms Natural Fear into Mental Disorder* and over 200 other publications on psychology, philosophy, psychiatry, psychoanalysis, and social work.

### **Psychohistory at a Crossroads.**

Two special panels address where the field has been, its state now, and what it can be in the decades ahead. Panelists include IPA founders David Beisel and Paul Elovitz, as well as younger scholars who will be shaping the future of our field.

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Molly Castelloe, Clio's Psyche listserv moderator [msc214@nyu.edu](mailto:msc214@nyu.edu)

### MASS SHOOTINGS

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who, while acknowledging freedom of expression as a fundamental right, also called for greater sensitivity to the religious sensibilities of cultural minorities.

After the killings in Paris and Copenhagen, the threat posed by Islamic fundamentalism to our democracies is regrettably well established—to the point that some have warned against a “Clash of Civilizations.” Without a better awareness of the real causes of mass violence, such a response raises the specter of escalating intercultural and political conflict.

### Transmission of Violence

A society shaken like this to its foundations often reacts by scapegoating one or more subgroups. This common coping mechanism manages mass outrage but does not mitigate the real external threats nor does it acknowledge large group dynamics. An alternative is to examine acts of public violence in the context of the intergenerational transmission of trauma that gives rise to them.

This includes the complex inter-relations between abusive family dynamics, the neurophysiological imprinting of trauma, and the ideological trappings of religious fundamentalism.

Can the root causes of these recent attacks be addressed from this perspective? According to available information, the profiles of the Paris and Copenhagen murderers share at least two things in common: a history of childhood violence and emotional neglect, and patterns of risky behaviors that lured them into social exclusion, crime and ultimately violent jihad. Personal tragedies impacted their early formative years and left in their psyches what is known as “traumatic memory,” the neurophysiology of which is increasingly well understood.

Coming back from school one day, the ten and twelve year old Kouachi brothers, the Charlie Hebdo shooters, found their mother dead in their apartment from a suicide. Amedy Coulibaly, who killed a French police officer and four customers of a kosher market two days after the Charlie Hebdo massacre, had a similarly traumatic past. At the age of 18 he saw his best friend killed in front

of his eyes after being chased by police officers.

While we don't have detailed psychobiographies of these young men, we do know that many immigrants like them experience violence frequently from an early age in ghettos and foster care institutions. A community activist told the Internet daily *Reporterre* that children in these poor neighborhoods are routinely subjected to beatings, electric iron contact burns and sexual assault committed by pedophiles. Close to them at the time, she confided: “I remember those kids whose father was always drunk and fell asleep before they came back from school. He locked the door and the children slept in the stairwells.”(1)



Child abuse is common throughout the world

## A Religious Framework

As adults, people with such traumatic family histories are at greater risk than the general population for induction into religious fundamentalist “families,” where their abusive parental introjects can be projected onto authoritarian leaders. One such leader was Djamel Beghal, a former member of an Islamic fundamentalist group in Algeria, who played a key role in the radicalization of the Paris murderers. “For me, religion comes first, I don’t give a damn about family” said Coulibaly to Beghal, unaware that the police were monitoring them.(2)



Amedy Coulibaly, who coordinated his attack on a kosher supermarket with the Charlie Hebdo massacre.

The Copenhagen killer was a street urchin and former gang member, who was later radicalized in prison. Upon his release, Omar Al-Hussein didn’t chat about girls or cars anymore, he gravely spoke of religion, Gaza or entering paradise. A Dane of Palestinian origin, he grew up in the immigrant neighborhood of Nørrebro. In 2008, Omar was interviewed by a sociologist who described him as “a ghetto loser very upset with Danish society.”(3)

This hatred focused on the Western world shows yet another common trait of the killers—the inner urge to find targets to discharge an emotional burden accumulated throughout their short and dreadful lives. With a religious framework legitimizing such rage and promising the gratifications of martyrdom, it is a short step from feelings and words to violent deeds.

## Acknowledging Denial of the Self

The Paris and Copenhagen killers may well have embraced violent religious fundamentalism because it provides an opportunity to reenact the traumas that they themselves endured as children, to

have decidedly moved towards helping our youngsters truly flourish on their own by banning all forms of childrearing violence. This is urgent unfinished business, considering that the world will soon be in the hands of today’s youth.

The IPA should especially reach out to mental health professionals and all others in immigrant communities and developing countries who support this agenda but who face environments dominated by religious fundamentalism and abusive child rearing cultures. This is a concrete action psychohistorians can take on behalf of a more peaceful and humane future.

## NOTES

- (1) Evelyne, interviewed by Eloïse Lebourg, *L’enfance misérable des frères Kouachi*, Reporterre, 15.1.2015, <http://www.reporterre.net/L'enfance-miserable-des-freres>.
- (2) Emeline Cazi, Luc Bronner, *Amedy Coulibaly, la fabrique d’un terroriste*, Le Temps, 15.1.2015, <http://www.letemps.ch>.
- (3) Andrès Allemand, *Le tueur de Copenhague était « un loser du ghetto »*, Tribune de Genève, 18.2.15, <http://www.tdg.ch/monde/tueur-copenhague-loser-ghetto/story/11768436>.

Since the adoption twenty-five years ago of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, societies have made some progress in meeting the developmental needs of their children and youth. But few

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## IS PSYCHOHISTORY A SCIENCE?

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*science generally. The dialogue concluded with the issue of psychohistory's relationship to science on the one hand and the humanities on the other. The text that follows is an edited composite of the original transcripts, published with permission of the authors.*

**TED GOERTZEL:** In his article, "The Gulf War as a Mental Disorder" (*Journal of Psychohistory* 19: 1-20, 1992) Lloyd deMause presented a testable theory that certain kinds of imagery predominated in editorial cartoons during the period of hysteria leading up to war. DeMause illustrated his ideas provocatively with selected cartoons, which was fine for what philosophers of science call the "context of discovery." But for the "context of verification," you need systematic evidence, not selected illustrations. I then collected a reasonably comprehensive and unbiased data set and conducted a content analysis to test this theory. Based on this analysis as well as my qualitative impressions from immersion in this material, I concluded that the time trends deMause hypothesized—increasing war fever leading up to war—don't occur in the cartoons (*Political Psychology* 14: 711-723, 1993).

When I presented this result at a Psychohistory Forum meeting, one of deMause's supporters objected that "some cartoons matter more than others, it isn't fair to just count them." That may be true, but you would need some objective criteria for stating which were more important, other than just assuming

that the ones that fit the hypothesis were the influential ones. Others simply said that psychoanalytic insights are too subtle and complex to be tested empirically. Some may be, but not the hypotheses that deMause stated about mass psychology and war. He was advancing testable hypotheses, which is why I was eager to test them.

**BRIAN D'AGOSTINO:** Ted's comment about "the context of discovery" vs. "the context of verification" is important and gets at something that Ken and I have talked about on this list. I have argued that theoretical (as opposed to empirical) work has a legitimate place in psychohistory. Our theories need to be consistent with known facts, and tested against evidence, but the person who creates a theory need not be the one who tests it. In fact there is often a division of labor that is institutionalized in different sub-fields of the same discipline, such as theoretical and experimental physics or psychoanalytic theory and clinical research.

I think the most important scientific theory in Lloyd's work is his idea that childrearing practices are a major causal factor in explaining historical events and processes. The Winter 2015 issue of *Psychohistory News* contained excerpts from a Clio's Psyche internet discussion on this subject. In that discussion, I argued that research on authoritarianism, including my own study "Self Images of Hawks and Doves" (*Political Psychology* 16: 259-295, 1995), provides indirect evidence for Lloyd's psychogenic theory of history, though not for the reductive form in which he stated it. Much more empirical work must be done in this area before we can have a

mature science, but I think the psychogenic theory in some form provides a deep and coherent scientific theory that merits such a program of empirical research.

That said, I do not believe that history and the social sciences can be value free. Taking the side of children in the face of abusive subcultures, past and present, is a non-negotiable core value of the International Psycho-historical Association, and I want to keep it that way.



*Lloyd deMause explored the history of child rearing through children's eyes*

**HANS BAKKER:** Brian, you cannot argue that psychohistory is a scientific enterprise that is subject to falsification of research theories and at the same time argue that social science cannot be value free. The distinction between value relevance and value freedom was made by Heinrich Rickert and used by Max Weber. We study topics that are relevant to our experience and in that sense we are always somewhat biased because we study X rather than Y and Z. But once we have chosen to study X we must study it using the best scientific methods available. If we argue that all swans are white and refuse to travel to Australia to see a black swan then we are not being value free in our empirical inquiry.

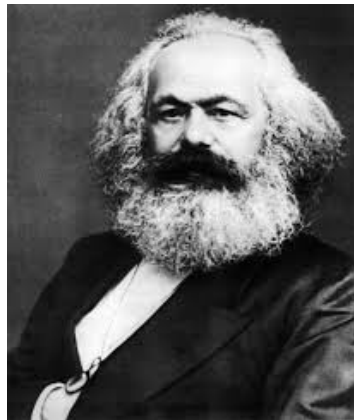
***For Marx and deMause, the view of history  
“from below” raises new scientific questions.***

**BRIAN D’AGOSTINO:** Thanks for this clarification, Hans. This is a useful distinction and from now on I will use “value free” in this more precise sense. I completely agree that regardless of our values we should be committed to the scientific method. But here’s the thing. The choice of which facts to think about due to one’s value relevance can make a huge difference in the kind of scientific theory one develops. For example, Karl Marx, based on his values, looked at history from the viewpoint of the working and marginalized classes, and this transformed the social sciences. Similarly, historians such as Howard Zinn look at history from the viewpoint of the victims of war and genocide, not the viewpoint of elites engaged in geopolitical chess games. Lloyd deMause and Alice Miller have done with the history of child rearing what Marx and Zinn did with macro-history—look at the historical record from the viewpoint of the victims, in this case children trapped in abusive parenting subcultures.

History from the viewpoint of the victims raises new and very important empirical questions. If the past was much more violent than most historians indicate, to what extent was the violence of the macrocosm a reenactment on the stage of history of unconscious motivations shaped by an incredibly violent history of childrearing? And to what extent has the reduction of violence in the macrocosm been driven by progressive evolution of child rearing practices? These are the questions posed by Lloyd's

psychogenic theory of history. They can only be answered by a far-reaching program of empirical research.

So our research needs to be “value free” in the sense of academically rigorous and open to disconfirming evidence. But no matter how rigorous it is, we need to also expect that it is going to be controversial. The “value relevance” of the IPA is going to put off many people in the mainstream. As Patrick McEvoy-Halston never tires of reminding this group, many people are too disturbed by deMause's picture of the history of childhood and too defensive of their own abusive parental introjects to appreciate what we have to offer, and many will be actively hostile to it. This must not become an excuse for poor quality scholarship, but neither should we shrink from a pioneering research agenda in a quest for academic respectability.



Karl Marx explored history through the eyes of oppressed and marginalized people.

**KEN FUCHSMAN:** Some are saying we should treat psychohistory scientifically. History is not classified as a science, but as one of the

humanities, though history certainly has scientific elements within it. Academic psychology is a social science, yet much of psychology outside of academia has as much affinity with the humanities as the sciences. Those who look at psychohistory primarily through a scientific lens are one-sided. They are not recognizing that the humanities are as integral to what psychohistory is as science, and are underplaying the complexity of psychology, history and psychohistory. Science has revolutionized knowledge and set high epistemological standards. Yet for all its significance, when it comes to many things, we do not need scientism, and this is true for psychohistory as well as many other things central to life. So let us be more balanced when discussing the nature of psychohistory.

**BRIAN D’AGOSTINO:** Ken, I completely agree and have always argued against reductionism. My position would be “scientism” and one-sided if I were trying to reduce psychology and history to natural science, which I am not. I do argue that psychohistory is potentially a science, but not ONLY a science. I have been discussing the scientific side of these disciplines, but did not mean to exclude the humanistic side. Here Freud was a pioneer in creating a psychology that sought to integrate natural science and the humanities. We need to build on, update, and extend that project, whether or not we accept the Freudian paradigm as an adequate foundation for psychology and psychohistory today.

*To join the Clio’s Psyche discussion group, contact Molly Castelleo at [msc214@nyu.edu](mailto:msc214@nyu.edu)*

# MODI'S INDIA: AUTHORITARIANISM OR DEMOCRACY?

by Souvik Raychaudhuri

India's 2014 parliamentary elections yielded a colossal triumph to nationalist leader Narendra Damodardas Modi. Colloquially referred to as NaMo, Modi won the 2014 Time "Person of the Year" Reader Poll. This was quite a surge of legitimacy for someone widely considered complicit, as Chief Minister of Gujarat, in the 2002 massacre of hundreds of Muslims. Modi's blend of nationalism and neoliberal discourse mobilizes major psychoclasses in Indian politics. With the support of big corporations and the rich, he is beginning to dismantle more than sixty years of progressive social policy instituted under the Nehrus (Jawaharlal, his daughter Indira Gandhi, and her son Rajiv). Whether India is headed into a right wing era or whether progressive leaders will regain power in the coming years remains to be seen, but at the moment it does not look good for the progressive forces.



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi

Hindu-Muslim relations in India have never been in greater need of healing. The riot that destroyed the historic Babri Masjid in 1992 and the retaliatory blasts that shook Mumbai the following year were symptoms of deep alienation. In the poisonous climate after 9/11, many of the urban Hindu intelligentsia turned to nationalism with even greater intensity, and scapegoating Muslims became a way to divert attention from their appalling poverty and the need for social policy correctives.

Here are some glimpses of NaMo's new India. In this vastly multi-cultural country, the *Bhagavad Gita* has been recommended as a "national scripture." India will provide military assistance to Sri Lanka, the Maldives, Mauritius and Seychelles to counteract China's influence in the Indian Ocean. The government-appointed Central Board of Film Certification censored the word "lesbian" from a newly released Hindi film. Modi's regime blocked the broadcast of "India's Daughter," the documentary about the 2012 Delhi gang rape. The film then began to go viral on YouTube, but the next day the company withdrew it from India under government pressure. The suppression of this issue occurs at a time of alarming levels of sexual brutality in the country and weak commitment to the prosecution of such crimes.

Given that Muslims comprise more than 13% of the country's 1.2 billion people, NaMo's Hindu-dominant agenda is deeply divisive. The psychoclasses who support this agenda are represented by the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party/Indian People's Party) and VHP (Vishwa Hindu Parishad/Universal Convention for the Hindus). At the same time, the government's pro-corporate yearly budget is eliciting broad-based popular opposition. The Aam Aadmi ("Common Man's") Party, which is conservative on social issues but progressive on economic issues, won a majority of votes in this February's elections for the Delhi municipal legislature. Nationally, however, the weakness of the Indian National Congress and the left parties does not bode well for the struggle against right-wing authoritarianism.

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