Psychotherapy and Politics International
Psychotherapy and Politics International, *11*(3), 210–224. (2013)
Published online 15 January 2014 in Wiley Online Library
(wileyonlinelibrary.com) **DOI:** 10.1002/ppi.1314

Social Trauma and Distortions of Phantasy Formations

FLORENTINA C. ANDREESCU, University of North Carolina, Wilmington, North Carolina, USA

ABSTRACT *This article proposes a model for analyzing transformations of phantasy formations triggered by radical social change. Phantasy has been rarely addressed by scholars studying radical social change, yet it is a key social element that functions as the "glue" that keeps a community together. Trauma associated with radical social change, such as revolution, market collapse, radical economic reform, genocide, or acts of terrorism, has the potential to radically transform phantasy formations. This is the case because trauma is a sudden opening between registers that were once discrete, the opening of which facilitates unforeseen connections. After discussing radical social change as a traumatic event, and three key elements of phantasy, that is, discourse, topography of commonplaces, and structure of phantasy, this article proposes four ways in which trauma can be dealt with in phantasy formations. Copyright © 2014 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.*

Key words: radical social change; trauma; social trauma; phantasy; Lacan

INTRODUCTION

This article investigates how social traumatic events such as war, genocide, and radical political and economic transitions alter phantasy formations. Social traumatic events have created strikingly different effects for communities and the phantasies they share. In some instances, because of trauma, the community becomes stronger, for instance, by adopting a powerful allegiance to the nation, while creating a stark opposition with an antagonistic other which is seen as the element that endangers the community's wellbeing and enjoyment. I illustrate this situation with *Halftime in America*, a commercial clip that was presented during an American national sports event, the 2012 Super Bowl. The commercial clip portrayed the American nation as injured, and lagging behind in a competition with an antagonistic other. In a second instance social trauma is not only portrayed as a source of destruction and separation, but also as a cause of an unspoken bond with the other, which reveals that people connect through the experience of trauma. The situation is specific to recent Bosnian films that reflect the way the civil war trauma was managed. A third instance reflects on the

*Correspondence to: Florentina C. Andreescu, University of North Carolina, International Studies Program 601 S, College Road 219 Leutze Hall Wilmington, North Carolina 28403, USA.
E-mail: Andreescuf@uncw.edu

emancipatory aspect of social trauma. Here I discuss the sudden collapse of the power/magic of the Other during the Romanian revolution, when, in matter of seconds, what evoked a mixture of fear and respect was experienced as a rather different mixture of ridiculous imposture. Referring to "the Other" with a capitalized "O" represents the locus of truth and meaning, the source of authority (Borneman, 2004); it is the locus where the signifying chain emerges and where the subject is constituted (Lander & Filc, 2006). A fourth instance refers to the situation in which social trauma has the ability to destroy the very community's structure of phantasy, making it impossible for the community to continue its life in the Symbolic. This situation is illustrated with reference to the historical trauma experienced by the Native American community.

The article investigates what it is that causes this variety of effects in response to social trauma. What is the actual mechanism/process through which trauma is dealt with in a community's phantasy formations? It is suggested that these strikingly different examples allow the acknowledgement that trauma could lead to invalidation of communities by tearing apart the phantasy that supported and held them together, but also to the strengthening of those communities, as trauma is the center around which new social phantasies are woven. Drawing on the works of Bormann (1985); Rose (1996); Stavrakakis (1999); McGowan (2007), and Žižek (2008), phantasy is discussed as a key social element that functions as the "glue" that keeps a community together. This article encourages psychotherapeutic practices to maintain openness towards the collective aspect of phantasy and traumas. This is especially important as the domain of phantasy, analyzed here, does not solely belong to the individual. Phantasy also belongs to the social world, and is a key element in understanding the functioning of socio-political life as the phantasy structure shapes the narratives of communities. At the same time the narratives reinforce it as they make up the context of the socialization of the members of the community. By focusing on groups and societies, psychotherapeutic practices also involve an element of "socio-therapy".

I begin with a discussion of the Lacanian framework used in this research, following it with an analysis of social radical change as traumatic process. I continue with a presentation of the three key elements at the base of phantasy formations – discourse, rhetorical topography of commonplaces, and national structure of phantasy – and, finally, propose four distinct transformations of phantasy formations due to trauma.

LACANIAN FRAMEWORK OF ANALYSIS

I analyze social trauma from a Lacanian standpoint, which does not see the subject as a unified collection of thoughts and feelings, but, instead, marked by an essential split. Lacan and Miller (1988); Lacan and Fink (2006) argued that the split is caused by the subject being formed as part of three separate registers: Real, Imaginary, and Symbolic. The Imaginary includes the field of fantasies and images; the Symbolic is concerned with the function of symbols and symbolic systems, including social and cultural symbolism, and the Real designates that which is impossible to symbolize. For Lacan, explanation of the Real is always in terms of the impossible: the Real is that which is impossible to bear (Sarup, 1992). When experienced, the Real is best described as episodic interruptions into the other two registers, interruptions that are traumatic (Homer, 2005).

Entering within the Symbolic (language) one gains access to reality, as a symbolic construct, but the signified of the signifier "reality", the Real itself, is sacrificed for ever

DOI: 10.1002/ppi

(Stavrakakis, 1999). One will never access the Real directly but always indirectly, through language; as such, reality will always be lacking. Phantasy is the mechanism that compensates for the lack of the Symbolic. Through phantasy we attempt to repress the lack encountered in the Symbolic and make it bearable (Stavrakakis, 1999).

According to Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, humans act as directed by desire. Freud viewed the nature of desire as unconscious and related to representations, and, therefore, belonging to the world of phantasy. Following Freud, Lacan argued that the subject's desire is the desire for the Other's desire: the subject wants to be wanted by the Other, that is, one experiences a desire for love and recognition within the social order. Channeling and capturing human desire is what determines whether a certain political system functions. In this sense every political promise is supported by a reference to a lost state of harmony, unity and fullness, a reference to a pre-symbolic Real (Fink, 1995), which most political projects aspire to bring back. Through symbolization, what is impossible becomes prohibited and thus can also be recaptured (Stavrakakis, 1999).

TRAUMATIC RADICAL SOCIAL CHANGE

Trauma is the dynamics specific to the moment in which an old social order, together with the phantasy that supports it, loses validity, while a new one is not yet established. This is a moment of an encounter with the emptiness at the core of and the inconsistency characterizing any social organization. The encounter exposes a community to the extent to which what was considered "matter of fact", "natural", or "personal" is strictly a social construction. For instance, aspects that were thought to be deeply personal, such as one's desire, phantasies, identity, and social network, are exposed as intimately linked to and shaped by a law, which, at the moment of radical social change, is rendered flawed and arbitrary. While the assimilation of the Other's desire is an inevitable aspect of the formation of desire, with the sudden invalidation of a social order, it is experienced as an intrusion or violation. In this sense, cherished life goals could be exposed as part of an oppressive "common sense". In a radical social change one realizes to what extent his/her dreams and desires were shaped by and belonged to the order which is crumbling.

Seen from a Lacanian standpoint, radical social changes are traumatic events because of the way they bluntly expose the nature of the social. They impact the individual's sense of ontological security offered by the position one occupies within the symbolic order. Laing (1960), Giddens (1991), and Mitzen observed that ontological security is a fundamental requirement for an individual's or a society's functioning. This form of security refers to one's need to experience him/herself as a whole and continuous person in time, which leads to a sense of agency. The sense of ontological security is usually achieved by routinizing social relationships (Mitzen, 2006), in other words, through his/her association with a symbolic identity, the individual gains a grounded sense of self as a citizen of a state, a member of a national community, a member of a family, a member of a work community, and/or of various social groups. Embodying such a symbolic identity he/she reproduces an institution and a social order while gaining a sense of security as part of it. In a traumatic event this group, identity, security, and social order are dislocated and rendered instable, temporary, and flawed.

In a radical social change we are dealing with a "rupture" of the fabric of reality, a concept discussed by Eisenstein and McGowan (2012). Rupture, the authors argue, occurs at

DOI: 10.1002/ppi

moments of revolutionary historical change and of the interruption of the flow of social life. Ruptures interrupt the chain of signifiers building up a social plane. This leads to the continuous order of things being interrupted, to things being all of a sudden truly up for grabs, and to the very emergence of value to appear in a new and nonsensical way. Rupture and trauma find themselves in a close relationship. To remain within the rupture is to exist without the security of a place in the world; one is traumatically cut adrift.

Sztompka (2000) emphasized that radical social change could disrupt the universe of meaning, as:

> symbols start to mean something other than they normally do; values become valueless, or demand unrealizable goals; norms prescribe unfeasible actions; gestures and words signify something different from what they meant before; beliefs are refuted, faith undetermined, trust breached; charisma collapses, idols fall. (p. 458)

In a radical social change the new order challenges the founding principles of the old ones; it invalidates its *point de capiton* (which may be translated as a "button tie" or "anchoring point") and the family of commonplaces, contesting what was once considered moral and just. The basic frame that once grounded and organized the social is dislocated, leading to the suspension or invalidation of institutions, norms, principles, rules, plans, and identities. As a result, the ideology that covered over the lacking nature of the social authority collapses, and a brief interregnum occurs before the new order is set in place and gains legitimacy to impose a different form of concealment (Edkins, 2003). Sztompka associated trauma with a cultural disorientation and saw it taking place when some significant, sudden, and unexpected episode of social change gives a blow to every central assumption of a culture (Sztompka, 2000, pp. 453–455). In these circumstances people come to the realization that the identity they used to consider their own, as well as the position they used to occupy in society, are no longer available. Trauma produces dislocations in routines by changing the life of people in often dramatic ways, and, more importantly, as we will analyze later, reshapes their pattern of acting and thinking (Sztompka, 2000). Such social dislocation significantly affects old values and orders. Radical social changes make evident that the answers and models provided by previous forms of organizations were flawed, biased, and oppressive.

In what follows I address three main components of phantasy formations that could be reshaped by traumatic radical social changes: the discourse, the topography of commonplaces, and the structure of phantasy. The discourse is the actual material (fabric) out of which phantasy is built, the important elements of which are the commonplaces structured according to a topography and the *point de capiton*. These are the elements of discourse which acquire a special status through their association with traumatic experiences, and are key in structuring and holding together the discourse and the production of meaning. The structure of phantasy refers to how exactly phantasy through discourse captures desire and shapes the subject, by positioning the subjects in a certain way *vis-à-vis* the Other.

DISCOURSE

As mentioned earlier, discourse is the material out of which phantasy formations are built. Discourse theory investigates the way social practices form identities and a social order by

DOI: 10.1002/ppi

articulating together a series of signifying elements available in a discursive field (Howarth, Norval, & Stavrakakis, 2000). Discourse is conceived as an articulation (a chain) of ideological elements around a *point de capiton* and a family of commonplaces (nodal points). Saussure (1959) work stressed that language is a system of difference. In this sense linguistic identities are relational and, as a result, the totality of language is involved in each single act of signification. The identity of each element in a signifying system is constitutively split: on the one hand, each difference expresses itself as difference; on the other hand, each cancels itself as such by entering into a relation of equivalence with all the other differences in the system. It is only in so far as there is a radical impossibility, exclusionary limit marked as an interruption, a radical impossibility or a breakdown of the process of signification that actual systems can exist (Laclau, 1996). Exclusion grounds the system by interrupting the differential logic and privileging the dimension of equivalence. In this sense any system of signification is structured around an empty place (a constitutive lack, an impossible object, or the Real in Lacanian sense). The *point de capiton* stands for this lack and as such is able to constitute the discursive center. It is a privileged element which gathers up a range of differential elements, and binds them together into a discursive formation. The *point de capiton* is called to incarnate a function beyond its concreteness. It is "emptied" of its particular signification in order to represent fullness in general and to be able to articulate a large number of heterogeneous signifiers (Stavrakakis, 1999). The *point de capiton* is no true anchoring here, it is rather a tie of a specific meaning to particular words without regard to an absolute referent. The *point de capiton* creates a foundational, unshakable meaning (Fink, 1997). According to Lacan, every act of speaking implies not only a speaker and an addressee but a third place, the Other, posited as a "site" that guarantees the truth and meaning of what is being said. Thus it is from within a fantasmatic framework that we communicate; always implicitly seeking, by communicating, some kind of recognition from this third-party Other (Pluth, 2007). Political practices attempt to "fill" the lack of the Symbolic. In this sense, even though the fullness and universality of society are unachievable, societies are nevertheless organized and centered on the basis of impossible ideals (Howarth et al., 2000).

TOPOGRAPHY OF COMMONPLACES

The family of commonplaces is a main feature of discourse and a key element in structuring phantasy formations. I look at *commonplace* in the same fashion that Patrick Thaddeus Jackson (2005) did when formulating the basis of relational constructivism; nevertheless, while Jackson's theory operates solely at the level of discourse, my model pays additional attention to both the Real and the Imaginary registers. By "commonplaces", I mean concepts that are deeply ingrained and accepted within a society and are found at the center of various narratives specific to the society in focus. Jackson argued that commonplaces are structured in a rhetorical topography, as they are placed in a certain relation to each other. This topographical relation is reflected in the way commonplaces fit within the frame of narratives. The social relevance of commonplaces does not rest solely at the level of discourse as it also comes from the energetic charges of past traumas that attach themselves to these commonplaces. Lacanian psychoanalytic theory stresses that there is an underlying system that Lacan called *jouissance* (libido), which cements fundamental fantasies in memory,

DOI: 10.1002/ppi

fixations, or commonplaces, that is, *jouissance* battens down meaning that is radically repressed because it was first created in response to traumas. The investment of commonplaces with traces of traumas is what accounts for their prevalence within social life. Commonplaces are one way in which traumas are inscribed and re-inscribed into everyday narratives. Commonplaces act as if charged with a sort of energy that keeps bringing them forward. What we describe as our "character" is based on the memory traces of our impressions (Freud, 1955), and more so, on our past traumatic experiences. From this perspective, we may look at the collective consciousness of human beings as being a cumulative mass of trauma. While most of these remain unconscious, they continue to have an impact in structuring actions and thoughts (Kellermann, 2007). Furthermore, traumatic radical social changes are expected to rework the rhetorical topographical arrangement by charging new commonplaces, creating additional connections, or disabling prior ones.

A discourse could be swiftly invalidated in radical social change. In this sense one's access to language changes to the point that what one can say no longer makes sense, while what one wants to say, one can't, as the words for it are no longer available or they are invested with different meaning (Edkins, 2003). As discussed, nodal points account for the structuration of elements into a meaningful system of moments, as they function as privileged signifiers or reference points that bind together a particular system of meaning. The change of the point *de capiton* alters the meaning of the nodal points. For example, in communist ideology a number of pre-existing and available signifiers (democracy, state, freedom) acquire a new meaning by being articulated around the signifier "socialist state" which occupies the structural position of the nodal point, transforming these elements into internal moments of communist discourse. Democracy acquires the meaning of "real" democracy as opposed to "bourgeois" democracy; freedom acquires an economic connotation; and the role and function of the state are transformed (Howarth et al., 2000).

STRUCTURE OF PHANTASY

The structure of phantasy is a key element in discussing radical social change, as it represents the "glue" that keeps a community together. My understanding of the structure of phantasy relates to the research done by Benedict Anderson (2006) on imagined communities. Anderson made relevant the importance of the novel and the newspaper as two forms of imagining. He argued that these forms of imagining provided the technical means of representing the nation as an imagined community (Anderson, 2006). Similarly, Ernest G. Bormann (1985) argued that phantasy provides a common consciousness and creates a sense of identity, community, and common consciousness. Thus attacks on core phantasies are often interpreted as attacks on self-definition. When the old phantasy formations are broken up, the individual feels lost and disturbed (Bormann, 1985). Another author proposing a similar argument regarding the function of phantasy is Jacqueline Rose (1996). She brought attention to the fact that, at first glance, phantasy appears to be asocial as it seemingly creates a world of pleasure without obligation to what it is either permissible or possible to do outside the realm of phantasy. In her work she shows that phantasy is far from being antagonistic to social reality but, instead, is its precondition or psychic glue, and it plays a central, constitutive role in the modern world of states and nations. As she put it: "Like blood, fantasy is thicker than water, all too solid" (p. 5).

DOI: 10.1002/ppi

Similarly, this article argues that at the base of a national imagined community are shared phantasy coordinates. More specifically, the members of a national community have similar ways of addressing desire in phantasy scenarios, further determining common views and interactions with the world and the social authority (Andreescu, 2011). In this sense, as Žižek (1993) put it, a nation exists only as long as its phantasy structure, an expression of its specific connection to enjoyment, continues to be materialized in a set of social practices and transmitted through national myths.

The dynamics of the structure of phantasy are very similar to those of the Lacanian fundamental phantasy. What is specific to the fundamental phantasy is that it positions the subject in a certain way *vis-à-vis* the Other, further determining that the subject plays out a specific stance or position in relation to the Other's desire, attempting to satisfy or thwart it, be its object, or undermine it (Fink, 1997). The fundamental phantasy is repeated in all actions and patterns of thought; it stages the relationship between the subject and the lost direct connection to the Real which provides a now prohibited satisfaction. Once lost, it seems all the more valuable, and it is transformed into *jouissance*. The individual adopts a position with respect to the demands regarding this loss, implicitly a position towards the Other, which constitutes the basis of the fundamental phantasy (Fink, 1997).

Žižek (1993) noticed that the Thing, expression of the enjoyment, is present in that elusive entity called "our way of life", which can be exemplified by an enumeration of disconnected fragments of the way the community organizes its feasts, its rituals, its initiation ceremonies – in short, all the details by which is made visible the unique way the community organizes its enjoyment, for they are all molded by and are perpetuating a common national structure of phantasy. In this sense trauma has a social dimension as it creates communities. The common traumatic experience creates a mood, an ethos, or a group culture (Erikson, 1995). Furthermore, subsequent traumas lead people to look out at the world through particular lens, and to experience not only a changed sense of self but also a changed worldview (Erikson, 1995).

TRAUMA IN PHANTASY FORMATIONS

As mentioned earlier, trauma plays an essential part in national phantasy formations, as a key element in creating and shaping discourse, the rhetorical topography of commonplaces, and the national structure of phantasy. In this part of the article I propose four ways in which traumatic radical social change can be dealt with in phantasy formations.

Restoring a narrative thread

The usual way of addressing trauma implies an attempt to include it into narratives built either at the personal level or at the national level. This could happen in the office of a therapist where the trauma victim tries to find words to give meaning to the traumatic event that he/she experienced, or it could happen at a national level by commemorating traumatic events in art, museums, monuments, films, and novels. For example, Peter Felix Kellermann (2007) discussed a way of dealing with social traumas by acting them out on a stage. This acting out would form a narrative that would give meaning to the traumatic event. This could be done by a sole individual, called psychodrama, or by a whole group of people, called sociodrama. Sociodrama deals with situations in which the collective aspect of the problem is put in the

DOI: 10.1002/ppi

foreground (Moreno, 1969). By focusing on groups and societies, sociodrama is a form of "socio-therapy" (Kellermann, 2007). Dealing with trauma in this way implies writing over a gap, putting together a story that would discipline an intrusion from a different temporality which interferes with and distorts personal or national narratives. Such an intrusion reminds one of the limitations of the Symbolic, and of its lack of guarantees. For this reason, in order to continue life within the Symbolic one needs to give up the special truth (awareness) accessed through the encounter with the Real. Integrating the memory of trauma into other memories could be seen as a way of forgetting, and not a way of remembering (Edkins, 2003).

This specific way of dealing with trauma can be illustrated with a commercial clip presented during the halftime at the 2012 Super Bowl (American football) game. It featured the famous American actor and director Clint Eastwood, who talked about America and the American economy, using the metaphor of football. The recent economic downturn exposed the limits and inconsistencies of the capitalist system, and, in turn, led to Americans losing jobs and being forced to radically adjust their skills and way of life to match the new economic realities. The economic changes were experienced as traumatic, not necessarily because of their severity but because they took those involved by surprise. This was the case, as the American capitalist system was trusted to be especially secure and stable. The commercial clip, reflecting on the new economic and social realities, succeeded in displacing the emotional charge caused by the radical economic change from the individual and placing it on the abstract entity of the nation, which was depicted as in need of help and protection. In this sense its narrative has the potential to create powerful effects within morality and organization of the American society (Alexander & Butler Breese, 2011). This discourse builds the basis for community, but creates a corrosive community marked by a promulgation of stark binary opposites (Schick, 2012).

The narrative started in this manner:

> It's halftime. Both teams are in their locker room discussing what they can do to win this game in the second half.
> It's halftime in America, too. People are out of work and they're hurting. And they're all wondering what they're going to do to make a comeback. And we're all scared, because this isn't a game. (Chrysler, 2012)

The inconsistencies within the Symbolic, here within the capitalist system, are covered over and disciplined with a simple story that associates the cause of trauma with a lagging behind in the competition with an other. Even though this specific other has no concrete identity, it is depicted as the one taking away from the American nation its well-deserved enjoyment and sense of security. We are facing an antagonistic other that is a threat and because of which the nation needs to come together as one and act on what is "right". The rigid explanation does not allow questioning. It resists ambiguity and instead paints a simple, rigid story with the purpose of securing the state and the capitalist order in the wake of the insecurity and vulnerability.

Trauma as social dislocation creates desire driving antagonistic articulations of discourses that attempt to form around and suture the lack exposed by the rupture within the social fabric. The discourse of Eastwood's Super Bowl clip aimed to include the emotional charge released by the traumatic event into a discourse/narrative of the state and nation, displacing the suffering from the individual to the "body of the nation. In such a way, the integration of trauma in phantasy formations becomes a practice that reproduces stories of national glory and heroism, and it also

DOI: 10.1002/ppi

produces linear time, which is the time of the state (Edkins, 2003), reinforcing the national myth and the imagined community of the nation. This is illustrated by the following statements:

> I've seen a lot of tough eras, a lot of downturns in my life. And, times when we didn't understand each other. It seems like we've lost our heart at times. When the fog of division, discord, and blame made it hard to see what lies ahead.
> But after those trials, we all rallied around what was right, and acted as one. Because that's what we do. We find a way through tough times, and if we can't find a way, then we'll make one. (Chrysler, 2012)

Transforming individual suffering into collective trauma is cultural work (Alexander & Butler Breese, 2011). In this displacement process, symbol creators, like Eastwood, make different claims about collective identity, about the nature of the wound and what caused it, about the identity of the victim and the perpetrator, and about what is to be done to prevent the trauma from happening again (Alexander & Butler Breese, 2011). In this sense the state legitimates its own answers to the traumatic tear in the fabric of normality (Edkins, 2003).

The major aim of the clip's narrative is to construct and stabilize the nodal points that form the basis of concrete American capitalist social orders (Howarth et al., 2000). The new story's purpose it to construct spaces of representation that attempt to suture the dislocated/ruptured space. In case the story proves to be successful in neutralizing social dislocations and incorporating a great number of social demands, then we can say that it has been transformed to an imaginary (Howarth et al., 2000).

Giving the enemy the face of one's lover

A second way of dealing with trauma in phantasy formations allows for the linear narrative that builds up a social structure, that creates a sense of past, present, and future and that legitimizes a social authority and its law, to be interrupted by a different temporality, that of trauma. From a Lacanian standpoint, trauma refers to the inability of the ego to process or assimilate into its system the amount of stimuli originated by the signifying chain at any given moment. As the experience is not assimilated or processed, it leaves a trace that is defined as traumatic (Lander & Filc, 2006). We can think of trauma as of an experience that cannot be organized on a linguistic level, but instead on a somatosensory or iconic level: as somatic sensations, behavioral reenactments, nightmares, and flashbacks (Brett & Ostroff, 1985). For this reason, such experiences cannot be easily translated into a symbolic language necessary for linguistic retrieval. This explains why, while the images of traumatic reenactment remain absolutely accurate and precise, they are largely inaccessible to conscious recall and control (Caruth, 1995). We could say that trauma is not triggered by the violence of an event, but instead by its unassimilated nature (Caruth, 1996). As it was not transformed into a narrative memory, traumatic recall cannot be accessed at one's will, but has instead its own logic that disrupts the social order. The traumatic experience remains dissociated from the Symbolic, it cannot occupy a place in it, it cannot belong to the past, and its lack of comprehension dissociates it from the present also (Caruth, 1995).

Contrasting with the commercial clip discussed earlier, recent Bosnian films have a strikingly different approach in dealing with trauma of the 1990s civil war. Not only do the films' narratives refrain from offering clear explanations and solutions, or from naming those responsible for

DOI: 10.1002/ppi

atrocities, but, instead, they tend to remain ambiguous about such issues. The films problematize instead of clarifying who is be to blame or who to be called an enemy. Such a situation is specific to the films *Fuse* (Žalica et al., 2003), *Go West* (Imamović & Puska, 2005), *Grbavica: The Land of My Dreams* (Žbanić, Karanović, Lučev, & Ćatić, 2006), and *In the Name of the Son* (Harun Mehmedinovic, 2007), where father and son, mother and daughter, as well as two gay lovers, respectively, find themselves included by what is presented as an aberrant logic of war in opposing sides of the conflict. In this sense, and very different from the commercial clip discussed that depicted a threatening, antagonistic other, almost lacking humanity, the Bosnian films show the enemy to have the face of one's father, mother, son, daughter or lover, in this manner greatly problematizing war, and the fear and hate for the other. Furthermore, while the war in these films is portrayed as a source of destruction and separation, it nevertheless seems to create, through its traumatic experience, a bond between people from similar as well as from different ethnic groups. People connect trough the trauma of war, also through the trauma of death and birth that war generates. In *Fuse* (2003) it is the death of a Bosnian family's father that brings together Bosnians and Serbians, as both Serbians and Bosnians know well the pain of losing a relative. Furthermore, in *In the Name of the Son* (2007) it is the trauma of a Serbian man who shoots his own son for fighting on the side of Bosnians that allows him to connect to his son's Muslim friend and to accept his Muslim grandchild. Similarly, in *Go West* (2005), it is when a Serbian father is losing his son that he accepts and helps his son's Muslim gay lover. It is not only the experience of death that brings the two sides together – birth does as well. In *Grbavica: The Land of My Dreams* (2006) a woman, through the love for her daughter, deals with her traumatic experience of having been raped numerous times in the war camp by Serbians. Her daughter, a product of these rapes, is nevertheless the one person she loves most. These films show that it is indeed the enigmatic language of trauma of war, of death and birth, of experiences not yet completely grasped that allows people to communicate across the gap between their cultures and their experiences. By insisting on ambiguity and refraining from simple explanations, these films stress people's ability to connect and form communities. These communities do not rely on what they simply know of one another, but on what they do not fully know in their own traumatic experiences. In this manner a new mode of seeing, listening and connecting from the site of trauma opens up (Caruth, 1996).

The different temporality of trauma that disrupts linear narratives further helps us make sense of the way Ismet Prcic's (2011) novel *Shards* is written. *Shards* is the story of a Bosnian man who fled his war-torn homeland and is struggling to reconcile his past with his present life in California. The novel presents us with two parallel temporalities: the one of Ismet Prcic himself as the character who fled the war; and the other of Mustafa, a shadow of the author, who remained and fought the war. We could say that the memory of war trauma refuses to be disciplined into one's personal history, but constantly reemerges as a traumatic present, forcing one to live in two different worlds. This approach to dealing with trauma differs significantly from the first one presented, and entails refraining from covering over the traumatic wound or disciplining it with linear narratives, but, instead, it encourages marking its presence, lingering over, and encircling it again and again. Even though trauma is a sort of memory that cannot be symbolized, described or named (Broderick & Traverso, 2011), it nevertheless can be acknowledged, by allowing – in the sense of remaining open to – its return and disruption of linear narratives. Instead of allowing itself to be integrated within a narrative memory, traumatic recall manifests agency by disrupting and escaping our sense of time and space. Not fixed within the past, trauma is perpetually re-experienced in a painful, dissociated, traumatic present (Edkins, 2003). We could

DOI: 10.1002/ppi

read the refusal to allow symbolic disciplining not as a denial of knowledge of the past, but rather as a way of offering access to knowledge that is not available in narrative memory (Caruth, 1995).

Emancipation possibilities

Trauma triggered by radical social change has the potential to transform phantasy formations in a third way which brings about possibilities for emancipation. This is because, at the point when old identities, cherished plans and dreams are no longer valid, when the social context stops being seen as all-powerful and holding all answers, we could become aware of and understand certain social aspects that are hard to acknowledge in everyday life. The traumatic confrontation with the limitations of the Symbolic and with the lack at the core of self and social authority could lead to awareness, or more specifically to what Lacan calls *traversing the fantasme*, and to the possibility of a revolutionary political act. The crossing or traversing of the fantasme expresses the subject's ability to become aware of his or her fundamental phantasy without guilt feelings or fears (Lander & Filc, 2006). Referring to this fundamental phantasy Lacan stressed that it constrains the subject by creating a situation in which the "game is already played, the die already cast. It is cast, with the following proviso, that we can pick it up again, and throw it anew" (Lacan and Miller (1988), p. 219). Through an act one gains the opportunity to re-throw the dice (Pluth, 2007). A new throw means a reconfiguration of the fundamental phantasy and thus a new relation to the Other, making possible the situation in which the subject stops looking for validation in the Other (Fink, 1997). An act brings about an event that triggers something new into the world that changes the significance of the very terms by which we had previously comprehended the situation. More specifically, it changes the phantasy coordinates by which we grasp a situation. It transforms what counts as significant in the framing of a situation (Rothenberg, 2010). The political act rejects the cover provided by the Other. In this sense, acts differ from phantasy because they situate one outside the Other's law, and for this reason it is appropriate to consider acts to be transgressive (Pluth, 2007). Instead of looking for authorization in the Other, the act will "authorize itself only in itself" (Lenin & Žižek, 2002, p. 243) as an act creates its own (new) rationality.

Žižek illustrated this situation with an example specific to the 1989 Romanian revolution. He referred to an image which, during the revolution, was often displayed as a symbol of change. This image was the national flag with the coat of arms of the Romanian Socialist Republic incorporating the red star, the Communist symbol, cut out, so that instead of the symbol standing for the organizing principle of national life, there was nothing but a hole in its center. The image marked the rupture, the moment at which the old master signifier, the old social order and the phantasy that supported it, was losing hegemonic power, and a new social order was not yet set in place (Žižek, 1993). The place of the Other is left empty. A second example Žižek discussed was the moment in which people's investment in the power of the Romanian communist regime simply vanished, at the famous mass rally in Bucharest. The rally was called by Ceauşescu after the demonstrations in Timisoara in order to prove that he still held popular support. The crowd started to shout at Ceauşescu, who then raised his hands in, what Žižek called, a tragi-comic and bewildered display of impotent paternal love, as if wanting to embrace them all. As Žižek (1993) pointed out, in that moment, nothing really great happened, yet "nothing was the same as before" (p. 234) – what a moment ago evoked a mixture of fear and respect, was now experienced as a rather different mixture of ridiculous imposture and brutal,

DOI: 10.1002/ppi

illegitimate display of force. Such moments open up the possibility of assuming fully the "nonexistence of the Other" or, as Žižek put it, of "tarrying with the negative" (ibid., p. 237).

Death as structure of phantasy invalidation

In the fourth instance, trauma generated by radical social change has the ability to erase the very national structure of phantasy, pattern of thought, or matrix at the base of narratives produced in a social space. As previously discussed, this matrix creates the subject, and all the additional traumas need to be integrated within it. When a traumatic experience is too powerful, it could destroy this very matrix. In this case we are dealing with the death of the subject as one is losing his/her very core. This situation could be illustrated with the historical trauma experienced by the Native American community. Historical trauma is conceptualized as a collective complex trauma inflicted on a community over generations and encompasses the psychological and social responses to such events (Evans-Campbell, 2008). Historical trauma is collective, while events occurring at different time periods come to be seen as part of a single traumatic trajectory. Furthermore, scholars have suggested that the effects of these historically traumatic events are transmitted intergenerationally (Brave Heart, 1999). Although the events involved may have occurred over the course of many years and generations, they continue to have clear impacts on contemporary individual and family health, mental health and identity (Evans-Campbell, 2008).

The experience of the Native American community represents one of the most systematic programs of ethnic cleansing the world has seen (Whitbeck, Adams, Hoyt, & Chen, 2004). It included: community massacres; genocidal policies; pandemics from introduction of new diseases; forced relocation; forced removal of children through Indian boarding school policies; and prohibition of spiritual and cultural practices: amounting to a painful history of ethnic and cultural genocide (Evans-Campbell, 2008). Responses to historical trauma include: substance abuse and other types of self-destructive behavior; suicidal thoughts and gestures; depression; anxiety; low self-esteem; anger, and difficulty in recognizing and expressing emotions (Brave Heart, 1999). The number of suicide victims among Native American youth (ages 15–24) is estimated to be three to four times higher than of other ethnic groups (Echohawk, 1997; Novins et al., 2012). These responses speak of the severe problems the Native American community faces in integrating the traumatic experience within their phantasy structure and continuing life in the Symbolic. Carl Gustav Jung (1958) brought attention to the fact that the myths – and, I would add, the phantasy structure that shapes them – are the psychic life of a tribe, which immediately falls to pieces and decays when it loses its mythological heritage. The Native American historical trauma caused a dismantling of the entire structure of phantasy that shaped the reality of the community, by actions directed at "civilizing" children, transforming the tribal social organization, and destroying the spiritual practices and the use of Native American languages. Tribal cohesiveness was transformed into chaos and social disarray because of the intervention of unfamiliar systems upon Native American tribes (Echohawk, 1997). Native American children were removed from their families to attend boarding schools where the use of Indian languages was forbidden. Students were sent out to live with white families during vacation times, and native religions were suppressed (Echohawk, 1997). The intention was that the children would be "civilized", and reject the values and lifestyle of their parents. In this manner the distance created between Native American children and their traditional culture

DOI: 10.1002/ppi

has served to alter the cohesiveness of the tribes (Echohawk, 1997), leading to the invalidation of the community. The new subject that emerges out of the historical trauma survives its own death, the death (erasure) of its symbolic identity. As Žižek (2008) wrote, there is no continuity between this new "post-traumatic" subject and its old identity. He described the features of the new subject as lack of emotional engagement, profound indifference, and detachment. More specifically, it is a subject who is no longer "in-the-world" in the Heideggerian sense of engaged embodied existence. This subject lives death as a form of life, his/her life is death-drive embodied, a life deprived of erotic engagement (Žižek, 2008).The new form is not a form of life but, rather, a form of death – not an expression of the Freudian death drive, but more directly, the death drive itself (Žižek, 2008). The destruction of the structure of phantasy deprives the subject of an engaged existence and of a loss of reality itself.

CONCLUSION

This article has brought attention to social trauma triggered by radical social change and further discussed how trauma could be dealt with in phantasy formations. The research insists that radical social change is most likely to result in social trauma because of its ability to expose aspects of the social which are hard to acknowledge in everyday life, such as the emptiness at the center of self and the lacking, biased, and ungrounded nature of social authority. In other words, its traumatic dimension comes from unveiling the limits of the Symbolic, and from staging a confrontation with the Real. The model uses a Lacanian framework that has as its main focus the study of trauma in grounding, structuring, and reconfiguring the social. This framework understands phantasy formations to have three key components – discourse, topography of commonplaces, and structure of phantasy – which have particular configurations, due to initial as well as subsequent traumas. Its strong agency in shaping phantasy positions trauma as a main element in creating communities, for it shapes the way its members understand the world and the way they relate to it. The article has addressed the particularities of the three phantasy formation components and continued by proposing four ways in which they could be changed by radical social change. Traumatic radical social change could lead to: creation of linear national narratives that cover over and discipline the traumatic wound, reinforcing in the process the state and the nation; an openness to the effects of trauma, by allowing its interruption of linear narratives; an awareness of the constraints imposed by the national phantasy coordinates and a reconfiguration of these coordinates; or a destruction of the national structure of phantasy leading to a post-traumatic subject that can no longer engage within the Symbolic register. In this sense radical social change could lead to furthering the social constraints, creative openness to the Real, awareness and emancipation, or to Symbolic death.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Sean P. Quinn, Hasmet M. Uluorta, Keith Tudor, and the anonymous reviewers for inspiring conversations and comments which helped materialize various aspects of this article.

DOI: 10.1002/ppi

REFERENCES

Alexander, J. C., & Butler Breese, E. (2011). Introduction: On social suffering and its cultural construction. In R. Eyerman, J. C. Alexander, & E. B. Breese (Eds.), *Narrating trauma: On the impact of collective suffering* (pp. xi–xxxv). Boulder, CO: Paradigm.

Anderson, B. (2006). *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (new edn). New York, NY: Verso.

Andreescu, F. (2011). The changing face of the Other in Romanian films. *Nationalities Papers*, *39*(1), 77–94.

Bormann, E. G. (1985). *The force of fantasy: Restoring the American dream*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.

Borneman, J. (Ed.), (2004). *Death of the father: An anthropology of the end in political authority*. New York, NY: Berghahn Books.

Brave Heart, M. Y. H. (1999). Oyate Ptayela: Rebuilding the Lakota Nation through addressing historical trauma among Lakota parents. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, *2*(1–2), 109–126.

Brett, E. A., & Ostroff, R. (1985). Imagery and posttraumatic stress disorder: An overview. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, *142*(4), 417–424.

Broderick, M., & Traverso, A. (2011). *Interrogating trauma: Collective suffering in global arts and media*. London, UK: Routledge.

Caruth, C. (Ed.), (1995). *Trauma: Explorations in memory*. Baltimore, MA: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Caruth, C. (1996). *Unclaimed experience: Trauma, narrative, and history*. Baltimore, MA: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Chrysler. (February 5, 2012). Halftime in America: Official Chrysler Super Bowl 2012 commercial [Video file]. Retrieved from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_PE5V4Uzobc.

Echohawk, M. (1997). 7 Suicide: The scourge of Native American people. *Suicide and life-threatening behavior*, *27*(1), 60–67.

Edkins, J. (2003). *Trauma and the memory of politics*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Eisenstein, P., & McGowan, T. (2012). *Rupture: On the emergence of the political*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.

Erikson, K. (1995). Notes on trauma and community. In C. Caruth (Ed.), *Trauma: Explorations in memory* (pp. 159–183). Baltimore, MA: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Evans-Campbell, T. (2008). Historical trauma in American Indian/Native Alaska communities: A multilevel framework for exploring impacts on individuals, families, and communities. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, *23*(3), 316–338.

Fink, B. (1995). *The Lacanian subject: Between language and jouissance*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Fink, B. (1997). *A clinical introduction to Lacanian psychoanalysis: Theory and technique*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Freud, S. (1955). *The interpretation of dreams*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Giddens, A. (1991). *Modernity and self-identity: Self and society in the late modern age*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Homer, S. (2005). *Jacques Lacan*. London, UK: Routledge.

Howarth, D. R., Norval, A. J., & Stavrakakis, Y. (Eds.), (2000). *Discourse theory and political analysis: Identities, hegemonies and social change*. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press.

Imamović, A., & Puška, E. (2005). *Go West*. Sarajevo, Bosnia & Herzegovina: Comprex.

Jackson, P. T. (2005). Relational constructivism: A war of words. In J. Sterling-Folker (Ed.), *Making sense of international relations theory* (pp. 139–156). Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner.

Jung, C. G. (1958). *Psyche and symbol: A selection from the writings of C. G Jung*. (V. S. de Laszlo Ed.). New York, NY: Anchor Books Doubleday.

Kellermann, P. F. (2007). *Sociodrama and collective trauma*. London, UK: Jessica Kingsley.

Lacan, J., & Fink, B. (2006). *Écrits*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton.

Lacan, J., & Miller, J.-A. (1988). *The seminar of Jacques Lacan*. New York, NY: Norton.

Lacan, J., Miller, J.-A., & Tomaselli, S. (1988). *The seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book 2: The ego in Freud's theory and in the technique of psychoanalysis, 1954–1955*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

DOI: 10.1002/ppi

Laclau, E. (1996). *Emancipation(s)*. New York, NY: Verso.
Laing, R. D. (1960). *The divided self: A study of sanity and madness*. London, UK: Tavistock Publications.
Lander, R., & Filc, J. (2006). *Subjective experience and the logic of the other*. New York, NY: Other Press.
Lenin, V. I., & Žižek, S. (2002). *Revolution at the gates: A selection of writings from February to October 1917*. London, UK: Verso.
McGowan, T. (2007). *The real gaze: Film theory after Lacan*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
Mehmedinovic, H. (2007). *In the name of the son*. Sarajevo, Bosnia & Herzegovina: Ajfelov Most, American Film Institute (AFI), & NOS Films.
Mitzen, J. (2006). Ontological security in world politics: State identity and the security dilemma. *European Journal of International Relations*, *12*(3), 341–370.
Moreno, J. L. (1969). *Psychodrama*. Beacon, NY: Beacon House.
Novins, D. K., Spicer, P., Fickenscher, A., & Pescosolido, B. (2012). Pathways to care: Narratives of American Indian adolescents entering substance abuse treatment. *Social Science and Medicine*, *74*(12), 2037–2045.
Pluth, E. (2007). *Signifiers and acts: Freedom in Lacan's theory of the subject*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
Prcic, I. (2011). *Shards: A novel*. New York, NY: Grove Press, Black Cat.
Rose, J. (1996). *States of fantasy*. Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press.
Rothenberg, M. A. (2010). *The excessive subject: A new theory of social change*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
Sarup, M. (1992). *Jacques Lacan*. Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press.
Saussure, F. (1959). *Course in general linguistics*. New York, NY: Philosophical Library.
Schick, K. (2012). *Gillian Rose: A good enough justice*. Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press.
Stavrakakis, Y. (1999). *Lacan and the political*. London, UK: Routledge.
Sztompka, P. (2000). Cultural trauma: The other face of social change. *European Journal of Social Theory*, *3*(4), 449–466.
Whitbeck, L. B., Adams, G. W., Hoyt, D. R., & Chen, X. (2004). Conceptualizing and measuring historical trauma among American Indian people. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, *33*(3–4), 119–130.
Žalica, P., Kenović,A., Bešlagić, E., Diklić, B., Petrović, S., & Bajrović, I. (2003). *Gori Vatra* [*Fuse*]. Sarajevo, Bosnia & Herzegovina: Refresh Production and Novotny & Novotny Filmproduktion.
Žbanić, J., Karanović, M., Lučev, L., & Ćatić, K. (2006). *Grbavica: The land of my dreams*. Sarajevo, Bosnia & Herzegovina: Coop99 Filmproduktion.
Žižek, S. (1993). *Tarrying with the negative: Kant, Hegel, and the critique of ideology*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
Žižek, S. (2008). Descartes and the post-traumatic subject. *Filozofski Vestnik*, *29*(2), 9–29.

Florentina C. Andreescu teaches International Studies at the University of North Carolina, Wilmington, North Carolina, USA. Combining insights from the study of politics, global economy, and psychoanalysis, her research investigates issues of legitimization and social authority, body, identity, trauma, aesthetics, and radical social change. She has written for journals such as: *Nationalities Papers, Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism and Ethnicity*, *Space and Culture*, *Studia Politica: Romanian Political Science Review*, *Journal For Cultural Research*, and *Short Film Studies*. She is presently working on an edited volume titled *Genre and the (Post) Communist Woman Analyzing Transformations of the Central and Eastern European Female Ideal*.

DOI: 10.1002/ppi