

Erlich, Shmuel (Israel) Chair
Ermann, Michael; Pflichthofer, Diana; Kamm, Harald (Germany) Presenters

Children of Nazi-Germany. Representation of their childhood sixty years later

In this panel three research studies from Germany are presented. They evaluate the representation of the childhood at the NS time and in World War II in psychoanalytically oriented research interviews. They deal with the images and traces of the childhood with focus on memories of the childhood and conceptions of the war and the NS time, on individual, family and transgenerational mastering processes, self concept and identity, relationships to the parents, family involvement into the NS system, shame, guilt feelings and guilt acceptance.

Involvement, shame and guilt

Michael Ermann, München¹

It is a moving moment to present on the subject of Nazi Germany in the first congress of the IPA in the capital of Germany since the gloomy period when this country and its criminal ideology overwhelmed Europe with war and terror and brought incomprehensible sorrow to its peoples. And it is not easy in the face of millions of victims to deal with the trauma which Germans themselves have suffered by that catastrophe which they had brought to others.

But after 60 years there is an increasing readiness to reconsider the fact that the war which had been incited by the Nazis also reached increasingly the civilian population of Germany in a devastating way. A huge number of children became traumatized by violence and loss of relatives, by bombing, destruction and displacement, by illness, hunger and emotional deprivation.

The violations of those children of Nazi Germany were denied for decades during the post-war time when at least Western Germany was dominated by hypomanic defense against shock, guilt feelings and shame about the crimes which they had tolerated or even participated in, but also shame about their fascination, about being seduced by and having submitted to the terror system.

The parents of the children of Nazi Germany – who were the children of the First World War themselves – were paralyzed by shock, post-war depression, and by what the Mitscherlichs called the inability to mourn due to the involvement of most of the German families into the Nazi terror in one or the other way. They were incapable to share their feelings with their children as well as to share the feelings of their children. Worried and burdened themselves, many of them parentified their children and made them supporters of their own coping process. Mothers who had to bear the burden of war and post-war experiences, being left alone without husbands and having to substitute the father to their children. Fathers, who returned from the war disappointed as losers, many of them hurt, or who came home from prison as weakened, ill and broken men.

Many of these children became carriers of the hope and future and supporters of their parents. They devoted their lives to the restoration of the families and of the parents' self - working hard and efficiently, taking responsibility and gaining success. They denied their personal belongings and identified with those of the family. They substituted the partners, and many never lived an independent life.

As the parental generation was occupied by own problems and denial, few of the children of Nazi Germany got adequate attention and support for their feelings and suffering. Trying not to load the parents, they did not ask and did not talk. They were left alone with what they felt about others, and they were left alone with themselves. Lacking reflection of their own and others' experiences, they became deaf in respect to their biography and that of their family. They knew the facts, but these did not touch them. By this way, they became the mute heirs of a history which they did not deeply

¹ Prof. Dr. med. Michael Ermann, Abt. Psychotherapie und Psychosomatik, Nussbaumstr. 7, D-80336 München. michael.ermann@med.uni-muenchen.de

understand. Thus, in the last consequence, they did not really understand themselves and failed self identity.

It happened not before the end of the century that public attention turned to the meanwhile aging children of the Nazi Germany. This happened after a long and exhausting period of ambivalent remembering of what had been done to the Jewish and other victims of the NS terror, and after it had been more or less become accepted, that being a victim of the terror, and being traumatized from the war which was incited by the own country, is fundamentally different and must not be compared.

It was in those days that in preparing a conference on childhood the topic of war children came for the first time into my professional thinking. Being a war baby myself, it became obvious to me how little the fact of being born during the war time in Nazi Germany had touched me in my self analysis and during the years of my previous psychoanalytic practice. I was surprised and ashamed. And I began to look for how that could have happened.

What I found in myself was a complex of different feelings and attitudes. One is the diffidence against my parents which filled me with a deep ambivalence in regard to the biography of my family. I felt a tendency towards idealization - blowing up humanistic thinking and solidarity of my family with sufferings. But I also recognized that I always had hesitated to get realistic information about the biography of my family during the NS time. I had never asked for the facts in detail. Today I have understood that I was frightened to meet both - the Nazi and the traumatized part of my parents, and in the last consequence to have it reflected within myself.

Another obstacle is the ambiguity as a German towards the Jews. It constituted for a long time a tension which had disabled me to regard my personal violations. The encounter with Jewish colleagues, especially during the Nazareth meetings of Israelis and Germans, had taught me that being born as a German for ever is attaching to the heritage of the Nazis. This heritage keeps the recognition live that we as Germans are on the side of the perpetrators. In one of those meetings in Nazareth this perpetration was dramatically put into a scene when I was the initiator to keep the Jewish subgroup out of the meeting room there. I was deeply ashamed to be confronted with my Nazi introject just in Israel.

On the background of these reflections and ideas we started to study the long term implications of the childhood in war. So we founded in 2003 a project at the University of Munich² which is dealing with the conscious and unconscious representations of the II. WW and of the NS time in Germans who were born between 1933 and 1945. We examine the self assessment as children of Nazi Germany and what they think about their biography and their relationships. How can the experiences from a war be processed where fascination and being frightened, perpetration and trauma were so close together?

The object of this project is not simply characterized by the word "war childhood". It is indicated by the term "war childhood in the NS time and its consequences". Which traces has the intrusion of this confusing and devastating outer reality left to the unformed inner world of those children – and how were they mastered?

Our project is still running. We have carried out almost 100 interviews with people out of a sample of 900 applicants who contacted us spontaneously after the project was announced in the media. It was an overwhelming response which reflected the need to communicate which had aroused among that specific generation in the context of a media campaign due to the war memorial days of 2005 in Germany. Several applicants reported that they had felt isolated for decades with their destiny, with anxieties and feelings of alienation. They felt relieved by our initiative, and many of those who were not invited to personal interviews were disappointed.

The semi-structured interview is lasting around two hours and covers the memories and knowledge about experiences during the war and the post-war time, about the family (and especially the parents) during the National Socialism and war time, about the later psychosocial development and about

² Project „Children in War“ at the University of Munich. M. Ermann (head), A. Bauer E. Heidtmann, H. Kamm, M. Kohnert, T. Krüger, K. Monsees, C. Müller (present members of the Munich Study Group).
www.warchildhood.net

contemporary attitudes and opinions. The interviews are transcribed totally and undergo a qualitative analysis which is at present in the state of development. For the occasion being, it is enough to say that we analyse special object representations, e.g. the representation of the concepts "my mother" or "NS time". Each representation is regarded in respect to three levels:

- 1) the manifest contents, e.g. violence during the flight
- 2) latent contents and mechanisms like ambivalence or unconscious affects and feelings which become obvious for the raters, especially by evaluation of their counter-transference,
- 3) formal manifestations during the interview like contradictions or silence

By an additional assessment linguistic aspects are identified as markers of the stability of the representations.

It would be too early to present definite results. Our group is still in the state of training in order to gain sufficient rating reliability especially in regard to latent contents. Nevertheless I want to share only two of my personal impressions from more than 40 interviews which I carried out during the last two years. I want to speak about the motivation to participate in the interviews and about ambivalence in regard to the Nazi war which became recognizable for me.

One of my strongest impressions was that most of my interview partners had a double motivation to participate: Self-pity and selflessness. On the one hand they gave me the feeling of coming like a saviour who is granting late atonement for their long lasting suffering. Being interviewed sixty years after the Nazi war meant to them not only recognition of their early fate but also gratification for the silence in their families and in public which they had suffered during the long decades thereafter. "We always were alone ..." "Nobody cared for what was going on within me..." "I do not know whether anybody can understand what that meant." They were somehow proud of how they had mastered their lives out of themselves, but now they longed for late satisfaction.

On the other hand, they wanted to present their story in order to help others – the children from the wars of today. Many of them had followed an altruistic way of life and had cared for weak and suffering persons – parents, siblings, partners. Most of them had lead their lives efficient and conscientious, serving the self esteem of their families. Some could spell this out openly, others let me feel how they had neglected their own needs in order to satisfy their families. Sometimes they had overtaxed themselves, followed by illness and breakdown. Very often these mastering processes were accompanied by an internal dialog which became obvious in my counter-transference – admiration and guilt feelings. I felt as if it was me who had not supported them. I understood that those people never had gained appreciation for what they had done, but inducing guilt feelings in me, it became obvious why they had done so: They felt deeply guilty in the relationship to their parents.

Shame and guilt feelings are important topics in our interviews. It was only in a few cases that my partners spelled out these feelings spontaneously. Some had been to visit the concentration camps and were distressed by what they had seen. Others were deeply impressed by movies about the persecution and the Shoa. Some had even been engaged in reparation actions. But these attitudes seemed to me separated from hidden parts of the personality which came to the floor when they were less controlled when describing their memories. Then, a very complex world became live – a world of anxiety and fascination, where they had lived to see dramatic threat and violence as well as exciting adventures. It was not so seldom, that telling about German soldiers or shot American fighter-bombers evoke enthusiasm, admiration and pride and gave room to repressed identifications to emerge. When my interview partners realised that mood, they gave me the impression to be ashamed. Then I felt representative of a repressive world which did not allow but what was conform to political correctness.

In the same way I experienced ambivalence in regard to the assessment of the NS ideology. Some interview partners told openly about the involvement of their family into the system and seemed to take responsibility for it. A few others reported convincingly that their families or part of them were in opposition to the system; attachment to the church or to the antifascist movement seemed to have helped them to keep distance.

But most participants of our research denied their knowledge about the activity of the parents and other relatives during the NS. Their families had refused to give space to that theme after the war as well as most families avoided to deal with anti-Semitism and persecution openly. But when describing

what had really happened and what they remembered, there appeared contradictions which showed deeper involvement, sometimes even collaboration. Some interviewees recognized those contradictions – as they said – for the first time. Others played them down. For me as interviewer it was important to control my persecuting counter-transference and to understand that there was a deeper identification with the Nazi part of their parents. It created a loyalty conflict which caused paranoid anxieties in them and made me the persecutor.

From this experience I come to a general conclusion as to what I personally have learned from my interviews. I have learned that topics which are involved into the NS history of Germany bear a potential for splitting. As an interviewer about the subject of the childhood in the NS war, I felt two different tendencies in respect to my own attitude towards the interviewed persons. The one was to identify with them as "victims" – in our case as "victims of the war" – neglecting the fact that their trauma was a consequence and repercussion of the political development for which we Germans have to take responsibility. The other tendency was to take the position of the persecutor who intends to uncover the Nazi identifications of the interviewed. Especially for a German, both these tendencies are serving as a defense against the recognition of the personal involvement into the share of responsibility for the German history – finally against shame and guilt feelings within oneself.

This splitting is keeping the complexity of the truth out of mind. The truth is that we have to bear the tension coming from the fact that trauma and perpetration are so close together in us Germans and the NS past of our country. It is hard to accept that children of the perpetrators and the approving majority are traumatized children as well.

Another truth is that the suffering of the children of Nazi Germany must not be offset to what the Nazi have done to the victims. To bear this tension is the developmental challenge in dealing with the past of this country and hopefully a resource of mental growth.

Transgenerational transmission of the displacement

Diana Pflighthofer, Hamburg³

The small town where I grew up lies about 30 km from the former concentration camp of Bergen-Belsen. The first concentration camp memorial I visited was, however, in Dachau, some 800 km away. I can still remember the shock and indescribable horror I and my schoolmates experienced there. As a nine-year old, I had already heard of the events of the end of the Second World War and the flight from east Prussia from my grandmother. I still remember many horrible details of this flight which my grandmother, with her three children, survived. My mother, two years old at that time, was one of these children. I heard these stories on many occasions. On the other hand, I only found out about the concentration camps, and the one near my home town, and the murder of millions of Jews from books and I first heard of them at school.

Werner Bohleber has said at today's congress:

»[...] the open discussion with the generation of the parents frequently stopped at the house door. The silence and denial on the societal level had been broken but continued on the individual level« (Bohleber 2007, p. 316).

The small town I grew up in was bombed on the 11th April 1945 by the British air force. Civilians were killed. A goods train of cattle trucks was standing at the station platform at the time. The trucks were full of people who were being transported to the concentration camp in Bergen-Belsen. The guards fled during the bombardment of the town and a group of the captives was able to escape. The order to recapture them was given. The Hitler Youth was given arms. 90 of the prisoners were murdered by the citizens of the town. On the 11th April 2007 a memorial to honour the victims of the Nazi terror regime, consisting of eight of the trial monoliths of the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin, was inaugurated. A week later, a citizen who at the time of the bombardment was eleven years old and had been buried under rubble, complained in the local newspaper that, while the victims of the Nazi regime

³ Dr. med. Diana Pflighthofer, Petkumstraße 1, D-22085 Hamburg, E-Mail: pflighthofer@t-online.de

were being remembered, the victims of the 'bomb terror' in the town were not. On the day of the inauguration, the publisher of the same newspaper, a lawyer, wrote an article in which he claimed that no such train had stood at the station. I was scandalised by this denial and wrote a reader's letter to express the intolerability of such euphemistic arguments. The then boy who had been buried under the rubble called me and accused me of ignorance, of uncritical adoption of the theories of the occupying powers and of not remembering and honouring the victims of the bombings. We talked for a long time and I discovered a great deal about the still prevalent processes of denial, particularly those on the emotional level. Sentences like "Yes, of course what Hitler did wasn't right" seem to want to demonstrate the success of a "denazification" while showing a complete lack of emotional conviction. At the end of the telephone conversation, the man told me that he could not convince his children either.

He feels alone, even today, and cheated of the acknowledgement of his suffering which is so important to him. He does not know that he is looking for this acknowledgement in the "false object". He still sees the English and the Americans as the real perpetrators: even today, he cannot see his parents' generation as the cause of his suffering.

It is so very difficult for the war children of the Second World War to recognise their traumata, embodied as they are in the even greater trauma involving the annihilation of millions of people and for which their parents were responsible.

The massive resistance to this view, with its idealisation of the father as one of its bastions, is understandable when one bears in mind as Leuschner points out in his article "War children and »68«": defensive action is necessary against the marked infanticidal impulses of the fathers.

The war children were not just threatened by any war, but by a war for which their fathers were responsible and a war in which their fathers had left them completely defenceless. And when the gruesome crimes of the parents against millions of human beings became known, the fantasy became reality; other children had suffered. Particularly in the last throes of the Nazi regime, their own children became victims of their infanticidal impulses. The Nazi fathers, in the face of the destruction of their megalomaniacal illusions and their own deaths, and in the knowledge that their deeds would become known, took their children with them.

After this conversation, I was upset, angry and distressed. I felt helpless and powerless, the victim of an ongoing Nazi ideology. At this time, our research project⁴, which was concerned with the trans-generational transmission of war traumata, had been in existence for two years. The events I have just described confronted me once again, and in an absolutely compelling and unavoidable fashion, with the questions regarding what we were actually researching and why we had initiated such a project.

The answers which we can offer and which are probably only of a provisional nature are the following:

1. There is the wish for reparation, also for the very reason that there can be no reparation. This wish cannot be 'turned off'. And there is a corresponding 'task' for the generations which follow the collapse of civilisation. Adorno begins his essay '*Education after Auschwitz*' with the appeal:
 »The demand that Auschwitz should not happen again is the prime demand on education. It goes so much further than the others that I neither believe I have to justify it nor should I« (Adorno 1967, p. 85)

To assume the responsibility for this belongs unquestionably to our German heritage, to the heritage of all succeeding generations and thus to mine, the third post-war generation.

2. There is the unconscious wish to settle the hitherto unexpressed conflicts with the other generation. Leuschner maintains that the majority of the war children clung to the "earlier idealisations" and "in contrast to their 'bad' brothers and sisters" never reneged on the 'pact of denial'.

»They were not conscious of the fact that they had failed to come to terms with their inner and outer enemy, [...] and thus remained alone with their phobias of destruction« (Leuschner 2006, p. 373).

⁴ Hamburg Research »War Children And Their Flight. The Transgenerational Transmission of the Traumata« (Diana Pflighthofer, Mercedes Dohrn-van Rossum, Hans-Joachim Heist, Etelka Horvath-Höhling, Wolfgang Neumann)

These 'phobias of destruction' also seem, in one form or another, to permeate our work on the research project. The wish to come to terms with the respective other generation, as well as the associated apprehension, is still present. It is probably this subconscious wish which motivated both our interview partners to take part in this project and also ourselves to initiate and organise it. The fact that we ourselves are a part of this unresolved generation conflict could throw light on the occasionally vehement dynamic processes within the group.

A further question which continually arose was that regarding the *why now?*

Schneider, Stillke and Leineweber establish the following in their work *Trauma and Criticism*:

»What a generation *is*: what it stands for, and what significance is attached to it, can never in the last resort be determined by its own form. It is part of the logic of the relationship of generations to each other that the *adult* form of the succeeding generation throws the correct light on the contours of the preceding one« (Schneider/Stillke/Leineweber 2000, p. 36).

This important observation throws once again a somewhat different light on the question why the interest in the generation of the war children is *now* so great.

One of the most frequently given answers, namely that we *may* only now deal with the issue because the processes of coming to terms with the past are more advanced so that an analysis is only now made possible, is one part of the answer.

The question as to what the war children generation really *is* and what significance it has can, according to the thesis mentioned, only be understood by looking at the succeeding adult generation as its contours clearly reflect those of the parent generation. Leuschner thus sees precisely the lack of confrontation between the 'good' war children and their parents as 'one of the constituting factors of the war children group', as their loyalty towards the parent generation prevents the 'inner separation from the father-introjections' and leads to an inhibited development. In such a case there is the danger that the introjection lives on unconsciously, while intensely resisted and rejected on the conscious level.

I would now like to briefly describe our project and later present two aspects of our work and our resulting hypotheses.

Our group consists of six male and female psychoanalysts of different generations both as far as age and also professional training are concerned. We carried out interviews with war children born between 1930 and 1945 who not only suffered the war years but also experienced the flight from the east. Their children were also interviewed. So far we have arranged that a member of the 'older' generation of psychoanalysts (whether according to real age or time of professional qualification) carried out the interviews with the war child and a member of the younger generation those with the son or daughter.

Two interviews and one supervision take place. Afterwards both interviewers present their interviews in a group process which is also supervised. Several group sessions are then held to discuss the progress to date and to develop psychodynamic hypotheses on each trans-generational transmission.

I now come to an aspect and result of our group work – the dynamics in the group – which is both surprising and striking:

Although it was clear to each of us that we would be dealing with traumatic experiences, extremely destructive introjections and an entwined shame and guilt complex, we experienced phases – generally during the non-supervised sessions (!) – where the group went through massively destructive processes. These led not only to deep dissociations in the group and threatened to destroy our ability to work analytically but also pushed us to the limits of what we personally could bear. So much so that the idea and anxiety that the group would not survive this process and also that individual members of the group could suffer real harm accompanied us constantly.

As far as we can assess at present, the theme of these massively destructive processes is a reflection of the heritage of the war children: the *National Socialist Introject*, which seems to be found in a dense capsule of shame and guilt.

The content of this introjection is reflected in the themes which preoccupied the group: the remains of the National Socialist ideology of discrimination, destruction, defamation of the weak and needy, the narcissistic illusion of racial superiority, invincibility and subordination (and loss) of individuality to the 'cause'. This introjection can be a component of the generation conflict. Because it is in the unconscious of the war children, it is a barrier to the conflict-resolution with and separation from the parents and their ideology.

The following is an example:

My colleague carried out two interviews with Mr. B. who was one and a half years old at the time of the flight from the east. He was his 'mother's darling', remembered nothing whatsoever of the flight and now, in old age, must suddenly cry bitterly for no apparent reason. He identifies strongly with his mother. The father spent 6 months as a prisoner of war, was thereafter a successful engineer, a very strict man who at the age of eight had to attend a cadet academy. Mr. B. was 'proud to be a refugee and not a displaced person'. Displaced persons were, he said, 'scum'. This is the point where the theme, for Mr. B. completely unconscious and with which the group was – somewhat later - to be very intensely occupied, presented itself for the first time: the National Socialist vocabulary 'scum' and the associated concept of those 'unfit to live', the weak to whom you must not belong if you are to survive, discrimination in order to destroy those discriminated against and thus save oneself. Mr. B. became a teacher but when he was not able to get a place to complete his practical training, he suffered panic attacks and a paranoid anxiety that he would starve and was admitted to a psychiatric hospital. The collapse occurred because Mr. B. could not live up to the ideal, showed weakness and was not strong and invincible. The resulting regression punishes him with the threat of starvation. The feelings of weakness and inadequacy lead to overwhelming feelings of shame which, together with the feeling of guilt, can only be resisted with tremendous effort.

Mr. B. describes the relationship to his daughter as very good; he is proud of her. The daughter is healing for Mr. B's narcissistic wounds; she pays a high price for this.

I carried out the interviews with the daughter, who was afraid she could only give me unimportant, uninteresting or 'false' information. She later told me of her chronic anxiety to say anything at school, although she was a very good pupil, and of her permanent anxiety to show herself. She got on with her parents. Her father was demanding, always wanted to hear sensible reasons and did not accept emotional ones. She frequently had to mediate in her parents' quarrels and felt obliged to comfort her mother when she lay crying and depressed in bed. She knew little about her parents' past. I concluded that the daughter had the function of containing the father's unbearable feelings of shame. She feels chronically ashamed and also guilty but does not know why. I only later heard from the colleague who presented her work with Mr. B. that he had frequently beaten his wife. The daughter had not mentioned this with a single word, remained 'loyal' to him. At this point in time the destructive effect of the father's introjection was not completely clear to us. This was to change in the course of the group processes.

My colleague excused herself at short notice from the planned group session for important personal reasons. The group was annoyed, felt isolated and set back, could not decide whether to continue or postpone the work. It did not seem right to continue as the father, represented by the colleague, would not be present and the daughter, represented by myself, would again be alone. It did not seem right to postpone the session as that would be interpreted as a punishment of the colleague. The group expressed its irritation to the colleague who then felt misunderstood, excluded and hurt – to such an extent that, as she was later able to tell us, she considered leaving the group. At the same time, a further phenomenon could be recognised; although the 'father' was not present, everything revolved around him. There seemed to be no room for the daughter. This was also reflected in the minutes of the sessions taken by the individual members; while a lot of thought about the father was expressed and recorded, most members could hardly remember the daughter and wrote, at the most, a single sentence about her. The daughter had in fact become uninteresting and invisible. Only during the subsequent laborious analysis of the group process did the following become clear to us:

- The implantation of the Introject in the group leads to massive splitting and exclusion tendencies which could initially not be symbolised but had to be concretely acted out.
- The fantasy exists that through a single 'wrong word' one could be excluded for ever. This runs parallel to the feeling of complete lack of trust in all object relationships.
- The unconscious tendency arises to demand a complete commitment to the 'cause' and to put individual interests in the background.

- A massive regression anxiety arises, which means weakness and which can mean death, both physical or social.

The transgenerational themes were the transmission of shame and guilt. The feeling of shame which was unbearable for the father could be found again in the daughter who felt ashamed that she even existed.

Erich writes in his *'Personal reflections on the self-image and sense of identity of the Germans'* about his observations at the *Nazareth Conferences*:

»They are full of feelings of shame and guilt and their innermost desire is to be rid of them.(...). One of the astounding findings regarding the German participants was that they grew up without exception in families in which, in very different ways, they were the victims of 'respectable' but at the same time uncomprehending parents who cared for their material well-being but knew nothing of their emotions« (Erich 2007, p. 389).

We can share this view after our hitherto experience of carrying out the interviews. The 'capsule' of feelings of shame and guilt envelops the Introject and at the same time prevents its treatment. It is also part of the National Socialist ideology that shame and guilt are banned from the self in order to become 'insensible' and to externalise them. It seems to me that this mechanism is, among others, transmitted across generations. The war children live with an introjection which sees shame and guilt as signs of weakness and weakness is unconsciously 'not fit to live' and must be destroyed.

It is then frequently the third generation children who take on the task of living with the feelings of shame and guilt. They are the containers for the parents. Trans-generational transmission is also a way of coming to terms with traumata. The 'adult' form of the third generation now shows a contour of the previous generation, the 'war children', their inability to deal with these feelings and to confront themselves with the associated anxieties. None of them could allow this as they would be alone, their parents not being able to offer them the relevant containment. Their children, the third generation children, can now offer this container. The parents, the former war children, can now see, in the mirror of their own children, that it is possible to live with shame and guilt, that this is part of the human being and that this is a step towards self-empathy which in turn is a step towards a separation from the National Socialist Introject and towards experiencing also oneself as a victim of one's own parents, the perpetrators.

Transference of silence in the psychoanalytic socialisation

Harald Kamm, Bamberg/München⁵

I'd like to give you a brief outline of our study *"Childhood in war and National Socialism and psychoanalytical socialisation"*⁶ with a group of 30 psychoanalysts. The object of the study is to contribute empirical data on what it meant to be a child during World War II and the period of National Socialism in Germany and how this has affected the further personal development, psychoanalytical socialisation and current professional practice as psychoanalysts.

30 members of the *German Psychoanalytic Society, DPG*, who were born as German nationals between 1933 and 1945, take part in our study. We conducted semi-standardized interviews along previously established guidelines with the psychoanalysts. The actual data collection has almost been completed. At the moment we are working on evaluating the material.

There is a chance that we might be able to continue the interviews, to document the statements of eye witnesses of historical events, as a kind of 'oral history'.

I'd like to give you some impressions gained from the interviews I've done so far, a kind of interim report, which includes some of my emotional experiences.

Quotes are from the interviews, unless I mention other sources.

A surprising number of psychoanalysts (67) were prepared to participate in our project. I found conducting the interviews a moving and sometimes upsetting experience. I was met with openness,

⁵ Dipl.-Psych. Harald Kamm, Untere Koenigstrasse 26, 96052 Bamberg, Germany.
harald.kamm@bnv-bamberg.de

⁶ A study of the Childhood in War Project at the University of Munich: www.warchildhood.net

kindness and the willingness to recount difficult, personal and intimate details of their lives to a basically stranger in an interview situation. This impressed and affected me very much. Our project, to interview psychoanalysts born between 1938 and 1945 about their personal lives and their analytic training, has met with some strong criticism. Accusations ranged from "revanchism", an "attempt to relativise German atrocities" in a "competition of victims"⁷ to an "effort to pathologise successful colleagues" as part of "suggestive expectations". Right from the beginning our team found itself faced with critical attitudes to what are indeed problematic aspects. Again and again we became painfully aware of our own involvement and to which extent we are mired in German history. Aftermath and residues of National Socialism, bound by shared emotional defences, are continuously touched in the *Jewish-German supervision/Intervision Group on the after-effects of war and National Socialism in contemporary Psychoanalyses*, which I have been attending now for several years, and which I personally find very helpful and important. However, we do not intend to criticise, let alone pathologise. Together we wanted to establish which aspects of a childhood in World War II and under National Socialism rule could be discussed in a psychoanalyst's training and which could not and how this could be interpreted in a transgenerational context of the peer group.

In other words: how did a childhood during World War II under National Socialism affect the psychoanalytical socialisation? But to deal with this question one really has to take into consideration Germany's difficult history as well as the not less burdened one of the German psychoanalytical societies. Ought the experiences and possible suffering at that time be mentioned at all?

In *Totem and Taboo* Sigmund Freud wrote:

"The greatest suppression must leave room for distorted substitutions and their resulting reactions. But in that case we may assume that no generation is capable of concealing its more important psychic processes from the next."⁸

So to what extent can we talk about a transgenerational transmission in the case of psychoanalysts, too? The means of dissemination are not immediately evident; the content is transmitted in concealed, often mysterious ways, originating in the original, possibly traumatic events and passed on to the next generation. Can we talk about traumatic content or do we run the risk to contribute to a further inflation of the concept of trauma?

I consider it an important issue to talk about lives' history, to face up to the past to prevent it from becoming one's own future. This is the duty of each new generation so that the ghosts of the past may become one's ancestors, even if problematic ones. Is it at all possible to take responsibility where parents and forefathers could not, so that their unsolved conflicts and guilt inevitably become those of the descendants who in turn have to suppress their own suffering and even sacrifice it?

The interviewees often describe the compulsion to empathize with their parents, to learn their untold story, and to feel their suppressed emotions, to get an idea of who they really are. In a kind of reversal of rôles these children attempt to gently empathize with their parents. For the parents they are a bridge to life, they agonisely ponder over their parent's past, trying to fill the emptiness with meaning.

"We always worried about our parents ... I still ask myself why I thought I had to do this and not the grown-ups. It's crazy – I took the responsibility for everybody."

The experiences and history of the parents' generation are implanted into the psychic reality of following generations in a barely noticeable process where they remain as foreign matter. Amigorena and Vignar describe such an implant: "A totalitarian regime is not content with repressing the outer reality by forcing all members of society to live according to a precise code. It forces itself into the psychic world, too, where it establishes itself as a system of checks, hierarchies and surveillance within, as the inner structure of the subject. This is perhaps the most archaic and most disguised form of power. It imprints itself into the unconscious where it remains hidden, becoming a tyrannical, silently working entity."⁹

Faimberg speaks of a "tyrannical penetration of a history"¹⁰ and of a "alienated narcissistic unconscious identification".¹¹

According to Ferenczi the child's life force is also appropriated. Needy parents take from the child whatever they need, sucking it dry and annexing it.¹²

⁷ Chaumont 2001

⁸ Freud 1919, p. 262

⁹ Amigorena & Vignar 1979, p. 610

¹⁰ Faimberg 1987, p. 50

¹¹ Faimberg 2005

When arranging dates for the interviews, appointments were often forgotten or postponed, important other appointments came up, we somehow managed to miss each other, were in the wrong place at the right time or in the right place at the wrong time.

Many interviewees were worried about not being able to contribute anything interesting and important towards my study: "I don't know if I'm the right person for your project."

Often the interview caused obvious affective strain: "I hardly slept all night, and I'm not as bright as I usually am. I was very, very excited. It must have something to do with this, because there's nothing else happening that is important."

Most of the interviewees recounted that the war and National Socialism did not come up during their training and was of no importance:

"I can't remember from my psychoanalytic training that anything like that was considered of the slightest importance."

"Funny that this was never considered in psychoanalytic training. I never thought about it up to now, but it almost frightens me now ... that surprises me."

"Was never of any importance – apart from the odd apocalyptical nightmare. Why do I not know that -and why did nothing of that kind ever surface?"

"The time of the nazis was hardly talked about, I get the impression you are only allowed to talk about it now ... These people were all idealists, they all believed in it. The Holocaust was repressed."

"I wanted to understand that. There was a private meeting of colleagues in groups. I wanted to make the group talk about anti-semitism today, but failed."

"I think we always lived with double book-keeping. On the outside everybody said: Yes, yes, this was all very bad, but privately they thought: It was quite a good time, really. That's what I think happened in the generation before mine."

"There's a lot of dishonesty involved. That's the only way it would work. Let me call it dishonesty.

There is so much underlying fear that you were touching on a taboo subject. It's a two-way situation on the couch: the one lying there perceives as much as the one sitting. And what's known as parentification applies here too: the trainee analysand protects the training analyst."

»Well, my training analyst was severely disabled in the War. I don't know if you were aware of that ...

He didn't see very well on one eye and didn't hear very well. When he was seventeen he got into some dodgy situation, all the others died and he was finally found half dead. They patched him up again. ... his facial expression on the one side was also kind of impaired. But it didn't make the man ugly, fortunately. Now, he was really handicapped... I never dared to ask him. But I know that others of course did. I built a fence around it. I felt I had to protect him. «

"The training analyst is not allowed to give any information anyway. It's against the method."

In their own training activities some colleagues have become very involved in approaching the subject of the problems of German history in general and the history of psychoanalysis: "We had some people who always pointed it out. They had a highly developed sense of history, but as far as our oldtimers were concerned, to be nasty, there was nothing, zilch, and the whole gang just sat there and called the shots. They were the ones in power. We were just the poor trainees."

I got the impression that in training analysis in these days more emphasis was put on the inner psychic world, on the intricate detail of the Oedipus complex while the outer reality was of secondary importance. The dialectics or the balance between inner and outer reality were abandoned and lost. The potential space which serves to connect inner and outer reality broke up, lifting the border or border layer between inner and outer reality. Denying the outer reality and concentrating on the inner world instead may have counteracted one's own feeling of passiveness and helplessness towards guilt, death and destruction. A 'classic' or 'neanalytic' analysis attempted to analyse the defence mechanisms and to assess them to reach an analytical interpretation. Anxieties caused by a possibly traumatic external reality were unimportant. The anxieties of the analysand and of the analyst could not be contained this way.

According to Parin¹³ people from different cultures form different ego-structures which suit the particular cultural environment in which they live. Adaptation mechanisms are specific to the cultural and social conditions which generate them because they are a result of these conditions. Adaptation mechanisms defuse conflicts. As a means of coming to terms with social demands they function unconsciously, are automatic and always follow the same pattern and allow conflict-free interaction with the respective environment.

¹² Ferenczi 1985, p. 124f

¹³ Parin 1977

Many of the interviewees repeatedly suffered from psychosomatic impairment. Their wish to understand better how the catastrophe in Germany had been possible, played an important part in their decision to become psychoanalysts.

Sometimes experience gained abroad is a useful antidote to muteness and something becoming unmentionable.

I would now like to take a look at my emotional reactions to the interviews and to analyse them in the light of their significance to our topic, as one would do in the psychoanalytical process. You are welcome to join me in this.

It just 'happens' that I take the 'wrong' list of addresses or can't find important documents. Have I really taken everything I need? Isn't there anything else which might be important? I look through my briefcase again and again. I do have a town plan, still I get lost. I wander through the streets, search rows of houses, and find myself back where I started from. I hurry so that I'm not late for a prearranged appointment. I suffer from pangs of hunger – which I suppress- or I try and eat something 'on the run'. Sometimes I'm terribly thirsty and don't have anything to drink and sometimes I urgently need the loo – and there is never one near.

Now, my personal conflicts and problems resulting from my background – they are definitely real. I am also tense and excited because of the interview that's coming up with representatives of my parent's generation. Being a bit overworked at times may also play a part. But on the whole I am a quite well organised person with a tolerable sense of direction.

So, to which degree does this situation reflect the story of my own life? What was planted in me? What does it mean in the context of countertransference reaction? What do both interviewer and interviewee create?

I develop the hypotheses that my emotional states might reflect catastrophic feelings of the children: I am becoming a refugee, feeling immensely lonely and afraid of being abandoned, who does not know where he belongs, who does not know if he packed everything that is important and may have forgotten documents which may be essential for his survival. "Now you will have to recover from these tales of horror of mine." "Standing waiting all on my own on the platform for a whole day was no fun ... Normally you could indeed feel lonely, for hours and hours."

I turn into a small child desperately banging on doors to be let in as bombers are approaching overhead with nobody opening, a small child playing all alone in the garden.

I develop a feeling of timidness to inquire deeper, as if I wanted to break a taboo, as if I penetrated a forbidden space, which might reflect apart from an appropriate reserve and respect for colleagues may be also the muteness, the refusal to talk about some matter.

Inner conflict, disruption/severance, destruction and disaster are key words, a '*Leitmotif*' mentioned repeatedly in the interviews when talking about a childhood during the time of the National Socialism and World War II.

According to Devereux¹⁴ behavioural science data arouses fears which are combatted by a pseudo-methodology inspired by countertransference. This move is the cause of almost all shortcomings in behavioural science. If such a close connection between fear and method exists even affecting the preferred method of psychoanalysis against a background of a war childhood in national socialist times? And if so, how much does fear influence the process of realisation and thus the reification of the process of realisation?

What are the "contrabands of memory"¹⁵, and what part would an "borrowed unconscious sense of guilt"¹⁶ play? Are there any strategic structures, and what are the relations to a possible "taboo of appropriation"¹⁷? To what extent does such a background strike deaf and dumb, freezing emotions?

John Steiner¹⁸ refers to it as withdrawing from the truth, to turn a blind eye, a way to keep facts hidden, to allow yourself to know and yet not to know. This leads to distortion and misrepresentations of reality. In this sense there is not a lack of coming to terms with the past, but an unresolved present: "We've never managed to get over the disaster of war and National Socialism."

Eissler wrote: "No individual can divorce himself from the historical period in which he is living any more than he can put himself beyond time or space (...) But we must remember that although historical factors may be easily correlated with the technique of a given period, the correctness or incorrectness of any technique is not decided by such correlation. Everything that is created by man

¹⁴ Devereux 1967

¹⁵ Hassoun 2003

¹⁶ Eickhoff 1986; Vogt & Vogt 1997

¹⁷ Beland 1986

¹⁸ Steiner 1993, p. 169f

must be deeply imbued by the historical climate at the time of its creation (...) we observe that at certain times and under certain circumstances the historical climate has led to a correct interpretation of reality; at other times it has led to an incorrect interpretation."¹⁹

It seems to me that for psychoanalytic socialisation of German psychoanalysts, born between 1933 and 1945, training analyses were often a repeat of what happened in the family, not talking about matters and silence. Mentioned were the analysand's loneliness, taboo-forming, inhibition to ask, protecting the training analyst, feelings of guilt, embarrassment all the way to falseness.

It may require still a long time of remembering and working through, to listen and to understand the not yet told, to avoid, searching for adequate words, to be cut off one's own history.

We hope our project will answer some of the many open-ended questions on the matter, though it may give rise to just as many new ones.

¹⁹ Eissler 1953, p. 107f

