

SILENCE AND TRANSGENERATIONAL TRAUMA

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Dear Colleagues,

I am glad to be here in Rovinj, to be part of this round table to speak to you about the theme of silence and transgenerational trauma. My part is speaking about the German point of view, with public, therapeutical and personal experiences.

1. Silence in groups

Different perspectives of silences in psychoanalytic practice could be discussed such as warmth, complicity or defensiveness between others. Newcomers in groups normally don't appreciate silences, because they are full of fear or sometimes anger, in which they easily feel persecuted.

Transgenerational silence means the transfer of specific historical experiences which could not be transported or worked through with words or by speaking. In the unconscious this knowledge seeks other ways of communication, and normally produces symptoms (psychosomatic - and psychic ones). The silence is used as a defence mechanism.

Here we try to go deeper not only into the defence of familiar and historical trauma of patients and therapists, but also of the 'normal' society using the unconscious defence as unique manner of survival. (Überleben, innere Gruppalität, Kaës 2009) .

History is always full of harm, force, violence and movements. The movement of lots of Jewish immigrants in the end of the 19th century from the East to the West had similar xenophobic reactions as now we experience with the immigrants all over Europe.

Different reflections of situation about xenophobia or dictatorship with reclusions we can find in the European literature. I.e. Alexander Solschenizyn, *The Archipel Gulag* (1973), the history of a camp in Siberia, or Lydia Tschukowskaja 'Untertauchen' *Spusk pod vodu* in original Russian language, in English *Going under*, written in 1957 treats similar traumas.

Heinrich Böll was one of the first one who had a critical view to the recent past in Germany and made 'memory' like in 'Ansichten eines Clowns' published first in 1963 (English translation 'Opinions of a Clown'), the history of a man who was a Nazi and made career in the fifties, sixties denying his past.

I would like to mention now another American novel: *The Sun's Attendant* (*Der Sonnenwächter*) by Charles Haldeman born in 1931, died in 1982 with 51 years in Greece. He tells us a story full of European history of the last century. In the centre of his narrative is Auschwitz daily life as if all of it would be 'normal'. The second part of his novel takes place in the end of the fifties and sixties, it is the time of his studies in Heidelberg where he meets

students full of new spirit, philosophical discussions without really questioning the past. This novel was published first in 1963 in the US, and now translated to German and published in Germany. Why didn't it find interest in his time. Why now? Were we just confronted with the book of Böll and had no space for more confrontation with the past?

A similar theme is treated in the narrative of the Oscar nominated film of Giulio Ricciarelli 2014 *In the labyrinth of silence*, a young public prosecutor of Nazi crimes in Auschwitz is confronted himself with his own ignorance, an example of making memory with a film, which drives us to the way of transmission in my short trip through this important theme.

2. Silence and working through in Germany now

The special situation of Germany in working through history after the second world-war, has different aspects, one of them is the official one and the other the private one. The holocaust is almost unable to digest, and in official life the discussion is/was open after the 2nd world-war, but in the general population the working through had different faces, and as we see, is still active in neo nazi activities.

How do we confront these problems in our treatments and how should we be alert to these phenomena?

Which possibilities exist to go through the silence?

70 years after the end of the 2nd world war, reflections in television and the newspapers only during the last months shows us some point of view of this working through.

Just now, during the last months, the history of Oskar Gröning, now 93 years old, who was working in the concentration camp of Auschwitz as an 'commandant', his official working title was 'Untersturmscharführer' had the responsibility of 300 000 persons in Auschwitz arises. He is now on judge. Why so late? How was it possible that people like him could live happily normal life in Germany? The Simon-Wiesenthaler-Center in Jerusalem found some of them years later in different countries all over the world. Without going deeper now, I would like to be able to interchange this with you later on.

The discussion in comments, letters of readers, testimony of survivals, the discussion about guilt, culpability, and shame are part of this working through. How many of the first generation were involved directly or indirectly as 'helpers' as train chauffeurs, and for the second and third generation as collective guilt.

The NS documentation centre in Munich, opened its doors in April 2015 for not forget.

It is just situated in a place where 6000 people worked during Nazi time for the propaganda of the NS. In seven floors the different levels of establishment of the NS is documented and how it developed on. From the fourth floor to second subbasement.

4th floor Beginning of the Nazi movement in 1920

3rd floor The two sides of the Populist Society: to be with, to be in or to be out, the campaign against the Jews.

2nd floor Munich and the war. The beginning of a new area

1st floor Munich after the war, war crimes, the confrontation with the past

Basement Foyer, Subbasement 1 Library and Mediathek Subbasement 2 Café

Only with showing photographs, it is not possible to keep the memory alert. We have to get in relation with it, to be in touch with the history:.. from what was to what is now. An example in the way this could be done, is in the concentration camp Flossenbürg where handicapped people do serve to customers as waiters in a Café. This is an indirect answer to the idea of the extermination of non worthwhile life in Nazi times. Similar museums in Bavaria you can find in Obersalzberg near the Austrian Border, in Nürnberg at the Reichsparteitags Area, in Dachau the concentration camp where the original crematory is shown. It is necessary that it doesn't become monotony in showing photos or simply history and the kind of presentations changes from time to time as people change. The visitors of the third or fourth generation want to be informed differently than my generation. Multimedia becomes more and more important. The connecting to the mass of the Nazi followers interests now more than before. (Comp. Süddeutsche Zeitung Nr. 98, 29. April 2015, NS- Dokuzentrum, Graziska Brüning)

How we maintain the memory alert? In schools survivals of the holocaust make testimony with visits, telling their personal life experience. One of them is Max Mannheimer, a psychoanalyst who wrote several books. During the tv program of arte, a French-German channel and BR alpha, the Bavarian culture channel in January 30th and May 2015 in memorial of the end of the war, I made some photos during these presentations: pupils of public schools or colleges went with one of the survivals to the wagon where the prisoners of the concentration camps arrived by train to different villages and towns after opening the concentration camps by the GIs. The inhabitants of the villages received them differently, but generally well. These pupils in 2015 investigated about the circumstances (program in television). An artist did a memorial sculpture with old material he found on place.

The situation in Germany, recent history of the last 25 years.

Reunion of the east and western Germany was in 1990.

Where communism was, suddenly fantasies of old German glory could reappear. Why can we find just in this area/region so many people near to nationalism and right ideas, even we have to say it is not only the East where this problem expands.

Pegida is the answer to high unemployment rate in 'political national or right orientation' exists in East and West Germany. They use the three colours flag black, red and gold from the German flag as their symbol. The symbolic red flag the black Hakenkreuz (swastica) was in rivalry to the black, red and gold (yellow as Jewish flag). In the beginning, when this flag appeared first, nearly 200 years ago, it was a symbol of liberty and republican spirit. This seems to be forgotten and seen from an other point of view now. The flag of East and West Germany was the same except the socialistic symbol during the first 40 years after the 2nd worldwar. The national identity close to the flag arose once more with the football worldcup in 2006 in Germany.

AfD is a new right political party which gains with populism more and more affiliations, similar movement as in Spain and Greece.

Some decades ago the word *Vergasung* in English gasifying or gassing was used as common vocabulary, it was in the German unconscious, even within people who didn't know. Sometimes I hear it during a session, and I react in an attentive way. Little by little this word disappears, perhaps with making conscious the atrocity of the past.

Germans themselves have certain defence mechanisms which facilitate the digestion of the past in differentiating between speaking about Germans and about the Nazis. It is much easier to say the Nazis had done something bad ('I am not a Nazi') than saying the Germans had done this or that. This split was shown to me by an Hungarian patient of my generation which leads me to the experiences with patients.

3. Patients

In my psychoanalytical treatments of the second and the third generation I remember several cases of nazi past in which I would like to go into details.

A young medical doctor in a neurological-psychiatric clinic had to study the case of a victim of a concentration camp and had to decide at which point this trauma damaged the personality to get more or less money from a fond. This situation confronted herself with the past of her grandparents. Her grandfather made money during the Third Reich.

Another female patient 53 years old, had a father who was a prisoner in times of Tito in Yugoslavia. When she spoke to me about her visits to the place where her father was born, she experienced important reactions by herself due to our common history which ended up in the Contract of Versailles after the first world war. Talking to me in the 60th session of an analysis (went on over more than 320 sessions) that hearing the Croatian language of his father during a wedding she was invited, made her cry a lot. She didn't understand really why. Now her fantasies went to The murdered partisans, stories which did much harm to my father, the Serbs, that he said, they are bad persons. There is a mixture in me, but it was also inside my father. He was born after the contract of Versailles...in 1923. His head was a German one and his belly a Croatian belly.. He liked singing, but he couldn't speak out all his bad stories he had within.

And I couldn't go along with all that. What happened there? Thinking in all that at home last weekend, I sat in front of my husband and I thought, where and who I am, who is he, why I am sitting here?

The split of the father of the two 'souls' of the head and the belly as she said becomes a split in herself. From the depressive position to the paranoid-schizoid position happened just in the session. Depersonalisation, she didn't know who she was, where and why she experienced these feelings (comp. M. Klein).

The murdering of 20 000 people in Serbrenice is one of the traumata which these peoples must work through and had his roots in more than hundred years of German, Austrian and Hungarian history.

Now I want to go to a group vignette which happened in my slow open group a few years ago.

A new member of the group, A., introduces himself shaking hands, saying his name, what

is not very common. As one member enters late, he repeats his handshaking to M. a female member since two or three years. Then he talks about his problems why he is coming, to be in touch with somebody or to be in partnership. After a while, some other members talked more superficial things, V. says something about the first name of A. which seems to him a Bavarian name. A. denies. He tells about losing his roots, a theme of his infancy where his parents nearly separated and he didn't know where he ended up, with the maternal or the paternal grand parents. After a while he tells a situation in the underground train in Munich after a football game with hooligans. He explains, that the wagon was full of loud noisemaking people from whom he felt attacked. After a while he responded them also with loud voice: You can directly go to Dachau. The first reaction in the group is a long silence. Then, after a while the late coming lady M. says: 'I think, what A. said, is terrible, and is offending the victims of the holocaust.' Then two members react. They really haven't understood very well before, but now, knowing what he said, they are really shocked and one, H., said, she isn't sure if she wants to be in a group with a member who pronounces this kind of things. The group is really touched by this, but the end of the group makes it finish without any decision. (My only reference was, that we all have to digest this first session with A, in the group, as the same he has being in the group with feelings of being rootless in relation to the feeling of the patient A. and of feeling attacked by V. because of the reference of the Bavarian name.)

Meanwhile in next session H. starts with the reference to the last session and says, that she, H., would not stay any longer in the group with a person who do not feel shame about what he said last time. A., the new patient, does not seem to rectify anything. 'Who is his father?', asks V., one of the oldest group members, he was the one who asked him about the roots of his name in the last session and wants to know more, he supposes, his father was a Nazi. A. now tells, his father was in a Nazi sympathising organisation after the war, as his father was only 16, when the war ended, just when his family had to leave Schlesien.

Another young man, N. , in the group says, he wouldn't think nothing special, hearing Dachau. It is like saying Landshut (he named another little town near to Munich). After the comments of several group members, he specifies that one of his grandmothers died in Dachau, but he doesn't know anything about the circumstances, which doesn't interest him anyway. This total denial shocked me more than the group.

M. finally said, she would not take the responsibility to expulse A. and she would give him a chance. She has the impression that he only can resolve some of his internal problems in that aggressive way, provoking the group...

It is not possible here to go more in details, but I wanted to show that in our daily work as analyst and group analyst we are also confronted with our past and the past of our patients.

4. Personal experiences

Born after the second world war in 1948, but after the money crash in 46/47 I am the youngest of four children, really five, in the city of Munich in a family whose parents apparently were not related to the nazi activities, but with the time I realised that it was not possible to be totally untouched by the cruelty of what was going on.

One of my siblings, the three years old brother Ernest died in 1944 by a bomb attack at

night in the house of my parents.

She and my eldest sister were injured. My mother was mourning a long time after this trauma. She didn't seek the culpability in the Americans who threw the bomb, because she had the only desire of an end of the war. But a part of the war trauma, she idealised this dead child for the rest of her life. It was not easy for us four to reach his level. My father was first in Poland, than in France and then in Russia during the war. He returned injured and traumatised home in 1945. He was a normal soldier even being a lawyer he didn't want to be involved more than necessary. He refused to be a judge of the war tribunal. So he worked as a defence. In our family there was not this typical silence, but I know it from other families around. Now, with my school friends we speak about the time and it is very interesting what is coming out.

Visits to Holland and France in the sixties showed me the active hate against the Germans, specific to the recent history of German activities in each country (20 years ago, not only the war, also occupation and persecution).

The other way of digesting the past for me is my membership in EATGA during the last 30 years, having workshops, conferences and symposiums about European and world-wide historical and recent ethnical fields of conflicts.

In Spain, where I lived since 1974, just the last year of Franco dictatorship, people very late began to question the interchange of Hitler with Mussolini and Franco.

Paco Roca a comic drawer: *Los surcos del azar* published in Germany in 2013 about a group of Spanish emigrants who battled against the German occupation in France. Seeing the Germans go away in France, meanwhile in Spain, Franco continued for a long time. An exhibiton in the Instituto Cervantes in Munich this year shows his comics.

Because of my personal life, being married to a Spaniard with victims in the civil war within the family, I was also confronted with the recent Spanish history. There are some points of similitude between both countries in the same and anterior periods such as the expulsion of the Jews by the Catholic Kingdom in the early 16th century and later on in the 20th century the two dictatorial states of Franco and Hitler. Franco reigned 40 years in Spain, Hitler 13 years in Germany, both murdered, one helped the other.

The discussion about the persecutions and extermination in Spain was much more occult than in Germany. Recently there are more public discussions in newspapers and broadcast.

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