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CHAPTER 7

Holocaust Trauma in Germany and Austria

The legacy of the Hitler regime still haunts us, causing many of us Germans to feel frustrated or even angry at anybody who mentions the Holocaust.

—Ursula Duba (1997)

Earlier chapters of this book discussed the obvious long-term emotional effects of Holocaust traumatization upon the survivors and their families. The traumatic impact on those who belong(ed) to the “other side,” however, remains more obscure. But the fact is that many Germans and Austrians also may suffer from one or the other traumatic effects of the war, even if some of them have chosen to put a lid on their wartime experiences. Apparently, there has been insufficient psychological working through (German: *Bewältigung, Auseinandersetzung*) of this tragic legacy, both on an individual and a collective level.

The tall man was born in 1927 and had served in the German *Wehrmacht*. He told us that at one occasion, he had stood face-to-face with Adolf Hitler during a general inspection of the troops at a train station. As the former soldier showed us the situation in action and looked the man playing Hitler deep in the eyes, I asked: “What would you have done if you had met Hitler today?” The question obviously shook him, and he became pale

in his face, but he declined to respond and backed off. It was unclear if he would have embraced the *Führer*, or if he would have shot him.

The scene is taken from a group session held in Vorarlberg in the autumn of 2004 in which Austrian participants of various ages were looking at their National Socialistic past and themselves today. The situation symbolically represents the essence of the German-Austrian discourse, in which its Nazi past is neither embraced, nor rejected, but largely avoided. For very many years, it was left out of consideration; the first generation of Nazi collaborators and bystanders refused to talk about it at home, neither was it taught properly in schools, nor dealt with in a straightforward manner on a sociopolitical level. World War II (German: *Der Zweite Weltkrieg*) remained a *taboo* subject in many circles of society for almost half a century.

During the last decade, however, this situation has started to change, but slowly. Now, the Holocaust is moving from being avoided to becoming a focal point of contemporary interest. The younger generation has started to confront its National Socialist past and to also admit its own people's responsibility for the Holocaust. However, while the collective responsibility of Germany-Austria became more acknowledged, the working through of individual family histories remained difficult. In addition, there was a substantial lack of knowledge among the younger generation of the genocide committed during World War II. As a remedy for this, it was decided to improve the quality of Holocaust education. In conjunction with the *Yad Vashem's* International School for Holocaust studies in Jerusalem, various educational projects were initiated for teachers at German and Austrian schools.

The goals of these projects were to make the history education of National Socialism and the Holocaust more relevant for students today and to connect this tragic period of history with the present. As a psychologist and group therapist with experience from the treatment of Holocaust survivors and their children I was invited to facilitate self-reflection sessions within these seminars for more than ten years. In addition, I conducted a series of workshop seminars when traveling through Germany and Austria during the last decade. All together, there must have been more than a thousand participants in these events.

The present chapter is an attempt to summarize some impressions from these group sessions. After an overview of the Second Generation literature in Germany and Austria and a description of the methods used in my experiential investigations, I will discuss secondary war traumatization

among descendants of victims, collaborators, perpetrators, bystanders, rescuers, and resistance fighters, or a combination of these.

As it is not immediately obvious why a subject like this is presented in a book on Jewish Holocaust trauma, I would like to make a few comments on my personal interest in this matter. Being a child of Holocaust survivors who grew up in a German-speaking family of emigrants from Vienna, this was a highly personal issue for me. As with many Jews of German/Austrian heritage, I have ambiguous and complicated feelings toward the former homeland (German: *Heimat*) of my family. A deep affection for everything Austrian is mixed with the bitter memories of Nazi persecution. Often, the Viennese *Gemütlichkeit* still reverberated in my blood and phrases like *Guten Morgen*, *Guten Abend*, *Auf Wiedersehen*, *Grüss Gott*, and *Servus* make me immediately feel at home. However, this affection is overshadowed by also hearing the rough sounds of German commands and curses like *Juden raus!* (“Out with the Jews!”), while learning about the systematic persecution of Austrian Jews before and during the Second World War that reduced the Jewish population of Austria from about 300,000 in the 1920s, to less than 15,000 today. Returning to the land of my family’s dispossession, I cannot refrain from being highly disturbed by this tragic history as well as by the observation that there presently is an upsurge in “new” anti-Semitism in many parts of Europe. It is therefore with great curiosity that I take a peek “on the other side” to try to understand how our former neighbors live with their memories and daily concerns.

Second Generation Literature in Germany and Austria

Ever since the end of the Second World War, German/Austrian literature has continually been discussing the consequences of the Holocaust and the question of individual and/or collective guilt.

Already in 1946, Karl Jaspers wrote about *The Question of Guilt* (German: *Die Schuldfrage*) and called for individual war criminals to be held responsible, rather than promoting collective guilt which would be regarded as more anonymous. In the early 1960s, the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem and Hannah Arendt’s subsequent book (*Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, 1963/1977), reopened questions about individual and collective guilt in Germany and Austria.

The notion of a collective burden of responsibility upon an entire nation is unique to the Holocaust. Collective guilt meant that all Germans and Austrians shared the blame, not only for the war, but for Nazi atrocities as well, and that they should take responsibility for its consequences. But as years have passed, such guilt has begun to fade out, while the responsibility

has taken its place. This was clearly expressed by West German chancellor Helmut Kohl, during his visit to Israel on January 24, 1984:

The young German generation does not regard Germany's history as a burden but as a challenge for the future. They are prepared to shoulder their responsibility. But they refuse to acknowledge a collective guilt for the deeds of their fathers. We should welcome this development.

But the Holocaust continued to disturb authors of all types and descent. The most prominent were perhaps the following four Nobel Prize-winning authors who attempted to come to grips with the Holocaust in their writing: (1) Thomas Mann strongly denounced National Socialism and encouraged resistance by the working class; (2) Heinrich Böll, the leader of the postwar *rubble-literature* (German: *Trümmerliteratur*) in his books kept returning to the painful memories of the war, the Nazis, and the guilt that came with them; (3) Günter Grass (who recently disclosed his service in the *Waffen-SS*) described the ambiguous attitudes in postwar Germany in his famous 1959 novel *The Tin Drum*. But only in his 2002 book *Crabwalk* (German: *Im Krebsgang*), did he also describe the emotional suffering of German civilians during the war; and (4) Elfriede Jelinek, in her critical novel *The Children of the Dead* (1995), focused on the repressed Nazi past and how the new Austrian republic rested upon the precarious foundation of millions of disavowed murder victims. The following paragraph from *Wonderful, Wonderful Times* (1980) is particularly colorful and sums it all up very succinctly:

Presently there are, however, still numerous innocent perpetrators. Full of war memories, their friendly faces look at the public from windowsills decorated with flowers, they wave or hold high posts. In between geraniums. Everything should finally be forgiven and forgotten so they can make an entirely new beginning (p. 7).

These are all parts of the general postwar German literature. However, among the first specific accounts of children of perpetrators was an article in *Die Zeit* and, in 1965, a critical book, *Children of the Perpetrators* (German: *Kinder der Täter*) by Dörte von Westernhagen, a daughter of an SS-commander who committed suicide before she was born. In an attempt to come to terms with her conflicting roots, she researched the past and accused her father of participating in the crimes of the Third Reich.

A second early description of children of perpetrators was Sichrovsky's (1987) book *Born Guilty: Children of Nazi Families*. Born in postwar Vienna by Jewish survivors, Sichrovsky grew up with children of former Nazis. After becoming a journalist, he asked them what their fathers had done during and after the war. In fourteen tape-recorded case studies he presented portraits of deeply complex people with various kinds of conflicts and psychopathology. The contents of this book have been dramatized and are presently being shown in a theatre in Tel Aviv.

A third early investigator of the children of Nazis was Norbert Lebert, a German journalist who, in 1959, set out to interview infamous Nazi leaders' children. But for some reason, he himself never published his findings. After his death, his son Stephan discovered the interviews and reinterviewed some of those children of perpetrators, including the daughters of Himmler and Göring, and published their accounts in the year 2000.

Subsequently, many other accounts of children of perpetrators, and the issues raised with German and Austrian attempts to work through their Nazi past, were published, including Wolf (1989), Heimannsberg & Schmidth (1989), Halbmayer (1995), Merten (1995), Krondorfer (1995), Rosenthal (1997), Ziegler & Kannonier-Finster (1997), Staffa & Klinger (1998), Staffa & Spielmann (1998), Kranz (1999), Neumann (1999), Munn (2001a), and Berger & Berger (2001).

The pioneering field research of Dan Bar-On from the mid-1980s received wide attention. His book on the *Legacy of Silence* (1989b) contains reports on interviews conducted in Germany with the children and grandchildren of Nazi perpetrators. Later publications (Bar-On, 1989a; 1990; 1995; 1996; 2000) described additional issues regarding this population, and defined specific characteristics such as the *double wall* that prevented the generations from communicating with one another.

Ursula Duba, a non-Jewish German-American writer shared her observations from meetings and discussions with German youth in her book *Tales from a Child of the Enemy* (1997). Her poetic descriptions of the massive silence are both telling and moving and explain some of the ignorance and lack of empathy that the German people feel for the victims of the Holocaust. For example, she pointed out that most German children know from a very early age not to ask as to what grandpa did during the Third Reich.

Müller-Hohagen, a psychotherapist and son of a cooperating family who settled in Dachau, worked for more than twenty years with perpetrator families. In his books *History in Us* (1994) and *Denied, Repressed, Silenced* (2005), he presented actual case studies and suggested

enlightening analyses about the dynamics of their massive repression. In a conference proceeding on this theme, Staffa (1998) concluded that "The perpetrator generation tacitly or explicitly transmitted their guilt or hate, their views of the enemies, their biases, or their anxieties upon the children or grandchildren" (p. 72). Jurgovsky (1998) suggested the term *subsequent effects* to describe such transgenerational phenomena.

But it took many years for ordinary Germans and Austrians to realize that their Nazi past indeed continued to have an effect on subsequent generations, and even on the grandchildren of Nazis. This wider awareness was to a large extent created as a result of the publication of the book with the pertinent title *My Grandfather Was Not a Nazi* (German: *Opa war kein Nazi*) based on the study by Welzer, Moller, & Tschuggnall (2002). From interviews with 142 grandchildren of German soldiers, they found that most of the forty families tended to construct a positive picture of their grandparents who were seen either as victims or as heroes, or as unknowing passive bystanders, but not as Nazis, even though they clearly were Nazis. This book showed more than all the previous studies the extent to which personal family involvement in the crimes committed had been massively repressed or silenced, making it very difficult for the subsequent generation to really grasp what had actually happened and to acknowledge their painful past. However, in subsequent discussions of the above study, someone cynically suggested that the above title may have had some truth in it after all: "Grandfather *was* not a Nazi, he *is still* one!"

Didactic and Methodological Remarks

The method used in the group sessions I conducted in Israel, Germany, and Austria was a combination of lecture demonstrations, workshop-seminars, sociodramatic explorations, and open-ended discussions with a high level of participation by the group members. After a brief overview of the long-term psychological effects and treatment of Holocaust trauma, the focus was put on the personal experiences of the German and Austrian participants themselves, asking: "How does all this affect you?" Common history from the war was thus shared in action and memories from the past were brought to the surface. The following elements were frequently utilized as *warm-ups* to facilitate a process of individual and collective working through:

- Holocaust survivors and war witnesses were invited to

give testimony in front of the group, who would ask them personal questions;

- Year-of-birth spectogram;
- Role play (various roles from the first generation in Germany and Austria) with a reversal of roles within the same person;
- Sociodrama: experiential process for the investigation of social phenomena in action from then and now (Kellermann, 2007);
- Role play demonstration of communication problems between parents of the first generation and children of the second generation with action alternatives;
- Dialogue between children and grandchildren of survivors and of perpetrators;
- Screening and discussion of the film *2 or 3 Things I Know About Him* (German: *2 oder 3 Dinge, die ich von ihm weiß*). This is a provocative documentary film from 2005 in which German director Malte Ludin examines the impact of Nazism in his family;
- Discussion of the study *My Grandfather Was Not a Nazi* (German: *Opa war kein Nazi*) by Welzer, Moller, & Tschuggnall (2002).

An exercise frequently used was the *year-of-birth spectogram* which makes some of the more unconscious processes more visible and hopefully also easier to comprehend and to digest emotionally. This is a group demographic investigation tool in which participants place themselves on an imaginary continuum in a room according to their year of birth, thus focusing on the various generations after the war. At the beginning of the line were those from the first generation (who were born before the war and who had experienced it *firsthand*); then came the child survivors and *war children* (who were born during the war); then the *postwar* children (born between 1945–49); then the often numerous subgroup of *baby-boom* children of these first groups (born between 1950–60); and finally came the grandchildren of those who experienced the war (usually in their early twenties or younger). Going around the group, and focusing on each person at a time, the participants were encouraged to share how the war had influenced them.

At a later stage of the group process, during various active role-playing

simulations, some of the communication difficulties between parents of the first generation and children of the second generation were demonstrated and improvised. Thus, the concept of *transgenerational transmission of trauma* was introduced and made more visible. These group explorations made it repeatedly obvious that while each and every person somehow has his or her own personal relation to the NS-time, they all together form a microcosm of collective consciousness (or collective repression) that may be representative for the German/Austrian population as a whole.

Facing the history of World War II means that we are also facing ourselves. The following points were used for further working through and discussion:

1. A self-critical look at our own NS-past. How does the Holocaust history affect me personally? What is my own personal connection with the NS-past in Germany and/or Austria?
2. Was there a "conspiracy of silence" in my family? Was there a taboo against talking about what my parents or grandparents did during the war? Did they remain silent and did I refrain from asking them?
3. Who was guilty? Individual and collective guilt. Inherited guilt (German: *Erbsünde*).
4. What meaning does the Holocaust have for the first generation, the war children (*Kriegskinder*), the second generation, and the grandchildren of the war generation?
5. What were the different roles of the war generation? How did these roles interact within the same person?
6. What was transmitted upon the second generation? Shame, guilt, responsibility, and/or perpetratorship?
7. What can we learn from the Holocaust? To fight against racism? To be more tolerant? Not to follow orders blindly? To be more politically aware and active?
8. How could it have happened in the first place and why in Germany and Austria? If students ask: "Were these Nazis human beings?" what can we respond with? (see chapter 8).

Primary and Secondary War Traumatization

Raising issues about the Second World War inevitably evoked strong emotions in participants. In addition to breaking the conspiracy of silence from the past, it also brought to the surface the heavy burden of years of concealment. When the past had been so massively repressed, it was not easy to suddenly acknowledge and digest painful emotions that suddenly were revealed, such as shame, guilt, anger, sadness and anxiety. These appeared in a confusing combination; compassion with the pain of the victims, shame of the bystanders, guilt of the perpetrators, ethical questions about possible personal or collective responsibility and the urgent need for reconciliation and normalization. Depending on what they themselves, or their parents and grandparents had endured during the war, participants expressed such painful emotions, which had a profound impact on their entire lives.

Whatever influence, the groups gave an opportunity for participants to face history in the context of facing themselves. This led them to variously describe themselves or their parents and grandparents as taking the roles of:

1. the victim;
2. the collaborator and/or the perpetrator;
3. the bystander; and
4. the rescuer and/or the resistance fighter.

These roles (or archetypes) were then utilized to look at any war scenario. But it immediately became obvious that none of them were easily delineated and that they should not be used in a simplistic and *either-or* fashion. Hence, more than one role may have been present in one and the same person at the same time. During the extraordinary chaotic times of World War II, a *Wehrmacht* soldier may, for example, have been first a perpetrator and then a victim, as well as a bystander and possibly also a helper in certain situations. I will clarify these war roles further in the following sections.

1. The Victim

While we (Israeli Jews) have come to retain the *victim* designation for those who perished, and the word *survivor* for those who lived through it all, the word *victim* (German: *Opfer*) will be retained here, as it has become commonly utilized in German and Austrian vocabulary and because

it seems to bring additional underlying meanings in German-speaking countries. Hence, *victims of the Nazi-regime* refer to all kinds of people who were more or less detrimentally affected by the war and who may be therefore eligible for some kind of compensation. Such a broad definition of *victimhood* may thus include additional groups of citizens who were either for or against the NS-regime, whether they initially suffered from it or not.

Because people preferred to see themselves as (innocent) victims instead of (guilty) perpetrators after the war—according to Müller-Hohagen (2008), “Perpetrators were the others!” (p. 155)—this created various kinds of *victim-myths* (German: *Opfer-mythos*) both in Austria and in Germany. And the more they focus on their own victimhood, the less they are able to face their own responsibility for the war. Urban (2004) even observed that “Holocaust education in Germany is being slowly but steadily undermined by the new trend of seeing Germans themselves as victims, with many people feeling that they are fed up with the Shoah.”

The most famous one was perhaps the Austrian victim-myth (Pollak, 2005), which claimed that Austria had been the first Nazi-victim when occupied by Germany on March 12, 1938 and that it therefore was not responsible for the Holocaust. It is now more widely accepted that, while there were Austrians who opposed Hitler, the German NS-regime was enthusiastically welcomed by the Austrian people, who cooperated willingly with the persecution of its Jews.

A similar myth was created by the communist regime of the former East Germany. Instead of recognizing their own part in the implementation of the NS-policies, East Germany blamed the “anti-Semitic and fascistic West” for having initiated the Holocaust while the East was portrayed as taking part in the resistance movement and were the sole heir of antifascism (Wolffsohn, 1995; Völter & Dasberg, 1998).

But West Germany was not immune to such myths either. Urban (2008) explained how some of these modern myths originated by subtle rationalizations: “Historian Guido Knopp, who is director for the public station ZDF of a large number of TV series on aspects of World War II, the Holocaust, the Third Reich, and its leaders, does much to promote this trend of rationalizing one’s own behavior. His documentaries often deny that there was any possibility to act against the Nazis. He and many other historians often distinguish sharply between Nazis and Germans. Thus, those who lost their homes or even families in the Allied bombing or were expelled after 1945 are *Germans*. The Nazis are such as Adolf Eichmann or ghetto administrators. Indeed, history requires distinctions and not every German was a Nazi; some were persecuted or executed for political

reasons. The Nazis, however, clearly were Germans (and Austrians, as well as collaborators from all over Europe). Knopp presents in one of his numerous productions, a six-part series on the Holocaust, a former female camp guard from Bergen-Belsen named Helga Bothe who justifies her actions. She says she was not guilty because she only obeyed orders, and otherwise she would have been sent to a camp as well (part 6 of the serial *Holokaust*, ZDF, 21 November 2000). Her statement is shown without comment or contrast—such as a guard who helped inmates, a bystander who chose to help, a story of a Bergen-Belsen inmate, and so on. This fosters an impression of a National Socialism without National Socialists, a Holocaust without or nearly without perpetrators. Such narratives can be viewed as modern German myths.”

The classical German victim-myth, however, is best expressed during the yearly memorial march of the allied bombing of the town of Dresden on February 13, 1945, in which the population mourns the victims (Friedrich, 2002). The problem is that neo-Nazis utilize this event to declare that this “mass murder” was the *real* Holocaust of innocent German civilians and refugees who perished as a result of the British and American “genocide.” Contrary groups, including anti-fascist, leftist, and Green party groups, vehemently protest against such a revision of history, and arrange contra-demonstrations under the slogan *Geh Denken!* (“Go think,” which is a paraphrase also for a memorial). I was impressed by the intense emotional energy both groups of anti-fascist demonstrators, as well as the police, invested in the event during a personal visit to Dresden in 2007.

Undoubtedly, however, there were also many *real* German and Austrian war-victims. But they were mostly silenced because it was not politically correct to openly talk about them. Given that the Germans and Austrians were the war-villains, the public tended to focus on blame rather than sympathy and understanding. More than sixty years after the war, Radebold (2005)—a psychiatry professor treating elderly German war children—hesitantly asked: “Are we allowed *as Germans* to deal with this part of our history? Are we allowed to call ourselves *victims*?” (pp. 25–26).

And he answered in the affirmative: “The surviving younger elderly must become aware of how painful their childhood was and that they still suffer from these effects until today.... We must become aware that: *We have a history, we are history, and we embody history*” (p. 27).

But acknowledging human suffering and victimization in the very same people that committed crimes during the war remains a controversial subject. One may ask if this is another attempt to transform the perpetrators into victims, and thus to minimize their responsibility. This is not my intention. What I want to emphasize is simply that war traumatization is

present in this population and that it must be illuminated parallel to an acknowledgment of personal and/or collective guilt.

Perhaps it is easier today for everybody to recognize that the German and Austrian peoples suffered millions of civilian victims during the war and to allow them to grieve for their losses. For example, the German historian Friedrich (2002) noted in his book, *The Fire: Germany in the Bombing War 1940–1945* that over half a million German citizens, including eighty thousand children, were killed in the bombings on German cities. Even though some of his characterizations of the allied bombing falsely equalized the events with the systematic and intentional annihilation of the persecuted Holocaust victims, the truth is that innocent civilians accidentally perished and that their surviving relatives naturally responded with grief. Perhaps it is now easier to share such victimization because the collective guilt and responsibility of Germany and Austria has been more openly admitted. From a psychological point of view, perhaps the time has also finally come to recognize the need of the German people to mourn their losses and to express their suffering?

Because clearly, the civilian population did endure extraordinary hardships and suffered a multitude of traumatic experiences that left their indelible marks. As a result, some of them still continue to hoard food, express fears of renewed occupation, and mourn family and friends who perished in the war.

In a series of publications, Radebold (2000; 2003; 2004; 2005) described such late effects of the war on the elderly German population who suffered a multitude of losses, violence, flight, and expulsion. In his book, *The Dark Shadows of the Past*, Radebold (2005) pointed out that there were two million children and youth among Germany's refugees, and about a third of these had experienced traumatized experiences. Many of them still feel the effects of these late in life, even if they do not like to speak about them: "The fallen left more than 1.7 million widows, almost 2.5 million half-orphans and about 100,000 full-orphans (Dörr, 1998, p. 323, 563) and about a quarter of all German children grew up without a father" (Radebold, 2005, p. 23). Many of these war children (German: *Kriegskinder*) suffered from emotional scars similar to the Jewish Child Survivors described in chapter 3.

Another effort to investigate the suffering of such war-children was initiated by Ermann (2004) and colleagues. One of their studies found that 10.8 percent of former German children of the war still suffered from PTSD symptoms sixty years later (Kuwert et al., 2006).

As I have already pointed out, the first generation of German/Austrian war survivors were suffering alone without anywhere to turn for help.

Concepts such as a *conspiracy of silence*, a failure of society to accept and understand traumatized individuals, while first utilized in connection to Holocaust survivors, made perfect sense also for the description of the first generation of German and Austrian individuals afflicted by war trauma. Similarly, the massive repression of all emotions, including the inability to mourn (Mitscherlich & Mitscherlich, 1967) and anxiety-provoking triggers from the war were relevant also for such war survivors (cf. chapter 2). However, despite such profound personal scars from the war, these had been left almost untouched, or totally repressed (or diagnosed as a “psychosomatic ailment” by the mental health establishment). It was as if some kind of collective consensus had tried to conceal anything that would admit individual vulnerability in connection to war trauma. A reason for this silence might have been the overwhelming feelings of guilt and shame felt by many when they realized the scope of the destruction that their own people had inflicted on others. According to Kahn (2006), however, many younger Germans now feel shame for their parents’ deeds and accept a responsibility for rectifying the damage that was done. For example, one woman commented: “I think my guilty conscience has to do with the fact that fundamentally, in my heart of hearts, I can’t comprehend that a people can intend to totally negate another people, to wipe them out, along with everything that belongs and is connected to them. I must be missing a link. I don’t get it. And I don’t understand where this set of ideas comes from” (p. 88).

The workshop seminars sometimes gave a first opportunity to hesitantly share such painful emotions with others and to realize that they were not alone. In fact, such sharing revealed that most participants (or their parents) had experienced some primary or secondary traumatic experiences during World War II. They shared accounts of personal pain and suffering from the war and/or immediately after (during the occupation of the allied forces). This included the terror of the Hitler regime, the fear of bombs, long periods of starvation, painful war injuries, years of imprisonment, contemptuous foreign occupation, the rape of German/Austrian women, the loss of close family members, the debilitating grief of orphans and widows, etc.

Most participants initially talked about their parents’ (primary trauma) experiences: “My father was a soldier who lost a leg and two brothers in the war. But he never talked much about it, and he never shared his feelings with us. I saw that he was suffering and I heard him shout during the night as if he was still in the midst of battle. But he took it all into his grave ...” Only later did participants also share their own (secondary trauma) feelings

of having grown up in these severely dysfunctional families, and how they carried within themselves their heavy burdens (Bar-On, 1989).

In addition to these disclosures, it became clear that the participants also carried within themselves a kind of collective trauma of the German/Austrian people as a whole. Even if they had been born many years after the war, they had somehow absorbed the feeling of having been born into a *despised people* and they felt unjustly victimized as a result. German and Austrian youth had indeed inherited a legacy of guilt, shame, and blame. Duba (1997) put the responsibility of such feelings on the German society, which did not help the young generation to properly acknowledge the suffering inflicted by their grandparents. Instead, the youth were burdened with the impossible task of defending the “innocent perpetrators,” who continued to exert enormous powers upon them even from their graves.

2. The Perpetrator and Collaborator

The perpetrators and the collaborators were directly responsible for orchestrating the atrocities against civilians during the war.

After the war, however, most criminals did not readily want to admit their involvement in the Holocaust. The gradual process of acknowledging personal responsibility seemed to proceed through various stages of rationalization, from blaming others to the admission of personal guilt. When asked by their children about why they had participated in the war, the parents responded in any of the following ways. (It sounds so much more convincing in the German language):

- *“Hitler war Schuld. Die Nazis waren es.”*
- *“Die Totalität des Führerstaates erlaubte keine andere Möglichkeit.”*
- *“Ich habe nur Befehle befolgt.”*
- *“Wir waren besetzt. Ich wäre erschossen worden, wenn ich mich geweigert hätte.”*
- *“Ich habe nur in die Luft geschossen.”*
- *“Wir wurden in die Irre geführt. Sie haben uns mit ihrer Propaganda einer Gehirnwäsche unterzogen.”*
- *“Wir glaubten, dass uns Hitler ein besseres Leben ermöglichen würde. Jeder glaubte an ihn. Er war unsere Hoffnung!”*

Translated: "Hitler was to blame. The Nazis did it. I was only following orders. We were occupied. I would have been shot if I refused to enlist. I shot only in the air. I didn't kill anyone. I was so young. We were misled. They had brainwashed us with their propaganda. We believed that Hitler would make life easier for us. Everyone believed in him. He was our hope!" Only in exceptional cases was there a realization of disillusionment, an admission of guilt, and the ensuing remorse and a search for reconciliation.

Thus, participants who were more informed about the historical facts were understandably skeptical when learning that their fathers had served "only in the *Wehrmacht*," implying that, unlike the SS, they were innocent of crimes against the Jews, that they had done only their duty and served their country and that they had treated civilians with respect.

In fact, many of the loyal followers of Hitler and devoted members of the NS-party, the *Bund Deutscher Mädel* (BDM)—The League of German Girls, or *Hitler Jugend* (HJ)—The Hitler Youth, never felt any remorse. After the war, they found it very difficult to adjust to the new social reality. Upon returning to their homes and towns, they had not only lost the war, but were also reprimanded by society and (sometimes) by their families for having enlisted in the first place. Similar to returning Vietnam War veterans, they felt that society had let them down twice; first, when they were recruited to a mission without purpose, and secondly, when they returned home broken and defeated. Before they had been told (or forced) to love and serve Hitler. Now they were treated as war criminals.

Therefore, they were invariably unable to take individual responsibility for the war crimes even though they admitted that "bad things had happened." In order to cope with this cognitive dissonance, they found it easier to take upon themselves the role of the victim of circumstances, saying: "I only did what I was told. I had nothing to do with the decisions. In fact, I did not shoot anybody. I shot only in the air." Secretly, however, some admitted that the first years of Hitler-rule "were the happiest in my life!"

Immediately after the war, former soldiers of the Third Reich were first imprisoned for a short time or for many years and then "de-Nazified," which was a process of resocialization and admission that they had given up their NS-ideology and their loyalty to the *Führer*. During this first period after the war, there was an official effort to erase the outer signs and symbols of the former regime. A participant remembered: "After the war, everything suddenly changed. Pictures of Hitler were taken down from the walls. We were no longer supposed to greet one another with *Heil Hitler!* Defeated soldiers came home from years of imprisonment with

physical and emotional injuries. The Russian and other occupying armies did terrible things to us.”

Fathers who returned from the war had lost face in their families and there was an enormous void between them and their children. They became *absent men* even if they were physically present. Many were struggling with pent-up aggression and became addicted to alcohol in order to repress their feelings. As a result, many of the children who were born immediately after the war had the feeling of growing up without fathers. For reasons of their own, mothers remained depressive, anxious, and largely detached, unable to show affection to their children.

Perhaps it was possible within the closed circles of the various veterans clubs (*Kameradschaftsbund*) to talk about the war, but not with remorse or regret. The study by Welzer, Moller, and Tschuggnall (2002) confirms that it was easier to talk about the victorious moments and happy occasions, rather than sharing the painful experiences. The sweet taste of heroism was probably a more popular subject than the fact that they had lost the war, their beloved *Führer* (and all the hopes that he had evoked), their comrades-in-arms, and many years of their youth and young adulthood (for nothing). In closed circles, a call for revenge possibly took the place of mourning and old anti-Semitic sentiments were again expressed.

But this first period of postwar adjustment was soon transformed into the next period of rebuilding and renewal. Citizens tried to put the past behind them and look to the future, to forget and to close this chapter of history forever. Rapidly, they learned to present themselves, not as aggressors, but as victims of the NS-regime and/or of the Allied Forces. Memories from the war were repressed and family secrets were created (Padover, 2001; Rommelspacher, 1995).

This massive repression had a detrimental effect on family communication. When children grew up and asked their parents about the war, they received no answers. As a result, the children developed all kinds of fantasies about the “real” identities of their parents: “Where did he serve? Who did he kill? Was he a war criminal and a Nazi? Why does he have to conceal everything? What does he have to hide?” Intergenerational conflicts arose between children and their fathers.

In the extraordinary film document that we have already mentioned above, Malte Ludin tells the *typical German* story of his father who was a war criminal and of his mother, sisters, and other relatives who didn’t want to talk about the past. Malte grew up without knowing much about his father because most facts had been carefully hidden from him; old photos and memorabilia were put in a closed wooden box in the cellar and his father was described only as a hero and as a martyr. After the death of

Malte's mother, the box was opened and its contents investigated, and the truth was finally revealed. Malte's father had indeed been a real Nazi war criminal. When asking his older sisters about this, they refused to describe him as such, even though Hanns Ludin, a devoted NS-supporter and Hitler's envoy to Slovakia, had clearly been one, and he had been sentenced to death for his crime. The sisters tried everything to prevent the truth from being revealed: "No, he didn't do anything. He didn't know what happened to the Jews in Slovakia. He was a lovable person. Why do you destroy his memory?" Like most Germans, facing the fact that the father had been a "bad person" created a cognitive dissonance that apparently would have been too much for them to digest.

During one of our public debates after the screening of his film, I asked Malte Ludin if it would have helped if his father had acknowledged his guilt. I suspected that if the *content* of the transgenerational transmission was out in the open, perhaps the children would have suffered less. And he immediately affirmed that this would indeed have been very helpful.

Similar to Malte Ludin, the (19)68 generation (Götz, 2008) loudly deplored the Nazi past of their fathers and proclaimed symbolic Patricide. Many processed their paternal relations in a series of books (e.g., Henisch, 1975; Frank, 1987; von Schirach, 2005; Weiss, 2005; Botz, 2005; Pollack, 2004/2006) in which they openly confronted their parents with their complicity in the Nazi regime. As a result of such confrontations, parents and children often clashed in violent and painful conflicts around such or similar subjects during the 1970s and 1980s. In some families, it resulted in a total split that could not be bridged for decades. It was much more than a generation gap. It was a vast desert of conflict and misunderstanding. One participant who had broken up with his father explained: "How can I continue to have anything to do with my father, who was a former Nazi (and who might still be one)?"

Instead, children left home early and distanced themselves from their (unreformed) parents. Many developed extreme left-wing opinions, in which their disgust for any totalitarian system could be expressed. The parents, in turn, responded with an equally massive rejection of their children, who they felt were accusing them unfairly. And as the intra-family conflicts intensified, any honest discussion of what had actually happened during the war was even further pushed out of the common frame of reference.

This situation was further intensified during various public events in Germany and Austria, which also reignited the family conflicts and actualized the unfinished business of the past. The Eichmann trial in Israel was perhaps the most obvious, as well as the screening of the TV series

The Holocaust in 1979 (Märthesheimer & Frenzel, 1979). In addition, the controversial 1995 exhibition on the war crimes of the *Wehrmacht* (Heer & Naumann, 1995) made it common knowledge that ordinary *Wehrmacht* soldiers, not just Nazi hard-core *Waffen-SS*, had participated in the atrocities against civilians during the war. Similarly, the publication in 1996 of Goldhagen's book *Hitler's Willing Executioners* also became a powerful trigger for opening the old wounds of German conscience. Lately, the heated discussions around the Holocaust memorials erected on the *Judenplatz* in Wien (2000), and on a block south of the *Brandenburg Gate* in Berlin (2005), also created major political and aesthetic controversies and public debate.

As they recounted these public events, participants shared the moral dilemma of being descendants of fathers who had committed horrendous acts of crime against humanity during the war, but who still were their (biological) fathers. The processing of this dilemma took different forms in different people, but inevitably created an inner conflict that demanded some kind of resolution. The conflicts were frequently resolved, according to Simenauer (1978), by "a depreciation of the father figure, with the resulting negative identification" (p. 412).

While learning the facts about the Holocaust, such children of perpetrators tried to work through (sort out, or in German: *Auseinandersetzung*) some of the issues that their parents had been unable to even acknowledge. This German concept of *sorting out* is in fact a very suitable one in this context, because it indicates that there is a healthy *differentiation* process (cf. separation-individuation) between parents and children, which is sometimes overlooked on account of the more commonly described process of *identification*.

In the process of identification, it became apparent that the second generation of German perpetrators had inherited not only guilt and shame, but also a kind of predisposition to become perpetrators themselves. "If my father could do it," they ask, "Could I?" Müller-Hohagen (2008) suggested that such an absorbed trait could become a kind of *perpetratorship* (German: *Täterschaftigkeit*); a potential scary disposition to become a murderer. Through identification with the aggressor-father (who was a former Nazi), the child would unconsciously internalize a (potentially) abusive and violent parent-representation in themselves, which they have to struggle with all through life. For example, during a psychoanalytic session, the son of a sadistic SS officer exclaimed: "Ich kann nicht zurück, aber ich kann auch nicht vorwärts. Ich bin ein Deutscher, ein Glied in einer Kette, wenn auch die Kette fatal war. Aber wie kann ich mich von meinen Wurzeln abschneiden? Also bin ich dazu verurteilt, das zu bleiben was ich

bin. Ich bin ein Sohn, ich habe keine anderen Väter, auch wenn sie mir Gift vererbt haben.”

I cannot go back, nor can I go forward. I am a German, a link in a chain, even if the chain was a fatal one. But how can I cut myself loose from my roots? So I am condemned to remain what I am. I am a son; I have no other fathers, even though they bequeathed me poison (Jokl, 1998, p. 99, as reported in Kahn, 2006, p. 89).

Because such internalized self-representations are largely unacceptable in the present day society, a German *underworld* has been created in which anti-Semitism, racism, and xenophobia continue to flourish.

As a result of this identification with the aggressor, the assumed content of transmission of children of the war generation of Germans and Austrians (2GGA) will be decidedly different from the kinds of trauma transmission found in children of Holocaust survivors (2GHS). If the 2GHS absorbed vicarious traumatization, the 2GGA got secondary perpetratorship. On a collective level, while the Israeli Jews absorbed the consequences of catastrophic anxiety, the German and Austrian people got collective guilt. Both have a vague sense that there is something wrong with them: the 2GHS because they continually feel persecuted and the 2GGA because they feel seen as potential villains. The lesson of persecution for the 2GHS was to create their own Jewish homeland, while the lesson for the 2GGA was to merge within a global European Union, which somewhat erased their national heritage.

3. The Bystander

According to the stories told by group members, however, most Germans and Austrians seem to have been “neutral” or “passive” bystanders, who preferred to “mind their own business” while the Holocaust occurred. The German word for bystander is *Zuschauer*—someone who *watches*, but is not actively involved. For example, people would say: “We saw that they took the Jews away, but we didn’t know what would happen to them ...” The more correct German word for this behavior, however, would be *Wegschauer*—someone who *looks away*, in order not to see what was happening and in order not to have to take personal responsibility for it (Latane & Darley, 1970; Gellately, 2002).

There is an important lesson to be learned from bystander behavior. Ervin Staub (1989) from Hungary was saved during the war by a courageous Christian woman who was not a bystander, but an active

rescuer. This personal experience evoked his curiosity in understanding why some people became active rescuers, while others remained passive bystanders. Many years later, as a psychologist, he conducted some psychological experiments, which further investigated this phenomenon. In one such study, for example, volunteers heard a loud crash from the next room, followed by sobbing and groans. When the confederate said, "That probably has nothing to do with us," only about 25 percent of the volunteers investigated the source. But when the confederate said, "Let us see what is happening," every volunteer went to see what was wrong. The study showed the power of bystanders to prevent crime, brutality, and acts of violence. By simply being witnesses (and not *looking away*), bystanders can empower the victims and possibly prevent further injustice.

Most Germans still feel that bystanders were powerless and largely free from any responsibility. For example, in a Spiegel-survey (1992) of three thousand (East and West) German citizens, most respondents (45 percent) felt that "only those Germans who were involved in the persecution" were guilty, as were "only the Germans who knew about it" (32 percent).

But it is still unclear as to how much ordinary Germans and Austrians really knew about the Holocaust: about the deportations, about the extermination camps, and the systematic annihilation of the Jews. In their retrospective study of three thousand German respondents in the 1990s, Johnson & Reuband (2005) found that a little more than a third of those asked at the end of the war had *known, heard, or suspected* that the Jews were annihilated en masse (p. 369). In his suspicious manner, Welzer commented that it remains unclear what was behind the "open secret" of the *other 62 percent* of the respondents who said that they had known nothing about it at all. "Unfortunately, all historic, social-psychological evidence indicate that this is not true.... [They did know.]... It is even more tragic that so many of them not only knew about the persecution of the Jews, but that they were in favor of it" (Welzer, 2009, p. 74).

Historians, such as Bankier (1992), Kulka & Jäckel (2004) and Longerich (2006), summarized various studies on what the Germans in general felt about the persecution of the Jews. While most public opinion reports confirmed that the German society was saturated with anti-Semitic views, they also concluded that on the whole, it was impossible to definitely answer the question whether the attitude toward the persecution of the Jews among the non-Jewish Germans was marked more by indifference or by agreement.

Whether they knew or not, many bystanders expressed feeling *shame* for what the Nazis had done during the war. In fact, Brendler (1997) found that 65 percent of German youth still felt ashamed when they heard of

the mass murder perpetrated by their ancestors during the war. Many also felt guilty, paralyzed, and afraid of punishment when thinking about the Holocaust. Brendler (1995) concluded that "the enormous guilt of the ancestors was combined, in these young people's concept of themselves, with their own identity as Germans" (p. 260). According to Marks (2009), the Germans felt ashamed after 1945 because: (1) they had lost the war; (2) they had endured many traumatic war experiences; and (3) they had a bad conscience because of the Holocaust. Various defenses against such shame continue to poison interpersonal relations within and between such families and they are such a normal part of the German culture that people seem not to notice anymore.

Emphasizing such more general issues of bystander mentality, shame, and social responsibility makes history teaching of the Holocaust even more relevant for students today. For example, during a sociodrama on the effects of the Holocaust in Austria, a Kurdish immigrant shared with the group an incident in which he had been called a "filthy Turk." Though people around had clearly heard the comment, nobody had reacted. It was immediately obvious how the earlier anti-Semitism had been presently transformed into the hate of immigrants (xenophobia). Thus, Holocaust history can be looked at and learned from, not as a distant thing from the past, but as a relevant universal lesson for the present. More specifically, students can examine, not only the responses of victims, victimizers and bystanders during World War II, but also discuss moral and ethical issues, such as acceptable and unacceptable behavior, prejudice, conflict, power, leadership, and obedience that are relevant in their lives today.

4. The Rescuer and the Resistance Fighter

Apparently, not everybody did as they were told during the war. There were also those who resisted Hitler. As an illustration, a participant proudly told the following story about his socialist father: as a small boy, he had come home from school one day wearing a Hitler Jugend uniform, and proudly showed his parents how he had learned to pronounce the Hitler greeting correctly. Instead of praise, however, he received a slap on his face for his behavior and was severely reprimanded. His socialist parents explained that Hitler's ideology was dangerous and repulsive to them and that they were strongly opposed to it. The son adopted this worldview of his parents and he soon found himself in a prison with other opponents of the NS-regime who were treated as criminals, ridiculed, ousted from the community, or murdered to set an example.

Some of these opponents to the NS-regime continue to feel ousted

from society until this day. For example, a non-Jewish Austrian former political prisoner who had spent many years in Dachau because of his opposition against Hitler, and who joined me in sharing his experiences in an Austrian school, told me that he still felt intense animosity around him in the small town where he lived. People seemed to be unable to forgive him for his betrayal of the "Fatherland." When walking past a tree, he stopped to describe how the leaves change colors during the various seasons of the year. He said: "First they are green, and then they become red (socialist or even communist), and then finally, they become brown (NS)." For him, nothing much had changed in Austria since the war.

There are plenty of historical accounts of German opposition to Hitler (e.g., Balfour, 1988; Thomsett, 1997). In fact, more than half a million non-Jewish German civilians were imprisoned for such resistance, which was classified as a *political crime*. Such resistance was found within the religious, political, civilian, and even military communities. Several church and political leaders, as well as ordinary citizens protested against the National Socialistic regime before and during the war, and were severely punished for this. For example, at the Memorial of German Resistance in Berlin, a documentary film was shown about a priest with the name Lichtenberg who openly resisted Nazi persecution policy, was imprisoned, and died in 1943 on his way to Dachau.

Other active rescuers risked their lives to save Jews by providing them with shelter, food, and clothes or by helping to bring them to safety over the borders (Oliner & Oliner, 1988). Many of these conscientious *Righteous Gentiles among the Nations* (Hebrew: **בלוּעָה תְּמוּאָה יְדִיּסָה**) are honored in *Yad Vashem* for their brave behavior during these dangerous times. Such non-Jews who risked their lives during the Holocaust in order to save Jews from extermination by the Nazis are awarded a medal bearing their name, a certificate of honor, and the privilege of having a tree planted or their name added to those on the Wall of Honor at *Yad Vashem*. In addition, the law also authorized *Yad Vashem* to provide them with honorary Israeli citizenship in recognition of their brave acts. Recipients who choose to live in the state of Israel are entitled to a pension, free health care, as well as assistance with housing and nursing care. At the beginning of January 2008, over twenty-two thousand individuals from forty-five countries have been recognized as such, most of whom are of Polish, Dutch, French, or Ukrainian origin.

When Pope John Paul II visited Israel's national Holocaust memorial *Yad Vashem* on March 23, 2000, it did not only initiate the old controversy of the role of the Vatican in the Holocaust. More importantly, it focused on the incredible stories of courage that had saved many Jewish lives. Most

remarkable was the story of Edithera, who, aged eleven, had fled through the sewers of Krakow but was later interned in a Polish labor camp. On the day of liberation by the Soviets, she was near death when a young priest named Karol Wojtyla fed her and carried her three kilometers on his back to join other survivors. Now she stood with tears streaming down her cheeks before that same man, now Pope John Paul II.

Conclusion

At the end of a seminar, a participant spontaneously commented: "I am surprised that you still are occupied with all this Holocaust stuff. I thought it was already finished/completed (German: *erledigt*) a long time ago!" He was visibly shaken by the fact that people still were upset about the Holocaust and that it was such a loaded subject even after so many years. His comment bothered me and after some thought I realized that his use of the German word *erledigt* had offended me. The meaning of this word could be interpreted both as the final solution of the Jewish problem and as something being finally settled and finished with forever, indicating that "we have provided compensation and now have nothing more to do with this issue." I suspect that his words expressed a common desire in Germany and Austria that their NS past would be finally settled and forgotten once-and-for-all, that they should stop being reminded of it all the time and that there finally would be an end-line (German: *Schlußstrich*) over the Holocaust past.

Evidently, the present project did exactly the opposite.

It recommended a very personal kind of Holocaust education, both as a way to work through and confront a past that was massively avoided for years, and as a springboard for learning for the future. Such a process would help Germans and Austrians to become aware of the various traumatic events that formed them, both those that they inherited from their parents and grandparents and the collective responsibility of their country that they may identify with.

It is their moral obligation not to forget so that it will not be repeated. Otherwise, they will be guilty of the *second guilt*, described by Giordano (1987), that of trying to cover up that it ever happened.

However, in addition to learning about what happened to the *others*, the present project also tried to provide a setting in which it would be possible to talk about themselves in connection to the Second World War. From my experiences in these groups, it seems that there is a real need among Germans and Austrians to work through, both on an individual and on a collective level, their feelings about the war. But to the best of my

knowledge, there is no institution that deals specifically with this issue in Europe today.

Because the issues raised are complex and multifaceted without any clear-cut answers, this would include the sharing of ambivalent feelings and thoughts that evolve during a long process of personal and collective working through taking place over many years. The ultimate goal would be to help remember and mourn the victims on both sides, and to motivate German and Austrian communities to start to come to grips with their empty or burned-down synagogues and destroyed cemeteries. In addition, it would encourage teachers to include the history of the expulsion, persecution, and annihilation of the Jews in their school curriculum and to initiate youth visits to former working and extermination camps in Europe so that they can see for themselves what happened. Holocaust survivors and other witnesses from the war would be invited to give personal accounts of their experiences and relevant questions about how all this could have happened could then be discussed.

Then, we could start to listen also to the former soldiers of the Third Reich and try to understand why they behaved as they did, and learn important lessons about social behavior and group pressure, about the danger of propaganda and totalitarian regimes and about large groups who blindly follow a strong leader. As a result, the value of free speech and democracy would be appreciated and, possibly, we would be able to empower one another to have the courage to make a difference if we *do not* look away when we see injustice done.

Most importantly, however, such a process would make it easier for children and grandchildren of the German and Austrian victims, perpetrators, bystanders, and helpers to meet with one another and to share their common burdensome legacy. In addition, children and grandchildren of perpetrators and of Holocaust survivors would be able to discuss their common tragic history, as reported in various such encounters around the world (e.g., Bar-On, 1993; Krondorfer, 1995; Krondorfer et al. 1998).

One by One dialogue groups, for example, are open for Holocaust survivors and their descendants, as well as for perpetrators, bystanders, resisters, and their descendants, and are led by professionally trained facilitators from both sides of the war experience. Another program is called *To Reflect and Trust* and it has conducted annual encounters amongst descendants of Holocaust survivors and descendants of convicted Nazi war criminals ever since 1992. Similarly, a specific *Austrian Encounter* was convened by Samson Munn (2001b) and, finally, Yaacov Naor (1999) from Israel, together with colleagues from Germany, utilized psychodrama and expressive therapy methods in such groups.

Because both the German/Austrian and the Jewish participants are more or less vicariously traumatized, the Holocaust falls like a heavy shadow on these encounters. Although seldom verbalized, each group approaches the other with a certain amount of apprehension, to detect some potential trigger that might remind them of their Holocaust trauma. A hidden scenario is played out in which the child of a survivor initially wants to know the war history of the German or Austrian participants: "What did your parents do during the war? Were they actively involved in the killing of Jews? Were they Nazis?" On the other side, German or Austrian children of war participants try to find out if the Jew still holds a grudge toward them, and if there is a place for reconciliation: They frequently ask: "Can you forgive our people for what we did to your people?"

Simply put, both tend to project their own internalized representations of the victim and the perpetrator upon the other. Germans and Austrians tend to look upon children of survivors as potential victims and children of Holocaust survivors tend to look upon the Germans and Austrians as potential perpetrators. During this process, both sides try to conceal their different painful emotions that arise from these projections: the Germans and Austrians cover up their sense of guilt and shame while the children of survivors try to cover up their fear and anger. Only after some mutual *testing of the limits* will the relation become more relaxed and open for further exploration and deeper working through.

The situation described in the beginning of this chapter, in which a German soldier is standing in front of Hitler, seems to remain the prototype scene of Holocaust trauma in Germany and Austria, as well as among Jews in Israel and elsewhere.

Will the soldier embrace or kill the dictator?

Will he raise his hand in a *Heil Hitler!* salute, or will he protest?

Will he follow the command or will he follow his inner human voice?

We do not know.

But we will certainly be watching.