

Transgenerational War-Related Trauma in Post-War Germany: Evaluation of Results and Research Perspectives

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1. Introduction and Statement of Problem

When a war comes to an end, societies commemorate the dead and focus on the wounded. In Vietnam, the victims of Agent Orange have been given particular consideration. This conference is mainly about the environmental destruction that was carried to an extreme in the *American War*. War-related psychological disorders are less obvious than physical injuries and environmental damage and are therefore discussed less frequently. This is even more so with the psychological damage that may manifest as long-term trauma. Today, forty years after what we call the *Vietnam War*, I would like to address this issue. The German experience which now, 70 years after the end of the Second World War, goes back one generation further, can lead us to reflect on many aspects in Vietnam that have so far not been scrutinized by the historians.¹ I would be very interested to hear more about Vietnamese research on this question.

Dealing with the psychological effect of war is important in two respects: for the individuals and families affected and for society as a whole.

1 This shows that there has been fruitful cooperation between historians and psychologists in dealing with their own country's history. On psychiatric war trauma in Vietnamese people I have only found two publications in languages that are accessible to me. One is the government publication, Lê Thi (Duống Thi Thoa) (2005): *Single Women in Vietnam*. Hanoi. And the other is a French article by Guillemot, François (2014): *Des jeunes filles mutilées*. In: Guillemot, François/Larcher-Goscha, Agathe (eds.): *La colonisation des corps: de l'Indochine au Viet Nam*. Paris. P. 343–392. A differentiated account on soldiers' motivation for fighting is presented by Guillemot, François (2012): *Be Men! Fighting and Dying for the State of Vietnam (1951–1954)*. In: *War & Society* 31, 2. 184–210. 196. For war accounts of the generation of heroic Vietnam fighters of the period preceding 1968 cf.: *Circulating War Memories: The Diary of Ang Thùy Trâm*, in: *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 3, 2. 172–179; Lam, Mariam B. (not yet published): *Not coming to terms: Archival Trauma and Strategic Effect*. Durham.

The urge to justify or even glorify war as well as the wish of simply forgetting its horrors, on the other hand, often lead to repression. Individual and collective denial can reinforce each other.² What we repress finds its way into our daily lives in roundabout ways, however, and can become a burden for individuals as well as for society.³

I would like to make one important point at the beginning in order to avoid misunderstanding: The Vietnamese War of Liberation was of course a totally different conflict from the racist and offensive war waged by the Germans. I will therefore not dwell on the aspect of the extermination of the Jews (the Holocaust) despite the fact that the research into the processing of that specific trauma was very important – heuristically and historically – for the victims of the Holocaust (and, later, even for the perpetrators themselves).⁴

My main concern here is with the general war damage caused by shelling, bombing, displacement and forced migration, the loss of parents, partners and other close relatives, by people becoming brutalized through actively participating in the war, by the shootings and deprivation that are an inevitable part of any war, however lofty the moral ideals that led to it in the first place.

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- 2 Regarding the spirit cult as one of the reasons why the commemoration of the war dead cannot be suppressed in Vietnam Margara, Andreas (2012): *Der Amerikanische Krieg. Erinnerungskultur in Vietnam*. Berlin. 91. Rudolf, Gerd (2009): *Kriegskinder und Persönlichkeitsstruktur*. In: Radebold, Hartmut/Heuft, Gereon/Fooken, Insa (eds.): *Kindheiten im Zweiten Weltkrieg*. Weinheim. 83–91. 89.
 - 3 This is of course also true for the repressed history of the war in South Vietnam which is still not publically commemorated.
 - 4 Basic reading: Bergmann, M.S./Jucovy, M.E. (eds.) (1982): *Generations of the Holocaust*. New York. An up-to-date overview: Wiegand-Grefe, Silke/Möller, Birgit (2013): *Kriegskindheit im Hamburger Feuersturm und ihre Folgen. Eine theoretische Einführung in die Perspektiven der Enkel und Familien*. In: Lamparter, Ulrich/Wiegand-Grefe, Silke/Wierling, Dorothee (eds.): *Zeitzeugen des Hamburger Feuersturms 1943 und ihre Familien: Forschungsprojekt zur Weitergabe von Kriegserfahrungen*. Göttingen. 295–306. 296f. Bohleber, Werner (2000): *Die Entwicklung der Traumatheorie in der Psychoanalyse*. In: *Psyche. Zeitschrift für Psychoanalyse und ihre Anwendungen* 54. 797–839, particularly 810ff., 815, 817. <http://gsp.yale.edu/resources/bibliographies/holocaust-bibliography>.

2. *When Do Traumatizing War Memories Affect Individuals or the Society – or: the Transgenerational Effect of Memory*

It is not true, however, that the psychological effects of a war are not spoken of, too, after a war. There are those who lie sleepless as a result of the air raids they witnessed. Others start up from their sleep in the middle of the night because of the violence they experienced; there are soldiers who return from the war unable to resume their ordinary lives again: they start drinking or become violent.⁵ Bao Ninh's novel is about this. That this novel has been so hugely successful points to the wider societal need for reflection in Vietnam, too.⁶ The immense individual suffering in Germany after 1945 – and it was probably the same in Vietnam after 1975 – was endured and partly worked through within the family; in isolation, as it were.⁷

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- 5 Goltermann, Svenja (2009): *Die Gesellschaft der Überlebenden: Deutsche Kriegsheimkehrer und ihre Gewalterfahrungen im Zweiten Weltkrieg*. München. 130–162 [engl. edition: *War in Their Minds: German War Veterans and Their Experiences of Violence in the Second World War*. Michigan UP.]. For a concrete example cf. Meyer-Madaus, Amelie/Wiegand-Greife, Silke (2013): *Familien über drei Generationen im Familieninterview. Ein Fallbeispiel*. In: Lamparter/Wiegand-Greife/Wierling (2013), 320–335. 332. Müller-Hohagen, Jürgen (2005): *Verleugnet, verdrängt, verschwiegen. Seelische Nachwirkungen der NS-Zeit und Wege zu ihrer Überwindung*. München. 14ff., 73–80, 108, 200.
- 6 Ninh, Bao (1996): *The Sorrow of War*. New York. First published in roneotype in 1990 as *Nỗi buồn chiến tranh* (Identity of love), then in 1994 in English, and finally, around 2006, in Vietnamese; pirate editions of the English version were sold before to tourists and also to the Vietnamese. Translated into many languages, mostly based on the English version co-written by the Australian author Frank Palmos, in close cooperation with the original author. Cf. Meyer, Christina (2008): *War and Trauma Images in Vietnam War Representations*. Hildesheim. 161–189.
- 7 For tolerated local private commemoration, veneration of the dead and clever reasoning see Kwon, Heonik (2013): *Cold War in a Vietnamese Community*. In: Laderman, Scott/Martini, Edwin A. (eds.): *Four Decades On. Vietnam, the United States and the Legacies of the Second Indochina War*. Durham. 84–102. 89. For the publically steered positive commemoration Kwon, Heonik (2013), 90f. and Vương Trí Nhàn (2008): *The Diary of Dang Thùy Trâm and the Postwar Vietnamese Mentality*. In: *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 3, 2. 180–195. 182–186 for photos, then the censoring of the first critical literary publications in the 1980s and the beginning of the Doi Moi reform as the framework for the publication of a – still – heroic diary by Dang Thùy Trâm, 189; and more comprehensively Margara (2012), particularly 25ff., on the disregard for the individual suffering of war veterans and those returning from the war in the commemoration culture 81ff. On further, mostly artis-

In Germany there were specific added problems with the processing of war experiences. In particular, the generation that took part in the war had often been involved in very disturbing actions or war crimes which they were determined to forget. They tended to keep these painful experiences bottled up for decades and never spoke about them.⁸

In the first years after the war people were primarily preoccupied with their material needs: the children were malnourished, yet one basically never reads about their psychological wounds during the post-war period.⁹ As late as the 1950s, the public and the psychologists thought that young

tic and literary processing of war memories see Ho Tai, Hue-Tam (2001): *Situating Memory*. In: Ho Tai, Hue-Tam (ed.): *The Country of Memory. Remaking the Past in Late Socialist Vietnam*. Berkeley. 1–17.

8 For other coping mechanisms cf. Mitscherlich, Alexander/Mitscherlich, Margarete (1967): *Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern. Grundlagen kollektiven Verhaltens*. Munich. Particularly 24, 40.

9 Dinges, Martin (2011): *Die Gesundheit von Jungen und männlichen Jugendlichen in historischer Perspektive (1780–2010)*. In: *MedGG* 29. 97–121. 109. Coerper, Carl/Hagen, Wilhelm/Thomae, Hans (eds.) (1954): *Deutsche Nachkriegskinder: Methoden und erste Ergebnisse der deutschen Längsschnittuntersuchungen über die körperliche und seelische Entwicklung im Schulkindalter*. Stuttgart. One result mentioned, which even surprised the authors, was that children from neglected backgrounds (poor living conditions, poor care and family dissolution, inner neglect) did better at school than well cared-for children (278); mention is made of their lower levels of cheerfulness (284ff.), leaving a higher general readiness to perform. The positive effect of motherly care, even in difficult circumstances, is emphasized in what follows (302). Huth, Albert (1956): *Die Entwicklung des Kindes im Volksschulalter*. Donauwörth. “The now 13 to 19 year-olds have been through the war; their unconscious has been permeated by experiences that continue to have a negative effect. This is why it is essential to convey true, beautiful, good and sacred experiences to these young people!” Huth (1956), 152. This seems to imply that the problems are being perceived, even if the views differ on how to resolve them. Hau, Theodor F. (1968): *Frühkindliches Schicksal und Neurose. Schizoide und depressive Neurose-Erkrankungen als Folge frühkindlicher Erlebnisschäden in der Kriegszeit*. Göttingen. Hau pointed, as early as 1965, to a “structural change in the neuroses of adolescents after the war,” although not much attention has been given to his findings. The lasting psychological effects of the war, which led to “rebellion, protest, extravagance, outsider idolization and a deeply rooted lack of sociability in adolescents, who at the same time overcompensated by seeking mostly superficial contacts, extreme psychomotor states in jazz events,” remained unnoticed, or possibly not understood, by the parents because of their different orientation. The war experiences, which evoked fear, a sense of being exposed and a lack of existential safety and self-assurance in the children and adolescents who were not prepared for the world, continued to affect them detrimentally. The adults and

children did not remember the war and could therefore not be harmed or traumatized by it.¹⁰ And much praise was lavished on the mothers who had everything under control.¹¹

The survivors needed a roof over their heads, the soldiers who had come back and the war widows claimed pensions, the expellees demanded compensation for everything they had lost.¹² For society it was also almost exclusively about material concerns – housing and factories needed to be rebuilt.¹³ Literature was the only place where, even in the early stages, the surviving soldiers' loss of orientation and the problems arising from this for their families were occasionally articulated.

Soon, collective commemoration rituals were introduced.¹⁴ But the psychological consequences of the war remained unarticulated, certainly in

society as a whole were confronted with something they had forgotten, something they wanted to forget and did not want to be reminded of. Only many years later the young people began to ask for what they had missed out on in their earliest childhood." Hau, Theodor F. (1968), 132f., 32, 81f., in particular on father absence, 112. The solution suggested here, too, is "emotional reliability and constancy of interpersonal relationships," which need to make up for the deficits incurred due to the father's earlier frequent absence (or his substitutes who were not reliable due to their age or because they were not consistently present) as well as the lack of affection shown by the mother Hau, (1968), 135.

- 10 For evidence cf. Radebold, Hartmut (2004): *Entwicklungspsychologische Aspekte*. In: Schulz, Hermann/Radebold, Hartmut/Reulecke, Jürgen: *Söhne ohne Väter: Erfahrungen der Kriegsgeneration*. Berlin. 137. Decker, Oliver/Brähler, Elmar (2012): *Die psychosozialen Folgen von Vertreibung, Ausbombung und Vaterlosigkeit bei den Geburtsjahrgängen 1930–1945*. In: Radebold/Heuft/Fooker (eds.), 119–138. 120. Radebold, Hartmut (2012): *Während des Alterns*. In: Radebold/Heuft/Fooker (2012), 139–148. 146. For the sources of this statement see Hagen, Wilhelm/Thomae, Hans (1962): *10 Jahre deutsche Nachkriegskinder*. München.
- 11 Reulecke, Jürgen (2010): *Vaterlose Söhne*. In: Thomä, Dieter (eds.): *Vaterlosigkeit: Geschichte und Gegenwart einer fixen Idee*. Frankfurt. 142–159. 152–156.
- 12 Mitscherlich/Mitscherlich (1967): 23, 40. Winkler, Christiane (2007): *Männlichkeit und Gesundheit der deutschen Kriegsheimkehrer im Spiegel der Ärztekongresse des Verbands der Heimkehrer*. In: Dinges, Martin (ed.): *Männlichkeit und Gesundheit im historischen Wandel ca. 1800 – ca. 2000*. Stuttgart. 157–173.
- 13 Not least in order to be able to generate the transfer payments and the burden sharing – for the *displaced* and the various groups of war victims.
- 14 For instance the Hamburg *Firestorm* etc. where the city commemorated the victims of the bombing with annual wreath-laying ceremonies. On their annual con-

society. After a phase of repression the society in the Federal Republic of Germany has by now collectively worked through the war crimes.¹⁵ Unlike Japan, it tried early on to enter into dialogue with the former enemies in the neighbouring countries, a step that proved instrumental in the subsequent unification of Europe. The Federal Republic of Germany has paid considerable damages and has written history books together with historians from those neighbouring countries. The younger generation has been systematically confronted with the wartime atrocities across the school curriculum. It was nevertheless exactly these war crimes that blocked off German war memories for a very long time: Germans were allowed, expected and willing to publically remember their part as perpetrators, but not their part as victims. This role was fully occupied by Jews, Russians, Poles, et cetera.

This changed relatively “suddenly” around 2000-2003, when those born around 1940 reached retirement age.¹⁶ Now most of them had time at their hands and could no longer repress troubling emotions or stop them from surging up. Some experienced deep inner crises or even severe depression which forced them to confront their past. Some went to see a psychiatrist¹⁷ where they came to realize that, throughout their lives, they had been unable to free themselves from the burdens of the past:¹⁸ they suffered as a result of their parents’ forced silence, especially regarding the question as to their contribution to the running of the Nazi state.¹⁹

These sixty-somethings went public. They declared themselves collectively to be the generation of war children, which initially referred to the now defined memory construct of “war childhood and fatherlessness.”²⁰ They demanded that they should be “allowed to remember without the risk

gresses the territorial associations of the displaced persons bewailed the loss of their homeland – having asked for it to be returned to them for a long time.

- 15 The differences between the experiences in East and West Germany cannot be further investigated here.
- 16 The existing, and frequent, earlier statements and publications, to which Dörr quite rightly refers, were not perceived nearly as clearly cf. Dörr, Margarete (2007): *Der Krieg hat uns geprägt. Wie Kinder den Zweiten Weltkrieg erlebten*. Frankfurt.
- 17 “A few percent”, Rudolf (2009), 90.
- 18 Schulz-Hageleit, Peter: Zur Problematik des *Durcharbeitens* lebensgeschichtlicher Erfahrungen. In: Reulecke, Jürgen (ed.): *Generationalität und Lebensgeschichte im 20. Jahrhundert*. München. 17–32. Esp. 29.
- 19 Mitscherlich/Mitscherlich (1967).
- 20 Cf. Schulz/Radebold/Reulecke (2004).

of being accused of offsetting their own grief against the suffering that Hitler Germany inflicted on other peoples, or of feeling sorry for themselves and styling themselves as ‘victims’.”²¹

The war-induced fatherlessness that first dominated this generational construction was a mass phenomenon. “Millions of German soldiers” were already “absent for long periods of time during the war.”²² In World War II, which claimed inside Germany 4.7 million lives, every eighth German male died, including all ages from children to old men.²³ 3.2 million men were still imprisoned in POW camps in the spring of 1947.

“More than two million civilians were killed whilst fleeing or during displacement. Half a million fell victim to bombing.”²⁴ “Those who died or went missing in the war left behind more than 1.7 million widows and almost 2.5 million half or complete orphans. It is estimated that after World War II around 25 percent of all children grew up fatherless.”²⁵ “Countless others had a troubled relationship with a father who, traumatized by the war, had fallen silent.”²⁶

The consequences for these children, boys as well as girls, were horrendous: growing up without a father meant being deprived of the triangulation (i.e. forming attachments with a mother and a father) that is essential for children’s psychological development.²⁷ Fathers are very important for child development.

They can

- promote a secure mother-baby bonding and contribute their own attachment aspects from an early stage,

21 Reulecke, Jürgen (2012): Die wiedergefundene Vergangenheit. Generationelle Aspekte der neueren deutschen Erinnerungskultur. In: Gansel, Carsten/Zimniak, Pawel (eds.): *Kriegskindheiten und Erinnerungsarbeit*. Berlin. 15–30. 16.

22 Franz, Matthias/Lieberz, Klaus/Schepank, Heinz (2005): Das Fehlen der Väter und die spätere seelische Entwicklung der Kriegskinder in einer deutschen Bevölkerungsstichprobe. In: Radebold, Hartmut (ed.): *Kindheiten im II. Weltkrieg*. Gießen. 45–55. 48f.

23 Of those conscripted one in two of the 20 to 30 year-olds died and one in three of the 30 to 40 year olds.

24 More than half were women and children.

25 Radebold, Hartmut (2004): *Abwesende Väter – Fakten und Forschungsergebnisse*. In: Schulz, Hermann/Radebold, Hartmut/Reulecke, Jürgen (eds.): *Söhne ohne Väter: Erfahrungen der Kriegsgeneration*. Berlin. 115–119. 115f. With more detailed information on individual age cohorts.

26 Franz/Lieberz/Schepank (2005), 49.

27 Reulecke (2012), 22.

- promote separation if the one- to two-year old is too closely attached to the mother, and help to ease the child's anxiety,
- help to strengthen the sexual identity of the three- to six-year old child, and
- through their active involvement favourably influence the child's cognitive competences and internalization of values so that these influences can serve "as models for coping with potentially critical biographical transitions in later phases of life".²⁸

All that was often left to the fatherless children were father projections – mostly idealized images of the absent father – and "allocations of tasks" by their mothers such as, "You owe this (a particular, desired behaviour) to your father." At the same time, children were often required much too early to take responsibility for their younger siblings. Some children were treated like partner substitutes (parentification), a role that could only overtax them. And the mothers themselves were often unable to cope or depressed.²⁹

3. Retrospective Psychological Findings

Parallel to this discovery and public articulation – initially by individuals – of the effects of a repressed war childhood, psychologists came across phenomena that surprised them. Their original aim was merely to find out how widespread psychogenic illnesses – alternating states of anxiety and depression – were in any given urban population.³⁰ At three points in time the researchers investigated 600 randomly selected individuals (equal

28 Whole paragraph according to Franz/Lieberz/Schepank (2005), 50f., quote 51. For more detail cf. Radebold (2004), 120–130.

29 This view only emerged later: Franz/Lieberz/Schepank (2005), 49. Franz, Matthias/Lieberz, Klaus/Schmitz, Norbert/Schepank, Heinz (1999.): Wenn der Vater fehlt. Epidemiologische Befunde zur Bedeutung früher Abwesenheit für die psychische Gesundheit im späteren Leben. In: Zeitschrift für psychosomatische Medizin, 45, 260–278. Radebold (2004), 130–136. The classic description of this generation goes back to Schelsky, Helmut (1957): Die skeptische Generation. Düsseldorf. Specific problems of single mothers after the war, young people's attempt to quickly catch up on training, the premature taking on of responsibility – often for younger siblings, because the working mothers were frequently absent, helping with the reconstruction, great reluctance to engage in politics.

30 Including a tendency towards symptom shifting.

numbers of men and women) who were born in 1935, 1945 and 1955, using standardized questionnaires and interviews. The survey was first carried out in 1979-83, then repeated in 1983-1985 and again in 1991-1994.³¹ This Mannheim Cohort Study showed on the one hand that a quarter of the population suffered from such disorders; on the other hand – and more importantly – that these sufferers mostly belonged to the older generation. This was interpreted as a consequence of the extremely disturbing war experiences of this age group which showed that the problems had not sorted themselves out in the course of a long life; on the contrary: when the study was repeated eleven years later, they were equally prevalent.³²

In a follow-up assessment that aimed to isolate the risk factors which may lead to mental illness, fatherlessness was unexpectedly found to be a statistically significant indicator of later problems and their persistence over eleven years.³³ Where with children of 6 and younger the father was absent for more than six months – only in a few cases the father had died – they displayed even fifty years later more strongly pronounced disorders than other members of the same birth cohort.³⁴ The absence of a father is of course only one factor among many, because with psychogenic disorders several factors come together such as personal characteristics, social support, chronic stress, genetic influences and other strains of early childhood. But extended separation from the father increases the risk at a statistically significant level. These findings corroborated the self-interpretation of the *generation of war children*.

The specific strains of being a war child have been researched in more detail since then. In the ELDERMEN study, which was carried out from 1994 to 1997, all over sixty-year old patients admitted to hospitals for acute internal medicine were, during the last third of their treatment, questioned and examined with regard to psychogenic disorders, present physical disabilities, subjective wellbeing and subjective physical ailments. As a first important result the study revealed that those who experienced the

31 Franz/Lieberz/Schepank (2005), 45–48.

32 Based on the central study year, the missing “spontaneous remissions” were an important topic of psychoanalysis for some time. Franz, Matthias/Lieberz, Klaus/Schmitz, N./Schepank, Heinz (1999): A Decade of Spontaneous Long-Term Course of Psychogenic Impairment in a Community Population Sample. In: *Soc Psychiatry Psychiatr Epidemiol* 34, 651–656. 652f.

33 Franz/Lieberz/Schepank (2005), 49.

34 Franz/Lieberz/Schepank (2005), 50f.

war as children or pupils were significantly more stressed by this experience than those who were already adults at the time.³⁵ This became apparent on comparing elderly with very elderly people in the 1990s. The latter group was born between the wars, before 1930, the younger group were born later. Members of the younger group had more problems working through the stressful events because they had not been offered or learnt ways of coming to terms with their experiences. The older ones had coped better although they were in a worse physical state at the time of the investigation: they were, after all, on average 15 years older!

On closer inspection, the generation of war children born between 1930 and 1945 proved to be rather heterogeneous which meant that further research was necessary: the question now was how “displacement and being bombed out had affected their present state of health” and “to what extent anxiety and depression continued to be more prevalent today among those who were displaced or bombed out.” In addition, half of this generation grew up with fathers, with a quarter of them the father was absent part of the time, and with almost another quarter the father was away for a long time or permanently.³⁶ Further studies were therefore carried out to see “to what extent growing up without a father affected people’s present wellbeing.” In order to further verify these results an investigation representative of the overall population followed. In two sections, conducted in 2002 and 2003, approximately 4500 (4478) persons aged 14 to 93 years were questioned. Of that number, 1247 were war children (born between 1930 and 1945).³⁷

The results were unambiguous: refugees saw themselves as physically less fit (they reported problems with climbing stairs, walking longer distances, taking baths by themselves) than those who had not been forced to

35 Schneider, Gudrun/Driesch, Georg/Kruse, Andreas (2012): Belastende und fördernde Faktoren im Lebensverlauf der Kriegskinder – Zusammenhänge zur psychischen Gesundheit im Alter. In: Radebold/Heuft/Fooken (2012), 93–104. 101, 103. (522 of patients over 60, objective physical disability, subjective wellbeing, subjectively experienced physical complaints, biographical experiences).

36 Brähler, Elmar/Decker, Oliver/Radebold, Hartmut (2012): Ausgebombt, vertrieben, vaterlos – Langzeitfolgen bei den Geburtsjahrgängen 1930–1945 in Deutschland. In: Radebold, Hartmut (ed.): Kindheiten im Zweiten Weltkrieg und ihre Folgen. Gießen. 111–136.

37 572 in the first section (2002): Displacement, bombed out and at least two years without a father; 675 in the second section (2003): mostly grown up without a father, Brähler/Decker/Radebold (2012), 115–117.

flee. In women this was even more pronounced than in men.³⁸ The same result emerged when it came to physical role functioning (“doing difficult jobs in recent weeks”, “not being active for as long as before”) as an element of reduced life satisfaction. The second factor investigated, being bombed out, compromised physical role functioning in men more than in women. The same applied to social functioning: men who were bombed out have more problems keeping in contact with acquaintances, visiting friends etc. – and they tend to have more pain. The psychological wellbeing is generally lower in people who were bombed out, and lowest if they were women. Bombed out people have panic attacks twice as frequently as the not-bombed out; 13 percent of bombed out men and 18 percent of bombed-out women display reduced psychosocial functioning: in each case these figures are about three times as high as for people who never lost their homes. They have “difficulties doing their work, looking after their homes and getting on with other people.”³⁹ One therefore needs to differentiate between the consequences of fleeing, which stressed women more permanently physically, and being bombed out, which, in men, led to physical and social problems in particular whilst more often causing mental stress in women.

38 Brähler/Decker/Radebold (2012), 124f.

39 Brähler/Decker/Radebold (2012), 128f.

Temporary paternal absence of up to two years had no long-term effect. Growing up largely without a father, on the other hand, proved to have further adverse effects on development as the table shows.

Table 1: Grown up fatherless: increased symptoms compared to children with fathers⁴⁰

Parameter	Men	Women
Depressive symptoms (stronger, episodes)	increased by a third	almost twice as high
Dysthymia (mood disorder: milder, lasts longer)	increased by a fifth	increased by a third
Social phobia (mistrust towards others)	increased by a third	almost twice as high
Somatic symptoms	minimally higher	increased by a third
Stress	increased by half	increased by half

The same picture emerged for all forms of fatigue⁴¹ - physical, cognitive or affective: symptoms are higher for all who grew up without a father. With women they are, at 40 to 50 percent, twice as high as with men where the increase is only 20-25 percent. Negative affectivity (proneness to anxiety, anger or depression and pessimistic outlook on life) and social inhibition are up by about 10 percent in both sexes.

The absence of a father therefore had a permanent negative effect on boys and girls. Psychological stress is, however, mentioned more often by women than by men throughout. On the whole, the specific war effects in people who were bombed out, displaced or fatherless are obvious, with stress patterns differing between men and women.⁴² The results of representative population studies and a series of specific studies on smaller

40 Author’s own presentation based on the precise figures in Brähler/Decker/Radebold (2012), 130ff.

41 Brähler/Decker/Radebold (2012), 134. It should be “fatigue”, not “fatigue”.

42 It cannot be discussed here why the reported lower mental stress in men is due to the phenomenon that mental illness in men remained a taboo until recently. The fact that the questionnaires and scaling tools used are based on self-evaluations could have an effect: Maybe men did, “merely” for gender reasons, not think of reporting such symptoms more often.

populations – such as refugee children, elderly people in need of care, myocardial infarction patients, psychotherapeutic patients – corroborate each other. Personal accounts⁴³ and more recent epidemiological findings also point in the same direction.⁴⁴

Finally, a study representative of the overall population on – full or partial – post-traumatic stress disorder showed the ranking order of traumatic war experiences in the older patients even more clearly: “Direct war experiences were most frequent at 23.7 percent, followed by being bombed out during the war (20.6 percent) and traumatic events in connection with displacement (17.9 percent).”⁴⁵

4. Transmission to the Second and Third Generation

Another important finding of this research is that trauma does not end with the generation directly affected by the war, but is passed on to the second and even the third generation, that is, the grandchildren of the survivors. This transmission can be explicit or implicit.

For Germany this has been investigated in depth with reference to the severe bombing of Hamburg, known as the *Hamburg firestorm*: a series of air raids carried out in the night of 27 July 1943, with 739 bomber planes not only causing immense damage to buildings but temperatures soaring up to 1000° degrees as a result of *chimney* effects, melting the tarmac in the streets and burning those alive who tried to escape. 30,000 were killed in that one night. As part of this project, particular families were questioned about the entire stretch of 70 years that had passed since the bombing.⁴⁶ Using tried and tested psychological tools – questionnaires for self-evaluation – as well as objective physiological parameters, it was possible to show that members of the second or third generations also presented

43 Radebold (2012), 140f.

44 Glaesmer, Heide/Brähler, Elmar (2011): Die Langzeitfolgen des Zweiten Weltkrieges in der deutschen Bevölkerung: epidemiologische Befunde und deren klinische Bedeutung. In: *Psychotherapeutenjournal* 4. 346–353.

45 Maercker, Andreas/Forstmeier, Simon (2008): Posttraumatische Belastungsstörungen in Deutschland. Ergebnisse einer gesamtdeutschen epidemiologischen Untersuchung. In: *Der Nervenarzt* 79. 577–586. 582. Fatherlessness was not asked about in this study.

46 64 were war contemporaries, 45 or 43 from the generation of their children, 16 grandchildren.

statistically significant dispositions to psychological disorders.⁴⁷ One of the particular benefits of this project was that it was also possible to obtain information in longer interviews on factors that may have reduced the traumatic effects, such as adults dealing with a harrowing situation in a calm rather than frantic manner in the presence of children.⁴⁸ Later on, speaking about the experiences helped coming to terms with them, but for this it needed a reliable family member and such a person was often not available. Women processed many experiences by devoting themselves to their families, men by seeking success at work or by building family homes.⁴⁹

The study also revealed that people found it easier to talk about their experiences with their grandchildren rather than with their own children, a fact that points to people's inhibitions in speaking about their direct war experiences as parents as well as to the next generation's lack of interest in or reluctance to deal with their parents' problematic experiences. To an extent, these are dispositions that are conveyed by society: a long-lasting climate of collective repression or politically imposed glorification of war memories – as was common in Vietnam for a long time – can also affect communication within families. It was definitely easier to find access for

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- 47 In the case of the firestorm project there is also a strong correlation of psychological disorders between the degree of stress in the first and second generation, Isendorff, Philipp von (2013): Transgenerationale Weitergabe von Kriegstraumata. Eine psychometrische Untersuchung. In: Lamparter, Ulrich/Wiegand-Grefe, Silke/Wierling, Dorothee (eds): *Zeitzeugen des Hamburger Feuersturms 1943 und ihre Familien: Forschungsprojekt zur Weitergabe von Kriegserfahrungen*. Göttingen. 256–273. 267.
- 48 Möller, Birgit/Lamparter, Ulrich (2013): *Erlebnis und Verarbeitung des Feuersturms im Lebensverlauf. Ein typologischer Ansatz*. In: Lamparter, Ulrich/Wiegand-Grefe, Silke/Wierling, Dorothee (eds): *Zeitzeugen des Hamburger Feuersturms 1943 und ihre Familien: Forschungsprojekt zur Weitergabe von Kriegserfahrungen*. Göttingen. 67–103. 88. Drost, Nicole/Lamparter, Ulrich (2013): *Das Tableau diagnostischer Urteile. Eine qualitativ-quantitative Auswertung des Zeitzeugeninterviews*. In: Lamparter, Ulrich/Wiegand-Grefe, Silke/Wierling, Dorothee (eds): *Zeitzeugen des Hamburger Feuersturms 1943 und ihre Familien: Forschungsprojekt zur Weitergabe von Kriegserfahrungen*. Göttingen. 167–192. 174.
- 49 Möller/Lamparter (2013), 101. Holstein, Christa/Lamparter, Ulrich (2013): *Die zweite Generation. Qualitative Befunde*. In: Lamparter, Ulrich/Wiegand-Grefe, Silke/Wierling, Dorothee (eds.): *Zeitzeugen des Hamburger Feuersturms 1943 und ihre Familien: Forschungsprojekt zur Weitergabe von Kriegserfahrungen*. 231–255. 250. On the generation of children of contemporary witnesses.

those directly affected, once they had retired from work, and for their grand-children, who were in any case further removed from the events.

Aside from such explicit ways of processing war trauma there are also implicit effects – such as total silence about what has been experienced.⁵⁰ Inner blocks in dealing with traumatizing events affect “the intergenerational mental structure”, “since the generations do not pass the time allocated to them in isolation.”⁵¹ Experiences that have not been adapted will eventually come to the surface “behind the backs of the subjects” (as Hegel put it) – and affect the next generation. The medical scientists were surprised by the outcome of their research: even in the third generation, people whose grandparents remembered traumatic war experiences needed psychiatric treatment more frequently. This greater *vulnerability* in grand-children was statistically significant and therefore not mere coincidence. This result was the more astonishing as the grandparents in question had kept their war experiences to themselves for many years and even the parent generation had often found out little or nothing about their own parents’ experiences before they began treatment. It is as if there had been a longstanding vow of silence: people preferred not to talk about the war and their horrific experiences and it was better not to ask any questions. These experiences were often mentioned for the first time forty or fifty years after the end of the war as part of the treatment. This observation also showed that keeping silent does not help to relieve psychiatric stress. Those directly affected were clearly so deeply influenced by their war experiences that they passed on their fears and traumas wordlessly and unaware of their own compensatory actions. Psychologists speak of “implicit missions” that are passed on to each following generation. With war children these are clearly associated – as has been proven clinically – with the specific experiences of their parents.

50 Cf. Lamparter, Ulrich/Holstein, Christa (2013): Was ist gefolgt? Erste Ergebnisse zur Transmission von Erfahrung des *Hamburger Feuersturms* (1943) zwischen der ersten und der zweiten Generation. In: Lamparter, Ulrich/Wiegand-Greife, Silke/Wierling, Dorothee (eds): *Zeitzeugen des Hamburger Feuersturms 1943 und ihre Familien: Forschungsprojekt zur Weitergabe von Kriegserfahrungen*. Göttingen. 274–292. 291. On the effect of not speaking about Nazi involvement see Hanebutt, Otto F. (2003): *Die vaterlosen 68er und ihr Erbe. Identitätsfindung bei Nachkommen der NS-Generation; Entwurf eines intergenerativ und narrativ orientierten Konzeptes zum Verständnis rechtsextremistischer gewalttätiger Jugendlicher*. Heidelberg.

51 Reulecke (2012), 19.

This is best observed with people who lost their home through bombing or displacement.⁵² The generation directly affected often tends to compensate by being particularly focused on acquiring possessions, hoping that this will give them – practical and symbolic – security. But the experience can also give rise to a sense of homelessness and general insecurity regarding the possibility of being able to hold on to anything one has achieved. This constant insecurity can be unconsciously transmitted to the next generation who receive the *implicit mission* not to be disorderly or conspicuous and not to endanger the status the family has worked so hard to establish. Or it might be indirectly conveyed to them that they better choose an apprenticeship as a safe route to professional security rather than academic studies which would take longer.

These permanent unconscious fears in members of the war generation manifest, on the one hand, in the inability to speak about them with their children. On the other hand, these parents tend to be particularly strict with their adolescent children, especially their daughters, warning them not to stay out late, because they perceive the night time, beyond any reasonable measure, as particularly dangerous. Some children rebel vehemently against such implicit missions, fighting the imposed restrictions, sometimes for decades, by pursuing often harmful and chaotic lifestyles in their search for independence. Eating disorders are also frequent. These young people often do not even know why they seem almost driven to keep making the same mistakes. The autobiographical and psychological literature of the recent decades on the consequences of war and displacement in Germany is full of just such examples. But the inferences are clear enough: war trauma is transmitted implicitly within families – manifesting also as feelings of guilt, helplessness, desolation, loss or yearning – and can heavily impact on the life of the next generations.⁵³ What astonished the researchers of the Mannheim Cohort Study was that also among the second and third generations the number of psychiatric diagnoses was higher for those whose parents or grand-parents were traumatized in the war. This meant that they were *more vulnerable* across several generations. The German scientists in question would have been less surprised

52 Holstein/Lamparter (2013), 238 seq. Hirsch, Helga (2004): *Schweres Gepäck. Flucht und Vertreibung als Lebensthema*, Hamburg.

53 To mention just some of the topics which have been well researched by Lorenz, Hilke (2012): *Weil der Krieg unsere Seelen frisst. Wie die blinden Flecken der Vergangenheit bis heute nachwirken*. Berlin.

had they been familiar with the research into victims of the holocaust.⁵⁴ This research focused on the psychological experiences of victims, mainly in Israel and the US, who had survived the German concentration camps.

One might surmise that these survivors were simply glad to have come through their ordeal alive. Yet the study found that those who were able and willing to speak about their experiences at all were tormented by the question as to why they were saved while their siblings, parents and other relatives perished. In Israel the generation of grand-children also suffered particularly from their parents' and grand-parents' silence and developed feelings of guilt. What is important for our context is that the silence, even in those who were indisputably victims and who, as survivors of the death camps, were entitled to claim a high moral status for themselves, was – in the long-term – harmful for their own mental health and that of their children and grand-children.

Long-term studies also revealed that psychoanalytical treatment can be helpful.⁵⁵ Special forms of therapy, such as Integrative Testimonial Therapy (ITT), were developed that work with the resources of the trauma sufferers. The participants of this therapy first undergo a phase of guided biographical reconstruction, followed by a phase where they confront the experiences they have so far repressed and, finally, one of cognitive re-evaluation.⁵⁶

There is thirdly and lastly a series of investigations that try to establish how failure to work through war-related trauma can have repercussions in the wider society: the German student protests of 1968, for instance, were interpreted as symbolic patricide without fathers.⁵⁷ One interpretation sees

54 See note 4, in particular Bohleber (2000), 811f., for Niederland's lecture at the 1967 Psychoanalysis Congress, and 817ff. on the extended silent phases in illness.

55 A catamnesis study (summary of treatment, including in particular psychotherapy and rehabilitation) showed the absence of symptoms after coming through the encoded illness. More detail and better illustrated in Leuzinger-Bohleber, Marianne (2012): *Kriegskindheiten, ihre lebenslangen Folgen – dargestellt an einigen Beispielen aus der DPV-Katamnesestudie*. In: Fooker/Heuft (eds.), 61–82, 63ff.

56 Among the less specific precursors is "reminiscence therapy" which aims to bring harmony to the way one looks at one's life and attach meaning to one's experiences. In "testimonial therapy" the main focus is on working through trauma; Glaesmer/Brähler (2011), 350.

57 Pilzweger, Stefanie (2015): *Männlichkeit zwischen Gefühl und Revolution: eine Emotionsgeschichte der bundesdeutschen 68er-Bewegung*. Bielefeld 2015. 215–219, 224.

symbolic parentlessness as the underlying cause of the revolts and as a failed attempt of the generation of '68 to de-identify from their parents.⁵⁸ It is thought that, after an apocalyptic childhood during or directly after the war, the members of this generation felt they had no right to their existence because they had been conceived accidentally while their soldier fathers were on home leave. This made it impossible for them to detach themselves from their parents in the usual way, leading them to rebel against them excessively.⁵⁹ At least partly, the student protests were also represented as a way for these students to reckon with their Nazi-fathers. Whether these fathers were still alive or not, the question now had to be asked what their mothers and fathers, the whole generation in fact, had undertaken to stop the Nazi regime.

Complementing this interpretation is the hypothesis that the protesting students were looking for a symbolic father substitute: leaders of revolutionary liberation movements, such as Che Guevara and Ho Chi Minh, who were viewed as occupying a particularly high moral status, took the place left empty by fathers. Both these figures were spatially as well as culturally far enough removed for the students not to have to look more closely at their actions.⁶⁰ Whatever one thinks of the scope of such psycho-historical interpretations of entire social movements, they offer inspiring socio-psychological hypotheses for historical research.⁶¹

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- 58 Before that, but not relating to the actual motives of the generation of 1968, Mitscherlich/Mitscherlich (19667), 262, 258.
- 59 Particularly regarding male identity disorders Hanebutt (2003), 70ff., 218–226. Busche, Jürgen (2003): Die 68er: Biographie einer Generation. Berlin. Simon, Annette (2001): Wir wollten immer artig sein. Generationskonflikte der 68er in Ost und West. In: Wirth, Hans-Jürgen (ed.): Hitlers Enkel oder Kinder der Demokratie? Gießen. 45–72. 49. Cf. Bude, Heinz (2010): Metamorphosen des Ödipus im Generationenverhältnis. In: Thomä, Dieter (ed.): Vaterlosigkeit: Geschichte und Gegenwart einer fixen Idee. Frankfurt. 269–279. 274.
- 60 Cf. Franz/Lieberz/Schepank (2005), 53. Some German psychologists and historians hold, moreover, that even the grandfathers of those students were yearning for surrogate fathers, because some of them were also fatherless war children of World War I. Cf. Stambolis, Barbara (2014): Aufgewachsen in *eiserner Zeit*: Kriegskinder zwischen Erstem Weltkrieg und Weltwirtschaftskrise. Gießen. This idea probably goes back to Mitscherlich, Alexander (1963): Auf dem Weg zur vaterlosen Gesellschaft. München. 223ff. For earlier thoughts on the “socialized hatred of fathers” see Bednarik, Karl (1953): Der junge Arbeiter von heute – ein neuer Typ. Stuttgart. 50ff.
- 61 One would – when comparing other fascist countries (Italy, Japan) and liberal societies (England, USA) as well as the hermaphrodite France (because of the Vichy

On the whole it can be said that war trauma does not resolve itself in those directly exposed to the traumatic experiences, not even if they reach a ripe old age. A warm climate inside the family can be helpful to cope.⁶² In addition, war trauma is transmitted, explicitly or implicitly, to the second and possibly even the third generation and can ultimately even have a noticeable effect on society as a whole.

5. What about the War Trauma in Vietnam?

Against this background it is easily conceivable that traumatic disorders must be widespread and in Vietnam, following the extensive bombing the country was exposed to.⁶³ As far as I know, psychological research has been limited to Vietnamese emigrants who now live in the United States (originally around 650,000).⁶⁴ For the historian the question inevitably arises whether some of the therapies described by psychologists are not reminiscent of the possibilities of Oral History. Is there not – beyond the individual processing of war trauma – scope here for parallel historical research?⁶⁵ Would guided biographical reconstruction, with the aim of confronting experiences that may have been repressed so far, not be a way of allocating a place to these multi-layered experiences and of ultimately re-

regime) – have to operationalize the intensity of revolts (also with a view to specific national protest traditions) in order to arrive at conclusions that can be taken seriously. But many external observers see the split of generations as particularly strong in Germany. Cf. Gilcher-Holtey, Ingrid (2001): *Die 68er Bewegung: Deutschland – Westeuropa – USA*. München. Further interpretations of political culture are provided in: *Generation, Unbewusstes und politische Kultur* (1997): Schwerpunktthema Psychosozial 20, 68. Roberts, Ulla (1997): *Anklagen, Verschweigen, Verdrängen: Die NS-Zeit im Konflikt der Generationen*. In: *Psychosozial* 20, 67. 61–75.

62 Quindeau, Ilka/Einert, Katrin/Tauber, Nadine (2012): *Kindheiten im Nationalsozialismus und Zweiten Weltkrieg*. In: *Bios* 25. 87–117. 113.

63 40 million were directly affected, 2 million widows, orphans and disabled, 50,000 mixed-race children (of American fathers) who were ostracized for a long time – and the victims of Agent Orange up to the third generation! Details in Margara (2012), 18f.

64 Lai, Phuong (2008): *Impact of Migration and Trauma on Communication in Vietnamese Families*. San Francisco. Cf. Wilson, John P. (2007): *Cross-Cultural Assessment of Psychological Trauma and PTSD*. New York.

65 Even if today's historiography still has only a very narrow scope in Vietnam, cf. Margara (2012), 23ff., 137.

evaluating them cognitively? Or should this task be left to the writers who, as part of the *doi moi*, were the first in Vietnam to take up this topic after the 1990s?⁶⁶ It would certainly be an interesting field for German-Vietnamese cooperation with the aim of comparatively researching not entirely dissimilar experiences from very different wars.⁶⁷ It can certainly be concluded that coming to terms with trauma can have a positive effect on society. It saves children and grand-children much suffering and, in the long term, it saves society expenses in the health-care system caused by multimorbidity. From the point of view of the historian this is not about moral judgements but about “the attempt to work through psychological and historical experiences as objectively as possible.”⁶⁸ It is, after all, an unfortunate truth that “the end of the war is not the end of the war.”⁶⁹

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66 Margara (2012), 104. A first key text in the literature of renewal of 1988, which also addressed the problem of father absence, is Nguyen Huy Thiep (1997): *Der General im Ruhestand*. In: *Du* 7/8. 36–41. See also the evaluation of personal testimonials in Kwon, Heonik (2008): *Ghost of War in Vietnam*. New York. Appy, Christian G. (2003): *Patriots. The Vietnam War Remembered from all Sides*. New York.

67 It needs to be pointed out, however, that the connection between individual memories and societal developments has not yet been fully explained. Cf. Schulz-Hageleit (2003), 17–32.

68 Reulecke (2012), 19.

69 Radebold (2012), 147. A statement he only relates to 1945, however.

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