

# Anne Frank was not alone

– *the Hidden Child Congress in Amsterdam 1992*<sup>1</sup>

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Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like, in this paper, to try to give you an impression of the debates and discussions at a congress held by the Jewish Community in the Netherlands some years ago, and then go on to try to put this congress in the wider context of the discussions going on at the moment on the so-called ‘second generation’.

So what was this congress all about?

Organized in August 1992 in Amsterdam, it brought together five hundred or so people from all walks of life – from all over the world – who had this one criterion in common: all of them had survived the German occupation as children in Holland, all of them – although what this term could mean was itself a recurrent theme – were Jews. No family was present, no friends, no ‘outsiders’, no media, no interested observers.

Which is not to say that there was not an organising committee, a secretariat, attendant social workers, prominent politicians and artists, psychoanalysts and psychiatrists, journalists, writers, and religious leaders – it was just that, remarkable as this may sound, every single one of them was either a ‘child survivor’ or one of their war-time helpers.

The atmosphere was electric, and of an astonishing intensity which this narrator has experienced neither before nor since.

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1 "Für ein Kind war das anders." Internationale Tagung der Philipps-Universität Marburg, 22-25 May 1997. „Literarische und künstlerische Repräsentationsformen traumatischer Kindheitserfahrung im nationalsozialistischen Terrorsystem.“

Perhaps because it did not have the character of the kind of gathering to which we have become accustomed in the last decade or so: it was neither a therapeutic self-help group solicitously shepherded by social workers, nor a congress of trauma-specialists staking out the claims of a new academic discipline, nor social scientists intent on laying the foundations of a new canon. Not that any of these activities are all that heinous, it was just that, in this competitive and cut-throat world of ours, the feeling that an entire nation is trying to come to grips with the catastrophe of fifty years ago, and that this transcends the usual disciplinary boundaries, was something quite unique.

The opening address by the then major of Amsterdam – later the Dutch minister of the Interior – Ed van Thijn, left a profound impression, and it is worth dwelling on this for a moment, and not only because a speech like this, from a leading politician, would be unthinkable here in Germany.

„I have left my chain of office at home. In the program before you it says that the mayor of Amsterdam, after the Minister for Welfare, Health and Culture, will welcome you, but that was a flight ahead. Much more important is that, today, but in fact all of the time, I am one of you, a hidden child. ... I've been asked to say a few to you this morning, something personal, about myself as a hidden child. I agreed to this after much hesitation, but never before have I had such inhibitions in telling a story as I have now . ... Up until yesterday I had no idea what I was possibly going to tell you today. I've left my chain of office at home, but why is it still so difficult to say something of a personal nature? As mayor, people tell me, I'm an excellent speaker, with much personal committment, when we're dealing with the horrors of the war: on the 4th of May on the Dam, at the annual Auschwitz-commemoration, on Jom Hashoa in the Hollandsche Schouwburg and so on. I see this as a duty, perhaps even as a vocation. But to say something personal, as a hidden child, and that at this venue, is a sheer impossibility. For all that, I've left my chain of office at home because I realize that my problem, the embarrassment which I feel in speaking about personal experiences is one which we all feel, that it is this indeed which is a central theme of this congress, and itself an explanation of the fact that it has taken almost fifty years for the hidden child to leave his/her place of hiding and claim some attention. Everyone knows of course the story of Anne Frank, but Anne Frank did not survive the war, whereas we, luckily, did. One could say that we were fortunate, and for that reason we have remained more or less silent to this day.“

Van Thijn then goes on to describe his own childhood. One of many such biographies we were to hear in the next three days, and not untypical.

Deportation to the transit camp Westerbork, illness, a dangerous escape. Freed by his father, in the middle of a razzia, using a stolen ambulance, handed over to a strange woman in the middle of the night – a member of

the underground – further flight from the persecutors. Eighteen different places of hiding. Each family quite different from the next. Most of them deeply religious, some roman catholic, some protestant reformed. Only once did it become too much for him.

„I had been in hiding with a catholic family and had already identified myself fully with catholicism, when the great day of my tenth birthday dawned. I had seated myself at the breakfast table early, waiting expectantly for that which was to come. But nothing whatsoever happened. When I asked if they knew that it was my birthday they said: ‘yes, but we don’t celebrate birthdays. Only holy days.’ I broke into tears and burst out: ‘what a lousy religion!’ I was back on the street that same day. Seven more places of hiding were to follow.“

He was finally betrayed, spent two months in a crowded cell, to be deported once again to Westerbork, to be saved, this time, by the date: it was January 1945, and the trains to Poland – those box-cars which are such a permanent fixture in all Jewish nightmares, which Yad Vashem has chosen as a symbol – had ceased to roll. He was liberated by Canadian forces in April – one of approximately four thousand Jewish children to have survived the war; half of them orphaned.<sup>2</sup>

In this personal history – which can be, and indeed was, retold in countless variations, several elements recur, and they mark themes to which the plenary sessions as well as the individual discussion groups kept returning.

I would like to discuss them under the headings: Problems of identity, Problems of emotional ambivalence, doubling, dissociation, Reception after the war, Grief, mourning, death.

## *I. Problems of identity*

Who am I, where do I come from, where am I going? These classic questions from Kantian philosophy were posed in many different variations, some of them in startlingly poignant ways. There was a pinboard in the foyer, on which faded old photographs of groups of children were to be seen. The caption read: „does anyone here know who I am or the fate of my parents? If you recognize anyone on these photographs please phone the following number ...“

Orphans, in other words, who to this day know not even their own name, whose only link to the past, to their murdered families is a faded photograph.

„It happened frequently that children became confused about their own identity, in part because they changed names at least twice, their addresses regularly, where in turn they were given new nicknames, and had, time and again, to deal with quite new foster parents.

Some lived with different foster families even after the war, and could not, over many years, if at all, ever ‘feel at home’.

It wasn’t only that many children asked themselves: am I Marietje Jansen or Judith Polak but also: where do I belong. Am I Jewish or Christian – since the religious influence of foster families was in some instances considerable.“<sup>3</sup>

A book tracing the history of Jewish war-children, by Elma Verhey,<sup>4</sup> which was much-discussed at the congress, bears, on the cover, the photograph of a little girl aged five or six, dressed in the habit of a nun. (One needs to pause at that thought for a moment..) There was a video to be seen of an ordained priest who discovered at the age of forty that he was an adopted Jewish orphan. (The story of Cardinal Jean-Marie Lustiger of Paris springs to mind, the first baptised Jew to have risen to the position of Cardinal in the Roman Catholic Church for 1500 years, who has a similar background. Asked recently by a journalist, whether he had any ambitions to the Papacy, his excellency replied: „Oi ve, you think I’m meshugge?“)

This ambivalence towards the Jewish tradition as a whole goes very deep. Here’s something else I picked up at the congress: a fictional conversation on Jewish identity which someone read out at a discussion group. It illustrates something which outsiders, most especially here in Germany, find difficult to grasp, namely that for Jewish survivors it is by no means self-evident what that means: ‘to be a Jew’. That the struggle to regain a sense of self, of individual and collective dignity, – which is so manifest in the Jewish communities after the war – is at the same time a struggle to understand the insane century in which we happen to live. Where ‘understand’ here is not meant in the scientific sense of cause and effect, but in the moral sense, of understanding that the fight against intolerance and prejudice is something which affects each one of us.

#### *Jewish identity – two views*

„A: The concept of a Jewish identity is an anachronism, a self-contradiction. To take it seriously at all is to abandon the hard-fought principles of intellectual universalism which marks the modern world, to which we owe our emancipation

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3 Bloeme p. 19.

4 Elma Verhey, *Om het joodse kind*, Amsterdam 1991.

from religious dogma and superstition, to say nothing of the positive advances in science and medicine. To take the notion of Jewish identity seriously is to abandon the principles upon which modern society is based – of justice, freedom, equality – for a return to cultural particularism, to the ghetto, and hence also to the tacit acceptance of what the consequences of such an intellectual regression would be: the inevitability of religious wars.

B: I disagree. Whatever these principles you try to defend once meant, they've been betrayed, gutted, reduced to slogans meant to hide what the so-called first world is doing to the third, to the environment, to the future of our children, to – if you will excuse the pathos – the foundations of life on this planet. These principles of yours are a metaphysical fig-leaf behind which you hide your fear of the future, your cowardice, your deliberate ignorance of what can be read about in the papers every day. In the synagogue I can weep unashamedly for the dead, can steel myself for what lies ahead, can see to it that my fears do not degenerate – as yours do – into hatred of out-groups. Can try to protect the young from these hatreds. All of this I do in the company of others, in the company also of the many generations who have gone before, whose fortitude and courage I can try to emulate. I am not as alone as you are, not as afraid of death as you are.“

Or to sum all this up in a sentence from Jacob Presser, the much-respected author of the two-volume history of the fate of the Dutch jews, *Ondergang – De vervolging en verdelging van het nederlandse Jodendom 1940-1945*<sup>5</sup>: „For me the problem remains: I don't know what that means, 'a Jew', and I have the feeling that this asking about Judaism calls into question the very core of my existence.“<sup>6</sup>

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5 Jacob Presser 1977: *Ondergang*. 's-Gravenhage (Staatsuitgeverij).

6 Nanda van der Zee, 1992: „Jacques Presser – Das Recht auf Zweifel an der Menschlichkeit“ in: *Dachauer Hefte*, vol. 8, *Überleben und Spätfolgen*, ed. Wolfgang Benz, p.50

## II. Emotional ambivalence, 'doubling', dissociation

Feelings of ambivalence towards the (foster)parents, towards authority figures in general, conflicts of loyalty, of gratitude and anger, of grief and mourning, were a constant theme. „Living in a state of non-existence“<sup>7</sup>, „War, an existential break“<sup>8</sup>, „The unspeakable“<sup>9</sup>, „Borrowed children“<sup>10</sup>, „Incomprehensible“<sup>11</sup>, „Speaking of Silence“<sup>12</sup> were typical topics and titles.

The following poem by Erebos, which I take from the paper by Dr. Bloeme Evers Emden, puts in a nutshell what the feelings were within Jewish families – or what was left of them – at the end of the war:

„United after a fashion once more,  
a family swept together in an untidy heap,  
broken shards of roughly shaken pottery.  
Strangers to one another and barely welcomed,  
lacking all certainty of where they belonged,  
words of tenderness that would not come,  
forgotten the familiar gestures of long ago.  
The long-awaited liberation  
left us banned, each one within his private memories.  
Things fell apart, and  
with it, faceless, began the time of exile.“<sup>13</sup>

And, one more quotation, this time a paragraph with the title:

*We, the ANGs, the Accidentally Not Gassed, the Luftmenschen.*

„What makes the difference is this: the feeling of being understood, ‘contained’, as Bion calls it. For our kind that means: crawling into a hideout, a hole, with another victim, crying ourselves to sleep in each other’s arms. That is what makes

7 Ziporah Valkhof: *Leven in een niet-bestaan. Beleving en betekenis van de joodse onderduik*, Utrecht 1992.

8 c.m. Jacobs-Stam: *Oorlog, een breuk in het bestaan. achtergrond en problemen van door de oorlog getroffen en hun kinderen*, 1981.

9 F.A. Begemann: *Het onvertelbare – Een verkennend onderzoek naar psychotherapie met oorlogsgetroffenen en hun kinderen*. Amsterdam 1991.

10 subsequently published as: Dr. Bloeme Evers-Emden: *Geleende kinderen. Ervaringen van onderduikouders en hun joodse beschermelingen in de jaren 1942 tot 1945*. Amsterdam 1994.

11 Gerhard Durlacher: *Niet Verstaan*, Amsterdam 1995.

12 "Over het zwijgen gesproken": later to become a congress theme in its own right.

13 Quoted in Dr. Bloeme Evers Emden.

our kind travel long distances to speak to people we've never met before. We go to these lengths to find others who share this feeling of desperation because we know that they too are chained for life to the same endless nightmares of mass graves and burnt corpses. We are tied together by the same emotional scar-tissue. It distorts, it taints everything we do, touch, or say. In Poland – in Warsaw for instance – one has the feeling that one is literally walking on the skeletons of the dead. When one universalises this attitude one knows how we survivors see the world. The world-view of the ANGs jars mightily on that of a postwar generation for whom all this is little more than ancient history: that is the root of the problems we have with those who think of themselves as 'normal', whose psychic and intellectual development have allowed them to follow the conventional trajectory of family, career, material security and an old-age pension. The ANGs have their hands full just battling the nightmares, the anomie, the feeling of being in this world but not of it. We have no energy left to compete with the healthy monads around us, we stand at the roadside of life, watching the well-fed moffen in the large limosines race by. Wondering whether to put an end to it all right now, or whether to wait until tomorrow."<sup>14</sup>

### *III. Reception after the War*

The reception after the war was a recurrent theme. One speaker called it the 'little Shoah':

„The few Jews who had survived the Shoah were not exactly greeted warmly in the liberated Netherlands. Not by all of those who had, during the war years, taken over Jewish businesses, practices, or customers. Not by all of those who now lived in the houses left behind by the Jews. Not by all of those who during the war had taken care of Jewish property or valuables. Not even by all of those who had risked their lives to hide Jewish children – or adults, and that means us – in their own families.“<sup>15</sup>

Elma Verhey on this:

„For the Jewish community 5 May 1945 definitely did not become Liberation Day. Their days were burdened with the many problems that confronted them in reclaiming their homes, their possessions, and even their children. And how little the non-Jews understood the Jewish sorrow. Sometimes I have gained the impression that what was done to the survivors was worse than murder.“<sup>16</sup>

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14 congress notes.

15 Isaac Lipshits: „Leven met de Shoah“.

16 Elma Verhey, *Om het joodse kind*, Amsterdam 1991. Quoted in Hans M. Reijzer: „On having been in Hiding“ in: Groen-Prakken et. al., *Traumatisation and War*, p. 101.

This bitterness caused by post-war callousness towards the victims has two sides to it which has not been much discussed in the literature. One side of it is this ‘little Shoah’, and one gets the impression that this societal indifference – not to speak of unabashed antisemitism in many cases – to the victims after 1945 is quite a major cause of what Hans Keilson has described in his well-known study on ‘sequential traumatisation.’

The other side of it is something which the Israeli psychoanalyst Chaim Dasberg has written about: namely that the medical profession itself – with notable exceptions – was not innocent in this rejection of the victims. In its refusal to take a moral stand, in its insistence that spiritual anguish should be treated as a mental disease, with its ingrained natural science orientation, its moral-political abstinence, it stood, in the view of the survivors, mostly on the side of the powers that be.

„Die richtige therapeutische Einstellung wurde in Israel von Ärzten wie Hillel Klein, Shamai Davidson et al beschrieben. Diese Therapeuten trauerten zusammen mit dem Patienten, sie sahen die post-traumatischen Schuldgefühle des Opfers als Ausdruck einer kontinuierlichen Bindung mit den Toten, die kein Grab haben, eine normative Verpflichtung und kein neurotisches Phänomen, das man ‘wegtherapeutisieren’ müßte.“

...

„Wenn die Gesellschaft sich nicht fragt: ‘Warum haben wir es erlaubt?’ werden auch die Überlebenden nicht fragen: ‘Warum habt ihr es erlaubt?’ Der Therapeut als ein integraler Teil der Gesellschaft, meistens ein konservativer Teil, wird nicht solche politischen Fragen stellen, die Opfer schweigen und beschuldigen sich selbst. Die Opfer schweigen, der Diagnostiker schweigt. ... Er begnügt sich mit der Diagnose: ‘Schuldgefühle eines Überlebenden’ und vergißt, daß er selber Teilnehmer an der Schuld ist, indem er keine Stellung nimmt.“

„Der Begriff Sekundäre ‘Viktimisierung’ ist in diesem Zusammenhang wichtig. Es handelt sich um ein zweites Trauma, das seinen Ursprung in einer gesellschaftlichen Interaktion (manchmal auch therapeutisch) hat, zusätzlich zu dem ursprünglichen Trauma, und in vielen Fällen ist es mehr entscheidend für die Prognose.“<sup>17</sup>

A further quote from the Amsterdam congress, in which both of these things are eloquently expressed:

„The survivor reminds those who regard themselves as ‘emotionally healthy’ (including the psychoanalyst) of his/her mortality, of the precariousness of all human existence, of the ignominy and barbarity with which ontold millions of in-

17 Haim Dasberg: „Trauma der israelischen Gesellschaft – Holocaust-Überlebende, Opfer der israelisch-arabischen Kriege und die Golfkrise“ in: *Dachauer Hefte*, vol. 8. (*Überleben und Spätfolgen*)

nocents have met their death within the last sixty years. This reminder is intolerable, its suppression is a central function of all that which passes for contemporary culture, its presence is universal to a society which calls itself post-modern. Hence the victim is 'sequentially' traumatised (in a sense different from the one used by Hans Keilson), is once again ostracised and rejected: this time round not in the name of the racist madness of the Nazis, but in that of the sonorous terminology of official psychiatry. Upon the heads of those who have gone through a hell beyond the imagination of a Dante or a Breughel is heaped the final indignity: instead of the understanding and support which they crave above all else – for the lack of which they commit suicide with unfailing regularity – they are given to understand, with the full authority of modern scientific medicine to back it up, that they are not quite right in the head. The very witnesses of the pathology of modern society, whose testimony could shake us out of a once again dangerous complacency about the state of the world in which we find ourselves, are stigmatised as neurotic, are treated as a new field of research for the psychiatric PTSD specialists, (i.e. as objects), rather than as a group of people who have something of great importance to say to us all."<sup>18</sup>

#### *IV. Grief, mourning, loss, the need to confront the ineluctability of death*

The dutch psychoanalyse Eddy De Wind, was already saying the following during the sixties:

The defence system that human beings erect against the certainty that one day death will come is well known. Defence mechanisms vary from silly jokes to elaborate hypochondriac delusionary systems. Modern western society tends to deny the existence of death, while other societies, such as the Buddhist, see death as an integral part of life. Eissler points out that modern American society is characterised by a strongly developed consciousness of life in the here-and-now and by denial of death. With some modification the same could be said of concentration camps. Whilst in normal life we can keep the idea of our own death at an unconscious level by means of all kinds of defence mechanisms, this possibility disappears as soon as we are confronted with death, and especially our own death, as a reality. When that happens, the two final defence mechanisms of which I have already spoken come into play – ego regression and the entertaining of the idea of death as a mystical experience."<sup>19</sup>

18 congress notes.

19 Eddy de Wind, in: Han Groen-Prakken, Antonie Laden, Antonius Stufkens (eds.) 1995: *Traumatisation and War – The Dutch Annual of Psychoanalysis*, vol. 2. (Lisse: Swets &

Harry Mulisch:

„This world, which once and for all has botched up the history of Europe, lies before us as a threat. Whoever speaks, with a sigh of relief, of ‘the past’, is making a mistake. The Europe of Rafael and Goethe has about as much in common with the Europe of today as a bucket of milk has with the curdled mess which results when a dash of vinegar is thrown in. We may have distilled the acid brew in a more or less democratic direction, stirred it all up into a welfare cheese, but milk it no longer is, and we have to beware that from now on not all roads lead to Auschwitz. Everyone who reads these lines, in less years than he has fingers, stands a chance of being thrown into the fire of his own home in which he is seated at the moment. Because he can read, for instance, or because he has blond hair, or for reasons not made clear to him.“

...

But whether it affects the Jews or some other group – what’s to be done when the next house-painter receives the revelation that this that or the other group of people has to die? What do we oppose this with? How do we protect ourselves? With what are we to arm ourselves?<sup>20</sup>

To recapitulate this part of my paper: there wasn’t a lot of childishness going on at the Amsterdam congress on ‘The Hidden Child’. When one examines the papers delivered, the topics discussed, one finds that for people who are now adults, a reflection on their own childhood during the war years is a means of grappling with questions which go the heart of the human condition at the end of this millenium: human identity, the relationship of society towards its minorities, the confrontation with fear, with desolation, with death, questions about the causes of the world wars of this century.

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Allow me now, in the second part of this paper, to give you some of my own impressions.

When I examine my own motives for dwelling, in such detail, here in Germany, on the Amsterdam congress, then I find that I am torn between conflicting emotions. I’m an academic, and hence I’m trained to think, just as the organisers of this congress put it in their statement of intent, in terms of analysis, documentation, empirical description, theoretical frameworks.

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Zeitlinger) The Netherlands, p. 35. German version: „Begegnung mit dem Tod“ in: *Psyche*, 22, 1968, p. 423-441.

20 Harry Mulisch, 1966: *De Zaak 40/61 – een reportage*. p. 101, 170.

The literary critics are looking for subtexts, for contextualisations, for the way in which human memory restructures the past. The historians want interviews with survivors, the teachers and educationists want to know how to present this material to their pupils and students, the psychoanalysts and psychiatrists want to know how to cure their clients, the media people want to know how to make gripping films, the organisers of congresses want to know how run well-visited congresses. The academic in me says: that's all legitimate, that's how I myself operate. The Holocaust has become, for whatever reasons, a popular topic, so why not take advantage of this?

But there is another side in me, and it runs completely counter to this. Zwei Seelen wohnen, ach! auch in meiner Brust. This second part of me says: there is nothing I can say, no words which are capable of expressing – to those who have not experienced it – what it means to have spent a childhood in the shadow of overwhelming fear and anxiety. In a quite literal sense, the 'hidden children' have spent a childhood in the 'shadow of death'. Compared to this reality, everything else pales into insignificance.

Zwar gilt die Katastrophe als existenzieller Bezugspunkt für alle Juden, doch geistig nach- und vollziehen können das Ereignis nur wir, die Geopferten. Den anderen..... Nur zu, gute Leute, plagt Euch ab wie ihr wollt, ihr redet ja doch nur wie der Blinde von der Farbe.<sup>21</sup>

In a similar vein:

„Wen einmal Kafkas Räder überfahren, dem ist der Friede mit der Welt ebenso verloren wie die Möglichkeit, bei dem Urteil sich zu bescheiden, der Weltlauf sei schlecht: das bestätigende Moment ist weggeätzt, das der resignierten Feststellung von der Übermacht des Bösen innewohnt.“<sup>22</sup>

In my own thinking about this, I have not ever been able to get beyond the following antinomy: namely that the resources and the research tools which we have at our disposal, those of the social sciences, of the artist and the writer, must be devoted to trying to understand the European catastrophe of this century. At the same time, parallel to this, the conviction that we are ourselves part of this crisis, that these intellectual tools of ours, the only ones we have, are themselves implicated in the very processes we are trying to analyse.

Adorno once put it like this:

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21 Jean Améry: *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne*, (S. 136.)

22 Adorno, „Dialektik des Engagement“ p. 25

Indem noch der Völkermord in engagierter Literatur zum Kulturbesitz wird, fällt es leichter, weiter mitzuspielen in der Kultur, die den Mord gebar. Untrüglich fast ist ein Kennzeichen solcher Literatur: daß sie, absichtlich oder nicht, durchblicken läßt, selbst in den sogenannten extremen Situationen, und gerade in ihnen, blühe das Menschliche; zuweilen wird daraus eine trübe Metaphysik, welche das zur Grenzsituation zurechtgestutzte Grauen womöglich insofern bejaht, als die Eigentlichkeit des Menschen dort erscheine. Im anheimelnden existentiellen Klima verschwimmt der Unterschied von Henkern und Opfern, weil beide doch gleichermaßen die Möglichkeit des Nichts hinausgehalten seien, die freilich im allgemeinen den Henkern bekömmlicher ist."<sup>23</sup>

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In the last part of this paper, allow me to try to say something about the question which motivated this description of the Amsterdam congress in the first place: whether it is possible to ‘integrate’ traumatic experiences, whether it is possible to learn from the Jewish experience in The Netherlands, whether the Dutch-Jewish experience has anything to do with what here in Germany is understood by the ‘second generation.’ We now know, from the work of Hans Keilson, Judith Kestenberg, Martin Bergmann, Milton Jucovy, from the publications coming from the Sinai Clinic in the Netherlands, that the effects of trauma – even when one uses the term in the more restricted sense of psychoanalysis and psychiatry – vary greatly, that much depends on age, the particular experiences involved, whether the children were separated from their parents, whether the foster families were supportive or not, and so on. A child from an illiterate peasant background involved in a ‘necklace’ killing in South Africa – to take an example from the 1993 Hamburg congress *Children, War and Violence*<sup>24</sup> – lives in a world very far removed from that of the adult survivors of the concentration camps; these in turn quite different from the ‘child survivors’ or the ‘second generation’, these in turn in a quite different world from the one described by Dan Bar-On, that of the children of Nazis, trying to come to terms with their own legacy.<sup>25</sup> Let alone that of refugees, incest victims, or

23 Adorno, op. cit., p.22/23.

24 Umesh Bawa, 1993: „Organised violence in Apartheid South Africa: Children as victims and perpetrators“ in: *Children, War and Violence – Proceedings of the Congress Hamburg Sept. 1993* Osnabrück 1995.

25 Dan Bar-On, 1989: *Legacy of silence – Encounters with Children of the Third Reich*. German: *Die Last des Schweigens. Gespräche mit Kindern von Nazi-Tätern* Frankfurt/M.

the attempts, within the Feminist movement, to apply the term trauma as a description of specifically female experiences within a world seen as male-dominated. That each of the abovementioned topics is important and needs to be discussed is clear; not, however, that anything is gained by insisting that themes as disparate as the above are all covered by the term 'trauma'. That we should be trying to do so within an explicitly psychoanalytic framework at all is itself a testimony to what Philip Rieff has called the 'triumph of the therapeutic'<sup>26</sup>, namely the peculiar way in which, in the 'Western' countries after 1945, moral-political discourses have progressively been replaced by medical-therapeutic ones.

The question: can traumatic experiences be integrated, does not really admit of a definite answer. The Amsterdam congress showed that – given a liberal political atmosphere, financial support, a high degree of community organisation, a sophisticated intellectual tradition in which a 'vengeance' mentality is noticeably absent – a collective discussion of repressed and traumatic experiences can indeed 'work wonders', and that for a significant number of people it is possible to free themselves from what would otherwise be a life-long burden of fear and despair. If 'words can kill', they can also heal, and if there is such a thing as spiritual murder<sup>27</sup> there is also such a thing as spiritual liberation and rebirth.

Are there conclusions to be drawn from this for the debate about the 'second generation' in this country? Here in Germany the 'trauma'-debate – unlike the Netherlands – has unmistakable political overtones. The Frankfurt psychoanalyst Werner Bohleber warns: [es] „muß ... ausdrücklich einer möglichen Parallelisierung von Tätern und Opfern widersprochen werden. Es darf keine Entdifferenzierung des Holocaust-Geschehens und seines Verständnisses geben, etwa nach dem Motto, das in der letzten Zeit in der Bundesrepublik wieder an die Oberfläche kam: 'Wir sind doch alle Opfer'.“<sup>28</sup> That he should find it necessary to insist on this at all speaks volumes.

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26 New York, 1976

27 William G. Niederland, 1980: „Clinical Observations on the 'Survivor Syndrome'“ in: *Int. J. Psycho-Anal.* 1968. Reprinted in: „Symposium on Psychic Traumatization through Social Catastrophe“ *Int. J. of Psycho-Anal.* 49, p. 313-15. German: *Folgen der Verfolgung: Das Überlebenden-Syndrom Seelenmord* Frankfurt/M.

28 Werner Bohleber, & B. Meckler, I. Roessler, B. Schneider, G. Schrödter, C. Volhard, 1989: „Der Umgang mit der nationalsozialistischen Vergangenheit in der Beratungsarbeit. Probleme der zweiten und dritten Generation“ in: Renate Cogoy, Irene Kluge, Brigitte Meckler (eds.) *Erinnerung einer Profession – Erziehungsberatung, Jugendhilfe und Nationalsozialismus* Münster, p. 255.

To conclude with a comment on the title of our congress: ‘für ein Kind was das anders’. The discussions here in Marburg — these very intense four days, have shown that we fail to understand what Ruth Klüger meant with this sentence – ‘für ein Kind war das anders’ – if we read into it only an invitation to build up a new interdisciplinary field concerned with childhood trauma. Her work leaves us in no doubt that she also meant it as a warning, a menetekel. The horrors which we have grown used to summarise with the name of the polish city Oswiecim are not ‘treatable’ in the clinical sense, nor are they ‘explicable’ in the main-stream scientific sense of this word. There is only one rational way of dealing with these things, and it imparts a new urgency to old insights. In Adorno’s *Negative Dialektik* I read the sentence:

„Hitler has forced upon the human race, in its state of unfreedom, a new categorical imperative: to organise its thinking and its actions in such a way that Auschwitz does not repeat itself, that nothing comparable can occur in future.“<sup>29</sup>

I thank you for your attention.

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<sup>29</sup> *Negative Dialektik* p. 356.