PSYCHOTERAPIA 1 (176) 2016
pages: 103-110

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HISTORY AND ITS (UNCONSCIOUS) DISCONTENTS

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trauma
history
psychoanalysis

The author of the article considers various psychoanalytical methods of psychological strategies of dealing with social catastrophes (in the memory of individuals, as well as in the context of collective memory), as seen from the psychoanalytical perspective. He expands J. Puget's ideas on the impact of the historical context of both the patient and the therapist, upon the course of psychoanalytical psychotherapy.

Summary

The experiences from 1939–1950 had a significant impact on mental functioning of the society, families, and individuals. Trauma and the confusion of roles between victims, witnesses, and beneficiaries hampered the formation of critical and reflective narrative concerning this period. The construction of an inclusive narrative is extended to repressed elements of history and experiences. It is an opportunity to weaken denials, primary defenses and alienation. These narratives may strengthen part of the reflective and the self-conscious of individuals and social groups. This task belongs primarily to historians, reporters, journalists, anthropologists and philosophers, but it can also be an area of reflection of psychotherapists who every day come in contact with the history and reality of the suffering of individuals and families. The ethical aspect of this issue can be summed up by the question: can we refuse ourselves and the patients the exploration of stories and memories that have been largely repressed in the society? We can also wonder how macrohistorical processes affect microhistories — in global terms (bleedingland), but also in individual terms, which is always very personal, intimate, connected with the family of origin, and in our own beginnings. The study of this beginning makes sense because it allows us to understand the unconscious aspects of suffering, envy, anger, anxiety and guilt that have become part of intergenerational transmissions.

In Poland there is a long tradition of studies of intergenerational transfemissions and trauma. The works of Antoni Kępiński [1], Maria Orwid [2], Adam Szymusik [3] and many other psychiatrists, psychologists and therapists [4,5] have paved the way into the research and

thinking about the experience of survivors. However, one might ask: do they influence the practice of psychotherapy, and how? Are we truly able to identify an intergenerational transmission of the experience of social catastrophes and work with it? And perhaps thinking about the catastrophe is also repressed, just like the trauma itself?

The following text deals with the relations between a social catastrophe and psychotherapy. It is based on the paper given at the 3rd Psychotherapy Sessions' Conference: *The good of the patient, the good of the therapist, and the good of the system: ethical dilemmas in psychotherapy*, which took place on the 18th October, 2015 in Kraków.

Forget the suffering/ You caused others./Forget the suffering/ Others caused you./ The waters run and run,/ Springs sparkle and are done,/You walk the earth you are forgetting[1]. — Czesław Miłosz noted in his poem "Forget" [6]. But how can one forget sufferings, when causing them has been negated, repressed, or denied? In his play The Wedding, Stanisław Wyspiański wrote: "We have forgotten everything…" — yet although this opens the door to the reappearance of the repressed memories of far-away suffering, it is still difficult to differentiate who in this situation is the real victim, and who is the oppressor.

Here, I would like to quote a conversation I had this year with my friend, during our trip into the Masuria Lake District in Northern Poland (we were both born in this region, and have been friends for almost half a century). One day, we have been travelling through the countryside, near a lake-side village.

— *I've always wanted to have a house here,* I said.

— *Seriously?* my friend asked. — *Why, it is ghastly here! Only eerie thickets all around. Look at this rattled road! You talk about some childhood memories, but now it is all positively frightening*!

I looked around, pondered for a moment, and agreed. *You're right… It really is ghastly here. What a terrible place.*

For a moment we both fell silent.

— *There's a sense of unrest* he finally said.

— *Well… Yes, there is,* I agreed. *As if some sort of a Jožin z bažin were luring here.*

We both laughed.

My friend pondered: *Maybe it is a place of a medieval battle? One with no survivors?*

— *Perhaps…* I said. *It really is land full of fear… How could I have wanted to live here? I would be constantly terrified!*

We both paused for another moment, then I said: *You know what? This year, when I was in the South, near Jasło, I happened to talk with one of the locals and he too remarked that Masuria is full of 'the smell of fear.'*

— *Oh, that's really good! It does smell of fear here…* said my friend.

— *And do you think that our town also smells of fear?* I asked.

— *Well, it does… A bit.*

— *Where?*

— *Well, for example: near my house. It really does smell of fear.*

— *Why there?*

[1]Czesław Miłosz, translated from Polish by Jessica Fisher and Bożena Gilewska. English version from the December 20th, 2001 issue of *The New York Review of Books*.

My friend considered for a moment before replying: *"Well, maybe it's because that the old house used to belong to a German family and later, when the Russians came, they shot them all in the garden… Exactly were the new house is now."*

How interesting: we have known each other for over forty years, we have had countless conversations, yet never before have we talked about that terrible crime, our fears, and that "smell of fear."

My other example is a conversation with a woman who, while walking by a cemetery, noted the nearby houses and remarked: *"I could never live by the graveyard!"*
This comment would not strike me as odd were it not for the fact that she actually *does* live near a graveyard: the Jewish Cemetery. Each day, when she glimpses through her window she sees at the cemetery and some smaller buildings. She looks, but does not notice. Her perceptions, however, return in the form of the negative: *"I could never live by the graveyard!"*

How are those two examples connected? To explain I shall use the metaphor coined by the French psychoanalyst André Green [7], that is the term "the work of the negative." This "work of the negative" is a post-traumatic repression mechanism, in which although the object disappears, some part of its outline remains. The memory becomes a negative of the experience. Green uses Fraud's [8] concept of denial, which has been further expanded by, among others, D.W. Winnicott [9][2]. In describing the work of the negative, Green uses his other ideas: blank psychosis, blank fear, blank threat, blank mourning [10] and negative hallucination [7]. In typical mourning, traditionally associated by the Western world with the colour black, the lost object is very vividly present for the bereaved, it is sometimes venerated or aggressively attacked, mourned, remembered, its memory is strengthened until attachment towards it starts to fade. The characteristic of "blank mourning" is, however, a disappearance of its object or its gradual fading, disintegrating, blurring of its shape, until what is left is a blank, a hole. The remaining blank space is empty and clear. It is created as a result of a massive decathexis of libido due to a sudden, violent loss.

According to Green, the equivalent of the emptiness is the "negative hallucination" — the gradual disappearance of certain elements of reality, especially those associated with the lost object. Therefore blank mourning is created when the object vanishes suddenly and only once. Green writes: "All seems to have ended, as with disappearance of ancient civilizations, the cause of which is sought in vain by historians, who make the hypothesis of an earthquake to explain the death and the destruction of the palace, temple, edifices and dwellings, of which nothing is left but ruins" (1986) [10]. Green writes also about the repression of the traces of a memory and equals it to being "buried alive" while "the tomb itself had disappeared," another time he mentions "drowning in the void" [10]. Moreover, he points out that the work of the negative may also possess a social aspect. He sees a similar mechanism as the cause of the repression of death in Western culture in the aftermath of the Second World War [11].

The third group of facts that I would like to mention concerns family therapy. It is (especially psychoanalytical or narrative psychotherapy) a space and (non-linear) time, in which there is room for many stories, distant facts and legends concerning the whole family can take place. In this space various narrations appear and form a symbolic field of reference, which

[2]Winnicott mentions the case of a patient for whom the lost and repressed seems more real than here actual experiences.

facilitates a certain "rooting" in the world and what we might call a "mentalisation of intersubjective processes." René Kaës describes a shared, group family psychic apparatus [12]. From the point of view, in which we look upon history and cultural processes, what strikes us is the fact that during therapy, family narrations always break by the late forties, maybe early fifties, of the twentieth century. It is as if the memory of a given family did not reach further into history or as if nothing happened before that time. And yet it is hard to believe that this period of history did not influence the family in any way, that it did make its mark on the fate of its members. Are there really no stories, no intergenerational transmissions concerning this period of time? Perhaps the opposite is true: this period of history had, and still has, a great impact on the society, yet families and individuals lack any narration to describe the complex and painful years between 1939 and 1950? Of course the year 1950 here is just an arbitrary endpoint –it with it discontents and suffering did not end, it closes however the early period of the end of World War Two and its immediate aftermath.

On the other hand, one might say that in the cultural sphere, that is a common space shared by Polish society or — in a wider sense — the society of Central Europe, certain images, reflections, thoughts appear (or violently emerge) and obstruct or even demolish the longstanding mechanisms of dealing with history. These mechanisms are based on repression, denial, projection. When mentioning reflection, I have in my mind the works of Jan Gross, Michał Głowiński, Marcin Zaremba, Andrzej Leder, Timothy Snyder, Martin Polack, and in the sphere of literature, the books by Magdalena Tulli, Andrzej Stasiuk, and many other authors. Probably this process is accompanied by a contrary one, which strengthens repression and deepens the process of denial — which also concerns a wide array of social groups.

Psychoanalytical therapy of families in Poland — on the terrain on which the factories of death were built, where gas chambers stood and Holocaust took place — might face a different array of issues that in other parts of the world. This is thus described by Anne Applebaum: "To the citizens of safe, happy countries which have never known war and occupation, the lives of ordinary people in less safe, less happy countries can seem extraordinary indeed" [13]. The communities in those "less happy countries" were the victims, witnesses, and sometimes the tormenters and beneficiaries of the crimes committed during the Second World War and in its immediate aftermath — and here it must be noted that the fate of the non-Jewish part of the society, though also terrible and traumatic, was still different, that the fate of Jews. This mixing of the roles, where an individual or a family could be a witness, a victim, and tormentor led to an unimaginable chaos in people's minds, which resulted in the repression of the experiences in the years 1939-1950 and the perpetuation of the heroic and martyrologic narrative. Some scholars, like Andrzej Leder [14] or André Green [11] claim that this process halted not only the historical reflection upon the period in question, but also influenced personal narrations or lack thereof in the case of many people — therefore also influenced the intersubjective functions and dynamics of family processes. Maria Orwid points out that witnessing the Holocaust left repressed aggression and guilt, returning in the form of, for example, irrational acts of destruction [15].

In my opinion we — as therapists — possess very limited means of exploring these spaces of experience and repression. To demonstrate the difficulties that a therapists faces in their study of the memory of historic catastrophes, I shall use examples and ponderings from a different historical context — namely, from Argentina. Many scholars — such as Mary Ainsworth [16]

— claim that certain psychological phenomena can be noticed only in research made in a remote cultural context. Perhaps the same can be said of studying the influence of social catastrophes on the functioning of the mind and further psychotherapeutic processes. The distinguished psychoanalyst Janine Puget [17], describes the influence of historical processes on the functioning of the patient's mind and their psychoanalyst, when both are emerged in the same cultural realities. Her works deal with the period of terror in Argentina during the Junta Rule in the years 1974 to 1983.

At the beginning of her work, Puget points out that when the mind tries to understand suffering during a social catastrophe, the first instinct is to place it in a remote geographical or mental region. The psychic defends itself against the confrontation with suffering by getting rid of it, projecting it far away from immediate context. It is not difficult to notice the similarity of this mechanism to the unconscious mechanism of deactivating any connection with one's victim, so common in everyday life. A social catastrophe creates a totally new situation, which concerns the minds of particular individual as well as communities as groups. It also has a paramount influence on the process of psychotherapy. According to J. Puget, examining the influence of the influence of the social context requires adding certain modifications: both in the theory of psychotherapy and in psychotherapeutic techniques. She claims that the omission of the catastrophe upholds the patient in the process of suppression, repression, and denial, that the avoidance of examining the social and historical context results in the monopolization of the psychic life of both patient and therapist by this historic-genetic world, and it becomes the battlefield of defence mechanisms of both.

J. Puget analyses the stages in the development of terror in Argentina. First comes a perverse use of language, then the elimination of the communities which think independently (first the opposition leaders, then potential leaders), which finally leads the society to poverty and hunger — that is to a state in which controlling vast social groups is relatively easy.
J. Puget writes that within the period of terror, there is a change of rules and norms of individuals and group concerning the relationship towards life and death. The sense of guilt is disconnected from the previous order and causality, and is transformed into social blame. The transformations of guilt described by Puget lead to projection and laying the blame upon particular communities. The way towards dehumanization or — as Green describes it [18] — *de-objectification*, is clear. In the foreword to Jan Gross' *Złote żniwa* (*Golden Harvest*), Jan Grabowski writes [19]: "As we see in the text, sometime during the occupation — it is difficult to say exactly when — there has been a violent shift, a change of values concerning the Jews and what is Jewish. These were not «dots» on the maps, some extraordinary instances, separate «terrible» counties or villages, but an occurrence of European scale — murders and robberies have been committed in every place where Jews fleeing the Holocaust went. It seems as if on one day or week in the summer of 1942 suddenly all was permitted" [19, p. 10]. The scale of this "show" which happened in Europe (thus to a large degree on Polish territories) does not succumb to description and does not find an adequate narrative. It would be difficult, however, to claim that there are no traces of it left in the minds of individuals and in family narratives.

Following J. Puget's ideas we can see how the apparatus of terror influences the human mind. Firstly — those are the consecutive constraints of the ego, to the degree that it cannot rebuild the space for the relationship or reconstruct the lost values in a way for the individual to be able to find their way in society. Secondly — the person becomes too transparent or

withdrawn, overshadowed. Results of the repression appear — such as a sense of the uncanny, emptiness or something unthinkable. Thirdly — due to the repression, certain predictions and expectations become disorganized. Fourthly — the catastrophe reactivates indescribable primal mechanisms. Finally — the breaking and sudden change of social relations lead to the feeling, that belonging is a threat.

Further in her study, Puget deals with the influence of terror on individual therapy, couples' therapy, and group therapy.

Psychoanalysis was created in the times in which the dominant ideology was that of the bourgeoisie, in which (notes Puget) it the emphasis was on the fundamental influence of the relationship between the child, the mother, and the father. Social context was underestimated and was deemed secondary. Puget's work shows, however, this approach to be incomplete. In reference to Freud, she points out that the reality of the "non-ego" also influences the development of the mind, and that what Freud describes as the "oceanic feeling" of unity with the universe might reflect the primary relationship between the ego and the wider socio-cultural context. When the significance of the social catastrophe and its influence on the psychic life is left unexplored, this historical-genetic world starts invisibly to dominate and organize the psychic life of a group or individual.

Those significant, and perhaps critical in understanding one's psychological situation, events may be easily overlooked or unnoticed, especially when the experience of a social catastrophe is shared by the patient and the analyst, who are both "emerged" with the same cultural context and exposed to the same fears and traumas. Janine Puget calls this situation in psychotherapy "superimposed worlds" and points out that it can lead to significant difficulties in establishing the analytical relation. In the case of "superimposed worlds" it is difficult to establish the division between the field of analysis and the experience of sociocultural reality. Janine Puget identifies the following events which obstruct the examination of psychic life: endangering the analyst's sublimation mechanisms, the loss of the psychoanalytical point of view, seeking out illusionary illocutions belonging to the world of their daily lives, the omission of material (resulting from the patient's denial), and establishing a "pact of complicity and 'forgetting' the outside world." This may cause a "fusion effect" of mixing the world of the therapists with the world of the patient. On the one hand it can reinforce the analyst's omnipotence and narcissism, on the other: it may lead to "depressive functioning" resulting in maintaining that "I don't know anything" [17].

Conclusions

1. It is highly probable that the experience of the period of 1939-1950 had a significant influence on the psychic functioning of Polish society, families, and certain individuals.

2. Building a narrative which includes repressed elements of history and experience may weaken denial, primary defences and alienation. These narratives would reinforce the reflective and the self-conscious of individuals, as well as social groups.

3. This is primarily the role of historians, reporters, journalists, anthropologists, and philosophers, yet it may also be an area explored by psychotherapists who each day face the history and the reality of the suffering of individuals and families.

4. The ethical aspect of this problem can be summed up by the question: can we refuse ourselves and our patience the opportunity to explore stories and memories, which on the social scale have been largely concealed?

5. We might also ask how macrohistorical processes influenced the microhistories of us all — both on the global scale (bleeding land), and on the individual level, which is always really personal, intimate, connected with the family roots and one's own beginnings. In my opinion, examining of these beginnings makes sense, as it helps to understand the unconscious aspects of the suffering, envy, anger, anxiety, and guilt, which have become an element of intergenerational transfer.

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