The Legacy of War and the Distortion of Cultural Mirroring

Teresa von Sommaruga Howard

Introduction

This paper was originally written as book chapter. [1] It focuses on the enduring legacy of war. The two great wars of the twentieth century in Europe precipitated millions of my parents' and grandparents' generation into a state of 'shattered attachment'. Through displacement and exclusion they were forced to find new lives in new countries as they lost loved ones, homes and motherlands. For those who did return it was to 'familiar' places that were no longer recognisable. As a child I had always thought this experience was a family aberration but later I learnt that whole communities, families and places were destroyed and restoration of what had been lost felt impossible.

In writing this chapter I have used two perspectives. The first is my own life as the daughter of at least three cultures born at the end of the Second World War. The second is my experience of working as a group-analytic psychotherapist with people of my parents' generation, my generation and the next generation who are usually described as the first, second and third generation. [2] In this work the main focus is the tracking of the unconscious influence of social and political events on the psyche. Many of the groups I conduct are large, some up to 350 people, while others are much smaller. All of them emphasise 'mending the broken connections' that individuals carry that might link their personal and the contiguous socio-political history. [3] The lens of group-analysis enables the individual, the group and the relationship between the two to be viewed and understood in a way that enables profound re-linking to be made.

At the end of this chapter I suggest that the traumatic consequences of the two 'great wars' have been transmitted beyond individual private experience into our culture and particularly into current organisational management culture. This hidden process has created an atmosphere, which feels increasingly inhuman and warlike.

The Long-Term Legacy

A month or so ago, I was sitting in a sunny garden in Stockholm under an abundant apple tree talking to two men who had been born before the Second World War in Eastern Europe. One had been a surgeon and the other, a forensic pathologist. Both had been successful in their chosen field. I don't know how it happened. Perhaps I told them about my annual workshop for the

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[1] Parsons, M. D., Ed. (2008). *Children: The Invisible Victims of War: An Interdisciplinary Study*. Peterborough, Cambs: DSM.

[2] Group-Analysis was developed by S H Foulkes during the Second World War. He described it as a form of psychotherapy "by the group, of the group, including its conductor". When applied to larger settings it enables cultural assumptions that are often disabling and located in the social unconscious to be revealed. Foulkes, S. H. & Anthony, E. J., (1984) [1957] *Group Psychotherapy: The Psychoanalytic Approach*. London: Karnac (Original edition published in 1957).

[3] *Breaking the Silence: Mending the Broken Connections* is a workshop that I co-conducted every year in Germany for First, Second and Third Generation after socio-political trauma such as the Holocaust.

second generation in Germany but it wasn't long before one of them told me that the town of his birth, in what is now Serbia, had changed its name seven times in his lifetime. Early in his early childhood he had spent a year in Bergen Belsen. It had haunted him ever since but it was not until he had retired and started writing that he had begun to be able to re-member that dark time.[4] It was not until he had found enough inner strength to sit alone at night when all was quiet and dark outside that he could begin to recall the smells, the sounds and the feel of the terrifying time he spent in the Nazi death camp. The other man had lost his father when he was only six because the Russians had sent him to Siberia and he had died there in the freezing winter. This man told me, through tears that suddenly started to flow, that he still wakes from dreams about his father.

As both these stories demonstrate, war leaves us with a hidden long-term legacy that does not go away. Behind the successful adjustment to post war life, lies a devastating abyss that propelled many of my parents' generation into a state of 'suspended mourning'.

World War One was dubbed the war to end all wars while World War Two following only 21 years later was the most brutal in history. These two wars, so close together, signalled a disastrous inability to learn from experience and provided almost no time for any recovery. In their immediate aftermath, whole populations were up-rooted, displaced and bereaved in unprecedented numbers. A step-change in the number of fighting casualties and the number of people who were systematically murdered also occurred.[5] Huge numbers of the people of Europe were left brutalised and homeless. Millions upon millions, although surviving physically, were left emotionally broken without homes, country, family or friends. As a result, at least two generations were directly, severely traumatised.

My parents' generation growing up the First World War learnt from their from their parents that the best way of coping was not to give in to grief. Instead they learnt to direct their energies towards the future by building a new life with great energy and hope. As they tried either to put together the remnants of their former lives or to build new ones, a way of coping developed into a hidden and ubiquitous cultural phenomenon. The shame of being turned into a victim was buried under a mask of heroism and survival reinforced by 'Poppy Days' that gave little space for mourning what was lost or facing the shame of survival. With the pressing business of needing to build new lives taking precedence, an indelible enduring legacy has remained that persists as a subterranean force influencing our lives.

Often physically removed from their original historical and cultural context, many of my parents' generation had the additional burden of being emotionally stranded as well. All the accompanying assumptions, belief systems, rituals and expectations that were integral to life as it had been lived previously, no longer applied and no longer had the same relevance or meaning.

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[4] Rajs, Jovan, (2001) *Ombud for de tystade* Stockholm: Norstedts 2001 (Spokesperson for those who have been silenced).

[5] The end of World War Two brought in its wake the largest population movements in European history. Millions of Germans fled or were expelled from Eastern Europe. Hundreds of thousands of Jews, survivors of the genocide perpetrated by the Nazis, sought secure homes beyond their native lands. And other refugees from every country in Eastern Europe rushed to escape from the newly installed Communist regimes' (www.bbc.net.uk/history/worldwars/wwtwo/refugees_01.shtml). According to official West German accounts (perhaps exaggerated) at least 610,000 Germans were killed in the course of the expulsions. The total number of Germans who were expelled or who departed voluntarily from Eastern Europe after the end of the war mounted to 11.5 million by 1950. (www.bbc.net.uk/history/worldwars/wwtwo/refugees_03.shtml)

The new social context could not resonate with the experiences they had had. It was this confusing, traumatised and traumatising context that set the scene for the birth of my generation. Our childhood was often full of confusion. Its disconnection from the past made it very difficult to give meaning to present day experience and provided a fertile vessel for receiving the unfelt trauma of my parents' generation. It led to what is often referred to as the transgenerational transmission of trauma. The devastating losses that both preceding generations had to face was lost as the inability to mourn created a distorted cultural mirror that in turn prevented the possibility of healing.

Stories that Could Never be heard

I was born towards the end of the war in England of parents who had both grown up in the immediate aftermath of the First World War and lived through the Second World War but their experiences were quite different.

My father's experience as a child and adolescent during the pre Nazi and Nazi time in Berlin was one of having his world literally turned upside down! He became an outsider in his birth city just because his mother was Jewish and because he couldn't bring himself to 'play along' with the increasingly Nazi styled morning assemblies in school. One morning it all got too much for him so he followed three of his Jewish friends out. That courageous act, although interestingly he does not see it that way, resulted in him being expelled from school and later from Germany.

My mother was born in England and lived in privileged middle class Surrey and Hampstead. When war broke out she was working for the Ministry of Foods and was evacuated to North Wales. She could not 'play along' with the prevailing cosy assumptions of the British Middle Class so in 1949 they 'escaped' war-torn Europe and took me with my sister to New Zealand! Like many of the Second Generation, I did not really know where I had come from or why.

I did not realise just how predetermined the path of my life was until very recently. Two years ago, I went to Nürnberg for the first time and understood immediately. There, a fuzzy blur that had always been in my mind re-formed itself into a razor sharp image. As an architect and large group psychotherapist the relationship between the physical structure of the environment and our inner world emotional environment has always preoccupied me. For the first time, I witnessed the manipulative force of Albert Speer's architecture.[6] It's mighty construction so obviously sought to diminish the individual and enforce the power of the mass. Here was a place where it helped to comprehend both the physical and emotional environment to make sense of it. At that moment I discovered an unthought known (Bollas, 1987).[7] I recognised that being an architect and a large group specialist are two sides of the same legacy that had been handed to me when I was born.

As I took in the carefully orchestrated architectural apparatus, its mammoth proportions designed to reduce the individual to a mere speck in a massive killing machine, I recognised the malevolent origins of this unusual combination of skills. The Nazi terror generated by the gigantic gatherings held at the *Reichsparteitagesgelände* (Nazi Rally Grounds), with its catastrophic consequences,

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[6] Albert Speer was Hitler's architect and armaments minister who designed and redesigned many buildings and cityscapes during the Nazi time.
[7] Bollas, C., (1987) *The Shadow of the Object: The Psychoanalysis of the Unthought Known.* New York: Columbia University Press.

transmitted itself in the most mysterious way from a childhood in Berlin through a generation to a childhood in faraway New Zealand. I can only think now that this terrifyingly unthinkable, everyday life in Germany must have filled every fibre and cell of my father's being and in turn conveyed itself deep into my unconscious. There, in the physical structure, I saw concrete evidence literally of what had emotionally shaped my father's formative years.

This enormous rally complex, covering an area of 11 square kilometres, is situated a short tram ride from the walled city of Nürnberg, now explained the background to the incipient terror that pervaded my childhood. My father, born in 1920, had witnessed the inexorable rise of Nazism to power celebrated by that triumphant torchlight parade in Berlin in March 1933. He lived there through his early adolescence, until 1936. He often tells me this is his memory. As I wasn't there, it is my history! But, perhaps it is more than that. The jackbooted nightmare of the mass rallies of the Third Reich suffused my night time dreams. How did they get there? Perhaps they originated in the unpredictable eruptions precipitated by my father's painful memories that so often punctured my waking life.

My mother was born in February 1919 just months after the end of the First World War. Her father was still mourning his favourite brother who had been shot down over France in 1916. All he wanted was a son to fill the gaping void of his beloved brother's death but my mother was born instead. Although he loved her very much he had wanted a son. So when his second child was a boy, this son, my uncle, had to carry the impossible burden of keeping his dead uncle's memory alive by emulating his achievements. As far as I know none of this was ever talked about in any coherent way. Instead it existed as a hidden life script that dictated the course of their lives. My uncle was always ill. I suspect it was an unconscious decision to opt out of the impossible competition he was born into. My mother always railed against what she saw as favouritism and felt unacknowledged. This his-story has continued to live on. When my grandfather died he bequeathed almost his entire estate to my uncle. When I was born as the first grandchild, my mother again found herself in the back seat as her first daughter became the apple of her father's eye. Our relationship has always been an uncomfortable one.

These stories were largely kept out of awareness in a kind of 'then and there space' unconnected to the 'here and now' and when I recently suggested at a conference that most people of my generation had similar tales to tell, many people spoke movingly for the first time never having made any connection with these experiences before. These stories had been locked away in the family history box and had not been taken out to become a conscious constituent of their current identity. We had all been taught not to draw attention to a history that might precipitate grief or distress.

A Time to Forget or a Time to Re-Member?

So often we are told, "Isn't it time to forget and leave the past where it belongs, get over it, move on ….? After all it was more than sixty years ago and even longer ago back to the First World War!" I think the idea that we 'should move on and forget' was intrinsic to the prevailing coping mechanisms of the immediate post war era of the First World War and it has continued ever since (Barker, 1995).[8] The focus has been on actively making the world a better place in which to live.

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[8] Barker, P., ()

Until recently very little attention has been paid to the lingering after effects that lurk like a giant time bomb. According to Yolanda Gampel (2004) untouched trauma has a radioactive quality that transmits itself and lives on in all of us.[9]

At one of the recent Second Generation workshops I conduct in Germany, a participant encountering his first ever Social Dreaming Matrix (Lawrence, 2005) [10] declared, "This is a nightmare!" He was reacting to the snowflake pattern of the chairs but I think he was also referring to the task in hand.

For those who survived the mind-blowing terror of war or the concentration camp and subsequent displacement, their experiences could almost never be talked about. Such trauma usually renders the survivor without words and there was usually little encouragement from those they so thankfully returned to, to talk. But, who wants to hear about murder and violence? The two worlds were so completely incompatible it seemed better to try to forget despite the inevitable recurrent nightmares and the feeling that so many people had of becoming 'outsiders' in their own homes. The cultural expectation that sent them to war was not concerned with hearing how it really was. Little if any acknowledgement was given to the traumas they were carrying, further reinforcing the personal shame of first being a victim and ultimately for surviving. Their continued existence was also potentially a constant reminder of what many were trying to pretend had never happened.

Those who returned were often given an injunction never to talk. The Ministry of Defence gave a directive to those who were held Prisoner of War in Japanese labour camps not to speak about their experiences lest civilians be upset. My great uncle, taken to Sachsenhausen concentration camp for eight weeks after Kristalnacht, was told by the SS never to talk about his time there and good German that he was, he obeyed. According to my father, he was completely destroyed by the experience and never allowed himself the possibility of making sense of what had happened by at least talking about it to those closest to him. He never practised as a lawyer again and died in an institution in the United States.

Although a great deal is known about the long-term effects of shellshock, most soldiers could never acknowledge their frayed nerves at the time or afterwards. According to General George Patton "Any man who says that he has battle fatigue is avoiding danger… If soldiers would make fun of those who begin to show battle fatigue, they would prevent its spread, and save the man who allows himself to malinger by this means to an afterlife of humiliation and regret" (Holden 1998: 135).[11]

In August 1914, Admiral Charles Fitzgerald founded the Order of the White Feather. With the support of leading writers such as Mary Ward and Emma Orczy, the organisation encouraged women to give out white feathers to young men who had not joined the British army. James

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[9] Gampel, Y., (2004) Paper given to London Second Generation Network National Conference on Transgenerational Transmission of Trauma.

[10] Social Dreaming is the `process' developed by Gordon Lawrence of recounting dreams together in a group. It encourages our reflective nature as human beings and enables us to make sense of and give meaning to our experiences in both our social and inner worlds. Lawrence, W. G., (2005). *Introduction to Social Dreaming: Transforming Thinking* London: Forensic Psychotherapy Monograph Series.

[11] Holden, W., (1998). *Shell Shock* London: Channel Four.

Lovegrove was only sixteen when he joined the army on the outbreak of the First World War. He later wrote,

> On my way to work one morning a group of women surrounded me. They started shouting and yelling at me, calling me all sorts of names for not being a soldier! Do you know what they did? They struck a white feather in my coat, meaning I was a coward. Oh, I did feel dreadful, so ashamed (www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/FWWfeather.htm).

Evidence of the lasting effects of war is now emerging as people retire, and find themselves unable to cope with the suppressed details from their past lives. Veterans report high levels of breakdown realising that as they pass into old age that war robbed them of their youth (ibid, 1998:166). For those who survived the Holocaust, showing signs of vulnerability, often cast as a sign of weakness, continue to be impossible. This is a lingering residue of the probability of certain death in a concentration camp selection for example.

The Social Pressure not to Re-Member

Despite the strong social pressures to put these times behind us, I keep noticing the way the destructive aspects of their legacy live on. In another workshop on the theme of War and Peace, we discovered that many of us born during and after the World Wars are suffering under a cloud so engulfing that we are unable to see it or understand its effect.[12] Those in our families, who lived to tell the tale, were unable to talk about their terrible losses and experiences and unable to really mourn them. For many the very fact of surviving was at the cost of burying their emotional reactions very deeply and, unwittingly, passing them on to the next generation. The problem was they had been there and understood what had happened. We had not! Our experience was that we often had to make sense of strong feelings that could not be made sense of in the present because they had been triggered by a past that we knew little about. The present became further disconnected from the past as we employed the same mechanism of burying the pain that our parents and grandparents used. We followed their example!

Even when we know that our parents were probably traumatised, we often don't quite know how it has influenced our lives. Ernestine Schlant in The Language of Silence describes how the second generation in Germany 'inherited not only the unmourned traumas of the parents but also the psychic structures that impeded mourning in the older generation in the first place' (Schlant, 2002: 14).[13] Most importantly her work demonstrates how what happens to the individual may not be purely individual, but may be bound up with larger social, political, and cultural processes that often go unperceived' (ibid. 13).

It is not until we have the opportunity to work these experiences through together in a contained reflective space such as a large group that we can begin to make sense of our own often-incomprehensible reactions. Even then, with the benefit of consciousness, we might still not be able to recognise how much the unacknowledged past can distort our present. A story from the weekend in Nürnberg, I described earlier, with a group of First, Second and Third Generation Germans and

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[12] *War and Peace: By thinking Beyond Protest and Opposition and discovering ways to disagree without antagonism*, 32nd Annual Winter Workshop of the Group-Analytic Society (London) 4 to 8 January 2004.
[13] Schlant, E., (1999). *The Language of Silence: West German Literature and the Holocaust*. New York: Routledge

Jews, illustrates this idea. In our explorations together, intolerable feelings emerged from the historical experience of being a victim, perpetrator and bystander despite our conscious intentions to be otherwise.

Before this visit to Nürnberg, we had visited three Third Reich sites together; Osthofen a 'rogue camp' built almost immediately after Hitler came to power; Hadamar, one of the T4 euthanasia hospitals and Buchenwald concentration camp alongside the historic town of Weimar.[14] On each occasion I had noted that there was a tendency to organise a whole day confronting harrowing material without planning in times for eating. On our previous visit I remember finally in late afternoon sitting in a café in Weimar, after a morning walking around Buchenwald, waiting for what seemed an interminable time for lunch and shivering with a biting cold that also came from deep within. It was an experience that I wanted to avoid repeating at all costs. But, it happened again and I felt that it was important to try to bring the 'forgetfulness' about food to light. Not surprisingly, my strong feelings were met with extreme defensiveness and it seemed that few understood why I was making such a fuss. It then became clear that, even with a detailed explanation, it was too painful to recognise that the residue of our joint traumatic history had been played out in our group. Learning about another time is one thing. Having it resonate in the present, as in this case through enduring cold and hunger, is sometimes just too much to hear.

This painful encounter has continued. So far the consensus is, even amongst the Jewish group, that I was rude and ungracious. By attempting to bring what had been buried to light, I challenged the cultural expectation that we shouldn't notice. The resulting tension in the group has become so intense that it has become almost impossible to talk to each other. This way of explaining away the expression of pain as just bad manners has become encoded into everyday life. The deep hurt on both sides seems to be blocking the capacity to think.

An Unnoticed Discontinuity

War brutalises and traumatises everybody involved and yet there is no ritual passage to mark the transfer from war to peace in our society. We pretend it hasn't happened. Even soldiers, who have often witnessed the unimaginably brutal, let alone those who have been displaced, are expected to rejoin society afterwards or settle in a new and unfamiliar social setting as if their experiences were a mirage. Even now asylum seekers are expected to integrate without drawing attention to their experiences. What they have had to endure to leave their homes to seek asylum

is almost completely ignored. It is interesting to note that along with many other rules about how to conduct war in the Torah there is at least one clear instruction for the community to carry out a ritual to purge blood guilt (Deuteronomy 21: 3).[15] Many so-called primitive societies carry out such rituals in the understanding of how the delicate balance of what it means to be human can so easily be destroyed. In our society survivors of war are expected to manage, what to others are unimaginable, memories, alone without any cultural mirroring to enable them to have their heroism, and their trauma, publicly reflected, and reflected on. The very personal legacy of socially committed trauma is at the same time socially ignored, which creates a distorting cultural

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[14] Between 1939 and 1945 between 100,000 to 200,000 people who were considered 'unfit for work' or incurably diseased' for various reasons were killed in specially designed 'hospitals'. The Reichsministerium des Innern (Department of the Interior) in Berlin Tiergartenstrasse 4 planned and organised these killings and they became known as T4 euthanasia.

[15] JPS (2000) *Hebrew-English Tanakh* Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society.

mirror.

At this point you might think, "So what!" These are personal issues that have nothing to do with wider social mores. Until recently I would have agreed but as a result of working as an organisational consultant in different countries, I am noticing a pattern that appears to be ubiquitous and I suspect connected. In writing this chapter, I have had to struggle to connect my thoughts. In my inner process I noticed a disconnection that appears to mirror the cultural disconnection I have sought to trace. With the focus on building the future, the pain of our war-torn past, remains hidden in the personal psyche and is disconnected from the wider socio-political culture. The problem is that the painful residue of these unmourned memories does not disappear. It remains embodied in the social unconscious and re-emerges in organisational life, in an unrecognised form, as we struggle for both personal and national economic security.[16]

Almost everywhere I go I meet people in despair as they find their working lives becoming increasingly meaningless. Constant reorganisations, said to be improving efficiency, often turn out to be no more than expedient ways of saving money that inevitably precipitate enormous hidden suffering. Nowadays excessive stress is considered an almost natural accompaniment to organisational life. A strange situation is emerging where more and more is being squeezed out of less and less as skilled people are being expected to meet targets that appear to have little to do with their original vocation. Many colleagues find themselves frustratingly buried beneath mountains of time-consuming paperwork suggesting a lack of trust in their capacity to ensure a consistent quality service. There is a strange drift towards a lack of recognition as individuals are they are expected to behave as if they were replaceable 'numbers'. The luxury of being recognised as an individual with a name and a special set of skills appears to be rapidly disappearing. I notice increasing alienation in the true Marxist sense.

Let me give you two examples.

A group of graduates from the MA in Therapeutic Child Care at the University of Reading were recently comparing notes and discovered that 'looked-after' children were often no longer looked-after by the time they were fifteen. They were being put into Bed and Breakfast hotels because that is cheaper for the funding authority. These vulnerable young people had to go to school, wash and iron their clothes and cook their own meals with little or no adult support. When we remember that young boys of about the same age were sent to war as soldiers not so long ago, it is no wonder that there is a kind of institutional blindness to what these young people

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[16] The social unconscious as distinct from the collective unconscious was first described by Erich Fromm in *Beyond the chains of illusion: My encounter with Freud and Marx* (2002). London and New York: Continuum International Publishing Group: Reissue edition. He suggested that as our families reflect our society and culture, we soak them up with our mother's milk. Fromm pointed out that we may believe that we are acting according to our own free will but it is more likely that we are following powerful directives that are so proverbial we no longer notice them. Dalal (2002) in *Race, Colour and the Processes of Racialization* London: Brunner-Routledge and Hopper (2003) (2003) *The Social Unconscious: Selected papers*. International Library of Group-Analysis London: Jessica Kingsley, have both written about the consequences of the impact of power exerted by the social unconscious on the construction of our individual psyches as well as our interpersonal relations. The concept of the social unconscious is important because it describes the social forces that exist outside of our conscious awareness that inhibit our capacity to think freely and creatively and to institute social change. Unless we regularly move out of our prevailing social, cultural and political contexts, we are caught in a self-perpetuating recursive cycle that restricts the perceptions and possibilities we can have about the world far beyond the restrictions of our individual family psychic legacies.

might need to sustain them through the transition into adulthood.

In my work in local authority housing there is a similar institutional blindness that ignores ordinary emotional needs. We now have a government directive that requires local authorities to make all social housing decent to live in by 2010. Because there is insufficient money to achieve this aim, the skill is not one of creating decent homes for everybody but one of convincing tenants that their homes are decent enough after a minimum amount of work. Skills relating to diagnosing and repairing building defects are being supplanted by the need to exercise diplomacy. Not surprisingly many well-trained and skilled architects and building surveyors are suffering. They are stressed because they are feeling overworked and not appreciated as they try to do the maximum possible with the minimum of resources while being expected to improve their client focus with little or no training.

In both these examples there is a pattern that is almost schizophrenic in its effect. These days, public sector organisations seem to have become places where despite the oft-repeated mantra that people are our most precious resource, they are treated as if they were no more than robots. Even the most creative vocations have been reduced to a mechanistic procedure of ticking boxes. A kind of organisational false self is maintained where so long as the correct box is ticked, it doesn't really matter what the real achievement has been.[17]

Although we tend to think of an organisation as a separate entity with a life of its own, according to Ralph Stacey it only exists only as an imaginative construct that emerges in relationships between people. (Stacey 2005: 479).[18] If instead we recognise that we form our organisations as they form us, "we might begin to ask such questions as, what is the dominant discourse, what ideology does it reflect, what patterns of power relations it is sustaining and what patterns of inclusion and exclusion are evident" (ibid: 493). We might also begin to gain access to what it is that people bring with them into their organisations.

If we remember that so many of us have been traumatised by our parents' and grandparents' experiences, is it too much to hypothesise that our organisations actually reflect the same immutable imprint of trauma? Research has demonstrated that people who rise to management positions have developed their capacity to manage by surviving childhood trauma without adequate support (Cox et al, 1988).[19] It is also those people who are most likely to demonstrate the symptoms of post-traumatic experience and avoid attachments. They then rise to positions of 'power' and adopt influential cultural attitudes such as "get on your bike" to find work. I suggest that increasingly the predominant assumption in work settings is that deeply connected attachments should be avoided and that strong emotional reactions are unprofessional (Menzies

[17] 'False Self' as distinct from 'True Self' were concepts developed by British paediatrician and psychoanalyst D W Winnicott, (1974) Playing and Reality London: Penguin Books. A True Self that has a sense of integrity and connected wholeness whereas False Self occurs when the person constantly seeks to anticipate demands of others in order to maintain relationships. In early development, the False Self is split off as an adaptation to the primary carer who reflects her own defences on to the infant rather than reflecting the infant's actual moods. A profound sense of alienation can result in adult life.

[18] Stacey, R., (2005). 'Organisational Identity: The Paradox of Continuity and Potential for Transformation at the Same Time' in *Group Analysis* Vol. 38 No. 4 December 2005 London: Sage.

[19] Cox, C. J. & Cooper, C. L., (1988). High Flyers: An Anatomy of Managerial Success. London: Blackwell.

Lyth, 1988: 53).[20] The expectation that feelings should be kept under control and preferably not revealed is inhuman. It might have its place in the battlefield but in the workplace only serves to increase alienation through lack of committed relationship and attachment. The intention to deny the importance of committed relationships in the workplace is reinforced by a cultural assumption that seems likely to have a connection with the aftermath of war. Recently, a very committed middle manager took the risk of telling her executive manager that she felt that she wasn't coping. The executive manager told her that the organisation had to earn six million pounds to survive and that her team was expected to make its contribution. If she wasn't up to this, then perhaps she should leave! Where was the support or development of the 'valued people resource'?

When organisations reshuffle, merge or downsize, decisions appear to be made as if executive managers are generals fighting a battle. It is as if the change model being applied is being unconsciously lifted from war strategy where troops are moved around with little if any regard to the attachments that might have built up over time. Although these relationships provide the life and energy to work and live creatively, their importance is devalued except to maintain a kind of 'as–if relationship' that projects the image of an improved service that doesn't really exist.

So what can we do?

Learning to Re-Member Together

If as Stacey says, 'organisations are the ongoing patterning of conversations then changes in conversations are changes in organisations' (Stacey 2005: 479) there are two models at out disposal, the Therapeutic Community and Group-Analysis.[21] These two powerful ways of using the group for healing are of course not unconnected. They also emerged from the ruins of both the great wars and offered some hope to those suffering from shellshock. According to Bridger (2005: 19), the Therapeutic Community at Northfield II did demonstrate that problems of organisation hinged on problems of relationships'.[22] The Northfield experiment also showed that there is a link between participation and creativity, which are deeply connected at a psychological level.

The difficulty is that when attempting to use this model in situations, where there is no history of co-operative thinking, it can feel very subversive and frightening. It seems that most people find it is almost impossible to imagine that something quite magical can happen when they just sit together in a circle to talk about their own experiences. I suspect this inability to visualize new possibilities is another hidden legacy of war. It is almost inbuilt into our consciousness that there is always a winner and a loser. Films and books about the war, our legal system and British

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[20] Menzies Lyth, I (1988) 'The functioning of Social Systems as a defence against anxiety: A report on a study of the nursing service of a general hospital', Containing Anxiety in Institutions: Selected Papers Vol. 1 London: Free Association.

[21] Therapeutic Community [TC] is a term applied to a participative, group-based approach to long-term mental illness and/or drug addiction that includes group psychotherapy as well as practical activities. It is sometimes residential with clients and staff living together. The central philosophy is that clients are active participants in their own and each other's mental health treatment and that responsibility for the daily running of the community is shared among the clients and staff. TC's also emerged towards the end of the Second World War. They usually eschew or limit medication in favour of psychoanalytically-derived group-based insight therapies.

[22] Bridger, H., (2005). 'The Therapeutic Community: its potential for development and choice for the future' in Amado, G. & Vansina, L., Eds. *The Transitional Approach in Action*. London: Karnac.

parliamentary process reinforce this perspective.

I was recently involved in attempting to help a team who felt driven to write a letter complaining about their manager's abusive behaviour to a more senior manager. When I suggested that we all meet together to try to understand what had been happening I was met with animosity. Nevertheless we arranged a meeting to begin a dialogue. Not everybody attended and three walked out almost immediately when they discovered that I wasn't going to provide any answers. Many saw the fact that we did not immediately swing into a formal disciplinary process as managers as ignoring their experience of abuse. The idea, that making sense together might bring relief and provide a new context within which to work, was completely beyond comprehension. In this case the manager did movingly talk about his own experience of being bullied by a manager earlier in his career and his intense wish not to repeat that experience but he could not be heard.

So why is it that we are unable to make use of a way of managing that has been demonstrated to work in the Therapeutic Community? I am coming to the conclusion that we share a traumatic history that has become disconnected from the present and so we are doomed to repeat it. War taught us that what comes with being lovingly attached means loss that can be so unbearable that attachment can never be contemplated again. A culture-wide transmission of failure to mourn those loved people and places so savagely taken by war has influenced our predominant ways of thinking and behaving to such an extent that it seems we unconsciously imagine that life can be lived without attachment. For as long as we maintain this position, the profound pain that has been transmitted may never be transformed.

The Possibility of Transformation

The clue to the possibility of transformation is symbolically expressed in the Exodus story, told every year by Jews at Passover. In Egypt, '*Mitzraim*' meaning the narrow place in Hebrew, the Jews were oppressed as slaves. All this changed when they were able to find a powerful God who in describing her/himself to Moses, as "I shall be whom I shall be!" invoked the infinite possibilities for healing and transformation to be represented. The story illustrates how everything can be changed including an entire oppressive social order. When the Eternal One, with the help of Moses, 'extended a mighty hand by an outstretched arm and mighty power', (Deuteronomy 26: 8) God enabled the Jews to develop their self-respect and throw off the yoke of slavery. With a vision of the Promised Land and support, they were able to make the difficult journey to freedom. Although this symbolism is derived from Jewish cosmology, for me it represents what is possible when a contained reflective space is made available.

The difficulty is that such reflection demands a willingness to face what can be mirrored back in the reflective space. If my history is anything to go by, there is a great deal to face. The culture-wide inability to mourn has created a cultural mirror that reflects a consistent attempt to escape from the legacy of the past. Consequently few of us are initially able to make good use of a group. Our culture has not taught us why it is helpful to face pain and transform it. Instead, there is consistent encouragement to heroically keep a stiff upper lip and failure to maintain it is shameful. Although it is usual 'to keep a lid on things' in the workplace, I have discovered that when managers are encouraged to refrain from issuing instructions about how to deal with problems, providing a regular reflective space can help to build a cooperative and creative

environment where feelings can be simply and directly expressed. It takes time and a lot of patience to deal with the inevitable apprehension but people do get used to it if managers are supported to stay with a mode of asking questions and expecting staff to work with them. In the beginning people are usually taken over by an overwhelming anxiety that prevents them from speaking so sessions need to be conducted in a way that legitimises everybody's natural fears.

The reflective group is a delicate organism but if handled with concern and care new possibilities can emerge. The skill is to create a kind of emptiness, a nothingness that can hold open the possibility for the 'divine' to emerge. The New York based commentator and essayist, Douglas Rushkoff suggests that it is this nothingness that enables us to remember the essential human condition that there is nothing sacred for us to worry about except each other.[23] To achieve a space that is respectful to that degree requires careful managing wherever it is used. First of all, a suitable room with good proportions, that enables chairs to be arranged in concentric circles, is vital for the process. If a contained space is not carefully prepared, such a group will rarely work.

Such a group space is also a place that we have to learn to use and the learning can help us to make sense of ourselves. By learning to stand 'to be in exile' as Patrick de Maré often explained that when we can tolerate not getting an immediate response to whatever one says, an inner strength slowly builds.[24] Gradually it then becomes possible to think, to hold and speak your own thoughts, to disagree in the moment and to build a circle of shared thinking where transformative ideas begin to emerge.

As the larger setting provides a different and bigger context than usual, it also helps us to catch a glimpse of those hidden assumptions, 'structured out' knowledge, rules and unquestioned handed down ways of behaving that so powerfully influence our lives but are beyond individual understanding. A recent student group at Reading illustrated the possibilities of what can emerge in a carefully conducted group.[25]

Remembering what is Too Painful to Forget

About half way through the first year we discovered that one student had been in the Marines during the Falklands conflict. We also discovered that he had had a very difficult time at school due to undiagnosed dyslexia and finding himself unable to do what he wanted to be able to do, he constantly truanted. His Falklands experience came up quite by chance. We were on a residential part of the course at a country retreat. It was quiet and peaceful apart from helicopters that could sometimes be heard hovering overhead. Once when this happened, we were sitting in a reflective group and I noticed that he had started sweating profusely. We learnt later that he had responded to this problem over the years by taking showers and changing his clothes as soon as he could. In this situation he had to stay in the group.

His dyslexia and his war experience came together in an unexpected way. Like many of the

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[23] Rushkoff, D., (2004). *Nothing Sacred: The Truth about Judaism*. New York: Three Rivers Press.

[24] de Maré, P. et al (1991), Koinonia: From Hate through Dialogue to Culture in the Large Group. London: Karnac.

[25] The Experiential Group in the MA in Therapeutic Child Care, University of Reading, (2000 to 2016) is a place where students sit together in a group-analytic context every week for 75 minutes to reflect on their theoretical learning, their practical experience and their personal development and make connections between all three modes.

students he was having difficulty with writing essays but he seemed more than usually paralysed. The group, realising his difficulties, spent a large part of one session working with him and offering practical help. The following week, he told us that he had been on a high for most of the week and then tumbled into a depression and had found it very difficult to return to the course. He had realised that this feeling was the same feeling he had had when he had been at school – feeling ashamed and hopeless, outside of the school community. Then he remembered that when he had been discharged from the forces he had also felt outside the community with no one to talk to. Although he had profound memories of comradeship of his time in the Marines, other experiences were too painful to remember. On discharge, he had walked many miles and found himself sitting at the top of a steep escarpment above the ocean contemplating ending it all. He did not know how long he sat there but eventually he walked back home. At the end of the course, he realised that he was full of the same feelings except that this time he had something new and good inside to keep hold of and to remember.

Making a Connection

The immediate post First World War birth context of my parent's generation and reinforced by the post Second World War birth context of my generation required us to keep 'a stiff upper lip' to manage the future. This expected 'way of being' could only be maintained by discouraged acknowledging the importance of attached relationships. This tendency arose from a deep-seated influence that comes from the impossibility of mourning the enormous war losses and now appears to limit the ability of creative, cooperative and fulfilling enterprise to flourish. Instead of being supported and encouraged to work in mutually collaborative relationships that enable much-needed innovative thinking, many people find that organisational life is becoming increasingly rule-bound, bureaucratic and inflexible.

Vulnerability is a natural state in the face of overwhelming forces but we are taught to be ashamed of such feelings. Being faced with death and destruction early in life often leads survivors to feel deep shame for not being able to save those who died around them. This double process of feeling deep pain and shame but pretending that they don't exist is, I think, the lasting residue of a period in history that we can't bear to remember. It is making much of our current working life more unbearable than it ought to be and shapes a cultural mirror that often reflects back inhuman robot-like expectations of us all. The solution for many is to try to disengage in whatever way they can and spend a lot of energy plotting their premature exit. Although it might seem a logical step, the resulting withdrawal from relationship can lead people into a grey 'no man's land' that precedes the road to burnout. Without the inspiration of close, committed working relationships, the strategy used to solve the initial problem often leads people into a much more severely distressed and lonely place. Where possible, moving into alternative small-scale employment provides respite from the unbearable anonymity and confusing contradictions of organisational life.

Can We Retain our Humanity?

Brazilian anthropologist Carlos Rodrigues Brandão (2006) reminds us that culture is the way we became human.[26] It was by learning to live in a complex system of social relationships, governed

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[26] Brandão, C. R., (2006). Ownership, the gift, the talent: Reciprocity in the origins of human experience at 'Groups: Connecting Individuals, Peoples and Cultures' IAGP Congress, Brazil, July.

by laws that made it mandatory for us to consider one another. Consequently we transformed the wildness of nature into culture. The key to being human is our capacity to be in on-going relationships that we can think about together and describe in words. For as long as we fail to remember and fail to talk about the losses from our joint traumatic past, we keep the origins of current traumatic organisational experiences buried below multiple layers of defensive coping. Unconsciously, we help each other to avoid facing our shared history by avoiding attachment to important people and places. In the process, we create patterns of behaviour that might finally make us all, to some degree, inhuman. With this diminishing capacity to reflect on our own lives, to reflect on our shared past and to make long-term attachments, we contribute to keeping our cultural mirror distorted.