

Centro Veneto di Psicoanalisi  
**KnotGarden**



Idee, intrecci e snodi della Psicoanalisi

# War

Edited by

**Anna Cordioli and Paolo Fonda**

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**2023/2**

## **KnotGarden**

*Travelling around Britain one can visit some “knot gardens” reconstructed on the basis of designs and antecedents from the Elizabethan era. These are small gardens constructed in such a way that they can be walked in a continuous manner in innumerable chains of paths: sort of labyrinths without a single point of arrival; interweaving paths between low flowerbeds that can be walked without ever losing sight of the set of other possible paths. The antecedents of such realisations are the Celtic ornamental motifs based on complex interlacing of continuous lines that found expression particularly in the goldsmiths' and ornaments of the amanuensis' copies (motifs of this kind can be admired in the famous Book of Kells preserved in Trinity College, Dublin).*

*Leonardo da Vinci, Durer and Michelangelo also tried their hand at inventing such ornamental motifs.*

*The reference to knot gardens has a very precise reason: gardens, unlike drawings and jewellery, can not only be admired but also walked in. In them one can concretely have the experience of walking along paths that allow, by proceeding through linked passages, one to discover new ways of reaching a point by passing through disparate others, each point being reachable from every other without retracing one's steps and thus not having to give up a stretch of possible path.*

*This is what we wish to construct with this memory journal, which on the Veneto Centre for Psychoanalysis' site is, whenever possible, multimedia.*

*Patrizio Campanile*



# War

*Edited by Anna Cordioli and Paolo Fonda*



*In the confusion of wartime in which we are caught up, relying as we must on one-sided information, standing too close to the great changes that have already taken place or are beginning to, and without a glimmering of the future that is being shaped, we ourselves are at a loss as to the significance of the impressions which press in upon us and as to the value of the judgements which we form. We cannot but feel that no event has ever destroyed so much that is precious in the common possessions of humanity, confused so many of the clearest intelligences, or so thoroughly debased what is highest. Science herself has lost her passionless impartiality; her deeply embittered servants seek for weapons from her with which to contribute towards the struggle with the enemy. Anthropologists feel driven to declare him inferior and degenerate, psychiatrists issue a diagnosis of his disease of mind or spirit. Probably, however, our sense of these immediate evils is disproportionately strong, and we are not entitled to compare them with the evils of other times which we have not experienced.*

SE - p. 275

Freud, S. (1915) *Thoughts For The Times On War And Death*. The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud 14:273-300

*Von dem Wirbel dieser Kriegszeit gepackt, einseitig unterrichtet, ohne Distanz von den großen Veränderungen, die sich bereits vollzogen haben oder zu vollziehen beginnen, und ohne Witterung der sich gestaltenden Zukunft, werden wir selbst irre an der Bedeutung der Eindrücke, die sich uns aufdrängen, und an dem Werte der Urteile, die wir bilden. Es will uns scheinen, als hätte noch niemals ein Ereignis so viel kostbares Gemeingut der Menschheit zerstört, so viele der klarsten Intelligenzen verwirrt, so gründlich das Hohe erniedrigt. Selbst die Wissenschaft hat ihre leidenschaftslose Unparteilichkeit verloren; ihre aufs tiefste erbitterten Diener suchen ihr Waffen zu entnehmen, um einen Beitrag zur Bekämpfung des Feindes zu leisten. Der Anthropologe muß den Gegner für minderwertig und degeneriert erklären, der Psychiater die Diagnose seiner Geistes- oder Seelenstörung verkünden. Aber wahrscheinlich empfinden wir das Böse dieser Zeit unmäßig stark*

GW - p. 324

Freud, S.

(1915) *ZEITGEMÄSSES ÜBER KRIEG UND TOD*. GESAMMELTE WERKE: CHRONOLOGISCH GEORDNET 10:324-355



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## Introduction

*Anna Cordioli*<sup>1</sup>

*"We'll meet again  
Don't know where, don't know when  
But I know we'll meet again some sunny day"*  
(Vera Lynn, 1939)

In 1939, "We'll meet again" is played on British radio, sung in a dulcet voice by Vera Lynn. The song, poignant and very catchy, is a promise that there will be a "later" when it will be possible to meet again and start living a happy life again. It is a song of hope that entered the hearts of English-speaking soldiers and civilians involved in the war effort.

"We'll meet again" became very popular during World War II and was played on the radio after the bombings to try and boost the morale of the population. There would have been an aftermath of the war, one had to keep that in mind.

We find this same song exactly 40 years later, quoted in Pink Floyd's *The Wall*. Roger Waters had lost his father in the Battle of Anzio. He was one of those children who had not been able to re-embrace their father. For Waters, after the war there wouldn't have been a great reunion, but an emptiness filled with terrifying fantasies and the

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<sup>1</sup> Anna Cordioli (Padova), Associate member of IPA, Società Psicoanalitica Italiana and Centro Veneto di Psicoanalisi.



feeling of being somehow out of sync with the joy of rebirth he felt around him.

Vera Lynn had lied: there is not always a happy ending at the end of wars. In fact, a frightening number of young men had died as "rats in the trenches" (Pink Floyd, 1979), there never was a future for them, and even the future of their loved ones had been crippled.

Even those who had fought and returned home bore the marks of war: they were either maimed in their bodies or otherwise carried within them the long shadows of horrors suffered or acted upon.

Louis-Ferdinand Céline book "Guerre" (War) starts with him waking up after a bombing raid. He is the sole survivor of a carnage that can only be told in detail. Bodies, disemboweled and desecrated by howitzers, lay in a mush that no longer allows to tell them apart from those of their horses.

Céline tells us immediately that he will never be able to erase from his mind the horrors of those battles: *"I have always slept like this in the atrocious noise since December '14. I got the war in my head. I got it locked in my head. [...] I learned to distinguish external noises from noises that would never leave me again. [...] in order to think, even a little, I had to take it in bits and pieces like when two people talk to each other from a station platform when a train passes by. One piece at a time of well-crafted thinking, one away from the other. It is a tiring exercise, I assure you. I'm trained now. Twenty years, one learns. My soul is harder, like a bicep. I no longer believe in shortcuts. I have learned to make music, sleep, forgiveness, and, as you see, even beautiful literature, with little touches of horror wrested from the noise that will never end"* (Celine, 2022, 25-27)<sup>2</sup>.

War leaves an indelible mark, individually and collectively, now and in the future.

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<sup>2</sup> This quote has been translated literally from the Italian version of the book.





The book "All Quiet on the Western Front" (Remarque, 1928) begins with these lines: "This book is to be neither an accusation nor a confession, and least of all an adventure, for death is not an adventure to those who stand face to face with it. It will try simply to tell of a generation of men who, even though they may have escaped its shells, were destroyed by the war"

Generations. War butchers' generations: both those directly involved in the battles and those to come.

In "The Wall", we can clearly see how the death of his father is causing the child to experience a grief so deep that, as he grows up, he will find himself filled with anguish and in the grip of an increasingly radical fragmentation. War tears generations apart; the nightmares become less and less perceptible to the consciousness and yet they do not disappear: if anything, they infiltrate deep inside and become transgenerational results.

War leaves such a long-lasting mark that it exceeds the life span of those unfortunate enough to participate in it. Thus, we see how war destroys lives and things but also destroys the flow of time.

We are still here wondering why -"Why war?" (Freud, 1933), why another war? And bitterly we have to realize that this depends on the fact that the previous war was not yet over: its unconscious offshoots were still only partly in process, poisoning institutions and sickening individuals.

In the summer of 2021, I had found myself writing for the website of the Veneto Center for Psychoanalysis a short memoir to acknowledge the 30-year anniversary since the beginning of the war in former Yugoslavia.

I was upset finding that very few people cared about that.

In that situation, I came across an interesting article by Paolo Fonda in which he



recalled being in Istria in the very beginning of the outbreak of war between what is now Slovenia and the rest of Yugoslavia. It was the start of a violent conflict that lasted ten years.

I soon found myself discussing with him and Vlasta Polojaz on the need to talk about war. Paul and Vlasta, both psychoanalysts at our center, are Slovenian-Italians and in their lives have crossed paths with war and ethnic persecution very often. They have been involved in training analysts in Eastern Europe for decades, and no one is as capable as they are of reading the deposits left by that war.

We felt it was important to have memory of the events of the 1990s, partly because the Yugoslav conflict had been a wound for us Italians as well, so close and often related to those territories, and partly because it seemed to me that no one was willing to acknowledge that 1991 was a past too near to be able to say we were free of it. I wondered what kind of removal was going on, whether it had the mixture of the defensive cleavages typical of present-day trauma or whether it had to do with omertous claustrations of ambiguous nuclei (Bleger, 1967).

However, there was another reason why, in the summer of 2021, that issue seemed crucial to me: as I had the opportunity to tell them, I was very much worried about what I could see from the window that is the Web. There was a strange electricity in the air.

We were still absorbed in the second wave of Covid, and perhaps that pre-apocalyptic mood was justified by the upheavals caused by the pandemic. Yet it wasn't just that: populism was becoming more and more disengaged, socio-political supporters more paranoid, and the economy seemed most fragile. And it was.

At school we studied how the Spanish flu pandemic broke out during World War I, and I, who had never witnessed any war, had a strange feeling of *déjà vu*. I asked Paul and Vlasta what they remembered about the war in the former Yugoslavia and, going



further back in time, the border persecutions of the first half of the 1900s. Between them and me lies a generation, and what was being created in the conversation we had was a scene that had a powerful transgenerational mixture (Spiller, 2022): I was sensing the rise of a karstic river that had invaginated many decades earlier without ever dying out. They were telling me what could be remembered but they were also aware of how forgetting is part of the processes of trauma processing. *"It takes time to come to think about trauma. Decades. Generations must pass,"* Paolo Fonda said.

There came a desire to broaden the dialogue to colleagues who were interested in war trauma care. We could have had a study group and perhaps a conference.

However, history was ahead of us, and on February 24th, 2022, Russian troops invaded eastern Ukraine. War had indeed returned back to Europe.

We all remember the anguish that gripped us over the news of civilians attacked and of the massacres that, week after week, came to light. Almost immediately the counter-information also began: the massacres had never happened, the children had never been abducted, the bombs were ones of liberation, not attack.

One of the first epiphanies of war is the collapse of agreement on reality: if until earlier it seemed possible to determine whether a fact had occurred, then each side was already shouting its own truth. In war, lies and truth are relative matters: whoever wins will determine how to read the events.

One is incredulous to see how difficult it becomes to state definitively that something evil occurred. Inside, each person feels the emotions strongly and seeks out those who mirror their feeling to reinforce their sense of reality.

Those outside the conflict cannot fully understand the anguish produced by this relativism that destroys the contours of reality. Those on the outside invite the parties



to mediation in an attempt to reconstruct a framework for dialogue. And, as we have been able to discover in the facts, sometimes this attempt becomes offensive to the parties in conflict, especially to those who have been attacked.

Those who seek mediation, those who are fortunate enough not to be directly involved in the war, must therefore remember that the position of being impartial and the ability to have a thought that integrates the split parts are two high-level products of the psyche and are a luxury we can afford when we do not have to fear for our survival. Asking someone who is struggling for his or her own life to have a triangulated thinking and reality may hide a radical non-understanding of one's experience.

We were here, in a partially-involved Europe, still convinced that we could be moderate, that the war had not already changed the usual parameters by which we understand reality. Yet, the contagion ran fast.

I remember feeling that I had to quickly learn the meaning of war-thinking: the public opinion was clogged with an increasingly radical polarization, voters chose right-wing governments, and we were already beginning to feel nostalgic for a past that, not long ago, we considered wretched. We all had to realize that war has the power to affect relations between people even thousands of miles away from where the bombs fall.

What we needed was to stop and think.

On the initiative of Vlasta Polojaz and Paolo Fonda, the Polojaz Foundation offered the Centro Veneto di Psicoanalisi to create together an international meeting on the topic of war experiences. I am very grateful to the CVP's assembly and executive group for wholeheartedly embracing this initiative, which was then held on October 1st, 2022.



The first part of this issue of KnotGarden collects almost all the papers submitted during the international meeting "*Psychoanalytic Thinking and War Experience*", which also obtained the sponsorship of the Italian Psychoanalytic Society.

In addition to various analysts from our center, colleagues from Ukraine, Slovenia and Bosnia and Herzegovina also spoke. In the present issue, only Dr. Matačić's intervention - who brought an intense and beautiful clinical work that cannot be published for privacy reasons - is missing.

A report of the conference is available on the website of the Italian Psychoanalytic Society.

The proceedings were opened by **Roberto Musella**, who, on behalf of the SPI, welcomed the many national and international guests. This was followed by **Patrizio Campanile**, president of the CVP, who offered a brief introduction titled "Destructiveness: an intolerable reality" that immediately brought the proceedings into the heart of the topic.

**Oleksandra Mirza**, president of the Ukrainian Psychoanalytic Society, presented a paper comparing thought and propaganda in wartime. Mirza attended the meeting,



which was held in Padua, in person, to bring a direct testimony of what was happening right then in her nation. In contrast, his colleague **Igor Romanov**, UPS training officer, had to remain in Ukraine, as a man of draft age and therefore unable to leave the country at war. Dr. Romanov had, however, connected via Zoom, attending the meeting with a very substantial paper: "The War Within:

The unconscious experience of war in a patient and an analyst."

**Alberto Luchetti** spoke for the CVP with a powerful paper called "Why War? Without wind in the sails and with slow mills" in which he delved into the reflections on war made by great analysts including, Freud, Money-Kyrle, Fornari and Laplanche.

**Paolo Fonda**, who is also a member of the Polojaz Foundation, presented an original interpretation of the schizo-paranoid position in the dynamics of war conflict, later on focusing on the question of the time required for war to be processed.

**Maja Dobranić**, a colleague from Sarajevo who had previously collaborated with our website with a memoir on the beginning of the siege of her city in 1992, brought to the meeting a very moving work on the psychic condition that is activated in patients and analysts when one has been a civilian victim of an ideology of massacre.

Concluding this first part of KnotGarden were a commentary on the conference, offered by **Andrea Braun** and **Maria Ceolin**, and a touching speech by **Vlasta Polojaz** tracing the activities carried out by the Libero and Zora Polojaz Foundation in favor of young analysts in Eastern Europe and for the development of a culture of peace based on authentic and non-rhetorical exchange between colleagues from different territories.

The second part of this issue of KnotGarden collects articles touching on various aspects related to war.

**Maria Tallandini** recalled the great work done by Anna Freud and Dorothy Burlingham



in the Hampstead Nurseries, which were wartime nurseries dedicated to traumatized and/or orphaned children.

**Wolfgang Lassmann**, a Viennese fellow, brought a contribution named "An Inextricable Link. Individual and collective attempts to clean up once and for all" bringing attention to the aspects of cruelty, as eternal as it is everyday, that run through humanity.

**Patrizia Montagner** brings a vibrant testimony of her work with a group of Ukrainian teenagers refugees expressing through their drawings the horror they have seen and were invaded by. Dr. Montagner's working group was awarded, in 2023, with the IPA "In the Community and the world" award precisely for their support of Ukrainian refugees.

The third and final part of this KnotGarden finally collects, within my short introduction, two papers brought to the 2022 European Federation of Psychoanalysis conference in Vienna. **Massimo De Mari** and **Carine Minne** reason about the psychic effects of the mafia and the functioning of criminal gangs. Although these cannot be considered strictly as war situations, they crudely show us many of the deformations that the ego suffers during a war conflict, particularly related to the ideal ego.

War, as we shall see, completely changes a person's experience, and caregivers must really understand, as Céline wrote, that there are no "shortcuts" and that a song is not enough to believe that there can still be "an afterwards" full of sunshine.



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## **FIRST PART**



FONDAZIONE-SKLAD  
LIBERO ZORA POLOJAZ



CONVEGNO INTERNAZIONALE

INTERNATIONAL MEETING

The official language is English. Italian translation will be available.  
La lingua ufficiale è l'Inglese. Sarà disponibile la traduzione in italiano.

# PENSIERO PSICOANALITICO ED ESPERIENZA DELLA GUERRA

# PSYCHOANALYTIC THINKING AND THE EXPERIENCE OF WAR

1° OTTOBRE 2022

1<sup>ST</sup> OCTOBER 2022

VIA ZOOM 9.00-13.00  
IN PRESENZA - PADOVA 9.00-18.30

VIA ZOOM 9.00-13.00  
IN PERSON - PADOVA 9.00-18.30

## INTERVENGONO

PATRIZIO CAMPANILE **ITALIA**  
ALBERTO LUCCHETTI **ITALIA**  
PAOLO FONDA **ITALIA**  
MAJA DOBRANIĆ **BOSNIA**  
STANISLAV MATAČIĆ **CROAZIA**  
ALEXANDRA MIRZA **UCRAINA**  
IGOR ROMANOV **UCRAINA**  
MARIA CEOLIN **ITALIA**  
ANDREA BRAUN **ITALIA**  
VLASTA POLOJAZ **ITALIA**



CON IL PATROCINIO DELLA SOCIETÀ PSICOANALITICA ITALIANA

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## Welcome from Società Psicoanalitica Italiana

Roberto Musella<sup>3</sup>

Dear friends, dear colleagues, it's a great pleasure for me to bring you a greeting from the SPI Executive committee that I represent today. I am very sorry not to be with you today, among people very dear to me but, unfortunately, the overlapping of multiple commitments, forces me to intervene remotely. The initiative of the Veneto center, which I thank in the person of President Campanile and the entire local executive, is, as always, of the highest profile and is part of a line of continuity with activities undertaken by the SPI and other centers of the SPI in a dark moment for the history of our Europe. Since the beginning of the conflict, the SPI has placed itself at the side of the Ukraine and of the Ukrainian Psychoanalytic Society by providing it with therapeutic, scientific, logistical and, within the limits of its possibilities, economic support. The ground of political and scientific exchange, after a prompt statement in support of Ukrainian people and colleagues, by our President, Sarantis Thanopoulos, saw the participation of the President of the Ukrainian society, Olexandra Mirza, at the XX national congress of the SPI. We supported and promoted the sharing of scientific seminars in collaboration with psychoanalysts from different geographical areas, including one last Sunday on trauma, and we set up an internal task force that led the delegations of the two societies, Italian and Ukrainian, to meet in Vienna during the annual conference of the EPF for a scientific, cultural, economic and therapeutic collaboration. The SPI economically, in its small way contributed with a donation and a

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<sup>3</sup> Roberto Musella (Napoli) Full member and Secretary of the Italian Psychoanalytical Society.



fundraiser, donated to the Ukrainian Society. From the point of view of the humanitarian emergency, we have moved to create a listening network. We immediately set in motion a task force, through the PER group (a group of psychoanalysts working with refugees), to mobilize local forces to take care of refugees and relatives of the victims of the conflict, numerous on our national territory

The combined effort has led to the result of cooperation with other national and international political actors: The Italian Psychoanalytic Society (SPI), the Exarchate of the Ukrainian Church in Italy, the Association of Ukrainian Psychologists, the Alfredo Rampi Center, and the United Nation High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Which allows today to have a collaboration agreement that has the purpose to offer psychic support to Ukrainian refugees and to support operators who collaborate to provide this support, through the activation of three listening locations. For the moment two in Rome and one in Milan, with a view to expanding this logistical support to other local realities. This, while aware that this is a drop in the ocean of suffering that affects our Ukrainian friends, is what the SPI has so far managed to do with the joint commitment of the forces at our disposal.

I wish all of you a full success of today's conference, hoping that psychoanalytic thought can help to understand more and better the reasons for so much pain.

Thank you

**Roberto Musella**, Napoli  
*Centro Napoletano di Psicoanalisi*  
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## **Destructiveness: an intolerable reality**

*Patrizio Campanile<sup>4</sup>*

How can we deal with the disastrous effects of war?

I'm not referring to material consequences which can be addressed by reconstruction and financial investment, but those which affect people. How people can overcome the horror of war?

These are just some of the questions that we will not solve today, but we can try developing some thoughts around it.

Today's meeting stems from a proposal that the Foundation / Sklad Libero and Zora Polojaz made to the Centro Veneto di Psicoanalisi. Some members of the CVP are part of it and a good number have contributed over the years to its initiatives always sponsored by the CVP. In this case, however, there is a direct commitment from our side that aims to emphasize both the appreciation for the initiatives carried out over the years by these colleagues, as well as the commitment and solidarity that since the beginning of the invasion of Ukraine, the members of the CVP showed towards colleagues who are suffering terrible abuse. Beyond the initiatives that each of us, as citizens, have decided to undertake, as analysts' members of the International Psychoanalytic Movement we wanted to give concrete signs of brotherhood towards our Ukrainian colleagues, both by proposing to the SPI to organize a fundraising, and by

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<sup>4</sup> Patrizio Campanile (Venice) Full member and Training Psychoanalyst Member Italian Psychoanalytical Society, President of the Centro Veneto di Psicoanalisi.



activating the group of analysts who have been dealing with refugees in the CVP for years.

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Thinking, thinking about destructiveness while it is being perpetrated is even more difficult than at other times and because of it I can say on behalf of all that we are very grateful to the Colleagues who today have accepted to bring their experiences as psychoanalysts who are, with their fellow citizens, undergoing an invasion war that is bringing pain, death and destruction.

Thanks also to those who suffered the same fate not many years ago and who today make themselves available to bring us their testimony. I think it takes a good dose of courage to face the fatigue of thought in the heat of the moment, because it is a matter of great effort to face horror. We know well even after many decades that it is still difficult for us to face the traces of the war and not only because we saw our country lined up on the side of the aggressors and murderers. War leaves sometimes incurable wounds, divides communities; creates enemies among friends and even among family members themselves. It raises children by depriving them of all that is necessary and to which they would be entitled. It puts colleagues who until recently kindly cooperated, on the opposite side of the line. As it is inevitable, it becomes difficult to understand ourselves exposed, as it is and we all are, to propaganda, ideology and the manipulation of truth.

How to save what can be saved?

I do not say how to save humanity, the sense of the human, and I do not say it consciously because unfortunately we are also made by destruction. This is the most hidden and most difficult component of the human to accept. We know how difficult it can be to recognize it and recognize its action in our lives and in the choices of individuals and human groups.



For me, the pain that Freud had to face has always been a cause for reflection, since he has always forced himself not to hide the truth, and that is reality, when he could not escape the recognition of destructiveness as an original component of the human: *"Men are not gentle creatures who want to be loved, and who at the most can defend themselves if they are attacked; they are, on the contrary, creatures among whose instinctual endowments is to be reckoned a powerful share of aggressiveness. As a result, their neighbour is for them not only a potential helper or sexual object, but also someone who tempts them to satisfy their aggressiveness on him, to exploit his capacity for work without compensation, to use him sexually without his consent, to seize his possessions, to humiliate him, to cause him pain, to torture and to kill him"* (Freud S., 1930. *Civilization and its Discontents*" (Freud S., 1930. *Civilization and its Discontents*. The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, 21, 111).

This is a difficult way of seeing the human and to accept.

As Freud said: *"The assumption of the existence of an instinct of death or destruction has met with resistance even in analytic circles; I am aware that there is a frequent inclination rather to ascribe whatever is dangerous and hostile in love to an original bipolarity in its own nature. To begin with it was only tentatively that I put forward the views I have developed here, but in the course of time they have gained such a hold upon me that I can no longer think in any other way.*

*To my mind, they are far more serviceable from a theoretical standpoint than any other possible ones; they provide that simplification, without either ignoring or doing violence to the facts, for which we strive in scientific work. [...]*

*I remember my own defensive attitude when the idea of an instinct of destruction first emerged in psycho-analytic literature, and how long it took before I became receptive to it.<sup>1</sup> That others should have shown, and still show, the same attitude of rejection*



*surprises me less. For 'little children do not like it'<sup>2</sup> when there is talk of the inborn human inclination to 'badness', to aggressiveness and destructiveness, and so to cruelty as well"* (Freud S., (1930). *Civilization and its Discontents*. The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, 21, 119-120).

I would like briefly to draw attention to an element that I personally believe to be central: the horror of destructiveness as a central trait of the human involves resorting to ways to explain and justify one's own destructive acts in one's own eyes and those of other human beings. The ideals to which we promptly resort then make our destructive actions presentable, justifiable and possibly even worthy.

The ongoing aggression in Ukraine gives us yet another example.

The fact is that even to add a contrast to the aggressions it is inevitable to put ideals on the field. They are necessary to support the ego especially in times of difficulty, they contribute to its edification and development; at the same time, they can also open the path of destructiveness within the victim. As Freud showed, there is a link between the construction of ideals and sublimation and this explains how they, due to the *defusion of instinct* that sublimation brings with it, can be at the origin of intolerance, oppression and destructive actions.

How complex is the way we are!

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I'm sure today will offer us new incentives for reflection. Thanks again on behalf of those who wanted and organized this meeting and good work.

## References

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## Thinking vs Propaganda <sup>5</sup>

*Oleksandra Mirza*<sup>6</sup>

Dear Colleagues, Dear Members of the Italian Psychoanalytic Society,

Thank you for the invitation to the conference and organizing such an important event, drawing the attention of the professional community to such an essential topic as "Psychoanalytical Thinking and the Experience of War".

For more than half a year, the topic of War has not left the headlines of newspapers and has not gone out of the heads of all representatives of the civilized world. It would seem that in our days the existence of a primitive psychology of conquest, violence, rude submission to one's will and outright robbery is impossible. However, it exists. The war continues in its wild manifestations. And it happens on all fronts: territorial, economic, informational.

That is why our meetings and discussions have great importance. We have to withstand regular, massive information attacks in the form of Russian propaganda, to oppose it with real thinking, understanding of what is happening and a critical attitude towards it. Propaganda is contagious like a sticky virus. It engages the basic instincts by juggling emotionally charged images and words. Day after day, year after year, decade after decade, Russian propaganda influenced the minds of people, lulling vigilance with sweet promises of "justice" - the return of the loss (territories, former greatness, power, etc.). This has led to the fact that the vast majority of the Russian

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<sup>5</sup> We are publishing the version of this paper prepared for the conference and therefore lacks the bibliographical references. We apologise to our readers..

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population supports the totalitarian regime, Putin's policies, and this brutal war. In addition to the low standard of living of Russians in the provinces, and the lack of perspectives, distorted perception of reality, limited way of thinking, pushes them in search of the meaning of life or just making money into the army.

Examples of the work of Russian propaganda are clearly visible in the territories of the so-called DNR and LNR (Russian-occupied territories of the Ukrainian Donbass and Luhansk region). For 8 years of rule and the total absence of Ukrainian news on TV, they have managed to create a completely opposite picture, a parallel reality, where Ukraine, not Russia, is bombing the Donbass, and is the culprit of their troubles.

Of course, the seeds of Russian propaganda fell on fertile ground. For many years in the history of modern independent Ukraine, these territories were underfunded and "neglected" in terms of the development of culture and science. There is a sad joke in the Ukrainian Psychoanalytic Society (UPS) that the only large regions in Ukraine where there was no development of IPA psychoanalysis were Donetsk, Luhansk and Crimea. And in 2014 we saw a result of that.

To paraphrase a well-known proverb which originally sounds like: "There is a part of truth in every joke". One can say: "There is a part of joke in every joke".

And the truth is that psychoanalysis, with its eager to know and accept the reality, to establish of responsible emotional relationships, is a reliable and proven method that can form independent critical thinking.

As you know, W. Bion, who made an enormous contribution to the psychoanalytic understanding of thinking, considered this process as an emotional experience of knowing oneself and another, as a link.

War destroys links. It used to be intense relations between Ukraine and Russia - family, economic, scientific, cultural and many others. With the beginning of war and occupation in 2014, these links began to crumble; the history of the countries, one own



life story began to revise and reflect. It was a very painful process that has been continued nowadays. In many families bonds are tearing, a similar vision of what is happening has become fundamental for friendship, colleagues are expected to be precise and clear in wording and understanding where black is, where white is. The world has been divided into friends and enemies, which, of course, does not facilitate thinking process. But in parallel another process is taking place - in this confrontation, national identity is becoming more and more differentiated, clearly aware. The Ukrainian language, which was prohibited and persecuted by Soviet and tsarist Russia, wins the hearts of Russian-speaking Ukrainians, and becomes a border that defines the Ukrainian mentality. This is one example of the struggle on the invisible mental front. Another, destructive example, is the fact of the deportation of 1,300,000 people from Ukraine to Russia, of which 300,000 are children. This numbers are declared by the Russian Federation. The information front is fighting for minds and for the future. Teachers from Russian Federation were brought to the occupied Ukrainian territories with the mission of instilling a Russian vision of history in Ukrainian children's mind, to change their way of thinking. Now that Russian troops have retreated as a result of a lightning-fast counter-offensive by the Ukrainian military, these teachers have been arrested and will be convicted. They face up to 12 years in prison according the accusation in "Violation of the laws and customs of war."

We can also see an increase in propaganda in kindergartens and schools in Russia when they want to place the past in the future - all these videos, when children march dressed in WWII military uniforms.

This is a very disturbing trend not only for the world but first of all for Russian population and Russian psychoanalysts as many people who were grown up in the USSR remember well the repressions of the scientific and creative intelligentsia in the 30s of the last century, when entire scientific branches were severely criticized and/or



destroyed. This is what happened with genetics and psychoanalysis. In the families the memory of an acute sense of insecurity is still fresh when after a conversation with a neighbor/colleague/friend, a car came at night and took the father of the family with his subsequent sending to the north or execution without any investigation and trial. It got known that in Bucha, before the retreat and atrocities, there were initially targeted killings. They killed teachers, volunteers, activists. Lists of such people were being prepared in Kyiv as well. In addition to being inhuman, cruel and immoral, it is also an attack on the thinking and active part of the population. These are attacks on thinking, as Bion wrote.

This raises the question: is analytical thinking possible under totalitarianism or during war? Is it possible to practice psychoanalysis and free-floating attention, without memory or desire, while in a situation of physical or mental insecurity and uncertainty?

The world has already experienced a great war more than once. And there is an experience when the war in a strange way served to advance thought, stimulated insights and new theories. The new time dictates another style of war and offers new opportunities. With the development of the Internet, many chances to be in contact have appeared. In the last century, it would have been unthinkable to continue the analysis, being in different countries, letters of support went for weeks. In February 2022, having faced with the war directly, we got the immediate support of friends, colleagues, and all kinds of assistance from the EPF and the IPA - emotional, legal, financial. We experienced the full power of emotional connections which were able to contain even catastrophic anxiety. It took time for all UPS members and candidates to be safe and able to regain our ability to work with patients. Many of those who was in a safer place from the beginning were able to organize and provide volunteer assistance to other, more needy and affected fellow citizens. A few months later, the UPS



was able to restore the educational process. Meetings of Friends are held regularly, providing the space for professionals from different countries to exchange their clinical experience, ideas and emotional experiences. It can be said that the rupture of links the UPS (inside and outside the Society) caused by the aggressive intrusion of the Russian Federation into the territory of sovereign Ukraine has been eliminated, and now it is time to reflect it. Without communication between professional communities, without the active care of friends and colleagues, this is not possible. Therefore, I am very glad to share with you the pleasure of participating together at the conference and look forward to hearing the further presentations!

Thank you for your attention!

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## Why war? / Perché guerra?<sup>7</sup>

**With no wind in the sails and slow mills / Senza vento nelle vele e con lenti mulini.**

*Alberto Luchetti*<sup>8</sup>

My introduction to our work today is simply to re-capitulate the writing that Freud dedicated to war exactly ninety years ago. That being said, it was not easy to embark on a journey to accomplish it. First of all, we inevitably find ourselves inhibited to speak or write about war here, involved but protected, while once again (but has it ever been otherwise?) war tragically engulfs millions of people: once again people close to us, in Europe, have come under attack for months. On the other hand, how can we not feel torn—like Freud himself—between the need to reflect psychoanalytically about these catastrophes provoked by human beings and the feeling of impotence and futility we feel in doing so, appalled at the disturbing repetition of what von Clausewitz himself called “nothing but mutual destruction”, which accompanies *ab origine* the history of human beings?<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Anthropologists, archaeologists, and ethnographers disagree on the origins of war. According to recent studies, it appears that the earliest documented occurrence of warfare was at Jebel Sahaba (a submerged necropolis at least 13,000 years old and located in the north of present-day Sudan, near the border with Egypt), where in the late Pleistocene the Nile Valley was the scene of repeated clashes, probably caused by territorial disputes exacerbated by climate change.



These feelings and sensations are expressed well by the title *Warum Krieg? / Why war? / Perché guerra?* which, rather than alluding to an explanation (much less an exhaustive one), conveys bewilderment, perplexity, astonishment in the face of war. Rather than the starting point of Freudian reflection with the goal of reaching an answer, it emerges as its end point, its result. The answer to that question, is the self-same question...

Ninety years ago, it was Freud, in the absence of his correspondent who had already flown to the United States, who insisted on giving this title to the exchange of two letters—the minimum to be considered correspondence—with Albert Einstein. The latter, as we know, had been invited by the “Permanent Committee for Literature and the Arts” of the League of Nations through initiatives of the International Institute of Intellectual Co-operation, to choose an interlocutor and a topic of universal interest on which to exchange respective ideas. Einstein had mentioned the name of Freud, whom he had met five years earlier, and the topic he proposed was, “Is there any way of delivering mankind from the menace of war?” in the firm, personal conviction that “The ill-success, despite their obvious sincerity, of all the efforts made ... to reach this goal leaves us no room to doubt that strong psychological factors are at work, which paralyse these efforts”. Einstein then asked, “Is it possible to control man’s mental evolution so as to make him proof against the psychoses of hate and destructiveness?”

Freud insisted on the title *Why war?* instead of *Right and violence*, that he himself had used to replace the one proposed by Einstein—*Law and might*—, deeming the word “violence” “balder and harsher” if one wishes to indicate without feigning what it is about (on another occasion, he mentioned the importance of not “giving way first in words, and then little by little in substance”). Freud goes as far as to state that:





*Right and violence* “seems absolutely insufficient. I cannot accept it and I feel myself obliged to demand that ‘war’ also appears in the title.”

Yet Freud makes no explicit mention of the shadow of war that, in those dark times, was no longer a threat coming from behind but already casting grim shadows over the future. Indeed, we have the impression that Freud was speaking from a *Turris eburnea*—as has been mentioned—withdrawn from the menace outside, taking refuge in his laboratory of thought, “turning his back on the external living world in the present in favor of the past and inner world” (P. Bion). This impression is also given by comparisons with his other writing on war, dating from the spring of 1915, *Thoughts for the Times on War and Death*, which began describing Freud’s bewilderment: “In the confusion of wartime in which we are caught up, relying as we must on one-sided information, standing too close to the great changes that have already taken place or are beginning to, and without a glimmering of the future that is being shaped we ourselves are at a loss as to the significance of the impressions which press in upon us and as to the value of the judgements which we form. We cannot but feel that no event has ever destroyed so much that is precious in the common possessions of humanity, confused so many of the clearest intelligences, or so thoroughly debased what is highest. Science herself has lost her passionless impartiality”. At the end of that same year, 1915, Freud wrote to one of his correspondents that “... If you will now observe what is happening in this war—the cruelties and injustices for which the most civilized nations are responsible, the different way in which they judge their own lies and wrong-doings and those of their enemies, and the general lack of insight which prevails”.

What is more, again in that 1915 writing, Freud wrote of “the mental distress felt by non-combatants, against which it is such a heavy task to struggle”, while those who are fighting became “a cog in the gigantic machine of war”, which, once set in motion,



then proceeded on its own accord. Misery was brought about by, among others, disillusionment that civilization had not overcome barbarism, and by the imposed change in attitudes toward death, which could no longer be denied.

Seemingly, none of this comes out in *Why War?* Here, Freud declares his own incompetence: what he could say as a “philanthropist” had already been said by Einstein: “But though you have taken the wind out of my sails I shall be glad to follow in your wake”. Indeed, Freud seems uncertain of his ability to offer a precisely psychoanalytical contribution, and apologizes at the outset “You must forgive me if in what follows I go over familiar and commonly accepted ground as though it were new”. Furthermore, he had expressed his dissatisfaction to Eitington even before beginning the correspondence. “I don’t expect to get a Nobel Peace Prize for it”, and once it had all been concluded, spoke of it as “the tedious and sterile so-called discussion with Einstein”.

However, in the text, as mentioned above, he begins with an abrupt consideration that originates from an initial, bitter consideration: “You begin with the relation between Right and Might. There can be no doubt that that is the correct starting-point for our investigation. But may I replace the word ‘might’ by the balder and harsher word ‘violence’”? The right developed out of the violence. As in the whole animal kingdom, conflicts of interest are, in principle, “settled by the use of violence”. There is no other option but to transfer the latter (first in the form of muscular strength, with the introduction of weapons, to an intellectual one) to an enduring community: “*L’union fait la force*. ... right is the might of a community [*Gemeinschaft*]. It is still violence, ready to be directed against any individual who resists it; it works by the same methods and follows the same purposes. The only real difference lies in the fact that what prevails is no longer the violence of an individual but that of a community”. To be maintained permanently, this community must be organized through norms,



institutions, and especially by the growth of emotional ties which are the true source of the strength of the group of people.

At this point, rather abruptly and categorically, as if irritated at not finding wind for his own sails, Freud declares: “Here, I believe, we already have all the essentials: violence overcome [*Überwindung*] by the transference of power [*Übertragung der Macht*] to a larger unity, which is held together by emotional ties between its members. What remains to be said is no more than an expansion and a repetition of this”. With this “transference of power”, in reality, the problems actually shift. They recur when inequalities are recreated within the established community. “Thus we see that the violent solution of conflicts of interest is not avoided even inside a community”. Hence a second bitter conclusion and warning is made: “We shall be making a false calculation if we disregard the fact that law was originally brute violence and that even to-day it cannot do without the support of violence.” “The attempt to set up a central authority to which the right of giving judgement upon all conflicts of interest shall be handed over and to replace actual force by the force of ideas seems at present to be doomed to failure.”

But why is it “so easy to make men enthusiastic [*begeistern*] about a war?”, Einstein asked. What is “inflammable” in the human animal? Here, Freud’s recourse to his theory of erotic and destructive drives—to the new dualism of Eros and the death drive—is another decisive plunge into the unique condition of human beings, namely, to be a drive animal. Indeed, another bitter conclusion follows. “Do not now ask us to turn too quickly to the values of good and evil. Both drives are equally indispensable, because the phenomena of life depend on their concurrence and contrast.” It is rare for action to be the work of a single drive, itself already composed of Eros and destruction: the reference to Lichtenberg and his “Compass of Motives” is to emphasize that



the pleasure of attacking and destruction is present, mixed with other drives, even the higher ones, which are sometimes hiding behind those two.

Here Freud takes an in-depth examination of the death drive:

- it acts in every living creature and its aspiration is to bring it to ruin;
- it becomes a destructive drive when it turns outward, against objects. “The organism preserves its own life, so to say, by destroying an extraneous one”.
- part of the death drive, however, remains active within the living being, in an internalization of the destructive drive (again, a “transference of power”). “We have even been guilty of the heresy of attributing the origin of conscience to this diversion inwards of aggressiveness”.

And he gives us another bitter conclusion: “if these forces are turned to destruction in the external world, the organism will be relieved and the effect must be beneficial. This would serve as a biological justification [*biologischen Entschuldigung*] for all the ugly and dangerous impulses against which we are struggling. It must be admitted that they stand nearer to Nature than does our resistance to them for which an explanation also needs to be found”. Regarding nature, to speak of “biological justification” confirms what Fornari would later state as a criticism of Freud (who surely alternates between endogenous and exogenous): the expression “nearer to Nature” is meant to refer to “human nature” rather than nature in general. Fornari continues: “the problem of guilt [and of drive, which is above it] represents a novelty brought into the world of nature by man as animal who is in conflict with his instinctual life ... the rise of peculiarity of guilt is due to a condition of primary ‘mutation’ (used here in the same sense that this term is accorded in biology)”.

Therefore, it is *Homo homini lupus*—as Freud had written a few years earlier referencing Hobbes—but clarifying that the wolf is neither a *lupus* to the other wolf (not



even in male rivalry) or to its prey: “No pleasure in causing suffering [that is, no sadism]; no inclination to massacre the entire herd in a holocaust!”. And the wolf is not *lupus* to man, either. “The wolf of ... Hobbes is a kind of *emblematic* figure for our own cruelty, but can in no way serve as an argument for invoking ... the so-called biological character of our destructiveness”. (Laplanche) Only man is *lupus* for man. Man’s sadistic and destructive aggression is absolutely unrelated to any animality, and the drive is not an original “natural-ness,” but a true “second nature” deposited in man by the effects of the child’s rapport with the adult other. Money-Kyrle pointed out in those years that war is a human passion, all too human: in the higher animals there is nothing corresponding to the warfare made by human beings; “if war consists in fighting, between members of the same species, *in cooperation* ... in the rutting battles of animals only the first two items in this definition are fulfilled”, “But the man is capable of fighting under a leader, with one group against another; the ape apparently is not”.

Precisely because of this intimate and inseparable connection between human beings and drives, Freud concludes that “there is no use in trying to get rid of men’s aggressive inclinations”, and thinking you can do so is a risky illusion. In those same weeks, he wrote in another context of a “sad disclosure”: “It really seems as though it is necessary for us to destroy some other thing or person in order not to destroy ourselves, in order to guard against the impulsion to self-destruction”. However, one can take these and “try to divert them to such an extent that they need not find expression in war”. But how can we achieve this diversion? “Anything that encourages the growth of emotional ties between men must operate against war.” The structure of human society is to a large extent based on these ties, which may be of two kinds: love, though inhibited in the sexual aim, and identification.



These “*indirect* methods of combating war” are surely more practicable in contrast to an ideal “subordination of the instinctual life to the dictatorship of reason” [an ideal that would thus fall under the category of “transference of power”], But they give no guarantee of success, much less a quick one. If there is no wind in our psychoanalytic sails, the mills at the disposal of humanity, and psychoanalysis with it, to grind this “human matter” and to feed with it the building or rebuilding of these bonds is slow, too slow and for this reason perhaps painfully ineffective. “An unpleasant picture comes to one’s mind of mills that grind so slowly that people may starve before they get their flour”. But wasn’t it Freud that pointed to psychoanalysis as “slow magic”, the talking cure?

Discouragement is inevitable. And contrary to the impression of *Turrus eburnea*, here Freud expresses it, in reverse, by asking a seemingly cynical question, yet explicitly stating that this is “a mask of assumed detachment”: but why then do we become so indignant at war, resisting it instead of accepting it as “one of life’s many painful calamities,” that is, considering it in accordance with nature and fully justified biologically, and in practice quite avoidable?

Though the question seems cold and detached, the answer is actually quite impassioned: “everyone has a right to his own life, because war puts an end to human lives that are full of hope, because it brings individual men into humiliating situations, because it compels them against their will to murder other men, and because it destroys precious material objects which have been produced by the labours of humanity ... [and because of the present-day] perfection of instruments of destruction a future war might involve the extermination of one or perhaps both of the antagonists”.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Moreover, here Freud also takes a position concerning defensive wars: “one cannot condemn all types of war to the same extent; as long as there are states and nations ready to annihilate other states and nations mercilessly, the latter are required to prepare for war”.



And just like the inflammability of war, we feel this way because “we cannot help doing so”: “we are obliged ... for organic reasons”. For incalculable ages mankind has been passing through a process of evolution of culture or civilization, whose “causes and beginnings are obscure and its outcome uncertain ... It may perhaps be leading to the extinction of the human race”. To this process we owe “the best of what we have become, as well as a good part of what we suffer from”, comparable to the domestication of certain species of animals and involves physical and psychological alterations: including a progressive displacement of instinctual aims and a restriction of instinctual impulses, a strengthening of the intellect and above all an internalization of the aggressive impulses.

Freud continues, “Now war is in the crassest opposition to the psychological attitude imposed on us by the process of civilization, and for that reason we are bound to rebel against it; we simply cannot any longer put up with it. ... [we have] a constitutional intolerance of war, an idiosyncrasy magnified, as it were, to the highest degree. It seems, indeed, as though the lowering of aesthetic standards [here again we see a reference to organic, perceptive, and sensorial modifications] in war plays a scarcely smaller part in our rebellion than do its cruelties”. It is precisely on these organic reasons related to our civilizational evolution that the “non-utopian” hope that wars can be ended in the near future is based, “one thing we can say: whatever fosters the growth of civilization works at the same time against war”.

Confronted once again with war (not only by Einstein’s call for it), Freud can only come back to it from the point he had reached in *Civilization and its Discontents*, from that assessment and consideration of the human condition and the “disturbing factor” that characterizes it. In *Discontents*, he starts from the original impotence of the man-child, narcissism, and the resulting aggression and destructiveness from the need to ward off that which causes displeasure and pain – the body, the external world, and



especially relations with others. Freud emphasized that hostility to civilization arises precisely because it imposes on the infant body a “treatment” that implies a limitation and transformation of drive sexuality produced precisely by those relations. A treatment that is indispensable so that the drive state can flow into civilization and contribute to the bond between individuals more strongly and stably than mere interests in self-preservation, draining significant amounts of libido.

In *Discontents*, through the paradoxes of the internalization of aggression, with psychoanalysis Freud arrived with astonishment at some painful but inescapable truths:

– That is, there is “a kind of compulsive impulse of an almost organic nature” to get rid of the internal drive-attack (which has something entirely irreconcilable about it and of which anxiety is an initial, rudimentary form) by means of a passage into the real and the act: it is “the need to create an act, so that the drive itself finds its limit” (Laplanche), a link that is already a first sketch of representation: “It is a matter of giving a certain positivity in the real to what is formless, in order to succeed in relieving its burden” (Goldberg). From this need for punishment to curb the drive in reality, we move on to guilt (“a topographical variety of anxiety”, Freud says), which curbs that drive attack through the construction of a topic, a “new step in the Ego,” the Super-Ego.

- The only realistic strategy for satisfying destructive aggression (equivalent to the sex drive) is to dominate it, but the only way to dominate it, after initially diverting it by directing it against the other, is to satisfy it by leading it back against the ego as superegoic aggression and guilt.
- If human drive sexuality has an irreconcilably disruptive register, and if sexuality equals aggression, then civilization neither lies outside of this equivalence nor in front of it: “civilization itself *repeats* rather than opposes the other two





terms” (Mistura), so that the heresy of *Civilization and its Discontents* is the triple tautology that ensues: sexuality equals aggression/destruction equals civilization. “What a powerful obstacle to civilization aggression must be, if the defense against it can cause as much unhappiness as aggression itself!” he exclaimed in *Discontents*; here, in *Why War?*, he suggests that “it may perhaps be leading to the extinction of the human race.”

- A few days before writing *Why War?*, he wrote that the alternative for the sexual death drive that flowed back from the external world was either being bound by the Super-Ego and accordingly turning against the ego, or letting it carry out “its mute and uncanny activity as a free destructive instinct in the ego and the id.” So, it is binding *versus* unbinding.

*Discontents* outlined a diagnosis not of human adaptation but of what makes us unsuitable for the civilization/culture that is nevertheless necessary for us to adapt and which organically modifies us. Indeed, we are unfit because of “our blind destructive fury” that turns out to be “an intractable psychic function,” insofar as it coincides with the sexual that, along with language, indeed intertwined with it, characterizes our being human. “We can, at best, ... adapt to that which makes us incapable of adaptation. To go any further ... would be to cure ourselves of being human” (Bersani). But this is precisely the *Kulturarbeit*, the impossible but indispensable cultural and civilizational task that Freud entrusts to psychoanalysis, an endless and precarious task, always to be resumed like the draining of the Zuiderzee, he says in those same weeks of 1932: to cure ourselves of our humanity, of which war seems to be a tragic “corollary.” After all, we wonder if Freud, by pushing the newly introduced death drive onto a biological or meta-biological plane where there are only instincts and physical forces actually ends up bringing the “iron and fire” of the sexual into the very foundations



of life, just as, in the body of the man-child, it is the generalized subversion introduced by sexuality that brings human war into life (Laplanche).

In those early 1930s, the Freudian question found immediate resonance, developments and equally radical reassertions.

As early as 1931 and again in the context of certain initiatives from the League of Nations, Edward Glover, emphasizing the role in war of sadistic and masochistic impulses and the unconscious defenses against them, argues decisively that the real functions of war are destructive. Indeed, the more just and realistic the immediate motives for war appear, the more men use them to deny the evidence of unconscious motives. The purpose of psychoanalysis would be precisely to uncover the irrational and illusory character of political-economic rationalizations. War is a dramatic attempt by the group to resolve internal, individual conflicts and anxieties, causing the id to coincide with the superego, which short-circuits the ego.

In 1934 and then in 1937 Money-Kyrle, along with a sexual theory of war, seen as an eruption of sexual fantasies, and an Oedipal theory, where the warlike impulse originates in ambivalence toward the father, added a paranoid theory of war. This held that, at its root, there was a psychotic mode of dealing with real difficulties, specifically unconscious persecutory anxieties that lead to identifying a foreign group with the internal bad object that must be attacked in order to defend itself, and depressive anxieties about attacking and destroying the internal good object. Significantly, Money-Kyrle points out how these modes can insinuate — and here another destructive effect of warfare — into those who must defend themselves against brutal and unprovoked aggression by an enemy group or people, risking to distort thinking and undermine action either by excess or defect, for example prompting denial of real danger.



As we know, these reflections will be taken up, in Italy, by Fornari, who would trace the “war phenomenon” back to the sphere of human reactions to mourning and, in general, to human attitudes in the face of death, which have important possibility of controlling depressive and persecutory anxieties in their socialization. This is a socialization where sharing itself becomes the criterion of reality and truth, a psychotic dimension of group life that is intolerant of different criteria of validation, hence the slide from separate to different, different to extraneous, alien, and finally alien to enemy. “If the ‘other than the self’ is perceived as a threat to, or a destruction of, the reality of the self, the killing of the ‘other than the self’ coincides with the affirmation of the reality of the self” and of its own truth, not to be set apart.

Hence the psychoanalytic definition of war proposed by Fornari: *“a criminal act, fantasied individually and consummated collectively for the purpose ... of preserving the love object through a paranoid process.”* It is precisely by offering the possibility of a paranoid reaction to mourning that war can go so far as to seem an admirable institution – as Freud asserted – but now proven to be historically and definitively illusory with the technical advances by which, as Freud wrote in *Discontents*, the “men have gained control over the forces of nature to such an extent that with their help they would have no difficulty in exterminating one another to the last man.”

Surely, if Freudian reflections land on a painful and enigmatic enquiry, there is, on the other hand, certainty regarding the traumatic consequences of war. These have been evidenced by the pioneering psychoanalytic research on the traumas of World War I, then on the equally terrible of World War II and then all the wars and conflicts that have followed in various forms and extents over the past decades.



This leads me to another legitimate question: considering the latency with which their effects are detected (in fact, they transcend several generations), don't we find distant but pulsating echoes of wars in all analytical events, especially at moments when these most challenge us? Doesn't the madness of war, which annihilates human lives physically and traumatically by breaking bonds and dismantling relational, social and cultural references, emerge in the transference where we struggle with areas without words and without Ego or subject, where the unrecognizable fragments of histories that were expunged from History break through?

Just as Rabelais's Pantagruel found himself sailing on the border of the Frozen Sea when he suddenly hears voices and sounds in the air without seeing who or what is making them. He picks up these frozen words, burning in his hands, and they can finally be heard, for they were "in some barbarous language." "Many sharp words, and bloody words too ... there were terrible words, and others unpleasant to behold." In those seas, the helmsman testifies, an immense and cruel combat had taken place, for "at that moment, the words and shouts of men and women, the beating of clubs, the clanking of men's armor and horses, the neighing of steeds, and all the remaining din of battle froze in the air. And now that the rigors of winter have passed and the beautiful, calm and temperate weather has returned, they melt away and can be heard."

We will need other seasons and the warmth of human bodies to unfreeze the words, sounds, voices, affections, even the time itself that the war has frozen.

The experiences we will hear from our friends and colleagues will testify to this.

*(Translated by Scott Alan Stuart)*



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## When War Overwhelms Us

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I believe that in considering war one must take into appropriate account two things: the group psychological dimension and that war traumas are mainly elaborated in a transgenerational dimension. Therefore, I will speak about:

- a. The relationship between individual and group psychology.
- b. War as a group phenomenon, which involves the mental activity of individuals.
- c. The aftermath: the traumas of war and their transgenerational dimension.

*a. The relationship between individual and group psychology*

In Freud's (1921, p. 123) "Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego" he states that: "We must conclude that *the psychology of groups is the oldest human psychology*; what we have isolated as individual psychology, by neglecting all traces of the group, has only since come into prominence out of the old group psychology, by a gradual process which may *still, perhaps, be described as incomplete.*" (*my emphasis*) And Freud again (p. 129): "Each individual is a component part of numerous groups, he is bound by ties of identification in many directions, and he has built up his ego ideal upon the most various models. Each individual therefore has *a share in numerous group minds*—those of his race, of his class, of his creed, of his nationality etc.—"

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and he can also raise himself above them to the extent of having *a scrap of independence and originality.*" (my emphasis)

Bion also expressed himself in the same way.

Group-analysis goes on to describe how human beings are inextricably linked to each other in groups throughout life. Kaes uses the metaphor of the mycelium to represent how individuals are - similarly to mushrooms - the partial expression of an underground part that connects them and makes them part of a whole. The groups would be endowed, according to some authors, with their own psychism or even with their own unconscious.

Psychologically, therefore, we could imagine ourselves as amphibians. We cannot ignore that we are also immersed also in the waters of the groups. We influence them and are influenced by, through unique permeability.

The vital links with the group dimension provide us with stability and security. We must belong to a group and identify with it, to ensure our survival, a territory in which to live, access to linguistic codes and cultural acquisitions accumulated throughout human history, and so on.

Group-state entities build an identity that, besides psychological elements, also includes territories, people and the goods, that they believe belong to them, - partly this believe is completely subjective. These elements of identity also connect to their own founding myths. To this end, they use the most varied, often bizarre, criteria to justify their claims of possession. Thus, against the identity-cultural background of many nations, an image of itself as an empire has formed, with a determination to support or increase this ambition at any cost, even thru warfare, fighting everything that opposes it.





When peoples, who - not by their own choice - find themselves part of an empire that is not theirs, rebel and break away, the dominants - the "imperialists" - experience this as a mutilation, an irreparable narcissistic loss, which arouses catastrophic anxieties. The dismemberment threatens to bring the nation-empire group crashing down, its identity and its members risk losing the niche they live in.

The reaction we observe, when catastrophic anxieties loom, is the hypertrophy of projections and persecution feelings, and finally the war on who is identified as an enemy. It involves the settling into a rigid *PS position*, which compresses the group with incredible strength and releases destructiveness. Persecutory anxieties function as extreme defenses in the face of impending catastrophic anxieties.

However, this compactness is at risk. In the event of defeat, to continue to exist, it is necessary to process the loss to then reorganize into a more limited and more adequate identity. Just think of Austria and Germany at the end of the First World War and the state of confusion and disorientation that reigned. Then in 1945, thousands of Germans, as well as Japanese, committed suicide because they could not bear the catastrophe experienced in a Germany - or in a Japan - defeated and pulverized without reference points or prospects.

We also know other tragic events caused by the difficulty of mourning the loss of territories and strength.

For example, France, though exhausted from the Second World War, before leaving Indochina and Algeria, engaged in bloody, ferocious, and useless wars, which cost hundreds of thousands of lives. The United Kingdom, although its empire has now dissolved, has never stopped fighting, even with the Irish.

At the same time, other European empires, such as Holland, Belgium, Spain and Portugal, have tried in vain to oppose decolonization thru bloody wars.



Just 30 years ago, Serbia was unable or unwilling to give up what it imagined as its "possessions" in the former Yugoslavia, and the cost was a war with 140,000 deaths. We cannot but marvel at this collection of massacres and defeats, with similar psychological configurations in the background. The groups concerned - and thus their members - still have their mental spaces partially cluttered and conditioned by these traumatic experiences.

Now it is the turn of the Russian empire, which feels that it risks crumbling if it does not continue to dominate-possess Ukraine, as well as Georgia, Belarus, Chechnya and other nations.

As I mentioned earlier, these dynamics are inevitably, and significantly accompanied by intense suffering, including in terms of the mental activity of the individual. However, these elements rarely appear in the reports of clinical material in analysts, which should raise in us some important questions.

*b. War as a group phenomenon, which heavily involves the mental activity of individuals.*

War has accompanied us since the Stone Age and it is unclear how we could free ourselves from this evil. It has always taken place with an increase in the mental functioning of the group in a *PS position*. And this occurs since the conflict is stirring or feared, until it reaches its peak during the actual warfare. It then persists for decades after the conflict, fostered by unprocessed trauma.

The *PS position* therefore seems to be a primordial mental scheme, indispensable to both those who must defend themselves, and those who attack.



In the group in the *PS position* there is an impressive increase in projective and introjective identifications that penetrate single individuals, who are forced to assimilate to common thinking. It is incredibly difficult to resist and will then involve long and painful effort to be rid of it. In this position propaganda finds that the road for its diffusion has already been prepared

Thomas Ogden can be of great help here. He considers that Kleinian positions do not alternate, but are always present at the same time, albeit in different proportions. A partial split would allow the coexistence and dialectical interaction of the experiences relating to the positions, which gives meaning to each of them.

In war, the *D position* is inevitably weakened. We can hope that this does not happen excessively, as only this position allows for an empathic relationship with one's fellow person, helping to mitigate destructiveness, which is triggered and runs free in the *PS position*.

In relation to this, I would summarize the touching declaration of an Ukrainian soldier, reported by Igor Romanov: "I understand that in Russia there are lots of people, maybe millions of them, who experience this war as their personal moral drama... I understand that they can be tormented morally, that they can lose their jobs... But now I am simply not ready... You know, there is no need to play God. There is no need to make an appearance that a person has enough compassion, sympathy, and understanding for everyone. It's not enough. Each corpuscle, each photon, each atom of your compassion that you allocate to a person in Russia, the one who is tormented morally because his country did what it did, you do that at the expense of those people who are bereaved at the loss of the loved ones, whose homes have burnt down, those who are hiding in basements of Mariupol at the moment..."



For now, this soldier is claiming his right and duty to stay at the front in the *PS position*, to be able to shoot, not to have his hands and rifle bound by empathic feelings towards those who, in this moment, come at him with a tank.

But he also says "now ... I'm not ready", which means that there is also a certain functioning in *D position*, which makes him see that the enemy are people with aspects of humanity - which he himself lists - but for now he can only wait. However, he lets us understand that one day he could be "ready"! I assume that on both sides there are those to be feared; those, who instead of "for now" say "never", who exclude the possibility of putting the brakes on the destructiveness constituted by a *D position*. I hope and believe that they are a minority.

The same considerations can be made for the Ukrainian psychoanalyst (quoted by Romanov) who, in front of a proposed meeting with Russian colleagues, said: "... Give us time to bury our dead and mourn for them." He too says he's not ready now, but leaves a different future, a possible future as implicit.

After all, we have the experience of our patients who at times make us realize that they have the potential for love and reparation that, in this moment, they are unable to use. They ask us to safeguard them, until those precious resources are no longer threatened by their destructive anger. Only when the circumstances have matured, will they be able to take them back and make good use of them.

All of this offers a space to think war more clearly: as we do with our patients, now we can - or must - not ask a nation at war to do something that is premature. We should respect the correct timing. But we must carefully preserve and cultivate the



seeds of empathy that at the right moment, maybe after years, or after generations, can germinate. It would be a great harm if we were to lose them.

*c. The aftermath: the traumas of war and their transgenerational dimension.*

Taking up the metaphor of water, we might imagine that war pours traumas and other contents into the waters of the group psyche. These cannot be processed for the moment, and clog both the mental space of individuals as well as that of groups. This tends to hold them in a *PS position* even after the war.

Given the permeability between the individual and group spheres, individual traumas, which affect personal areas, also affect the group. Similarly, collective traumas evoke intense pain and participation in individuals, even in group members who were not directly affected by them.

The traumas suffered by the victims who belong to the group of winners are the first to be recognized and tend to be perpetuated in memory by monuments and celebrations. They can thus find a containment at the level of the group (but often also a manipulation, aimed at prolonging the *PS position* to use the compactness that this gives to the group).

The traumas suffered by the defeated, on the other hand, to use the words of Hobsbawm (1994, 16): «not only [are] reduced to silence, but [are] virtually expelled from written history and intellectual life, if not to be cataloged in the role of enemy ". Then there are the traumas produced in those who killed in war, as their self-image is heavily damaged. This is even more pronounced, when it comes to war crimes, which, as we know, happen on both sides. In this case, in addition to the victims, the crime heavily traumatizes also the perpetrators and the whole group to which they belong.



This is *not easy to work through*, not least because *they cannot take advantage of the group's containment*. No one erects monuments or organizes celebrations for them.

In addition to the victims, there is a large part of the population made up of informers, torturers, jailers in prison camps, and even members of the firing squads. They are also traumatized by the war. These are traumas that remain encapsulated-split-removed in the minds of the perpetrators, but also in the psyche-culture of the group they belong to. Somehow this is perceived too.

Becoming aware of one's responsibilities and faults on the part of perpetrators and groups is one of the most difficult tasks. For a long time, denial dominates this.

These kind of sewages also propagates in the waters of group psychism, where their action is prolonged over time in a transgenerational dimension.

The slow and difficult processing-purification of this group water, which naturally also contains all the great results of civilization, science and art, must proceed nonetheless, so that it is made less infected, more drinkable for future generations.

After the war there is therefore a great need to create a containing culture in one's group. Alongside this, it is also necessary in the adversarial group, in order to begin to process all kinds of traumas that clog the minds and impede relationships. However, it takes decades, so some generations can play a role only as trauma carriers and not as solvers, this latter role is postponed to subsequent generations.

We could identify three phases in the transgenerational elaboration of the traumas related to wars.

1. To be able to speak, to experience the pain, of what one has suffered and to receive containment from one's group.



2. To be able to remember, think, talk about the suffering inflicted, what one has committed, and obtain the containment of one's group. We must go beyond the "paranoid processing of mourning".

3. After clarifying one's responsibilities, being able to talk about it with "others", with the victims and perpetrators of the other ground, who are repentant in turn.

Only by this way the group will be able to evolve towards a "structure of peace" (mainly in the *D position*), in order to sustain and contain even heavy feelings of guilt and no longer function solely as an "evacuating muscle" of projections into others. But this only happens when the ego - whether individual or group - has reached the necessary strength to be able to bear the burdens without collapsing.

Adequate external conditions must also be created, such as fair peace treaties, a delimitation of sufficiently just borders, and the recognition and judicial condemnation of the most heinous crimes. It is necessary that the geopolitical and economic conditions which sustain tensions and manipulations aimed at increasing the *PS position* are reduced. Cultural progress is also needed, to which psychoanalysis can and must make its contribution.

Often successive generations grow and develop in better conditions, take advantage of less toxic and more containing group containers, and can feel sufficiently distant from what has happened and strong enough, to open even the sealed archives - the "cabinets of shame" - to initiate processing their contents.

In the Centro Veneto di Psicoanalisi, discussions have recently begun on the *repressed*, or rather *splitting* that has become repressed over time, concerning the Italian history of the last century. Even the "dirty" pages of history can now become part of the group's cultural identity construct.



And the surprising paradox is that by revealing them, not only does it not damage the image of the group, but instead it strengthens it, making the group more mature and functioning. Reparativity can replace hatred and becomes a powerful support for self-esteem, for "healthy" narcissism. True strength occurs when the *D position* prevails. In the *PS position*, might is apparent and is based on destructiveness, requiring a constant expenditure of energy to keep the contents split and the reality disregarded.

Personally, I am experiencing, how this slow, age-old purification-elaboration in the traumatized borderland where I live, is creating conditions of life that are much more fertile, interesting, and beautiful, as the putrid waters of the past become more transparent and clearer. It feels like a waking up from a nightmare.

In 2020 the presidents of the Italian and Slovenian republics, held hands and paid homage to the Italians killed by the Slovenes in the fojbe and to the Slovenes executed by the Italian fascists. But it took 75 years!

As analysts we can ask ourselves what role we have or can have in this long healing process of the group and individuals. How much of this reaches our analytic couches? Our patients and us are a part of this process, but how can we be more fully aware of this? And what can we do with it?

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## **WAR: What About Ratio?<sup>12</sup>**

*Maja Dobranić<sup>13</sup>*

“...If you ask how I'm doing,  
You'd know it  
If they only dropped two bombs on you...”

“A letter to a friend“, song by Kemal Monteno

23.7.2022

...On this day in 1993, 3777 shells were fired at Sarajevo.

In conversations with patients who have no experience or knowledge of psychotherapy, I share with them an old story about six blind men and an elephant. The story is very old and has undergone numerous interpretations. It is a parable that describes the meeting of six blind men with an elephant that they had never met before, so they tried to understand in their own way what the elephant could be. So, in the only way they could, they touched the elephant each from their side in order to understand it as well as possible. One of the blind men thus reached the elephant's tusk and concluded that the elephant was similar to some kind of solid trunk. Another touched the tusk and concluded that the elephant was just like some kind of spear. The third touched the elephant's ear and concluded that the elephant is actually like some kind of fan, the fourth caught the elephant's tail with his hand and concluded that the elephant is just like a rope. The fifth touched the side of the elephant's trunk

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<sup>12</sup> We are publishing the version of this paper prepared for the conference and therefore lacks the bibliographical references. We apologise to our readers.

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and concluded that the elephant was actually a wall, while the one who touched the trunk concluded that the elephant was actually a snake.

In the story about the war, I am blind and I am on a concrete level. War and trauma go hand in hand. It is not possible to talk about the war and not mention the trauma! In therapy, patients talk about the trauma, and very little about the war, even if the trauma is only a part and consequence of the war. On the path to the creation of this text, analysts were the guide.

Some analysts are present: physically and mentally. They are empathetic, capable of doing the holding, creating conditions in which you feel safe, so you can remember, feel pain, speak, associate freely. We get into reverie together and mentalize.

Other analysts are very important, unconscious in their trauma. They are close to us with their traumatized side. By listening and watching them, you can see yourself more clearly. They project their unwanted parts into us, stir up emotions. They really want to "teach" us. The strength of the desire tells how personal the matter is. To protect themselves they say they are not interested in war and trauma as a topic, they don't want to talk about them, they don't want to hear about them, and yet they are there and experience everything intensely emotionally. They tell us to be silent. They say that a traumatized therapist cannot work with a traumatized patient if they share the same trauma. They tell us to be silent. When they listen to what you say, they say that you are not competent with your experience of the traumatic event and tell you to keep quiet. With their emotion, attitude, content, the unconscious – they tell you to keep quiet. Everything reminds of trauma because silence is encouraged.

And then there are the analysts who are there through their books, texts and theories. When Kohut gives examples from World War II, he illuminates the common unconscious of people who go through war experiences in the forties all over the world, in the nineties in the area of the former Yugoslavia, in the 2020s in Ukraine.



Vignette: At the beginning of the war in Ukraine, Emir emotionally resembled a deceived and disappointed child: "Everyone was talking about a new way of war using drones, a virtual way, without blood, and now look at this. Same as here." Emir is a big fan of games. He was 3 years old at the beginning of the aggression against BiH. The father was absent because he was an adviser to the wartime president of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the mother was pregnant with his younger sister. At the age of three, he found himself in besieged Sarajevo and grew up inside the enemy ring for a full 1425 days, without water, without electricity in the ruins. I'm thinking that his early fantasy was to keep the war at game level because he needed it to feel safe. He dreamed that if you make a mistake, you can start over, if you die, you can have a chance to live again. In his associations, one feels the need for warmth, security, and children's hopes and fantasies are very clearly seen. Is that possible? I thought without blood, flesh and screams it's not a war, it's a game! War is a return to the concrete, there is no room for the virtual. Raw and cruel urges are unleashed without any control of the ego and superego. I look at his comment with a sneer, just as an older and bigger child looks at a younger and smaller one.

Without blood, flesh and screams it's not a war, it's a game! - a sentence that indicates that I am subjective when I write about the war. Kohut corrects me and gives a new angle to the "blind man"; in the book „Between guilt and tragedy“, he says: "Human aggression is most dangerous when it is related to:

1. Grandiose self
2. Archaic omnipotent object

The most gruesome human aggressiveness is not found in the form of wild, regressive and primitive behaviour, but in orderly and organized activity where destruction is mixed with belief in the greatness of the perpetrator and with loyalty to archaic almighty figures.



It is a historical fact that along with Hitler, Heinrich Himmler, Hermann Göring and Joseph Goebbels were responsible for the direct death of 600 million people. The Third Reich was a huge machine that destroyed, spread death and misery. From idea to realization, it took a lot of planning, organizing, working with deep dedication and discipline. They believed in the idea of their own uniqueness and greatness, for which the lofty goal justified the means.

Kohut warns: "As analysts, we must not trivialize aggression by interpreting it as a return to animal instincts." We need to be aware of aggression, try to curb it and take responsibility."

#### HOW A BLIND MAN SEES THE CREATION, BIRTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF WAR

Over time, it is increasingly clear that every nation has its own trauma, be it personal, collective, transgenerational, regardless of whether they are the aggressors or the attacked. New generations are growing up with traumatized parents. Kohut says: "The absence of fathers due to the war and their return exacerbates their Oedipal complex. This increases the willingness to experience anxiety due to their mothers' anxiety during their fathers' absence. Their superego is unstable, as is their identity. The child retains the image of the all-powerful father because he could not really meet him due to his absence. With the return of his father, the boy is no longer in charge. The grandiose self splits off and remains unidentified until self-esteem receives nourishment from the depths of the personality." The environmental mother is broken and weak while on the other hand she is devouring in her corruption. There are many children whose fathers never returned and whose spirit of omnipotence and heroism remains with them throughout their lives, leaving a deep mark. These are just some psychological factors that affect the childhood of an entire generation.



Aggression in Bosnia and Herzegovina left a significant mark on the lives of all my patients, either directly or indirectly.

Vignette: Lucija was born in Srebrenica after the aggression in BiH. Her father was in the Serbian army, and the uncle is a convicted war criminal. A good friend of hers had a child as a result of war-time rape.

Lucija: "I don't wonder if my father killed, I fear if he raped?"

Lucija was raped on three occasions, and only became aware of it in therapy after many years. She was emotionally distant while occasionally talking about these events in passing. In my head were Berlin women who were raped by the Allies after the Second World War. Berlin girls and Lucia have in common a feeling of reconciliation with fate, because they take on the responsibility of "their fathers". Working with Lucia brought me closer to the position of the aggressor. Would she be able to accept the sentence that my child has to "serve"? How to take this responsibility? The ego is defended at all costs. The environmental superego attacks. A vicious circle has been created and the solution is to create an isolated parallel world in which we tell our stories that slowly turn into myths, and on the basis of myths, large groups can easily be moved to realize the ideas of ideologues.

Kohut says: "Ideology executors are very often peripheral and superficial selves who easily achieve adaptation and comfortable consistency. Immersed in the body of the "powerful nation", they come to relief because shame disappears and the group provides a feeling of extraordinary strength. All this is transformed into an "almighty" leader. The old fantasies of omnipotence suddenly become reality." The "executors of the ideology..." are in an active, paranoid schizoid position, and they do not mentalize.



In the early 1990s, some republics decided to secede from the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The Serbs experienced this as the secession of a disobedient part of the extended self over which they thought they had the right and control. The Serbs are starting to "defend" Yugoslavia, because they are the most populous nation within the "mother country". They appropriate the Yugoslav People's Army, because Yugoslavia is theirs, everyone else is apostate, and they use it as a weapon for punishment. For decades, the YNA was financed, formed and served by all the peoples of the former Yugoslavia with the aim of defending against the external enemy, so that in the end these same funds were used for their destruction, the destruction of the "bad parts". Overwhelmed by narcissistic rage, they show a lack of empathy. In order to attack, the attacker must be in a paranoid schizoid position and then the object of destruction is an impersonal object. In war, the victim is dehumanized so that they can be killed more easily. Instead of dying, the victim disappears without a trace. In a paranoid schizoid position, one cannot take responsibility for one's emotions because the self does not exist. A narcissistically hurt person cannot calm down. All persons possessed by narcissistic rage show a lack of empathy towards the opponent.

In 1990, the bones of Emperor Lazar, who had died 600 years ago during the Battle of Kosovo in 1389 on the Kosovo field in the fight against the Turks, were excavated. For the Serbian people, the Kosovo battle is a great collective trauma that has been made into a myth. Upon entering the Srebrenica enclave, the convicted war criminal General Mladić declares: "Here we are on July 11, 1995, in Serbian Srebrenica, on the eve of another Serbian holiday, we present this city to the Serbian people, because the moment has finally come to revolt against the Dahi, to take revenge on the Turks in this part of the world". That's how the genocide begins. People are dehumanized, demonized. They are the Turks, not their Muslim neighbours. Authority gives murderers the role of avengers.



Even on the side of the aggressor, not everyone is the same. Some use time and resources to realize their grandiose plans, and some are resources in realizing their plans. Those who are at the end of the chain and the executors are expendable goods themselves, dehumanized by their leaders because they are invisible to them, and the leaders "make plans come true", "liberate territories", "take positions". There are no people, only plans and strategies. In the executors of the plans, a deeper regression can be seen where they have completely lost their self and for them the victim does not die but disappears because a person cannot die if he is not alive. On the other hand, they cannot take responsibility for their emotions and actions, because the self does not exist.

#### WHAT ABOUT THE ATTACKED?

I consciously chose the word attacked, not victim.

The main fear in a depressed position is the loss of an object. Unlike the aggressor, the attacked floats between a depressed and paranoid schizoid position. Aggressiveness is more mature and limited and serves the goal to survive. No matter how strong it is, its goal is final. Mature aggression is under the control of the ego and can be controlled by the ego, while this is not the case with narcissistic rage. Whether a group will be socially destructive depends not only on whether the ego ideals will dominate over the grandiose self, but whether the ego will dominate over them? For the attacked, the present is difficult, and the future is brighter.

#### I FAILED - EVERYTHING ENDS IN TRAUMA

In psychiatry, as a branch of medicine, doctors do not study diseases but psychiatric disorders. In order to call something a disease, we need to know the etiology (cause of the disease), clinical picture and therapy. When we talk about psychiatric disorders,





we have the ICD (International Book of Diseases), which groups clusters of symptoms into disorders. The etiology is mostly unknown, and the therapy is symptomatic. Is trauma the first psychiatric disease? The etiology is complex, there is a lot of individual, but also something common - the existence of a traumatic event. Clinical picture is clearly described: nightmarish dreams, cocooned in time, feeling of shame and incompetence due to personal experience of damage...

#### THERAPY:

TALKING ABOUT TRAUMA in a protected setting where the therapist facilitates mentalizing. When talking about trauma, the eyes burn, the throat burns and hurts, and the head becomes cloudy. The tongue breaks the words with difficulty, and the stomach tightens. Is the entire body and psyche sick from trauma that fights for its survival, just like a malignant tumour fights, by forcing us to keep quiet?

Trauma is a difficult experience, but is there a life without trauma? Should we stop fantasizing about a life without trauma; stop ignoring it and start accepting it?! By mentalizing, we begin to understand that trauma made us the way we are and that it doesn't necessarily make us worse or bad. Through transgenerational trauma, both knowledge and reparation are transmitted, and optimum frustration is necessary for skill development. The key moment is the time that passes without new traumas, because experience shows that only the third generation can positively resolve the trauma, when the active actors die and loyalty is lost. In the former Yugoslavia, the wars are not over, they have only changed their form, but you have to fight through speech and mentalization and hope for "victory".



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## **The wars inside and outside:**

### **Experience of war in a patient, a psychoanalyst, and a society in Ukraine**

*Igor Romanov<sup>14</sup>*

In this paper, I would like to focus on the topic of experiencing the ongoing war in Ukraine impact on both participants of psychoanalytic or psychotherapeutic process, continuing to work in these extreme circumstances. More specifically, I will be interested in two questions. First, how much psychoanalysis or, let's say, psychoanalytic awareness expands the possibilities to help people who suffered from an extremely traumatic experience of war: injuries, shelling, loss of one's home or relatives; and prior to this could it explain more the war impact on a whole society? Second, to what extent and in what way does "normal" mental life, with its conflicts, anxieties, and defensive strategies, continue under war conditions, and therefore there is a place for "normal" psychoanalytic work? To what extent does the psychoanalyst's consulting room turn into a retreat from external threats (Steiner, 1993) or a kind of "enclave" (O'Shaughnessy, 1992), and to what extent, on the contrary, it is a haven for the ongoing mental life - dreams, feelings, phantasies or internal relationships acted in the transference? The mental life, which, as Freud pointed out, does not stop even in a dream, and which, how Klein hinted and Bion insisted, exists before our birth (Freud, 1900; Klein, 1957; Bion, 1977; Waddell, 2002).

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## Observing the reactions to the war

I will draw on my own experience in analysis and therapy, as well as the experience of supervisions and clinical groups with colleagues. An important source for my reflections was also the study of previous great wars influence on psychoanalysts and their theories. I will attempt to describe how we are trying to use this experience in new circumstances. But I will start with a few personal impressions and a description of the current state of the Ukrainian Psychoanalytic Society.

*At a clinical group meeting headed by a foreign analyst one Ukrainian colleague reports a case. It is about a patient adjusting to real and imagined demands, criticizing her objects for the traumatic pressure on her, but also secretly trying to control everyone from the position of the victim: "If you refuse to be what I want you to be, you will turn out to be aggressors". This situation is clearly acted out in the transference due to a break in therapy, and among other "misfortunes" the patient mentions the war that forced her to move to another country. During the discussion, it becomes quite obvious to the group, the supervisor, and the presenter that the war for this patient is really just one of the events in a long series of her troubles (along with the break or silence of the analyst, harsh parental training, etc.). They are the troubles which, according to the patient's unconscious belief, she could prevent or remedy by her obedience or omnipotent control over omnipotent objects. In other words, the war did not represent for her any special "traumatic" event, but (as in the case of Richard in Klein's famous analysis) it represented the objects and conflicts of her inner world.*



*However, another startling fact emerged from this seminar. The session following the clinical discussion was devoted to a general discussion Ukrainian colleagues' work in current situation. And there was no other topic except the war. Interrupting each other, colleagues told horrific - and quite realistic - stories of their disasters, stories of severely traumatized patients, shared feelings of fear, anger, and helplessness. They also shared the recipes for successful work and overcoming.*

How can one understand this strange contrast between the clinical discussion and the general one? Did a split take place so that the traumatic experience of war did not emerge in the sessions with the patient and the clinical discussion, but was split off into the analyst and the group, and was enacted in general discussion? Or was the war an occasion for specific competition around the "lethic phallus" (Schmidt-Hellerau, 2008)? Or was there a third or fourth reason?

Over the summer months, I had to visit many cities in Ukraine and some different places. I met colleagues, patients, volunteer psychologists, doctors, students, migrants and ordinary residents of different cities. One of the things that struck me the most was how differently war is experienced in different places. At some moments it seemed to me that, having traveled barely 100 km, I was moving not between cities, and not even between countries, but between different universes. In one of political discussions was recently said that Russia and Ukraine are waging two different wars: Ukraine is engaged in a patriotic, liberation war, and Russia is fighting a religious one, against heretics. It seemed to me that for different Ukrainians in different parts of the country there are also quite different wars (of course, not so radically). In some parts there wasn't a single shelling or any destruction, but people feel the war quite acutely - as their own, but at the same time as something distant. They help refugees, the



army, they volunteer, they are patriotic. However, the war is far away, it is happening to others and does not prevent them from leading a normal life - opening restaurants, thinking about new business, etc. In other places there *was* a war, it left its physical and mental traces, but now there is peace and all kinds of activities resumed: concerts, traffic jams, projects... At the same time, since the wounds still hurt, both people and cities are ready to be on guard and protect their land at any moment - sometimes for very real reasons, sometimes for imaginary ones. In my hometown, Kharkiv, I encountered the most depressing atmosphere. There were no horrors of Mariupol or Bucha (although one could hear about such things not far from the city), nevertheless the city fell into a depressive state. Continuous, daily, albeit reduced in intensity, shelling, lack of a visible end to the war, emotional exhaustion - all this creates a feeling of being in the department for patients with severe depression. Dim, amimic faces, inexpressive voices, corresponding to the topic of conversation with periodically exploding anger... At the same time, a little more than an hour from there you can see a festival city, with concerts on rooftops, carefree young people lying in the grass, children walking and not paying attention to the sounds of air raid warnings.<sup>15</sup> I think this list of descriptions is missing perhaps the most important thing - the situation at the battlefield. But then only the people from there should talk about it.

In my opinion, this emotional map of Ukraine can also be presented as a map of the mind with the loci of possible psychological reactions to the war. The current war is different from the grand wars of the past, the First and Second World Wars. This war is not total, it involves a limited number of people, resources and territories (of

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<sup>15</sup> I should say that the situation in Ukraine is changing rapidly, and my impressions of different places could be different today. Now almost all country suffers the infrastructure destruction and is anxious about winter. But I am sure the differences are still existed.



course, this is for now, and of course, for Ukraine and many of its regions, the war is catastrophic). In addition, this war takes place in a globalized world, with well-developed networks of communication, information and disinformation, with the possibility of rapid movement and many other technological advances. All this affects both the experience of war and psychoanalytic and psychotherapeutic work. Speaking of Ukrainian Psychoanalytic Society - approximately half of our members have emigrated from the country, many have moved to other regions, and only a small part can remain in their home cities. An even greater percentage of refugees and displaced persons are among our candidates. The UPS is an IPA study group, we have 16 members, including 6 training analysts, and 28 candidates. The process of our development in recent years has been quite fast (Mirza, Romanov, 2022). The war interrupted it, nevertheless, we have managed to restore both our work and training. The previous period of work during the Covid-19 pandemic taught us to use tools for online work, and today only a few can afford to work in offices. Most conduct therapy, supervisions, seminars, analysis and training online. In addition, almost all of us are involved in various forms of volunteer work – with war victims, first aid psychologists, the military, IDPs, refugees, etc.

An important stimulus for my own and my colleagues' reflections was the study of the experience of British psychoanalysts during the Second World War and after it (see Frank, 2020; Milton, 2018; King, 1989; Bion, 1940; Jones, 1941; Money-Kyrle, 1941; 1951; Dics, 1973). There are many things that surprise me in this history. First of all, how actively psychoanalysts were involved in the discussion and solution of urgent social problems of war and post-war period, leaving their offices, but not their commitment to psychoanalysis. In my opinion, the contribution of psychoanalysts and psychoanalytically informed scientists from other fields to the discussion of the



causes of war, the means of achieving peace, the functioning of propaganda and cruelty is underestimated and needs further reflection and integration into social studies. The works of H. Dicks, R. Money-Kyrle, E. Glover in Britain, E. Kris in Britain and the USA (Kris, Speier, 1944; Leites, Kris, 1947), N. Leites in the USA (Leites, 1977), F. Fornari in Italy (Fornari, 1974), A. and M. Mitscherlich in Germany (1975), T. Adorno in the USA and Germany (Adorno, 1951), and many others contain important insights and, according to many testimonies, have made a significant contribution to the establishment of post-war world and the processing of historical traumas (Shapira, 2013; Adorno, 1959). On the other hand, it is worth taking a closer look at the influence of the external reality of wartime on the fate of psychoanalysis itself, its theoretical models, group conflicts and institutional decisions, which are often underestimated (King & Steiner, 1991). Without proper reflection, such influence can lead - and in fact has led - to serious errors in the application of psychoanalytic concepts to the description and explanation of social processes (Pick, 2012).

And yet, even considering the potential pitfalls of the abuse of psychoanalytic methodology, the devotion to psychoanalysis by earlier generations of analysts cannot but impress. M. Klein's correspondence, in which she proposes the concept of the "Munich complex" to explain the passivity in the face of the omnipotent destructiveness projected onto the figure of the father / Hitler, and her idea of the "internal Hitler", Jones' reasoning about the phenomenon of "Quislingism", W. Bion's thoughts about the need for social measures for distinguishing between unconscious anxieties and real dangers, the ideas of N. Leites and E. Kris about propaganda's efforts to subjugate the individual to the group and its various forms - all these insights seem incredibly relevant at the present time.





## **Members of the UPS on the impact of the war on the work of a psychoanalyst**

Inspired by the experience of predecessors, I invited members and candidates of the UPS to answer some questions related to the impact of the war on themselves, their patients and work with them (see Appendix). The majority of those who agreed to answer the questions mentioned the catastrophic impact of the war experience on the participants and all the components of the analytic or therapeutic process. Below are a few examples.

### *The question about examples of military themes in analytic or therapeutic work*

“The patient talks about her friend's parents, who live in Mariupol, with whom there was no contact for several weeks. Subsequently, it turned out that the mother went out into the street and got blown up by a mine, the father collected parts of her body and looked for a place to bury her. This friend was never able to evacuate her father out of the occupation zone. The story correlates with the patient's condition, her sense of chaos, inability to put herself together. It feels like she is "falling into pieces.””

### *The question about the dreams caused by the war*

“I dreamed that I and my husband were at home, in our apartment. I'm packing my things, and suddenly, we hear an explosion. Our small son, thank God, was not with us. We froze and dropped on the floor, feeling mute fear. Again this word – “mute”. And then, then, I get up and go to see what happened. I see that there is no kitchen, no living room, instead I can see the sky. And in my dream I think: “Phew! It's a good



thing I managed to collect our things.”” Even in a dream I act like this. Although, I’m scared to think that now we actually have nothing.”

(The same patient) “I dreamed that my mother and I went to a lake. We were going to swim. But we saw a lot of sunken cars, they were all in this lake. My mother decided to get something valuable from these cars. She is like that. Then she gets something, takes it, and we can see souls fly out of these cars and they try to drag me into this lake. I shout to mum: “Why do you need all this stuff?” But she wouldn’t stop. Sometimes I can wake myself up in a dream. This time I tried several times, but it went on. I felt fear, mute horror... “Mute” again...”

#### *The question about the influence of the war experience on transference*

“The soldiers were in the basement, grenades were thrown at them, there was a fire, they were suffocating, they were wounded, the Russians were waiting for them upstairs. They had already said goodbye to their lives. However, two days later, the Russians were forced to retreat and the Ukrainian soldiers were able to come out of the basement. They stopped trusting their commanders of different levels because they got them in this situation. In the hospital, during consultations, when switching to the story about themselves, their lives and relationships before the war — I felt a negative attitude towards me: “I won’t talk about it, I don’t know how you will use this information against me... I have already had such a bad experience””

#### *The question about the intrusion of the external reality of war into analytical work*



“During the session, we heard an air raid alarm, the patient in Ukraine says: “Alarm!” I feel anxious for her life. I tell her: “Perhaps it's dangerous now, it's probably better to go to the shelter”. The patient replied: “Before I reach the shelter the alarm will end”. The session continued. I had difficult feelings, thinking that I was maintaining the denial of the danger by continuing the session, but forcibly sending the patient to the shelter would have turned me into a strict parent. Second example: a session was missed because the patient was in a bomb shelter during the session. The missed session was paid for. But as a therapist, I had doubts whether it was fair to accept payment in this case”.

Most colleagues also reported the difficulty of the transference/countertransference relationship in situations where the patient and analyst are in different places, sometimes in different countries, and one of them could potentially be in a more dangerous situation. Feelings of guilt, betrayal, their corresponding attitudes of sincere concern or false attunement, avoidance of sensitive topics, etc. were fairly predictable reactions.

The majority indicated that only a small number of patients did not mention or barely mentioned the war. It was noted that far less often patients began to bring dreams into sessions. Nevertheless, when asked if colleagues could recall examples of the improvement in the condition of patients with the outbreak of hostilities, almost everyone was able to name such examples.

I do not attach much significance to this survey as a credible scientific study. Rather, it can be considered a preliminary collection of impressions. Like any survey of this



kind, it somewhat imposes on the respondents a certain train of thought - war, traumatic experiences, etc. It seems to me interesting to compare the data of this survey with my own and my colleague analytic and therapeutic experience, in which, as I see it, reality looks somewhat more complicated.

### **Examples of analytical work in wartime**

#### *Clinical example 1: A*

Patient A, a young woman in her early 30s, who began her analysis because of difficulties in her relationships with men and insecurity. A large part of our analytic work in this period was concentrated on her attachment to a rather perverse sado-masochistic relationship with a partner - both sexually and psychologically - largely reproducing her perception of her parents' relationships, as well as her own childhood experiences in an atmosphere of deprivation and psychological abuse.

In April 2022, we worked online and were in different cities. In the first session after a week-long break, A spoke in a way that made me feel detached, unable to get through to her feelings. Although she talked about rather dramatic events: her parents were under occupation, the city in which she lived was periodically shelled, she developed paranoid anxiety about the shaking streetlamp outside her window, which she took for the signals of artillery gunners, etc. At some point, she reported that she felt the floor tremble and was afraid that shelling or bombing had begun. At that moment, I felt fear for her and asked if we had to stop and she could find a safe place for herself? At the same time, I heard the sounds of repairs behind the wall of my office



and I wonder whether they could have affected the patient. She replied that she hadn't heard any air raid alarms and that the danger was unlikely to be real - she felt detachment. Perhaps it only seemed to her that there was a dangerous situation... This gave me the opportunity to draw her attention to this feeling: what was she detached from and how does she imagine the thing she was afraid of?

In response, A talked about her fear of confusing the reality with her fantasy. If she can feel the floor shaking when it's not, the opposite can happen too – she won't notice the real danger when it comes. At that point, I thought that she was able to convince me of the reality of danger - the floor shaking - so that I did not even know for sure whether it was happening in my office or coming from her room. I said that it was important for her to convey to me a sense of the reality of catastrophe that was happening to her.

Following this, A remembered her grandmother's stories about deportation during World War II. Her grandmother said she felt paralyzed. The Russian invaders are now behaving worse than Germans... And she also said that she wasn't afraid of death, but of losing an arm or leg - of being crippled, helpless in the power of strangers, which was very reminiscent of her grandmother's stories. She then moved on to the topic of language: her parents speak “surzhik”, a mixture of Russian and Ukrainian, but she was very proud of her correct Russian. Now she felt unsure whether this was indeed her language or the language of her enemies? There was some confusion. I interpreted it by saying that A felt a lot of fear and shame about the history of her family and country. But it belongs to her, and she was not ready to give it to anyone. It was noticeable that A experienced great relief.



At the next session, A shared a dream. In it, she walked with her grandmother through a forest among tall pines. She was a school teacher. Then a red car pulled up and took them to a party. A rolled on the grass and her clothes changed color. In the dream there was an atmosphere of fun with restaurants and wine. She gave more and more details and explanations. I drew her attention to the sexual atmosphere in the dream. At first she was surprised, and then she shared a fantasy about sex with different men and couples. Following this, she remembered another dream: about either Russian or German occupation, and how she seduced the guard in order to get food and win him over.

The discussion of these dreams led to the topic of A's sexual inhibitions, her aversion to molesting men ("slobber kisses"), and further to the father's abusive behavior in her childhood.

### *Comments*

This short piece of clinical material can be viewed from different perspectives. One can see in it the actualization of transgenerational traumatic experience in a situation of actual threat (Romanov, 2021). One can think about the influence of personal history on the perception of current events. I think it's also interesting to reflect on the possibility and difficulty of conveying a dramatic experience in an online work situation. From the point of view of the transference, what is striking is the gradual transition from detachment to a kind of "infection" (I think through massive projective identification), then to the perception of the interventions of the analyst in a manic and sexualized manner, and then to a feeling of intrusion and abuse. However, in the context of the paper, I am interested in the question of the mutual influence of external



traumatic reality - the threat of shelling, occupation - and internal reality, a derivative of both the historical and pre-historical experience of the patient, and the activity of her drives, anxieties, defenses and phantasies. I was particularly impressed by her realization of the threat of confusion between the one and the other – insanity, in fact – and also by how quickly, after "unraveling," A moved towards an exploration of her history and sexuality. One may, of course, ask whether the external threats receded into the background for both of us too quickly, that is, manically. But I had a strong conviction that the problems of sexual life, as well as a rather traumatic personal history, at this stage of the work were indeed something more significant in A's life than the war outside the window.

### *Clinical example 2: B*

Patient B, about 50 years old, comes from the Ukrainian city where I also live, but for many years lived between it and a nearby Russian city. Her business and family were scattered across the two cities and countries, but her roots, memories and childhood friends are connected with Ukraine. She perceived the war as a catastrophe, timidly tried to express her indignation at the war in her Russian environment (she remained in Russia and could no longer enter Ukraine), she helped Ukrainian refugees and relatives. However, after a while, our work went back to normal, and B began to mainly discuss her relationships with men. After her divorce from her husband, she could not find a new relationship for a long time, and finally she found a man with whom she felt neither masochistically subordinated nor arrogant. He had authority for her because of his position, but the thing that especially brought them together was their common attitude to the war.



For a while, the discussion of these relationships, of B's hopes, fears, and disappointments, occupied the entire space of analysis. One of the problems was B's anger at the religious sexual restrictions of her partner. She discussed these relationships with me again and again, sometimes I was completely immersed in their intricacies, the connection of her choice with her father's transference, personal history, etc. The war raging around, concerning me, her relatives, and our hometown, seemed more and more distant. Periodically 'surfacing' from these discussions, I couldn't help but wonder if her stubborn avoidance of war topics and denial of its significance as well as the whole romance were constructed as a psychic retreat. Whether talking about it would bring back to her real concerns, or whether those were my own thoughts about the war that haunted me? One day, B casually mentioned the blows in her city and quickly moved on to the topic of sexual taboos related to her childhood, etc. This gave me the opportunity to draw her attention to her quick avoidance of the topic of war. In response, B suddenly remembered one of the most depressing impressions of her childhood: the village of her grandmother (mother's mother), who never smiled and often looked at the photo of her little son who was blown up when he stepped on a mine which remained after the Second World War... At this point, her romance began to look like the attitude of children huddled together under bomb explosions. She remembered how her lover sent her a photo of soldiers from Mariupol at night - not children, but wounded men. He was crying and it shocked her. I assumed that this was what she was afraid of when discussing the war with me - we would just cry together, completely helplessly. There were indeed tears in my eyes, but my feelings were not unbearable. I hope our interaction at that point was better than the stiffening contact of the patient with her grandmother - and, as we knew, her mother - and I think that's why at the end of session she especially sincerely said: "Thank you!"





I thought B was really grateful for that session. But she began the next one (after weekend) by accusing me of ignoring the topic of sexual problems with her man and their connection to the prohibitions of her mother. I had a clear sense of the connection between these issues, and that it was the dead-faced, depressed grandmother/mother who was the authority forbidding love. Perhaps I became the same prohibition by bringing her back to the topic of war. On the other hand, B recalled childhood masturbation, which seemed to me an example of an escape from depression into sexualization. Following the discussion of these topics, she began to talk about the fear that her partner will grow old and their romance will turn into caring for a sick old man.

### *Comments*

In a sense, this example seems to me to be the opposite of the previous one. The immersion into romantic relationships and their discussion, "family romance" in the transference turned out to be a defense against depressive feelings and depressive anxieties associated with the war. However, as in the first example, delving into these experiences showed how much the current catastrophic situation, destroying many of her personal relationships, her business and relatives echoes her history of the interaction with a depressed mother/grandmother and the stable patterns of internal object relations acted out in transference: "you have no right to your life, you must not upset your mother", etc. B in general looks more depressive personality – her typical dreams were often fulfilled by destroyed houses, cemeteries, and lost people. At the same time her life seemed the series of attempts to cope with depression, her own and people around her, in many different and sometimes successful ways. Of



course, the war actualized her deepest depressive anxieties as well as oedipal illusion in its function of retreat and pseudo-reparation. I suppose that some period I was colluded with this wishful fantasy, and when was separated from it, the patient faced her deeply destroyed internal objects. Cruelty and guilt quickly changed each other attributed both to the patient, me, her external and internal objects.

### *Clinical example 3: C*

Patient C was born in the east part of Ukraine and lost his mother at the age of 4. According to his words, this loss provoked a “mature reaction”, one that he would go on to exhibit in response to all the difficulties of life. In his school years, C suffered from bronchial asthma, which he managed to overcome with the help of special breathing training. Ever since he has been controlling his respiration by “correcting” it. In psychotherapy C looks like a very “compliant” patient; he follows the rules, provides the material, reflects on interpretations, but at the same time causes a sense of a relationship paralysis of sorts in the therapist. With the beginning of the war this constellation changed, the patient started expressing his discontent with the therapist, although in a quite unexpected context.

As such, in one of the sessions, C started blaming the therapist for “excessive tolerance”. It concerned the choice of the language (between Russian and Ukrainian) given by the therapist. C spoke in his own native Russian, while expressing the opinion that it would be more appropriate for the therapist and everyone around him to *demand* of him and other people that they spoke Ukrainian. He personally strives to speak



Ukrainian in public places, but his efforts are apparently insufficient. Some “terrible people” don’t wish to follow him and respond in Ukrainian.

The therapist was at a loss under the pressure of the accusations made by the patient and their confusing nature: “I want to force you to force me...” She repeated multiple times that she was ready to converse with the patient in any language she finds comfortable, emphasizing as well that Ukrainian was becoming more widespread.

This did not only fail to reassure the patient, but, seemingly, disappointed him even more. He said, “A Ukrainian-speaking environment is important to me, it would make it easier for me. It seems to me that everything will remain just the way it is. (He began weeping bitterly.) L (C’s home city) was always a Russian-speaking city. Only about 15-20 percent speak Ukrainian. I went to a hairdresser, her parents live in R (occupied Ukrainian town). She says everything is alright, they took the children to K (Russian city) for a holiday, provided a compensation and everything that was necessary.” A little later C continued, “You are yet another somnolent person refusing to adopt responsibility in my life. You don’t want to introduce rules which will bring about change. It’s like demanding from a child to grow up without parental involvement...”

### *Commentary*

This session was striking to me – both in its counterintuitive content, and in the revelation of the inner structure of the patient’s personality and relationships. The mother, with her milk, tongue, and air, has betrayed him, and now C must learn to fully control his respiration, nourishment, and speech. He requires assistance in this



learning process, but the kind of assistance that would be *his* assistance, that is, control which would prove the uselessness of all that is motherly. Bitter tears, expressing an experience of loss that lies deeper than anger, demonstrate that this mechanism is malfunctioning. “It will remain this way forever,” says the patient, “the children will be taken away”, a good mother will never return. All he can do is complain to the bad but idealized mother of control – absence of her harsh rules is equated to the absence of care. Is there a way out of this dead end and confusion?

In the above, as in the first example, one can note the significant meaning the problem of language represents to the patients. Both A and C are Russian-speaking Ukrainian citizens, but perceive their native language as the “enemy’s tongue”, the traitorous part of the self, which has to be combatted (in a particular moment for A, and constantly for C). I will not dive deep into the political and ideological aspects of this subject that is so sensitive to Ukraine. However, perhaps, the clinical review may shed light on it from an important angle. E. Jones and M. Klein explored the misadventures of the omnipotent destructive figure in the inner world and projections of patients (the “inner Hitler”, according to Klein, “Quislingism” according to Jones) (Milton, 2018; Frank, 2020; Jones, 1941). They described such defensive maneuvers as identifying with the omnipotently destructive figure and passive submission to it.<sup>16</sup> Following this line of reasoning, we may suppose that both of the patients described were

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<sup>16</sup> F. Fornari also pointed towards relief in the case of projection or “export” of the inner Terrifying into the external enemy (Fornari, 1974). W. Bion, in his turn, emphasized the necessity of delineation between terrifying “childhood nightmares” and real enemies for the sake of efficient action during war (Bion, 1940). This is also indicated by D. Bell in a recent publication, where he casts doubt on the description of the military situation as functioning in paranoid-schizoid position (Bell, 2022, p.680). The issue of the proportion of “normal” and “pathological” mechanisms in the psyche of an “efficient soldier”, as well as any other participant of military action, was explored by many psychoanalysts during the First and Second World Wars (Freud et al., 1921; Eissler, 1960).



trying to overcome the realized – in their perception – introjection of the destructive figure and the identification of it with a part of the self. A’s dream about the seduction of the guard may serve as evidence of this.<sup>17</sup> The next step that already consciously manifests itself in analysis is the attempt to dispose of the inner enemy or traitor in a particular fashion, which the therapist should have provided C assistance with (essentially, taking on the role of the rapist in a positive nature), while A achieved it via a manically tinted sexuality (as well as elements of sadomasochism, as we may recall). A’s dream about color-changing clothing demonstrates, in my view, that such an exact “excision” of the dangerous part of the self must lead to a transformation of the whole personality.

### **Brief conclusion**

The impact of war on patients, analysts, and the analytic situation itself varies over a fairly wide range. We can observe reactions of denial and, on the contrary, defensive (denying) exaggeration of the impact of the war, the actualization of early and transgenerational traumatic experiences and the refraction of the perception of external reality through the prism of internal dynamics of drives, defenses and conflicts. The significance of a particular issue will depend on many factors. Among the external ones, it is important to consider whether both participants in the analytic relationship are exposed to the actual traumatic effects of the war or can work at least in relative safety. The situation of online work is complicated by the fact that the patient and the analyst may be in different situations. However, internal factors are no less important:

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<sup>17</sup> This reminds the a “self-object fusion” in traumatic situation described by W. Bohleber (Bohleber, 2007, p.342).



the strength of the ego, the dominance of mature or primitive defense mechanisms (both in the patient and the analyst), internalized patterns of object relations. It is also worth pointing out the importance of social factors. Public sentiment and wartime propaganda provoke both paranoid projective maneuvers and masochistic self-sacrifice (Money-Kyrle, 1941; Leites & Kris, 1947). All this makes the analytical relationship vulnerable, subject to destructive influences from different sides. But that doesn't make it any less valuable. War "breaks the bonds that bind people", as Freud noted in 1915 (Freud, 1915). He later reformulated this as a threat to the binding forces of Eros, love and identification, coming from the death instinct (Freud, 1933). As I have tried to demonstrate in my examples, disconnections also occur in the inner world, which makes analytic work especially difficult and especially important under such circumstances.

It would be imprudent to draw far-reaching conclusions regarding social and political reality on the basis of limited clinical experience. A lot of prominent psychoanalysts, such as F. Fornari and H. Segal, followed this path with a certain degree of success, although one may mention a number of instances of serious misconceptions caused by unjustified abstraction by psychoanalysts of their personal experience with patients and transference of that experience into non-clinical areas. But even within the limits of strictly clinical reflection it is difficult not to think of the dangers of such a form of splitting of the self, where one portion is perceived as "treacherous", identified with the omnipotent aggressor, while another portion is viewed as cleansed of evil, perfect, but quite phony (as it happened with the problem of "enemy's tongue" as a traitor inside in cases of A and C). Such consequences of similar processes as weakening of the self and distortion of the perception of others were described by Klein in the classical work on schizoid mechanisms (Klein, 1975). This problem was



encountered by all the three patients described above, including B, for whom the solution turned out to be more complex and “deactivating” one of the portions of the self every time would prove to be short-lived, even alternating with attempts at integration. Perhaps, the reason for this lies in the more extended period of analysis, or it could lie in B’s general depressive type of personality. It seems as if there is nothing unexpected about how war actualizes and intensifies in the psyche such primitive mechanisms as splitting, projective identification, idealization of omnipotent destructiveness, etc. More complex issues arise when studying the various forms and combinations they appear in. They also emerge when we wonder about their functions which at certain moments, at least subjectively, enable survival, while at other moments extremely weakening the individual and the group.

*(Translated by Vitaliy Yaskevych)*

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## **APPENDIX**

### **Questionnaire for UPS members and candidates about influence of war on analytic and therapeutic work**

1. Indicate your status.
2. What type of work are you currently doing: analysis, therapy, counseling, other?
3. Do you work online?
4. Are you located in the same place as your patients?
5. How many of your patients were affected by the war in one way or another? If you can, indicate the number, how many are in therapy and how many are in analysis, online or in the office.
6. What experience, in your opinion, was the most traumatic for your patients: injuries, loss of loved ones, flight, shelling, other issues?
7. Give some examples of the emergence of military themes in your analytic or therapeutic work.
8. If you can, also give examples of dreams, memories, and other material that reflects the unconscious meaning of external traumatic reality.
9. If you can, give examples of war-related experiences in the transference: lost of trust, fears of political differences, etc.



10. If you can, give examples of enactment, acting out, and other forms of war experiences expressions in action.
11. Can you give examples of external reality intrusion into your analytic work (for example, air raid alerts) and how you dealt with it?
12. Can you give examples of specific countertransference experiences related to the war that influenced your work?
13. Do you have any patients who constantly or often ignore topics related to the war? What is the approximate percentage? Can you provide examples?
14. Can you give examples of the positive impact of war experience on your patients and therapeutic or analytic work?

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## Comment

Andrea Braun<sup>18</sup> and Maria Ceolin<sup>19</sup>

We are now approaching the end of this day dedicated to the eternal question "Warum Krieg? / Why war?". We share what Alberto Luchetti said in his opening report:

“The answer to that question, is the question itself.... “

We strongly wanted this meeting to take place in order to share thoughts with those who underwent the experience of war in the past or are forced to experience it now. How does war affect us and our work as psychoanalysts?

Soon we will discuss the papers we listened to this morning and consider our exchanges within small groups during the afternoon.

A short comment beforehand.

When Bush declared war on Saddam Hussein's Iraq, Simona Argentieri (2003,27) wondered how useful the psychoanalytic tool could be in a similar context. "In the face of a collective traumatic event, death and war threats, even psychoanalysts cannot but feel - like everyone else - fear, uncertainty about the future, a sense of helplessness...; perhaps remaining - hopefully - a little more aware, without forgetting their main role in containing the anxieties of others". In Argentieri's words, we find the sense of limits, especially when she invites us to refrain from using wild psychoanalytic interpretations as improper weapons.

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Applied psychoanalysis has then investigated unconscious implications of war. In his reconstruction Luchetti considers the correspondence between Einstein and Freud, and many other psychoanalytic contributions on the topic: Fornari, Glover and Money-Kyrle etc. There is always the risk of trespassing into areas of relevance to politics and sociology, moving away from our specific competences. This is a pitfall that all the speakers today have managed to avoid, inviting us mainly to consider clinical experience.

We found important similarities between Luchetti's and Romanov's papers on the importance of psychoanalytic contributions on war.

Romanov, in particular, made us reflect on warfare in a globalized world and on the technological tools that can spread news in real time and facilitate communications among people over a variety of networks.

The awareness of limits can be found in a doubt formulated by Igor Romanov. Shortly after the Russian armed forces' invasion of Ukraine, he asked himself:

“How much denial is present in our efforts to engage in psychoanalysis in the current situation?” (Romanov 2022,2).

The clinical material that Romanov generously shares with us helps us to grasp how difficult it is to work on psychic reality in the context of an ongoing war.

Romanov shares and quotes the impression: “In times of peace, and in democratic countries, we do not realize, because we are so blessed, that a lot of implicit and self-evident conditions must be gathered for the analytic method to be implemented. (Romanov 2022,2).

Both Romanov and Mirza wonder about minimum requirements to work in a country at war and those conditions must necessarily guarantee a minimum level of safety. External reality enters the scene with its destructive potential and Winnicott's voice is heard inviting colleagues to look for shelter while London was being bombed.



Fonda establishes significant parallels between the war in Ukraine and the war in former Yugoslavia. In both wars he traces the difficulty of the central state power to accept movements towards autonomy being considered a threat to old balances and structures taken for granted. In this regard, he speaks of "individual narcissism grafted onto the group (Fonda 2022, 335) " and outlines a thoughtful approach to group dynamics from a psychoanalytic point of view.

We particularly appreciated his reference to a temporal dimension regarding the possibility of working through of war traumas.

He considers trauma as plural; that is, belonging to both winners and losers. Fonda then includes traumas of perpetrators of crimes committed in war on both sides.

The final part of Luchetti's paper with the poetic reference to Pantagruel by Rabelais seemed in tune with Fonda's realism on the time needed to elaborate trauma.

According to Dobranić and Fonda it will take decades and the span of one generation might not be enough to reach a form of elaboration in which the assumption of one's responsibilities leads to dialogue with the "other" who belongs to the opposite group, be it victim or perpetrator.

The topic of long-term implications of war and how to deal with them has been developed by Matačić. Some of you surely remember the clinical case of Ivan, he presented in Padua after the end of the war in the former Yugoslavia.

During that war, Ivan was taken by his parents to the clinic for a psychosomatic symptom: an outbreak of alopecia. Matačić succeeds in a focal intervention, sufficient for the (temporary) remission of the symptom. Therapy will start after the war, free from urgency, when it will be possible to think about a re-elaboration of Ivan's traumatic experiences.

Maja Dobranić (2022, 332) stated: "I would have preferred never to write about Sarajevo, the siege of Sarajevo, the attack on Bosnia".



But now there is another war that brings remote memories in the foreground: “Twenty-seven years after the end of the war, I repressed my war-time experience. I am dissociated because the memories are numerous and with the loosening of the “dam” I was overwhelmed by the intense feelings that follow the memories.” In the clinical material Dobranić shares with us, we understand how these experiences come back in treatment after decades and how it is possible to deal with them now.

Dobranić shows us that we have to consider blind spots and their protective function from overwhelming memories. The story about six blind men and the elephant reminds us of Saramago’s novel: *Blindness*. In his narrative there is a sudden outbreak of contagious blindness in town. While social order rapidly collapses the government attempts to encircle the contagion through repressive and brutal lockdown measures. Blind violence threatens to overwhelm human coping, solidarity and ratio...

And lack of ratio is one of the main issues risen by Maja Dobranić.

Last but not least we like to remember Alexander Langer who on February 22 2021, for the 75th anniversary of his birth, received Honorary Citizenship from the Sarajevo City Council for his commitment to promoting peace and reconciliation in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the war between 1992-1995.

During the last years of his life he was particularly committed to supporting peace in the territories of the former Yugoslavia marked by war, and, in 1994, he introduced for the first time to the European Parliament the idea of establishing a European Civil Peace Corps, to manage, transform and prevent conflicts without the use of violence and weapons.

Referring to the motto of Baron de Coubertin founder of the modern Olympic Games - *citius altius fortius*, faster, higher, stronger - that affirms the values of the culture of competition in our civilization, he invites us to practice the opposite: 'I propose on the contrary to overturn each of these terms: *lentius*, *profundius* and





soavius, slower instead of faster, deeper instead of higher, and more softly instead of more energetic, with more muscle. With this motto you don't win any frontal battle, but you may have the longest breath. '

We will stop here and open the discussion now.

You are very welcome to share your impressions with all of us.

Thank you.

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## Closing Remarks

Vlasta Polojaz<sup>20</sup>

As I was preparing my concluding reflections, I felt overwhelmed-swept away by these terrible threats from the Russian government to resort to nuclear weapons. I was frozen, unable to think, powerless, helpless, and above all I felt exposed to a devastating fury. I asked myself what use was there in planning or dreaming for the future in the face of such destruction? The whole planet would be wiped out along with humanity, the very project of life would be erased. Indeed, the use of these weapons requires men who are increasingly robotic, obedient, and devoid of feelings of guilt or shame (S. Amati wrote about this over 40 years ago). Why then write about it, I asked myself. Why hold a conference? What is the point?

I thought about giving up, I wanted simply to run away. Then I was fortunate to speak with a colleague and I recovered my ability to think, I regained that "modest omnipotence" that S. Amati considers when referring to an essential therapeutic aspect concerning the attitude of the analyst. This omnipotence is fragile, vulnerable; to become activated it needs to draw strength from support, which can also be a sense of belonging to a group. In short, therapists recognize that they can help as best they can, so in my case I said to myself, "I will conclude as best as I can."

I will begin with the question that some of those present may have asked themselves, namely, what is the relationship between the Libero and Zora Polojaz Foundation and

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<sup>20</sup> Vlasta Polojaz (Trieste), Full Member of the Società Psicoanalitica Italiana, Centro Veneto di Psicoanalisi, President of Polojaz Foundation.



psychoanalysis? I should briefly introduce the Foundation's activities, a nonprofit institution (in Italy it is part of the Third Sector). Among the many goals the institution promotes is coexistence among the different ethnic groups in Northeastern Italy and partly in the Balkan Peninsula. Through research projects, it evaluates the state of psychological well-being or malaise of members of individual groups and seeks to foster good relations between the Balkan and Italian areas.

As we know, psychoanalysis is a premier tool for studying and helping humankind: it alleviates mental distress and stimulates an awareness of what is taking place in the social fabric. A society that is aware can become the guarantor of the measures needed to address the problem and promote a fruitful coexistence.

Three psychoanalysts serve on the Foundation's Scientific Committee: Andrea Braun, Paolo Fonda and myself. Andrea and I are also constituent members.

From the early days of its inception, the foundation, in concert with Croatian colleagues, promoted a series of seminars held for years in Zagreb by psychoanalysts of the Italian Society. These theoretical-clinical meetings, also attended by psychotherapists with a psychoanalytic orientation, have fostered further interest in psychoanalysis in the Croatian cultural and scientific fabric, which was already open to the experience of group psychoanalysis.

A couple of years later, following the same model but more limited in time, similar workshops were started in Ukraine. Of this experience Aira Laine, PIEE's training director wrote to the Foundation in 2008: "on behalf of the PIEE Board and Staff I express gratitude and great appreciation for the support that your Foundation is giving to the teaching program in psychoanalysis, which is going on in Kyiv. In our mind, it is of basic importance to create an environment that is informed and sensitive to the psychoanalytic therapeutic approach, on which appropriate motivations for psychoanalytic training may grow. We warmly hope that your support may still continue,



allowing the accomplishment of the plans that our local colleagues are trying to realize.”

I must emphasize the generous contribution of Italian psychoanalysts, who conducted the seminars and clinical groups at no cost in both Croatia and Ukraine (the Foundation covered their travel and living expenses). Memory is essential for a nation to reconstruct the history of "its own" psychoanalysis. This would be all the more desirable in Ukraine, where oblivion has completely erased the contribution made by Italian psychoanalysts: their presence, although temporary, has disappeared, covered by blackness.

Today's conference was the fourth that the Foundation has held, always in concert with other institutions, especially the Croatian Psychoanalytic Society, and always under the patronage of the Italian Psychoanalytic Society. This time we had the pleasure and honor of organizing it with the Centro Veneto di Psicoanalisi and at the venue we three psychoanalysts call home.

I would like to briefly present the three previous conferences, which were attended by colleagues from eleven European countries, especially from the Balkans, in addition to Italian psychoanalysts and psychotherapists.

The first conference was held at Revoltella Civic Museum in Trieste on the occasion of the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War. Indeed, the war was devastating in Trieste, the Balkans and beyond, bringing about the fall of several empires and the birth of new nations. The title of the conference, Integration and Splitting, served as a cue to reflect on integrative and disintegrative urges, on fragmentations and splits caused by external events that manifest themselves in the lives of peoples and nations. Moreover, it was precisely the destructiveness of war that stimulated the emergence of some highly relevant Freudian concepts, such as life and death drives and group studies.



During the meeting we dwelt mainly on how these two psychic processes manifest in life, beyond the events of war. Indeed, in 2014 the war felt distant from our daily lives, although faintly present through traumatic elements in a part of the Bosnian population. But these critical points of great fragility with their presence in those Balkan lands still ensured that "normalcy" continued elsewhere.

Paolo Fonda then outlined an intriguing psychoanalytic reading of the pathological changes grafted by war onto the human psyche, an aspect he has further developed today. He also recalled Freud's initial enthusiasm for the declaration of war, underscored by his two sons' decision to enlist.

As we know, Freud recovered his critical thinking just a few months later. In his letter of October 22, 1914 to Jones he wrote: Do not forget now that the lies are many! referring to the propaganda that all sides were using.

In 2016 we organized the conference on Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy in Sarajevo. It was attended by candidates and analysts from Slovenia, Croatia, some other countries and many Bosnian psychotherapists. The latter brought many clinical contributions highlighting the almost impossible task of dealing with highly traumatized patients. From this "almost impossible task" arose the project of implementing in Sarajevo what had been done in Zagreb. So we organized theoretical-clinical seminars, taught by Croatian colleagues. Indeed, the Croatians could use with the young Bosnian therapists what they had experienced and learned in their experience gained professionally and/or personally in the war in Croatia and in the working through during the years that followed. It involved a complex methodology, but this is not the context to go into such detail.

We had the opportunity today to enjoy valuable clinical contributions for which we can be very grateful to our speakers.



In the conference held in Trieste in 2018 for the centenary of the end of the Great War we had proposed as a theme two cardinal psychoanalytic aspects, Encounter and Listening. These are also two moments that characterize human life, emphasizing the acceptance of the self and the other, each in their own otherness, difference and identity. This involves recognizing the uniqueness of each individual and each group to which the individual belongs, and overcoming the rigidity of boundaries and barriers that naturally exist but do not ultimately imprison. In proposing these themes, we were thus within the normality of everyday life, which also implies the eventual presence of pathology.

What I wish to say is that the possibility of the outbreak of a European war was not considered, at least not by myself. This is a recent, very painful discovery that is still accompanied by disbelief. If anything, people in Trieste were looking fearfully toward Bosnia-Herzegovina, which, you know, is a powder keg. Little news came from Ukraine, but by then we had become accustomed to the fact that Crimea had returned to its old masters, so it seemed there might be-as with earthquakes- certain aftershocks. I was therefore astonished and bewildered when I found myself during the summer of 2018 in Kyev in front of the monument-memorial with the endless list of Ukrainian casualties in the war against Russia. It was, however, a war that seemed very localized. At the time, I mentioned it to a Ukrainian colleague: probably both of us were proceeding with great caution, careful to "let sleeping dogs lie", so I could continue with my own half-asleep indifference, which as danger increased became more and more entrenched, until the rude awakening: the invasion of one nation by another which is aggressively attempting to destroy everything and everyone.

But I have a dream, yes, I have one, too. I wish to share it with before I conclude. It is a wish, perhaps a fantasy that might one day materialize into a project.



I imagine that one or two clinical-theoretical groups will be formed by colleagues residing in Italy mainly in the Northeast, Slovenia, Croatia and BiH. These groups would meet periodically via zoom, but also in person (and here perhaps the Foundation could make a concrete organizational contribution), and these occasions would facilitate the participation of other colleagues from different countries, who would function as "the third", which is always necessary and useful. These meetings would help foster greater mutual understanding, which is always important. They would also allow for a different kind of investment in work, which would become more varied and multifaceted as it would be composed of different professional and life experiences, and these experiences would be discovered and unfold over time.

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## **SECOND PART**





## **War and Children, Anna Freud and Dorothy Burlingham: The War Nurseries.**

*Maria Anna Tallandini<sup>21</sup>*

At a difficult time in European history, it is helpful to recall the vital contribution made by psychoanalysis in helping children affected by the often traumatic experiences wrought by war. I have in mind the establishment by Anna Freud and Dorothy Burlingham of the three War Nurseries in October 1940. I intend to recall the first publication on the subject (Freud, A, Burlingham, D., War and Children, Medical World Books, 1943), the annual report written for the association, The Foster Parents Plan for War Children<sup>22</sup>, which financially supported the initiative. The topic would then be taken up by A. Freud in the publication *Infants without Families: Reports on the Hampstead Nurseries* (in *The Writings of Anna Freud*, vol.3. International Universities Press, 1973), in which the later years of this experience are also described.

Far too many Ukrainian children have had to leave their homes without knowing where they are going, whether they will find a safe place to stay, and if they will be able to return. The affective situation and relationships with family members are pro-

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<sup>22</sup> Hampstead Nurseries consisted of three homes where an average of 90 children were housed. The Foster Parents' Plan for War Children helped protect children starting in 1936 when Spanish children faced civil war in their country. Later they cared for children in other European countries affected by the war.



foundly altered. Children see their parents in the grip of profound fears and sometimes no longer feel protected. Adult frailties that are tolerable and not apparent in regular periods become evident in wartime. The child then feels a loss of security and reliability in the face of these hardships. Never more than in wartime does the sense of home, the familiarity of the household, and what is contained therein take its toll on our daily living. The figure of the adult as a source of security and inner peace proves indispensable, and separation in such a dramatic context is all the more intolerable.

The subject of this paper is a report by the two authors, A. Freud and D. Burlingham, on the experience and data collected during the first year of operation of the War Nurseries, 1941. That experience ended with the end of the war in 1945. Here we do not observe the use of psychoanalysis in the context of a therapeutic setting but in that of acute and in-depth observation of child behavior. The focus is primarily on how the war affects the child's psychological development in their needs for personal attachment, emotional stability and continuity in the educational process. Through observation, comprehension of the child's emotional needs is aimed at making the war experience less traumatic in their daily lives.

At the beginning of World War II, London, especially its eastern part, was pounded by heavy bombings daily. Thousands of families had to spend many hours in the dark in subway shelters or sleep in bunk beds built in subway stations. Upon returning to the surface, they often discovered that their homes had been shelled and rendered uninhabitable. Faced with the death and destruction experienced by the children, Anna Freud wished to build spaces to provide a peaceful environment for the children and, at the same time, give the parents peace of mind in their work. The kindergartens were designed for children under five because, at the beginning of the war, the British government evacuation program had not considered children of this age, regarding



them as protected by their mothers. However, this was not always possible as mothers were frequently engaged in work outside the household, often in support of the war.

In the introduction to the notes on this experience, which lasted throughout the war period, Anna Freud and Dorothy Burlingham write:

“Work in War nurseries is based on the idea that the care and education of young children should not take second place in wartime and should not be reduced to wartime level. Adults can live under emergency conditions and, if necessary, on emergency rations. But the situation in the decisive years of bodily and mental development is entirely different. It has already been generally recognised .....that the lack of essential foods, ..... in early childhood will cause lasting bodily malformation in later years .... It is not generally recognised that the same is true for the mental development of the child. Whenever certain essential needs are not fulfilled, lasting psychological malformation will be the consequence. These essential elements are: the need for personal attachment, for emotional stability, and for permanency of educational influence..... To counteract these deficiencies, wartime care of children has to be more elaborate and more carefully thought than in ordinary times of peace” (my italics). (pag.12).”

Keeping these considerations in mind, nursery staff were continuously monitored by A. Freud and D. Burlingham and assisted in their activities with the children. At first, the staff consisted of refugees who had fled Germany and Austria, such as Anna Freud herself, and who had psychological and psychoanalytic interests at their origin. Many of them became well-known names in the field of psychoanalysis such as Ilse Hellman, who had been a student of Charlotte Buhler and was thus able to bring her empirical research experience to the kindergartens (Kennedy, H., 2009). They were young and keenly involved people who had gone through the experience of "evacuation" from



their home country. Other prominent people included Mr. and Mrs. Robertson, who later continued their work with J. Bowlby, to whom they provided much of the clinical data on which Bowlby documented his theory of attachment. A general practice, which continued in the Hampstead Clinic after the war, was that any person in the kindergartens with whatever job description had to have psychoanalytic developmental psychology as a theoretical basis and work accordingly in contact with children. For example, James Robertson operated as a social worker and, in particular, had to hold relations with parents; at the same time, he also had to act as a "handyman" who maintained the building and, in particular, its plumbing.

Constant attention must be devoted to children because the price the child pays for being removed from the dangers of war is steep. Indeed, children in this context face the trauma of being separated from their mother which, says A. Freud, is a far more dramatic experience than what they may experience when they see their home destroyed by bombs.

“Children have only one kind of punishment to use against everyone who hurts them: the person should leave and not return. In the child’s mind, this means they must die ... These negative feelings probably produce, in this period, the separation response. The father and the mother whom, at a certain point, the child wishes to be dead, immediately after are returned to their children’s love.... In this period the negative feelings towards the parents are only transitory...It does not appear to the child to be dangerous to kill a parent in fantasy if, at the same time, he or she can see that their parent is alive and in good health.... Conversely, the separation results in an unbearable proof of all these negative feelings if ... the natural pain linked to the separation thus turns into a tense waiting for their coming back which is difficult to bear. When the parents are absent the orders and prohibitions, which were previously resisted, are now thoroughly carried out. In this situation children are particularly good” .(p.30)



But what happens in the face of death when the parent is truly gone:

The case of Bertie (pp. 68-69).

“Bertie, .. was four years old at the time when he still refused to admit the truth of his father’s death. He was ill in bed at the time of the spring air raids, had a whole tray full of paper houses on his bed and played indefatigably. He would build the house up, cover them with their roofs, and then throw them down with small marbles which were his bombs. Whereas in the other children’s game any number of people were “killed” and in the end everything was left in bits and pieces, the point in Bertie’s play was that all his people were always saved in time and all his houses were invariably built up again. The other children repeated incidents of a more impersonal kind in their games: they played active and embellished versions of events which had actually happened. This served the purpose of relief and abreaction. Bertie’s play, on the other hand, had the opposite intention- he wanted to deny the reality of what had happened- since the denial was never completely successful the play had to be repeated incessantly- it became compulsive. The game of the other children remained transitory.

Bertie stopped playing in this way when half a year later, he, at last, gave up his denial and was able to tell his story: “My father has been killed and my mother has gone to the hospital. She will come back at the end of the war but he will not return”.

One of the tasks of the kindergarten staff was to observe and keep note of child behaviors using “free-floating” attention, similar to the mental disposition of the analyst. Observations were to be written down promptly using non-theoretical language, detailing the observed behaviors as thoroughly as possible. There was no interpretation, but rather interventions defined by Anna Freud as “educational” that considered the noted observations. For example, in this case, letting the child have time to accommodate, if possible, the burden of enormous grief as his surroundings seemed



capable of accommodating him and giving him a chance to feel safe; that they would not destroy him. No one intervened to interrupt his compulsive play, but he was helped out of his shell by, for example, being taken for a group walk when he wanted to participate.

It seems that to comment further on this vignette would be to intrude on the reader's reflections and feelings. We can better understand Bertie by taking him with us into our lives to learn that the world of children can be deeply painful and fragile, even if this is not strictly psychoanalytic theory.

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## Going murderous on an inextricable link.

### Individual and collective attempts to clean up once and for all

*Wolfgang Lassmann*<sup>23</sup>

In the Tarantino film *Jackie Brown* (1997), Ordell, the head of a gang of criminals, expects two of his people back from an assignment. To his surprise, only one person shows up. "Hey, where's Melanie?", he asks. The other, Louis, replies, "She's been talking the whole time. She was driving me completely crazy" "So you left her there", Ordell suggests. "I shot her," Louis says.

The way Louis deals with his need to maintain his distance to Melanie is not only shockingly brutal, but also deeply dumb. Louis employs particularly inept means to disentangle himself from Melanie's obnoxious presence. Doing so increases his difficulties exponentially.

At this point we can profitably draw on César and Sára Botella's thoughts on Freud's concept of representability. Representability is not just the ability to present things to others: before this can happen they have to be figured out by the subject. Louis does not really get very far in this. He loses his inner "face" and therefore cannot even explain to himself: what the hell made him shoot Melanie?

This is a situation that Claude Balier would have understood very well. As a psychoanalyst and psychiatrist, he was for a long time in charge of prison psychiatric care in a

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prison near Grenoble. A patient who talked about what he had done told him one day, "That was me, and yet, it wasn't me." The person who talks has limited access to the person who acted.

When the inner frame breaks, it is sometimes an outer corset that temporarily holds the broken parts together. But this helps only to some extent. At one point in Brasilia in 1975 (see Bion, 1994, 17), Bion takes up the words of Cyril Connolly:

Imprisoned in every fat man, a thin one is wildly signalling to be let out (Connolly, 1944, 58).

Perhaps this is also true in another form: In some dumb people, there may be a smart person desperately trying to break out.

In one famous story, a young prince leaves his palace for the first time, and is confronted with old age, illness, and death. What he sees shakes him so much that it causes a turnaround in his life. Posterity knows him as the Buddha.

But, deeply enshrined in tradition, there is also the story of another prince. One day he understood that he did not really belong to the ruling family, but to a people who did slave labour outside the gates of the palace. Venturing out to find out more, he saw an overseer brutally mistreating a slave, looked left and right to see if anyone was around, and killed the official: Problem solved. But there had been witnesses after all. He was forced to flee and had lots of time to reflect on how little his act had benefited anyone.

Then, one day in the desert, he came upon a bush that was burning, and yet was not consumed by the flames – a symbol adopted centuries later by persecuted minorities, who could not afford the luxury of giving in to righteous anger at the spur of the moment.





Back to the prince turned outlaw: his anger had urgently been in need of a pause for reflection. Only now could the story produce a sequel that was not just a continuation of what had happened before.

In a certain way, it all started with the subjective impossibility to remain calm in the face of outrageous oppression. Would it really be wise on our part to recommend philosophical indifference, as the gold standard of mental health in comparable circumstances?

Claude Smadja, a French psychoanalyst who has worked with patients who were unable mentally to process what was befalling them and, instead, developed all kinds of bodily ailments, suggests that some people might be suffering from a lack of aversion, not a lack of patience. Lacking sufficient cohesive density as a subject, as it were, they do not find it in themselves to put up enough resistance to a world failing them in a major way.

Moses, the wayward prince, turned out to be quite a disappointment to the ruling family in which he grew up. What his flare of uncontrollable rage revealed was that he could not remain an unconcerned bystander, shielded by his rank. Crossing lines, he left what and who he was, so as to become someone he was not familiar with yet. On closer inspection, things are probably even more complex. Moses' name would also have been a good fit for a non-Hebrew male at the times. Even if we lack the historical certainty to assume, with Freud, that there was an Egyptian Moses, the story of Exodus takes us to zones of endangered identity.

We know stories of toddlers who were taken away from their parents regarded as dangerous subversives by the Argentinian military dictatorship to be raised by officers' families trusted by the regime. All memory of their original families was to be erased. When, at a later stage, the true story emerged, seeming benefactors turned out to



have been perpetrators. Only by radically reinterpreting their memories could those abducted at an early age protect themselves against identification with the wrong side: with those who had violently “disappeared” their parents.

At least one commentator on the Exodus story suggested that a comparable burden cannot be shouldered by one person alone. Hezekiah ben Manoah, a 13th-century French rabbi, inferred from the context that Moses' highborn foster mother himself seems to have converted to Judaism, providing thus external support for the young man's identity.

Subsequently, at any rate, the name of Moses was to be inseparably linked to the command to make important distinctions, and the injunction to remember well.

Thou shalt not pervert the justice due to the stranger, [...] But thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in Egypt, and the Lord thy God redeemed thee thence (Deuteronomy 24:17.18)

As an old man, Bion returned to his World War I experience that had scarred him for life. The resulting book – *A Memoir of the Future* – is a frontal attack on the reader abducting him/her into a traumatic dream turned fiction.

Freud, living as a non-religious Jew in a Vienna that was becoming more and more anti-Semitic, for his part, also resorted to a novel form to deal with traumatic experience. His book on Moses approached the story by presenting it in a way that must ultimately remain science fiction: we might perhaps call it *A Memoir of the Past*, different from Bion's ‘novel’, but disturbing in its own way.

Jacques Press, drawing on his reading of Freud's book on Moses, but also taking into account Ferenczi's thought, has suggested that there are always traces of a stranger in us who cannot be permanently integrated, and with whom we never cease to struggle throughout our lives.



Christophe Dejours has come to a similar conclusion. In each person, he writes, there are split off compartments where experience that could not take shape has been deposited. This creates zones that remain mute and cold.

The Danish docudrama: *Your Neighbour's son: the Making of a Torturer* (1982) shows how the Greek military dictatorship trained ordinary recruits to become torturers and let loose political prisoners. They were subjected to extensive humiliation and torment until they were given the chance to change sides. What had been done to them, they were to inflict on others. It usually worked. What we find here is a reversal of the instructions handed down in Deuteronomy, quoted above : We find here a reversal of Moses' instructions in the quoted tradition into their opposite:

With the blessing of the authorities, do unto others what you are afraid of.

Even if things don't usually take such an extreme turn, Christophe Dejours suspects that there is a potential for it dormant in all of us. In peaceful times, they do not stand in the way of an inconspicuous normality. When the times themselves are out of joint, a terrifying capacity for cruelty suddenly emerges from among previously ordinary citizens.

Sometimes, even in quiet times, we get an inkling of some normally contained tension just under the surface. When my wife was traveling alone with our small children many years ago, she needed help with getting on the tram, which caused an outbreak of fierce hostility from an older woman. In rage, she remembered that she used to have to do everything on her own, with no help from anyone. By turning her anger against someone in a similar situation, the inner connection to the idea of having been helpless could be anesthetized.



In a paper, Gilbert Diatkine describes what he experienced in Zagreb in 1992 in the middle of the Yugoslav-Croatian Balkan war. There was, he heard, a new method of punishment that Serbian soldiers used on captured Croats.

They nail a living prisoner to the door of a house, cut his tracheal artery and pull out his tongue through the orifice just created in the form of a cravat. ... The agony is prolonged, painful and infinitely agonising. (Diatkine, G. 'The Croatian Cravat: The narcissism of small differences and the process of civilisation.', in *Reading French Psychoanalysis*. Routledge, 2014. p. 543)

His local contact said that after experiencing this torture several times, young art students began to inflict it on Serbian prisoners. A psychopathological approach had become an export item.

Having done deeds like this may weigh heavily on the mind of some of the perpetrators. That is why there will always be attempts to re-interpret the deed. When the inner judgment does not please, the verdict is appealed to a court filled with more carefully picked judges. "Alternative facts" are adduced: The object of hatred is not really a human being, but just vermin. There is no mass murder, we are looking at a sanitary measure. One does not attack: it is only self-defense.

Committing atrocities for a supposedly good cause is an inner state that has, for various reasons, difficulty aging well.

If reparation is to happen, fantasy must first be separated from reality, and unsuitable means must be clearly identified in their harmfulness. Falsely flattering memory must be deprived of community support.

Only then can the dance around the golden calf of orgiastic de-differentiation, which turns the other into a grimace so that one does not have to meet the grimace inside, gradually come to a sober end: only now can one see how things can somehow continue.



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## **War and refugees. The plight of children and adolescents**

*Patrizia Montagner<sup>24</sup>*

This paper stems from some observations I made during the work with Ukrainian children and teenagers refugees. It has the characteristic of being a work in progress and of being updated as of today, that is, a little more than a year after the beginning of the war in Ukraine. We are aware that much is still to be observed and understood and that there may be considerable changes in the future compared to the present situation, as the evolution of migration issues and the condition of refugees is greatly affected by the social, political and humanitarian situation in which they are living.

One of the most terrible consequences of war is the migration of people living in war zones.

When war broke out in Ukraine, many Ukrainians had to flee their country; Europe took in millions, at least 5 million, and Italy in a short time made room for about 200,000 of them.

The welcome they received was particularly benevolent, and housing and accommodations were quickly arranged. This tells us how much the people of Italy were touched by the events and got busy, along with the Italian and European governments.

Why this kind of reception? I think for several reasons.

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First of all, they are European citizens like us, and then they are white. But that is not enough. My idea is that there has been a great identification with these refugees, whom we have felt close to us, and above all we have feared and fear to be, like them, victims of the war if it spreads. We fear that we will have to flee like them. The war in Europe surprised us and perhaps disappointed us in our expectations that we would be able to guarantee Europe and ourselves a last lasting peace. (Freud 1915; Winnicott 1986).

We see that after a year war and refugees have unfortunately become almost "habitual" and no longer solicit the same participation that we saw in the first months, confirming the mechanism highlighted by Amati Sas that we adapt to "anything" (Amati Sas, 2020).

Real help was given to the refugees. An help that was overall well-organized and quick, but which does not, however, entail the possibility of as much help with the mental problems they present. Indeed, perhaps the difficulties here are paradoxically greater than with other migrants. Ukrainian refugees are also often very traumatized people, but it is difficult to give support in this regard. Trauma is not recognized, and even those who display obvious symptoms such as sleep disturbances, closure or *flashbacks*, often do not want to be helped. They play it down.

More than two-thirds of the refugees have the intention to return home, and they believe that the suffering is momentary, not deserving of any intervention.

THE desire to go back means that there is a very little - if any - desire to fit into our social reality. There is no desire in them, if not in some, to bond with other people who are not from their country, they do not wish to learn our language, which is considered "useless" unlike others such as English that can be useful, they do not want to find a job. We should add that most of the families that have arrived are composed of mothers, children and female relatives, there are no fathers, possibly grandfathers,





and there are no children over 18 years old. In these families we have seen the creation of major regressions and accentuated dependence on female figures, especially mothers. Certainly, this also has a lot to do with the family reality and the psychic situation of the refugees before displacement, however I think it is a significant condition. Families without fathers, distant and traumatized, in which it is difficult to feel an authority that assigns children and parents their respective roles. Oedipal conflicts that are powerfully reactivated.

To the present date some have returned home permanently, but most of them, although they made a quick return to see family and places again, have since returned to Italy. What does it mean for children and adolescents being here "momentarily,"? What are the implications of the sudden flight from home and what are those of this coming and going with the uncertainty that it follows?

I think one has to consider the fact that the experience of the Ukrainian refugees is that of having been forced to leave because their country was invaded with the aim of making it for all intents and purposes a Russian territory. This has understandably generated in them a deep anguish of losing their social identity and having to give up the specific characteristics that come with it: language, traditions, culture.

One of the first things we tried to do for them was to send them to school in our country, with the aim of getting them back on the path of interrupted learning and also encouraging new participation among peer groups.

The Italian school went to great lengths to include the kids, and the placements, though with much difficulty, took place last school year through June. Now in their second year, the vast majority of the refugee follow their home class lessons in Ukraine online, being in front of their cell phones practically all day. This has the function for them to maintain and safeguard their connection with their homeland, culture, language, etc. However, this actually leads to a condition of closure,



loneliness and non-participation in social activities in the place where they now live. We have organized<sup>25</sup> and we participate in initiatives aimed at providing psychic support to those who are refugees from Ukraine, and we have built a complex project of support that covers caregivers, mothers and children, and another also directed at schools, and children and families in obvious difficulty.

What is especially troubling is the condition of silence about their suffering that Ukrainian teenagers experience.

During one of the group observations organized with them, one said, "Every day is the same." Some of them have been included in sports activities and this is the only interesting experience of the week. Of particular concern is the fact that they are always connected to their cell phones on which they search for pictures and videos of what is happening in their home country. All this makes them continually exposed to highly traumatic visual content that they are unable to process, which who knows if they talk about in their families. It is important for them to have this contact; through it they participate in what is happening far away from them, perhaps indirectly experience the lives of the heroes who are defending them, and perhaps feel less guilty about fleeing.

The disturbing aspect is the amount of hatred that these children are growing within them toward the Russians. It is fully motivated by the events of the war. However, it is a new element; Ukrainians and Russians were culturally close peoples. Many Ukrainian teenagers, especially from the eastern regions, can speak Russian. What fate will this hatred have in the future? What deep cleavages is it causing? Will it be projected and maintained outside by increasing the conflict? Will it occur that a mechanism of identification with the aggressor will be activated? Will it be introjected

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<sup>25</sup> As members of the PER (European Psychoanalysts for Refugees) Group of CVP and also other local Associations.



causing depressive and melancholic experiences?

Hate has the function at this stage of sustaining social identity. For an adolescent, engaged in a crucial stage of the subjectification process, it constitutes an important element of his or her identity (Nicholas, Novelletto, Winnicott).

We observe that many of them are in great pain. They all present symptoms of a post traumatic stress condition (Bolheber, Elton et al, Garland). We know that in traumatic situations the speed with which it is talked about makes a difference. One wonders what is involved in the fact that no one seems to want to consider the problem. No doubt the denial and splitting defense are in place. How well do they really work?

These are defenses that imply an accentuation of closure and loneliness, at a stage of psychic life when participation and sharing with peers acquire a fundamental value.

During observations with them, I suggested drawing and painting. These are activities that engage them; by painting they talk. They tell about themselves, but without feeling sick or problematic. They manage to show a little of their suffering. Although they are not interested in learning, nevertheless in the group they help each other with language, they try to help each other out to communicate with me a little bit in Italian, a little bit in English and a little bit with the translator, to make themselves understood. I think the problem of not betraying their origins, which confronts all migrants with the difficult choice, never quite made, whether to integrate or not, represents an unbearable inner reality in them. Staying well here is experienced as a betrayal of their country, their roots, their comrades there.

The need is to strengthen the connection with that national reality, emphasizing all the tragic news coming from there. Everyone often draws their flag, and they use the colors yellow and blue very frequently.

However, the need to communicate, when they are enabled to do so, emerges. Communicate, not talk. By drawing, the psychic weight of the word is lightened; it is



used "only" to describe the image (Di Benedetto).

They thus allow me to understand something about them and allow themselves to express something of their pain.

Here now are two short vignettes, testifying to the depth of the trauma, the suffering they experience and that continues to torture them.

The first is about a 14-year-old girl. I propose to draw; someone in the group does it willingly, someone else waits a little while to get going, she tells me she doesn't want to draw, and adds that she only draws things from the war. I tell her it's okay, she can draw whatever she likes. She doesn't want to draw here. She runs off to her room and comes back with some sheets full of figures, other pictures of her have them in her cell phone.

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Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4

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These are images of tragic incidents in Ukraine that he has heard about. He says that he stands in front of the screen and watches what happens and then draws.

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Figure 5

Terrifying images in which fear, horror and destruction are depicted with extraordinary skill.

He tells me he thinks about it all the time.

These images seem analogous to the recurrent dreams and *flashbacks* so frequent in those who have suffered trauma (Freud 1920). An attempt that her psyche is making to master the trauma, to take an active role in the face of it, to bind together elements that need connection and meaning. I see how important it is for the young designer that I pay attention to her production and comment on the pain and tragedy she is experiencing. How important it is also that I accept that the drawings are her productions from a time other than this one, they testify to what she experiences when she is alone.

These are images that speak for themselves, screaming horror.

There are two more drawings of a 12-year-old boy who speaks good English. He is



always sleepy. The others in the group mock him a little for this. He actually seems very, too bright to me. But perhaps his being sleepy represents a strenuous defense against a reality, the present one, so unacceptable to him. He gladly agrees to draw, though. In the first meeting he draws a house; it is the one in a Minecraft video game.

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*Figure 6*

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(In Minecraft, players can freely explore a 3D world made up of blocks, go in search of raw minerals, make tools and various objects, and build structures. Depending on the game mode, it is possible to fight entities.) It is made of pieces put together. It looks unlivable to me. In the second drawing he makes this kind of map. With Ukrainian



cities where attacks and violence by the Russians have taken place.

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Figure 7

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And then he picks up a map he has on the first page of his journal and starts erasing some countries with white-out. I ask what he does. He says, "It's where the Russians are now."

I remain speechless. The scene has frozen my mind.

Slowly I was able to do some thinking about this. To consider that it was first of all a matter of space and place. That it is necessary to maintain a container to exist and to grow.

This preadolescent is beginning to reflect on his own identity. Thus he shows how, in order to begin this process, he feels he must put pieces together and place them in a place. The war has broken the container. Then resuming the path means for him to return to refer to and keep alive the place where his growth took place and where his identity has been maintained until now. Eliminate the places where the enemy can





potentially destroy it and annihilate the continuity of self.

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**Da internet**

<https://www.minecraft.net/it-it>

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## **THIRD PART**



## Introduction to the articles of dr. Minne and dr. De Mari

*Anna Cordioli*<sup>26</sup>

In the making of this issue of *KnotGarden*, we decided to include two very interesting speeches that let us reflect about war in a broader sense.

These papers, presented at the 2022 European Federation of Psychoanalysis conference in Vienna, speak of social phenomena that are devastating (Mafia warfare and gang wars), but whose dimensions are incomparable to wars between nations.

Vlasta Polojaz, in a conversation we had one summer evening as we commented with concern on the news from Ukraine and the growing tensions in Bosnia-Herzegovina, made me reflect on the dimensions of the conflicts.

Can we really juxtapose heinous but circumscribed conflicts alongside the testimonies of those who are suffering the invasion of tankers? Is there a risk of downplaying one or the other tragedy? Is it more terrible to die from a bomb falling from the sky or in an ambush in the city center? Needless to say, these are incomparable contexts, but it is important to grasp some differences and set up a frame thought that creates a reading perspective.

When the conflict is both in my city, and in the city next door, and in my street, and in the street next door, something peculiar happens in the mind: the destruction appears boundless, with no islands of safety; an uninterrupted erosion of hope and security.

When the numbers of war's annihilation are huge, even being a victim loses all its individual character. The people in the mass graves of Bucha or Srebrenica died only

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because they belonged to a different nation or ethnicity; there was nothing personal in their annihilation, no individual trait was granted to them either while alive or dead. And that is why, for a long-time, international commissions have worked hard and persistently to, at least, give the bodies of the victims a name again.

This depersonalization, which we are familiar with in the process of enemy's creation, in wars between nations reaches its apex of abstraction. The civilian population feels endangered in that each person, impersonally, feels that they are possible collateral damage from the war.

An individual story that will not be told by anyone. There will be no subsequent generations who can remember which life their ancestors lived because even children will be killed. The threat of war is to make everything disappear: the person, the history, the human heritage, the culture.

Mafia wars and gang wars, as Minne and De Mari will show us, while involving smaller geographic territories, nonetheless replicate on a smaller scale almost all the dynamics of war conflict. We find again the aspects of identification with the ideal of one's group of belonging, the disappearance of the subject and the appearance of the militiaman, the alienation from the other who becomes just an enemy to be annihilated. In particular, we will see adherence to a group narrative with epic and tragic overtones. Belonging to the criminal project is narrated as belonging to a code of honor and justice that just so happens to serve the militia's purposes perfectly.

Finally, it seems to me one aspect above all is typical of the war set-up: the absolute expendability of the young. As we have seen, war is mostly fought by young men, who often make up for their inexperience with respect to the things of life with physical strength and unawareness of the effects of their actions.

As De Mari will tell us, these young men become instruments of the war but are also



what was called "cannon fodder" during World War I. No one spares a thought about their future: their task is exhausted by their own sacrifice. They are instilled with the myth of the hero who dies young for the right cause – yet, the truth is that they are worth little or nothing. They are small fish - "paranza."

These two articles show us a close up of the processes of creation of the psychology of the private soldier and the lies behind it. There is a narrative that remains silent about a bitter truth: those who die in war, whichever side they are, will almost always be forgotten.

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## **From Gangs (Ideal Ego) to Groups (Ego Ideal)<sup>27</sup>**

*Carine Minne<sup>28</sup>*

### INTRODUCTION

The 35<sup>th</sup> annual EPF conference in 2022 was entitled Ideals and the focus was on Ego Ideals and Ideal Egos:

The Ego-Ideal provides for the regulation of the relationship between the Ego and the Ideal Ego. And through the Ego-Ideal originating from the Other, symbolization arises. Thus, the Ideal Ego as an image belongs to the imaginary register, while the Ego-Ideal as the result of an also linguistically mediated identification with a significant Other belongs to the symbolic register (we will refrain here from discussing the relationship between *Moi* and *Je*). These differentiations relate to the question of how ideals can serve the formation and maintenance of libidinal and object-related goals or how they can be used for goals on the level of defending primary narcissism in both individuals and groups which are potentially destructive. Following the evolution of psychoanalytic theories on ideals since Freud we can ascertain that for everybody ideals help to structure psychic life, but they can also become tyrannical and tormenting, while on the other hand a lack of ideals can lead to feelings of disorientation, emotional emptiness and despair. (Blass, H. Abram, J. Glód, E. (2022))

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<sup>27</sup> This unpublished paper was presented at the 35th Annual Conference of the FEP- European Federation of Psychoanalysis, entitled "Ideals", Vienna 15-17 July 2022

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Introductory statement, EPF Conference Programme 2022)

‘Changing the Game’, is the name of a group therapeutic intervention conceived by Paul Kassman, developed together with me, Carine Minne, and specifically designed for gang members. Despite coming from different professional backgrounds, we came together to trial the project, which adapts therapeutic approaches to address the specific needs and challenges presented by gang members. We both wrote up the pilot project as a chapter in Kahr’s (2018) book on *New Horizons in Forensic Psychotherapy*

This paper will not go into the details of just how many young people, mainly male but increasingly also females, are enticed into this world of violence and knife crimes and killing and being killed. In London and other cities, it is mainly young black men that are affected – because they come from the disenfranchised communities – NOT because black people are more violent by nature, a white myth that continues to be propagated. Other disenfranchised and traumatised communities are also represented.

How do clinicians (mainly white) understand the gang mentality and in what way can clinical understanding provide helpful interventions? The idea that one would attempt to understand what leads someone to become a gang member, and even soar through the promotions from ‘younger’ to ‘older’ or ‘don’ or ‘OG’ (Original Gangster) is potentially arrogant unless one is familiar with the background cultures and socio-economic circumstances. Trying to understand and provide interventions can also be misconstrued as being ‘soft on crime’.





The reality that today's gang members almost all come from marginalised and disenfranchised communities cannot be ignored. It's a done to community; it's a done for community; it's a disempowered community' as reflected by a lack of many local community leaders who advocate and organise effectively to address local sentiments and priorities. People in such communities are then feeling left out, left behind and paradoxically dependent on the very sources of those negative cognitions. This leaves them feeling as if they are 'others' and not really belonging to mainstream society. This 'othering' narrative is particularly noticeable today in England, as different groups of people from various communities, migrants and Muslims, to name just two examples, in addition to gang members, are left feeling 'othered' in society. Gang members are even further 'othered' within the secure estate in prisons. If you are marginalised and disenfranchised, you do not have available to you the hopes and aspirations that the rest of society takes for granted. Even though your grandparents may have come from abroad with hopes and aspirations, something has gone badly wrong for many of these young men and women. They are faced with insurmountable obstacles, in the form of poverty, over-crowding in poor housing areas with high churn adding to community instability, dependence on benefits, no jobs, debts, shame, discrimination, stereotyping, and all this within the context of inevitable family breakdown and dysfunction, with prominence of mental and emotional difficulties amongst the people, adults and children, not to mention the epigenetic influence of slave trauma.

Gangs as we consider them, exist within the most deprived communities of our cities. As tempting as it may be to draw comparisons between our urban street gangs and other 'gangs' such as the Bullingdon Club, (an Oxford university all male dining club for privileged under-graduates that several of the British Tory party politicians were



members of) the social and emotional experiences of the members of these two groupings could not be more different. Perhaps the only features these two types of 'gang' have in common is the sense of belonging, and loyalty, to the gang and secondly, the synergistic effect that gangs can have on behaviours that would never be considered if one was not a gang member but acting alone. There is perhaps an irony that several members of one type of 'gang' are in charge of setting up methods to manage the other type of gang, the urban one. It may be that a gang mentality at the centre of politics would need to be addressed before any meaningful plans to 'deal' with the problem of urban gangs are drawn up. Otherwise, there is a high risk of repetition rather than reparation. Are these really symptoms of communities where gangs exist or are these causes? From a politico-sociological perspective, one could express concern that if there is an 'Americanisation' of one social structure (loss of welfare state), then maybe the marginalised youth will also 'Americanise' their behaviours, often influenced by 'urban' American popular culture which glamourises the 'bling' of conspicuous consumption and higher rates of violence and use of guns. It is known that the urban gang problem in the United States of America is on a much larger scale than in the UK and we should learn from the American experience.

Urbanisation in the USA led to mobile and unsettled communities in combination with the further impact of mass migration from Europe. Those mobile communities were leaving behind what was familiar to them and they were faced with cultural dislocation. African American communities from the southern states were also moving to more northern urbanising states, having already suffered traumas of trans-generational slavery, segregation, lynching and bringing the impact of these traumas with them. Perhaps one way to imagine the experience of these communities one hundred years ago is to consider the equivalent today.



For example, we have Somalian and Congolese communities in the UK, having experienced and/or witnessed the most unimaginable traumas prior to coming to live in the UK. More currently, we have troubled and traumatised Syrian people still trying to flee their war-torn country, Afghanis, Yemenis and others easily forgotten with our preoccupation with the war in Ukraine and more mass migration of traumatised people.

Everyone needs a sense of identity and of belonging. If the experience is of not having a stable and secure family structure, or a stable and secure community, then there will be a need to create stability and security in other ways. One way is to 'team up' with those 'others' in similar predicaments and create an alternative family and community. The group of individuals will then form, as is known from group and organisational dynamics, the necessary hierarchical structure with leaders and followers. Given the amount of trauma already experienced by most of the gang members, the group dynamics will be fraught with survival difficulties, triggering a need to fend off any threats, real or perceived. Other similar groupings of what are now gangs, become threats, in the shape of sources of rivalry. The rivalry gets focussed on particular members, size of the group, income sources and territory. This might explain the intensity of the violence between gangs with disregard for any 'collateral damage'. The community where gangs are born has now got the ingredients similar to a war zone – angry young people, filled with energetic rage, the source of that rage being located in the rivals (the mirror) and not towards the real source, the 'segregation' of the poor still present in society. This is a potentially escalating problem because some of those refugees of today may need to turn to gangs in order to be able to survive, if they too experience feelings of being 'done too' or 'othered'. Saying



this is risky as such a statement could be pounced upon by the anti-migrant 'gang' as evidence for not allowing any of these 'migrants' (a dehumanising term) into 'our' country.

There are also the effects of the broader gang culture and the hype presented to youngsters via the contemporary social media and the marketing available.

Studies have shown the high degree of mental disorders in gang members

60% of a sample of 315 high-risk young offenders in 7 London boroughs have been assessed by Youth Offending Teams as presenting with emotional or psychological needs through the ASSET risk assessment tool. Particularly shocking are the following figures from this sample of 315:

33% witnessed domestic violence

30% experienced bereavement

30% experienced abuse (physical, emotional and/or sexual)

15% experienced parental mental health issues

15% experienced parental drug abuse issues

15% experienced parental alcohol abuse issues

Another study (Coid (2013)) examined the prevalence of mental health issues among a nationally representative sample of 4664 young men, including gang members and found the following diagnostic criteria were met in those belonging to gangs:

86% Antisocial Personality Disorder (57 times higher than compared to non violent men)

59% Anxiety Disorders (twice the rate of non violent men)



29% Psychoses (4 times higher than non violent men)

34% had actually made suicide attempts (13 times higher than non-violent men)

Interestingly, the only psychiatric diagnosis that had lower rates amongst gang members, compared to non-violent men was depression but could this be that the depressive symptoms are 'buried' beneath the gang persona?

These young people are actually a doubly traumatised cohort, traumatised by their developmental experiences and further traumatised by their gang experiences, the gang having been their attempt to find a 'cure' for their ailment as described by Rosca (2022).

#### THE GANG NARRATIVE

Probably the most important part of our approach together with these young men was being able to present and demonstrate an understanding of gang culture. This was one of the striking differences with offering a therapeutic approach to other groups of people. Before one could be accepted as having anything to offer, one had to be 'issued' with a 'hood-pass' in order to be allowed 'in'. This was something I, Carine had not experienced before but that Paul was very familiar with. Once 'in', then the gang narrative could be voiced and heard safely as the essential starting place for these young men's mental troubles to gradually be aired within that context.

What the gang promotes for these young men is a set of codes, values, expectations and behaviours in keeping with all of these. There are clearly recognised rules and rewards for following those rules, either through promotion within the ranks and/or financial rewards. There are specific violations and consequent sanctions, often severe, such as having to carry out an atrocity to 'prove' your worth, or a stabbing,



shooting, beating or even a killing. Within the gang there are specific roles arranged along strict hierarchical lines, in keeping with a group that has a formal leader and dependent underlings. In gangs, the leaders are known as 'Olders' or 'Dons' and the underlings as 'Youngers'. Within the gang structure, individuals often assume roles, which match the particular skills and attributes, which they bring to the group. Some have particular skills in selling drugs, or organising criminal endeavours whilst others are 'Soldiers' or 'Shooters'. They easily access, and make use of, particularly in recent years, of social media for 'marketing' purposes and propaganda. This, in the shape of You Tube videos and Gangsta Rap, for example, not only normalises the gang experience, but also idealises it. Gangsta Rap was really a hi-jacking of the original Hip Hop culture, which revolved around breakdancing, and dj'ing, veering an inner-city youth culture into a more ominous and risky direction. Gangsta Rap portrays a gritty, criminalised and deadly violent urban experience that is selling the gang image as reality, revolving around 'Rep' which has a dual meaning both as a noun (Reputation) and a verb ('Repping' or representing). Maintaining your rep and 'repping' the gang or the gang's territory becomes the daily goal *and* currency and must be protected at all costs. Indeed, it is horrifying to see how this hype has been glamourised and is now fashionable.

Once joining a gang, the young person gives up their 'government name' and is given their new identity with a gang name. The gang name, akin to what is commonly known as a nickname, is usually based on some physical, behavioural or psychological characteristic of the person. For example, a large and muscular person with low impulse control for violent outbursts could end up with a name such as 'Thrasher'. Once 'Jimmy' becomes 'Thrasher', he has to work hard to maintain his 'Rep'. This means he also has to work hard to suppress his 'Jimmy-ness'. A new identity is born



but it is constantly under threat from external and internal stressors. Fear, shame, remorse are forbidden emotions and the manufacturing of a 'protective psychopathy' is crucial. The young person is then in daily training to not care, in a sense, manufacturing psychopathy. This means, for example, that if one of them is stabbed or shot, their first and immediate response is no longer "Oh my God, I've been shot, I'm going to die" but rather something like "What? That shit had the nerve to shoot me? Doesn't he know who I am?" followed by an immediate plan to repair the now damaged 'Rep'. We heard in our group from a notorious gang leader who, described how, shortly after being shot, he was back behind the wheel of his car, driving despite the severe pain he was in with haemorrhaging, to maintain his visibility and prominence in the local area, and to send the message out that he was still fully operational despite the shooting. If he had not done this, his 'Rep' and that of his gang would have been possibly irreversibly damaged and the death of the gang. Alternatively, he could have lost his 'Rep' within his own gang and been replaced as leader or 'Don'.

#### THE SOCIAL NARRATIVE

It is important to refer to these young people's social narratives, those family and community influences they were immersed in before entering a gang. Many of them grew up in communities with experiences of immigration, only one, two, or three generations away meaning they grew up in 'dual' cultures prior to their gang lives. They experienced their migrant parents' or grandparents' cultural influences within the home from countries of origin, Caribbean or African mainly. These influences relate, for example, not only to food, music, icons and language, but also family relationships and expectations in terms of respect and deference to elders or church members. The second culture is a British, often marginalised, way of life outside the



family, often in socially deprived social housing complexes. Our pilot group members were confronted repeatedly with racism, one example only being the much more frequent 'stop and search' by the police of young black men compared to young white men.

I shall not in this paper refer further to all the other blatant racist exposures from football hooliganism to certain political voices that you will most certainly be familiar with. It is the more subtle and chronic forms of racism they all reported experiencing on a daily basis before being in gangs, such as sitting on a bus and noticing the white woman sitting next to them holding on to her bag more tightly and shifting away, because they are black. Or entering a shop and noticing the uniformed security person focussing on them and following them around with the automatic assumption that they were up to no good – because they were black. This is reminiscent of what many of us think was long extinguished, this attitude of “No Blacks, No Irish, No Dogs” posters on the doors of landlords with rooms to let in London, right up until the 1980s.

The communities are also filled with stories of hopes and hopes dashed. For example, a common narrative is one that goes like this. Little Jimmy was a very bright child who was top of his class. However, despite his obvious capabilities, he lacked a bridge to allow him to envisage himself becoming a success within a professional environment. He and his family lived in poverty on a social housing estate. In his mid-teens, in the absence of sufficient local youth clubs, after school clubs and general guidance, the lure of a gang experience was a temptation. He was involved in gang offending and was arrested and sentenced to prison. The local community's response was “Did you hear about little Jimmy? What a shame. What a waste.” This is a common community narrative. There are far too many little Jimmys.





## THE THERAPEUTIC RELATIONSHIP

The best way for me to describe the impact of the pilot therapeutic intervention with the group of 10 men is one of a shift from being a gang Ideal Ego to a group Ego Ideal. I should point out that these men had already experienced being either for a few months or a few years, within this prison, HMP Grendon, run along therapeutic community lines.

The men in the prison were told about a specific series of 'pilot' group sessions for gang members and signing up to it was entirely voluntary. Very soon, ten men signed up to join. All ten were serving sentences of between 10 and 30 years for extremely serious crimes of violence, including murders. The meetings, which lasted two hours weekly for (initially) three weeks were held in a private large room on one wing of the prison. Men from other wings were escorted to that wing to be able to attend. The space was completely confidential as no prison officers were allowed and this was agreed beforehand. All the men arrived on time for the first session and sat in the circle of chairs. Most of them were dressed in casual prison tracksuits and sweatshirts. Noticeably, they mainly sat in slouching positions turned away from facing the two of us. After we introduced ourselves, the first thing they asked us was if we worked for the government. Once we clarified that we did not work directly for the government (although Carine's NHS (public health system) salary is a 'government' paid one) and we were not reporting to anyone, their postures relaxed. Paul described in more detail his own reasons for having developed this intervention, his knowledge base, personal and academic, and Carine's experience of working therapeutically with young violent men.



Constricted within the “hype” and scripts presented by gang culture, it seems that many individuals who have fallen victim to the inevitable prison sentence which often follows gang membership lack the space to truly explore and express how they really feel about the reality of life in a gang. For example, despite the idealised concept of being backed up and surrounded by a ‘crew’ who you would trust to fight, shoot or kill to protect your status, alongside that of the gang’s, the parallel reality is also one of spending time around a set of violent, severely anti-social men, who you could never trust around your money, and particularly never trust around your girlfriend or “baby-mother”. The conversations started and did not stop for the whole two hours. Many group members complained that their narratives had been rejected as not ‘fitting’ with the expectations of other therapy groups, which they attended. They felt that they were told that they presented with the ‘wrong type of trauma’! Being presented with situations and scenarios, which they recognised from their own experiences gave them an opportunity to speak freely within their own narratives and galvanised the conversations. Without the need to explain or ‘translate’ in terms of the implicit values and reasoning associated with gangs, gave the group a sense of being heard as well as listened to.

Everyone attended the following week and the one after. The group requested additional sessions, which we negotiated with the prison in order to bring together the themes that had emerged during the three pilot sessions and this was agreed. A day conference was arranged at the prison to which stakeholders and other interested bodies were invited, as an opportunity to present the findings of the pilot. Instead of Paul and myself lecturing to the invited audience, 9 out of the 10 men stood up on the stage and presented their own accounts of having been in a gang, their index offence and what they had gained from the pilot. The 10<sup>th</sup> member who was still too shy to



present in public nevertheless stood on the stage at the end with the other 9 to be acknowledged at the end of the presentations.

We subsequently held a session with that group of men to obtain their own feedback of the pilot sessions and their experience of presenting in public. The most obvious positive feedback was the 100% attendance throughout the pilot. The most poignant feedback was the men saying that they had found, for the first time, a safe space in which they could talk about being a gang member and all its ramifications, particularly what lay behind the 'hype'. They were able to talk about those suppressed and shameful emotions that hid behind the manufactured psychopathy. They felt that we genuinely wanted to understand with them and learn from them, in order to develop a focussed and meaningful, in-depth therapeutic intervention for them and others suffering similarly. The term 'suffering' was able to emerge in the short course that the pilot ran, a word almost anathema to their cultivated 'Reps'. The third most welcome feedback was their own demands within the prison system to have made available the whole 10 weeks programme. This was achieved, mainly thanks to the men, and led to a waiting list!

What did we as a couple bring to this group? In our experience, the presence of a 'parental' couple, one who knew from personal experience the nature of their backgrounds and one who was experienced in listening and talking to violent young men, was crucial to this group of men. Nearly all of them had grown up without fathers in the home and all of them came from deprived and poverty-stricken backgrounds. Some had alcoholic or drug addicted mothers. Most of them had been emotionally and/or physically brutalised in early childhood and had suffered neglect. What was striking was that many of them had been A-Grade students at school, before their



'breakdowns' into gangs. These were bright young men that society was being deprived of.

What were their expectations? Initially, they were a little curious about who was coming and what we were going to bring but the expectation was restricted to thinking it was just going to be a "load of crap". This assumption was understandable, given that their gang lives remained closed by their very nature and they expected us to be coming along arrogantly thinking we were going to teach them something. They had never before been offered a space specifically only with other gang members and specifically only for gang members. They had never before experienced someone being interested in accepting, understanding and hearing their own narratives. Rather than coming along to "teach" the group how to think, or how to reflect pro-social behaviour and values, we were able to ask the right questions, the answers to which allowed us to non-judgementally dismantle the hype that lay behind their gang personas, using interpretations.

How did the gang experience get enacted within the group? At the very start of the first session, during the course of the personal introductions, we noticed that there were further postural shufflings, some men sitting straight and confidently, others sitting more tensely with their hands wringing. The latter tended to request permission to talk, via unspoken eye contact, from the former. The four gang leaders within the therapy group had managed to establish a mini gang hierarchy with the others as gang 'youngers'. This was pointed out to the group each time we observed it and by the second meeting, the gang had been able to become a group, with only brief moments of gang hierarchical re-positionings, which they then caught themselves doing and would immediately rectify.



How was a therapeutic group then established? Right from the start, it was crucial for us to help the gang members frame the conversations they wanted to have. The agenda was theirs and not ours. They swiftly realised, via repeated interpretations, that we did not require or expect them to join, or pretend to join, our 'gang', this group. This group space was for them as gang members. It was not for gaining a certificate towards parole or for getting brownie points within the prison. It was purely their time to talk about themselves to each other and with us present to frame what they said and interpret as and when this was therapeutically of benefit. Paul and I did have differences in our approaches, Paul's being more psycho-educational or didactic, preparing and bringing hand-outs and Carine's being more psychoanalytical, experiential. What was interesting for us was finding ourselves meeting in the middle with the help of the group. Indeed, another feedback they gave us after the pilot was that they didn't think the group would have worked with only a Paul or only a Carine. For them the couple, with their differences, was what enriched the experience.

## CLINICAL ISSUES

The main aim of our pilot was to provide a group therapy that had an understanding of the specific gang culture and gang issues that arise. After acknowledging and exploring the gang mentality, then the aim was to tentatively and sensitively begin to look behind this mentality and find the frightened traumatised young men. Once these could be found behind the locked door of the gang persona, then the treatment would have a chance to provide a solution of a different kind to the one the gang mentality provided. This is in keeping with Hopper's 4<sup>th</sup> Bion basic assumption, of "incohesion"<sup>7</sup>, especially relevant to

people affected by trauma where mental work is avoided as the suffering could



overwhelm. The main issues addressed were the typical ones found as described by Hopper (1997), where he addresses disturbed mental processes in general group therapy. With this group of men, these issues could only be accessed via this tailor-made-for-gang entry. The main issues that arose were, not surprisingly, maladaptive interpersonal relating styles, mainly those along controlling/controlled and threatened/threatening clusters. Impulsivity and affective disturbances were prevalent and related to their difficulties with affect regulation. The whole spectrum of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder symptoms eventually emerged, and we had to remain acutely sensitive to helping them understand that feeling worse meant becoming mentally healthier. Powerful examples of these symptoms being suffered were vividly described. One member, a gang leader, spoke of being in a car full of edgy men, all of whom were carrying guns and secretly praying for the police to turn up and bring the situation to an end in order to avert an unnecessary shootout. Another remembered becoming incontinent of urine during a gang fight. One member described walking around the high security prison he had just been remanded to after his arrest for killing and was noticed by another prisoner smiling and humming to himself. The other prisoner said to him “What the fuck are you smiling and humming for?” He realised that he was in a deep state of relief, that for the first time in years, he did not have to keep looking over his shoulder in case he was about to be shot. He was happy to be in prison, even though he knew this was going to be for decades. He had that feeling of “It’s over now. That’s it. I’m done”. Most of them had experienced suicidal thoughts.



## OUTCOMES

The outcome we hoped for entailed dismantling the ‘hype’ of the gang persona, which we saw as the gang member’s ‘solution’ to earlier difficulties arising, from experiences in their external environment and internal worlds. Creating a safe space where their individual narratives could be heard and emotional honesty cultivated for their vulnerabilities to be shown without judgement or loss of face. The remorse when they spoke of their victims, dead or alive, was palpable in the room. They used their victims’ first names and imagined what their victims’ families and friends must think of them, probably wanting the death penalty for them. The dismantling also of the idealisation of money and the close link between money, exhibiting wealth, and self-esteem was vital. This was not easy when, for example, one member would say, “look, I can get £2K in a day flipping ‘food’ (drugs) and you’re telling me I should go to a building site and earn minimum wage”. Despite this, they longed to be regular members of society, with jobs and families. Several of them had fathered more than one child and felt deep sadness about not seeing them, becoming an absent father to them, a personal and painful experience they all shared, and especially, despair about the shame their children would feel by having them as a father. They desperately wanted to find ways to make up for this. Most of them held deep regrets about their lack of education. Some had managed to retrieve this in prison, one was completing a biochemistry degree and another was reading philosophy. All of them knew of one person from their communities of origin that had become successful in a regular non-criminal way and this provided not only a source of envy but also one of hope. All of them except one wanted to retrieve their ‘government named’ selves that lay underneath the rubble of their gang personas. The one who didn’t had not yet been able to manage dismantling his gang persona and remained attached to the ‘hype’. However, I have recently heard that he is now out of prison working a regular job and



using his government name. One of the most powerful messages this group of men gave us was that they felt they had been taken seriously and that we had not turned up only to play football or do some DJ-ing with them. They wanted to contribute to the project developing in order to help other youngsters from their broken communities not to get into gangs, losing their own lives as well as taking others. In our view, they were the best but most ignored reference group in those bodies designed for tackling the gangs' problem. We look forward to further developments of this project as three are now in the community and part of my 'advisory board' planning to work together in the communities with children before they get caught up.

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## Little criminals: The “Paranze” of Camorra<sup>29</sup>

*Massimo De Mari<sup>30</sup>*

*"Cause we've almost made it,  
we've almost made it,  
we've almost made it to the top"  
(Randy Newman)*

Paranza, in mafia slang, describes metaphorically an armed gang but, literally, it refers to little fish which are blinded, and at the same time attracted by the strong light of lamps used by fishermen (called "lampare"). The fish, then, come to the surface from the bottom of the sea and are consequently trapped by the fishing nets (Saviano, 2016, p.11).

The same happens to certain youngsters who are blinded and attracted by the desire of easy money and power which they have no chance to get, given their age and social situation. But, in order to look like they have achieved that high-level lifestyle imposed by our nihilistic and consumerist society, they choose crime, violence, and oppression as their lifelines, knowing perfectly well that they are going to risk their life to reach that ideal model of existence. The term "paranza" is used to describe gangs of children, aged 10-16 and raised in mafia families, who are enrolled more and more frequently in their criminal activities.

The aim of this presentation is to underline how ideal-ego and ego-ideal for these children are linked together and very hard to distinguish from one another.

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In Italy, the well-known anti-social phenomenon called "mafia" has historical roots in the nineteenth century. At this point in time, Italy was formally becoming a whole nation, built from a large number of fragmented state-towns and regions. In reality, it took a long time for Italy to become united. The government decided that the northern and more advanced part of Italy needed to grow, in order to sustain the economy. This drove most of the state financial budget towards northern industries and factories, leaving the south totally abandoned to its basic economy, substantially supported by agriculture and farming.

The government wasn't even able to make people follow the national rules, as they were far from the population's expectations. The economical asymmetric situation, in fact, had led to more possibilities for young people to study and to find a job in the North. As a consequence, in the North human rights were much more respected, particularly regarding the role of the women in society. In those years, social, political, and financial assets grew fast in the North, while the South of Italy was fighting against poverty and ignorance. That's why some criminal personalities became popular heroes, as they took the place of the government and started thinking about how to help people to react to this kind of institutional injustice. Despite those great differences in the quality of life, people in the South had to pay the same taxes as the ones in the North. The first families who took care of these problems started by establishing a local unofficial government (obviously targeted to their own private interests) that was able to answer the people's need for food, order, and rules.

In the beginning, the mafia was an alternative government that fought against the Italian official government, on the side of the Sicilian people. But over time, it became a more and more structured criminal organization which only took care of its own economic interests, using its power against the population.



We all know how the mafia format has been exported abroad by mafia families, first in the U.S.A. (soon after the second world war) and then all around the world, particularly in European northern countries. Mafia also spread out in Italy, with different names linked to different social local backgrounds. So, we call it "mafia" when we talk about Sicily. In the region called Campania we have "Camorra", in Calabria we have "N'drangheta" and in Puglia we have "Sacra Corona Unita".

To end this brief historic excursus, it's important to understand how (under these different names) we find different ways of interpreting the mafia criminal way of living. In Sicily, the members of mafia families are linked by holy oaths which protect (or used to protect) women and children from the family criminal life. The Sicilian mafia is international but doesn't want to get power, as they are only interested in money. Families of Camorra are very close, and they are able to create and keep very strong affective links among their members. Their aim is to be recognized as a respected social authority in the area where they live, and don't export their activities abroad. Sacra Corona Unita is the smallest mafia organization, but it's very powerful in Puglia and has strong links with politics. Lastly, N'drangheta is maybe, nowadays, the most dangerous form of mafia because its aim is to conquer new territories, in order to reach economic and political power, both in Italy and abroad.

Maybe you might have heard something about an important Italian magistrate/judge who managed for the first time to understand the rules of mafia and, for its activities, has been killed with a bomb on may 23rd 1992.

His name was Giovanni Falcone (he is a sort of national hero in Italy), and he used to say: "*Mafia is a human phenomenon, and just like every human phenomenon has a beginning, an evolution and also an end*" (1991).

Calling mafia, a human phenomenon was a way to demistify/debunk it and to take away that halo/glow of mistery which for many years has contributed to deny the fact



that it could even exist or to make it almost inconceivable. Even today if you go to any town in Sicily and ask the inhabitants any question about the Mafia, the answer will almost certainly be "the Mafia does not exist." And it is true because the Mafia arises, as we have seen, from historical roots that are still very much entrenched especially in certain less culturally developed areas.

The child empty mind gains the possibility to think when it meets with the familiar capacity of thinking. It is possible to point out a strict relationship between the familiar possibility of thinking with the process of subjectivation, whose result depends on the quality of the familiar thought which might inhibit or improve the potentiality of the child to produce symbols.

If the familiar thinking is saturated and it is characterized by rigid behaviors and thinking patterns, the individual might become a victim of a circular and paralyzing repetition which will make him a mere executor of something already thought which has saturated all his/her symbolic maker mind's links (Menarini R., Pontalti C. 1986, p.18). Mafia's way of thinking is the expression of a familiar matrix qualitatively saturated, qualified by a strong representation of the family compared with the individual's weak one; the individual then is forced to find protection in the family or in the clan or in a big protective figure (like the so called "godfather", for example).

The internal representation of a good world, made by "men of respect" and of a bad external world is a fundamental characteristic of the mafia way of thinking: like in many fundamentalisms, the ways of thinking are dichotomous and totalizing so that the external world is split in a punitive way.

To escape from an empty and anonymous identity, therefore to have the right to exist, the mafia member looks for an omnipotent celebration of the self, given by the affiliation to the mafia family.



So we can understand how this kind of psychological training inside the mafia families might easily lead to the development of antisocial and psychopathic personalities.

There are plenty of famous movies on this topics that can explain more than many words what I am saying. From the most famous "The Godfather" series by Francis Ford Coppola (started in 1972), to "Once upon a time in America" (1984, by Sergio Leone), "Goodfellas" (1990, by Martin Scorsese) to a more recent "Road to perdition" (2002, by Sam Mendes), where the protagonist is actually the son of a mafia killer who follows his father's path as an ideal-ego model.

The ego-ideal is a term used by Freud as part of his second theory of the psychic apparatus: it is an instance of personality resulting from the convergence of narcissism (idealization of the ego) and identifications with parents, their substitutes and collective ideals. As a differentiated instance, the ego-ideal constitutes a model to which the subject seeks to conform.

The term "ego-ideal" first appears in "Introduction to Narcissism" (1914) to designate a relatively autonomous intrapsychic form that serves the ego as a reference for evaluating its actual achievements. Its origin is primarily narcissistic "What man projects before him as his own ideal is the substitute for the narcissism lost in childhood, that is, from that time when he himself was his own ideal."

In "Group psychology and the Analysis of the Ego" (1921) such a process underlies the constitution of the human group. The collective ideal derives its efficacy from a convergence of individual ego ideals.

Roberto Saviano is a famous writer in Italy. He has written many books about Camorra, and for this he has been threatened with death and has lived for years accompanied by an armed escort. As In his book on "paranze" he writes... "*The difference with adults is that while the former do not expose themselves and do not show themselves, kids post everything they do on social networks, without fearing that this will*



*expose them to negative judgment indeed... (nothing must be hidden, this is the modern pornography as the philosopher Baudrillard predicted a few years ago)...if you shy away from social you don't exist...the innocence that has led them to want everything and right away also leads them quickly to death, an idea that makes them almost happy...(if you die at ninety you are a centenarian but if you die at twenty you become a legend). In this sense they are very similar to jihadists, who have a kind of erotism of death, you attract more because to get what you want you are willing to die" (Saviano, 2017, interview).*

Maybe we might call it erogenous masochism.... however much becoming an object implies the risk of being hurt, the tendency of these kids might be to expose themselves without calculation to the family who is co-constitutive of their subjectivity from the very first moment. To desubjectify themselves in their families' hands, to lose themselves in their relationship with it, losing the boundaries of their identity, is the condition of true subjectification. It is like getting out of self-referentiality, opening themselves up to life, unbalancing themselves. Only if they lose their sense of self they will manage to find themselves fully present in the world.

I have not directly followed cases of children but I happened to know many members of mafia families who grew up according to the patterns described in this presentation and were devoted to the "family" job from an early age, with activities of logistical support (acting as poles to announce the arrival of then police in drug dealing areas) or acting as "fire groups," i.e. using weapons.

The ideal-ego, on the other hand, is an intrapsychic form that some authors distinguish from the ego-ideal by defining it as an ideal of narcissistic omnipotence built on the model of infantile narcissism.

This second model is characterized by a greater difficulty in tolerating frustrations imposed by reality and by the use of the relationship to gratify one's self by exerting



power and a form of overpowering where an obstacle to realizing one's omnipotent needs arises.

If the role models are inspired by violence and the overpowering of the other, life narcissism and death narcissism cannot distinguish one from the other. Likewise, the mixture between the life drive and the death drive will be unbalanced toward the death drive. The consequence is a blockage of the subjectification process that keeps these children relegated to a passive role in which erogenous masochism prevails. The prevalence of the death drive unleashes aggression that cannot be mentally contained and is acted out. The bond of dependence with the Mafia family is destined never to be broken, and in some cases, when a family member tries to escape this dynamic, he or she is killed.

This is a simple description of a phenomenon that is increasingly expanding and characterizing the social phenomenon of the Mafia in Italy. But in these dark times that we are living through, we are witnessing an ever-increasing expansion of the phenomenon of baby gangs, which Carine will tell you about, which have nothing to do with organized crime and also affect social groups that are not particularly deprived.

Thinking about the therapeutic possibilities in this difficult field, we should first assume an educational intervention that must start from primary school and aim to educate children about legality. The challenge is to overturn the negative image of the state and offer to these children-adolescents a positive encounter experience with institutions.

This includes, for example, the musical projects of street orchestras (which originated in South America under the name of "manos blancas") and, for example, the experience of the "ship of legality," a cruise in which boys taken out of prison are involved with the intention of re-educating them in socialization through a group training experience.



From a judicial point of view, after committing crimes, adolescents are given the opportunity to go through a rehabilitative process of "probation," at the end of which, if the process is successful, these little criminals are exempted from trial and re-enter social life.

From a psychoanalytic point of view every intervention with antisocial adolescents should have as a prerequisite the shared identification of their evolutionary needs, symbolically expressed through the transgressive behavior.

In practice, it is useful for treatment to be multi-systemic (i.e., intervening on the child and his or her context); integrated (capable of combining psychological, social, educational, and criminal work); individualized (aimed at the person in his or her context and history); project-oriented (future-oriented); empowering (aimed at a non-passive subject); and symbolic (attentive to the subjective meanings about being not aware of the antisocial behavior)(Maggiolini, 2014, p.283).

Finally, it is essential that the adult response be timely, swift and as early as possible, lest the cry of alarm expressed by the violent behavior go unheard, and also lest the adolescent be led to raise the bar of his or her challenge higher and higher.

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