



SYSTEMIC SOLUTIONS BULLETIN

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Editorial

Dear Reader,

As you read through Issue 3 you will repeatedly come across the image of a river, springing up through the earth at its source, swelling into its fullness, and eventually emptying into the oneness of the ocean. This is a lovely metaphor for family constellation work and for the movements of the soul. It also vividly illustrates the flow of articles and explorations in this edition of the Bulletin.

While Bert Hellinger's philosophical piece on 'The Alpha' concerns itself with the beginning of everything and likens it to a river at its source, so, Ursula Franke in her article 'A River Never Looks Back' specifically addresses the direct origins and foundations of the Hellinger work. Vivian Broughton's 'Sarah's Story' goes further back in history to biblical times and shows how even the distant past is ever present with us. The impact of the more recent past and the effects of war on family relations are brought home to us in the poignant 'War Story' and 'Eye Witness' articles by Ian Longstaff and Libby Shearon. Alongside these contributions, focusing more at an individual level, the issue of acknowledging our family histories and our cultural roots features strongly in the report by Otteline Lamet and Peter van Zuilekom, and in Karen Hedley's piece about the compelling and tragic impact of culture and belief on a person's destiny.

As a river progresses, it gathers the waters of many tributaries that come together so that it becomes more than the sum of its parts. Such enrichment from other sources is seen in the articles by Francesca Mason Boring and Daan van Kampenhout as they write about the merging of traditional indigenous wisdoms with contemporary psychological knowledge to give us powerful healing models to sustain us as we stand in the face of human suffering. It may not be possible to take away the pain; it may not even be desirable to have such an intention, but perhaps those who are burdened with sorrow can be supported to carry their mantle in life more lightly, with the grace of strength and dignity, and the courage for appropriate action.

In due course a river will spread into the flat lands and become more expansive and mature. Both the articles about working with rage, and with psychosis and schizophrenia, illustrate this kind of developmental phase in the Hellinger work. Albrecht Mahr offers an innovative and confident challenge to an orthodoxy that has grown up in constellation work about ways of dealing with rage, while Franz Ruppert builds on the work of Bert Hellinger and others, to give us an integrated model of how to work with severe mental illness. He courageously expands our knowledge of the underlying causes of breakdown in psychotic and schizophrenic clients and in so doing offers some hope for a client group that has often been dismissed as too disturbed for conventional psychotherapeutic treatment.

As a river swells with water so the currents in one part may be stronger than in another. In her two reports about Hellinger workshops Suzi Tucker illustrates how there are two major flows in his work – the traditional *Family Constellations* work and the more recent *Soul Work* where the waters appear to run more deeply and mysteriously. To illustrate the first sweep we have Alannah Tandy Pilbrow's moving personal story of the impact of traditional family constellation work on her life, and it is the first longitudinal account to be published in the Bulletin. Francesca Mason Boring's piece aligns itself more with the second flow, to the holy and the sacred, and to the movements of the soul.

And so we come to the last stage of a river's journey. The Bulletin was born from one small step, a thought spun in a moment of quiet reflective, infused with life by an excited conversation, and then energised into action. Its coming to fruition depends on the generous contributions of clients, authors, translators, advisors, editors, artists, poets, photographers, printers, friends and families, and others, each with their own unique input. As I think of the final stages of a river's life as it spills itself into the vastness of the ocean – so I think of the Bulletin as it is despatched from south-west London to many corners of the world. *"There is a river flowing now very fast.... Know that the river has its destination.... See who is there with you and celebrate."*⁽¹⁾

Barbara Stones

⁽¹⁾See *Native America Prophecy*, p36

Bert Hellinger: Forgiveness

Forgiveness that unites is hidden and still. It is not talked about, but practiced. In essence, it is nothing more than forbearance. It means overlooking a mistake, an injustice or someone's guilt and forgetting about it. In this way the relationship is safeguarded and the mistake, the injustice and the debt have no bad consequences for the relationship; on the contrary, because of the leniency the relationship has a chance to deepen. Confidence in the relationship grows again, especially for the person who has experienced the tolerance. In turn, when it comes to overlooking a mistake, an injustice or a debt of some kind in someone else, he or she may be more inclined to practice forbearance too.

It is quite different when a person says: "I forgive you." When these words are spoken or thought, then, with the same breath, there is an accusation of guilt and the person who says them belittles the other and inflates himself. This invalidates the equality in the relationship. It endangers the relationship rather than saving it.

What happens when someone asks us for forgiveness? When such a request comes from the pain of having upset or hurt us, then it helps to alleviate the mistake, injustice or guilt and enables it to be forgotten more easily. This is particularly so when we too have some guilt in relation to the other person. Then both parties can accept a new beginning without referring back to what has gone before. This is a very humane way of forgiving: both maintain their dignity and neither feels superior.

However, there are situations in which forbearance is not appropriate because the guilt is too great. It can only be acknowledged by the guilty person and endured by the victim. The most extreme example of such a case is murder, because it cannot be made good. Here the perpetrator has to stand by his guilt and its consequences without expecting forgiveness. And the victims cannot assume a position where they are able, or allowed, to absolve the perpetrator.

What happens in the soul of a perpetrator when he expects, or pleads for forgiveness after such a deed? He loses sight of the victims whom he has harmed in an irredeemable way. He cannot grieve for them. Instead he seeks to avoid the consequences of his guilt by placing the burden onto others and the responsibility on their shoulders. Maybe he even becomes angry with them as if they owed him forgiveness. By doing so he loses his dignity and his strength. Whoever forgives him also takes away his dignity and strength. Above all, he takes away the strength that he would have gained in acknowledging his guilt and its consequences. However, when someone uses this special strength to do something for others - he takes on a dangerous job like a mine sweeper for instance, or does something in the service of humanity - then he has a chance to regain his human dignity and maybe, even his place amongst his fellow humans.

What happens in the souls of those who grant forgiveness? They too lose their ability to look at the victims and grieve for them. But above all, they elevate themselves above the perpetrator and make him small and insignificant. Moreover, they anger the guilty person because they do not take him, or his deed, seriously. Then their forgiveness feeds evil and gives it new strength, instead of putting an end to it.

Anyone who feels they have the power to forgive meddles in something that is the concern of a higher force that asserts itself over both the perpetrator and the victim. Anyone who claims the right to forgive, refuses to acknowledge and honour this higher force and places himself at the same level as it, or above it.

When both perpetrator and victim acknowledge that they can't escape the consequences of what has happened because they recognise that they are both in the same insuperable maelstrom, then they have to submit to their impotence. The only thing left is to bow before their destiny. It unites them in some deeply human way, and in the face of such a fate it paves the path to reconciliation.

And how can others act humanely towards perpetrators and victims? The humble answer is - with compassion. This is an attitude of the heart and a movement from one human being to another, but also from a human being to an animal, or to any other creature. We feel it in the face of endless suffering or irredeemable guilt, we try to assuage it with our compassion, but we are impotent in the face of such suffering and guilt.

And how can we become compassionate? When we realise in the face of our own neediness, our guilt and our unresolvable dilemmas, that we are also dependent on the compassion and forbearance of others. In this way the compassionate share the same powerlessness as the guilty and the innocent, the perpetrator and the victim. From this place no one judges or forgives. They stay humble and surrender. This kind of compassion is still.

In this, I am also speaking of love that reconciles - a particular kind of love, above and beyond all others, which searches for something more. Love in this sense means acknowledging that we are all equal before a higher force. The same applies to humility, and to forgiving and forgetting.

Rage in Constellations

Albrecht Mahr

Is it possible that Family Constellation work could be a way to increase our understanding of the enormous and apparently escalating conflict in the world? Might it also contribute to finding some solutions?

It is now over a year since the attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon when we saw vivid images on our television screens of destruction and devastation. In the aftermath of these events we are experiencing the fragile ground between what we call 'good' and 'evil', and we can see the disturbing inconsistencies upon which these differentiations are based.

Are there similarities between these events and the incomprehensible ones that took place during the Holocaust, in South Africa, in Rwanda, in Yugoslavia and in many other countries, where thousands, millions of people were murdered without remorse or regret, in good conscience, out of a sense of necessity, justice or duty? Is it ever possible for us to understand the recurring explosive hate witnessed in ethnic, religious and racial conflict? Can it be moderated or even resolved? Is it possible that evil is an error of creation, and that it can be fought against, diminished, and through increased virtue finally defeated? I don't believe it can, or that we can escape the resurgence of that which is oppressed and defeated.

Realistically speaking, good and evil are inextricably bound one to the other, and the propagation of good does not necessarily diminish evil. It can sometimes increase it. Just as the source of good and evil remains incomprehensible and elusive, so our attempts to understand and control evil and destructiveness often elude us. We can do little else but wrestle with this impenetrable duality, perhaps until such time as we come into contact with the 'all-inclusive', which is above and beyond good and evil, where nothing is excluded and everything

belongs. Practically speaking, we will have achieved a great deal if we can occasionally have an experience like that reported by Ajahn Chah, a recently deceased Buddhist Vipassana Master from Thailand. During one of his most popular teaching sessions, a member of the audience suddenly stood up and shouted at him: *"All your magnificent words about compassion and loving kindness and in reality you are full of anger and hate!"* to which Ajahn Chah replied: *"This is true, but I don't act upon them."*

In constellation work we are often confronted with the issue of wrestling between good and evil, with our helplessness as well as surprising flashes of insight. The following discussion centres upon the theme of the rage and destructiveness that can come up in constellations and it is offered as a contribution towards a corrective balance in the development of this work. Maybe we have been attempting to be too good, too virtuous?

In recent months, I have observed that occasionally constellations have appeared to be too solemn and too sacred. Those qualities that, as a rule, are exactly the ones that belong to constellation work, i.e. devotion, depth and emotional response, occasionally seem to me to have been rather exaggerated. I have also noticed that the normal rituals of acknowledgment, respect, and reconciliation can sometimes result in rather shallow, passive and hollow solutions.

It is my opinion that the reasons for these phenomena in constellations are connected to a particular way of dealing with powerful, aggressive and destructive forces, such as rage, hate and the wish for revenge. In constellation work, as in many other branches of psychotherapy, anger - above all focused and intensely expressed rage - is regarded as one of the least acceptable emotions. This is in part because of an awareness of the possible repercussions of encouraging an expression of

this type of emotion, which can result in destruction, devastation and guilt. A belief has developed within constellation work that implies that anger, hate and destructive impulses are generally secondary or surface emotions. They serve to protect the individual from the unbearable pain of the underlying primary emotions of hurt love, longing, despair, or facing up to personal guilt. Moreover, it is often assumed that an individual's anger or rage is not their own but rather that it is unconsciously carried on behalf of another member of the system. Even when the rage clearly belongs to the individual it generally has been accepted among constellation facilitators that it should be expressed in a calm and composed manner, so that it is felt deeply and with more effect.

It is generally accepted that if the rage were to be expressed vehemently, then it is likely to rob the solution of strength.

Such assumptions are in many cases accurate and of great value in their application to practical work. However, if the 'often' becomes an 'always' and any strong aggression expressed in constellations has little, or no acceptable place, then we are excluding a powerful and potentially healing force. The consequence of such exclusion may be to aggravate a problem and to make the situation worse. For example, the aggression may return through the back door against the therapist, and burden the client if they fail to align themselves with the image of a resolution. Alternatively, the client may demonstrate an intensification of auto-aggressive symptoms, such as depression, loss of energy, or psychosomatic problems.

Dealing with Rage in Constellations

It would appear, according to the conventional tried and tested point of view, that it is sensible not to encourage the expression of rage and intense anger in constellations. If, for example, the client has undertaken other forms of therapy and has already extensively and cathartically experienced the emotion, then its expression in a constellation may indicate a tendency towards the dramatic. This will hinder insight rather than facilitate it. The same is true of repeated angry accusations. In

such instances, it is necessary to work towards those deeper levels of sadness and painful insight that are masked by the anger and scorn.

However, there are occasions when it might be appropriate to actively encourage the expression of anger, hate, and rage in a constellation. This is especially so when these emotions are not apparent, or are only indirectly evident. For example, there are clients who, as a result of painful or traumatic experiences, have every reason to be enraged but who do not express their sense of grievance; or those who, through therapeutic experiences, have become aware of the existence of their anger, but who nevertheless are unable to feel it. There are other clients who willingly adhere to systemic thinking patterns and caught in their entanglements and blind loyalty, they rationalise the hurtful behaviour of their parents, or family members. Clients who fall into these categories may appear frozen, paralysed and resigned following traumatic experiences, or they may be exhausted by the hopeless attempt to turn away from hurtful, disappointing and inaccessible parents. For many of these clients, the intense experience and the systemically framed expression of anger and rage can be a decisive step towards resolution.

Such a step may also be appropriate when usually reliable measures for the resolution of profound disappointment or pain have proved to be ineffective. In other words, when all the familiar movements of constellation work: expressing the pain, fear or frustration; accessing the original source of deep primal love that is there in spite of everything; letting go of an assumed guilt that has been carried on behalf of a perpetrator; and making the bowing movement in front of the parents - when these and similar movements have no effect, then it is often connected to a **Rage/Fear/Guilt Complex** that needs resolving. When this is ignored or avoided, then we are confronted with the energy of false righteousness that I spoke of earlier. Occasionally the client demonstrates an almost zealous willingness to honour and bow down, but the relief felt in such cases is not so much an act of resolution but rather a successful avoidance. Peace achieved in haste, and reconciliation in the face of unconscious anger and rage - 'reaction

formation' in psychoanalytic terms - operate from an attempt to sweeten a bitter pill, and lead nowhere.

Indications as to the presence of a Rage/Fear/Guilt dynamic can also emerge in a constellation in the reactions of the client's representative. The therapeutic value of the representative's perception is, in this instance, particularly apparent. When a client cannot experience their anger because of a fantasy of the terrible consequences that might ensue, then the perception of the representative - in other words, one of the client's hitherto unavailable aspects of Self - is very useful. A representative will often experience the anger and rage immediately; they may also feel somatic reactions such as heat, powerful muscular contractions, or extreme nausea. The representative can in this way prepare the client to directly and consciously experience these hidden dynamics of their personality when, later on, they are placed in their constellation. In this phase it can be helpful if, for a while, the representative stands behind the client to give them support and encouragement to express their hitherto repressed feelings.

In my experience thus far, dealing directly with intense anger and rage is called for in approximately 5% of constellations, that is to say one client in a workshop of twenty participants.

Technique and Insight: The Systemic Frame of Rage in Constellations

Above all, there are two important considerations when dealing with powerful aggressive impulses. Firstly, without an insight into the complexity of the psychological structures and dynamics that develop around rage, the intense experience of confronting this violent feeling will remain blind and pointless and will be reduced to short-term, cathartic relief. Secondly, a simple understanding of extreme rage and of the inevitable dynamic of guilt that is connected with it will not be enough to bring about a resolution. It will be empty and may well lead to an overall paralysis in the flow of emotion unless it is accompanied by a forceful and passionate expression of feeling, particularly in the physical body. There is a vital correlation between experience and insight and I offer the

following suggestion of how to manage rage in constellations.

Crucial for a targeted approach to rage is an in-depth case history of the origins of the wrath, of the painful early experiences and the systemic burdens of those involved. The often-used rule of approaching constellation work with little information is not applicable in this context. In order to compassionately lead the client into his rage, with helpful challenges and coherent suggestions for a resolution, we need a detailed knowledge of the specific painful or traumatic experiences. Emptiness and intuition are all well and good, but in this case they become even better when founded on facts.

Working with rage begins when things become critical. What I mean by this is, there will be a point at which the constellation unfolds into a scene where the story of the client's Rage/Fear/Guilt dynamic is present in its bare essentials. The constellation develops to a point where the original violent aggressive impulse emerges, as does the shock of confronting it, and its ultimate rejection and repression. Only at this point will there be sufficient energy in the field to enable a therapist to work with the client; their rage cannot be avoided and the opportunity for a successful resolution becomes real.

In practical terms the flow comes from a re-enactment and expression of the traumatic experience, alongside new systemic insights. With a close examination of a case history and a thorough sequential unfolding, it soon becomes apparent where the client is seeking a resolution. The following example illustrates this procedure in the case of a conflict between a man and his father.

Father and Son Conflicts

A constellation is set up in which a number of male ancestors support the client's father. The father's father and all his male ancestors going back three or four generations stand at his side or behind him, supporting his arms and back, so that he becomes rooted and immovable. The son stands opposite his father and holds him tightly by the wrists. Breathing deeply and quickly, as if he

were on a gentle jog, he looks at the father and breathes into the place where the blocked aggression needs resolution. His hands remain holding his father's wrists, his feet firmly on the ground. Thus the son is supported in a full expression of his disappointment, hurt and rage through his voice and body. In so doing he is able to fully and freely express his potentially murderous and destructive rage, whilst at the same time feeling entirely safe. In this way he is protected from the risk of annihilating others and from being annihilated himself.

There are a number of characteristic features in such cases of conflict between a father and a son. For example, the power of his own strength and that of his ancestors may surprise the son. His own aggression may trigger a reciprocal awakening and resurrection of aggressive forces within the system. The male ancestors are reminded of their own powerful strength, which in its original potent state they now place at the man's disposal. When this happens, then a great and dramatic battle unfolds into peaks of joyful awareness as the beauty and abundance of this strength emerge. The ancestors – together with the holding circle that represents humanity - testify openly and non-judgmentally to the necessity, beauty and greatness - and the limitations - of the son's strength.

As the rage is confronted in a constellation there will be a cycle of restraint, then of powerful expression, followed by exhaustion. This cycle may have to be repeated several times. With each wave - and this is particularly important - the actual experience is connected to new insights. Pauses, especially in the exhausted 'I can't go on' phase, are doorways to a growing awareness of the frightening and tormented illusions that are associated with the expression of rage. These may include vivid images of severely injuring or even murdering the father, resulting in losing him forever. This causes unbearable guilt, resulting in fear of the father's revenge and consequent suicidal tendencies.

In this place of heightened awareness, repressed memories of experiences at certain decisive moments in life are often re-awakened. These moments of pausing, of closing the eyes and

going fully inside and being fully aware of the body, are precious pearls in the process towards healing. They allow moving and sometimes shattering insights. Here, at these moments, even during an extreme expression of rage, the son can see for the first time that he cannot destroy his father. He can also have a sense of whether there is still some unfinished business that he has to attend to.

Often during this joint process the entangled ancestors also experience insights. For this reason it is helpful when setting up the constellation to name each individual ancestor. It can become clear to them what the consequences of their actions are, for their son, grandson and great-grandson. They can see the repercussions and the suffering caused by their actions. They might express their regret and remorse and be given an opportunity to make amends by blessing the son and setting him free. Through his fear, guilt, despair, regret and exhaustion, the son can eventually find his way back to the original source of respect and love towards his father. In turn, he may witness his father's primal love for him.

Case Study

In two earlier constellations, Leo had worked in depth with his family of origin and with his father, whom he experienced as weak and emotionally absent. There had been many losses in his father's family. Leo's grandfather had died in an accident when his father was a very young child. His great-grandfather had also died when his son was a young boy. Leo's father's elder brother died of meningitis when his father was twelve years old. Out of a loyalty to her socially superior family his father's mother was unable to stand by her husband.

Leo had an understanding of all these issues, having already worked through them in the familiar solution-focused process, and he felt some relief. He was less burdened and driven and had, for the first time, entered into a long-term relationship with a warm-hearted woman. In this relationship, however, he often initiated arguments and this regularly resulted in him running away from the relationship and experiencing suicidal impulses.

In the discussion preceding the constellation, Leo was concerned about the chronic resentment and reproach he felt towards his father, which he had never fully admitted to before. When in touch with it, his mood became one of agonizing restlessness or exhaustion. In setting up his constellation Leo placed the representatives for himself and his father far apart with their backs to each other. After a long period of standing motionless, Leo's representative slowly fell to his knees, then onto his hands. Then he began to crawl awkwardly, at first with some uncertainty, then with increasing purpose, in a wide, twisting arch towards his father. The striking of his hands on the floor became increasingly forceful; eventually he pushed his head and shoulders between his father's calves and like a bull, tried to lift him off the ground. He was unsuccessful. This scene was gripping and deeply moving but also frightening in its violence.

At this point Leo was brought into the constellation, supported for a while by his representative who stood behind him. In the manner described above, he positioned himself in front of his father and his ancestors, breathed deeply into his feelings of longing, bitter disappointment, hate, scorn and wish for revenge, and expressed them physically in the form of ever more powerful screams and yells that came up from his belly. Throughout this his father and the solid and powerful group of male ancestors held him in safety.

Following this intense expression of pain and despair with regard to his father, whom he perceived as unapproachable, there was a decisive moment when Leo felt the terrible fear of having annihilated him with his rage, and his only way to balance this out would be to kill himself. At this point, he wanted to give up, and he collapsed. What he had not anticipated was that his father and his ancestors would offer him powerful encouragement to continue and to prove himself a worthy descendant. They embraced him in a truly solemn, challenging and loving way, and he was only able to recognise this in the moment when he looked them fully in the eye. He stood up, gathered himself and allowed his body to express what was necessary.

At the end, he stood in front of his father and looked at him peacefully for a long time. Then he turned and looked intently at each member of the group who had witnessed this event and above all at his partner who was also at the workshop. It was obvious that he had taken an important and courageous step and that the effects of this experience needed further attention and time to develop.

Mother and Son, Father and Daughter Conflicts

The same principles apply to conflicts between a mother and son, a mother and daughter and father and daughter, with some important adjustments.

In conflicts between a child and a parent of the opposite sex any direct bodily contact can be experienced as an intensely sexual encounter. As a result of this, I have found alternative methods to be more appropriate.

When a mother and her son are involved I stand them opposite each other in such a way that body contact is not possible, and the son is physically well-supported by his father and his male ancestors, thereby allowing his feelings their full expression without crossing the safe boundary between him and his mother. In this way, the male ancestors demonstrate to the son the correct attitude to a mother and to women: that is, a respectful, loving and clear stance. In constellations such as these, the very best in men is propagated through the ancestors, something that is conveyed to the son while he wrestles to find himself. Behind the mother stand her female ancestors, supporting her in her dignity as a mother and as a woman, as well as in her compassion and suffering if her son has rejected her. These ancestral groups become powerful non-judgmental sources of strength that help to acknowledge and resolve the entanglements.

The same applies when a daughter stands at a safe distance opposite her father. The mother and the female ancestors, who support her, teach her about the dignity and strength of women and about expressing this in a positive way towards men. This may happen in a number of ways, for

example: through a clear assessment of personal guilt and responsibility and that of others; through not taking on a debilitating victim role; and through compassion, humour and generosity. The father's ancestors encourage and support him in the task of truly seeing his daughter; acknowledging his own guilt; and, if necessary, lovingly resolving the daughter's confusion, and recognising his original affection or love for her mother.

In the course of such a process we do not encounter just the perfect ancestors; they appear exactly as they were in life - called upon, however, in this exceptional situation and in spite of their own entanglements, to remember to the best of their ability and to pass on to their descendants, the wisdom that they have acquired through their own fate.

The Therapist's Responsibility

Our clients' rages can be a source of great challenge to us as therapists. As a result, it is helpful to gain some insight into this emotion in ourselves, and into our reactions to the wrath of others.

A number of years ago, a friend of mine, a psychoanalyst who also worked experientially, told me how in the presence of a dejected client, he grew so sleepy that he slipped off his chair onto the floor and was on the brink of drifting into an anaesthetized state, when he heard his client's worried voice calling from far away: *"This was not what I wanted!"* Suddenly he was wide-awake again and he asked the client: *"What was it you didn't want?"* *"I didn't want you to die."* In this way my friend and his client were able, for the first time, to address the latter's rage.

As therapists dealing with unconscious repressed rage in our clients, we must reckon with our powerful feelings of counter-transference such as tiredness, confused restlessness, personal anger and contrived gentleness. Only when we are able to deal sufficiently fearlessly with rage, that is, to perceive it with neutral interest, can we support the client in the above-mentioned procedure. In a constellation it is necessary to stand physically close to the client and to reassure him through bodily contact and words that the therapist is totally prepared for the rage to be expressed fully,

and that his safety, and that of others taking part, is ensured. The client needs to understand that the issue is one of powerful, authentic expression as well as of experienced insight. In such a process, compassionate provocation, loving firmness, patience and humour are good companions. For the therapist, this highly concentrated work can be totally fascinating, satisfying, and instructive for their personal development.

Contraindications

As I mentioned above, clients who have an inclination towards excessive expression of emotion and who are constantly seeking cathartic therapeutic experiences without real insight, will not benefit from this procedure, although it will cause no real harm.

Above all, clients who incline towards very weak personal boundaries and who suffer from a burden of defence mechanisms such as projection, de-personalisation or fantasy, should not be exposed to an intensive mobilisation of distressed feelings. Neither should psychotically inclined clients, or those who are physically very weak or at high risk of a heart attack. When spiritual or physical signs of over-burdening and risk become apparent, it goes without saying that the work should be interrupted immediately.

Habib Davanloo's Psychoanalytical Short-term Therapy

The Iranian psychiatrist and psychotherapist Habib Davanloo, Professor of Psychiatry in Montreal, has developed an original and highly effective form of short-term therapy - generally about twenty sessions - which focuses entirely on the resolution of the Anger/Fear/Guilt dynamic.

Davanloo's Intensive Psychodynamic Short-term Therapy as described in his book: 'Unlocking the Unconscious' focuses on the premise that childhood trauma inevitably provokes a response of rejection, rage and a wish to retaliate. These movements are suppressed but are substituted in the conscious mind by a fear of loss, guilt and punishment. Alongside the fear numerous defence mechanisms begin to operate, which ultimately combine to form complex spiritual and physical symptoms.

His simple, highly differentiated model is used to uncover the individual Rage/Fear/Guilt dynamic. Davanloo works in an extraordinarily precise and confrontational way with these life crippling defence mechanisms in sessions that may last several hours. His methods have earned him the badge of 'love without mercy'. The frightening impulses of anger and rage are activated and remembered with great intensity during the transference relationship with the therapist. This requires a great deal of the therapist. Ultimately, the process goes through numerous, ever-deepening cycles to the original source of love and to the profound pain of the child, to his feelings of guilt and shame, and to his inner desire for healing for himself and for those close to him.

Davanloo is a highly controversial figure and is almost unknown in mainstream psychotherapy, even though his book was published eleven years ago. His work requires a particular ability and inclination on the part of the therapist. A number of years ago, I tried to work with Davanloo's approach but discovered that I was not suited to it. However, the documented results of his treatment are so convincing that I consider Davanloo's work to be extremely valuable and a courageous contribution to the difficult field of working therapeutically with highly destructive impulses. This man, in his way, is conducting peace work. He enables the client not merely to think of evil but to experience it directly at an intense level and in so doing, to approach its close relative - suppressed love. From the point of view of constellation work, I have benefited above all from Davanloo's highly differentiated perception of defence mechanisms, and his courageous exposure of their life-limiting effects.

Systemic Beginnings

A female colleague recently suggested the phrase 'Systemic Beginnings' as opposed to 'Systemic Solutions'. 'Solutions' has a conclusive quality to it, whereas 'Beginnings' describes fresh starts and new openings. And so I return to the beginning of this article. The process of dealing with rage in constellations touches basic questions to which answers are not readily available. Are we fundamentally good and only reactively bad? Is War the father and mother of all things? Are the polarities of good and evil inextricably linked

because only in this way can each know of the existence of the other?

In 'African Fever' (Kapuszinski 2000, p.209) Ryszard Kapuszinski tells of Hamed, from Somalia who spoke about the often fatal conditions of life experienced by his tribe in the desert:

"Drought, heat, the dry wells, and death on the road are integral to life. Without them, man would never be conscious of the true joy of rain, the sacred taste of water and the life-giving sweetness of milk. Cattle would be unable to delight in juicy grass, to grow intoxicated by the scent of pastureland. Man would be ignorant of the feeling associated with climbing into the cold, crystal-clear water of a river. It would never occur to him that this was purely and simply equivalent to the Kingdom of Heaven."

In a memorable training group I attended a while ago, a number of us took some time to share memories about the experiences of our families during the War and the Nazi period. A music therapist then gave musical instruments to half the group in order to express what they had felt during this process; the other half held and observed the experience. Later the two groups swapped roles. After a tentative beginning in both groups, an overwhelmingly intense and powerful expression of warlike sounds, rhythms and tones developed to the extent that it was almost unbearable for some participants.

Afterwards as we processed our experience, the word inevitable was used often, as if it would have been impossible to avoid this powerful force. Expressing it was an absolute necessity.

The closing sounds of the musical expression were quiet, peaceful and had a pensive, open quality to them. The beginning of a new cycle? We could not say for sure, but it appeared to us all as though a space had opened up in the room.

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Psychosis & Schizophrenia: Disturbed Bonding in the Family System

Franz Ruppert

Psychosis and Schizophrenia

In diagnosing psychotic illnesses theorists confine themselves to the study of specific symptoms such as disorganised behaviour, hallucinations and delusions. Disorganised behaviour is normally an extreme retreat from everyday activities and duties and in some people it is combined with all the signs of depression, and in others with an extremely high level of activity. Common to both the depressive and the manic form of psychosis is a high arousal of all kinds of feelings, which negatively affect a person's perception and thinking. Hallucinations, a type of false perception, can affect all sensory channels and can be experienced as, for example, seeing phantoms, hearing voices, smelling corpses, or feeling spiders on the skin. The most important forms of delusion are: delusions of grandeur, love, jealousy, persecution, and body-related delusions. The narrowest definition of psychosis confines itself to delusional fantasies and elaborate hallucinations where the patient has no insight into their pathological condition. A slightly less narrow definition includes hallucinations that are recognised as such by the sufferer. The diagnosis of psychosis is often equated with schizophrenia and an alteration of the whole personality of a patient.

Psychiatric and Psychological Explanations

In the opinion of medically orientated psychiatry, psychosis and other related illnesses are disorders of the neurological metabolism, a problem of the human hardware, so to speak. For psychiatrists, persecutory ideas and hallucinations are not seen as having any connection to the actual reality of a psychotic patient's life. In the search for the physiological origins of psychosis a multitude of explanations has been put forward over the last hundred years. They include: bad blood; defective genes; metabolic disturbances in the brain; and most recently, viruses. But in spite of extensive research there is still no conclusive proof for any of these theories. (Breggin 1996)

In my opinion, an arbitrary link between psychosocial and biological factors is also insufficient to explain the emergence of psychosis. The so-called 'Vulnerability Stress Model' cannot satisfactorily explain the phenomenon of schizophrenia. The problem with this model is that both factors – vulnerability and stress – are defined as being dependent on each other. The fact that a person is vulnerable to psychosis can only be established retrospectively i.e. after a breakdown it can be said that his information-processing ability was disturbed and he must have been under some inner or external psychosis-inducing stress. It is not possible specifically to define or quantify the degree of vulnerability in a person or to produce a list of stress factors that can be reliably linked to the origin of psychotic illnesses, or used as a predictor for the onset of psychosis.

Psychodynamic and psychoanalytic psychosis theories point towards a breakdown of ego function as a result of early childhood trauma, or aggressive and sexual impulses, which the psychotic patient was unable to cope with, or to integrate into their personality structure. The psychosis serves the function of overcoming the inability of the ego to cope with such aggressive sexual impulses. However, this model does not explain the fact that psychotic patients are able to behave normally for extended periods of their lives in between psychotic episodes, and are capable of rational thinking and appropriate feeling.

Another type of explanation is 'the communications within families' theory. This goes beyond the limitations of the previously cited accounts where the only focus is on the individual patient's brain or ego. A number of factors are seen as possible causes, or at least significant contributors to the development of psychosis: parents who don't communicate meaningfully (Bateson 1999); mothers who give confusing messages (the 'schizophrenia-inducing mother');

or a family atmosphere in which over-protectiveness or excessive control are the rule. It is not made clear, however, what causes the parents' behaviour, why a psychosis-inducing atmosphere is created, and where such confusing communication within the family comes from.

This article cannot take account of all the specific features of the different scientific disciplines, theories and schools of thought that have attempted to reach a better understanding of psychosis and schizophrenia. Nor does it thoroughly examine the current state of empirical research. However, my practical therapeutic experiences with people who have become psychotic have shown me that none of the explanations of psychosis and schizophrenia offered so far have satisfactorily solved the riddle of such an enormous breakdown in a person's psyche.

Experiences with Psychosis in Family Constellation Work

In my psychotherapeutic work I have been using Bert Hellinger's Family Constellations for the last eight years. Over time I have observed in constellations that the representatives of psychotic patients suddenly get a variety of symptoms: shaky legs; a feeling as if they are about to float off the ground; a sensation that their body is being torn into pieces; or an overwhelming, massive attack of rage. Some representatives feel as though they are in a fog, so that they don't know what is really happening around them. In a constellation, a psychosis seems to engender specific symptoms in the representatives that are relatively easy to diagnose.

I have run several family constellation seminars specifically for people who have experienced psychosis and for family members of psychotic persons. As a result of the experience of working with about fifty such clients in groups and individual therapy, I have recently formulated a hypothesis that may describe the specific family dynamics inherent in psychoses, and offer an explanation of how psychosis and schizophrenia occur within family bonding systems. (Ruppert 2002)

Case Study

I will describe a case study of my work with a young man who for no apparent reason suddenly

became psychotic. Then I will sum up some of my insights into the kinds of situations in families that lead to psychosis and schizophrenia over two, three or even four generations.

Peter, about thirty years of age, came for his first appointment in 1999. He seemed calm and composed and the only striking feature about him was his stilted speech. He used hackneyed expressions in almost every sentence, such as: "*So to speak*" or "*In a certain way*". When I asked him what might be the meaning of these expressions, he told me that he was using them so as not to say too much.

He told me that of late he had been isolating himself and wasn't going out much. He had felt insecure since his aunt died in a car accident a year ago. She was his father's older sister. The reason why he wanted psychotherapy was to become more self-confident in public. He often felt people disapproved of him and blood would rush to his head as he felt his shame.

A few days later in a telephone conversation with the psychiatrist who had prescribed him with antidepressant and anti-psychotic drugs and referred him for therapy, I learnt that Peter had been suffering from paranoid delusions since the beginning of the year. He felt persecuted, thought he was under surveillance and that others were plotting against him.

Peter was the first-born and had a sister seven years younger than him. He couldn't remember having had any childhood illnesses and seemed healthy, physically fit and strong. He had no problems at school and passed the equivalent of A-levels with good grades. He said that as a little boy, in order to impress his paternal grandmother, he had tried particularly hard at primary school.

After his A-levels he began his law studies. He lived in a flat-share with a friend and for a year had a girlfriend who was a student and the same age as him. He had never been suicidal. His psychological problems began when he failed his degree and moved back to live with his parents. At the beginning of therapy his aim was to re-sit his exams.

In my next meeting with Peter he presented me with all his delusional ideas: he was convinced that he had done something for which he was going to be punished. He experienced being

persecuted through the radio and television. When I asked him what he had done, he said that he didn't know for sure, but he thought he might have jumped a set of traffic lights on his bicycle and caused a traffic accident behind him. He was now suspicious of everyone, including his parents and friends. He thought they were all judging and disapproving of him and that there was no escape for him. He felt he had better give himself up and confess his crime. On the other hand, he believed that if he was not guilty, then an enormous injustice was being done to him in that even his most intimate thoughts were being observed by those close to him, especially his family.

At his first constellation workshop, when I asked him about traumatic events in his family Peter said that he did not know of any apart from his aunt's accident. He set up his constellation with representatives for his father, mother, sister and himself, all standing very close to each other. None of them felt good. When I brought a woman into the constellation, based on my hypothesis that there was someone missing in the system, she immediately fell to the ground, crying loudly. All the other members of the family looked at her with deep sorrow but no one seemed to be able to make any movement towards her. The father's representative was especially affected by the strange woman but didn't know what it meant. I broke off the constellation at this point. By the end of the day Peter was experiencing paranoid hallucinations and I felt that I had to give him an opportunity to talk about his thoughts and feelings to prevent a psychotic breakdown. After the workshop he continued to come to individual sessions, but the psychotherapy was not getting him anywhere.

The turning point in Peter's therapy came after separate interviews with his parents. His father and mother both singled out taboo events and secrets in each other's families:

- Peter's father remembered a serious car accident in his wife's family. His mother-in-law's first husband was hit by a car on the 31st of December 1945 and died a few days later in hospital.
- Peter's mother told me that her mother-in-law, her husband's mother, had confided to her on her deathbed that she had had a love affair with her husband's brother – Peter's great uncle. Nine months afterwards she gave birth to her first child, a daughter. This was the aunt who had recently died in a car accident, and whose death had left Peter feeling so insecure. possibly Peter's great-uncle.

After some more interviews with his mother my suspicion was confirmed; there were confusing and traumatic events in the family of origin of both parents that could have led to Peter's schizophrenia.

It became evident that the police and law courts had not followed up the circumstances of the death of the first husband of Peter's grandmother. A car had knocked him down and there were witnesses who said that the driver was at fault. Moreover, it was probable that the driver of the car was a highly regarded citizen in the town. Since the grandmother's first husband was a refugee and an outsider, one can't help thinking that the accident was covered up to protect a local person of high standing.

The grandmother had come to the town from Berlin with her one-year-old son in order to meet her husband who was returning from the War. After his death she married a local man and stayed in the town. She had five more children by him, the first being Peter's mother.

Something else that was striking in Peter's mother's system was the fact that her younger brother suddenly stopped working in his mid-thirties and went into early retirement for psychological reasons. He had the same first name as the grandmother's first husband.

In the father's family system there were confusing views about his mother's sexual relationships. It soon became obvious that Peter's father's sister, his aunt, was always quarrelling with her mother and reproaching her for something. It seemed that his aunt was suspicious and insisted that her mother tell her who her father was. Her mother always refused to tell. Peter's father refused to believe that his sister could be his uncle's child, even after his wife told him about his mother's deathbed confession.

Throughout this period Peter became more and more obsessed with what he called his 'recurring thoughts'. Words and phrases took hold of his mind which he regarded as 'bad' and 'dirty': "You dirty pig"; "Atomic war"; "Aids"; "Gassing the Jews"; "Whore"; "Scapegoat"; "Child molester". His condition deteriorated to such an extent that his father wanted to admit him into a clinic for further investigation. I managed to persuade him to wait and see whether the revelation of any family secrets would improve his son's condition.

Peter complained of being more and more tired and sleeping a great deal. Under these conditions it seemed hopeless to try and re-sit his exams. He became increasingly inactive and put on a lot of weight. It is hard to judge whether the anti-depressants also contributed to his weight gain, but this could not be ruled out. However, there was no point in advising him to stop his medication since he believed his illness was purely physical. To discontinue medication would probably have increased the likelihood of him being admitted to a psychiatric ward.

During an individual session Peter set up himself and his father using cushions. (In my individual therapy sessions the simple use of cushions to represent people and feelings has proved to be very helpful.) Peter put both cushions very close together. Father and son stood facing each other. When I stood in the place of the father I felt a strong urge to turn around in endless circles.

In a subsequent Family Constellations workshop I suggested Peter set up himself and his father's system based on his recurring thoughts. Immediately the representatives for the father, grandfather, grandmother, aunt and great-uncle became involved in a heated discussion, watched with great interest from the outside by Peter's representative. This dispute could have gone on forever. I could not find an intervention that might lead to a good solution. So I sent the grandfather, grandmother, aunt and great-uncle out of the room and they continued with their heated discussions. The remaining representative for the father felt no better, but his son, Peter, looked at him and seemed a little more relaxed.

This constellation showed me that the patient's soul was connected to the secret in his father's family and his confusion and insecurity came from there. The specific amoral and sexual themes in his recurring thoughts seemed to fit very well into the grandmother, grandfather, great-uncle triangle.

In subsequent individual sessions I concentrated on trying to get a better understanding of Peter's entanglements in his mother's system. He felt emotionally upset after talking to his mother about his grandmother's first husband's accidental death. He also told me that his phobic thoughts about being criminally prosecuted had begun on New Year's Eve 1998, the fifty-third anniversary of the road accident.

Together with Peter I tried to reconstruct the details of the accident and suggested to him that his fears of being prosecuted could be aligned with those of the car driver who had killed his grandmother's first husband. This man had not faced his guilt or responsibility and he must have lived in fear of being discovered and called to account. As an attempt towards a resolution of the entanglement in his soul I asked Peter to bow before the traumatic fate of his grandmother and her first husband. This ritual had a very calming effect on him.

Over the next few weeks, as Peter became increasingly stable, so his obsessive thoughts became less intense and he was able to clearly identify these thoughts as alien to his ego - *"I know that these thoughts are entirely irrational."* Nonetheless, he kept insisting on having experienced 'thought transmissions', i.e. he predicted what someone was about to say and how he was going to react.

Peter made further significant therapeutic progress when both his parents agreed to participate in a Family Constellations workshop with me. Unfortunately his father did not return on the second day. However, his mother had gathered some information from her relatives prior to the event. She found out that her own mother had been raped by a Russian soldier in Berlin at the end of the War. She set up her present family (herself, her husband, her son Peter, and her daughter) and added some other important people in her family of origin. This constellation clearly showed Peter's grandmother's trauma and how her daughter was still entangled with it. Therefore I asked Peter's mother to bow before her mother's fate. Then I placed her in front of her mother with her back to her. Facing her son she said to him: *"I will protect you from what is behind me. You are free."* Peter's representative felt good about this.

Peter was not present at the above-mentioned seminar but he reported at our next meeting that his mother had told him in great detail about her constellation. But she had not told him what I considered to be the crucial part for the solution - her bowing before the fate of her mother, Peter's grandmother. I therefore asked him to bow before two cushions representing the fates of his grandmother and mother. He did this with real seriousness and dignity.

He came to his next session clearly changed, much more confident and less tired. He had decided not to re-take his exams but instead to start an apprenticeship as a trader in a publishing company. Step by step he began to disentangle himself from the emotional confusion in his family soul that had seriously undermined his own emotional stability and clarity. He gradually found some inner peace.

After three years of therapy Peter's obsessive thoughts have not altogether disappeared and I think there is a slight risk that they will continue while his father remains unwilling to clear up the confusion and uncertainty in his family of origin. Peter's father still refuses to believe in his mother's deathbed confession. To accept it would confront him with the possibility that his sister's car accident was connected to the conflict between her and her mother. Just before she died in the accident she had a particularly upsetting argument with her mother. The schizophrenic situation for Peter is that on the one hand he loves his father deeply, and on the other hand he cannot really trust him.

In my opinion, it is clear that a space is now available that allows Peter to have an insight into what has caused the confusion in his soul. The injustice and rape in his mother's family of origin can never be resolved or expiated. The confusion about his aunt's parentage is also not going to be resolved. However, Peter now has the possibility of making peace in his mind with the ghosts of the past. He can look at the events in his parents' family systems knowing that he is not responsible. He cannot atone for the guilt of others, regardless of what really happened. He will no longer need to feel the shame for what others have done.

Hypothesis for the Development of Psychotic Symptoms

As a consequence of working psychotherapeutically with psychotic patients and their families over many years, I am increasingly confident that my hypothesis can help us to come closer to understanding the mysterious phenomenon and syndrome of psychosis. This can be done through a combination of insights from research into bonding (Bowlby 1979), trauma theory, and Hellinger's insights into trans-generational systemic feelings and the effects of systemic conscience.

I do not believe that the roots of psychotic symptoms lie in a brain disorder, a malfunction of perception and information processing, or in a disturbance in the development of the sexual or aggressive drive. In my opinion psychosis develops in the family of origin, where family members are intimately related and bonded together through their feelings and share something that we can call 'a common soul'. Fifty years ago John Bowlby wrote about the existence and enormous relevance of the human bonding system, but it is only fairly recently that his findings have begun to be used to explain mental illnesses. In addition, we now have Bert Hellinger's more recent findings about the trans-generational effects of family conscience (Hellinger, Weber, Beaumont 1998). At present we have a greater possibility for a fuller understanding of the strange psychological symptoms and behaviours that are logical consequences of the interpersonal exchange of thoughts and feelings within a family bonding system.

Interpersonal relations leave positive as well as negative emotional traces in the family soul. Traumatic events that cause the family to fall apart leave all the members in a confused state of mind with no relief from feelings of anxiety, guilt and shame. The more the feelings are avoided, the more fixed they become.

The souls of children and grandchildren are receptive to the unresolved traumas of their parents and grandparents, and to their repressed thoughts and feelings. They take them into their own psyches. These thoughts and feelings that the parents have been unable to integrate are internalised by the children and grandchildren and felt in their souls, as if they were their own. In time they become mixed up with their own experiences. Like a virus in computer software, they occupy the ego-programme of descendants once they are activated by a triggering event.

According to trauma theory one can look at psychosis as an eruption of the repressed memories of traumatising events in a family system. They are like nightmares. They do not torment as much those immediately concerned with the real events but rather those in later generations whose psychological defence systems are more fragile, so that the repressed memories are able to intrude into their psyches.

Psychosis often occurs suddenly and unexpectedly. We do not yet have any conclusive explanation for

this. We may find certain clues if we look at psychosis as an event that takes place beyond consciousness on the level of the family soul. Psychosis seems to happen when someone in a later generation finds themselves in a parallel situation to the original event. Thoughts and feelings from that event then infiltrate and confuse his/her thinking and feeling. Trigger events can be a death, a separation from parents or a lover, an engagement or wedding, the birth of a child, or the anniversary of the original event.

A three, sometimes four-generational sequence often occurs in relation to psychotic illnesses - grandparents - parents - children. Initially the grandparents experience something that creates a traumatic, confusing and schizophrenic situation in the family. The children suspect something is wrong, but know that they are not allowed to think, or talk about, the confusing events. To do so would weaken their parents and endanger the continuity of the family system. Talking would be too dangerous for everyone and the feelings in the family system of anxiety, grief, guilt and shame would become out of control. Consequently a fog is created around the traumatic events.

In turn the children learn to repress things. They do this unconsciously as a defence mechanism to protect themselves and their parents. What remains is a nameless, incomprehensible, yet deep-seated insecurity in the whole bonding system.

This insecurity intrudes into the psyches of the children of the parents' generation. That which is repressed, nebulous and taboo reaches the grandchildren as dissociated feelings and thoughts. This generation, unlike that of their parents, has no awareness that there are any events in the family system that mustn't be thought or spoken about.

What we call hallucination is the certainty of a child in the generation following the traumatic event that there is more in their field of perception than their parents would like them to believe. The hallucinations are also their attempt to unearth something hidden. What we call 'a delusional system' is, in fact, the logical elaboration of their suspicion that there is something hidden in their family. The powerful force of these dark secrets shapes their fate (Bradshaw, 1995). If we bring the delusions down to earth, this secret can be recognised as something human. When the secret

that has been kept in the dark for generations is finally brought to light, then the psychotic patient can be released from his delusions.

Patterns in Schizophrenic Family Situations

From my experience with psychotic patients I can see two clusters of schizophrenic situations in families from which psychoses develop over two, three or four generations. The first concerns children who are not allowed to know their father's true identity; the second concerns mysterious deaths in the family system.

Secrets about fathers. There are a number of circumstances that can cause confusion about a child's real father:

- Incestuous love affairs between fathers and daughters, brothers and sisters, uncles and nieces, step-fathers and step-daughters
- Love affairs between a woman and a man before her marriage to another man
- Love affairs between a married woman and another man
- Love affairs between a man from a high social class and a woman from a lower one. Historically, the man's parents seldom accepted such a marriage.

Sometimes the woman is already pregnant by her lover when she hastily marries another man and pretends to her unsuspecting husband that the child is his. Since she is having sex with her husband, it isn't obvious that he isn't the child's father. She keeps it a secret, as do all the others who know the truth. Often her husband has his suspicions - perhaps the child doesn't look anything like him - but he isn't keen to admit this, or the fact that he has been cuckolded.

Sometimes a woman marries one man but continues a previous relationship with the man she really loves, and becomes pregnant by him. That may be made easier by the prolonged absence of her husband, for instance, if he is away as a soldier in the War. As she continues to have sexual relations with her lover as well as her husband she alone knows the truth about the child's father and she lies rather than threaten her marriage or reputation. If the truth were known it would destroy the cohesion of the family, so she must try to cover her tracks. She can, for example, deflect attention away from her indiscretion through exaggerated devotion to her husband. Or, torn between her love for the child's father

and the pressure not to admit to it publicly, she tries to repress her loving feelings. She becomes hard and shut off, emotionally unavailable to her husband and her children.

In my observation, there is a second category of family dynamics that can lead to psychotic illness, resulting from mysterious deaths or murders in the family system.

There are some specific scenarios that can cause confusion about deaths:

- Uncertainty as to whether the death of a family member was an accident, a suicide, a murder, or a death supported by the actions of some family members
- Uncertainty as to whether parents did enough, or fulfilled their responsibility, in trying to save the life of a child who was ill or in danger.

A particularly heavy burden is imposed upon the family when someone who belongs to the system has actively brought about the death of another family member, for instance, if a man kills his first wife in order to marry his second wife. An abortion late in pregnancy is also experienced in the system as a murder.

In Germany, we regularly come across situations in constellations where grandchildren begin to shake as soon as their grandparents who lived during the Nazi regime are put up in a system. In such cases it can be assumed that the grandparents were deeply involved in the Nazi dictatorship, for example as members of the SS, and that their actions cannot be tolerated by the family conscience, or rationalised away as acts of self-defence. Most probably they committed acts that, even under the altered moral values of war, must be looked upon as arbitrary murders, committed against totally innocent and defenceless people. Sometimes the children of these murderers protect their parents and there is a taboo against knowing the true function of the father's position in the Party, or the Army. Often the parents' generation deny murders that were committed directly or indirectly under the Hitler dictatorship, e.g. the acts of judges, prosecutors, doctors or psychiatrists. The grandchildren, however, still feel the threat from a grandfather who, in his function as a judge or district administrator, was responsible for the deaths of many innocent people. He remains frightening and causes terror in the souls of his descendants.

Another important source of confusion in a family in the Nazi context is the fact that some people betrayed Jewish relatives and so delivered them to death in the concentration camps. Only the revelation of the truth can help when, for example, one of the grandchildren behaves like one of the grandfather's victims and disappears into the darkness of a psychosis as if they too live in a concentration camp and are doomed to die.

A murder that is not cleared up and punished by the law may, under certain circumstances, lead to a later family member re-experiencing the traumatic feelings associated with this crime and in a state of psychosis unconsciously repeating a murder or criminal act.

In my experience, the symptoms of Mania and Paranoia seem to fall into two basic patterns, as follows:

- When the symptoms of psychosis manifest themselves as a manic compulsion to act, or speak, or to have many love affairs, then this normally points to suppressed feelings of great love in the family system.
- Paranoid feelings of tremendous anxiety, guilt and shame are probably the symptomatic expressions of a denied guilt and responsibility for a death or murder in the family system.

Consequences for Psychotherapeutic Work

The above discussion shows that therapeutic work with psychosis cannot focus solely on the physiology or neurology of the patient. The patients are only the symptom-bearers. Meaningful therapy must include their parents and all those who may be able to name the confusing and taboo-ridden events in the family system. The fact that one cannot always rely on the co-operation of parents is clear from the above-mentioned case study. The parents and relatives may, consciously or unconsciously, prefer to hold the secret or the denial, in order not to threaten their very fragile inner stability. Psychiatric or medical explanations and treatments for their children's illness fit more comfortably with their denial.

Without the co-operation of the parents it is much harder to get to the root causes of the psychotic illness. Even if the parents, for their own psychological survival, have learned to repress completely what may be causing psychosis in their children, one should, nevertheless, try and

persuade them to participate in the therapeutic process for their children's sake. One has to admire those parents who do face the risk of a family constellation in order to help their psychotic child find a way out of the entanglement.

As a rule, all the siblings come under the influence of a family secret. Often they are heavily burdened and show symptoms of psychosomatic illness. When the psychotic patient recovers, there is a risk that one of his siblings may take over the role of bringing to light the confusion, injustice, guilt or shame in the family soul. So it is important not only to treat the symptom-bearer but also to look at the whole family system. Often it is the first-born in the family who carries in their soul the dissociated energies of confused feelings in the system. Should it happen that the first-born is released from this plight because, for example, he/she is the wrong sex to repeat the original trauma, then the second or third child is at risk of becoming psychotic and carrying in his/her soul the burden of confusion.

The psychotic symptoms are the trail leading back to the traumatic and confusing event in a family system. When we follow this trail, refusing to be distracted by anything superficial, we reach the goal. The psychotic symptoms give us a clue about the family secret or taboo, while at the same time they shield it from exposure.

Without any prior knowledge of the confusing events mirrored in the psychosis I do not think that family constellations alone can help find a resolution. However, they can act as a trigger for progress in psychotherapy and so present a chance for secret events to come to light. But it does not make much sense to let a patient set up a family constellation when the facilitator has little knowledge of the family history and no idea what could have led to a psychotic breakdown.

If in a constellation something strange is brought into consciousness for which there is no explanation in the family system, we have to leave it at that and hope that what has been brought to light will go on working towards a good resolution in the patient's soul. I have often experienced this happening. Any speculations only tend to increase the confusion.

The view of psychosis presented here offers a plausible explanation for why severe mental disturbances are so difficult to understand as meaningful psychological processes. It also demonstrates why the patients themselves cannot contribute to uncovering the cause of their illness and why they are at the mercy of the psychic confusion. It also becomes easier to understand

why parents are often faced with a complete riddle when their child suddenly, out of the blue, becomes restless and starts to develop psychotic symptoms.

With this insight into the real causes of psychotic symptoms it is easier to understand the tendency of lay people, as well as experts, to suppose that the origins of psychosis lie in the patients themselves, or in obvious external conditions like puberty or drug taking, and not in the wider family system. Many members of the medical and psychosocial professions seem to be allied with the taboo against recovering the memory of a trauma, or exposing family secrets. Professional helpers are often reluctant to mention family details that can bring about enormous feelings of anxiety, guilt, and shame in their clients, as well as massive resistance.

The family dynamics of psychosis confront me as a psychotherapist with the limits of my competence. The feelings of bonding within a family system are at least as powerful as the instincts and drives in an individual as postulated by psychoanalytic theory. Sometimes a child will sacrifice his happiness and his life so that his family can continue to exist. Sometimes his parents sacrifice him as a compensation for their own guilt. Sometimes whole families will sacrifice themselves rather than face the truth or expose their secrets. In cases such as these we must withdraw and accept what is. But for those who want to find a good resolution to the threatening past in their family history we can be of some help in ending this poisonous process of confusion.

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