

# INTERNATIONAL BULLETIN

Issue 12, Spring 2001

Nummer 12, Frühling 2001

## INTRODUCTION

In this issue you will find passages from the brochure edited by Björn Krondorfer on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the International Summer Program on the Holocaust. He explains the aim of the Summer Program and Daniela Müller tells about her experiences during the Program of 1999. Quotes from an interview with four other participants in the Summer Program of 1999 have been published in German.

Teresa Howard wrote a text titled: 'It isn't the extreme right we should fear but ourselves'. You will also find an announcement of a workshop she and Ulrich Weber from Germany will organise this summer. The deadline for registration is June 1.

Some years ago Dr. Martijn Lindt from the Netherlands wrote a dissertation titled 'When one's roots are tabooed', in which he described how religious experiences of his interviewees helped them to cope with the past. For this issue he wrote an article on the same subject.

From a group of NS-children in Norway we received a review of the activities which they organised last year.

In December 2000, the second channel of the Belgian Television transmitted a program about the fate of collaborators' children in Belgium, the so-called children of the Repression.

I wrote a short review of this documentary film.

As early as 1987 I tried to contact children of collaborators in Belgium, but in vain. Each effort failed. In May I will have an encounter with one of the interviewees: an exciting development.

I hope that you will enjoy reading this issue. Your reactions and suggestions as well as articles are welcome.

All the best,

Gonda Scheffel-Baars

[This compilation does not include all the articles mentioned in the introduction]

## **WHAT IS THE INTERNATIONAL SUMMER PROGRAM ON THE HOLOCAUST ?**

A brief description on our web page reads as follows: "The International Summer Program on the Holocaust (ISPH) brings together students from American and German colleges and universities to address the legacy of the Holocaust. Its mission is to create understanding of the contemporary significance of the history of the Holocaust through one-month long study, travel and dialogue between Jewish and non-Jewish students".

This is a good definition for the condensed space of two sentences, but it does not tell much about the complexity of the different levels of learning with which we engage the students.

The program does not follow any traditional class-room format in which an instructor provides historical facts about the Holocaust. Rather, these third-generation students from different national, religious, and ethnic backgrounds are given an opportunity to articulate their own voices and make meaning of this history. Not that facts are unimportant. However, facts alone do not automatically lead to understanding. True understanding, we believe, requires the engagement of the whole person - intellectually, emotionally, and biographically.

Rather than teaching the third generation what to think about the Holocaust, we encourage them to discover what meaning these events hold for them as they search together - and argue with each other - as a heterogeneous group. Travelling to sites of historical significance, visiting archives, museums and memorials, meeting survivors, scholars and activists, watching selected documentary movies, and spending time in Jewish-American families and in Jewish communities in Germany and the United States - these and other scheduled events stimulate discussions and interactions in this mixed third-generation group. There are two facilitators for each program, one responsible primarily for the German group, the other for the American group. As facilitators, we pay special attention to the dynamics of processes within the group and provide an environment that is simultaneously challenging and safe.

### **The goals of the International Summer Program on the Holocaust:**

- to bring together German and American students of different religious and ethnic backgrounds in a safe, interpersonal environment to study the impact of the Holocaust on their lives and communities
- to give students opportunities to reflect on their family histories and on the intergenerational transmission of the trauma of genocidal events
- to make the third generation aware of the history of anti-semitism and of the impact of the Shoah on contemporary society
- to give American and German students guidance in how to explore honestly the current relationship between Jews and Gentiles in light of Auschwitz
- to make the third generation aware of the social consequences of victimization
- to encourage and challenge them to articulate their relation to the Holocaust

- to reduce prejudices, build bridges across separate memories, and improve future relations between people of different cultural, religious, and ethnic backgrounds.

## **Take Your Responsibility**

By Daniela Müller (Halle, Germany)

.....During our program in August 1999, we - ten American and the German students - talked about our responsibility. I will take up some of our ideas and expand them with my own thoughts.

I do not want to talk about responsibility in the past, about the responsibility of my grandparents during World War II. I could never safely say that I would have behaved differently than the majority of my grandparents' generation. That is why I do not want to blame them, although I cannot understand that humankind can be as cruel as it was and is. I condemn that thousands of people were killed and only a small group stood up against it. I feel sorry about it. But I would not like to blame anybody for something when I do not know what I would have done in similar circumstances.

That is why I want to talk about my responsibility today.

When I think of responsibility, it is often far away from my daily life. Normally, I do not think about it. Imagine I would have to consider all consequences of my daily activities every day. When I talk with friends about my activities at the university or in my spare time, they tell me: "Hey, you have a lot of responsibility". So what do they mean when they tell me this? How do I understand it?

There are guidelines in our lives that tell us how to behave, and if we do not follow them we can be held accountable. But what can we say if somebody asks us: "I do not agree. We can never totally assess our doing. So how can we be held accountable for it? Or how can we be held responsible for something that we even could not know?" []

I can know at least a little of the consequences of my doing. Of course it remains difficult for me to think about all the consequences when I can only see a small part of reality, but I should consider as much as possible.

I assess situations every day and fall back on my experiences. Another tool to assess situations is my conscience. I could not reconcile stealing and killing with my conscience. I also feel responsible with respect to my parents, friends, and God. My parents raised me and passed their values on to me. I do not like to disappoint them.

What am I responsible for? For the war in Kosovo, because I did not do anything against it? For the old lady in the house that has difficulties to manage her life? Am I responsible for my grandparents who did not do anything against the persecution of the Jews, Sinti and Roma, homosexuals, and other minority groups that did not fit the picture of a "powerful Arian citizen"? Or am I only (!! ) responsible for my own doing, or not doing?

Especially the responsibility of not taking any action is very important. Often people say (and said) that they cannot be held accountable because they did not do anything wrong. Not taking action can be also wrong. It is much more difficult to feel responsible for things you did not do. Nobody would blame me for the war in Kosovo, and nobody would hold me accountable for the old lady on the other floor, if

I am not related to her. But maybe my feeling tells me that I should help this old lady from time to time. Some participants of our group said that Germans feel responsible for their past, I believe we are responsible for our present. If somebody would ask me: "Why are there still so many Nazis in Germany?" I should be able to say that I do my best against it. It is on me if I have the feeling that I have done enough. Despite social standards and norms, there is enough room for anyone to make decisions. I am not only responsible for my doing or not doing, but also an example for others - like for my children.

If somebody asks me regarding the Holocaust: "Where do you see your responsibility?" I would answer:

- \* My responsibility is to be informed about the events of World War II, the Shoah, and about life during this time for different groups of people in different countries.

- \* I should also inform others and discuss with those who do not know enough or even talk falsely about topics related to World War II.

- \* I should be aware of my environment - like people close to me. Not everybody shows interest for the Holocaust, but some people do. It is up to me to share my experiences, to share my feelings I had during our program.

- \* I should keep a watchful eye on biases expressed against somebody, on discrimination, ignorance, and indifference.

- \* I should go into action if I recognize injustice.

Often we feel like sitting between two chairs. We have to decide if we want to take responsibility or not. There is no book where we can look up the answers. We should live responsibly, as Kant would say, as we want to be treated by others.

For readers who are interested: copies of the integral report of the International Summer Programm on the Holocaust are available for \$ 10. Contact Björn Krondorfer,  
e-mail: [bhkrondorfer@smcm.edu](mailto:bhkrondorfer@smcm.edu)

## **RADIOINTERVIEW MIT STUDENTEN DES SOMMERPROGRAMMS 1999 FRAGMENTE**

Purkert: Vier Wochen im Sommer - da können Studenten und Studentinnen einen langen Urlaub machen, mit einem Ferienjob Geld verdienen oder mit einer Hausarbeit ihr Studium beschleunigen. Die neunzehnjährige Ilana aus Miami, der 24jährige Tobias aus Halle und die 23jährige Barbara aus Nürnberg haben sich für etwas anderes entschieden. Vier Wochen lang sind sie zusammen mit siebzehn anderen jungen Leuten aus Deutschland und den Vereinigten Staaten gereist, um sich mit einem Thema zu beschäftigen: dem Holocaust. Ihr Weg hat sie von Washington mit seinem Holocaustmuseum über Berlin nach Auschwitz geführt. Was bewegt junge Menschen sich zu bewerben, für ein Ferienprogramm, in dem sich ein

bunt zusammengewürfelte Gruppe mit ganz verschiedenem kulturellen Hintergrund um ein so schwieriges Thema bemüht?

Barbara: Ich habe angefangen mich für den Holocaust zu interessieren, als ich ein Tagebuch gefunden habe von der Freundin meiner Oma, die das geschrieben hat während sie zwei Wochen in einem BDM Lager(BDM=Bund Deutscher Mädel) war. Und ich halt nicht so genau wußte, was ich damit anfangen soll. Ob das erzwungen war, das zu schreiben, oder ob sie sehr beeinflusst war. Und dann habe ich mich halt mit Jugenderziehung im Dritten Reich beschäftigt. Als ich dann von diesem Programm gehört habe, habe ich auch gedacht, das wäre eben eine große Chance ein sozusagen entspanntere Perspektive zu dem Thema kennen zu lernen. Weil ich denke, daß es für Amerikaner einfacher ist: also wenn ein Amerikaner den Holocaust sieht, daß nicht gleich eine Frage, wie er sich selbst sieht, nicht gleich eine Frage der eigenen Identität. Und deshalb habe ich gedacht, daß vielleicht eine entspanntere, neuere, offenere Herangehensweise möglich ist.

Tobias: Für mich ist ausschlaggebend gewesen, daß es eine interkulturelle Gruppe sein wird, daß es um zwei Nationalitäten gehen wird, und daß ein Land zumindest davon mit der Vergangenheit leben muß als Land der Täter, wo wir ja nun auch herkommen. Das ist ja auch unsere Vergangenheit, die ich auch mittragen muß, und daß das andere Land, das Land der Befreier auch war.

Viola: Was für junge Leute auch eine ganz große Rolle spielt, ist die Frage, die auch immer wieder in dem Zusammenhang der Diskussion um "bin ich schuldig", "bin ich verantwortlich" aufkommt: Wie kann ich eigentlich an etwas erinnern, oder wie kann ich diese Anforderung erfüllen, an den Holocaust zu erinnern, wenn diese Geschichte gar nicht in meiner eigenen Lebenszeit verortet ist, in meiner eigenen Biographie. Also können wir etwas erinnern, was wir nicht selbst erlebt haben. Und vor dem Hintergrund denke ich stellt sich diese Frage der Zukunft der Erinnerung gerade in einem interkulturellen Austausch noch mal so, daß man fragen muß: Wer erinnert eigentlich? Was sollen wir erinnern? Die normative Frage des Erinnerns. Wer erinnert an wen? Erinnern die Opfer an die Opfer? Erinnern die Täter an die Opfer? Also gerade auch Fragen, die im Rahmen dieser Debatte um das zentrale Holocaust Mahnmal eine Rolle gespielt haben.

Bernd: Vielleicht geht es erstmal darum mit den jungen Leuten heraus zu finden, wo sie ihren eigenen Standpunkt jetzt sehen. Ich denke, diese Erinnerungsdebatte ist erstmal eine der ersten und zweiten - gerade der zweiten - Generation nach dem Holocaust. Es wird auch immer wieder gesagt es müssen neue lebendige Formen des Erinnerns gefunden werden, die aus dem ritualisierten Gedenken heraustreten und eine Sprache finden, die diese neue Generation anspricht. Und eigentlich gibt es sehr schnell eine Projektion auf Jugendliche als wären die neu und frisch nur weil die jung sind. Und das zeigt sich in diesem Programm, daß das so schnell und so leicht nicht ist. Es wird auch ganz viel an einer Sprachunfähigkeit und gewissen Perspektiven erst mal einfach so weiter gegeben. Es ist nur so, dass die jungen Leute sich damit nicht mehr besonders wohl fühlen. Es ist aber auch: Es erfordert eine große Form von Arbeit, wirklich sich damit auseinander zu setzen, um eigene Sprachform zu finden.

Purkert: Zur Halbzeit des Programms haben die Teilnehmer und Teilnehmerinnen

festgestellt, daß zweierlei unausgesprochene Dinge ein ehrliches Gespräch verhindern: Die Vermutungen darüber, was in anderen Köpfen vorgeht und mitgebrachte eigene Vorstellungen, die man nicht auszusprechen wagt. Diese Einsicht nagt an vertrauten Gewißheiten, erzeugt anscheinend gleichermaßen den Wunsch zu reden und Angst vor dem Reden.

Barbara: Wir haben ja auch viel über Familiengeschichte gemacht, und da einfach zu merken, daß man innerhalb von einer deutschen Gruppe bei sehr vielen Sachen schweigen kann und das Schweigen wird verstanden und akzeptiert. Also, daß man sagen kann: Mein Opa war an der Ostfront und ich weiß nicht was da war. Und das in einer deutschen Gruppe, wenn da überhaupt drüber gesprochen wird, einfach so ein Einverständnis da ist: Man weiß nicht, was die Großeltern gemacht haben. Und für mich war dann einfach sehr interessant, daß es überhaupt nicht selbstverständlich ist, daß ich das nicht weiß, oder das da nicht drüber geredet wird. Und daß das nicht akzeptiert wurde, das war für mich schon wahnsinnig, schon ein großer Schritt, daß ich gemerkt habe, daß ich das nicht akzeptieren muß, sondern daß ich nachfragen kann.

Barbara: Es gab ganz kritische Momente zum Beispiel im Krematorium - oh - da bin ich ganz nervös geworden, weil ich überhaupt nicht wußte, wie man mit sowas umgehen kann. Es ist ja nicht das erste Mal, daß ich ein Krematorium gesehen habe. Oder man hat auch schon viele Bilder davon gesehen. Aber das ist auch ein unglaublicher Druck, der da auf einem lastet. Und die Angst ist bei mir eigentlich weg. Das klingt jetzt vielleicht etwas pathetisch, aber meine Angst hat sich sehr gemildert, oder war weg, als dann ein jüdischer Teilnehmer einfach meine Hand ergriffen hat und dann sind wir da zusammen die Straße runter gegangen.

## **IT ISN'T THE EXTREME RIGHT WE SHOULD FEAR BUT OURSELVES** **Thoughts after the Aftermath of the Holocaust on Both Sides**

This article was written after the third weekend deutsch-englischer workshop arranged by Ruth Barnett and Angelika Rieber to learn from each other about the aftermath of the holocaust on both sides.

This time we met in London in the first weekend in November. Last year it was in Frankfurt at the same time. One of the German participants put my thoughts into words, "I came because I have a brick-stone missing." I too want to discover the whole of that brick-stone if I can. Another person said that she wanted to open the inner encapsulation of the too-painful-to-bear experience and I agreed with that too. We do see these things individually don't we? But, what came home to me very forcibly this weekend was how these experiences are part of a giant collective experience that took in the whole of Europe. There is an outer encapsulation that takes place in society as well.

On the Sunday we went to Beth Shalom or 'The House of Peace'. There, inside, I saw a quote from the Talmud, "He who saves a single life, saves the entire world". It's funny the way we delude ourselves into believing we can separate the personal and the political. And few of us manage to put them together in the way Stephen Smith and his brother have.

Stephen told us about the journey he made, with his brother James, that eventually led to the building of this centre. He called it a place of commemoration. A place that reminds us that all the Jewish rites of life and death were desecrated at all the sites of mass execution. There are no birth dates or death dates there - just an absence, a void, a silence, nothing.

As a Christian, Stephen Smiths believes that anti-Semitism has very severe implications for us all. It is in-built and ingrained into the European environment. When he looked for responses from the Christian community to the holocaust, he found none. Yet at Yad Vashem (in Jerusalem) he found records of whole communities that had been extinguished in a moment. He doesn't believe it is a Jewish problem at all. The holocaust emerged from and was embedded in Western European civilisation. And now we reinforce this blindness by expecting people who had their family murdered to go through life as though nothing had happened. There was no CID then to solve these crimes! He said that we must avoid documenting the past without recognising the implications for the present. The holocaust was not a watertight package without ripples to the future. We have to learn to know in a personal way that engages us emotionally. "Ah, yes the holocaust", is almost a non-response and that is where anti-Semitism lies.

Stephen Smith reminded us that what happened then is important but not as important as what is happening now. How does what happened then relate to our own professions? What did our profession do in the 30's in Germany? 45% of doctors there became part of the Nazi Physicians League. How is that what preached from the pulpits in 1933 became part of the framework of Nazi Germany? How come nobody talks about that? I started to think about Albert Speer's contribution, his grand and grotesque plans. As an architect I was shocked to discover when I was last in Frankfurt that his practice still exists and is planning grandiose things for the Frankfurter Messe. We seem to be still blind to the fascism in architecture. Later I attended a small workshop in Germany on woman's leadership or Führung. The same word is still used!

On the day before going to Beth Shalom, we had talked about what we could do about the increasing neo-Nazi activity in Europe. By focussing on the extreme right, I realised that we were missing the point. The Nazi party came to power because they won the middle ground not because everyone became Nazis.

From as early as 1920 the NSDAP signalled their intentions. In their Manifesto dated 24 February of that year, the National Socialists stated that Jews would lose their rights as full citizens, would be unable to hold public office and would be expelled from Germany. They also made clear their intention to control the press, art and literature making no secret of their totalitarian aims. Yet there seemed to be an almost universal blindness to this vicious agenda. Perhaps it was too vicious to contemplate.

The Storm troopers were already formed by July 1921 and were used to 'deliberately provoke bloody confrontation with the communists... with clubs, bricks and broken bottles on the streets.' (1) Hitler attempted to take power of the Bavarian government in Munich in 1923 and despite the fact that by July 1932 the Nazi party only had 37% of the vote and by January 1933 their popularity had dropped to 33%,

Hitler was appointed Chancellor of the Weimar Republic on 31 January 1933. Understanding that by further manipulating fear the Nazis would increase their political hold on the government they organised the setting fire to the Reichstag on 27 February 1933. Hitler 'persuaded a very old Hindenburg to declare a state of emergency and to suspend all civil rights giving him unlimited authority to suppress his opponents and to win a free run for the Nazis. All this occurred just one week before the new national elections. After rounding up virtually all the opposition Hitler only just managed to scrape home with the support of von Papen's Nationalist party. He then passed an enabling act giving him dictatorial powers (2). At that time, only about half a million people identified themselves as Jews in the German Reich - less than 76% percent of the total population. The 'wave of national awakening' that began then made anti-Semitism official state doctrine to consolidate power.(3)

Civic blindness hasn't disappeared. It lives on. When things get tough we close the door and retreat into the peace of our own home. We vote for better things for ourselves without considering the impact on the whole community. William Hague's constant stream of promises to cut taxes is a blatant call to individual selfishness at the expense of the community. It gets dressed up as freedom of choice. Hitler's promises to the poor and unemployed in the late 20's and early thirties were also dressed up. He promised a new dawn relying on religious and mythological images. He spoke to the unconscious fears and motivations of many people who were tired of struggling to make ends meet. They were the unaligned middle ground who were blind to the wider consequences of their individual choice.

The recent American election held three days after our workshop weekend was also fought and continues to be fought over this same middle ground. Without this middle ground being won over, the extreme right or left has no chance of winning an election. Most elections during my lifetime, I realised uncomfortably, have been fought over this middle ground. Why? It seems to me that very few people can sit with a high level of pain for long. It becomes so unbearable that a way out, any way out has to be found. Prolonged depression, whether countrywide or personal, seems to be almost too difficult to deal with. In every group I have ever worked with, there is always a wish for a strong leader to sort things out. And strong leaders are often seen to be strong because they make decisions quickly without reflection, consideration or involving anybody else.

Those of the extreme right wing are at the most vulnerable end of this emotional pallet. One woman in Germany pointed out something that really impressed me. She said: "I have a funny feeling that whenever I hear 'Germany must be great' try changing the word 'Germany' to the word 'I'. Wouldn't you jump on the bandwagon, if you had no alternative? For once people are scared of you. You have power."

This weekend I also learnt that there is no word for assertiveness in German. Maybe it informs the question many people ask. "Why didn't anyone speak out?" There was an atmosphere of intimidation but even without that it is very difficult to speak out against what appears to be a prevailing movement. As an experiment, imagine quietly sitting, with a large group of people that you like, without a set topic or agenda. You will soon discover how difficult it is to find your voice and to speak up particularly if others seem very clear. It doesn't take very long to feel a bit paranoid or to begin to belittle your own point of view as unimportant. How much more difficult



it is to make contact with those whose life experiences are very different.

This weekend I learnt a new word, philo-Semitism. As I understand it, it means being biased in favour of Jews. It can be anti-Semitism dressed up as its opposite. It can be just as dangerous. The problem is how to live with diversity of background, one's own or others, without feeling that you have to either give up your own or hold too strongly to one part of it to the extent that you are unable to take in anything new. Many of us have a complexity in our background, identity and language but there is a pressure for immigrants and society not to accept difference. As one teacher from Germany explained, "How do we encourage students not to make parallels but connections and not be paralysed?" Alongside these thoughts is the idea in Germany of Leitkultur meaning leading culture and that since the Second world War European culture is based on human rights.

So slowly by each of us becoming a bit more aware of our own history we edge toward greater understanding and flexibility of thought. I want to finish with something that one person said over the weekend. "It is not a wound anymore. It is a scar that I can reasonably live with." It is a scar that informs my perspective of the world.

Teresa Howard  
December 2000

- (1) Read, Anthony and Fisher, David (1992) The Fall of Berlin Pimlico: London
- (2) Read, Anthony and Fisher, David (1992) The Fall of Berlin Pimlico: London
- (3) Benz, wolfgang (2000) The Holocaust Profile Books: London

## **GOD AND OUR LIFE AFTER THE WAR**

Religious experiences can help us to cope with the war in our life story.

The experience that we are accepted as we are, is a religious experience, it can help us to accept ourselves.

To accept ourselves is a very important way of coping with the war in our life story. What went on in the war and the way these horrors have pursued us since the war, all of it is a constant threat to our self-acceptance. In whatever form: survivor guilt, loyalty conflict, shame, many others.

Another religious experience is when we experience ourselves as very vulnerable, very small. It helps us to accept others with their shortcomings, to be tolerant.

The acceptance of others is also a very important way of coping with war and its aftermath. The war has as a consequence that many people hurt us and we can easily hate and reject people, we seem to have the perfect right to do so. And yet when we do we add more evil to all the evil that came with and after the war.

Another religious experience is that when we realise that ultimately we are safe.

This experience helps us to cope with all the fear that springs from the war, all the

fears transmitted to us and all the fears we experienced ourselves in connection with the consequences of the war.

There are many other religious experiences.

Maybe somebody asks: why do you call these experiences 'religious'?

They transcend the everyday interpersonal experience. The everyday interpersonal experience can bring me joy, the feeling of safety, the experience of vulnerability, to be accepted. But it is not lasting. These feelings come and go. The experience can be followed by an experience that shows me the opposite: I am rejected, I feel unsafe etc.

The religious experience is a hill-top one. I see that **ultimately** I am accepted, I am safe etc. It transcends all that is psychological and touches the deepest of my heart.

Maybe somebody asks: is this no illusion?

No. We can learn to discern the shorter living everyday psychological experiences from the spiritual ones. The experiences that stay. If they were illusions they would disappear too. They stay but they do not replace the psychological experiences, the joys, the fears, the irritations and so on. They help to cope with them.

These religious experiences transcend the everyday experiences but they are most of the time not apart from them. The transcending means an extra dimension is to be experienced in the everyday event, in the talk, the reading, the thinking. Through the joy, the distress, the feeling of acceptance we have a deep experience that we are vulnerable and in fear, but safe and accepted.

I said that we can learn to discern the psychological from the spiritual.

Yes learn. Life long learning with many mistakes, errors. Sure we have illusions, too, about religious experiences. But we can be liberated from these illusions. There is no reason to reject all experiences just like that.

There is no reason and it is the worst we can do. This mistrust toward religious experiences is understandable. In the name of religion much evil has been done. Yet we should relax our mistrust to let it become adequate vigilance, adequate attention. Isn't that what for all of us, postwar generation, the thing to do: to relax our mistrust, our alarm, our over-attention. No too naive confidence but adequate attention.

Many psychologists have done great harm by their anti-religious prejudices. The relationship between psychology and spirituality can be much better. Both could cooperate very well.

Psychological insight can be of great help for people when they have religious experiences and who go on to learn to cope with those emotions.

Religious experiences can be of great help for people who try to gain from psychological insight in coping with the consequences of the war. Psychology can be of help by critically distinguishing illusions from authentic religious experiences.

That is what we can do. We can not control and generate religious experiences ourselves. Like when we try to do by taking drugs or bodily exercise or imagination training. That really leads into illusion or worse. But we can sit, walk, work, be silent,

talk and wait. We can relax our mistrust and be patiently attentive. We can listen to the deep and pure impulse of our heart. We can travel to places, try to meet people and find books.

That we can do. When we have patience and attention it is as if the opportunities come towards us, the book will come to us.

Our religious experiences will contribute to our coping with the consequences of the war.

Martijn Lindt,  
February 2001

## **NS-CHILDREN, WAR CHILDREN AND GIPSIES IN NORWAY**

The NS-children in Norway meet 3-4 times a year. Last spring the writer and journalist Björn Westlie shared his thoughts with us. He was the one who started the debate about giving the Norwegian Jews back the property confiscated during the war and which was not returned shortly after the war. In Norway the values belonging to Jews as well as the property of Norwegians abroad were to a great extent taken care of during the war by the national authorities (National Unification, NS), but all was not given back during the immediate post-war-period. Now this has been effected.

Björn Westlie also has written about the Norwegian Gipsies and about race- and genehygiene. His chosen object was "Living with the sins of our fathers and carrying the shame without bitterness." As usual, the views in the group differed. The Bishop of Trondheim made in October 1999 the whole bishopry ask the children of German soldiers and the children of the members of the National Unification forgiveness. Later, he made all his colleagues do the same thing. We met bishop Finn Wagle on September 30 2000. He was publicly criticized for meeting a group with mixed views on the Norwegian WWII history. We had a good and open conversation. The bishop asked for and was told some of our personal and rather sad experiences with the church of Norway.

At Christmas Björg Jacobsson started a conversation about what we have learned from being NS-children. Among what we have learned is independent thinking. The experience of being misjudged because of our background helps us understand others with similar experiences.

The Nobel price laureate Björnstjerne Björnson was raised in Molde. He was among the men who together with Emile Zola made known the injustice against Dreyfus. The subject at the annual Björnson conference in Molde in August 2000, was the fate of the children of Germans born in Norway 1941-1946 and the children of the members of the National Unification. The NS-children were told that we no longer need to feel ashamed of our parents. What our parents did was not our responsibility. It is taken for granted that we all are more ashamed of our parents than of the Norwegian society at large. A program in the Norwegian TV in October about the NS-children gave the same impression. The producer, Ole-Jan Larsen,

met us on March 31, 2001. He told that this was the program of its kind seen by the most people this autumn, about 12% of all Norwegians watched it. He experienced, that many NS-children refused to partake in the program because they were afraid of the consequences it might have for them and their families. It seemed to be unexpected to many Norwegians that 100,000 - 2000,000 out of a population of 4 millions are NS-children.

February 16 - 18 2001 the War Childunion "Lebensborn" met in the town Kongsvinger. Among the invited guests were Leif Bodin Larsen from the Union of the Norwegian Gipsies and Inger Cecilie Stridsklev from the NS-children. Norway lost about 10,000 inhabitants at sea and on land during WWII, and during 1941-1946 got about 10,000 children of Germans living in Norway. We soon realized we have much in common. Many from all the groups had missed one or both parents from some years to all life. Many lacked schooling, and therefore were illiterate.

The Gipsies has the longest experience in being victims. They have been in Norway since the Middle Ages.

The NS-children have been persecuted since 1940.

The War Children hardly remember persecution before 1945, which does not mean it did not happen. The Germans wanted them to be Germans, the Norwegian authorities during the war wanted them to be Norwegians. The Norwegian authorities after the war regarded these small children a risk and a problem which they wanted out of the country. Some were brought several times from Norway to Germany and back.

Still none of these groups wants to be regarded as losers. We want to be respected for who we are, as persons and as groups, each with our specific background. Theoretically there may be some of us who belong to all three groups. Some Gipsies became members of the National Unification (some did so because that made them feel safer). Some members of the National Unification also had children with German fathers.

We hope this is the beginning of a co-operation.

The Union of the Gipsies was founded in 1995. They want to be of practical help to each other and to keep their culture alive. Every May 7 they meet at an anonymous mass grave near the great psychiatric hospital in Oslo where many Gipsies were buried after treatment in the hospital.

"Norwegian Mission among the homeless" (The Mission) tried in co-operation with the Norwegian government to make Gipsies like most other Norwegians. During its work between 1897 and 1986 more than 1500 children were taken from their parents, from a population of 3,000-4,000. Because the leader of the Mission was aware that the international Nazi Police was interested in "elements of differing races", he offered the archives of the Mission concerning the names and whereabouts of the Norwegian Gipsies to the Police Department, lead by the National Unification. He met little interest in the subject. After the war the Mission intensified its work, as well by taking children as by sterilisation. The Law of Sterilisation was passed already in 1934. During the war there was an increase in the operations, but never were so many sterilisations performed as in the period 1945-1954.

The leaders of the Mission were clergymen. One was called Ingvald B. Carlsen. He developed understanding for eugenics. He also was member of the "War Children Committee", which described all the problems Norway would have because of these children aged 0 to 4 and how to deal with them. It was taken for granted, that these children were genetically defect. In 1945 he wrote a book about the Norwegian Church during the war, in which he described his opponents in the National Unification as no better than himself.

Seven members of the War Child Union "Lebensborn" has filed a case against the Norwegian State. Their lawyer presented the state of the cases at the meeting. She assured us, that even by a lost case, the fate of the war children would be known to the Norwegian society at large.

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## **NS-KINDER, KRIEGSKINDER UND ROMAS IN NORWEGEN**

Die NS-Kinder haben ihre Freundestreffen 3-4 Mal im Jahr in Norwegen. Vorigen Frühling hat der Schriftsteller und Journalist Björn Westlie seine Gedanken mit uns geteilt. Er fing die Debatte an, dass Norwegen den Juden endlich den Teil ihres Eigentums zurückgeben sollte, dass sie in der unmittelbaren Nachkriegszeit nicht zurück bekamen. In Norwegen wurde Teile der Werten der Juden und Norweger im Ausland von Behörden der Nationalen Sammlung bewahrt. Alles wurde nicht den Juden in der unmittelbaren Nachkriegszeit zurückgeliefert. Das ist erst jetzt geschehen.

Björn Westlie hat auch über die Norwegischen Romas und über Rassen- und Genenhygiene geschrieben. Er sprach über das Thema "Mit den Sünden unserer Väter leben, die Schande ohne Bitterkeit tragend". Wie immer, waren in unsere Gruppe verschiedene Auffassungen vertreten.

Der Bischoff von Trontheim verordnete zum Busstag in Oktober 1999, dass man in den Kirchen seines Bistums um Vergebung für die Haltung der Kirche den Kriegskinder und die NS-Kinder gegenüber bat. Später haben alle Bischöfe das gleiche erklärt. Am 30. September 2000 ist Bischoff Finn Wagle uns begegnet. Er wurde öffentlich dafür getadelt, dass er eine Gruppe begegnete wo mehrere Ansichten über die Geschichte Norwegens im zweiten Weltkrieg vertreten waren.

Wir hatten ein gutes und offenes Gespräch. Der Bischoff fragte nach unseren Erfahrungen mit der norwegischen Kirche. Er hörte einige von unseren eher traurigen Erzählungen zu.

Zur Weihnachten leitete Björg Jacobbsen unser Gespräch ein über "Was wir daraus gelernt haben, NS-Kinder zu sein". Unter dem was wir gelernt haben, ist selbständiges Denken. Die Erfahrung davon, falsch gewertet zu werden wegen unser Hintergrund, hilft uns auch anderen Gruppen Menschen mit ähnlichen Erfahrungen zu verstehen.

Der Nobelpreisträger Björnstjerne Björnson ist in der Nähe von Molde aufgewachsen. Er hat mit Emile Zola damals die Sache von Dreyfus gefördert. Das Thema vom jährlichen Björnsonfestival in Molde 2000 war das Schicksal von den Norwegischen Kriegskinder und die Kinder der Mitglieder der Nationalen Sammlung. Den NS-Kinder wurden erzählt, dass sie sich nicht mehr wegen ihren Eltern zu schämen brauchen. Die Kinder haben keine Verantwortung für was ihre Eltern getan haben. Es wird als selbstverständlich angesehen, dass wir alle uns mehr wegen unseren Eltern als wegen der norwegischen Gesellschaft schämen. Ein Programm des Ersten norwegischen Fernsehens in Oktober 2000 über die NS-Kinder hat denselben Eindruck gegeben. Der Leiter dieses Programmes war Ende März 2001 in unsere Gruppe. Er erzählte, dass dieses Programm von etwa jeden achten Norweger gesehen wurde. Er hat erlebt, dass sehr viele nicht teilnehmen wollten, aus Angst davor, welche Folgen es für sie und ihre Familien haben würden. Es schien eine Über-raschung für viele Norweger, dass 100.000 - 200.000 aus einer Bevölkerung von vier Millionen NS-Kinder sind.

Am 16. - 18. Februar 20001 war eine Begegnung des Kriegskinderverband "Lebensborn" (1999) in der Stadt Kongvinger. Unter den eingeladenen Gästen waren Leif Bodin Larsen vom Verein der Norwegischen Romas und Inger Cecilie Stridsklev von den NS-Kindern (1996). Norwegen verlor insgesamt etwa 10.000 seiner Einwohner wegen den Zweiten Weltkrieg, und bekam etwa 10.000 Kinder mit deutschen Väter zwischen 1941 und 1946. Wir sahen gleich ein, dass wir viel Gemeinsames hatten. Viele aus allen Gruppen hatten ein oder beide Eltern vermisst, entweder eine Zeitlang oder das ganze Leben. Viele haben auch Mangel an Schulung, und einige von allen Gruppen lernten deswegen nie lesen und schreiben.

Die Romas haben die längste Erfahrung mit Verfolgung in Norwegen, nämlich seit sie im Mittelalter ankamen.

Die NS-Kinder wurden seit 1940 verfolgt.

Die Kriegskinder erinnern kaum Verfolgung bevor 1945. Das heißt nicht, dass es nicht vorgekommen ist. Die Deutschen wollten während des Krieges, dass diese Kinder Deutsche seien, die damaligen norwegischen Behörden behaupteten, sie seien Norweger. Die norwegischen Behörden der Nachkriegszeit betrachteten diese kleine Kinder als ein Risiko und ein Problem, dass sie gerne ins Ausland hinversetzen wollten. Einige Kinder wurden mehrmals zwischen Norwegen und Deutschland hin und wieder geschleppt.

Doch möchten keiner dieser Gruppen als Verlierer angesehen werden. Wir möchten für diejenigen die wir sind, als einzelne Personen und als Gruppen, jeder

mit seinem besonderen Hintergrund, wahrgenommen werden. Theoretisch mag es welche geben, die alle drei Gruppen gehören: einige Romas wurden Mitglieder der Nationalen Sammlung (oft weil sie sich daraus Geborgenheit versprachen). Einige Mitglieder der Nationalen Sammlung hatten auch Kinder mit deutschen Vätern. Wir hoffen, dass dies Anfang einer Zusammenarbeit ist.

Das norwegische Verband der Romas wurde 1995 gegründet. Sie möchten ihre Mitglieder praktisch helfen, und einander helfen ihre Kultur zu bewahren. Jede 7. Mai treffen sie sich bei einem namenlosen Massengrab in der Nähe des grössten Geisteskrankenhauses in Oslo. Dort sind viele Romas, die nach Behandlung im Krankenhaus starben, begraben.

"Die norwegische Mission unter den Heimatlosen" (Die Mission) wollten im Zusammenarbeit mit dem norwegische Staat die Romas mit anderen Norwegern gleichschalten. Während ihres Wirkens in der Zeit 1897-1986 haben sie aus einer Bevölkerung von 3000 - 4000 Menschen etwa 1500 Kinder ihren Eltern weggenommen. Weil der Leiter der Mission wusste, dass die Internationale Gestapo Interesse an "Elemente verschiedener Rassen" hatte, hat er das Archiv der Mission, mit Namen und Anschriften der Romas, dem Polizeiministerium angeboten. Die Leitung die damals der Nationalen Sammlung gehörte, hat kein Interesse gezeigt.

In der Nachkriegszeit hat deswegen die Mission mit erneuter Kraft ihren Tun angefangen. Sie haben Kinder weggenommen und Sterilisierungsoperationen vornehmen lassen. Das Sterilisationsgesetz war schon 1934 erlassen. Die Anzahl der Operationen wuchs während des Krieges, war aber nie grösser als in den Jahren 1945 - 1954. Die Leiter der Mission waren Pfarrer; einer hiess Ingvald B. Carlsen. Er lernte Verständnis für Rassenhygiene. Er nahm auch Teil im "Kriegskinderausschuss". Dieses Staatliches Gremium beschrieb all die Probleme die diese Kinder, damals von 0 bis 4 Jahre alt, machen würden, und gab dafür Lösungsvorschläge. Es galt als selbstverständlich, dass diese Kinder erbliche Schäden habe. Er schrieb auch 1945 ein Buch über die Norwegische Kirche während des Krieges, in dem er die Christen in der Nationalen Sammlung so beschrieb, als wären sie wie er.

Sieben Mitglieder der Kriegskinder haben ein Gerichtsverfahren gegen den norwegischen Staat eingeleitet. Ihr Anwalt gab Übersicht wie die Sache jetzt steht. Sie war sicher, dass auch wenn der Prozess verloren würde, wird dadurch das Schicksal der Kriegskinder in Norwegen bekannt.

## **CHILDREN OF THE REPRESSION**

In December 2000, the second channel of the Belgian Television transmitted a programme about the fate of collaborators' children in Belgium.

The five interviewees were children of Flemish families. One of them, Frans-Jos Verdoodt, did research of the role which his father played before and during the war. Frans-Jos is now the director of the Centre for Archives and Documentation of the Flemish Nationalism. His father was one of the leaders of the cultural organisation of

Flemish and German Co-operation, DeVlag (The Flag). During the Occupation he was mayor of one of the cities, responsible for the execution of the German orders, for instance gathering enough workers to be sent to Germany for the 'Arbeiteinsatz' (Forced labour).

The parents of Evert Lagrou were both lawyers. His father became the leader of the Flemish SS in Flanders. One of his tasks was organizing propaganda and maintaining contacts with the eastern front.

The father of Thea Peeters was the chief editor of the Flemish-nationalist newspaper 'Volk en Staat' (People and State).

Floor Grammens, Mark's father, was a Flemish activist and journalist who carried out the German orders with regard to the spelling of the Flemish language very conscientiously.

The father of Lutgard Beddengenoodts was a member of the Vlaams Nationaal Verbond (Flemish National Association).

The Flemish nationalism glorified Germany. The Flemish hoped to gain a kind of independence, if necessary as a part of the Great German Reich, at any rate away from the oppression of the French-speaking Walloons. Some members of the Belgian Government mistrusted the Flemish Nationalism. In May 1940, even before the invasion of the German Army, the government arrested Flemish nationalists, communists and Jews for fear of a 'fifth column'. They were sent to the south of France, where they were housed in barracks. In July 1940 The Germans arrived at the camp and released the Belgians. After an awful trip that lasted six days, the prisoners came back in Belgium, starving. The thousands of repatriants were, of course, grateful for their liberation by the Germans and it is logical that they soon became collaborators.

There was, however, another reason to become a collaborator: since 1930 Belgium had lived through crisis after crisis, the governments which succeeded each other were disbanded after several months, leaving the problems unsolved. Germany, where the question of unemployment had disappeared because of the measures taken by Hitler, was for many disillusioned Belgians the pre-eminent example. René Lagrou, Evert's father, wrote a book about his arrest and exile, titled 'Wij verdachten' (We, the Suspected), in which he expressed his feelings of revenge toward the Belgian government.

After D-day and the approach of the Allied Armies, several collaborators in Belgium became the target of attacks by members of the Resistance Movement and the so-called White Brigade. The collaborators started to find ways to escape. Especially the 'big fish' had the money and the opportunity to go to Germany, alone or with their families. Carel Peeters left Belgium, together with his wife and children, after burning compromising papers and bringing his belongings to a safe place. Thea went to school in Potsdam. Her father organised help for the Belgians who fled to Berlin and they even formed a kind of 'government in exile'. René Lagrou settled in Berlin as well, leaving behind his wife, who went into hiding and his children, who found shelter with relatives. The family of Marcel Beddengenoodst stayed in Belgium, whereas he himself fled to Germany.

On Liberation Day all Belgian citizens were expected to hang out their flags, but the family of Grammens did not, for the simple reason that they did not have a Belgian



flag. People noticed this and knocked on the door requesting that the father be handed over. They pushed Mark away, beat him, arrested his father, confiscated his typewriter and papers.

During this period there was no central authority. The bands of people who arrested collaborators lacked the juridical qualifications to do so. Old quarrels were settled. Even the parents of some collaborators suffered from attacks, their houses were damaged, one orchard was set on fire. Women and girls who had a love relationship with German soldiers were caught and maltreated. Their heads were shaven and the swastika was painted at their foreheads.

In May and June 1945, after the liberation of the concentration camps and the revelation of the atrocities which had taken place there, a new wave of violence rolled across the country. Children saw their parents arrested, were left alone and found shelter with neighbours or relatives or in monasteries. Children who spoke Flemish were severely punished when they spoke their mother tongue at the French-speaking schools they attended. Sometimes the accent of the children revealed that they originated from another region of Flanders and the reason that they lived in another place was clear. Other children teased them, there were fights in the streets. Some collaborators' children were sent away from their schools, others were refused attendance at the school.

The Flemish activists who fled to Germany had the money and the connections to escape. Verdoodt and Lagrou made their way through Austria and Switzerland, and found shelter in Spain under the rule of the fascist General Franco. Later on they sailed to South America with the help, among others of the monks of Mont Serrat. René Lagrou corresponded with his family, they exchanged pictures and in this way the family did not disband, although the members lived separated. In 1960 his wife and children met him in Spain. Evert was then 23 years old and discussed politics with his father about and told him plainly that he disagreed with him.

Verdoodt invited two of his sons to join him in Brasil, where they worked in the export of timber. They were murdered in 1963.

The family Peeters repatriated from Berlin and they were arrested at the border: not only the parents, but also the children, although they had not yet attained their majority. The only reason was that 'they were the children of their father.'

Ludgard and Mark related in the programme about the visits they paid to their fathers who were in prison: a complete lack of privacy, the guards who supervised the visitors, the distance between the prisoners and their families influenced their lives a lot. They felt that the guards judged them, that they saw them as 'those bad men, those black people'.

The trials were another emotional chapter for the children. Some of them understood only then why their fathers were in prison, why they had been away during the last months of the war. There was a striking arbitrariness in the penalties. Verdoodt and Lagrou were sentenced in absentia and got a death penalty. Peeters got a death penalty as well, but it was later converted to imprisonment for life. The 'small'fish could not reduce from their sentences and were in prison for several years.

In the mean time the families lived in bad conditions, the financial situation being especially disastrous. Relatives gave them help and sometimes friends helped them

to find a job after their release from prison. A director of a Credit Bank enlisted several ex-prisoners. One man funded the education of Evert Lagrou saying that the children should not become the victims of their fathers' crimes. Ludgard's father made a splendid career after his release, motivated by his will to show people that they could not keep him in his place.

The five interviewees were asked to give a final statement at the end of the program.

Mark Grammens blames the Belgian government which did not protect the children who are, after all, Belgian citizens.

Evert Lagrou and his brothers and sisters developed a deep mistrust against all kinds of authority.

Thea Peeters still regrets the fact that she did not have a father at home in her youth and that her father missed a great deal of the growing up of his children.

Ludgard Beddengenoodts is indignant that her father was punished for no other reason than being a member of the Vlaams Nationaal Verbond.

Frans-Jos Verdoodt refrains from judging his father, he feels that he is not in the position to judge him.

Many elements in the stories of the Belgians are similar to what happened to the Dutch collaborators' children. The nationalism, however, is an important difference, although the nationalist aspect was certainly also present in the Dutch National-Socialist Party. In the Netherlands, however, there was no oppression of one part of the population by another part as in Belgium. There was no striving for independence and that makes the story of the Flemish collaborators a different story from that of the Dutch.

Gonda Scheffel-Baars