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Introduction: The Contribution of Biographical Research

Looking at research on social change in Eastern Germany and Eastern Europe in the last decade, one finds a dearth of qualitative studies. Particularly lacking are theory of action studies and genetic analyses, i.e. empirical reconstructions of transformations and reproductions of individuals' history of action (exceptions include the biographical analyses by Miethe 1999; Delow 2000). By contrast, a substantial number of empirical socio-structural analyses on transformation in East Germany can be found, especially event history analysis (cf. Berger 1996). Peter A. Berger calls for an analysis of structures from the inside, i.e. from the perspective of the actors. Though this sounds familiar to us as interpretive researchers, analyses of "factual" events of individual life courses tell us little about the autobiographer's own perspective. Such studies based on socio-structural data and measures of institutional change may be able to generate hypotheses about cognitive, mental changes, as well as about changes in habits, but they are not really empirically grounded. In other words, in order to prove or ground such hypotheses empirically, we need interpretive analyses that are designed to capture and reconstruct the *self-interpretations* of society members as well as the *histories of their actions and of their families*. This is exactly the contribution of sociological biographical research in a family-sensitive form. Biographical research can meet the demand for a full understanding and explanation of transformation processes not only by reconstructing post-transformation biographies and societies, but also by retrospectively reconstructing the earlier biographies and societies. This is exactly where there are gaps in our knowledge about the social reality of Eastern Germany and of Eastern Europe in general. We cannot know how social reality was altered after the system changed if we do not know what it was like beforehand.

By studying the history of action in individual cases, contextualized in the histories of the family, the collective, and the society, we are able to reconstruct the individual's genesis and, furthermore, to distinguish manifest self-interpretations from latent structures of meaning. Biographical case recon-

structions of this kind are not limited to recounting self-descriptions, which may be far removed from the structures of action. In our empirical analyses, an especially significant gap is found between conscious or explicit reflection on an experience of social change and the history of concrete action. One minor but surprising discovery in our empirical analysis of three-generation families from the former German Democratic Republic (Rosenthal 1998; Rosenthal and Völter 1998) was that the collapse of the East German regime in 1989, the German unification, and the subsequent changes in everyday life were not always explicitly discussed in biographical narrative interviews.[1] We had asked our interviewees to tell their family stories and life stories without specifying a theme, so that the selection of themes and presentations of periods of their lives was completely left to their spontaneous choice. It was up to the biographer to determine which themes were addressed, in how much detail, how they were presented and in what order.[2] During the main narration that followed the initial question, and sometimes lasted many hours, the experience of transformation was often not explicitly mentioned. Later, in the questioning part of the interview, the interviewees' answers to explicit questions about social change corroborated the hypothesis that many changes in everyday life and in the biographical overall construction are not considered in the context of social change and unification. Rather, a tendency was observed to interpret these changes as personal achievements independent of general social changes. This does not mean that the biographers did not experience social change, only that they reinterpret them in another way. If we

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1 This study was supported by the German Research Association (*Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft*) from 1992 to 1996. In addition to East German families, we also interviewed families in West Germany and Israel. The specific focus of our study was on comparing different family constellations based on whether the first generation can be categorized as victims, perpetrators or Nazi followers during the Nazi period. We examined, primarily from a sociological perspective, how family histories that differ biographically after 1945—in Israel, in West Germany and in East Germany—affect the process of transmitting the family past from one generation to the next. We looked at the process of transmission of family history through three generations of Jewish and non-Jewish German and Israeli families.

2 We began each individual interview with the following request: "Please tell us your family story and your personal life story, we are interested in your whole life. Anything that occurs to you. Take as much time as you like to tell it. We won't ask you any questions for now. We will just make some notes on the things that we would like to ask you more about later, perhaps in a second interview if we don't have enough time today."
The interviewees generally responded with a long biographical narration (i.e. a biographical self-presentation) which often lasted for hours, uninterrupted by questions from the interviewer. Only in the second part of the interview do the interviewers ask about topics referred to in the main narration. In this "questioning part" the interviewer uses narrative questions to stimulate more detailed stories or narrations of themes and biographical events touched on in the main narration. In the third part of the interview, the interviewer asks questions about themes that the biographer has not addressed. On this interview technique see Rosenthal 1995: 186–201; Schütze 1976.

were to confine our analyses to the level of *self-interpretation*, we would not be able to recognize these differences and their meaning at all.

I shall come back to the difference in the levels of action and explicit self-definition in the second part of this paper, a case study of a three-generation family in the former Soviet Union, now living in Russia. In this study the enormous biographical and family-historical meanings of social changes were seen to be minimized in self-interpretation: this observation conforms to findings by Heidrun Schulze of Vienna. Schulze conducted biographical interviews with women in Moscow who stated that the change of system was not a real issue for them (Schulze 1999: 189). We would not concur with Schulze's interpretation, however, that this statement accurately reflects the experienced reality.

First, I shall address some theoretical biographical issues of experiencing social transformations, drawing on the results of our empirical study of three-generation families (Rosenthal 1998). In the second part of the paper I shall present the results of a case study of a family in the Soviet Union, and examine some of the similarities with our earlier empirical findings. In addition to the transformation processes in Russia, I am interested in discussing a simple sociological presupposition: namely, that the history of societies can have a considerable influence on our biographies over several generations and thus also on contemporary societies.

Reinterpretation of Past, Present, and Future

Not only do people change, but the transformations of political and state systems also affect members of society, producing large-scale changes in social reality. The transformation of social systems does not occur outside of social action. Rather, it has a history of acting individuals; it is initiated and carried out by the social action of members of society. The actors in this process, from the point of view of their self-definition, are not fully aware of their changed structures of action. We can assume that there are latent transformations, i.e. subtle processes which are not experienced by the actors and do not constitute decisive changes in self-perception (cf. Rosenthal 1987: 25–53; Berger and Luckmann 1966).

The transformation of state systems generally implies radical changes in occupational chances and positions related to generations and milieus. Members of younger generations with no history of participation in the prior system and members of groups that were persecuted or marginalized gain chances for advancement. Individuals once in high political and social positions are threatened with social decline. What had been a promising biographical path may become a dead end, and vice versa. In general we may assume

for East Germany and Eastern Europe an increase in options (Prawda 1995: 331). Nevertheless, the options and choices and the increasing heterogeneity of life courses follow certain patterns that are related to the past.

All transformations, whether individual or collective, and the opening and closing of future horizons which they entail, are accompanied by reinterpretations of the past, new perspectives in the present, and changes in people's projects for the future (cf. Fischer-Rosenthal 1995). Social transformations call for re-orientations and redesigned biographies. This leads to reflection on the life as it was lived before, its elective or compulsory biographical threads. Transformations do not extinguish the collective and personal past, although many might wish they could. On the contrary, they *produce* the orientational past that has to be adjusted to fit the present. This is a thesis of the present discussion: transformation processes are concerned with and generate the past. Individuals who are undergoing transformation processes thus realize the extent to which the present is affected by the past. By the same token, sociological reconstruction may disclose how the past is constructed by the present. With the new present perspective on past biographical work, more general biographical structuring (cf. Fischer-Rosenthal in this volume and 2000) becomes necessary. Parts of the experiential past, which have not been remembered or talked about for a long time, now have to be dealt with. Social and personal situations of change produce the breakdown of elements of everyday life that had been taken for granted (Schütz 1971). If the new social realities permit or even require the opening of a social dialog, the processes of reinterpretation will be still more intense. In the German Democratic Republic as well as in the other socialist countries, parts of the collective past and hence individual pasts were taboo in both public and private discourse. They were denied, mythologized, and rewritten to a great extent in accordance with the official ideology, sometimes reinforced by elements of power and violence. Opening public discourses has a tremendous effect on private dialogs and vice versa. This takes place not in a silent inner dialog of the individual, but in a real dialog with others: between the generations, especially in the family. This inter-generational and intra-generational dialog raises new questions, parts of the past are negotiated, and new taboos are established. This process also involves the remote past—often before birth—and elements of the family history in particular. Our empirical studies on biographical and family courses over three generations in the former German Democratic Republic (Rosenthal 1998; Rosenthal and Völter 1998) clearly show how the time of World War II and National Socialism was reinterpreted under the socialist state. For people in the German Democratic Republic, the collapse of socialism brought with it the "burden of a double past" (cf. Habermas 1994), i.e. the necessity of coming to terms both with the SED state and with National Socialism. If the lived family history and the history of individual action before 1989—e.g. antifascist practice in the GDR as com-

pensation for a Nazi family past—is now called into question, then the family's past under National Socialism, once put to rest, also becomes an issue. Another example became evident in the biographies of Jewish communists and their families. After 1989, their Jewish background, family history, and lifestyle, things that had been left behind in their grandparents' generation, could be discussed again. Rediscovering these formerly denied parts of the family past can make this past a central element of actual practice and self-definition (cf. Völter in this volume). Reconsidering the past does not, however, necessarily imply critical reflection on the history lived up to now. The process of looking back into the past may raise more difficulties than an individual is equipped to deal with, and this in turn may lead to new blocks against or excuses for certain sections of the individual's past.

When the past is rediscovered, certain issues, which were at work unconsciously before, may become conscious. Our empirical analyses demonstrate the extent to which the biographies of the descendants were affected by pasts which had been denied, and which may continue to be kept apart and not worked through. In Germany, the National Socialist past, with all the atrocities committed by Germans, has had a considerable influence on descendants. More than fifty years after the war we might suppose that the long-term psychological effects of that era would slowly begin to disappear. The contrary is true: the impact of a burdening and threatening past makes itself increasingly felt, and grandchildren suffer even more overtly under their grandparents' past than their parents did.

Our empirical comparison of families from West Germany, East Germany, and Israel clearly demonstrates that the structural differences inherent in the family dialog with regard to National Socialism owe little to differing socialization processes after 1945, but are very largely due to pre-1945 differences. That is, the more remote past has a far greater impact on the biographer's deep structure than the family history after 1945, whether in Israel, West Germany, or socialist East Germany. This implies that salient events in the family history which burden the family system and individual family members—even those which occurred before an individual's birth—can have a stronger impact on the current family dynamics and the biographies of individual descendants than the fact of being socialized in different social systems. Although we must restrict these findings to family histories that had traumatizing effects on the descendants, it seems safe to say that—in view of the course history has taken in our century—the same might be true of the majority of families both in Germany and in Eastern Europe and the Balkans, or in Europe in general. Whereas in Germany we are dealing with traumatic events of the two World Wars, in Eastern Europe we also have traumatic experiences in the context of Stalinist repression to deal with.

In our studies we have observed the enormous effects of family secrets, both in families of Nazi perpetrators and in families of survivors of the Shoah

(Karpel 1980).[3] In general, the more closed or guarded the family dialog, or the greater the secrecy about, or falsification of the past, the greater the impact of the family past will be on the second or third generation (Bar-On 1995; Danieli 1993; Sigal et. al. 1973). Children and grandchildren often unconsciously suffer from extremely detailed fantasies related to the undisclosed family history or family secrets. Our analyses clearly show a striking correspondence between the form and content of these fantasies and the specific experiences of the grandparents' generation. Subsequent generations suspect hidden parts of the past, and they act out the family past in their biographies. The impact of family secrets is especially evident in biographical choices, such as the choice of an occupation or profession, the choice of a spouse, the choice of a region or country of residence, etc.

I assume that Eastern European families are similar to German families in tending to keep silent about the painful experiences which historical events imposed on them: experiences of violence, crimes, and atrocities witnessed during the revolution, collectivization, and Stalinist repression in general; and certainly about any participation in these crimes. Consequently, I would also expect to find evidence of the impact of family secrets in the generation of the grandchildren.

Family secrets produce a *bound family system* (Stierlin 1981). They are a bond which often considerably impedes the process of separation and individuation in the children and grandchildren. A coalition of family members blocking a discussion of a family past that weighs heavily on all of them can be a decisive factor in the formation and maintenance of a closed or bound family system. Thus, the more complete the silence about the past, the more closed the family system. The bound family closes itself off from the outside world, while at the same time almost no boundaries are permitted between individual family members. Such families avoid conflict, cultivate a harmonizing style of communication and make large parts of the family history taboo (Wirsching and Stierlin 1982: 123ff).

Our empirical findings on the interdependence between family secrets and a bound family system, the enormous effect of the past on the biographies of the descendants, and on the family dynamics, correspond to a large extent with the results of the following case study of a family from the former Soviet Union. This case study offers a clear insight into the consequences of denial and family secrets imposed by the state and society. These constraints affect the family dynamics, the individual biographies, and the family members' experience of social change. Furthermore, this case study illustrates the extent

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[3] This is in accordance with recent international research on trauma in different forms: "Conspiracy of silence is the most prevalent and effective mechanism for the transmission of trauma in all dimensions" (Danieli 1998: 678).

to which the collapse of socialist society changed these individual life stories as well as the family story produced interactively.[4]

The Pikowski Family:[5] Banishment and Secrets

This family from the former Soviet Union stands for many families that have banned parts of their past. Past events were taboo both outside and inside the family. Perestroika made such topics permissible in the family dialog, while opening new possibilities in professional and everyday life, especially for the granddaughter.

The interviews originated as follows. I met the granddaughter of this family—I shall call her Galina—at a three-week seminar on methods that I taught in Russia in 1992. At that time Galina was a lecturer in history. She conducted oral history interviews in a group which had been suppressed and persecuted in the former Soviet Union, and about which no official records and sources were available. In other words, Galina's professional activities were greatly affected by the options opened up by perestroika. In addition, Galina's circle of friends mainly consisted of history students from the United States and West Germany. She tried hard to speak good English. When I entered her apartment I found little notes with English vocabulary stuck everywhere. She confided that she would like to marry a man from the United States. In general she seemed to be keen on relationships in which Russian was not spoken. As we shall also see, languages play an important role in her family history.

The everyday life of the 24-year-old woman and her future horizons were determined by the new post-Soviet options of which she had eagerly taken advantage. Galina herself is unaware of the extent to which many of her biographical choices—her studies, her friendships, and her 1994 marriage to an

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4 By "life story" we mean narrated personal life as related to another in conversation or as written down in the present. "Life history" refers to the experiences that a person has lived through. "Family story" means the shared construction of one family's history in the family dialog.

5 All names and several biographical data have been changed to protect the respondents' identities. The following discussion of this case study is result-oriented, i.e. the process of interpretation cannot be reconstructed here. The method used here to analyze narrated family and life stories is one of hermeneutical case reconstruction developed by the author over many years in combination with various other methods. On the procedure see Rosenthal 1993, 1995; Rosenthal and Bar-On 1992. Essential principles of this method are reconstruction and sequentiality. The texts are not subsumed under specific categories; rather, their meaning is analyzed in the context of the entire text (i.e. interview). The sequential compilation of the text of the life story as well as the chronology of the biographical experiences in the life history are essential.

American Jew—were influenced by elements of her family history reaching far back before her birth. This influence was only brought to light for me as a sociological observer by the analysis of her biographical interview.

Some Remarks on the Surface Knowledge of the Family History

In the context of the seminar, in which I used role-play to teach interview techniques, Galina talked about her family history—especially about her paternal grandmother Olga. Like her first husband, Olga was a teacher of Ukrainian language and literature before and during the German occupation. The couple's political orientation was Ukrainian nationalist. In 1943, after the Red Army re-conquered the Ukraine, Olga was imprisoned by the Soviets for alleged collaboration with the Nazis and was sentenced to ten years' imprisonment and subsequent banishment.

Galina found it hard to talk about this. She was repeatedly overwhelmed by her sadness. It was clear that she still suffered from her family history, that it weighed heavily on her, and that she had strong guilt feelings. The real weight of this family past, however, was due to the fact that it had been a family secret for a very long time. Galina torments herself with guilt feelings because—as she put it—she feels a kind of psychological barrier between her and her grandmother. Until Galina was 13 years old, she had no conscious idea of her grandmother's history of imprisonment. At this age she accidentally discovered a hidden document from which she learned that her grandmother had been sentenced to prison in 1943 and legally rehabilitated as late as 1956. Only in recent years has Galina gained some more knowledge about this period of her family history.

Galina's grandmother, who was convicted under Article 58[6], was one of many who were rehabilitated during the period of political moderation following Khrushchev's "secret speech" at the Twentieth Party Congress (February 25, 1956). This not only casts doubt on the exact reasons and circumstances of the judgment, but also raises the question of whether the grandmother may have been convicted unjustly. As we will see below, the granddaughter's main problem is a different one: she blames the grandmother for not having been able to talk with her about the conviction, and thus with having created a psychological barrier.

I offered to conduct a biographical narrative interview with Galina. She was very interested because she felt so burdened. We had two long conversations of about 6 hours in all. Our interview roused a strong desire in Galina to interview both her grandmother and her parents, and about half a year later she conducted biographical interviews with each of them. The three inter-

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6 Article 58 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Soviet Socialist Federation deals with high treason. This paragraph was used rather arbitrarily in the Soviet Union.

views were conducted in Russian and translated into German. They provide insight into the structure of interaction between Galina and her parents and between Galina and her grandmother. In the interviews with her parents, Galina seems to be much more at ease than with her grandmother. I shall return to this later.

Granddaughter Galina: "It is a big problem for me that I can't ask"

At the end of my second interview with Galina, I commented: "You haven't told me anything about how you experienced the political changes." She answered:

"I can say it is not important to me. At first, of course, it was extremely important. Especially for me as a historian, as I began to see an absolutely different history. Because in my family for example all these stories were something outside of the history I learned in school. I knew the history that was in my textbooks, and the fate of my grandma was an exception, and something is—(three-second pause) *When I entered the university and began to study in 1986, it was when our society began—it was very important really, it was interesting to go to the lectures and to see the movies, it was very important at that time. Now I absolutely consciously try to separate my life from the life of the state and from the general situation in the country, because it is too hard. I can't solve my own problems, and to think about problems of this country is too much.… I want to pay more attention to art, cinema, and books, but not to give my energy, my thoughts, my feelings to all the problems of this country." (Galina, 1992: 68)*

Besides Galina's assessment of the social change as unimportant to her, we find two interesting clues here. First, she alludes to the crucial role of the collective discourse in silencing a certain historical past connected with her grandmother. In the context of the complete interview, the sociological reconstruction shows this to be the unifying theme of her biographical self-presentation. Despite all efforts to separate herself emotionally from her grandmother, Galina remains identified with her and her persecuted past. The text segment also illustrates Galina's self-image as that of a person having no inclination to act politically or socially. If we were to subsume this under the general observations about the "de-politicized generation" (cf. Kon 1991: 32) to which she belongs, we might overlook the degree of political engagement Galina shows in her work. Furthermore, such an explanation would not reveal the biographical meaning of Galina's statement. The portrayal of her process of disengagement, starting with a great personal interest in the history of the state and ending with the need "to separate my life from the life of the state", is in accordance with the course of events from the collective feeling of reawakening in 1985–1988 to the depression following 1989, with the severe economic and political difficulties that ensued. Furthermore, the case reconstruction highlights Galina's need to lead her own life more freely and lightly as the dominant topic of her self-presentation. The two competing themes,

"my grandmother's past" and "my own life", make it difficult for her to narrate her own life story and constitute the thematic field[7] "My own life is burdened and handicapped by my grandmother's past". This latent biographical overall interpretation is manifest in the structure of the text. Galina needs the interviewer's help several times in order to switch from talking about the family past to relating her own biography. Galina's present time and future projections are determined by her need to separate herself from this burdening family past and from the corresponding family dynamics. The need for separation is so strong because she still feels tied to the family and its past.

Let us now consider Galina's life history and life story and the process of discovering the family secret.

Galina was born in 1968 in a small village near Krasnoyarsk, Siberia. The population of this formerly closed village was mainly German and Lithuanian: banished people and their descendants. Galina talks about this community very positively. She lived together with her great-grandmother Vera—Olga's mother—and Olga herself, Galina's paternal grandmother. Galina's parents lived and worked in Krasnoyarsk. Galina's first language was Ukrainian.

Galina's grandfather, Olga's husband, was lost and presumed dead in the Second World War. In the 1950s Olga remarried, but later divorced her second husband. He kept visiting her from time to time, trying to convince Olga to live with him again, to no avail. Galina remembers his visits, and as a child she used to be afraid of this man, whom she remembers as violent and aggressive.

In 1973, when Galina was five years old, her grandmother and great-grandmother decided to move with her to a region close to the Ukrainian border. (They were officially prohibited from returning to the Ukraine.) A family member explained to Galina that they had moved from Siberia for the sake of Galina's health. It was then that Galina learned that her father's family originally came from a Ukrainian village not far from the place that they had moved to. Very quickly she realized how unhappy her grandmother was to live in this region where the majority of people were Cossacks. Her parents followed one year later, and from this time on they lived together in one household. Now the parents spoke Russian with their daughter.

Until she was six years old, Galina was very close to her great-grandmother Vera (who died when Galina was aged 16) and also to a some-

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[7] As the analysis proceeds, the thematic links between the individual sequences of the main narration become clear. We speak of "thematic fields" after Aron Gurwitsch (1964). The underlying assumption is that the narrated life story does not consist of a haphazard series of disconnected events, but that the biographer's autonomous selection of stories is based on a context of meaning, i.e. the biographer's overall interpretation. The narrated life story thus represents a sequence of mutually interrelated themes, which between them form a tight network of interconnected cross-references (Fischer 1982: 168). In Aron Gurwitsch's terminology, the individual themes are elements of a thematic field.

what lesser degree to her grandmother Olga. When her parents moved in, the girl experienced growing conflicts of loyalty, especially because her mother and grandmother did not get along well. Galina experienced her mother as the weaker of the two and began to take her side. Today she says that at that time she developed a growing psychological barrier between herself and her grandmother.

The story of Galina's childhood and youth is the story of a child of poor health, or else one of a child of overprotective parents. In her interview, the theme of poor health is strikingly linked with that of guilt. In Galina's childhood, her grandmother Olga always felt guilty that her granddaughter was never quite well. Galina herself felt guilty for making her parents worry about her health. Her poor health, Galina thinks, was one of the reasons why her parents had no more children after her.

The hermeneutical case reconstruction has shown very clearly that the theme of "illness" here is used to work through the theme of "guilt" in the family dialog. From Galina's perspective, her illnesses always put her in the position of an outsider at school. She was kept in kindergarten only for a short time: her grandmother took her out after she had fallen ill again. At school she was exempted from sports. Only in her family circle did she feel safe and comfortable. She had no friends outside of her family: "My parents were my friends." This did not change until Galina moved out of her parents' house to attend university—and this move, she remarks, "was a tragedy for my parents" (Galina, 1992: 7).

All the interviews show that this family is a very bound or enmeshed one. Again, families of this type have clear and strong boundaries towards the outer world, while boundaries between family members are blurred. The relationships inside the family "tend to be undifferentiated, closed and diffuse. (…) A heightened sense of belonging is gained by sacrificing or discouraging autonomy" (Sauber et. al. 1993: 127). As we shall see, one cause of this bounded family system is the socially imposed taboo or secrecy.

In 1981, when Galina at the age of thirteen accidentally discovered the family's well-hidden secret, she was already allied with her mother. In an English-Russian dictionary, which she wanted to use in learning English, she found the document concerning the rehabilitation of her grandmother, which merely stated that Olga had been convicted under some "Article 58". Galina read it and stared at the number of this article:

"I was very surprised and I couldn't understand. Why? How? My grandma? I know her and she was convicted of … what crime? It was so strange because there was only the number of the article. And with this sheet of paper I ran to my father." (Galina, 1992: 19)

Before Galina told me about her father's reaction, I asked her—using the scenic memory technique[8]—to go back in her mind to this concrete situation. She recalled the fantasies she had had when she first read the rehabilitation card. "When I read this number I connected her guilt with her second husband" (Galina, 1992: 21). Her fantasy was that her grandmother had killed her second husband—even though Galina knew that he was still alive. Recalling this man whom she had feared, she said, "It is one of the most—er (four-second pause)—frightening recollections from earliest childhood; he is coming and his voice and his presence in our home" (Galina, 1992: 22).

How may we interpret these fantasies? First of all, we may suppose that as a child Galina sometimes wished that her grandmother had been better able to defend herself against this man. This might be the reason why Galina still connects guilt feelings with her grandmother's past. Second, the analysis of the interviews with her grandmother and her father suggests other possible interpretations of Galina's fantasies. Olga's second marriage forms part of the secrets kept in this family. The grandmother argues on the overt level that she married the man to change her name, thus veiling her past and especially the fact of her conviction. But the details of how she first met him are contradictory, and they hint that she may have had certain privileges, which she denies, during her time in the labor camp. Moreover, Olga talks—in a very fragmentary way and in confused chronology—of various murders during her time in the labor camp and in banishment, and perhaps also during the time of German occupation. In short, it is likely that Galina's fantasy is in some way related to the hidden parts of the family history and thus to experiences of violence.

Now let us return to her discovery of the document. Galina runs to her father, who tears the document out of her hand. Galina asks what it means and her father says: "It is about Grandma, it shouldn't be talked about." She grabs his arm and tries to take the document back from him, and he hisses at her: "It's none of your business; don't ask." Galina is startled at the violence of his reaction:

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8 When our interviewees have trouble remembering certain events, we work with the technique of "scenic memory" to help them go back to past situations. Working from fragments of sensory or physical memories, we help them to reconstruct these scenes gradually by asking questions about specific details. If the interviewee wants help remembering, we ask them to put themselves back into the past situation and then begin to reconstruct the scene, formulating our questions in the historical present. We move forward from one detail to the next: What do you see? Who are you standing next to? What do you hear? Is it dark? Is it cold? and so on. This technique allows biographers to extricate the scene that has been blocked out of memory. As individual details are named, it may begin to take shape. Eventually our detailed questions are needed less and less, and the biographers can gradually remember a sequence of events and begin to translate them into a story. Fantasies and dreams are reconstructed in a similar way.

"I was so surprised because I had a very close relationship with my parents, and I discovered that there is something he wants to hide, and I asked my Ma and she was just as surprised as I, she said that she didn't know." (Galina, 1992: 24)

The result of Galina's discovery is that she starts tormenting herself with questions, and that the psychological distance from her grandmother grows because Galina does not dare to confront her with her questions. And this has remained so until today. As Galina says: "The story of my Grandma is not clear to me. I know only the plot … and it is a big problem for me that I can't ask."

In fact, it is in part Galina herself who resists learning more about her grandmother's past. Although she is a trained historian, she has never tried to find out exactly what Article 58 was about, because it is still too threatening for her. As her interview with her grandmother shows, questions in connection with Olga's past during the German occupation are simply too dangerous for Galina to ask. She prefers to concentrate on the male violence that Olga suffered. She relentlessly and fiercely tries to pressure Olga into telling her painful memories in detail, especially of situations in which her grandmother suffered violence by men or where Galina suspects this happened. Her questioning becomes especially probing and pressing when her grandmother talks about the violent fights her parents had. When Olga's father came home drunk, he used to turn very violent against his wife, while treating his daughter with special tenderness—this is Olga's report. Galina's questioning makes plain that she suspects an experience of sexual violence here. Actually, in the grandmother's stories about the time she spent as a teenager in the household of her much older brother and his wife, we find some clear hints at a violent experience, but Olga repeatedly states that she does not want to recall it and does not wish to speak about it.

In contrast to the insistent way in which Galina asks about these subjects, her questions about the period of the German occupation are remarkably sparse. While Galina's questioning of Olga seems on the whole rather aggressive, she still avoids putting the questions which actually threaten her most, namely questions regarding her grandmother's conviction and imprisonment. We may ask whether the themes of male (sexual) violence and (alleged) collaboration with the Nazis are connected, and if so, how?

Only in the late 1980s after the transition of the Soviet Union, years after her discovery of the document, Galina learned from an aunt some more details about the painful parts of her grandmother's history. When Olga was arrested in 1943, she was the mother of a five-year-old boy, Galina's father. Her husband was missing in action. The story, as Galina's aunt told it, went like this: It was summer and Olga was arrested wearing summer shoes, which was why she had such bad chilblains on her legs. It was also mentioned that Olga used to be a beautiful woman. Galina's fantasies about her grandmoth-

er's collaboration grew around the remark that her grandmother was such a beauty:

"I always try to imagine myself in her place, where she knows she is a very attractive woman and she has only one small child and she knows that her husband has disappeared and—eh—what should she do in such a situation, and what did she feel? What was my father's role as a boy? … Should she be a woman first or a mother?" (Galina, 1992: 37)

Galina's fantasy is that of sexual collaboration—as we might call it—i.e. that her grandmother had been involved with German men. This also explains why Galina so pressingly questions her grandmother about her violent (sexual) experiences with men, and moreover, it explains her fantasy that Olga could have killed her second husband. As Galina comments later,

"It was the same situation in prison: because of her helplessness she could be oppressed, even by her second husband; he took advantage of her helplessness and made her marry him." (Galina, 1992: 38)

Daughter-in-Law Zhenia: "Nobody told me"

Let us now change the focus to Galina's mother, Zhenia, Olga's daughter-in-law. When Galina asks her mother in an interview, "When did you find out that grandmother had been in prison?" Zhenia answers in some detail: it was at the time when Galina discovered that document.

"I was shocked that I had lived so many years with them and didn't know, and nobody even told me the reason—whether it was mistrust or too great a tragedy." (Zhenia, 1993: 12)

Zhenia tells her daughter how she asked her husband why he had not told the truth. Her husband insisted that he himself had found it out only recently. Zhenia clearly felt that her husband was lying to her, yet it was more than ten years before she dared to ask again, around the year 1992, after the breakdown of the Soviet system. Her husband then admitted to her that in his family there had been a decision not to tell anyone anything.

Zhenia remembers that when she first met her husband she told him everything about her own family. She disclosed, for example, that her father was an alcoholic, that he was violent, and so on. Her husband had nonetheless refused to tell her anything about his family:

"I told him at once everything about my family, about everything. But I heard nothing from him. And that seemed very strange to me. But I didn't dare to ask him any questions. And so (three-second pause) *I felt as if something was missing. I knew that he loved his mother and* (four-second pause) *there was something, but I didn't know what exactly." (Zhenia, 1993: 10)*

Zhenia had felt very unhappy because of his silence, and from the beginning of their relationship she had sensed a kind of boundary between them. When she talks about her husband in the interview, Zhenia cries desperately—especially on giving the date of her marriage in 1965, and she says:

"Well, for four years we had been seeing each other, well. He was not very sociable. And I hesitated for a long time, whether to marry him or not." (Zhenia, 1993: 3)

Some years after the marriage the couple went to live with his mother and grandmother. Zhenia never felt close to her mother-in-law; and she lived in a house where all the other adults shared this family secret. This is what is called an "internal family secret" which "creates subgroups within the family" (Karpel 1980: 298). This constellation strengthens alliances among those within the family who are party to the secret and among those who are unaware. It also builds estrangement between the two groups. The alliance of the "unaware" in this family consisted of Zhenia and her daughter Galina. The rest of the family was in the know, including Wassili, Galina's father, who promised Olga and Vera that he would keep the secret. "Disclosing the secret would be experienced as an act of betrayal and would arouse guilt over disloyalty" (ibid.).

Son Wassili: "Don't tell anyone about Mother"

What is the perspective of Wassili, Zhenia's husband? Wassili's life history is intricately entangled with Olga's imprisonment. Furthermore, his silence about his family's past makes him unable to talk about his own life history, about his losses and his pain. Wassili was born in the Ukraine in 1938. Both his father and his mother were teachers of languages and literature. In 1941 his father was inducted into the Red Army. In 1948, three years after the end of the war, the family was officially informed that he was missing in action. Wassili was five years old when his mother, Olga, was arrested and sentenced to ten years' imprisonment in a labor camp in the central Volga region. During the first years Vassily lived with Vera, his maternal grandmother. It was she who first told him, "Don't tell anyone about your mother, nobody should know it." And he goes on: "I remember only that she told me this very often" (Vassily, 1993: 3).

When the war was over, Vassily and his grandmother moved in with his father's parents—also in the central Volga region—in order to be closer to Olga. But again, the whole family insisted on keeping the secret. In 1952 Olga was released from prison but was exiled to a "closed village" in Siberia, which meant she could visit but could not come to live in the village where her son lived. The family decided not to follow her to Siberia. On Olga's several visits to her son, the family pretended that she was only a distant relative:

"When she came, neighbors were told that this was a relative of ours. None of the neighbors knew that this was my mother, or about her history. And she lived there two or three weeks, I don't remember how long. It was hidden from our neighbors." (Vassily, 1993: 11)

This conduct was maintained until Olga's rehabilitation in 1956, when at last the whole family moved to Siberia to live with her. The "public" explanation was that the family had waited so long because they had not wanted to interrupt or disturb Vassily's schooling, which he finished that same year. We may draw a parallel to the year 1973, when Olga and her mother took Galina along with them to move from Siberia to the Ukrainian border. This decision, too, was made ostensibly "for the child's sake", although we can assume there were other motives related to the family history. It is also striking that Olga's decision to leave Siberia came when Galina was the same age her father had been at the time Olga was arrested.

Vassily himself did not stay long in his mother's house. Soon after they moved he went to Krasnoyarsk to go to the university. Vassily's interview is marked by considerable gaps of memory. He claims that he has no memories before the age of six or seven, and of the later years he recalls only situations in school, but nothing about his family. His mother Olga confirms this. When Galina asks her whether she told her son about the past, Olga reproachfully answers: "The way Papa was? Papa, you know how he is, your papa remembers almost nothing until he was thirteen" (Olga, 1993: 35). Vassily was thirteen when his mother was released from prison, and he does recall her first visit. In other words, in Vassily's memory, his whole life before his mother's return is more or less obscured; he has almost no recollection of it. Galina was also thirteen when she discovered the document of her grandmother's rehabilitation.

Vassily's remarkable memory gaps can clearly be attributed to the family's denial of his mother, and by the same token, to major parts of his own biography. We must also bear in mind that the traumatic experience of his mother's arrest occurred when he was only five years old, and the loss of his father also meant a dramatic change in his life.

Another interesting feature of Vassily's interview is the almost emotionless way in which he relates both his life history and his family history, limiting himself almost entirely to mere biographical data. There seems to be neither empathy for his mother's life history, nor for himself with regard to the terrible losses of his childhood and youth. He laconically answers the question about his mother's first visit:

"She came in summer. In summer, the year—it was the summer of 1952. So she came, we lived together as a family for some weeks. Then she went away. I had been told before that it was impossible for her to live here and so on. That is why I was ready for it and there was nothing unexpected for me." (Vassily, 1993: 5)

Vassily does not reflect on the consequences of a denied past for his career. His daughter Galina reports:

„My father tried to hide (his mother's) *past for her. Especially from me and my Ma, and from everyone. Even when he was recommended to go to Japan to work, he refused to go, because his department would look at his files, about his history. And he didn't want to hurt her of course, to refresh her memory of these awful things." (Galina, 1992: 33)*

His wife Zhenia also talks about the career opportunities her husband missed:

"I think our Papa refused to work abroad only so that his colleagues wouldn't know about his mother. That is why never even discussed it. And how many times he was recommended for section chief. He refused." (Zhenia, 1993: 13)

Perhaps we can interpret Vassily's denial of his mother during his youth and the denial of her history, and hence of his own life history up to his separation from her, as the development of internal family secrets imposed by the societal constraints of the period. Yet this would not fully explain why the family decided to resort to a strategy of denial which excluded even persons who had married into the family from sharing in the secret, instead of treating this part of the family history in some other way. Apart from societal constraints, this decision must have some connection to familial constraints, i.e. mechanisms in the family system itself. In Olga's interview, we learn about a similar pattern of behavior in her family of origin, between herself and her mother Vera.

Grandmother Olga[9]: "I can't remember"

The interview with Olga leaves many questions unanswered, and many aspects of her past remain vague. This may be due to the traumatic childhood experiences of her father's violence, and to Stalinist persecution and banishment in the years following 1943. Furthermore, the vagueness may also be caused by the years of silence and the denial of certain experiences, actions, and periods of her life. The following sketch cannot do justice to the life history of this woman. We shall concentrate on Olga's own presentation, her life story, in order to understand and explain the effect her biography had on the family dialog, and on Galina in particular.

Olga was born in 1918. Her parents were kulaks, or wealthy farmers. In 1929 Olga's father was sentenced to five years' imprisonment for his Ukrainian nationalist attitudes, which he had expressed in public. In the course of agricultural collectivization Olga and her mother Vera were banished in 1930. Olga, who was eleven at the time, experienced a traumatic phase of disenfranchisement, poverty and famine during which millions died. She talks

9 I am grateful for the assistance of Maria Nooke of Berlin in analyzing this interview.

about the fact that many children starved to death. Her mother sent her away for this reason:

"The children started to die in masses. Well, every mother wants her child rescued (eight-second pause). *She sent me away, no matter to whom, no matter whether to acquaintances or strangers, with whomever, she sent me away. But I was sent back: who needs someone else's children during a famine? I lived for a week with these people, then I went to others, and again to others." (Olga, 1993:4)*

After this phase of living with various families, Olga stayed for some time in the family of an uncle—more or less illegally—and later with the family of her much older brother.

Olga too denied her mother. Even as a university student, when visits were allowed, she used to introduce her mother to friends, and even to her future husband, as a distant relative. Olga's husband knew nothing about Olga's origin and family past until after they were married. The parallels across the generations in this family are obvious: the biographical experience of being raised in the absence of the mother is found in three successive generations; both Galina's grandmother and her father had to deny their mothers' identity.

The establishment of these family secrets has a very considerable impact on the marital systems of Galina's grandparents, and of her parents in the present day. This of course raises the question of whether Galina is reproducing the same pattern, and in what way. We can only hope that in her marital life she will not repeat the mechanisms of producing internal family secrets, which have proved so long-lived in her family of origin.

Let us now look at Olga's interview. On being asked to tell her life story, Olga first talks in detail and in chronological order about her history of distress before the German occupation. This is a life history full of suffering from an alcoholic and violent father as well as from a traumatic family history of persecution, disenfranchisement, and expropriation. After Olga has talked for about forty minutes, she briefly tells about the German occupation, and then continues about her time in the labor camp in more detail again. This passage is rather fragmentary, however, and full of vague hints about privileges in the camp, about criminal inmates, and even about the murder of prisoners.

The text as a whole shows that the German occupation, compared with other periods, was not a time of suffering for Olga. Presumably she rather welcomed it, which is understandable considering her prior history. Olga tells how many people were evacuated shortly before the Germans arrived: "Now those who stayed were forced to work by the Germans" (Olga, 1993: 8). After this remark Olga skips the entire occupation period and resumes her narration at about the time she was arrested: "The front wavered. Then those who had remained were closely examined as to whether they might have had a job with the Germans." Although at first, because of the quick temporal jump, this

could be understood to mean that those staying behind were "closely examined" by the Germans, it is now clear that it was the Soviets who conducted the examination—and it is at this point that Olga mentions her arrest and conviction.

Later in the interviews, when her granddaughter Galina asks to hear more about the German occupation, Olga makes a pause of about thirty seconds before she answers:

"Either there was nowhere to work or you would be sent off to Germany. Your family would be torn apart, and then you would find it hard to leave the child behind. And to take the child with you, why that was even harder. And so you had to make up your mind." (Olga, 1993: 29)

Here Olga indirectly places the blame for her staying and collaborating or cooperating with the Germans on her son.

At this point the granddaughter asks no further questions about that period, but jumps back to her grandmother's arrest. The skimpy answers she draws here include the fact that the entire teaching staff of Olga's school had been "examined" and interrogated. Olga however does not connect her conviction with the fact that she was a teacher—and as such was obligated to cooperate with the German administration. Instead she claims to have been convicted of "defeatist agitation against the Red Army." She also claims to have no recollection of the interrogations. Galina asks her: "Could you remember the interrogations, perhaps the first one?" Olga answers: "I can't remember what it was like. With all I experienced after that, you don't remember something like that" (Olga, 1993: 31).

In her interview with Olga, Galina was unable to bring much of her grandmother's life during the German occupation to light. As a member of the generation of grandchildren Galina could be said to have an ambivalent attitude towards the past, similar to that of the grandchildren of Nazi followers and perpetrators. On the one hand they wish to uncover the burden of the family past, but on the other, they have strong fears that their fantasies about this past might prove true.

Family Dialog

Finally I shall interpret a sequence of Galina's interview which illustrates her relationship to her grandmother as well as the difficult family dynamics caused by the family history. After the interview, I asked Galina to produce a family sculpture by grouping herself and the members of her family using small stickers of different colors on a piece of paper, positioning each one to represent their emotional closeness or distance from the others, as seen from

her perspective.[10] When the sculpture was finished, I asked her to have each family member say one sentence to her and then to make a one-sentence statement to each in return.

Galina had her grandmother say, "I am so sorry that everything has gone wrong, forgive me".

Her father, she says, is smiling and snickering, and says, "Everything is okay". And her mother says to her, "Oh, Galina your feet are wet again".

Galina answers her grandmother: "Don't say that. You see nothing has happened, everything is okay, please don't worry."

When I asked her, "Could you forgive your grandma," she replied:

"I try but every time I have the feeling that I can't, or maybe there is a barrier between us, and it's a matter of resentment on my part and resentment on her part."

Interviewer: "And what is it that she does not forgive you for?"

Galina: "It seems to me that neither of us can forgive the other for the existence of this barrier."

We may infer that Galina is not quite sure what to forgive Olga for. It is not simply the grandmother's past, but has to do with her silence and the conflicting loyalties in the family. Moreover, it might be connected with the fact that Galina as a young child did not feel protected enough by her grandmother from the "most frightening" experiences: the visits by her grandmother's second husband.

Conclusion

This family's interviews exhibit some obvious similarities with the interviews we gathered in our research on German families. We find the bound family system, and in connection with it a family dynamic marked by guilt feelings and family secrets. Peculiar to this family, however, is the attempt to keep the secrets even from those who married into the system. As in the German families, it is the third generation—the granddaughter Galina—who takes upon herself the biographical work of reconstructing the family history.

This family clearly shows how collective history—here the Stalinist repression—can affect family and life histories over several generations, and can continue to do so even after a societal transition. Only after perestroika could family dialogs like this one eventually open up in other families. This is

[10] This technique was developed in our research context (see Rosenthal 1998) and is adapted from the sculpture technique in family therapy (Jefferson 1978; Papp et. al. 1973; Simon 1972).

only a start, and a great deal of family work and biographical work is necessary to crack the old family dynamics and escape further repetition.

The impact of the past may also help us realize how family histories in turn can influence our contemporary societies. If we wish to escape certain recurring patterns that are acted out again at certain periods—Yugoslavia since World War I comes to mind—then we need to have a clear recognition of the impact of the past. With regard to biographical research, we must not be content merely to analyze individual biographies, but should reconstruct the family history as well. We need to know the family history in order to understand the biographies we are working with. In doing this of course we must draw on historical sources such as archives, and analyze public discourses.

The history of societies can have a considerable impact on our biographies for several generations. For a family therapist this assumption seems familiar enough, but sociologists, who often assume that society's influence in forming a "social being" does not start until a child goes to school, are not accustomed to this kind of thinking. On the contrary, some current sociological debates revolve around concepts such as "tinker identity" (cf. Hitzler and Honer 1994), trying to stress growing freedom of choices and deliberate self-definition. I find little empirical evidence for such de-determination processes. Perhaps some milieus and generations like to describe themselves as being free to orient themselves in different situations without being bound to some past or obligation. Nevertheless, structural empirical analyses prove that historical continuity determines acting and experiencing beyond our conscious perceptions as we reproduce old patterns in choosing biographically relevant issues and lifestyles.

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