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Three Generations in Jewish and Non-Jewish German families after the Unification of Germany

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1. Introduction

How do three generations of families live today with the family and the collective past during the Nazi period? What influences does this past of the first generation, and their own ways of dealing with it, have upon the lives of their offspring and on the ways in which the latter come to terms with their family history? These are the general empirical questions put forward by our current research[i]. The specific focus of our study lies in comparing different family constellations based on whether the first generation can be categorized as victims, perpetrators, or Nazi-followers during the Nazi period. Particulary form a sociological perspective we also investigate how biographically different family histories after 1945 - - in Israel, in West Germany (FRG) and in the one-time East Germany (GDR) - - affect the process of transmission from one generation to the next. In three generations of Jewish and non-Jewish German and Israeli families we examine the process by which the famliy history is passed down through the generations. The aim is to reconstruct constellations in life-stories which may facilitate the psychological and social integration of people burdened with a threatening collective and family past.

We have been conducting narrative-biographical interviews[ii] of at least one member per generation in each family. Following the individual interviews we conducted family interviews in order to examine the dynamics within family dialogue. At this stage we have completed interviews of members of 20 Israeli and 17 German families. At the beginning of the individual interview[iii] we asked the biographer[iv]: *"Please tell me (us) your family story and your personal life story, I (we) am (are) interested in your whole life"*. The biographers were not interrupted by the interviewers as they narrated; only after they had finished did we start to put forward questions about parts of their life and events we were interested in in more detail.

The interviews are done in a research rather than in a clinical setting. None of our interviewees had ever been hospitalized for psychological reasons. But it should be noted that we understand our interviews as a socialtherapeutic intervention facilitating communication. Our experiences made obvious the effect of the interviews on opening of the family dialogue, which can be considered as the start of familial restructuring.

The method used in analyzing the narrated family and life stories is one of hermeneutical case reconstruction[v]. The general questions posed for analysis can be formulated this way: In what way is the collective, as well as the family past integrated into the presentation of the individual life story? What meaning is given to it in the biographical construction of the biographer? What biographical repair strategies are used in order to heal the effects of a threatening past?

An empirical comparison of families from West Germany, East Germany and Israel clearly demonstrates that the structural differences inherent in familial dialogue with regard to National Socialism results less from differing socialization processes

after 1945 and more from their differing before 1945. That is, these pasts constitute the deep structure of the biographer to a far greater extent than the family histories after 1945, be it in Israel, in the FRG or under socialism in the GDR. Of crucial importance for the life stories of the subsequent generations as well as for dialogue within the individual family are whether and in what wayer the great grandparents, grandparents or parents persecuted in Europe, and how they survived such persecution. Or, on the other hand, to what extent the same were involved in Nazi crimes.

Based on these empirical findings, we would first like to discuss of the similarities and dissimilarities between families of the persecuted and those of perpetrators or Nazi followers. Second we will illustrate the differences among Israel, former East Germany (GDR) and West Germany (FRG). In order better to understand the mechanisms with which the families past is handed down through generations, we will introduce a detailed case study of a family from the ex-GDR. The Basler family[vi] consists both of Jewish and non-Jewish members. This case study illustrates, on the one hand, the ways in which one deals with the persecuted past of the Jewish family members in the GDR, and on the other, what kinds of repair strategies one employs to normalize the Nazi past of the non-Jewish family members. This case study will further serve to clarify the extent to which the collapse of socialist society and the unification changed these individual life stories as well as the interactively produced family story[vii].

2. Similar and Dissimilar Ways of Dealing with the Past in Families of Survivors and Perpetrators

At first glance, one can observe similarities when comparing ways of dealing with the traumatic past during National Socialism within Jewish families where the grandparents either survived the Shoah or managed to flee Germany in time, with the same in families where the grandparents were either perpetrators or active National Socialists. At the level of the individual life stories of the following generations[viii] these similarities manifest themselves in many ways: blocking out information about the family past, acting out the past through fantasies and psychosomatic reactions, fear of extermination, guilt feelings and disturbed autonomy processes. Additionally, one may also observe similar mechanisms within families of the persecuted and the persecutors with regard to inner family dynamics. The silence about the past that has institutionalized itself within perpetrator families extends itself to families of the persecuted as well (Danieli, 1982). Moreover, in both kinds of families one finds an enormous effect of family secrets (Karpel, 1980), a mutual obstructing of one another with regard to any thematizing of the past, accusations that render family dialogue impossible, the institutionalization of family myths (Ferreira, 1963) in order to circumvent familial conflict, and a bounded family system (Stierlin, 1981) resulting from the problematic past.

Behind these manifest similarities at the superficial level, however, lies the level of the latent deep structure, which is constituted differently in each case by the experience of the family past. In other words, no matter how strong the superficial similarities, their function within the family system, and, more specifically, their psychological effect on individual family members continue to be divergent based on the differences in the family pasts.

An aura of secrecy and shame hangs over survivor families where crucial information and experiences are not handed down to the subsequent generations. "The children develop fearful and embarrassed attitudes to the ´family secret´ and often weave horrifying fantasies about what was done to their parents and how they survived" (Davidson, 1980, p. 19). In their fantasies they fill in the gaps in their knowledge by imagining their relatives as active agents rather than as passive sufferers. In contrast, in perpetrator families this is substituted by justification strategies and myth building which attests to the victim status of the family during National Socialism.

In survivor families the silence of the grandparents regarding their experiences is connected to totally different problems and motives from the silence of those grandparents who actively participated in Nazi crimes. Similarly, different reasons motivate the frequently encountered reactions of children or grandchildren of survivors from those of the offspring of perpetrators. Examples include when they withdraw from the horror depicted in survivors' narrations of persecution and killing,

when they fail to grasp the full meaning of certain details of the experience, or when they even repeatedly forget the communicated information. These gestures of self-protection are aimed at warding off very different pressures from those of the children or grandchildren in perpetrator families, even when the latter employ similar self-protective methods. In one family, the grandparents, who were active Nazis, had enveloped themselves in a cocoon of silence and denial for fear of accusations and loss of familial affection. For their part, their son, their daughter or their grandchildren, protect themselves from having to be aware of the gruesome activities of their near and dear. They also try to ward off feelings of guilt as well as the fear that they themselves will be judged as unfit to live by the grandparents or parents (Rosenthal & Bar-On, 1992). One grandmother, who survived the ghetto and extermination camp, does not deny her persecuted past as is the case with perpetrators or Nazi followers. However, if she too does not articulate this past it is because, among other things, she tries to protect her children and grandchildren from the day-dreams and nightmares that haunt her. Survivors very often use their silence to spare their children the pressures they themselves are exposed to and to avoid burdening others with their painful experiences (Danieli, 1982).

Our case analyses clearly show that silence and family secrets as well as family myths constitute some of the most effective mechanisms ensuring a continued impact of problematic family past. This is true in families of survivors, perpetrators and those of Nazi followers. Generally formulated this reads: the more closed or guarded the familial dialogue, or the greater the attempt to make a secret of or to whitewash the past, the more sustained will be the impact of the family past on the second or third generation (Bar-On, 1995, Danieli, 1993, Sigal et. al., 1973). Our biographical case reconstructions will show that these subsequent generations often unconsciously suffer from extremely detailed fantasies concerning undisclosed family history or family secrets.

The respective family secrets differ both in content and function within the families of survivors and perpetrators and of Nazi followers. Further, the fantasies built around these secrets by subsequent generations are correspondingly different in content. These either revolve around the powerlessness and suffering experienced by a survivor, or around the criminal actions of a perpetrator. Moreover, their psychological dynamics also differ. Examples from the Sonntag and the Steinberg families offer preliminary insight into these differences. Both in the former, where the grandfather was most likely a participant in Nazi crimes, and in the latter, where the grandmother survived the Shoah, the children and grandchildren have access only to partial information and fill in the gaps with their fantasies. Fantasy building demonstrates, how, inspite of narrative silence, a latent handing down of the experiences and actions of the grandparents takes place.

In the Sonntag family[ix] the grandfather, who, as archival research shows, was possibly involved in constructing death ovens in concentration camps, continues to ponder how so many corpses could still be left over after 1945. After all, he argues, one did try to burn all the bodies. His whereabouts during the war and the crimes he was actively involved in continue to be a secret within his family. His son, however, continues to pose ”burning” questions with regard to his own life story, preoccupied as he is with whether he could bring himself to shoot people or even burn to death women and children locked inside a church building. He subsequently concludes that if he were required to carry out such orders, he would not risk ”burnt fingers” by refusing to do so. He primarily excuses the perpetrators guilty of such crimes by allocating responsibility and guilt to the victims. One of his main arguments puts forward the view that it was the victims' support of the partisans that led to the liquidation of entire populations by the Nazis in some places. On the other hand, in the Steinberg family[x], the interview with the mother, who was subjected to torture as a political prisoner as well as to incarceration in several concentration camps, is riddled with unspecified allusions to repeated abuse and rape. In her own narrative, the daughter, who is extremely close to the mother, makes cloaked allegations against her. She is unconsciously haunted by the fantasy, that her mother prostituted herself to the Nazis.

These scenarios reveal a son of a possible perpetrator, who tortures himself with his own potential to become one, thereby excusing the real perpetrators and, instead, turning the accusation onto the victims. In contrast, the daughter of a survivor struggles with suppressed accusations against her mother and with related guilt feelings. This scenario clearly signifies the handing down of a pattern already present in the first generation. While the real perpetrators attempt to deflect responsibility from themselves by accusing the victims (Rosenthal, 1992), survivors continue to be plagued by guilt for having survived, repeatedly calling into question their desertion of their parents, their failure to help others in certain situations and why during the ”selection” they only thought of themselves, rather than of those who were sent to be gassed.

A comparison of survivor and perpetrator families also illustrates structural differences with regard to the content of family myths. Within survivor families the construction of and identification with such myths are focused on the themes of ”strength” and ”resistance” (e.g. the fantasy that the grandfather had boxed an SS officer in the ear). In families with a Nazi past this takes on the form of stressing the victimhood of the family members (e.g. the grandfather as a victim of the war and subsequently of imprisonment, an image that concretizes itself in the process of fantasy building). A noticeable feature in Jewish families is the fact that children and grndchildren of grandparents both of whom suvrived concentration or extermination camps take a particular interest finding ´fighting´ parts in their family history. For instance, the Goldstein family, whom we interviewed in Israel, strongly identify with

the grandmother´s brother who was killed in action during the War of Independence in Israel. The enlargement of his photograph is put up very visibly in the grandparents´ living-room, whereas the unenlarged photographs of the murdered great-grandparents lie stored away in the grandparents´ sleeping room. The analysis of this family dialogue made clear that identification with this great-uncle served as a repair strategy, attempting to heal the intense feelings of powerlessness. This is especially true of the grandmother who witnessed the murder of babies and of her best girl friend in the Ghetto of Lodz. While on a superficial level this phenomenon might be explained to be an expression of collective patterns of interpretation institutionalized in Israel, we also find it in the families of Jewish survivors living in Germany. [xi].

In non-Jewish German families one increasingly comes across the myth of the ”clean” soldier who, in the midst of injustice, succeeded in helping enemy civilians or even in treating prisoners of war with respect and a sense of justice. This belief corresponds to the longstanding social myth of the ”clean” Wehrmacht, whose members, unlike those of the SS, supposedly did not participate in dishonorable criminal activities.[xii]

3. Differences in Social and Familial Dialogue in Israel, West Germany and the former GDR.

The phenomenon of collective silence can be found in each of these three societies despite the emergence of a more open social dialogue about the Holocaustin recent years.

In Israel the opening up of such dialogue has undergone several stages. Until the Eichmann trial, which began in 1961, the Holocaust was more or less taboo as topic in public discussion. Only with the public radio broadcasting of the trial, which contained the accounts and testimonies of the persecution and sufferings of the victims could it come to the forefront of public attention (Danieli, 1980, Segev, 1993). The Jom Kippur war in 1973 was the first time when Israel, caught by surprise, started to be more identified with the helpnessless of the victims of the Holocaust. However, until the early eighties one could still observe an effective socially imposed tendency to focus on the ”heroic” in Israel, with issues of powerlessness remaining unvoiced. This conspiracy of silence ”was accompanied by harsh value judgements, which blamed the survivors, who went, it was said, like sheep to the slaughter”. (Bar-On 1995, p. 19) During the last 10 to 15 years survivors are being denounced less and less for having exhibited any weakness during their persecution, and an increasing number of them have begun to speak about their past. In fact the end of the 1980s marks the beginnings of a public discussion -- both in films and in liturature -- on the tribulations not only of the survivors but also of their descendants.

In West Germany widespread silence had institutionalized itself on the topic of Nazi crimes and what prevailed was the myth of the innocent populace which unsuspectingly followed Nazism. This enabled perpetrators responsible for the crimes of Nazism to be freed of charges and the collective majority of Germans could mutually reassure themselves that they had seen or heard nothing concerning the persecution of Jews and other persecuted people until 1945. Empirical analyses of life stories of non-persecuted Germans (Rosenthal, 1990, 1991) illustrate the multiple ways in which members of all generations attempt to extricate accounts of their lives from any possible complicity with the Nazi regime. Although for several years the mass media have attempted to thematize Nazi crimes in a general way, this has hardly ever taken the form of the lived reality of people at the time. This silence on questions of perpetrators and of the lived experience of Nazi atrocities led in the course of time to establish certain rules which, in turn, effectively obstructed any intergenerational as well as intragenerational dialogue from taking place. Even the enormous energy that members of the so-called (19)68 generation brought to the discussion on antifascism in West Germany could not prevent them from unconsciously submitting to the same rules, in spite of their effort to seriously examine fascism, criticize the continuities between the ”Third Reich” and post-war society and to squarely face their parents’ generation with its complicity with the

Nazis. Our interviews with the 68 generation show how little they know about their own family histories. The act of accusing their parents or grandparents of being Nazis often works as an enormous defense mechanism against any concrete knowledge of their actual pasts as perpetrators or Nazi followers (Rosenthal, 1995b). The genocide of the Jews has however become a topic of public discussion leading to greater social dialogue following the initial broadcasting of the American television series ”Holocaust” in 1979. This increased discussion of the persecution and the fate of the persecuted in the media[xiii], in schools and even within families does not, however, rule out the hesitation, or even resistance, in directly addressing the question of perpetrators in either public discourse or within the family.

While in West Germany all discussion centered around the Holocaust more or less ignored the political resistance, in the case of the former GDR exactly the opposite held true. There was an overemphasis of communist resistance to Nazism and a corresponding underplaying of the Shoah[xiv]. Jewish resistance fighters were routinely exalted as antifascists, whereby their Jewish antecedents were bracketed out. Our interviews illustrate how this lack of a public discourse on racial persecution led to even less discussion on the Holocaust and Jews within the families in the GDR than in West German families. In the GDR, bourgeoise resistance groups gradually be came included in public discourse and since the mid 80s there was even an official attempt to rebuild structures to commemorate the Jews, such as reconstructing the New Synagogue in Berlin. However it was only with the unification in 1989 that an unambiguous reinterpretation of the Nazi past was ushered in. Sites of public commemoration, such as the memorials where the concentration camps of Sachsenhausen and Buchenwald once stood, could now be given a new emphasis. The Holocaust exhibits were rearranged to allocate more space to the genocide and the magnitude of the exhibition devoted to political resistance was reduced.

In general, it is necessary to emphasize that the silence about the Nazi past stems from similar motives in both East and West Germany, whereas in Israel these are altogether different. Examing the different ways in which Jewish families in West Germany, in the former GDR and in Israel deal with the past, should shed further light on the differences in social dialogue on the Holocaust in the three countries.

In the former GDR, until well into the 80s, one could find a strong tendency to remain silent about Jewish antecedents, and about the persecution or even about antisemitism experienced after 1945. Instead, the antifascist elements and the history of political resistance in the family would usually be stressed. This was part of an uncritical identification with the antifascist myth propagated by the East German state and the obligatory loyalty to the system. In other words, this way of dealing with the family history was symptomatic as well as reflective of the general social treatment of the Nazi past. Moreover, the state laid little importance on the development of Jewish self-awareness. According to the official definition, only

someone who was registered as a member of one of the 8 religious communities was considered Jewish (Runge, 1990). Secular Jews were considered ”GDR citizens of Jewish origin” at best (Schoeps, 1991, p. 374). In addition, many Jewish functionaries and intellectuals consciously did not profess their Jewishness (Ostow, 1988). These defense mechanisms, functioning partly as mechanisms of denial, contributed to a refusal to acknowledge antisemitism as prevalent in East Germany. Somewhat before the wall came down in 1989, however, these mechanisms were already losing their effectiveness. The more the belief in the socialist state crumbled, the stronger became the need for some to reflect on their Jewish origins. Others began to stress the difference between Jews and non-Jews, one based of necessity on their different experiences, and to take an interest in their family history. For instance, around the mid 80s in Berlin a group came together to build a circle of people with Jewish origins interested in questions of culture rather than those of religion.

In contrast, the self definition of Jews living in West Germany was based more strongly on their Jewishness. However, intil well into the 80s even here many of them kept this relatively inconspicuous and learned a form of self-presentation by which they could avoid being necessarily identified as Jewish within non-Jewish circles. Moreover, they too did not raise within the realm of public discourse questions on the topic of Nazi crimes. Finally, however, some children of families with Jewish background began to voice their thoughts in an openly political way.

While Jews in the former GDR identified with the East German state, those in West Germany suffered from a negative identification with their country of domicile. When comparing Jewish families in the two countries it should also be taken into account that the life histories of their grandparents had considerably different trajectories prior to 1945. In the west, the grandparents mainly consisted of survivors of the camps, who were of Eastern European origin and who immediately after the liberation lived in displaced-person camps (Richarz .1988). In the east, on the other hand, they were either part of the resistance or among those who had emigrated out of Germany before 1939 and, as members of the communist party decided to live in a socialist state after the war.

This group that was forced to emigrate and subsequently returned to the GDR shows interesting similarities to the group that left Germany before 1939 with the Youth-Aliyah for Israel. In Israel both the first and the second generation of theses families mostly live in the Kibbutz, and often hold strong often of decidedly Zionistic persuasion. Analysis of interviews with them shows that such identification serves, among other things, to alleviate the guilt that torments the first generation (Rosenthal, Völter & Gilad, in press): the self-accusation that they had left their relatives to die in Europe, while they themselves could build a new life in Israel. Both the Zionist identification in Israel and the identification with the socialist state in the former GDR are, therefore accompanied by an underplaying of the negative aspects of their respective systems.

4. A Family with Jewish and Non-Jewish Members in East Germany: Antifascism as a Substitute Mourning?

The Baslers[xv] are typical of a family of Jewish origin in the former GDR, both with regard to the trajectory of their family history and their way of dealing with the history of persecution. We conducted five interviews with them: with the grandmother Gertrud Kersten, her son Gerhard, his non-Jewish wife Silvia and with the grandsons Ralf and Roland. Both Gertrud and her son Gerhard refused to participate in a family interview.

Let us now look at the life story of each member individually. **The first generation**. Gertrud, the grandmother was born in 1919 near Heidelberg. Her family lived strictly according to Jewish rules. Her father was a tailor and her mother owned a fabric shop. Gertrud had seven siblings. In 1933, at the age of 14 she began to work as a maid in several Jewish households. One by one these families began to emigrate out of Germany. By 1939 four of her older siblings had also emigrated with the help of her father's relatives to the Australia. In May 1939 Gertrud herself emigrated to Sweden on her own steam. In her interview she only hints at her feelings of rivalry towards her older siblings.

Shortly after her arrival in Sweden she was initiated into the KPD (Communist Party of Germany) by her new circle of friends. There she met her future husband, Manfred, who was non-Jewish and who had fled Germany as well. When the Nazis came to power in 1933 Manfred and his brother Paul, a well-known philosopher, were active as communists in the resistance against National Socialism. While Manfred managed to escape to Sweden, his brother was captured by the Nazis and died in a Gestapo prison.

Gertrud and Manfred married in 1940 and in 1944 their son was born. In 1946 the Baslers returned to Germany and lived in the west, until 1949 when they went over to the GDR. Not too many years later Gertrud and her husband separated.

Since her return to Germany Gertrud has repeatedly tried to look for information on her family that stayed behind. In 1947 she had received archival information that her younger sister was transported to an extermination camp and died there. One of her brothers was murdered along with his family. She also found out that her paternal grandparents had been killed in Holland. Some years after the war she was able to determine that her parents had been taken to the concentration camp in Theresienstadt. It was only after 1989 that Gertrud turned to the archive at the Theresienstadt memorial and found out that her mother and father were transported from Theresienstadt to different camps at different points in time. In spite of this knowledge, she tries to alleviate her grief for losing parents by imagining that they died together in the gas chambers. She insists that her mother, eleven years younger than her father, voluntarily accompanied him to his death: *"It was typical of my mother to say that she wouldn't let my father go alone. I'm convinced that this is how it happened. And she must definitely have fought so they could go together."* Gertrud finds it easier to live with this fantasy than with the possibility that her father might

have died alone. The thought that her mother fought against the passivity of her situation is equally relieving. Alone with her grief and her thoughts, she hardly ever has the opportunity to talk about her parents' deaths or to share her pain with others. *"Not a day goes by when I don't think about these things. ... I was the only one who went away to Sweden....I always lived without my family"*. How little of this is spoken of within the family becomes clear, especially in the interviews with her grandsons.

Exactly how threatening these memories of her family can be for Gertrud also becomes clear from the text structure of her biographical self presentation. Despite repeated attempts on the part of the interviewer to motivate her into talking about her family, her childhood and growing up, she answers purely with descriptions of everyday routine in a religious household, refusing to relate any stories about her parents or her siblings. Although she begins her interview by recounting relevant dates in her family prior to her emigration, her presentation focuses to a much greater extent on her own experiences of persecution after she left home at the age of 14. Rather than speak about her family, she concentrates her narrative from 1933 to 1939, i.e. up to the point of her departure, mainly on her life outside the family. We interpret this text structure as being influenced by her guilt at having survived. Like many of her generation, Gertrud was in a situation of despair. Her parents and younger sister had written to her for help, even for money so they could pay for visas in order to emigrate, but she was in no position to help[xvi]. Especially in the months before the war broke out her days were entirely taken up with the *"problem, how to get the parents out of there."* The last set of letters Gertrud exchanged with her parents and her sister, providing further insight into this inner-family conflict, was in 1941. After a long silence she writes to tell them about her marriage. Her parents and sister write back, complaining about her long silence, adding that they regretted that she had married a non-Jew. The mother writes: *"However, since it is already the case, then let it be so. As a mother, I wish you and your husband every happiness and send my blessings. I pray to God that your marriage may be a happy one."* Gertrud did not reply to this letter. Nor did she exchange any more letters with her siblings in Australia.

Her political ideas and her related lifestyle, as well as her marriage to a non-Jewish academic, drew her further and further away from her background. She had moved away not only from her family but also from her life as a Jew and had found instead a new home for herself in an atheist, communist world. Her marriage and her new circle of like-minded people were definitely a great help during her adjustment to a foreign country. When she moved to the GDR she was asked by the communist party to make a clear decision as to whether she identified as a practicing Jew or not. The party line did not allow one to be a member of the Jewish congregation and of the SED at the same time. In the early fifties Gertrud therefore renounced her Jewish identity. We surmise that this is a further reason for her feeling guilty, especially after the wall came down in 1989.

Her efforts to construct a memorial, together with her family, to her non-Jewish brother-in-law, Paul Basler, in his hometown, provide further insight into her difficulties in dealing with her family history. Every year the family conducts a memorial service there. As the interviews with Gertrud's son and her grandsons also show, this non-Jewish member of the resistance, whom she personally knew, is the only victim of National Socialism who is openly commemorated by the entire family. In psychoanalytic terms, this could be a displacement of the grief surrounding the killings of her Jewish family members onto a process of grieving for a political resistance fighter from the non-Jewish side of the family. In this context it is possible to use the term "substitute mourning". This displacement is also influenced by the social discourse in the former GDR, where members of the communist resistance earned far greater respect and acceptance in public memory than did religious Jews.

Biographical case reconstruction shows that Gertrud Basler had replaced her Jewish self understanding with her communist identity. While this exacerbating her guilt regarding her parental family, this, at the same time, helps her to block these feelings and provides her with means to occupy herself with the politicized, non-Jewish side of her family. However, in contrast to other Jewish families interviewed, Gertrud feels deeply connected to the time in her life she spent growing up in a Jewish milieu. As opposed to many other Jewish communists, she was still a member of the Jewish congregation during the initial years in the GDR. She says: *"Everyone who knows me, knows that I'm Jewish. It has always been that way."* However, she still sees herself as a communist and continues to be a member of the PDS, the party that came out of the former SED. If she were to question this identification, her distance from her parental family would become an even greater problem for her.

The second generation. Gerhard Basler, born in 1944 is the only son of Gertrud and Manfred Basler. He works as a historian and was an active member of the SED.

Asked to narrate his family history and his lifestory he begins with his biographical self presentation: *"I was born in Sweden, on (...), in 1944, as the son of an emigrant family"*. After this introductory statement, which we may read as an identity tag, Gerhard Basler narrates his family history under the rubric "emigration". His life is shaped specifically by the fact that his parents could escape persecution and that after he was born the family moved from a west European country to the GDR. Concretely, however, he knows little about his family history prior to 1945. Although he can talk at length about the later part of his life story, when it comes to the topic "family history" he suffers from a total block, able only to hint at certain things, and often breaks off his report or lapses into silence. While to his relief he can recount a few *"facts"* about his maternal family, his knowledge about his paternal family is totally fragmentary. But from his implications and the gaps in his knowledge, we may surmise that there were some Nazis in this branch of the family. At least one of his father´s brothers was a member of the NSDAP and therefore a potential threat to Manfred and his communist brother Paul. However, this aspect of their past was never discussed openly in the Basler family. This tendency to remain

silent about, or even make a secret of, the unpleasant parts of family history comes up in other contexts as well. For instance, only after many pointed questions did Gerhard admit that his father died while under psychiatric treatment, in Gerhard's words *"surrounded in mental darkness"*.

In his interview, Gerhard Basler, moreover, displays a noticeable need for harmony with regard to the relationships in his family. For example, he refuses to distinguish between people whom he feels close to and those he does not. He can only partly meet the request of the interviewer to illustrate this with the help of a family sculpture[xvii], where he is asked to attach dots in distances to signify his emotional relationship with different members of his family. After he has stuck the dots representing his wife, his sons, his mother and her partner on top of each other, to signify that he is equally close to each of them, he refuses to position his uncles and aunts. He likens the request to demonstrate emotional closeness and distance through graphic representation with Nazi practice, which divided people into categories which read: "fit or unfit to live". He says:

"I refuse to hierarchize human beings. I cannot do it. Even apart from the Holocaust, when one has two children one compares them and asks of oneself, which of the two do you love more. This question cannot be answered and I refuse to evaluate in this way. I don't consider it human."

In the conversations that followed, regarding his vehemence on the matter, it became clear how strongly he fears the question of which of his sons he feels closer to, a question he often finds himself asking. He feels a tremendous pressure that it is wrong to differentiate within the realm of his family. In this context, Gerhard Basler begins to talk about his mother having survived the persecution, as opposed to her sister and her brother. When asked whether he thinks that his mother experiences guilt, he responds strongly: *"I think it's possible. But I would never discuss it with my mother. It's too personal, I wouldn't want to trespass. I would only hurt her with a question like that and I don't want to dig around in the past in that way."*

Like numerous members of the second generation of emigrants who returned to the GDR, Gerhard Basler had identified with socialism for as long as he can remember and had worked to fulfil its goals. After the wall came down in 1989, bringing with it a crisis in his work life as well, he began to question his own behavior during GDR times. The revival of Nazism, rassism and antisemitism in Germany deepened his insecurity and lent greater importance for him to his Jewish origins. While earlier he would identify more strongly with the communist tradition within his family and definitely knows more about it even today, his connection to his Jewish family history grew in importance in the newly-unified Germany. What remains important for him, however, is the difference between the family history of his father, who was part of the communist resistance, and that of his mother, whose family members, according to him, "went to their death unresistingly." Gerhard would like, above all, to resolve this difference. This becomes clear not just through his actions -- he too displaces his grief onto the non-Jewish resistance fighter Paul --

but also in his dreams. When asked what kinds of dreams he had as a child about his grandparents' fate, he describes persistent dreams in which he saw himself on the way to the gas chamber: *"Pretty realistic dreams, where someone says 'Let's see if you all are brave enough and if you can march in there', and I knew what it meant."*

Gerhard interprets this situation of ultimate powerlessness, i.e. the journey to the gas chamber, as a courageous act in his dreams, thereby dissolving the difference in the family histories of his father and his mother into one shared picture. Moreover, in this way he continues with his mother's fantasy in which she imagines her own mother fighting to be allowed to accompany her husband to the gas chamber.

In 1973 Gerhard married Silvia Scholz, a daughter of non-Jewish parents. Silvia was born in 1949. She too is a trained historian and was an active member of the SED.

Silvia's grandfather worked for the Reichsbahn (railways) and was transferred in an important capacity to Posen, in the annexed part of Poland, when the war broke out. The Reichsbahn administration in Posen was responsible for loading Jews onto trains from Wartheland for transportation to the extermination camps (Hilberg, 1990) and it seems highly probable that he was involved in the process. Silvia never got to know this grandfather. In her family he is considered missing, presumed dead as of 1945. Her statements about her grandfather's potential involvement in Nazi persecution are fairly unreflected and she blocks out the emotional underpinnings entirely. When asked by the interviewer whether her grandfather had anything to do with the transportation of Jews, she answers succinctly: *"I think that in Posen he (the grandfather) did, because it was a railway junction, and trains to Ausschwitz and Treblinka had to pass through it."*

Silvia herself was born out of wedlock. Her father was a commanding officer in the Red Army and was stationed in the Soviet-occupied zone. He lived together with her mother and her until she was a year old and then returned to the Soviet Union. Since then she has lost all contact with him and he is never mentioned in the family: *"that was always something that strained relations between my mother and me, because we never really talked about it"*. In 1954 her mother married again. Although Silvia always knew she had a different father, her mother kept his identity from her until she was 18 . The secrecy around his real identity was sometimes the topic of gossip outside the family. When she was a child, Silvia was once told by a friend: *"'My mother said your father is a Russian'. I said: 'No, that can't be, that's not true.' And I said it with total confidence"*. Today she herself makes a secret of her father's existence within the family. In her interview she emphasizes that her sons should not learn about him. For them her stepfather is her actual father. The decision to keep the existence of their real grandfather from them has far-reaching consequences for the family. Ivan Boszormeny-Nagy (1975, p. 296) writes in a similar context: "One such decision makes every subsequent effort at honesty and openness among family members concerning important matters in life impossible." Silvia's husband is also forced into the role of the accomplice. The grandfather

becomes part of internal family secrets (Karpel 1980) with which the parents keep parts of the family history from the children. Silvia therefore puts her children in a situation similar to the one she was in as a child and one day they too could be confronted with statements such as, ”your grandfather is a Russian.”

The thematic field that Silvia’s life story is embedded in is her political trajectory as a socialist. Silvia and her husband’s common political orientation helps them ignore unpleasant parts of their respective family histories. Her marriage to a Jew, who identifies himself as a communist first and foremost, enables her to distance herself from the Nazi elements in her family background and at the same time to identify with the victims without having to deal with her grandfather’s involvement in their persecution. Their common political ideas also take care of any potential conflict within the family which could otherwise result from the difference in their sensibilities and perspectives owing to different family histories.

The third generation. The grandsons Ralf and Roland were born in 1975 and 1978, respectively, and are still in school. Their presentation of their family history also begins with the topic of ”grandmother’s emigration” and they know nothing of their family history prior to this point.

The younger brother **Roland**, when asked to recount his life story as well as his family history, begins: *”Well, I know that my grandmother (3 seconds pause) went over to Sweden with her entire family during the Nazi era.”* It is clear from the first sentence that Roland has never found out or felt the need to repress the threatening parts of his family history, for instance that his great greatgrandparents, his greatgrandparents and his grandmother’s siblings were killed, and that the grandmother was alone in Sweden. He continues:

”....and there she (2) gave birth to my father (5 seconds pause, takes a deep breath) and then her brother and other relatives remained in Sweden or moved to Australia.”

At this point Roland introduces his granduncle Paul Basler, the communist resistance fighter, into the narrative, along with the information that he died of an illness in a concentration camp. Then he goes on to speak about himself:

”....well, that I have Jewish roots (2) and I don’t really know in which, phf, well, I think my father’s family is Jewish and my mother’s is not. My mother comes from M. and (2) um..(3) well, I don’t know anything about that (5)...”

Roland is not sure who was or is Jewish in his family. His confusion about who is related to whom, in which way, is so great that he thinks Paul Basler is his grandmother’s brother and therefore a Jew. The numerous pauses in his recounting of his mother’s family point to his own confusion and above all the darkness her family history is cloaked in. However, at the very least, Roland has some vague feeling that there were Nazis in this branch of his family:

”Grandmother also said they had all cheered Hitler at the time, he gave them work..., obviously, it was a dictatorship, and anyone who didn’t go along was done away with, and so they preferred to go along....more than anything he (Hitler)

enticed them, everyone could get a job and the Jew is to blame and once the Jews have been removed, your situation will improve."
I: "Can you imagine that your grandmother also thought this way?"
R: "Well, I would rather not imagine that....I don't know."

As a result of family tradition and his socialist education Roland identifies strongly with the communist resistance. Faced with the question of what meaning he attributes to whether someone was persecuted as a Jew or as a communist, his initial response is based on a scene from the television series "Holocaust" in which,*"...thousands of Jewish families were transported away and there were only about 20 guards. And the Russians made a run for it because they recognized they were numerically stronger and the Jews didn't try to defend themselves."*

In his imagination Jews, as opposed to communists, are passive. Since, however, he makes his granduncle Paul Basler out to be a Jew, this causes great confusion. When asked, *"And on which side do you see your uncle?"* he answers, *"If he was in the resistance he must have been a communist but he was (3) a Jew (15).*
I: "Are these mutually exclusive?"
R: "(3) Well, I can't say now how I place him, as a Jew or as a communist (15).
I: "What would you rather see him as?"
R: "As a communist (4) but (16) I don't know (6).
I: "What's going through your head at this moment?"
R: "I don't mean that I'm ashamed that he was a Jew (3) that was stupid of me (5) I'm a Jew myself."
I: "Have you ever thought about how you would have behaved?"
R: "As a communist or uh, or how. If I wasn't alone, I would put up a fight, if one does that alone and not in a group it makes little sense. One always has to be part of a larger mass (7)...
I: "How do you imagine Paul Basler in the camp, alone or in a group?"
R: "Well, as an outsider, because those in the camps were mostly either Jews or communists and he was both."

For Roland, Jews and communists do not belong in the same schema. Jews, who are communists at the same time, do not belong to any group. This crucial statement in the interview corresponds equally to how Roland feels about his life post-unification. As the son of communist parents he falls under the most attacked minority in Germany today. As a "leftist" and a Jew he fears the Neonazis and "Right Radicals" whoe are now active in his school. However, he tells the interviewer that he is friends even with them. They are "sportsmen", and therefore unpolitical and not so radical. Obviously he fears the role of the outsider and the thought of having no one to stand by him. As a result he harmonizes his relationship with his potential persecutors, despite having been attacked by Neonazis in the subway once. By arranging the past and the present of both persecuted and persecutor into a harmonious picture Roland tries to do away with the threat such a reality would otherwise present. This shows how behavior patterns present in the earlier

generations of his family the refusal to disturb or deal with certain family connections to National Socialism are handed down.

This confusion around the process of mourning and the handing down of family history produces a sense of diffusion in the members of the third generation that defines their entire identity. Even if one interprets this in the case of the 15 year old Roland as lack of orientation during middle adolescence, in the case of his 18 year old brother **Ralf** it becomes increasingly clear that this confusion results equally from their specific family dynamics. In Ralf's case, both his confusion regarding his relatives and the lack of a concrete sense of identity that results from this are more pronounced. Although at the time of the interview he was 18 years old, he could barely narrate either his family history or his own life story.

His markedly brief response when asked to recount the above can be broken down into four headings: emigration, lack of knowledge about when his paternal grandfather actually died, Jewishness in the family, and granduncle Paul:

"Well, I know nothing of what happened before the second World War, I only know that they escaped to Sweden, America, Australia, and got to know many of their present friends at the time. My father's father died there. I don't know if that was in the war or before. ...Well, they are very interested and involved in Jewish culture, museums and so forth, and they built a memorial or some such thing to my uncle, he was some kind of a philosopher and, well, (6) I guess that's it for starters."

In his fantasies Ralf lets his grandfather die before his return to Germany. This is probably because no one in the family ever mentions that the grandfather died while in psychiatric treatment. Ralf's interview also illustrates that he substitutes the dethematization of his Jewish family members with thematizing his non-Jewish granduncle Paul. When asked what he had been told by his grandmother about her past, he replied: *"Well, actually we only spoke about the philosopher all the time, not much about the rest of the family."* Ralf's confusion around his family history is especially striking with regard to his mother's family: *"I don't know whether they (the grandparents) were Jews or not ."* He also wonders if they emigrated out of Germany during National Socialism. However, he clearly considers his mother Jewish: *"As far as I know she's Jewish, she's very into Jewish culture."* In his understanding, Jewishness is obviously defined by Jewish culture. He defines himself as a Jew but also fears being identified as one and tries to keep his Jewish family background as inconspicuous as possible in his school. He is especially fearful of the Neonazis in his class, *"although we get along very well."*

Asked to narrate his own life story, he says:

"Hm, well, hm, so I was born at some point, and what really impressed me, well (3) hm (2) difficult to say (2) because the last thing I know is the radical change, the turning point here in the GDR, that's really impressive.....the last two years now, also left their mark on me, because Neonazism and hatred toward foreigners and suchlike keep growing in Germany (2) that's also a little confusing (5) hm (6)..."

For Ralf, as also for his younger brother Roland, the fall of the wall brought about a sense of insecurity in their self-understanding, a simultaneous strengthening of the awareness of their Jewish origins and a growing fear of the Neonazis.

5. Concluding remarks

The Baslers represent the type of family where the focus on the emigration within the family story allows a denial and warding off of the unpleasant and threatening parts of their family history. This repair strategy helps achieve two things. First, the mourning around the murdered Jewish members of the family members is split off. Second, the actions of the non-Jewish members from 1933 to 1945 are bracketed out of the family history. In other Jewish families, where the grandparents were also forced to leave Germany, we observed the same repair strategy. Both in families in the GDR and in Israel, the family histories and life stories are narrated under the latent heading ”Shoah” and the manifest ones of ”emigration” and ”living in the new society”. In the ex-GDR families the heading ”emigration” could and still can be embedded in the socialist self understanding of all three generations. This is because for the grandparents the ”antifascist” trajectory began or could continue with such emigration.

What is GDR-specific in the Basler family is that they commemorate the victims of National Socialism in a peculiarly indirect way, through strategies of mourning directed supposedly at a non-Jewish resistance fighter. This corresponds to its public variant in the former GDR, reduced as it was to mourning the murdered communists exclusively. Antifascism therefore fulfils the function of a substitute mourning in such families.

As in other Jewish families, with the Baslers the fact of the Nazi past of some members remains undisclosed. Instead, the family’s common identification with communism is emphasized and in this way the divergent family pasts are harmonized. The specific family dynamics that arise from such harmonization corresponds to the larger social dynamics in the GDR. In this context it is necessary to note that in order to present itself as the new, antifascist Germany, the East German state rejected all continuity or connection with the Nazi past. Only that which bound everyone was stressed after 1945, i.e., the building of a socialist society, and the difference in family histories resulting from different backgrounds could not be thematized. Even when both persecuted and persecutor could be found in one’s family history, this social reality strengthened, indeed demanded, the individual need for harmony and denial. This mechanism, institutionalized over years, was seriously called into question after the wall came down in 1989. However, although this crisis widely affects such family histories, it may not be wrong to assume that as a first re-action it will usher in even stronger defence mechanisms rather than an immediate opening up of familial dialogue.

For the Baslers the denial of divergent family pasts spawned family secrets and the myth of the communist resistance fighter. These can only be revised with the help of far-reaching biographical processes of reinterpretation in the future. In the case of the grandsons, the existence of these secrets and myths has led to extreme confusion regarding both their own life stories and the general family history. This insecurity is strengthened by the fall of the wall, bringing as it did the possibility of new forms of self definition and religious identification for ex-GDR citizens in general (Völter,

1994, in press). This transformation is today not just a possibility, but a demand they are socially required to meet. Social transformations require reorientation of biographies and so hitherto unquestioned family and individual pasts have to be looked at anew. This process of looking back into the past may bring up more difficulties than one is equipped to deal with, and this, in turn, may lead to renewed blocking or excuses for certain sections of one's past.

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[i] This study is carried out by a project run by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, under the aegis of Prof. Dr. Fritz Schütze (Magdeburg University) and Prof. Dr. Regine Gildemeister (Kassel University) in co-operation with Prof. Dr. Dan Bar-On (Ben Gurion University of the Negev, Israel). Our co-workers in Israel are Noga Gilad and Yael Moore. Revital Ludewig-Kedmi participated in recording the interviews with the Basler family presented here.

[ii] This interview technique (Schütze, 1976, Rosenthal, 1995a) works by means of an initial opening question in order to elicit and maintain a longer narration. This narration -- the socalled main narration -- is not interrupted by further questions but encouraged by means of nonverbal and paralinguistic expressions of interest and attention. In the second part of the interview - - the ´period of questioning´-- the interviewer initated, with narrative questions, more elaborate narrations on topics and biographical events already mentioned and locked-out issues were addressed. The method is based on the assumption that the narration of an experience comes closest to the experience itself. Narration of biographical events gives the social scientist the chance to glimpse some of the motives and interpretatoins guiding the actions of his subject.

[iii] Some interviews were carried out by two interviewers.

[iv] We prefer to use the term "Biographer" instead of the term "Autobiographer" in this context. In our opinion the latter term does not lay adequate emphasis on the social

construction of life stories.

[v] For elaboration of the procedure of hermeneutical case reconstruction see Rosenthal, 1993, 1995a. Essential principles in this method are reconstruction and sequentiality. The texts are not subsumed under specific categories but the meaning is analysed in the context of the entire text (= interview). The sequential compilation of the text of the life story as well as the chronology of the biographical experiences in the life history play an essential role.

[vi] All names and several biographical data have been changed to protect their identity.

[vii] By life story we mean the narrated personal life as realated in conversation or written in the present-time; by life history we mean the lived-through life. By family story we mean the shared construction of one family history in the family dialogue.

[viii] In contrast, there are significant differences in the ways in which members of the first generation - victims, perpetrators and Nazi followers - deal with the past (Rosenthal, 1991).

[ix] A detailed discussion of this perpetrator family can be found in Rosenthal, 1995b.

[x] For a detailed discussion of this family see Zilberman & Rosenthal, 1994.

[xi] For a detailed discussion of this family and a comparsion with the myths in a familiy of a perpetrator see Rosenthal, in press.

[xii] This myth has partly been called into question in Germany, by, among others,

exhibitions and publications of the Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung under the heading ”war of extermination” (Heer & Naumann, 1995). The exhibition was taken to several cities in Germany and gave rise to innumerable controversies.

[xiii] The stir caused by Daniel Jonah Goldhagen´s PhD thesis, recently published in both the USA and in Germany, reveals more about the American and German discourse in public on topics concerning Nazi Germany and the Holocaust than about internal scientific discussion. Goldhagen´s findings are not at all new. The myth of an unwitting and uninvolved majority of Germans with only a small number of persecutors has long been dispelled in academic and also in public discourse in Germany and has been further discredited by the exhibitions and publications of the Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung (see footnote 10).

[xiv] ”The persecution of Jews by the Nazi regime was not mentioned in East German history books but the persecution of resistance fighters was greatly emphasized” (Spülbeck, 1994, p 97).

[xv] The following discussion of this case study is result-oriented, i.e. the process of interpretation cannot be reconstructed here. Therefore we would like to make the reader aware of the fact, that the analytical method applied here (Rosenthal, 1993, 1995a) implies that both the construction and the examination of hypotheses takes place in each concrete case.

[xvi] The feeling that one could integrate into a life outside Germany, while one’s family was persecuted and killed by the Nazis, is a constellation in the children’s

life stories that leads to tremendous guilt at having survived (Rosenthal, Völter & Gilad, in press).

[xvii] After the interview we asked our interviewees to build a family sculpture, to associate to it and explore it´s meanings further in a way following the one used in family therapy (Jefferson, 1978, Papp et. al., 1973, Simon, 1972).