

Horst Kächele

The Shadow of the Past on the Present

The handling of a present political situation may be imbued by past experiences.

In the third year of the analysis I told a patient that I would be away for a longer time visiting Chile.

The patient remained silent for quite a long time, then said in a low sarcastic voice: „So you too“.

The 32 year old female patient, a psychologist working at a consultation center, had applied for a special training two years ago and was rejected. As a consequence she developed a severe depressive symptomatology which impaired her professional activity

Meeting with the patient I encountered a highly attractive lady, clothed in black, elegant clothes, blonde, consumptuous hair, silver bracelets and rings. Her countenance was just perfect. Her deprecatory self-presentation was well organized and professionally worked out.

Everything started when she left Munich where she had "a wonderful time with her friends". She left Munich as her husband's professional career led them to a small town close to Ulm. In Munich while being a psychology major she had many erotic and sexually gratifying relationships with men, including her later husband. Out of many admirers she picked him as he was the only one she could share an intense pleasure in cynical remarks about God and the world. Her political self-understanding was marked by the same distant cynical remarks about the present situation.

She told me that she had grown up in Berchtesgaden. She was the elder child of a blonde, beautiful, spoiled, and very young mother and a blonde and beautiful former SS-man who was one of Hitler's lifeguards on the Obersalzberg. Later I learned that her mother was the only child of a rich, catholic warehouse family. The mother had started the relationship with the SS man against her parents wishes at the age of sixteen in 1944. Slowly I realized that in this Bavarian, deeply catholic, nationalistic family it was one thing to do business with the Nazis from the Obersalzberg, but being sexually involved was something completely different. Alas, one might think that the sixteen year old blonde and beautiful adolescent daughter was acting out what was best for the family's business.

Immediately it occurred to me that her black death angel beauty (as she reminded me of Jean Marais' movie < Orphée >) - this shiny, yet stiff blackness of her outfit would be connected to this background. However I knew that she was born in 1946 - one year after the collapse of Nazi Germany. So all in all there would be no simple connection. When it was all over her father - the patient once characterized him as a psychopath: a primitive beast who hadn't learn't anything but killing - disappeared in the woods. He escaped from all political purges, never underwent denazification, but he must have remained in contact with the mother. Later on in the analytic work the patient started to realize that even her kind, catholic grandfather must have been involved in this survival and cleaning procedure. The patient was born eighteen months after the surrender of the Reich, the mother only just eighteen years old staying

with the jobless father in Heidelberg financially supported by the grandparents.

Without going into the details of the development she went through a major reorganization of her adolescent personality. She discovered that the lesson she had learned with her grandpa also worked with other men: "I'm pretty good in getting men where I want them, and I know from one look whether they want me."

Part of the change became the habit of wearing elegant black and only black clothes. "I'm a specialist in black" she said, "there are so many shades in black, so many nuances". So we discovered that the patient's presenting image of being a super attractive, seducing person was the outcome of a betrayal which had many forerunners in her life history. Alas, from that time onwards she reversed the active and passive role, from then on she never would be in the passive situation again. When this connection had been cleared up we understood her depressive mood changes as a loss of control and identified her typical defensive ways to counteract depression by initiating seductive relationships with men.

While the patient was a student in Munich she met a Jewish looking businessman. The patient vividly remembers that she had the conviction that he was a Jew - which turned out to be a false assumption later on - and this conviction was connected with a feeling to undo an injustice in which her father had been involved in some undeterminate yet cruel way. Out of this acquaintance developed a very intensive sado-masochistic relationship (besides all her other superficial short-life one night quickies) which was still alive in a way when the patient came for treatment. To please this "Jew" - who in fact had his origin in Lebanon

even though she continued calling him "my Jew" - she started to buy extravagant, black underware/lingerie as he seemed to appreciate these on her very white-reddish skin. At first the sexual experiences were most exstatic for her and they satisfied something "deep inside of me" as the patient was able to formulate late in treatment. When she finally realized that there was no Holocaust victim in her "Jewish lover's" family she felt deeply disappointed. However it took awhile before this influenced their relationship. Finally his praising of the German philosemitism as something very profitable for his business helped her to slowly get disentangled.

What is the role of the "Jew" in the patient's unconscious relationship role model? Politically the patient had never done more than to read the weekly and fairly left-winged magazine SPIEGEL and certainly had never undertaken any activities to work on the past of her father. She pronounced him dead and she has never seen him again until we were able to work on the topic. Instead of the dead father she had engaged with a living victim.

It took a lot of work before we got could tackle the shadows of her past – At the end of the fourth year we found out that she maintained a representational world where men are either very soft, maternal, reliable like her grandfather with no open erotic qualities allowed or where men are brutal, sexual, beasts, criminals. For the first time she took to the idea that her father should have been arrested for his crimes. „What kind of crimes?“ I asked.

P.: "The crimes he must have committed to get the job on the Obersalzberg, I mean, there has certainly been a gratification for being very effective in the concentration camps".

Late in treatment she was reminded of a terrible dream - a nightmare that she had dreamt during her summer holidays in Berchtesgaden.

„I am standing on the balcony of our house and movie-like I observe a great number of naked, dirty people, ready for deportation. Many people are on their balcony, as it is at Corpus Christi or any ecclesiastic festivity, but no one is doing anything about it. I am also doing nothing, but I feel very bad about it“.

In her association the patient soon identified the people as Jews. She herself also felt like someone who is not looked after in an adequate way. She then proceeded talking about her total abstinence from politics which she rationalized as the only way to cope with the helplessness. We were able to parallel her retreat from bi-personal engagement into her syndrome of being the active deserter with her retreat from political engaged activity. In this context the patient was able to approach the issue whether she should inform herself in more detail what had happened in the concentration camps.

The patient reported another dream:

"Yesterday I observed how cattle was transported to the butcher. The guilelessness of the animals - not anticipating what was waiting for them - made me cry even in the dream".

This was the feeling she also connected to the dream with the Jews.

A: „It is your own guilelessness, your not knowing what your father and your mother were doing to you that made you so vulnerable. So you had

to learn to avoid looking too close in order not to be confronted with another example of maltreating you and your feelings“.

P: „It is true, I knew that he was in Dachau, nothing more, and I have never asked. I even never have been to Dachau“.

A: „So by not knowing you tried to protect yourself; at the same time you had to protect yourself from thoughts and surmises which led to your very self-estranged way“.

Parallel to working through her suppressed anxieties concerning the father's criminal involvement in the Nazi regime the patient changed in different ways that even her colleagues in the consultation center noticed. She became more open and relaxed, was less controlled and to her own great surprise she became pregnant.

During all this battle for remembering the things of the past the patient gave up her habit of wearing those black festive garments. To me this way of expressing her enmeshment with a family world full of guilt and disruption was based on a private unconscious identification composed of being in mourning for the loss of her family. Her strong hysterical involvement with both parents made her receptive for the notions of death prevailing in the Nazi world: *Der Tod ist ein Meister aus Deutschland* (Death is a master from Germany by Celan).

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