

“Anglo- German displacement and diaspora in the early twentieth century; an intergenerational haunting”.

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In this chapter I look at a little known episode in the history of migrant communities: the break up and disappearance of the Anglo-German community in Britain as a consequence of the First World War. I draw partly on a “history from below” approach, but one that is further informed by a contemporary growth in the availability of family ancestry records.

Theoretically I am interested in a psycho-socially informed perspective that can help focus on the role of memory, its erasure and the construction of post traumatic narratives of identity.

Professionally I draw on research into practitioner-based approaches to inter-generational memory and memory erasure. Personally I draw on research into my own Anglo-German family and my involvement with colleagues from family history societies in Britain and in Germany. There is a methodological auto-ethnographic element to this work in that I include some of the experiences I have had in doing this research while, at the same time being involved in interrogating my own and others’ family histories.

The First World War destroyed the German communities that had thrived in Britain during the Victorian and Edwardian period. This destruction came about by a combination of huge popular hostility, driven by a xenophobic right wing press, and actual war time events (notably the sinking of the Lusitania in 1916). Government measures included mass internment, and deportation. The combined factors of mob violence and government action led to the disappearance, by the early 1920’s, of the extensive and complex German communities in Britain. As Panayi (1991) has noted, the May 15th 1915 edition of the patriotic journal *John*

Bull, provides a powerful insight into the anti-German mood of the times in the words of Horatio Bottomly the journalist, financier and former London MP:

I call for a vendetta against every German in Britain, whether naturalised or not, you cannot naturalise an unnatural beast-a human abortion-a hellish freak. But you can exterminate it. (Panayi, 1991 p. 233)

How many Germans were affected? No one really knows as migration had been essentially unregulated since the start of the German royal lines in Britain, but estimates vary somewhere between 30,000 and 50,000. Some, including my direct family, managed to hide. Most could not. This largely invisible and unacknowledged ethnic cleansing has had, and continues to have, consequences in our world today. I'm going to try and map my and my family's thread in the fabric of this social and cultural trauma, but first I will set the scene by outlining the cultural context of the community it effected.

My father (Ray) wrote a memoir before he died. In it, amongst many other things, he wrote down what he knew of our German ancestors. None of the story I have just alluded to appeared in his carefully written account. Not a word. He would have been interested in the truth had he known it or had some way of knowing. He bemoans as he writes how "infuriatingly incomplete" his knowledge is, the only echo of the extreme affects of this period is in his word "infuriating". In 1917 he was one year old, an unwitting survivor of something he knew not.

Historical and cultural context of the London Anglo-German community

By the time the nineteenth century closed, the German community in Britain was by far the largest migrant group. Germans were established at every level of the class structure, although the majority were bakers, sugar bakers, and pork butchers. My family were hairdressers, a triumvirate of three brothers and their German and English wives, making a living in the

bustle and buzz of middle class central London. They apprenticed, worked long hours, and gradually, over a decade from 1880, they became upwardly mobile, running their own salons, along with other business ventures and parallel professional services such as chiropody, manicure and massage. They were representative of a new breed of service industry, trading in large part on the cultural prestige of being German in London. Hairdressers made a significant contribution to the shop working hours reform movement, a bill that took nearly 30 years to become law, such was the opposition to it. It was finally passed into law on May 1st 1912. Shop hours were long and arduous, with low pay, and typically apprenticeships lasted several years. Established fellow countrymen typically exploited the incoming next wave of migrants, who would be younger and less resourced (Towey, 2004 p. 29).

All migrants are subject to push-pull factors in their motivation for migration. In the case of the Germans in London poverty, political turmoil and the unpopular and long military service (three years for Prussians) were important reasons to leave. A strong pull factor, however, was the unique position of the long standing Royal family connections going back to George the First. This attracted those with skills or seeking to acquire skills of “being in service”. From German housekeepers, teachers, to “royal hairdressers” hopeful migrants competed for the needs of London’s new middle and upper classes. In working class areas hairdressers, pork butchers and bakers serviced the needs of the industrial workers supplying fast food and weekly high quality shaves and haircuts. The theme was the same, service and “civilizing” (Elias, 1994 p. 54). The Germans migrants’ emphasis on hard work, tidiness, order, and physical culture also traded on the Prince Albert factor, and the “modern family” that he and Queen Victoria had projected as an image. My ancestors traded on modernity. If you wanted to look and be modern then you needed at least one if not several of their services. Even the steel of their scissors and pork butchery tools were German made. The lotion and potions of the chiropodist, beautician, and manicurists were manufactured in Germany.

How had this situation of complex migration come about? Britain in the last quarter of the nineteenth century was unusually unregulated. None of my ancestors had passports; they do not appear in passenger lists, they arrived possessing only the paper work that they needed in order to leave their home principality. Those who paid to escape military service did not even have this. The longer and better-known journey to America was more costly. Many Germans, intending to travel to America, stopped in London, so the shorter journey represented a significant pull factor.

Other key push factors were political and economic. The museum of migration on Ellis Island, in New York harbor, organizes the immigrant waves in years. The 48'ers, as they were known, went to America as ambitious, politically disenfranchised reformers denied the hope of political emancipation in the failed revolutions of 1848 in Germany. Karl Marx, although he arrived later in London via Paris, was one of these. By contrast Frederick Engels' name appears on a local passenger list from Antwerp to London in 1837. Engels was actually more typical of Anglo-Germans in that he went back and forth on business, including that of organizing international revolution. Others who did not have revolution in mind, came for three months after the harvest to play in touring brass bands that frequented most English seaside resorts. Many pork butchers were "chain migrators" (Wustner, 2012), each family group training up a new set of skilled male and female workers who would then migrate and open a new outlet in a British industrial city.

The Marx family arrived from Paris in 1849. Marx, despite his dangerous reputation, travelled back and forth to Germany visiting friends and later in life convalescing. London was a key destination for revolutionary activists, and this had a strange and very personal bearing on a particularly important phase of the Anglo-German diaspora: the mass internment of enemy aliens that began in the autumn of 1914 and that continued through to the summer of 1916. During this period of time massive and extensive rioting against Anglo-German families

and businesses took place. The internment was as much about managing the agent provocateur aspect of stirred up social unrest as it was about a clearly defined legal process.

In the largest internment camp at Alexandra Palace in London, the well know anarcho-syndicalist Rudolph Rocker informally led the 3,000 inmates of the camp, delivering no less than 139 lectures to Anglo-German internees in the period 1915-19 (Butt, 2011). Rocker, after being deported back to Germany, emigrated to America and finally published the influential *Nationalism and Culture* in 1937. The internment was a key part of trauma formation for some families and individuals in both their attempts to avoid it or their experiences of undergoing it. Much more could be said about the experience of internment and its social causes, it was clearly a source of huge resentment and social suffering. There is currently research going on led by the Anglo-German Family History Society to try and establish in more detail what happened and to whom (Mitteilungsblatt, 2013 p. 36).

War and famine were significant push factors in migration; an equivalent of the Irish potato famine drove many rural Germans to migrate in the years from 1845 to 1850. Some arrived in London and went no further. The Franco-Prussian war of 1871 produced an unknown number of pre-emptive migrators and active draft dodgers. Dutch traders made large sums by securing nighttime snatches, clandestine arrangements for young men avoiding the draft, across the nearest border and exit via Antwerp. Exploitation of vulnerable individuals and families was rife. Just as borders were porous in a Europe struggling to invent and maintain the nation state, so migration was highly de- and dis-regulated. Trauma caused by dislocation was made worse by impoverishment caused by the journey and being preyed on by ruthless middlemen offering “safe passage”.

The City of Hamburg was one of the first to create a safer regulated environment for migrants, putting ceilings on rents chargeable, and providing regulation of accommodation. Eventually a purpose built facility, a factory of exit, called the Ballinstadt emigration halls,

was built and named after its founder Albert Balin. New York later followed suit. A key function of the incoming centers was to control migrants to test for their “viability” in terms of health and economic prospects. Ellis Island isolated poorer migrants for assessment. The earlier mainland disembarkation point of Castle Garden was retained for middle class migrants. No such arrangements existed in London. Migrants sank or swam on luck, or on the strength of their pre-existing networks. Some who intended to make the journey to America were tricked out of their savings and were left stranded in the East India docks. Some walked to Liverpool for a cheaper passage.

At the outbreak of the First World War, many German families, shaken and displaced by rioting, some responding to a call to arms from Germany, walked from London to Harwich (the main port of exit in the UK for Hamburg). Some of these men, retaining their Territorial Army status joined the German reserve armies and faced their fellow compatriots across the trenches in 1915. This recently lost familiarity with fellow Londoners may have given rise to a series of events on Christmas day 1915 which astonished middle class English officers when men on opposing sides recognized each other, played football, sang familiar songs and exchanged haircuts. “One Tommy from the 3rd rifle brigade even had his hair cut by his former barber in High Holborn, who was now a Saxon soldier” (Towey, 2004 p. 91. A reluctance to fight, which troubled some British officers, may have been underpinned by familiarity and friendship; a cultural factor in these strange and little understood cease-fires of mid-winter 1915 (Jenny Towey personal communication 8.9.2012)

Another key push factor was anti-Semitic labour laws in Prussia. For migrating Jews there were no embargoes on entry into the professions and trades in Britain. However, middle class Jews tended to be well naturalized in Germany and there was no significant mass migration of middle class Jews from Germany until the days of the Third Reich. By contrast, working class German Jews were subject to all the push/pull factors described above and were also deeply

involved in migration to escape the complex embargoes on trades in which Jews were prohibited from engaging in Germany. Searching in the British National Archive in Kew for my own ancestors nonexistent naturalization papers, I found records of wave after wave of Russian early twentieth century Jews. They were often poor, and consequently worked in co-ops of joint savings cartels to pay the then very large naturalization fee.

I like to work archives without using an index if I can. This produces contact with the original documents and allows me to search without a purpose (the psycho-social equivalent of free association and being without memory and desire). In these searches I found a German bookseller whose citizenship was cancelled in 1920. It wasn't difficult to imagine what kind of books he had been selling. The records for that year carry many red stamps that indicate deportation. The majority are German, re-categorised as "enemy alien".

In short, during the latter quarter of the nineteenth century, and in the early part of the twentieth century, it was so normal and so easy to pass back and forth between Britain and Germany that a new unofficial international zone had emerged. This was characterized by short-range migration, a proportion of which was also seasonal. This in effect gave rise to a sense of cultural and geographical extension for many Anglo-Germans, which may be represented in Georg Kenner's (1915) internment painting called "My First Christmas" where he depicts himself sitting huddled below a map of Europe "the right way up"; Britain is depicted upside down, where it belongs, as an extension of Europe (Butt, 2011 p. 36). There were, however, many more mundane examples of extended and porous national boundaries where, for example, in my own family, service work was sought and taken for Swiss clients that involved travelling back to Europe while young wives and children remained in London.

The older non-migrating generation continued to exert a pull and influence on my Anglo-German family both culturally and in terms of business ties. Soaps and lotions vital to the hairdressing trade continued to get imported via small family businesses. On the death of her

husband my great grandmother migrated to London to live with her Anglo-German children and grandchildren, the final seal of approval on a successful three-generational migratory venture started in the 1880's. She died in 1905.

Cultural political factors: Growing rivalry and invasion fantasies.

As the turn of the century approached, other vital factors started to emerge in Anglo-German relations that had a subtle and sometimes very direct bearing on migrants, particularly those who were becoming better established. The older Victorian sense of two nations joined by family was increasingly disturbed by both economic and military rivalry. The Franco-Prussian war and subsequent German Unification occurred in 1871. As a direct response the first invasion fantasy book, called *The Battle of Dorking* (Chesney, 1871), was published in Britain. In it, the vastly superior German armies land at Worthing, and defeat the British Volunteer Army on Box Hill, in Surrey. England is humiliated and loses its empire. Published as a pamphlet it rapidly sold 80,000 copies. While the invasion fantasy is a ready-made English reflex encompassing figures as diverse as Normans, Irish, Spaniards, Barbary pirates and the French of the Napoleonic era, it is deeply ironic that the story was renamed *Was England Erwartet* or *What England Expects* and issued to German troops in anticipation of their successful invasion of Britain in 1940 (Dorking Museum and Heritage Centre, 2014).

Over sixty different invasion stories were published between *The Battle of Dorking* and the start of WW1. The Daily Mail launched its reputation and role as promoter and guardian of British xenophobia with Le Queux's (1906) story *The Invasion of 1910*. It was serialised and accompanied by frequent editorials about the danger of "Germans in our midst", and the growing threat of German naval power. In Germany the translation of the same *Die Invasion von 1910: Einfallen der Deutschen in England* (Tamm 1906) proved equally popular due in

some large measure to the omission of the last chapter where the British push the Germans back across the channel.

Europe was changing. In the last decade of the nineteenth century a strange division of labour started to emerge between Britain and Germany. Britain remained pre-eminently a nation of extended overseas empire, aloof or buffered at least from continental politics. Germany could be admired, and acknowledged as, the economic leader of all Europe. Between Hamburg and London the feeling of a single area of trade and migration subtly emerged. It was an illusion but a powerful one for migrants, and London represented a haven for those Germans unable to live with the increasingly centralizing and authoritarian Prussian state. Around 1900 a new dynamic emerged shaking and disturbing this illusion or “imagined community”; that of the first “proxy war” where Germany actively, although mainly in the cultural sphere, supported the “Teutonic Boers” against the English in South Africa.

Bur und Lord (Boer and English) by Karl Bleibtreu (1900) names and anticipates the struggle between downtrodden Teutonic brethren, and the aristocratic and superior imperialist English. “Lords” and “Hun” are part of an emerging language of mutual denigration.

Utopias and Science fiction in Anglo German relations

There is another significant literary genre of the period, broadly known as utopianism or futurism that has a bearing on Anglo-German relations. HG Wells is the most well-known proponent of this genre, which also became a part of popular literature that explored Anglo-German conflict via imaginary cultural and technological futures. Ian Boyd White (2006) documents this clash taking place in his essay ‘Anglo-German Conflict in Popular Fiction 1870-1914’ (Boyd White, 2006).

Wells' earlier *War of the Worlds* (1898) depicts merciless androgynous Martians invading the earth and dominating all warring nations. His visionary *War in the Air* (1910) shows the dystopian future as the world is ravaged by technologically driven warfare. Wells' debt to Darwinism is grimly present in the description of the various arms races that express the survival of the fittest. His predictive power of the emergence and then collapse of new world order seems to signal an idea that the First World War was actually the start of another European Thirty Years' War (Neumann, 1946). Wells' predictions cover features of both world wars and the cold war. This is a broader cultural haunting, an uncanny foreshadowing of events via literature. By the time war was declared in 1914, it had already been fought many times over in popular imagination. Wells even successfully predicted its physical destructiveness, as his character Marcus Karenin says in *The World Set Free* (1913), knowledge and power, not love, are the essential goals of humanity (Wells, 1924).

It was left to the subtle and brilliant imagination of his German contemporary Kurd Lasswitz (1897, 1971) to imagine a Martian takeover where both parties are altered forever by the experience and where mankind acquires a new collective identity in its collision with an older but vulnerable civilisation. *Zwei Planetum* (1897) was not translated into English until 1971, but was widely read in pre WW1 Germany and was the favourite boyhood read of the famous theorist of culture and the civilising process, Norbert Elias (1994 p. 17). Lasswitz deals with the Anglo-German conflict as something that expresses an immaturity in man and a misunderstanding of the sources of social conflict. These, for Lasswitz, are about the scientific, economic and technical failure to tackle scarce resources and at the personal level to do with the need for renewal in relationships. He wrote *Zwei Planetum* in 1897, in the same Silesian town my family came from, Breslau (now Wroclaw, Poland). In the next section I explore what this emerging sense of danger associated with being Anglo-German meant for ordinary families.

Danger, name-changing and shape-shifting

Curiously, my German grandfather's father in law, George Capel, was a British army veteran. He had been in the Indian Army in the mid 1890's: a working class man who was an expert at handling horses. He lived a few doors down from a Silesian German family called the Sussenbachs. Julius William Sussenbach (my great grandfather) was a chiropodist and hairdresser, and his two children Blanche and Percy were just starting their first jobs, Percy was a chauffeur/mechanic and Blanche was a West End manicurist. Percy probably met George's daughter, Martha, in London's Fulham area while living a few doors down. By the time Percy and Martha got to know each other the family name of Sussenbach, and also Percy's Christian names, had undergone transformations that would provide a basic puzzle, a century on, in my own ancestry research.

My grandfather Percy officially carried a traditional set of three Christian names, the last two being Edwin Adolphus, but was signing himself "Tommy" in his letters. This is a shift not only away from German-ness but also towards a particular brand of British-ness, both inconspicuous and patriotic. Tommy Atkins was the nickname given to the 'ordinary soldier' by the Duke of Wellington in the mid-1840s and was the example name used on British army joining papers to show how to fill in the form. One need only read the Kipling poem 'Tommy' (1892) to imagine the kind of working-class-hero social currency that my grandfather may have been reaching for. Percy's father Julius and his younger brother Herman had already adopted the surname Williams by 1901. The middle brother Carl kept the German surname, but was the only one in the migrating generation to marry an English woman, her Englishness offering a palpable prop to his otherwise German sounding identity when needed.

All my German ancestors had three Christian names, one the same as the grandparents. It was easy to follow through the name of the grandparent of each gender. The three brothers all

carried Carl or Karl. The next generation, despite being settled in London, continued to do the same. Here the names Herman, Carolina, and Bertha remained stable and significant for the siblings of the next generation. The parents and the grandparents seem to have been remembered in this way. These naming patterns represent generational signifiers of identity, authority and origin. Yet origin can become a source of anxiety and shame, and is often overlain with a story about a current and recently acquired or even imaginary identity.

A key signifier of the extinguishing of the familiar aspect of German identity is the stopping of Christian name resemblances. This was achieved in my own family by the reduction of three names down to one. I myself have only one Christian name, even though the English naming tradition is often two. My grandfather took another route: He adopted a nickname. Percy Edwin Adolphus passed as Tommy, and signed his letters the same. His beloved nephew Carel (another Anglo-German) added another disguise in his paintings of Percy; in these he is called "Uncle Joe".

None of my family actually changed their surnames by any legal process, but I can see from various documents that a strain had started to manifest itself in the mid 1890's. Both oldest and youngest brothers had William as their middle Christian name, and they started to use it as an alternative to the deeply southern, middle European sounding Sussenbach. They just added an "s" and the trick was done. This simple reconfiguration signifies the double impulse of the suppressed German identity, which is both subsumed by the new name Williams and yet its haunting trace remains in the transformative 's'. 'S' marks the cost at which my family remained German sounding and yet appeared British in the written idiom.

Who marries who in the second generation

In my family people have maximised or minimised their German-ness as the cultural advantages and disadvantages of being German in London waxed and waned. Marriage and

child birth are strong markers of deep level identity and are signs of its shifting and changing. In the migrating generation of my family, from 1880 to 1900, the couples were German. Their children were baptised with the German family name, and all Christian names were of German spelling and origin. The marriage certificates have German sounding friends as witnesses (they were often brothers and sisters in the families). The fathers had clearly stated origins in various parts of Germany.

Another kind of ambivalence made its way in for the next generation. In the decade 1900-1910 something happened that made it desirable to have an Anglo-German marriage. The sons of my great uncles sought English women to marry. The choices of their daughters are not so clear. One remained with a continental choice of partner, one made an English choice. One uncle, a widower, sought and found an English wife for his second marriage in 1910. Now it was desirable, even essential, to have an English wife. The war was on its way. A cultural war had been fought for the previous decade.

Desire, partner choice and social mobility

When deaths occur people revert to their old names. When my great grandmother died in 1905, Rebecca, my middle great uncle's English partner, signed in her husband-to-be's German name on the death certificate. She was co-habiting but did not marry into the family for another two years! Whose desire was in the signing? Love for the cultural other is always to some extent transgressive and can denote both upward and downward mobility. In the game of cultural snakes and ladders that migrants and their families play, perceptions of downward mobility are equally as powerful as perceptions of upward mobility and they can haunt generations that have no power to alter them. This was true for my father. My English Grandmother, speaking of my father about to marry my mother in 1946, is reported to have said: "A nice man Ray, such pity he is descended from those beastly Germans" as she

unconsciously echoed both Noel Coward's song of 1943 "Don't let's be beastly to the Germans", and Horatio Bottomly in 1915! (Panayi, 1991 p. 233).

The role of romance and marriage in changing identity

In *Howard's End*, E.M. Forster (1910) tells a story of love and betrayal, turned to a story of intergenerational conflict and reconciliation. This is based partly on his experience of tutoring for the family of a contemporary Anglo-German marriage, that between Elizabeth Von Arnim and Henning Von Arnim Schlagenthin. As Forster narrates a series of complex class based and interethnic relationships with the power to overcome national, ethnic and class division, he portrays a reconciliation of the idealism and future focus of the Schlegel sisters and the pragmatic self-interested Wilcoxes. It is the women who lead this Anglo-German reconciliation and finally enact it. It is also women who possess a mystical connection to the past and the power to reach out beyond their own social circle, vital for the resolution of complex cultural conflicts.

Elizabeth Von Arnim herself voices a woman's inner experience in a marriage going wrong. She gives ironic and reflective voice to something that is also political and power based. From *Elizabeth and her German Garden* in 1898 to the more political *Frauline Schmitt and Mr Ansthruther* in 1907, she plots a theme of women, first as observers of their "national other" partners, then as free agents in their own right. The personal is being portrayed as political and the theme is voiced by the other major Anglo-German relationship of the period, that of DH Lawrence and Frieda Weekly.

DH Lawrence is the only Englishman to have been accused and arrested for spying both for the Germans and the British. The first time, it was brought about by his and Frieda's al fresco liaison outside the town of Metz, attracting the attentions of a passing German policeman. The second time, less dramatically, having a German sounding wife in Zennor, Cornwall, was

sufficient (Worthen, 2005). I mention these because Lawrence came to think that the war between nations was like the war between men and women in that it had to be fought out in all its destructiveness before something new could be won. For Lawrence, New Man is born out of the ashes of Mass Man, to re-state his refrain of cultural death and rebirth. Lawrence successfully avoided the draft during the war, and felt profoundly rejected by the narrowing horizons of his native England (not least by the banning of his book *The Rainbow* in 1915). For Lawrence, women, by their sensual nature and socially inferior position, can see and bring into being a new world order that goes beyond the miserable confines of industrialism and war. This is summed up in the character of Ursula and her experience of the struggle for personal emancipation in the last lines of *The Rainbow*: “She saw in the rainbow the earth's new architecture, the old, brittle corruption of houses and factories swept away, the world built up in a living fabric of Truth, fitting to the over-arching heaven.” Lawrence 2012 (1915), p. 444

Lawrence and Frieda escaped to Cornwall. Other Anglo-German families were not so fortunate. Many were separated, the men interned and the women and children left to fend for themselves. In her book *True to Both My Selves*, Katrin Fitzherbert (1997 p. 17) describes the plight of her English grandmother with young children in London after her German hairdresser husband is interned in Alexandra Palace. George Kenner, the German artist, is separated from his German wife. They are repatriated into such poverty in post war Germany that both their children die. The fate of the Anglo-Germans in Germany post deportation is another story that has yet to be told fully. Katrin Fitzherbert's three-generation story is a lively example that shows, amongst many other rich narrative strands, that the romantic pull and counter pull of Anglo-German relationships can become a feature of future generation's partner choices.

The War Starts... Germans in the British Army

The Anglo-German experience of war had a number of variations; established migrants, children of German settlers, were exempt from internment but none were exempt from the need to prove their affiliation to their host nation as a matter of survival. Three of my ancestors entered a London regiment called Middlesex Rifles. In one of their joining papers the name 'Sussenbach', is changed to Beck. The regiment was known jokingly as "The Kaiser's own". While urgently asked questions from liberal pro-Anglo-German Members of Parliament sought assurances that these soldiers would not have to take up arms against their fellow countrymen, the regiment did go to France. In 1917 my own grandfather (Percy/Tommy) went on a long convalescence in the countryside, walking perilously close to one of the internment camps in Frimley, Surrey. He successfully avoided the last draft of the war, probably on medical grounds.

Other families caught by direct split loyalties had members fight on different sides of the same conflict. Typically they were men who had retained their German Territorial Army memberships and left at the outbreak of war to answer the fatherland's call to arms and to avoid internment. This may have given rise to some of the strange and unexpected activities during the Christmas day armistice of 1915, which I recounted earlier.

Back to the affective start of this research-another war, a strange haunting

My grandfather died in 1940 during the London blitz. He had suffered from bouts of poor health since the years of 1914-18, and, like many, had a form of incipient lung disease. I heard the story of his death from my father. We were in the garden shed on a rainy day. My father trying, as he often would, to convey something of the existential power of ordinary life, had just said, apropos of nothing, that his father's head had still been warm a while after he died. This somehow got my grudging ten-year-old attention. I listened as he told how his Dad,

terrified of the dive-bombers, had discharged himself from hospital and walked home. There he lay in a daze for several days until one night he woke with a terrible nightmare, “The German aunts have come to get me” he cried out, and proceeded to make a recovery that lasted for a few days. He then died peacefully in his sleep.

I didn't consciously think about this episode, although it remained in memory until after my father had died. It was only then I asked the question “Who are the German Aunts?” In his memoir, written in the year before he died, my father bemoaned the “infuriating incompleteness” of his knowledge of his own family origins. His decision to write was informed by this and, as a result, we have a delightfully full social record of his own life and times as a child, and a young adult in pre-war WW2 Britain.

The German Aunts

So in 2009, a decade after the death of both my parents, I decided to see if I could “tidy up” some of the missing bits in my father's memoir. This dream-like memory swam up and I could as a researcher, rather than a child, ask who were these women and why should he be so frightened? I had barely started to ask the question when to my surprise, and rather like my grandfather's experience, one of the aunts' descendants came and, figuratively speaking, knocked on my door. Equipped this time with computer, ancestry charts and narratives she reproached, “Now we are not going to lose touch this time, are we?”

I had just tumbled to the fact that there were in my family a sibling system of three brothers, Julius, Adolph and Herman starting back in 1880. The moment I had posted the information about the brothers on an ancestry website the aunts, descendants of my great uncle Herman on the maternal side, started to contact me! I think of them now as the first of the German aunts. I surmise now that some of Percy's fear was about hearing the voice of the cultural other, the voice of his mother and her sister and sisters in law come to claim him, take

him home as it were, after so much of his identity had been built up around denial of “German-ness”. As we die we become what we were. More recently acquired languages are lost, earlier affect-laden memories come to the fore. Percy’s story is personal, but it is also a cultural haunting which makes no sense without the actual lost history. This makes a point that intergenerational hauntings are often—perhaps always—about lost information and experience. It isn’t that they are failed symbols in the psychoanalytic sense, but they are more like dreams to which the day time referents have been lost, or which are not directly in view. They make perfect sense, but not to us. To us in another generation they simply disturb and trouble.

Back to the future 1914 and now with some theory

Linking my own family history to broader social history of the period I now think Britain and Germany had a kind of unofficial sibling relationship deeply tied by generations of two-way migration and culture. Perhaps, in some secret familial sense, they had become one nation, too close for comfort—made up of intermarriage, alliance, and counter alliance, as well as the rivalrous projection that arises out of mutual dependency. I think that something like that rivalry may have also occurred in the brother sibling system in my family. I believe this evolved from strong co-operation with elements of conflict in the last decade of the nineteenth century, to increasing rivalry during the first ten years of the twentieth century. The final break between the families occurred in the early 1920’s. The conflict of going to war was experienced between both families and nations. I argue that mutual trauma of this kind is a key factor in the erasure of identity in that it necessitates a forgetfulness of who we are.

I propose that the states of mind produced in this kind of trauma are those of silence and then absence, where the names of the brothers and their wives and children must be forgotten, lest their fate and betrayal be revealed. For the survivors on each side the German or the

English aspect of their identity must be expunged or radically modified in order to continue. Names must be changed or forgotten forever. Disguises must be donned, then taken for real, and then it must be forgotten that they are disguises. Thus many Anglo-German descendants no longer know their histories and no longer know that their name and identity was changed or abandoned. At a political cultural level the British still quickly fall into anti German stereotypes, and seem powerfully attached to prejudices formed during the two world wars. Even today, the German is still firmly seen as in the beast. Yet there is a painful echo on the German side, an echo of a long lost generation when two nations were culturally close, intermarried and intermingled.

Important questions remain for politics and cultural life about whether social representations of traumatic events can allow people and nations to heal. One very clear aspect of this is that the mirroring of what has happened to any group or people has to be accurate. Ancestry research of the kind that informs this study can, if handled in the right way, help this process. This applies as much to the attribution of guilt and the dispensing of justice as it does to the recognition process that allows the working through of a social trauma and identity loss.

The much reviled Prussian state is a good example of the dilemma and deep ambivalence over remembering and forgetting. Seen by the Allies as the cause of all of Germany's, and indeed Europe's, problems, it was abolished in 1947, the only modern nation state to have suffered this fate (Clarke, 2006 p. 675). This no doubt has stored up problems both culturally and in contested geographical/ territorial terms that may yet have bite in the future.

The personal in the political and the ancestral in the historical

In order to understand the fragmented nature of my family experience it has been necessary to attend to a sense of being haunted by something hidden and incomplete. Nicholas Abraham, and Maria Torok (1987, 1994) suggest that trauma leads to psychic cysts; compressed

unspoken traumas that are passed down in the psyche. In psychoanalytic terms the problem with such traumas is that they are not amenable to symbolization and hence deplete and haunt the psyche of more contemporary generations. In the classical Freudian sense they also carry an accompanying risk or likelihood of repetition. They haunt, they are ghosts rather than actual ancestors with real experiences and untold stories and unrequited grief, loves and losses. Those who are silenced, the erased and unspeakable, have ways of making themselves known. In the book *History beyond Trauma*, Françoise Davoine and Jean-Max Gaudillière (2004) coin the phrase, “Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one cannot stay silent”, and while they tend to concentrate on traumatic loss and dislocation the book ushers in a powerful post Foucauldian theme of the return of the cultural repressed (Foucault, 1961, 2005).

We know that the centrality of procedural memory in the development of identity means that many of the key moments and relationships making up our emotional lives are invisible and only partly remembered. Many bodily memories link to cultural memories—I have always liked pickled herrings and anyone who comes from Hamburg will know why—and by the same token are often only recoverable by reminder, by stimulus, by chance meeting or evocation of a past relationship or experience. This is true even more for group life, which can contain and express profound experiences and then disappear, disperse, and apparently evaporate.

Much complication can also arise through processes of identification where a child identifies with a split off aspect of a parent’s personality or experience. This can become an “unthought known” (Bollas, 1987), or an object without a self to realise it. In short this can lead to profound confusion where an experience lives on through a child without them knowing properly what it is. Abraham and Torok (1987, 1994) call it “rejected psychic matter”, which can take the form of psycho-somatic symptoms. I think it is equally the case that unrecognised creative capacities or qualities get locked up by similar processes.

I am proposing something simpler, but also something that promises to extend psychoanalytic thinking. This is that much that haunts us about our past, that which is beyond our immediate living generation, is an absence of information, rather than unsymbolised and therefore primitively disturbing experience. As in puzzling dreams, it's not condensation and displacement that are the missing guests at the party, but the associations about the dream, the thoughts that are part of the person whose dream it is. It is missing associations and missing links that disturb.

This leads to another very useful and sensible concept coined by the American sociologist Charles Wright Mills, that of the Sociological Imagination (1959, 2000). Mills says we suffer, and internalise what we can't imagine socially. We divorce and feel terrible about it, without knowing that socially the odds are stacked heavily against our marriages working. My ancestors experienced shell shock, cowardice and the disobeying of orders as moral failure. Sociological imagination sees these experiences as ones engendered by powerlessness and mediated by social relations of power. There are many such experiences in need of sociological imagination for healing.

Freud makes the distinction between peace-time and war-time neurosis. The former is more to do with life instincts and their conflict, while the latter is more to do with the death or dissolution of the Self. This theme is evident in and taken up by cultural theorists such as . Ann Kaplan (2005, p. 35) and Paul Lerner (2003), and clinicians such as Allan Schore (2009). The sociological imagination is very helpful when dealing with radical social discontinuities which may link to the formation of traumatic vertical splits in the psyche where identity is threatened, lost, or utterly misdescribed. All of my latter day Anglo-German relatives suffer that social fate of identity loss via misdescription, although some have direct and intervening psychological trauma as well. Psychoanalytic thinking is stronger and possibly more helpful where intrapsychic conflict is the focus. Intergenerational healing has to address both aspects

and their interrelations. We have to be inter-generational as well as trans-generational in our thinking.

Do I feel different as a result of a decade of research and inquiry? If anyone had told me before any of this broke into my consciousness that I would be working at migrant identities and their implications for relations between nations I would have said no, I am a psychotherapist, I do not do the social, it is too ephemeral. Now I feel enormously increased by it, there seems to be more of me, and I have met many new people. More than anything else I have become more confident that if I look steadily at this new field it will gradually be possible to do what Norbert Elias (1978) in *The Civilising Process* proposed, which is to establish a practice for and sensibility of the long term, so that the complex histories that make up our conflicted migratory and war torn planet can be acknowledged as the seed for conflict resolution in neighbourhoods, nations and between nations. Norbert Elias' sociology is an intergenerational project, an evolving commitment to understand and develop practices both now and in the future that counter splitting and non-connectivity.

Of course I would be the first in the queue to tell me that this idea is largely illusory and grandiose, but even to have the wish is an achievement and reconnects with my ancestors' conviction that a different and radically better life was possible. I think that tackling intergenerational dynamics in this way has to be in the spirit that the world itself is redeemable, and that the biggest and most profound problems can be solved. The contribution that an understanding of intergenerational dynamics might make is that each person's and each group's past interacts with and in some way articulates contemporary problems. Every attempt at conflict resolution, or, in the therapeutic arena, any attempt to work through a problem, brings pressing opportunities to heal old hurts as well as current ones.

Mourning loss is all well and good, but one person's mourning is another's loss and oppression, when it comes to war, civil conflict and ethnic cleansing. Care over the detail

helps a lot; in fact it is the difference between solution and repetition. But first we have to have the courage to look and continue looking; we have to think it is worth it.

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