

Thinking about the unknown. An Interview Study of Finnish War Children

Barbara Mattsson* & Sinikka Maliniemi-Piispanen*

Abstract. During the Second World War, 1939-45, around 80.000 Finnish children were evacuated to neighbour-countries, the vast majority of them to Sweden. Approximately one-third of them were between two and five years of age at the time of their departure. Ten of the approximately 5000 to 7000 children who did not return to Finland permanently after the war were interviewed in 2007. The present study focuses on how they as adults during the interview cope with their early experiences of evacuation and on the ways they are thinking about and remembering, or not remembering these matters. This material was processed in line with the principles of Grounded Theory and with a psychoanalytical perspective. The conclusion is that the war children had great difficulties when it came to thinking about the significance of the evacuation for their lives. Obstacles to reflection were manifested, among other things, as acute traumatic reactions during the interview. Most of the interviewees could not confront or handle their ignorance and anger. Bion's concepts of K and -K give precision and depth to the picture of the evacuation's traumatic after-effects. Lack of containing has an influence on the capacity to experience mourning and loss and therewith on the development of thinking as well.

Keywords. Evacuation, trauma, containing, development of thinking

Introduction

In Finland the Second World War started in November 1939 with Soviet attacks. Almost immediately, Sweden sent an invitation to Finland expressing a willingness to provide homes for Finnish children in order to protect them from the dangers of the war. It was understood as an expression of neighbourly solidarity. The evacuation of children was carried out under the management of the Finnish government. The evacuation of children had a humanitarian dimension but also a political base. Finland was eager to maintain a close contact to Scandinavia. Sweden had a strong need to engage in Finland in the light of uncertainties over Soviet invasion of Finland. (Kayen, 2010).

Of the 80 000 Finnish children who were evacuated abroad, mainly to Sweden, during the Second World War approximately one-third were between two and five years of age at the time of their departure. The transports of children was taken were carried out for the most part by boat or train and the journey could take between two and six days. The groups were large, around 600 children per transport. There was usually one attendant per 30 children (Kaven, 2010). Upon arrival in Sweden, the children were required to spend a certain period of time in quarantine.

We have a research material consisting of interviews with ten persons, "war children" as they are called in Finland, who were evacuated from Finland to Sweden and who did not return to Finland on a permanent basis after the war. Nine of the interviewees were between the ages of two and five and one of them was seven years old at the time of the evacuation from Finland. They were interviewed in Stockholm in 2007 with an open request, "Tell about your life". Here we wish to study what it means to a person to remember or not to remember these central events in his or her life. We try to trace how the war children as adults, during their interview, cope with these matters. We view our findings for the most part through the lens of Bion's theoretical concepts, especially his thoughts around K, getting to know. His thoughts about man's central striving to understand his

* Institute of Behavioural Sciences, University of Helsinki, Finland. E-Mail <barbara.mattson@dlc.fi>, <sinikka.maliniemi-piispanen@presenssi.com>.

life and to give meaning to his experiences, concentrated in K, appear to have special relevance in relationship to the war children.

Not much is known about the effects of separation and emigration in early childhood. The little child's relationship to its mother and separation from her are often characterized in terms of attachment, trauma and loss. A disruption in the early mother-child relationship can be considered to be one of the main causes of psychological disturbances and may appear immediately or later in life (Bowlby and Winnicott, 1939, Freud, A. & Burlingham, 1943).

Varvin (2010) stresses that a society, because of war and destruction of its social structures, may not be able to uphold the frames that support the child's development and the family's functions. Lack of adult presence witnessing what a child experiences leaves him alone with encapsulated anxiety. An anxiety-ridden mind deprives a person of the psychic space needed to understand and to think about anything that is different, new or unfamiliar. Such encounters create anxiety and fright and pave the way for early defences such as splitting, projections and denial. The ability to symbolize is disturbed. Traumatized persons often perceive themselves as though they were partially outside the sphere of shared definitions or meaning. Traumatic experiences are expressed as dissociated representations and lead to feelings of unreality since these experiences cannot be shared with another person. Human beings in exile can be cut off from their cultural roots and different signals can have confusing and alienating qualities.

Bion describes the circumstances that should prevail in order for children to be able to develop an understanding of them selves and of the world. Experiences of "knowing or not knowing" take on a deepened meaning through Bion's theoretical concept K, "knowing", the human striving to understand and give meaning to experiences as well as to seek truth. Other alphabet-based concepts are L and H, which stand for love and hate in different forms. We can see these, L, H and K, as impulses, feelings and instincts, three summarizing categories that provide a key to the dominating emotional atmosphere in a relationship. K could be seen as a process, a tendency for a person to want to make sense of his or her reality. Also, K is always object-seeking and tied to emotional experiences. A living K means a capacity to tolerate uncertainty and doubt, a capacity that thus ensures a continued flexible curiosity (Fischer, 2011).

Attacks on K lead to a denial of the truth. Here we have not merely an absence of K but more accurately a perversion of K which tell about a denial of reality rather than about an emotional experience (Bion, 1962a).

A prerequisite for the development of thinking is that a person is conscious of his losses Bion (1962a). If not the person makes the absent good object into a present evil object. If the object remains good, despite its absence, mourning is possible. The ability to bear absence and accepting tension is necessary for the development of understanding and thought. If this tension cannot be borne, understanding becomes distorted and knowledge is then replaced by various demands on the outside world. Feelings of not knowing and of doubt are thus avoided. This leads to illusions. If a person imitates knowledge, he turns to rituals and dogmas that help to avoid a genuine investigation and inquiry. If the archaic super ego dominates, the person might seek facts but he does so first and foremost in order to be able to deal out accusations (Bell, 2011). As an element of K, the impulse toward curiosity is always object-seeking. According to Bion, a close adult's containing capacity is the prerequisite for the child's development of K. The basis for our thinking process is the modification of our pressing needs so that we are able to postpone satisfaction (Bion, 1962b).

Successful containing according to Bion's concepts has much in common with secure attachment according to Fonagy's theory of attachment (Fonagy, 2001).

Ogden (1992) speaks of the unconscious fear of not knowing. "What the individual is not able to know is what he feels, and therefore who, if anyone, he is" (p. 165). Something a person is not always capable of knowing is the origin and nature of his feelings. He needs to explore these matters in order to know who he is. It can be difficult for him to accept that there is something he does not know. Ogden refers to Bion, who describes how psychic pain can be fended off, not only through projections or projective identification but also through entering into a state of non-

experience. Here an individual lives partly in a state of psychic death, i.e. there are parts of his personality where unconscious meaning and affects cease to be dealt with.

Our previously published article concerning the same research material (Mattsson and Maliniemi-Piispanen, 2011) was a case study. Analysis of the entire interview material made up the background of the case study: feelings of emptiness, anger, the conflict of having two sets of parents (the lost Finnish parents and the Swedish foster parents) and different signs of traumatic reactions were common for all of the interviewees. Traumatization was confirmed through two methods for discourse analysis (Crittenden and Landini, 2011; Kaplan 2008). In the case study we became interested in how our interviewee related to that which she remembered vs. did not remember. We studied her way of coping with her memories, especially when it came to things that she could not have known anything about. Her narrative about her life was pervaded by attempts at control, which led to various defensive manoeuvres, most notably compulsive actions. We designated her central communication pattern as attempts to cope with “not knowing”. She compensated for not knowing by creating narratives that could be seen as an attempt to hold together childhood experiences that were split at an early age, owing to the evacuation. Our conclusions were that the interviewee tried to defend herself in various ways against feelings of not knowing, helplessness and psychic conflict. Our interest in the significance of not knowing has led us further to Bion’s thoughts.

The research material

Interviews with the ten Finnish war children were carried out in 2007 at Karolinska Institute in Stockholm. The interviewees, who were all members of Stockholm’s War Children’s Association, participated on a voluntary basis. They had previously answered a questionnaire about their experiences of the evacuation and were asked if they were interested in giving an interview. We did not have a special selection process but we could observe that all ten interviewees turned out to have stable relationships, were well educated and had established themselves professionally.

We have processed this material in line with the principles of Grounded Theory (Glaser 1992, 1994, 2010) and we have a psychoanalytical frame of reference. The interviews took approximately two hours per person and were held in Swedish. They were audiotape-recorded and transcribed. The authors of this article functioned as interviewers and are from Finland but are also Swedish speaking.

The present study

The overarching aim of the present study is to expand and deepen the theoretical understanding of the psychic consequences of the evacuation of children. The study is based on the same interview material as the previous article and takes examples from five different interviews. Based on insights gained from the previous study we believe that the war children’s lack of knowledge about earlier and crucial courses of events in their lives can be experienced as confusing and worrying as well as contribute to feelings of helplessness. We know that the children did not have a close adult with them during the evacuation or during the subsequent quarantine. They lost contact with their Finnish parents and most of them later became attached to their Swedish foster parents (there is a large deal of popular literature where war children have written about their life stories). Many war children experienced a great deal in connection with the evacuation that they did not understand or were not able to know anything about. This has meant that the children, even in later phases of their lives, have been forced to react in some way to their memories, or lack of memories, or their lack of knowledge concerning this event, the event that has had a decisive effect on their lives. They have borne their uncertainty or defended themselves against their lack of knowledge in various ways. The ability to bear uncertainty and ambivalence is central to the ability to think, according to Bion (1962a).

We focus on the relationships of the war children to their Finnish and Swedish parents and siblings as well as on their ways of describing people close to them. Fonagy (2001) emphasizes that individuals' ability to give a coherent description of the actions of their parenting figures and of their own actions in terms of mental states is a crucial factor in the assessment of stable attachment. Furthermore, Bion (1962a) underlines that knowledge or lack of knowledge about oneself and one's life is always tied to human relationships and feelings. The ability to experience loss and mourning is decisive for thinking according to Bion. Therefore a central question to consider is whether or not the interviewees were able to mourn and express their losses.

The relationship of the interviewee to the interviewer is also a reflection of the relationship to "the other", another individual who is separate from oneself in the outer world (Hämäläinen 2009). To experience the other is at the same time a measure of differentiation and individuation. The interviewer also represents "the one who does not know", that is to say, an aspect of the war child's dilemma.

During the processing of our previous article, we observed that the interviewer's counter-transference was an important source of information about the interviewee's unspoken feelings. In this study as well, we listen to our counter-feelings.

Results

Cases

Anna was five years old at the time of evacuation and the oldest of the persons in these examples. She gave her narrative chronologically and took the interviewer along with her as she let the events of her life unfold. She reflected over her relationships to different people in Finland and Sweden. Anna spoke with pride and satisfaction about her early life in Finland. Prior to her evacuation, she had lived with her parents at the home of her paternal grandparents. She described her parents as young and disoriented while her paternal grandmother stood for order, principles, care and continuity, qualities with which she strongly identified. *"All my love lies there with grandma and grandpa."*

Anna travelled back and forth between Finland and Sweden and kept up her contacts with her closest relatives in Finland. As an adult she found her wartime letters to her Finnish mother. The same question, repeated again and again, was found throughout all of them: *"Please mum, may I come back home?"*

During the interview she said: *"And I can't remember writing that...but I have wondered how it happened that I didn't feel any warmth toward my Swedish foster parents...I didn't feel that they understood me."*

She gave some time to the thought that she had forgotten about writing those letters to her mother, with all the longing and discontent that they expressed. She returned several times to her feelings about different people from her childhood. Anna had had many difficult experiences in Sweden. She expressed a strong and conscious hatred over abuse to which she had been subjected.

In Anna's narrative we see a functioning combination of L, H and K: Anna was conscious of her different feelings, positive as well as negative. When Anna was evacuated as a 5-year old, she had already had time to establish stable bonds with her Finnish family.

Pirjo told her life story by sweeping over matters to a great extent. She started by stating that she had just had her fourth birthday when she was evacuated to Sweden and that her brother came over a little later but was placed in a family in a different town. She had four sisters and one brother in her Finnish family. She spoke fleetingly about where she was placed and where her brother ended up. Then she made a leap forward in her story and remembered when she had visited her former hometown in Finland together with her evacuated Finnish brother in 1952 and 1958. All she said

about this was “...and I couldn't talk to them... (probably the Finnish parents) it was so hard on me not to be able to talk to them.”

She had forgotten her Finnish language. She burst into tears and cried during almost the whole interview. Then she spoke at length about her (also evacuated) brother and said that his Swedish family had wanted to take him because he was a boy. She also spoke in detail about his school years and his marriage to a Finnish girl. About her self, she finally said that she had repressed most of what had happened.

“I mean I really don't remember much of anything in particular... I don't know...” (cries).

“They (the foster parents) said I screamed like a pig at the slaughter and when I was told to go to bed I apparently made a horrible fuss.” ... “They said they had to give me something from home only then could I calm down”

She spent a considerable amount of time speaking disparagingly about herself and about her foster parents. For example, she mentioned how they showered her with toys that she cared nothing about. She had come to a culture that was alien to her and that made it harder for her to create meaning in her new existence. She did not say much about her life with the new family and she offered no explanation about why she had remained in Sweden after the war. When she was six years old a little brother was born in her Swedish family and she actually did stop there to give a detail:

“They (foster mother and son) were so tight, like, if you know what I mean.”

This life-changing experience was followed two years later by the divorce of her Swedish parents.

“There was a huge row of course and I was told (by the foster mother): ‘If things don't suit you, you can just go back (to Finland).’ ... When people say stuff like this you don't feel worth much, do you?”

At this stage Pirjo's narrative became more and more chaotic and difficult to follow, owing to incomplete sentences among other things. She cried a lot, had a childish vocabulary and often used slang.

Pirjo's foster father later tried to help her in various ways with her education and work situation but she felt that he did not understand what was right for her. She did not express any gratitude; on the contrary she blamed him for her failings:

“That was nothing for me, absolutely wrong!”

However, about herself she spoke at length and in detail about certain phases of her life, such as her schooling. She could describe how she managed different situations but ended by saying:

“Oh, well, it wasn't much of anything.”

Here we see elements of omnipotence behind her mien of humility. However, what she talked about most were her biological brother and her foster brother. Her envy toward them was obvious. It seemed as though they were more valuable and more living for her than she herself was. With the help of the interviewer she was able to say something toward the end of the interview about her Swedish mother.

“...I have never had a close mother-daughter relationship.”

And, in another context

“...are adults allowed to treat kids that way?”

The interviewer felt that there was something arrogant or edgy about Pirjo when she did not offer any details or when she skipped over things so that the interviewer could not understand her. In such moments the interviewer's counter-transference turned into mounting anger. We can infer that Pirjo was staging her own feelings of not knowing and letting the interviewer feel the same thing through projective identification. Aside from Pirjo's fragmented and unclear narrative, there were also many other trauma indicators in her presentation, such as stuttering, affect outbursts and leaps on the time axis. She showed no signs of a psychic work of her experiences, which left her in a state of helplessness. Her trauma was active and made her bitter but also incapable of thinking and reflecting upon who she was and who she had become.

We see her as a clear representative for those who “don’t know” and have not wanted to know, either, about e.g. different details of their lives. We think that her envy and her concealed anger have been determining obstacles (Bion 1962a). Perhaps she also had, if we use Bion’s terms and word choices, problems with curiosity combined with arrogance and “stupidity”. Such a combination of characteristics means that a psychic catastrophe has taken place according to Bion (1967). He spoke about catastrophes and not about trauma.

In the interview it was as though Pirjo had obliterated all thoughts and feelings in relationship to her Finnish parents. She did not mention them one single time. Nor was the interviewer present to her as a living person to whom Pirjo should orient her narrative. Her foster parents remained strange people according to her narrative, difficult to understand. It seemed that she was incapable of making observations about “the other”. Nor was she able to formulate the question “why?” which Bion (1967) sees as a disturbance in the curiosity impulse, e.g. as the obliteration of curiosity. In such a case it also becomes impossible to exercise deductive reasoning (if-then), which could otherwise have created some order in her mind. Pirjo had not been able to grieve over her Finnish parents and she bore a feeling throughout her life of having been treated unfairly. All in all, the picture that we got is of a four-year old present at the interview, unchanged, unmoved and encapsulated.

Kari told about his life in a richly detailed and light, chatty manner, with many vivid episodes. He oriented himself toward the interviewer and made an effort to give a coherent narrative. The interviewer’s counter-feelings consisted of interest but also of empathetic sorrow, even though Kari himself spoke for the most part without obvious affects. He gave a long, detailed account of his career that the interviewer perceived as a way for Kari to gain security for a while during the interview. Here he deadened the curiosity of the listener.

Kari was evacuated together with his family the first time from Karelia (an easterly part of Finland that was later occupied by the Russians) as a baby, with severely impaired lungs. He felt that his mother had saved his life by sending him as a three-year old to Sweden. He came to a well-to-do family with no children of their own. As if it were just a comment in passing, Kari said that his compassionate Swedish foster mother died when he was six years old. He thus had had two major losses at the ages of three and six, respectively, his separation from his Finnish mother and the death of his Swedish foster mother, but he did not make any reflections about this. He said that while he was growing up in Sweden, the thought of Finland made him see red. He was afraid of being sent back to Finland, something that his Finnish father wanted to happen. A real obstacle lay in his path as well: his lung disease was being successfully treated at a Swedish hospital.

As a young adult, Kari made renewed contact with his Finnish parents at the initiative of his fiancée. He spoke about his mother in an admiring and idealizing manner and said that she was looked upon locally as a “wise woman”. The home of his Finnish parents was extremely poor; for example, it was hard to keep the house warm during the winters. He had forgotten his Finnish and could not speak directly to his parents. He gave a picture of his father that was comical and caricatured. He laughed about how he had tricked his father to keep him from knowing that Kari was to attend a local dance. In contrast, he also gave an account of how during the war his father had been a member of a partisan group that had carried out raids on the other side of the Russian border and of how he underwent periods of war psychosis after the war.

The tone changed toward the end of the interview when Kari spoke indignantly about a visit his Finnish sister had made to him some years ago. He asked her to tell him about their family and she refused. He tried to make her understand:

“You know that I have no one else to ask. You’re the only human being I know who can tell me about my life as a little child so to say...”

But she did not want to tell him and only got angry.

“When no one’s left, you get more and more curious.”

He spoke at length about his children and grandchildren.

In the following section, verbs in the present tense are marked.

“I only know that it’s important for them to know – to know before – before I disappear.” ... “Many people maybe think that – that what I’ve lived through, what I’ve told you now, is dramatic and whatnot, but there’s no..., I mean it’s a normal life really, it’s an ordinary life when all’s said and done. But okay, a little, little different anyway, isn’t it? To be a foreigner in another country and not know the language and then suddenly know the language, but not know your own – your real language or ...”

“When I asked my mum questions via the interpreter, the interpreter often just said, “ridiculous, ridiculous” and then did not translate the questions for my mum. And that was the worst word I knew. It is horrible and it shows she hadn’t understood why I was asking those questions ... and I took her to mean that – ‘you who are so young, your brain shouldn’t be burdened with – with details about such awful things’... I wanted to know, I wanted to know so badly and I never got to know anything (cough) so it’s missing ... so much is missing, like, in my knowledge, like, about myself and about them ... I got quite annoyed when I hear these tendencies to say ‘you shouldn’t talk about these things ... they say you’ve had such a good life in Sweden, you know, you’ve been to school and you’ve had food on your table and you’ve managed but we here in Finland, we haven’t been given anything, we didn’t get to go to school, we’ve had to – had to live in poverty, you have to understand.’ ... and I’d like to say to them ... just because you’ve had a hell of a life there, okay I know, but, well, don’t think we haven’t had – had our own little hell here, haven’t we, and so – so you can’t make comparisons like that... many of us (war children) feel that everyone let us down, you know... .”

Here he exposed his vulnerability when he described how he had landed outside the fellowship of his Finnish family. The trauma was present and was made visible for example when he changed verbs from the past to the present tense; time stood still.

Despite what Kari said about wanting to know, it seems as though when he spoke to his sister, he placed the responsibility on her to be the one who knew: he asked but he did not make any reflections of his own. Perhaps he harboured envy toward his sister, who had both the language and the family ties that he himself lacked. Can we say that he was curious? He did not try to make his own formulation of how his life had been. The things that were wrong in his life were considered to be someone else’s fault. In the passage referenced, it seems as though he lashed out at everyone with attacks and accusations. He was in a paranoid-schizoid position for some moments.

Kari also mentioned in passing that an other sister two years older than himself, had held him in her arms during the evacuation from Karelia and took care of him when his mother had to get off the train to look for food. As an adult she suffered a psychosis and was reported to have screamed out his name in despair.

When the actual interview was over and the dictaphone turned off, he mentioned having heard that Finland-Swedes (a language minority in Finland) thought that Karelian women (as his mother was) were unfit as mothers and that it was therefore considered right to take their children away from them. Notions like these about their native country were observed de facto in almost all of the interviewees. The descriptions were often about something threatening or strange that happened in Finland. Are these notions remnants of the lost Finnish parents? In Kari’s case, the remark can also have been meant as a jab at the interviewer, who was a Finland-Swede. Perhaps he was projecting his own ambivalence toward his mother into resentment and anger over those, the others, who said that Karelian mothers were unfit. He however expressed a strong and conscious anger over the fact that the Finnish authorities had turned down a request to give Finnish passports free of charge to war children who had remained in Sweden. He felt that the Finnish state denied and excluded its own children. Perhaps it also awoke feelings about how his family excluded him.

Kari held a distancing and normalizing posture throughout the major part of the interview. He belongs to those who have kept up a relationship to their country of birth. He considered that he had a living interest in Finnish culture and pointed out that he had chosen to retain his Finnish surname, even though this sometimes made problems for him. Kari was preoccupied in his thoughts with the

consequences of the evacuation. He partly hid his bitterness but felt wronged and left out. However, he projected his disappointment over having been sent away on “the others” who had disparaging thoughts about Karelian women. His career was impressive and he himself was greatly satisfied with it.

Ossi began his narrative like this:

“Yes, right, I was born in Kotka [a small town in the eastern coast of Finland] at the height of the war, so to say, to an unmarried mother, yeah, and while bombs were falling I was taken by boat to Stockholm and then we continued on to a delousing camp ... one of those camps where we were scrubbed clean and deloused like they always did and then by and by I was placed in a foster family.”

(You were three years old, right?)

“I was three and a half years old at the time.”

“And I have a, a first memory of ... when I was riding a bicycle and I rode down toward the house, where I sat on the bicycle ... down at the bottom of a hill so – so there was a little cabin there, and when we came closer then – then the door was opened and there I remember seeing my little foster brother crawling around in the opening of the door.”

(Was that the first time you went there?)

“Yes, and that cabin I have, yeah (clears his throat) in a precious painting that I got as a gift or a memento of my foster parents when – when my foster father had died, he died last of my foster parents (cough, throat-clearing) and ...it was said I heard how, I mean – how this family thought I was a playful and nice little kid, who was an early starter, who started to teach my foster brother some words in Finnish.”

(How old was he?)

“He is one and a half year younger than me. He died of cancer in December last year. And now all three of them are buried.”

He talked about his foster brother in the present even though he was dead but evidently highly present in his mind. He talked about the cemetery and then returned to his arrival in Sweden.

(Do you remember anything about the delousing?)

“... don't remember anything, absolutely nothing. But I've heard people say that my physical status was pretty bad since I had one of those puffed out, hanging bellies that a kid gets because of hunger, right? Hunger belly. Like you see when they show kids in some places in Africa on TV nowadays.”

(How did it feel to be reminded of that?)

“It didn't feel any special way, really, anyhow not just that particular thing all by itself. ... I don't have so many memories from my childhood, but, yeah, I mean they're there but they're hidden, but the feeling can sometimes trigger, yeah, trigger, what's it called, I've got some triggers in my personality and they, they ... yeah, they wake up feelings in me ... I mean feelings of – of, yeah, of separation and divorce. I remember one time when I was supposed to give a speech for my foster parents and thank them for the invitation and thank them for a nice time and thank them for the years that had passed ... but it turned into a total, I mean a total catastrophe as far as giving a speech was concerned because my feelings took over and it was just, you know, tears. It was that thing about leaving something and losing something that's called loss and grieving ... right there is a hidden trigger package that gets to me sometimes... . There was an elderly lady there at that dinner and she said afterwards: “That was the most powerful thing I've ever experienced.”

(Do you think it has been a torment for you your whole life, the fear that you might expose this feeling?)

“No, I haven't felt any fear like that at all ... not in the least.”

The above is an example of the contrasts in Ossi's narrative: first he told about the degrading quarantine that had the features of a concentration camp and then about the precious painting of his foster parents' cabin that he had received as a memento. During the opening minutes of the

interview he told about the deaths of both foster parents and his brother but he mentioned nothing about his family in Finland. Then he told about how undernourished he had been. Later he was the one who thanked everyone at the dinner party for the years that had passed. The narrative alternated between affect isolation, images of shame, denial and the need to get revenge. His reference to the quarantine was not a memory but instead a hateful attack on what he had been made to endure. He “knew” but did not remember.

What confused the listener were the changes in tempo, with fleeting images that were quickly changed into something else. Ossi would tell about something tragic but just a moment later his associations would go to something that turned out to his advantage, where weakness was turned into victory.

After the war his Finnish mother moved to Sweden and married a Swede. Ossi was eight years old at the time. Here he mentioned his biological mother for the first time.

“My mother refused to let me be adopted (by the foster parents) but instead insisted that I should leave my foster home ... and it was of course a – a huge crime all over again and emotionally I was of course very hungry there because I didn’t get, you know, the same things as I got from my foster parents. The love and the warmth and the kindness and the closeness and, yeah, empathy, were not up to the level I was used to.”

(After all, your mother didn’t know you so well.)

“No, she didn’t know me at all and I didn’t know her ... so it happened once again, a kind of situation where there was emptiness all around me.”

When everything became empty around him, it looks as though he lost contact with his language (the Swedish language), which did not keep its living character but rather became rigid and technical. A little later he told about a fight, a crucial, life-threatening, physical trial of strength with his stepfather, which Ossi won. He became however aware of his physical strength and after that he did not have to hear constant derogatory remarks.

To be sure, the split nature of his narrative was an expression of trauma. An interview with a traumatized person is seldom logically or chronologically structured. He told his sorrowful story but soon covered up the sorrow with an example of some achievement. Much that he said about his adult life in the latter part of his narrative gave the impression of being so-called generational linking (Kaplan 2008), i.e. restorative activities to deal with the split life that he had had: he sought his Finnish roots and he sought a father image in order to be better able to live in the present. And he sought to pinpoint who was responsible for all the injustices he, and by extension, his Finnish family, had suffered. When he told about how he looked for his father, he however lost his Finnish mother in the sense that he did not talk about her any more. She did not stand out as a person who was living or present. Upon closer examination his activities do not seem to be simply restorative but perhaps more an attempt to create an idealized picture of himself, with the guilt placed upon all those who had made his life so hard. At the same time his narrative was also about trials of condemnation and revenge.

It did not become clear until toward the end of the interview and later after several re-readings that we perceived ourselves as witnesses to this central path in his life: an atmosphere of a trial existed in the present and was powerfully experienced in the interviewers’ counter-transference feelings during the re-readings; “what is true?” Early during the actual interview, the interviewer was aware at first of an admiration for Ossi when he told about all the hardships that he had to go through.

There were hints in Ossi’s narrative as well about something mysterious that had happened in Finland after the war: people disappeared, certain words could not be spoken about ... his mother worked for the railroad under inhuman conditions during the war, etc. He also referred back to the Finnish Civil War (1918) in which his maternal grandfather was shot in a prison camp, undeniably a cruel and unjust action. As a polar opposite he also said that he identified with the leader for the other side in the Civil War. Was Ossi seeking confirmation of his wishful thinking, to be guilt-free? The archaic superego gives just two possibilities, either guilty or not guilty. For Bion (1967) truth is

central to mental development and without it the psyche does not develop. Deception leads to self-deception and trust is turned into mistrust. The interviewer experienced this pattern in her counter-feelings toward the end of the interview. Ossi's narrative awakened thoughts about how the working through of childhood experiences can be used in the service of denial. We are reminded here of Bion's (1967) thoughts about how knowledge can be replaced by illusions, leading to a situation where the archaic super ego dominates and stands in judgement of – others. This is the effect of a stern and destructive super ego on the child's curiosity.

As an adult, Ossi, with a singleness of purpose, had worked himself upward to better and better career positions. His life was governed by various defence manoeuvres, such as the way he had developed a sort of psychological language that did not seem integrated. Questions about his worth were acutely present as was also the question of guilt. "To know" requires an endurance of uncertainty and a tolerance of doubt. We think that parts of this narrative come close to –K.

Elina gave an extremely chaotic narrative about her life but was in some way aware that it could be difficult for the interviewer to follow her. She was evacuated as a two-year old. She related that she had believed herself to be the Swedish foster family's own child, despite the fact that her two Finnish sisters were living in neighbouring homesteads. Accordingly, she lived the first six years of her life under conditions in which she was not given true or real knowledge about herself or her surrounding world. She then experienced it as a catastrophe when she, like all Finnish war children, was summoned to return home to Finland after the war. However, as it turned out, she was only there several months after which she was fetched by her foster parents for a return to Sweden.

As an adult Elina suffered from serious illnesses and her children had major problems, but after having told about all this, she said many times: "*But I'm an optimist!*"

However, she also said: "*I've always had a hard time trusting people. But animals, I trust them.*"

She told how as a child she had sat in the stable between the horse's front hooves and cried. But what she cried about remained obscure. Obviously there was something the whole time that was too much for her: she had attempted suicide as a young girl. We can sense that an alcoholic foster father and an aloof foster mother made life tough for her. Despite this, the impression was that Elina for the most part denied all the tragic elements of her life. She expressed no sorrow in her narrative about her adult life. She was resolutely upbeat and positive. She talked about how she had made it in life through enterprise and decisiveness. Once when she had wondered about a scar she had on her back, her Finnish mother told her that when she was a baby her father had thrown her up on the hot stove in his anger over her having been born. This matter was not mentioned any more during the interview.

At first this incident involving the stove also disappeared from the interviewers' minds just as did Kari's earlier mentioned loss of his foster mother at an early age and his sister's psychosis. We have made the following analysis of this: Neither of the interviewees put any emphasis on these events but instead treated them fleetingly, without giving them any special implications. We wondered later how it could be possible that we missed them. We see it now as the interviewees' communication patterns. Elina answered the questions she was asked but deviated from the time axis in a way that made everything hard to follow. She violated time in a way that made her answers meaningless. For example:

(How was your relationship with your dad (as a child)?)

"He was impressed by my profession."

(How was your relationship with your foster mother?)

"Things got better when she became senile."

The meaning in the communication was rubbed out. We think that our inability to notice these certain moments during the actual interviews may reflect something that comes close to Ogdens (1989) description of "non-experience".

Elina's inability to think also came to expression in the problem she had discerning any chronology in her life. Much of that which had happened was incomprehensible to her. The axis of time was so split that it was impossible for us to arrive at an understanding of "why?" We became co-actors in her denial. What had she experienced? Questions of guilt and accusations were missing from her narrative.

Elina did not ponder over why she had remained in Sweden after a short visit to Finland right after the war or why she continued living with her foster parents after her Finnish parents had moved to Sweden. Nor did she ponder over the significance of the evacuation. To be sure, she cannot have had any memories of her own about the evacuation considering how young she was. She had various manoeuvres to keep the unthinkable hidden and the interviewers were not capable of hearing that at first. Of course the child's age at the time of evacuation influences the adult's way of relating to it. But was it impossible to ask: why did you send me away? Why didn't you take me back home?

Discussion

We have studied Finnish war children who were evacuated to Sweden during World War II and remained there after the war ended. During the open interview "Tell about your life", we see how they are prepared to remember or think about their early life history and how they put it into narrative form. We have processed this material in line with the principles of Grounded Theory (Glaser, 1992, 1994, 2010) and we have a psychoanalytical frame of reference. The significance of how the interviewees relate to the interviewer and of the interviewer's counter-transference has been taken into account as an aid to understanding the material when it was analyzed. These issues have come to clarity through repeated readings of the interviews, where we have looked for common reactions and phenomena.

We think that the adults' retrospective looks at their lives, as they take form during the interview, can give us a picture of the significance of separation and evacuation in their life histories. In an earlier study it was found that their attitude toward "not knowing" can be problematic for the war children. This finding alerted us to Bion's thoughts. During their evacuation to Sweden, these children had no containing possibilities for their experiences. They were torn away from all the contexts that were familiar to them (family, surroundings, language). Little children cannot understand different courses of events in their lives if they do not have an adult close to them who can help them interpret what is going on (Bion, 1962b; Varvin, 2010).

We do not know much about the children's circumstances in their Finnish families but the absence of a containing adult during the evacuation process has been common to all of them. We see in them as adults an inability to reflect over the significance of this turning point in their lives. Furthermore, they seem to lack an open, reflecting posture toward life in general. At the same time we do see an oscillation between a greater openness and a closed position. However their narratives indicate that the war children are unable to work through the consequences of their evacuation and first and foremost unable to pay heed to the fact that they have two sets of parents. Experiences that are not worked through are impossible to think about and thus impossible to tell about as well.

Most of the interviewees show signs of a locked defensive position coloured by early defences such as denial and projections which does not leave space for psychic flexibility. This defence pattern has apparently prevailed from childhood since it is shared by most of them. The absence of interest and openness toward events in one's own life, -K, can be seen as a trauma indicator. If the object is absent, curiosity dies out, a pattern observed in most of the life stories. The younger the child was during the evacuation, the harder it seemed to be for him or her as an adult to think or fantasize about the past. In such cases it has not been possible to work through experiences of loss and absence. Many of the war children talk about a "black hole" of emptiness and unknowing.

The war children brought with them their war experiences, which could be hard for their foster parents to understand. Even though Sweden is so close to Finland, there were many differences

during war time. Most importantly, the language was different, an issue that was mentioned by all of the interviewees. When the children forgot their Finnish mother tongue, their living contact with Finland was also shattered.

Most of the interviewees also expressed various notions about threatening or mysterious events in Finland. Did they say that something incomprehensible had happened in their lives? Perhaps they were trying to find an expression for the emptiness and lack of meaning they felt at times. Perhaps these shadows of unspoken experiences stand for the remnants of disappointment and hateful but unconscious feelings that separation has brought with it?

Older children could understand the reality and dangers of war.

Various affective reactions that acutely came to the fore in the interview situation indicate a present and non-worked-through problem in accordance with the laws of procedural memory. There were moments of timelessness. In many of the interviewees, we discern a hidden anger and bitterness over their fate. The presence of mourning is harder to ascertain. On the emotional level there are traces of the trauma which have not been possible to compensate in spite of the educational achievements and stable human relationships held by all of our interviewees. The traumatic reactions that we have noted, e.g. invading and activating affects (Kaplan, 2008), were present in the now, during the interview itself. The trauma was active and manifested itself, among other things, as a split narrative, as a disregard for time markers and as a communication pattern where it could be difficult to perceive the interviewer as a separate individual who wanted to know and to understand. Bion (1970) wrote about how it is possible to feel pain without suffering it. The pain can therefore not be detected, which could give rise to feeling the pain and bear the experience. We have been able to see how disrupted containing, especially with children between two and four years of age, deprives these individuals as adults of the chance to integrate feelings and thinking in relation to their pasts and also of experiencing a sense of well-being.

We have also noted the interviewees' educational and professional development and the psychological significance of these factors. All ten of the interviewees have given their schooling and education a great importance in their lives. Do we expect education to compensate or to cover up the original traumatic state of unknowing? We believe that in such cases education possibly functions as a compensation for helplessness. The state of unknowing is a part of the traumatic experience that can later be developed into an obstacle to learning and to the dominance of the reality principle. Bion (1967) connected the capacity for curiosity and the consequent ability to learn. However, in our interactions with the interviewees, it appears as though learning and knowledge acquisition would not have been inhibited while at the same time the dominance of the reality principle would have been. We have seen this as a possible new angle of approach for a later study.

We have interviewed war children who have managed well in several important areas of life. War children who, unlike our research subjects, do not belong to an association for war children might possibly give a different picture.

Conclusions

In our research material we have been able to see how the consequences of the evacuation have had a paralyzing effect on the war children's ability to integrate thought and feelings into a narrative where expressions of ambivalence, doubt and uncertainty, combined with interest in their own life stories, could also have their place. These obstacles have not been possible to compensate through the course of their lives. We draw this conclusion because traumatic reactions were activated and present during the interview itself. We believe that the evacuated children's sense of having been abandoned by their Finnish parents has not been modified. We have been on the lookout for mourning but we have mostly encountered reactions that we have interpreted as unconscious anger. The search for truth is a constantly ongoing process, which a person can tune into or avoid. What

counteracts searching for and striving toward the reality principle can be various forms of unconscious envy and hatred, which have clearly come to the fore in this study of war children.

Some of our interviewees oscillated between the will to know and the will not to know about courses of events in their lives. However, an inability to reflect over the effect of the evacuation on their lives dominates in many of them. They were especially unable to reflect over the significance of their Finnish parents, which would have led to, in our assessment, an encounter with frustration, loss and abandonment.

The desire to seek the truth and to explore the reality of their lives, expressed in the concept K, was brought to realization in part in some of our interviewees but was shattered in a notable and crucial way in many of them. In this study we see how Bion's concept –K gives precision and depth to the understanding of traumatic after-effects of evacuation.

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