

Report about the first international Russian-Ukrainian-German group analytic conference: Encounters. A group analytic conference on Ukrainian-Russian-German understanding in regard of a common historical background, from May 28th until 31st in Potsdam (Germany).

The message is, nothing gets done alone, and all outcomes depend on interdependence. In contrast, the prevailing myth of the age is: it is all up to you alone and it all depends on the leader. (Wilke, 2014)

“I am entirely charged with new experiences. Some is a remaining impression like an image, atmosphere. Words become thoughts step by step. ... How do I experience the other? How does he/she experience me? ... My inner landscape changed. The people living in Russia I look at from a different and more personal perspective, as well as those from Ukraine and the German-German relation seems to be reflected in a new light.”

Likewise are the impressions from 63 participants after the four day group analytic conference. Every day we met in a large group setting and, additionally, one until three times a day everyone met in a small group with fix members. 38 participants and ten group leaders come from Ukraine, Russia, Germany and two came from Great Britain. “Do I have to speak Russian or Ukrainian?” this was often the question before the conference. The answer was “no”. Three interpreters constantly accompanied the group and the two group leaders. Group leaders were always mixed pares: German-English, German-Russian, German-Ukrainian. Three groups were accompanied by one interpreter and the fourth group was held in English and, therefore, no interpreter was needed. The large group was lead by a Russian colleague and myself and was accompanied by three interpreters who translated in turns. The groups were mixed in terms of origin, language and gender. Exchange and intercommunication was quite possible. Every group session was observed by two to four colleagues (twelve in total) of the International Psychoanalytic University Berlin (IPU). During these four days the group leaders and interpreters, called Staff, were accompanied by Gerhard Wilke, a very well experienced organizational consultant and supervisor.

How did the idea to this conference evolve?

Since a few years due to my work in seminars as group analyst (dedicated to S.H. Foulkes and his developments) and Jungian psychotherapist I travelled to Moscow, St. Petersburg, Krasnodar and Kiev. This is how I got to know many colleagues there. Over and over again I was confronted by the horrifying occurrences and experiences done by the German Wehrmacht and the SS in World War II. During the seminars we discussed these topics (collective and individual guilt, shame, responsibility and trans-generative transmission). However, the subject asked for more. I profit from the work in group analysis between German and Jews (Erlich et al. 2009) over years, and I learned from their experience about the positive impact on the cooperation in short- and long-term. This is how I got the idea to group analytically examine (Foulkes, 1992; Nitsun, 1996, Wilke, 2014) the difficult relation between Germany and the countries of the former Soviet Union (1920-1991), which are Russia and Ukraine today. In spring 2013 I have been with Elena Pourtova (Psychologist, Jungian Psychoanalyst in Moscow) and Dmitro Zalesky (Psychiatrist, Jungian Psychoanalyst in Kiev) together in the south-Russian city Krasnodar. We lead the training within the training program of IAAP for the colleagues in Krasnodar to become Jungian Psychoanalyst. I asked both if they could imagine a group analytic conference with a psycho-historian focus. After a short consideration they both agreed to plan this conference for 2015. Due to the start of the revolution in Ukraine in November 2013 we had to shift the venue from Kiev to Potsdam. Gradually we established a planning group for the conference. Firstly we were supported by the International Association of Analytic Psychology (IAAP), further and with a lot of drive from the Berlin Institute of Group Analysis (BIG). Later we got support from the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Analytische Psychologie (DGAP; engl.: German Society for Analytic Psychology) and from a private foundation dedicated to the sponsorship of Analytic Psychology. We were deeply grateful for the support.

The planning group met regularly over one year. After weeks of worry, finally, there were enough participants registered for the conference. Already a few days before the start of the conference some decided to join spontaneously.

As an introduction I said the following while addressing all participants: “We met for the first international conference on group analysis, addressing the invitation primarily to colleagues from Ukraine, from Russia and from Germany. We also have colleagues from Great Britain with us, which makes me happy as well. Maybe we will be able to invite colleagues from countries like Belarus in a future conference. Within the framing of large group and small group we want to talk to each other. This setting in itself is fascinating, some of you may know it from their self experiences or their work in clinical settings like psychiatry, psycho-

somatic and psychotherapy used to understand and decrease psychic suffering. We gathered here in order to search on our own family history, our personal history and the European history, all sharing a common interest as a conjoined background. More modestly speaking we want to be interested in one another and we want to learn from each other. All of us know we carry prejudices – consciously and unconsciously. And we all know that prejudices, pre-judgments respectively, may help us sometimes, however, often they lead to massive misunderstandings. On the one hand we know a lot about us and the others, anyhow, on the other hand we know nothing or even false or distorted or even bizarre (Bion, 1962). As usual there is a lot of curiosity and interest within the encounter of groups, if there wasn't you all may not have come at all. Nevertheless, there is as much fear. We may have fear and we may be anxious because this signalizes danger. The countries we come from are all interconnected and in East-Ukraine is civil war. More or less the Russian politics is involved. Germany takes a middle and mediation position because the German politics takes side with USA and NATO because they support the Ukrainian independency¹. On the other side especially Germany shows effort to support a peaceful solution without military force and with a cooperative stance towards the Russian and Ukrainian politicians. Already now I am afraid to be misunderstood. Moreover, we as German citizens are first and second generation children after 70 years of the end of the horrible Second World War, started by Germany. At the beginning of may this was subject of many public memorials. – Carl Gustav Jung called this the “German's collective guilt” when he talked in the same context in 1945. We “Later Borns” (Berthold Brecht) know that we do not carry an individual guilt. Therefore, we call these collective feelings, which all have something to do with group identity according to Vamik Volkan (2005), guilt or shame in the light of the known atrocities done by the Germany Wehrmacht and SS towards the Slavic people, the Jewish people and the people of Sinti and Roma. These atrocities of war with its dreadful perpetrator-victim-dynamic were also my motivation to meet colleagues from Russia and Ukraine in order to understand and think about the “nameless horror” (Bion) and the “unbelievable terror”. Accordingly to that we carry the horror of the past as well as the horror of the present in ourselves. This is the danger as well as the potential. There is the danger of repetition as well as the potential to experience creative and spirited life maintaining and life supporting experiences in a safe surrounding confronted by those atrocities.”

¹ In the book, released 2015 already in its eighth edition, written by G. Krone-Schmalz “Russland verstehen. Der Kampf um die Ostukraine und die Arroganz des Westens” the fact evolves that the economical interest of the US to win natural gasoline by fracking is very high (p. 156-157).

What were the results of the conference?

Participating observation was done in every small group by two psychology students from IPU, four students observed the large group. The group of observers was guided by Prof. M.B. Buchholz. At the end of the conference they talked about their observations in the “Fishbowl” setting. It is a helpful setting enabling reflection processes. Basically, they said how touched they were by the participants’ earnest effort, how much they learned about themselves and that they felt addressed as the young generation.

Impressively in personal conversation and via written messages participants described their overwhelming emotions and thoughts. The level of openness and mutual trust during the group work was valued. In such an atmosphere personal pain, shame, guilt, anger and sadness could be experienced.

Some of the Russian colleagues had just celebrated the Red Army’s victory over Nazi Germany 70 years ago in the beginning of May. They now expected skeptical and hostile attitude from the Germans. Hence, they were kindly touched by the friendly invitation and welcome by the Germans.

My Russian colleague and I (as the leading duo) already found out in prior conversations that our grandparents may have fought against each other on the war front in WWII and both died. With feelings of scare, pain and sadness and enough trust I was relieved we could do that together. Now the grandchildren are sitting together and are talking with caution and curious interest about themselves. Due to the positive resonance I felt connection in spite of former death and neglect.

For some participants in the small groups a family like memory level was established. One German colleague was raised in a surrounding of unbearable silence. Only on the dining table they remembered the missing and the dead uncle during a prayer. Only later he learned his second name referred to that missing uncle.

A German colleague was raised by a mother who was raped by soviet soldiers under the threat of being shot in 1945. Still today they cannot sing Russian songs or even hear the language without freezing inside. While telling this she sits in a group with a colleague from Russia. When he listened to her story he felt ashamed. This was not what he had expected. For both of them it was confusing, anyway, eventually the shared shock, the shared tears and the possibility to look at each other from a new perspective became a connecting experience.

A colleague from Ukraine talked about her job to psychologically take care of wounded soldiers. Those young men with cut off hands or shot legs are as real as mothers and fathers trying to hold back their children of going in to war. Immediate encounters in war the killing

can lead to an end in each other's countenance. This is what Rainer Maria Remarque already said in his book "All Quiet on the Western Front" in 1929. Through immediate encounter it was possible during the conference to gain new perspective and to question assumed obvious truth.

Another moving event was the short presentation given by Gert Sauer (Jungian Psychologist) on one evening. He presented an extract from the very well known novel by Michael A. Bulgakow: "The Master und Margarita". Bulgakow was born in Kiev 1891 and died in Moscow in 1940. In 1938 he describes how death and destruction find their significant counterbalance in care and love.

In order to leave our hospitable conference hotel (Seminaris Seehotel Potsdam) once, we visited Cecilienhof in which the Potsdam Conference was held from 1945. Past and present we experienced in a way that made it possible to startle one another and to conciliatory reach out for each other's hands.

What were the resistances during group process?

Resistance was obvious in many kinds. At the beginning the notion of approaching the subject under a certain task was present. One participant missed extra information about the other countries and their history. Silent situations were significant. Such reactions were shown in moments of painful experiences that needed protection for now.

My résumé:

The benevolently mutual respect, the shared horror about the destruction in past and present led to an idea about the happiness of life and love. In its finiteness it led to take over responsibility for life. The wish to carry on such encounter was made many times. Probably, in two years we will meet in Potsdam or Krasnodar, in Kiev, Lwiw (Lemberg) or Moscow.

Thanks to all participants, allowing this conference to take place. I would like to thank all group leaders from Russia, Ukraine Great Britain and Germany.

Stephan Alder (4th September 2015)