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## Children of Collaborators From Isolation toward Integration

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Germany had its collaborators in all the countries it occupied during World War II. These collaborators were called *quislings* after the best-known among them, the Norwegian Vidkun Quisling. Many of them were arrested and put on trial after the German defeat and the liberation of the occupied countries. In some countries (e.g., France), many of them were killed without a trial, while others escaped, either by leaving their country or by hiding their past. These historical facts are well known. Particularly in The Netherlands, a number of extensive studies about the trials have appeared in the last decades (Belinfante, 1978; Groen, 1984; Romijn, 1989).

What happened after this? What was the fate of the quislings and that of their families and children? This is an unwritten page of history.

Interest in the fate of children of collaborators is growing rapidly. The amount of attention paid to this subject by the media testifies to this. On the occasion of the fiftieth commemoration of the end of World War II in Europe this year, in The Netherlands alone there were more than 20 interviews with children of collaborators on radio and television or in various newspapers (Donkersloot, 1995). Scientific publications had begun to appear in modest numbers since the 1980s. Most of the existing research was carried out in The Netherlands. Therefore, the subject of this chapter is the situation of children of collaborators in this country.

The German regime in The Netherlands was particularly severe. Austrian Nazis were in charge, and they had to prove their good “German” Nazi mentality.

The well-organized Dutch bureaucracy was a reliable instrument in the hands of the occupier, and this contributed greatly to the efficacy of the extermination of Dutch Jews (De Jong, 1988; Scheffel-Baars, 1988).

This left Dutch society with an enormous trauma. Without any doubt, the deepest chasm in The Netherlands is the one caused by World War II between people who sided with the Germans and those who did not. This trauma and this chasm make the subject of the fate of the collaborators’ families and their children a very sensitive one. The first authors of scientific publications on the subject were attacked as if they spoke on behalf of criminals (Montessori, 1987).

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Researchers on this subject are confronted with difficulties in access to data. Dutch collaborators were and are, when they are still alive, absolute outcasts, and their shame has extended to their children. Children of collaborators tend to hide their background in public as well as in clinical situations. Their situation is a part of the “conspiracy of silence” resulting from World War II, described by Danieli (1985).

In this chapter, I first describe the sources of data on the subject, and then I discuss some methodological issues. Subsequently, I present the information under the headings of “isolation” and “integration.”

## SOURCES AND ISSUES OF DESCRIPTION

In 1981, Hofman wrote his dissertation on the sociopsychological backgrounds of the collaborators. This started a new period in The Netherlands, in which it became possible to write more objectively about the war. The dissertation attracted the attention of the press to the situation of children of collaborators. Hofman, several professionals from helping professions, a journalist, and a radio minister took the initiative to create opportunities for children of collaborators to react to publicity. The radio minister, Reverend A. Klamer, responded to the reactions. These contacts led to the creation of a working group composed of children of collaborators and several professionals. It was baptized *Herkenning* (Recognition). Its goal was to offer support to these children and break the taboo of their situation in society. The children of collaborators participating in this group were born before, during, and after the war. The group made very clear that any person who might have fascist sympathies and might wish to participate in the self-help group would be excluded. The youngest such child to contact the self-help group was born in 1963.

All the authors (nine so far) of scientific studies published on the subject profited from the existence of this self-help group in obtaining their data. The first to publish about the children were Montessori (Psychoanalytisch Instituut, 1981) and Hofman (1984), both professional helpers engaged in the self-help group and clinical practitioners offering children of collaborators a safe setting. They both base their descriptions on interviews with 40 children of collaborators.

From 1984 on, other leading personalities from the self-help group began to publish: Scheffel-Baars (1984), Donkersloot (1988), and Blom (1988). These authors had received historical (Scheffel-Baars), sociological (Donkersloot) and psychiatric (Blom) training. All of them based their work on contacts with the members of the self-help group, which extended to 3,500 people in 1995. This comprised counseling, regular meetings, and telephonic first aid.

In 1986, Willemse did a study on the fate of children of collaborators in the period immediately after the war, using government archives as sources. This kind of research was continued by Reuling-Schappin (1993).

Extensive studies of qualitative research have been done by Vorst-Thijssen & de Boer (1993) and Lindt (1993). Vorst-Thijssen and de Boer interviewed 13 children of collaborators and 19 professional helpers who had experience with these clients. Lindt reviewed the earlier studies and interviewed 40 children of collaborators, among them the leading personalities of the self-help group. Among his interviewees were children of collaborators who had made their backgrounds public without having any links to the self-help group. This latter study also placed the material in a theoretical perspective. It explored the way in which existing theories may clarify the results and proposed several hypotheses and amended theories.

To what extent is the information gathered about these children of collaborators representative for the whole population of children of collaborators? In The Netherlands, their number is estimated between 150,000 and 250,000 such children. As already mentioned, these individuals are rather secretive about their backgrounds. Therefore, overall surveys seem possible only far in the future. Nothing is known about the range of generalizability of the characteristics found in studies concerning the persons who contacted the self-help group.

There is also a particularly tricky aspect to generalization. Treating children of collaborators as a population means grouping them under their only common feature, namely, being the child of a collaborator. But it is precisely this feature that causes them pain and fear. When their backgrounds became known, they were subjected to a great deal of prejudice, stereotypes, projections, and outright rejection.

The description in this chapter is based on induction, and any generalization should be read in a tentative manner where it has not been written in that way for reasons of readability.

Interested researchers and clinicians are very much prone to countertransference. The work on countertransference with Holocaust survivors done by Danieli (1980) can also be applied to the work done with children of collaborators. Dutch society knows a wide range of perspectives on this subject and the individuals involved. These perspectives run from suspicion and fear of recurrence of the Holocaust by recruiting new perpetrators from among the children of Nazi sympathizers, to acceptance of these children in their own right.

The terms used in presenting the results reflect an important source of bias, which requires further discussion. It is interesting to consider the terminology for *collaborator* in The Netherlands. The Dutch counterpart of the word *collaborator* is not used very often in Dutch publications concerned with the subject, apart from the work of Hofman (1981, 1985, 1988). The term *quisling* is not used at all. The term most often used, symbolic for the Dutch way of looking at this subject, is that of *wrong*.

Dutch people are classified in accordance with their attitude during the war as either "right" or "wrong." Although many authors point to the fact that in reality there were many shades in between these attitudes, until now, no other terms have been coined. This is the Dutch semantic expression to connote coming to "terms" with World War II. Thus, one of the phrases used for children of collaborators in The Netherlands is that of "children of wrong parents." This phrase causes difficulties for the individuals involved, as it is stigmatizing and does not leave room for conflicts of loyalty.

Another frequently used term is that of *NSB children*. The national socialist movement in The Netherlands was the NSB (Nationaal-Socialistische Beweging). This term has some disadvantages, too. Strictly speaking, it does not cover all the population of children of collaborators involved. Many more Dutch people had opted for the occupier than those who were actual members of the NSB. Still, as Hofman (1988) remarks, the terms *NSB* and *NSB children* have become dominant in naming all the people who had collaborated with the Germans, and also their children.

From an international point of view, the term *children of collaborators* seems the most objective for this specific population.

This chapter groups the psychological histories of children of collaborators under the contrasting categories of "isolation" and "integration," which appeared to describe and structure best in the long iterative process of research. The first to use the concept of isolation to characterize the situation of children of collaborators was Montessori (1987). The concept of integration is the result of a process that elaborated upon Bar-On's (1988) psychological concept of "working through." I have extended the concept to the social integration of children of collaborators both in the second generation after World War II and, in a broader sense, in society (Lindt, 1993).

## ISOLATION

### Before and during the War

Before the war, children of members of the Dutch Nazi party were already seen as outcasts (Spruit, 1983). During the war, the isolation of these children in school and neighborhood was growing. Out of contempt and fear, “right” parents were forbidding their children to mingle with “wrong” children (Willemse, 1986).

On “Crazy Tuesday” (September 5, 1944), at the moment when the German defeat in The Netherlands seemed imminent, about 65,000 collaborators, most of them, together with their families (De Jong, 1980), fled from The Netherlands to Germany. Many of them took their children with them. They traveled through Germany and lived in camps. Montessori (1987) writes:

This was a shocking, confusing and terrifying experience. There was cold, hunger, contempt from the German population, there were bombings and artillery attacks. Children experienced maltreatment and kidnapping (p. 50, author’s translation).

These children felt unprotected, homeless, unwelcome, and powerless.

### Arrest, Internment, and Conviction

After the German capitulation, the collaborators who remained in The Netherlands were arrested. This started immediately after the “Crazy Tuesday” in the south, when this part of the country was liberated by the Allied forces. In the rest of The Netherlands, it occurred in April and May. After the German capitulation, the collaborators who had fled to Germany gradually returned to The Netherlands and were arrested there. According to Hofman (1988), nearly 100,000 persons were arrested, 23,000 of whom were women. The number of suspects was much larger. By the end of 1947, 450,000 files were opened. The courts passed sentences in 90,000 cases (Romijn, 1989).

There were 141 death sentences, of which 40 have been carried out. The other collaborators were put into internment camps. The situation in these camps was described by Belinfante (1978), Groen (1984), and de Jong (1980), the Dutch official World War II historian. The situation in the camps was bad. There was a lack of food and sanitary facilities, rules were severe, and there was forced labor. Individual camp guards committed excesses of violence and maltreatment. This has been reported in 69 of the 130 internment camps. In many cases, it was hard to distinguish the behavior and the methods of the guards from those of the Nazis.

The possessions of the collaborators were confiscated. They also lost several civil rights for many years after internment, for example, the right to leave the country and the right to vote. All this followed the message sent from London by the Dutch government stating that “there will be no place for collaborators in The Netherlands.” In most cases, after internment they remained unemployed.

### Children in Camps, Children’s Homes, and Foster Homes

It is not known how many children born before 1945 were involved. There must have been well over 100,000. The arrest of the parents brought along much violence and humiliation for the children. The families were forced to abandon their homes. According to Reuling-Schappin (1993), 50,000 children were left behind because both parents had been arrested.

Many of them were interned in camps. Children were anxious about their parents. According to De Jong (1980), many children died during internment.

In October 1944, the Dutch military government issued an order that prohibited the arrest of wives and children together with the collaborating father. Wives and children were to be supported and taken care of. As the majority of the population wanted revenge (Belinfante, 1978), this order was disregarded. The Dutch government (in exile in London) did not pay attention to the families of collaborators.

During the war, child care institutions disappeared. In 1945, the institution of Special Youth Care was organized. About 25,000 children were placed in children's homes and about 8,000 in foster homes (Reuling-Schappin, 1993).

In children's homes, conditions were pretty bad. Often, there was no heating; medical and social care were hard to find, and the personnel were not qualified. The children were provided with little guidance. Contacts with parents were almost completely broken off. Children were humiliated and sometimes maltreated, with little attention given to their needs.

In foster homes, children were forced to show gratitude. Often, they were severely punished for behavior that could easily be explained by the tension they were going through. Sometimes, those that took care of the children were vindictive to them.

### **The Families and Children in Society**

The families of collaborators were cast out of Dutch society; they were surrounded by hatred. Children who stayed with the mothers or returned to their families, and those who were newly born, lived in poverty because of confiscation of property and lack of income. Children born after the war numbered approximately 100,000.

Their families were disrupted. In many cases, the father's return from internment added to the already existing tensions. His children no longer accepted his authority. Material poverty, demoralization, difference of opinion between marital partners, and long periods of separation contributed to marital problems. There were many divorces and extramarital children. Thus, these families lacked the material and social conditions for bringing up their children as secure members of the society. The fathers were embittered and discouraged by their experiences. The parents were preoccupied with their own emotions, and little energy was left for providing the children with attention and protection.

Hofman (1988) remarks that in The Netherlands, children of collaborators were identified by others with their parents. He finds it understandable that the misery of the occupation resulted in an intensely emotional and nondiscriminantly critical attitude. When the atrocities done by the Nazis were made public, collaborators were regarded and treated as fully responsible (De Jong, 1988). There was little willingness to improve the image of the "wrong."

By identifying the children with their parents, Dutch society has complicated greatly their attempts to find their own place in society. Children of collaborators feel that they are not entitled to be treated as equals, regardless of the choices made by their parents. They are alienated by Dutch society because of mistakes for which they are not guilty.

Several investigations (Groen, 1984; Hofman, 1988; Lindt, 1993; Montessori 1987; Scheffel-Baars, 1988) mention the scapegoat mechanism that works against children of collaborators. These authors attribute it to feelings of shame and guilt existing among a great part of the Dutch population about their halfhearted attitude toward the Germans.

Children of collaborators were scolded, sometimes maltreated, and excluded from social activities. They suffered from stigma in school, in examination situations, and in job applications. In some work situations, they were fired because of their background. They experienced

discrimination even in situations of professional assistance. Vorst-Thijssen and de Boer (1993) quote a helper who refused to give aid to children of collaborators because he “detested NSB-people” (p. 17).

These situations continue to the present. Children of collaborators are confronted with mistrust and prejudice when their backgrounds are revealed. In many respects, Dutch people do not live according to the principles of antidiscrimination codified in the first article of the Dutch Constitution and specified in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, that is, not to be discriminated against for the political convictions and political past of the parents (Cohn, 1991).

## Family Dynamics

In most families, discussing the history of the family during and after the war was a complete taboo. It remained a secret for children born after the war. They learned to avoid embarrassing questions. The consequences of growing up with a family secret are well known in the literature (Pincus & Dare, 1980). They hamper the development of the children, contributing to feelings of insecurity and social anxiety.

The discovery of the family secret at a later age forced these children to struggle to come to terms with their parents' choice during the war. The discovery meant a conflict with the parents, sometimes manifest, sometimes latent. Many of the children, particularly those born after 1943, broke their relationship with their parents.

Jessica discovered her father's war history when she was 12. She felt compelled to be his judge, yet she despised herself for judging him. She wanted to defend her father, and then felt guilty about that.

Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark (1984) made clear that the loyalty of children toward their parents is always a reality. For children of collaborators, this loyalty conflict is particularly violent. In this conflict, children of collaborators struggle with substitute guilt feelings toward Nazi victims. Also they wrestle with the realization that their parents have become social outcasts because of their choice, and all this has made their own youth an agony (Montessori, 1987).

Developing an identity in these families was very difficult. The common phrase “I got that from my parents” is an impossible utterance for children of collaborators. They have to check carefully everything they have received at home.

## Taboo

The background of children of collaborators is a taboo subject in the Netherlands. A “dear” neighbor of a collaborator's daughter refused to participate in a television program in which the collaborator's daughter was interviewed, stating: “I don't want to be associated with children of collaborators.” The society has remained silent for a long time. It has not recognized these children's problems. It has not recognized freedom of speech for children of collaborators. It has not even recognized their existence.

What are the forces that maintain this silence? From the children's youth, their families exert pressure to be silent. Parents are afraid to be exposed. Once exposed, they go through hard times. Their children are willing to spare them new agonies in their old age. The constant vigilance to prevent a revival of fascism also contributes to silence about children of collaborators. However, this vigilance does not justify the taboo. In fact, this contributes precisely to

what one wishes to fight against. Modern individualism notwithstanding, the tendency to judge children by their parents operates in all of us. Sometimes the subject "children of collaborators" is avoided to protect Nazi victims against renewed pain. As mentioned before, some Dutch camp guards had engaged in behavior that rivaled that of Nazi guards. They were never brought to trial for their behavior. Silence was substituted for justice. The subject of the collaborators is so embarrassing that people become silent when it is mentioned directly by "representatives" of "the other side."

Finally, remaining silent has become second nature for children of collaborators themselves. Most children of collaborators hide their backgrounds for fear of rejection. Conforming with the general taboo on the subject seems to be their only way of coping with the danger of stigmatization. As stated before, Montessori (1987) writes that this group of people finds itself in isolation.

Even those who decided to make their backgrounds public still doubt whether they have taken the right step, given the high emotional costs and the fears and disappointments they meet in their lives. Children of collaborators who hope to make a successful career must avoid appearing on television to discuss their predicament.

Having been silent for such a long time makes it increasingly difficult to speak openly. When bottled-up emotions come to the surface, they scare off potential conversation partners, and this experience reinforces the silence.

The commemoration of the liberation and the judgment of "right" and "wrong" are at the core of postwar Dutch culture. Children of collaborators are outsiders in this core culture. To advance their viewpoints means to risk being misunderstood, mistrusted, and rejected. Saying that your parents were not just "wrong," but that they were also "right," is against the national "right-wrong scheme."

In the context of the commemoration, children of collaborators, like the rest of the population, are happy that the values of the civil order have been restored. They are as sad as many other Dutch people about the losses and pains of the past. But they also feel depressed to live in a country that for them is not completely liberated, a country in which they are afraid to speak about their background, a country in which they have to stay out of conversations about the war. To be silent about your background means to be silent about the war. To be silent about one of the most important and most emotional topics in Dutch memory means not to belong.

Being silent about such an essential topic as one's own background, which can be a daily topic, ends all spontaneity. It causes difficulties with self-disclosure even in the most intimate relationships. On the other hand, many children of collaborators have become good listeners (Donkersloot, 1988).

### **Lack of Social Support**

Children of collaborators go through many difficulties with their partners, which, in turn, engender guilt feelings (Scheffel-Baars, 1988). They feel guilt because it is their background that seems to cause the difficulties. The relationships with their own children are hampered as well. Many children of collaborators do not dare to reveal their backgrounds to their own children. A national advertising campaign for libraries in 1994 seemed to depart from this fact. On the billboards the posters read: "Was grandfather wrong? Look it up in the library."

So social support was absent, and research indicates that social support is the most important factor in coping with traumatic stress. The reference group offered no support until 1981. The group cohesion was nil because each member (child of collaborators) was an isolated individual.

## Consequences

The past has left many tormenting memories for children of collaborators (Hofman, 1988). Events that seem of little impact to bystanders can trigger heavy emotional reactions because they are experienced as if past events are being revived. Problems that occur frequently among the population of children of collaborators include depression, suicide, incapacity for work, alcoholism, and psychosomatic conditions.

Their constant feelings of guilt and shame cause social defenselessness. When something goes wrong, children of collaborators automatically assume guilt. They are frequently unable to express adequately aggressive impulses (Horman, 1988).

According to Montessori (1987), the long-term effects of the children's experiences are dissociation of emotions and repression of hatred. This blocks their ability to understand themselves. Scheffel-Baars (1988) points to the resulting feeling of inferiority, the feeling that one has no right to be there.

According to Donkersloot (1988) the main component of the personality of children of collaborators is anxiety and a vague feeling of being "different" and "wrong." They live in a world they experience as threatening. They are constantly alert, always preparing for disaster. They feel more comfortable with people who also know the experience of being threatened. Children of collaborators try to avoid any possible mistakes (Donkersloot, 1988). They are particularly alert and try consistently to be politically correct.

As a result, they feel a constant fear of failure. Although they have developed leadership qualities in their long struggle for survival, a leading role provokes too much anxiety because it contradicts remaining silent and trying to avoid any mistakes.

They have developed very critical attitudes that lead to a great sensitivity to issues of abuse of any kind. They consider their choices thoroughly and are aware of the relativity of "good" and "bad" in many situations. Children of collaborators have cultivated an acute intuition. Having no other framework for orientation, intuition has gradually become the basis for their judgments (Donkersloot, 1988).

According to Blom, the core of the problem is not to feel allowed to be there, to have to hide. "I have to adjust at any price" (Blom 1988, p. 1). They dare not be who they are, but not just because of their background. They also do not dare to ask for help for problems for which one normally would not be ashamed to seek help.

Children of collaborators find it hard to accept love and support. Being uprooted undermines their self-esteem. Seldom do they realize the consequences of societal attitudes and their interaction with the handicap of their family backgrounds. Instead, they usually experience their problems as personal failure (Scheffel-Baars, 1988). They fear and suspect that they are accused of not living up to ideals and norms, and that they are excluded (Lindt, 1993).

There are some differences between children of collaborators who lived through the war period and those who were born after 1942. Nevertheless, similarities outnumber the differences (Lindt, 1993). Factors in which the aforementioned differences are manifest include war experiences, loyalty conflicts, direct rejection after the war, and relationships with their own children. Children of collaborators born before 1942 are more often plagued by conscious memories of war events and they have experienced direct rejection more often. For children born after 1942, the loyalty conflict with the parents is more outspoken. They have relatively more fear of being rejected by their own children. They also fear the rejection of their parents by their children. The other characteristics of children of collaborators mentioned in this chapter do not differ between the two groups.

## INTEGRATION

### Changes

The churches formed an exception to the prevailing attitude in The Netherlands of ignoring the existence of children of collaborators (Lindt, 1993). They requested their parishioners to look after the families of collaborators. They pointed to the suffering of children in these isolated families. But it appears that this request has only partially been answered. The life stories of children of collaborators in my dissertation study included not only incidences of pastoral care but also of exclusion emanating from the pulpit (Lindt, 1993).

The thawing of the isolation actually began in 1981, when Hofman (1981) wrote his dissertation about the sociopsychological backgrounds of the collaborators. This led to the creation of a self-help group of children of collaborators. The goals of this self-help group are to survey the existing problems, educate the helping institutions, and break the existing taboo. Apart from that, several self-help groups have been formed in order to exchange thoughts and ideas about the burdening past.

In these groups, many children of collaborators dared to reveal their background for the first time in their lives. Here, they could receive understanding from each other, more understanding than anyone else can give (Scheffel-Baars, 1988).

### Integration of the Second Generation

From 1988 on, several initiatives were taken to break through what is called the “compartmentalization of suffering.” Individuals from all categories of second-generation, war-affected groups were brought together in congresses and meetings. Children of collaborators were emphatically included. From now on, the term *children of war* refers to war-affected children from any background. In 1991, a University chair was created for “transgenerational consequences of war,” including all background categories. Much opposition had to be overcome. The pioneer role of well-known Jews and resistance fighters in this process was outstanding.

After long hesitation, in 1995, the Dutch government decided to subsidize some of the work done by the self-help group for children of collaborators.

### Outcomes of Help

In several research studies (Lindt, 1993; Vorst-Thijssen & de Boer, 1993), children of collaborators reported positive experiences with the helping professions, along with the negative experiences reported earlier. Over and over again, the crucial factors reported by children of collaborators were the trustworthiness of helpers, not being blamed for their parents' past, unconditional acceptance, unprejudiced listening, and other unspecific factors of psychotherapy. Essential in experiencing the liberation so many years after 1945 is to be allowed to be there with one's story. Telling this story engenders insight and the capacity to come to terms and cope with a hindering past, a toilsome present, and an insecure future.

### Self-Acceptance

Insights that contribute to self-acceptance are important. Among these, identifying unfounded guilt feelings and weakening them by reinforcing self-esteem and laying the foundation for the conviction that one has the right to be there are paramount:

For Ella, the key in her therapy was one sentence that she had to repeat many times: "I am I, and they are they."

Anna learned that she had the right to be who she was, and that making mistakes and falling short are part of being human.

After a long struggle over "good" and "bad," Jessica concluded that they are *both* present in every person, including her father and herself.

Titia, whose father was killed by the liberators, accepts her inability to belong to any group because she is so sensitive to totalitarian traits which, she feels, always appear in groups.

Children of collaborators have tried to speak with their parents about the past. This succeeded only in very few cases. But many of them were able to reach a less emotional attitude toward their parents. The sharpness of the loyalty conflict was lessened. Jessica, having discovered good and bad in her parents and in herself, is no longer judging her father.

### **Attitude of the Public**

The attitude of the public in The Netherlands has changed. Nowadays, children of collaborators meet rejection less frequently than in the past. Most reactions to publicity about children of collaborators are positive. Still, there are also angry reactions of people who either are unable or unwilling to see people in their own right, regardless of the political past of their parents.

Also, recognition of children of collaborators is often conditional. In a reaction to the government subsidy, the spokesman of the major political party in The Netherlands declared that he did not like to subsidize these people, but he argued for it because subsidizing a self-help group was the cheapest way of solving the problem. A famous psychiatrist argued for help because it would be politically dangerous to neglect this group. The recognition of the existence of problems among children of collaborators is almost unanimous but, for the most part, the cause of these problems is seen in the behavior of the parents during the war, rather than in the postwar reaction to this behavior. The size of the subsidy granted to children of collaborators is not proportionate to the subsidies granted to other "children of the war."

On the other hand, for the first time (1995), the self-help group of children of collaborators was officially invited to be present at the commemoration of the liberation of The Netherlands from the Germans 50 years ago.

Out of the 200,000 to 300,000 children of collaborators living in The Netherlands, less than 4,000 have made themselves known to the self-help group. Of the latter group, only very few have taken the step to make themselves known in the media. Most reactions to media programs on the subject are positive. However, children of collaborators who have revealed their backgrounds in public report much lack of understanding. In particular, people find it difficult to understand that children of collaborators can also have positive feelings toward their parents, that for these children, their parents were not only "wrong" parents, but also "right" parents.

### **Giving Meaning**

A last important factor for the integration of children of collaborators in society is the inspiration they received to give meaning to their experiences. Many report that this inspiration came from people who represent philosophical and religious traditions. It helped them to accept their own life histories, face the negative aspects, and try to distill positive insights from

them. They were inspired to cope with the enormous issues of guilt, suffering and, evil, and, in particular, that of belonging. Many searched for information about the past and struggled to give this information meaning.

Many have matured from unfounded guilt feelings to a sense of responsibility and the desire to contribute to the community. It is likely that they will always stand out in their critical attitude toward discrimination and exclusion of people, toward projecting evil onto others.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter is based on findings that have been confirmed by means of “member check” within the group of children of collaborators who participated in the self-help group formed in The Netherlands. The judgments of clinicians and researchers have also been taken into account in the description. However, much more work remains to be done.

One aim for further research could be to check a particular implication of the findings: the importance of nonspecific therapy factors for this group of individuals. Another aim could be to elaborate scapegoat theories in order to clarify the reactions war-affected people encounter in everyday life. Focusing on the societal aspects of the continuing trauma described herein might be of help for the work of the self-help group in corroborating self-esteem.

The descriptions in this chapter can serve several purposes. For example, they can be used as a framework for further research in that they provide rich material for formulating new hypotheses and questionnaires. They can also be used to develop educational material for training and retraining psychotherapists, pastoral workers, and other professionals.

The insights into the life conditions of children of collaborators constitute an appeal to the citizens of this country to become informed about this uneasy subject, face this aspect of the heritage of World War II, and confront the many questions that arise. This can enhance the full integration of the consequences of the war.

Far more work is needed to extend the information contained herein to the people not attending the self-help group. The challenging question of how to inquire into the life stories of people who are silent about their backgrounds must be tackled.

The findings and tentative generalizations may also suggest a framework for studying the situation of children of collaborators in other countries occupied during World War II, as well as that of people involved in today's conflicts, such as that in former Yugoslavia.

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