

Winfried Kurth

**The psychological background of  
Germany's participation in the Kosovo war**

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Although the German share in the allied air force bombing Yugoslavia is rather small compared to the US participation<sup>1</sup>, this first combat mission of German military forces since World War II is intensively discussed in Germany and emotionally loaded. German co-responsibility for these Nato attacks is vividly felt, and a majority of the Germans supports the air raids (between 60 % and 64 % in surveys during the first month of the attacks<sup>2</sup>). There is even a widespread conviction of a special duty of Germany, allegedly resulting from German history, to apply military means against Slobodan Milosevic's regime. This opinion is particularly strong among members of the formerly pacifist Green party<sup>3</sup>. What are the motivational reasons for this distinct approval of military action in a country which was not attacked and has lived in peace for 54 years?

### **The humanitarian rationalization**

The official reason for beginning the air raids, expressed by many politicians, was "to prevent a humanitarian catastrophe in Kosovo"<sup>4</sup>. However, a closer look reveals that this cannot have been the true reason. Otherwise, field hospitals and other means for humanitarian aid would have been prepared much earlier at the borders of Kosovo<sup>5</sup>. The extremely strict segregation of Kosovar refugees by the European nations, even preventing families from uniting, is also not a very great indication of humanitarian concerns<sup>6</sup>. German perception of the situation in Kosovo varied considerably with time. Official documents of the German Foreign Ministry stated that between November, 1998, and March 24, 1999 (when the NATO airstrikes began), there was "no political persecution in Kosovo... explicitly associated with Albanian ethnic origin."<sup>7</sup> In fact, although there was a bloody conflict between the Serbian forces and Kosovar-Albanian separatists which should not be played down, the number of killed civilians in Kosovo during the above-mentioned period was by no means so high that the notion of "genocide" (used later by NATO politicians to justify the bombings) would be appropriate.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, the military strategy was not changed when it became obvious that the bombing did not prevent the expulsions, but that they instead provided the Serbian forces with a pretext to extend and brutalize them extremely - a development which had been predicted by many experts before<sup>9</sup>.

When ordinary, everyday ethical principles are in use, it is unacceptable to give aid to some persons by inflicting harm or death to other, innocent people (as it is inevitably a consequence of air raids). What would we think about a doctor who has some patient needing a transplant of an organ for survival, and who goes out on the street and catches some passer-by to gut him?<sup>10</sup> In international life, however, different rules seem to be in force.

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<sup>1</sup> Fourteen German Tornado airplanes, compared to more than 300 US jets in mid-April, *Frankfurter Rundschau*, April 30, 1999, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> *Die Woche*, April 16 and April 23, 1999, p. 5.

<sup>3</sup> e.g. J. Fischer, see *Die Woche*, April 23, 1999, p. 5; L. Volmer, see *Konkret*, 5/1999, p. 13; comments in *Freitag*, May 14, 1999, p. 3, p. 8. Among party members, approval for the attacks was highest in the Green Party (73 %): *Konkret*, 5 / 99, p. 27.

<sup>4</sup> G. Schröder, *Göttinger Tageblatt*, March 23, 1999, p. 1; *Göttinger Tageblatt*, March 25, p. 1; R. Scharping: "We want to help the people in Kosovo", *Frankfurter Rundschau*, March 26, p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> Jonathan Eyal, British expert in international law, in *Der Spiegel*, April 26, 1999, p. 156.

<sup>6</sup> extreme cases described in *Frankfurter Rundschau*, April 30, 1999, p. 31.

<sup>7</sup> documented by a team of jurists, *Frankfurter Rundschau*, April 23, 1999.

<sup>8</sup> Lloyd deMause gave evidence for this discrepancy in a contribution to the 1999 IPA Convention, New York.

<sup>9</sup> e.g. comment in *Tagesanzeiger*, February 27, 1999; *Der Spiegel*, March 22, 1999, p. 198; a UNHCR speaker: "We have always said: When the bombing starts, in Kosovo the law of the jungle will rule", *BZ am Sonntag*, March 28, 1999.

<sup>10</sup> Philosopher and jurist Reinhard Merkel, *Die Zeit*, May 12, 1999, p. 10.

All this supports the thesis that the superficial humanitarian arguments hide some deeper motivations which we don't wish to express (or even to know).

### The development of public mood before the war

The European nations have made great progress during the last years: The treaty of the European Union was renewed, negotiations leading to the admission of new member states were started, and a common currency, the Euro, was created. Perspectives for economic growth and for a stronger melting-together of the nations were thus opened. However, these developments, along with the process of "globalization" of the markets, also caused massive fears.<sup>11</sup> Since 1995, a group of psychohistorians has been systematically collecting and analyzing political cartoons from German and Swiss newspapers<sup>12</sup>, following and extending the methods of group fantasy analysis developed by Lloyd deMause<sup>13</sup> and Jerrold Atlas<sup>14</sup>. A "strength index" was defined which measures the proportion of cartoons showing some defined motifs of strength<sup>15</sup>. The long-term chart of this strength index (Figure 1) clearly exhibits a decline, superimposed by some fluctuations, since the summer of 1996. (By the way, this point of high strength in 1996 coincides well with the moment when the German team won the European soccer championship.)

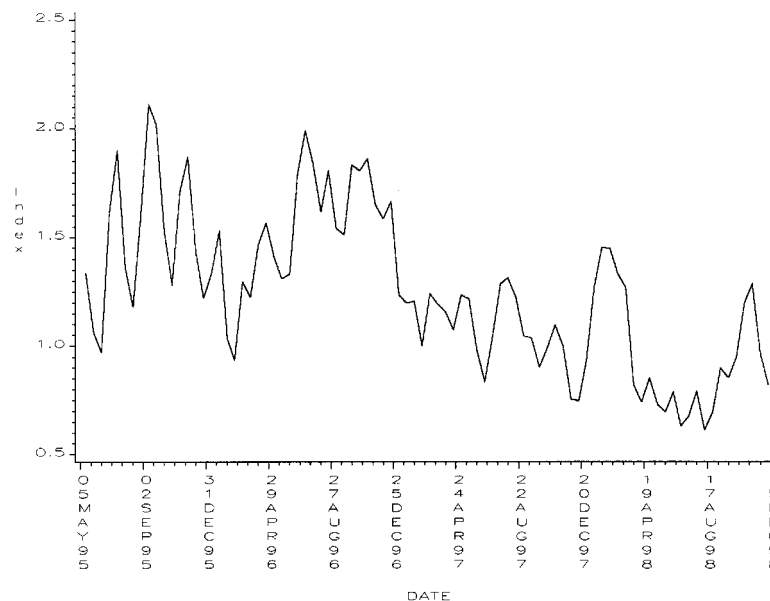


Fig. 1: Strength index, derived from cartoons from German and Swiss newspapers. Monthly averages.

The Germans were already fantasizing about participation in war in the Balkans in 1995. After the Dayton treaty, the possibility for sacrificial action on the battlefield was (temporarily) gone. The Kohl administration concentrated from 1996 on economy measures,

<sup>11</sup> For a discussion of certain aspects of these fears see W. Kurth, "Analysis of German group fantasies (1995-1996): An empirical approach", *Tapestry*, 1 (1998), 5-24.

<sup>12</sup> The author thanks Florian Galler, Frank Horstmann and Ludwig Janus for their essential participation and help in this work.

<sup>13</sup> L. de Mause, *Foundations of Psychohistory*. New York: Creative Roots, 1982.

<sup>14</sup> J. Atlas, *Was in Deutschland passieren wird*. Düsseldorf: Econ, 1992.

<sup>15</sup> see W. Kurth, "Analysis...", for a more detailed definition of cartoon indices.

cuts in welfare spending, and on plans for a tax reform in favour of the employers - thus creating a perspective of "internal sacrifices" in Germany. Most of these initiatives, however, were blocked by the opposition which was in control of the second legislative chamber. To break up the deadlock, the Germans elected a new government in September, 1998. The former opposition, namely, the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the smaller Green Party, got into power under the new Kanzler (prime minister) Gerhard Schröder. However, the prospect of economic sacrifices got even worse by this change: Oskar Lafontaine, the new minister of finance, stood for a policy of spending more money to boost the demand, and of lowering the interest rates. This seemed to have had very disturbing effects on the psyche of most Germans. The new government was soon depicted as chaotic and unprofessional, and cartoons showing threatening situations in which figures were attacked, squeezed or even strangled began to proliferate (Fig. 2). As we know from Lloyd deMause's work, this is an indication of deep regression into pre- and perinatal fears - and furthermore, strangulation fantasies have been identified as often preceding the outbreak of war<sup>16</sup>.

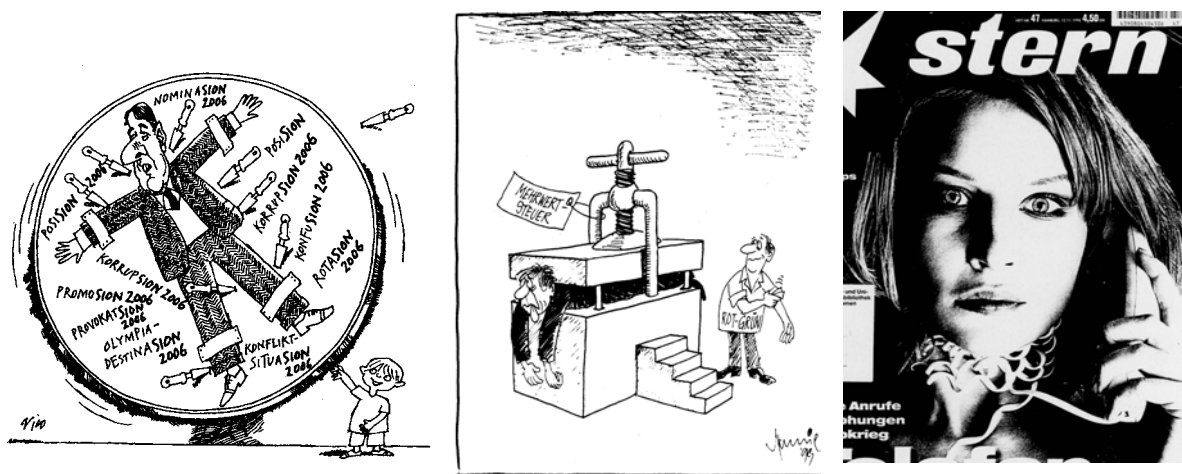


Fig. 2: Fantasies of being under attack, squeezed or strangled, appearing before the war.<sup>17</sup>

However, the first reaction of a nation-group experiencing rising growth panic is to transform a leader figure into a *poison container* - an object into which we can dump our disowned feelings<sup>18</sup>. In Germany, this was Oskar Lafontaine's role. In a host of cartoons, he was depicted as hangman, torturer, preparer of poison - and he was imagined to be dominated by his even more dangerous wife (Figure 3; we can only show a few examples). Other frequent epithets attached to him were "Schröder's shadow"<sup>19</sup> and "Angst maker"<sup>20</sup>.

In March 1999, there were signs that the situation was going to escalate: Pictures in some newspapers showed crosshairs, guns pointing at heads, and bloody sacrificial rituals (Fig. 4).

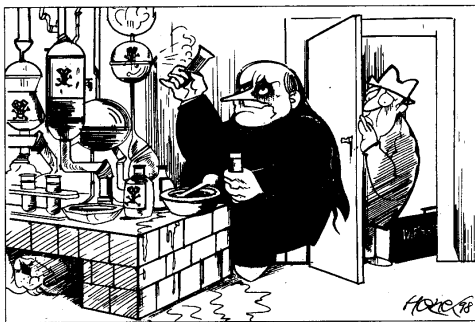
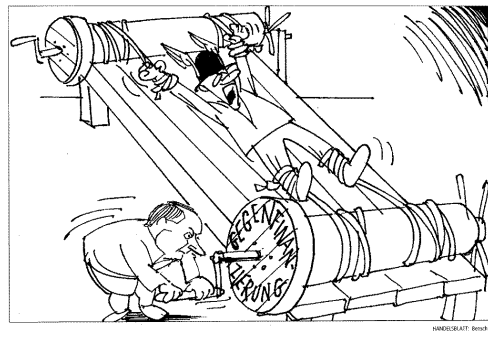
<sup>16</sup> L. deMause, "The psychogenic theory of history", *The Journal of Psychohistory*, 25 (1997), 112-183; L. deMause, *Psychohistorical Evolution* (book in progress), chapters 3, 4.

<sup>17</sup> *Tagesanzeiger*, Feb. 6, 1999; *Frankfurter Rundschau*, March 23, 1999; *Stern*, Nov. 12, 1998.

<sup>18</sup> L. deMause, "The psychogenic theory of history"; see also L. deMause, *Foundations of Psychohistory*.

<sup>19</sup> *Der Spiegel*, Oct. 26, 1998; Nov. 23, 1998; *Handelsblatt*, Nov. 5, 1998.

<sup>20</sup> *Die Woche*, March 12, 1999.



Giftküche Lafontaine

Hanel



Fig. 3: Oskar Lafontaine, minister of finance until March 11, 1999, as Germany's poison container. Lower right part: His wife, Christa Müller, as phallic woman dominating him.<sup>21</sup>

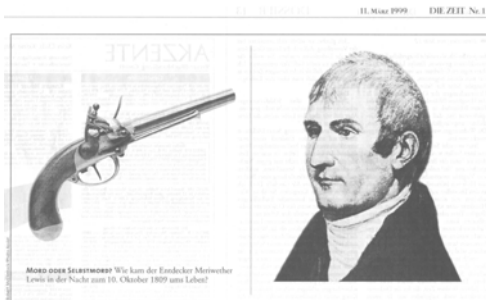
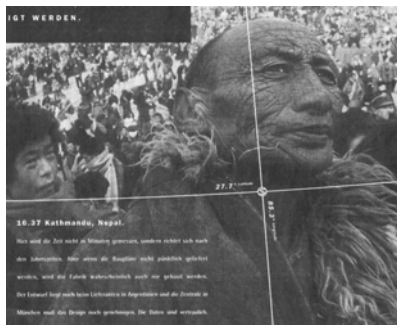


Fig. 4: Bloody homicide is imminent (all pictures from within two days before Lafontaine's resignation)<sup>22</sup>.

<sup>21</sup> Handelsblatt, Jan. 5, 1999 and Nov. 3, 1998; Göttinger Tagebl., Nov. 10, 1998; Bunte, Nov. 26, 1998.

The author did not find any cartoon directly showing Lafontaine as victim of assassination, but the threatening signals were clear enough.

As he had been victim of an assassination attempt already in 1990, Lafontaine was probably particularly sensitive to such signals. Having been under merciless attack for several months and mobbed even by his colleagues in cabinet, he suddenly resigned from all political positions on March 11, 1999.

Sensational as it was, this act did not render him really "dead" in public consciousness, nor was it suitable to satisfy the subliminal wishes of the public for a sacrifice. In fact, the very next day he appeared lively with his little son in the garden of his private home (Fig. 5). The public was foaming with rage, and viewed his stepping down as "desertion"<sup>23</sup>, "below par"<sup>24</sup>.

This harsh emotional reaction certainly had several components, one of them being the provocation which a caring, helping and high-valued father-son relationship must be for all those men who followed other priorities in their careers (and who had had quite different experiences when they were children themselves).



Fig. 5: Oskar Lafontaine on the day after his resignation from office, with his little son at home in Saarbrücken<sup>25</sup> - a disgusting picture for traumatized psychoclasses.



Fig. 6: Oskar Lafontaine as a red spectre behind Kanzler Schröder, thus embodying bloody guilt in war<sup>26</sup>.

Consequently, Lafontaine was only "half-dead" in group fantasy, and he haunted the cartoons as a red spectre symbolizing the bad conscience of the government, especially later during wartime (Fig. 6).

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<sup>22</sup> *Handelsblatt*, March 10, 1999; *Stern*, March 11; *Die Zeit*, March 11 (2 times); *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, March 10.

<sup>23</sup> *Die Woche*, April 16, 1999, p. 3, and others.

<sup>24</sup> Reader's letter, *Die Zeit*, April 8, 1999.

<sup>25</sup> *Frankfurter Rundschau*, March 15, 1999.

<sup>26</sup> *Der Spiegel*, May 3, 1999.

But the immediate situation after Lafontaine's withdrawal from the German political scene was that *the main poison container was now lost*. This resembled very much the situation in the U.S.A., where President Clinton's affair and impeachment trial had just ended as a "failed regicide"<sup>27</sup>. It can be concluded that the group-fantasy cycles, which were formerly discovered by Lloyd deMause<sup>28</sup> in the U.S., are in almost perfect synchronicity in Germany and in the U.S., and that in both countries they were in the upheaval phase - an observation which is in good accordance with the observed decline in strength symbol abundance in Germany (see Fig. 1) as well as with earlier observations of the course of the U.S. group fantasy<sup>29</sup>.

But that is not all. The collective psychic turmoil affected other European nations too, as could be seen by the unprecedented resignation of the whole European Commission in Brussels (20 persons) only five days after Lafontaine's abdication. The same practices of sinecure-spending, nepotism and mild corruption which had been tolerated for many years were suddenly considered as totally unacceptable; the whole European bureaucracy was seen as polluted and out-of-control<sup>30</sup>. However, the resignation of the commission also could not calm the public mood; it only corroborated the bad feelings about the state of the European Union. It was in this blood-thirsty state of mind that the so-called "peace negotiations" in Rambouillet were conducted!

### **Kosovo as a prepared stage**

The political and ethnic tensions in Kosovo were apparent at least as early as 1989<sup>31</sup>. The western governments did nothing to support the non-violent movement of Kosovar-Albanian leader Rugova, nor did they foster peaceful mediation. Small volunteer groups from international non-government peace organizations were active in the region - with temporary successes<sup>32</sup> - but they got almost no public funding and were too weak in resources and manpower to trigger a peace process on a broader basis. Instead, the extremist forces of the KLA (Kosova Liberation Army; UCK) were equipped with weapons and money from western countries - a violent organization which did not shy from attacking civilians and placing bombs in Serbian refugee camps<sup>33</sup>. KLA warriors were trained by instructors from German secret services<sup>34</sup>. But the opposite conflict party, Milosevic's nationalistic regime in Belgrade, was supported by the West too: After a special "repatriation treaty" between the German and Yugoslavian governments had been signed in 1996, Germany forced Serbian refugees to go back to Yugoslavia where they had to do their service in the army and thus strengthened the regime<sup>35</sup>. In 1997, Great Britain even exported military equipment to Yugoslavia<sup>36</sup>.

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<sup>27</sup> *Die Weltwoche*, Feb. 11, 1999.

<sup>28</sup> L. deMause, *Foundations of Psychohistory*.

<sup>29</sup> L. deMause, personal communication.

<sup>30</sup> *Der Spiegel*, March 22, 1999.

<sup>31</sup> I. Banac, "The fearful asymmetry of war: The causes and consequences of Yugoslavia's demise", *Daedalus*, 1992, 141-174; see also A. Puhar, "Childhood nightmares and dreams of revenge", *The Journal of Psychohistory*, 22 (1994), 131-170.

<sup>32</sup> O. Arajärvi, *These are my friends from Belgrade. Approaches towards civil conflict resolution in Kosov@*. Berlin: Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, 1998 (in German).

<sup>33</sup> Ch. Chiclet, in: *Le Monde diplomatique*, May 14, 1999, p. 20-21.

<sup>34</sup> *Ossietzky*, Vol. 8, April 24, 1999, p. 261.

<sup>35</sup> "Rückführungs"-Abkommen Deutschland - Jugoslawien, documented in *Rundbrief KDV im Krieg*, 6 / 96, p. 9-10; see also: B. Aleksov, "The fate of war deserters in former Yugoslavia", in *Zene za mir / Women for Peace*, Belgrade, May 1996, 282-286.

<sup>36</sup> *Frankfurter Rundschau*, March 29, 1999, p. 9.

All these activities lead to the conclusion that the western nations had an unspoken intention to let the conflict "cook". When it finally escalated in 1998-1999, it was particularly the Germans who arranged the peace negotiations in Rambouillet in such a way that they inevitably ended in a deadlock<sup>37</sup>. By trying to enforce the signature under a treaty by a military threat and by giving an ultimatum, the NATO members themselves created the situation of "no alternative" which they used to explain their bombing later.

That the mediation of true peace agreements and the initiation of a de-escalating movement normally needs much time and an atmosphere of patience can be seen from the history of the peace processes in Northern Ireland or South Africa. The Rambouillet negotiations had clearly the opposite effect: escalation.

### The overwhelming will to punish

The topic of dangerous children was one of the principal themes of group fantasy in Germany during the last two years (Fig. 7).



Fig. 7: Children threatened us.<sup>38</sup>

Restrictive means against young criminals were broadly discussed, and the theory that contemporary education is much too "mollycoddling" and produces monsters got much public support<sup>39</sup>. When we look at the way the Kosovo conflict was reflected in cartoons before NATO started the attacks, the pictures fit well into this fantasy: Milosevic is shown as a *naughty child*, with the parents (us) failing to give (enough) physical punishment (Fig. 8).

Two days before the NATO jets started, the front page of the newsmagazine *Spiegel* showed a child who did not control himself - and the question posed was "Can Europe still be saved?" (Fig. 9).

<sup>37</sup> J. Elsässer, "Die Falle von Rambouillet. Wie Deutschland die USA in den Kosovo-Krieg gezogen hat." *Konkret*, 5 / 99, 52-54.

<sup>38</sup> *Göttinger Tageblatt*, March 21, 1998; *Wirtschaftswoche*, Dec. 11, 1998; *Die Zeit*, Oct. 29, 1998.

<sup>39</sup> e.g. A. Wunsch, "Droge Verwöhnung", *Die Zeit*, Oct. 1, 1998, p. 89.



Only an action of strict punishment could save Europe - there was a "longing for bombs"<sup>40</sup> now. We have already seen that the main driving force behind the raids was not humanitarian concern, nor the case for human rights. It was the fierce will to punish. The bombing was an "educative punishment"<sup>41</sup>; the poet Durs Grünbein called the bomb "a means of education"<sup>42</sup>, and with this characterization he referred also to the historical Allied bombing raids against us, against Germany.

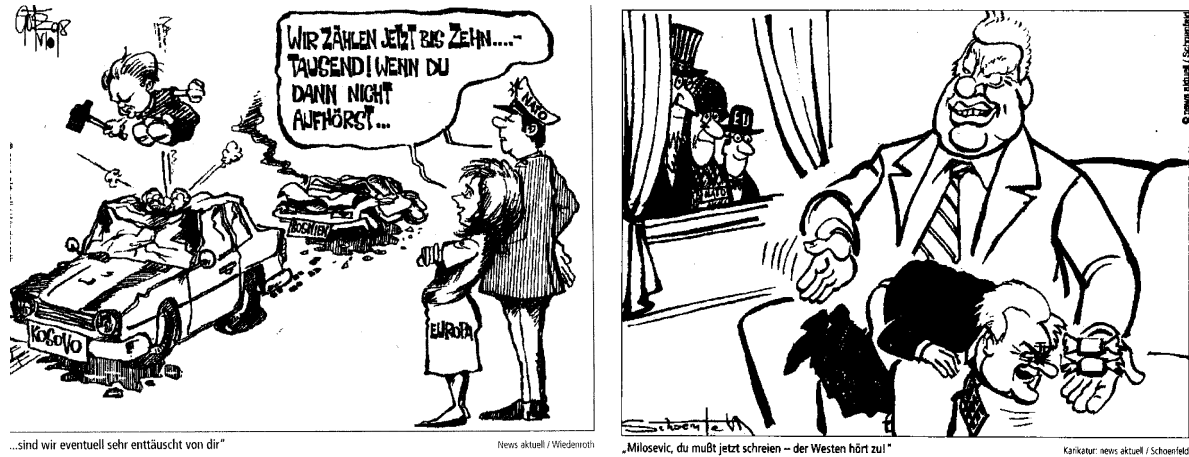


Fig. 8: Milosevic as ill-mannered child, needing harsh punishment.<sup>43</sup>



<sup>40</sup> *Die Welt*, March 22, 1999.

<sup>41</sup> *Die Woche*, April 29, 1999, p. 1.

<sup>42</sup> in *Der Spiegel*, cited by R. Wieland, *Konkret*, 5 / 99, p. 61.

<sup>43</sup> Left: Europe and NATO: "We now count till ten... thousand! If you don't stop then... we are possibly very embarrassed about you." *Handelsblatt*, July 23, 1998. Right: Yeltsin: "Milosevic, you must cry now - the West is listening!" *Handelsblatt*, Oct. 8, 1998.

Fig. 9: The most dangerous threat to Europe was a little child not controlling himself and urinating publicly.<sup>44</sup>

We identified ourselves completely with the Western alliance ("NATO is a sanctuary now"<sup>45</sup>), which was without any stain; whereas the enemy, Slobodan Milosevic, was filled with poison until near-bursting ("the insane Serb"<sup>46</sup>, "Slaughterer"<sup>47</sup>, "devil"<sup>48</sup>). All mobilizable condemnation was concentrated on this single object of hatred, and each tiny expression of doubt concerning the sense of the punitive bombs was morally knocked as "support for Milosevic". The author had to experience this personally when he participated in a street protest picket against the NATO attacks. Some passers-by felt immediately and deeply provoked by the sheer presence of protesters, and one just insisted again and again: "Now, is Milosevic a criminal? Just answer me: is he??".

Since the motivation for the attacks was so deeply rooted, it could not be affected by any rational thinking. Though it soon became apparent that the military strategy had effects which stood in total contrast to the officially-stated purpose (to stop the maltreatment of the Kosovars), the strategy was not changed, but instead the bombings were intensified. After these attacks had triggered the massacres which they had officially been supposed to prevent, the media were flooded with images of helpless, victimized Kosovar refugees, particularly with images of traumatized women and children<sup>49</sup>. The public consensus about the necessity of the bombings was to a great degree reinforced by the presentation of these images<sup>50</sup>. This is remarkable, since images normally cannot logically prove the adequacy of some means to change a deplorable state of affairs. They can only do so if this adequacy is *a priori* carved into the deep unconscious foundations of our minds: Punishment is right because our parents have punished *us* when we were in such a defenceless state as the Kosovars are now.

This is the only explanation of the seemingly illogical collective behavior in wartimes<sup>51</sup>: We regress to our own early childhood and restage our traumatic experiences. These were so unbearable that the only way to handle them was identification with the aggressor. In every moment when the suppressed, desparate feelings from childhood threaten to overwhelm us again, we strive to become the punishing adult. The media images of helpless refugees were a key stimulus activating this deep reflex of protective identification.

On the political stage, this mechanism explains the wish expressed by many politicians and journalists that "Germany must be adult" and act "with full responsibility" - which is always a synonym for "use military force"<sup>52</sup>. This includes the undertaking of immoral deeds (e.g. killing innocent persons), since the right to do immoral things is part of being adult<sup>53</sup>. However, the main point is that we *act* at any price. Thereby we fight the experience of powerlessness associated with childhood trauma. Rudolf Scharping, Minister of Defence, admitted bluntly that it was "a feeling of powerlessness" which was fought against by the

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<sup>44</sup> *Der Spiegel*, March 22, 1999.

<sup>45</sup> H. Scheer, *Die Woche*, April 23, 1999, p. 6.

<sup>46</sup> *Berliner Kurier*, March 25, 1999.

<sup>47</sup> *Bild*, March 27, 1999.

<sup>48</sup> Minister J. Fischer, cited in *Die Woche*, April 23, 1999, p. 1.

<sup>49</sup> e.g. front page of *Der Spiegel*, April 5, 1999; the *Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* showed for several weeks nearly daily a crying mother with child on its front page.

<sup>50</sup> Jürgen Link, "Diese Bilder!!", in: *Im Auge des Tornados*, Extra issue *DISS-Journal*, 1999, p. 10.

<sup>51</sup> cf. L. deMause, *Psychohistorical Evolution*.

<sup>52</sup> e.g. W. Schäuble: "The Federal Republic... got definitely adult now", *Der Spiegel*, April 26, 1999, p. 42.

<sup>53</sup> K. Theweleit, "Logical, radical, criminal". *Konkret*, 5 / 99, 22-28.

bombings<sup>54</sup>. Bundeskanzler Schröder told a confidant that now - after the bombings had begun - for the first time since he came into office he had "the feeling of having the thing [government] under control"<sup>55</sup>.

For many political actors in Germany's new government, this feeling of powerlessness also echoed experiences from their political biographies: Many came from the so-called "generation 68" who had participated in the protests against the conservative establishment during the students' rebellion in 1968, and in similar movements in the Seventies. But there had always been higher authorities having the whip hand; the rebels' lasting experience was that of political impotence<sup>56</sup>. The stronger was the temptation to go to the utmost extreme of political power - to initiate a war - when finally, 30 years later, the much longed-for opportunity was there: "For the first time, I had to decide about the question of war or peace", boasted new Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer in an interview about the Rambouillet negotiations<sup>57</sup>.

This attitude, along with the loss of touch with the reality of the effects one's actions have, is narcissistic and basically childish<sup>58</sup>, as is the stubbornly iterated verbal Milosevic-beating. However, the media cover up this regressive manner in innumerable commentaries as "mature", "responsible", "adult" etc.<sup>59</sup> Consequently, critical discussion about the NATO strategy is denounced as "theater"<sup>60</sup> and "immature"<sup>61</sup>. This reversal is due to our urgent need to *hide* the truth about our regressive state of mind<sup>62</sup> - neither the group nor our own consciousness is allowed to think about it, since this would also bring the suppressed, unbearable pains back. Likewise, we don't want to realize that by using violence to enforce the will of the power which is stronger, we basically adopt the same level of problem-solving as Milosevic - the level of the law of the jungle, or of the helpless nightmares of childhood under traumatic conditions.

### **The German "war cabinet"**

If our conjectures are true, then the leading German politicians, who are responsible for Germany's active participation in the war, must share the mental traits which have led a large part of the public to favor the air strikes on Belgrade. The group-fantasy of becoming an adult by punitive beating of naughty Milosevic must have a psychoclass<sup>63</sup> basis - i.e. there must be a large portion of people sharing similar childhood experiences - and the leading figures of this war are just representatives re-enacting these experiences as delegates of the whole class.

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<sup>54</sup> R. Scharping on March 26, 1999, cited in *Konkret*, 5 / 99, p. 12.

<sup>55</sup> *Die Woche*, April 16, 1999, p. 3.

<sup>56</sup> K. Theweleit, "Logical, radical, criminal"; cf. also B. Knebel, "Der Kosovo-Konflikt: Ein Generationen-Konflikt", *Göttinger Tageblatt*, April 9, 1999, p. 4.

<sup>57</sup> cited in J. Samuel, *Ein Bombenwochenende*. Berlin: Spotless, 1999, p. 62.

<sup>58</sup> "a perfectly stage-managed kindergarten level" was recognized by one of the few seeing commentators, Chr. Hans (*taz*, April 22, 1999, p. 7).

<sup>59</sup> e.g. "Green party must learn responsibility", *Die Zeit*, May 6, 1999; cf. also Gerhard Schröder's reference to "new German responsibility" in his opening address in the reconstructed Reichstag in Berlin, *Die Woche*, April 23, 1999, p. 5.

<sup>60</sup> "Das grüne Theater", *Die Zeit*, May 12, 1999, front page headline.

<sup>61</sup> e.g. R. Urschel, "Grüne und Kosovo - Noch unreif", *Göttinger Tageblatt*, May 14, 1999, p. 4.

<sup>62</sup> cf. the concept of "social alter" in L. deMause, *Psychohistorical Evolution*.

<sup>63</sup> see L. deMause, *Foundations of Psychohistory*.

The leading German politicians (and currently also the most popular ones), in power since October 1998, are Gerhard Schröder (Bundeskanzler and leader of the Social Democratic Party), Joschka Fischer (Foreign Minister and head of the Green Party) and Rudolf Scharping (Minister of Defence, former unsuccessful candidate against Kohl in 1994). They were born in 1944, 1948 and 1947, respectively; hence they all belong to the first post-WWII generation and grew up under the physically hard conditions of the time directly after the war, with Germany in large parts bombed to rubble, scarce food supply, and war victims to be mourned for in almost every family. It is, however, difficult to assess the emotional conditions and the way of childrearing in specific families, since these details are often not told in biographies, and when they are, some later idealization of the parents is often merged in<sup>64</sup>. Nevertheless, the published biographies of the three "war cabinet" members give us some information.

### *Gerhard Schröder*

His father died as a soldier in the Balkans in 1944 when Gerhard was five months old. The relationship to his mother was later described by himself with the words "no sentimentalities, no great feelings". Since his mother had to earn money, he was raised by his paternal grandmother, and he had later to unlearn the strong Saxonian dialect which he had adopted from her when learning to speak. The social conditions of the family were very bad, and when he was a boy, he had to fight against prejudices of being "antisocial" amongst his peers<sup>65</sup>. Schröder claimed that his mother did not beat him. However, physical punishment was regularly practiced at school: "With a large cane, he [the teacher] ensured order. When something got out of hand, a rap across the knuckles was given. Then the teacher had also a wooden pointer. With this he once smashed a boy's collarbone..."<sup>66</sup>. Early in his life, Gerhard Schröder himself adopted a punitive attitude against subordinates: It was reported that he hit his younger, then 15 year-old half-sister Heiderose when he got to know that she already had a boyfriend<sup>67</sup>.

### *Rudolf Scharping*

He was the first of seven children. His father was a furniture seller, later taking a job as an official specialist. Rudolf Scharping said about him: "He was authoritarian. The material conditions might have been the cause. Anyway, it was a difficult childhood for me." The pressure to do well at school was strong. When his moving up was once in danger, his mother boxed his ears<sup>68</sup>. Like Schröder, as the eldest brother he had early to exert authority himself. However, even more than Schröder he seems to have internalized an obedient stance — later, in his political career, he was a perfect "party soldier" who willingly stepped back into the ranks when Lafontaine or Schröder got more public support. The ministry of defence was not the office he wanted to have, though now the press sees him as the ideal man for it<sup>69</sup>.

### *Joschka Fischer*

He has probably the most bizarre career among all contemporary German politicians. Let us first have a look at his parents. After WWII, but before Joschka was born as the third and

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<sup>64</sup> cf. Ch. and W. Hopf, *Familie, Persönlichkeit, Politik*. Weinheim: Juventa, 1997.

<sup>65</sup> U. Posche, *Gerhard Schröder. Nah-Aufnahme*. Munich: Goldmann, 1998.

<sup>66</sup> B. Anda and R. Kleine, *Gerhard Schröder - eine Biographie*. Berlin: Ullstein, 2nd ed., 1998.

<sup>67</sup> Anda, Kleine: *Gerhard Schröder - eine Biographie*.

<sup>68</sup> U. Rosenbaum, *Rudolf Scharping. Biographie*. Berlin: Ullstein, 1993.

<sup>69</sup> e.g. *Stern*, April 8, 1999; *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, April 1, 1999; cf. K. Lorenz in *Konkret*, 5 / 99, 44-45.

youngest child, they left their Hungarian hometown (voluntarily) and settled in a small village in southern Germany. (Both were of German descent.) The mother was described as "a very dominating person ...with an excessive inclination to cleanliness, not without compulsive traits". "The kitchen was always so shiny polished that one could have immediately carried out an emergency operation there", the son remembered later<sup>70</sup>. The mother was a strict Catholic, and she "made demands on herself and on her children, who always looked spruce". The father, a butcher, also sometimes became angry and slapped the children, but normally he remained in the background<sup>71</sup>. Joschka was brought to the Kindergarten because his mother had to go to work, "although he was still much too little"<sup>72</sup>. He claimed later that he had been "very pampered" as a child, but on the other hand, his sister reported that "there had been far too much compulsion" at home<sup>73</sup>.

We don't have information about the means his mother used in his early education to make him fulfill her "demands", but frightening traits in his personality and in his later career let it seem reasonable to suspect that these means had not been very soft. As a young man, Joschka Fischer joined a left-extremist so-called "Sponti" group in Frankfurt and participated in paramilitary trainings in streetfighting<sup>74</sup>. He once admitted a "pleasure to beat" and was reported to solve problems - even among his close political friends - by using physical violence<sup>75</sup>. He hit his young wife in a quarrel a few days after marriage<sup>76</sup>. In conflicts with state authorities in connection with house occupations in the mid-seventies, he participated with his extremist group in brutal streetfights against policemen, using heavy iron projectiles<sup>77</sup> and sometimes also incendiary compounds<sup>78</sup>. His comrades gave him the nickname "minister of defence" in this time<sup>79</sup>. His distancing from violence happened not before he had been in prison for two days<sup>80</sup>. Since he had acted out of a group, the prosecution was not able to hold him personally responsible for the crimes which had been committed in the streetfight.

This militant past of Germany's celebrated new Foreign Minister has been almost completely erased from public consciousness. The reason is that Joschka Fischer adopted a pacifist attitude in the eighties, when this was opportune. It was the time when the peace movement in Germany was growing, when the new Green Party united ecological and peace activists, and when a lot of people from the "left scene" entered this newly emerging political movement. Using his eloquence and his network of old friends, Fischer soon occupied a leading position in the new party. In 1985 he became the first minister of the Greens in a "red-green coalition" in a Bundesland (state) of Germany. From the beginning, he stood in the Green Party for a position of so-called "political realism", giving participation in power the priority over questions regarding contents. Thus it was not really surprising when he abandoned the pacifist position again in 1995 and advocated a military intervention in Bosnia<sup>81</sup>. Meanwhile exerting much control over the Green Party at the federal level, he improved by this step his chances to

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<sup>70</sup> S. Krause-Burger, *Joschka Fischer. Der Marsch durch die Illusionen*. Stuttgart: dva, 1997, p. 37.

<sup>71</sup> Krause-Burger, p. 38.

<sup>72</sup> Krause-Burger, p. 39.

<sup>73</sup> Krause-Burger, p. 50.

<sup>74</sup> Ch. Schmidt, *"Wir sind die Wahnsinnigen". Joschka Fischer und seine Frankfurter Gang*. Munich: Econ & List, 2nd ed. 1999.

<sup>75</sup> Schmidt, p. 66.

<sup>76</sup> Krause-Burger, p. 71.

<sup>77</sup> Schmidt, p. 72.

<sup>78</sup> Schmidt, p. 91.

<sup>79</sup> Schmidt, p. 82.

<sup>80</sup> Schmidt, p. 99.

<sup>81</sup> Schmidt, p. 270.

become minister in Bonn in a red-green cabinet - and this finally worked out in 1998 when the two parties, the Social Democrats and the Greens, together won the majority.

To sum up, one can say that in all these biographies there are indications of traumatic experiences in childhood. This is certainly nothing unusual; in fact, the three politicians are probably representative of most members of their generation in this respect - and this is the reason for their success. However, it is also important to note that the traumatizations which they experienced were obviously not so extreme as was the case for children in the 19th century, when the so-called "black education" was broadly propagated and practiced in Germany. The German emperor and the Nazi leaders had much worse childhoods than the contemporary politicians<sup>82</sup>. Consequently, there is less need to enact violent punishment and cruelty now than there was in the first half of the century. Although a war is conducted, the situation cannot be compared with Nazi Germany.

### The redeemer

It is interesting to elucidate further the role Joschka Fischer is playing in the actual German group fantasy. The Green Party had fought in the eighties for protection of the environment and for disarmament, and these activities - probably together with their unification with the "Alliance 90", a party of the civil rights movement of the former GDR after 1991 - laid the basis for a public image as a "moral authority". The Greens were not loved, but to a certain degree respected as representing high ideals. This image was transferred to Fischer as one of their leading figures, too (though we have seen that personally he did not much embody these ideals). However, the standards of ecological correctness and nonviolence were at the same time unpopular, because they contradicted our own deep wishes<sup>83</sup>. How great was the relief when Fischer left the demanding nonviolent position!

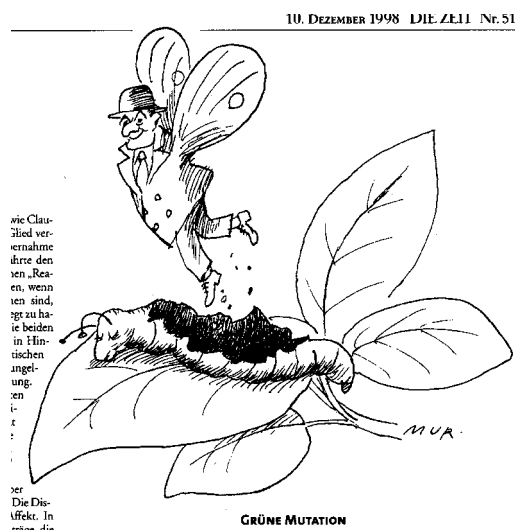


Fig. 10: Joschka Fischer's metamorphosis from a member of the ugly (placental) Green party to our flying Foreign Minister.<sup>84</sup>



Fig. 11: Father Schröder (center) with Joschka Fischer as the obedient son (left) and with Minister for Environment, J. Trittin, as bad child (right).<sup>85</sup>

<sup>82</sup> cf. Alice Miller, *Am Anfang war Erziehung*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1980; A. Miller, *Wege des Lebens*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1998.

<sup>83</sup> cf. W. Kurth, "Analysis of German group fantasies (1995-1996)", *Tapestry*, 1 (1998), p. 13 for a discussion of the Greenpeace campaign against sinking the "Brent Spar" oil platform.

<sup>84</sup> *Die Zeit*, Dec. 10, 1998.

<sup>85</sup> *Göttinger Tageblatt*, Feb. 20, 1999.

His step, which was soon followed by other Green members, was celebrated again and again as "mature", "responsible", "indicating the ability to govern" etc. - and since he was still seen as a moral authority, he enabled us to eliminate our scruples concerning the use of military force. As (alleged) former pacifists who were converted to a seemingly better position, the Greens became principal witnesses for the (alleged) failure of civil society<sup>86</sup> and enabled us to lighten our conscience - and this was their main task in the red-green coalition. This "adaptation to reality" (which is basically a complete loss of backbone) was personified in the often depicted metamorphosis of Joschka Fischer (Fig. 10) and in his image as the "well-educated son", contrasted with other, less adapted parts of the Green party (Fig. 11).

We felt that he took all our scruples and sins, all the darkness of the world on his shoulders (Fig. 12).



Fig. 12: Joschka Fischer is carrying all our bad conscience on his shoulders - and he deserves sexual gratification for doing so (right).<sup>87</sup>

This delegation of conscience was so pleasant for us that we stylized Fischer more and more as a moral leader and redeemer, until he is now identified with Christ himself (Fig. 13).

The events at the recent Green Party's convention concerned with the war fit well into this fantasy: Most party members adored Fischer as the only one who can help<sup>88</sup>, while a minority of radical opponents of the war took the role of the crucifiers: By throwing a bag with red paint at him, they gave him the aura of a martyr. Instinctively, he did not change his stained jacket<sup>89</sup>, but held his speech with the red paint on his clothes which symbolized so well the bloody guilt he is willing to take from us.

Thus we have the paradoxical situation that one of the most opportunistic members of the new government<sup>90</sup> is meanwhile the most idealized one and gets the best polls among all German politicians<sup>91</sup>.

<sup>86</sup> Ch. Ziller in *Freitag*, May 14, 1999, p. 8.

<sup>87</sup> *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, Jan. 11, 1999; *Hamburger Abendblatt*, Nov. 5, 1998.

<sup>88</sup> "Holy Joseph, help", *Die Woche*, April 29, 1999, p. 6.

<sup>89</sup> *Die Zeit / Leben*, May 20, 1999, p. 13.

<sup>90</sup> cf. Schmidt, "*Wir sind die Wahnsinnigen*".



Fig. 13: Joschka Fischer as our messiah, delivering us from our sins.<sup>92</sup>

## Sacrifices

Before NATO started the attacks, we felt squeezed and strangulated (cf. Fig. 2). When the bombings began, it was clearly a great relief. However, we were not allowed to show our positive feelings openly. We knew that the bombings would cause civilian casualties, and although Joschka Fischer had absorbed much of our scruples, some bad conscience remained. The result was a certain ambivalence. A "great quiet"<sup>93</sup> was sensed in Germany immediately after the raids against Yugoslavia had started, a "strange silence"<sup>94</sup>. The newsmagazine *Der Spiegel* prepared a front page with two optimistic-looking youths and bright background - but decided obviously at the last minute that this was too offensive in the given situation and wrapped another title page around it (dark, with small pictures of refugees), thus creating the unique case of an issue with two title pages<sup>95</sup>. Our feelings of strength and optimism were shifted to other contexts, e.g. to sports: The German national soccer team ended a long-lasting series of humiliating defeats and won against Northern Ireland (on March 28) and Finland (March 31)<sup>96</sup>.

In fact, we knew that families with children were the real victims of the military actions (Fig. 14), and the Serbian civilians were our "sacrificial lamb"<sup>97</sup>.

<sup>91</sup> *Der Spiegel*, May 24, 1999, p. 28.

<sup>92</sup> *Berliner Zeitung*, March 9, 1999; *Freitag*, May 14, 1999.

<sup>93</sup> *Die Zeit*, March 31, 1999, p. 1.

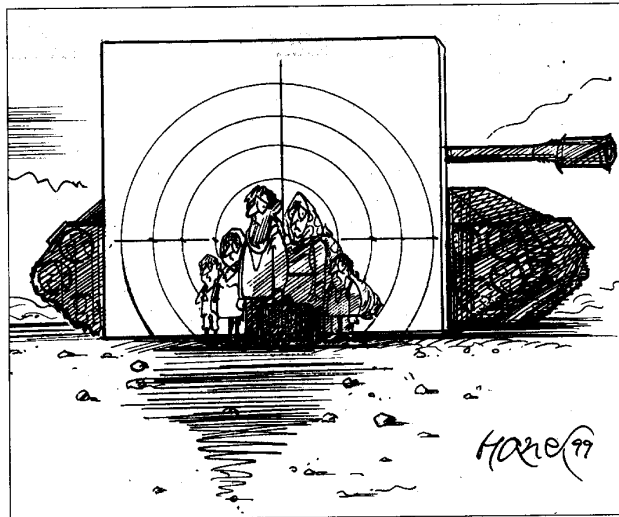
<sup>94</sup> *Die Zeit*, March 31, 1999, p. 7.

<sup>95</sup> *Der Spiegel*, April 12, 1999.

<sup>96</sup> cf. comment by Th. Gehrman in *Kommune*, 4 / 99.

<sup>97</sup> U. Neufert, *Göttinger Tageblatt*, April 12, 1999, p. 3.





Im Visier der Nato.

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Fig. 14: "In sight of NATO" - human sacrifice is the true purpose of the war.<sup>98</sup>

Lloyd deMause has verified in a lot of historical examples that the usual purpose of a war is to cleanse the (imagined) "polluted blood" of a nation by sacrificing its own boys - and that this happens particularly after periods of growth, new wealth or change<sup>99</sup>. A lot of people, even academics, recently expressed their feelings that more sacrifices of their own nation-group would be necessary, notably the intervention of German ground troops in Kosovo, and thus they gave (unintentionally) further evidence to deMause's findings: "War... requires the physical courage to risk one's life for others, to suffer and if necessary to die. Societies which don't summon up these virtues should retreat at once..."<sup>100</sup> - "The moral corruption behind this modern... low-risk warfare [by air strikes only]... is inherent to the rich countries of the West as a, so to speak, chronic mentality. The immorality of retreating into the private sphere as pure consumers... becomes more and more characteristic of mentality in the western countries... 'humanitarian' wars (...) really cost sacrifices."<sup>101</sup> - "We have war again, and we will again have to bring sacrifices, not only materially... some will lose their life, some their hope... When Germany today... brings sacrifices it shows its ability to change its views..."<sup>102</sup>. The German poet Wolf Biermann published a poem titled "Address to my son" which justified the bombings and ended "...beloved son, when you come back from there in the plastic bag I'll know who has lost the just war."<sup>103</sup>

However, despite these voices there is still (at least till now, end of May) a majority in Germany against ground troops, and it can be seen as a progress of civilization that the wish to sacrifice one's own children is stalled to a certain degree by care and empathy<sup>104</sup> - at least in comparison with the other wars Germany has fought in this century. It also gives some hope that occasionally voices like that of Ilona Rothe can be heard publicly - a soldier's

<sup>98</sup> *Göttinger Tageblatt*, April 16, 1999.

<sup>99</sup> L. deMause, *Psychohistorical Evolution*.

<sup>100</sup> W. Sofsky, "Krieg und Illusion". *Die Zeit*, May 20, 1999, p. 52.

<sup>101</sup> Reader's letter, *Die Zeit*, May 20, 1999, p. 70.

<sup>102</sup> Reader's letter, *Göttinger Tageblatt*, April 24, 1999, p. 22.

<sup>103</sup> *Stern*, April 22, 1999, p. 38.

<sup>104</sup> S. Tönnies, *Pazifismus passé?* Hamburg: Rotbuch, 1997, p. 87 ff.

mother having a much better insight into what is going on than all the above-cited intellectuals:

"During all the years, one has watched how Serbia could fill itself up with weapons. This was a fine business, in which Germany participates often enough when regions of crisis are involved. It became a powder keg. Now the powder keg is full, the fuses are set on fire, politicians have spent a lot of money and our sons have been put into the keg."<sup>105</sup>

### **Bombing away the German past**

The identification of Milosevic with Hitler, and of Kosovo with Auschwitz, was one of the main arguments used to justify the military intervention of NATO: "Milosevic acts in a way not different from Hitler"<sup>106</sup>, "I have not only learned 'never war again' but also 'never Auschwitz again' "<sup>107</sup>, "...in the north of Prishtina, a concentration camp is established... [we look] into the grimace of our own history"<sup>108</sup>, "Milosevic adapts more and more the traits of a second Hitler"<sup>109</sup>, "Shall Auschwitz be repeated?"<sup>110</sup>.

This crude historical parallelism<sup>111</sup> is an easy means to avoid an analysis of the causes of the original Nazi seizure of power and of the holocaust (and, also, to avoid thinking about the contemporary growing Neonazi movements in Germany). Instead, the "new Hitler" is punished by bombs. This is also an act of distancing oneself from the German past, to neutralize its disturbing presence in mind<sup>112</sup>. It fits well into this pattern that a commemorative place in Kragujevac (Serbia) was among first targets in Yugoslavia which were bombed. It was a memorial for one of the worst massacres which German troops had committed during WWII in the Balkans: About 7000 Yugoslavians had been shot there, amongst them all pupils of the local high school together with their teachers<sup>113</sup>. A similar case of a bombed memorial was reported from Novi Sad<sup>114</sup>. Did this happen by chance? Serbia is a traditional poison container for Germany - German troops attacked Serbia twice in this century and caused massive traumatizations with long-lasting effects.

When we discuss the psychohistorical background of the present war, we must not omit the fact that Germans were not only *persecutors* in WWII but also *victims* of war crimes committed by the Allied forces<sup>115</sup> - notably, of the massive bombings of residential areas in

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<sup>105</sup> Ilona Rothe in German television (ARD), cited in Samuel, *Bombenwochenende*, p. 90-91.

<sup>106</sup> Ludger Volmer (state minister, Green Party), cited in *Konkret*, 5 / 99, p. 13.

<sup>107</sup> Joschka Fischer, cited in *Konkret*, 5 / 99, p. 12.

<sup>108</sup> Rudolf Scharping, cited in *Konkret*, 5 / 99, p. 14.

<sup>109</sup> *Berliner Zeitung*, March 29, 1999.

<sup>110</sup> Hans Koschnick, cited in *Konkret*, 5 / 99, p. 48.

<sup>111</sup> for a discussion of the Auschwitz analogy and of the fascist challenge to pacifism see S. Tönnies, *Pazifismus passé?*, p. 132 ff.

<sup>112</sup> This mode of operation of German group fantasy could already be identified in 1995, when by Christo's "Wrapped Reichstag" a main symbol of the German past was symbolically eliminated or white-washed in the same moment when the German parliament decided to send Tornado jets to Bosnia: cf. Kurth, "Analysis of German group fantasies (1995-1996)".

<sup>113</sup> *Ossietzky*, 8 / 99, April 24, 1999, p. 261.

<sup>114</sup> *Sozialismus*, Suppl. 5 / 99, p. 30.

<sup>115</sup> cf. M. Armstrong, "Scham or shame, in any language it feels terrible." Contribution to the 13th annual convention of the German Society for Psychohistorical Research, Frankfurt, March 26-28, 1999. "The price we pay for shaming little boys", *The Journal of Psychohistory*, 27 (4) (2000), 446-452.

German cities, and of the expulsions from the eastern territories of Germany. (Not to be misunderstood: It is clear that Germany had begun the war, and that the war crimes committed by Germans were more monstrous - but one crime cannot neutralize another.) This victimization is even more suppressed in the contemporary public discourse in Germany than the German war crimes are. The commonly-shared secret knowledge about the dead victims of the Allied raids against Dresden, Hamburg and other towns binds us Germans together<sup>116</sup>. Since unresolved traumatic experience demands repetition, this could possibly lead to a longing for re-enactment. When we support the air raids of NATO against Serbia now, we identify ourselves not only with NATO, but also with the Allied bomber squadrons of WWII, i.e. (when we consider the criminal mass killing of civilians) with the aggressor. The deep psychic necessity of this identification is one reason why Joschka Fischer emphasizes that "Germany now fights for the first time in its history on the right side"<sup>117</sup> (- which belligerent nation would not claim to be on the right side?). The deeper motivation is again the wish to unite with those who are imagined as "adult". Our individual childhood experience of having been punished merges with the collective fantasy of a Germany having been "punished" by the Allies for its sins. However, a "punishment" by bombs seldom hits those who are really responsible for war crimes; instead, it causes new trauma for the children of the war and thus lays the basis for future wars.

### **The causes of war**

We did not discuss the causes of the ethnic tensions and civil war in Kosovo itself. To comprehend it, a study of the historical and cultural background, including the modes of childrearing in the region, is indispensable. We refer to the pioneering work of Alenka Puhar on family life and violence in the Balkans<sup>118</sup>. The traumatization of children in Yugoslavia was probably more severe than in western countries (partly due to the violent intervention of Nazi Germany in the region), a situation which can explain the more totalitarian character of the local group fantasies and the amount of direct physical violence. It is remarkable that all the nightmares of the Yugoslavian war which started in 1991 could have been foreseen. Signs of the coming menace were easily detectable in local texts and cartoons from 1989-1990<sup>119</sup>. Thus it would make sense to organize an international psychological task force which regularly scans the press organs of all nations and issues a warning if signs of threatening group hysteria are detected. Then, an early intervention with civil means could be launched and possibly prevent a military conflict — if this prevention is wanted by the other nations. However, first of all we are responsible for our own children: We have to avoid the traumatizations which would provide a basis for the willingness of our nation to wage wars in the future again.

### **Acknowledgements**

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<sup>116</sup> W. G. Sebald, *Luftkrieg und Literatur*, Munich 1999, cited in *Die Zeit*, April 29, 1999, p. 55.

<sup>117</sup> *Die Woche*, April 23, 1999, p. 5.

<sup>118</sup> A. Puhar, "Childhood origins of the war in Yugoslavia. Part I: Infant mortality". *The Journal of Psychohistory*, 20 (1993), 373-379. "Part II: The Zadruga". *The Journal of Psychohistory*, 21 (1993), 171-197. A. Puhar, "Childhood nightmares and dreams of revenge". *The Journal of Psychohistory*, 22 (1994), 131-170.

<sup>119</sup> I. Banac, "The fearful asymmetry...".