

Cultureel trauma in Europa: een mini-reader

Inleiding

Het is mijn overtuiging dat de beide wereldoorlogen voor een collectief trauma gezorgd hebben. Het psychotrauma zorgt ervoor dat we niet neutraal over ons verleden, en *dus* niet over ons heden en onze toekomst, kunnen denken. Zelfs het *ons* is beladen geworden.

Het gereguleerd toelaten van de “verboden” gedachten en herinneringen in het collectief bewustzijn, oftewel schaduw-integratie, is niet gemakkelijk. Maar wat is het alternatief? Het terug claimen van de eigen wortels is een mooi begin op weg naar een vruchtbare toekomst.

Ik heb een paar teksten verzameld die m.i. goed bij dit thema passen. Bolkestein heeft het over de figuurlijke en letterlijke ondergang van het oude aristocratische Europa en de opkomst van het nationaal socialisme. Jan de Vries geeft inzicht in de oude germaanse cultuur en hoe die verschilt van de romaanse cultuur. Tolkien laat van zich horen als hij Hitler bekritiseert. Violet Firth (Dion Fortune) vertelt ons over ons filter, dissociatie, en nog wel meer psychologische concepten die van toepassing zijn op het thema van collectief trauma.

Van elke bron heb ik een aantal alinea's en/of stukjes tekst gekozen. De complete teksten kun je vinden via de bronvermeldingen.

Hopelijk vind je het interessant :-)

Groet, [Evert](#) (2019-04-16)

Bolkestein on the death of aristocracy and the conservative revolution

The Beginning of the First World War

Everywhere there were flags and music and the young recruits marched with happy faces because they were admired. Stefan Zweig himself admits that there was something tremendous, something seductive in this great manifestation of the masses. As never before these thousands, these hundreds of thousands felt that they belonged together, that they were one. All differences between classes, languages and religions were submerged in one vast current of brotherliness. Everyone felt an elevation of his ego (“eine Steigerung seines Ichs”). People in small and boring jobs suddenly felt the romantic possibility of becoming a hero.

Zweig mentions Freud's “Das Unbehagen in der Kultur”, viz the secret desire to escape from the humdrum existence of every day, from the world of laws and signatures, in order to glory in the exercise of age-old instincts. It was the enchantment of millions “which for a moment gave the greatest crime of our time a wild and almost sweeping dynamism”.

Buber greeted the First World War with enthusiasm. He saw war as a primordial power with a cleansing effect, which would give birth to a new “eon”, in which individualism would be transcended. He wrote “the violence of war signifies the start of a new Zeitgeist”.

The definitive downfall of the aristocratic world view

At first sight, the assumption that the aristocratic worldview only disappeared for good as a result of the First World War may be somewhat surprising. After all, the ‘Whig Interpretation of History’ teaches us that with the transition from the ancien regime to the modern world the old, aristocratic world view had given way to a new, bourgeois view of society. In this view of history, the revolutionary year of 1789 is usually regarded as the year when such change took place.

But the ancien regime did not of course vanish from one day to the next. In many cases, continuity was above all to be found in the way the traditional elite adapted themselves to fit into the new social order. The nobility and patriarchal families continued to play a significant role, even in a democratising and industrialising Europe. And there was most certainly a continuity of ideas too. The continuing devotion among the university-educated young men to the old, moral code of the aristocratic world view – in which ideas of honour, virtue and a sense of duty were central – led to increasing tension with the new, often quiet virtues of modesty, courtesy and faithfulness, based on Victorian ethics. That is why the young Winston Churchill – himself a member of an old aristocratic family and educated at the elite Sandhurst

Military Academy – could not disguise his enthusiasm when he wrote to his wife about the impending First World War : “Everything trends towards catastrophe and collapse. I am interested, geared-up and happy.”

No less than 20 per cent of students and graduates from the top universities of Oxford and Cambridge fell in the trenches. Of the students who began their studies between 1910 and 1914, the percentage of victims was in fact as high as 28%. The old elite literally died on the battlefields of Ypres and the Somme. One could even say that the old ethics of honour died with them. At any rate, it had become clear that the new forms of waging war left no room for concepts such as honour and virtue.

Let me here quote one of the great classics of English literature. It is called “Goodbye to All That” (1927) and it is the autobiography of Robert Graves, who was born in 1895. He went from school straight to the trenches of the First World War. He became a Captain in the Royal Welch Fusiliers.

1. “At least one in three of my generation at school died.(-) The average life expectancy of an infantry subaltern on the Western front was, at some stages of the war, only about three months, by which time he had been either wounded or killed” (p.54).
2. “In eight months the 69th batallion had lost its full fighting strength five times over” (p.80).
3. “The total number of men killed in the British and overseas forces during the war was a million men (p.274).

The conservative revolution in Germany

A strong conservative intellectual current existed in Germany in the second half of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries. The same current was manifest elsewhere in Europe, notably in France and Italy, as well as in Hungary and Romania.

In 1922 the well-known historian Fritz Stern published his best-known book “Das Dritte Reich”, the title of which provided the national socialists with their dominant political myth. In 1925 he committed suicide in Berlin.

The followers of the conservative revolution sought to destroy the despised present in order to recapture an idealized past in an imaginary future.

The intellectual roots of the conservative revolution go deep. Rousseau had fathered a new type of cultural criticism. His German followers linked his criticism to an attack on what they called the naïve rationalism and the mechanistic thought of the French Enlightenment. In Germany, from 1770 to 1830, cultural criticism and the deprecation of rationalism were often fused. Remember *Sturm und Drang*.

Dostoïevsky and Nietzsche were leading figures of this movement. Nietzsche was the first to recognize the psychological force of resentment. The overwhelming fact of the nineteenth century was secularisation. In Nietzsche’s words : God is dead.

There is a discontent in the Western world that does not stem from economic want or from the threat of war. Rather it springs from dissatisfaction with life in an urban and industrialised society. This is what Freud wrote about in his “Culture’s Qualms” (“Das Unbehagen in der Kultur”). Dissatisfaction was one of the causes of the cultural revolution of 1968 and the years thereafter.

The German critics thought of man as a volitional and spiritual being, in need of a faith and a community, and they extolled the romantic sense of the tragic. In this, they were remote followers of Rousseau.

The National Socialist movement had the *élan*, the dynamism and the religious tone that our critics, in their lives and thought, had longed for. The various attempts to understand the triumph of National Socialism have consistently underestimated the deeply rooted spiritual longings which inspired so many of Hitler’s followers.

Source: *Intellectuals in Politics*, Campus Lectures 5 & 6, Frits Bolkestein (2009).

Jan de Vries, Edda-vertaler, over de Germaansche oudheid

De Leidse hoogleraar Jan de Vries is vooral vanwege zijn vertaling van de Edda. In 1930 schreef hij "De Germaansche oudheid". Hieronder staan enkele geselecteerde teksten.

Eerst in de Middeleeuwen zien wij overal in het gebied der Germanen groote, krachtige koninkrijken ontstaan, geschraagd door Romeinsche staatstheorieën en een naar universaliteit strevende kerk; dan eerst zien wij Germaansche vorsten bevangen door den rampzaligen waan, dat zij de erfgenamen van de Romeinsche caesaren waren. [p.97]

Men kan herhaaldelijk opmerken, dat de Germanen zich niet schrap genoeg weten te zetten tegen invloeden uit den vreemde. [...] Rome en Parijs zijn de fakkels, waaraan de Germaansche geest zich herhaaldelijk de vleugels heeft gezengd. [...] De blinde verrukking voor de Renaissance, de slaafsche navolging van de Fransche klassieken zijn hiervoor welsprekende bewijzen. [...] In hoofdzaak betreft het dan uiterlijkheden en het is vooral daarom, dat zij zoo en potsierlijken indruk maken. [...] Te verheugender is het, dat het innerlijk leven zoo weinig werd aangetast en dat een onbestemd gevoel van zelfbehoud de Germaansche volkeren er toe bracht behoudend te zijn in het handhaven van de innerlijke structuur van hun geestesleven en van hun samenleving. [pp.110-111]

De Romaan bezit de gave in ernst of uit scherts, zich anders voor te doen, dan hij is. Hij verstaat de kunst een rol te spelen en dit met toewijding te doen, ook al weet hij, dat het slechts ijdel vertoon is, het te blijven doen zelfs als het voor hem noodlottig kan worden. De gemakelijkheid waarmede hij in een ander vel kruipt, is vaak verbluffend. Frankrijk heeft de beste toneelspelers en de slimste diplomaten gehad. De Germaan kan moeilijk zijn eigen ik verloochenen en geloofd ook niet licht, dat een ander dit doet. Hij is daarom gewoonlijk de dupe van een dergelijke comédie. Het gevolg is, dat hij dengene, die dit wel kan, vreest, omdat hij zelf zoo gauw geneigd is schijn voor wezen te nemen; dat hij hem minacht, omdat hij den mimus haat. Kenschetsend is de moeite, die de Germaan heeft om ironie te begrijpen. Dit onderscheid tussen beide volkeren laat zich herleiden tot de tegenstelling: vorm en inhoud. [pp.307-308]

De Duitsche geleerde is mateloos in zijn toewijding, grondigheid is daarvan een lofwaardig gevolg; [...] Maar de stijl der Duitsche wetenschappelijke werken heeft een treurige vermaardheid; zij ergeren meer door een teveel, dan dat zij prikkelen door een te weinig. De Franschen mogen in menig opzicht het harde handwerk onderschatten, zij munten daartegenover uit door een klaren en zwierigen stijl, door ingenieuze gedachten en overzichtelijke synthese, door het zekere vermogen in een betoog de groote lijnen vast te houden en bijzaken van hoofdzaken gescheiden te houden. Dit zijn tegenstellingen, die elkander op zeer gelukkige wijze kunnen aanvullen. De hooge vlucht van de Westeuropeesche cultuur berust in niet geringe mate op de wisselwerking van deze uiteenlopende geestelijke gesteldheden. Samenwerking kan niet anders dan vruchtbaar zijn. [p.309]

Hem [de Germaan] past het beste een staatsgezag, dat althans den schijn van vrijheid bewaart. Daartegenover is allen Romaanschen volkeren de staatsidee van Rome in het bloed gevaren. Hier vinden wij telkens weer opkomen het streven naar sterk gecentraliseerde regeeringsvormen waarin het hoogste gezag zich het recht toekent tot in de geringste zaken haar macht te doen gevoelen. Het imperialisme van Rome, het absolute koningschap van Lodewijk XIV, de straffe staatsorganisatie van Napoleon, de staatstheorie van het fascisme zijn alle uitingen van deze zelfde centripetale neiging in het staatsbestuur. [...] Dergelijke tegenstellingen wijzen op een ingeboren verschil van geestelijken aanleg. [...] Waar Germanen en Romanen elkander ontmoeten, liggen de slagvelden van Europa. [p.310]

Bron: *De Germaansche oudheid*, Jan de Vries (1930).

Tolkien about Hitler and the northern spirit

According to some Tolkien scholars, the author's heroic dwarves are a conscious inversion of Wagner's negatively "Jewish" dwarves, meant to flip the switch on damaging stereotypes. As a lover of Norse mythology, Tolkien despised the Nazis' distortion of ancient tales to incite hatred.

"Anyway, I have in this war a burning private grudge... against that ruddy little ignoramus Adolf Hitler," wrote Tolkien in a 1941 letter to his son. "[Hitler is] ruining, perverting, misapplying, and making forever accursed, that noble northern spirit, a supreme contribution to Europe, which I have ever loved, and tried to present in its true light."

“World War I represented everything Tolkien hated: the destruction of nature, the deadly application of technology, the abuse and corruption of authority, and the triumph of industrialization,” wrote Ott. “Yet at the same time it gave him an appreciation for the virtues of ordinary people, for friendships, and for what beauty he could find amidst ugliness.”

Source: *Are Tolkien's dwarves an allegory for the Jews?* Matt Lebovic, 11 December 2013, in [The Times of Israel](#).

The UK doesn't suffer so much

The UK, being the “winner” of WW2 and having slain the “bad guys”, does not suffer so much from a traumatic guilt complex. One example is the scientific debate about eugenics, which is often driven by academics from the UK. Even then, authors often mention the War. One of them, David Gems, works for the University College London.

Eugenics, it must be agreed, has not generally been a force for good this century, but why exactly? Why should anyone object to the idea per se of improving humanity by any means, genetic or otherwise? Among the numerous reasons for disapproving of 20th Century eugenics programmes are the fact that they were typically not only authoritarian, but also based on an inadequate understanding of human genetics, particularly before the Second World War. Then there was the special place of eugenics in the deranged ideology of German National Socialism. Arguably, Nazi atrocities justified in terms of eugenics (principally the Holocaust) are more the consequence of the brutal, totalitarian and at times insane character of Nazism, than the desire to promote human well-being through genetics. These failings of eugenics are historically contingent and do not necessarily follow from the idea of promoting human genetic well-being. Yet there remains another reason for disapproving of eugenics that stems from its basic aims: positive eugenics promotes human enhancement, which raises the sinister prospect of the creation of supermen, or a master race. It is open to debate whether the possibility of genetically based human enhancement should be approved or condemned. What surely is a mistake is to conflate these four elements - authoritarianism, fallacious biology, criminal misapplication, and enhancement, with the application of genetics to ensure the birth of healthy babies; and an open question remains: is the pursuit of eugenic ends necessarily a bad idea?

Source: *Politically Correct Eugenics*. David Gems (1999) in *Theoretical Medicine and Bioethics*.

Schuldgevoel en schaamte na de Tweede Wereldoorlog

Opvallend is het gemak waarmee andere genocides vergeten. Bijvoorbeeld de miljoenen doden van Stalin (Holodomor: 3 tot 7 miljoen doden door uithongering in Oekraïne) en de Turkse genocide op de Armenen met pakweg een miljoen doden. Duitsland staat in het hart van de Westerse beschaving; hun falen en hun schuld zijn misschien ook onze schuld?

Ondanks het feit dat tegenwoordig weer vlaggen mogen wapperen in Duitsland en dat steeds meer mensen bij voetbalwedstrijden luidkeels het volkslied meezingen, hebben veel Duitsers nog steeds moeite met een gevoel van trots op het vaderland. Alleen het woord al, vaderland, heeft voor velen nog steeds een beladen, bijna onheilspellende connotatie.

Al vroeg leerden we op school hoe snel het fout kan gaan met die trots. Klassikaal lezen we boeken en keken we naar films over vriendschappen tussen joodse en ‘arische’ kinderen die plotseling niet meer met elkaar mochten spelen, over de aardige joodse buurman die altijd snoep uitdeelde en ineens verdwenen was, over vrienden die uit elkaar groeiden omdat de een naar de Hitlerjugend ging en de ander niet. Iets ouder gingen we gezamenlijk naar Schindler's List. Popcorn en frisdrank waren uiteraard verboden. We moesten op een waardige manier kijken naar de gruweldaden, het leed en de misdrijven die in de film getoond werden.

Soms lijkt het dat hoe meer je weet, hoe groter het gevoel van schuld en schaamte is. En we wilden alles weten. Juist omdat dit verleden voor ons, voor mijn generatie, al veel meer tot de geschiedenis behoorde dan voor onze ouders. Maar schuld- en schaamtegevoel zijn ook diep verankerd in ons bewustzijn en onze relatie met het vaderland.

Bron: *Het schuldgevoel van de derde generatie*. Birte Schohaus (6 feb. 2009) in de [Groene Amsterdammer](#).

De Dalai Lama on refugees

The Tibetan spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama, said Wednesday that “Europe belongs to the Europeans” and that refugees should return to their native countries to rebuild them. “Receive them, help them, educate them... but ultimately they should develop their own country,” said the 83-year-old Tibetan who fled the capital Lhasa in fear of his life after China poured troops into the region to crush an uprising. “I think Europe belongs to the Europeans,” he said, adding they should make clear to refugees that “they ultimately should rebuild their own country”.

Source: *Dalai Lama says ‘Europe belongs to Europeans’*. [The Business Times](#) (13 sep. 2018).

Jezelf snijden

De ontkenning van het eigene, het substituerende verlangen naar wereldburgerschap, en het wegsnijden van de eigen tradities en historie lijken wel erg veel op het snijgedrag van een individu met ernstig trauma.

Snijden helpt. Het is raar en onvoorstelbaar: die jonge meiden en knullen die hun eigen lichaam kapot maken. Maar het helpt, zegt Nienke Kool. We weten dat het emoties reguleert, vooral heftige, negatieve emoties. Voor jongeren die ‘niets’ meer voelen is het een teken van leven, soms is het de pijn die ze troost, soms de kleur van het bloed. Even voelen ze fysieke in plaats van geestelijke pijn. Ze gaan zich er echt beter door voelen.” Nienke Kool is als bestuurslid verbonden aan de landelijke Stichting Zelfbeschadiging.

Bron: *Hoe help je iemand die zichzelf snijdt?* Maaike Bezemer (31 maart 2017) in de [Trouw](#).

Valse controle: Anorexia en jezelf snijden hebben beide het effect dat ze een gevoel van controle geven; er is toch iets wat je zelf kunt controleren. Daarom gaan ze er mee door. Dus als zo’n anorexiapatient wel eet verliest ze haar gevoel van controle. Zie ook *Emma wil leven - Anorexia Special*, NPO 3 (21 nov 2016).

Violet Firth on self-preservation, the censor, and dissociation

Lack of self-preservation instinct is usually due to deep-seated psycho-pathologies, too complex to be entered upon here, but we may say in passing that this failure is often due to a division of aims in the subconscious mind; the individual is not sure which self he ought to preserve and so preserves neither. The self-preservation instinct has a great influence upon vitality. All observant persons must have noticed how easily the man who has lost his hold upon life, or has given up hope, succumbs to disease.

The organisation of the mind may best be realised by thinking of it as a tank across which, at different heights, are placed sieves of varying coarseness of mesh. We must conceive of the mind as being composed of certain layers, and the layer in which our conscious life has its most permanent focus we will consider to be the outermost layer and name The Focus of Consciousness. Immediately behind The Focus of Consciousness lies the level which psychologists call The Fringe of Consciousness, and the two are divided from one another by a sieve-like mechanism which is technically called a CENSOR.

This censor-sieve is of the greatest importance in the mental economy, for upon its function the health of the mind is largely dependent. If its meshes are too loose, we get an uprush into consciousness of ideas which should never be there, and if too tight, the conscious mind is cut off from the source of its energy, the subconscious.

SHOULD an instinct be denied its expression and all ideas connected with it be repressed into the subconscious, trouble will ensue. The lower reaches of a river can be emptied by the simple expedient of placing a dam across its channel, but this does not solve the problem of the surplus water, which gathers head behind the obstruction till it bursts its banks and makes a morass of the upper reaches. If it is necessary to deflect a river from its bed, then an alternative course must be provided, for the water continues to come down from the hills and must by some means be disposed of.

The distinction between repression and dissociation must be clearly borne in mind in all reeducational work. A certain amount of repression is unavoidable in a social life, for each individual sacrifices something of his personal desires for the sake of the benefits of cooperation with his fellows, and the energy

thus sacrificed is turned to social purposes. Dissociation, however, is always a pathology, and should never be allowed to occur.

Dissociation is pathological forgetting. Emotion is the life of an idea. In ordinary forgetting a memory sinks into the subconscious because insufficient interest is attached to it to enable it to remain in consciousness. If, however, an idea associated with some strong emotion is repressed into the subconscious, that emotion will, as it were, vivify it, and cause it to have an independent life of its own. It splits off from the personality and is said to be dissociated.

It will be noted that in our study of memory we saw that ideas never remain solitary, but tend to form associations among themselves, or, as they are technically termed, complexes. The dissociated idea is no exception to this rule; not only does it form alliances with its fellow prisoners, but its chains of associations manage to evade the censor and ramify through the other levels of the mind with far-reaching consequences, giving rise to much of the illogicality and unreasonableness which disturb our attempts at rational thinking.

As has been truly said, the subconscious grows at the expense of the conscious and the balance of the mind is upset. The thrust of life, the source of all energy, instead of flowing freely from level to level, is blocked by the complex and held up in the subconscious, causing the pressure on that level to rise to danger-point. The conscious mind is sapped of its vitality, producing an individual of imperative and chaotic needs which he is unable to formulate, even to himself, and with no power to give them expression or obtain their satisfaction.

We have seen that the dissociated complex, following the ordinary laws of association, forms alliances with ideas that have a symbolical or fanciful connection with itself. These ideas, not being in themselves objectionable to the character, are permitted by the censor to enter consciousness. Then the dissociated complex, taking advantage of its alliance with them, pours its bottled-up emotion along the association-channels thus formed, and so obtains an outlet into consciousness. This gives rise, however, to very different results from those which were its original intention, and produces those irrational likes, dislikes, and eccentricities which are characteristic of the person whose mind is not working smoothly.

The subconscious makes use of symbolism in precisely the same way that the poet does, but it employs a device which the poet does not. It remembers that a pair of opposites have a connecting link in their very polarity, and uses a negative to express a positive, if the positive is repugnant to the character. Thus an unmarried woman, whose healthy sex instinct has been denied fulfilment through husband and children, may become morbid. She may read literature concerning the repression of the white slave traffic, ad nauseam, and becoming worse, may develop what is called old maids' insanity, and imagine that perfectly innocent men are pestering her with immoral attentions (which in her heart she secretly desires) and go to the police for protection.

While it is necessary that certain types of ideas should be repressed lest they should translate themselves into action, let us never forget that repression need not necessarily imply dissociation, which is an un-mixed evil. Dissociation would never occur if we were honest with ourselves.

Briefly, the primitive man lies at the base of our being, but the divine man stands at its apex, and we, in our ascent, are in a transition stage, with subconscious and superconscious not yet correlated in the conscious mind. We do not see our past and future save in the dim pictures of dream and vision, by the uncertain gleam of intuition rather than the clear light of reason, and no solution of any human problem, either social or psychological, can be valid which does not look to the future as well as the past.

Source: *The Machinery of the Mind*. Violet Firth (1922).

Nawoord

Onderdrukte wortels en de moderne cultuur; schaduwen en het bewuste; die beide integreren valt niet mee. Ons verleden idealiseren is net zo kortzichtig als het wegdrukken van ons verleden. Het "ons" ontkennen en onze tradities overboord gooien kan niet gezond zijn. Het lijkt een onderdrukking of pathologie van het (collectieve) overlevingsinstinct. Uiteindelijk levert dat alleen verliezers op. Laten we het individu weer borgen in de tradities van het land, en het land daardoor bevrijden van collectieve trauma's. We gaan de toekomst voeden met het de wortels uit ons verleden.