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Continue Our Collaborations and Psychoanalytic Supervision with the Russians? Yes, because We Are Psychoanalysts!

I share with Sergio Benvenuto a long and fruitful experience of psychoanalytic teaching and supervision both in Russia and in Ukraine, where I had the pleasure of meeting him. Like him, I have very dear friends and colleagues in these two countries whom I hold in high esteem.

I also share with him his total disapproval of the aggression by the Russian state against the Ukrainian state and like him I hope for the urgent return of peace.

Finally, I share with him the sincere desire to be useful to both Russians and Ukrainians and more particularly to the analysts who work there with rigor and honesty.

On the other hand, I do not share at all, but not at all, his decision to interrupt until the end of the war the supervisory work he leads [1] with Russian colleagues. Not only because of what he says about it, but also because of what he does not say and what he does not consider useful to stop.

Indeed, if one can easily agree with him that psychoanalysis is based on an ethical approach to subjectivity and that some options, such as racism and fascism, are not compatible with it, it is impossible, at least in my eyes, to retain the idea that, because some Russian colleagues do not share his analyses of the causes of war or his conception of liberal democracy (that he poses as a “prerequisite” for psychoanalysis), one can no longer work with them. This obviously has absolutely nothing to do with the right and even the duty we have to refuse or pursue a cure because we cannot assume to be or remain in a benevolent neutrality.

To this I believe it is legitimate to add that we cannot lock up the other and pretend to know what he is, even less his capacity to be an analyst solely with regard to what he defends as a political opinion. Sergio Benvenuto cannot deny one of his Russian interlocutors the right to argue, in response to his arguments concerning the collaboration of the Ukrainians with the Nazis during the 2nd World War. To refuse, as he does, to take into account the past (“These are things from over 70 years ago”), to stick to what is happening today and what his interlocutors think “to understand who he has to deal with” is de facto hardly compatible with the psychoanalytic ethics of which he claims to espouse.

Indeed, it is clear that many psychoanalysts, both Ukrainian and Russian (like many other citizens around the world, we must insist!), are suffering because of their history, that of their family or their group of belonging, known or unknown.

Caught in the defiling events with which some of their ancestors may have been associated, they are thus often entangled in what they do not have knowledge of, in what they cannot or do not want to know.

Our clinical experience in this region of the world shows us that these can be facts associated with state lies and have led to the rewriting of the history of Russia, to revisionism, to the denials of the many crimes perpetrated in the name of the people, but also by them (since it was necessary for Russian citizens to lend their hands to it), denunciations, compromises and other racist and anti-Semitic acts as evidenced by the work of the NGO “Memorial” now banned by Mr. Putin’s courts.

This experience shows us that it can just as well be denials or “forgetfulness” by Ukrainian analysts of the existence of an SS division composed entirely of young Ukrainian volunteers [2], denunciations and personal contributions to the persecution and extermination of the Jewish population in Ukraine, or even the assertion, as peremptory as it is stupid (that I witnessed during a meeting in Kiev), that there had never been a pogrom in this part of the world before the arrival of the Nazis.

In this region of the world, as elsewhere, the prohibitions to remember and speak mark with their deadly imprint the unconscious whose cures sometimes bring to the surface of awareness the traces of the terrible secrets of former torturers, but also of former victims

It is from them that we sometimes have to hear in our supervision and no doubt they are not unrelated to what allows Mr. Zelenski to compare (despite all historical evidence and everything that his personal history makes him a depositary for), before the Israeli Knesset (four times in 10 minutes!), the fate of the bombarded Ukrainian population and the fate of the Jews during the Holocaust.

No doubt the unconscious is not far away either, and as Laurent Le Vaguerese points out quoting Jo Benchetrit [3] about these calls for help wherein Zelensky complains bitterly, always before the same Knesset, that they have not been heard by Israel,?? who after all does not forget those who threw their compatriots, the Ukrainian Jews, into the crematoria. Without being able and wanting to evaluate the relevance of the subject, *a fortiori* to draw the slightest conclusion on what each other wanted, the psychoanalyst cannot refrain from hearing that there are also words that speak sufferings, sometimes old and that awaken noisy and burning news.

If there is no doubt that over the past ten years Ukraine has evolved a lot, that pro-Nazi parties like Svoboda have become less influential, that honors are much less often given to Bendera [5] and his companions, Ukrainian unconscious(es), like those of the Russians, often retain traces of a past that, if not recognized, does not pass!

However, it turns out that this is precisely what psychoanalysts can also be useful for and that it is through this that we can, during our supervision, help colleagues in difficulty with certain patients. By making them attentive or reminding them that those who do not remember the past are condemned, in one way or another, to relive it, we do our job

In the best of cases, it is this work that has led some colleagues whose analytical work had ignored these “details” of history, to evolve, to change their opinions, including political ones.

That is why I will continue to listen to Russian colleagues, as well as Ukrainians, French and even Chinese, that is, all those who continue to have confidence in psychoanalysis, in order to allow them to hear what they may have to say.

Notes:

[1] <https://www.journal-psychoanalysis.eu/>

[2] The 14th SS Galicia Grenadier Division is made up of Galician Ukrainians in the same way as the 13th Mountain Division of the Waffen SS Handschar, the first SS division recruited from among non-Germanic volunteers from the Galician district of the Government-General. The formation of this division was accomplished with the active support of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church with chaplains in the rank of leaders. The surplus of volunteers (between 80 and 90,000) was allowed to participate in training with the 5th, 6th, 7th, and 8th SS Volunteer Regiments, and with the 204th Battalion. Thereafter a part of the surplus was used for the creation of other divisions. They were abolished in Brody , Ukraine, in June 1944. In February 1944, two combat groups were formed, oriented towards anti-partisan actions in the district of Galicia, at the same time as the SS regiments “Galicia” 4 and 5, already active in the region.

https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Collaboration_en_Ukraine_durant_la_Seconde_Guerre_mondiale#Division_SS_%C2%99

[3] Stepan Andriyovych Bandera (1909–1959) was a nationalist politician and ideologue. Ukrainian, commander of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) and leader of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN-B), with a fascist tendency and violently anti-Semitic. He fought alongside the Nazis for the independence of Ukraine against Poland and the Soviet Union.

[4] <https://www.ktotv.com/video/00037034/la-shoah-par-balles>

Bio:

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