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Heinrich Himmler, the Reichsführer-SS, second man after Hitler and responsible for the organisation of exterminating the European Jews and killing millions of Russians and East-Europeans, was my great-uncle. His younger brother Ernst was my grandfather, both of them died in 1945, before I was born.

I always knew about this notorious relative, as my father told me already in my early childhood. I have been aware of carrying a familiar burden as long as I can think. I have been provided with books about the Nazi time, and have been educated to tolerance and civil courage. My parents always have been engaged for political refugees and for other discriminated or underprivileged people. Later I studied political science, and started myself to engage against racism and anti-Semitism.

The Nazi era and its heritage has always been a key topic for me and my family. But I was growing up with the conviction, that only Heinrich Himmler was the 'black sheep' of a very respectable and high-educated bourgeois family. For many years, I believed that his parents and his brothers would have been sceptical towards the Nazi movement – the parents, because they were catholic, conservative Bavarians, and the brothers, because they were engineers, with less political than technical interest. Unfortunately the reality was different.

Years ago, my father asked me to do a research in the Federal Archives in Berlin about his father. While he just wanted to have confirmed if his father was a member of the Nazi party or not, for myself it was the beginning of a long familiar research. On the one side my curiosity as a scientist made me going deeper and deeper in it. On the other side, I had very personal reasons for doing so, as in the meantime I had become mother of a son, and I wanted to be able to tell him more about his family whenever he would start to ask, than my father ever could. This was necessary above all,

because the ancestors of my child are not only perpetrators from my side, but also survivors of the Holocaust from the side of his fathers family.

In the next years I was discovering that all the Himmler family had been supporting the Nazi regime. This was shocking enough. But it was even more shocking for me to realize that I had never thought about this possibility so far - despite my political and historical awareness.

At the beginning of my research I was just interested in the relationship between Heinrich Himmler and my grandfather. And of course I wanted to know how it could happen that a normal little boy, coming from such a normal family, developed into the monstrous Heinrich Himmler, the notorious mass murderer? Why, if all the family was believing in the same Nazi ideology, only H.H. was becoming the man he was, and not one of his brothers? How big was the influence of education and of the historical and social situation in which they grew up?

The three brothers Gebhard, Heinrich and Ernst Himmler grew up in Bavaria at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in an honourable middle-class family, with their father being a school teacher for Latin and Greek and having good contacts to the Bavarian monarchy. The parents tried their best to support the boys in every way. 'Any sacrifice is worth making for a *good* and *all-round* education for the children', my great grandfather emphasized. His supreme ideals were the typical bourgeois virtues before the WW I: Devotion to duty, pure morals and obedience. And it was important for him to have his sons grow up to be 'German-minded men'. The relations between parents and children were warm-hearted. But the older the children became, however, the more the expectations and demands for discipline by their parents have been attached to their affection. And the three brothers clearly made great efforts to satisfy them, being outstanding pupils throughout their school careers, displaying that exemplary discipline their father, both as a teacher and later as a headmaster, demanded 'with kindly strictness' of his pupils. The upbringing he gave them followed political ideals that all three sons were to take up later in life – Heinrich, the first to do so, took them to the most radical extreme.

After the lost WW I and the end of monarchy in Germany, the world tumbled down for many conservative middle-class families like the Himmlers, having dreamt about a strong, imperialistic Germany. The elder sons, Gebhard and Heinrich, were studying in Munich from 1919, and they engaged from the very beginning against the new democracy in radical right wing military groups, where many of the later Nazis exercised already the terror they would bring to such horrible perfection several years later.

The legend of H.H. being the familiar outsider, as his picture was drawn by historians as well as by my family, is based on the time in the 20ies, when he was starting to work for the National Socialistic Party, earning very little money and making his family feel ashamed for a son, who was not at all following his expected social career. But in the beginning of the 30ies, during the world wide economical crisis and the crisis of German Democracy, when the Nazis got more and more votes, the parents finally could be proud of Heinrich, as in 1930 he became a member of parliament. When Hitler was appointed as German Chancellor in January 1933, all the Himmler family was engaged in the Nazi movement.

Both brothers have made career in the Nazi era, too, they profited enormously from their relation to Heinrich and other high-rank people, and obviously, from their point of view, it was the best time of their life. In the SS, the Himmler family could feel like being part of the 'elite' again, which they once were belonging to.

But nevertheless, only Heinrich was becoming the responsible man for millions of murders. If we look after possible explanations in his upbringing and education, it seems that Heinrich, from the three brothers, could identify best with the contemporary 'virtue' of being hard towards himself and others, and being willing to bring any sacrifices to the aim of a strong 'German Reich', in which he was believing and fighting for since his early years.

Compared to this, his brothers have been influenced more by other aspects of their parents upbringing, making them more flexible, pragmatic and opportunistic than Heinrich. But it's very possible, that, under different political and economical circumstances, and without the possibilities offered by the Nazi regime, Heinrich would have become a brave bookkeeper or

landholder, and only his wife or friends would have suffered under his tendency to educate other people.

But why, you may ask, did I decide to write a book, instead of just doing the research for me and my family? There were different reasons. First of all, the more I found out about this family, the more I understood about the relations between the different levels of power and the sharing of responsibility, between the main perpetrators like Heinrich and supporters like his brothers, parents, neighbours and friends. The structure of my family is somehow reflecting the reasons for the growing of Nazism in those years and helping to understand, why so many middle-class people supported a terror regime actively. There was a huge diversity of motives: some of them have been radically anti-Semitic, many of them just wanted to do their 'job' as good as they could. Others were mainly interested in personal profits and careers. The mortal efficiency of the Nazi terror regime seemed to be based exactly on the perfect 'team work' of the different levels of power, the different groups of professions or society, and the mixture of different interests.

But also for the time after 1945, the dealing with the past in the Himmler family seemed to be quite symptomatic to how most Germans did. No one was speaking about the past, and no one was asking questions about. For most Germans it was clear that only Hitler and his entourage was responsible for all the committed crimes. Hitler had promised them a glorious future – but in the end Germany was completely destroyed, Millions had died or lost their home, they, the so-called 'supreme race of Arians' had lost the war. Many people just felt betrayed by Hitler. They had so much pity with themselves after the war that there was not any pity left for the real victims. In the next years, Germans were busy with building up the country, getting wealthy again and, beside, learning democracy – and they did it, of course, with the same profoundness and seriousness like Germans are doing everything.

When the students movement started in 1968, German society was at a point where the second generation, the children of the bystanders and

perpetrators, were grown up and started to confront their parents with the past they have never spoken about.

The many letters and emails I got from this and the following generation in the last years, were allowing me to gain a deeper insight into the dramas that have taken place in many German families for decades because of the 'legacy of silence', as the Israeli psychologist Dan Bar-On called it. But I also got the impression that there is a strong desire in the second and third generation to speak finally about the hidden family secrets.

On the other side, the many positive reactions from survivors of the Holocaust and their children, or from East Europeans who suffered horribly under the Nazi terror, show me how important it was for them to understand that there are descendants of Nazi families going in clear distance to the crimes their ancestors have committed. Some of these Jewish or Polish survivors and their children have become my good friends. These friendships alone are worth the effort of having written the book and also the trouble I got with some few members of my family.

Another reason for publishing my family's story was, that during my research it became more and more clear that the common picture of Heinrich Himmler as a bizarre outsider, as the 'black sheep' of a normal family, was less and less convincing.

Of course, we all prefer to keep a clear border between us, the normal people, and them, the evil perpetrators. But defining them as inhuman monsters, doesn't help us to understand why they did such inhuman things. The German historian Michael Wildt has revealed the scaring fact, that those SS-officers, who planned the mass murders of the European Jews and Others in the Reichssicherheitshauptamt of the SS, were highly educated and cultivated men, many of them even having a doctor's degree. Most of them took part in the mass murders actively, and after 1945, almost none of them ever had an awareness of injustice, or a feeling of worry and pity towards the victims.

It's hard to understand how those perpetrators could go home after their daily killing and be normal husbands and fathers. They obviously had no problems with the contradiction of taking care for their own families, and

murdering other families, as the latter were officially defined as enemies and non-humans.

The huge majority of Germans was not killing people. Nevertheless they were profiting from the regime, as it was offering work for everybody and a lot of reliefs in organising daily life. And the exclusion and persecution of those who were defined as not belonging to society offered the possibility to the included of feeling superior to the excluded.

The sociologist Harald Welzer is in Germany until now one of the very few scientists who have tried to analyse the German National Socialism in comparison with other terror regimes that also have committed genocides. („Perpetrators: how normal people can become mass murderers’) He comes to the conclusion that most murderous terror regimes with their very different societies can be compared in one certain point: they are based on the radical and absolute distinction between those who belong to society and those who are excluded. This distinction is combined with the maniac idea, that the only solution of all social problems would be to get rid of the groups who don't belong to society. It's this transformation or deformation of civil rights which offers all further measures against the excluded: from discrimination in daily life over deportation and robbing their property, until the last consequence of exterminating them, because, in the logic of this system, it just has to be done.

For the Nazis, especially for Heinrich Himmler, it was always important to emphasize, that killing Jews, Russians, Sinti and Roma and many others, was not based on hate or sadistic feelings towards them, but that it should happen with 'decency' and 'correct behaviour'. While Himmler was giving the order to his SS-men to kill millions of people, on the other side he was strictly against enriching from the property of the murdered humans.

The history of National Socialism in Germany, but also the history of other terror regimes in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century, practising genocides, shows that violence is not an archaic, but a modern phenomenon. It has specific social and historical reasons and is practised in a specific context of sense, making the violence not only 'reasonable', but also 'inevitable'.

That brings us to the question, of course, why some Germans resisted to the Nazi-regime or saved the life of persecuted people. Why did they have more civil-courage than others? Or, in other words, is civil-courage a question of character, or is it something that we are able to learn? What are accordingly the requirements for building up a peaceful society?

The US American psychologist Eva Fogelman (Conscience and Courage, Rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust, 1995) found out that the few people who were helping others during the Nazi regime were coming from all social classes, all religions and political camps. But they had a few things in common: they were shocked about the mistreatment and persecution, and they were helping because they felt pity with the victims. And, what seems to be the key for understanding their behaviour: all of them had parents who were treating them without expecting absolute obedience and without physical punishment, but with love and respect, encouraging them to become self-confident persons with empathy and tolerance towards others.

In the last years there have been a lot of publications from the children of perpetrators showing that their education usually was completely different. Nazi education was based on obedience and brutal punishments, and many people remember their parents as cold, with a love towards their children they couldn't trust, because it was always depending on good behaviour of the children. The brutal violence of the Nazi ideology and it's general disdain of human life found it's equivalent in the familiar life of many Germans.

It took a long time until the democracy in West Germany arrived also in the families, in East Germany it started much later, of course, and the process was very different.

Nowadays most young people have much better relationships to their parents than they had in the generations before, as the relationship is less based on obedience than on respect on both sides. These changes and the time that has passed, enables slowly a more open speaking about the past in nowadays families.

Since several years, there are more and more children and grand children starting to speak and write about their family past, many of them making the experience, that it can be a relief to get the skeletons out of the closet. It doesn't only mean clearing up the past, but also clearing up one's mind.

In the last years, I have been reading my book in many German schools. The pupils, although already the third generation after the war, are still very interested in the task, as it allows them to get a personal access to this historical period of time, which they usually don't get in history lessons. Of course young Germans of today are mainly interested in other things but German history, which is so far away for them. But most of them are well informed about the time of the National Socialism, and many of them are engaged against racism and neonazism.

Of course there are always those who can't cope with a more open and tolerant society, there are Neonazis in Germany like in all European countries – people who are narrow-minded and unable to accept human differences, many of them being frightened by the rapid changes, or envious of immigrants who are more successful than themselves.

Only some months ago it has become public in Germany that a Neonazi group had been killing about a dozen of migrant people during the last ten years, most of them Turkish. These rassistic 'hate murders' are very shameful for my country, especially because it took so long time to arrest the murderers.

As I'm in Mexico for the first time in my life, I would like to know, how this country takes part in the discussion about what human beings can learn from the Holocaust and other genocides in mankind's history? Do you think that looking on the problem of genocides from outside can be a chance for going further in this debate? How is the interest of Mexican society towards such a University conference about 'Holocaust and Tolerance' like here today, or towards the 'Museum of Remembrance and Tolerance' here in town, whose matter of concern is exactly such a debate?

Thank you very much for your attention.