ERO LANGLOTZ:

Future for all – or short profit for a few?

Global crisis as key for a system change

Chapter 6: Self, Trauma and Self-Alienation

6.1 Autonomy and Self-Connection

The need for self-determination (autonomy) is an innate basic human need. If we can perceive and fulfill our own ideas and needs, then we are satisfied. We experience ourselves as self-effective. When we treat others with respect at eye level, we also recognize their ideas and needs. We are aware of conflicts, can endure them and find compromises that are satisfactory for both sides.

We assume that the source of our ideas and needs, comes from an inner Self, our core essence, which makes us unique. We receive it together with our lives, as a gift, so to speak. The Self also includes the awareness of belonging to a greater whole – like nature or the TAO.⁷ Hence, it also has an inner dignity, regardless of whether someone achieves something or not. The Self is, you might say, part of our "basic equipment".

⁷The ancient Chinese doctrine of Taoism describes the greater whole, "The Tao that can be named is not the true Tao."

Even if we are not connected with it, or if we do not know it at all, we cannot ever lose it. Neither can it be destroyed. However, first and foremost it is a disposition, a potential. Autonomy, the ability to live one's life self-determined requires the connection with one's core essence, one's own Self - instead of allowing the outside pressures to dictate oneself. This connection enables us to perceive our own needs and beliefs and align ourselves with them instead of other people' needs and beliefs. This is the key to inner happiness and peace. It makes the need to search for substitutes unnecessary.

I will explain the phenomenon of Self-determination using an example from the field of competitive sports.

6.2 "Intrinsic Motivation"

Sports trainers distinguish the motivation of an athlete between self-determined and externally determined. Extrinsically motivated (externally determined) describes a behavior that is driven by external incentives. The incentive does not lie within the activity itself but within rewards which are tied to a certain achievement or fear of punishment.

"Intrinsic" is described as a motivation in which the activities correspond to one's own interests, so that a sense of self-determination can arise. The individual perceives him- or herself as the creator of his or her own action. He/she does not act on the basis of external influences, but experiences his/her own ability to make a difference. This enables a feeling of *joyful absorption* into the action itself which we call *flow*. Intrinsically motivated behavior leads to better cognitive flexibility, greater creativity and a more positive emotional state - happiness! It even enables better performances, although - or better said - *because* the performance is not the main focus but it is done for its own sake! This sounds like a paradox, but also the Eastern philosophies see in this the secret of success. Every sports coach knows that extrinsically motivated athletes can deliver high performance at short notice. But because their self-regulation is blocked by this one-sided motivation, they exhaust themselves more quickly, tend to injuries as well as to wear and tear due to excessive strain. Therefore, coaches try to strengthen the intrinsic, self-determined, motivation of the athlete. Let us keep in mind that self-determination combines happiness with better performance at lower energy consumption.

6.3 The Inner Self and its Development

The development of the Self requires a friendly environment (family) that perceives and appreciates the uniqueness of the child and, secondly, allows the child to reject things, to say NO, i.e. to set own boundaries. This enables the child to learn to distinguish between his or her own needs and those of others, between his or her own area of responsibility and that of others. This creates a feeling for one's own personal Space, in which one's Self can differentiate itself.

In case of a disturbed Self-development

From birth on, a child shows his or her agreement or resistance to a given situation with either joyful or upset facial expressions, through different movements, by satisfied sounds of happiness or excited crying. Empathic, sensitive adults react accordingly. At the age of about one and a half, a child says "No!" for the first time. Parents who have successfully developed their own autonomy, who are able to set their own boundaries and can say "No" are happy about their child's independence and will support it. Of course, a child also has to experience limits. Parents who have learned to say "No" themselves are also able to set their child affectionate limits. But more than 70% of the parents are not happy about their child's first "No" - because they themselves were raised by authoritarian parents and therefore have never had the experience that their "No" was accepted. On the contrary! The parents worry, "If my child says no at the age of one and a half, what will I do when it is 17?!" And in accordance with the authoritarian educational tradition of their family, they also try to expel their child's "No" as quickly as possible, initially by withdrawing their love and if that is not enough, by raising feelings of guilt, "Your mummy will be very sad if you say "No"!"

Sense of guilt is a powerful means in order to make people compliant and obedient. But if that doesn't work either - there are very vital children - then the mother must "unfortunately" become violent which they then belittle and dismiss as trivial. In order to survive in one's own family - on which the child depends - the child adopts the parents' point of view (their lenses). These experiences lead to the development of the core belief: My family does not appreciate my Self; my Self is not welcomed. Neither am I allowed to distance myself, nor to say "No". At this point the child adapts its life strategy.

It suppresses the unwanted Self and disconnects him/herself from it. Instead the child pays an inordinate amount of attention to the beliefs of its parents rather than to its own personal needs. So, the parents get a place within the child's personal space, instead of the Self. The child identifies itself more with the parents than with him/herself. They alienate from their Self - and as a consequence the child's Self gets suppressed. That creates tension, stress.

6.4 Trauma

If a painful event could not be processed and forgotten, it is stored as a pathogenic memory (maladaptive processing). This introject is incompatible with our own Self, which is our innate regulatory and orientation instance. It removes the Self from its core place. With the loss of the Self-connection, however, the ability to orient oneself and to regulate oneself is also lost. This puts the system into an alarm state (creates stress). The trauma-introject and the loss of one's Self affects the structure: the awareness for boundaries and one's personal space fades away. This triggers regular compensation mechanisms. Instead of Self-determination external determination takes its place (symbiosis pattern as trauma disorder). This can lead to submission and dependence, but also to assault and destructiveness.

A vicious circle develops: Self-alienation strengthens external determination and vice versa. And the vital power potential (aggression) can no longer be used constructively - e.g. by setting healthy boundaries – instead it seeks other, destructive channels: Self- and external destruction.

Thus, one trauma generates further traumas, which are not processed either and are therefore also stored as pathogenic memories. The result is a network of stress stimuli which pushes the stress level even higher. This is the cause of mental and physical disturbances.

Definition of Trauma

Trauma has so far been commonly referred to (ICD10) as

"Exposure to a stressful event ... of exceptionally threatening or catastrophic nature."

Based on our reflections on the consequences for the development of autonomy, trauma can be redefined as "an event that is capable to impair the development of a person's autonomy."

This directs our focus to early childhood - In their development of autonomy, children are extremely needy and dependent on the attention of their parents.

Parents who are themselves traumatized might

- treat their child as if it did not exist when they themselves are emotionally absent
- reject their child because it reminds them of their unloved partner
- blame their child for their marriage which they now regret
- use their child to satisfy their own unmet needs, for support, for self-affirmation, to act out their own anger, or by engaging in sexual abuse

That opens a wide spectrum of traumas.

6.5 Trauma Consequences

When experiencing a trauma, a person might erroneously incorporate external elements into their own personality that have nothing to do with their own Self. The individual detaches themselves from their own Self which causes immense stress and insecurity. They identify with the external so strongly that they cannot separate that person or object from themselves anymore. The distinction between one-Self and the external becomes blurred and herewith also the feeling for one's own boundaries and personal space. This survival strategy therefore makes it difficult

- to differentiate clearly between me and you
- to set boundaries
- to clearly perceive one's personal space and the space of another person

This, again, means that the people concerned tend

- to feel responsible for other people's lives

- to handover their own responsibility to others for their feelings and needs

If one's own strength is blocked, if setting healthy boundaries is not possible, then

- this force is destructively directed against one-Self

Dissociation

Systemic Constellations is a method that assists us in finding what is needed to resolve pressing problems. But if an issue holder (the person who is asking for help) wants to reveal his/her Self-parts with the help of representatives, we know from trauma research that these cannot resurface as long as the spaces are still occupied by a trauma. This can be either an own trauma or even somebody else's. The issue holder is detached from these Self-parts! This corresponds to the phenomenon of dissociation. (Latin: separation from something that actually belongs together). In order not to feel the trauma the client distances him/herself from his/her body as well as from the trauma, as if they were willing to put the trauma first in their personal space. This can be tested within a constellation by stepping onto a stool. The stool symbolizes the dissociation as it represents another, higher level. Does this situation feel familiar to the issue holder? Does he or she feel better – and even the other representatives? But now the client is not grounded but detached from him/her-Self. That makes one feel very lonely. As long as the client erroneously clings onto the trauma, dissociation is perhaps an acceptable survival skill. But as soon as he/she realizes that the trauma is not part of his/her identity, the client can do without the dissociation, represented by the stool, and put the trauma out of his/her place. Only when the issue holder has taken possession of his/her personal space and freed him/her-Self from foreign "introjects" does a connection with the own Self become possible!

Different key points of dissociation:

- <u>Detachment</u> from immediate surroundings, instead living in fantasy worlds

- Detachment from one-Self, from one's own needs, perceptions, convictions

- Detachment from one's body in order not to feel any pain

- A sudden change in behavior, as the affected person - when being detached from themselves - always acts in alignment with their counterparts Dissociation affects people to different degrees. It is always a reaction to a past trauma and can still be triggered in the present by elements which had preceded the trauma of that time. Dissociation makes people stronger or weaker as if under trance. This is so widespread that it is usually not even noticeable.

The obedience to authority described by Milgram can be understood as a consequence of a person in a state of dissociation. The loss of one's Self and the resulting lack of Self-regulation leads to an over-adaptation to external circumstances. This also seems to me to be the reason for the apathy and resignation of the population in the face of the global crisis.

6.6 Symbiosis Pattern as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

These key points: Alienation from one's own Self in connection with putting other people first (obedience) can in turn lead to a symbiotic fusion and suppression of one's own healthy power (prohibition of aggression). Although this can be understood as an essential survival skill, it leads to numerous problems. Often compensation strategies are developed by the persons concerned. Lack of demarcation becomes over-demarcation, dependency becomes dominance, suppression of aggression becomes destructive behavior. This complex pattern is called symbiosis pattern. It causes an enormous amount of stress; it is very confusing and consumes a lot of energy. It also determines the form of relationships.

The "Symbiotic" Relationship

If the Self-connection is disturbed due to a traumatic experience, then it is not possible to create a bond between two independent and Self-determined people. Instead of attraction another aspect becomes essential. It is vital that one partner takes the role of the rescuer or caretaker while the other takes the needy dependent part. Both partners pay more attention to the other than to themselves. They live more in alignment with their partner's needs than with their own Self. They feel more responsible for the partner than for themselves. They have lost the awareness for their personal space as if there was no boundary between themselves and their partner. If they have "learned" to take on a certain role for a parent in their family of origin, they will intuitively find a partner so that they can apply what they have "acquired" during their childhood. For example, if a child had to take on the role of a father who died at an early age, he/she will again find herself in a relationship later on where to take that very role. Instead of a relationship between Me and You a relationship develops where the partners become crucial to each other. One person needs to be needed while the other has the need to control. They intervene in each other's matters without realizing boundaries or being Selfconnected. This leads to a relationship which is determined by mutual dependency. This means the bonding in symbiotic relationships is not primarily based on an exchange at eye-level but, on the need to feel needed or to being looked after. If this refers to only one partner, a difference in power will evolve with a one-sided dependency. If this refers to both partners, a mutual dependency develops.

Symbiosis and Language⁸

So, a symbiotic relationship is less characterized by a Me and You relation than by dependency. Language is used less in the sense of

messages from Me to You, but manipulatively in order to bind the partner to oneself

• by awakening needs in the partner, that one believes to be able to fulfill

- by emphasizing one's own needs, which one hopes the other can fulfill

- by frightening him/her only to subsequently offer one's help

Symbiosis pattern are the cause for all (!) relationship problems and emotional disorders, including burnout, depression and psychosis. The individual characteristics of these autonomy and symbiosis aspects can be evaluated with the help of an autonomy questionnaire. The result of this questionnaire allows to realize the extent of one's own trauma and at the same time to recognize one's own hidden potential.⁹

⁸ see also Elisabeth Schrattenholzer, "Macht macht Sprache – Sprache schafft Wirklichkeit: Für ein Fundament ohne Fundamentalismus", Berlin (Germany)/Vienna (Austria): LIT Publisher 2015

9 see <u>www.e-r-langlotz.de</u> , "Selbst-Diagnose und Selbst-Therapie"

6.7 "Self-Integrating Trauma Constellation"

Based on the concept of autonomy, trauma and self-alienation a new therapy method has been developed. The so called "Self-Integrating Trauma Constellation" which is a variant of Systemic Constellation. Such a constellation is helpful when one wants to understand the development of self-determination or autonomy. The constellation is possible with the help of various abstract elements such as Self, Boundaries and Personal Space as well as with representatives. Now the causes that have blocked the development can now be investigated and dealt with.

It turns out that the development of autonomy requires

- appreciation for one's own Self, that has "its value in itself regardless of whether one is useful for others or not" and

- the ability to distinguish between Me and You so that

- the boundary becomes clear which creates an own personal space

- the capability of constructively using one's aggressive potential, that is to say in a healthy manner of setting boundaries between one-Self and the other person (Non-Self), so that one's private space becomes free and one's own (Self) can unfold

Self-Integration

The connection with one's own Self can be tedious. If the issue-holder has never had the chance to get to know his/her Self it may even seem to be impossible. Or the issue-holder might have mistakenly rejected his/her Self, because it had been depreciated by his/her environment. But if, as a result of the "Self-Integrating Trauma Constellation", the issue-holder succeeds in establishing a connection with his/her Self for the first time, then it will be possible to wake up from the trance, the dissociation. This Self-awareness is like an initiate-experience which leads to more Self-esteem and Self-confidence. The issue-holder becomes more resilient. (Resilience is the ability to resist stress.) And the capability to deal with conflicts will now increase. Instead of constant adaption, contacts now become encounters between an autonomous Me and an autonomous You. If a client has such an attachment with his or her Self, then he or she will do things their way, regardless of other people's expectations. These authentic people are real and genuine and that makes them so likeable and pleasant. If two authentic people meet and find each other attractive, then a deep meaningful relationship can develop between them. They are not afraid of the other who has different values or opinions. It does not trigger any fear of loss. On the contrary it makes the other one even more appealing. This gives both partners a chance to develop and grow - in contrast to the harmonious narrowness of a symbiotic relationship.

Many people who only know the narrowness of the symbiotic relationship fear that setting boundaries and Self-connection would harm their relationship – but on the contrary they are the foundation for the second basic need, which is to establish contact.

6.8 Trauma "Algorithm"

Until recently neurobiologists were absolutely convinced that stored traumata could not be released. Current neuroscience discoveries have shown, however, that the brain remains capable of learning and that unresolved trauma can be healed. ("Memory Reconsolidation") It is necessary though to follow a set of instructions. This procedure is called an algorithm. ¹⁰

The following therapy method of a "Self-Integrating Trauma Constellation" corresponds to this new paradigm¹¹. The method is described in detail below.

¹⁰ Wikpedia, ["]An algorithm is an <u>unambiguous</u> specification of how to solve a class of problems....and other tasks."

¹¹The trauma therapist Thomas Hensel has summarized these latest research results and developed a new paradigm of therapy. Thomas Hensel, "Stressorbasierte Psychotherapie". Stuttgart/ Germany Kohlhammer 2017 1st The trauma-introject – stored memory- as well as the sensations that are linked to this traumatic experience will be symbolically presented.

2nd The suppressed authentic Self will be revitalized. This enables

 3^{rd} to distinguish between trauma and resource. The trauma can now be understood as an external issue. From this moment the client has the capacity

4th to detach him or herself from the trauma. Which is essential, in order

5th to reconnect with one's Self. This makes the next step possible

6th the removal of the trauma-introject out of one's own private space. From this moment on, the client regains his/her personal power and feels self-effective instead of helpless and powerless.

7th The client uses his/her body to symbolically distance him/herself from the introject. The energy which had been bound in the body can finally be released and be lived in a manner of setting healthy boundaries.

8th In the next step the client advances towards the trauma again, with which he/she had been identified until now. But this time the therapist stops the client from approaching any further by informing him/her clearly, "That's not you. That has nothing to do with you."

The effect is fast and lasting. Due to the regained self-connection the client has been able to build self-confidence, autonomy and resilience. The stress level decreases. Confusion and loss of energy diminish. The symbiotic post-traumatic symptoms disappear. And the client learns to use their personal power again for themselves and not against themselves.

Two case studies shall explain the procedure.

6.9 Case Study "Insecurity towards Authority"

Claudia, 35, a lively and successful businesswoman, comes to therapy sessions because she always feels insecure, small and helpless when dealing with authority figures. This annoys her a lot. It reminds her of her feelings towards her mother when she was a child. Her mother was a very dominant and negative person. My hypothesis is that Claudia has still stored in her "space of identity" an early devaluation trauma (introject) caused once by her mother. Whenever she encounters an authority figure this introject is triggered again and pushes her living it all again. I suggest taking a one-to-one session for a systemic constellation in order to verify this hypothesis. She takes two chairs with round meditation pillows which are going to represent her mature self and her inner child. A stool stands for her trauma which she places opposite herself and next to her inner child. Her mature self, which "feels complete even without the trauma", she puts into the corner a bit out of her sight.

Obviously, the trauma caused by her pejorative mother was the reason that she had given her trauma, her mother's paradigm, priority rather than to her Self. She had identified more with her mother. She had still payed attention to it, allowed her mother to take influence as if she was still a part of her identity in the here and now!

With the help of a scarf she marks a border between herself and the trauma. She declares, "You are the trauma of little Claudia. And I am the mature Claudia of today. I am complete even without you. And you happened more than 30 years ago!"

That feels forbidden and at the same time like a relief. She puts the trauma back into her space. This is familiar to her. But this time it feels strange and uncomfortable. She withdraws herself.

With the help of a stool she examines the phenomenon dissociation. She does recognize parallels between her issue and some aspects of dissociation. There is the desire to control situations with the consequence that she neither is grounded nor attached to herself, to the confident Claudia. She notices that the trauma no longer belongs to her. When she parts from the dissociation (the stool) her feelings rebel against it. This shows a prohibition of self-determination which is a result of traumatic conditioning. But she puts the trauma out of her space and separate it from her-Self. This frees her private space and makes room for her mature Self, for the "confident Claudia".

As this trauma was linked to her mother, Claudia verifies whether her mother also acts as an introject within her private space. Since this is the case, she also removes her mother from her private space and distances herself from her.

Now she can finally turn to her Self instead of identifying herself with the trauma and her mother. But she hesitates.

My hypothesis is that since Claudia had always been overly focused on the trauma, she had neither been able to perceive nor to appreciate her adult Self! I recommend that she honors her Self by bowing deeply to her Self. She immediately agrees and can now regain a connection to her Self instead of the trauma. This feels new and good to her. Then she turns to her inner child.

Disconnected from her mature Self she had obviously never been able to protect the little needy, vulnerable Claudia. Instead she had chosen a "stranger" such as the publisher with whom she was working. Claudia speaks the suggested sentences, "The dreadful situation of that time is over and will never happen again. From today on, I am the only one who is responsible for you. And I will never let you down again!" Deeply touched she takes the pillow which represents her inner child into her arms. This shows her inner child that it now has a safe place within her. Connected to both Self-parts she feels whole and grounded.

At the next appointment two weeks later, she announces, "I must tell you something. Last week I was invited by a very important publisher. I felt as if I was on pins and needles. Because he had already invited me once before and at that time, he had just introduced me as somebody's former girlfriend without mentioning my name. I was furious but I hadn't dared to say anything. This time I asked myself whether it would happen again. And when I was standing in front of him, I suddenly heard myself saying, "This time you will introduce me by telling him my name. Otherwise I am going to step onto your foot so that you will think of me for the next three days!" He was absolutely surprised by my spontaneous reaction and so was I! And I was successful. He introduced me using my name!

Commentary

It seems as if Claudia was now able to break free from her conditioning of her childhood trauma. The systemic constellation had obviously enabled her to sense the unconscious prohibition of selfdetermination which she then consciously ignored. This resolved the prohibition of setting own boundaries. And she was even able to transfer this newly acquired ability to another relationship, that with her publisher. Her reaction might have been a bit unconventional but it just corresponded to this vital woman.

This case study also shows the phenomenon of "triggering a trauma". The mother's negative reactions towards the little – and obviously lively – Claudia had a traumatic effect on the child. The trauma and the linked traumatic feelings such as fear, insecurity, helplessness and anger were still stored within her body. (Introjects). Whenever Claudia had to deal with an "authority figure", in this case her publisher, her trauma was triggered. Her early survival strategy, the dissociation, kicked in immediately. At that very moment Claudia disconnected herself from her mature Self, which could have successfully dealt with the authority figure. But she was controlled by her past again. She felt victimized and reexperienced her traumatic feelings, which actually belonged to the little Claudia of the past and not to the mature Claudia of today.

6.10 Case Study "Professionally unsuccessful"

Beatrice (name changed) tells me that at the age of forty she still has not found the right job.

In order to find a solution, I suggest using a new format of the Self-Integrating Trauma Constellation. It is called "Problem as a key to the solution" and is based on two basic assumptions.

1st Every person has a Self that is able to appropriately solve a specific problem.

2nd An insolvable problem shows that a person's connection to his/ her Self is blocked by a "blocking element".

The client can detect for him/herself what is hidden behind the blocking element. The blocking element often proves to be an introject either in form of an adopted core belief or a traumatic event from one's own biography or that of another family member.

Beatrice works with two representatives. A stool which represents the blocking element and a second one that represents her Self. She puts the stool between herself and the represented Self.

"If you think that your blocking element does not belong into your personal space any longer, then you may mark a border with this scarf so that the blocking element is outside of your personal space while your Self is inside."

Beatrice follows the suggestion. Interestingly, she now misses the blocking element as if she were not complete. "Would you like to

have it back or would you like to find out what is behind this?" She does not follow her - obviously confused - feeling, but her common sense.

Beatrice takes the place of the blocking element and tracks her feelings. She suddenly feels sad and burdened and then remembered her mother leaving the Czech Republic as a refugee. Her mother had completed an academic education in a profession she would have liked to pursue. But in Germany she was never able to work in this field as her education was never officially recognized. Soon she became pregnant and from then on, she took care of the children.

Now it is possible for Beatrix to recognize the blocking element as her mother's trauma in regards to her work. Once again, Beatrix puts it back into her private space. The feeling that rises feels familiar. Despite her reluctance she decides to remove the introject from her private space. "You are my mother's trauma in terms of her work. You don't belong into my space."

Only now does she feel the bonding to her self and can fuse with it instead of her mother's trauma.

In the end, she distances herself from the trauma. She is now able to physically sense that she is not responsible for her mother's trauma. After completing all these steps, she still feels an inner resistance and at the same time an immense relief.

Hypothesis of the Dynamics

It is a common phenomenon that clients do not want to "release" the blocking element. They cling to it as if it were a treasure and not the cause of her suffering. My hypothesis about this unconscious dynamic is as follows, when a child experiences the pain of his/her mother (without distancing him/herself) the thought arises, "If I cannot help my mother, then I at least want to share the pain with her." The desire to share the pain is an expression of his/her love for the mother. This thought then works - unconsciously - like a resolution, like a vow and determines one's own destiny! To distance oneself from this fate feels unkind, like betrayal to one's mother! This feeling of prohibition prevents clients from parting with this blocking element. The client expresses with help of their own pain their caring bonding to their mother. In other words, the bonding to the mother was based on her suffering.

There seems to be an unconscious **mixture** of one's own pain with the mother and the mother's pain. And this complex is taken up as an introject into one's own "identity space". It becomes a blocking element and creates the problem.

It is vital to become aware of the blending of love for one's mother and her suffering. Distinguishing between these is the essential step needed to separate oneself from the pain of the mother without having a feeling of "betraying" her.

Blessing

This distinction becomes easier as soon as the client understands that this dynamic does not make the parents happy but upsets them. During a constellation it can be brought to light through a ritual of blessing. A representative of the mother touches the client's head and says, "I give you my blessing. Live your life, live your strength, live your love. You are free."

Bottom Line

The concept of the "Self-Integrating Trauma Constellation" is an excellent short-term therapy as one can see in further examples.¹² Few targeted interventions have a quick and long-lasting effect.

The procedure can easily be carried out on one's own with the help of the attached instructions. ("Do it yourself")¹³

¹² https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCuqF2nRlxDkn67675J DT-GQg

¹³https://www.e-rlanglotz.de/systemische_familientherapie/familientherapie_selbstt herapie.php