**xxx 1. Introductory comments – Causal factors of the *first and second orders*, taking the example of the factor of "trust formation"**

The empirical analysis of the "responsibility educational" training technique employed by the VPN was able to reconstruct various impact factors for de-radicalisation and reintegration that are crucial for the high success rate of the "good practice" method.

However, before these factors can be cited and discussed in detail, one of the most important structural research findings needs to be commented on. This is important for the way the following description is systematised, for the conception of the comparative research and the research on effects, and for the practical application of the results of the analysis in various national and cultural environments. Overall, it can be seen that the impact factors of a complex social therapeutic method such as the VPN group training need to be set at two categorically different levels.

(1) First, impact factors in the narrow sense could be observed that could more or less directly be linked to the individual methodical components that flexibly combine to make up the VPN method. A proportion of the statements given by coaches and participants in interview directly concerned these individual elements and methodological components – for example the biographical narration and reflection carried out in one-to-one or group conversations according to specific rules; the various educational exercises, each with their different aims; the working-through of the act of violence in the group; the family day; the role plays; the ideological discussion about topics of civic education, etc. (cf. the VPN Curriculum).

It was possible at this level of observation to reconstruct with relative precision the impact of the respective methodical components. For example, it emerged that talking about personal biographies, and the experiences of violence and neglect they include, though not possible to the same extent with all persons, can, with all persons and under specific methodological preconditions, provide considerable stimuli for new ways about thinking about oneself – ways that had much to do with the resulting alteration of behaviour (cf. point xx). These types of factor, i.e. those that can be

assigned to specific components of the method, will be termed *first order impact factors*.

(2) It was also possible to observe, on the other hand, that the first order impact factors alone were unable to bring about changes in the attitudes and behaviour of the person as a whole. Hence, for example, the effects prompted by the stimulus of biographical self-observation appeared irregular insofar as it was increasingly impossible to dismiss the existence of further unknown factors. These factors extend across the entire VPN method and could not be directly and precisely related to one of its components; rather, they arose from the context as a whole – or rather from particular qualities of it, which had not yet been consciously observed and formalised.

To take as an example another impact factor of the *second order*, which will be explained in more detail later: in the evaluation process, it emerged relatively early on that a certain, as yet unexplained type of *"trust" / basic trust on the side of the participant* was a crucial requirement for successful training. In the VPN training concept, particularly at the beginning, a number of educational exercises are routinely employed to develop trust within a group or a team. These exercises are by no means used always, however, but rather on a sporadic, spontaneous and unsystematic basis. Moreover, there were barely any indications in the review of the interview statements that the trust-building exercises as such were significantly involved in the generation of what, in the course of the analysis, was articulated as *basic trust on the side of the participants*. With the few interview passages that did make direct reference to the trust-building educational exercises, it was far more the case that they cautioned against overrating the impact of them in isolation – particularly with young violent offenders, a relatively unstable group of persons. (In addition to this were indications that two different dimensions need to work in combination so as to produce what in the VPN training method is defined as "trust". It appears that a first sort of trust, one which the participants sense in the coaches and that can above all be recognised in the one-to-one conversations, needs to be supplemented by a second sort, namely a trust which extends towards other training participants and thus is directed towards the group as a whole.)

It thus becomes apparent that it is more difficult to evidence and account for these *second order impact factors* than first order factors. While indications for specific impacts can be found in the interview material, indications to which it is straightforward to attach a provisional designation, e.g. *"trust"*, it is not evident precisely which elements of the coaches' method and approach it is that actually bring them about. Still, one needs to warn against ignoring these, or, for the sake of order, to attribute them to individual elements of the intervention method. This is all the more the case given the fact that in the analysis of the material, it emerges that the second order impact factors assume a relatively major structural importance. They appear, namely, to be an essential prerequisite if the first order factors (e.g. educational trust building) are to be fully effective. To stay with the first example: if *"trust" / basic trust on the side of the participant* is proven to be an impact factor, or even an essential prerequisite, then this might have the apparently paradoxical effect that a minimum degree of *"trust" / underlying trust* first needs to be generated in another way, before trust-building and trust-deepening exercises during the group work can take full effect.

The precise analysis of second order impact factors becomes especially crucial when it comes to guaranteeing the transferability and practicability of the research findings – for example as regards the VPN method – in other national and cultural contexts. It is the declared aim of the TPVR and other EU projects of "best practice" research, with respect to intuitively developed techniques and innovative initiatives, to compile a selection (or "tool kit") of intervention methods from the various European member states, or at least to derive basic practical recommendations that extend across disciplines, so as to be able to bring about an exchange and a transnational development of methodologies.

This aim, which is to be applauded, nevertheless brings with it certain difficulties. It can be predicted that it will be possible to transfer first order impact factors over to other national contexts without the need for a great deal of adjustment. For example, certain educational exercises can be relatively easily matched to other environments. However a second order impact factor, for example one based on generating *"trust" / basic trust on the side of the participant*, is unlikely to be so easily transferable. (Whenever attempts at methodological transfers over to other use-contexts fails, or

fails to live up to its potential, the reason is usually that second order impact factors were insufficiently understood and therefore could not be guaranteed.) This means it is all the more important to emphasise the reconstruction of the second order factors. When it comes to our exemplary factor of *basic trust*, it will be necessary to observe and to consider as precisely as possible how trust-building in this target group functions, how it is effected by the VPN method, and, on the basis of this, how it might be applied in other socio-cultural contexts.

**xxx 2. The impact factor of "strengthening the emotional memory"**

More appropriate as an introduction might be the reconstruction of another second order impact factor, one that also cannot be attributed to an isolated methodological component of the VPN training method, however which proved highly significant in terms of alterations in the behaviour and attitudes of participants. In the case of an impact factor such as *"trust" / basic trust on the side of the participant*, sketched (though not yet elaborated upon) above, a causal attribution to a particular methodological element seemed logical, at least at first glance. However in the impact factor described below, one's initial reaction is complete and utter disorientation.

In the course of the evaluation, it turned out that the statements of various participants of the VPN training contained indications to suggest that the method has an impact upon a particular sector of the *personal capacity for remembering*. Specific effects had clearly resulted, namely the *"strengthening of emotional memory"* and "emotional learning"; moreover, these effects were obviously of major significance for the success of the training. Individual participants of the VPN training who were particularly disposed appeared to have discovered a completely new connection to the field of experience we are calling "emotional remembering", and to have gained new insights as to what this remembering – which is also, of course, reflection and contemplation – can achieve in terms of concrete assistance in dealing with difficult situations in the future. With other participants who were less disposed, indications could still be found that the impact dynamics of "emotional remembering" could at least be touched upon and stimulated.

These initial, still vague observations regarding *"remembering"* were at the first approach understood to mean that the participants were strengthened in their ability to form personally significant and emotionally rich memories directly from their everyday social experiences in prison, and in particular within their VPN training group. The working term "emotional remembering" and "emotional memory formation" that was coined in response meant, in this context, not so much that the person was able, with increasing reliability, to remember the "big" experiences, key moments and upheavals in their lives, although this would certainly also represent a significant ability (and indicator) and will later be discussed as one of the basic

requirements for emotional memory. Rather, it was personal experience in the recent, everyday past that was being emphasised.

Statements about memories, which were understood as an indication of a strengthening of the *"emotional memory"* in this latter sense, were characterised in general as being emotionally rich and associatively permeated by connections to personal life-experiences. It was also noticeable that it was often a matter of "positive" memories – meaning that these memories on the whole exhibited contents of a joyful and "pro-social" character, and that the content of these memories often had to do with experiences of the broadening of personal perspectives. This was experienced as subjectively insightful and satisfying, especially where these experiences were depressing or frightening. (Typically, these "positive memories" were of moments in the group and in the one-to-one conversations, in which moments of clarity and steps towards "coming clean" arose in connection with significant experiences of personal pre-history.) The recollection of *increased emotional memory* during the interview also tended to be easy to talk about – and appeared to be sufficiently stable and robust to be effective in the person's future decisions as regards their own behaviour.)

Before introducing and discussing the range of empirical evidence for a strengthening of the "capacity for emotional remembering", it may be worth mentioning that the analysis was relatively late to take on board the discovery of the significance of these factors – which is typical with second order impact factors. The VPN Curriculum also fails to include a method element or module that might be attributed to the formation of memory in the sense described above. Instead, it initially seemed as though the mental activity of human memory formation was too general and omnipresent an occurrence – at least in connection with a narrative interview – to warrant being the focus of analytical attention. Particularly the ever-present, spontaneous memory-formation that takes place beyond the "big" biographical memories discussed in the interview (e.g. memories of suffering both received and inflicted within the family) – in other words the memory-formation that plays a role in every individual's ongoing process of experience and narration – did not make its way directly into the analysis of the material.

All the more surprising, then, was that the analysis proceeded to approach a fundamental conclusion about the relation between memory-formation and social-therapeutic work: namely, that "remembering" and "memory formation", in the sense of our working concept of "emotional memory", represented an impact factor which in all cases worked beneficially with respect to the de-radicalisation and re-socialisation of persons either already violent or at risk of becoming so. Conversely, it became possible to understand radicalisation and violent behaviour as a direct consequence of a lack of personal memory-formation, one based on the function of mental severance – or, more precisely, association-free disassociation (xx) – from experience (of one's actions), the result of which is, in most cases, entrenched repetition compulsion and the repetition of patterns of offending (cf. point xx). These findings regarding remembering and disassociation were later supported to a remarkable extent by the psychiatric and forensic literature.

The possibility that the *strengthening of "emotional memory"* in our sense was not only one among many elements, but in fact the central impact factor of the VPN method, became increasingly apparent. In terms of methodology, this provided reason to hope that increase in "emotional remembering" provided an entirely unambiguous criterion capable of indicating with a high degree of reliability when a social-therapeutic intervention is successful – and intervention, in other words, that has positive effects on participants in terms of de-radicalisation.

It will only be possible to observe fully to what extent this is actually the case at a later stage. Initially, what needs to be described is how the "strengthening of emotional memory" was expressed in interviews with participants and coaches, and what gave cause to think that we are dealing here with an important impact factor for de-radicalisation, one that contributed to a considerable degree to participants' development in the direction of pro-social and non-violent behaviour.  It will then be necessary to proceed to the basic question of "best practice" research: how is it possible that, from a theoretical perspective, the VPN method barely took into account the aspect of "memory-formation", yet in practice was clearly extremely effective in supporting favourable modes of personal experience- and memory-formation (and thus "emotional learning"), in doing so strengthening the "emotional memory" of the participants and thereby encouraging their personal reintegration and development?

What were the method-elements, forms of intervention and setting components contained in the VPN method that produced these positive results? When assessing other methods and procedures and/or when applying the findings of the VPN, what is it particularly important to look out for?

**xxx 2.1 'Samet' 1: The ability to remember as emphatic experience – and factor of group work. (On the "personal stop-card" method)**

The first general observation leading to the formulation of the impact-factor "strengthening the emotional memory" was how often former prisoners spoke in interview about their experience both of being able to remember and of not being able to remember. Formulations like "I can remember as if it happened today" or "I still think about it sometimes", or "for some reason I can't remember exactly what happened anymore" often define the style. The theme of "remembering" is mostly peripheral and only rarely spoken of explicitly and with emphasis. Nevertheless, even the mention of it in passing occurs with a frequency and in a way incomparable with narrative interviews conducted with other groups of persons in less precarious social situations. However the precise meaning that personal remembering had for the training participants was not immediately obvious on the basis of the off-hand comments provided.

Among the numerous examples, the statements of one young man – Samet – stood out especially. Samet's made such progress that it was later possible to train him as a VPN co-coach, whose role is to support the coaches involved in ongoing groups in a specific way (xx anonymisation). However Samet's case not only provides explanations as to Samet himself, but also helps understand the process of development of several other participants. Samet thus possessed typological relevance – and exhibited *"qualitative representativity"*. This occasions a further important methodological remark that will constantly need to be recalled in the qualitative-empirical work: none of the interview citations provided here stand for themselves alone. Every statement included may be considered to be typologically assured and thus to stand for a whole class of statements made by the group under analysis.

Even when referring to the interview situation itself, Samet said with a great personal emphasis that it would be good "to tell about [what happened] and so be able to remember again". With regard to the subsequent, year-long stabilisation coaching, carried out by one of the two facilitators after release, Samet underlined that "it was very, very good, it made the training stay present in the memory, [...] the supervision is good, you stay with the topic, the man [facilitator] is still there, then it's in the present, otherwise you forget everything." Clearly, it is the mental *maintenance of "remembering"* which in Samet's experience was an important precondition for being able to consolidate and sustain the positive impact had by the VPN group training on him. Samet's primary need is to keep these "memories" subjectively "present", so that they can also be relied on to "still be there" after time has passed or when he needs to deal with stress. For Samet, it seems that this – i.e. the reliable recourse to personally significant, affect-laden "memories" – is precisely what has not been easy for him until now. On the basis of his own descriptions, Samet's life before prison and before the group experience must have played out rather like a uniform, tendentially "memory"-less sequence of events, albeit one (as the files make clear) which proceeded according to a fixed pattern of repetition perforated by corresponding "memory"-weak outbreaks of violence.

More broadly, it is possible to observe in Samet's statement – and in numerous similar statement from other participants – that this difficult step in personal development towards more personal memory and self-experience is obviously, for him, closely connected to the continuity of the relationship to a group coach. This is a person who, for one year after Samet's release, accompanied him as a "supervisor" during the so-called "stabilisation coaching" – and who always represented for Samet his group and the memory of the process of his group experience. It is clear that the genesis of the ability for abundant "memory-formation" which Samet has learned to perceive and to value is to a great extent *relationship-based*; and that it is cultivated by individual and group relationships whose quality has yet to be fully defined. Because "the man is still there, [...] otherwise you forget everything."

Another interview passage in which Samet speaks about "remembering", indirectly rather than directly, concerns a particular methodological component of the VPN method: the *"personal stop card"*. This is a pedagogical exercise in which the

individual participants of the VPN training are required to create a visual picture in their mind able to exert a maximally calming effect upon them. The content of this picture is intended to be of a kind that, come situations of provocation and imminent loss of control, can be recalled as an inner image or a calming refuge, thereby enabling the participant to deal with highly-charged situations without lapsing into aggression or violence, or fleeing in panic. Experience shows that the mental pictures developed in this exercise are mostly of the family and/or have a peaceful, pro-social and sometimes also idyllic character.[1] Samet, for example, imagines to himself his large family: "All my brothers and sisters sitting there, the table laid, everything absolutely beautiful". Indeed, recalling this picture has proved to be extremely helpful for Samet in tense situations.

Yet what Samet emphasised in particular was something else: "For the first time in my life I imagined a picture, and I talked about it in front of the others, and it is still in my head, whenever something bad happens I imagine this picture [...] for the first time in my life [...] and that's helped me at times [...] I remember it [...] then I calm down". The central personal experience for Samet ("for the first time in my life") appears to have been a particular, *new experience of remembering* ("it is still in my head"), one that was just as much a moment of self-pacification ("then I calm down") that allows him to dampen his aggressive impulse and resolve the highly-charged situation in a non-violent manner.

In other words, the central impact factor in this experience of remembering was a specific kind of affectively positively-charged mental image that displayed a *positive, pro-social and peaceful* scenic content; one which was also connected with aspects of reflective, *perspective-broadening* insight ("I can form memories", and "It helps me to calm down"). Here, the conscious experience of remembering "in the group", in other words the interactive *process of the group context*, occurs for the first time, indicating that here, as above, a *relationship-based* procedure is present. Samet's positive family experiences may have played a role (the verbalisation of which during the group process is greatly beneficial for all involved), although this could not be reconstructed

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[1] Significant at a purely personal theoretical level is the remarkable fact that in psycho-trauma therapy with victims of violence, i.e. the opposite of work with violent offenders, a technique is employed that in some respects is comparable: the formation of mental images of the so-called "secure inner place" (xx). This has to do with the fact that...

unequivocally in the analysis of the material. Also possible is that it is only in the course of such exercises that positive aspects of family experience of this kind are registered as such, and placed before the troubled and turbulent dynamics that overwhelmingly define the families of violent offenders.

The parallel interview with one of the two coaches of Samet's group produced an another important indicator. Clearly, Samet later even worked with several of memory-pictures of this kind: "Samet had several of them [...] these stop cards are a process, after all [...] things develop from session to session [...] it goes over a long period of time, something happens to you [...] the picture doesn't have to stay the same". Here, an aspect of the "stop-card" exercise emerges about which some of the VPN coaches appear not be fully aware. In the way this exercise is employed in the VPN training method, it is not only effective as a specific exercise with a narrowly defined purpose – i.e. to create for oneself, at the technical level as it were, a practicable instrument for the prompt defence and management of acute situations of provocation and risk of control-loss. With Samet (and similarly disposed participants), the effect of the "stop-card" exercise appears to be that, through it, participants begin to form emotional memory via a *gradual process of development*, whereby they successively generate various memory-concepts based on personal experience that contain "positive", pro-social and peaceful images.[2] This process may draw on the thematic development of the group-work and/or the dynamic stations of the participant's own path of development within this; however it will always seek out various areas and images of the participant's individual life-story which then are drawn upon to form and to create pro-social memory concepts in the present moment. This procedure indirectly indicates the activity of a second order impact factor, one we have called "memory-formation" and/or the "strengthening of emotional memory", proving its major social-therapeutic importance.

More broadly, what is noticeable is that some participants of the VPN groups have, of their own accord and in an intuitive fashion, been able to begin to use the "stop-card" exercise for themselves. That this exercise is able to generate an *unexpected side*

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[2] With regard to the formation of positive, pro-social and peaceful memory-contents, the recollection of negative and troubling experiences (e.g. experiences of violence and victimisation regularly found in the biographies of violent offenders) has its own, central status, which will be discussed more closely in point xx.

*effect* and *intrinsic value* alongside its primary purpose draws attention to the following: the VPN method, in the way it is employed, is characterised by a particular *methodological flexibility and relaxed approach*, and by a *relationship-based process-openness*, which will later need to be reconstructed more precisely (cf. point xx). These features make it possible for an exercise with a specific focus (the defence against acute violence) to develop a methodological life of its own, and for its spontaneous therapeutic surplus value to be absorbed.

As regards methodological conclusions, however, this moment of "process openness" and "processuality" also demands caution: to cleverly remove the "personal stop card" as methodical component from the overall context of the VPN method and employ it in isolation in other settings will generally produce limited results. It cannot be ruled out that the durability of memories and their resilience of their imaginary pictures in stress situations – the sole factors able to ensure that the "stop card" exercise fulfils its function under acute conditions – are only obtained in the VPN method because the individual images arose from a gradual process of development embedded within dynamic group action, which, on the basis of a whole series of different memory images, allowed emotional memory-formation to take place. As Samet said, "For the first time in my life [...] I spoke about [the image] in front of others" – and on the basis of the coach's statement, about more than one picture. As Samet's facilitator said, "These 'stop-cards' are a process, after all".

If it is possible to observe that, with the help of the stop card, formerly impulsive violent offenders were later able to deal non-violently with potentially explosive situations in which they were provoked and in which aggression levels rose, and if it can thus be shown that the mental images possessing pacifying-calming associations created in the group was resilient and durable, then this will not only be traceable to the logic of a single exercise concerning situational de-escalation ability. It is more the case that this result, if it is to be sustainable, depends on the context of the method as a whole, i.e. participation over several months in a process-open group event, which cultivates the overall emotional memory and the emotional intelligence. It can be assumed that personal de-escalation ability is far more complex as to be reliably obtained by simply learning a "trick". This, by the way, is also likely to work in reverse, in connection with the ability for emotional remembering, which proved to be

effective as a background factor in the stop-card exercise. Here the point becomes even more apparent. After all, it would never seriously occur to anyone to credit mnemonic exercises – emotional Sudoku séances, as it were –  with the emergence of emotional memory.

The "stop card" exercise thus also shows how important it is to focus on the (structurally complex) second order impact factors. This holds true even if they are difficult to research, and even if, at the present moment, it needs to be admitted that the question remains open as to how personal memory-formation in the sense described above can be initiated and supported.


### xxx  2.2  'Samet' 2: Memory formation – individual contemplation and/or interactive remembering in the group

Memory formation – in particular the formation of "positive" memory – was an ongoing theme that in many respects was characteristic of Samet's interview (also proving typologically relevant for other participants). One of Samet's coaches reported that after Samet's release, he took Samet with him to one of the prison training sessions running at the time, in order that Samet could provide an example to the group as someone who had "made it". Afterwards, Samet thanked him profusely. When the coach replied that it was he, Samet, who deserved thanks for giving up his time so willingly, Samet said: "No, I'm really grateful, because I'd forgotten what it's like in prison and what it all was back then [...] you forget that completely." This is perhaps surprising given that Samet's own spell in prison had ended less than a year ago.

Samet reveals here a particular experience of emotional remembering (which is also always conceptual-reflexive), one wrested from the strong forces of amnesia, thereby emphasising the *memory-supporting function* of the stabilisation coaching. At the same time, it is an example of a *recollection with "positive" connotations* in the sense described above (cf. page xx). It concerned an experience of a pro-social character, namely, and for Samet obviously represented a moment of self-reflection and perspective-broadening, one experienced subjectively as satisfying and insightful.

Although the subject of "prison" as such cannot have had a "positive" connotation, in the moment he remembered it he was thinking about the transformation of his personal awareness and the resolution of individual life-problems – "how it all was back then" – and, implicitly, "how today everything is totally different". Different not only in the sense that Samet is now "out", but also because he recognises that he has undergone a fundamental change as a person. This is further evidence, then, that Samet has found a completely new relationship to the area of experience known as "remembering", a relationship that was useful in his personal development towards a life free from violence and delinquency.

Further evidence that proves how significant experiences of memory formation and of learning to remember were for Samet has to do with the fact that during his prison term, and before the VPN group, Samet enrolled in another training course. This was an ancient Chinese method of re-socialization involving contemplative memory work. As Samet described it, this method – called Neikan – involved spending several days in silence, during which the inmate remembers and writes down things he did during childhood (wrong-doing included), particularly early childhood. In the assessment of Samet's description of this experience, several similarities emerged – as well as differences, of course – with the impact factors of memory formation as observed in the VPN method

(a) On the one hand, the impact element Samet knew as the "silence session" is also present in the VPN method, namely the time between the highly intense and eventful group days, particularly the phases spent in solitude in the cell. The participants' experiences in the group sink in during this time. Numerous statements by VPN coaches contain observations about the results, initially barely anticipated, obtained with many participants during this intermediary phase of contemplation in the cell ("It continues during the week [...] of course, a lot happens between the sessions, then they are alone a lot [...] they also see one another and talk about it, especially in the youth prison [...] and that feeds back into the group"; cf. point xx).

Here, the following basic conclusion can be drawn: the nature and intensity of the experiences that take place in the VPN training cause an intense mental process of self-awareness and memory work to continue on those days when there is no group

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training. This means that this memory work needs to be carefully picked up on in the following session, so that any conceptual-emotional changes obtained in the intermediary period can be consolidated and anchored. (For an exemplary case, see point xx, "##der Schlucker##) It will therefore be necessary to cede more importance to the easily overlooked aspect of *lifetime continuation*. The procedure accompanies the participant over a certain period of his lifetime and is based not only on the sessions themselves, but also to a great extent on the life-world experiences that arise in periods between them – insofar as these are picked up again in the group process.

(b) The experiences and memories developed by Samet in the "silence session" exhibited a characteristic affect dynamic. Whatever reprehensible and violent acts Samet's contemplative reflection on his past might have contained, his childhood memories were obviously such that, for him, "all the contemplation" in the silence session "was good fun", often causing him to "laugh and cry". The factor of laughing and crying about memories is of course also effective in the VPN group method, constituting, in a specifically moderated way, one of its central psycho-affective tools. Here another aspect can be mentioned that will be given a more precise psychological explanation later on: anyone who learns to remember in way that he or she is able to "laugh and cry" about their memories, and anyone for whom this memory-experience becomes a lasting content of emotional memory, is well-prepared for being able to depart once and for all from the path of blindly violent behaviour.

It is not surprising, therefore, that in Samet's mind, both methods – the contemplation of the "silence session" and the group experience of the VPN training – are directly interlinked, and that in the VPN group, which he joined immediately after the contemplation exercise, he was able to verbalise some the childhood memories that had already been reactivated. These could, one by one and with the interactive assistance of the coaches and the other group members, be extensively built on, corrected, linked with further memories and consolidated conceptually-emotionally. Of particular methodological interest with regard to the accidental resonance of two different social-therapeutic methods is, however, the clear indication that the effectiveness of the memory work that takes place in a silence session, work which is not systematically externalised via interaction with others, is strictly limited – and that it can also conceal significant risks. At any rate, it seems that in a professionally led

(group) discussion, the direct linkage of memory-formation with the narrative process can deepen and consolidate the impact of remembering on a long term basis (and/or set it on an appropriate track to begin with). In Samet's case, it was very apparent how the impact he had on others in everyday prison life altered when he entered the group. From this moment, an astonishing phenomenon occurred: Samet, who had previously been considered an outsider, began to exercise a pacifying influence on fellow prisoners who were not participating in the training course (this is discussed in greater detail in point xx "Contextual linkage of the training course").

It is safe to assume, moreover, that the lonely thinker, who barely has at his disposal narrative and relationship-based links to other persons with whom to link his memories, in principle runs the risk of developing trite self-justifications; either this, or he remains narrowly self-punitive and atoning, or indulges in feelings of guilt. For example, there is a risk that someone who recalls his wrongdoing at nursery school will not include in his memory how his parents acted. With childhood wrongdoing, however, the parents' behaviour and style of upbringing is always of great relevance; as are the general coordinates of the person's cultural background and historical circumstances (see below the case of Baran xx). The result of such regretting is likely only to elicit a largely ineffective sense of moral dejection, which would stand in the way of a constructive change in behaviour and willingness to make amends – and possibly even  risk dissociational outbreaks of old patterns of violent and destructive behaviour.[3] In a professionally led (group) discussion context, however, both context dimensions – i.e. the family dynamic and socio-cultural circumstances – are taken into account and placed in relation to the delinquent behaviour. In the process, connections emerge that are as illuminating as they are troubling. However they are indispensable for a precise assumption of responsibility as this is understood in the context of "responsibility training".

Overall, the opportunity for comparison coincidentally provided by Samet's participation in two different and almost simultaneous measures connected to memory

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[3] A further risk factor emerging from the contemplation exercise tried out by Samet was that a silence session of this kind places great demands upon participants. With this target group, these challenges can can only be met in exceptional cases. Practical experience shows that the method is taken up only by a small number of inmates, and seen through to the end by even fewer.

and remembering made clear the following: essential is the impact element of the formation of *emotionally-saturated memories* ("laughing and crying") and their anchoring in the emotional memory – and in particular the formation of affectively-positively connoted and/or subjectively satisfying-insightful experiences/memories. More broadly, it could be seen that this memory-formation was always embedded in the interactive-discursive context of an interpersonal (group) discussion, together with the social relation(s) underlying it, and therefore that memory-formation should take place in a "relationship-based" way.  The various mental images need to be worked through together with and "in front of" the others, as Samet put it. This implies that the process of relationship-based memory work can stretch over a certain period of shared lifetime.

Returning, then, to our point of departure, it is possible to say the following: that regardless of how universally human and omnipresent the mental phenomenon of personal memory-formation might have appeared to be, it is fundamentally impossible to take human memory for granted. It is by no means the case that there are no prerequisites for remembering in the above sense. Nor is it by any means easy to recall past experiences in an emotionally saturated way, or to absorb an experience in the moment it occurs in a way that sets in motion a process of emotional memory-formation and emotional learning.

**xxx  2.3  Biographical excursus on Samet**

It is hard to overestimate the personal development undergone by Samet in connection with the strengthening of emotional memory supported by the VPN training. To add some information about his case history: Samet's path into criminality and violence appears to have been predestined, and he had already embarked a considerable way upon it. Samet had been sentenced for multiple violent offences, the majority of which were of an impulsive nature and which also had a connection to drug dealing. Some of the victims had been seriously injured. Samet comes from a troubled family constellation. His parents, who are culturally and religiously influenced by Islam, left their country of origin partly because of conditions of civil-war and received political asylum in Germany. The circumstances of this migration were so turbulent that, until

recently, Samet was unsure which country he was actually born in and how his first and surnames are correctly spelled. His father of nine children broke down as a result of the cultural change and unemployment, and, despite being a Muslim, began to drink and hit his wife. He has since left Germany and his family, possibly in connection with criminal activities and the threat of criminal prosecution. Samet's first major experience of violence was when, as a youth, he attacked his father with a knife, after his father had again hit Samet's mother. Separated by the police, father and son were taken to hospital.

This heavy baggage had severe consequences for the family. For example, on the day Samet's older brother was released from prison, after serving a six-year sentence for grievous bodily harm, he attacked and almost killed a former acquaintance. What happened was completely inexplicable and irrational: as far as Samet knew, it was by no means the case that there was a "score to settle" between the two young men. At any rate, his brother had received no opportunity to participate in a VPN group or received any other preparation for his release. Samet refers to this as a "classic" case of prison "damage", saying that, in his experience, similar (almost psychopathological) states of being overwhelmed after release from prison are by no means rare.

The brother pre-empted being expelled from Germany, which was to be anticipated following the latest violent offence, by going to a country that he had never previously been to in his life. This must have affected Samet in at least two respects. First, his brother's departure meant that he was now the oldest son in the family, which brought with it a range of duties. Second, he was very close to his brother, not least because the prison terms of the two had overlapped and were served in the same institution. Because of the progress shown by Samet in the VPN training, the prison authorities decided to move him to a cell next to his brother, enabling the two to communicate from door to door during periods when the cells were closed – an opportunity the brothers made a great deal of use of.

In view of this biographical background, it is all the more remarkable that Samet, in connection with the VPN group experience, was able, while still in prison, to exert a quite extraordinary influence upon others on his wing (before being transferred). The

calming effect that Samet had on others meant that the usual mobbing dynamics came to an end (this is developed in more detail in point xx, "Contextual linkages of the training"), and that since then it has been possible to train him as a co-coach. Samet has now caught up on his school exams, has built up a long-term relationship with a woman from a non-Muslim cultural circle, and takes engaged part in the families of his numerous younger brothers and sisters. As concerns the processes of social and emotional learning that can be recognised here, it is not insignificant that Samet has discovered a new access to personal memory experiences. Also, it appears to be important for Samet's entire personal development over this period of time that his purely formal, aggressive self-understanding as a Moslem has transformed into a highly nuanced faith that interprets the Koran in a peaceful and liberal way (which he discusses with one of the imams involved in the VPN training).

**xxx  2.4 Connections to empirical violence research 1**

The finding thus far (which will be continue to be closely tested) is that the ability to form emotionally-rich, and, in particular, "positive", pro-social and subjectively insightful memories, plays a central role for participants in the VPN method. In one respect this is hardly surprising. A look into the research literature suggests that this will be the case – although the question is rarely addressed as to what conclusions can be drawn from this finding in connection with work in prevention and reintegration. Some time ago, analyses proved that persons with an affinity for violence are strongly affect-led and sometimes suffer from a pressing sense of persecution, and are comparatively limited in their intelligence and ability to reflect. Not only that: persons with an affinity for violence demonstrate a specific *shortcoming in their ability to remember*, including in particular the ability of the memory to absorb positive experiences.

Studies conducted in the 1980s concluded that among "imprisoned young men", there often exist *"paranoid styles of attribution"*, on the basis of which "others are [accused] of hostile intentions [...] and preventative attacks [are carried out against them]" (Tedeschi 2002, 585). Plausibly enough, this empirical finding can also be made with regard to memory and remembering – from childhood onwards. Early

empirical-experimental analyses of the memory function of aggressive children showed that they tend to "remember hostile information" more than non-aggressive children. (Qualitative accompanying research on the biographical and family backgrounds of these children were uncommon in those days – and even today are by no means self-evident.) The reverse conclusion – i.e. that *"positive", non-hostile* information and experiences have less mental impact on aggressive children and adults and entering to a lesser extent into memory-formation (if only because there is less positive information) – is logical, however was not researched (the present findings could provide occasion for this).On the other hand, the degree of verbal "articulation ability" was quantitatively-empirically defined. Here, the observation was made that articulation ability was less marked among violent persons, so that only a few were initially even able to remember, and then to verbally express, emotional and, in particular, conflict-laden affective states – in other words to communicate these states to themselves and others. This already provides an indication that the functions of self-expression and remembering – in particular in the realm of emotional experience – is closely related to and has a direct influence on the aggressiveness and/or peacefulness of persons (cf. below under the impact factor "narrativity" pxx).

Empirical-experimental evidence confirms that among this target group, significantly underdeveloped are those memories that with Samet (and other participants discussed below) are termed "positive", "pro-social" and peaceful (and that frequently correspond to emotionally underpinned experiences of perspective-broadening insight). Among violent people, there is obviously an inner *lack of "positive" memories*. From here it is easier to gauge how personally significant it must have been for Samet when he emphasised that of all the helpful and positive things he gained from the VPN training, one thing stood out: an ability to remember, one that he experienced "for the first time in his life", whose content was able to make him "laugh and cry", and that today is "still in his head" and protects him from "bad things".

More broadly, it is becoming clear the extent to which this analysis, in its concern to define the essential impact factors of successful violence prevention, needs to be concerned with establishing precisely what it is about the VPN method that allows Samet and other participants to form these kinds of memories.

**xxx  2.5 'Mussa': The deepening of emotional memory-formation and emotional learning, particularly concerning affects of shame, embarrassment and uncertainty. (The methodological element of role-play reconstructions of highly-charged scenes)**

Although, in empirical terms, our initial findings concerning emotional memory-formation are relatively solid, it will certainly be a good idea to evaluate further interview material. In order to check our hypothesis about the VPN method, it will be necessary to pay attention to precisely that material in which, unlike Samet, interviewees did not explicitly and extensively raise the topic of "memory", but instead touched upon on it briefly and in passing – as was most often the case. Particularly telling is material taken from the *border zone of remembering and forgetting*, in other words where persons are no longer able to remember (precisely), as is naturally likely to occur when one is being interviewed. After all, alongside the frequent statement "I can remember as if it were yesterday", there were also, as already mentioned, numerous comments from the same participants that emphasised how difficult remembering was. As Samet put it, "you forget it so easily".

Mussa, a participant in another VPN training group, referred to experiences of remembering in an off-hand manner. The interviewer's opening questions about what Mussa could still concretely remember of the training sessions at first seemed to be going nowhere. Then Mussa, with an "Oh yes I'd almost forgotten", recalled a particular episode. This phenomenon of memory-formation was not, as with Samet, connected to the "stop card exercise", but took place in the context of another methodological element of the VPN group work: the role-play. These role-plays are initiated by the group and take as their object a particular configuration or scene of conflict and confrontation that has regularly occurred in the lives of the participants up to now, leading to problems, aggression or violent escalation. The scene is initially acted out in its normal, problematic form, after which the group, in a second step, develops possible alternative sequences of events or ways of acting that enable de-escalation. These alternatives are then acted out and rehearsed. In his "Oh yes" moment, Mussa remembered a role-play based on an episode that he had described:

an everyday scene of provocation between young persons, triggered off by someone (allegedly) having damaged an object belonging to Mussa, which as a result of the ethnic constellation of the participants, then escalated. "Well, it's like: come on then, let's sort this out [to his mate], come on [...] and then he goes, 'You son of a bitch' and what not [...] and I push him, he grabs a collar [...] and then I put in a fist and the others join in [...]".

Various (self-)distraction manoeuvres, resolution-oriented dialogue elements and/or paradoxical interventions are conceivable when searching for viable alternatives for acting that would enable violence to be avoided and elicit another sequence of events – alternatives that can be played out and rehearsed. The variants that Mussa so suddenly and intensely remembered during interview had been thought up and acted out by Mussa himself – notably, in the role of the person being threatened. The role required that, when his mother was insulted ("son of a bitch"), Mussa retorted with a short, clarifying comment designed to take the edge off the situation ("my mother's no more of a bitch than anyone else's"). This was then followed by abrupt change of subject about something peripheral, or even something positive about his counterpart: "my mother is no more of a bitch than anyone else's, [...] tell me something else, your jacket's cool, where did you get it?" And if the reply was still provocative, for example, "jackets like this aren't for victims like you", then Mussa was to carry on defusing the situation: "no problem, I like it that's all, I was only asking". Or, if the threat becomes extreme or physical, to say: "look, I've already gone to prison for beating someone up, I don't need that again and neither do you."

As can well be imagined, exercises like this produce good results. The simultaneous activation of one of the personal "stop card" visions might supplement the exercise as a mental background (one that carries, consciously or semi-consciously, associations with the training group, giving rise to an additional impact). Several participants have confirmed during interviews that they have managed to prevent difficult situations escalating by using similar dialogic turns and changes of subject. This means that in these cases, *emotional memory-formation* proved itself in practice, and that the impact factor of strengthening the emotional memory has come into effect in an adequate way. Numerous such dialogues can be prepared, discussed and selected according to

personal appropriateness, and then effectively rehearsed. This is what happened in the session spontaneously recalled by Mussa in interview.

What was particularly remarkable about Mussa's report of the role play was something else, however – and this is what ultimately turned out to be the actual *effective factor of memory*. It was not the alternative dialogue in itself, but rather the specific *emotional experience* that for Mussa was connected to its rehearsal – and which in the VPN method is obviously given enough room to make a lasting impression. This could be inferred from the way that Mussa described his role-play experience, where he consciously grasped the various steps of a process of emotional learning. Mussa had the following to say about the alternative dialogic option: "At first I could hardly imagine you could say something like that, [...] it was totally weird [...] at first I had to keep on laughing, [...] a few people found it childish [...] I couldn't act it out at all [...] later it went really well [...] one of the guys in the group could act really well, [...] when he did it you really bought it, I reckon he bought it himself, he really meant it, [...]".

As with comparable interview statements from other participants, this passage illustrates that these role-plays, in the way the VPN uses them, are not so much (or not only) about the rehearsal and learning of concretely defined ways of behaving. This can already be inferred from how Mussa introduces his story about the role-play during the interview. The "oh yes, I'd almost forgotten", with which he spontaneously began, referred not to the dialogue he had rehearsed – far from it. (It would have required more precise and persistent enquiries to get Mussa to remember this word for word.) It was more the case that the memory impulse was directed towards an experience of subjective astonishment: "It was totally weird, [...] at first I could hardly imagine." In other words, Mussa's personal narrative prompt consisted in his emotional experience of astonishment and strangeness.

In the session in question, Mussa was above all concerned with a process of a much more far-reaching nature: he had, without noticing it, gone through all the steps of a *process of emotional learning*, and this had made an impact on his *emotional memory* (which is probably also why he vividly and spontaneously remembered the session during the interview).This process concerned the *basal psycho-affective ability* first to

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admit to oneself an experience of extreme personal *astonishment* and *uncertainty* about something new, about something subjectively strange and untypical, and then to go about dealing with it. What is remarkable is that dialogic options such as those developed in the group and practiced in the role-play not only were largely unknown and inconceivable to Mussa up to that point ("I could hardly imagine"), but also seemed to him "funny", strange, embarrassing and possibly "unmanly" ("laugh", "childish"). This, then, is what his emotional learning concerns.

The individual steps of this learning process are precisely reflected in Mussa's statement: (1) first the incredulous encounter with a dialogic option that appeared to him unfamiliar, strange and "unimaginable", which required that he overcame his own resistance ("I had to keep on laughing", "a few people found it childish", I couldn't act it out at all"); (2), taking the risk of doing this new and unusual thing, an experience which in itself seems to have been surprising to Mussa ("later it went really well"), and lastly (3), the step of "even taking it really seriously", where the dialogic option which at first appeared strange to Mussa increasingly came to feel authentic and credible (as he said about the group colleague, "you really bought it"), so that he begun to consider it as a possibility for himself.

It becomes apparent that the difficulty is not a result of deficits in his cognitive problem-solving abilities. Rather, it is *affective self-consciousness* – feelings of embarrassment, shame and uncertainty – that account for why, in Mussa's attitude to life and in his everyday surroundings until now, it would never have occurred to him to develop and test out alternative behavioural options like this. It was precisely this theme that Mussa worked on, unobtrusively and in his own way, in this session and in the group experience as a whole. He had gone through a process of *emotional learning*, or at least embarked upon one – a process that had to do with admitting situations of *astonishment and uncertainty* caused by the unfamiliar, the strange and the "unmanly". Not only that: he was even able to overcome his uncertainty by repeating the dialogue, at least insofar as he learned to play his role.

What we are dealing with here is a result by no means easy to obtain in emotional learning. In these three steps, Mussa took on the far from negligible psycho-affective challenge of playing a subjectively unfamiliar, subjectively strange, and for him

ambiguous role or way of acting, and not only for rational reasons (though with the rational goal of behaving in way that violence and aggression do not break out, but rather are diffused). Moreover, Mussa also was able to reach the point at which he even "meant" this way of acting, so that it was "buyable" and that one "bought it" oneself. This kind of acting demands a degree of affective tolerance for experiences of personal *uncertainty and ambivalence* about subjectively experienced novelty, unusualness and strangeness. Even when the interview took place, it could be observed how these unusual dialogic options used to make Mussa feel uneasy – even today they are new for him – and how he is astonished by the fact the one can "mean them seriously".

In the role-plays it is not a matter – or not only a matter – of rehearsing and (behaviouristically) learning isolated ways of acting. It is far more about processes of *emotional leaning and memory-formation*, which have far more complex and multi-faceted effects on the person as a whole, and which, from an educational-methodological point of view, probably have many prerequisites. It therefore cannot be expected that these effects are generated merely through rehearsing isolated ways of acting. In order to be able to act reliably in the way that the role plays stipulate, one must not only be capable of rationally perceiving the sense of a particular dialogic option and then rehearse it. One first needs to be able to deal with it emotionally, to place oneself in what at are at first strange behavioural contexts, and to risk forms of behaviour that are unusual in "the scene".

The emotional intelligence that arises from these situations of risk-taking and dealing with the unfamiliar is both the goal and the path of this educational work. On the basis of what Mussa says about his experience of the role plays, emotional intelligence seems to have been the real impact factor, both in terms of memory and development. Here it is in principle possible to assume that only when basic emotional competence in dealing with subjectively experienced *strangeness and ambivalence* regarding the new and unfamiliar is spoken about and developed, will it be possible to move on to developing higher levels of competence in empathy, reflection and anticipation. These higher levels of competence are indispensable if the participant is to reach the point where he is able to gauge in an empathetic and reflexive way what is actually happening to him and his counterpart during an aggressive scene, to assess which

ambiguities and inner conflicts are playing a role, and to recognise how this all comes together in a highly-charged situation. This will allow him to know the kind of tensions to expect and the behaviour appropriate to successfully avoiding trouble. It is fair to assume that the ability to take responsibility – in the sense of the "responsibility education"® of the VPN approach –  depends to a great extent deal on *emotional intelligence* in dealing with emotional reactions to strangeness, uncertainty and ambivalence, and that this represents an essential aspect of the high success rate of the method.

Generally speaking, then, the following observations can be made: whenever participants or coaches talk directly about specific educational exercises, be they dialogic or behavioural, and their presumed affects, a more precise examination and reconstruction needs to take place. It might be that the dialogue as such and the roles rehearsed are of secondary importance (given that Mussa could not recall the dialogue word for word). It would also be fundamentally naive to think that repeating one of a series of rehearsed dialogic options would be enough as soon as the participant, after his release, finds himself in a tense situation. After all, every moment of provocation and imminent loss of control is marked by particular concrete circumstances and needs to be dealt with in a flexible and resourceful manner. (Mussa, for example, has obviously never needed, or never had a reason, to deploy precisely this dialogic option in everyday life.) More interesting to follow up is the question whether what was *de facto* effective with these participants was not an increase in *emotional competence* (rather than merely the ability to act out roles). This is a competence that enables them to even consider such dialogic options, and then to employ them in stressful situations, and as such to remember them. As concerns work on the potential for violence, the importance of the impact factor of *emotional memory* and *emotional learning* is thus becoming increasingly clear; as is the importance of the *second order impact factors*.

**xxx  2.6  Conceptual comments on the terms "method tool" and "impact factor" – with regard to the transferability and applicability of the VPN method for other users**

In a theoretical-methodological sense, Mussa's case makes one thing clear above all: it is of utmost importance not to lose sight of the conceptual distinction between a "method tool" on the one hand and an "impact factor of the method" on the other. The role-play, for example, is a "method tool" based on the repeated rehearsal of a particular way of behaving. It is reasonable to assume that a tool like this, and the factor of rehearsal that it involves, has an impact. When a participant who makes progress refers, unprompted, to his role-play experience and attributes personal relevance to it (as was the case with Mussa), then this indeed permits the basic assumption that the role-play, in the way it was employed, has something to do with this progress. However, as long as no systematic reconstruction takes place to ascertain precisely *what* was effective in this role play and *how* it was effective, then its impact factor must be considered unknown. On no account should a conceptual short circuit lead to the assumption that it was solely the repetitive rehearsal of roles and modes of behaviour that induced Mussa's progress (or even that it had anything to do with it).

In addition, when complex psycho-affective learning goals are obtained, such as the ability to deal with feelings of strangeness and ambivalence, then there needs to be a fundamental assumption that the impact factors involved go far beyond the methodological tool in the narrow sense, and that they are instead based upon the method as a whole. That includes, for example, how the role play is embedded in the entire training procedure, and how it interacts with the other tools and elements. From everything we know so far from psychological pedagogy and psychotherapy research on challenging and complex psycho-affective competencies, it is logical to assume that the elicitation and support of these competencies can hardly be obtained through repeated rehearsal of behavioural variants – and that successful social-therapeutic work "cannot [just] be reduced to enhancing cognitive [and] social [...] skills" (Gadd, 2008). Looking at our interview studies, what is striking is how often it has been observed that what is important for the emotional learning of the participants is above all a *trusting* framework based on dependable two-way relationships (cf. point xx), as well as a *processual duration* of the training experience over a period of shared lifetime. These observations will need to be documented and reconstructed more precisely at a later stage.

Of essential importance is the conceptual distinction between "method tool" and "impact factor of the method", particularly as regards the basic intention to which the application-oriented *Best Practice Research* is committed: namely, to find effective methods for and practical examples of the reintegration of violent offenders; to reconstruct these methods' mode of functioning; and to render them usable for others, i.e. make them transferable to other institutions, contexts and countries. With respect to the transferability and applicability of the findings on the VPN method, it would be fatal if individual methodical tools were mistakenly extracted and isolated – for example, if the role play were to be cited and recommended without inclusion, analysis and description of the complex surrounding framework conditions and interactions of the VPN method. The misconceived attempt to transfer the tools of a complex method of successful integration work to other application contexts in the form of "toolkits" is very unlikely to be successful.

This concern (which is entirely practically motivated) requires that, before proceeding any further, a conceptual distinction needs to be drawn between first and second order impact factors. The repeated rehearsal of helpful dialogic and behavioural options (in the role-play) can be understood as a *method-specific* impact factor that, in order to be able to function fully and effectively, must always be underpinned by impact factors that are contextual and that *pertain to the method as a whole*. These include the factors mentioned above (which first need to be precisely reconstructed), namely the method's processual character, its basis in relationships, and the formation of trust and memory – i.e. factors that generate emotional learning.

This is demonstrated by Mussa and Samet in equal measure. With Mussa, it became clear that merely the rehearsal and (behaviouristic) learning of roles and isolated modes of acting cannot be effective. Samet's interview comments regarding his personal "stop card" and his memory image, meanwhile, warn against trying to extract isolated tools from the context of the VPN method. With Samet, what could be seen is that the generation of various memory images took place as a process. There is much to indicate that the permanence of these images in Samet's memory – and thus their stability and ability to function under conditions of stress – was caused not so much by the content of the images as by their relationship-based and emotionally-saturated process of formation in a dynamic group discussion ("I spoke about [the picture] in

front of others [...] for the first time"). Exactly the same thing appears to have been the case with Mussa when he was required to deal with feelings of strangeness and uncertainty caused by things he perceived subjectively as unusual or odd. With Mussa too, this emotional learning took place in the group, one coached in a way that encouraged the development of trust and respect, and would probably have been impossible to achieve without this framework of committed relationships between participants and coaches.

**xxx 3.1 'Baran' 1: Initial observations regarding ambivalence and dealing with ambivalence**

In connection with the emotional learning shown by Mussa in "dealing with astonishment and subjective feelings of strangeness towards the new and unfamiliar" ("it was totally weird, [...] at first I could hardly imagine"), the general comment can be made that, with this target group, the importance of the emotional *ability to deal with ambivalence* cannot be overestimated. The theme also proved to be significant for Baran (without it being noticed by the coaches).

Baran's biographical career of violence was not as directly and as drastically connected to his family as was Samet's (and also Mussa's). No indications can be found for massive or systematic physical violence or degradation in the family. This was probably why Baran could say, with respect to his biography of violence, that "in the first six years of primary school everything went well".  However then came secondary school at the age of twelve, and that meant, "the first fights that were really rough [...] with blood". It is revealing how this topic developed in the narrative conversation:

> Baran: [...] yeah that was in secondary school, this guy came on to my girlfriend, you know, jealousy, I flip out [...]
> Interv.: [...] what did he do [...]
> Baran: [...] like I said, he came onto her, he goes up to her and it's like oh sweetheart and blah, talks to her real cool, you wanna get something on and so on, all three of us were at school together, we knew each other,
> Interv.: "Uh hu" (questioning)
> Baran: [...] or no, everything was new, it was all in the first week [of secondary school], you haven't got a clue, I flipped out, at primary school got all my mates and then everything's new, other people, I flip out and attacked him, watch it that's my girlfriend, she's mine, wants nothing to do with you [...]

Baran explicitly connects his first serious scene of violence with "his girlfriend" and with "jealousy". This might tempt one to resort all too quickly to clichés of developmental psychology, for example to attribute the violence to the onset of

puberty – and thus to fail to notice Baran's own strategy of justification. With Baran this would represents a false conclusion if only because in the interview it is clear that he already knew his "girlfriend" from primary school. In other words, it appears that he was already friends with her during the pre-pubertarian phase of latency, a fact that weakens any explanation based solely on developmental psychology. Some additional explanation is therefore required.

The actual motivations and causes of this "fight" – which continued after school on a larger scale in the city park, now also involving his brother, which Baran describes as marking the beginning of his career of violence – are in fact to be found in a lack of affective tolerance for *feelings of ambivalence* and fear of feeling strange and of the new and unfamiliar. In the interview, Baran even almost deceived himself about the fact that the real trigger was not his "girlfriend", "jealously", sexual advances, puberty etc., but something else. In secondary school, namely, everything was unknown unfamiliar and ambiguous: "then everything new, other people [...] you haven't got a clue [...] I flipped out".

It can also be said of Mussa and Samet that, in their lives both before and in prison (and above all during the VPN training), experiences of *unfamiliarity, strangeness and ambivalence* had caused them to feel uneasy and had led to outbreaks of violence. While, for Samet, the "stop card" memories were completely new ("for the first time in my life"), for Mussa the role plays were initially unfamiliar and strange. Many of the scenes of violence the young men had been involved in, both large and small, were at least indirectly connected to the existence of ambiguous situational elements, i.e. ones perceived as unfamiliar-inappropriate, which raised the level of aggression. What was certain to have been unknown and strange to all the VPN participants, however, was the way communication and exchange was practiced within the VPN group. All the more so when this exchange led, as it often did, to subjects connected to their life histories being touched upon. Until then, these subjects had to a certain extent been unfamiliar, because they had never been understood, or only apparently (e.g. domestic violence, experiences of biographical uprooting and neglect, their own experiences of criminal offending etc.). With respect to these subjects, Baran's words applied: "you haven't got a clue [...] it was totally new".

Here, an essential impact factor of the VPN method can be observed: providing participants with the ability to tolerate feelings of ambivalence and unease, and to deal with these non-violently, without "flipping out". Even more, to learn to value this feeling (as in Mussa's case with the role play), and thus increasingly to add these experiences to the emotional memory.

## xxx 3.2 'Baran' 2: Memory formation and "emotional memory" under conditions of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHS)

As regards memory formation, it is nevertheless necessary in Baran's case to add a proviso – one that will lead to an important clarification. In interview, Baran was very able to remember and describe many events from his life history (e.g. the aforementioned "fight"). However what Baran was almost completely unable to do, unlike Samet and Mussa, was to remember events and personal experiences from the group training and to talk about them. It can be directly inferred from the interview sequence cited above that this weakness of memory pertains in particular to those experiences perceived as ambiguous.

As already mentioned, interview material stemming from the *border zone of remembering and forgetting*, where no (sufficiently precise) memories could be retrieved, is of particular significance for our analysis. It is alone this material that can provide a counter-example for our hypothesis about the formation of "emotional memory" in the VPN method, and thus act as a check. The following finding is hence all the more important: namely, that even for participants who, like Baran (although unlike Samet and Mussa), expressed great difficulties in singling out in the memory any of the interactive events that took place during the group training, it was nevertheless often possible to conclude that the impact factor of "strengthening the emotional memory" was not entirely ineffectual.

How was it possible to recognise this? Overall, it can be said that this type of participant enjoyed taking part in the training course and was vaguely aware that the group process included many experiences that, despite occasionally being strenuous, were on the whole helpful – that at least were somehow "worth it", as was often said

in the interviews. However at the moment it came to admitting they could barely remember or describe how the training proceeded, there immediately came a gesture of "I'd like to remember more precisely but can't", where it was often possible to detect an honest personal wish to be able to remember better. The training obviously appeared to have elicited a great, instinctive valuing of memory. This wish to remember better expresses an esteem and an awareness directed not only at the training itself, but also at *recollection and remembering in the present moment* of events/experiences that took place in the group interaction. This is what the interview aims to achieve. It is possible that, particularly among this type of young person, this valuing of moments of personal, emotional remembering was not present in the same form before the training.

This was particularly visible with Baran. He, too, found the training super, and for that reason gladly took part in the interview and talked about his life today. However he was unable to remember anything about precisely what happened in the group – perhaps an exercise or two, however as regards what exactly happened and what was said, and what emerged in the free thematic discussion, all that was available were isolated guesses and keywords, rather than any coherent description of remembered sequences of events. Baran's coaches reported at length how he had had to struggle with internal and external restlessness and how difficult it was for him even to listen, let alone to participate and calmly tell the group about episodes he experienced himself. One of the coaches sometimes felt it necessary to sit next to Baran and thus establish a physical-spatial proximity, or to temporarily leave the group with Baran and to calm him down, so that he could continue to participate gainfully without causing too much of a disturbance. "He's a lovely guy, the probation officer he has at the moment also likes him, but there was a constant fidgeting [...] as soon as he is with more than one other person [...] he becomes distracted, he gets sucked in by everything [...] and then its impossible to get a hold on him" (more material xx).

Because of this relatively pronounced *attention deficit hyperactivity disorder* (ADHD), in the first two interviews Baran was unable to produce any narrative memories of the episodes of the interactional group event (despite the fact his group-dynamic experience took place less than one year ago). Spontaneously arising conversation and interaction within the group appear to have entirely escaped Baran's

memory. (Only a few educational exercises and parts of his work on his own offence could be roughly remembered). Symptomatic for this was the frequency with which Baran's answers came with a habitual "and blah-blah", denoting large areas of his life experience, which, though engaged, was largely distracted and still vague. This "and blah-blah" marked many points in the conversation where Baran ought to have been able to remember more accurately, since it concerned powerful, emotionally loaded experiences. For example, a colleague in the group who had "even cried once" had talked "about his crime [...] and blah-bah". However what this colleague actually said, the precise state he was in, and how the group, the coaches and even Baran himself reacted, remained unknown, even after more precise enquiry.

All the more significant, then, is that Baran's fundamental feeling regarding his experiences with the training group was overwhelmingly positive. He was subjectively convinced that it was helpful. This explains why Baran's willingness to take part in and to contribute to the VPN sessions, and also later in the interview, remained constant throughout. Moreover, Baran was the only participant who, as the analysis proceeded, got in touch of his own accord to offer another interview appointment, despite the fact that he was very busy, and without it being possible to observe any particular reason or personal need in the narrow sense. Moreover, in his life after his release from prison, Baran showed indications of stable alterations to his behaviour and attitude, in which it was possible to recognise the contours of a reliably re-socialised young fellow citizen.

What was particularly notable with Baran was his repeated comment that "I'd like to remember more precisely", i.e. his wish for more personal memory. Even in the interview, Baran was barely able to remember concrete experiences and sequences of events. Nevertheless, during his group experience he had clearly developed a sense that this remembering and narration – regardless of the difficulties and unpleasant aspects that it sometimes causes – can be "fun" (as his group colleague Samet consciously phrased it). Baran wanted to remember better and felt the desire to be able to get more out of himself when narrating. It must have been precisely this desire that, in the interview, made Baran to make an entirely pragmatic and promising suggestion for a solution: "I'd need to have someone from the group here, or Jens [the coach] should be here, someone to help me, then everything would come back to me."

Could this be arranged? Here, Baran, of his own accord and having given the matter thought, suggested that it might be possible to involve a former colleague from the group or one of the coaches, so that, with the support of various "memory aides", he might be able to obtain a better access to the events and his experiences at the time.

Two things are noticeable here. First, Baran's desire to improve his ability to recall and to narrate emotionally loaded personal memories is perceived by him as a *positive vision* and a *personal goal* that he has intuitively set himself. Precisely this wish represents a major gain that should not be underestimated. As already mentioned, it should by no means be seen as a given among young persons from this social sector. This wish could act as a counter-force to the aforementioned "blah-blah" (Baran's most frequent yet never substantiated verbal filler), providing a certain calm and grounding, on the basis of which greater narrative returns – and less risk of violence – might develop. Second, it can be seen from Baran's own suggestion that he has intuitively perceived the training group as a factor that today can still significantly support his wish for more personal-emotional memories. Fundamentally, Baran is attempting to reconstruct the group for the interview situation and to revive its stabilising and memory-supportive function.

Carried away by the excitement of the interview situation, Baran went as far as to develop a fantasy about jointly writing a book. "That would be cool wouldn't it, we [me and some of the guys / "memory aides" from the VPN group] [...] we'll tell these gripping stories and then you write them down [...] you're someone who can do that [...] like a real book, we can get rich". One might initially see in this a certain tragi-comedy, since up to this point no "gripping stories" had (yet) to emerge. What is expressed here above all, however, is the strength and the potential impact of the factor of *remembering/narrating*, at least with a person who currently still seems far from being able to personally acquire this factor.

This shows that even with a participant by no means disposed to remembering, signs could still be detected that he will in the future intuitively search for opportunities and "aides" that can calm him and strengthen his memories and experiences – particularly the instable and infrequent *affective positive* and *perspective-boradening* memories – or at any rate that he will not continue to impulsively avoid these supporting factors.

Here, where the "strengthening of the emotional memory" as such can hardly or only partially be achieved, it can nevertheless be anchored as a *vision* or a *suggestion* offering a potential for personal orientation.

Another aspect must always be considered with VPN groups in prisons: that the way these groups are (necessarily) formed means they include participants who, though they may share similar careers of violence and latent extremist inclinations, may in other respects be extremely varied in terms of the kinds of issues they bring with them and what is required in terms of personal development. For example, often a deep-rooted personality problematic exists that in early adulthood can take the form of an ADHD. In order to be able to reliably resolve this, more will be needed than is possible within a five month group-awareness dynamic.

The finding concerning the revival of a desire for personal memory is important not only for assessing the progress of individuals, but also with regard to group processes as a whole. Not for nothing have the VPN coaches concluded, when looking at the development of a group as a whole, that it is especially the *turbulent and disorderly sessions* that, despite initially not having given the impression of having brought forth a great deal of personal memory, nevertheless reveal an impact. Bearing the observations regarding Baran in mind, it can be therefore be emphasised that, as long as the central structural features of *narrative openness* and *process orientation* are maintained, it is possible to assume that corresponding effects are obtained that perhaps only fully reveal themselves in subsequent sessions – or even after the participant's release from prison.

 (The interview with Baran and his friend...xx)


**xxx  3.3  Connections to empirical violence research 2**

At this point a connection to empirical violence research can again be made. Analyses of memory capacities have been cited above (point xx) that prove that violent persons demonstrate a general low level of performance as regards intelligence, expression and memory. In particular, indications of an inner shortage of "positive", "non-

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hostile" memories have been observed, this shortage appearing to stand in direct psychodynamic relation to the person's inclination to violence. It can now be added that attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), something common particularly among our target group, is well known to accompany not only a lack of ability to comprehend the present moment and to process information, but also to remember. In other words, ADHD is connected to a weakness of emotional memory and emotional learning in the sense described above (xx more material on ADHD).

It is therefore all the more significant that although during Baran's (successful) process of re-socialisation, no emphatic memory experiences could be noted (e.g. as articulated by Samet), it was possible to observe a newly awakened sense of the value of personal remembering and narrating. This strengthens our hypothesis about the existence of a connection between the ability to remember and the avoidance of violence: violent behaviour represents a "highly emotional" and self-propelling occurrence, one that is barely controllable rationally and that is often driven by "incalculable, intra-group dynamic processes" (Heitmeyer 533). It is precisely because this occurrence is essentially based on "intrinsic motives" and the "enjoyable experience of violence" (Sutterlüty 77), that it is especially important to be able to remember what is experienced in an emotionally saturated manner – and in doing so to be able to evoke particular "positive" and trust-inspiring contents/states and with which to be able to calm oneself.

This can be powerfully observed in the material provided by Ferdinand Sutterlüty in a study that serves as a benchmark for psychodynamic violence research. One offender who tends towards exceptionally brutal and uncontrollable outbreaks of violence, and who says of himself that in these moments he "flips out", "shuts down" and "doesn't think", because then he is "like a terrier that you've got –, you've almost got to beat so that it lets go of the victim" (64), was barely able to remember the acts of violence and in particular what led up to them. He was thus also generally unable to provide any reasons for his outbreaks – save that they were "enjoyable" or that he had been feeling "frustrated".

> "Had some kind of, some kind of problem at the time, dunno what it was anymore. There was something I found totally shit, it was like, like one of those

phases again that last a month or so, three months where I (.) felt like, totally

mad, and where all I did was get into fights. (2) I just felt like, weird [...]

Int.: Where did the frustration come from?

[Irritated:] Where did it come from? Dunno. From inside like. From the gut or

something, or from my big toe. Dunno. Always mounts up like that.

[...]

Still it was fun in way, it was a laugh. (68f.)

In the light of these comments, Heitmeyer is to be seconded in the view that the "rational choice theory" commonly found in older research is "unable to convincingly explain" (ibid. 533) violent events such as this – and thus unable to develop helpful prevention strategies. Our assumption about emotional learning is all the more strongly confirmed, and one begins to understand how deeply important it is when clients of social-therapeutic work – regardless of their particular form of susceptibility or the treatment they require – succeed in being able to say of their personal experiences, and in particular their "positive" and pre-social experiences, that "I can see it in front of me like it was today [...] I can remember as if it was yesterday"; and when clients (like Samet) form stable, personally associated memory image "for the first time"; and when, like Baran, they actively invite pragmatic help in order to be able to recall their own experiences and to remember them.

Just how significant "strengthening of the emotional memory" is for interventions in the area of violence prevention, and precisely what it implies in psychodynamic terms, can be explained by means of a simple comment made by Samet when talking about his contemplative memory practices: that they were "fun" and that he had often "[had to] laugh and cry". The conjecture that whoever can "laugh and cry" about memories will be able to depart from the track of violence turns out to be supported by the relevant literature. Disregarding the details of the objects and the process-quality of the childhood memories that made Samet "laugh and cry" (when asked, the memories he recalled concerned childish pranks that in some cases were positively nasty), the following can be said: in the deep psychological and clinical literature there has been, at least since Margarete and Alexander Mitscherlich's book *The Inability to Mourn*, a general consensus that the ability to find personal access via

memory to emotions of sadness and joy, and to be able to deepen these independently and express them verbally, is an essential foundation of mental health and social harmony.

Psychological suffering and social destructiveness/violence, on the other hand, are at core traceable to the strong presence or surfeit of *mental defence mechanisms* that ultimately are always directed against the experience of remembering emotions of sorrow and joy (vgl. OPD). Whether this occurs directly or indirectly, and whatever the personal perceptions, memories or realties might be that the mental defence mechanisms are directed against, the emotional end result is always that joy and sorrow, Samet's "laughing and crying", are painfully forfeited in a way that affects the entire spectrum of a person's affective self-orientation.

Persons with an affinity for violence not only, as is well-known, lack empathy and sympathy (in other words the ability to feel sorrow for others and for one's self). The emotional ability *to be happy* is also restricted. The clinical-psychodynamic literature, in particular, is unequivocal about this. It makes clear that the affect balance of violent persons is characterized not by sorrow and joy, but rather by affect reactions of *depressive moodiness* or *free-floating panic*. Irrational feelings of persecution and humiliation predominate and ecstatic thrills of momentary (violent) euphoria are sought out. Such affect impulses – atrophied forms of more mature human emotionality – allow neither sorrow or joy and are, by definition, characterized by an advanced lack of memory and/or "dissociative splitting" and timelessness, because "split off from the consciousness" (van der Kolk/ Streeck-Fischer in Heitmeyer/ Hagan 1035). In addition they mainly derive from the person's own experience of "violence and neglect" on a traumatic scale – and result in a correspondingly high degree of latent violence.

Anyone wishing to develop methods of de-radicalisation and violence prevention will, it seems, necessarily have to address questions of emotional intelligence in the affect areas of sorrow and joy – and, by extension, questions of emotional memory (for example dissociative "absence of memory"). Empathy and long-lasting peacefulness are impossible to obtain without the personal ability to remember and to experience sorrow and joy. One thing in particular is obvious in the case material with regard to

violent offenders' lack of ability to experience joy (an aspect that it commonly overlooked): namely, that this ability is just as closely related to emotional memory as the ability to feel sorrow. The formation of the emotional memory images of a "positive", peaceful and pro-social nature (which, as has been discussed above, stood out with Samet and other participants of the VPN training) play a major role in this.

These findings, if they turn out to be correct, pose a major challenge. They indicate that the *de-radicalisation and re-socialisation* of violent offenders deserves more attention, and that high-quality measures need to be developed. They also suggest the fundamental conclusion that this work above all needs to aim at strengthening prisoners' emotional abilities, namely joy, sorrow and affect-laden memories. In its practical consequences, in particular, this conclusion might appear to be unexpectedly broad and "take some getting used to", so to speak. It clearly goes beyond the requirement that certain clearly delineated alterations to attitude and behaviour be instilled among the prisoners. Work on needs as complex as those connected to emotional learning requires a degree of *methodical effort*. As a group training approach, the VPN method seems to be exceptionally well-placed to do this.
In the final paragraph of their contribution, van der Kolk and Streeck-Fischer emphasise that the emotional abilities to summon "mutual understanding", to obtain "attentiveness", and to gain "control over impulses", "are best learned in the group" (1036). These are abilities that can only be acquired in the framework of "secure bonding" and reliable relationships (1024).

This hypothesis will need to be tested even more closely when the VPN method comes to touch on further difficult personality competences, for example, as we will see in the next section, in the field of self-expression and confidential personal narration.

### xxx  3.4  'Baran' 3: Perspective on the impact factor of "open-narrative story telling"

It is impossible to overrate the importance for Baran and other similarly disposed VPN participants of the ability and the wish to remember personal experiences with

emotional valences precisely, and, in telling others about them, to derive individual grounding and peace, not to mention "fun". The brief survey of the research literature above emphasises how risky the state of distracted restlessness generated by the history-less (and story-less) hyperactivity of ADHD can be, and how quickly, under certain circumstances, it can fuel the escalation of violence. Particularly with young persons and young adults suffering from attention deficits, it is therefore seen to be a "high-priority therapeutic goal" to "help [clients] to keep a clear head and the ability to occupy themselves with things", and to support them in expressing themselves (1035 ??xx). More broadly, empirical violence research not only supports the finding based on the evaluation of Samet that violent people have a weak memory, especially when it comes emotionally positive information. It also supports our central finding drawn from the Baran interview, namely that violent persons have a significantly less marked "(narrative) ability to express themselves", so that few are in a position to verbally express conflictual states of mind and personal experiences in general. Van der Kolk and Streeck-Fischer emphasise the effectiveness of the narration of "one's own stories", and that it is above all a matter of "learning how to speak about oneself in groups" – despite the "ambivalence and doubts" (1036). Remembering and telling – especially of "non-hostile", emotionally positive and pro-social experiences – are therefore significant for contexts of violence prevention and de-radicalisation.## Erinnern und Erzählen – gerade von „nicht-feindseligen", emotional positiven und prosozialen Erlebnissen – haben also für Kontexte von Gewaltprävention und Deradikalisierung: WORD MISSING## xx

In the analysis of methods of therapeutic intervention, it therefore seems all the more important to observe, alongside the factor of "memory formation", the *factor of narration*. The significance of *open-narrative story-telling* about personal experiences has already clearly revealed itself with Samet. Even in the interview situation, Samet, as described above, emphasised how good he found it "to tell and by doing so to remember again". In addition, when asked about the one-to-one conversation with the coach, Samet said (this has not been mentioned yet) that these conversations were "brilliant" because he had been able "to really tell for once [...] they were interested". It is necessary here to note that Samet's one-to-one conversations took place during a phase of his imprisonment during which fellow inmates and prison employees viewed him with a certain suspicion because of his "completely closed manner" (and his

appearance: he wore a long, religious-looking beard). Clearly, prison life was a long way from showing an "interest" and providing an opportunity for Samet "to really tell", as Samet understood it. (When, as a result of his exceedingly successful re-socialisation, Samet later was referred to as a "model prisoner", there appeared on the part of the prison employees to be no recollection of the fact that Samet had previously been seen as particularly problematic and even suspected of being a "possible Taliban"). Not only were the topics of memory and narration closely brought together by Samet from the very start, but also his pleasure in being able to narrate – which, providing someone was "interested", was "really […] brilliant" – was comparable with the experience of remembering, and was likely connected to it.

Baran, too, represented a typologically relevant example of the impact factors of remembering and narration. His suggestion in the interview regarding the "memory helper", and his excitable wish to narrate with his colleagues entire books, implies that he has intuitively understood the connection between remembering/telling and self-calming/satisfaction. This strengthens the impression that, in his comprehension and enthusiasm for remembering/telling, Baran was not only talking about the present interview situation, but must also have been referring his experiences in the group training. After all, it is not solely the individuals' group experience that is the main object of the interview. There exists between the group training and the interview an inner connection that is of major methodological importance – and which needs to be pointed out in order to make the function of the *narrative impact factor* fully comprehensible.

Although the group training is a social-therapeutic intervention and the interview represents a method of empirical research, and despite the fact that each belongs to a different working area and has a different purpose, both share important elements. Both are principally *oriented at narration*, in other words they are "narration generating" and aimed at the personal narration of a person's own experiences. In order to even allow such personal narration, they need to be *structurally open* and/or self-structuring and *processual*, and not committed to a teaching plan or a common

thread.[4] More broadly, both methods require the stabilising framework of a confidential interpersonal relationship between narrator and listener, be it in the group or the interview. For this reason, the methodology of the study assumes that the participants spontaneously identify the interview with the context of the group training and the one-to-one conversations conducted within its framework.[5]

Baran's intuitive wish to bring both together, and to involve fellow group colleagues in the interview, can be understood against this background. Baran had obviously developed an intuitive, pre-reflexive sense for the factor of *narrative work*, precisely because his hyperactive attention weakness brings him up against the limits of his ability to narrate and to calm himself – beyond which no calming, personally filled narrative can be obtained, and where "constant fidgeting" contains a high risk of violent delinquency.

In this connection, it is no coincidence that it was Baran's interview material that, in a particular sense, revealed most clearly why the impact factor of narration – alongside that of memory – is so important. This emerges if one considers two facts and comprehends them in their authentic connection, or more precisely, if one (a)  looks more closely at the scene Baran attributed to the beginning of his career of violence and if one (b) goes on to consider the nature and the basic function of all human narration.

(a) Baran's first serious experience of violence (when it "was really rough [...] with blood"), which occurred in connection with Baran's entry into secondary school, was only apparently caused by factors of "jealousy", "puberty" or other circumstances connected to developmental phases. As could be inferred from the interview, it was much more the case that Baran was overwhelmed by the new, unfamiliar and strange

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[4] For both techniques, what appears to be crucial for the success and the quality of the work is the extent to which the coach and/or interviewer de facto succeeds in generating narration, so that a personal, emotionally rich narration is able to develop, with an open structure and with confidential participation of narrator and listener (xx Rosenthal).

[5] Seen from another persective, this means that the qualitative-empirical, narratological research accompanying the therapeutic practice is always inherently a function of the quality assurance of this practice, and it therefore makes sense in each project conception that the development of the method and the accompanying research is always closely connected.

environment. This was the actual reason why he hit out ("everything was new, other people, [...] you haven't got a clue, I flipped out").

A glance into the scientific literature on the psychodynamics of violence confirms that the ability for affective tolerance and valuing of experiences which include personal unease and ambivalence as regards the new, the unusual and the strange, is indeed of great importance. The most recent empirical interview studies assign a major role to the ability to "deal with precarious life situations" and make personal "openness towards others and the other" a main criteria of their model of analysis – an "openness" that is of central importance in the ability to deal with feelings of ambivalence and ambiguity (Bude/ Lantermann 2010, p.4). This provides the basis for the authors' assumption that this "openness" and/or processing of ambivalence has a major impact on how persons regulate their behaviour along the axis of "violent versus peacefulness."

(b) What, on the other hand, is the underlying function and the *essence of human narration*? This question can be answered by drawing on the basic finding of the interdisciplinary academic field of *narratology* (Herman 2007, Weilnböck 2006): human narration is fundamentally nothing other than the thematisation – and possibly the processing – of experiences of what is subjectively new, strange and/or ambiguous, and thus implicitly the generation of "openness towards others and the other" in the above sense. Human narration of the genuine kind – "Listen, I've got to tell you something", or "Tell me about it, that's interesting / I've never heard about that / I can hardly imagine" – is always occasioned by a personal experience and demonstrates a personal point. This point always concerns something the narrating person has experienced subjectively as new, unusual, strange, and usually also inappropriate and conflictual; something that strikes the person as being ambiguous and requiring processing; something the person would like to understand better and be more at ease with. (Even when a story has an entirely joyful and "unproblematic" character, it will in some way – most likely from the representational perspective of the solution of certain problem –  have to do with such a topic.) Without this element of subjective unfamiliarity/strangeness, an ambiguous and conflictual object is not narrated: it does not have "narrative worth" or an "event-character" in the narratological sense. It can at best be reported or explained.

The ability to tell – as verbal thematisation of experiences of the subjectively new/strange and ambiguous – is precisely what Baran and similarly disposed participants miss so sorely, and what feeds their tendency for violence. Moreover, what can be counted as the real function of human narration is to mentally process this subjectively new/strange and ambiguous object – and thus, via personal processing, to appropriate for oneself what is strange, or at least to create an chance to do so. This is why the narrator always actively involves a listener and adapts his or her narrative self-expression to the latter – although what is crucial is the narrator's own needs as regards the reaction of the listener.

The psychological and psychotherapeutic literature on narration nevertheless also emphasises the question as to whether *narrational processing* does indeed occur and how lastingly the ambivalence that underlies the need for narration is resolved – and thus its potential for fear and anger defused. This greatly depends on the exact *quality and the context factors* of the narration. Here, blockages to the narrative process can arise that cause the person to be unable to remember/narrate anything, or very little, as with Baran, or that cause the same narratives to be repeated again and again, without being added to or developed, as was the case with other participants (and partly also Baran). This is commonly known as story-telling in which someone "lies to themselves" or "pretends to themselves and others" and can "only dimly" remember essential details that might be contradictory – so that telling and listening can end up as a mutual cultivation of anti-narrational defence mechanisms.

Literature with a psychodynamic orientation usually makes two general causes responsible for this: (a) on the one hand, blockages result because a person is emotionally unable to tolerate a specific experience and therefore recoils from its narrative exploration, or (b) because, while the person may possess basal knowledge of the sequence of events, he or she is not clear about their personal involvement and the extent to which they are affected. In the latter case, it is possible to describe and to report a great deal, however the personal point is missing or is unclear – and the effect upon the listener is mostly one of confusion.

The narratological literature is largely unanimous that forms of *narrative interpersonal conversation* and/or corresponding social therapeutic measures can free up blockages in the impact factor of "narration" and can to set in motion the processes of *mental processing*. The question as to how far this is successful depends on how this conversation is conducted and how the existing narrative framework is regulated – a framework which in this case is provided through the systematic procedure of the VPN method. Especially important here is the function of the active listener. A good example of this is the narrative passage in which Baran described his first violent escalation at school at the age of twelve. One can see precisely how, via narration, Baran attempts to process this experience and find answers to questions resulting from it, and more generally the difficulties he has in doing so, and how the function of the active listener comes into play. This passage make it possible to understand in detail how Baran first places his personal point in a way that in certain respects proves unclear and "untrue" – which can only mean that his point is unclear and inaccurate *for himself* and in the context of his own (implicit) knowledge about what happened and what was experienced. Here, the function of the listener is solely to ask questions or express impressions that allow the narrator to perceive any inconsistencies and misunderstandings that may have arisen. It can be seen how Baran, as a result of the small prompts provided by the listener, re-aligns his point, positioning it in a way that can be called more consistent or "true".

Baran began by saying (as cited above): "yes that was in secondary school, this guy came on to my girlfriend, yeah, jealousy, I flip out", whereupon the interviewer asked briefly, "what did he do". In response, Baran took a new approach his story, succeeding in obtaining a fundamentally new personal point and justification for his action. Obviously, it suddenly became clear to Baran that the other young schoolfellow obviously hadn't  "come on" to his girlfriend at all, or at least not in a way that was insulting or violence-provoking, as Baran had claimed at the beginning of his story. It was rather that case that the schoolfellow had talked to his girlfriend in a way that was "real cool".

Shortly afterwards – all this plays out in the course of a few seconds during the *co-narrative exchange* – Baran manages to recognise that what he had wanted to say next in the narrative minefield of his "jealousy" point, and what he then actually said,

namely that "all three of us were at school together, we knew each other", was not in fact true. It was it this point that the interviewer had uttered a non-verbal "uh-hu". Immediately afterwards Baran corrected himself mid-sentence and explained that the opposite was in fact the case: "or no, I was new, it was all in the first week [of secondary school], you haven't got a clue, I flipped out." Here, one can assume that without the (co-narrative) "uh-hu", Baran may not have been able to make the narrative re-alignment that was so important for his personal reappraisal of his own career of violence. What was probably needed at this point in the dialogue was the renewed presence and attentiveness of a listener, one related to the narrator as intuitively and as precisely as possible, so that Baran could clearly recognise and admit that it was not the "come on" or "jealously" that caused him to "flip out", but rather his concealed feelings of being uneasy and overwhelmed in the unfamiliar environment of the new school.

Both of Baran's self-corrections, made seconds after one another, clearly show how the defensive narratives that offenders build up in order to legitimate and minimalise their actions are long-lasting and robust mental constructions whose restructuring and realignment can only be obtained piecemeal, over the course of a longer process of narrative work. It is therefore all the more appropriate that the VPN method assigns major importance to precise work on these legitimising narratives. Overall, it can be inferred from this passage from Baran's interview how the process of *dynamic open, relationship-based narration* – which is not only a core element of the interview method but also of the VPN method itself – is committed to the fundamental task of encouraging participants in their narration, and that means: supporting them in their efforts to place their narrative "point" as consistently and "truly" as possible in the verbal expression of biographical experience. "True", as already mentioned, means that the overall shape and emotional accentuation that a person creates in their retrospective narration of an experience corresponds as precisely as possible to the experience at the time, in particular its emotional aspects. This allows the relation between "experienced" and "narrated" biography to be as free from tension as possible (cf. Rosenthal xx). In this connection, it may also be recalled that psychotherapy as such is always, from a narratological perspective, defined as conversational: as the "constant re-telling of one and the same story" – only that this story is told "better and better" (Roy Schafer). On the whole, this means working on

criteria of detail concerning the content of the narration and the coherence of the logical development of events, as well as the affective involvement of the narrator. For Baran, what was crucial in this moment of narration was: How did I really experience the scene in the first week of secondary school with my girlfriend, the "come on" and jealousy? And how did this experience then lead to violence? These are questions that for Baran obviously remain open and underdeveloped. In the VPN modules, which are based on biographical work, the "reappraisal of the act of violence" is approached in the same way. This will be discussed in more detail later (see point xx).

More broadly, this passage shows how much persons belonging to this target group honestly try to produce as accurate a story as possible. They willingly and emotionally pursue what might be called, to paraphrase Sigmund Freud, the *natural drive towards human narration*, or at any rate personal resolution – on the condition that someone is "really interested" and that a trustworthy listener attentively asks questions. It is an oft-confirmed scientific consensus that the impact of the listener – without which narration in this sense cannot take place – always flows directly into the narrative process. For that reason, contemporary narrative research at practically every research faculty assigns fundamental importance to the concept of *co-narration*. This implies that a narrator and a "rememberer" can act only within a discursive and relationship-dynamic context in the presence – be it real or mental – of a listener. The filigree structure of interaction that becomes visible in the Baran interview draws attention to how much depends on the fine details of the dialogue between narrator and listener (or the group), which can often occur in fractions of a second and in the form of small, non-verbal gestures or short interjections. In general, it is possible to assume that the effects of co-narration are more long-lasting if this "co-" not only involves a single individual but an entire group, which, if facilitated in the right way, can provide a whole range of narrative prompts.

The amazement that the interviewer's brief "uh-hu" or the simple question "What did [the other boy] do?" could have such an impact raises the more far-reaching question as to the *underlying attitude of the VPN coach* and how this is communicated, along with the question as to precisely how the culture of conversation and relationship-building in the VPN group training is composed. One thing is clear, namely: that these

short interjections alone cannot have been what prompted in Baran this minor narrative earthquake. It would be absurd, merely for the sake of obtaining a quick social-padagogic aide, to draw from this an abbreviated recommendation along the lines that de-radicalisation in conversation can best be achieved via brief interjectory questions and non-verbal points. Interventions such as this always need to be seen in the context of the group and relationship culture of the method as a whole, which in this case means the entire context of the interactive logic of the VPN group-training (with which Baran identifies of his own accord). Its precise composition sets the framework not only for the developmental opportunities of the participants, but also for the coaches' (and interviewers') options as regards courses of action and effects produced. For example, only by looking at the implicit rules of this specific logic of interaction will it be possible to infer why and how the interviewer was able to recognise with such relative accuracy the right moment to make these rapid, fraction-of-a-second interventions in Baran's narrative – and also, of course, why they had such a strong impact on him.

This obliges us all the more to examine the rules of the culture of narration and interaction in the VPN method with the greatest possible precision (see point xx below). It can be predicted that it will be possible to identify as a major factor in the effectiveness of the VPN method its intuitive emphasis on the *process of narration* in the sense developed here. More broadly, generating a *trustworthy conviction* that the group coaches "take it seriously" and that they are "really interested" – as both Mussa and Samet said – appears to be crucial for the quality of the remembering, talking and telling being aimed at.

## xxx  3.5  Biographical excursus on Baran – civil war, asylum seeking, deteriorating families

The underlying psychodynamic context that can be inferred from the evaluation of the material on Baran regarding his constitutional restlessness/hyperactivity (ADHD), his high degree of latent violence, but also his favourable reaction to the impacts of the co-narrative narration/remembering, provides us with an opportunity to make a few comments about the biographical background of his delinquent behaviour. Baran, who

today comes across as a pleasant, endearing, albeit highly distracted young man, had already come to notice in his early youth for repeated offences of bodily harm (sometimes grievous) in connection with physical conflicts actively sought by him. Sometimes these developed from conflicts between youth gangs and cliques and occasionally affected random individual victims. More recently, he had also repeatedly committed armed robbery of supermarkets, before being sentenced to imprisonment in a young person's facility, from which he was released at the age of twenty.

It is possible to say of the gang fights and physical conflicts that they generally took place in the context of cliques of youths with migration background and were fuelled by the proud consciousness of being a Muslim with Lebanese background. The robberies were the result of the obligation to act-out and to finance the norms of masculinity prevalent among Baran's contemporaries. Like many prisoners with comparable cultural backgrounds, Baran's actual knowledge about Islam was very limited and generally pre-reflexive, so that it was barely possible to notice an engaged reflection about existence, faith and ethics. Nevertheless, in those sessions in which an imam was involved, it emerged that Baran – unlike his Muslim colleagues in the group – knew how to perform prayer, even if he did not practice this regularly either before or after his imprisonment. As a child, Baran had briefly attended an Arabic Sunday school where, though he soon proved lacking in the patience necessary for participation, experienced a certain degree of child-oriented cultural and religious instruction.

It cannot be ruled out, however, that one element in particular of his Arabic-Muslim influence had, if anything, a negative effect upon his development. In prison, Baran received the opportunity to pray, which he willingly took up, because, according to him, praying had a very good effect upon him. Praying "calmed" him, as he emphasised; it "relieved" him, and afterwards he felt good in himself and satisfied. With respect to Baran's hyperactivity and attention deficit disorder, this must have been a major gain for him – and would certainly have stabilised the impact that the group training had upon him. Nevertheless, as a Muslim, Baran felt bound by the law forbidding him to pray for forty days after drinking alcohol or after having committed any other kind of sin – a law that predictably prevents someone like Baran from

praying altogether, and thus from experiencing the calming effect it brings. In addition, Baran had highly archaic ideas about hell and paradise, ideas which contained certain risks. After all, the notion that in hell one is burned to death on a daily basis – "really badly, like, with lava" – together with an image of paradise in which one gets "everything you want", including alcohol and ten virgins, doesn't seem particularly well suited to calming high levels of constitutional nervosity. It is more likely, instead, that it will give rise to a bi-polar oscillation between moods of deep remorse and aggressive-delinquent behaviour, which is precisely what Baran's life before imprisonment resembled.

On the other hand, the social-spatial and (familial) biographical background of Baran's childhood and youth would have played a much more significant role. Both among his brothers and sisters, as well as in the delinquent youth cliques, Baran was always one of the younger ones who was unable to distance themselves from group dynamics. The violence and, in part, ethnically-polarised conflict that defined the general atmosphere of Baran's school and youth must have intensified this problem. What should probably not be underestimated, however, is the biographies of his parents, who before his birth were forced to flee the civil war in Lebanon, in which numerous family members lost their lives. Precisely because Baran obviously had no exact idea about the bereavements and experiences of his parents, one can assume that the trans-generational transference effects of the parents' psycho-traumatic impairment, particularly the mother's, extended to him and his siblings. Such effects are always of an entirely unconscious nature, and their role is easily overlooked in the violent behaviour of youths with migration background caused by civil war. A further familial factor likely to have had a negative effect on Baran's development – unlike his older brothers, who had no criminal records – is that fact that his parents divorced while he was in prison. This supports the conjecture that Baran's years of delinquency occurred during a period marked by the conflictual pre-divorce dynamics between his parents – about which Baran was able to give no more information than he was about the misfortunes that befell his family during the civil war.

Any more precise (familial-) biographical and sociological evaluation of Baran's hyperactivity and delinquency will need to take account of how his high susceptibility to the pressure to join a clique and act aggressively might have come about. It will

also be necessary to consider which biographical and familial-biographical factors are the most relevant to the weakening of his emotional memory and his narrative competence. Even less surprising might be that both types of offence committed by Baran – affectively-caused grievous bodily harm as well as armed robbery – were, in his subjective experience, also characterised by the fact that they brought him a specific inner peace. It was possible to gather from Baran's descriptions that his first feelings were of extreme tension and excitement followed by the affective kick of violence and/or the euphoric experience of unlimited power over the victim of his armed robberies. The latter caused him to feel a sense of satisfaction and inner peace – a peace that Baran fundamentally needed, however which could not last, since this dynamic of perception and action proceeded in a more or less amnesiac cycle of repetition.

This crudely drawn case history reveals how central it is for Baran's training result (and those of similarly disposed participants) that he has, in his own way, approached an understanding of what emotional learning is and can be, and what narration can achieve. The fact that despite being barely able to talk about his group experience, Baran has developed the personal wish to remember better and be able to talk about those memories, and that this wish has become more or less stably anchored in him, will be of major importance in his future progress. As demonstrated above, the wish to remember acts as a protection against violence and pre-verbal inner restlessness. It can lead to a narrative that is calming and "fun", and that in turn generates more "openness towards others and the Other".

**xxx  4.  What is sustainable civic education and how should we deliver it? Ambivalence about the subjectively alien and "making friends through violence" – in the light of some findings from psychodynamics and psychiatry**

Before we show further evidence of the effects of the factors of "remembering" and "narration" – and implicitly also of their high level of dependence on a solid environment of trust – it is necessary to return once again to the core topic from the case studies on Baran: the impulsive-aggressive reaction to experiences of *the new, unfamiliar and alien/subjectively disturbing* – and to the ambivalence and the avoidance of ambivalence connected with them. This is because, firstly, this theme seems to have a high degree of relevance for all representatives of this target group. And secondly, it clearly demonstrates how the element of *civic education*, which represents a key tool of the VPN method, is employed, and reveals the origin of the profound effect it has.

Fundamentally, the theme of the subjectively unfamiliar and disturbing was *doubly* present in the passage from the Baran interview, or, to be more precise, it operated on two different levels of "alienness" and "appropriative story-telling". Firstly, in the course of the interview, Baran – as inevitably happens when a story is being told under these conditions (cf. above 4.3) – was still coming to terms psychologically with a personal experience that was special for him: namely the first, and at that time doubtless unfamiliar, outbreak of his own violent tendencies as a twelve-year-old. That is, he was continuing to psychologically appropriate aspects that, even after a long time (and probably after having talked about them many times), still seemed disturbing, unsettling and ambivalent. In the narration, he gradually became familiar with and appropriated, at least in part, what was subjectively alien and disturbing to him. Secondly, in this sequence of the conversation the subjectively alien and disturbing itself became the *explicit theme* and – for a few seconds at least – formed the subject matter of Baran's narrative. Here, Baran came close to the insight that alienness as such, and the experience of alienness, made him feel extremely uneasy, worried and aggressive. Baran may even have had the first personal sense that he and other young men like him become aggressive and violent chiefly because they do not, so to speak, trust themselves to feel alienated, uneasy and frightened.

It hardly needs to be stressed how important, but also how difficult this particular dimension of Baran's new version of the story is for him and the other members of his group, as it must have conflicted very strongly with Baran's *masculine image of himself*, according to which he understands himself to be a "cool" and self-assertive young man, unperturbed by external circumstances. Basically, what is in jeopardy here is a central part of Baran's *image of masculinity*, which also contains an effective strategy for the legitimation of violence. This touches on a key social and cultural problem, which should have a place in every curriculum of *civic education* for this group. However, it also becomes clear how important it is that this insight of Baran's is derived not from a presentation in the classroom or theoretical instruction, but by individuals telling stories about what they have experienced themselves and about being personally affected. Only on a foundation of personal narrative prepared in this way can a module of civic education that follows and applies these principles – bringing in topics of masculinity, i.e. male fearlessness, combativeness and honour (perhaps backed up by press reports or other material) – be fully effective. Civic education itself may take away from such experiences the valuable lesson that it is not always best to narrowly focus on political questions and matters of fact. Rather, measures such as, e.g., *systematically aiming for spontaneous narratives concerning moments of experienced ambivalence* may prove to be unexpectedly effective elements that would be worth considering and methodically elaborating in the interests of a post-classical civic education (xx Lit.).[6]

As already indicated, many years of *scientific experience* have heavily underlined the great importance of areas of experience like "alienness", "unease", ambivalence (and avoidance of ambivalence) (see above page xx). Among young people with a tendency to extremism and violence (hate crime offenders) – across all the different ideological and typological subgroups – only a very low level of competence in managing feelings of ambivalence, unease and subjective weakness can be found. This is closely connected with the above-mentioned limited competence of "openness towards other people and different circumstances", with the result that the great difficulty experienced by these young men in participating in a liberal society based on tolerance, diversity and the rule of law becomes psychologically understandable.

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[6] The concept of psychological ambivalence may be seen as similar to the older term of cognitive dissonance, but with the addition of emotional and biographical components.

Psychological studies attribute this limited capacity for "openness" and diversity to the fact that the "self-identity" of the young men is characterised by major and largely unconscious and mentally dissociated conflicts and ambivalences, which comprise of both cognitive and emotional aspects, touch on various areas of life and personality and evince high levels of intensity. Xenophobia – hostility towards foreigners in the narrower sense – is thus only one of many expressions of a general misanthropy, which is rooted ultimately in an alienation from and ambivalence towards *themselves* and their own life. In this mental dissociation and denial, the psyche "liberates itself from ambivalences" by psychodynamically "projecting itself on to the alien group" (Wimmer/Schetter 314xx ##volkan##). This explains the high potential for violence of hate crime, which can be overwhelming, since the rage at what is projected from oneself onto others is usually characterised by an absence of boundaries, which is fundamentally a reflex of a psychic loss of the boundary between oneself and others (cf. below the case xx in point xx).

As already mentioned, in the light of these quite unconscious processes, approaches to hate crime prevention based on cognitive-behavioural research assume that intervention "cannot be reduced to enhancing cognitive, social and/or employability skills" Gadd, 2008xx). Rather, work with "'subconscious', 'dynamic', and 'emotional factors'", such as the feeling of conflict and ambivalence, must be an essential element in prevention and integration work (Dixon/Court 2003 xx). In relation to ambivalences, however, the psychodynamic literature also argues that these represent not only a problem in need of a solution, but also an *essential mental resource* of individual identity development – just as much as social diversity represents an essential social resource for any community. Moreover, the concept of *personal identity* is only meaningful if identity entails that the person has learnt to connect and integrate something that was previously divergent, subjectively contradictory and ambivalent. One only has identity to the extent that one has experienced ambivalences and *identified* them as belonging together – especially where a person has been subject to many conflicts that are inaccessible to the conscious mind.

On the other hand, the high "narcissistic sensitivity" of violent individuals is explained with reference to "an insufficiency in themselves or their experience of

themselves", i.e. a lack of "identity" (Battegy 78). This arises from having suffered early on in life a deprivation of individual experience and inadequate processing of conflict, stress and ambivalence, with the result that ambivalence is experienced not as a potential inner enrichment but as an existential threat. Decades ago, the *psychoanalytical theory of narcissism* underlined the particularly highly-charged nature of "narcissistic aggression (Kohut xx). Contrary to first impressions, the precise meaning of narcissism is by no means understood to be an (unduly) high degree of self-love, but, quite the reverse, as a lack of the capacity to love and acknowledge oneself and others – or even to quietly tolerate them.

Theoretical approaches to narcissism see the capacity for ambivalence and diversity in contemplation of oneself and others as an essential – and pacifying – developmental benefit for humans, one that produces identity and a stable self, whilst the absence of it can cause a high degree of latent violence. Hence, it is not surprising that in investigations of acts of "narcissistic rage", especially investigations that were primarily quantitative and empirical, the first question that arose seemed to be: "Does self-love or self-hatred lead to violence?" (Bushman/ Baumeister).[7] In psychodynamic assessments, on the other hand, it is completely clear that acts of hate-crime violence are regularly due to a complicated mental dynamic, in which two factors work together: an exaggerated, idealised self-image and an equally profound loss of self-confidence. In developmental psychology, this contactless, dissociative co-existence of two contradictory, though inherently entirely monochrome complexes of feeling is attributed to a person, through the circumstances of his upbringing, having been forced from an early age to deny personal experience of conflict and ambivalence and to mentally dissociate them in diametrically opposite poles.

An even more graphic illustration is the psychological connection between ambivalence-dissociation and destructive action, indicated in the more recent psychodynamic literature on *borderline syndrome*; this, in its many different clinical gradations (borderline disturbance with greater or lesser integration), has also been found to underlie violent crimes (Böhme in Kernberg et al.195ff.; Dulz in Kernberg et

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[7] B.J. Bushman & R.F. Baumeister: "Threadend egotism, narcissism, self-esteem, and direct and displaced aggression: Does self-love or self-hatred lead to violence?" In: *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* (1998) 75: 219-229.

al. 6, on "fundamental violence"; Green in Kernberg et al. 635). The "basal axiom of the classical borderline conception" is the "good/evil split", in which the person perceives his or her world as free of ambivalence, as what might be called a *black and white construct*. It is no accident that it is always criteria of "others versus us" and of "those that belong versus those that are excluded" that trigger the violence between youth gangs and cliques of which Baran and other participants regularly reported. The "predominant separation into 'only good' and 'only evil' self-images and object-images" may also affect other areas of personal life and will inevitably lead to "strongly conflictual" tensions in very varied situations (Kind in Kernberg et al. 42). In such cases, borderline dynamics can sometimes reach quasi-psychotic intensities that go as far as "incapacity to separate self- and object-representations". At such moments it becomes impossible "to tolerate proximity that is based on ambivalence" (Osofsky in Kernberg et al. 743, and Green see above) – and the consequence is delinquency and/or impulsive acts of violence.

It then becomes all the more evident that social therapeutic intervention – especially in the context of *civic education* – is initially confronted with the important and difficult task of reconstructing participants' basic psychic capacity for constructive processing of ambivalence. In the light of such challenges, it is not hard to see why the employment of a method of group work that is process-open, narrative, and relationship-based – such as the one practised by VPN – is, relatively speaking, so effective and hence to be recommended. Psychodynamically complex development tasks like that of *constructive processing of ambivalence* are unlikely to be accomplished by other, simpler paths.

The fruitfulness of the focus on *ambivalence* in analytical investigation of interventions against hate crime is evident from the fact that it enables us to understand connections between seemingly disparate phenomena – and to draw methodological conclusions that are correspondingly more appropriate. Thus it could be observed in the interviews with Baran and Samet – as with other participants – that the violence that arose from the young men's feelings of alienation and hostility was often sustained, paradoxically, by an unconscious desire for the antithesis of alienness/hostility. Many of these scenes of violence are, namely, fundamentally understandable as a highly ambivalent, affectively charged *mechanism of 'making*

*friends',* which, in an almost erotic dynamic, embraces, even if in a violent manner, the frightening other, and binds the antagonist and the perpetrator together as friends. The theme of *making friends* – and the formation of cliques – raises a further topic, which is important for civic education in a different, "post-classical" sense. Baran reports on the course of events subsequent to his first act of violence:

> Baran: "Went to school next day [...] everything had calmed down like, it was break time, big apologies and whatever, 'don't make such a fuss about a girl', [...] I go 'it's not just any girl it's my girl' [...] then everything settled down and it was all OK [...]"
> Interviewer: "[...] How did everything get to be OK then?"
> Baran: "To be honest, it's always like that, enemies get to be good friends – it's always like that, with everyone [...] my friends here in the house upstairs on the fourth floor, we used to be enemies too [...] we played football together, never stopped rowing with each other, threw punches, then the next day they came down again [...] nope, he's a good lad, there's something about him [...] and it was the same with me, I didn't put up with anything and they didn't put up with anything and then everything was fine and now we're friends, well not friends-friends, but we do respect each other [...]"

Here the ambivalence between alienness and friendship is played out in a scene of almost choreographic quality. The young men, who were at first strangers and were suspicious of each other, come to blows but then go on to become acquaintances, then friends – although it's not unusual for this to backfire, leading to continued escalating dynamics of violence.

There is a very similar passage in the interview with Samet (as in many other interview partners, particularly from a migration environment), when the conversation turned to the many intercultural altercations between young persons with a migration background in Germany ("I've never got into a fight with a German; there were a lot of fights at that time but they were always with foreigners [...] we had 15 nations at our school [...]"). The following passage on the subject of multiculturality occurs in the interview:

Interviewer: "Did you have much contact with the others so that you got to know them, the Russians, for instance?"

Samet: "In the end I did have friends, we became friends because we measured up to each other in a punch-up, that happened often, first we fought and after that we were friends (laughs) [...]"

Interviewer: "[...] and that often happened [...]"

Samet: "[...] yes that often happened, unfortunately it often happened [...] well, the good friends I got to know were the ones I had fought with (laughs) [...] there was one in particular [...] he had a nickname, they called him the bear, because he was strong, we had a fight because he thought I was looking at his girlfriend [...], they separated us [...] after an hour he came up to me, I remember exactly what happened, he was almost crying he was so worked up, and he says, listen, my girlfriend wants to break up with me because I had a fight with you, please come with me and tell her we've made it up [...] that's what he said, then I felt sorry for him, I went with him and told her we were just having a bit of fun, it wasn't serious, and then I shook hands with him and then they stayed together [...] so we became friends [...] I remember exactly what happened [...]"

Aggressive and combative ways of processing feelings of alienation, which are evident in more than just these two interviews, frequently prove to be a cross-cultural pattern in the behaviour of young offenders. In addition, a further thematic aspect of ambivalence-dissociation appears here. It will be treated later (cf. below, point xx), namely the young men's image of women, which is invoked here in relation to the girlfriend of the "Russian" (and in the case of Baran in the stereotypical insults directed at his mother and sisters). The *explosive civil-social potential* of this pattern of "making friends", which tends to be played down by the social environment, is very obvious in our target group. What can easily be mistaken for a normal phase of male development is shown here to have a direct connection with the most serious violent crimes. At the psychodynamic core of these actions is, however, the relative ability (or rather, inability) of individuals to deal with basal ambivalences of alienness/friendship or hostility/liking, and to resolve these in the process of identity formation.

The significance of this pattern of ambivalence-acting for the concerns of *civic education* can therefore be clearly appreciated. If we look at the stories in passages from the interviews we have quoted, it is evident that for these young men it is a matter of very personal and extremely emotionally charged life-themes. These include friendships with their peers/other men, first relationships with women/ a "girlfriend of their own", not forgetting, as a highly charged provocative formula, the relationship with their own mother ("son of a bitch"; "hey, I fuck your mother" etc). Also, rather under-emphasised in relation to the target group but all the more potent for that, is the relationship to their father/head of the family and internal family authority figure, who is always there to defend the honour of the person and the family when it is under threat (especially since VPN participants have in many cases become fathers themselves). It is hard to imagine more personal and intimate themes; and we can assume that they are frequently affected by largely unconscious ambivalences. Yet despite, and indeed because of, this intimacy (and ambivalence), these themes are at the same time subjects that have great political-social relevance and need to be closely examined on a personal level as part of ongoing *civic education*. Models of masculinity and masculine action, relationship to women, equality of the sexes and of ethnicities, a liberal attitude in intimate/sexual matters, civil liberties and fundamental rights as a whole, active tolerance of social diversity, i.e. of "other people and of difference" – these are themes and areas of action that cannot be successfully overcome unless the inevitable ambivalences that they invoke, particularly in the development years of young adults – and especially those from troubled social backgrounds – are made a focal point of the work.

Against this theoretical background, it is easy to see how important and expedient it is that the VPN method, based as it is on responsibility education, should give a high priority to this central social concern. Especially important, moreover, is how it does this and how it ensures the effectiveness of its civic education. Many passages from the interviews clearly demonstrate, namely, that the VPN method acts in the awareness that topics of civic education always describe personal and intimate matters as well as political-social matters, and that, if possible, they should be tackled as such, i.e. as "*political-personal topics*".

When Baran, for example – in the course of the narrative process of personally involved storytelling in the presence of other people with an interest in his case (that is to say, a group) –suddenly reached the point where he reveals his profound unease and aggression towards what is alien, or "other things and other people", he touched (one might say, incidentally) on an absolutely key aspect of civic education. He has found of his own accord a direct and personal link, based on his own experience, to topics of the "alien"/"other", which have a great emotional valence for him. No learning module "on the subject of 'archaic images of masculinity, violence and civil liberties", however carefully conceived and organised, could have produced such a level of personal engagement on the subject of 'archaic images of masculinity, violence and civil liberties.

Civic education is thus is treated by the VPN method in a decentralised manner: as a "crossover topic" running throughout the life-world narrative work. The responsibility-education approach fundamentally aims to activate narrative episodes from the personal experience of the participants, in order then to deepen participants' understanding of these and cast as much light on them as possible – and to do this in the first place purely for their own sake and the sake of their personal experience value. The second time around, the political-social concerns inherent in each episode of experience and narration are clarified. Civic education is thus treated not as a precisely demarcated module with prepared teaching materials, to which a certain number of sessions/hours and a fixed curriculum of political-social topics can be allocated. Rather, the method consistently assumes that in all modules and phases of the training course, *political-personal themes* will emerge – whether in the biographical work, in the reappraisal of the crime or whatever –, and that these themes can serve as organic points of reference for concerns regarding civic education. From the methodological point of view, the basic attitude seems to be that it is worth taking the trouble to wait for these process points to arise, because then it is possible to work with these topics all the more effectively and with more lasting results. Thus, the topic of "masculinity, fear/aggression towards the alien/other" arose almost automatically for Samet and Baran (and others) out of their narratives about fights, and were thus directly related to their biographies. To this extent we can speak of the *impact factor of "civic-personal education"*.

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A further observation could be made that follows on from the impact factor of *memory formation* discussed above, namely that in some cases the *civic-personal topics* developed by individuals in the group immediately became leitmotifs of the group discussion. Whenever a particular topic that had previously been mentioned cropped up in the group discussion, the mention of two or three cue words could be used to bring these to mind, allowing the participants to immediately recall the political-personal topic being referred to. In other words, *civic-personal topics* or motifs of individuals were sometimes intuitively used as anchor concepts for a shared group memory – and as such proved to be entirely capable of supporting the impact factor of shared memory formation. Taking the example of Baran (for the sake of brevity), this would mean that the sentence "everything was new, it was all in the first week [of secondary school], you haven't got a clue, I flipped out", or just the cue words *everything was new*, could serve as a memorable episode or memorable short narrative; the coaches would then remind the participants of this if the topic "alienness/ambivalence, fear and aggression" looked likely to come up again in the group process – and it could be integrated into the memory-forming group matrix.[8]

## xxx  4.1 "Civic-personal education" – the lifeworld-narrative aspects of the political

This is evident from the following interview narratives ...
(here more scenes/stories from the civic education environment xx)

Regarding the methodological element of "civic education", it was possible to establish that working with civic education topics within the framework of the VPN method is as effective as it is because – in connection with recent developments – priority has increasingly been given to matters pertaining to the individual and to participants' *lifeworld-narrative interests*, exploring them in the form of a personal narrative and proceeding ad hoc to foreground the societal topics contained in them.

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[8] At the time, Baran's episode does not seem to have been sufficiently used as a leitmotif and anchor concept, which may perhaps (alongside his underlying ADHS condition) be the reason why in the interview he originally put forward the jealousy version of his story.

It is hardly surprising that the great – and initially abstract – themes of democracy, human rights/children's rights, division of estates, minorities, gender, the rule of law, civic duty etc. can only be effectively treated by indirect means via individual, lifeworld-narrative links. It is the connection of topic and person that creates the indispensable emotional engagement; without this, the complex processes of introspective insight, understanding of others and, consequently, lasting behavioural change, are scarcely possible. After all, those engaged in civic education have often made the bitter discovery that when young people are introduced to matters concerning civil society in a rational, intelligent and informative manner, the more well-intentioned and sensible the topics are, the more resistance, scorn and cynicism they can arouse. Even if the effectiveness of *personal, lifeworld-narrative reference points* seems to apply particularly to deprived and educationally disadvantaged social milieus on the margins of society (which at the same time most need to tackle these issues), it basically also applies to the more average zones of society. In general, it is possible to observe that, in matters political, the more the background of personal experience is (or is believed to be) ignored, the more the abstract, and the more dogmatic, the debate becomes. Meant by "background of personal experience" is that which underlies the particular topic for the individual, and which requires a certain degree of trust before it can addressed. It is also true that political arguments and actions become more intense and *radicalised* the more this ever-present personal background to the relevant political issue recedes into the unconscious realm and remains unspoken. The resonance that allegedly exists between young hate-crime offenders and the relatively broad spectrum of norm-related societal violence and hate latent in their social environment, could have something to do with this link between remoteness from life and narrative on the one hand, and radicalisation on the other.

It is therefore rarely disputed that it is an imperative for civic education to leave space for reference points to participants' personal experience (lit civic education xx) – which, of course, does not mean that it is already known which methods and approaches are necessary to make them sufficiently effective in practice. Consequently, good intentions often fail (as they inevitably must) to get beyond isolated gestures of the "And-how-are-you-getting-on-with-this-topic?" variety. The intention to activate the factor of *reference to personal-narrative experience*, and to tread the path of a process-open mode of procedure, clearly conflicts with old-

established educational traditions of informing and instructing, and this conflict must be resolved methodologically.

The VPN training method, with its intuitively chosen approach of "*political-personal education*" and its associated prioritization of lifeworld-narrative emphasis, seems, especially as pertains to young violent offenders (a particularly marginalised social group), to have arrived at a path-breaking methodological response.

### xxx 4.2 The methodological tool of the educational exercises

Recently, the importance of the overarching factor of *memory* and *emotional memory* has been recognised – incidentally, as it were – in connection to the above mentioned impact factor of "civic-personal education". The use of narrative points of connection with the biographical, personal-lifeworld experience of individuals, an approach also embraced by VPN in its discussion of political topics and the virtues of civil society, proved to be effective above all because it represents a highly memory-active methodological element. This means that a degree of effectiveness is achieved that cannot be attained by a predominantly cognitive and fact-related approach to civic education, i.e. one that is chiefly devoted to informing and arguing. This was particularly evident in the interviews mentioned above (e.g. with Baran), in which personal links sometimes became leitmotifs and memorable episodes/short narratives, and which then became fixed in the group memory, and thus also in the individual memory of each person.

It was also noteworthy that the effects of "emotional memory" were not only felt in the context of detailed interviews regarding personal matters (life story, friends, girlfriend, mother), but also where participants referred to the *educational exercises and games* that were carried out in the training course. From the start, one could not fail to notice that many interviewees mentioned these exercises at an early stage without being prompted. It was particularly noticeable that this also included participants who otherwise experienced great difficulty in recalling anything from the training course in any detail or in retelling what was said in the course of the group discussions. This scarcely seems to need explanation if we think of the activating and

motivating dynamics that games and exercises, by their very nature, provide. Those evaluating the interviews were initially misled into assuming that the principal function of the games and exercises was to *lighten the mood* and *entertain*, and thus to provide relief from the sometimes stressful group dynamics. It was only at a later stage in the evaluation that it was appreciated that these games and exercises, far from playing a secondary and subsidiary role, actually functioned as key factors in the educational procedure and contributed as such to the strengthening of the emotional memory.

At the same time, it became clear that there are great variations in the practical execution of exercises and games in an educational process, and that these can influence effectiveness. In particular, it was observed that exercises and games performed in the manner employed by VPN could by no means be subsumed under the *paradigm of cognitive, behaviourist learning theory* or Bandura's categories (Heitmeyer xx), as is commonly assumed for these exercises. It must be considered doubtful that a behaviourist training based solely on the principles of repetitive conditioned learning, or behaviourist therapy, could have the effect of deepening the *emotional memory*, as was observed in many participants.

At all events, it was certainly noticeable that, at an early stage, both hitherto recognisable types of interviewee – the comparatively memory-strong Samet and the relatively memory-weak Baran – mentioned, of their own accord, the *exercises and games* that they had experienced with the group and the coaches. Both recalled this experience with pleasure, and it was evident that for them the memory had "*positive emotional connotations*". Although, and indeed because, these exercises were at first relatively free of biographical baggage, and were, on the whole, pleasurable in character, they were able to give the participants powerful personal sense of self-awareness, and were thus highly effective in terms of responsibility-education (this was something that began to appear in the case of Samet, and was later confirmed in the case of other interviewees). In addition, it was shown that memories and associations formed in this manner – which proved very easy to recall – represent pro-social experiences that not only have emotionally positive connotations, but are also felt by participants to expand their perspectives and promote reflection in the sense defined above.

**xxx 4.3 Educational exercises 1: Key situations of powerlessness and creative problem-solving – exercise, reflection and memory formation**

How was it possible to tell this? Without describing too many exercise episodes in detail – one exercise to which many interviewees referred is constructed as follows. The two coaches stand several metres apart and hold a length of rope stretched out between them: the group is given the task of getting over this rope without touching it. As soon as they have succeeded in doing this, the coaches hold the rope up higher and give the group the same task again. This goes on step by step until – at least according to the strict interpretation of the task – the rope is simply too high to get over.

Some of the educational impulses that this exercise contains, quite independently of clientele and context within a training course, are clear. The task given to the whole group is obviously only achievable if the participants communicate effectively, coordinate their efforts methodically and systematically, and help each other. Ill-considered, impetuous and purely individual actions, such as young people from this social sector are prone to, can only hinder the solution – and this is directly visible here. Also, the differing physical abilities of individuals have to be taken into consideration. Furthermore, given the steadily increasing degree of difficulty of the exercise, it is inevitable that frustration and feelings of helplessness arise, which have to be endured jointly. In the early phases, however, they can experience and share pleasure and a sense of success, which does not come easily to some of them. The emotions of both pleasure and frustration should, where possible, be directed to the continuation of the productive search for ideas. Some of the strategies that arise from this may then have additional intrinsic value. If, for example, a group were to hit on the idea, in suitable circumstances, of leaving the room, going one storey higher, walking across the room above and thus indirectly getting over the rope, then it would have successfully evaded any further increased difficulty imposed by the coaches. Alternatively, a group might try talking to the coaches until they agree to lower the height of the rope so that the exercise can be continued in a satisfactory manner.

There is no doubt that these and similar exercises have much valuable educational potential. And it is easy to see that topics such as tolerance of frustration, creative problem solution and persuasive argument have particular relevance for this target group. However, it should be borne in mind that the true potential of the exercise for lasting effectiveness is only fully realised if it is followed up by *prolonged reflection and personal processing* in the context of the trusting group context. It is one thing to organise a game with the participants in practice, and tacitly to rely on its – so to speak, inherent – educational effectiveness, but quite another to comprehend, verbalise and fix in the mind the progress of the exercise in its various phases and the emotional dynamic experienced by the individual. It is only when the experiences that the participants have actually had – the stressful frustration, the difficult cooperation, the arduous search for solutions, but also the shared pleasure – have been verified in the group discussion, personally absorbed and mentally secured, that they can be lastingly appropriated by the person and become part of that person's emotional memory.

On reflection, it was precisely these *processes of reappraising* personal experiences in the group discussion that on closer inspection turned out to be essential elements of the impact of the VPN exercises. Here, too, we see that the key situations experienced in the course of specific exercises in a group can only become effective leitmotifs of the group memory by way of *precise descriptions of the experience* – as we made clear with the example of Baran's narrative biographical work (see the short narrative that served as a leitmotif: "everything was new [...] I flipped out"). When, for example, the participant was driven to desperation by the rope exercise and was in danger of losing control, and this became crystallised in a memory-forming key word or phrase ("I'll eat you [the rope]"); or when, reacting against the excessive demands being made on him, someone started fooling around and then suddenly, to everyone's surprise, found a helpful solution, which became a group metaphor for surprising solutions found when the tension was relaxed ("Remember? You just have to chill out"); or when someone recognised his helplessness, felt anger but was able to overcome it with greater or lesser difficulty – such situational turning points in the course of an exercise need common reflection and naming in the group if they are to be secured. So the essential reason why the VPN exercises were so often referred to in the interviews – and proved to have such a *great memory impact* – was less the way

the exercises lightened the mood, as had at first appeared to be the case, and more the special manner in which each member of the group, through narrative, worked through the individual experience of the exercises.

## xxx 4.4 Exercises 2: Experiences of non-verbal interaction and their reflexive linguistic articulation

Furthermore, it was possible to establish that the methodological tool "educational exercises" was characterised by a high proportion of *non-verbal interaction, using mimicry and gesture and scenic-situational acting*. Clearly, the VPN method makes use of this fact to address and develop appropriate abilities. This seemed to be particularly important for those participants whose skills of verbal self-expression were fairly limited. In the case of interviewees who corresponded to Baran's type, and who were thus less capable of remembering, it could be observed that the less they were able to recapitulate and describe discursive and verbal interactions in the group, the more frequently they made reference to the exercises. Due to their less articulate persona, these participants seemed to use the exercises to a certain extent as the first anchor points for the formation of personal narratives of experience. In general, we can assume that the constant reciprocity that the VPN method creates between, on the one hand, the scenic-practical interaction in the exercise, and the retrospective self- and other-observation in the follow-up discussion, benefits the capacity for non-verbal, body language interaction, as well as the ability to reflexively explore it and articulate it verbally.

It is worth noting that the VPN method also takes account the impact factor of the "development of the *capacity for non-verbal interaction* and linguistic articulation" by including exercises that have this as their sole aim. Here, video recordings are employed in order that the participants' (own) gestural and body language is as visible as possible. To cite one of these exercises, let us consider the one known as "Walk across the room". This simply designed exercise runs as follows:

A starting line and a finishing line are marked out on the floor of the room with tape. The participants are given the task of moving rapidly from the starting position to the

finishing line. This is at first allowed to take place undisturbed, and is sometimes carried out in ways that are very individual and meaningful in terms of body language. Just viewing the video recordings of this first phase of the exercise can give rise to reflections on possible correspondences between the manner in which the person crosses the room and his behaviour in the group and/or his biography and delinquency. Some participants stride confidently across the room with an upright posture, shoulders back and with stiff arm movements, as though to demonstrate strength at all times. Others may frequently look sideways and behind them, as though someone was lying in wait for him and/or he needed reassurance from the group. Yet another may stroll across the room in a deliberately casual manner.

When, in the second round, a chair or other obstacle is placed between the start and the finish, a more varied range of observations is possible, since an obstacle of this nature virtually challenges this clientele to make some gestural statement. For example, the chair may be taken as a personal provocation that one can only walk past slowly with a proud manly bearing and piercing glance, in case any contemptuous looks or covert attacks should emanate from it. Alternatively, a participant may ignore the chair in a "self-assured" manner and take no notice of it. Or someone may avoid the obstacle, giving it a wide berth, as though it harboured something incalculably alien and menacing.

From the third round onwards, the coaches themselves join in, influencing individuals' progress by means of various provocations and disruptions. By now it is clear that the reactions of individuals through body language and gesture yield a great deal of symbolic information about their general pattern of action and reaction. In the joint period of reflection and discussion of the video recording, participants engage in self-observation, the conclusions of which they are able to draw on after their release, when they will need to develop further in a positive, pro-social manner.

Exercises with this emphasis do not solely support the development of the capacity for *non-verbal, body-language communication*, important though that is. (After all, the dynamics of escalation that underlie violent hate crimes are principally determined by non-verbal factors of interaction – along the lines of "that foreigner gave me a funny look".) These exercises – like all the other exercises, together with VPN's other

methodological tools – also represent specific paths along which new elements of the shared group memory of the participants can be created, so that more memories, which can easily be recalled, may come into being to further enrich and deepen the group process.

Nevertheless, it again needs to be cautioned strongly against drawing the conclusion that educational exercises per se necessarily have this effect, or that the immediate use of such exercises ought to be recommended without qualification. On the contrary, it needs to be made absolutely clear that the observable functions of the group memory – or, to be more exact, "emotional memory" and "emotional learning in the group" – are not attributable to the exercises in themselves, but to the specific manner in which the VPN method implements and operates these exercises.

### xxx  4.5  Exercises 3: Physical tension, self-perception and biodynamic relaxation

A special feature that seems to be decisive for the effectiveness of the educational exercises employed by VPN as regards memory and behaviour is the self-perception of *physical-bodily tension* and the corresponding psychosomatic phenomena of dealing with stress. Here we are talking in particular about the perception of the psychodynamic and biodynamic equilibrium of tension and relaxation, and the susceptibility of this equilibrium to disturbance by situationally determined external influence and provocation. Of course, this important skill is taught by all the exercises mentioned; it is of central importance because the basal task of all re-socialisation – namely, to turn offenders away from impulsive acts of violence and to train them to be peaceable in their personal life – can be simply described, in biodynamic terms, as the path from *tension to relaxation*. And yet, even with respect to this special feature, we were able to observe that VPN training intuitively includes exercises that in a highly targeted manner focus above all on the ability to perceive physical tension and the ability to loosen these tensions through self-observation and concentration.

One of these exercises proceeds as follows: a table tennis ball is placed on the mouth of a bottle and the task is to step swiftly up to the bottle and flick the ball off the mouth with the index or middle finger without touching the bottle itself, and, of

course, without knocking it over. The coaches describe this task precisely and in a tone that urges participants to act with speed, deftness and resolution. In most cases, participants either miss the ball altogether or knock the bottle over. In the second and third rounds, too, only very few succeed in carrying out the task, with the frustration building up in the group only causing the failure rate to increase.

When the point is reached where tension and frustration have settled over the whole group, the coaches modify their instructions. They encourage participants to relax, to take a deep breath before starting and to loosen up their shoulders; then, keeping as inwardly calm as they possibly can and concentrating hard, to set about the task quickly but without rushing. While doing this, each individual should observe and assess the extent to which he needs to calm down and slow down in order to complete the task successfully and to enjoy doing so. Short relaxation exercises are also included (similar to those increasingly used by professional sportsmen). The coaches continue to coach the participants and to encourage them to be inwardly calm until they succeed in flicking the ball off the mouth of the bottle. The members of the group observe themselves and each other to see how they go about finding the degree of concentration they need and following their personal learning process.

In the subsequent period of reflection and discussion of the exercise, particular emphasis is placed on articulating, in the greatest possible detail and emotional depth, participants' experiences in terms of the spectrum of *psycho- and biodynamic tension and relaxation*, transferring these to situations in their lifeworld reality. This process of reflection goes far beyond merely learning educational lessons and the rules derived from them, which would be equivalent to a purely cognitive-behavioural approach. Certainly, it is possible in such exercises to point out the truth of the saying: "Strength lies in calmness"; however the environment of these young offenders is usually far from conducive to calmness, and they often have to find ways and means to calm themselves down, to free themselves from the agitation emanating from the environment and to concentrate resolutely on themselves. It is right to stress that it is rarely possible to master major personal changes, developments and learning processes if external pressure is too great, that everyone must find his own way, must recognise the limits of what he can take and where he needs help, and at the same time that he has a right to assess these matters for himself.

Yet, beyond these educational lessons, the core factor of the *process-oriented group method* consists in exploring personal experience in the exercise situation for oneself, and capturing it in concise, graphic concepts. As already mentioned, these – standard – concepts and images can become part of a group's permanent stock of memory, and can enter its culture; participants can then recall them or remind others of them when, later in the process, certain observations need to be enabled and insights mediated or deepened. The image of a "crushed table tennis ball" could thus become a memorable image for a group if, for example, one of the members, in anger or jokingly, were to have shouted: "I'll smash the bloody thing and shove it up you know where", and if, in the subsequent discussion, this exclamation had become a symbol and shared leitmotif for situations of tension, helplessness and hitting out. Emotionally involved memory-formation of this kind can undoubtedly be regarded as a basic prerequisite for the further development of *emotional intelligence* – and it is ultimately indispensable if the ability to take personal responsibility is to be acquired.

Looking back at the exercises cited here, it can again be emphasised how important it is that the analysis of the interviews surprisingly found the (not consciously intended) factor of the "*formation of the emotional memory*" to be the overarching impact factor of the VPN method. Another important finding, in connection with the methodological tool of the exercises, is that emotional memory and the ability to form and recapitulate emotionally rich, personal memories are different and more far-reaching assets than the specific behavioural changes that are their result. Emotional learning and memory not only produce changes of particular, narrowly circumscribed *modes of behaviour*. They also generate *consciousness* and a fundamental personal *attitude* that did not exist in this form before. The difference between these two dimensions of impact is highly significant, since, with hate-crime offenders, what needs to happen, if re-socialisation is to be achieved and re-offending prevented on a lasting basis, is not a change of specific *modes of behaviour* – which may be purely strategic – but the expansion of personal *consciousness* and the *fundamental attitude* towards oneself, towards others and towards liberal society as a whole.

That this is the case – and that for this reason we should dispute the tendency in the Anglo-Saxon world to stress the pragmatic argument that emphasises changing

*behaviour* rather than changing the *attitude and outlook on life* – is demonstrated by two facts. Firstly, hate crime patterns of offending are so strongly emotionalised and so profoundly biographically influenced that cognitive motivation and behavioural correction alone can hardly be expected to have more than a temporary effect (Hagan xx). Secondly, hate crimes always represent a phenomenon that is embedded in the context of society and in the attitudes and outlook on life prevalent there. These offences always have some support in what the surrounding social sphere informally assumes to be "common sense" or the general "way of the world". This applies equally to offences with a neo-Nazi background (cf. Brähler/Decker) and to those with a background of religious fundamentalism.

Patterns of action and offending based on general social attitudes and outlook on life – which thus tend to be normalised – are difficult to reach by cognitive means alone and cannot be lastingly changed by behavioural conditioning. Conditioning exercises based on repetition can hardly be said to convey personal experience and/or emotional memory, nor do they form consciousness or attitude. Analysis of the VPN method thus increasingly supports researchers who take the view that lasting re-socialisation and integration of hate crime offenders presupposes a change of fundamental personal attitude and consciousness (Haubl xx). This further implies that we need educational and social-therapeutic methods that go far beyond behavioural conditioning. Only methods with an attitude-forming impact potential can set in motion a re-socialisation in terms of *attitude, consciousness* and *fundamental outlook on life*.

It is noteworthy that the VPN approach of "responsibility education"® chose as its key conceptual focus the complex capacity for *personal acceptance of "responsibility"*. This seems appropriate at all times. In the lifeworld reality of the offender, everything does indeed depend after release on taking "responsibility", and this means finding convincing answers and successful solutions to difficult questions of personal history and future, and being able to implement these under concrete lifeworld circumstances in situations that involve the offender personally. The task of acting "responsibly" thus confronts the individual with complex challenges. It calls for a sophisticated psycho-affective ability to adapt to situations – an ability that is in general undervalued, one of whose indispensable preconditions could be said to be that it relies on a personal *attitude* grounded in individual experience.

Regarding the concept of "responsibility", it should also be stressed that behavioural change which results from training and conditioning, and which is purely situationally focused or strategic, may represent a significant individual element. (VPN certainly employs situational training and role play in a specific manner, cf. point xx.) However these things cannot guarantee lasting security, faced with the highly insidious dynamics of re-offending. Experience also teaches that moral motivation tends to be unsuitable here, even though it is based on abstract values and might appear to be appropriate to the concept of responsibility. It has, however, proved meaningful and effective for the VPN approach of "responsibility education"®, in its (originally intuitive and eclectic) group work praxis, to develop, *nolens volens*, factors of emotionally involved, personal (group) memory-formation; of emotional intelligence; and, finally, of consciousness and attitude.

As the evaluation increasingly shows, further basic presuppositions for the development of the ability to take personal responsibility seem to be that the method employed should be *relationship-based, personally focused, narrative-open* and *process- oriented*. This involves a whole series of impact factors of the second order, many of which have not yet been elaborated upon. What these attributes comprise shall be described more precisely at a later stage.

### xxx  4.6  The attitude of the coaches – the 'supportive-critical' attitude ('Heissam')

The impact factor of the capacity for remembering and of the emotional memory has appeared in a wide variety of methodological contexts. Some of these were quite unexpected, and as such carry particular methodological weight as counter-intuitive proofs of the hypothesis. Above all, however, it will have been appreciated over the course of the analysis how ambitious the aim is of strengthening violent offenders' emotional intelligence and their capacity for emotional remembering, thereby opening up positively charged, pro-social and perspective-broadening associations and memories.

This is remarkable not least because the procedure has operated in a *largely intuitive* manner. Although participants – if in most cases only implicitly and incidentally – frequently made mention of the theme of the capacity for (emotional) remembering, the coaches seem to have given it scarcely any consideration. This despite the fact that when observations regarding the capacity for remembering were mentioned in the interviews, the coaches completely agreed with them. Yet they never mentioned them of their own accord. Furthermore, in the theoretical plan and curriculum of the VPN training course, the capacity for memory is assigned no explicit role. It could be, then, that with regard to the impact factor of emotional memory, a *doubly informal* factor is at work in the VPN method. Not only is it not expressly mentioned in the concept, it played no significant part in the subjective theories that the coaches formed about the training activities. The effects of the *strengthening the capacity for emotional remembering* are immanent in a doubly informal way.

All this makes the question all the more pertinent as to *how and which among* these more or less intuitively chosen interventions caused the participants to experience these effects – not an easy question to answer, as plainly no measures or educational exercises were deliberately carried out in order to strengthen the (emotional) memory of experiences within the group or of relevant experiences elsewhere, and in order to anchor the positively charged emotional valencies of (self-) confidence and of pro-social experience. Also, faced with an extremely complex and demanding competency like that of situative recollection of emotional experiences, it seems scarcely possible to foresee *which particular educational measure* or method might produce a positive effect – especially with clients who have erected immense psychological and interactional defence mechanisms to prevent emotionally charged experiences from being recalled in detail or communicated to others.

Although it is not possible to give a final answer to the question of the conditions in which this complex impact factor originated (too many variables of the training programme seem to play a part in this), some basic facts can be established.

First of all, it is evident that some elements of the VPN training programmes are directly linked to the processes of mental recollection – especially the discussion of the subject's own experiences of victimisation, the biographical family themes and the

central "working-through" of the offence and his experience of it. It is therefore a fair assumption that the group activities directed towards these experiences have a general impact on the personal capacity of individuals to remember personal experiences, and thus to remember emotional experiences as a whole – especially those that were troubling. But it would probably be premature to conclude that this was the whole story: when participants made statements about outstanding and at times epiphanic memories of group events that they could visualise "as if they happened today", they were not referring to elements of specific biographical remembering. Rather, they were usually referring to experiences in the group. Furthermore – unlike the experience of victimhood and coming to terms with past offences – these were characterised by positive, pro-social emotions, by a lively curiosity and occasional puzzlement at new insights; either that or they contained positively-charged calming images – the so-called personal "stop cards". How, then, was the VPN training course able intuitively to produce such an abundance of positively-charged, pro-social memories?

A procedural precondition for the "strengthening of the emotional memory" must be that personal experiences and *emotionally charged events* are discussed exhaustively and in depth. The fact that the VPN coaches constantly encourage participants in one-to-one and group discussions to commit themselves personally in a truthful, authentic and emotionally involved manner, and that they *practise this themselves in an exemplary fashion*, as well as the fact that they indicate credibly that, far from being afraid of engagement with areas of experience that can be highly stressful, or with the group dynamics set in motion by these topics, they actively seek these – this attitude was singled out in the evaluation as one of the fundamental prerequisites for achieving a strengthening of the participants' emotional memory.

This is no trivial matter. Many of the procedures employed in prison seem to fail to give adequate *attention to personal emotionally charged experiences* – especially where work with groups is concerned. The evaluations of participants in VPN courses, who, having experienced a wide variety of social therapeutic measures, were able to make comparisons with other methods, were very informative in this regard (cf. point xx Trust). Evidently this also applies to some of the methods whose stated aim is to take account of the participants' personal and emotional level of experience.

These methods do not seem to pursue in a purposeful manner and with the necessary seriousness a sincere, thorough and relationship-based personal exchange. Closer examination of the relevant interview material showed how demanding and ambitious this goal is. Clearly, there is a need for a certain *personal attitude* and intervention-competence on the part of the coaches, one that cannot be achieved simply by gestures of encouragement to tell stories. (Furthermore, credible communication of such an attitude of personal openness and trustworthiness seems to depend to a significant degree on whether the trainees are independent and therefore not part of the institution; cf. point xx.)

What does seem to be crucial for this target group is that the coaches, for their part, are authentically and humanly present. In particular, it is important that they openly express *any possible doubts* they may have about the participants' accounts and that – together with the other group members – they question them and insist on answers if the narratives and stories they are offered appear incomplete, inconsistent or inadequate. It seems essential that any superior or suggestive gesture is avoided, and that coaches adopt an attitude that might be called *supportive-critical*. This means that they seek a frank exchange of views with individual participants in a way that is interested, analytical, personally respectful but prepared for confrontation (cf. also Jack Bush & Daryl Harris "supportive authority" xx).

The interview material shows clearly that, in many cases, the VPN coaches, with their particular attitude to their work, draw on an experience that is also described in research publications (xx). It is well established that offenders' statements are often characterised by the way in which their narrators *embellish and falsify* essential aspects of their personal history and experience, or omit them entirely. Especially in the case of strongly emotionally-charged types of offence, such as violent crimes, this is usually not (or not only) motivated by the need to conceal their culpability. Instead, what we see here are mental defence mechanisms that offenders employ in order to protect themselves from the full force of emotions that are at times very violent and, even for them, threatening and hard to bear. Accordingly, participants in the VPN training course often prove to be quite skilled in giving compromised or simulated versions of authentic personal statements that might satisfy the expectations of run-of-the-mill social-pedagogical discourse, but fail, in terms of their content and ductus, to

penetrate to the actual course of events or the core of the offence as it was experienced.

On the other hand, the main methodological emphasis of the procedure followed by the VPN coaches seems to have been placed precisely on this aspect of *narrative vagueness*. In the interviews with the coaches, they often described instances when they *made observations that contradicted the narrator,* when they showed unwavering personal interest, and when they employed *supportive-critical questioning* – things one would shy away from in everyday conversation – as the most valuable and crucial moments in their experience of the VPN method.

(Examples of original recordings of coaches xx).

So it is not only simply about speaking personally, but about the common *exploration of the boundaries of narration* for each individual offender in the group – as well as the thorough study of one's possible self-deception, pretence and narrative adjustment. This narrative exploration represents the true substance of the of VPN coaches' *supportive-critical* attitude to intervention. The moments spent dealing with doubts, in an atmosphere of trust, permit coaches to create a relationship of respect for the participants and for the group as a whole, thereby generating effective impulses for behavioural and attitudinal change.

Crucial for the reliability of our finding, however, is that the significance of the *supportive-critical* attitude with respect to the strengthening of the emotional memory is demonstrated not only by the interviews with the coaches. The finding is also confirmed by the interviews with participants. The supportive-critical engagement that at first puts pressure on the participants is, in the end, much appreciated by them. It is no accident that group events that are recalled "as if they happened today" emerge principally from the interaction sequences prompted by supportive-critical engagement.

A particularly telling example of this is the story told by a participant by the name of Heissam. This young man was, on the whole, rather difficult to approach, was rather reluctant to cooperate, and could be disruptive. His basic conceptual and linguistic

abilities seemed relatively undeveloped, to the extent that towards the end of the group process the coaches were doubtful whether any lasting favourable effects had been achieved in his case. When, at the end of the training course, Heissam, to everyone's surprise, applied for the one-year post-release stabilisation coaching, the opportunity arose for an in-depth one-to-one interview. The key question to him was: having previously not been particularly responsive or constructive, what was it now that especially stayed in his mind from the group experience, and which particular experiences now motivated him to take up the VPN offer of continued help? Without hesitation, Heissam replied: "The reason is that you never gave up on me! [...] that I can rely on you!" This was what persuaded him – this was what caused him to stay the course and why he now wanted to receive the stabilisation coaching.

What Heissam meant by "You never gave up on me" became clear later in the interview. In his "violence session", Heissam had reported on one of his relatively early violent offences, when, having only just reached the age of criminal responsibility, he broke into a corner shop in his district, wounded the owner and robbed the till. His report was full of the omissions, embellishments and self-justifications that violent offenders usually employ in such reports. It was the woman's own fault; why was she in the front of the shop at that time instead of at the back, where he had assumed she would be; he only pushed her to one side, it was just the way she fell, he never really noticed etc. The coaches, as usual, discussed Heissam's story in a *supportive-critical* fashion, made various observations and threw in some detailed questions regarding the course of events and his subjective experience. And, again following their usual pattern, they urged the group to share (contribute) their (extensive) experience of violent offences and their subsequent description, and so help to achieve clarity.

In this way, Heissam's story was expanded and corrected in essential points, so that the actual sequence of events became clear. Due to certain previous experiences that Heissam had had with this neighbourhood shopkeeper, who "had caused him a lot of grief", he "absolutely hated this woman". At the time of the robbery, she surprised him and offered resistance; he lost control and physically attacked her with some force. He had to admit that the proceeds were unexpectedly small (because the shop owner had taken precautions), which made Heissam even more furious and led to

further coercion and physical violence. This finally helped to explain the woman's injuries, which were described in Heissam's file, and which could scarcely have been caused by merely being shoved and having fallen. (The coaches have access to all the files, but make use of the contents with great caution, on the assumption that the common experience of building up a picture of the course of events and of how they were experienced is incomparably more worthwhile than confronting the group with facts from the file.)

However, it was Heissam himself – albeit involuntarily – who supplied the piece of information that completed the story, constituting the most important factor in his personal development in the group. This occurred when, at a relatively early stage of his initial description of what happened, he made a brief aside: "Afterwards I felt sorry for her [the shop owner]". In tone and content, this remark was felt by the group and the coaches to be authentic, and showed the young man in a more sympathetic light. At the same time, however, it seemed to be curiously out of context. After all, what was there for a tough young lad to feel sorry about, if all he did was give the woman a shove so that she fell awkwardly? The follow-up questions not only threw more light on the true extent of the offence and his loss of control, but also, and especially, went some way towards explaining Heissam's complicated emotional involvement in it. It became clear that Heissam chose this relatively early offence for his violence session not only because, compared with his later escalation of violence, it was less serious, but also perhaps unconsciously because the victim was a woman, moreover a woman of the age of his mother or grandmother, which made his actions even more unacceptable in view of his Muslim background. He really did feel sorry for the woman, and in view of this background, the twinge of remorse he felt was understandable. In the course of this group session, and with the help of the other participants, Heissam was able to progress a little further by taking a story that he thought he knew in every detail and telling it from a new angle – an angle that had been inaccessible to him hitherto.

It was vitally important for the success of the work that the piece of information, scarcely noticeable at first, that Heissam had involuntarily supplied, was unerringly recognised and fully taken into account – and that it was then developed further within a group process and shaped into a common story that was relevant to all

present. To lead and control a narrative process like this, however, is to tread a narrow and uncertain path. It is important not to be over-ambitious when assessing the degree to which members of this target group can tolerate the opening up of taboo subjects without being provoked to strong resistance. At the same time, if the training is to have a lasting effect, coaches should guard against the danger of not challenging them enough. In Heissam's group, the exercise was evidently a great success, as later on members often referred to the sign he spontaneously gave of a personal reaction of empathy, even if it was at first faint and ill-defined. For Heissam himself, the incident was led to his re-appraisal of the other offences he had committed, where he had lost control of himself and his emotions in a similar way, and had gone on to commit excessive violence. For the other group members, the phrase "afterwards I felt sorry for her" became a kind of leitmotif, that people could refer to with if it was necessary to approach the difficult question of consequences for the victims (xxIII).

With regard to the impact factor of the "strengthening of the emotional memory", we can therefore now state that it was precisely the moment when someone "didn't give up on him" that Heissam later recalled most vividly, although (or indeed because) this moment had by no means been easy for him. It was this experience that imprinted itself on his emotional memory most profoundly. "That you never gave up on me! [...] that I can rely on you!" basically refers, then, to the coaches' and the group's *supportive-critical* attitude, which is *respectful but prepared for confrontation*, and which enabled Heissam to narrate the course of his violent offence in a new way, to explore parts of his own life story and to retain it in his memory with lasting effect. That Heissam, guided by this thought, decided to apply for post-release stabilisation coaching also underlines the fact that "emotional remembering" in the sense understood here represents not only mental processes but also factors that can lead directly to action and so bring about changes of attitude and behaviour. Heissam's story – and the other narrative episodes recounted here – are typical of similar accounts given by other participants, which also show that it was the moments of supportive-critical discussion that imprinted themselves particularly strongly on the memory and became effective in influencing behaviour.


**xxx  4.7 Interim conclusion on the factor of "emotional memory"**

When it was stated above that a procedural precondition for the "strengthening of the emotional memory" was the "close, exhaustive and in-depth discussion of personal experiences and *emotionally charged events*", it was already clear that the implementation of a group discussion of this kind has implications that should not be underestimated and is likely to make significant demands on all involved.

In the light of academic literature on psycho- and social-therapeutic group dynamics, it is appropriate at this point to make a recommendation regarding methodology. Namely, that any measure that can support the formation and cultivation of a so-called "group memory" and a thematic group matrix may be regarded as highly effectual, and is therefore to be recommended (Tschuschke 329 ff.). The cultivation of a group memory can proceed in a number of different ways. In principle, this can be done by the coaches showing that they value the experiences brought into the group, and by making sure that they are preserved by frequently recalling them using the cue word, then grouping them together into thematic clusters with other more recent stories. In particular, narrations of experience that are relevant for several participants – or represent central aspects of careers of violence – can in this way be laid down as exemplary narrative markers in the group memory. As coaches and participants gradually adopt the routine of reverting to these cue words and narrative episodes whenever the opportunity arises, a group matrix and group culture becomes established that is analogous to "the general cultural process" (Haubl/Lamott 9 xx). This group matrix embraces a kind of intuitive, micro-social *historical consciousness* (through the shared stories), which is probably a new experience for the participants, and which helps them to lead a more strongly memory-based life even after their release. All in all, the common formation of such a *memory-active group matrix* will have a crucial role to play not only in providing a cognitive and ethical basis for behavioural changes, but also in emotionally anchoring these changes in the individual through biographical narrative.

**xxx 5. Integrated working-through of both biography and crime and the use of constellation exercises and so-called confrontational elements**

Once the aforementioned impact factors of the VPN method (e.g. trust-building, memory formation / emotional memory, ambivalence-processing, "narration") have been sufficiently guaranteed, participants can then begin, both in the one-to-one conversations and in the group, to work on locating precisely where important experiences in their own life story lie, and what relation these have to their respective crimes and patterns of offending. The VPN experience provides numerous examples – sometimes of extremely violent crimes – that prove the existence of a close *behavioural-logical connection* between, on the one hand, the emotional dynamic of the crime and the way it is experienced, and, on the other, the emotional events of the family history. The use of the approach of *integrated working-through of both biography and crime* has repeatedly shown that, as a rule, the offender is largely unaware of the connection between offence and life, as well as the detailed behavioural motivations for the offence. Furthermore, it emerged that if it is possible to prompt only the first traces of such an awareness, this often has a strong impact in the direction of sustained changes in the person's behaviour.

**xxx 5.1 Richard the "bottler" – family dynamic and the boundless anger of manslaughter**

Thus Richard, for example, whose crimes included excessive and uncontrolled acts of violence, appeared in group and one-to-one conversations to be very calm and introverted. At first he barely opened up at all; however in his own, silent way he nonetheless seemed involved, and began participating more as time went on. Once the group and its participants had gained sufficient trust and confidence in one another, the coaches decided to address Richard more directly. It should be noted here that, in interventions like this, it is always important to balance one-to-one conversations and group situations as evenly as possible.

A small and well-placed *confrontation/provocation* succeeded in providing Richard with an important prompt. At a certain moment in the group work, one of the coaches

had intuitively decided – as an aside more than anything else – to call him a "bottler". "And you, Richard, you're more of the bottler type" remarked the coach, after the group had been having a relatively lively discussion in which Richard had, outwardly at least, taken no part. However Richard – as if to confirm this name – did not respond, and the focus of the conversation returned to the group. Nevertheless, this short intervention could count on acceptance all-round. The coach had placed his remark in a way that re-affirmed the basis of trust in this form of group work, as well as the autonomy of each individual. In other words: Richard was sufficiently acquainted with his coach's basic attitude and could be sure that "yes, my coach has taken the liberty of making a personal remark about me, but he doesn't mean it spitefully, even if the remark shocks me or makes me uncertain. As for my part, I have the right not to reply if I don't want to."

This *methodological premise* must be explicitly recalled here so as to avoid the misunderstanding that this intervention is connected in some way with the provocation exercises of the so-called "hotseat" method, from which it needs to be clearly distinguished. This small scene between Richard and the coach can, in terms of its nature, indeed be called a "provocation/confrontation" – and turned out to prompt a major impact dynamic with Richard. On the other hand, it was the precise opposite of a provocation in the sense of confrontation and provocation exercises. The reason for this is the coach, on the basis of his personal assessment about the state of the trust-relationship between himself and Richard, as well as that between Richard and the group, followed his spontaneous impression that this was a good moment for a more direct form of contact with Richard. In other words: his intervention was by no means provocative in the sense of "provoking", but was instead "relationship-oriented" and based upon trust. It had absolutely no intention to cause aggression, but on the contrary was an attempt to establish understanding and contact and to make use of a situational opportunity for development.

This was probably why its effect on Richard was all the deeper and long lasting. Despite his apparent calm, Richard was, in fact, somewhat upset and disturbed by the comment. "He thought about it a lot later on in his cell" (coach) and in the *one-to-one conversation* urged the coach to tell him more precisely what was meant by it. He himself did not understand it and didn't know why he had been called a "bottler". On

the basis of this engaged conversational situation it was easy to feed back to Richard that on the whole he was someone who didn't engage directly in the group conversation but who was nevertheless inwardly involved, and that rather than openly talking about things that moved him he "bottled them up". At this point it was already possible to start considering to what extent this "bottling" was connected to his life history and family, and whether this "bottling" needed to be seen as an emotional precursor to his outbursts of immense violence – in which that, which had been "bottled",  explosively burst out onto the outside. Sensitised by his experience with the VPN group, Richard by no means dismissed these ideas out of hand.

*Richard's outbursts of violence* were indeed of a fairly explosive and drastic nature. In one instance, Richard had almost killed a flatmate in the supervised flatshare in which he lived. The trigger and the circumstances of the attack were peculiarly undramatic. All the flatmates had been sitting normally and peacefully watching television when a quarrel broke out over sweets. When Richard returned to the living room having gone to the toilet, he had the impression that someone had eaten a share of the sweets that were due to him, and formed an intuitive suspicion as to who it was (the person was no longer in the room). First he soberly enquired among those still present and then voiced his suspicion in a wholly calm and measured fashion. Only later did his immense anger erupt. Richard went to the room of the flatmate who had allegedly taken his share of the sweets. Richard's affect concentrated and he punched the flatmate with such force that the latter suffered a complicated and life threatening fracture of the skull.

Some of Richard's other, apparently more conventional *crime scenes* also on closer inspection pose questions about the motives and the causes of this strange *auto-dynamic* of seemingly boundless anger. For example, there was one situation where Richard was with his girlfriend in a discotheque. While he was going to the toilet, a young man got talking to his girlfriend (neither of them knew him). Richard then told the man to leave the discotheque immediately – again, with a comparatively calm and outwardly relaxed comment, albeit one that was probably pretty threatening after all. However this solution did not satisfy him. He followed after the other man, who had already voluntarily backed off, and began provoking him and finally beat him up, in the process, as with his other victim, seriously injuring him.

Another of Richard's crime scenes demonstrated a vague *rightwing extremist* context, which – in this case at least – proved to be less serious. Still, late one evening Richard was together with a group of friends who were recognisable as skinheads. A cyclist rode past and called the young men a "bunch of Nazis", whereupon they pulled him off his bike and beat him up. When the man was lying injured on the ground, the group, Richard included, continued on their way. However when Richard turned around and saw the man move his head, he got angry again and hit and stamped on him, again causing his victim very serious injuries. However this time it seemed that Richard was uncomfortable about his own actions, or at least was worried about their consequences. In any case, he immediately called an ambulance.

In view of offences like this, the question arises all the more as to what was being "bottled up" by Richard if, prompted by petty matters and taking a detour via typically measured and calm-seeming gestures, such intense violence could erupt. Once Richard had got the hang of the mode of enquiry and thinking that the VPN coaches used to shape the one-to-one conversations and group work, and had developed a degree of trust, he was well able to follow these figurative-metaphorical ideas of "bottling" and "erupting", and to relate them to himself. He then began, in conversation with the coaches, to undertake some initial mental investigation as to the reasons and the causes for the way he was – and to consider options for help. At the same time, Richard's *basic biographical constellation* was relatively complicated. While the overwhelming majority of this group of criminal offenders have been subjected to massive violence and abuse in the family – mostly by their father, step-father or brothers – this was not recognisably the case with Richard. Later – when he began to articulate himself more – he could rightfully enough say that, "I don't understand it ... it wasn't like that with me at home ... I was never hit but I'm still a time bomb that can go off any minute ... I've got a completely normal family ... my father didn't touch me."

The *familial-biographical exploration*, which in this case could go relatively far, was duly revealing. Not only was the narrative interview and genogram carried out, as in the plan; the parents also turned up at both of the two family days, which are a fixed component of the VPN method, and showed themselves to be willing to contribute to

improving the situation. In the course of these conversations it was possible – with the help of the coaches – for Richard to arrive at enough insight into his childhood and youth and its connection with his violent outbursts so as no longer to assume unconditionally that he came from a "completely normal family". Both the coaches who accompanied Richard in the family conversation agreed that his father – a retired NVA officer (a military unit of the former GDR) – was a glaring example of an "completely emotionally absent father, who permanently disparaged his son". As emerged in the one-to-one conversations with Richard, this was the case not only since his criminal offending began, but systematically throughout his whole life. Richard's mother, on the other hand, gave the impression of being a passive and diffusely emotionalised person who "basically wept the whole time" during the conversations, however without making any personal comments of her own. It could thus be conjectured that, in this family dynamic, the mother had also been unable to contribute much to giving the son a feeling of being accepted and a sense of self-worth.

### xxx  5.2  Ferdinand Sutterlüty's qualitative-empirical study of "careers of violence" and the significance of experiences of systematic familial humiliation

The aspect of disparagement and disregard leads us to an important finding from the latest empirical-clinical research on violence. This findings comes from Ferdinand Sutterlüty, who also has been looking at young offenders tending to extremely brutal and uncontrollable outbursts of anger and violence (see above xx).

Sutterlüty's study is all the more noteworthy for the fact that he understandably distances himself from purely "sociological violence research", which is primarily quantitative-empirical and concerned with the "social causes of violence but almost entirely omits any analysis of the acts of violence themselves (a fact that deserves interpretation)" (347). Overall, argues Sutterlüty, sociological violence research is too rationalistic-behaviouristic, despite the fact that it has long been agreed that "rational choice theories" are unable to "convincingly account for" violent acts of this sort (ibid. 533). Sutterlüty, in contrast, examines the peculiar emotional quality and euphoric affect content of the crime itself and the way it is experienced, with a view

to the symbolic-scenic significance of the details and to the life history of the perpetrator (356ff).

Relevant for our discussion of Richard – as well as Max, immediately below – are Sutterlüty's observations about the biographical function of familial "dynamics of disregard and disparagement", which, alongside the presence of massive violence against children that is present in an overwhelming number of cases, is often ignored. As in the work of the VPN coaches with Richard (and Max), it also emerged through Sutterlüty's research that the lives of some of the most brutal perpetrators were determined not only by domestic violence, but also to a great extent by [their] fathers' "humiliating behaviour" (181).

Whether the paternal and/or maternal dynamic was characterised by "passive disregard" or "acts of active humiliation" towards the "black sheep" of the family, there was much to suggest in the analysis that a familial relationship style of humiliation and disregard can have even more serious effects on young persons than massive physical violence. "Unlike experiences of impotence, which can be traced back to violence in the family, familial disregard typically continues past childhood into adolescence." It thus embraces the entire biography of childhood and youth and is all the more tenacious as a result of its being rooted in "relatively stable familial interaction structures" and thus not necessarily being obvious to the social environment (191f).

These findings of course have implications for the intervention methods and demand heightened biographical-analytical attention. For Richard, in any case, the experience of being asked by a third party what it was that "he actually wants from his father" appeared to be an unusual or completely unfamiliar experience. With the help of the VPN group he was able to become a little clearer about this until, in the presence of his father, i.e. in public as it were, he was able to answer that what he wanted is simply "that he (father) gets of my back, and that he listens to what I say."

The fact that a large part of Richard's immense and long stored up anger has its roots in this *family-dynamic, transgenerational situation*, in other words that it has to do with the heavily impaired relationship that his father (and in another way his mother)

has with him, as the only son of the family, was something that Richard at first found impossible to believe; however in the direct experience of the family conversation and then in exchange with the group, it became extremely illuminating for him. It became glaringly obvious to Richard how similar his affective experiences of his violent acts were to some of his feelings in the relationship with his father and his parents. Particularly notable were parallels in connection to the "great calm" and the "clear statement" immediately preceding the sudden eruption of violence, as well as his uncontrollability and implacability during the violence itself.

Especially the one-to-one conversations with Richard left no doubt about the extent of the emotional impact upon Richard of this biographical circumstance, as well as the extent to which the revelation of this shook him up. What did come to be discussed in the group conversations will also have been illuminating and useful to other participants in solving their own problems. It is often a novel experience for the participants, however one that they quickly and intuitively learn to appreciate, that similarly disposed young people are able to learn from one another when, albeit with the requisite caution, one comes to talk about oneself and one's own concerns, things that in one's clique (or "group of mates") one never used to talk about.

Here it becomes clear how essential it is for this processual, narrative-based intervention method to aim for a *biographical-thematic interconnection* between the offence and the life story. The goal of the exploration of the biographical and family-dynamic carried out in the one-to-one and group conversations is hence to seek out this behavioural-logical link between offence and life history, and to make this comprehensible to the participants both conceptually and emotionally. If, when recalling his crime scene in precise detail, a participant is able to grasp connections between the emotional dynamic of his experience of the crime and his emotional experiences from his family life, then a great deal has been gained and there is a good chance that a sustainable alteration of his attitudes and behaviour can be obtained.

What might initially seem to an outside observer to be a surprising and possibly ambiguous aspect of Richard's case is the following: There is much to indicate that the basis for the autonomy and clearer self-understanding which Richard reached during the VPN work, had already been prepared for in the far-right oriented *skinhead*

*clique of peers*. For Richard, the clique served as a *substitute* family for his emotionally blocked and disparaging parents. Aspects of this clique experience were important for Richard's emotional and psycho-social survival.

The fact that this group of young people, who for personal reasons were important to Richard, nevertheless tended towards extremist attitudes and had xenophobic grudges that they sometimes vociferously expressed and directed at corresponding victim groups, is unmistakeably of social and criminal relevance. For that reason, these attitudes need to be directly addressed during the training course. However Richard's case – as well as that of Max (xx) or the case-study of Michaela Köttig (xx) – again makes it clear how strongly the aspect of ideological orientation among this group of offenders (and generally among young persons and young adults from disadvantaged backgrounds) needs to be seen in relation to the person's affect profile, as this is conditioned by the family biography.

The practical work of the VPN therefore clearly demonstrates that by no means all violent offenders with whom the VPN has worked could be recognised in advance as being *extremist or fundamentalist*. With many of them, a political or ideological motivation for the crime cannot at first be demonstrated unequivocally (let alone documented in their files). However the reverse is also true: practically every offender has xenophobic and homophobic prejudices and grudges. Nevertheless, according to empirical research conducted by Brähler/Decker and Heitmeyer (2002/ 2007), xenophobia and homophobia can also be found in between a fifth and a quarter of the supposedly non-extremist "normal population", in more or less moderate form and among all age-groups. There are, in practice, no violent offenders not characterized by *group-related hostility*. However, as Richard's case clearly exemplified, these affects are strongly biographically determined as opposed to being an intellectual or ideological position. Therefore it is all the more important that intervention methods be oriented towards "personal-political education", as described above, and include work on biographical memory and reflection (see above xx).

**xxx  5.3  Max 1: Fatherlessness and the delegations of a maternal victim-disposition: more on the significance of family-therapeutic aspects**

The *comparable offender profile* of another VPN participant also demonstrates the aspect of peculiar calm and relaxation prior to the crime. This is something that one would not expect in impulsive hate-crime offences, something that can lead to complications in sentencing if this is taken to be an indication of premeditation. However it is a feature of a small – and in social-therapeutic terms particularly relevant – group of offenders. In one instance, Max, who was also sentenced for extremely impulsive violent offences, had been at a big indoors event when he had merely heard from a friend, and not even seen himself, that a girl had been hit, and supposedly by whom. Max had then decided to walk home to get his knife, however had then attacked the man in way that bore all indications of a highly impulsive, affect-led hate-crime offence. At the same time, the fact that the man who was attacked had a migration-background and in the common parlance of Max's clique and city district was a "foreigner", played no significant role in his recollection of the events, which was strange because this aspect commonly came to the fore in offences committed by Max's clique.

The biographical working-through of the offence – in other words a more precise examination of the emotional dynamic of events and the experience of the offence on the one hand, and the corresponding aspects of the family history and experience of it on the other – produced the following picture for Max's offence and pattern of offending: The reason that a mere rumour about a woman having been hit created in Max such a deep and uncontrollable impulse was because his whole life history had been marked by that fact that he grew up as the son of a single mother who repeatedly got involved in partnerships with violent and sexually abusive men, in which she was beaten. In this situation, the son increasingly had the role ill-befitting his age (to put it mildly) of "beating these men out of the house". Max's real father, on the other hand, appeared to have been depressive and/or alcoholic and a few years after Max was born committed suicide.

Although in this offence – and unlike other of his offences – the biographical parallels to his mother's partners were particularly obvious, Max, according to his coach, was "completely surprised" by this connection. He "couldn't believe it at all". He had "put his past behind him a long time ago", he said. Everything was "over and done with".

In this session, several of Max's group colleagues expressly encouraged him to consider possible connections such as this, and to talk about events in his life that could be relevant. These group colleagues were already somewhat more familiar with the experience of long-term biographical effects, one reason being that with them these effects were of a less complex nature: for example, repetitions of the physical violence inflicted by the father.

In this group, which was comparatively advanced and positively-inclined, it was also discussed whether the fact that Max was "frightened of becoming like his father" – i.e. depressive and suicidal – played a major role in his violent outbursts. Rather unwisely, his mother had, when Max was six or seven years old, had a kind of medical genetic test done on him, which found that he had a similar disposition, albeit one that need not necessarily emerge. This aspect certainly represented a significant biographical component of the case (and also demonstrated how little the medical-technical sphere is able to help in challenges of psychological and psycho-social development).

Still, Max was not completely wrong when he said that the past was "over and done with": His mother, who attended both VPN family days and appeared to want to contribute to the process, had since been able, with the help of psychotherapy and counselling, to break out of her fatal relationship pattern. In other words, she had stopped choosing abusive and violent men as partners. yy What clearly remained to do, and what could be begun on the family days of the VPN training, was to correct the disastrous after-effects that this pre-history had left behind in the son.

**xxx  5.4  Max 2: An exercise in a 'constellation-exercise' his current personal situation**

A particular methodological tool that can sometimes be useful in the *integrated working-through of biography and offence* of this kind had with Max some remarkable results and effects. At a suitable point in the group conversation, the coachs decided to suggest to Max a so-called "constellation exercise". At the same time it was also clear that the highly demanding and sometimes extremely

emotionally intensive method of "family constellation" could not be used in its pure form. The psychological stability of the participants of a VPN course is unlikely to be sufficiently strong for this. Nor is the fundamentally stress-inducing environment of the prison likely to be suitable for such a far-reaching psychodynamic exercise. In any case, a more cautious approach is called for. In general, the "family-constellation" industry that has arisen in the past decade has repeatedly shown that even with normal-stable clients, the emotional intensities of this method sometimes lead to major psychological distress. Here it not seldom seems that the minimal requirements of responsible therapeutic accompaniment fail to be met, so that persons suffer serious psychological damage (cf. footnote xx).

In contrast, the biographical work in the context of the VPN course is distinguished by the fact that it always has as its foremost concern the right dosage of emotional intensity and psychological stability of the respective participant. Without this, social-therapeutic work and effective preparation for discharge from prison cannot be successful. In individual cases this concern might mean that only very little biographical work is carried out with some participants, or that this primarily or exclusively takes place in the one-to-one conversations, though the respective biographical topics can still be discussed in general terms in the group. These topics often apply to several participants and can be borne by a large part of the group collectively.

For this reason, it was suggested to Max that he attempt to stage his "general life situation" by naming important aspects and persons in his life at that moment. He then had to assign other participants to figuratively incorporate these aspects and to arrange them in the group space in a way that appeared appropriate to him. The concrete question was: What things, topics and persons are important for you, Max, after your discharge, and what will be crucial to the success of your life in freedom? What spatial positions would you give these? The group was sufficiently trustworthy and already acquainted with this method. For this reason, the group did not hesitate, with the help of the coaches, to assist Max by raising questions and recollections of topics from the collective group experience. As a result it was possible to nominate a figure for "the past", "music" (Max's hobby), his "mother", "cheerfulness", and "anger".

As is usual in these constellation exercises, Max then placed these figures in a constellation of various positions, whereupon the other participants as well as the figures and Max himself were asked about their impressions and associations created in them by the resulting spatial image. Associative freedom was the name of the game here, in other words participants were allowed to refer to impressions from the previous collective group work or from daily prison life, or to more distant sources of spontaneous associations. On the basis of this commentary, the staged picture could be re-arranged – with Max's permission – and new impressions discussed and conclusions drawn concerning Max's resources and risks.

The first *mise-en-scene* created a very strong image: Max placed his "cheerfulness" immediately in front of him, as the most important thing in his life. Not far to one side was "music" as his beloved hobby. His "mother" was placed to his left, so that, as he said, he could keep his eye on her. Even though his mother had said that she had since been able to correct her relationship pattern of choosing violent male partners, Max was obviously still unable to trust her completely, and thus wanted to keep his concerned and controlling eye on her. Max did not of his own accord place his "past" in the scene at all, however realised that this would make sense and, nominating a slightly-built person to stage it, placed it far behind and to one side of him. Placed even further behind him – and incorporated by a very heavily built and powerful person – was his "anger", which Max claimed he now had completely under control and was able to deal with.

The positioning of his "anger" prompted the most questions and comments from the group and from the coaches. The fact that "anger" took such a massive and ominous presence behind his back according to him represented the fact that he had it under control: a visual contradiction, to a certain extent. Suggestions were made along the lines that it was "anger" that he ought to keep his eye on and keep under constant control. In contrast, control over the "mother" could ultimately not be the job of her son. It was possible to position the "mother", with Max's agreement, behind him, where she belonged, so to speak. The question was also raised whether "anger" ought not to be closer to "cheerfulness", since these feelings were opposites after all, and perhaps the one would be able to moderate or calm the other. Further rearrangements of the formation provided renewed occasion for more considerations and

observations. Constellation exercises like this have thus proven to be helpful in deepening biographical work and anchoring its central aspects in participants through greater memorability. However, the creation of a sufficiently stable degree of mutual trust within the group is the indispensible – and not easy to achieve – prerequisite for this tool to be successfully applied.

Like Richard, Max is a striking example of how the methodological tools of *family therapy* are often very well suited to – and necessary for – working successfully with hate-crime offenders. Both Richard and Max also prove that the VPN tool of biographical work as well as the family days deserve even greater attention – and could or should be systematically extended. Of course, this does not mean that the dimension of "personal-political education" is to be neglected. It was the case for Max, as it was for Richard and many others from thus sub-group of highly uncontrolled young affect offenders, that despite their deeply individual and biographical disposition to violent behaviour, in which the family dynamic was a major determining factor, they also demonstrated and publicly expressed certain political attitudes and grudges as well as the affects of *group-related enmity* – and pestered and attacked the corresponding victim groups.

Hence the close behavioural-biographical connection between the emotional dynamic of the experience of the offence and the affect events from the familial life history is, even for this partly atypical group of offenders, determined within a *cognitive-ideological framework* of multiple prejudices as well as deep, illiberal suspicion towards all human freedom and diversity and towards society. For this reason, the fundamental decision of the VPN method to work at all times at both levels, and to bear in mind and to relate both the *personal biographical* as well as the *ideological-political*, can be seen as an essential factor for its success.