

# THE POLITICS OF AMBIVALENCE: Towards A Conceptualisation Of Structural Ambivalence In Intergenerational Relations

*Dagmar Lorenz-Meyer*

Gender Institute New Working Paper Series, Issue 2, February 2001

## INTRODUCTION

Reviewing the literature and their own empirical research Lüscher and Pillemer (1997) have recently advocated a change of perspective in the study of intergenerational relations. They suggested that the predominant 'dualistic solidarity-versus-conflict' framework (cf., p. 17), which considers family solidarity and conflict as opposing ends of a continuum, should be replaced by a focus on ambivalence that can account for countervailing positive and negative forces simultaneously inherent in and generated by intergenerational relationships. This plea coincided with the 1997 presidential address to the American Sociological Association where Smelser (1998, p. 5) promoted the idea of a 'logic of ambivalence' as a framework of 'understanding, analysis, and explanation ... beyond the scope of rational-choice explanations' in contexts of interdependence where actors feel 'locked in' by personal or institutional commitments and constraints.

The need to lend weight to the concept of ambivalence and the discussion of some of its applications point to the remarkable absence of social-scientific theoretical models of ambivalence, even though the (distinctly modern) term ambivalence has become common currency in the humanities, social sciences and in everyday language. The relative lack of theoretical conceptualisation is all the more surprising given current epistemological challenges, such as the acknowledgement of difference and diversity and the call for multi-perspectival approaches in the analysis of the contemporary condition. Indeed the necessity to go beyond 'a bivalued logic incorporating an either/or model' (Simon 1998, p. 217) in favour of both/and models that allow for the simultaneous presence of opposed 'valences' (emotions, thoughts, motivations) has long been recognised in such diverse fields such as philosophy, cultural studies, attitudinal research and family therapy, albeit more often than not without exploring the analytical power of the concept of ambivalence.

Billig and colleagues (1988), for example, have argued that just as the politics and philosophies shaping it (and being shaped by it), common sense contains conflicting and opposed themes or values, for example, that people should be merciful and that justice should be dealt. The authors argue that the conflicting nature of common sense gives rise to discussions and dilemmas, making argument and even thought possible. Individual and collective deliberations are frequently marked by changing nuances and 'interpretative repertoires'. Billig (1989, pp. 238-240) discusses ambivalence as a special case, generated in situations where a speaker seeks both identification and contradiction with the audience. Ambivalence is thus considered as a situational or contextual concept (see also Weigert 1991).

From the point of view of conceiving 'culture' as multiple (competing) discourses Dirks and colleagues (1994) have suggested that

neither 'culture' itself nor the regimes of power that are imbricated in cultural logics and experiences can ever be wholly consistent or totally determining. 'Identities' may be seen as (variably successful) attempts to create and maintain coherence out of inconsistent cultural stuff and inconsistent life experience, but every actor always carries around enough disparate and contradictory strands of

knowledge and passion so as always to be in a potentially critical position (Dirks et al. op. cit., p. 18).

Given the 'compelling evidence of the resilience and plasticity of the psyche' (Cornell 1988, p. 271) in dealing with discontinuity and inconsistencies it remains an open question when these 'disparate and contradictory strands of knowledge and passion' produce ambivalences in contemporary 'postmodern' societies, which have been characterised as perpetually or increasingly ambivalent. Societal changes such as the impacts of globalisation and shifts in social production and circulation of knowledge are frequently seen as producing conditions of profound uncertainty with impacts on interpretation and ethics, social practices and politics. Thus Bauman (1992, p. 193) holds that the post-modern habitat 'is a territory subjected to rival and contradictory meaning-bestowing claims and hence perpetually ambivalent'. Addressing modes of agency in the context of risks Beck (1994, p. 33/12) argues that as high modernity 'abolish[es] its own ordering categories ... irreducible ambivalences, the new disorder of risk civilisation, openly appear'. As a result not only of the failure to systematically delineate the concept of ambivalence as a universal or particular concept but also of conceptualisations, which imply that ambivalence on the level of society and on the level of the individual are located 'on different planes of phenomenal reality, on different planes of conceptualization, on different planes of causation and consequences' (Merton and Barber 1963/1976, p. 7), there remains an ongoing lack of understanding how these different levels relate to one another.

This paper aims to contribute to a social-scientific conceptualisation of ambivalence by reconsidering some of the conceptions of ambivalence and the discourses in which they appear as well as by empirically exploring its productiveness and the challenges it poses in understanding intergenerational relations. The empirical part of the paper is concerned with the application of ambivalence as a mode of analysis to the historically constituted discourse of intergenerational solidarity and to contemporary narratives generated in the research encounters that focus on the anticipation of parental care.

The paper will focus on (i) conceptions of the generation of structural ambivalence, in particular with respect to the interfaces of 'the psychic' and 'the social', (ii) modes of manifestation and strategies of dealing with ambivalence, in particular with respect to the relation between opposed 'valences' and (iii) possible consequences of these strategies for the (re)production or challenge of structural ambivalence. Rather than offering a set definition of ambivalence from the outset the procedure will be to explicate conceptual dimensions in the theoretical and empirical discussion of its uses and its delineation from alternative concepts.

While attempts to conceptually define a notion, which, like ambivalence, refers to non-identity, run into the problem of imposing fixity and closure in and through the identification of non-identity (which might produce new ambivalences), such an endeavour is necessary to develop the analytical power of ambivalence and to forestall the tendency to apply the term indiscriminately or ambiguously to all forms of vaguely conflicting expressions, behaviour and interpretations (Laplanche and Pontalis 1992, p. 57). Moreover, a conceptual approach is necessary to address the politics of structural ambivalences in particular contexts both in their enabling and productive aspects and in their constraining aspects.

#### INTERSECTIONS OF AMBIVALENCES

That the term ambivalence is a category of interpretation, as suggested by Lüscher (1998a), is purported in its etymology although the origins of the term are unclear. It is composed of the Latin prefix *ambi*, English 'around', akin to Latin *ambo*, English 'both' (of two objects whose duality is assumed as already known) (Lewis 1889, p. 103), and Latin *valentia*, English 'power', 'valence'. A duality of opposed emotions, attitudes, thoughts or motivations, which a person simultaneously holds towards a person or object, is the centrepiece of the standard psychoanalytically shaped definition of ambivalence (The Oxford English Dictionary 1989). Considering the ambiguous prefix *ambi/ ambo* prominence is thus given to the simultaneous presence of two opposites at the expense of the connotation of movement ('around'), a circulation and fluidity of (possibly more than two) opposites.

This primacy of a conflicting duality characterises contemporary definitions such as the one suggested by Lüscher, according to which

we speak of ambivalence in a social science perspective when dilemmas and polarisation of feelings, thoughts, actions and, furthermore, contradictions in social relations and social structures, which are relevant for personal and societal development, are interpreted as in principle irresolvable.

(Lüscher 1998a, p. 7)

The conception of irresolvable conflict is most clearly illustrated by the Swiss psychiatrist Eugen Bleuler who first conceived of ambivalence as a fundamental symptom of schizophrenia. Laplanche and Pontalis (op. cit.) have argued that Bleuler's concept of ambivalence was influenced by the psychoanalytic use of the notion of bipolarity referring to the co-existence of extreme opposites in attitudes and thoughts, coined by the psychoanalyst Wilhelm Stekel. Stekel (1943, p. 180) posited the 'law of bipolarity' according to which it is essential for mental equilibrium that 'in the mind there should be contrasts, holding counterpoise in the scales'. Referring to the extreme shifts between polar opposites of a neurotic patient Stekel used the metaphor of a 'mental pendulum, [that] like water in a glass, swings as far as possible to right and to left. He is simultaneously a loyal subject and an anarchist ultra' (Stekel op. cit., p. 126). Whereas the metaphor of a pendulum suggests an oscillation between bipolar opposites, Bleuler emphasised the rigid impermeable and irresolvable separation of (logically) contradictory motivations, feelings or thoughts in schizophrenic patients (of the kind 'I'm doctor A., I'm not doctor A.') that are manifest 'côte à côte ou, avec de multiples alternances' (Bleuler 1911/1993 as quoted in Grilliat 1998, p. 174). In his account the schizophrenic deficiency to make associative links is contrasted with the 'normal' psychological ability to integrate, balance or offset diverse aspects of a person, object or motivation.

*Pour le sujet sain toute chose a deux versants. La rose a ses épines. Mais dans 99 des cas le sujet normal fait le bilan à partir de la soustraction des valeurs négative et positives. Il aime la rose malgré les épines. Le schizophrène, avec ses liaisons associatives déficientes, ne recompose pas forcément par la pensée les différent versants en un tout: il aime la rose pour sa beauté et en même temps la déteste à cause de ses épines.*

(Bleuler 1911/1993 ibid.)

Taking examples from his own psychiatric practice Grilliat (1998, p. 174) highlights the neutral tone and the absence of punctuation in schizophrenic linear utterances such as 'il est mort à A. mon père il est ici' or 'il est gentil Raymond c'est une ordure'. Grilliat comments that '[le] discours est clos, irréductiblement fermé sur lui-même, ininterprétable en ce qu'il est inaccessible à la métaphore ou à la métonomie' (ibid.). In its original formulation ambivalence was thus conceived of as a particular concept generated by psychopathology. By denoting logical contradiction it entailed fixity and closure and was contrasted with and isolated from 'univalence', itself not simply a given but a product of the ability to offset and integrate different aspects of an object or person. Drawing on the works of Freud, Grilliat argues that in the context of neuroses, on the other hand, a fundamental associative link between the two opposing valences is maintained as a result of which one has to be repressed, displaced or counter-acted. For Freud (1912/1982a; 1917/1982d), ambivalence is a universally occurring phenomenon generated by irreconcilable impulses. He used the term to refer specifically to the resulting (simultaneously present) opposed feelings and practices. In his earlier work conflicts of

ambivalence were seen as grounded in the early mother-child relationship in which the child's demand for love was considered excessive and exclusive - and necessarily had to be disappointed. Yet, because the child's self is not fully developed the resulting 'ambivalent feelings [Gefühlseinstellungen], which would lead to conflict in adults, are reconciled in the child for a long time, as they later co-exist in the unconscious' (Freud 1917/1982d, p. 327).

Freud (1912/1982a, p. 166) held that the difference between 'normal' and 'neurotic' ambivalence is a matter of the relative quantity of the drives/impulses involved. A permanent co-existence of a high intensity of irreconcilable love and hate is only possible through the 'involvement' of a different psychic register, the unconscious. Neurotic symptoms were considered as attempts to resolve ambivalence, while effectively preserving it and restraining behaviour. Thus excessive tenderness and anxiety about the well being of a close person can serve to counteract repressed feelings of hatred and aggression. The (unconscious) interpenetration of the opposites involved is illustrated in the 'artistically chosen ambiguity with entirely contradictory meanings' (1917/1982e, p. 555) manifest in hysteric symptoms, but also in 'normal' metaphoric utterances, such as 'I love your guts' (Cohler 1998, personal communication).

At the same time as locating conflicts of ambivalence in an ahistorical psychic economy Freud's discussion of ambivalence in intergenerational relationships indicates how conflicting impulses are always shaped by society and culture. 'Societal ideals' (Freud 1916/1982c, p. 209-210) of an absence of hostility and aggression in these relationships and the imbrications of authority and piety mitigate but also are constitutive of intergenerational ambivalence. Within families, Freud argued, conflicts of ambivalence are most pronounced between the same genders because for the daughter the mother is the authority, who limits her will and has to enforce her sexual abstinence, whereas the son's will, sexual pleasure and access to family property are limited by the father. Not surprisingly in a patriarchal society where the birth of a son enhances the social status of a woman, Freud characterised the mother-son relationship as 'the most perfect, most likely ambivalence-free of all human relationships' (Freud 1917/1982e, p. 563). As he put it this relationship allows the mother to transfer the ambitions, which she had to suppress in herself, to her son, and thereby to gain satisfaction from her remaining 'masculinity complex'.

In his discussion of intergenerational ambivalence Freud illustrates the criteria of personal and societal relevance, highlighted by Lüscher (1998a): intergenerational ambivalence is generated with respect to things that matter and point towards action: sexuality, property, independence and power. Yet, subsequent psychological developments of the concept of ambivalence frequently ignore the degree to which the psychic is inevitably shaped by social meanings and values constituted in practice. They often fail to address the dimension of the culturally specific socio-structural positionality of actors, which, as I will show below, generates specific degrees of ambivalence. This can be illustrated even in attempts to provide a situated understanding of ambivalence, for example, in the differentiation of 'primary ambivalence as an anthropological possibility' and 'secondary ambivalence [as] culturally induced contradictory feelings' (Weigert 1991, p. 25/21).

Increasing attention has been given to a quantitative measurement of ambivalence, which sometimes coincides with an appraisal of moderate levels of ambivalence on the individual level as a sign for a 'realistic' assessment of a person or object. Thompson and Holmes (1996) have suggested an expansion of the model that conflicting impulses - or, in the context of close personal relationships, increased interdependence - lead to ambivalent feelings and practices by suggesting that ambivalent feelings require a specific evaluation or representation of the person or object, which is not integrated, indifferent or compartmentalised. This evaluation can create a motivational state in which ambivalence becomes a catalyst for changing emotions and/or practices. Conceiving of ambivalence as a function of the weaker impulse the authors take up the idea of a threshold that the weaker impulse has to surpass in order to distinguish the resulting feelings of ambivalence from feelings of indifference. Whereas high levels of ambivalence may lead to distress, erosion or dissolution of the relationship, moderate levels can enhance and revitalise commitment to the relationship. At the same commitment to the future of a relationship is found to be an intervening motivational variable, which furthers the resolution of ambivalence, rather than the lock-in situations described by Smelser (1998). From this perspective ambivalence

appears as 'a necessary and perhaps cyclical element in continuing involvements' (Thompson and Holmes op. cit., p. 503).

Considering the case of 'maternal ambivalence', generated by conflicting impulses of 'love' and 'hate' (revealed by changing contradictory prescriptions of 'perfect motherhood'), Parker (1995) has suggested (with Freud) that in the mother-child relationship full and permanent integration of ambivalent feelings is never possible. Similarly to Thompson and Holmes she argues with reference to Melanie Klein that 'achieving ambivalence' (i.e. the experience of ambivalence and management of the attendant anxiety) bears the potential of self-knowledge and a more complete assessment of the other, which can promote both concern and responsibility and the necessary drawing of boundaries between mother and child. Although Parker does not explicitly consider the possibility that contradictory social prescriptions of motherhood may generate maternal ambivalence her account suggests that the discourse of ambivalence, that is, the degree to which conflicting feelings in intergenerational relationships are considered acceptable and 'normal' may be itself a moderating variable for the achievement of ambivalence and the management of guilt and anxiety. Of interest for a conceptual approach is her observation that 'the words 'love' and 'hate' ... carry a certainty and fixity which seems to be belied by the passionate mobility of feeling, on the one hand, and the passages of frank boredom which characterise motherhood' (Parker op. cit., p. 5). In this account (non-normative) feelings of indifference may alternate with ambivalence and, I would add, potentially can become one pole that in conjunction with 'love' or 'hate' generates ambivalence. Ambivalence (achieved), Parker concludes, does not obliterate opposed feelings but makes passion circulate, forces reflection and firms boundaries. While there is some intuitive sense of ambivalence as an experiential category it is the merit of Merton and Barber (1963/1976, p. 4) to explicitly locate ambivalence at the level of society and to map what they call sociological ambivalence, conflicting maxims and resources of action that 'come to be built into the very structure of social relations', as well as calling attention to its social consequences. The authors suggest that the sociological construct of ambivalence in the narrow sense refers to incompatible normative expectations (dominant norms and subsidiary counter-norms) and demands incorporated in a single status or role, which may generate a functional flexibility of roles. In a broader sense the concept also refers to ambivalences generated between different status-sets and contradictory values and norms, or values and available resources that are not ascribed to particular statuses. The authors embrace a quantitative consideration in contending that the structure of the field of activity may entail different degrees of ambivalence and importantly open the possibility of thinking of overlapping sources of ambivalence in particular social positions. Although they state that the analysis of ambivalence requires a dual focus and 'sociological ambivalence is one major source of psychological ambivalence' (Merton and Barber op. cit., p. 7) the intersections between the two remain underdeveloped as Merton and Barber insist on different causes and consequences of psychological and sociological ambivalence. The main competing concept for societal ambivalence is societal contradiction, a notion used, for example, by Becker-Schmidt (1980) who distinguishes the sociological category of analysis of contradiction or contradictory structure, (that refers to contradictions in structure, forms of organisation and behavioural demands assigned to statuses on the level of society), from the socio-psychological category of ambivalence at the level of the subject. In her conception, ambivalence refers 'to a reaction to competing motivations in the face of a contradictory reality' (Becker-Schmidt op. cit., p. 725) and is conceived of as a subjective dealing/coping [Verarbeitung] with outer (societal) and inner contradictions. Ambivalence is thus performative but more than a simple reflex of 'objective' conflicts. 'Inner contradictions' are - psychoanalytically understood - a result of the constitution of a 'self-image' that through biographical processes of identification (which Freud had described as an ambivalent process of appropriation and erasure) is differentiated in different psychic registers. According to Becker-Schmidt the self-image is necessarily ambivalently 'cathected' (see n. 4). These cathetic energies blend with affects triggered in a given situation, a process that is mediated by the degree to which a subject is able to tolerate a contradictory or ambiguous reality ('achieving ambivalence').

These multi-layered interrelations between inner and outer dialectic also suggests the view that expressions of

ambivalence are not only evidence of a conflicting relationship to one subject area [Gegenstandsbereich] but express a specific psychic mechanism of coping: the coping with conflicting situations through a biographically acquired tolerance of ambiguity.

(Becker-Schmidt op. cit., p. 713)

This tolerance of ('objective') ambiguity and ('subjective') ambivalence is the prerequisite for transformative practices. By acknowledging that the self-image is constituted in interaction with the social context and a given situation necessarily interpreted through this social-psychological lens Becker-Schmidt challenges the conceptual divide between psychological and sociological ambivalence. Yet this division is reinstated in the distinction between subjectively experienced ambivalence and objectively existing contradictions. Even though social institutions can be conceived of as consolidated systems of order, and conflicting status demands as 'real' for the individuals concerned, the notion of contradiction, as has been shown by Bleuler, can imply a fixity and closure of 'structures' that foreclose the view that structures are continuously constituted and challenged by social practices and agency. Insofar as they are identified in and through language, post-structuralists among others have argued that structures are not set against their irreducible opposites but contain various degrees of oppositional elements on the grounds of the inescapability of multiple meanings and the instability of discourse (Derrida 1978). I therefore suggest that the concept of societal ambivalences opens up the focus of changing, unstable conflicting forces in particular structural positions, which at certain times are interpreted as irresolvable. By considering structures as constituted in social practices the performative dimension of ambivalence is re-emphasised. I shall argue that suggestions that subjective ambivalence can be both a product of societal contradictions and a cause of behaviour, decisions and well being (Weigert op. cit., p. 43; Lüscher and Pillemer 1997, p. 21) have to be extended by a dimension that indicates that institutional and individual practices of dealing with ambivalence in turn impact on societal ambivalence. Strategies of dealing with ambivalence can sustain or challenge structural ambivalences.

The preceding discussion suggests that, removed from its static and isolating context of psychopathology, the concept of ambivalence refers to the interpretation of a simultaneity of opposed 'valences', which presses towards opposed courses of action on the individual and societal level. The social-scientific conceptualisation of ambivalence requires a leap from thinking of ambivalences in terms of experiential pushes and pulls (each of which must be identified without social actors necessarily identifying this state of mind as ambivalence) towards a 'widening of horizons' (Bauman 1992, p. 133) where ambivalence on the level of the subject is conceived of as generated through opposed orientation and interpretation patterns and demands that are constituted in social practice, and ambivalence on the level of societal and institutional structures as generated through discourse and agency.

The task of the social scientist, then, is to locate and specify the 'nature' of simultaneously working opposing forces, institutional and individual strategies of dealing with them and their consequences for the maintenance or challenging of structural ambivalence. Insofar as even intimate and intergenerational relationships are regulated by societal prescriptions and values, the opposing forces that are effective in particular situations have to be linked to broader cultural and social structures.

A turn away from the context of psychopathology furthermore suggests that we not equate ambivalence with stagnation but focus on the ways in which the impossibility of integration of opposing orientations and emotions can open up new possibilities of practice and thought, and to the respective resources and strategies required. Such an analysis contributes to a reassessment of the relative opportunities and constraints for agency inherent in and generated by different social positions.

#### WIDENING THE FOCUS: AMBIVALENCES IN THE DISCOURSE OF INTERGENERATIONAL SOLIDARITY

In their preliminary attempt to locate sources of ambivalence in adult intergenerational relationships Lüscher and Pillemer (1997) have identified solidarity as one source of

ambivalence. But expectations and demands of solidarity are also implicated in their other two illustrations of intergenerational ambivalence, ambivalence between dependence and autonomy and ambivalence resulting from conflicting norms. Given the predominant perspective of an increasing individualisation of intergenerational relationships (Hareven 1994) and the view that as choices, networks and identities become in principle open for negotiation, intergenerational commitments have shifted from the obligatory to the voluntary (Hess and Waring 1983; Jerrome 1996), solidarity and the image of an indissolubility of intergenerational relationships become something that requires social scientific exploration.

I therefore suggest that it is fruitful to reconsider in a historical perspective some of the ways in which solidarity as a normative value came to be built into intergenerational relations. I argue that structural ambivalences between a grounding of intergenerational commitments in nature and in human practice are inherent in the 'foundations' of intergenerational solidarity, namely in the powerful metaphor of blood ties and in justifications of intergenerational rights and duties developed by modern political philosophy, both of which inform common sense beliefs and social policy. Moreover, while apparently universal and ungendered, intergenerational solidarity in western societies has always been structured by gender.

The term generation, 'a metaphor [for] the emergence of social realities ... linking time and social structure' (Bengtson et al. 1985, p. 306) is notoriously polysemous. According to The Oxford English Dictionary (1989, p. 436) generation refers to both the action of generating and that which is generated. In its least ambiguous sense it denotes family lineages, or more precisely a 'reproduction-lineage nexus' (Collier and Yanagisako 1987, p. 3). It seems to be a trivial fact that a new generation comes into being when a child is born and that the resultant generational position is defined as 'cognatic descent' (Fry 1995, p. 131). Yet, the biological facts of generation have been constantly disputed since antiquity and the opposing models of the (Aristotelian) one-seed and (Gallenian) two-seed model have coexisted over centuries (Laqueur 1990). Against the sensory evidence of corporeal motherhood both models of generation assumed and grounded sexual difference in the claim that the father is the prime genitor, and the assumption of an invisible economy of bodily fluids in which male sperm is refined out of blood through an excess of body heat in men and the female body converts blood into menstrual blood and milk. They differed in that the Aristotelian view posited that women provide the raw matter of the embryo through menstrual blood and only men have semen, which give the embryo form and soul, whereas the Gallenian model hold that both men and women can produce sperm and contribute to generation, but the female sperm is the weaker auxiliary one (Pomata 1996). What is informative in the context of intergenerational ambivalence is that efforts to 'scientifically' establish the primacy of the father in the 'blood theory of semen', which remained a dogma of official medicine until the 18<sup>th</sup> century, can be seen as a strategy to manage an existential uncertainty of fatherhood and concomitant fear that women could procreate without men (Thomasset 1992; Laqueur 1990). Moreover, the ancient biological texts suggested that the 'stuff' that links a man with his blood-relatives is literally a tie in blood that constitutes a natural, positive and unbreakable bond. As Patterson (1997, p. 27) argues in her discussion of Welsh kinship, the patrilinear symbol of blood is tremendously powerful because it is 'given by nature, not man-made'. Anthropological and social historical studies have shown, however, that this tie in blood was vested with quasi-instinctual bonds of solidarity, 'natural affection' (Maine 1917) or the 'the feeling of kindred' (McLennan 1865 as quoted in Schneider 1984, p. 166) as well as with ideas of the nobility of origin or *bonne race*, which obliged descendants to lead a life befitting their position (Davis 1986). Through practical and symbolic work, such as the strategic planning of marriages and the writing of family histories, (high status) families contributed to this kind of generational making in which children, as Schmoller put it, 'enter into a relationship of love and sympathy, faithfulness and admiration with the formerly more distant father in a conscious continuation of his blood' (1919 as quoted in Oekinghaus 1925, p. 8, emphasis added).

Thomas Laqueur has argued that the contradictory models of generation that only men had semen and both women and men had semen were upheld simultaneously because they were linked to distinct legal circumscription of generational positions. Thus the term *cognatio* in early Roman law had a double meaning referring to intergenerational relations as understood in Natural and Civil Law (Pomata 1996). Natural Law posited that *cognatio* was

established by birth and hence included also illegitimate children, supporting the two-seed model. On the other hand in Civil Law that regulated the order of inheritance, cognatio referred exclusively to birth in a legitimate marriage and also included adoption. The legal category consanguinei that in ordinary language denoted the sharing of the same blood referred exclusively to the children born to a common father, independently of whether they had the same mother, giving evidence of the view that only men have generative seeds. Pomata (op. cit., p. 46) rightly asserts that gender was a key distinction between natural and civil kinship. While men could create various forms of intergenerational (blood) ties and were able to bequeath their legal status (in particular citizenship and inheritance rights), women could only create 'natural kinship devoid of the privileges attached to legal kinship'. These examples may suffice to illustrate the extent to which seemingly ungendered blood became simultaneously a symbol of natural intergenerational cohesion and solidarity and an authenticator of specific gendered privileges constituted by legal and political circumscription - an ambivalence that was sustained and concealed by the double meanings of intergenerational kinship categories.

Modern political philosophy has developed the powerful idea that political institutions are based on convention, i.e. on contract, consent and agreement. Turning against an order of status in which patriarchal authority was based on the natural authority of the father as prime genitor, classical social contract theorists attempted to supplant natural paternal dominion by the idea of a rationally willed reciprocity of rights and duties. Thus the founder of modern political theory Thomas Hobbes argued that parental authority was legitimate only on the basis of the practice of bringing up a child for which the child occurred perpetual obedience and loyalty. A quid pro quo character was postulated, which assumed and implied that what was exchanged between parent and child was (at least to some degree) equal, mutually beneficial and thus rational. Because of the uncertainty of fatherhood this pact was based on the conjugal contract, in which authority was passed on to the husband, whereas wives were tacitly assumed to fulfil the day-to-day necessities of practical solidarity, an aspect of intergenerational relationships that was taken for granted by all classical social contract theorists.

Hobbes, although not basing intergenerational rights and duties on affection or nature, in his discussion of inheritance returned to the belief of natural affection in blood, after giving due priority to the freedom of inheritance over custom. In cases where there is neither a will nor custom

it is to be understood ... that a Child of his own, Male, or Female, be preferred before any other; because men are presumed to be more inclined by nature, to advance their own children, than the children of other men; and of their own, rather a Male than a Female; because men are naturally fitter than women, for actions of labour and danger. Thirdly, where his own Issue faileth, rather a Brother than a stranger; and so still the neerer in blood, rather than the more remote; because it is alwayes presumed that the neerer of kin, is the neerer in affection; and 'tis evident that a man receives alwayes, by reflexion, the most honour from the greatnesse of his nearest kindred.

(Hobbes 1651/1997, p. 137)

For John Locke this desire of self-extension in one's posterity was not merely an assumption but a divine and natural principle on which inheritance rights down the generational line were based.

The first and strongest desire God Planted in Men, and wrought into the very Principles of their Nature being that of Self-preservation. ... But next to this, God Planted in Men a strong desire also of propagating their Kind, and continuing themselves in their Posterity, and this gives



Children a Title, to share in the Property of their Parents,  
and a Right to Inherit their Possessions.

(Locke 1698/1988, p. 224-25)

Although for Locke the duty to preserve one's offspring is anchored in Natural Law this law has to be recognised and understood so that it can be acted upon. Locke rejected the idea of an implicit pact between father and child and limited paternal authority to the time until the child reached maturity. But he further developed the idea of practical reciprocity that is rational and equal: in return for care and education the child has to pay perpetual reverence and gratitude equal to what 'the Father's care, cost and kindness in his Education has been more or less (Locke 1698/1988, p. 330). In the Lockian scheme the parental duty to provide care and education is indispensable and as property has to be passed on down the generational line, fathers cannot usually inherit the property of their sons. In his three-generation model the 'Score of Education received from a Man's Father, is paid by taking care, and providing for his own Children... unless present necessity of the Parents require a return of Goods for their necessary Support and Subsistence' (Locke op. cit., p. 225-26). From the fact that (only) when a child does not have any children of 'his' own does a father legitimately inherit his property, Locke concluded that children too have to provide for their parents in specific instances of severe material need if this duty can be reconciled with the primary duty to support their own children, which is 'made by Nature preferable' (ibid.).

Locke's account illustrates how intergenerational commitments were defined as self-interest (propagating one's kind) grounded in nature. The insistence on the (contractual) idea of an equal exchange extended over the span of three generations therefore does not presuppose that rights and duties are freely negotiated between equal partners. Thus the persuasive language of rights and duties in intergenerational relationships alongside or anchored in nature rests on the presumption of fair reciprocity as a result of which intergenerational solidarity is and must be freely willed and yet obligatory. Intergenerational solidarity as conceptualised in modern political philosophy is thus potentially ambivalent: given, or at least assumed to be given, by nature and established solely through practice by rational deliberation and will.

I argue that these dimensions of solidarity given by nature (blood) and solidarity achieved through practice and privilege, as universal and equal and particular (applied to fathers and sons only) have morally underwritten modern social policy legislation and institution building. The relative scarcity of quality services in childhood and old age was based on the assumption that families 'naturally' supported each other. At the same time a duty to support relatives up and down the generational line in countries such as Germany has been legally instituted since early modern times and mapped onto inheritance rights, which depend on closeness 'in blood' (Conrad 1996). Moreover, the dimensions of the discourse of intergenerational solidarity explored above provide the seeds for ambivalent patterns of belief and orientation. They can be interpreted as mutually reinforcing or, as George (1986) has argued in the context of the provision of care for chronically ill parents and spouses, as producing dilemmas between the norm of reciprocity, according to which exchanges should be equitable, and the norm of solidarity, which prescribes that support is given according to need.

#### NARROWING THE FOCUS: STRUCTURAL AMBIVALENCES IN ANTICIPATING PARENTAL CARE

I will now turn to the empirical investigation of structural sources of intergenerational ambivalence and the possibilities of challenging or sustaining ambivalence that strategies for dealing with ambivalence entail, by taking the example of the anticipation of parental care needs as explored in face-to-face semi-structured interviews with a group of 49 adult children (aged between 30 and 41 years). The research participants were children of mothers who were born around 1930 and had undergone skilled training after WWII in two culturally contrasting regions in West Germany. One of the unexpected results of the life course study of the older women in the study had been the considerable amounts of time that these women had spent caring for older relatives: Twenty-three out of 52 women interviewed reported that they had given regular practical assistance, including eleven women who had given intensive personal care to relatives confined to bed. An in-depth analysis of their narrative accounts revealed the variability of time and extent of caring

work over the life course, and in the case of support given to their mothers, its frequent embeddedness in a life-long exchange of practical assistance in the absence of emotional closeness. Narratives of caring work had shifted between the insistence of absolute obligation ('I had to do it, no one else was there') and absolute voluntariness ('I volunteered for all that, you can't demand it of someone'). The women's management of ambivalence included strategies of 'forgetting' previous conflict, as well as renegotiating support relationships by articulating felt personal constraints and insisting on the explicit formulation of needs by the care receiver so as to make more transparent what aspects can and cannot be legitimately met (Lorenz-Meyer 1999).

Against the background of these intra-familial caring traditions on the one hand and a decrease in social dependence between generations, a proliferation of institutional services, as well as a newly emerging counter-discourse of care-givers rights to choice and self-determination, and an acknowledgement of state responsibility (Twigg and Atkin 1994) on the other, I have explored how the women's adult children prospectively planned ways of dealing with their parents' potential need for care. In addition to sampling criteria of gender (inclusion of sons and daughters), educational status (skilled training vs. university degree) and the inclusion of sibling dyads of different gender I included participants of families where the mother did and did not provide care to older relatives. The group of young adults participating in the research were recruited via their mothers and hence may exclude those who permanently broke off contact with their parents. While the parents were still in good health, the children had largely established their own lives. More than half of the younger research participants had moved away from where their parents lived, although mobility was regionally bounded. Thirty-eight of the 49 respondents were presently employed, 33 were married and 32 had children.

The exploration of care anticipations is a promising case for the study of intergenerational ambivalence because the majority of both men and women across all educational backgrounds identified the anticipation of care needs of their parents as a dilemma without a 'satisfactory solution' (Son 508b); a choice between two evils, namely the institutionalisation of the parent or the provision of co-residential care by the respondent. Care anticipations are thus likely to be a point of articulation of ambivalence, generated by an anticipated scenario that presses for action and appears irresolvable. Yet, the ways in which the dilemma was phrased, the ease or difficulty with which certain options were embraced, ruled out and sometimes reaffirmed in different contexts indicated that degrees of ambivalence, as well as the strategies of dealing with ambivalence, differed considerably. Moreover, the explications of the strains on the research participants in the research encounter often generated narrative accounts of (ambivalently perceived) normative guidelines, family relationships and social institutions which in their ensemble were constitutive of ambivalence. A minority of respondents did not articulate ambivalence at all.

In order to be presented as entailing the dilemmatic choices mentioned above the anticipated need for care had to surpass the threshold of requiring 'mere' practical assistance and turn into the need for full-time personal care. In the case of practical assistance, domiciliary services contributed to an institutional reduction of ambivalence. Not a single research participant ruled out complementary practical and emotional help. On the one hand, in the scenario of full-time personal need, the option of residential care appeared unacceptable because of the negative image of and, in a minority of cases, disconcerting experiences with such institutions, the widely shared belief that people 'go into rapid decline' (Daughter 546c) when they leave their familiar environment, and the conviction that parents would not want to go into residential care, even if they had claimed the opposite. The provision of co-residential care, on the other hand, appeared to be unacceptable because it would require a complete change of life-style, residence and a cutting down of paid work on the side of the research participant, was expected to conflict with other commitments and at times to bring out personal conflicts, which were prevented from surfacing through the separation of life spheres between parents and adult children. Both sides of the dilemma were thus multiply determined and constituted a scenario in which the well-being of one family member was considered to be maintainable only at the expense of another: a choice between sacrificing the parent and 'sacrificing your personal freedom' (Daughter 700a). Attendant feelings of pressure and sometimes anguish were reported in the concomitant remark that they 'repressed' the possibility of parental care

needs, evidence of the commonsensical deployment of the psychoanalytic category of repression in the sense of conscious forgetting.

'On the one hand you always repress it a bit, because you don't know how to solve it. Well, I also would be reluctant to put my parents in a nursing home. That would be the very last solution for me ... well but if it would be a severe case you'd have to, when I work again sometime, give my job up again ... I wouldn't like to do it.'

Daughter 831b, caring  
tradition, 1 brother, 1  
sister, skilled training,  
married, housewife, 1 child

'Yes, of course I thought about it. And either I've repressed it or I've come to the conclusion that there is no - no satisfactory solution. Well, what I actually wouldn't like to do would be to move back home, because my parents needed care. Because that would mean a change of job, that would mean changing your whole life context... that would be out of the question.'

Son 508b, caring tradition,  
1 sister, university degree,  
cohabiting, f/t employed,  
no children

The research participants not always spelled out all aspects the dilemma. A theme-centred interview comparison showed that what was considered as an im/possible option depended chiefly on the social structural position of the research participant constituted by factors such as gender, employment (orientation), family commitments and geographical distance as well as 'personal' factors such as experiences with co-residential care arrangements, perceived relationship with parents and expected commitments of other siblings. Together these factors impacted on the interpretation of cultural guidelines, family relationships and institutional contexts and on degrees of articulated ambivalence. Thus the first interlocutor quoted above lived in relative proximity to her parents and did not expect any care-giving commitments of her siblings who in her view had a more 'ambivalent' (831b) relationship with the parents. Furthermore her interrupted employment history potentially failed to qualify as a 'legitimate excuse' (Finch and Mason 1992) to decline future care giving. The second research participant on the other hand lived about 400km away from his parents, had built up a career and had a sister who lived close to the parents. An additional link between the sister and the parents was given through the sister's children so that the respondent, even though he did not expect that the parents would move in with his sister, expected her to take major caring responsibility. This expectation together with his gender (in a cultural context where women were traditionally expected to do caring work), his job and partnership in a different city might have firmed his decision not to share a household with his parents and mitigated feelings of ambivalence and discomfort.

#### Generation of ambivalence

The following narrative account illustrates more explicitly that ambivalences in the face of anticipated care needs were multiply constituted. Moreover, it shows that these multiple opposing forces not merely reinforced each but that the addition of further structural ambivalences could lead to a shift of the overall dilemma from a personal (forced) choice situation to an 'objective' impossibility. Whereas the research participant's gender and sibling position, the parents' perceived expectation and an embracing of the norm of reciprocity had pulled her towards personal care-giving, geographical distance, her employment and (expected) family commitments and the perceived reservation of her Catholic parents towards her Muslim husband counteracted these pulls. As in other accounts high degrees of ambivalent orientations were expressed by the use of direct speech, which

allows quite literally for the expression of different voices without the need of integrating them into one coherent pattern of interpretation; feelings of pressure and desolation were expressed in metaphors of bodily pain.

A shift of perspective occurred when the research participant acknowledged a difficult personal relationship with her mother in response to her husband's suggestion of moving in with her parents. The suggestion by the husband implied that structural factors preventing co-residential care giving could be in principle rectified. In the light of the interpersonal conflicts between mother and daughter, care giving by the daughter appeared as sub-optimal also from the viewpoint of the mother/parents and the research participant embraced a position where she 'would like to' provide personal care for her parents but 'it would not work'. Yet, this shift of interpretation did not necessarily resolve ambivalence.

Resp: I'm very concerned. And I always have the feeling because I'm the only girl I'm responsible. Because they keep close contact with me too. And I have already talked to my brother, the second youngest. I say: 'What are we going to do?' I say: 'I know - this makes me sick. I don't know what to do. On the one hand I can't leave here, I have the job, don't want to give it up either. Or if I have a family - whatever is going to happen? The big house, no one is at home. I only know this: I don't want them to go in a nursing home, on any account.

Int: ... have you also tried to touch on the subject with the other brothers?

Resp: No. But I also think, everybody pushes it aside. Well, I also feel stressed because I think, they've done so much for us, they were always there for us. If I knew they weren't well, I don't know, I think that would cause a terrible conflict. ... My husband once suggested, 'well we can move in with your parents'. And I said, 'yes, but it wouldn't work'. Because my mother and I are attached, but there is some friction between us. I do things here where my mother perhaps would say, 'this isn't my daughter'. And that's a problem because often you want to please your mother, you do something, get in inner conflicts, get angry and come to blows. But as to the caring, I'd like to do it, instantly.

Daughter 516a, caring  
tradition, 4 brothers,  
skilled training, married,  
f/t employed, no children

The theme-centred analysis showed further that higher degrees of reported ambivalence were likely to coincide with more ambivalent interpretations of cultural guidelines, family relationships and social institutions. I will illustrate each of these three potential structural sources of intergenerational ambivalence in turn.

With respect to cultural norms, findings showed that both men and women used interpretative repertoires of the solidarity discourse explored above: notions of gratitude and repayment but also of equality, fairness and freedom of choice. Overall the analysis confirmed findings that individuals in contemporary societies do not believe that there are fixed normative rules or a consistent code of filial conduct (Finch and Mason 1992). But whereas men tended to focus on the dissolving of binding social norms ('you have to decide for yourself what you do and there are many different possibilities!' (Son 022)), women irrespective of their educational status (that had an impact on expected care-giving commitments) were more likely to articulate subsidiary moral cross-pressures arising from the imperative to care, traditionally bound to the female gender role, while likewise

insisting on the absence of binding social norms. Their accounts suggest that a weak verbal encoding of social norms need not to imply weak emotional commitment to internalised norms (see also Patterson 1997).

'Well I think that there is something like a moral uhm pressure from, or not pressure, but there still is a, uhm, how can I say? I also think that you can now do what you want, but it is not that you're completely free of moral concerns. ... But at the end of the day you can do what you want.'

Daughter 804a, no caring  
tradition, 2 brothers,  
skilled training, married,  
f/t employed, 1 child

That normative pressure is higher for daughters than for sons has been social-scientifically expressed in the notion of a normative 'hierarchy of carers' (Qureshi and Walker 1989; George 1986), which in western societies assigns care-giving responsibilities to spouses before adult children(-in-law) and among those to daughters before daughters-in-laws and sons. Both men and women made the qualification that expectations of gratitude are only legitimate 'if there is a reason for it' (Daughter 811). But it is from the point of view of felt responsibility that daughters, more easily than sons, pointed to a conflict between the differential assignment of responsibilities, and the norm of filial reciprocity according to which 'all [children] have the responsibility [to care for their parents], because they are the parents of all and were there for the children' (Daughter 516a). The identification of normative ambivalence between universal and gender specific reciprocity contributed to the generation of ambivalence in that a reduced pool of possible helpers simultaneously reinforced women's sense of responsibility and gave rise to the question: 'why me?' Finch and Mason (1992) have pointed to a further consequence - and potential source of ambivalence - of the weak encoding of filial obligation, namely that filial support cannot be legitimately claimed either. Openly asking for family support, the authors argue, would impinge on the right of the donor to give or withhold support. Indeed parents were unanimously reported not to have asked for filial support. As I shall argue below this 'norm of non-articulation' (Patterson 1997) while seemingly securing the 'free choice' of the potential caregiver effectively reinforced pressure and ambivalence. One important source of ambivalences within family relationships had been the perception that parents had given support unequally to their children, an example of which will be discussed below. The interviews had focused on ways of dealing with the parental model of life-style. Here too degrees of reported ambivalences differed along gender lines, seemingly confirming the dominant discourse of an increased ambivalence in mother-daughter relationships: by virtue of being of the same gender daughters are said to experience ambivalence between identification with and separation from the mother (critically Nice 1992). The interviews showed that women in particular ambivalently evaluated the maternal model of life-style, specifically the strong work ethic of women of the 'reconstruction generation' (Son 814). Daughters admired their mother's strength, energy and will to help others, which at the same time was seen critically insofar as it forestalled leisure activities and time for the mothers themselves. More often than fathers, mothers were characterised as 'dominant' but this dominance co-existed often with a subordinate position in their marital relationship that the respondents unanimously rejected for themselves. Both men's and women's testimonies speak of efforts to transform parental legacies in specific respects which were only partially successful. Women's efforts seemed at the same time more determined and bound up with their personal identity. Ambivalence was reported when research participants in the processes of working through these legacies rediscovered attributes in themselves that they had disliked in their parent and had tried to counteract. These incidences might be a special case of ambivalence between dependence and autonomy: adult children were committed to establish their own lives and embraced the idea that society allowed them to a larger degree to choose which aspects of the

parental life style they liked and wanted to continue and, as one woman described it, were 'shocked that these fine inner structures repeat themselves so much' (Daughter 821).

'I rebelled from an early age at being a girl and moaned at the thought that I could have breasts. Yes, and I didn't want to admit that I was gifted in languages and against my mother's insistence chose the natural sciences in upper school and not languages... It was always my mother who affected me badly... Particularly because I'm very similar to her in some respects, and I often found myself with inner conflicts when I was fighting sides that are similar to my mother, in myself, right ... And when she is dependent, if she were to be dependent on me, that is something which I would fear.'

Daughter 700a, no caring  
tradition, 2 brothers,  
university degree, married,  
f/t employed, no children

By contrast, the narratives of the interviewed men who become aware of unintended similarities with their fathers' life-styles were more divorced from questions of personal identity as the formulation 'playing the role of my father' in the following account suggests and did not appear to generate ambivalence.

'I would say that I've tried hard where it was possible, not to be an absent father... but I find that I rather tend to repeat the role of my father, whereas P. [partner] evens out more and she licks me into shape for example she says, you have to take the children more seriously, you can't always play the authoritarian. Well there I have to say for myself that I have to watch myself that I don't continue to play the role of my father.'

Son 054b, caring tradition,  
1 sister, university degree,  
cohabit, f/t employed, 1  
child

In accordance with studies that show that the quality of the interpersonal relationship did not predict care-giving (Qureshi 1996) the interviews with the older women suggested that neither did interpersonal ambivalences predict care-giving practice. Ambivalences are also inherent in the institutions of the welfare state. Thus the proliferation of social services and the introduction of long-term care insurance in Germany are evidence of the state acknowledgement of care needs that cannot be met by families alone. Yet, in contrast to the stated universality of service accessibility, quality services are in too short supply, often unaffordable and, as the care insurance legislation shows, structured so as to reinforce rather than complement or substitute for home care mostly provided by women (Mager 1997). Furthermore, assistance is not necessarily given according to need but to those who most effectively articulate their needs and whose needs are considered to be most legitimate (Twigg and Atkin 1994). One can perhaps speak of a hierarchy of care provision, where services are given to older men at lower levels of disabilities than to women, to natives more easily than to ethnic minority groups and to people with sons who can negotiate access more frequently than to people without children (Qureshi 1996). Non-availability, non-accessibility or non-acceptability eliminate choices and are likely to increase pressure on the part of those who are seen as the first line of resort: spouses and adult daughters.

Among the adult children interviewed women were the majority of those who explicitly opted for residential care while at the same time it was exclusively women with lower educational background who prospectively committed themselves to co-residential care. Although the sample is small, the differences in anticipation among women may suggest that material resources to buy in quality care can mitigate ambivalence, as has been shown by Krüger and colleagues (1987) in the case of childcare. For those research participants who planned to rely on services the expected availability and quality of services were a main concern. Against the background of available domiciliary services home care was seen as preferable to residential care because parents were expected to decline help from outside of their family environment. Against the background of the strains that co-residential care might entail for adult children and their families, and the perceived isolation of the care receiver on the other hand, residential care also appeared preferable to co-residential care for the care receiver because of the full-time availability of professional carers. An underlying ambivalence between the benefits and inadequacy of residential care was often expressed in multiple changes of perspective between caregiver and care receiver and the evaluation differed with the contrasting background.

'I would see that they get into a good home. That might sound hard but they have it better there. And I would do everything to keep them in their familiar environment as long as possible with these community workers ... because as soon as they lose the security within their own four walls, they go into a rapid decline ... But in a decent nursing home, they have speech therapists, they have carers who can give time and attention to the old people, right? I think you can't do it that way, you have to go to work, the children go to school ... Basically the person sits in front of the telly all day. It's so isolated, it's a (prison) cell, a family cell, although it is not depicted like that.'

Daughter 546c, no caring  
tradition, 4 sisters, skilled  
training, married, p/t  
employed, 3 children

The degree to which opposing structural forces were identified in cultural norms, family relationships and social institutions depended thus on the positionality of the research participants, notably on their gender but also on the degree to which they felt responsible for providing or organising parental care. Among those who felt highly responsible, ambivalence indeed forced them to reflect on the parent-child relationship but sometimes also on issues of gender and justice more generally. The finding that overlapping sources of structural ambivalence did not simply cumulate but also allowed for changes of perspective suggest to focusing explicitly on the reported strategies and resources to deal with ambivalence.

#### Management of ambivalence

Structural ambivalences, as Junge (1998) has argued, are managed both on an institutional and on an individual level. As suggested above with respect to the performative dimension of ambivalence, these levels are interdependent. Thus the proliferation of care services can be seen as a product of groups articulating their legitimate demands and as working towards resolving or mitigating ambivalence between caring roles and other commitments. At the same time this proliferation can produce new ambivalent choice situations for the individuals concerned. Conversely seemingly 'private' strategies of dealing with ambivalence are political insofar as they may challenge, as well as sustain, structural ambivalences.

Strategies of dealing with ambivalence are partly implicit in the interview passages quoted above. With respect to the anticipation of parental care needs, some men succeeded in defining their occasional practical assistance to their parents as fulfilling their filial responsibilities. ('In this way I practically cover my responsibility constantly' (Son 805a)). Or they referred to their primary responsibilities to their own families as legitimate excuses

not to provide personal care. Their anticipated course of action, the reliance on service provision, was clear and did not appear to generate ambivalence. If ambivalence was articulated one important response was not to think about the dilemma parental care needs posed, and as the interlocutors put it, to repress it. 'Repression' was sometimes justified with reference to the impossibility of foreseeing and planning for parental care needs. Men in particular, used it in order not to specify possible commitments, even when the need for communication and timely planning was explicitly acknowledged. The following account indicates that the strategy of repression and non-communication could often be a forced choice.

Resp: Three years ago we had the case that my grandfather needed nursing ... And that was basically a horrible time, which also had to do with the fact that in this family many things have gone wrong for thirty years. Which means things, important things weren't talked about, which was simply catastrophic in this situation. But I think, if there is more communication from the beginning it doesn't have to get that bad. But the subject actually gives me stomach aches because I have the feeling that I'm stuck with it because my brother, I'd simply say, has a disturbed relationship to it...

Int: So you probably haven't talked about this with your brother?

Resp: Yes, sure, I have, um attempted, or let's say, I let him know my worries or that I thought about it in this context. And well what I learned from the situation with my granddad is that you can never plan it anyway.

Daughter 707a, caring  
tradition, 1 brother,  
university degree,  
cohabiting, f/t employed,  
no children

The strategy of repression can be facilitated by the tacit assumption that somebody else, usually a sister, will take over main caring responsibilities. On the other hand, prospectively assigning main responsibility to a sister, even if based on ambivalently perceived family relationships arising from unequal support given by parents, can generate new ambivalences between the assignment of responsibility to a sister and the research participant's own felt responsibilities arising from the norm of reciprocity. In the following case this ambivalence is reconciled in the development of a model in which opposed orientations are merged: the anticipation of a 'proportional' sharing of caring responsibilities between the siblings.

Resp: Well my husband he is of the opinion - I mean I have to give my opinion - but he says - I can't do it, I'm a very emotional person, I would drop everything, if something were to happen. But my husband, he says 'your parents have never done anything for us. They always went to A [sister], so they can take care of it', right? Because my mother - when my sister needed somebody for her daughter, my mother was always there...

Int: So you're saying that concerning the need for care you wouldn't feel responsible in the first place?



Resp: I would feel responsible; they are my parents after all. You've become a decent person, there is a lot involved in this. Well I would take some responsibility. Only if I consider the - how should I say - the situation, as a matter of principle, right, then I'd say ... 'A, you had the greatest benefit, you take the greatest responsibility!'... It depends on the situation whether you can do it, whether you could really say: 'yes, we take them for a couple of weeks [at a time] but mainly they stay with you.' ... Or that you go over there and take it in turns.

Daughter 546b, no caring  
tradition, 4 sisters, skilled  
training, married, p/t  
employed, 2 children

Yet, the prospective merging of two courses of action can mitigate or resolve ambivalence only if the anticipated model is explicitly discussed and negotiated with both parents and siblings. Overall parents were reported not to raise the issue of care in old age for fear of putting pressure on their children and adult children were reluctant to raise the issue with their parents because they feared that this was interpreted as a refusal to provide care.

'I didn't dare to ask whether they have registered somewhere. Years ago my father talked about a senior citizens' house... I don't dare asking because I'm anxious that if you make suggestions they think you don't want to look after them. I'll go there at Christmas, perhaps I'll raise it then. Because my sister has asked me, to talk to them because she doesn't dare to either. Because they have a house and when the children move out they even would have the space. Well she is the one who is concerned there, and is a bit anxious... And of course when they raise it, it's something different from when I raise it. Because I'm so far away, I wouldn't be available for long-term care... But I think this is a subject that you simply must talk about with your parents in time.'

Daughter 546d, no caring  
tradition, 4 sisters,  
university degree,  
cohabiting, f/t employed, 1  
child

Non-articulation held ambivalence in suspense by neither confirming nor declining personal assistance. It thereby seemingly secured openness and choice, while in practice sometimes concealing decisions already made. Non-articulation was likely to increase uncertainty and ambivalence both on the part of possible care receivers and on the part of those who both felt and according to a normative hierarchy of carers were held most responsible. On the other hand communication alone does not necessarily solve dilemmas. The testimonies of both mothers and children show that even if they were articulated children tended to distrust their parents' plans to go into an elder care home and mothers did not trust their children's assurances that they would not be 'sent' into a home. But even if it does not resolve intergenerational ambivalence the research suggests that articulation is a way of not only sharing concerns but also promoting accountability as a prerequisite of distributing help in a more equitable manner. Importantly it is necessary to access various forms of services as well as personal support, which, as the testimonies of the older women impressively show, will be needed whatever the course of action taken. It is a step towards promoting the institutional management of ambivalence.

OUTLOOK

In this paper I have argued that the concept of ambivalence is a valuable analytic tool for the exploration of and theoretical preservation of moments of non-identity and non-closure: the interpretation of simultaneously present opposed forces that press towards opposing courses of action both on the societal and individual level. In order to develop the concept in social science terms it is necessary to focus on the normative and performative aspects of ambivalence, namely on the ways in which opposing values are shaped by social practices and discourses and on the institutional and individual strategies of dealing with ambivalence. These strategies feed back, sustaining or challenging structural ambivalences. Such an approach requires conceiving the opposing forces not in terms of logical contradictions but as contrary opposites that may be unstable and changing. It further suggests a path of analysis that is directed both towards specific situations in which ambivalences are articulated and towards broader discourses, maintained by social practices and material institutions, which contain opposed valences, one of which might be more dominant, the other taken for granted and unmarked.

Taking the example of (anticipated) provision of support in intergenerational relationships I have argued that modes of scientific and philosophical justification of intergenerational commitments contain opposed foundations in nature and human practice. The assumption of natural solidarity coexists with assumptions that intergenerational rights and duties are rationally willed. The assumption that reciprocity in intergenerational relationships is universal coexists with the assumptions that rights and duties are exchanged between fathers and sons, whereas women fulfil the taken for granted day-to-day necessities of caring work. These opposing themes underlie anticipations of parental care of a group of German adult children who saw themselves faced with a dilemma of having to provide personal care or putting their parents in an elder care home. More precisely they were one source of ambivalence as intergenerational ambivalences generated by care anticipations were multiply constituted by cultural norms, social institutions and family relationships, the interpretation of which varied with the effective structural position of the research participants. Thus women felt both pushed towards care-giving on the basis of their family ('blood') relationship and held that care should be given in accordance to what they had received from their parents, and caregiving should be distributed equally between siblings. Care institutions were seen both as beneficial alternatives to home care and as inadequate. Strategies of dealing with intergenerational ambivalence generated by a dilemma between sacrificing the parent and sacrificing one self included the promotion of residential care in which prominence was prospectively given to one course of action while drowning out its potentially negative implications; the anticipation of a sharing of responsibility among siblings complemented by social service provision in which the opposed courses of action were merged; and the strategy of repression in which both courses of action were faded out.

The task of the social scientist is to spell out the consequences of these strategies in order to draw attention to the politics of ambivalence, that is the processes by which certain social positions are structurally spared high degrees of ambivalence or allow for an integration of opposed courses of action more easily at the expense of other positions. Individual and institutional responses have to be analysed in their enabling and constraining aspects and in terms of their sustaining or shifting the opposing discourse. By drawing attention to these processes social scientists contribute themselves in the discourse of ambivalence. Previous studies have indicated that the discourse about ambivalence can itself be a resource for a productive achievement of ambivalence and reduction in the degree to which 'negative' impulses and orientations have to be prohibited or silenced. Thus the aim of locating and analysing structural ambivalences is not motivated by a wish for an end of ambivalence but perhaps by contributing to a shift in the underlying terms of the oppositions.

---

## References

Bauman, Zygmunt (1992) *Intimations of postmodernity*, London: Routledge.

Beck, Ulrich (1994) 'The reinvention of politics: towards a theory of reflexive modernization', in U. Beck, A. Giddens

& S. Lash (eds) *Reflexive modernization. Politics, tradition and aesthetics in the modern social order*, Cambridge; Oxford: Polity Press.

Becker-Schmidt, Regina (1980) 'Widersprüchliche Realität und Ambivalenz: Arbeitserfahrungen von Frauen in Beruf und Familie', *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie* 32, 702-725.

Bengtson, Vern L., Cutler, Neal E., Manden, David J. & Marshall, Victor W. (1985) 'Generations, cohorts, and relations between age groups', in R.H. Binstock & E. Shanas (eds.) *Handbook of aging and the social sciences*, New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold.

Billig, Michael (1989) *Arguing and thinking: a rhetorical approach to social psychology*, Cambridge: Maison des Sciences de l' Homme and Cambridge University Press.

Billig, Michael, Condor, Susan, Edwards, David, Gane, Mike, Middleton, David & Radley, Alan (1988) *Ideological dilemmas: a social psychology of everyday thinking*, London: Sage.

Born, Claudia, Krüger, Helga & Lorenz-Meyer, Dagmar (1996) *Der unentdeckte Wandel: Annäherung an das Verhältnis von Struktur und Norm im weiblichen Lebenslauf*, Berlin: Edition Sigma.

Collier, Jane Fishburne & Yanagisako, Sylvia Junko (1987) 'Introduction', in J. F. Collier & S. J. Yanagisako (Eds.) *Gender and Kinship: Essays Towards a Unified Analysis*, Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Conrad, Christoph (1996) 'Mixed income for the elderly poor in Germany 1880-1930', in M. B. Katz & C. Sachße (eds) *The mixed economy of social welfare: public/private relations in England, Germany and the United States, the 1870s to the 1930s*, Baden-Baden: Nomos.

Cornell, William F. (1988) 'Life script theory: a critical review from a developmental perspective', *Transactional Analysis Journal* 18 (4), pp. 270-282.

Davis, Natalie Zemon (1986) *Die Geister der Verstorbenen, Verwandtschaftsgrade und die Sorge um die Nachkommen. Veränderungen des Familienlebens in der frühen Neuzeit*, in N. Z. Davis (ed.) *Frauen und Gesellschaft am Beginn der Neuzeit: Studien über Familie, Religion und die Wandlungsfähigkeit des sozialen Körpers*, Berlin: Verlag Klaus Wagenbach.

Dirks, Nicholas B., Eley, Geoff & Ortner, Sherry B. (1994) 'Introduction', in N. B. Dirks, G. Eley & S. B. Ortner (Eds.) *Culture/ power/ history: a reader in contemporary social theory*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Derrida, Jacques (1978) 'Structure, sign, and play in the discourse of the human sciences', in J. Derrida Writing and difference, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Finch, Janet & Mason, Jennifer (1992) Negotiating family responsibilities, London: Tavistock/Routledge.

Freud, Sigmund (1912/1982a) 'Zur Dynamik der Übertragung', in S. Freud Studienausgabe, Vol. 3, Psychologie des Unbewußten, Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer.

Freud, Sigmund (1913/1982b) 'Zur Disposition zur Zwangsneurose. Ein Beitrag zum Problem der Neurosenwahl', in S. Freud Studienausgabe, Vol. 7, Zwang, Paranoia und Perversion, Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer.

Freud, Sigmund (1916/1982c) '13. Vorlesung: Archaische Züge und Infantilismus des Traumes', in S. Freud Studienausgabe, Vol. 1, Vorlesungen zur Einführung in die Psychoanalyse und Neue Folge, Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer.

Freud, Sigmund (1917/1982d) '21. Vorlesung: Lidoentwicklung und Sexualorganisation', in S. Freud Studienausgabe, Vol. 1, Vorlesungen zur Einführung in die Psychoanalyse und Neue Folge, Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer.

Freud, Sigmund (1917/1982e) '33. Vorlesung: Die Weiblichkeit', in S. Freud Studienausgabe, Vol. 1, Vorlesungen zur Einführung in die Psychoanalyse und Neue Folge, Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer.

Fry, Christine L. (1995) 'Kinship and individuation: Cross-cultural perspectives on intergenerational relations', in V. Bengtson, K. W. Schaie & L. M. Burton (eds) Adult intergenerational relations: effect of societal change, New York: Springer Publishing Company.

George, Linda K. (1986) 'Caregiver burden: conflict between norms of reciprocity and solidarity', in K. A. Pillemer & R. S. Wolf (eds) Elder abuse: conflict in the family, Dover, MA: Auburn House.

Grilliat, Denis (1998) 'L'ambivalence comme paradigme de la différence structurale entre schizophrénie et névrose', Bulletin de psychologie, 51, 2, 173-179.

Hareven, Tamara K. (1994), 'Aging and Generational Relations: A Historical and Life Course Perspective', Annual Review of Sociology 20, pp. 437-61.

Hess, B.B. and Waring, J. M. (1983) 'Family relationships of older women: a women's issue', in E.W. Markson (Ed.) Old women, issues and prospects, Lexington/MA: Lexington Books.

Hobbes, Thomas (1997) Leviathan, edited by R. Tuck, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. [First edition 1651]

Jerrome, Dorothy (1996) 'Ties that bind', in A. Walker (Ed.) The new generational contract, London: UCL Press.

Junge, Matthias (1998) 'Ambivalence and social change', paper presented at the workshop 'Ambivalences in Intergenerational Relations', Cornell University, 4-6 December 1998.

Krüger, Helga, Born, Claudia, Einemann, Beate, Heintze, Stine & Saifi, Helga (1987) Privatsache Kind - Privatsache Beruf. „Und dann hab' ich ja noch Haushalt, Mann und Wäsche!' Zur Lebenssituation von Frauen mit kleinen Kindern in unserer Gesellschaft, Opladen: Leske & Buderich.

Laplanche, Jean & Pontalis, Jean-Bertrand (1992) Das Vokabular der Psychoanalyse, Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp.

Laqueur, Thomas (1990) 'Destiny is anatomy', in T. Laqueur Making sex: body and gender from the Greeks to Freud, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Lewis, Charlton T. (1889) A Latin dictionary for schools, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Locke, John (1988) Two treatises of government, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. [First edition 1698]

Lorenz-Meyer, Dagmar (1999) The gendered politics of generational contracts. Changing discourses and practices of intergenerational commitments in West Germany, unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, London School of Economics.

Lüscher, Kurt & Pillemer, Karl (1997) Intergenerational ambivalence. A new approach to the study of parent-child relations in later life, Arbeitspapier 28, Sozialwissenschaftliche Fakultät, Universität Konstanz.

Lüscher, Kurt (1998a) A heuristic model for the study of intergenerational ambivalence, Arbeitspapier 29, Sozialwissenschaftliche Fakultät, Universität Konstanz.

Lüscher, Kurt (1998b) 'The challenges of ambivalence', paper presented at the workshop 'Ambivalences in Intergenerational Relations', Cornell University, 4-6 December 1998.

Mager, Hans-Christian (1997) Pflegesicherung in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland PfLEG-Projekt, Forschungsberichte 9, Frankfurt a. M.: J. W. Goethe Universität.

Maine, Sir Henry (1917) Ancient law, London: J. M. Dent & Sons. [First edition 1861]

Merton, Robert K. & Barber, Elinor G. (1976) 'Sociological ambivalence' [orig. 1963], in R. K. Merton Sociological ambivalence and other essays, London: Macmillan.

Nice, Vivien E. (1992) Mothers & daughters: The distortion of a relationship, London: Macmillan.

Oekinghaus, Emma (1925) Die gesellschaftliche und rechtliche Stellung der deutschen Frau, Jena: Gustav Fischer Verlag.

Parker, Rozsika (1995) Mother love/mother hate. The power of maternal ambivalence, London: Basic Books.

Patterson, Nerys T. (1997) 'Conflicting norms in modern British kinship: cases of domestic violence and competition for care in North Wales 1920-1996', The History of the Family, 2, 1, 1-29.

Pomata, Gianna (1996) 'Blood ties and semen ties: consanguinity and agnation in Roman law', in M.J. Maynes, A. Waltner, B. Soland & U. Strasser (eds) Gender, kinship, power. A comparative and interdisciplinary history, London: Routledge.

Qureshi, Hazel (1996) 'Obligation and support within families', in A. Walker (ed.) The new generational contract: intergenerational relations, old age and welfare, London: UCL Press.

Schneider, David M. (1984) A critique of the study of kinship, Chicago: University of Michigan Press.

Simon, Fritz B. (1998) 'Beyond bipolar thinking: patterns of conflict as a focus for diagnosis and intervention', Family Process, 37, 2, 215-232.

Smelser, Neil J. (1998) 'Presidential Address 1997', American Sociological Review, 63, 1-15.

Spinoza, Baruch (1960) 'Ethics demonstrated in geometrical order' [first edition 1677], in M. C. Beardsley (Ed.) The European Philosophers. From Descartes to Nietzsche, New York: Random House, pp. 140-226.

Stekel, Wilhelm (1943) The interpretation of dreams: new developments and techniques, translated by P. Eden & P. Cedar, edited by E. A. Gutheil, New York: Liveright publishing corporation.

The Oxford English Dictionary (1989) 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., prepared by J.A. Simpson and E.S.C. Weiner, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Thomasset, Claude (1992) 'The nature of women', in C. Klapisch-Zuber (ed.) A history of women in the west. II. Silences of the Middle Ages, Cambridge, Mass.; London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Thompson, Megan M. & Holmes, John G. (1996)  
'Ambivalence in close relationships. Conflicted cognitions as a catalyst for change', in R. M. Sorrentino & E. T. Higgins (Eds.) *Handbook of motivation and cognition*, Vol. 3, The interpersonal context, New York: The Guilford Press.

Twigg, Julia & Atkin, Karl (1994) *Carers perceived: policy and practice in informal care*, Buckingham: Open University Press.

Weigert, Andrew J. (1991) *Mixed emotions: certain steps toward understanding ambivalence*, Albany: State University Press of New York Press.