

Speaking with EVA POPPER and LORICA BÆCKSTRÖM about their book "THE LETTERS FROM DORIS THE DESTRUCTION OF A FAMILY"

By Silvia Constantinescu.



Eva Popper: "Xenophobia is mostly a fear of the unknown, it feels threatening to a person's cultural background".

Photo: Octavian Ciupitu / © CR.

In 2010 I have announced the publication of this book, on the occasion of my interview then with Lorica Bäckström.

"The conversation" I had then with Lorica Bäckström, a journalist, but also a person with a specially long experience in receiving immigrants from around the world to Sweden – a country so different in mentality compared to the other countries in the world - has been so interesting, so that has been extended, postponing in a way the presentation of this book.

The review of the book "The Letters from Doris – The Destruction of a Family" will be published by Octavian Ciupitu in the forth number for 2011 of the magazine CURIERUL ROMÂNESC.

However, I will ask here the authors some questions about how this book has been born, about xenophobia, anti-Semitism, and racism – about the mechanisms which start these dark aspects of the human psychic, and if there are solutions to exterminate them.

Silvia Constantinescu: Eva Popper, together to your sister, Lorica Bäckström, you have written and published the book "Breven från Doris - en familjs undergång" (The Letters from Doris – The Destruction of a Family). You are also the responsible publisher to this book. I would like to ask you some questions about this book, however the magazine's CURIERUL ROMÂNESC tradition is to let my interlocutor to introduce him, or her self. Please tell about you, about your family, and about your activities.

Eva Popper: My name is Eva Popper, and I was born in Stockholm 1930. My Parents immigrated from Hungary (father), and Germany (mother) after WW1. They raised three daughters. My father was

Jewish, but he converted and became a Christian in 1925.

After having finished school I moved, as newly married, to Jämtland, a province in northern part of Sweden, where my husband and I started a chicken farm, and later on a transportation company. We raised four children (three girls and one boy). We separated in 1973, after which I went to back to school, and graduated from a School of Social Studies. I then got an employment as a social and refugee consultant at the district secretariat in Jämtland's province.

I stayed there until my retirement in 1995. I moved back to Stockholm and live here since 2006. I live at a retirement center called "Sällskapet vänner till Pauvres Hontoux" (SVPH).

S.C.: What kind of literature do you like? What sort of music do you love? What kind of fine arts do you prefer?

E.P.: I am very much interested in literature, being a member of two literary circles. Music is also of great interest. I play guitar and sing in a choir. My interest in fine art is modest.

S.C.: In 2010 you and Lorica have published the book "Breven från Doris - en familjs undergång", which tells about a dark period in the history of the humanity: the Second World War. How did you learn about this tragedy of a family? Why came the book so late?

E.P.: My cousin's child, Doris, the subject of the book, was moved to Berlin from the small town Guben in the beginning of 1940, where her parents hoped that she could attend school with arousing attention, as being Jewish. She lived there boarded and lodged for two years (1940-1942) and she corresponded during this time with her family. She was then between nine and eleven years of age. After hers and her mother's deportation, the letters were found by an aunt and were then saved in an archive. By coincidence, my sister and I learned about these letters, when we visited our only surviving relatives in 2008. They gave us copies of all correspondence, which we translated into Swedish. The book "Breven från Doris" has been published in 2010.

S.C.: I would like to ask you: What do you think it makes possible that people became xenophobes, anti-Semites, and racists? Which mechanism in the human psychology makes that these feelings, these attitudes wake up such wrongdoings? What is it to do that these horrible issues from the Second World War not will be repeated?

E.P.: Xenophobia is mostly a fear of the unknown, it feels threatening to a person's cultural background.

S.C.: How was it like to collaborate with your sister to write this book?

E.P.: My sister Lorica's and my co-operation in translating the book went smoothly, as we divided the work to us both.

S.C.: Dear Lorica, we had already a long, long "talk" about your life, about many aspects of the society we live in, about immigrants and their situation in Sweden, etc., conversations that I have already



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Photo: Octavian Ciupitu / © CR.

published in a couple of numbers of the magazine CURIERUL ROMÂNESC, both in 2010, and in 2011. Now I would like to ask you what you think it is making people xenophobes, anti-Semites, racists Which mechanism in the human psychology makes that these feelings, these attitudes wake up such wrongdoings? What is it to do that these horrible issues from the second world war not will be repeated?

Lorica Bäckström: How do we create the Kingdom of Heaven on earth? So I understand your question. Of course I have got no answer.

I will have to leave it to great men and women, to the philosophers and religious believers: Mother Teresa, Dalai Lama, Martin Luther King. A fourth name that comes into my mind is the Swedish diplomat Dag Hammarsköld who was also a poet.

It brought up all our questions about the Holocaust – of which we knew very little, as we grew up in the 1930-ies, and although we were too small to grasp the horrible things that happened to our relatives in Germany and Hungary, we could feel that something strange and incomprehensible was going on in Europe.

But our parents never said a word about it: they didn't want to scare us (or each other).

We don't know how much they discussed between themselves, but I think they denied the facts, as people do in great danger - see the chapter about Bruno Bettelheim: he was one of the survivor who could bear witness to all the atrocities, and he also wrote several articles and books about them.

There were – and are – heroes of course, such as Raoul Wallenberg, and the German survivor Viktor Frankl, who wrote a book called "Life must have a sense", which I highly recommend. ★