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**BEWARE – THE FIRST TRAIN CAN HIDE THE ONE BEHIND.
ONE MEMORY CAN CONCEAL ANOTHER MEMORY.
THE ROLE OF MEMORY IN THE GROUP ANALYTIC AND TRANSCULTURAL
PROCESS.**

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All of us surely remember from our childhood and even now in rural areas, railway crossings equipped with signposts: “Caution! The first train can conceal the one behind”. Everybody, who has been part of an intensive experiential group will understand why this picture of the trains came to my mind to illustrate the process of memorizing and working through in a group.

In the seventh and eighth decades of the last century about a dozen Western European psychoanalysts and group analysts met to share their common interest in intercultural processes in the analytic, therapeutic, group dynamic fields. They wanted to define and raise a new theoretical and institutional alliance for common research.

And so the European Association for Transcultural Group Analysis (EATGA) was founded in the early 80s.

We wanted to investigate the cultural foundations of personality by exploring the relations between the intrapsychic organization and the system of cultural connotations, and of inter- and transpersonal relationships in groups and institutions.

In every society a balance exists between the individual and the group, which is based on an individual intrapsychic organization (dependent on the genetic inheritance, developmental conditions and so on) and the specific parameters and limitations of a culture. The relation between individual and group varies according to dependence on the specific culture. Different from other inter- or transcultural research projects, this group of psychoanalysts had the aim of using, in particular, group methods with a psychoanalytic orientation as the research method. Workshops would be organized and evaluated in different European countries with regard to the different transcultural aspects of the psychic functioning.

This method of group analysis was chosen because it offers an adequate instrument both for personal experience and for collective research. The workshops were organized to alternate between the small and large group processes, a setting that provokes the appearance of regressive elements of the undifferentiated -self at individual and group level.

Primitive fears arise if normal cultural references are no longer available. The lack of translation leads to a linguistic pain connected to a cultural fear: the changeover from small

groups to large groups in an intercultural setting confronts the participant and the group with the impossibility of a common language and common culture.

We must remember that Europe in the eighties was different from the Europe of today. Europe was part of the western world, ending at the borders of the Eastern bloc. The central states of Europe were Britain and France. Germany, at that time, was already an economic giant, but politically, culturally and scientifically still blocked by the results of the Second World War and Nazism.

Within the Transcultural Association this European constellation had the effect, that personal and scientific discussion was primarily determined by the dynamics between the group of French psychoanalysts around Jean Claude Rouchy and the London Group Analysts around Malcolm Pines, Dennis Brown and others.

The tradition of group analysis founded by S.H. Foulkes resulted from the circle of the Frankfurt Sociological Institute of Horkheimer, Norbert Elias, Adorno and Marcuse. They had developed this method of group analysis during the war and post-war years, triggered by the investigation of the authoritarian personality and the democratic system, and it came also from the work of British analysts working at Northwick Park.

From the French group analysts came the tradition of the strict analytic setting, the compliance with framework and rules in order to allow the transference to become visible.

The then current European understanding that in human life aggression primarily has to be understood as reactive and destructive elements arising from non-integrated experiences of childhood and adolescence, often of a traumatic nature. Thus these came to be represented in the body of thought of this group.

The concept of the death instinct was regarded as old fashioned and as historical fact.

Later on, we will see that these positions had to be better understood as a history of memory within psychoanalysis and as the lack of integration of the traumatic experiences of the Third Reich and the Shoa.

I will examine single elements of the memory work in the transcultural workshops, which have been organized by the EATGA nearly every 2 to 3 years between 1985 to 2008 (Maastricht to Marsala.)

I will take up some important thoughts of Sigmund Freud's late cultural historical works, particularly "Moses and Monotheism", mirrored in the reception of the famous religious scientist and specialist in Egyptian science, Jan Assmann (Heidelberg).

Within the research discussions about transcultural aspects the thoughts of Freud that represent a quarry of fascinating ideas have largely been neglected.

The results from the first workshop (1985) in Maastricht have been discussed and published by Dennis Brown and Jacques Le Roy.

The participants and the staff, Swiss, French, English, Belgian, German and Italian analysts were shaken and impressed by the emotional force of this group experience.

There had never been a comparable large meeting of psychoanalysts in this context of self-experience at a European level until this Maastricht workshop..

In those days we were acquainted with the discussion about the traumatic experiences on the victims' side of the World War and the Shoa, and on the side of the perpetrators' children, too. However, at a group level, experience with these topics had been missing.

In Maastricht, the large group was particularly dominated by the memory work of the results of the invasions of the European countries by the German Wehrmacht and the ensuing holocaust and the destruction of the culture of other minorities.

Although at least 1/3 of the participants spoke German, the use of the German language had taken on an unconscious taboo at the workshop.

The suppression of the German language and of the German culture produced altogether a clear division between the victims, - those who could speak and the perpetrators or fellow travelers who were speechless.

Later we will understand better this form of memory, because we will experience that one memory can cover up or replace another one.

In Maastricht it was the suppressed memory, and that fact being frightening, that created a clear division between victims and perpetrators as a secondary historical construct.

The later workshops in Heidelberg and Oxford helped us to question how this simplifying construction, separated into victims and perpetrators, was represented in the individual and in his internalized history.

It became possible to find a deeper differentiation concerning the ambivalence towards the Nazi leaders, the anti-Semitism in many European countries and the USA, the fellow travelers in the occupied countries, and the collaboration and building up of political and military alliances with Nazi Germany during World War II, as represented in the individual and in his internalized history.

Once again we should remind ourselves of the Zeitgeist of that period and the state of the discussion:

1985, the year of the workshop in Maastricht, was also the year of the first International Psychoanalytic Congress in Germany since the end of the Second World War. The International Psychoanalytic Association (IPA) had previously rejected an invitation to meet in Berlin, because the end of the World War had felt too close.

At the welcoming ceremony of the IPA Congress the Lord Mayor of Hamburg, Klaus von Dohnanyi, called on those present to deal not only with the Germany of Hitler, Himmler and Eichmann, but also with the Germany of Goethe, Beethoven and Kant.

The IPA conference was overshadowed by a scandal, which only a few weeks earlier had been exposed - the first chairman of the German Psychoanalytic Association had in the past been a member of the NSDAP.

After Maastricht, the research group was able to recognize that the unconscious perpetrator/victim constellation restored itself not only by avoiding the German language.

The unspoken German also represented the part of the self which had been brought to silence. The question was asked - how could one find a language for the inherent destructive elements in relation to others.

We understood through the dynamics of this workshop that frequently a trauma could not be processed in the generation which had experienced it and so it was passed on to the following generation

First considerations were possible about how far history is not a copy of reality, but also has a metaphorical quality.

The same history can be experienced with different outcomes in the different cultures.

In the following years the model used successfully in EATGA workshops was also used in Argentina, the USA, Brazil and other international meetings.

During the International Group Psychotherapy Conference in Argentina (IAGP) (Buenos Aires 1995) the large group had for example a similar development to the one in Maastricht - the place the German culture had taken in the large group, in Buenos Aires it was the English culture fixed on the Falkland war between England and Argentina.

At this time we started questioning how far trauma has a structuring identity constituting the functioning of a group in the development of its own culture, which goes beyond pure memory work.

The psychoanalyst Volkan speaks for example of the Yugoslav identity conflict as a form of the "chosen trauma".

At this point I would like to introduce Jan Assmann, scientist of religion and Egyptian history: with his book:

"Moses the Egyptian, the deciphering of a memory trace".

Assmann succeeds in his understanding and interpretation of Freud's: "Moses and Monotheism" to deliver Freud from a central misunderstanding. Freud did not look to the reconstructions of the history of Moses, as a real person by using his theory of the "Urhorde" for explaining Moses. Freud describes Moses as a founder of the Jewish religion as well as of the Israeli nation and as an exemplary study of the memory culture and not as the concrete history and thus using memory as an identity-creating moment of a community, a nation.

We will see, how far the principles that Assmann describes about the normative identity formation of the religious, Jewish culture, can be transferred to transcultural thinking in general.

Assmann describes the development of a religion out of the process of setting boundaries against competitive, parallel earlier religions.

A "counter-religion", as mentioned by Assmann, excludes everything outside this religion, as nonbeliever, as paganism. Religions do not work as a medium of intercultural connections, but as a medium of the alienation of another culture. The other group is considered to be leprous, perverse, and lawless.

Memories are used in this model to two opposite goals:

On the one hand, memory is an act of constant dissociation, so that what is behind doesn't come back. This is called the "conversion memory".

The second function of the memory work is the “deconstructive memory” which uses intercultural translation as a medium for bringing different values from other cultures into its own culture.

In large group processes we know these two memory functions form a typical phase. First the delimitation (conversion memory) and, after a phase of a decisive group development, which occurs later, can lead to the deconstructive memory and a possible integration of other cultural values into the original culture (deconstructive memory).

So we understand better, that in analytical, transcultural processes, memory work is a dynamic point of view not centered around the history in the narrower meaning, but around the past, as it is remembered.

In the present the past can be reconstructed, modeled and also invented.

Memory cannot be regarded as a reliable source, cannot even be checked on objective facts, since the choice of the facts already has a subjective factor itself.

We come to the phenomenon of “counterhistory” which is used by the individual and also in the group context by contradicting another memory explicitly. (Counterhistory)

We have experienced in our workshops over the last thirty years that a central role in the first third of the group process consists of the reflection of an individual or group trauma.

Assmann confirms this hypothesis, that memory of a trauma is a group-stabilizing phenomenon, forming the identity of the group.

Another element is that in the large group at the Maastricht workshop there was a clear victim/perpetrator dynamic in its immense, emotional memory of individual and collective experiences of the Second World War and the Holocaust.

We have learned that this simplifying perception of the history began to dissolve in the later workshops.

In 2006 the EATGA organized a workshop in a country of the former Eastern bloc - in Budapest, Hungary.

This was an essential step in the development of our association.

Over the years the association had fallen into its own transcultural crisis. Twenty years after the fall of the Berlin wall the Budapest workshop can be seen as overcoming this crisis, with positive outcomes.

In EATGA, due to personal changes within the central figures of the association, the polarity between the French and English group analysts was broken.

One single theoretical concept had threatened to suppress the plurality of the different personal, cultural and psychoanalytical concepts.

In a very hard, painful experience for all those involved within the EATGA in working through our own inner dynamics, we came to an experience that today almost appears banal.

Our experience was that development could take place only through integration of our own destructive, no longer fended-off and projected parts of our selves.

The theoretical position, that negative aggression and destruction are to be understood as only reactive, could not be maintained any longer.

Since then the EATGA has again become a viable and lively association of European

analysts of differing provenances, impressive in its multiculturalism.

As a result the group of workshop conductors were able to open up and integrate colleagues from the former Eastern bloc countries into the Budapest workshop. Added to this was the selection of a large group conductor who did not come from the tradition of the EATGA workshops. A further phenomenon of this opening up, was the inclusion of artists in this process through the integration of a drama therapy performance, which reflected the European topic.

A great part of the participants in the Budapest workshop came from the countries of the former Eastern bloc, from Hungary, Yugoslavia, and Romania.

The contents of this workshop were determined by the fairly recent traumatic experiences of the regime of Soviet communism, which pervaded the East European countries. The results of the disintegration of states for example in former Yugoslavia were primarily taken to be connected with the communist occupation.

Just days before the workshop and within the days of the workshop itself, there had been demonstrations and battles in the streets of Budapest with the neofascists.

It was a phenomenon that neither in the small or large groups was any reference made to this.

You will remember, that some countries of the former Eastern bloc had an alliance with National Socialist Germany up to the latter part of the Second World War. This was so in the case of Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, and in the western area in the post-war period, with unallied Austria, and fascist Italy.

Particularly through work with the destructive element of the large group and through the conductor, who was being experienced in the large group for a long time as Occupier, an aggressive oppressor, was an integration of these projected victim roles into history made possible and led to a more mature discussion about the unaccepted and projected parts of our self in the individual and reference group.

The question arises, why is foreign rule of one's own nation easier to memorize than one's own role as victimizer?

In consequence, we must specify our assumption that a collective trauma can represent an identity-forming element, and in the memory a collective experience of conquest can become much more stabilizing. It attaches to the experience of a defect and of shame. It seems, that a community can deal with these emotions much more easily than with the experience and integration of the homegrown perpetrators or fellow travelers.

Ammann describes here a collective phenomenon, that from the background of the experience of a defect, which hurts, the establishing of legislation in the organization under a leader (normative inversion) is made possible.

The disgust of the other culture is made to the regulation of the own culture.

A hatred in one culture can be turned into a way of regulating that culture.

(The meal of pork is stipulated, not because it is nourishing or cheap, but because it is forbidden to the other culture and therefore demonstrates that one is not part of the other).

If we transfer these mechanisms onto the Transcultural group process, as seen in the workshops but also in the ordinary European intercultural events, we come to an enlarged appreciation of the cultural difficulties and conflicts in our times.

However, it is alarmingly clear, that clearing up and a greater knowledge do not improve a better relation with another culture.

But, without integration of our own destructive, frequently protectively defended-off-elements, development is not possible.

It has also to be understood, how destruction as a structuring element can arise in the confrontation with strangeness.

It seems that the xenophobia in the background becomes an expression of one's own unintegrated pathological elements.

In conclusion, I would like to develop a last thought in analogy with Jan Assmann, hoping that the process of the workshop in Sicily, Marsala, is better understood.

In Budapest, the integration of group conductors from the former Eastern bloc countries was understood as a representation of the new countries and they had themselves to bring in and to set themselves up without the experience of the Western European countries in this new emerging European Union.

This was picked up in Marsala and supplemented with another element: the element of concrete history, represented in the historical town and landscape of Marsala.

During the changeover between small and large groups it was possible for the participants, to experience the unique architecture of this Sicilian town as an historical space, which was then taken into the unconscious perception.

Sicily existed long before Hellenistic and Roman times and until the 18th century was the center of a world of its own: - the Mediterranean. The architecture of the towns of Sicily are like open excavation sites displaying the many cultures which have been conquered, attacked, and colonized through the centuries and have left their imprint on the Sicilian culture, its people and its architecture.

They have brought in models of states and religions, which flourished and receded again. Governments, which permitted different internal cultures and religions led to social, economic and scientific growth, while those states, which suppressed, in an authoritarian and hostile way, the indigenous population lead to impoverishment and exploitation.

In the Marsala workshop the participants, the Staff and the research group on the other hand had different perceptions in their experience of the process.

Group conductors and researchers had collectively worked out the central hypotheses in the preparatory phase. They left the workshop at the end with a high degree of satisfaction about the process and the results and the cooperation within the staff.

Besides many very positive individual experiences, a fair amount of confusion was registered within the group of participants with regard to the working through of the topic of the workshop.

What had happened? The experience of the Budapest workshop with regard to memory

indicates that a deep split is to be discovered in the conscious topic of the large group and the unconscious fended-off central topic.

The central topics of the large group and many small group meetings in Budapest were the traumatic results of the communist regime in the Eastern bloc countries. Only through confrontation with the denied destructive perpetrator parts, which were mentioned consistently by the large group conductor, could the history, the present and thus also any development be connected in the large group.

The Sicilian large group in Marsala picked up the topic of the invasion of the older mostly non-Italian analysts into the workshop and their attempt to colonize the topics, the setting and the contents as a central theme .

Alongside this stood the perception of the group of Sicilian students as dependent, exploited slaves.

Unfortunately, these topics in which the historical elements of the place had been reproduced, could not be related sufficiently to their aspects of transference and repetition of the unconscious reproduction of the experience of occupation and exploitation.

An integration of the past into the present as a prerequisite for an actual lived present and future was blocked in the large group.

The over-strong supportive style of the large group conductors did not take up sufficiently the destructive elements in the large group.

The missing integration of the concrete place into the group process reminds us of what Jan Amman describes as “Verkryptung” (encryption) of traumatic experiences.

If a society tries to eliminate due to traumatisation all traces of names, monuments and traces of specific ideology, a process of encryption starts, so that these memories form a “crypt”, i.e. they become unapproachable to conscious reflection and processing. Frequently these memories are even better kept than in the conscious memory. However they do not lose the power of the traumatic experiences.

Assmann states that the encryption can produce phobic anxieties and concepts of an enemy in which the repressed emotions can return.

We could be very aware in the large group of this process in the unresolved transferences onto the organization and organizer.

We have seen that traumatic experiences have a power, which is identity forming and structuring. Obviously the collective experience of being attacked, occupied and being conquered is for the work of memory much easier to bear than the taking over of responsibility of our own role as perpetrator and thus also of guilt and shame.

Freud has pointed out in his work “Moses and Monotheism” the powerful role of guilt, memory and denial in the history of religion, the history of the development of culture and cultural identity.

In my opinion, there exists only one other event comparable to the research of the EATGA where psychoanalysts of different cultures have confronted themselves with the perpetrator/ victim/fellow traveler dynamic in the actual process of a group.

These are the “Nazareth Group Conferences”, where Israeli, German psychoanalysts and analysts of other European countries work on the social roots of destruction in history

and the present in meetings between 1994 to 2000 using the method of the group conferences, the Tavistock model.

The first results of this project are published this year under the title:

“Germans and Israelis, nursed with tears - poisoned with milk -- the past is present „by Mira Erlich Ginor, Hermann Beland, and Shmuel Erlich.

In his preface to this book, Archbishop Desmond M. Tutu writes, that he will pick up the model of these conferences to create a new organization.

The aim of the organisation will be to transfer the results onto the working through of other comparable destructive experiences, which are still alive in the heads and souls of people.

I hope that I have enlarged the field of the transcultural scientific work a little.

Psychoanalysis and group analysis are too precious to leave only to psychoanalysts and group analysts.

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