

## REPORT ON THE SCIENTIFIC MEETING

*Mary Spreng-Courtney*

Venue: Institute for Group Analysis 1 Daleham Gardens London NW3

Members Present: Antonio d'Angiò, Cycek Ayfer Barracke, Velia Bianchi Ranci (chair), Dorothy Brown, Laura Bercich, Giovanna Cantarella, Anna Checchi, Bettina Fink, Kurt Husemann, Georg Laszlo Kruppa, Alessandra Manzoni, Malcolm Pines, Christoph Rosenberger, Christine Schwankhart Perez de Laborda, Maria Silvera, Marlene Spero (convenor), Mary Spreng-Courtney (report), Elisabeth von Strachwitz, Juha Matti Toivola, Ruth Waldvogel, Mary Bruin Wooster, Gerald Wooster.

Apologies: Silvia Amati Sas.

Velia, our vice-president, opened the meeting conveying our president's best wishes for a stimulating and successful discussion. Silvia was down with flu and is unable to be present. Everyone joined in wishing her a speedy recovery.

Velia then announced the themes we would focus on in to-day's discussion. They would centre mainly on the two papers, which had been presented at the IAGP conference in Rome, August 2009. At the end there would be time for exchanging information on the transcultural activities of the members in their own spheres and for considering the topic of the next Study day in March, 2010, in Berlin.

The discussion was lively and constructive, involving all the members, and took place in a relaxed atmosphere, not least due to the impeccable organisation of Marlene. I shall start with succinct summaries of the two papers and then mention some of the themes that came up during the discussion.

### **Papers:**

Kurt's paper took us through the history of EATGA from the perspective of one founding member. He moved through the EATGA workshops from Maastricht to Marsala, concentrating his attention on the perpetrator victim aspect of European history that emerged in the workshops. He sees a healthy development from a position of splitting to an effort of integration. In the Maastricht workshop, the traumas of the victims were voiced in a dramatic and impressive way but unconsciously the perpetrators were silenced and their language, a

major European language, was suppressed. Victim and perpetrator were clearly defined and identifiable. The collaboration of other European nations with the Nazis, for instance, or the strong fractions of sympathisers in the allied countries were overlooked. In the following workshops the duality of perpetrator and victim were differentiated and the internal perpetrator victim constellation within the individual emerged as a theme, in relation to aggression and trauma in societies. In the Budapest workshop it became possible for EATGA to open its perspectives and to integrate group conductors from other group analysis cultures and from the formerly excluded Eastern block of Europe, thereby further differentiating the duality of victim and perpetrator.

The second main theme of Kurt's paper concerned trauma as a structuring element of identity. Here Kurt quotes Volkan's concept of "chosen trauma" and Jan Assmann's book, "Moses the Egyptian, the deciphering of a memory trace." Memory works in two opposing ways. In "Conversion memory" dissociation from what has happened occurs. "Deconstructive memory" allows the integration of other cultural values into one's own culture. Kurt takes up Assmann's thesis that purports to confirm the hypothesis that a memory of a trauma is a group-stabilizing phenomenon. According to this thesis, the collective experience of being occupied and conquered is much easier to bear than the take-over of responsibility of our own role as perpetrator and thus also of the guilt and shame. In the workshop of Marsala, according to Kurt, an "encryption", as Assmann describes it, i.e. a suppression of the memories of occupation and exploitation, took place, resulting in unresolved transferences in the large group onto the organization and the organizer.

The Profita/Ruvolo paper is interestingly enough a power point presentation, which allows the authors to mirror the Italian cultural heritage of multiple origins with its rich imagery and to bring in the central element and theme of the workshop Sicily itself, showing us the pictures of Marsala town and the venue points of our group meetings. A challenging aspect of the workshop was the attempt to integrate 80 students of the Coirag Group Analytic training of the Palermo Institute. It was the first time an EATGA workshop attempted to integrate such a large group of participants from another group analytic institute. It was organized into median and large group sessions with no small groups. Profita and Ruvolo suggest that the median groups offered a "safe place" in contrast to the large group, which was beset with paranoid themes and phantasies, the staff being seen as a mafia and the students being perceived as being forced to participate without having to pay.

They mention one important event in one of the large group sessions, where some participants moved their chairs closer towards the centre and the large group conductors followed suit, but the outer circle remained where it was, leaving a large symbolic gap. This event was not thematised in the large group and led to disagreement in the staff group. Due to the crisis of cultural references, the palm- tree, pointing to heaven, and the blood red geraniums, in the middle of the large group space, were used as a focus for providing a new transcendental, mythical-ritual reference.

The authors register the omission of the history and rich tradition of Marsala as a theme in the Conference. They connect this omission to the co-existence of the two paradigms of social exchange, state/market on the one hand and gift on the other. Due to the complexity of the setting (the inter-institutional relationship between Coirag and EATGA), they suggest that the exchanges based on the paradigm of gift were frustrated.

### **Discussion themes:**

In the lively discussion that took place several main themes crystallised. Since every member present took part at one time or another in the discussion, I do not mention any individual contributor by name, but rather group the contributions around several main topics or themes, thus hopefully allowing for a more coherent picture to emerge.

The opening discussion theme was the Marsala Workshop with the split between the young participants from Coirag and the older generation of EATGA participants. The question was raised as to whether the young participants had been misused in an attempt to secure a future for EATGA.

Some members questioned the idea of a gift as it was portrayed in the paper. In other cultures, there is an emotional and affective transfer, in giving a gift. No return is expected. It is similar in therapy. However, tribes in India give big gifts as a form of non monetary trade.

Splitting as it is created in the encounter with different cultures became a theme of the discussion. For the relatively new members of EATGA curiosity arose about the splitting off of the French group in the history of EATGA, or around the supposed antimony between the French and the English way of working in groups at the beginning of EATGA. It was suggested that ignorance of the French culture was at the root of the so-called splitting, a lack of knowledge of the French culture on the one hand and a lack of knowledge of the English culture on the other hand. The interest in splitting then extended to the absence of East Germans from the first Berlin workshop and questions were asked as to why this was possible. The discussion moved on to splitting within the therapeutic professions for example between the psychiatrists and the psychologists. At the IAGP conference in Rome, conflicts between the English and Italians arose. The current splitting at present in the Italian political scene became a further topic of discussion. Finding common ground was suggested as a way of containing splitting, wherever it occurs. (Two references on this theme were mentioned: Dennis Brown's paper on the French and the English, Edith Le Court's book on psychotherapy in different cultures)

Transmission: the difficulties of transmission, of passing on to the younger generation, were addressed. It was felt that an enactment, rather than a reflection on these difficulties of transmission, took place in the large group in Marsala.

Sea and land cultures: Trade surfaced as a form of communication between cultures. Differences were voiced between sea and land trade. The desert Arabs and Bedouins with their caravans have different traditions, compared to the Mediterranean Arabs, who trade over sea.

The shipwreck in Shakespeare's *Tempest* is a typical element of sea culture. The ship in Shakespeare's play was shipwrecked off the shores of Bermuda, a relatively small island, and is based on the historical event of the loss of the Sardinian government at sea.

Migration: One Italian member, who works with immigrants, spoke of the Sans Papiers people and how the themes in the two papers, that of fragmentation in the large group and that of the difficulty of elaborating trauma, were relevant to her work. She described the process she observed in her treatment of these migrants.. As a result of cultural differences, the Sans-Papiers people develop expectations of "magical" solutions that are impossible to satisfy, leading to secondary delusions, causing further trauma and evoking feelings of victimisation. In the treatment it is important to connect their culture to the outside, creating a container instead of a mystical retreat. The "context", according to Ruvolo, can't become conscious, so connections, even small ones, create a holding culture.

A similar process took place for her in the Budapest and Marsala workshops. In the Budapest workshop, the many Hungarian participants had to find listeners among the other cultures, which had not been exposed to their traumatic experiences under the communist regime. It is in such a search that old wounds can easily be opened and traumas can be repeated. In the Marsala workshop, the anxiety, which was generated in the large group, could be worked through in the median group. So first a net could be created in the median groups, which could then enable a next step, which would be to build a new culture. The main task in working with migrants like the Sans-Papiers people is to enable those of them, who are neediest, to feel a sense of belonging. In Austria an attempt is made to create a "transitional space" for them, which is a similar process. Another group member suggests the importance of doing cultural work on our own fears, regarding these migrants.

### **Information Exchange:**

Giovanna reports that the IAGP opens a section on transcultural issues and Maria Von Noort is the head of it. There is a possibility of becoming a group analytic member and a transcultural member. Giovanna speaks of the social dreaming workshop she and Elio Vera conducted at the conference in Rome

Susann Scharweiss works with Eastern European Network.

The next conference is in Lemberg, Lvov. E-mail: susannscharweiss.10@aol

Mary reported on the ongoing EFPP transcultural workshop, she and Inger Larsson run and which took place this year in Prague in May. A request was made for a written report for the Newsletter. She also reported on the workshop of Claude Rouchy and Jaak Le Roy at the same conference in Prague.

3 Conferences: - 27th-29th November: Shaked's 80th birthday  
- Milan: next weekend: Silvia gives a paper  
- EGATIN: 16th-17th April 2010

### **EATGA Study day in Berlin: 12th-14th March 2010**

Place of venue: Kreuzberg

Hotels: Hotel Matzberg, Hotel Beethoven

Groups: 2 parallel groups:

1. Group: conductors Laszlo and Cycek

One suggestion for the 2. Group was a transcultural intervision group, as Kurt gave for the first time in the last Study day in London.

Topics for Papers: -Laszlo's practice in a multicultural area in Berlin.

- Study of Adolescence in Eastern and Western Germany

- American mothers and Costa Rican mothers: different aspirations.

Kurt tells of the history of the new Museum in Berlin: Nofrotete, wife of Echnathon, who created the first monotheistic religion, is depicted there.

Malcolm relates that the last number of the Group Analysis has an article on Group Analysis with Egyptians.

Study day Title: While looking for a title, two members related their dreams of the night before. Malcolm could not drive the right way to visit his mother. Kurt lost his dog in Berlin.

Loss thus surfaced as a theme and found its way into the proposed titles.

Suggestions of titles were:

- Transculturality: a difficult exchange

- A difficult exchange, the balance of gain and loss

- The complexity of Transculturality: gain and loss

- The balance of Transculturality: losses and gains

- Living the complexity of Transculturality: losses and gains

Another possibility could be:

- Transcultural experience: tipping the balance of loss and gain in multicultural settings

**Next Workshop:**

Places of venue suggested were: Istanbul, Serbia, Finland.

Bettina works with Liliane in Novisdad. Liliane could act as a local liaison agent.

**Newsletter :**

Contributions are welcome and should arrive by mid-January at the latest.

**Ideas for the Future:**

Interviews with the Founders: a young member such as Cycek could do the interview.

History of EATGA :could be gleaned from the minutes of the board meetings. Malcolm suggests employing an archivist, who knows Italian.

Podium Discussion: an exchange of experiences among those working with different cultures e.g. Elisabeth Rohr in Guatemala and Bali, David Becker in Chile, or the beginning of ethno psychoanalysis with the Platform in Zurich e.g. Berthold Rothschild, Mario Erdheim.

Malcolm's coming book: on the history of the phases of psychoanalysis up to the present.

This information could be recorded in the form of archives or videos.

The meeting ended with a round of applause for Marlene, who had organised the weekend meticulously with an attentive eye to detail.

8th December 2009,

Mary Spreng-Courtney