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TRANS-CULTURAL GROUP INTERVENTIONS & RESISTANCES TO MULTICULTURALISM

Different approaches to psychosocial group interventions with trans-cultural issues are discussed. Material is drawn out of interventions which have taken place in the **Aharnes Second Chance School** - an adult educational unit.

The participants (groups of 13-17 members) were mainly of Greek origin, interacting with two major sub-groups of a) **Roma** and b) **Pontii** (Greek repatriates from the former USSR).

Three different group approaches to trans-cultural conflict resolution **(active learning through educational project implementation**, **class discussion of trans-cultural issues**, and **free floating groups**) are discussed in relation to the elaboration of group resistances to develop a multicultural character of the school as a whole.

Difficulties of interaction between specialists of different approaches are also discussed under the same perspective.

Parts of this text where used in the following papers presented at the 2nd Regional Mediterranean Conference of the International Association of Group Psychotherapy (Athens 2004):

- *Second Chance School: A Chance for Community. A Group Analytic Approach to an Adult Educational Unit (A. Angelopoulos, P. Hatzitheocharous, V. Menoutis)*

- *Trans-cultural Group Interventions: Resistances to Multiculturalism* (A. Angelopoulos, P. Hatzitheocharous, V. Menoutis)

- *Trans-cultural Mobility: Repatriating or Being a Foreigner Everywhere* (A. Angelopoulos, V. Menoutis)

Second Chance School

Second Chance School is an institution established in various European countries, including Greece, as a means for combating social exclusion. This new institution offers to Greek young people, aged 18 and over, who have not completed the compulsory 9-year education the opportunity to obtain the gymnasium certificate [lower secondary education] in order to be smoothly integrated in the social, economical and professional structures.

SCS were instituted in Greece by law in 1997 [Article 5, Law2525/1997] based on the principles laid down by the European Union authorities.

The program emphasizes the acquisition of basic qualifications and the development of personal skills. The acquisition of general knowledge, learning how to use new technologies, learning foreign languages, and counseling on vocational guidance, improve significantly the chances of young adults to have access to employment. The common goal of all Second Chance Schools is to promote the employment and social adjustment of young and unskilled people.

Three basic principles determine the identity of the SCS program:

The educational means used to achieve the basic goal must be flexible enough to support every student in his/her effort and they must be adapted to the educational needs, expectations and

skills of each student.

The needs of the students must be approached as a whole and not partially. To succeed in their effort to be educated and trained, the students must be helped to deal with problems in other sectors, such as health, family, the workplace, and the immediate social environment.

Complex and varied educational needs require a multi-level educational and professional staff of acknowledge ability which will be able to respond to the multiplicity of the tasks they will undertake. Educators should be willing to contribute to the implementation of innovative programs.

The SCS curriculum is significantly differentiated from its counterpart in ordinary formal education, mainly in terms of the principles, content, teaching methods and evaluation of the students. The students are helped to respond to the demands of different environments and communications contexts. The workplace, the world of image, the media and advertising, the world of natural sciences, the world of politics and broader social issues all require various skills from today's citizens, and flexibility in their use so that people can communicate effectively both orally and in writing. That is why multiliteracy has been adopted as a basic principle of the program, according to which the written and oral word is determined by the social environment in which it is used.

The Acharnes Second Chance School

The Acharnes Second Chance School was founded and has been functioning since January 2002. It is running the forth year of its function and its program is divided in two circles of nine months each one. In July 2003 graduated 34 trainees [3 men and 31 women] and in June 2004 graduated 35 trainees [6 men and 29 women]. It is evident that the number of women participants is greater than that of men, particularly around their forties, inhabitants of the Acharnes community and of neighbour communities.

This situation is probably due to the following reasons: a] The first drop out of school was at the previous decades a phenomenon that concerned mostly the women population; b] unemployment, unsatisfactory working conditions and labour insecurity mostly strike women population; c] a lot of women dropped out early and got married in a very young age, so they are asking for a job place or seeking for a chance to substitute the lost opportunities for self-development, since they have brought up their children.

The Acharnes municipality, where the SCS unit is located, experienced a tremendous attack from the earthquake of 1999. The direct consequences of this tragic event have been the economic overburdens for a great number of households and the increase of unemployment. The Acharnes SCS can contribute in various ways to the efforts of the inhabitants for a new start.

TRANS-CULTURAL GROUP INTERVENTIONS

Who are the Pontii

Greek repatriates are those populations living for several generations as officially recognised Greek minorities in the former USSR countries (such as Russia, Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan) and have recently returned to the land of ethnic origin. In fact, these are populations that lived at the around the see of Eukseinos Pontos that is of Black sea, and they really have a long history and a very interesting culture. Despite that, their language is much more closer to that of ancient Greek than that of the modern spoken Greek. The same is also evident in their folklore dances which are thought to exist for more than two and a half thousand years. Populations of Pontii live mainly in northern Greece after the War and the massive deportation of 1922 in Turkey. Some of them are found in Turkey too.

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repatriates moved and settled out in Greece during the last two decades in a form of massive emigrational waves. Officially, repatriating is not considered as an emigration process, despite the fact that repatriates moved and settled out in Greece during the last two decades in a form of massive emigrational waves. Despite that repatriates are not officially recognized as emigrant hence they are of Greek origin. Repatriating is considered as an individual choice related to the responsibility or the individual attributes of the repatriated.

On the contrary, repatriates are one of the main target populations of all psychosocial activities that have been carried out in Greece for the last decade or so.

This is a quite confusing situation where the Greek state focuses on the static collective identities of this population in order to offer its services on the one hand, and on the other migration and its psychosocial consequences are approached through individual responsibility. The main issue here, is that repatriates are emigrants – they arrived to Greece from countries that are in poverty – they experience the consequences of emigration, but they are not recognized officially as such. This approach leaves them unprotected to non systematic and non formal social mechanisms of adaptation that are largely the same ones that cause social exclusion.

Although we can not claim that repatriates form a homogenous cultural group or that they posses a core minority identity, there is a lot of facts showing that the possibility of forming a unifying core identity is related to the unconscious tendency of both state policy and social interaction to marginalize them.

I have been working with repatriates for almost a decade in various settings and activities and with a variety of methods. I even had a major transformation myself as a professional in these years: at the beginning I was working through socio-psychological trainings (sensitivity trainings, communication skills, role plays etc.) but latter on, I discovered for myself group analysis. I feel that there will be a lot of work with repatriates in the future, since I have been educated in the former Soviet Union, I speak Russian and I have a personal experience of both the initial culture and of the new to them welcome-culture.

So, our proposition is to approach repatriation as a case of trans-cultural mobility. This term is wide enough to describe various phenomena of interaction between representatives of different cultures including emigrants, repatriates, refugees and so on. By this approach psychosocial work can focus not on the "adaptation" of repatriates to the dominating Greek culture, but on their ways of enriching it and integrating themselves through this effort.

Who are the Roma

The Roma are a distinct ethnic minority made of many different groups of people from the very beginning and distinguished at least by Rom blood and the Romani (or Romanes) language, whose origins began on the Indian subcontinent over one thousand years ago. No one knows for certain why the original Roma began their great wandering from India to Europe and beyond, but they have dispersed worldwide, despite persecution and oppression through the centuries. There have been several great migrations (diaspora) in Romani history. The first was the initial dispersal from India at the beginning of the 11th century. As the ethnically and linguistically occupational population from India moved further and further away from its land, so it began to acquire its own ethnic identity and it was at this time that the Romani language also began to take shape. In Europe, Roma were either kept in slavery in the Balkans, or else were able to move on and up into the rest of the continent, reaching every northern and western country by about 1500. In the course of time, as a result of having interacted with various European populations, and being fragmented into widely-separated groups, Roma have emerged as a collection of distinct ethnic groups within the larger whole. Romani culture is diverse, with many traditions and customs. It would be invalid to generalize and oversimplify by given concrete rules to all Roma.

The Roma, known also by many names (such as Gypsies, Tsigani and others), are today more than twelve million all over the world and remain the least integrated and the most persecuted people of Europe. Almost everywhere their fundamental civil rights are threatened. Discrimination against Roma in employment, education, healthcare and other services is observed in most societies, and hate speech against them deepens the negative anti-Roma stereotypes, which are typical of European public opinion. In the last few years, the Roma issue has been addressed by various non-governmental organizations, national as well as international. Different approaches – economic, social, political, cultural – have been applied in the hope of improving the living standards of the Roma, of promoting a more just social policy, of strengthening Roma culture identity, or of encouraging Roma political participation. Solutions have been sought in the context of the struggle against racism and nationalism, as well as in the context of enhancing cultural pluralism.

Three types of trans-cultural intervention

Active learning through educational project implementation
Three different group approaches have been adapted during the last two school years (2002-2004) in Acharnes SCS unit, so that the participants would be able to accept the multicultural character of the school and of the society further on. The first one began in November 2002 and integrated in July 2004. This approach included:

A) Educational approaches through the social education (social literacy) with various teaching methods, such as collaborative teaching about the Greek history and the history of different social groups as well; free dialogue about social phenomena like prejudice and stereotypes; project method for studying and searching the culture of different social groups etc.

B) Educational approaches through the Greek language (Greek language literacy). In the unit which was devoted to the texts as sources of comprehension of the past, some literary texts, poems and testimonies of the modern Greek history were studied; the trainees were asked to produce narrative texts on their own or family life. In this way they realized that their personal or family story interests the others and can become a source of inspiration and creativity.

C) Educational approaches through two inter-disciplinary projects. In the first one, with the title "Prejudice and Stereotypes", 25 trainees participated along with two trainers, and in the second one, under the title "Family Photos of Historical Importance", 11 trainees participated along with two trainers.

    i. The participants in the first project decided to study and search the history, the culture and the social integration of two social groups, namely, Greek Pontii and Roma (Gypsies), who are directly related to the location area of the school and form part of its trainee population. This project was decided so that the participants would be able to understand the multiculturalism of modern society, to accept the differences and the "other" and to possibly change attitudes. The data of the research and study derived from interviews with members of both social groups mentioned above, some trainees' and their relatives' testimonies, historical studies, newspapers, magazines, photographs and electronic sources. The participant trainees' experience was reported as unique. The data collection process was for them a continuous study and valuable research. Their contact with the people during the interviews had been proved to be a channel of communication, approval and respect.

    ii. The participants in the second project decided to select family photos of historical importance, that is, photos that bring in a historic message, to study and comment on them, drawing information from the family environment or the scientific reference books, in such a way that each one of the photos could be exploited from the point of view of historical data and any other messages (social, etc.) The themes of some of the

photographs were related to sensitive periods of the recent Greek history. Apart from the skills that the trainees developed, a real empowerment took place almost for all of them, whose attitudes changed due to the increased participation and great interest shown in both their family history and History. It should be mentioned that some improvement was evident in their "management" of the present reality. As a result an enhancement of the trainees' self-confidence took place. Also, they realized that there were many similarities amongst the different personal histories and that they had a valuable and important heritage to share with the other people.

Socio-psychological training

This was a project that was carried out by to external collaborators of the school: A psychologist and a social worker of the local social service. They were invited by a trainer - a sociologist – who felt that trainees of the first grade were having trouble to collaborate without conflicts. These colleagues were invited to sensitize trainees in trans-cultural issues. The methods used were role plays and lectures. The sessions last for a 6 months period almost weekly. It was a part of the schools program, thus the trainees had to participate as any other school activity. During these sessions the trainees often expressed their discomfort and anger. There was also a lot of discussion taking place during the lectures on socio-psychological subjects and usually they tended to raise topics of every day life and not these of trans-cultural conflict – which seemed to them boring and unnecessary. The consultants could not always resist to this tendency.

A group-analytic intervention

It consisted in my being the schools consultant, working in individual counselling and in both small and median groups. My main effort was to facilitate the school to develop as a whole, in a community way. Methods used consisted of dynamic counselling, inspired by some principles of brief therapies and the Enterprise model carried out in Salamina Naval Hospital. The groups were conducted in a group-analytic way, but we have to realize that they were not therapeutic groups. This means that they were mainly feed-back groups that gave the opportunity of all the members despite their nationality or origin to interact equally. The conductor – myself – used interpretations only to refer certain foci derived from interviews and group work. Other forms of group work emerged during Participatory Action-Research sessions were the participants them selves proposed their own views. This intervention lasted for two years.

RESISTANCES TO MULTICULTURALISM

A multicultural setting is one in which integration is the generally accepted way of dealing with cultural diversity. This diversity is in fact determined by voluntariness, mobility, and permanence of contacts. Multiculturalism is meant to create a sociopolitical context within which individuals can develop healthy identities and mutually positive inter-group attitudes.

Resistance to change relates to the fear of the unknown and of potential danger to the status quo. The more insecure the world is, the greater the temptation to achieve security through conformity and power. The perpetuation of such value system favours isolation inside the community and maintains the groups of minority people marginalised. Nevertheless, positive change may occur when mobilising all community's forces through processes that enhance participation and facilitate the elaboration of resistances.

Resistance to change is both an individual phenomenon and a collective one. Lay community is mainly oriented to individual adaptation through the establishment of common rules and behaviour legacy. Collective properties are somehow underestimated or unrecognized.

Professionals also restrict their activity to the management of individual or small group phenomena, whereas collective cultural or large group dynamics often treated as illusionary or reduced to one-to-one psychoanalytic interpretations.

I felt during these interventions that something was not so clear. After all, it was only a community of 120 people, why do we have to implement three different programs.
The trainees of Greek majority origin started complaining in individual and in group sessions that despite the fact that minorities are over-protected in the school now even lessons have been lost for they shake. One lady told me that "if you are not a member of a minority nobody takes care of you". Others asked me in groups: "Why do we have so many psychologists? Are we Psychotics?"

Then I realized that despite the fact that I - as the conductor of the groups – appeared to be tolerant to all these approaches and did not behave in an antagonistic manner to the other projects, members wanted me to resist to all this extensive activity. They wanted me to protect them from what?

Furthermore, conflicts were not reduced despite the effort. On the contrary, paranoiogenesis reached high levels in one of the trainers group sessions. Having to move to a new building the trainers themselves were terrorised by the thought that Roma or gypsies of our school will steal at night the new expensive hardware. The feelings were anger, fear, and disappointment.

Then I realized that the main resistance to multiculturalism was not the behaviour of the trainees but the remarkable absence of cooperation between professionals. We tolerated one another but we did not want to cooperate. We behaved as if we doubted that the school can exist as a whole and as if trans-cultural phenomena is not only ethnic. This appeared to be a systematic and quite persistent resistance from the very beginning of my work in the school – and here is found out that I myself was not immune to this resistance also. I gained a lot of narcissistic pleasure to secretly imagine myself as a great conductor through whom parts of the whole can communicate. I have also let a grandiose self evoke through the tolerance I showed to different approaches. I behaved like a shaman but this does not help the community as a whole.

After that things became simpler. I tended to strengthen cooperation and mutual participation to these parts of the projects that were it possible, even at the end of them. Then I persisted on initiating anew meetings of the school's large group. It was definitely worth it because the participation of the whole membership gave anew a hope for recovery and a feel of safety.