

Unitas Multiplex

The therapeutic function of a rite in group psychoanalysis and traditional treatment. Convergence and diversity

Alfredo Lombardozzi

Abstract

The author is inspired by metaphor “*Unitex Multiplex*”, he thought that taking inspiration from this metaphor would be a good beginning in order to produce a piece of work on groups from the psychoanalytical and anthropological points of view, using multiple approaches, and, at the same time be an attempt to come up with unitary parameters. So, will be further explained to the complexity of ideas that are relative to the therapeutic function in groups. One has also to pay particular attention to the mythical-ritual aspects and also take the contingent factors of the meeting that a small analytical group has into account. These factors possess elements of similarity but are also different from those that are specific to a social group that puts rite into play.

The author would now likes to enlarge upon the classical idea of Tarantismo by addressing Ernesto de Martino’s well known study and enlarge upon it with an experience of child group analysis. A common aspect regards a musical ritual that is a structuring element in the Puglia therapeutic rite, whilst in a group of children, it seems to establish a fluid, passionate element that opens up to a different group formation.

In the last part the author would now likes to try and express the idea around which the reflection on the “Gods’ Group” rotates. With this definition he thinks that we can turn to the possibility of linking the term “group” to the plural dimension of the noun “god” that is in fact, a representation of a pantheon of divinity. Both in traditional rituals of trance and being possessed and in the experience of group psychoanalysis, the “subject group” makes up its symbolic horizon by activating processes of recognition and belonging and giving space to a multiplicity of identifications and images.

Key-words: rite, group, culture, symbol

And you, who are you?
Mamadi, son of Diubaté
Where are you from?
From my village
And where are you going?
To another village
Which other village?
What does it matter?

I am going anywhere where there are people.

Francis Bebey

Introduction

I would like to begin by explaining the reason for the title of my reflections. “Unitas Multiplex” is a term used by the paleo-anthropologist Telmo Pievani to give weight to the complexity of the study of nature and human diversity. The author presents an original in-depth view of the themes that are relative to the development of human species as studied by Luigi Luca Cavalli Sforza (Cavalli Sforza, Menozzi, Piazza,), who, in his research, supports the idea that the origin of Homo Sapiens is from a single African lineage. He then followed the complex developments by analysing rigorous parameters of population genetics.

This theory which is obviously not the only one, but is widely accredited, scientifically and credibly dismisses the same concept of race and describes the substantial genetic homogeneity that is taken further to another rich and complex diversity that is attributable to cultural, climatic and environmental factors. As Pievani said, “a new statistical figure,” as regards human evolution on earth is emerging. An evolution that is characterised by the metaphor “unitas multiplex”, the diaspora of peoples on earth reveals a genetic and anthropological unity that is contextually rich in noteworthy diversity of cultures and human morphologies” (Pievani, 1998, p.107).

I thought that taking inspiration from this metaphor would be a good beginning in order to produce a piece of work on groups from the psychoanalytical and anthropological points of view, using multiple approaches, and, at the same time be an attempt to come up with unitary parameters. Those who work with groups on the therapeutic level know about the extreme variety of experience. An anthropologist who studies rites and the relative mythologies and cosmologies knows what their structural and morphological wealth is. I believe, however, that there are different types but that they are always forms of humanity, as to use a term that was favourite to the anthropologist Francesco Remotti (Remotti, 2000). In this context for a psychoanalyst and in particular, one who works with groups, it is very important not to forget the global anthropological approach that uses more diverse variables. Francesco Siracusano invites us to contemplate how mistaken an individual and group psychoanalyst is “if they don’t consider that the group they are leading is part of humanity, whichever part it is, it wants to be treated as such and each member wants to be individual in humanity.” (Siracusano, 2000 p.19).

This group function of recreating the conditions of seeing compactness of experience from multiplicity, that is, also, disorganisation and destructuring, is present in the more sophisticated theories even when one starts from a different point of view.

For example, René Kaës attributes the capacity of favouring the process of recognition to the group through forms of similar sharing rites of passage. In this

way a therapeutic function is activated and deep emotional aspects are tied to new possibilities of richer and unifying changes. The group “also undergoes therapeutic functions. The group is therapeutic because it is the place of internal reunification, the place of sense and place of linking, the re-found agreement between dream and myth.” (Kaës, 1999, p.22). Claudio Neri has expanded upon the concept of “Semiosfera” i.e. relationships with a whole situation or entity. He gives the idea of supplying a theoretical framework that is able to encompass the complexity of group experience and present an organisation model of sense, one that is specific to the group situation and includes various functions in a relationship of mutual exchange, such as “self-representation, the γ function, associative group chains, the mimesis” (Neri, 1995, p.80). Francesco Corrao identified a specific aspect of group thought in the γ function in the process of working through from the thinkable to the non-thinkable, like the equivalent of Bion’s α function for an individual (Corrao, 1981). Thereafter, he moved the emphasis onto the make up of the self in a group, defining the “ipseità” concept as a specific way of converging individual selves in a shared experience (Corrao, 1995). Finally, he examined the nature of group experience, describing it as Koinonia, a concept that highlights the enriching quality for individuals to live a “common” condition in a relationship between various elements in a group. “The group puts thoughts, emotions, etc. together from the various individuals who make up the togetherness of the group (Corrao, 1995 p.197).

Malcom Pines’ reflection on this is interesting, the group therapist has to take the enlarged dimension into account. From his Foulksian perspective that is integrated with self-psychology, Pines holds that, “the group analyst is, then, open to both sociological and anthropological points of view as well as those of the individual psyche. The intra-psychic reality is the reflection of interpersonal reality, the social fact precedes the psychoanalytical one” (Pines, 1998, p.99).

This view, in particular, seems to be the closest to a certain type of relativistic historical, anthropological research, even if I don’t think that it coincides exactly with it.

I would now like to return to my suggestion of approaching the idea, thinking about the metaphor of “unitas multiplex,” that, seems to me, is a sound model that is capable of guaranteeing both variety and coherence of the argument. This is meant not as a rigid metaphor that is set in predetermined concepts, a little like the film “the Postman”. The character played by Troisi who listened to and recorded the sounds of his block in order to offer them to a poet friend of his.

With this spirit in mind, I believe it would be profitable to look at the complex dynamics that are connected to the inter-relationship between afferent elements regarding both the social context of the group (and also of the small analytical group) and the intra-psychic group dynamics. Going back to Malcom Pines’ argument, and accepting the importance of the “social fact”, I would tend to think instead not about a precedence of a sociological factor over a psychological one but a co-existence and interaction between the two aspects together. I would

prefer to think that the relationship of the individual with the group and between the profound psychic aspects of the group's mind and those that are more social-relational - inherent to the context – have a dynamic relationship.

In the same way, the multiple symbolic constructions of the group interact dynamically with the more “genetic” aspects, identifying common elements in here that are widely shared in different forms of humanity but are also subject to differing cultural transformation and changes.

It is interesting to note one of Sergio Bordin's ideas that suggests that “subjectivity – the being subject to mental states – is an achievement that develops over time through congenital organisational and creative activity because it advances aims and goals, either predetermined or imaginary. It is prepared to establish interactions with specific, talented people who have acquired such skills from infancy so as to tune in to those fundamental attitudes in the world of human beings. It is the meeting point which accompanies growth and allows genetic potential to reach the subjective dimension that is the human being” (Bordin, 2002, p.74).

I would like to add that if we speak about groups, we should think about extended subjectivity, the realisation of many complex factors, that is the outcome of a dynamic process in which, for example, the various make ups of the group as an objective self, that tend towards coherent forms of existence, also link closely to the most fragmented and multiple faceted aspects. Furthermore, as a basic assumption, the manner of the group as an expression of a deep relational manner, for Bion, integrates with other appeals of the group, “the group can be thought of as a mediator between individual necessities, the mentality of the group and the culture of the group” (Bion, 1961, p.63).

I hope that this premise may be useful in facing up to the complexity of ideas that are relative to the therapeutic function in groups. One has also to pay particular attention to the mythical-ritual aspects and also take the contingent factors of the meeting that a small analytical group has into account. These factors possess elements of similarity but are also different from those that are specific to a social group that puts rite into play.

Group and Rite

We could say that gathering together according to a ritual process is a human trait and perhaps also an animal one. For example, a party celebration or a maturity rite in the case of initiation or even a magical-therapeutic ritual or just a plain, normal get together in a group.

A rite is a way of initiating a link, establishing connections or bonds and, therein contained, one can see the repetition of behavioural models that also contain elements of change. Victor Turner taught us that a rite is also a performance and a way of expressing and mediating conflict through the production of symbols and affects and knowledge regarding symbols. As Turner says, the ritual function is connected to a tendency of a group to give a definition of itself at many

moments in its life through social “structural” models that are well defined but which tend to become disorganised in a dimension that he calls “antistructure” and which are characterised by emphasised elements of risk and precariousness. As regards the “structure” the complementary condition of existential “flow” rises against it and it crosses critical moments in the life of the group. A rite is a symbolic construction process through which both the elements of social drama and the actors are presented. “Social drama” as a result of an intra-structurally stressed situation may originate from open and deliberate breaking of basic norms for the sake of a relationship between the parties involved, but it may also result from natural or physical phenomena which introduce some anomaly into the structure that forces a collective redefinition of the social relationship (Zadra, 1972, p13).

Turning to Van Gennep’s theory, Turner, in his treatment of concepts of marginality and liminality, has enriched the analysis of the ritual with dynamic elasticity and a creative nature. In the intermediate space of liminality, one works through the symbolic, affective and cognitive meanings in the social group through the ritualising of the mythical dimension. In such a way, the rite takes on some importance in the repetition part that is, at the same time, change. The “unitas multiplex” metaphor again seems suitable in describing the context of the rite, that repetition is, and at the same time it is renewal, homogeneity and heterogeneity. Lucilla Ruberti brilliantly describes the analogous process in a new psychoanalytical light, “The repetition in the psychoanalytical field has generally considered resistance to change that is present in psychopathology in so much that in Freud, a repetitive event adds a pinch else from knowing “differently” in the oscillation of the “getting close” game of identical and new. The repetition of that daily something, that is, the doing, in analysis, becomes the “precious tool” as Soavi says (Soavi, 1990), however, it doesn’t simply fill the part that was missing but it provides ways for new images (Ruberti, 2000, p. 12-13).

The rite therefore, shows a double-sided character, it is involved both in daily existence and in the particularity of the moment when a rite is taking place. It is also related to affects as Turner often stated. Vitto Lattanzi suggested a descriptive analogy with the novel “The Little Prince” by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry (de Saint Exupéry, 1943). The fox in the story pined the little prince the moment it became domesticated and waited for his return with the golden colour of his hair in his mind. “What is a rite” asked the little prince. “It is what one day does that is different from the others, one hour different from the other hours,” answered the fox. That’s it. A rite marks out a difference in the normal flow of time and opens a possibility of change from daily routine. It is a reflex action which always tends to update circumstances and historical contingencies, it also works at de-structuring and re-structuring daily life” (Lattanzi, 2000, p.25). I would also like to add that the function of a rite is that which gives a new

meaning to reality in oscillation “flow and structure”, or, in other terms, “ordinary and extraordinary.”

This discussion takes us back to the theme of domesticity, of things that Claudio Neri examines in his reflections on Ernesto di Martino’s cultural and psychopathological apocalypses. Neri suggests that we look at the therapeutic aspects of a rite that are connected to a ritual function in a group, it is that of going back to unforeseeable unimaginable elements of risk in an environment of the thinkable in the dimension of warmth and affect of the obvious. Reference to Bergman’s film “Il Settimo Sigillo” which to me seems to present a type of initiation rite on life and death giving the feeling of alterity and total difference. It may be useful to clarify the idea of passage from the unique to the obvious that is not necessarily an expression of banality. In fact, there is a scene in which the knight, who plays chess with death and lives in a state of torment due to mourning and loss in the group with the visionary players, the couple and the child, rediscovers the simple taste of strawberries. This experience seems to make up something like a sort of daily rite, something special that re-links existential anxiety or the “present crisis” to a well known element that is commonly shared. In terms of dramatic presentation, myth and rite play an essential role in making the positive passing through a present crisis possible. There is a close relationship between a crisis and a redemption that is activated and is based on “mythical ritual.” Beyond any shadow of doubt, rite, which is linked to myth, has a precise psychotherapeutic function” (Neri, 2000, p.134).

Thus it seems necessary to link myth with rite. According to Vittorio Lanternari, the therapeutic function of a rite seems to be that of validating a group’s sense of identity. “The function of rites is that of ratifying the reality of the world – symbolically reiterating moments and gestures of the mythical “founders” that are set in original myths – of both man and culture. That is, briefly, reconfirmation and periodical validation of the elements of one’s own identity through the recovery of its first matrices at the time of such a myth” (Lanternari, 1997, p.28). This idea binds itself to Corrao’s reflections on rituals. He believed that a rite had a significant function in providing a sense of organisation for passionate drives, and in this way, it permits a process of identity construction. Given this, Corrao warns against the risk of impoverishing the function of a ritual. The loss that Corrao speaks about not only regards a fall of coveted constituents of significance and symbolism but also to the impoverishment of a function that guarantees symbolic action of a rite as a constituent and unifying factor of man in both a society and a group. At the same time it is a factor of expression and cultural differences, even radical ones (Corrao, 1983).

This reflection of Corrao’s is useful in order to introduce a more specific analysis when comparing therapeutic aspects in a small group, both for analytical ends and in ritual contexts in traditional cultures. These may be European or non-European. A first point concerns ritual changes. I would like to suggest the hypothesis that during the impoverishing of a function of a rite in a process of

change in traditional societies, a therapeutic effect on the rite often occurs even at the expense of the sense and binding function between a human experience situation in all its multiple aspects and cosmogenic myths. The analytical group is often formed from a specific therapeutic request but the recovery horizons take the route of new meaning and symbol formation and new formulations of the sense of humanity. In many realities as occur today in Brazilian Candomblé or in Italian Tarantismo in Puglia, one can see a greater concentration of the therapeutic aspects of a rite. Candomblé for example has an African origin. In the Yoruba people, a principle function of certain rituals is to create symbolic links between various aspects of social life, i.e. the crops produced in the fields and the ancestor cult and pantheon of the gods. In the passage in the Bahia culture in Brazil, the process of inter-mixing and new social and cultural needs have led to giving greater importance to the therapeutic function of possession rites and trance (Bastide, 1972). In my opinion, in our culture, the analytical group is formed from the contrary, in fact from a specific therapeutic request in medical terms. The group psychoanalytical process, however, triggers an increase in the sense of cultural belonging that allows us to access shared and changed symbols and in a certain sense, access a historical dimension that values the group context.

Rhythm, tarantulas and children

I would now like to enlarge upon the classical idea of Tarantismo by addressing Ernesto de Martino's well known study and enlarge upon it with an experience of child group analysis.

A common aspect regards a musical ritual that is a structuring element in the Puglia therapeutic rite, whilst in a group of children, it seems to establish a fluid, passionate element that opens up to a different group formation. The function of music in the two contexts possesses similar significant characteristics but the manner of ritual use and the moving towards specific symbolic horizons is quite different.

In the 60s, De Martino carried out some important team research on Tarantismo in the Salento area in Italy. The Puglia phenomenon was, at that moment in decline but he widely examined the historical comparisons with rituals in ancient Greece, the ethnological ones with other cultures and the historical development from the medieval period on. Tarantismo is a belief that a person, usually a woman, gets bitten by a spider which then takes over her body. The first bite always occurs in the summer at the same time as the crop cutting and grain harvest, when contact with spiders is highly likely. From that moment on, each year, a fear crisis due to the spider's bite repeats itself with increasing regularity of psycho-motor palpitations. De Martino underlines how the main fact is not the actual fact of being bitten but the symbolic connotations of the event, which for this, there is the repetition of remorse. The belief of being possessed by the insect is inserted into the Catholic context of the St. Paul cult. St. Paul is the protector of this type of event and the cult communicates the spider's bite to the victim

through visions and apparitions in dreams. In de Martino's opinion, the symbol of the tarantula frees itself from the natural element of the bite in order to arrive at the condition that the author defines as "symbol autonomy". The rite takes place in two parts. The first, the choral musical rite takes place at home. A group of musicians with traditional instruments plays some "spider" music in the presence of the victim who listens to the music in a state of trance for days until the crisis is resolved when the rhythm to which the tarantula responds is discovered. The second part, which is more closely linked to the Catholic liturgy, consists of a trip to the sanctuary in Galatina on the day of the celebration and provides illustrations of spectacular intensity.

De Martino's work then, places the concept of symbolic autonomy of the tarantula symbol inside the complexity of the mythical-ritual dynamic of Tarantismo. The various aspects that characterise this context of ritual, such as economic, psychological, mythical, sociological etc., all converge with their complexity onto the attribution of an autonomous symbolic function for the tarantula symbol. According to current thinking, this may be seen as a definition of the tarantula symbol in its multi-vocal and polysemy states. De Martino suggests this way in addition to representing his basic discussion that regards the crisis of presence and its solution in a rite. It seems that it is possible to pick out a process which starts from the spider as a natural element, and presents not only all those aspects of risk that are linked to the critical moment of "vegetal trauma" during the harvest, but also the non-thinkable and uniqueness of the connected condition of existential emptiness. The harvest does in fact cause what in the farming world is called "vegetal emptiness." A sense of guilt for having denuded the earth of its resources is connected to this, it is however, a condition that makes it necessary to turn to symbolic repair rituals and propitiation.

I tend to see something that in Bionian psychoanalytical terms could be proto-mental in the presentation of the silent body of the spider symbol, up until the moment of the rite of the old group. The victim of the bite, who is symbolically bitten by the spider, may not only be seen for its aspects relative to inhibition of sexual drives that are connected to archaic female conditions that even de Martino picked up on, (de Martino refers to a drive theory even though he doesn't explicitly say so), but also for his capability of seeing the push to human communication which is trapped in the non-humanity of the spider in the crisis. This is also present in the tarantula rite, and even before this in the visionary anticipation of the appearance of St. Paul (a syncretised element in pre-Christian cults). The rhythm, through the choral musical group ritual, becomes the instrument, the connecting system that manages to translate into and put the identity of the tarantula into words, not only at an individual level but at a shared level in the group.

As de Martino says, "This is, in itself, the tarantula symbol like the mythical-ritual prospect of evocation, of set up, of discharge and of resolution of unresolved psychic conflict that "re-bites" in the depths of obscurity of the

unconscious. As regards a quality model, this symbol shows a mythical-ritual order so it can put this conflict together and reintegrate the individuals of the group. The tarantula symbol gives shape to the shapeless, rhythm and melody to threatening silence and colour to the colourless in a continuous search for exact and distinct passions, there, where agitation without limits and depression that isolates and closes in, alternate with each other. It offers a perspective for imaging, listening and looking at that which doesn't have imagination, the deaf, the blind, and that finally, demands to be listened to, imagined and seen" (de Martino, 1961, p. 63).

However, being possessed is lived as a form of alienation, and through a rite, that introduces a dimension of rhythm, a group may reintroduce a trapped existence of a single person into a symbolic and cosmological horizon that is also a form of humanity. That is, a possibility that a certain culture offers its members identification in a specific culture. Above all, in the past, even before the influence of Catholicism on a rite became dominating and changed all those aspects that were traceable to a religion of nature, the restructure of a "bitten" individual as a person in a group ritual was brought about through exalting the sensitivity that is linked to symbolic, natural elements such as water, paint, colour and scents. "A vase of basil, of verbena or mint were used during exorcism as a stimulant for the sense of smell, the victim would sometimes smell these aromatic herbs in a similar way that he or she would look at the colours of cloth or ribbons or approach a certain instrument in order to get closer to it" (de Martino, 1961, p. 131).

Such a particularity is a good connecting point in experience of groups of children where a "corps" relationship is activated through the stimulation of sense elements where the group is not only the container but also the transformer that drives itself in a more refined symbolic process in a narrative, mythical-symbolical shape. (Baruzzi, 1981, Bernabei, 1990, Lombardozi, 1990, Ruberti, 1990).

The small group of children in analysis is made up of between seven and nine members, it meets once or twice a week with a specialist in group and infant psychoanalysis. The setting requires the use of a room equipped with games and objects. The children who have different problems can play and interact freely among themselves. The leader relates with the group, trying to underline and favour the symbolic transformation processes of emotions by involving the children in group games and by verbally intervening which in turn guides the group dynamics.

In a children's group that I led in a town in the Lazio region of Italy, closely linked aspects to the culture of a large group arose. For example, a large female doll is burst at the end of the celebration of Holy Mary, the Madonna, carnival masks, witches and so on. The moving condition of the analytical group is in itself, an altering factor. In an early phase in the group, subjective experiences were put into play through chaotic disorganisation where the processes that are

under way in the children, who are forming their “self” and individual identity, are banded around the group in anxious and precarious ways. They are in some way similar to that form of social existence that Victor Turner described using the concept of anti-structure.

The group work formed a process of new types of symbolic structuring starting from the point of these de-structuring anti-structures as mentioned above. Children in the new play and relationship situation of the group, with the adult group leader, seemed to be a little disorientated by a chaotic Dionysian break-in, almost being possessed by group ghosts that represented unknown sensory elements. The familiar figures of origin presented themselves outside a normal logic and thus took on worrying aspects. The chaotic and free play (Baruzzi, 1981) began, however, to take on a structure in terms of shared ritual rhythms. The group ghosts arrived not only exorcised but also tuned to the rhythm of clapping and foot-stamping and to sounds that evoked the dreaming body of the group. As in ancient “victim” rituals, the colours, the scents and the fluids represented by melted clay pushed themselves into the group experience. On the other hand, the ghosts that were not definite, were white and vanishing and seemed to signify the sense of the group’s non-existence, became the red marks that were left by hands that had touched red dye.

“In this phase, the ghosts have a double function that expresses a certain ambivalence. On the one hand, the ghost depicts an absence of group emotion, the experience of non-existence of the group, and on the other, at a moment when the ghosts appear, they become visible in all their emotional power and the group can then begin to exist and make itself seen [...]. Against the ghosts, the children carry out a type of exorcism, they wander around the room chanting “long live Mary” [...], this chant keeps the group united, together, and is full of both the excessive heat that is produced from emotions and the anguish from the risk of being destroyed by “cold ghosts”. (Lombardozi, 1996, p.112).

The ghosts then are represented by a multiple, and at the same time unifying design, ghosts (mouth-ear-sun-tree), as if reliving in a single touchable, visible and thinkable body. Thus, in this way, one sets up important connections between different ways of communication starting from the possibility of sharing a rhythm that allows us to change a deafening, de-structuring roar into a mythical configuration and be able to chant the single phrase “long live Mary” together. This has a meaning and refers to a common “religion.”

In this way, from fragmented experiences, the group becomes something like an important container or point of reference that holds up and gives a relative coherent shape to all the multiple emotional moments that is the being in common, the Koinonia. In this context, the group also becomes the place where processes of recognition that are traceable to the idea of an object-self are triggered. I would say that they have a mirroring type character that allows one to give body and expression, through strong idealisation, to the single member’s needs that are reflected in the group and its togetherness (Kohut, 1977; 1984;

Neri, 1995). This comes about through the crossing through a ritual that ferries the group towards an “effective meeting” (Neri, 1995) in a myth that is narrated as a part of a picture, given by a young girl whose is the narrative voice in the group’s visual context. The picture represents a child-witch who goes to the moon on a broom to recover her hand that had been previously cut off. In this way the girl shapes the destiny of the group through the picture, or better, one of the possible destinies, especially after so much fragmentation. It is the destiny of re-finding or perhaps discovering a whole dimension, a so called, more human one. (Lombardozi, 1996, p. 117).

The “effective” rite then reopens the “sense of possibility” to existence. In his analysis of initiation rites and of groups of children that have strong initiation elements, Francesco Remotti has shown that an important aspect is not only that of carrying out the passing from the state of infant-adolescent to adulthood, but, above all, in the more definite setting up of an identity, a youngster comes up against various alternative possibilities for existence. The point is this. You are what you are but you could have been so many other things (Remotti, 2000). In a group of children, the members may also acquire a new identity whilst keeping all the possible alterities open and draw up a connecting network between body, mind and culture of the group. That which for Pievani holds for every individual who “at an internal neurological level possesses all the alterities in the world, each individual has to make the crucial choice of connecting and co-evolving the multiple possibilities that he or she has inside.” (Pievani, 1998, p. 124). This may also concern a group.

Thinking about a comparison between some aspects of Tarantismo and a group of children, one may say that the aspect that unites the institution of the social rite to the experience of the group in analysis, is the ability of reopening a world that is welded to the symbol, the meaning and its imagination. This seems to hold true for the “victims” and other ritual participants, both for children and adult members as well. Instead, I believe that the way of getting better, that both situations lead to, are different. In the therapeutic choral/musical ritual of Tarantismo, the “victim” may reposition herself in the social and family situation through the restriction and working through of emotion and unease that is at the origin of psychic suffering. This may be carried out with greater tolerance and balance. In an analytical group of children or adults, the processes of the restructuring of the self cause splits and break ups with the identifying contexts of belonging that are part of the mechanism of “getting better” in the changes in one’s personal world and the new position of the original belonging to a group. This occurs through ways that are characterised by the setting up of new cognitive and affective languages.

Parents and Ancestors

I would now like to make another comparison between an African ritual that was studied by Victor Turner in the Ndembu tribe and an experience with a therapeutic group of adult patients. The “Isoma” is a very particular ritual that concerns the problems connected to a fertility problem of women in the Ndembu society that is a matri-lineal culture but male dominated as regards the choice of the couple’s place of living. According to Turner’s analysis, the traditional belief is that faulty reproductive capacity in a woman is connected to conflictual elements that are related to the conflict between powers that come down the family line from the wife’s side and the adjacency with the male side in the male dominated position of the situation. This element of conflict shows its symbolic form in the belief that in the woman concerned, the shadow of the ancestor weighs down considerably. In some people this is presented as male or female and that the origin is a curse that moves around a stream. “ It is thought that a relative on the victim’s mother’s side is to have gone to the source (kasulu) of a stream near the village of her mother’s side and have put a curse (kumushing’ana) on her. The effect of this curse was to “reawaken” (ku-tonisha) a shadow which was once part of the Isoma heritage. (Turner, 1966, p. 49). As happens in all rituals, for Turner, the process reproduces the moments of separation that Van Gennep suggested (the witchcraft and evil intervention), margins (definitions of transitional, ritual space) and aggregation (the reforming of conflict in terms of new integration into a group). The name “Isoma” has two meanings, one regards the bonding, the other the abandoning of one’s own group. At the final analysis, “Isoma is then the manifestation of a shadow that causes a woman to give birth to a still-born child or causes several small children to die” (Turner, 1966, p.46).

The rite is very complex, so I will put off giving it full coverage as Turner does this so well. One can see some essential points here. The end of the rite is the exorcism of the evil forces, both of the living and the dead, and is the reconciliation of the “visible parts to the invisible ones.” The central point of the rite consists of the moving of the woman and her husband from a “hot” hole (the place of death where the evil originates from) through a tunnel towards a “cool” hole (new place for their life). The cool hole for life and proliferation is associated with a white hen, whilst a red cock is associated with the hot one, the cock is then sacrificed. The old ritual participants collect specific medicinal plants and herbs that are ground together and treated to the same system of being hot or cold. The bride and groom pass several times from the hot hole to the new one and from the state of heat to that of coolness.

The Isoma then, contains important elements that give them form such as an initiation rite. In fact, the woman is treated almost as a novice and has to be able to be reborn into a new life during the passage from the old hole of death to the new one of life in order to be able to move into the state of being able to procreate. In order to reach this objective, using the process of ritual, it is necessary to put both the couple concerned and their helpers into a condition of

being able to free themselves from the ancestor's shadow that weighs upon their destiny and that is the expression of social drama and conflict between the "actors" of such drama. In this way, the individual and the social group may symbolically integrate the disorganising elements of social, family and interpersonal relationships into a new symbolic order using the rite. In such a context, the symbols of the ritual make up "a unit of evocative instruments that are headed towards causing, channelling, and taming violent emotions such as hate, fear, love and pain. Furthermore, they also have a goal and a well-trying aspect. In short, the whole person, and not exclusively the Ndembu "thought" is involved in problems of life and death at an existential level which "Isoma" is concerned with (Turner, 1966, p.67).

I would now like to present the experience of a therapeutic group of adults that I conducted and found some important similarities with the above described rite even though the situation was quite different. I am obviously not referring to the specific contents of the rite, which are also important, but I am talking about a comparison on a similar front between the dimension of the rite and the work model of a small analytical group.

The group meets weekly and contains seven members and myself, the analyst. This setting has been ongoing and was that of the session that I am going to speak about. One day during the session, Anna posed a personal question that had such an impact that made her think about giving up continuing in the group. She had to face up to a family drama that touched on her tried and tested problematic relationship with her parents. She is the daughter of separated parents. She hasn't spoken to her father for some time and at the same time, has a complicated relationship with the mother who has serious psychic problems. The current problem regards an argument about the division of a house that belongs to the father who offered a part of the value of the apartment to her but was conditional however, on her graduating from university. Anna seemed discouraged about repeating the dynamics and family behaviour that arise again and remove her hopes of a change. In this mood, she expresses her tiredness in returning to psychotherapy and throws a shadow of pessimism and resignation onto the group. She feels that the group may not be a sufficiently valid container for her unease and she thinks about stopping or as an alternative, about having individual therapy. At this point the group focuses on Anna's problem. Lino, another group member, suggests not giving answers, but to think together.

Anna narrates the reasons for her conflict with the father that are connected to his request for her not to see an aunt (father's side) with whom he had argued. She also tells the group about some of the mother's comments about the power of her family, given the acquired position of being able to put the ex-husband in great difficulty.

Another member, Aldo, thinks that she should try to have a relationship with her parents. Angrily, Anna says that she doesn't see life like her parents do and feels that she refuses their way of being. Laura invites Anna to get on with her life and

not worry about all these problems and to forget family money and inheritance. As group leader, I underline the weight of a couple of parents place on the group and the fact that they might cause it to explode. Rodolfo speaks about his role as father and husband who has more children and more experience, and understanding the difficulty of Anna's situation, he tells her that it would be a good idea in her unstable situation to linger upon some of the daily results in her life in order to get further ahead. Lino underlines the importance that he acquired from his family after a certain time and thinks that it is crucial to remain outside the family feuds.

At this point in the session, Anna looked at the leader and with great force asks for an explanation as to why she sees her father in Rodolfo. Seeing the risk of an individual request that would have activated a fatherly transfer whose deficit balance character wouldn't have had the possibility of being faced up to by the group, I replied by moving the attention onto a group project that was more suitable to the situation, I triggered a wider sense of sharing, of mirroring, thus presenting a possibility of change.

I invited Anna to consider the fact that Rodolfo had expressed a group desire that she could graduate. Anna, taken aback, thought that I had been eccentric in my reply. Lino remembered that he had enrolled again at university after many years away and that this was a group that made you graduate. Rodolfo smiling said that speaking about Anna's degree, we were speaking about the end of our adolescence. Anna replied that she had already lived alone for many years. Laura noted that you could live alone but not really detach yourself from the weight of your parents. Aldo said that in his first contribution he had really wanted to say these things, that parents could be seen in a different way and suggested the idea that Anna's father wanting her to graduate could also be a way of demonstrating his affect for her. Closing the session, Lino looking at Anna, observed that she had begun by saying that she hadn't known whether she should continue with the group and left with the idea of graduating.

Now, as in a rite, the group suggested to one of its members, Anna, that she undertake a process of changing the meaning of the image that she has of her parents, also giving a sense of initiation rite in the dynamic of leaving her adolescence. The important thing is that, previously, the group seemed to get bogged down by pictures of parental couples. Suggesting, through intervention from the leader, the eventuality and the desire for Anna to graduate, the group seemed to want to free itself from the shadow of Anna's parents in a ritual kind of way. This could be viewed in a similar sense to "Isoma" and the desire of freeing itself of the parents who were seen to be the ancestors. In this context in the therapeutic dimension, the group took an individual problem upon itself that could be highly destructive for the group in its overall sense of being and could create a new aggregation. This situation appears to be pertinent to Claudio Neri's concept of commuting. That is, "in the ambient of group analysis, we have used the term "commuting" to indicate the relationship between individual and

community... With reference to a small analytical group, commuting refers to the oscillating movement between the sphere of an individual and the field of a group. In group psychotherapy, an individual's problem may be faced effectively only after it has been changed into a free element for every member through commuting, when, that is, it has changed into a format that involves the group overall." (Neri, 1999, p. 136-137).

The Gods' Group

I would now like to try and express the idea around which the reflection on the "Gods' Group" rotates. With this definition I think that we can turn to the possibility of linking the term "group" to the plural dimension of the noun "god" that is in fact, a representation of a pantheon of divinity. Both in traditional rituals of trance and being possessed and in the experience of group psychoanalysis, the "subject group" makes up its symbolic horizon by activating processes of recognition and belonging and giving space to a multiplicity of identifications and images. This is a sound starting point for giving shape, once more, to the idea of "unitas multiplex" as a metaphor for the possibility of creating a relationship between different situations in a dynamic way. At the same time it explores possible connections and assimilation without losing its sense of being different. The comparison between the "apex" of psychoanalysis and the "traditional" concept that takes place during an interview with Balbino in Brazil held by Claudio Neri is interesting when he wanted to know Balbino's opinion about the psychoanalytical concept on dreams. Beyond the idea of giving gratification for its own sake, Balbino moved the attention onto his traditional theory of dreams as a premonition and seemed to place the experience of dreams into the field that Kaës has defined as the "second umbilical chord of a dream" (Kaës, 2002). Kaës suggests that there is an existence of a profound aspect of oneiric experience like a place of social sharing and unconscious social representation. On the one hand however, we can see clear differentiation on Balbino's part regarding the psychoanalytical concept of dreams being connected to desires. Instead, if we take a wider point of view of the dream as being a shared space, we may find some points in common with him. In fact, Balbino speaks about an oneiric experience that took place through mediation of Orixà that, however, wasn't present in the dreamer at the time of the dream. However, it left its mark, a trace as if to present its relationship with some world that not only concerned the dreamer but also the whole social group to which it belonged.

This aspect made me think about one of Kaës' comments on the interview in so much as he suggested that in a traditional context of belief, that Balbino expressed, the idea of the dream seemed to be subordinate to the "culture" of trance. It is not easy to produce an answer to this problem, but it seems however, that "trance" is a term that defines an experience with multiple facets. Above all, the relationship with being possessed is very complex and it is not always necessary to be so. In fact, if being possessed can be placed in a more

“individual” light, the dimension of the group is always dominant in trance. The person in a trance finds himself in a very particular state that is often induced by suggestion in the ritual context, and, in the state of trance, many important changes take place. Trying to translate this into psychoanalytical terms, one could say that the trance condition is in some way going into making up a transitional area such as an intermediate space, a dimension in which, on one hand, subjective creative processes come into play and on the other, an area of negotiation between the individual and the group is produced. The individual’s situation of suffering and crisis in a traditional society seems almost to be a pre-condition that produces the state of trance together with the creation of a social, ritual space of sharing in which the presentation of a group of mythical characters takes shape. In differing contexts, these characters come forward as saints, ancestors, Orixà, tarantulas and so on.

In my opinion, the idea of being possessed puts us onto an important plateau where various convergences arrive but so do differences between the psychoanalytical approach to groups and the ritual approach to groups, the so called traditional ones. In the analyses given by the main anthropological scholars and historians of religion, an interpretation of being possessed rituals dominate, for example, starting from Tarantism and arriving at African rites and those syncretic Afro-Brasilian ones such as Candomblé, or the Haitian Vudu or Cuban Saint types. The form of these is an expression of protest but more importantly of being harnessed in a code of norms and control of worry. In order to be so, traditional societies have to turn to a pantheon of divinities that require usage, costumes and symbolic and thought systems. Furthermore, today, these societies find themselves in a moment of great change, that we are aware of, and are also extremely full of conflict.

Currently, in a certain sense regarding group psychoanalysis, I believe that the myth, the rite, the experiences of worry and the changes which they lead one to, have to be dealt with through both a multiplicity, almost a pantheon” of psychoanalytical theories and their intersection with other social and scientific fields of research. In analysis of cultural contexts and their comparison with psychoanalytical experiences, we don’t do justice to psychoanalysis or traditional cultures if we flatten one against the other. I think that one particularity of a psychoanalytical approach concerns the capacity and the possibility of linking experience of knowledge to the sense of hope and liberty. These dimensions are present in Corrao’s teachings who stressed us to evaluate the importance of the consideration of “knowing” in psychoanalysis as a growing field in accordance with Bion’s Probe model.

From this point of view, Corrao, who in breaking into the Dionysiac dimension, seems to catch an element of freedom that also becomes an element of risk if it doesn’t locate an expressive form inside a system of symbolism and experience. De Martino in his historical/religious analysis and Lapassade in his sociological analysis both evaluated and made reference to rites on trance and being possessed

in their breaking into the Dionysiac dimension like Corrao. “The Dionysian affair [...] was closely linked to a group dimension right from the beginning. Dionysus is a collective, public and social god. He is inseparable from his “Tiaso”, from satire, maenad, as at the beginning of his life he was inseparable from the Curety and the Corybant. It is likely that the divinity dimension coincides with the group dimension in so much that it is able to create images that make up the transcendent and those from another world. This is done through the experience from the transpersonal and relational experiences and through contact with the great power from trans-subjective forces” (Corrao, 1992, p. 51).

So Corrao in attracting attention onto the Dionysian social dimension, underlines the function of myth and rite in group relationships and their change.

At this point, the positive possibility which may arise from a multi-disciplinary approach is that a lot of space has been created for many interpretations that allow one to grab and expand upon the complexity of social phenomena and the connected psychic dynamics. As we have seen, Corrao seems to catch the generative power of images in the Dionysian group dimension that closely concern some form of “alterity.” As an extension to this, I would now like to present an interesting expansion made by Roberto Beneduce in his “trance and being possessed” study in Africa. This regards not only “trans-subjectivity” but the trans-cultural, where”...the relationship between possession cults and myth and history ...seems to emerge strongly and lead us into considering the relationship between possession cults and social strategy from a particular point of view. The action of remembering, of reproducing a shared memory ... It seems that the agents of the “possession” in many cases are made up like privileged go-betweens through which history grafts itself onto cosmogony and onto the myths of a people. They offer the bridges across which the relationships with other societies and other human groups who practise other religions may be symbolised. However, if that history can find a position in amongst the myths it is because it is a particular history that concerns contact with alterity and with another culture that asserts itself through special relationships of strength that undoes pre-existing power hierarchies. This is often the rule and will of colonising bodies and minds” (Beneduce, p.196-97).

The idea that Beneduce presents is that of the consideration of how much the phenomena of possession, of trance and of ritual are the mirror of the relationship between the person and his group culture and other cultures that interact between each other in a reciprocal relationship of identity/alterity (Remotti, 1998). This concept seems very close to the idea of what I mean when I refer to the metaphor “unitas multiplex” which basically means being able to consider problems of society and human groups from a planetary point of view. One also does this without giving up keeping an eye on different specific conditions.

Conclusions

I would like to conclude by underlining that If we wish to consider the importance of a reflection on the anthropological approach to the study of traditional magical-religious therapies for group psychoanalysis and for psychoanalysis in general, we will have to avoid exhausting the dichotomies and try to form a united approach. In this sense we also have to think that we are part of humanity, even though we are different, and that cultural differences interact in a contingent way with the bio-evolution dimensions at a social level. Not everything is culture neither is it only genetic.

As regards group theories and rites, we can for example, welcome Levi Strauss's famous work on symbolic effectiveness where he describes a therapeutic ritual that was used in easing a difficult and painful birth. The witch-doctor chants and sings a mythical story and places the characters inside the woman's uterus as if they were barriers to be removed and so lead to a positive outcome of the whole situation. In this way a building process of an effective mythical symbol through a rite is produced where the individual body acquires a language that renders it a symbolic body for the whole social group (Levi Strauss, 1967).

This last reference is important in the closure of our discussion if it is aligned with Corrao's thought on myth. However, in my opinion we have to remember that one can see that myth without rite is dead on its feet. Claudio Neri underlines Corrao's original use of mythologem, "the smallest significant unit of a myth" in his isolation of it in a suitable institutional context in order to re-invent the elements of a myth. Such an operation of "de-saturation" allows one to use them effectively in a context of group analysis" (Neri, 1998, p.15). The mythologems seem to be restoring base elements in a group individual's crisis moments during the reconstruction of shared cultural horizons. Regarding this Corrao says that, "I consider that mythologems are constructive "elements" of every structure and mythical area and it is these elements that one can use for revitalisation and redefining. They are similar to that which operates in both an individual and in the group analysis room" (Corrao, 1992, p.28).

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Alfredo Lombardo is a trained anthropologist, psychoanalyst member of SPI and a member of The Italian Institute of Group Psychoanalysis (IIPG). He is interested in child group psychoanalysis, and in numerous scientific contributions has worked on studies regarding the relationship between anthropology and individual, and group psychoanalysis. He has taught psychoanalytic anthropology, child group psychology and development psychology at Chieti University and at Aquila University.
E-Mail: alfredo.ombardozi@gmail.com