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A METAPHOR FOR THE GROUP ANALYSIS

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Abstract: In this article we propose the Mediterranean Sea as a metaphor to discuss some aspects relating both the theory and the group analytical technique. We think, in fact, that thanks to its morphological, climatic and historical features, the Mediterranean Sea allows an effective translation of the group analysis key conceptions into images. Moreover it will allow us to present some investigations proposed by the Italian school including: 1) the systematization of the transpersonal levels (Lo Verso G., 1989; 1994); 2) the widening about the transgenerational level, including the sature/unsatured configuration of the family matrix (Pontalti C., 1989; Pontalti C., Menarini M., 1985); 3) the reflections relating to the foundation and the dispersion of the identity (Napolitani D., 1987; Ferraro A. M., Lo Verso G., 2007), 4) other more technical reflections connected whit the treatment through relationship (Lo Coco G., Lo Verso G., 2006; Lo Coco G., Prestano C., Lo Verso G., 2008). Therefore, from theoretical foundations to more technical questions, the analogies recalled by this comparison are a lot. Now we will share some of them.

Keywords: Group analysis; theory, technique.

The Mediterranean Sea and the systematization of the five transpersonal levels: with the term *transpersonal*, as everybody knows, we refer to the collective structures which are present in every individual and found his mind. Just with regard to these collective structures and the relation between these and the subject, we needed a thorough analysis. Inheriting Foulkes's lesson about the operating-methodological plan, we were curious to develop the theoretical potential of his intuitions. In fact, if on the one hand they opened the way for the scientific refoundation of a personality theory, on the other hand these hesitated in covering it. So, putting ourselves on the way of this intuitions, we have sounded and extended their importance. To this end we have made use of the essential contributions of the complexity paradigm (Morin E., 1977; 198), the elementary anthropology (Ghelen, 1961; 1978) and the existentialist-hermeneutical perspective (Heidegger M., 1927; Minkowski M., 1968). We have also suggested a kind of mapping of the *transpersonal* aspects of human psyche as a guide both to recognize in the individual these "collective psychological structures, and to understand their placement within the largest and complex anthropological-psychological system. These two spheres of research (the individual and the anthropological-psychological system) inform us, in fact, of the essential features of the *transpersonal – subjectual mind* (Lo Verso G., 1994) relation, or pre-existence and consubstantiality.

Briefly: as a collective psychological structure, the transpersonal leaves aside the single individual, it exists apart from someone (characteristic of pre-existence); the only thing is that this one-individual (or better each individual) embodies and re-interprets the anthropological transgenerational data re-bringing up-to-date continuously "the collective psychological structure" (characteristic of consubstantiality). The work of "*transpersonal mapping*" has allowed us to distinguish different aspects (or levels) of the relation between *transpersonal* and *subjectual mind*, that is: 1) the biological-genetic level, 2) the ethno-anthropological level, 3) the transgenerational level, 4) the institutional level, 5) the social-communicative level and finally 6) the political-environmental level. Analysed in detail, these levels, allow to understand with less delay the mind idea as «*network of unconscious relations where the biological cultural patrimony of the human species lies dormant and on which the psychological life is based*» (Giannone F., in Lo Verso G., 1994, p. 109). The transpersonal, therefore, as a melting pot of human vicissitude, as a dimension «*before everyone and inside each one, where aspects connected*

to different spheres of human existence converge, sediment and mix» (Ferraro A. M., Lo Verso G. , 2007, p.12). We believe that as the *transpersonal* so the Mediterranean Sea is a melting pot of human vicissitude. In its basin, in fact, the inevitable appearing and leaning out of different cultural, linguistic, religions, and political elements, have made this Sea like the blue storage of a hybrid connective knowledge, the huge network of the signs left on the depth by the civilization which went through it. That being stated, we will go deeply into the metaphor through the discussion about the *ethno-anthropological* and the *transgenerational* of *transpersonal* levels.

The Mediterranean Sea and the ethno-anthropological level of transpersonal: full of history and legend, of painful dramatic vicissitudes, of the harshest tension as well as the biggest touching returns, the Mediterranean Sea is the birthplace of civilization of our history and, therefore, the founding place of the *subjectual* psyche. Inside it the miscellany of remains deposited on the seabed seems to tell us about the need, for each ecosystem, to translate into dialogue the contemporary presence of different elements. The mind is an ecosystem as well, and as the Mediterranean Sea (where the wreckages, the lost anchors, the amphoras attached by the algae change into a habitat for the marine flora) it needs some plasticity. This is true if we refer to the *transpersonal* as a collective psychological structure (the *transpersonal* existing before the individual) or to the re-bringing up-to-date of this “collective psychological structure” in every individual’s mind (the *transpersonal* consubstantial with the individual). The two levels of analysis are inseparably connected and the Mediterranean Sea helps us again to catch the nature of these connections. In its inside, it is possible to discriminate many microorganisms that have got in themselves the code of the macro-balance as well as into the psychological collective transpersonal structure it is possible to recognize many *nodal points* or *subjectualies* which show traces of the balance or unbalance orders of the family and the macro anthropological networks. From this point of view, we need only to think about the concept of the trouble location proposed by Foulkes and the latest reflections and techné about the therapeutical *multipersonal* intervention. But perhaps, the most interesting aspect, on this level, concerns the opportunity to consider both the issues resulting from the systems plasticity degree and the dynamics that start among the different elements and from which comes the possibility or

the impossibility to exchange something and to recombine together. The Mediterranean Sea knows the results of both these events and tells us about them. In fact, it was present at the clash between the fundamentalist civilizations, it has known the three monotheist religions since the day they were born (the Jewish faith, the Christian and the Islamic ones); it knew the colonialist propensity and know how inevitable schism and breaks, follow the incapacity to talk each other. It is the same on the psychological level. Except that, instead of playing on the customs, the edges of a map, or the dogma of a sacred text, these clashes happen on an unconscious relational dynamics level. This happens for example, when “the family identity” aims to suck “the personal identity” into a totally undifferentiated psychological field; when it has difficulty to recognize the Alterity of the individual, and would like to change it into a colony, triggering, like this, the dynamics of many dependent or against-dependent psychopathologies. But the Mediterranean Sea knows something else: it is also the privileged exchange place. It saw the Greeks learn from the Egyptians, the Latin from the Greeks, from the Etruscan, and so on. And it is not at random that it is here that the idea of democracy, agora and republic was born. It is not at random if the Mediterranean Sea can “deny itself too”, if it knows it is diffuse and turbulent like the port of Genova and Tunisie rather than classic and tidy like Rome and the Latin genius (Matvejevic P., 2006), if it knows it is (and it knows it is) the “*Elsewhere*”. Now, the results of the exchange availability, that we have just seen referred to the history of the Mediterranean Sea, are the same for the *subjectual* mind. But, clinically speaking it is important to underline how such results express themselves through the subject’s feeling, through his way to explore the world, and himself in the world (Lo Verso G., 1989). In short, to conclude the discussion related to the analogies between the Mediterranean and the *transpersonal ethno-anthropological level*, we would like to let you observe a last interesting correspondence, that is as the essential requirement of both, for example the salinity of the Mediterranean Sea and the phenomenology of the psychological suffering, have changed during the time, and in both cases as an effect of the human conduct.

The Mediterranean Sea and the *transgenerational level of transpersonal*: now, since the *family mental field* extracts its meaning and defines its internal structures from the collective meanings and from the particular culture of a given age, we pass our analysis from the *ethno-anthropological level* to the *transgenerational level*. The *collective psychological* structures (or *transpersonal*) transfer their codes and contents to the individual through the *transgenerational* canal. This transmission is possible thanks to a structural connection that is typical of the *sapiens* species, which allows the small child to learn, and the *parental care system* to teach him all the representations and abilities which configure his first psychical equipment. Therefore, the human psyche is the result of the reciprocity bond between the family system and the un-born child. Now, we suppose that, just in the essential features of its structures, the Mediterranean Sea shows some interesting analogies regard to the (desirable) configuration of the *family mental fields* (Pontalti C., 1989; Pontalti C., Menarini R., 1985). In fact, although the Mediterranean Sea is relatively closed amid the European, African and Asian coasts, its morphology consents a water exchange with the Atlantic Ocean through the Strait of Gibraltar. Referred to the *family mental fields*, this kind of configuration allows the individual to re-mean in a new way his “to be-in-the world”, thanks to the possibility to change some meanings... like the water of the Mediterranean Sea with that one of the Atlantic Ocean. In this case, in fact, the internal family (the *transgenerational*), that remains the first and the main connection between the individual (or *subjectual mind*) and the *transpersonal*, allows him to re-write the signs of *transgenerational* psychological endowment in a personal way. Otherwise, a “saturated” configuration of the family mental field would condition negatively the patient’s psychic vitality, making it, as a closed sea, a sort of “endemic space” suitable to contain, safeguard and preserve only some representations rather than others. Consequently it turns into a vicious circle of psychopathology. Nevertheless, we believe that, nowadays, the exchange of meanings (or the difficulty to re-interpret the signs) does not depend on the family code resistance to revisit itself but in the “*Plexus’s depopulation*”, the psychological phenomenon we have recently analysed (Ferraro, Lo Verso, 2007), and that we will present below through another image of the Mediterranean Sea.

The Mediterranean Sea and the reflections about the foundation and dispersion of identity

In a metaphorical key, the “*Plexus*’s depopulation” is comparable to the tropicalization process of the waters of the Mediterranean Sea. In fact, for thirty years in its basin some significant climatic changes have been registering, which cause the settlement of the species coming from tropical or sub tropical areas. Since these species are dominant, they are able to supplant the preexistent species. At the present time the number of Lespessian species is increasing, and many are already fished and marketed. The facility by which these species install themselves in the Mediterranean basin is due to water overheating, excessive fishing and pollution water. All these conditions contribute to deprive the Mediterranean ethological niches, making them easily colonizable by other tropical organisms. Out of metaphor, this is the effect of “*Plexus depopulation*” (*ibidem*), or of that relational poverty that, above all if prolonged during the age of the growth, has an unfavourable repercussion on the identification process. In fact, it can make the most intimate part of the identifiable matrix (the *Plexus* just so) colonisable by “tropical” figures. Otherwise said: we refer to the changes of the family tissue, and how these can reflect themselves upon the identity development of the individual. In fact, in the last decades the family has changed both in the composition and the role, so we think that it is necessary to question us about the reflection’s changes on the *subjectual* psyche. The clinical experience suggests us, in fact, how the lack of figures suitable to support a stable and lasting identification is the starting point of the problems concerning the identity sphere. So, we inquire which effects has the excessive delegation of the family function, and if it does not comport a loss of real and symbolic affects, opening the way to the tropicalization phenomenon, for example, through, TV programs. A synthesis explanatory note: up to this point, we have cleared some main aspects of the group analytic research, through the morphological, climatic and historic conditions of the Mediterranean Sea. We have seen, above all, how the formation of subjectivity begins in the family mental fields, that are strictly related to the transgenerational and ethno-anthropological level of transpersonal; we have seen how the formation of personality needs a discontinuity dialectics (... of the ocean waters) so that it will be possible to complete the developmental task of separation from the family. With reference to this aspect, we have noticed two risks: one related to the

“endemic structure” of family mental fields, another related to the tropicalization of plexus. Now, we will try to share other more technical reflections connected with the management of therapeutic group and the treatment through relationship (Lo Coco G., Lo Verso G., 2006; Lo Coco G., Prestano C., Lo Verso G., 2008). To this end we will refer to the various revisitings of Homer’s myth that will allow us to link Ulysses, Leopold Bloom and ‘Ndrja Cambria’s notorious vicissitudes to the difficulties that patients meet during the group therapeutic course. In fact, both Homer and Joyce’s Ulysses, as well as D’Arrigo’s seaman, represent the human adventure in the world. Even though the first one wanders about distant seas and countries, the second one loses himself among the bars of Dublin, and finally the last one stops, waiting for the transfer on the Calabrian coast, they all are enriched by the diversity that they meet by travelling. Each one travels in both an emotional and physical way. Each one hesitates, distrusts, relies himself.... to discover after that in the *other* the only possibility of his travel. The return is the archetypal theme that binds deeply the three literary works, and these to the analytical work of a group patients. The three protagonists, as well as our patients travel toward the return direction (to the recrossing of identification matrixes) using, for this travel, the *others* (the patients of the group). In this sense, we could say that in a group each patient represents for the other, what Eolo, the Feaci’s king, and all the others represented for Ulysses, what the old beach man, or Ciccina Circé represented for ‘Ndrja Cambria, etc., that is: fundamental meetings for the return home. In a group, this meetings emerge and solve inside the *dynamic matrix* when the patient uses the *others* to re-propose unconsciously his typical modalities of conflict. Like this, starting from the visualization of their relational modalities in a group, patients start their journey toward the depth. A journey that starts by the possibility “to observe” the relational conflicts emerged from the work on the *dynamic matrix*, and that enters more and more up to the comprehension of the *belonging matrixes* (firstly family and cultural) that have “determined” these conflicts and that “support” them. Therefore, the work on the *dynamic matrix* allows patients to catch “the syntax and the semantics” of the emotion that is acted in the “here and now” of the relation, so that each patient can at first observe and subsequently realize the problematic dysfunctional aspects of his relational approaches. Moreover, as literature points out, how the taste for the unknown comes up by the side of the yearning desire to return, the same our patients experiment, in a group, the ambivalence between the psychological need to keep a continuity as regard the affective symbolization produced by

the family systems and the exigency to recapitulate this same symbolization through their natural inventive inclination. Therefore, in order to overcome the ambivalences and resistances that prevent patients from immersing into the therapeutic journey, the therapist must select carefully the patients for the composition of the group. Afterwards he must be able to recognize and to hold a dialogue with the “characters” of their inner world, as they emerge through the relationship with the other. With the aim to consider how the repressed conflicts express themselves in the manifest behaviour (Foulkes, S. H., 1948), the therapist stimulates the active participation of each member of the group, keeping an attitude more reflective than guiding. Such attitude is important since it allows the therapist “to put the head out of the water ...” (Foulkes, S. H., *ibidem*) and to realize that as in the mentioned literary works the “protagonists” (that for us are the patients and their affects) are not the only protagonists, because there are also the culture and the history of the humanity where the events develop. From this point of view, we could say that as Mr Blomm’s odyssey-day would not be like that if it did not reflect the failure of the contemporary society on the daily dimension, or as the seaman ‘Ndrja would not have travelled towards the death (to the hungry and unemployed Cariddi fishermen, to the Orc...) if he had not been survivor of the horrors of second world war, in the same way the sufferings of our patients would not be what they are today if they did not assume upon themselves all the anxieties and anguishes of the modern society, interpreting their malaise. It is the social work, in fact, that decides “what is symptom”, that fixes the vulnerability to the manic-depressive psychosis (Stanghellini G., 2006), that makes also the adolescents more sensitive to the depressive aspects connected with the separation process from the family (2007; Pietropolli Charmet G., 2000), that affects the building process of identity (Ferraro A. M., Lo Verso G., 2007), etc. Moreover, the social work can also influence the therapeutic work in terms of predominant political and cultural positions, of the most pressing requests and social aims, etc. The consciousness of this is fundamental for the treatment. Therefore, some years ago we predisposed the GAS (*Grid Analysis of Setting*) (Giannone, Lo Verso, 2011) as a help so that the therapist can hold in mind what influences the treatment, beyond the structural aspect related to set variables, beyond the theoretical framework, the theory of technique and the therapist’s personal characteristics. Now while the therapist’s difficulty depends on managing this complexity, the patient’s difficulty depends initially on succeeding in separating himself from the symptom. Although it is limiting, in fact, the

symptom is “useful” for the patient since it allows him to maintain a balance within a dysfunctional relational system involving the whole family (for example, the disorders in Axis II, , DAP, DCA, etc.). Within the therapeutic group, however, the symptomatological and, in a certain sense, caricatural aspects of suffering are soon questioned, thanks to the action of the therapeutic factors operating within it. In this way, the very eloquent assertive people, the sarcastic vehement ones, the monotonous bothersome ones, the obstinately taciturn laconic people and gentle moderate ones, learn, in the social microcosm of the group, not only to understand their own relational modalities and the effect they have on other people, but also to recognize the reasons that they presuppose. They also learn to live with the *Alterity*, to discover and to accept its value since the group, like the Mediterranean, is a melting pot of diversity. Naturally, for the patient it is a very disturbing experience to realize that, for example, behind his defiant attitude and his unremitting attack are hidden the submissiveness and sweetness of a child who asks only to be loved and accepted. Recognizing this means beginning to discover, to recognize the un-born parts (Napolitani, 1987b) those left hindered inside an endless gestation of oneself. This discovery is painful since it is not easy to agree not to be “completely born”. So, sometimes, the dismayed and the sorrow can be such as to make intolerable the possibility to face up to the therapeutic journey. Among patients who show a greater difficulty in experiencing the group therapy, there are those sucked into the “endemic dimension” (for returning to the metaphors about the *transgenerational* level of the *transpersonal*) of the “family mental fields”. For these patients the group is a source of anguish because it makes clear the dysfunctional knots of the family plots. The chance of starting to see, causes wariness, hesitation... the old beach man from D’Arrigo’s romance knows well this condition, when he tries to explain to ‘Ndrja the difference between the “seen by eyes” and the “heard by ears”: « I [...] say you the “seen by eyes”. Not much but sure. Or, by chance, the “seen by eyes” does not suit you and what suit you is, instead, the “heard by ears”? Do you know the difference between the “seen by eyes” and the “heard by ears”? It is the same difference that there is between the day and the night. [...] (D’Arrigo S., 2000, pp. 112; 117). The night, as regard us, is the collusions time; in a group, instead, patients have the possibility to focalize the emotional events and the “*subjectualities*” that overwhelm in the dynamic matrix and, as in an intimate stage, reveal the psychical plots where the suffering is entangled... so that «... if it (the suffering) was not “seen by eyes”, it was imagined, seen by the mind eyes»

(*Ibidem*, p. 118) concludes the old beach man, interpreting for some aspect Tiresias of the eleventh *Odyssey* canto, and for other us, the group analytic therapists. But the possibility to see provokes sentiments of treason and guilt. So, meeting the group can be an experience that causes great anxiety for these patients. That is why, despite the explicit request for help, they unconsciously reveal the most valiant resistance to change. It is also because they know that, just as the navigation in the Mediterranean, the therapeutic journey in the group involves the risk of running up against Mermaids carriers, the former according to the Homeric myth and the latter in the seafaring tradition of ruin and misfortune. The possibility of running up against mermaids, of discovering oneself to be Circe's prisoner, a survivor on the island of Nausica, or with one's face transfigured by the long journey back... terrifies the patients who, and not without reason, during the initial phases of analysis, have dreams of a tempest at sea. The reason for these dreams is understandable: every phase of the therapeutic journey is marked by particular tensions. But the tension present in the polarity between the faithfulness to one's family roots and the risk of knowing the other completely is, perhaps, among those that group-analysts know best, as it springs from the group itself. Another typology of patients that runs into great difficulty in facing the therapeutic journey is represented by those who have great difficulty to empathize with others, by those who live on spectacle and self-image, who prefer simulacrum to reality. Once again the reference to the Homeric myth, and particularly to Ulysses's meeting with the mermaids, can help to understand the question. As everyone knows, Ulysses has himself fastened to the ship mast so that he can hear the mermaids' bewitching song without yielding to their ardent invitation to pleasure. In this, if according to Horkeimer and Adorno, Ulysses reflected the typical situation of a western middle-class person enclosed in his alienating social role, from our point of view, he embodies (even if for a short tract) the narcissistic attitude of the person who cannot allow himself to have a real relationship since he is too busy preserving his own grandiose image. Especially nowadays, many people who, if they are integrated in authentic contexts such as the group therapy, have difficulty in emerging themselves and prefer "to fasten themselves to the ship mast", to damn themselves, to remain prisoners. And the stronger the invitation to authenticity is, the more they feel they must tighten their ropes. As the sea journey progresses, in fact, the therapeutic journey assumes larger and larger proportions. The sense of estrangement with respect to his own story is very strong at this moment. Symbolically, in fact, the open sea represents the

condition of being in exile. And, nevertheless, it is precisely beginning from this condition, essentially oriented towards introspection (but also clear and courageous) that it will be possible to recognize and journey through psychic plots, source of suffering, at first in the group and then in the real life. We would add that, fortunately, in group therapy, the feeling of loneliness springing from being in exile is temporary and contained within the group itself. In fact, everyone goes back to his own story and to his own home in the end, just as Ulysses and 'Ndrja did: changed inside and moved, on the way back, by nostalgia, but with new horizons inside, beginning with the world to explore, and that is to say, the life to live has changed frontiers. And this is, after all, the cure. From what has been said, it is easy to understand how the therapeutic journey is very complex and difficult. Some patients, in fact, may need a long time, others, the chance to benefit from individual meetings parallelly to those of the group, others the use of medicines or an appropriate integration among models, etc. Clinical experience teaches, in the end, how a certain type of group is more appropriate for one particular patient than for another. In any case, we think that navigation is a beautiful metaphor, as it must always adapt to the conditions at sea, just as the therapy must adapt to a patient's needs. An efficacious treatment, in fact, does not exhaust itself in creating a suitable *set(ting)* but involves the ability to modify it if the patient's conditions require it during therapy. With this in mind, we would like to remark on how useful the "seafaring approach" is on the part of the therapist in building a multimodal therapeutic plan. The fideist attitude, in fact, would represent a great obstacle as regards the possibility to consider the patient's multiple needs, that often require a suitable integration among models. Moreover, it would risk turning the therapy into "entertainment" rather than treatment, with the danger of making patient's pathology chronic. To conclude, therapies generally involve the comparison between two cultures: The *peasant culture* and the *seafaring one*, expression of two psychic needs, of continuity and of discontinuity (Lo Verso, 1994). They are recognizable in therapy: the former in the patient's unconscious resistance to the therapeutic work (and not only), the latter, on the contrary, in an attitude of opening and willingness towards what is new and different. It is understandable, however, how an attitude based on the seafaring culture, should characterize, before the patient who is near the end of his therapy, every therapist at the beginning of his practice: in terms of his willingness to engage in an exchange of learning and experience, of his opening towards the scientific community, of attention paid to the advances in research and

clinical practice and, because of all this, of the possibility to discuss and identify the limits and the possibilities of his own “modus operandi”.

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