



## The Social Responsibility of Psychoanalysis and Its Potential in Working with the Underprivileged

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“The Social Responsibility of Psychoanalysis and Its Potential in Working with the Underprivileged,”  
in: *Fromm Forum* (English edition), Tübingen (Selbstverlag), No. 7 (2003), pp. 33-39.

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Contemporary psychoanalysis is seriously committed to the task of understanding the constitution of the self from a perspective closer to that of the child.<sup>1</sup> The challenge is to understand the world and the constitution of the social subject from a perspective at once closer to that of social groups in the new economic order. Forms of ideology and power relations participate right from the very outset in the formation of self<sup>2</sup>. On many occasions these forms go unnoticed by the analyst, but are evident, for example, in „the private and social nature of dreams”<sup>3</sup>, as I will illustrate below.

### Working with People of Different Socio-Economic Levels

I will present two clinical vignettes, each relating to a dream. For some time, I was working separately but simultaneously with two teenagers, Ana and Bety. The two experiences can help illustrate how social factors and external living conditions weigh on unconscious perceptions of the identity experiences of dreamers, as well as on what I call social counter-transference on the

part of the analyst. For purposes of discussion, I will leave aside most of the dynamic material in both treatments.

Both girls began with motivation problems in their schoolwork and also problems relating to identity construction.

The two girls came from opposite ends of the social spectrum. Ana studied at a state school and later, while undergoing analysis, she decided to work after school as a bagger at a local supermarket. Her mother was unmarried and as a single parent had placed her daughter from the time of her birth in a number of homes so that she could herself work. Ana's mother had fled the home of her own parents because of violence directed against her (so Ana's mother had suffered a history of mistreatment and physical abuse). Mother and daughter now lived alone, in conditions of pronounced poverty.

Ana was brought for treatment because she lied continually to her mother about what she did in school, showed no interest in her studies and, as a result, was beaten by her mother, who always referred to her personality in negative terms. Before she began working in the supermarket, she would leave home and hang around in the street, so she wouldn't have to endure the absolute silence that was demanded of her as she performed the domestic tasks her mother assigned after school.

Bety, on the other hand, studied at a very exclusive private school because her parents were very wealthy. Her mother did not work

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<sup>1</sup> Paper presented on a panel about *Psychoanalysis and the World we Live in* at the XII International Forum of Psychoanalysis, Oslo, May 23, 2002

<sup>2</sup> Elliot, A. *Teoría Social y Psicoanálisis en Transición. Sujeto y Sociedad de Freud a Kristeva*, (1992) Amorrortu Editores, Buenos Aires, 1995.

<sup>3</sup> Lippman, P. *Nocturnes: On Listening to Dreams*. New Jersey: The Analytic Press, 2000, p. 245.



and did not have much of a life of her own. Her social life was conventionally focused around her daughter's schooling and her husband's work. Bety's father was a high-level government official. The mother's family history was marked by the unexpected losses of her father and her mother years earlier, under violent and traumatic circumstances. These losses had come at different times in the mother's development, but at any event before Bety was born.

Bety's parents brought her to me citing her „low self-esteem,“ which they saw as causing her socialization problems. She also had weight problems and suffered from dermatitis. Bety said she was unhappy because she was not accepted as she was. Her favorite pastimes were getting together with her friends in fashionable shopping malls and chatting on the Internet. Bety's family unconsciously had very low expectations of her because she was a woman.

There are obvious physical contrasts: the thinness associated with malnutrition, mistreatment and a general climate of need on the one hand, and the obesity associated with overfeeding and material abundance on the other. Two types of anxiety that stem from the nutritional link between this dyad, manifested in two distinct socio-economic contexts.

It took Ana an hour to get to my office by public transportation, and she only paid a symbolic fee. She seemed lonely but strong. Bety's trip from home to my office took 15 minutes; she was driven by her family's chauffeur, in the company of her mother. She paid the full fee. She seemed overprotected and fragile.

Although at the start of their treatments, both girls showed a lack of imagination and creativity, they were both avidly attracted by playfulness, so our sessions became a transitional space for playing with the therapist. Each of the two girls had her own interesting and likeable traits. This sums up how my link with them began, which allowed me to get to know each girl in the context of her own social world and ambient systems.

### Dreams

Ana dreamt about the head of a woman on top of a tree trunk which had been cut off very close to the roots. The head exploded into pieces.

There was no moon that night.

Bety dreamt she was a flag, that her body was a flag (of her country), with a head on top and some tiny feet at the bottom.

In constructing the original link, the living conditions of the primary figures and the events that bring important changes to the life of a subject may threaten the sense of identity. The idea that a sense of identity is developed on the basis of one's contextual links with others<sup>4</sup> is fundamental. What are the limits of change that can be tolerated before identity is damaged to the degree indicated in these dreams?

Ana's dream revealed in one fragment the tragedy of her life, viz. „outbursts of violence or madness,“ and referred to her mother's fury, which she provoked to some extent through her countless lies, failures and silences. It showed that Ana's „pieces of identity“ flying apart [?] found no „continent“ in the figure of a mother who unconsciously rejected her simply for having been born. Her identity had been affected almost down to its roots, made up of disassociated parts of her self and other fragmented parts that functioned with no interlinkage. In this dream, she felt the terror of collapse amid a loss of support in her environment, involving a clear state of disintegration with no clear differentiation between herself and her mother--the dream could have been about either one. It also reflected the violence she endured from her mother, and the absence of her father. The tree trunk could have been a reference to her father, about whom she knew nothing. The tree was cut off, lost at the very roots, with obvious consequences for her identity.

In Bety's dream, on the other hand, her physical self was coherent but showed no differentiation from objects or things. In her there was no clear differentiation between self and non-self. She did not feel experience herself as a complete, live person (Winnicott); instead she objectified her body. Her self had become an object; as a flag of her country she had more attractive qualities, a better personality profile. What she really was, what she felt herself to be,

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<sup>4</sup> Grinberg, L. Grinberg, R. *Migración y Exilio, Estudio Psicoanalítico*. Madrid: Editorial Biblioteca Nueva, 1996, p.128.



did not count and was not appreciated. This could be a defense that allowed her to feel a sense of „belonging,“ the product of an introjective identification issuing from the father. The need to maintain status before the father (who unconsciously rejected her for being born a woman) and his social position—which was important to him—gave this young woman a false sense of identity. The fact that she dreamt of herself as a flag bespeaks certain introjected attributes like loyalty, obedience to the family ideology and to an authoritarian social group.

A flag waves placidly when the wind blows, showing its direction; the fabric is made up of the space that it encloses—although having a head and little feet (despite the suppression of the woman's body) does potentially allow for a certain autonomy.

In Bety's dream, she was denied the satisfaction of her longing for contact; what predominated instead was her need for recognition. This self-experience was manifested in a dream that was more or less agreeable—certainly not a nightmare—to her. We can deduce from it that Bety's predominant psychic mechanism was the denial of herself as a human being, as a body with its own desires.

### Counter-Transference Aspects

I was treating Ana, whose mother would actually physically attack her, who instead of caring for her, expected that her daughter would act as her caretaker, there to gratify her every wish. If Ana failed to do so, the mother became impatient and furious and would strike out violently. Bowlby says physical aggression, difficult though this is to deal with, is only the tip of an iceberg<sup>5</sup> of hostile rejection and prolonged abandonment. In *A Secure Base*, Bowlby confesses that he had never encountered a mother who actually attacked her own child, though he had treated some who were on the verge of doing so.<sup>6</sup>

The anger I transferenceally felt made me wish to disengage Ana from her mother, to protect her. But Ana was loyal to her mother, felt that she herself deserved every blow she re-

ceived, that the abuse relieved her guilt at being bad. I was also concerned by her work situation, which is widespread among major Latin American supermarket chains, where school-age boys and girls are employed without pay but have to wear uniforms and work strict working hours, dependent on the modest tips they receive from shoppers to buy food, school supplies, clothes, and candy. But even such a socially unjust system was seen by Ana as something of a step towards autonomy.

With Bety, I became accustomed to her comfortable lifestyle. Our conversations became friendly and courteous, and I even began to think of her as girl like so many others nowadays. I then realized that sometimes I felt bored at her trivial chattiness, at her stories about futile exchanges with her friends in shopping malls, at her superfluous consumerism. This realization made me aware that there was something underneath this air of apparent happiness—I perceived how bored Bety was herself in her interpersonal relationships—although she had not articulated this verbally—how her tendency to „have fun“ was a facade. Many times I felt I was being borne along on gentle waves from the authoritarian tradition of Bety's father toward the marketing culture. However, I could perceive the alienation common to her social group, feigning normality while suffering inside. Her smoking and drinking was becoming increasingly troubling. „It is difficult to help the patient resolve her resistances,“ Stream points out, „unless the therapist can face their own issues: their boredom or excessive enthusiasm in the therapy sessions“<sup>7</sup>. A possible way out was for patient and analyst to be completely honest with regard to the main conflict.

In the social character of lower class groups like Ana's, where the primary mode of socialization is irrational authoritarianism, violence can be open and direct. In contemporary upper class western families, violence can be subtle and elaborately disguised. Confronting external conditions like those in Ana's life would be a painful experience for anyone, difficult to face alone.

<sup>5</sup> Bowlby, J. *Una base segura*. Paidós, p. 106.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104.

<sup>7</sup> Stream, H.S. *Resolving counter-resistances in Psychotherapy*, Brunner/Mazel Publishers, New York, 1993, p. ix



Dealing with extreme economic conditions reveals the practitioner's counterresistances<sup>8</sup>.

Outside of the sessions, I would indulge in a mental exercise: I would exchange scenarios from Ana's life with Bety's, i.e. as secret wishes of mine. Ana had a fundamental right to a little of what Bety enjoyed, and Bety would probably benefit from the responsibility that comes with housekeeping or earning her own money, with learn what it is to work every day to secure the bare means of survival. If Ana were to spend some time in Bety's socio-economic context, or Bety in Ana's, maybe they would be able to reconstruct a more humanized identity.

Clinical practice would be pegged to working in a Latin American country, where social reality is marked by yawning disparities between the economic extremes involving certain socially typical reactions, like scenarios drawn from fairy tales or else from myth and expressed in a symbolic language that show a social countertransference. These represent a collective knowledge of social equality, affirming that the rich can only know what is going around them if their leaves the terrain of their palaces disguised as poor beggars or strangers. When the rich lose the objects of their ambition, they discover a truer identity, they are humanized, they learn a lesson, or they experience the punishment they can always escape if only they would modify their orientation away from Having toward Life and Being.

Oscar Wilde's Happy Prince has a statue made out of gold and precious jewels, but gives up his wealth to a swallow which takes it to someone who really needs it to survive. There are other stories, some of them which have been made into movies, like Little Orphan Annie, about poor orphaned children who are placed in rich homes and transform the experiences of those belonging to the social class that has wealth and power.

A particularly interesting example is that of the adventures of Harun Al-Rashid, beautifully told by Princess Sheherazade in *The Thousand and One Nights*<sup>9</sup>, where Al-Rashid, the sultan of

the empire, disguises himself as a beggar and goes out into the world. He meets a poor woodsman who is critical of the local mayor's power, and who offers to share with him his humble table. Whereupon the woodsman reveals his desire to be supreme leader just for a moment in order to settle his accounts with justice. When the woodsman is lulled to sleep by the effects of the wine, the sultan decides to grant his wish, and takes him to the palace and dresses him in gold and silk, instructing his entire court to make him believe he is Al-Rashid himself. What happens afterwards is psychologically interesting: the young man becomes terribly confused about his identity, and is forced by his new circumstances to give up his idea of who he really is and to believe he is, instead, someone with wealth and power. Eventually, he really believes he is Al-Rashid, the ruler and highest authority of the empire, so he starts working. When he is returned to his original home, he keeps saying he is Al-Rashid and insists that he was the one that modified the law. The people of his town do not believe him; they brand him a liar and madman and torture him to reveal his true identity.

What is interesting about this story is that in it social and economic circumstances largely determine the construction of identity, not only the quality of the original mother-infant relationship in isolation from the social context. If living conditions change dramatically, the experience of identity is affected too. The transition from one world to another, from one context to another, has repercussions on the construction of the many elements making up a sense of continuity in identity. This phenomenon is corroborated in clinical practice.

The state of social and economic order in the external world and its marked disparities

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save the women of her kingdom by going to the Caliph, who in retribution for his wife's infidelity has ordered a woman to be brought to him that very night, and killed at dawn. Sheherazade hopes that she can spellbind the Caliph with the thousand and one tales she knows, breaking each one off at the most important point at dawn, in order to buy another day of life. In the end, the Caliph, who has been in love with her from the first night, is cured of his diseased thirst for vengeance.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Sheherazade, a young and beautiful princess of enormous gifts and cultivation, brave and sure of herself because of the love of her parents, offers to



awake counter transference reactions of disagreement and of social change. Reactions are nevertheless controlled by power, whether suppressed or sublimated into an artistic creation of a merely mythical kind in which the established order changes only for a certain time, before returning to its previous status. Psychoanalysis, which has it in it to be „revolutionary“ according to Fromm, when forced into an exclusive practice, has become just another means of social control. The limitation of opportunities imposed by family, social group, or the larger society in which we live, affect our psychological development. We should not therefore conceive of illness as something involving only the patient, but as involving also the patient's relation with the surrounding interpersonal world.

#### The Personal Transformation of the Analyst

Since it was set up as a group, the Seminario de Sociopsicoanálisis A.C. (SEMSOAC)<sup>10</sup> has sought to apply the same sociopsicoanalytic methodology that Fromm and Maccoby<sup>11</sup> developed in Mexico. The methodology demonstrated the interaction between socio-economic factors, living conditions, and characterological factors<sup>12</sup>. The Seminario takes a central interest in the group work of participatory social research and developing creative potential among extremely underprivileged and traumatized populations<sup>13</sup>, encouraging social change and emotional development in the studied groups.

We also view it as a social duty, given such contrasting conditions, to turn our gaze from

the university to the community, to make knowledge acquired in academia available to the people. Our community work in close follow-up meetings with individuals from a different social and economic background not only enriches us as researchers, but affords us the opportunity to return some of our academic results to the wider community, thereby setting up a research process that instead of being unilateral and asymmetric is based on reciprocity and shared knowledge. Over time we came to realize that, in addition to working within the group, our distinct experience of concrete individuals drawn from such different socio-economic worlds had transformed us on a personal level, even as it had had a marked impact on our clinical practice at the institutional level and on our own private experiences in the city. These personal experiences had sensitized us, opened our eyes, awakened our social conscience. This practice generated new participation and new actions on the part of both the team and the group studied, allowing productive and creative traits to develop.

We worked for nine years within a mining community, studying the formation of character traits among miners' children<sup>14</sup>. We specifically set ourselves the goal of communicating the results of our research to the community, of opening a dialogue with them and listening to their experiences. One of the most interesting and encouraging findings to emerge from this, when the questionnaires were recirculated after the first three years, was that mothers were resorting less often to corporal punishment in disciplining their children. Physical violence directed at the latter had diminished considerably<sup>15</sup>.

This we gained social experience via the path of psychoanalysis, broadening our horizons to encompass knowledge of the social unconscious of concrete societies<sup>16</sup>. The point of this

<sup>10</sup> Seminario de Sociopsicoanálisis, A.C. is a group for sociopsicoanalytic study and research founded in 1985. Its current members are Guadalupe Rosete, Patricia González, Cristina Duarte, Clotilde Juárez, Mauricio Cortina, Juan José Bustamante, Guadalupe Sánchez, Ana Carolina Fontes, Angélica Oviedo, Angélica Cortés, Angélica Rodarte, Estela Palma and others headed by Salvador Millán, and Sonia Gojman.

<sup>11</sup> Fromm, E., Maccoby, M. *Social Character in a Mexican Village* (1970) Transaction Publishers, New York, 1996.

<sup>12</sup> Funk, R. Erich Fromm, *El Amor a la Vida, Una Biografía Ilustrada*, Paidós, Barcelona, 1999, p.140.

<sup>13</sup> Millan, S., Gojman, S., *The Legacy of Fromm in México*, *Int -forum Psychoanal* 9:(207-215), 2000 p.214.

<sup>14</sup> Seminario de Sociopsicoanálisis. *Social Character: its Study, an Experiential Interchange*. Cuadernos IV, (4):1-142, 1993; also Cuadernos I and III, IMPAC, Mexico, 1991-1992.

<sup>15</sup> Gojman, S. *Revaloración del Cuestionario Interpretativo en una comunidad minera después de tres años de trabajo comunitario*. Reporte al CONACYT, México, 1991.

<sup>16</sup> Sánchez, G. *Sociopsicoanalytic Experiences in Par-*



type of work, very much like following the course of a river, was to learn by transforming<sup>17</sup>, something that has now a fundamental part of the socially oriented psychoanalytic training our Seminario currently provides. In socio-psychoanalytic research, social participation and community work practiced among underprivileged persons have proven their worth as a transformative personal experience for the psychoanalyst.

Now the idea is to extend our reflections on the evolution and personal trajectories of the analyst to contexts outside of formal academic studies and clinical practice. Psychoanalytic trainees are all the more insecure in social practice because the institutional approach to training does not recognize the value of knowledge gained from informal experiences.

In critical social theory, there is a good deal of interest in psychoanalysis as a basis for reformulating questions concerning how psyche and social field are linked and how the subject is constituted. Psychoanalysis has shown no corresponding interest in what social theory with its Freudian-Marxist synthesis has to contribute.

In social sciences, the method of the „reasoned autobiography,“ begun in France by Henri Desroche in 1985, has been envisioned as a link between theory and practice, between gathered experience and academic knowledge. His method has been applied to groups in Africa and in Mexico (the northern Sierra of Puebla) by *Prade*.<sup>18</sup> The person writes his or her autobiography, the story of their life, incorporating both general and family data, formal studies, non-formal studies, social and cultural activities, and professional activities. It is completed, then reasoned through and analyzed with an individual advisor or in a collective session, before being utilized for the project. The purpose is „to help adult persons unlock cultural potential . . . accu-

mulated throughout their social and professional life. Frequently this potential is ignored even by the subject himself . . . who can, by this means, turn their lived experience into an expressed experience.“<sup>19</sup> There is a social need to have a written curriculum vitae, but „the partiality of this written curriculum is such as to leave out the most creative elements in the life of a person . . . the engine of their personal adventure,“<sup>20</sup> which is what we call self-training but which is rarely valued. This methodology seems to be a reflexive option that might be able to balance out the risk in current psychoanalysis caused by the tendency toward „self-disclosure“ before the patient or in the context of a conference, which is likely to occur in a rather unreasoned and often irrational manner.

In his book „Beyond the Chains of Illusion,“<sup>21</sup> Fromm offers what is basically a reasoned autobiography. There he insists that only by analyzing the social unconscious can one overcome individual impediments, i.e., break the illusions imposed from the outside, to become free and develop one's creative and emotional potential. So as to turn this to their patients' advantage, analysts may through their psychoanalysis, and self-analysis de-repress their own social unconscious.<sup>22</sup> Fromm remarks metaphorically that the tree of life cannot be separated from the tree of knowledge, because both spring from the same roots. We cannot speak of transforming society if we cannot, as analysts, first transform ourselves. The book is a good example of this, given the current proposals afoot for modifying and updating programs of psychoanalytic training and transmission to include historical trajectories and new kinds of dialogue between psychoanalysts, as has been proposed by Molad.<sup>23</sup>

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tipicative-Action Community Projects: On Facing Social Character, in *Fromm Forum*, 5/2001, p.27

<sup>17</sup> Sánchez, M.E., Almeida, E. La Relación Humana simétrica: Fuente de Acción y de Conocimiento, en: Cuadernos II, Seminario de Sociopsicoanálisis 1991, Instituto Mexicano de Psicoanálisis A.C. México.

<sup>18</sup> Desroche, H. Citado en: Sánchez, M.E., Almeida, E. Conocimiento y Acción en Tzinacapan. Autobiografías Razonadas, *Lupus Inquisitor*, 2001 p.24.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Fromm, E. Más allá de las Cadenas de la Ilusión: Mi Encuentro con Marx y Freud, (1862) Herrero Hermanos, Sucs, S.A. México 1964.

<sup>22</sup> Sánchez, G. Sociopsicoanalytic Experiences in Participative Action Community Projects; On facing Social Character. Work presented in New York, May 2000 and published in *Fromm Forum*, 5/2001.

<sup>23</sup> Molad, G.J. Mutual training of Developmental Trajectories: The Shaping of Dialogue Between analysts



Another of Fromm's most important contributions is to have insisted on the centrality of overcoming individual, family, and class narcissism, this to be done chiefly by social participation.<sup>24</sup>

### A Social Vignette

Two or three out of every four Mexicans are poor, and close to 40 million of them live in extreme poverty. These conditions include a lack of basic health care. Self-care, popular medicine, medicinal plants, self-generated development projects, and participatory research, are all resources that can be tapped into as a survival strategy.<sup>25</sup>

The dizzying changes of modernity upset the existing equilibrium in the human psyche, threatening us with a loss of our previous adaptation in the new environment. We have been able to see this in the westernization of indigenous communities, for example in a small Purépecha community (in which we have recently begun to work) where there have been several teenage suicides. Suicide was formerly unheard of in this community and among indigenous people generally. Let us begin where the highway ends, in the town's only school building. Beyond mountains rise up; below is the lake with its fishing boats and islands. Along its shores are pastures of jute plants, the leaves of which are dried for weaving. The drying process needs sun and a brisk wind.

In our first interchange with this community, as in the first clinical interview, we faced something unknown. When faced with the unknown in the social field, wisdom manifests itself in respect and listening.

As social analysts, we learn that suicide is viewed by the community as a social problem, as a painful event lived collectively, as a space in which it can be suggested „Let's do some-

thing.“<sup>26</sup>

This community is daily immersed in the experience of sending off migrant workers to the United States, because the burlap fabric that is woven there does not have any value outside the community. Those who travel to northwards face a basic lack of respect of their human and labor rights; many do not return because their lives are lost—or taken from them—on the way. What we have is a rural community that has gradually renounced its indigenous roots to assimilate into western culture. The migration of the men means families are abandoned to their fate for almost nine months out of the year. The women are left alone to care for the children and home, and manifest increased violence precisely toward their adolescent children. This creates a collective crisis, dominated by an impulsive, self-destructive dynamic uncharacteristic of comparable groups who are traditionally bent on their own survival.

The migratory experience<sup>27</sup> is inevitably a crisis<sup>28</sup>; it can, on occasion, produce „outbursts“ of madness or an inexorable slide into insanity,<sup>29</sup> because it disturbs the existing balance between psychic conflict and its defenses, which can precipitate a chiefly psychotic mechanism of dysfunctionality.<sup>30</sup>

When children are separated from their father in adolescence, i.e., during a period of transition in which they leave childhood and join the adult world, a period when bodily functions undergo radical change and a new identity has to be found; when the family structure is thrown into disarray in living conditions where poverty eliminates all hope of a better future;

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in Conference Space, *Int Forum Psychanal* 10(227-234), 2001.

<sup>24</sup> Fromm, E. *El Arte de Escuchar*, *Obra Póstuma* 4, Paidós Studio, México, 1993.

<sup>25</sup> See social character questionnaires completed in connection with the Attachment Research Project among Mexican peasant dyads, headed by Sonia Gojman, which is currently being analyzed (2001-2002).

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<sup>26</sup> Self-care is a structural element in all human societies, the impulse to "do something" when someone is taken ill. Paul Hersh, *Ethnobotanical Garden and Traditional Medicine Museum and Herbolaria*, Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, Acatzingo, Morelos.

<sup>27</sup> Grinberg, L. Grinberg, R. *Migración y Exilio*, *Estudio Psicoanalítico*. Madrid: Editorial Biblioteca Nueva, 1996.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, The authors are referring to migration for political and social reasons, but I believe what they say is equally applicable migration caused by extreme economic conditions.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, p. 133.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*.



the whole experience can be silently traumatic if, in addition, the mother is left alone and is unprepared to allay her adolescent child's anxiety, meaning for the child the loss of a protecting maternal presence. From the standpoint of attachment theory, these women demonstrate an extreme degree of anxiety-driven attachment, which according to Bowlby<sup>31</sup> occurs because experiences of prolonged or repeated separation were a common feature of their own childhood. Bowlby notes that, in his experience, most mothers who resort to abuse were extremely sensitive to any type of separation, even the most daily and common instances, and that their responses indicated high levels of anxiety and/or anger.<sup>32</sup> These mothers had, in turn, themselves suffered abuse or the repeated threat of abandonment or death,<sup>33</sup> hypotheses which have stood up to being tested by attachment theory. Under such circumstances, young persons may feel utterly unprotected and be overwhelmed by a sense of „catastrophic anxiety,“<sup>34</sup> from which they try to escape through death.

In dealing with the phenomenon of youth suicide in this community, we find parents and teachers arguing about who bears the least share of the blame. Meanwhile the families of the suicide victims isolate themselves, not attending the meetings because no one offers them consolation; in fact, they find themselves being blamed for what has happened.

In this experience, we find a symmetry between internal and external danger. The self is threatened both from within and from without<sup>35</sup>. This is a response to the fundamentally „non communicational“ context.<sup>36</sup> The violence that is intended to repress young persons only engenders further distance and aggravates the conflicts. It is a fairly general rule that between traumatic events and their perceivable effects, there is what we might call a period of latency. Bearing in mind that adolescents go through three basic phases of „mourning“ --for the child's body, for their role and identity as a child, and

for the parents of their childhood<sup>37</sup> -- we can readily understand that adolescents are particularly vulnerable, because they are made receptacles for the projected conflicts of others and of their surroundings.

On a personal level, the analytical framework provides a „platform,“ or container, whose function is to contain projections that transmit disassociated „pieces of experience“ taken from the context and from background history. To be integrated,<sup>38</sup> these must be passed through the receptive mind of the analyst, as the mother initially does with her child. On a social level, when we are listening to a community talking about the complex operations it weaves collectively, fragments of experience underlying the lack of relationship between the various levels of analysis (emotional, social, cultural, economic) are projected on to the mind of the social analyst and later formulated. This results in a kind of „containment“ which, as the community work continues, can be integrated into the group. The problem reveals another side: not the guise in which a difficult teenager conceals himself, but rather the face of a difficult and hostile society.

To survive psychologically in a social world that is changing from the traditional to the modern, a community needs to reorganize and strengthen the feeling of identity, the sense that one is still oneself for all the social changes. The sensation of continuity is necessary for our transformation--one of the many paradoxes of life.

It is possible to recover the memory of our „extracurricular“ background, as well as the imagination needed to recognize ourselves and again learn to open up to new experiences. Perhaps we can learn how to interact with the social context while conceiving a cultural and community identity, wresting it from a globalization process that tends to standardize and suppress differences, even as it fragments identities.

In metaphorical terms, it is as if we were

<sup>31</sup> Bowlby, J. *Una base segura*, Paidós, pp. 94-117.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 102.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103

<sup>34</sup> Grinberg, p. 24.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 135.

<sup>37</sup> Aberastury, A., Knobel, M. *La Adolescencia Normal. Un Enfoque Psicoanalítico*, Paidós Educator, México, 1988.

<sup>38</sup> Grinberg, L. Grinberg, R. *Migración y Exilio. Estudio Psicoanalítico*. Madrid: Editorial Biblioteca Nueva, 1996 p. 128.





circling the high walls that enclose the gardens, houses and mansions of pure psychoanalysis, when suddenly under a streetlight we see an alleyway leading off somewhere. Judging by its age, it must be an ancient thoroughfare. We follow it along and find that we are now on the main street of this community. Children are running and playing, but some are crying. Some people are playing instruments, and further down the street a tape recorder is playing songs that were popular in the big city a few years back. A woman sits on the steps of a house, weaving baskets. A man is discussing something with his neighbor across the street. Now we are inside someone's house, as night falls; a short woman dressed in a hand-made embroidered (huipil) blouse and full skirt, wearing simple sandals, comes out into the rain carrying her

baby under an umbrella. Some sickly children, five in all, follow her in a row, heading homeward in the deluge toward the flimsy shelter they live in. And you ask yourself, is it true? Is she a widow, and with all those her children?

In the transition from psychoanalysis to inter-subjectivity, from the relational to the inclusion of the social, every human being has a social responsibility to learn from his fellows, to learn cultural identities, to conceiving of the person as part of a collectivity.

Psychoanalysis today must choose between an attitude of exclusion or one of inclusion. There are two possible futures. To choose inclusion is to choose responsible recognition and, with it, the experience of personal transformation.

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