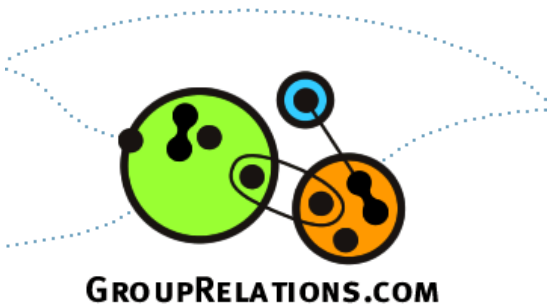
Second Quilted Patchwork

A Group Relations response to Covid-19



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Partners in Confronting Collective Atrocities

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Final stitch: Friday 5th June 2020

This is a second set of reflections about how Group Relations thinking can assist people and systems to explore the COVID-19 pandemic. It is not intended to be complete, but is a snapshot of a moment in time from a group of systems-psychoanalytically informed people.

The contributors are members of a group which has been meeting on Zoom following on from a tri-annual meeting that took place in Belgirate, Italy in November 2018. The Group has been exploring the hypothesis "Are we Better Together?" – can we as group relations practitioners, theorists and advocates live and work through, the dynamics that we invite members to encounter in a Group Relations Conference. As a result of COVID-19 the question of being "better together" is now one for us all, as we "Social Distance".

As we prepare to re-enter "physical closeness" perhaps our fear and anger will also emerge closer to our experience.

The Patchwork that follows, invites you to engage with the eye of an artist. The offerings are rooted in institutions and geographies but are the vistas of the authors.

We will produce another patchwork in the Autumn.

CREATING A SECOND PATCHWORK

These latest patches have been written just as countries are starting to come out of quarantine; the previous one having being done as quarantine was beginning. The brief for every member of the group was, as before, 250 words on COVID-19 in their context and what a group relations perspective could add. The patchwork of contributions which follows has been somewhat edited for clarity. Our job as one Londoner and one Russian was then to attempt to synthesize and create an overview.

We thought of the pandemic as an earthquake: the first shock has passed, the fear of death is reduced; people are striving for belonging and are returning home to rebuild their lives. There is hope: organizations are rescheduling their events. But there could be aftershocks.
We noticed that more representatives participated this time (18 to 12 previously). May be there is more clarity now, both about the task and the situation with COVID. The contributions seemed more hopeful and lively, with less talk of trauma in comparison with the first patchwork.
Statistics have again been largely removed, although there were noticeably far fewer this time round. There also seems less variation in the balance of Personal vs Organizational vs National viewpoints, this time, with much more emphasis on organizational ideas and very little about the individuals who wrote them. Connections with and support by other organizations and people were highlighted. And curiosity as a part of anthropological way of seeing things: first experiences with on-line events – moving from shock to acceptance of a new reality, to trying new experiences and curiosity.
Depression, melancholia and loss were touched on- perhaps the buzz of initial action in a crisis was a manic defense which has worn off.
Anger seemed to be missing – might it be hidden somewhere? Inner and outer protests were described; about rules and regulations long work shifts, not wanting restrictions anymore.
More questions were asked than in the previous patchwork and the majority were about the future, as if it is easier to look forward than backwards: recent experience is perhaps too traumatic to refer to. What's next? What is the meaning of life? What does it mean to be human? Valuing having less opportunity to do, and much more to be. Is it a privilege to be privileged? Or is it an illusion. What is the risk taken by those who are among the most privileged eg Sweden?
Again the patches convey tribal competition, othering, looking for scapegoats, so as not to be one. But race and the interaction of ethnicity with the virus, once again seemed less in focus than one might perhaps expect, and its relative absence, seems worth commenting on. Linked to this, 'losing 3D thinking' and 'the 3D globe made into a flat 2D drawing' convey a loss of complexity and critical approach, a reductive process of moving towards simplicity and polarity.
Body: From personal need for humanity, to touch and be touched in return, to organizational - how are organizations embodied?
Control: less (trust replaces control) or more (control and segmentation, "blind democracy")?
Role of the government and authority: dependency and the search for a father and mother. Disappointment in authority on the one hand and dependency and realization how much we rely on social systems (government, social and health care) on the other hand. Hence protests against rules and regulations. Basic Assumption Oneness was frequently described - despite or because of leadership?
There must be envy of those countries that are more open, who managed the situation better, with fewer deaths. We wish not to be in the 'bad' group. We all want to be 'good' and be on the winning team, to do well, get a gold star and come out of lockdown quicker. Is this a version of the search for the Holy Grail?
National characteristics were again highlighted as affecting response to the crisis – restlessness and rebellion particularly in the States vs defensive retreat to isolation, such as the Finnish response. This can raise issues of being self-centered or even selfish, with one's moral compass switched off. Does this link with feeling orphaned?
Like the authors of the patches, we seemed to be left with more questions and less answers than before.

GROUP RELATIONS TAIWAN: TAIWAN

It has been 28 days since we last had someone who caught the virus within Taiwan. As a result, people are less and less compliant with the Taiwanese CDC guidelines (e.g., wearing masks, washing hands, social distancing). Still, people are required to wear masks while taking public transportation and in banks…etc. Many businesses affected by the pandemic are gradually recovering although international travels are still almost closed.

As the result of the pandemic, Group Relations Taiwan had canceled the 2020 Taiwan GRC, originally scheduled to occur this July. We are hoping to reschedule the conference to April 2021. As we are in the infancy stage in our organizational development, we rely on international colleagues for most of our consulting staff support. We are fully aware of the fact that we need our international colleagues; just like that Taiwan needs our international allies to support our survival and growth.

We are very grateful for OFEK and GRA for their support in our organizational development. Even though Taiwan is an orphan in the global community (not recognized by the United Nations due to the objection of China), we are aware of the fact that we have something to contribute to the world and we hope to foster connections with more and more like-minded organizations over time.

TAVISTOCK INSTITUTE CHINA: CHINA

Experiences of being a Scapegoat.

At present, the Covid-19 situation in China is slowing down, new challenges of economic and the crisis of mass unemployment and bankruptcy looms. During this period of time, China has been assisting other countries with its own successful anti-epidemic measures, and there have been reports of confrontation. A large amount of masks donated by China to other countries have been returned due to substandard quality. In some countries, it has been launched a crusade to China, requiring huge reparations. Although it is clear in our hearts that the top priority is to do our best to contain the spread of the epidemic and save lives, we are now faced with a complex and cruel situation in which accusations, abuses, cover-up of mistakes, failure of the plane, shirking responsibility... China has become a scapegoat in the global system of panic, division, paranoia and mutual harm.

The Chinese nation is troubled! But anyway, we have to carry on! The United States is too domineering, we struggle with it for a long time, we must prepare and plan for a long-term battle!!

China is now a scapegoat in the world system; China is also a country that specializes in making scapegoats. If there is any problem in history, one or a number of scapegoats will always be introduced, and then turn over the page, people rarely reflecting on the substantive issues; This makes the cycle of evil repeat itself. Why does a nation that prides itself on 5,000 years of culture never reflect on its mistakes and foolishly repeat them over and over again?

There is a God in the Bible who pardons all transgressions as long as people are honest with themselves and confess their SINS honestly and he will forgive sinners with grace. But for the Chinese, we don't have grace and forgiveness in our culture and those who have committed sins will never be able to repair, so no one dare to confess, dare to face their own, only with all the strength to cover up, to whitewash.

The Chinese are people with unbounded affection, but history and trauma have done great damage to humanity, and this is a nation in need of healing. The courage to look at ourselves and the ability to reflect on ourselves determine our future.

The East is the other of the West and it is another aspect, different from the West. "De-Chinese" (get rid off Chinese) will bring both suffering to Chinese and retrogression to the West, which is a common failure of the world.

CHINA-AMERICA SOCIETY FOR THE STUDY OF GROUPS AND ORGANIZATIONS (CASSGO): CHINA

I talked of my panic and death anxiety previously. And we began an online support group during the pandemic time, to provide a space to hold the emotions and to support each other, so as to contain the emotions and help persons to face the uncertainty, helplessness, and regain control. During this process, I, myself, also became more and more calm and under control.

With the decrease of the pandemic, I became depressed for several days, lying on the bed, nothing interesting, lost direction with the enemy disappearing. Later, I got up and resumed normal daily life.
One day, I went out to buy breakfast without a mask, when I found out, no time for me to go back home to wear it. I decided to buy breakfast without a mask; it is the end of the April already. I quickly found that I hesitate to come close to the person who sell the breakfast, and the people around me keep distant from me, I felt shamed, all the people around me wore masks, I stood just like a wild beast, feeling myself like a source of infection, awkward. I suddenly realized that there exists a panic about touch, lack of interpersonal trust, and that these will last for a long time.
I need a container to rebuild my security again, I know our government did a great job during this process, from the very beginning, many people questioned some officials, governmental organizations, and to the end, many people began to show confidence and gratitude to Chinese government, and felt luck and happiness living in China.
I know the Chinese government began to build a social service system, hoping to provide a better container for Chinese people to regain security. I can sense there does exist some competition and cooperation at the same time. Some people sacrificed to alert us to something, some people got punished for setting up some rules, some people still question the Chinese government, some people struggle to survive after the pandemic, some people reach out to help small and medium-sized enterprises, some people work hard to contribute to the future innovative life.
I know the whole structure of the world is changing, COVID-19 intruded on the world, destroying boundaries; the whole world lost its normal structure, and has to begin a new structure to rebuild security. Take the world as a big family, just like siblings, love and hate, competition and cooperation, without parents. What the hell, we are brothers and sisters, and have to figure out our position in the big family, but for what?

CASSGO: USA

We are adjusting to the "new normal." Personally, I have conducted twenty virtual groups every week, including psychotherapy groups, consultation groups, process groups and mutual support groups. Our Chinese colleagues report emerging from the plateau of morbidity and mortality of the pandemic to greater mobility and return to face to face contact with others in a carefully managed loosening of restrictions. The cautious nature of this return is underscored by the decision of the directorate of the Guangzhou Large Study Group Consultation Training Program to hold this program virtually this August. Similarly, the directorate of the Shenyang Group Relations Conference decided to hold this conference virtually this December.
This immersion by CASSGO into virtual group relations mirrors my own surrender to the "new normal." Having learned that the annual leadership conference for psychiatric chief residents in the US has been cancelled due to the pandemic, I am organizing a virtual group relations conference in August for forty psychiatric chief residents to be staffed entirely by psychiatrists trained in group relations methods. I anticipate that this conference will help prepare me for directing the Shenyang conference in December, and I have been invited to direct a virtual group relations conference in March 2021 for a Russian colleague who runs the Institute of Psychodynamic Coaching in Moscow.
I note with gratitude that a community of group relations practitioners who are supportive of working in the virtual environment is developing in tandem with the pandemic. As I write this report, I am preparing for a meeting with a subset of the global leadership council to discuss our interest in virtual group relations, and after that for a community meeting with the A. K. Rice Institute where a breakout group will be addressing the same topic. With deepest sympathy for those who continue to suffer in this pandemic, I see our willingness to adapt our work to the needs of the community as a sign of hope.

AKRI: USA

In response to the Covid-19 crisis, AKRI has shared many of the experiences common across the global Group Relations community—the cancellations of conferences and other events; anxieties about the health and well-being of our members; and curiosity about the possibility of virtual conference life. As in the rest

of the world, we've felt our inter-connectedness, in both its power and its hazards; and we've also been reminded of our differences, especially vis-a-vis vulnerability, both to the virus and to the accompanying political and economic turmoil.
One special thing worth noting in the AKRI community has been our online membership meetings. Prior to March, the AKRI community had never gathered online. Since then, we've held four meetings (with another scheduled, and the expectations that they'll continue once every two weeks for the foreseeable future).
These meetings have been remarkable for several reasons. First, they've been extremely well attended (with 20%-35% of AKRI's entire membership attending) and they've offered deep, substantive engagement with our experience of this crisis. Second, they've offered a tangible experience of being a membership organization; rather than the membership being in-the-mind, the membership is visible on Zoom screens—more than 60 faces you can see at once: old friends, colleagues and strangers, young and old, from far and near, together on your monitor. Finally, tangible organizational desires have emerged from these meetings. Among them, desires 1) to help and support front line healthcare workers; 2) to learn more about how we study organizational life online and offer group relations learning in a virtual environment; and 3) to explore how what we know about authority can help negotiate our experience of irrational governments and authoritarianism in places like the US and China. My sense is that these organizational desires can help guide our organizational work and link our mission to what our membership wants.

GROUP RELATIONS INTERNATIONAL: USA

What is real? Who can we trust? How should I relate? Who takes leadership and in what way? Who am I? What has priority: health, life, economy, jobs, climate, collaboration? Who and what and where is privileged? Giving or withholding? What does it all mean? Where do we go from here?
Because of the pandemic we notice familiar but exacerbated patterns: Black, LatinX communities are disproportionally affected. Older people die in their "care homes" disconnected. The most vulnerable youth drop out of education because they don't have access to the internet let alone suitable electronics to do homework. People seem to be even more set in their political ideologies.
People are getting restless and antsy. Protests pop up more and more: against the stay at home order, masks, gatherings, new rules and regulations. Resilience is wearing off, anxiety is increasing. Restlessness. Uncertainty. Irrationality is rampant: science seems to be used willy-nilly. 'Othering' and 'if only' dynamics are prevalent. Staying in the moment remains the most difficult place to be.
Desire for connection - touch and 'being touched' - with each other, with the earth, with something More?
Virtual gatherings: living life in Zoom boxes – escape, necessity, new reality?
Pause. Do I do what I want to do? Do I live the way I want to live? What choices am I making? What is the meaning of life? Where is the Spirit?
GRI held its first gathering ever – online.

FINOD: FINLAND

In Finland we have historically defended ourselves from our enemies by retreating to the wilderness far from everybody. Sometimes we have fled Vikings some times Cossacks. Modern hideaway places in Finland are summer cottages. In many places those escaping form crowded cities have doubled local population. Those who cannot go to their summer cottages have curled up in their home nests. We are known for keeping social distance and now this ability is put to good use. No touching or kissing and staying far from each other. The situation has created polarity. One part of Fins is scared and strongly dependent authority and collective instructions given by government. Has Prime Minister Sanna given permission? Yes, we are calling our prime minister by surname and making her into a mythic war mother taking care of us and fighting for us. At the same time others are frustrated, maybe aggressive and grown numb about all restrictions.

Right now we are little by little opening society. Students are going back to schools, restaurants are about to open their doors, gatherings less than 50 people shall be permitted etc.. Still many people are as scared as those hiding from Cossacks centuries ago. Is enemy still here? What if covid-19 will catch us? How do we survive economically when many things are closed down?
This hide-away strategy has divided us into those who can remote work in hide-away places and those who are working in less educated jobs and are either working in the front line of the pandemic or being suspended. Still remote work has created lots of creativity and feelings of freedom. Many of those, who could not have dreamed of working away from their offices, have found lot of joy and peace when working from home or summer cottage. Surprisingly a lot of the control there has been in work is missing and it seems that trust has replaced control.
It is possible that safeguarding and social isolation raises in many a feeling of me and mine first, which makes it impossible to plan the bright future. At the same time there is still lot of hope and collective care of others.
The Finnish group relation movement is now active in video conferencing and social media. Social Dreaming has gathered lots of interest and we going to organize a virtual conference, and a Listening post. We are also taking part in on going dialogues organized by other agents.

TAVISTOCK CLINIC: UK

I am going to stay with 250 words because one of the most significant features of life at the moment is growing flood of information, guidance, offers of help, commentary and spin. There is a huge sense of uncertainty, and a rush to action that is a temporary relief but when the buzz stops, the uncertainty is compounded by a recognition that the action hasn't, materially, changed anything, and we are still in a world that looks the same in some ways but feels totally different.
Inequalities and inequities are raw and more vivid than ever, in the proportion of those ill and dying, in the Catch-22 expectations about who will now be expected to take risks in going back to work on public transport (if you have the kind of job you can't do from home there's a high probability that you won't have any option to get there other than by overcrowded public transport). And people are tired, and flagging, tired of all the change and adaptation, tired of 'zoom', tired of Covid.
Group Relations thinking seems helpful in recognising the state of a system struggling to connect and potentially in freefall, but without the boundaries that might at least say: this will be over, this can't happen in this space, this is what we need to do. But trying to join up, having some confidence that the system is in the individual is helpful, valuing the small connections that can get made.

TAVISTOCK INSTITUTE OF HUMAN RELATIONS: UK

I have become obsessed with maps of the world and how they represent what is real from the 3D globe onto a flat 2D drawing. France is 5 times the size of England, and the whole of the UK should fit into the USA State of Texas – there are other anomalies, I invite others to take a look. Perhaps it is the spread of the virus that is bringing these questions of territory to mind?
If the picture in the mind bears no relation to the external reality, what foundation do we have for our relations? What sense can we make of our history? What does it mean to be human or part of humanity? COVID-19 is shifting our social order. States and nations are reaffirming old borders. I have re-read Freud's Moses and Monotheism and re-discovered his skill in saying difficult things to ideologues. What are we finding difficult to say to each other? Are the issues of representation and authority relations too painful to be worked through? Perhaps the flight into loyalty is more comfortable than the struggle required to sustain commitment?
Staff across a range of industries are facing issues during "furlough" – being paid not to work in order to safeguard their jobs and organisations.
The Institute has made a smooth shift into its digital existence. Staff are on furlough in a rotation pattern, a new deepening creative practice course has started, preparations are on the way for its first ever AGM online. There is a creative energy flowing through the system.

Where is home? Our bodies/ jobs/houses/workplaces/nations/identities? How do we face the political realities of the bodies we inhabit without literal and metaphorical masks?

GROUP RELATIONS INDIA: INDIA

Will the focus shift from the virus of entitlement and narcissism to the vaccine of compassion and sustainability? That is how a group of associates in GRI ended our earlier reflective piece on 26th of March. We were at that point just 2 days into a national and total lockdown announced with exactly 4 hours' notice to a nation of 1.3 billion people, 80% of who are poor, informal - daily wagers or subsistence agricultural workers/artisans. Today, the 52nd day, and the lockdown is sure to be extended to its version 4.0 as the graphs of infected cases and deaths only rise.

Heightened persecutory anxieties - because everyone is a suspect, a possible COVID infector a threat to my survival. The more privileged you are, more the anxiety about infection and personal safeguards. Feeding on this fear is the projection of blame on Muslims via fake news and persecution. The sensitization shown towards health and sanitation workers seems mostly about ensuring I won't get infected.

Authoritarian state

The nation is gripped by the impacts of another more devastating virus. The rise of blatant authoritarianism, and the use of fear and power to enforce and control, is visible in a series of moves by the government and its pairing with corporates. The callous and inhuman abandonment of millions of its migrant workers with no work, no food, no money and no means to go back to their homes – leading them in state of acute distress. Heartrending images of thousands just walking, walking, hundreds even thousands of miles, enduring massive trauma and risk – just to get home. This will be the shameful and lasting image of corona virus time for any sensitive Indian. Shockingly, at this juncture several state governments have decided to abrogate the already precarious and flimsy protection of workers via labour rights and laws, in order to favour capitalists and the accumulation of private capital. This throws us into the era of slave or bonded labour, instead of being one of the world's largest democracies. Other institutions of democracy - the judiciary, the police, the administration, the mainstream media seem to be blind, invisible, apathetic, or they are sold out. A moral deficit of humaneness plagues us, perhaps the outcome of a pervasive culture of Ba M, and it has shown up in relative terms the novel corona a more 'ethical' virus to reckon with.

Uncertainty leading to chaos

A fragmented cacophony of different voices of self-interest Ba M, Ba Fight/Flight is evident in an increasingly uncontrollable and undisciplined nation – who will take care of me? The prime minister's addresses to the nation reinforce the image of the single powerful man who takes the weight of the nation's woes on his broad shoulders. His speeches are simplistic – to continue to promote an infantalisation, with big promises of deliverance, but no accountability or back up as to how this will all be implemented. His latest clarion call to be a self-reliant nation is perhaps a decisive attack on the idea of an open system and its interconnectedness – which is what covid 19 teaches us the world is in reality.

Locked into our choices?

The talk of the new normal is often experienced as being locked in to our choices - how do we get out of them? The difficulty in accepting the new without the familiar, especially when the new may indicate shifts in power and privilege. This results in decision-making that is unilateral, manipulative and authoritarian, rather than dialogue as a lever of change, for small transformations in systems. From the viewpoint of systems the questions loom: What could have been prevented? What is my role and how much of what happens systemically is a consequence of my stances and actions? Grief, and guilt over privileges seems to be a ready defence to disable more radical action.

The ray of hope: While the state suffers from deficit of compassion and accountability and abandoned its primary task, civil society activists, some sections of the media, and common people demonstrate that a responsible use of personal authority and leadership towards collective – connecting action is our best, even if frail, hope.

Whither Group Relations?

For us from a GR lens – why is the overwhelming focus on individuals and their emotions – fear, anxiety, lack of my normal life, and how little we think about systems and institutions. How helpless, apathetic and even unthinking we are when these institutions that we have set up and delegated authority and mandate to, don't do what they are supposed to do. Is it because most institutions we build favour the privileged in any case? How much is GR going to risk in order to understand and work with these trends? Will it see all of society as its terrain or choose to stay in familiar and safe agendas? What does the rush of online offerings mean? Is it a creative outburst – pilots of different kinds, is it to contain and comfort? Or are there elements of colonising markets on the World Wide Web – where, like the corona virus, there are no boundaries or barriers to entry.

OFEK: ISRAEL

Israel is coming out of the health crisis, revealing the tension between society and individuals. After the dominant climate of oneness during the last two months, we can see that **individuals are different** in the way the financial crisis meets their personal life.

The protest of young physicians against having to work very long shifts. During Covid 19 health care staff were our heroes. In these days when there is an improvement in the public health condition, the intern physicians are beginning to feel the pain of working too many hours. It might be the beginning of a social protest. The feeling of 'togetherness' seems to give them a hope that their voice would be heard.

The Education System-is being challenged. There are tensions between the education system and the treasury in managing the crisis routine. The treasury expected the teachers to donate some of their time. Schools are partially going back to routine; most classes will be divided into subgroups and will attend only part of the week.

Covid 19 meets Israel in a political, moral crisis. We have been struggling for more than 15 months to create a government. The leader, Prime Minister Netanyahu has to fight to prove his innocence in court. The pandemic reinforced his political power. COVID 19 has helped him to be the next prime minister in Israel.

The pandemic brought up a shared sense of losing control. The need for dependency on leaders was reinforced. Leaders seem to use this and these times for their personal needs.

It seems to be difficult to return to routine.

Mourning- Until recently Families that lost their loved ones couldn't be comforted. According to the social distancing regulations, instead of sitting Shiva in an open house many grieving individuals and families received short text messages.

At a time when we all withdrew into our homes, many initiatives sprung up from OFEK members: Zoom meetings for OFEK members; international social dreaming matrices; developing an online GR Conference, and more. At the same time the board found it difficult to work during this time that things were urgent. It seems as though there was more room for special initiatives rather than official, routine activity.

PCCA: ISRAEL

Looking back it seems that Israel did well in containing the pandemic. For some, yet unknown reason, the whole Middle East seems to have done well with varied degrees of governmental control. Now facts are remembered, but the anxiety and fear attached to them are hard to retrieve. So fast!

From one day to the next the whole psychoanalytic and psychotherapeutic community moved to work "remotely"- by phone, WhatsApp and Zoom. Time went in a different way than the usual. Endless meetings led to "Zoom fatigue". Many conferences, including PCCA conference in August, were postponed.

Questions waiting to find answers:

Did we learn from Covid-19? If so, then what did we learn?

Was it a trauma? If so, then in what way was it so?

Did we at least learn to be more modest, or will our hubris get the upper hand again?
The Israeli specific situation was that Covid-19 broke out in the midst of a political crisis and was used politically. Leadership decisions were not trusted by half of the country. Daily broadcasts told of catastrophic forecasts: "end of humanity", "worse since the Black Plague", "10s of thousands will die", "we will be like Italy". Despite the mistrust, the fear-mongering led to a collective submission to authorities. What ensued was a collective regression to dependency, paranoia and loss of personal authority. On the positive side, the anxiety and fear of a shared catastrophe bred solidarity. Neighbours went out of their way to help those who had to stay in. This regression may be the collective trauma, even more than the danger of the disease. Nature-made calamity combined with man-made calamity. During this period "Mathematical models", a language unknown before, became the authority. Pessimism became the political tool of control.
Under these circumstances a new political coalition was formed, and highly suspected. The "economical virus" – the aftermath of the health virus - is in the making and is now the source of anxiety and deep concerns.
From my GR perspective I participated in an unusual WhatsApp group of 150 psychoanalysts: a leaderless Large Group for which the daily summaries provided containment and interpretations. This large group became a "good mother", a container and healer. We also organized for the psychoanalytic community 3 weekly sessions of Social Dreaming Matrix. Some of the emergent themes:
Catastrophic dreams full of danger, imagery of death and malaise. Phantoms and Holocaust. Children as well as adults are in danger. Isolation and social distancing.
Wish for a father figure to know exactly what to do, ready to take risks and save the day. Flooded. Lost in familiar place. Longing for parents, feeling of being orphans. Cemetery and wedding. Generational tensions.
My first report ended with the sentence: "I try to keep the situation as an uncanny reality against the temptation of adapting too fast". Now I can finish by saying that I hope the uncanny situation will not evaporate too fast in the rush to get hold of the previous life.

IGO (INDIVIDU, GROUPE, ORGANISATION): SWITZERLAND

Switzerland was in a semi-confined state with non-essential businesses and schools closed and priority for health care (COVID-19 healthcare) at the center of the society. Now businesses, and most schools are reopening, social/physical distancing is still there, healthcare systems are trying to reorganize themselves without focusing only on COVID-19.

Looking in the past weeks we see: Fear, sorrow, hope, exhaustion, grief, losing track, losing 3D thinking, trying to get preconscious back, where is “rêverie” ...what is the task, what is the meaning...Why?

They are heroes...what heroes? Men vs. women leaders? What is the truth? Do we need to do all that? Can they take our liberty like that? Are we responsible? Is it all a conspiracy...for what? For who? The US? CHINA? WHO? GAVI? ID2020? Gates foundation?

Ethical dilemmas, health vs. economy? Young vs. old? Fit vs. obese? Poor vs. rich? School vs. no school, who can we treat? Millennials vs. boomers? COVID-19 as a “boomer remover”...?
Why is the weather so nice and the sky so blue? Is it true? Look at this landscape so calm...the air so fresh, the smell...the smell of the flowers and the trees...
The world is going to change?...tomorrow will be different?...more cooperative?...with profound transformation?...an opportunity for autocratic leaders to control?...resiliency?
What about philosophers? Artists? Trying to make sense? Not too fast...
Dreaming? Social-dreaming? Rêverie!
Our 8th Geneva conference in May was canceled, as was our yearly group dynamic training (first time in 26 years). Isn’t this crisis an opportunity also for us? Rethink the task? Our role?

ARIFANA: SWEDEN

Yes, the fear has transformed. It is tinged with depression now. The young people greet each other with "Hi, how´s the 'dep'?"

We´re out of the initial shock, confusion and incredulity. We have moved into the next, or the next in plural, stage/s. We are confronted with existential questions for the future. When will this pandemic be over? When will we touch each other (physically) again? What will we feel then? Another kind of fear? All we wanted to do! All we had planned to do!

Winnicott wrote about the psychologically so important relationship between mother and baby. He spoke about to do – and to be. In our society, so much depends on to do. Our self-esteem, our social status are closely linked to what we do, and how we promote our actions. And here we are, with much less opportunity to do, and much more to be…Winnicott emphasized the importance of to be, and not always do.

So, here we are, on the threshold of the next phase, which we hope will be "it´s over." Patience, endurance. It is humbling.

On the doing side, Arifana is working on a virtual conference. The work is slow, and the ambivalence is alive. Maybe the biggest obstacle is the longing for a "real life" conference, where we touch and smell each other. Where our laughter rings in one and the same room.

Oh, and yes. We are privileged. Our society is still not in a lock-down. Schools are milling with kids, hospitals are working overtime with heroic effort, shops, cafés and restaurants are open, albeit empty, but still. Faith.

GROUP RELATIONS AUSTRALIA: AUSTRALIA

Australia and Australians' responses are generally characterised by a compliant acceptance of expert medical advice, social distancing, business closure, significant government support and other Covid19 regulations and policies. A few fatal or at least life-threatening mistakes leading to infection clusters have largely been accepted as unfortunate errors in a novel crisis rather than an opportunity for blame or scapegoating. Some less generous areas of government support have been met with volunteer, philanthropic and community assistance.

There has been an ongoing attempt at political bipartisanship; sometimes interrupted by outbursts from less mature politicians or media commentators but these have been the exception. This shared leadership has pleasantly surprised everyone. Jacinda Ardern's example as Prime Minister in neighbouring New Zealand – of decisive action, genuine engagement and empathy - has been widely admired and praised. There has also been sadness at the catastrophic impacts elsewhere in the world – where many Australians trace their heritage - and public bewilderment at the social policy and leadership failures.

It does seem to be understood that this crisis response in Australia of trust and reliance on authority is in our shared interest, despite the real costs. This can be characterised as a depressive position response. The alternative, much less accepted narrative - that these government and communal actions are a reckless over-reaction that is destroying lives and businesses, seems to be explicitly or intuitively seen as denial or distortion, as personal counter-dependency or worse, a wilful attempt to make others fearful. This does seem to represent an ongoing shift and flow between depressive position and paranoid schizoid responses. It is, for now, unclear how or why the largely depressive position state of social mind in Australia has come about and predominated at this time.

We have conducted the first two of three Listening Posts, initiated a 'Dynamics of Racism and Covid19' blog and will soon commence a 'Working Mothers and Leadership blog' and a series of 'Trust and Mistrust in Organisations' online workshops. All are intended as offering a space for members and the general community to reflect on our shared experiences of the Covid19 times; these have been welcomed by members, who seem eager to connect and engage.

IL NODO GROUP: ITALY

This is to share the experience of being in Italy, before and during Covid19 as it has emerged during monthly social dreaming matrices. In January, when the virus belonged to the distant China and Italy was far from recognizing the threat of the contagion in its own territory, dreams were talking of:

- *fear*
- *an invisible enemy*
- *the complete loss of control*
- *the urgent need of containment and of somebody who could take care and responsibility for us*
- *genetically modified insects.*

In February, when the contagion had just landed in Italy, but there was still much disbelief about its extension and future consequences, the dreams narrative spoke of:

- *being unprepared and anxious*
- *loss of bearings*
- *tsunami*
- *facing an event like 9/11, which would change the perception of the world*
- *confronted by a deep sociocultural identity crisis (who is on the boat now and kept at the borders?)*
- *searching for safety*

On the optimistic side one dream spoke of the *possibility to reassemble and give meaning to something from the past that needed to move on and let go*.

In March Italy was in lockdown, ahead of the rest of Europe; the SDM took place via zoom and it was flooded by people who wanted to join, expressing the need for connecting and sense making. Dreams' narrative:

- *fragmentation of body parts*. Legs, denied; eyes, hypertrophic; the eyes of science and technology, drones and apps to control us;
- *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* science, which saves, science that controls and goes out of control producing androids, disquieting beings.
- *what is left out, denied, hidden, cannot be spoken of.* Death of the elders, in particular men; the eyes of who is left to dye alone; selected to die in order to leave space for a younger person. Guilt, how does one feel, locked at home, hiding, while doctors in the front line have to make choices, unprepared and unprotected?
- *children of the fairy tales, unprotected by careless parents, betrayed by them*: like Hansel and Gretel and Tom Thumb. As in the previous matrix, one sign of optimism appears: children are intelligent and know how to survive.

With the virus we have been put in front of a mirror, which reveals more than we were ready to acknowledge. Covid19 has interfered with our culture of denial. We are exhausted and traumatized; the future is confused and hazy.

The image of rubbles left by the war or by the earthquakes that shake Italy every few years, has come to our mind; as well as the awareness that what we are dealing with now is an invisible, untouchable, boundaryless danger.

Photo of the 2016 earthquake in Italy

LITHUANIAN GROUP RELATIONS SOCIETY: LITHUANIA

The loss of privilege of physical contact and doing what you want, frustration, having to keep silent. Wanting to be more active, not wanting restrictions anymore. Missing fighting and flirting. Longing to travel, but having to stay at home, a nice home, but it is starting to feel like a nice prison.

Divisions in the society. One group is used to and loved IT before the virus, so they feel comfortable working from distance. The other group is tired, flooded, overwhelmed, and confused by blurred boundaries between work, family, parental tasks and roles, and longing for coming back to 'normal' mode of living and working. The third group is trying to adapt to changes, feeling "back on track", exploring on-line work possibilities, recognizing the need to get used to the thoughts of restrictions lasting through the end of the year or maybe even longer.

Quarantine and restrictions created conditions for living laboratory to experiment with technologies. Tech companies promise a better future, but it isn't for all. IT skills adds up to the sources of inequality.

How life will be after two years of zooming? Political and social changes? Some won't come back to "normal" as it will be proved as cost effective. Some businesses will die, others will survive and maybe some new to be created? COVID-19 changes forever our ideas of what an organization is, who is in and out. Boundaries are changing in companies, breaking rules, authority taken away, changed.

Evolution? Natural selection? Who dies in evolution? Inequality. In the last news from Lithuania, the hospices, old people houses, almost all inhabitants affected by COVID-19. Harsh target group. Hospitals became centres of virus infection, patients with chronic diseases or other conditions are not admitted, they might die not from virus but because of virus. It is a risk of seeing the virus everywhere.

The need for self-sustaining, survival, some national economies cannot sustain themselves, are dependent from products produced in China, or international market for export. There may not be food in the shop if we can't work in the lands. Farmers may not harvest.

Tenseness of constantly being watched by cameras connects to data gathering. Is there liberation through technology or more control and segmentation? To protect you against corona they can trick you, and your data can be used against you. Are those on-line communication platforms secure? Or do they just feed The Big Data?

GROUP RELATIONS RUSSIA: RUSSIA

Creating the narrative: is it going to be a new one or a repetition of the past?

- The mood in Russia is like a swing – from fear of death in some people (fear of going out even to buy food, hysterical quarrels in shops about social distance, aggression, etc.) to the notorious Russian "to hell with the rules" that stems from history (historical mistrust of the officials and official news: "they lie to us", "they make money from us", "it's all fake"etc).
- No or very little financial support to small businesses and people. There is high anxiety about the future individual well-being, fear of not being able to survive the consequences. People do not trust the government; the psychological burden of being left alone in this crisis is unbearable.
- Enforced confinement at home brings out the genetic memory of the Soviet times - jails, fear of being punished for nothing, fear of being detained in the street. Many Russians live in very small apartments with no individual space, so the combination of high anxiety, fear and physical discomfort causes a lot of problems in families.
- Russians have an inferiority complex about having to get a visa (often with difficulties) for travel abroad. This complex has become much bigger in this situation. There are a lot of rumours and

speculations that the borders will be open only to the rich and privileged, that we are back to the "iron curtain" times, that even if the borders open people will not be able to afford travel due to expensive flights and stricter rules. Russian Internet is full of articles about how beautiful Russia is and there is no need to go to other countries.

- Role of the leaders in both organisations and government becoming more significant: who will lead and where? Employees and people are hoping to be led by strong figure as it was in the past. Corporates set up the new plans, they call it 'Reaching the Space, Going beyond Achievements' to mobilize employees for actions and planning, not really leaving much space for reflections and discussions.
- Having official long holidays for around 4 weeks, where in a way some people stopped looking for a job, considering it to be a real holiday, being locked at home and separated with others, loosing energy slowly – all this takes people away from critical thinking and gives others more power. We could observe here the appearance of new laws and rules, which limit the rights of citizens.
- People are following the rules but one can feel more fear and aggression in the air.
- Would we be strong and honest enough to look at our own hearts and values or will we be influenced by the power? There is a space now, as there was in the empty Red Square, on Victory Day: to have a deeper look. There is still a choice to lead or be led (or both) and maybe the most important – how and what will be driving this leadership?