The life of relationship in globalized financial economic devices. Evidences from the experience of a group-analytic transcultural workshop.

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Summary
The present contribution - starting from the experience of the EATGA Workshop 2011 that took place in Palermo, whose theme was “Intersubjective bonds in a globalized economy”- invites reflection on the quality of the life of relationships and intersubjective connectedness in the social contemporary world.

One of the characterizing cultural phenomena influencing contemporary reality is made up of the dominant and pervasive presence of the logic and language of the financial markets in policies and activities that organize and articulate daily life.

The theoretical hypothesis driving our research is that the structures of subjectivity, the meaning and the way of being in a relationship are characteristics (cultural themes) that emerge within a historically defined cultural system/device.

In such a theoretical perspective, the cultural themes (i.e. gift, market,) are incorporated or interiorized by men belonging to a shared cultural system and so become elements of the shared subjectivity and of the meanings given to intersubjective exchanges and bonds.

From the workshop experience some meanings emerge concerning the role of the economical-financial system in promoting codes and symbols that define the shape and the sense of relationships.

The cultural codes of the market have come out of the economic circle in which they have originated and are offered as organizers of affections and of relationships.

This denotes and marks the current critical historical moment, in which the values and the cultural codes organized on trust, on reciprocity, on community participation and solidarity seem to be interdicted.

Key words: Transcultural Group-Analysis, Intersubjective Relationships, Cultural Models of the Exchange

This paper aims to highlight the main cultural and relational dynamics observed in the group-analytic transcultural workshop held in September 2011.

In the course of this workshop, which we shall further describe below, we have intended to collect the content and processes related to our research interests on the quality of the life of relationships and intersubjective connectedness as they are formed in the social contemporary world.

One of the characterizing cultural phenomena influencing contemporary reality is made up of the dominant and pervasive presence of the logic and language of the financial markets in the policies and activities that organize and articulate daily life.

The prevailing characteristic of this socio-cultural phenomenon is that of being already largely approved, being transverse and independent from local cultural identities on which it inevitably weighs and so causing intense modifications in individual and collective lifestyles. This cultural
phenomenon, which seems to be unstoppable, orientates and influences the quality of everyone’s life, influencing the dynamics between groups, institutions and communities; it directs the form of exchange and the modality through which relations are built.

According to Marcel Mauss’s (1924) anthropological studies on the gift, brought forth by many social scientists still today, it is possible to come up with two fundamental paradigms on which individual and social relationships are based: one that describes the gift as a form of exchange, able to establish lasting relationships and processes of recognition, debt and solidarity between men; and one that originates from the free market where debt is canceled through the exchange of money and economical financial transactions that encourage utilitarian and impersonal relationships. In our daily life both models of exchange coexist in various forms and it is not always easy to distinguish them in concrete situations.

In today’s world, the economical and financial system strongly determines what men are, or have become as well as their way of being-in-relation.

Such a system (or device, in order to express it in terms of cultural analysis) unfolds through the social institutions and working organizations. This cultural device governs relational life, including family and social life, and has redefined the meaning and significance of bonds, thus penetrating into the innermost structure of personality.

This perspective of analysis supports and partially replaces the more traditional psychodynamic one, which, on the contrary sees culture and the outside world as an epiphenomenon, expression, if not simple projection, of intrapsychic and unconscious requests/instances supposed to be ahistorical and universal, belonging to the intrapsychic and unconscious.

We are therefore trying to embed our understanding of subjectivity and of relational devices in the contemporary world in a frame of culturalistic / historical meaning, less "naturalistic" and more specifically anthropological.

In such a theoretical perspective, the cultural themes (i.e., the gift, the exchange of money) have the role of directing our understanding as to how men are more subject to external cultural dimensions rather than to internal drives. These cultural themes are incorporated or interiorized by men belonging to a shared cultural system (cultural device). The cultural themes therefore become elements of a shared subjectivity and of the meanings given to intersubjective exchanges and bonds. When not understanding the relation existing between internal and external world, one runs the risk of focusing on a presumed individual fragility without considering pressure from the external world and considering the latter as inevitable and non modifiable, rather than as a cultural/historic device which is pervasive, shared, or internalized.

The analysis of cultural phenomena therefore requires to go beyond the traditional theoretical psychoanalytic frame and its methods. It requires the construction and experimentation of transcultural (or cross-cultural) clinical settings able to connect intra psychic, intra cultural and social phenomena.

**Workshop setting and methodological issues**

The aim of Workshop EATGA (European Association for Trascultural Group-Analysis) 2011\(^{13}\), was to analyze cultural phenomena specific of contemporaneity and their effects on the structure and meaning of intersubjective bonds.

In order to achieve this goal, a work setting was structured addressed to participants of different nationalities and organized in small and large groups, which were conducted in a non-directive way and without suggesting a specific national language\(^{14}\).

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\(^{13}\) The workshop took place in Palermo from 9 to 11 September 2011.

\(^{14}\) This setting is the transcultural analysis device that EATGA promotes periodically since the 70s.
The group sessions were preceded by an introductory part, which had the primary objective of offering evocative and representative images of the cultural theme at the centre of the workshop. The themes proposed were:
- scenes from the movie "Up in the Air", which exemplifies the impersonality of work relations and the unnecessary and trivial nature of bonds, group belonging, and personal history within the economic logics that overrule the working world today;
- a suggestion on the economical-financial paradigm, by citing Luciano Gallino’s work which outlines the individualistic and utilitarian nature of the economical-financial system, and emphasizes the strength exercised by neoliberal culture in determining and building up the "economic man". The author writes: "humans are immersed in the social and cultural institutions – school and market, production and consumption, media and entertainment, government and politics – which intensively operate as if everyone was an economic man.” (Gallino 2011, p. 140).
- the core exposure of the gift paradigm as theorized by Marcel Mauss (1994), with particular reference to the relationship giving-receiving-exchanging. The gift builds relationships and bonds of solidarity and reciprocity.

Workshop processes and reflections on the experience
The introduction of a cultural theme is a change in the traditional analytical setting because:
- it directs the exploration of current cultural phenomena, rather than events placed in history and sedimented in individual and collective memory;
- it binds to contextualize and interpret workshop processes; it requires, especially on behalf of the staff, the movement from an analytic interpretative position “without memory and desire” to a position in which the sense of experience is build up with reference to the cultural theme highlighted in the introduction.

Our reflection on these two issues, which have characterized the work of the groups during the workshop, have allowed us to explore some important aspects, such as specific group phenomena, dreams, and conduction modalities.

Cultural theme and specific group phenomena
A first point was the analysis of the specific group phenomena emerging with the introduction of the cultural theme.

The group phenomena regarded a massive utilization of intellectualization, of rationalization, and the significant use of dreams.

We believe that proposing the cultural theme has activated deep anguish of identity annihilation, not merely related to small and large group dynamics.

According to George Devereux (1967), we think that intellectualization is the most useful defense mechanism in restoring an emotional distance, when facing themes and experiences that perturb the cultural codes that define personal identity. Anguish is deposited in dreams that become real places of contact with the emotions of disorientation and loss of his/her own identity.

The dream: One of the possible interpretative readings of the workshop in Palermo.

We find it useful here to mention an example which can better describe one of the interpretative directions of the workshop.

In a dream, a participant goes to the cashier of a bar to pay for something probably consumed, but the cashier cuts his hand and the participant-customer thinks that the cashier has acted on behalf of Mafia.

During the work session there is an associative chain concerning trust; in particular, a participant emphatically wonders: “Whom can I trust?”. And the group answers “no one!”.
The dream connects two meanings: payment and the mafia system, as if it were proposing two opposing perspectives on the theme of bonds:

- the first one is economical (or market), which is legal and in which there is an equal exchange, a price in money is paid in exchange for consumption or service, but it does not create a bond, it does not create any relationship between the cashier and the customer; after the payment, the interaction is dissolved because there is no debt left;
- the second one is illegal, criminal, in which there is no equivalence and both violence and relations of power and submission are generated.

The cutting of the hand seems to show that the law of the Mafia prevails. The Mafia’s law considers the act of paying as a form of submission, thus this law creates a bond of dependence that binds and obliges people. The hand cutting inhibits the economical/market exchange, with its logic of autonomy and resolution of the bond.

The dichotomy Market/Mafia shows that there are only two possible representations of the exchange:
- the Mafia relationship which looks as both a poisoned and perverse gift, and which creates an abuse of power;
- the Market logic in which the exchange and the relationship between two subjects is resolved and concluded by making payment.

The logic of the gift, in which the debt is constituted of both gratitude and bond, is excluded from representation and thought.

The theme of trust

The theme of trust seems to be connected with these meanings: if you cannot trust anyone, every gift seems to be poisoned, it contains a trap that leads to logics of illegality and instrumentality, which, in terms of the local culture, refers to Mafia.

When trust does not circulate, the logics of market exchange allow a resolution of relationships. All economic theories, from Adam Smith onwards, are based on the economical individualism of appropriation, that postulates the lack of trust as a fact of nature: everyone "naturally" tries to get something for himself/herself to the detriment of others, so the equivalent payment is the best way to “put things right” and avoid conflicts.

The contact in the exchange, expressing itself through negotiation and relational dispute, is seen as extremely risky. Money makes possible an idea of fairness, which does not entail trust, because it is established through a neutral third (money): giving trust is risky, but it is even riskier if what we have internalized derives from the culture of the economical individualism of appropriation.

During the Workshop, the cultural theme showed the gift as a possible anthropological organizer of both bonds and relationships of gratefulness and appreciation, assuming therefore the value of a scandal. The latter triggers off "troublesome contents" of which it is embarrassing to speak (Bion). The cultural theme provokes scandal because it makes visible the criticality of the exchange and of the encounter with the other, and highlights the conflict between the distance, emphasized by a market logic which asks for free subjects always ready for new relationships, and the personal implication in relationships and relational bonds. We wish to underline the fact that participants in the workshop were required to pay a registration fee and that many were expecting a workshop based on well-known and partially repetitive modalities. Having introduced a cultural theme has represented a variation of the setting, which has thrown in psychotic elements (Bleger), as suggested by the cutting of the hand. The unexpected generated confusion and uprising and suggested a criminal attack (mafia).

The analytical position and the transformations of the psychoanalytic and group-analytic settings.
The troublesome characteristic of the cultural theme is moreover expressed through the violence perceived when explicitly requested to work on something which right from the start appears as a theme of reality, of concrete life, and not originating from deep intrapsychic dynamics.

Once again, this matter poses the theme of the articulation between the individual and the social levels. This theme is evidenced in the interaction *here and now*, and reflects the social and cultural dimensions. There is a part of the unconscious that is not connected to individual *refoulement*, but simply does not fall within the individual and collective perception. Jankélévich (1980) defined this cultural dimension as *méconnaissance*, according to which "we think we know what, as a matter of fact, we don’t know at all". That's where misunderstanding comes from. We believe we know the cultural system which we live in, but it is possible to understand the cultural dimension of personal and collective identity only through difference, when we come into contact with identities belonging to different cultural systems.

In our opinion, the most insidious form of *méconnaissance* concerns the invisibility of the relapses of the social level on individual behaviors and feelings, which is exclusively interpreted in terms of intrapsychic conflicts, especially within psychoanalytic and group-analytic contexts.

However, this kind of invisibility has concrete and visible character in the phenomena that it produces. The ways through which these phenomena are thought and understood replicate its invisibility.

The introduction of a cultural theme has represented, in our opinion, a scandal for the group conductors as well because it binds them to operations of contextualization and interpretation of the group processes. This implies the change from an interpretative analytical position "without memory and without desire" to a position in which the sense of the experience is built starting from the relationship that is unfolded inside the same setting and with reference to the proposed cultural theme.

During the workshop, the staff was only partly mentally focused on the theme. The neutral and abstinent analytical position adopted describes the difficulty, in our opinion, of recognizing and of being aware of being crossed by the same transpersonal meanings of the participants. Confrontation with the cultural theme of exchange and of bond discloses one’s own personal implication, forcing oneself to assume a critical position of observation of the phenomena being observed: it is not possible to do it from "no position" or from an alleged cultural, professional or even political neutrality. What humans are, both in an individual and collective sense, does not simply depend on a father, a mother or a family genealogy, but is connected with a historical-cultural device that crosses and organizes them and all the devices (according to Foucault, cited in Deleuze, 1989) that we cross and that leave a mark on us.

**Conclusions**

From the workshop experience emerges the role of the economical-financial system in promoting codes and symbols that define the shape and the sense of relationships and of exchange. Both the Market and the Gift have always been, with various and alternate historical vicissitudes, two important cultural organizers of groups and communities; both have represented the cultural organizers of relationships, and of the relationships between people and between populations.

Today, we are witnessing the hegemony of the Market and the marginalization of the Gift in bordering human experiences. The cultural codes of the market have come out of the economic circle in which they have originated and are offered as univocal organizers of affections, of relationships and of human existence.
From the group processes emerges the strength through which such a cultural model is able to block the access to the dimension of the gift. The affirmation for which it’s not possible to trust anyone describes the adherence to a model of relationship and of exchange in which there is no possibility for the recognition of the other, for gratefulness and for the need to reciprocate. As if the system of exchange and of relationship could have only the coordinates of utility, of individualism, of appropriation. Other coordinates of meanings and other declinations of exchange are precluded from thought and from action.

The gift paradigm can be assumed only in its deformed, illegal and perverse value. The reference to Mafia describes, in fact, the emotions of submission, of power and of deception. This reflects the current critical historical moment, in which the values and the cultural codes organized on trust, on reciprocity, on community participation and solidarity seem to be interdicted. But it is from this evidence that we are solicited to start a continuous research on the theoretical and technical changes of clinical settings and on their potential in visualizing and possibly transforming the anguishing drifts of the contemporary world.

In partial conclusion, and highlighting an unresolved paradox, we may say that the setting up of a device in itself generates a situation of neutrality, in which the exchanges and the relationships that are being established are subject to the logic of equivalence and in search of resolution, in which the risks are ruled by the contract form and, for this reason, are to be considered as exchanges in a free market and only temporarily can they be considered as gifts.

**Bibliography**