

IAGP KUDÜS 2000

The Marmara Earthquake and Psychodramatic Interventions

Dear Colleagues,

It's a great honor for me to talk in such a congress. But to talk about such a topic is hard and painful. My first aim in this speech will be to let you feel about what happened in Marmara as if you were in it, not in a far world apart; and as well as to make a ground for exchanging knowledge about what you and we know as if we were close enough to see it from apart.

On August 18, 1999, one year ago from today, at 3.02 in the morning, an earthquake of 7.4 Richter severity, struck Gölçük centered region heavily. It lasted just 45 seconds... Forget about the aftershocks; the damage of only this 45 seconds, seems to take years and years for recovery both physically and emotionally.

Let me talk about a few numbers: Officially it is, 18.000 death tolls, which is speculated to be in fact about 40 000 and about 40.000 injuries. Let me show you some pictures.... Of the properties, houses, factories, the big threats, universities, schools ruined, of the pain and of the happiness, hopes of people...

The region is one of the most beautiful coasts of the country. It is an industrial area.
(Slides 1-3)

In a country like mine, common people give half of their total income for renting a house, their 25 years of savings for owning a house, at least their 5 years to furnish a house...

The disaster is both by "God or Nature" as well as "human" made. Not enough qualified house engineering, stealing from the equipment in sake of money providing, not enough control systems by local and general government officials, legally weak system of law of punishments as the result and or cause of being an underdeveloped country, was the human part of the disaster.

If we can use it for future, we learned a lot about the importance of being prepared, a lot about what it means to be well equipped for a disaster on every level, from individual to organizational; from civil to governmental. Or if we cannot, as one of the ordinary ways of coping with such a big trauma, we will dissociate it, ignore it, forget it; distort it as it's seen widely seen in the history of mankind, in the history of psychiatry, in the history of families, in the history of individuals...

In the first week of the disaster, I, as a volunteered member of a civil professional organization felt myself in the need of doing something. There are not so many qualified group therapists in my country. You can count them by hand. Getting into cooperation with board members of TGPA with some psychodramatists, I offered a project of acute preventive intervention, as well as a follow up and research design in it. So we planned to go to the field for at least 10 months- 18 months every week a team at least of 3; for 2-4 group work each lasting 2-3 hours with 15 to 50 people.

It was a good start. Being in cooperation with Kocaeli Psychosocial Solidarity Unit, Medical Boards, we selected Gölcük as our working field. I think you are all acknowledged about that psychodramatic-sociometric group psychotherapy method founded by Moreno is well equipped to deal with trauma for more than 70 years.

Volunteers from Turkish Psychological Association were in the field since 6 days. Our first professional cooperation started with them and with the local state hospital staff. They knew things about the families and subgroups in the Gözlemepepe Tent Camp. The military forces had got the directory of the camp and we also get into cooperation with them.

The first two groups, 2.5 half hours each, with 15 people/ the hospital staff; which I will mention about the first earthquake protagonist a little bit further in this presentation. What we saw in the field (SLIDE) . The groups were always selected carefully. The cement bringing them together was homogeneity in political and ideological similarity or at least their professional background. Although each group was expected to be around 50 by agreement only 15 were there to join. We had the chance to work with heterogeneous groups but not at the same time. Most of the emotions around the disaster was surprisingly universal but the target of anger and rage was always different. Radical Muslims were telling that this event was a punishment from God to fake(false) Muslims; left-viewed socialists were complaining about the faults of officers and of military force for being unorganized for helping people, and being insufficient and injustice for the needs. And anger and helplessness were detouring, causing chaotic situations and hardening to find solutions. For example, we were expecting that the colleagues in the field would arrange for the next week's group works; but suddenly in the middle of the week our two colleagues informed us that they left the field because of unresolved inner conflicts.

In each group we worked, spectrum technique which was a good way of warming-up or ending up; gave the same result: there appeared a curve of feelings: grief at one end; hope in the other; fear, anger, guilt in the upper levels. And when processed, for each intense feeling we put not feeling to one end and to be very disturbingly in it; it was helpful for participants to see themselves in their daily coping ways as they are in today.

When we were first driving from Izmir to Gölcük, we were listening music; this was also an effort to find a national sound for our grief. Because in our culture the most common way to the ritual of mourning is "requiem", song for death and loss. We found one. It was a song by a famous Turkish singer, Sezen Aksu; who is surprisingly accepted by very different conflicting subgroups. From communists to radical Muslims. She was talking about the bad side of people, giving harm to each other; and she was praying God for all of us, the good and the bad; to forgive us. The term God had a meaning for some subgroups; but the same term was a symbol of justice for the other. I remember that we had an "ahaa, that is it syndrome" for our finding a way for sublimated expression.

When Dr. Kellerman spoke about posttraumatic therapy in Turkey in May 2000 this year; I realized that we were in the same trend about the ritual of healing in a disaster. We did not think of it too much at the moment we were driving to Gölcük; but when we used it, the requiem we chose

and which helped to open up for a cultural way of grief resolution ritual in such a disaster, was a way to talk to God; it was logical in psychodramatic method to make a way to role reverse with the agent when ready to. The agent was the God, the Nature God for more than half of the people; and was human power used badly or in good manner for the rest.

So, we had to revise our project; and to specify our target more clearly and to make a better contract with our target population by one to one contact, we decided to make a survey, both searching for the ones in more need and for building a face to face contact. Twelve psychodramatic therapy trainees took part in interviewing, after a period of training. Now I would like to present the findings of this survey; which was not the first goal of our efforts but which became a step to jump to the next step of doing therapy and searching the efficacy of therapy.

With DSM-IV criteria, %35.9 of a sample population was effected at syndromal level. When a little bit widened it may rise up to % 86. As proved with lots of data, women, mentally disordered are more affected.

What we could do can be discussed!

But I would prefer to try to conceptualize and discuss how psycho/sociodrama helped and can help.

To start with a case example: Sevda was talking repeatedly about the details of her story. When I asked her if she was volunteered to show us what happened to her we started with her sweat home which was not existing anymore. She was a nurse away from her family of origin for a long time when she met with B., who is now her husband. Their story was especially interesting when you take the oint that they, the two, made a sweat home for the last two years, giving all their effort and their future salaries for the things they wanted at home. There was even a furnished room for a future "son". This sweat home was prepared by them; and they went to Mugla to get married. The night the earthquake took place, they had just finished their wedding ceremony. As a director I asked her to double the parts of the sweat home. And her husband...And to role reverse with the future son. The people in the group took the roles of the important places and things in their home. (kitchen, curtains, the flower, the music player, the bed room.) And the moment that earthquake struck was reenacted. She started crying. The auxiliary playing her husband, too. With the mirror technique when she looked at the situation, she could reframe and give herself a message. Later she talked to her future son, telling him their story, in the new version.

For the group, the sharing part was extremely important. The auxiliaries, the child, talked about her recent loss, 2 months before the earthquake. The auxiliary playing the husband, shared her own story: her husband was away for military duty that night and she had to rescue her ill father and her small son alone. Deep sharings went on. Later specturum tecnique helped members find out their feelings; the group finished collectively singing the song to God the song of forgiving instead of forgetting.

So to go on with case histories we can deepen the basic concepts of healing from trauma; the procedure of transforming trauma to event; transforming the victim to survivor; transforming the disaster to the parts of our life story.