

The Homophobic Discourse Remembering the Authoritarian Personality. A Case Study

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Starting from the first session with A.H., his phobia about being gay became immediately evident. A.H. was inquiring his parents and relatives asking them, with anxiety, if they were thinking he was gay. Everyone was trying to keep him quiet answering no, and reassuring him. Such an answer, instead of tranquilizing him, increased his idea of being “contaminated” by homosexuality. After several sessions of clinical work, the therapist proposed a diagnostic assessment with TAT. TAT revealed that, beyond Homophobia, A.H. showed a more general process of Phobia, and some delusional features in connection with the encounter with other people who, for some reason connected to Otherness, could either be perceived as showing aggressiveness or, vice versa, could stimulate aggressiveness in A.H.. During the presentation we will also propose some clinical interpretations starting with the TAT use in the classic research by Adorno et al. on Authoritarian Personality.

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Adolfo comes to the therapy and during the first session speaks about his terror to be homosexual; he would like the psychotherapist to tell him if this feature could be proven true or false. The psychotherapist explains that “homosexuality” is not a diagnostic category. It is a personal choice motivated by a sexual desire and attraction to members of one's own sex. On these bases homosexuality is not a mental illness. The psychotherapist also says that the only person who can acknowledge one's own homosexuality is the subject himself through his sexual and love choices and each discourse about it may be arguable.

Adolfo's response to this preliminary explanation has been to assert that he feels like he is suffering from something that concerns homosexuality, in respect to which he consults his parents. They have tried to reassure him in two ways: firstly, they did not see any homosexual manner in Adolfo, secondly informing him that if ever he were gay, he would be accepted into his family anyway, despite the problems that this could arise.

However, Adolfo's response about the possibility to be homosexual is a reaction of profound anguish and fear.

In the subsequent meetings three topics are produced by Adolfo: his physique, his body linked with his ugliness and his being unable to seduce young girls, who are often younger than him, but they appear to be more expert on the sexual level, as if they had daily sexual relations whereas he is still a virgin. The third point regards other men's body, his peers, that he describes as more muscled, tonics; he describes their pectorals and etched abdominals whereas A. describes himself as flabby. These descriptions seem to screen some pleasure which is however radically denied.

In the next stage another annoyance comes to light: Adolfo's reaction when he comes in contact with gay men. This tension is related with the irritation felt with Moroccan, Albanian and Gipsy, persons that, in the collective unconscious, may represent a threat to entirety of socio-cultural identity.

Adolfo attends medicine department and he thinks that his disorder goes beyond fear of homosexuality. He asks again, but in a new way, for diagnostic assessment. Psychotherapist supposes with Adolfo a Phobic Disorder with a strong homophobic component. The therapist suggests an evaluation through the medium of TAT.

TAT administration: epistemology and methodology

The Thematic Apperception Test, developed by Henry Murray in 1935, is with Rorschach one of the most famous projective test and it has a long and rich bibliography in researches, studies and

applications in clinical environment and so on. An heterogeneous overview due to its own nature, which does not lend itself to standardization or quantitative validation processes. The issue of utility and meaning of a diagnosis has always been problematic and controversial in the psychotherapeutic and psychoanalytic environment. If a psychodynamic and ecological conception of the psychic universe were chosen, then it

wouldn't be possible to use a medical idea of diagnosis which could stand detached or independent from a more complex existential situation of the patient.

Only an idiographic perspective, able to look at the psyche as a complex semiotic net that is not circumscribed to an individual's brain without history, could try to build a diagnostic discourse which does not impose itself as a nomothetic verdict.

We use TAT as a sharing tool of a potential diagnosis. As an element during which diagnosis and therapy are not separated. Therefore the discourse on diagnosis could join the therapeutic conversation, bringing it back into it because it's preeminent compared to technical evaluation. The TAT reveals to be a therapeutic tool itself.

The therapist and the patient, through its administration, become actors of a co-constructive process which is able to create worlds and imagines characterized by a strong metamorphous power. This could be useful to identify and understand, through the relationship, not only dysfunctions and symptoms or problematic knots but also several forms of resilience, in order to appraise all the patient's and therapeutic link's resources.

The TAT, through projection's mechanism interlaced with perception, is able to understand the individual mental operation along with his semantic system, understood as idiosyncratic form appearing from a cultural context. The testing's name, Thematic Apperception Test, transmits a perception's imagine as culturally impregnated: an event that, although biologically grounded, is essentially thematic. It brings meaningful subjects, which, for their nature, have a cultural matrix.

The TAT is a peculiar stirring which is fit to stimulate in the patient his imagination level, transitional area par excellence, rich of convertible and creative possibility. This is the reason why the TAT is composed of several ambiguous imagines, which do not make up an unique narrative sequence. These two elements actually establish a possible access to imaginative reign for the therapeutic couple. Since the imagines which TAT is composed of, are not ordered in a narrative uniform sequence, makes it suitable for describing a complex dynamic and existential framework, open to a theatre of identifications and projections, which are not forced to converge on the Id and on an normative cohesion or a functional cohesiveness in the terms of most traditional Ego Psychology.

In this way, the TAT could become essentially a vehicle in according with Klein's theories: the tales which are arisen by it, could not be neatly organized to mark a biography nor paint a map of Id's integration, but they compel the couple to work on a unique mean's fragment; each chart is on its own without strict representatives to any psychoanalytic theory.

This view gives us prolific clouts to the thought of authors like Winnicott, Bion or Bollas. Effectively, the figural and fragmented nature allows a link with reality's fact extremely free, open, polyvalent, positioning the therapeutic couple in a transitional and intermediate area as Winnicott called it, opening to exploration of "known not thought" and to the evocative resonances into co-transfer relationship. Starting from these premises, the TAT could become an outright transitional subject between therapeutic's world and patient one; accepting a relationship-wise function.

Finally, the fact that the TAT displays the imagines evidently coming from a world which is far from our own, immediately ascribable to a past time, gives to these pictures an additional evocative value, forcing the narrator to compare himself with a material which contains a historic importance, accepting an opportunity of releasing himself from probable flattening on the present and opening, at individual and collective level, to the game of intergenerational cross and to the existence of social anthropological and historic cultural differences.

In according with these premises, we do not want to proceed with a rigid classification about the tales, in forms or contents, neither to work on an important numerically sample to establish congruencies on probably diagnostic features. Rather each administration is part of the therapy and the therapist who judges, in each case, the meaning and the possible utility of the test.

The administration of the tables is made in several rounds, it is recorded and then transcribed. An equipe, composed by at least three psychologists and the therapist, listens the administration's record, they discuss and analyze it, recording themselves too to allow an extra analysis.

After this work, the tables are administrated to the patient again, according to the equipe's analysis, and he is requested to make additional comments. In this way, the flexibility/rigidity about the possibility of tales' change is judged, as well as the resulting margin of therapeutic intervention.

In Adolfo's case, his request for a diagnostic assessment has incited the therapist to use the TAT, inserting this need of definition and labeling in the therapeutic speech, allowing a different understanding and giving a direction for a possible change.

The therapist chose for Adolfo these 22 tables: 1, 2, 3BM, 4, 5, 6BM, 7BM, 8BM, 9BM, 10, 11, 12M, 12 BG, 13MF, 13B, 14, 15, 16, 17BM, 19, 20.

Generally, the administration consists of 20 tables, but according to the previous meetings and the emerged material, the therapist chose to insert a double version of the tables 12 and 13, showing to Adolfo the imagine for adult men and for adolescents. Both choices are made according to an Adolfo's infantilism, such as making him swing from adults to adolescents categories.

The administration was conducted initially in two sessions for the 22 tables, adding a third meeting to let him choose three tables that he liked the most and three that he hated the most. The sessions were all recorded, transcribed, and analyzed.

Theatre of a homophobia: imagines and fragments

Table 6BM gives us the picture of the relationship between Adolfo and his mother. His mother is a business woman, who had entrusted little Adolfo to his father. Despite her choice, she was still the family's pillar, personifying a figure of economic and social success, deserving her son's respect and consideration. The necessity of loyalty to this figure is clear, also for a debt felt toward her, an obligation felt for an important person, toward a pilaster of one's own life and family, although his inevitable lack, in his felling, of an emotional acknowledgement.

A mother's figure had already appeared in table 5. This last passage suggests that the mother is seen as an independent figure of growth and maturation, versus his father's apprehension, with all the ambiguities that this represents in an evolving experience: to dismiss is like an abandonment, it allows a detachment and a separation that, even if legitimated, embodies a grief. In Adolfo's story, the mother, who was less and less present on an emotional and care level, has always been the one who incited to autonomy balancing the father's behavior, more protective and caring.

Finally with these tables we could recognize a mother in respect to whom the subject feels an ambivalent feeling: in one way there is the consideration for her ability, her bravery, her success. Her distance to the family's affects allows her to be free, in addition to a debt because she had supported the family's life. On the other side there is the necessity of dealing with all that it has taken away in emotional terms from the mother-children relationship.

The most important tables which enable to rough out some aspects of the relationship with the father are the 7BM and 8BM. Aron notices that the subjects with authoritarian high score describe the 7BM table as an humiliation by the old man to the young man, and the persons with authoritarian low score describe this as a respectful relationship from guy to the adult, whereas Adolfo sees a criminal conspiracy between two crooks. The meeting between the subjects takes place for the necessity to set right a common problem: to stamp out a lawman. This seems an inverse Oedipal scene: the two, starting from the idea to kill the mother-law, arrive to the solution to sully her name and so to rub her out. The name, the social success, the fame, the patrimony.

In the next table the tale continues, but now, the murder of the mother, which has sacrificed herself for her son, brings the killer guy to the insanity. There are two identifications: between A. and the mad avenger against the mother's killers, and between himself and the crook who together with the godfather had killed the lawman.

In the 12BM table, a woman is going to die. The caregiver was identified by Adolfo as the woman's father or a priest. The end of the tale is different for each subject. The priest is the spiritual father but in this picture his distance, which makes him familiar and at the same time able to leave without struggling, might save the young woman's life. Vice versa, the father's pain makes the scene so sullen to design the girl for death.

In the 13B table, a father plans to finish his work earlier than usual in order not to make his son unhappy for something that the child was waiting to arrive but that his father feared may not realize. It's a child's positive memory with something bitter inside. In a way there's a big emotional value, with care, safety and aid. In the other way, there's the reproach for the inability of separation, which could bring to a symbolic death.

In the 1, 2, 4, 9, 10, 13 MF, 17BM and 18BM tables we could observe some peculiar features of Adolfo's relationship with himself. It stands to reason that there is an inner split between duties linked to the possibility of success, in order to satisfy the narcissist desire of power, achievement and sexuality released from the emotions and the affections (1, 4), and the idealization of an amorous sentiment without the sexual part (10). It's moreover evident the division of the subjects (and of the world) in the superior and inferior social classes, or between the esteemed and respectable persons and the slackers (2, 9). In these tables, the homophobic traits appear clearly, along with the ambivalence towards the powerful male figures, which are craved and deeply despised (13 MF, 17BM, 18BM). Being homo-sexual would signify to symbolically surrender to the flatteries of these individuals, to be their defenseless prey. To Adolfo's eyes the most terrible scenario is to identify with the victim and the weak, without the courage to despise those boastful muscles and the empty narcissism that would prevent him from the possibility to have plain and good emotional relationships.

It's interesting to note that the tables with the higher therapeutic value, which could outline feasible harmonic poises for Adolfo's conflicts, are the ones that make more room for the imagination, with less ties. Now a shepherd appears and sacrifices himself to save his oxen (11); a boy finds an abandoned newborn and decides to take care of him (12); a guy looks at the moon and may have a fiancée (14); some long and deep thoughts about the inevitable coexistence of death and life appear (15, 16); finally a guy emerges, capable of bearing the uncertain waiting for a beloved girl whom he would be able to share an emotional life with (20). A beautiful and sweet memory of his grandparents emerges here. It is as if this ambivalence and expressive freedom had a curative power against his rigid dichotomies and the violence of a narcissistic desire produced by scissions and insecurities.

The research on authoritarian personality by Adorno et al. could be useful in this context, such as some psycho-socio-analytic attempts to read mafia mind or behaviors linked to fundamentalism. It is the phobia of alterity and differences, produced by the identification and security needs. The narcissistic vulnerability prevents from the possibility of an ambivalent and strong enchantment, as the love and eros relationships. At the same time, it impedes the development of an open identity, which allows for uncertainties and ambivalences, captivations and pains. The narcissistic traits are even hated because they negate a more realistic possibility of self exploration.

The homosexuality is feared because it represents an unforgivable alter ego of the idealize narcissistic superhero, his victim, his shape. Being homosexual could mean to sully his mother's name, surrendering to his father's love; a father that, despite his sweetness, risks to block any growth and autonomy of his son and any possibility of success and achievement. It could represent the other face of the serial killer into whom the college boy, whose mother sacrificed for, transformed.

At the same time, homosexuality exerts a strong attraction power since it represents the possibility to release the exhausting control, required by the interior superhero not allowing him to enjoy the love of his father, who he does not want to resemble, still loving him and having been loved back. The stronger the attraction, the bigger his fear to surrender, and the resulting denial and scorn.

Despite the differences into the classical description by Aron on the problem of an authoritarianism caused by a controlling father, the investigation on the personal past conducted by TAT, enables to show an interior

theatre, which allows to reconstruct the identification dynamics, counter- identifications and feelings that bring to the need to totally identify. This generates a social phobia, not in medical or diagnostic terms, but to be seen as a phobia about the others, the Other and the alterity that inevitably lives inside us.

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