

["We should contain our opposites"](#)

[Costas Raptis interviews Haritini Karra, member of the Scientific Meetings' Committee of HELASYTH, for SKAI.gr newspaper, 21/12/2008](#)

Haritini Karra, psychologist / family therapist, said: "we, therapists, in our own practice, kept realizing, during the past one or two years, that things were reaching a deadlock: too much anger, a lot of depression, lack of meaning – so, the whole situation seemed ready to "burst out". But nobody expected such violence, in such extent.

H. Karra together with her colleague, Maria Aggelou, presented a pot-pourri of pieces, related to labor issues, published both in the press and the internet, Then, they moderated a discussion group on these subjects. This is where they witnessed people's realities: people who work more for less money, who suffer from burn-outs, who are employed in jobs that are not related to their specialization, who are constantly under the pressure of their families for occupational success, whose labor rights are violated to such a degree that they are unable to build a long-term life plan.

However, there were also some positive hints in this group discussion: people seem to slowly develop new skills to cope with this difficult situation; for example, they have been learning how to re-negotiate their contracts to fit their different needs every time since long term occupational stability doesn't seem to be so common any more.

H. Karra was surprised to witness a new fighting spirit in the young people, not in a political sense though. They kind of said "we won't let this happen just like that, we are not dead". Most of the younger ones were determined not to repeat their parents' mistakes, that is, to work just for money and not be happy with their jobs – they wanted to remain creative and satisfied in their job. There was a clear need to maintain their meaning, both in the work and in the personal life area. People would not identify themselves with their jobs (this was very common in the older times).

H. Karra says that she was moved by those young people's new born maturity: "there is a common feeling that youngsters among 18-28 yrs old are in a kind of "hypnosis", as if they are asleep. Well, this is not true: I realized that they have been thinking a lot, asking themselves questions. The same seems to be happening with parents: they have been reflecting a lot on the values they have "legated" to their children. What was clear in all ages was this urgent need of taking personal responsibility on one's own life: "what do I, personally, choose my life to be like?" .

There was also a clear focus on the high value of collective effort and solidarity in every aspect of social and personal life. It seems that the era of "individualism" is slowly on the decline."

"I believe", she says, "that we are no longer invited to choose between this government and the other, but between this kind of life and the other. I hear that even the words used in the protest marches are now different: they no longer talk about the "ruling party", they talk about life. We are obviously in front of something deeper and more symbolic. Consider the symbolic side of the killing of the young boy: a rich, higher social class boy was murdered – this is something that could not be easily hidden from the media, a lot of people were really terrified.

According to H. Karra, group therapeutic processes usually contain what we call "polyphonic identity" (a kind of "multi-dimensional identity"), that is, each one of us is constituted of many "voices", many "dimensions": one is related to the family of origin, another to the social surroundings, another to the cultural or political context, etc. "We are beings with many sides. Each of us might prefer to fight for himself from a different bulwark, yet, we still have a lot of things in common. Behaviours or attitudes that we hate in other human beings can also be parts of our own identity. I was very relieved to hear that some of the people who were responsible for the destructions in the center of Athens wanted to speak. It's sad that the police do not want to discuss, to express their own opinion on the situation, I think I saw only one of their labour unionists expressing his view on TV."

"I have an example in my mind which of course is very different from what we experienced here but we can learn a lot from that: I was very inspired by a speech given by a family therapist and politician in the EFTA Congress in Glasgow two years ago who explained to us how terrorism in Ireland decreased when the government decided to include terrorists in the disarmament dialogue, which was unthinkable some time ago..."

"I think phrases like "we should isolate the destroyers" that are very often used by the police or the government are to be avoided, I personally find them inappropriate and dangerous. Isolate who? Someone who expresses part of how we, personally feel?? We should contain our opposites. Containing does not mean "agreeing" or "consenting", it means "accept to talk with" – it is neither simple nor easy. But I believe that each one of us has to fight with his or her own ghosts. When we don't do that, violence prevails."

So, does violence come out of anger? "We, human beings, usually resort to violence when we have somehow felt humiliated, abased, neglected. These feelings almost always arise in therapeutic sessions with violent

people. So, exchanging humiliation or defiance can only lead us to violence. On the contrary, anger is a very creative feeling, very much connected to life: it can lead to wonderful change, to evolution, as long as we let it lead us to new positions and choices. Of course this means that we should be ready to leave our old positions or views aside and this is a separation process. To me, this is the bet we are now challenged to take."