

*Transgenerational violence against women:  
Jungian psychodrama on the path to individuation\**

**Leandra Perrotta<sup>§</sup>**

**Summary.** *Women with violent transgenerational histories tend to repeat dysfunctional patterns in their emotional life. This paper discusses the case of Irina and how Jungian Psychodrama helped her work through her trauma, remove her fear of mental illness and free herself from a painful and unacceptable past. The objective of Jungian Psychodrama is therapeutic: transgenerational themes and dreams are analysed to bring conscious and unconscious elements of the psyche into balance and provide relief and meaning to psychological suffering. Jungian psychodrama is healing. The experience of emotional and cognitive restructuring facilitates a dialectical discourse between identification and individuation from transgenerational mandates of female passivity, psychological paralysis and learned helplessness and allows disempowered women to become authentic protagonists of their life.*

**Keyword:** *Psychogenealogy, Transgenerational, Psychodrama, Dreams, Individuation.*

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*<sup>§</sup>Clinical psychologist, Jungian psychodramatist and dancetherapist in Turin, Italy.*

*FEPTO Member of the Council – Federation of European Psychodrama Training Organizations. Tel. +39.3489392018. Email: psicodramma@gmail.com. www.jungianpsychodrama.com*

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Women with violent transgenerational histories tend to repeat dysfunctional patterns in their emotional life (Faimberg, 2005). This paper discusses the case of Irina and how Jungian Psychodrama helped her to work through her traumatic experience, remove her fear of mental illness and free herself from a painful and unacceptable past.

The objective of Jungian Psychodrama (Gasseau, & Perrotta, 2012) is therapeutic: starting from dreams and everyday reality, transgenerational themes are analysed to bring conscious and unconscious elements of the psyche into balance and provide relief and meaning to psychological suffering.

Thirty-year old Irina from Russia asked to join the psychodrama group for «problems regarding men» and because she suffered from numerous psychosomatic symptoms. She had a history of unresolved pain relating to a former relationship with an abusive partner and the fear of reliving this experience.

Irina's personal narrative was imbued with transgenerational echoes (Perrotta, 2011) of violence. Her mother was depressed, unloving and dependant upon an abusive father who sexualized his relationship with Irina as soon as she entered puberty. In order to escape from her feelings of guilt and fear of mental illness, she fled to Italy. Scared of new relationships, she felt lacking in relational intelligence and regarded emotional ties as places of enmeshment and dependency.

Dreams are a privileged area of exploration for Jungian psychodramatists who work on individuation and transgenerational themes. Irina's persecutory ideas made it difficult for her to play real-life scenes. Fascinated by the oneiric world however, she played out dreams filled with military figures, dead people, collective violence and an incumbent, threatening, gigantic extraterrestrial eye. To the group, she confessed her fear that her dreams proved she was «transitioning into insanity».

Irina's body caught her father's attention upon entering puberty. The abuse permeated the confines of her ego, deeply modifying her psychic space. In order to survive, Irina's body became a «container of symptoms», incapable of expressing her pain in any other way. Clinging to the possibility of a normal relationship, Irina found herself complying with her father's every desire but felt betrayed by her mother's silence and inability to protect her.

Silence is a fundamental process in a transgenerational dynamic (Tisseron, 1996). Unable to speak the unspeakable, the unbearable emotions caused by the conspiracy of silence in her family obstructed Irina's process of individuation whereby her psyche could develop and gradually expand its consciousness. Irina's inability to individuate from her

family's transgenerational mandates of female passivity, submissiveness and psychological paralysis, trapped her in a role of learned helplessness and disempowerment.

Transgenerational psychodrama (Schützenberger, 2007) is a powerful means of shedding light on fantasmatic relationships in the inner theatre of the mind. The re-enactment of transgenerational patterns, condensed into visual images, creates awareness which breaks cycles of repetition and heals emotional wounds.

The «phantom in the crypt» (Abraham, & Török, 1978) is a concept which describes a formation in the dynamic unconscious caused by family secrets which are passed down through the generations. The phantom is formed by the cryptic burial of unspeakable shame, an inaccessible sepulchre of secrets often expressed in Irina's dreams by the presence of a gigantic extraterrestrial eye constantly observing her from the sky. The transgenerational mandate was to «bear the unbearable» as the past generations chose to cover up the abuse perpetrated upon women.

Repeated violence had caused Irina to identify with a «dead mother» complex (Green, 1983): a maternal object who dragged her children into the underworld, producing feelings of impotence and psychic non-life through the generations. As the guardian of unresolved transgenerational toxicity (Schützenberger, & Devroede, 2003), Irina started to feel the urgency of voicing the unspeakable and staging a recognition ritual of the phantom. She needed a privileged place to produce new meaning and create a safe place of meta-cognitive and reflective thinking. Psychodrama helped Irina interrupt the cycle of transgenerational necrophilia and imbued the maternal object with new life.

Irina's dreams, played on the psychodramatic stage, were deep messages from the unconscious. The dreams helped her to create new gestalts, softening the rigid confines of her inner roles crystallized by transgenerational prescriptions and accompanied her on an inner voyage of individuation towards new awareness (Perrotta, 2009).

Jungian psychodrama is healing. The experience of emotional and cognitive restructuring facilitates a dialectical discourse between identification and individuation from transgenerational mandates of female passivity, psychological paralysis and learned helplessness and allows disempowered women to become authentic protagonists of their life story<sup>18</sup>.

<sup>18</sup> Symbolically equivalent substitutions and other necessary changes have been made in the presentation of this clinical case in order to protect the identity of the patient involved.

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