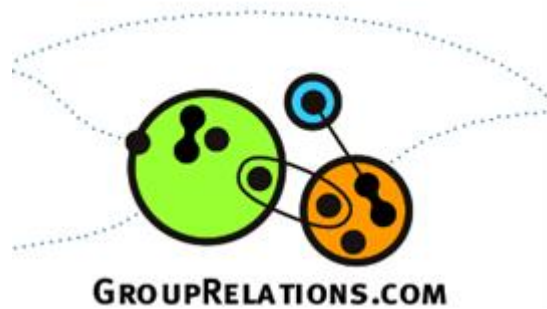


# Fourth Patchwork

## A Group Relations response to Covid-19



台灣團體關係

Group Relations Taiwan



## INTRODUCTION

We have 15 national reflections on Covid 19, in all hemispheres from November 2020. The local experiences of the pandemic however are quite different depending on location, season of the year, government and community response. Most nations have experienced some version of a second wave but with very different outcomes. We write this synthesis in early January, as vaccines start to be rolled out, but while the pandemic continues to have very different impacts across the world – with dichotomised responses and polarised comparisons between countries, cultures and policies.

The themes across many contributions are similar and seem to reflect larger, socio-political events – Brexit, ‘Black Lives Matter’ protests and the US elections in particular.

Many themes are common. Chaos, irrationality and ‘splitting’, with a recurring vulnerability to lies and conspiracy theories is described in many contributions. Criticism and mistrust of government is endemic with very variable learning from experience.

Yet more measured responses have also been described, sometimes in the same country, with individuals and whole communities feeling tired and isolated, but prepared to wait cooperatively and ‘abide’ with an acknowledgment of appropriate but not overwhelming depression and anxiety. These contributions also describe feeling supported and ‘held’ well-enough by their leaders and governments. Some also describe emergent creativity and collective engagement, in online tasks, innovative Group Relations events and in the creation of new rituals and roles. We might ask if this can be described as a ‘depressive position’ response.

The arrival of the vaccine is mentioned in a number of contributions, as a hope or seen as “Messiah.” Is the world ready to feel hope yet? seems to be a question, or will cynicism and anxiety prevail? The split between those who believe in the vaccine and the “anti-vaxxers” is a further mirror of other polarized political and cultural conflicts - around dependency, autonomy and authority.

Economic consequences of the pandemic are more present in this edition than in earlier editions of the Patchwork, possibly because the long duration of the pandemic has hollowed out the political and social efforts to save finances, both on an individual and societal level.

The commonality and differences of these contributions raises interesting questions about governmental and shared community leadership and our capacity to manage our own ambivalence about authority, acknowledge our own helplessness yet still identify and collaborate with others.

## THE PATCHES

### **Arifana International, Sweden**

The illusion of omnipotence and immortality has brutally collapsed with the second wave of Covid 19. Sweden handled the pandemic differently from our neighbor countries in the Nordics, and we are paying a heavy debt in deaths compared to for instance Norway or Finland.

On the other hand, this strategy was strongly supported by the Swedes, and the high mortality has shown severe weaknesses in our eldercare institutions. The debate is intense on how to improve life conditions for those of us who are the frailest.

There are new recommendations from the government and the Authority for Healthcare (Folkhälsomyndigheten) and this time also some regulations: We are not allowed to gather more than 8 persons in any general event. Exception: Funerals, when we may be 20 persons, the reason being that if somebody dies in the middle of life, they will have more than 8 mourners.

Schools are still open, but the possibility for distance teaching is reinforced.

The earlier feeling of unrest has now matured into a feeling of impatience. Many disregard the recommendations, which led our prime minister Stefan Löfvén to express in a rather harsh tone: "All this dancing has to stop."

Arifana's yearly conference Transformation: Organization, Leadership and Creativity is postponed to September 2021.

So, we are waiting and abiding.  
Endurance.

## **Lithuanian Group Relations Society**

COVID-19 is slowly enveloping all of us with the consequence that we are now all living in a dull, depressed, anxious state of mind. We are isolated and, as such, have reduced experiencing, making us more susceptible to lies, false "facts", and conspiracy theories. It seems that society is increasingly splitting into parallel worlds: the one which cares for each other, acting responsibly and the world ruled by conspiracy theories. Are we still all in this together?

In spring pandemic was pulling us down while nature cycle was rising. It was more joy and adventure. Now we are better prepared for pandemic, but there is little hope that it will end soon. It is dark outside when the workday is over, and we stay at home instead of balancing ourselves in nature.

Lithuania has new government. Women-led coalition wins confidence in difficult times. The conservative party takes charge as they did during the previous crisis. And just at the border, people in Belarus fight for democracy more than against covid.

There are disruptions in supply chains and bankruptcies in some businesses. Employees blame leadership for not good enough change management. Middle management is overloaded with anxiety. Who will be the first thrown out of the ship in case of failure? Artists, yoga teachers, actors and many more professionals who just recovered after the first lockdown, all of a sudden are on hold again. While private savings are increasing, governmental institutions demonstrate financial stability, ordering services from the market and increasing public spending.

Education became more visible, can it be otherwise, when classes are happening at home. Kids attend kindergartens and primary schools. Pupils met in high schools at least for 2 months and went online. Some universities started autumn with most of the lectures remotely. The size of the groups became very important. It looks like small groups function similarly online. But big groups seem full of phantom participants with switched off microphones, images and no-names making lecturers feel like talking with the mirror. Covid have stolen our rituals, coffee chats in the office, business trips and international meetings, which was an important part of fun at work. With one click between roles and online events we madly long for pauses and transition spaces. We are ready to drive in the car additional 30 kilometers just to find a space for ourselves.

How long can this last? What will everything look like in the future? The keyword Zoom became more popular than covid. Will kids talk to Santa over Zoom? Will we lose our coming home for Christmas?

If this generation is about to lose so much, has this generation also much to discover?

## **CASSGO:USA**

As COVID-19 continues on what seems like a chronic course, the polarization in politics in the US may be either shaped by or reflected in a dichotomized response to the pandemic. Some of us may be surrendering to the tidal wave of infections by adapting to the demands of social distancing, while others may be reacting with denial and minimization, rejecting public pleas to maintain precautions. This splitting has resulted in intense conflict and mistrust between these opposing camps.

In preparing for our first virtual group relations conference in China, we are working on studying these tensions as they are arising within our conference staff. We have increased the complexity of the staff work by introducing a research team, whose task is to study the staff dynamics from a position external to the relationship with the membership. Two areas of conflict have emerged: one about the manner in which we transition from face-to-face work to engagement in the virtual space, and one about how the research team negotiates its task with the administrative, small study group and large study group teams.

A third tension continues from before the pandemic: how do we understand the introduction of negotiated authority, which we examine experientially in our conference work, into a culture which has traditionally located authority in its leadership rather than given by the followers to their leaders. This tension affects the relationship between Chinese and Western colleagues, which began with idealization of the Western colleagues in a dependency culture. Is the introduction of negotiated authority a Western infection into Chinese culture or an opportunity to learn about potentials which are nascent within China?

COVID-19, with all of its limiting consequences, has moved group relations work in China forward in preparing our Chinese colleagues to assume greater responsibility and authority for creating an authentically Chinese group relations culture. Engaging virtually may create distance, but also space for growth. One important manifestation of this growth is the continuation of conducting the work with members, and increasingly with staff, in Mandarin. A second manifestation of this growth is the use of a Chinese virtual platform, Zhumu, for our upcoming conference. A third indication of growth is described by our colleague, Ming-Hui Hsu, in organizing a virtual group relations conference from Taiwan, also to be conducted in Mandarin.

## **Group Relations Taiwan**

Group relations speak to us about COVID-19 in Taiwan in terms of how global and our internal political conflicts affect our government's Covid-19 management. While the world is confronted by the second or third wave of COVID-19, Taiwan remains safe place from Covid-19. Globally, with its significance in geographic location and semiconductor enterprise, Taiwan is in the forefront of the U.S.-China conflict and has received more recognition and support in the world stage. The recent U.S. Presidential election was closely watched by the Taiwanese for its consequences on the future Taiwan-U.S.-China relations. The pro-China political camp in Taiwan continues to challenge our government's international and domestic policies (including COVID-19 recommendations) for its political and monetary gains. If not for a strong leadership and support from the Taiwanese people as a whole, and for understanding the importance of having a clear boundary with China, our government would not be able to contain COVID-19 today.

A **Mandarin-speaking** international Taiwan e-GRC, organized by Group Relations Taiwan and a Taiwanese Group Psychotherapy Organization and directed by Daniel Hsu, a Taiwanese, will take place April 2-5, 2021. The consultants are from five countries and membership is open to anyone in the world who speaks Mandarin. Registration will open in early December.

## **Metanoia/FINOD**

In Finland we live darkest time of year. Its dark because day light hours are so few but also because Covid19 spreads in growing speed. Lock down is reality in southern Finland at Helsinki area. This means, all most all the gatherings are withdrawn. People are working remote if possible. It seems, the Christmas will be called of as all the traditional family gatherings like midsummer, labour day and eastern has been. Comparing to neighbour countries, especially to Sweden, we seem to be much more careful and afraid of cobid19.

Population seems to be divided in two. Those who are careful and those who are maybe tired to covid19 and reckless. Covid19 spreads specially between younger people and inside families. Workplaces are representing holding environment because they ability to keep covid19 out of working environment. Consultation and training busines hapens almost totally in digital environments. GR work is also totally in digital. People are more and more buying their daily necessity from internet even groceries. This makes me wonder howe much covid19 is first world problem?

It seems finns are using dark time of year as a common defence – except younger ones – curling up to home and pulling out to loneliness. As we have done so many times in history.

Finnish national group relation conference shall be organized at august 2021. Right now we have more registree as ever this time of year. Digital environment shall have stronger role in conference.

## IL NODO

Lockdown 1 - Semi-lockdown 2/Curfew

Covid as a work of art: it makes visible the invisible

Safety and repression

Surrounded by covid

Pan in the Greek mythology is the god of the wild : Pan's angry shout inspired panic in lonely places.[31][32] Following the Titans' assault on Olympus, Pan claimed credit for the victory of the gods because he had frightened the attackers.

In the Battle of Marathon (490 BC), it is said that Pan favored the Athenians and so inspired panic in the hearts of their enemies, the Persians.

Italy is in the second lockdown/curfew, not as strict as it was the first one.

There is a sort of angry resignation, like a déjà vu, without the hope/illusion that 'everything will go well' as last spring the banners at the windows declared.

There is an exponential growth of the contagion and the NHS is close to collapse,

it seems impossible to learn from the experience and from the others.

Schools and universities are nearly completely closed (only primary schools are open): a tragedy for our young generation, deprived of learning and socialization.

Social unrest happens, more is expected as more layers of the population are falling into poverty and unemployment.

The last SDM prior to the 2nd lockdown, captured huge feelings of intensity and consternation, it spoke of repression. Social trauma develops parallel to the growth of the contagion, there are many difficult news, not only covid related, but also to social and ecological disasters: their existence is negated.

Social distancing runs deep in our psychic life.

An emblematic image from a dream: fleeing to safety into a cinema, the only protection (salvation in fiction?)

## **AKRI**

In the months since the last patchwork both AKRI and the U.S. have been pre-occupied with the U.S. election. We have continued to organize bi-weekly membership meetings that have been well attended. The theme of the meetings has been to “Explore Social Chaos and Irrationality in the Context of the 2020 Elections”. The meetings have included plenaries and break-out groups exploring these topics: Group Relations in the COVID-19 Era; Innovation, Creativity, and the Challenges of Recovery, Restoration, and Re-imagining; Joining, Authority, Mission, and Voice; and Systemic Racism and Oppression Within and Without.

A challenge for AKRI and the U.S. as a whole lies in how we will govern ourselves after our 2020 attention has been focused on COVID-19, massive street demonstrations around systemic racism, and the prolonged anxiety regarding the national election. Community meetings are engaging, but what specific changes in policies and procedures might AKRI enact to promote vitality of the organization? What are our values and mission that should guide changes? Who will step up to take less glamorous roles on committees that govern the organization?

Similarly, while the U.S. has elected a new President the country still faces governing challenges if not existential threats. Citizens can no longer seem to agree on basic questions of what is a fact or true. Tribal affiliation seems to determine “truth”. This makes governing difficult. The exercise of raw power to undermine institutions has also been alarming. Many of the practices by which the government has operated historically and the roles government leaders take are not written in our Constitution or laws. They are dependent upon precedent and shared understanding. This arrangement now feels fragile when persons in power can make up their own facts and are oriented towards splitting rather than integrating and containing diverse elements.



## **Group Relations Australia**

COVID19, November 2020

Since early July, Victoria, and the state capital, Melbourne, in particular, have been wrestling through a second wave of the pandemic with over 800 hundred deaths, mainly elderly people in nursing homes. While this is much less than many other places in the world it has been both distressing and sobering for our local communities. Our State government responded with a comprehensive and strict lockdown, including on travel, both domestically and internationally, mask wearing, closed businesses, curfews and social isolation that although difficult has been broadly accepted.

Some politicians and sectional interests responded with outrage and attack - within which it is easy to identify crude defenses of denial, splitting and projection. The quieter and by far most common reaction however has been 'good-enough' acceptance and a shared sense of community care and mutual support. The narcissists have criticised this as 'compliance' but it could perhaps be more accurately described as shared engagement and concern.

Now, three months later, with internal travel restrictions and the natural boundaries of our island nation, we have been free of any new Covid19 cases or deaths for nearly four weeks and are on the cusp of eradication!

This is in painful, shocking and bewildering contrast to what seems to be chaos and is certainly tragedy in Britain, the USA and some European countries. Australia is a largely migrant nation but with a love of international travel. Many people have friends or family living or travelling 'overseas', from whom who we are now separated and who can't come 'home'. Christmas, Hanukah and Ramadan will be very different over the next few months, but it is a poignant reminder of the unconscious forces at work in societies – and the real-life consequences of leadership and social cohesion or of the fracturing of these.

## **OFEK/ ISRAEL**

Since last September, when Israel went into its second lockdown, OFEK has been very active. Our “Learning from Conferences” series for members drew large numbers with active participation from our international members, and we have been developing new projects. One of these is an online conference for OFEK members and those who have participated in at least one GR conference. Its task is to study the impact of the online medium on authority and leadership.

Similarly, with our activities for the public. Despite having to move online, our professional development series of short courses. *TouchOFEK* has had the largest participation numbers in four years and our newly launched mostly pro-bono consulting arm *OFEK in the Field* has already begun work on several projects. Two of these projects are in the medical sector, working with hospital teams recruited to treat COVID-19, both in terms of physical and mental health.

It appears there is a drive to remain active and to continue to develop while the outside world is in semi-lockdown. The desire to connect with others and not to be held back by the Covid-19 situation also seems to be factor.

Interesting, however, is the move “inwards”, either to one’s smaller community. For example, there will be no international conference in 2021 and the planned online conference is only in Hebrew and not open to the general public. This seems to reflect what is taking place in wider society, i.e. withdrawing to national borders.

The difficulty in planning for the future is an ongoing challenge that we are also facing us.

The political field in Israel is also very active. A long-term protest is taking place in Israel. Creative demonstration is happening in Jerusalem and all over the country every weekend. The economic situation is getting worse. The pandemic influence is all over. We all are waiting for the vaccine as if we are waiting for the messiah.

## **PCCA**

It is not easy to write this patchwork. The previous ones, especially the first one, had a sense of urgency, a need to share with other where we are and check on where they are.

Now, 9 months later, there seems to be a cycle we are all moving in: opening and closing, distancing and exploring the new environment. Suffering from over-zooming and covid fatigue.

Covid is politicized in Israel but not only here, leading to increasing mistrust and attacking solidarity. Social solidarity, that seemed to play a major role in the first wave, was noticed and appreciated then, has given place to an ever growing Me-ness, that is hampering efforts at mitigation of the virus.

On the PCCA front:

### **From PCCA 2020 in-person conference to PCCA 2021 on-line conference:**

PCCA 2020 conference: *Walls, Open, Sliding? Europe and Our World Today*, was due in August 2020 in the Netherlands, because of covid-19 it was postponed.

It felt too uncertain and risky to run an in-person conference in 2021 the next PCCA conference will be online. The idea is not to have a new conference, but a postponed conference, innovated to incorporate the dramatic changes which occurred in 2020 and touching on the global traumatic and post-traumatic experiences that seem to have changed the world as we knew it.

PCCA conference: *Walls Open, Closed, Sliding? The Virus, Europe and Our World Today*, will take place April 8-11 2021, directed by Louisa Bruner.

## **Group Relations Russia**

The situation with COVID could be described as “stable bad”, we do have some restrictions reflected in wearing masks and gloves in public places, but public places – restaurants, gyms, shopping malls etc are opened. Schools and Universities have some restrictions and shifted mostly to on-line. Small and mid-size business suffer financially. National currency goes down and in November we experienced the biggest drop since the beginning of the year (around 30%).

Russia stepped into 2<sup>nd</sup> lock down almost straightforward after Europe. Feels like it would be rather long or with the small break going then into the 3<sup>rd</sup> one.

Fear of getting COVID makes people stay at home, now the close circle of people is getting sick with quite a different form of disease – from light to lethal outcome.

The norm duality – you cannot fly - but could fly to a few countries, you cannot go to University – but could go to shopping mall refers again to soviet time duality message – we are equal, but somebody has a special privilege.

The question of trust is up on the surface: could we trust Russian vaccine, where vaccine is only one of the thing to illustrate the dilemma.

People are talking about feeling like in death camp or like in GULAG (Soviet type of death camp, were “national enemies” (mostly scientific and cultural elite, mostly Jew but not only) were paced during Stalin’s regime). Where one could not stay cos it is intolerably, but also could not run away as would be killed. It raises up feelings of fear (of death) and isolation or death in isolation.

## **CASSGO-China**

Difficulty for me to write this, further and further away from COVID-19, but still under its shadow, people began to be nervous to some degree and prepare for something in case it come back again, for example, our students will leave the campus next month as soon as they finish the study of this semester.

At the beginning of COVID-19, we use zoom for many online group, and later, zoom always out of work, and we bought a Chinese edition of zoom, and then it is also failed to work, I personally began to use Tengxun, and CASSGO begin to use Zhumu for its coming 2020 online GRC.

We change our Shenyang Conference into 2020 online GRC, since we could not meet in Shenyang this year, and also we have hot conflict around the research issue.

We still have very successful recruitment for our first eGRC, we got more applications than we can contain, we will have a full conference with 66 members and 10 research observers.

We will face the two big challenges at the same time, the first online GRC and the first research team in the staff.

For myself, I felt overwhelmed a little bit, have a feeling of distant, don’t know why. Just don’t want to do any things but have to do, tired, exhausted. But things are the same with before, no more things need to be done by me. Is it because I am getting elder and elder, or the dynamics become more and more complex and without awareness.

Xiaohua Lu

CASSGO-China

## **Tavistock Institute of Human Relations**

November seems to have emerged as the month that never was. As the Black Lives Matter social movement has gathered momentum, in contrast, the World Trade Organisation stalled the authorisation process to announce its first African and Female Director General. The USA General Election did not follow the usual behaviour of concession by the projected loser, whilst the corona virus entered, as expected, its projected winter spike and the second wave of lockdowns began.

The Group Relations community has engaged with online group relations conferences, and many are in the planning stages for 2021. Along with training and innovations incorporating arts and various attempts to understand our dis-embodied existence, within the TIHR, staff have been engaging with clients and networks to further explore the nature and impact of the online world and the emotional toil of persistent physical distancing.

Authorisation and Projection seem to be two striking processes and forces in the global mind as we approach the end of 2020. Political regimes are experiencing civil and social unrest and striking images of Police at war with the citizens they are meant to serve and protect abound. How are we working to make sense of the projective processes at play, and in particular the hatred toward the Brown and African role holders in, or excluded from, authority?

The emergence of the US constitution as an object under attack, can be seen as a collective process of struggle with the rule of law, and trust the law-makers and administrators who will shape the nature of our representative institutions in the coming decade and the for next century.

## **The Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust**

It feels like a difficult juncture at which to write this 4th patchwork. On the one hand the vaccines offer a possible solution, a hopeful near future, in which we really might return to meaningful physical contact. But allowing oneself to feel hopeful means suppressing considerable cynicism and anxiety about our government's capacity to implement this, given their track record of cronyism and corruption.

Not to mention their ownership of the imminent financial and emotional disaster that is Brexit. We are about to cast ourselves adrift in a very small boat with very few provisions and a captain who doesn't have our interests at heart.

In our organisation and more generally in the NHS in London we're aware of pockets of creativity and the forging of good relationships as a result of the Pandemic. In the early stages there was a powerful promise of more collective thinking, and societal change. But this seems increasingly to be relegated to side channels or liminal spaces, because what's to the fore again is cut throat competition, which has resurfaced thanks to the return of austerity policies, driven forward despite the clear damage being done to the large swathes of society, who have very little. And because there can be so little trust in our leaders, paranoia as exemplified by the anti-vaxxer movement, is rife and may capsize us, even at this more hopeful moment. This leaves us ambivalent and anxious, looking for hope in much smaller more scattered places.

## **Tavistock Institute China**

### **【New challenges】**

On the way to democracy, the Chinese have shed the blood, but over time, in particular the US election the bewilderment and confusion it brings, one is hardly to tell if it's reality or diverse illusory, the idealization of democracy has been falling in the hearts of the Chinese people. To be able to think reflectively, to be able to face the reality, continually learn from the West, meanwhile distinguish the differences in between, respect it and learn the resources and opportunities the differentiation bringing to us - are the most important challenge we face today in the view of TIC.

Competition is the current tension between China and the US and some other countries.

Chinese people face a high degree of competition in school since childhood. By winning, one could have a better chance and occupy a favorable position in life. However, when Tavistock's Group Relations approach came, it opened up another possibility. In the past, the competition was vertical, and the ability to go higher meant a greater victory, but in GRC system it's flat, everyone matters, everyone is unique, and by sharing, giving out the uniqueness and authentic voice, the whole system maximizes its benefits. Competition changes its nature, making your voice being heard is a sign of success, it's a form of human rights emphasis that does not require bloodshed.

### **【Revolution in Learning】**

The way of learning has changed. It's no longer to find the "standard answer" or the most ideal model, it's not the authority always "right", people can only follow, but imperfect gain respect, authenticity has the value, everyone could have its own thoughts, every each deserve to be listened to carefully, which is a system level subversion.

People desire for freedom, equality, but in the real power, it also means responsibility, ie. responsible for the own learning; however the fear underneath – fear of making mistake, uncertainty and not having standard answer and being confirmed by teacher like before - would cause defensiveness and strong complex emotion like anger, upset, disappointment, etc. without digesting and learning from it blocks the way of reflecting and closing down the channel for important data entering in the mist of the struggle in reality. This happened with TIC's first online training started at the end of November, after waiting one year for the coVID-19 to end. THIR conducted training for us to train Organizational Consultant through online translation, it works, for the deep pain and struggle that real growth entails increasing with online format itself. New things and new challenges are unfolding in time of difficulties, which provides us with more learning opportunities.