Chapter 12
A Multi-level, Multi-focal, Multi-voiced Journey: Not Without Family Therapy—Not with Family Therapy Alone

Kyriaki Polychroni

Introduction

It seems like only yesterday when in 1972, I knocked on the door of the Athenian Institute of Anthropos.

Then studying towards my first degree in Psychology at the University of British Columbia (UBC) in Canada, I had returned the previous summer to the homeland—Greece—for a vacation and to reconnect with my extended family of origin. I was surprised by what I discovered. I had expected to find the mentality of the Greek immigrants that I had grown up among—a mentality extremely different to that of my fellow Canadians of the late 1960s with their focus on the individual and his/her freedom from social norms and restrictions.

I was not aware at that time that, in their attempt to survive and make meaning of the threatening waves of new experience, first generation immigrants tend to "freeze time" in the new country—to strongly hold on to the traditional roles, values, norms, behaviours and relational patterns characteristic of the period when they leave their original cultural context.

I thus found the Greek reality in Athens had moved on and was more open than I had initially predicted. And while the individual—particularly the woman—was now more free to engage in developing autonomy, there was still a very strong emphasis on the human need of belonging to family and the "ingroup". In traditional cultures such as Greece, the ingroup has been shown to be central in understanding the individual and the family (Vassiliou, 1970). The ingroup is not broadly or abstractly defined as "people like me" as is the case in more modern western milieu. For the Greek it means "people who show concern for me and with whom I can form interdependence". This group then is not primarily based on blood ties, but

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includes friends and friends of friends, and is open to change according to the criteria of an on-going, active show of concern.

The discovery of this new reality of my cultural origins was illuminating with respect to how I had perceived my family and the confusion I had experienced with its attempts for integration into the modern context of Canada. And so I decided to stay in Greece for what, at that time, I had planned a year.

One other aspect that drew me to prolong my visit was the broader political context of Greece at that time. The Greek nation was under the rule of a horrendous dictatorship where democratic social rights had been done away with and all individuals with visions of liberty and justice were severely punished. Young people my age, particularly students, were slowly joining together in a common struggle to change their destiny. I soon came to understand that I yearned both to connect more deeply with my origins and to learn how they had influenced my personal development and to also contribute to the joint effort of bringing change to our broader sociopolitical system. This is where I belonged.

I enrolled in the American University where I met Vasso Vassiliou, Professor of Social and Clinical Psychology and Chair of the Department. I did not know then that Vasso would become my "scientific mother" and would have a major influence on my professional and personal development. Vasso Vassiliou had recently completed years of research on the Greek Traditional Family as compared to families of other cultures, particularly those of the US. Her collaboration with Harry Triandis on this widespread cross-cultural research resulted in the publishing of an important book of that time, *"The Analysis of Subjective Culture"* (Triandis, Vassiliou, Vassiliou, Tanaka & Shanmugam, 1972). This book illustrated in depth the need of social scientists to grasp a clear understanding of the way one experiences their social environment, to have a grounded knowledge of individual and group dynamics in the specific culture so as to develop effective means of therapeutic intervention. Subjective culture can be considered forefront of what today is the social constructionist perspective (McNamee & Gergen, 1992) and its focus on uncovering the ways in which individuals and groups participate in the construction of their perceived social reality.

The new knowledge transformed, not only my understanding and appreciation of my traditional origins, but also challenged my view of self and important others. I immediately requested to begin training at Anthropos and there met George Vassiliou, my trainer in systemic epistemology and practice, my mentor, one of my most influential teachers in life.

This was an exciting time, a crucial evolutionary period. Through my connection with the Vassilious and my new learning of systems science and its application to family therapy, I felt I was contributing to changing the field. Through my systemic understanding of broader social systems and my active involvement in the student movement against the dictatorship, I felt I was contributing to changing Greece.

Throughout my subsequent journey, my major "lighthouse" principles have been: the essentiality of systemic therapy being embedded—both in its theories and practice—in knowledge and experience of the socio–cultural context in order to understand and honour the meaning of perceptions, emotions, behaviours and relational patterns and, so, to effectively intervene; and secondly, that family ther-

apy is optimized through opening up its boundaries and integrating modalities that prove operative in intervening on the other interconnected systems levels (i.e. individual, group, community).

In this chapter I share with the readers a narrative of my scientific journey from its origins to its today's originality. Along the way I refer to professional "stations" in terms of theory and methods that I found significant and useful over the years. These include theoretical concepts such as the Multi-level, Multi-focal Model of Intervention, Subjective Culture and Cultural Chronos and the Multiplicity of Inner Voices.

The methods of application I refer to include Systemic Group Therapy and Experiential Training in Family Dynamics and Therapy.

Finally, I share aspects of the current state of my clinical practice through two illustrations where I have incorporated the attachment paradigm in systemic group therapy and the model of Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT) to my work with couples.

I throughout weave into the above more personal "stations" and experiences so as to illustrate their meaning to my development.

The Athenian Institute of Anthropos[1]: Early Learnings

George and Vasso Vassiliou, a husband and wife, psychiatrist—psychologist team founded the Anthropos Institute in 1963 upon their return to Greece after studying/working in the United States for many years.

According to Mony Elkaim, (personal communication, 2002) Anthropos was the first centre for the practice and training of family therapy in Europe. Moreover, from the Don. D. Jackson Archive studied by Wendel Rey (2015), it was one of the pioneering four Institutes to practice and train in systems and family therapy in the world.

Violeta Kaftatzi (1996) reports that the epistemological and theoretical approach of the Anthropos Institute synthesizes a systemic perspective with a humanistic one entailed in the ancient Greek philosophy of Diogenes and his search for Anthropos (Greek—refers to a whole integral human being).

George and Vasso had lived in the US during the period when systemic thinking was just beginning to emerge and flower. Their connection to the systemic approach—from the beginning—did not concern only family therapy, but was an integral part of their involvement in the then fore-fronting Social Psychiatric movement.

The Systemic-Dialectic approach they developed with its Multi-level, Multi-focal model concerned intervening at the various systems levels: the individual, couple, family, group, community (Vassiliou & Vassiliou, 1968).

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[1] *Author's Note*: My work over the years has developed largely within the context of on-going collaboration with colleagues at "Anthropos", Petros Polychronis (Director), Dionyssis Sakkas, Mina Todoulou and Georgos Gournas. Although this chapter is written from my personal perspective, I wish to honour our interdependent group process and thus will use "I", "We", "Our" interchangeably.

At that time the Systems epistemology among practitioners in the States was particularly applied to group therapy.

The Vassilious became close with pioneers both in family therapy—Nathan Ackerman, Paul Watzlawick, Virginia Satir, and others, and also systemic group therapy—William Grey, Jay Fidler, Helen Durkin, Adriane Beck and Yvonne Agazarian.

Yet, when trying to apply the learning and experience of their work in the US to Greek families of that period, the Vassilious confronted difficulties.

The dynamics of the Greek family were very different to that of the American and, consequently, many of the therapeutic techniques they had acquired proved ineffective. Through this initial disappointment, the Vassilious realized that research on the family in the context of our specific Greek culture was necessary so as to understand the milieu—our specific perceptions and attributes of roles, behaviours, emotional expression, communication and relational patterns.

During this early developmental stage of family therapy, practitioners were not sensitive to the cultural context of families and so did not appreciate in actual practice the influence it had on members and their patterns of relating. This is supported in Britt Krause's study of Gregory Bateson and his ideas of schismogenesis, feedback and other cybernetic concepts developed in his book *Naven*. In her article, *Reading Naven: Towards the Integration of Culture in Systemic Psychotherapy* (2007), Kraus attempts to answer why Naven, the text that puts forth Bateson's more cultural understandings, was left out by systemic psychotherapy. She explains that the exclusion of culture in systemic psychotherapy, was due to the fact that, by the time Bateson published *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* which was to become most famous in systemic psychotherapy (Bateson, 1972), the importance of complexity and cultural variation in the meaning aspect of communication, had *already* been left behind through the earlier unexpected publishing of *Pragmatics of Human Communication* by Watzlawick et al. (1967). And that this sudden publication, which took Bateson by dejecting surprise, led him to critically note (Bateson, 1972) how Pragmatics discussed communication in isolation from culture without any regard for its influence in communication. Krause concludes that the splitting of culture and emotions from other aspects of systemic thinking emerged very early in the life of the systemic psychotherapy discipline.

From this elucidating perpective, the Vassilious' insightful comprehension of the crucial importance of cultural patterns and their implications for therapy as described in their chapter *Milieu Specificity in Family Therapy*, published in Nathen Ackerman's early book *Family Therapy in Transition* (1970) can be appreciated today as pioneering work. This appreciation is also evident in the acknowledgement of Don Jackson that "Dr. Vassiliou's remarks are penetrating and his admonitions are well taken. In fact, I can find nothing to disagree with ... and am glad, for this reason, that I hope to study at his institute next year" (Jackson, 1967, p. 151).

Utilizing their acquired knowledge of the Greek milieu and family dynamics, the Vassilious integrated into their approach to family therapy the more psychodynamic work of Nathan Ackerman, Watzlawick's communication patterns, Minuchin's boundary structuring, extended family relations as described by Boszormenyi-Nagy, and Murray Bowen's work on differentiation. The conceptualization of family

therapy as education for change developed by Virginia Satir also formed a fundamental basis for their work.

The Multi-level/Multi-focal model of intervention so emerged. Intervening strategically to enhance effective family relations is here seen as an outcome of shifting the focus of intervention from one member of the family to another and shifting the level of intervention from one subsystem to the other and to the family system as a whole, so achieving the required restructuring of family patterns most effectively (Vassiliou & Vassiliou, 1982).

From the very early years this model included all modalities of therapeutic intervention. "It does not dichotomize them in either/or categories—for instance, individual therapy or family therapy or group therapy or psychodrama or community therapy. On the contrary, it actualizes all modalities, alternating or combining them in a Systemic/Dialectic way" (Vassiliou & Vassiliou, 1981, p. 216–217).

Intervention in the family system starts with a diagnostic exploratory family session. One or more members may then be invited to join a group therapy process so as to be provided with opportunities for individual differentiation and growth.

In other family cases, troubled couples and parents are invited to workshops which offer an understanding of the transition of family living from more traditional patterns of interaction, roles, values and ideologies to the ones needed for adjustment in the changing milieu. At the same time, children or adolescents of distressed families may enter peer groups aimed at their sensitization to family dynamics.

In the family sessions that followed, the new learnings and skills acquired through the participation of different family members in their groups is seen as corrective *anotropic* feedback for the family system and its evolutionary restructuring. (Anotropy is the term proposed by G. Vassiliou as more suitable for what has been known in the field as negentropy, 1981).

Theoretical Influences

One of the earlier theoretical frameworks relevant to our approach was that of Alvin Toffler. In his 1980 book, *The Third Wave*, Toffler conceives civilization as divided into three major phases, three societal waves—each wave developing its own ideology with which it explains reality, so pushing previous sociocultural realities aside. "Every civilization has a hidden code—a set of rules or principles that run through all its activities—that impacts change on all spheres of human life: social patterns, information patterns, power patterns, technology" (Toffler, 1980, p. 46).

The First wave—the agricultural time in society—a period with limited resources where survival was at stake. Life was organized around the extended family in small close knit and stable communities where one interacted with a small number of people.

The Second wave—the revolution of industrialization with its need for social mobility required individuation and brought an end to the large multigenerational, extended family—the nuclear family emerged. The individual became the basic social unit and through mass media, man's image/values changed and independence

became the basic goal. "Industrial capitalism needed a rationale for individualism… a free, independent individual. Each individual had rights…according to his or her own active efforts" (Toffler, 1980, p. 111).

Interpersonal relationships now entailed a set of transactions between individuals so changing behaviours based on friendship, kinship, or group allegiance. Husbands and wives began to speak of marital contracts.

The Third wave, the post-industrial society or the onset of the age of information particularly through the internet, brought possibilities for a vast number of relationships and abundant alternatives for satisfying personal needs. The decline of the nuclear family and the emergence in its place of a diversity of family forms followed thus changing families more in these years than in any previous century.

Other theorists later referred to this second and third period of societal development as "modernity". Foucault describes modernity as an era of questioning and rejection of tradition; with prioritization of individualism, freedom and formal equality—a movement from agrarianism toward capitalism and the market economy; industrialization, urbanization and secularization.

In his definition of modernity, German sociologist, Ulrich Beck (1992) includes much more the change of societal characteristics and normal biographies, changes in lifestyle and forms of love, change in the structures of power and influence, in the forms of political repression and participation, in views of reality and in the norms of knowledge—a much deeper process, which comprises and reshapes the entire social structure.

Still other theorists such as Lyotard understand modernity as a cultural condition characterized by constant change in the pursuit of progress, and goes on to argue that contemporary society moved into a literally *post-modern* phase distinct from modernity. Rapid on-going change culminated, becoming the status quo, *an end in itself* where the notion of certainty/truth became obsolete.

Others analyze the present as a development into a second, distinct phase that is though still "modernity": this has been conceptualized as "risk society" by Ulrich Beck (1992) and "liquid modernity" by Zygmunt Bauman (2000).

In the face of what he identifies as the human-made dangers of today's risk society, Beck introduces the idea of "reflexive modernization". He draws heavily on the concept of reflexivity as a new type of solidarity that offers a reconstructive counter balance to the postmodern paradigm and the loss of all previous sources of support with the rise of deconstructionism and individualization. Beck proposes the idea that, as a society examines itself, it in turn changes itself in the process.

Importantly relevant to our work is Beck's perception of individualism as an important consequence of social changes in late modernity and his stress on the reality that individuals are today increasingly required to construct their own lives and personal meaning.

Zygmunt Bauman (Bauman, Bertrando & Hanks, 2009) explains that the characteristics of today's 'liquid modernity' are the individuals' increasing feelings of uncertainty and ambivalence. It is a kind of chaotic continuation of modernity, where a person can shift from one social position to another in a fluid manner. Nomadism becomes a general trait of the 'liquid modern man' as he flows through

his own life like a tourist, changing places, jobs, spouses, values and sometimes more—such as political or sexual orientation—excluding himself from traditional networks of support.

The result is a normative mindset with emphasis on shifting rather than on staying—on provisional in lieu of permanent (or 'solid') commitment—a shifting style that can lead a person astray towards a prison of their own existential creation.

Bauman goes on to stress the consequent new burden of responsibility that fluid modernism places on the individual—namely that "traditional patterns need to be replaced by self-chosen ones" (Bauman, 2000, p. 8).

Extrapolating from the above ideas of both 'modernist' and 'post-modernist' thinkers we clearly understand that the period we are currently undergoing, characterized by exploding social change and ever-increasing complexity, has deepened the disruption and fragmentation of cultural unity and meaning in the lives of individuals, families and their support systems.

Not only has that which we knew to be true yesterday changed, but tomorrow is now unpredictable.

This unpredictability is made even more complex through cultural globalization and the process of international integration arising from the transmission of ideas, meanings and values highly diffused around the world by the internet and popular social media and international travel.

And although cultural globalization has increased the individual's ability to partake in extended social relations and cross-cultural contacts, it is accompanied by a decrease in the once face-to-face more traditional communities, and the recognition of their unique and meaningful patterns of relating. Yet, Fritjof Capra (1997, 2002) reports that, through their close contact with nature and their place in it, traditional cultures had what Gregory Batson called, "systemic wisdom" in terms of relationships, connectedness and context.

Furthermore, we can appreciate a term coined by Ronald Robertson (1995)—"glocalization"—which combines the idea of globalization with that of local considerations. It presents a potential response meant to offer protection against the more negative effects of globalization. Robertson focuses on a more psychosocial approach that stresses the importance of a clearly identified local cultural identity of the past with conscious personal choice of aspects, values and patterns to embody, while being open to permeation through global interactions.

In order to gather the necessary collective mental resources to tackle 'thinking globally and acting locally', Jeremy Rifkin (2010) elaborates that our existing modes of consciousness are structured for earlier eras of development that have faded away. In his book, *The Empathic Civilization*, Rifkin focuses on empathy and its ever-increasing role in our emotional and intellectual development, connecting empathy with the biological function of mirror neurons and the social value of altruism. He argues in favour of relationalism and describes the meaning of human existence as being *to enter into relationships*. Rifkin proposes empathic relationalism as the functional pattern in the race for global consciousness in a world in crises.

We see the above theoretical understandings of the broader social context very relevant to that of Greece—a society that went through a relatively short period of

industrialization and has been, and is still battling today, with a period of transition from traditional realities to modern and post modern ones. This context gives solid validation to how our approach views the needs of today's Anthropos (Greek—meaning the human being as a whole, whether female or male) and the psychosocial skills he/she is required to develop for a personally meaningful life—a life based on self-leading, self-regulating processes and personal choice, alongside skills of actualizing difference and cooperation with others—the necessary metaskills for '*Autonomy through and for Interdependence*' (Vassiliou, 1982).

This liberating but painful transforming process of designing the life of one's own entails the discovery of diverse inner voices, perceptions and emotions, many of which originate in previous sociocultural realities connected to and transmitted by intergenerational patterns.

A view of self as 'relational' (Gergen, 1991) is consequently essential and the crucial importance of reflexivity and inner dialogue becomes obvious.

Here, we are reminded of Bakhtin's inspiring study (1973) of Dostoyevsky's polyphonic characters and its influence on perceiving self as being a dialogue of multiple inner voices. Hermans (2001) refers to this multiplicity as the *dialogical self* and later, with Dimaggio (2004) goes on to elaborate on this concept as a synthesis of numerous and different 'subselves'.

In the wider area of systemic and family therapy, modern dialogical approaches such as those of Harlene Anderson, Tom Andersen, Jaakko Seikkula and Karl Tomm (Hoffman, 2002; McNamee & Gergen, 1992) emphasize the significance both of dialogue that opens up space for the emergence of the yet untold, and the internalization of external dialogue which allows new inner voices to be incorporated (Androutsopoulou, 2014). Karl Tomm (Hoyt & Madigan, 2001) regards self as constituted by an internalized community and the patterns of interactions among the members of that community.

In summary, it becomes evident that the creative processing and managing of today's cyclonic change and complexity imposes the inclusion of multiple perspectives which requires but also supports the *interactive–relational self*. Essentially, this favours a more differentiated Anthropos, an internally richer—cognitively and emotionally—human being, more open to relationships and ongoing self-development.

The fostering of these skills in personal differentiation and relating is considered an integral part of therapy.

"Cultural Chronos" and Relational Change

The concept of *cultural chronos*, initially developed by Vasso Vassiliou (Vassiliou, L.G., 1986) refers to patterns of relating within the context of sociocultural change and the subsequent multiple, diverse inner voices that contribute to interrelational difficulties. Within this perspective, the couple relationship can be conceptualized in "5 Chronos"— 5 periods of time.

In Fig. 12.1, the realities of the agrarian traditional milieu are represented in Time 1 (T1) where the basic goal was survival. The couple existed through the roles of mother and father within an extended family with open boundaries to the community. Spouses had a clear understanding of their division of roles—father the good provider and mother the raising of children and functioning of the home. Partners had "a back to back relationship" and although the exchange of more personal thoughts and emotions did not characterize their relationship, they supported each other through behaviours of their respective roles. The woman would seek emotional support in her difficulties in the next door female neighbor while men would exchange with other men of the community at the village coffee shop—the only then source of input regarding economy, etc. Through the son, the woman would gain social status since he would be the continuation of the family. The daughter was seen as belonging to the family of her future husband and would prepare herself by modeling after her mother (in traditional Greece there is a common saying of "I have one child and one daughter").

These traditional patterns of relating can be understood and honoured as functional only when placed in the broader social context of that period where the basic goal was survival.

Time 2 (T2) refers to the period of industrialization characterized by urbanization and social mobility. The closing of boundaries resulting in the evolution of the nuclear family deprived its members of past social support systems. The invasion of foreign values through mass media brings tensions to the couple and disrupts past views of partners' traditional roles. In this phase, the coalition of mother–child, particularly mother–son, becomes very durable, and is prioritized in family relations, a dynamic often leading to individual and family problems.

Time 3 (T3) sketches the furthering of industrialization - modernity - with its accentuated prominence on the individual and the goal of independence and self-actualization. Here, the manners of relating that couples had deployed so far become, in the most part, no longer effective and the volatile manners of partners' emotional expression often result in conflict and/or distance. On the social level, civil/political rights emerge and the care of others is now undertaken by welfare and social services.

Time 4 (T4) and Time 5 (T5) refer to the period of post-modernism or liquid modernity - the period characterized by an on-going tsunami of socio-technological change and permanent unpredictability. Thrown into previously untravelled relational waters without guidance, parnters' anxiety and uncertainty around relating intimately with each other increases. And, although they attempt to engage using their own personal wits, skill and dedication, in a time of constant distability, none of these bonds are guaranteed to last. Moreover, bonds today often tend to be tied loosly so they can be untied again, quickly and as emotionally effortless as possible, when circumstances change - as they surely will in our liquid modern society, over and over again. The uncanny frailty of human bonds, the feeling of insecurity that frailty inspires, and the conflicting human desire to connect and tighten bonds yet keeping them loose, are the principle predicaments that couples face in this contemporary period. So, as to grapple with the inherent fears of this predicament, partners
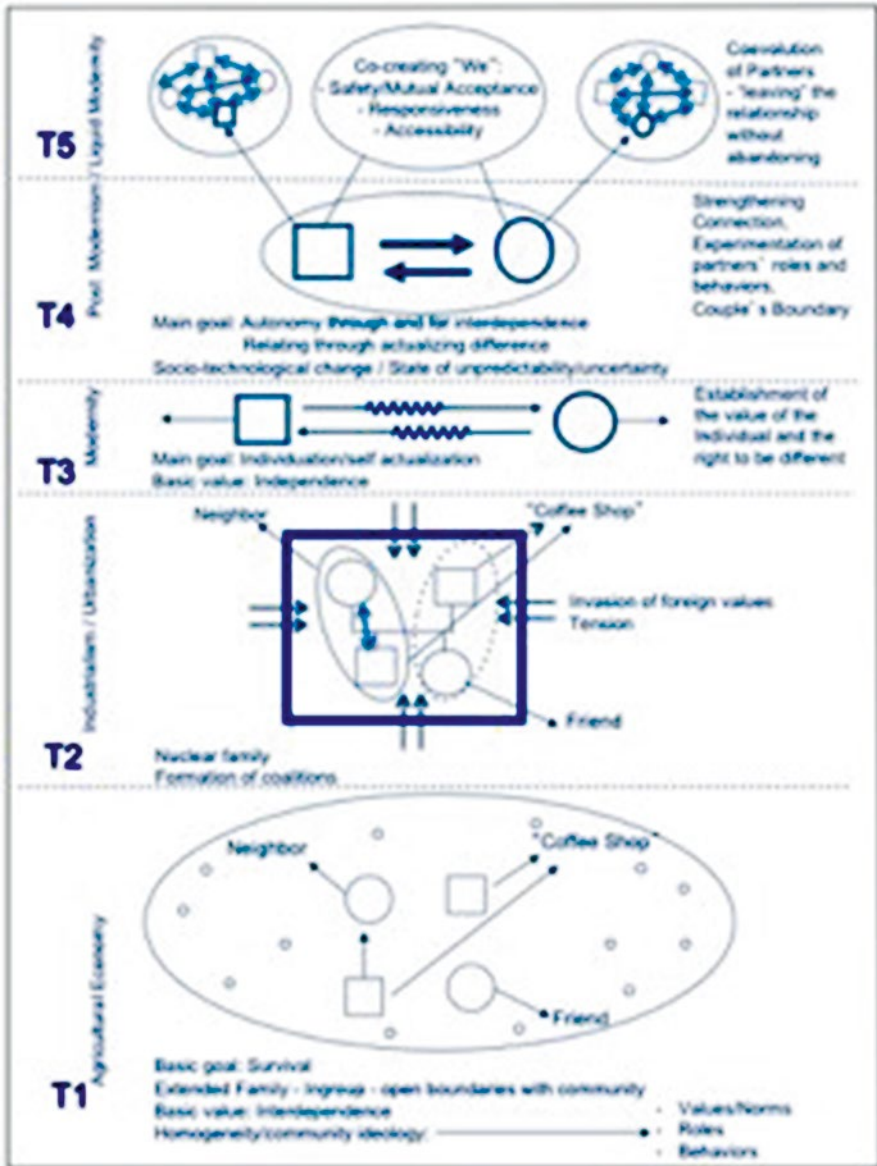
Fig. 12.1 Cultural chronos and relational change

need to develop skills in fostering their personal development while, at the same time, strengthening their connection. Serving *autonomy through and for interdependence* becomes even more prominent and is achieved through openness to experimentation of new roles, behaviors and emotional risk-taking.

As shown in time 5, developing these new relational skills nurtures the couple's need to co-create a "We" which is characterized by safety, mutual acceptance, accessibility and responsiveness. At this stage, partners are engaged in the co-evolutionary process which allows safe space for "leaving the relationship" to serve one's autonomy without abandoning the other.

A most important dimension of Cultural Chronos is that today's partners, even those younger in age, have unconsciously internalized diverse inner voices and relevant emotional experiences from each and all of the five time periods.

These prompt confusion in partners' inner dialogue and, in turn, their perceptions of the other and their patterns of relating. Thus, when interacting with each other, particularly in moments of tension, partners fluctuate among the different chronos and "an inner conversation cultural chitter-chatter" is experienced (Stephen Madigan, Yaletown Family Therapy Center, Vancouver, B.C., Canada—personal communication). Chitter-chatter intensifies couples' problems and contributes to escalating their distress and conflict. This collision of cultural voices can be seen as similar to what Gergen (1991) refers to as '*multiphrenia*', a condition whereby one is simultaneously drawn to multiple and conflicting directions.

When using cultural chronos in therapy and in relational enhancement workshops, partners discover that this dynamic is common to most couples in our current transitional sociocultural context. They resonate with a cacophony of inner emotional voices which often result in negative interaction patterns and they feel relieved by the validating acceptance that it is a norm in our every day life.

Through the cultural chronos concept, the therapist moves away from labeling the relating of the couple as pathological and understands their interaction cycle in the context of transition from traditional to modern and post-modern patterns of relating. The ground is then laid to assist each partner to develop skills in recognizing his/her multiple culturally defined inner voices and in accessing their underlying related emotions; skills in reflexivity, emotional regulation and inner dialogue—a process which facilitates emotional expression and the restructuring of their negative interaction patterns as a couple.

Systemic Group Therapy

As previously described, the process of clients discovering multiple inner voices and emotions and developing their skills in inner dialogue is optimized through integrating family therapy and client's participation in didactic Systemic Group Therapy.

The value of the group has been documented by many theorists and practitioners over the years. Today, with the advances in neuroscience, participation in small group processes can be viewed as affecting the neuroplasticity of the brain, i.e. our ability to change our brain's structure and function (Cosolino, 2006).

As Daniel Siegel (1999) describes, the factors necessary for the promotion of neuroplasticity are: (a) strong emotional bonds, (b) an environment rich in stimuli,

(c) learning through experience, (d) a state of safety which is characterized by cooperation, nurturance, positive reinforcement and a feeling of fairness. All these factors highlight the profound social nature of the human brain (Gournas, 2013).

The group's effectiveness can also be inferred from the writings of the narrative approach, which proposes 'story and re-story telling' of personal experiences so as to co-create new liberating narratives that foster a new meaning of life (White & Epston, 1990). Through the group members as *witnesses* of the alternative stories, the group process can be utilized in enhancing the development of new novel narratives and different personal identities.

I will illustrate this function of the group through a recent narrative shared by a member of a mixed-sex group comprised of eight members, aged 32–42 years, all initially referred to me for family or couple problems. The analogic tool used in this group was the Synallactic Collective Image Technique-SCIT (Vassiliou, 1981). This is essentially a cognitive-emotional tool that uses images in activating analogic processes, which facilitate the expression of personal stories. This is done in the three dimensions of time: in the past—through memories/stories; in the present—through narrating/sharing stories and related emotions while interacting in the here and now; and in the future—through members' reflections on the sequence and connection of the diverse shared narratives and the emerging new understanding of the group as a whole (Polychroni, Gournas & Sakkas, 2008).

Lella is a single 37 year old successful lawyer, living on her own in Athens and involved in a relationship with Dimitri. Her only brother to whom she was closely attached, committed suicide 10 years ago at the age of 24. From that time her family closed itself in and never openly expressed their emotions. Lella has been struggling to open up her emotions from her traumatic loss and make meaning out of its impact on her current partner relationship. She shared the following story.

"Last Sunday I was sitting in the airport waiting to return to Athens. I had spent the Christmas holidays with my parents at home in Thessaloniki where I had the time to relax and enjoy seeing my friends. I feel fulfilled from these holidays—I felt much lighter in my family's home. My outings with my friends, although many and intense, did not make me feel the urge to withdraw or drink too much. I still didn't express my feelings to Dimitris but I shared this difficulty with him and that I would like to be able to. At the airport I reflected on these days and how really different they were and I discovered that this was very much due to the group. When I felt less angry towards my parents, it was like I could hear Maria (fellow group member) trying to understand and connect with her mother. And I really felt that my parents are doing everything they think is best and so I didn't get so angry like I did all the previous years when I felt they didn't understand how I felt. When my anger faded, at times a sadness arose inside me and I thought about Eleni (fellow group member) and how she gets angry so that she doesn't feel her pain—so it's human.

When I was trying to open-up to Dimitris, Katerina (fellow group member) came to my mind and her joy when she succeeded in telling Niko how she felt. Also, Kostas (fellow group member) who is now able to clearly say what he wants and needs. I then got frightened that perhaps my change won't last for long but then I thought of Thanasi (past fellow group member), his joy and confidence during his last days

before his closure in the group, and so I felt optimistic. I still feel optimistic along with a little fear. The title I give to my story is *"Along with the others you can succeed"*.

Through Lella's narrative, we can see that incorporating group therapy in our systemic practice, fosters the discovery of one's multiple inner voices and develops skills in inner dialogue and emotional expresssion.

Experiential Training in Family Dynamics and Therapy

In reading the above, one may understand that according to our approach, training and therapy are viewed as different aspects of the same process and based on similar systemic principles. An example of our use of multiple inner voices and dialogue in the context of family therapy training is described below. A more detailed description of this training process is given by Polychroni and Gournas (2004).

With the goal of learning family dynamics, the trainees' group is asked to simulate a specific family incident, the scenario of which is selected by the trainer according to the specific systemic principle that is to be experienced (e.g. triangulation and boundering). The family may be one of various forms, i.e. single parent, multi-generational, homosexual couple etc.

Figure 12.2 illustrates the family as a system with permeable boundaries in interaction with voices from cultural chronos processes. Each member, with multiple inner voices, is seen as interacting with others at times through one prevailing voice and at other times through a synthesis of diverse voices attained by inner dialogue.

Thus, in training, each member/role in the simulated family is formed, *not by one*, but by 4–5 trainees. Each trainee represents an inner sub-self of the role with its own voice and emotional experience. So as to grasp the influence of cultural processes on the family, we often ask a small group of trainees to bring in the voices of the more traditional cultural chronos and another group to voice those from the modern and postmodern perspective.

Each sub-self is then invited to come in contact with the emotions/thoughts/perceptions/voices catalyzed by the incident and to share these with the other sub-selves of his/her role—throughout speaking in the first person I-position of that particular role. An inner dialogue of each role emerges. The trainer actualizes this inner dialogue to facilitate interpersonal and intergenerational family interaction so that the dynamics of the family as a whole emerge and are experienced by the trainees' group.

Trainees then de-role and form new small groups of four. The goal here is for the trainees to process the experience through their personal resonance (Elkaim, 2008), their own emotions/reflections and to share their learnings that emerged. As the level of safety evolves over the process of training, trainees open-up and more fully disclose their relevant personal experiences and their understanding about their own selves/roles/families.

The training group is in the end brought together in full circle. Small group reports are shared and are actualized as the inner voices at a higher level of the system,
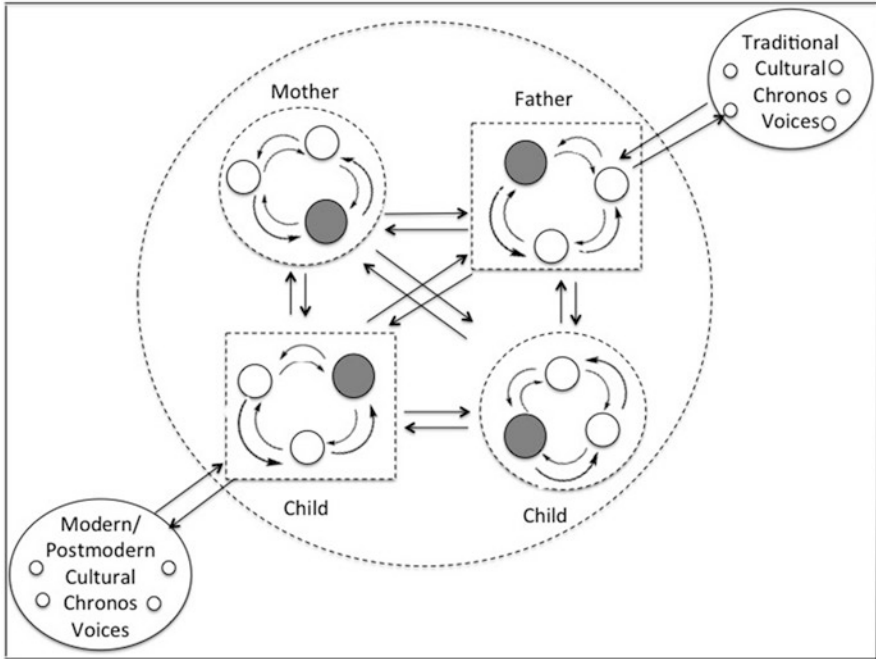
Fig. 12.2 Family simulation in experiential training: multiple inner voices and family relations in the context of cultural transition

i.e. the group as a whole. A collective narrative emerges which the trainer reflects back to the group, relating the overall training experience to principles of Anthropos and the family as a living system in continuous interaction with an ever-changing broader environment and to the implications/applications for therapy.

The feedback from a group of trainees illustrates the manner in which this method of training is experienced 'from the inside out': "Our experience was unique and at the same time enlightening. What impressed us immensely was the revelation of multiple voices. Particularly those that we have internalized without being aware of it. We could feel the different emotions inside each family role. We resonate with many of them. This complexity was illuminating but also frightening. But the fact that the different narratives in the exercise exposed common underlying emotional needs was relieving for all of us. And the common narrative we co-created together in the large plenary group revealed connections among all members of our group that before were hidden. This was like an embodying experience which at the beginning was surprising. Later we realized that indeed we are all members of one connected process and that what connects us as members of the whole and as human beings is much more than what separates us" (Systemic Institute of Cyprus, Training group, 2015).

Current Clinical Practice

Approximately 8 years ago, I was personally engrossed in a specific stage of our family life cycle—that of launching our adult children and moving on (Carter & McGoldrick, 1989). The stress I experienced by the inherent transition of this phase and the emotional upheaval it brought to my relationship with my spouse was unexpectedly intense.

I sincerely attempted to practice what I had been successfully preaching to so many couples for so many years, but was not fully content—something was missing. The need to make sense out of my experience brought me to searching for new developments in the field of couple therapy and in the process I discovered the enlightening framework of attachment.

In the development of the systemic field, we seem to have forgotten John Bowlby. We classically placed him in the category of psychoanalyst and viewed the application of his attachment theory as limited to the relationship between parent and young child. Yet, in his report to the International Society for the Systems Sciences, G. Metcalf (2010) proclaims that we need to rediscover Bowlby as a systems scientist. Metcalf describes in detail Bowlby's use of aspects of cybernetics control theory as part of his attachment theory and his systemic focus on making sense of the patterns of organization he perceived in relationships.

Attachment theory is easily integrated in to our systemic approach since it focuses both on self and system and views individuals' construction of self in the context of their closest relationships.

Yet, according to the more traditional systemic perspective, emotion, the primary signaling system that organizes interactions of attachment, was generally viewed as an individual phenomenon that does not need to be primed in order to modify interactions. "…emotion, if discussed at all, was seen mostly in terms of ventilation and catharsis and was generally avoided in couple therapy sessions" (Mahoney, 1991, p. 186). Emotion was thus often perceived as part of the problem of distress, rather than as part of the solution. This led our field to an artificial dichotomy of the '*within*' emotional experience of partners and their '*between*' p'rocesses of relating. And even though clinicians such as Virginia Satir (Satir & Baldwin, 1984) had early formulated a number of relevent interventions, until recently there was no articulated model of couple therapy that combines a focus on inner realities and outer systemic interaction patterns.

Neuroscience research has today come to support attachment and primary emotional experiences by showing us that human's innate wiring to connect with others is primarily influenced by our early environment and that right hemisphere functioning from birth—responsible for much of our emotional experience—is most impacted by parental attunement or lack thereof (Fishbane, 2013). It is now evident that, in contrast to explicit memory, preverbal implicit memories register our early life experiences. These experiences are unconsciously carried into our current interpersonal interactions and are particularly potent in our most intimate relationships.

Their experimental and observational studies on the effect of attachment on perceptions of social support brought Collins and Feeney (2004) to conclude that

adults' desire for comfort and support should not be regarded as childish or immature dependence; instead, it should be respected as being an intrinsic part of human nature that contributes to personal health and well-being. John Bowlby had earlier advised that "all of us, *from cradle to grave,* are happiest when life is organized as a series of excursions, long or short, from the secure base provided by our attachment figure(s). Dependency is an innate healthy part of your being, not something that we overcome growing up" (Bowlby, 1988, p. 62).

Focusing specifically on distressed interactions between adult partners, it now seems that the core elements of such interactions are 'absorbing states of negative emotions' which lead to rigid negative interaction patterns repeated over time. "The picture that seems to emerge…is that the power of rigid negative interaction patterns, with which all systemic therapists are familiar, is not simply about interpersonal homeostasis or systemic coherence. It is primed and maintained by powerful, attachment-related affect that reflects our basic sense of security in the world, and whether we can get others to respond to our needs. In distressed systems, negative patterns of interaction, and patterns of processing and/or regulating negative affect, become "stuck"—reciprocally determining and self-reinforcing" (Johnson, 1998, p.3).

It becomes clear that if we are to fully actualize our systemic principles that focus on context and wholeness, we need to integrate intrapsychic realities (i.e. emotional experience and how it is constructed and processed) and utilize them as feedback loops into couples' patterns of relating. In this way, we gain a whole picture and are able to comprehend distressed interactions and more effectively restructure them.

I was grateful for this new enriching knowledge—it offered me novel insight into my emotions and personal needs from my partner relationship during the launching of our children. It also opened up a new dimension for my clinical practice with couples. I thus went on to study and specialize in Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT) and have since incorporated this approach in my work with couples and families and in training.

The EFT model was first presented and tested in the early 1980s (Johnson & Greenberg, 1985). Developed primarily by Susan Johnson (2004), EFT is a brief integrative approach to couples that focuses on helping partners in close relationships co-create secure attachment bonds. EFT's substantial body of research, both in terms of outcome and process, has illustrated its effectiveness (Johnson & Brubacher, 2016). The model has been applied and validated for different psychological problems and cultural contexts of couples (Furrow, Johnson & Bradley, 2011) and has now also been shown to be effective in family therapy (Stavrianopoulos, Faller & Furrow, 2014).

In practice EFT integrates—within a systemic approach to reciprocally reinforcing patterns of interaction—an attachment orientation to intimate adult relationships and an experiential humanistic perspective that values emotions.

In trying to connect, distressed couples get caught in negative repetitive sequences of interaction where partners express secondary emotions—the more reactive emotions such as anger, jealousy, resentment, and frustration—rather than primary emotions—the deeper, more vulnerable emotions of sadness, hurt, fear and loneliness.

The EFT therapist focuses, and works very deeply on the emotional responses underlying the interactional patterns and uses each of these—the emotion and interaction—to influence and recreate the other in the 'here-and-now' of the therapy session. The therapist helps partners access, explore and reprocess the more vulnerable emotions, which they usually avoid or disregard and so fosters the restructuring of new interactional patterns.

According to Lebow et al. (2012), the EFT therapist is a process consultant, helping partners expand constricted and constricting inner emotional realities and interactional responses, thereby shifting rigid interactions into responses that foster resilience and secure connection.

Over the years, along with the fundamental attachment base, what never ceases to intrigue and move me with the EFT model is the potency of its therapeutic moves. The therapist engages on an emotional level with the couple through validating each partner's position and emotions in their interactive "dance". Through simple - slow - soft interventions, honoring and repeating the clients' own words and images, a unique therapeutic attunement with each partner is attained. Behaviors, perceptions/attributions and reactive secondary emotions are validated and reframed in terms of unmet attachment needs. This process is extremely powerful in accessing partners' underlying primary or more vulnerable emotions which, through the span of therapy, they are assisted to share with each other. In my experience, we as therapists are permitted in this way to enter and in depth touch upon an essential aspect of human nature, that of our inherent need and yearning for emotional connection and the integral difficulties and fears this entails.

As a brief illustration of the EFT model in my work, I will describe a couple I saw in a live consultation to a couple therapist[2] who is currently in the process of learning the model. Anna (39) and Georgos (39) have been together for 1 year. They had not planned to marry but recently did so due to Anna's unexpected pregnancy. They requested couple therapy since they were fighting quite often and Anna was worried about bringing a child into their relationship. The couple therapist shared that she was having difficulty in forming an alliance with Georgos and asked for my consultation. As she described, "Georgos talks on and on about how helpful and reliable he is and that Anna has no reason to worry."

Very quickly in the process of the session cultural chronos confusion was quite evident. This was particularly manifested in Georgos, a young man raised in a small city in northern Greece. As a more traditional man, Georgos focused on the task of being a good provider and trying to 'fix the problem'. He would withdraw from discussing Anna's worries with her, characterizing them as exaggeration; any emotions such as sadness that would arise from not having the acceptance and appreciation he needed from his partner were avoided and, as he expressed, "I delete and try again." He manifested extreme anxiety from not succeeding, in spite of all his many efforts to convince his wife of his value and reliability, so as to help her not be afraid of the new-coming realities their child would bring. Anna, on the other hand, felt

insecure from Georgos dismissing her worries, she felt she was not seen and feared that Georgos was in the relationship because of the pregnancy. She experienced an underlying fear of abandonment (prompted by her attachment history with her primary attachment figure). Rather than express these vulnerable primary emotions, Anna would complain, criticize, become angry and push Georgos away. Although Georgos would then feel sadness and despair of being rejected by his spouse (emotions he accessed as the session progressed) he would not express them, but rather "delete" and either leave the conversation so that things would not become worse or defend himself and try to convince Anna of his reliability and worth.

Figure 12.3 portrays the inner emotional realities and interactional cycle of Anna and Georgos in the format first introduced by fellow EFT trainer, Scott Woolley (2011). The 'infinity loop' concept illustrates the layers embedded in the interactions of distressed couples. As can be seen, the couple's negative pattern of 'criticize/demand' responded to by 'defend/distance' is generated by inner attachment related affect is presented. In this case, the use of slow, soft, repetitive validation of each partner's perceptions and positions in the relationship was particularly crucial in accessing their underlying emotions and attachment needs—particularly with Georgos who in the session acquired a felt sense of his more primary emotions and experienced in vivo - through enactments - how their expression softened his wife's response into one of more appreciation and acceptance.
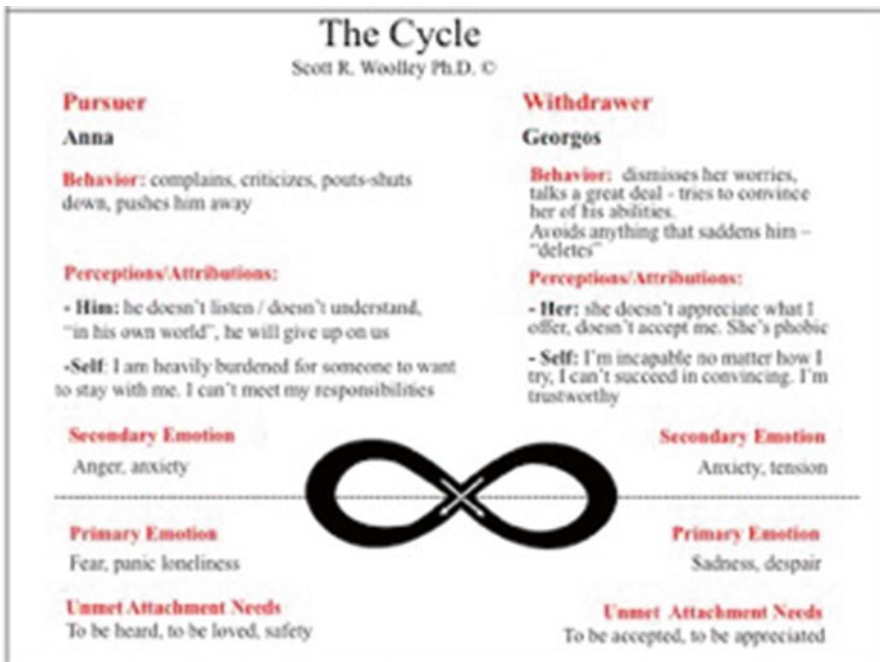
The Cycle
Scott R. Woolley Ph.D. ©

Pursuer
Anna

Behavior: complains, criticizes, pouts-shuts down, pushes him away

Perceptions/Attributions:

- **Him:** he doesn't listen / doesn't understand, "in his own world", he will give up on us

- **Self:** I am heavily burdened for someone to want to stay with me. I can't meet my responsibilities

Secondary Emotion
Anger, anxiety

Primary Emotion
Fear, panic loneliness

Unmet Attachment Needs
To be heard, to be loved, safety

Withdrawer
Georgos

Behavior: dismisses her worries, talks a great deal - tries to convince her of his abilities.
Avoids anything that saddens him – "deletes"

Perceptions/Attributions:

- **Her:** she doesn't appreciate what I offer, doesn't accept me. She's phobic

- **Self:** I'm incapable no matter how I try, I can't succeed in convincing. I'm trustworthy

Secondary Emotion
Anxiety, tension

Primary Emotion
Sadness, despair

Unmet Attachment Needs
To be accepted, to be appreciated

Fig. 12.3 Couple's Negative Interaction Cycle

Through this experience, their therapist now had a map of the territory of this couple's negative pattern, primary emotions and underlying attachment yearnings and could go on to use her EFT knowledge and interventions in her further work with them.

The incorporation of attachment and the EFT model has also affected the manner in which I conduct Multiple Couple Therapy Groups.

A number of therapists today have referred to the use of the attachment framework in group therapy (Flores, 2010). As individuals interact in the group, "they rely on their previous attachment experiences to manage group processes, meet internal needs and cope with their emotions. Their internal representation of self and others and emotion-regulating strategies are automatically triggered in the group. The therapist must create a safe environment where individuals can explore these implicit attachment-based processes as they are activated in the group sessions. Through feedback from the group and the therapist, members explore their current emotional and relational difficulties in the here-and-now of the group process, allowing for corrective emotional experiences that contradict attachment failures and ultimately facilitate more attachment security" (Marmarosh, Markin & Spiegel, 2013, p. 4).

This process is particularly potent in couples' group therapy, where partners have the opportunity to experience each others' efforts in self exploration and attachment based emotions triggered by their relationship.

Along with the use of the Synallactic Collective Image Technique (SCIT), I have devised specific inner dialogue exercises used to foster partners' accessing of primary emotions and attachment needs and other experiential tasks that guide couples in restructuring their relational patterns. Four to five couples embark on a group journey where they are guided in discovering the underlying emotional realities of their relationships while at the same time being engaged in the group process. Through the group experience partners gain an understanding of the nature of adult love and realize that the disconnection and distress they experience is common to all couples and can be transformed.

Each couple is asked to individually draw an image symbolizing an emotion he/she is experiencing when entering in the group. The group votes on which couple's drawings they wish to focus on in that session. Each partner is then invited to allow the selected images to guide him/her in recalling a memory/story in the life of their relationship. Each couple then goes on to share their stories with the group. Interaction among the couples follows with mutual sharing of resonant experiences and expression of emotions that emerge in the process.

The chosen couple's images of a specific group session can be seen in Fig. 12.4.

I will here only refer to the collective narrative and title of the group experience that emerged through the process of interaction at the end of the session. The stories/memories of each couple, important for understanding the basis on which this collective narrative emerged, can be found in the sequence they were presented in the group in Appendix 1.

Fig. 12.4 Drawings from Couples' Group Therapy: "Searching for Connection Through Forces of Conflict"
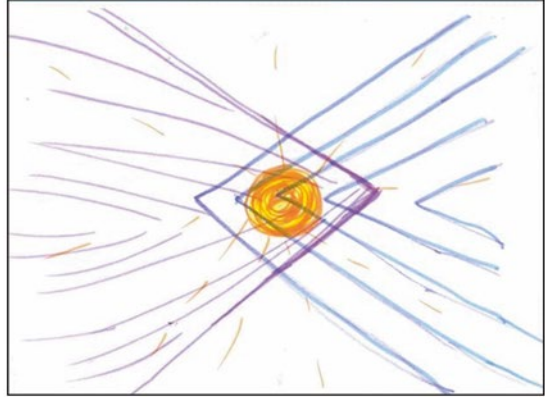
Title: "Searching for connection through forces in conflict"

Collective narrative: "When we get into conflict with our spouse we have difficulty in expressing our more vulnerable feelings. If though we take the risk and share our difficulties and fears openly, we feel relieved and come closer to our partner, united together in an upward direction. And then, in spite of previous obstacles, we feel intimacy and love. Yet, there are many other times when relating with each other becomes overwhelming, frustrating and sad. It's at those times that we experience a great deal of uncertainty and question in which direction to turn—perhaps just cut off the relationship. But then, when we open up space to hear ourselves more deeply like we hear the others in the group, we realize how a renaissance of our relationship emerges—when we allow ourselves to reach the sadness, pain and loneliness from having lost our connection and express these feelings to our partner without criticism. So, although we still have times of collision and upheaval and experience fear and tension in our relationship, we are also optimistic of our life's path together. We feel relief, hope, love and less worry in this upward development".

Personal Closing Reflections

I hope in this chapter to have succeeded in transporting to the readers, the importance for us as therapists to have a grounded understanding of the sociocultural context of the couples and families we offer our services to. This becomes more prominently crucial in an age where social mobility, immigration and refugee families are rapidly increasing.

As family therapists, we need to open our boundaries as a discipline to include other modalities that have proven useful in intervening on the different levels of systems. We will in this way '*go back to the future*' and emerge again as systemic practitioners.

Furthermore, understanding attachment and working more deeply on inner emotional realities underlying interaction patterns, can transform our clinical practice with couples and families and empower us as therapists.

Today, the attachment perspective is slowly being integrated in systemic couple and family therapy in the field in Europe. Important contributions being made include those from colleagues of the EFTA "family". My fellow EFTA Board Member from Italy, Rodolfo de Bernart, the new president of the International Association for the Study of Attachment (Dilorenzo, 2015), is currently attempting to utilize knowledge of attachment strategies in family assessment and treatment. Arlene Vetere, former president of EFTA from the UK and co-author in the present book (Chapter 9), has focused on narratives of attachment in relation to families and violence. Emotionally Focused Therapy is thriving in the various European countries through the work of many systemic family therapists. Among them, Barbara Kohnstamm, past EFTA Board member and cherished friend from the Netherlands who first introduced me to EFT, is conducting novel applications of the model with her passion for therapy and experiential supervision (Vetere & Stratton, 2016).

On a personal level, as I enter my later years, I am now involved in applying the principles I have elaborated in this chapter, in an area which comes 'full circle' in my life—perhaps this is a common process for all of us, a living process.

I started out as an immigrant returning to the homeland in search of personal and professional meaning through my training. And now, within the new reality of my homeland, with its overwhelming incoming wave of despaired individuals and families searching for new horizons, I am involved in training immigrants and refugees to become cultural mediators to offer their supportive services to the families of their people.

Using the knowledge and experience I have acquired over the years—subjective culture, cultural chronos and multiplicity of inner voices, the supporting process of groups in developing reflexivity and inner dialogue with their power to foster resilience, and the fundamental human need to feel emotionally connected, safe and loved—I hope to offer a small pebble in us co-creating an empathic civilization where, as Gregory Bateson has taught us, '*difference makes the difference.*'

Appendix 1

Partners' Recollections/Stories: Couples' Group (May 2015)

Couple A: Ioanna

A few days ago, I was very sad because my communication with Mihalis wasn't good at all. We had come against one another because I asked him to help me with our son in order for me to be able to go to some seminars and he only saw his own needs. That evening we discussed it and I told him that I can't tolerate one aspect of his character (I have to say here that I had great difficulty and fear to tell him that) and immediately after that I told him about my difficulty of saying this and my fear that he would not understand what I told him. I immediately felt relieved, freer and I saw that Mihalis was close to me.

   At the beginning I felt fear and desperation. Now I feel freedom.
   Title: "Connected in upward motion"

Couple A: Mihalis

On the images I see powers that are connected and have common traits—but uncommon ones as well—powers that wobble. There is though a centre core.

   I remember when Ioanna and I were together on a trip in Egypt and we were climbing down the Sinai mountain. I felt love then and now hope when I remember.

   Title: "Despite the obstacles"

Couple B: Anastasia

I remember an incident a few days ago, when we were on holidays. The atmosphere between us hadn't been good for a while now but both of us were making an effort, or at least that's what I thought. One afternoon I started a conversation and Nikos said that he hasn't seen any change in me, no effort on my part and that all the years we have been together, we have never been well.

   I felt all the effort that I thought I was making was ruined and this burdened me. We said many things to each other, which made my confusion even bigger.

   I felt very frustrated and now I feel sadness.
   Title: "Which will be the direction of the ball?"

Couple B: Nikos

I see two forces colliding and finally following an upward direction. It reminds me of last week when we were away on holidays. Following consecutive "battles" and difficult times, Anastasia asked me when we return to Athens to find a place of my

own to stay and that she takes the responsibility to put an end to this relationship that isn't going anywhere anymore.

The previous day and while we were both in a good mood, she had gone for a walk and while I was waiting for her, I was reading my book. When she returned I was happy to see her and I felt that there was potential for us. But when she looked at our son and again noted that he had gained weight lately, she told me that I must agree with her and start telling him that he has to stop eating so many sweets. We disagreed and we didn't talk any further …

The next day she asked me to separate. I stayed alone on the beach for a long time trying to think how our lives will be. I felt anxious, stress and sadness. I cried very carefully because I didn't want her to see me.

After quite some time, I went to her and, with difficulty, I told her that we should wait one more week in order to come back to the group and decide after that.

She accepted and so here we are with that deadline hanging in the air…

I'm anxious about what is going to happen but without stress now because I think that she may be right and that only by breaking something can we fix it from the beginning.

Title: "Renaissance"

Couple C: Eleni

I see a sun rising and it's getting bigger and more luminous.

It reminds me of my relationship with my husband and our journey up to now. Yesterday morning, specifically, I said at breakfast: I can only imagine how much you may be suffering and how troubled you are lately, since you are at home but you don't seem to be here. When you return from work you are either on the phone, the couch, the TV or on the computer.

I told him that I say this with sadness and pain, without any criticizing mood. I feel like I have an angel next to me and I can't even enjoy him. He told me that he does many things in order not to think. I asked him if it crosses his mind that I might be feeling lonely. And then he told me that I don't support him as well. And we started to talk and feel each other.

At the beginning I felt lonely.

Now I feel some optimism because we talked.

Title: "Life's Path"

Couple C: Yiannis

I see a collision and then calmness, restoration and development of upward direction.

It reminds me of the upheaval we had in our house this morning when our son was leaving for camp. We talked about this with Eleni.

Then I felt little bit of fear, tension and worry, but now I feel relief, hope and love.

Title: "The development upwards"

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