Disruptions from the Periphery

From EGATIN to IGTAIN?

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(I will be working further on this in order to put it into the Group Analytic Journal)

Processes of Inclusion and Exclusion in EGATIN & Other Group Analytic Training Institutions

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The current group analytic training in India is accredited by the International Courses Committee (ICC) of the Institute of Group Analysis, London (henceforth, IGA). As our graduates are keen to join the international community, it means that Group Analysis India has to also to meet the requirements of EGATIN as well as the IGA. As convenor of a yet to be completed training, I am speaking to you from the vantage point of an outsider. An outsider knocking on the door of EGATIN, asking to be let in.

The IGA and EGATIN position themselves as guardians of standards that I/we need to meet before I/we am/are granted entry. They think of themselves as rational scientific entities that have reasoned their way to a rational consensus about what the minimal standards are, why they make sense, and why they are necessary.

No doubt this is true. However, I will argue that many standards are in fact arbitrary born of precedence and practicality, rather than theoretical reason. This is important because these standards are what drive the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion.

As we were preparing to start our training, we thought to invite our Serbian colleague and friend, Tija Despotovic, to join our staff group. Whilst the ICC itself did not object to this, higher authorities at the IGA had previously declared that IGA trainings should be staffed only by IGA graduates. So the answer was no.

But when it was discovered that Tija had been a student on the very first training in Serbia, and that her trainers had been group analysts from London, she was allowed to join us.

This little story gives us a glimpse of the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion that police the boundaries of group analytic institutions. It so happens that these mechanisms are same as those utilized by the processes of racialization. Depending on the outcome that is desired, racialized discourses use one of two strategies to construct a racialized ‘us’ vs a racialized ‘them’, these being *Lineage* and *Typology*.

Lineage works on the blood-line principle: to be one of us, you need to be born from one of us. You have to be born of Royal blood to be a Royal – else you are a commoner.

Typology works on the principle: you count as one of us if you are of the same ‘type’ as us. For example, Whites everywhere on the planet are members of the White Race, whatever their lineages.

Depending on the outcome that is desired, on some occasions racialized discourses utilize lineage, and on other occasions it finds that typology produces the differentiations that are desired. It tends to be the case that the divisions are produced in such a way that they meet the needs and interests of the more powerful. I think that this is also true of our group analytic institutions, as I will go onto explain.

Clearly, despite Tija being the same *type* as ‘us’, a fellow group analyst, was not sufficient for the IGA; the IGA required her to be connected by lineage to be accepted on an IGA course.

It turns out that *Lineage* has played a critical role in the formation and proliferation of group analytic institutions.

## Lineage

The story starts of course in London and with Foulkes. The first generation of group analysts, Malcom Pines and so on, were never formally trained. They were more like apostles and disciples. They could call themselves group analysts by virtue of having touched the hem of Foulkes’ garment.

When this first generation started to train others, they became *the* authority of group analysis. At the same moment they promoted themselves into a new category, *training group analysts*. It was in this way that the priestly caste of group analysis came to be created. The IGA only recognizes those who have been trained by a group analyst who had been trained by a group analyst who had touched the hem of Foulkes’ gown. I am a group analyst by virtue of the fact that my group analyst was Liesel Hearst who herself had received her knowledge directly from Foulkes. It is in this way, through lineage, that I come to embody the authority that is Foulkes, and can pass it on to later generations.

## Creating the Gold Standard

From the very first days it was a requirement for trainees to attend a twice weekly group conducted by a training group analyst. The rationale being that a twice week therapy was likely to penetrate deeper than a once weekly therapy. There is true.

But why twice weekly and not three times or five times a week? I think one reason had to do with group analysis’ relationship with psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis looks down on once weekly treatment, calling it psychotherapy. Group Analysis wanted to associate itself with the prestige of psychoanalysis. And so, anything more than a once-weekly treatment meant that the modality could call itself group *analysis* rather than group *therapy*.

The significance of frequency becomes clear when we look at two group analytic trainings that IGA group analysts started in London, at The Westminster Pastoral Foundation and Goldsmith’s College. The content and structure of those trainings were almost identical to the training at the IGA, apart from one key fact: trainees attended a once weekly rather than a twice weekly group. Because of this, their qualification was Group *Psychotherapist*, not Group *Analyst*.

Anyhow, the requirement to participate in a twice weekly group became the gold standard of group analytic training. Further, it had to be a proper stranger patient group that the trainee joined. This gold standard was totally non-negotiable for many years.

## IGA: The First Disruption

But then, group analysts from London started a new kind of training at the periphery, far far away in Manchester. It was a block training, the format of which immediately broke several of the cardinal rules. First, the therapy group was constituted entirely of trainees; and second, the therapy groups were not weekly, but a month’s worth of therapy packed into one weekend a month. The reason for the new structure had to do with pragmatics and practicalities, rather than theoretical reasoning. The only way a training could take place in the North of England, was for group analysts based in London to travel there. And they could only do this at weekends because of their weekly clinical practices. It was the best that could be managed in difficult circumstances.

But everyone agreed that this ‘best in a difficult circumstance’ could not be as good as the gold standard *weekly* training in London. Therefore, the group analysts produced by Manchester were *obviously* copper rather than gold. And so, for many years Manchester graduates were barred from becoming full members of the IGA. I think their qualification was a ‘Diploma’. Full membership of the IGA was the privilege of real group analysts who had been in the weekly London training.

As the numbers of group analysts being produced at the periphery in Manchester grew, they took to militating, wanting parity with London group analysts. London resisted saying this would dilute the gold standard. London eventually succumbed. Henceforth, the monthly block Manchester training had equivalence with the weekly London training. The rationale for equivalence was ‘intensity’. It was claimed that the intensity of groups taking place over a weekend was somehow equivalent to the intensity of treatment produced by twice weekly groups. In this way, the old gold standard that was previously thought to be unchangeable, was now changed into a different gold standard.

Some IGA members are of the opinion that the new gold standard is fairer and more inclusive, whilst others continue to look down on block trainings as lesser in some way.

There are several points I want to underline.

Although the argument about equivalence had been *procedurally* settled, it actually remains deeply problematic. For example, I cannot eat the equivalent of a month’s worth of food over a weekend. I simply could not digest it. The two situations are not equivalent by any stretch of the imagination. The statement of equivalence is an administrative stratagem, not a factual reality. The gold standard was modified through political agitation from the periphery, the ‘science’ was a post hoc justification for the change.

Also note, initially Manchester was excluded through typology: saying that block and weekly trainings were different types of training. When Manchester was included, it was on the basis of lineage, in that it was London that had trained Manchester.

It was this precedence, the legitimation of block trainings in the UK, that fuelled the proliferation of group analytic trainings on the European mainland, and this in turn eventually necessitated the formation of EGATIN.

## EGATIN

It seems to me, that the mechanism of inclusion and exclusion that EGATIN *ought* to rely on is that of typology. As long as a training is group analytic, then it ought to be able to be a member of EGATIN. However, it turns out that lineage continues to play a major role in the legitimation of trainings (with one or two exceptions).

The first trainings on mainland Europe became established through two routes. One route consisted of UK group analysts travelling to other countries where they initiated the first training (as in Serbia). The other route, Zoe Voyatzaki tells us had to do with the ‘non-English graduates of the IGA, who, following the completion of their training in London, returned to their home countries and promoted group-analytic practice’ p.1

In this case most roads lead back not to Rome, but London.

But there were also group analytic trainings that began in other ways: For example, the ones in Italy, which sprang up entirely independently of London. Lineage played no part in the genesis of group analysis in Italy. Therefore, Italian group analytic trainings are members of EGATIN solely by virtue of typology.

However, I think that if the first version of the Italian training asked to join EGATIN today, it would be excluded as it does not meet today’s EGATIN’s Essential Training Standards. The Italian trainings are not alone. Many of the institutions that first created EGATIN would have failed to meet today’s training standards and requirements.

## Mission Creep of Training Standards

It is the case generally, that over time institutions of all kinds tend to ramp up their entry requirements. Those who manage to get into the institution, tend to raise the threshold and make it more difficult for the next generations to become members of that institution. The rationale is always standards, and so it is always made to look like an improvement. In this way there is a steady mission creep regarding requirements and standards. Not only is more and more required, what is required becomes more stringently required. Criteria for inclusion become increasingly restrictive.

It is those at the centre, the ‘Established’ as Norbert Elias would have said, it is they who have the power to determine what standards should be met by the ‘Outsiders’, before they can join the Established. The conditions that the Established require the Outsiders to meet, are always more than the Established ever had to. The primary function of criteria becomes that of exclusion rather than inclusion.

All it took for the very first generation to call themselves group analysts was simply that they were in a position to have conversations with Foulkes. When they started a formal training, they established the first threshold. It began with the familiar tripartite structure, personal group therapy, supervised practice and theory seminars. Over time, a requirement to have a year’s placement in a psychiatric setting was added. This was followed by a further requirement for trainees to see two patients in individual therapy under supervision for a year. The requirement to write one paper at the conclusion of the training was ramped up to two. Today, trainees are required to run two groups under supervision; in my time one group was sufficient. And so on.

And then, having finally qualified as a group analyst, one has to go through further hoops to join the priestly caste in order to become a training group analyst.

My point is not to argue whether these changes are reasonable or not, but to show how the gold standard is being continually modified, and modified in ways so that it becomes heavier and heavier for each new generation.

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Aside:

The mission creep is also evident in other areas. For example, previously supervisors were simply therapists who had had more experience than those they were supervising. Now you have to do a further training to learn how to supervise and gain a certificate to demonstrate competence. We have not got there yet, but some other psychotherapy organizations offer even additional layers, a training in how to deliver a training in supervision. And so on.

Mission creep means that the field is becoming increasingly restricted and overly regulated, with requirements to do more and more trainings and collect more and more certificates.

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EGATIN’s ‘Essential Training Standards’ have become bloated through mission creep. Today it consists of something between 50 to 100 statements about what is thought to be essential.

Although all this is justified by claiming that the increased requirements are in the service of standards and protecting the client, I think that it has more to do with generating hierarchies in order to be able to position oneself as a member of the ruling elite.

## The Most Recent and Most Formidable Disruption

Everything was thrown up in the air in 2020 with the arrival of Covid and the global lockdown. Before covid, I had thought that the idea of on-line therapy was ridiculous.

But then, like everyone else, I was suddenly doing something that had previously been unthinkable, conducting psychotherapy on-line. It worked to a degree that I had never thought possible. To be sure on-line therapy was not at all the same as sitting in a room, a body amongst other bodies. And yet on-line therapy was clearly possible.

Because all training institutions were forced to go on-line, including those delivered by the High Church called the Institute of Group Analysis, London, what was previously unacceptable was now not only legitimate, it was the norm everywhere.

The IGA changed the gold standard because it was forced to for its own needs. The previously totally unthinkable, was now not only thinkable, it seemed eminently sensible. Anyhow, this change trickled down to the benefit of our training in India. Without this new norm, our training would never have got off the ground.

Today, in the post-lockdown world, the gold standard is changing yet again. Because it has now become possible to meet in person in London and elsewhere in Europe, the ruling institutions have once again made it a requirement for training therapy groups to take place in-person. The IGA has said of graduates who have ‘conducted their training group(s) online, [that] there is a CPD requirement to conduct an in-person group for a year, with appropriate supervision’.

The implication of this requirement is that what has been learnt whilst running an on-line group is not transferable to in-person groups. Therefore, one needs to learn something additional about running in-person groups.

But if it is the case that one needs to learn a new ‘skill-set’ to transition from on-line groups to in-person groups, then surely one would also need to learn a new ‘skill-set’ to transition from in-person to on-line. And yet, we all managed the first transition without having to go through a further training about how to conduct on-line groups.

I am not by the way wanting to suggest that there is no difference between on-line and in-person groups. It is clearly the case that the in-person experience is richer. What I am saying, is that if we were all able at a moment’s notice to transition from in-person to on-line groups, then surely the same is the case for those going through the transition in the other direction, from on-line to in-person. So why do *they* need to do something *we* never had to?

Why did we not have to do an additional training? Because we were in a sufficiently powerful position to simply declare that it was unnecessary for *us*. It is the same powerful position that then allows us to declare that *it is necessary* for ‘them’.

It seems to me that the relation between on-line and in-person brings us to a similar crisis moment to when block trainings were thought to be lesser than ongoing weekly trainings. The justification then as now, is that of standards. Implying that persons whose training groups have been on-line, are less capable than those whose training groups were in-person. I have no argument that an in-person group makes for a richer experience than an on-line group. *But this fact has no bearing on the aptitude and capacity of those whose training took place on-line to work in-person*.

I think that EGATIN is a bit confused about where it stands as well as where it ought to stand. On the one hand EGATIN claims that it is not an accrediting body; however, by virtue of the fact that EGATIN has ‘Essential Training Standards’ which trainings have to comply with, means that *de facto* it is functioning as an accrediting body.

The objective sounding essential standards are in fact born of expediency. Take for example #5.10, which says that block training should meet for a *minimum* of 5 times a year.

But why settle on 5, and not the 10 times a year that UK and other block trainings meet for? I think the standard is set at 5, simply because this was what the trainers from London were able to manage when they set up trainings in Oslo, Russia and elsewhere.

*Meeting five times a year is a precedent; it is not a standard.*

Plato was already onto this when he said that humans characteristically mistake the *necessary* for the *good*. David Hume said something similar when he cautioned against deriving an ‘ought’ from an ‘is’. The quantity 5 is an outcome of practical logic, not scientific logic.

There is an inverse correlation between the distance of the training from Europe, and the number of residentials that are feasible in one year. In the UK, 10; in Russia 5; in Singapore and Rwanda 3.

Throw into the mix dramatic differences in living standards between trainers and trainees, as well as oppressive and controlling State regimes, and the frequency of in-person blocks are reduced even further. As the politics of India moved further to the right, our training was not able to meet in India at all (let alone for the three residentials we had originally planned). Circumstances dictated that we are only able to meet once a year for an extended residential, and that too in Nepal, not India. We have compensated for this by a mix of weekly on-line therapy, supervision and seminars, and monthly on-line blocks for the duration of the training.

In my view when precedence-generated European ‘standards’ are imposed on contexts such as India and Rwanda, then at best it will result in a second class citizenship (not proper group analysts), and at worst they will exclude them entirely (not group analysts at all).

I end with questions:

* Is EGATIN an enabling organization or is it in danger of becoming a fearful and defensive institution that is primarily concerned with the protection of the purity, status and privileges of the already Established?
* Will EGATIN be as flexible and sensitive to the needs and limits of trainings in non-European contexts as it has been to trainings in European contexts?
* Will everybody be obliged to dance to the old European tune?

We know what happens when ideas of purity become the rationale that drive the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. They produce totalitarian racialized regimes which are not only ethno-centric, they can also become ethno-fascistic.

Surely, this is a grave danger, a danger we need to guard against.