

# Ethnopsyoanalyses: An Investigation in Talamanca, Costa Rica, with the Ethnie of the Bribri in 2016

Ursula Hauser

Psychotherapy Science, Sigmund Freud University, A-1020 Vienna, Austria

## Abstract

In March 2016 the association of critical social psychoanalyses (ASPAS) in Costa Rica realized together with the BRIBRI association DITSÓKATA a pioneer project in the field of ethnopsyoanalyses.

Ethnopsyoanalyses is the science, which applies psychoanalyses in the field of social investigation; the founders of this school were Paul Parin, Goldy Parin-Matthéy and Fritz Morgenthaler, the 'School of Zurich' [1]. The special focus of ethno psychoanalyses in social investigations concentrate on the relationship of the scientist and the object of investigation, including both subjectivities and the process of transference and counter transference [2].

The project included a group of 13 Austrian students of the Sigmund Freud University (SFU) in Vienna chaired by the author, and where the author was a professor for years for ethnopsyoanalyses and psychodrama. The overall goal was the interchange of our different ways to interpret dreams, and the encounter of the different cultures.

More comprehensive analyses, reflections and forwarding developments are requested to use the intensive experiences, which were made for individual cases, ethnopsyoanalyses in general and the understanding about more and different cultures, and human rights in general.

## Introduction

Internationally it is mostly unknown, that in Costa Rica live eight indigenous ethnicities, among them the BRIBRI people, the biggest ethnicity with around 8'000 humans. They are living mostly in Talamanca, in the wide forest and in the mountain at the south border from Costa Rica to Panama.

Currently social movements and solidarity groups work together with indigenous people in Costa Rica, in order that they for example get and protect human rights, to receive voices in academic circles and power in governed organizations.

In this context, the psychoanalytic association ASPAS prepared during three years an ethno psychoanalytic investigation, together with the Bribri association "Ditsókata", and a group of psychology students from the SFU (Sigmund Freud University Vienna). The investigation was a 1:1 visit during 20 days in the jungle of Talamanca in Costa Rica.

## Content

The Bribri culture is based on dreams and includes dreams in their daily life.

In psychoanalyses dreams are interpreted as 'the direct way to the so named "inconsciousness" [3], means thinking about individual psychological processes. Individual psychological processes are characterized for example by sensations, perceptions, learning, memory, thinking, motives, motivation and emotions, constructed during childhood and the socialization processes, which determine mental health, social behaviour and empathy as adults [4].

The challenge was to experience the possibility of a real encounter of young psychologists from Central Europe (Vienna) and the indigenous community in Costa Rica.

## Publication History:

Received: February 20, 2020

Accepted: August 03, 2020

Published: August 05, 2020

## Keywords:

Ethnopsyoanalyses, Culture, Bribri Culture in Costa Rica, Dream work, Human rights

The professional leadership was held by two ethno psychoanalysts, Ursula Hauser and Alvaro Dobles.

Most important was the anthropologist experiences of Dobles, who lived seven years with the Bribri people in the 90ies in Costa Rica.

The preparations in Vienna at the university by Hauser, took three years and was characterised by the detailed work of ASPAS, visits to Talamanca in Costa Rica, and invitations of the Bribris for meetings in San José in Costa Rica, seminars with psychodrama at the SFU in Vienna, and the work and preparations with a group of volunteer students.

The Bribri contact in San José was a university linguistic professor, Ali Garcia Segura [5] who selected together with Dobles the Bribri community for the investigation.

One difficulty was that the student's group of Vienna wasn't able to speak Spanish, nor to understand the Bribri language.

The strategic plan was to spend 20 days in Kachabri, sleeping in hammocks, "eating rice and beans", and getting to know the daily life of the Bribri community including an introduction to the wisdom of Bribri shamanism and natural healing processes.

The time of 20 days was short, but long enough to experience intellectually and emotionally the impact of the "other" culture, and

**Corresponding Author:** Dr. Ursula Hauser, Psychotherapy Science, Sigmund Freud University, A-1020 Vienna, Austria; E-mail: [ursonio@hotmail.com](mailto:ursonio@hotmail.com)

**Citation:** Hauser U (2020) Ethnopsyoanalyses - An Investigation in Talamanca, Costa Rica, with the Ethnie of the Bribri in 2016. Int J Global Soc Work 3: 110. doi: <https://doi.org/10.15344/ijgsww/2020/110>

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the ethno psychoanalytic work about 'the own and the strange', among fear and fascination [6], among the experience of 'social death' [7].

Before and after the expedition to Kachabri, the participants gathered with the group of students in the clinic of Hauser in San José, the capital of Costa Rica, every day for a dream seminars and conferences in ASPAS, as preparation for the field work; all in all, the investigation in Costa Rica lasted one whole month.

The experiences of all the participants are documented in three languages (Spanish, German and Bribri) [8].

During the 20 days in the jungle of Talamanca [9] the participants analysed their dreams in detail. The dreams were presented mutually, in front of the whole group and conformed that dreaming is still a mystery of human cognition like formulated by Ruby [10].

The most important part in the group process was to learn from each other and to understand that there are different ways to understand and interpret dreams.

The Bribris interpret dreams messages like danger and announcements of sickness or death, as well as happy events as birth or marriage in their community.



Figure 1: Forests and mountains in Costa Rica.



Figure 2: A holy house and cultural centre of the Bribris.

The students from Europe analysed their dreams as phenomena's of unconscious processes, individually understood in the context of the specific actual experience and the biographic background. This meta language of the dreams' might united the participants.

All the presentations were given in a Usuré, the holy house and cultural centre of the Bribri people.

After one month the students from Vienna turned back to Vienna, to their families, homes and their study programs at university.

As documented in their writings, all of them were deeply, in the sense of a great depth psychologically, involved emotionally and considering this unique experience as a transformation of themselves.

And from this side it was possible to overcome deep wounds, historical wounds, prejudices and fears from each other and to understand each other in a new and specific way.

## Conclusion

A transformation and transition with students from Europe and indigenous people in Costa Rica were possible in this project, and vice versa.

It was possible to reflect in detail about facts, feelings, expression, interpretations and about former historical developments, like neo-colonialism [11].

Other interesting consequences, in the sense of discovering old conflicts in the Bribri community awakened by the investigation and the processes of evaluation and publication, will be included in a second publication.

In the future further engagements and investigations in this field are necessary, despite similar data collections, similar reflection methods with other participants and study groups, based on a sound methodology, documented analyses and data, respectively scientifically comparable results and conclusions.

## Competing Interests

The author declare that there is no competing interests regarding the publication of this article.

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