Mourning, Large-Group Identity, and the Refugee Experience

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Abstract

The refugee experience varies tremendously. I have interviewed some who barely escaped to safety by literally running over dead bodies. In October 2016, the Associated Press stated that at least 3800 refugees had died in the Mediterranean Sea so far that year in an attempt to reach Europe. We can easily imagine the "survival guilt" experienced by their relatives or friends who did not lose their lives. I also have interviewed children who were babies when they were saved and taken to a foreign place, and as they grew up they had no recollection of their parents who had been killed. Other refugees face less traumatic but still impactful conditions.

The initial care of the newcomers also varies from one host area to another. Some are kept behind barbed wires while others receive sophisticated and humane care. In this chapter I will not focus on initial care, but rather on two psychological phenomena all refugees share after their dislocations: an obligatory mourning process due to loss and its complications and a struggle with national, ethnic, religious, and other large-group identity issues. The very act of settling in a new place where natives have different shared sentiments and speak a different language inflames the newcomers' large-group identity issues. Meanwhile, a huge number of individuals in host countries perceive the mass of refugees as "the Other" and develop hostile prejudice against them. This chapter also examines refugees as the Other.

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2.1   Psychoanalytic Observations

Psychoanalysts have presented observations and theories concerning voluntary or forced newcomers to another country, and descriptions of their experiences range from newcomers facing "culture shock" [1, 2], to developing guilt for surviving while others did not [3], to becoming "bicultural persons" without conflict [4, 5]. Other psychoanalysts who had escaped from the Holocaust wrote their memoirs (e.g., see: [6–10]). I reviewed psychoanalytic observations of what newcomers face in host countries and theories related to them in my book on immigrants and refugees [11]. Sometimes people are dislocated within the same country and are settled in a new place where the natives also belong to their ethnic group and speak the same language. For example, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, ethnic conflicts erupted in the Republic of Georgia. Georgians living in the Abkhazia section of the country were forced to flee elsewhere in the country. Under such situations the newcomers' and hosts' adjustments, in general, follow similar processes to those of newcomers who settle in a location where natives have different language, religion, and other cultural amplifiers. For example, when I was working with Georgians who had escaped from Abkhazia in 1993, I noticed the newcomers' hesitation to mix with the local people, and on many occasions I noted "Refugee Go Home" signs in the streets of Tbilisi [11].

2.2   Refugees' Mourning

There is one obligatory, common element that refugees initially share, to one degree or the other, for the rest of their lives. Since moving from one location to a foreign location involves losses—loss of family members and friends; loss of ancestors' burial grounds; loss of familiar language, songs, smells, and food; loss of previous support systems—all dislocation experiences can be examined in terms of the refugees', and even voluntary immigrants', ability to mourn and/or resistance against the mourning process.

Adult-type responses to meaningful losses can be divided into two phases: (1) the grief reaction and (2) the work of mourning. The grief reaction includes responses such as shock, denial and bargaining to reverse the outcome, pain, and anger, all of which, especially anger, eventually lead to the beginning of an emotional "knowledge" that the lost object is indeed gone. Before grief is completed, the work of mourning, as Sigmund Freud [12] described, begins. Mourning refers to a long-time process that involves revisiting, reviewing, and transforming the mourner's emotional investment in the images of the lost object. It comes to a practical end when such preoccupations, with associated affects, lose their intensity. Mental health workers who are assigned to care for refugees at the time of their dislocations usually observe the newcomers' grief reactions. In this chapter my focus is the mourning processes. However, I have observed individuals who are stuck in repeating their grief reactions, even many years after experiencing their significant loss [13].

The mourning process results in the mourner's identification with images of such lost persons or things and their realistic and/or fantasized psychological functions [12]. There can be enriching identifications: The indolent son of a lawyer has an urge to enroll in law school after his father's death. A refugee some years after settling in a new country may become a novelist telling stories of her grandfather or other persons or things lost during forced dislocation, thereby earning money and fame. Disruptive identifications that are invested with deep ambivalence cause "melancholia" [12]. Some refugees who continue to have contradictory perceptions and affects about the place and people they left behind and about conditions in the new location experience depressive affects for a long time.

For all practical purposes, the mourning process comes to an end when the images of lost items in the mourner's mind become "futureless" [14]. In other words, the mourner's internal relationship with such images no longer preoccupies the mourner's mind. Since individuals retain images of lost persons or things in their minds during their lifetimes, theoretically speaking we can say that the mourning process never ends until the mourner dies [13]. In examining refugees' adjustments, we need to access their ability to make the images of what was lost "futureless."

Many refugees become "perennial mourners" [11, 15] to one degree or another depending on their personality organization, severity of traumas associated with their dislocation, the degree of support system and acceptance in the host country, and the availability and the nature of connection with persons and things at the location left behind. Perennial mourners experience their mourning without bringing it to a practical conclusion or developing melancholia.

2.3   Linking Objects and Linking Phenomena

Perennial mourners create linking objects or linking phenomena. A linking object is an item such as a coin or photograph from the old country that the perennial mourner makes *magical.* This linking object unconsciously connects the lost persons' or things' mental representations with the mourner's corresponding self-representation *out there.* It becomes a psychological meeting ground for both. The linking object in the external world contains the tension between ambivalence and anger pertaining to the narcissistic hurt inflicted on the refugee by his losses.

By *controlling* the linking object, the refugee controls his confusing affects pertaining to a wish to recapture some elements left behind and affects related to this wish and other affects related to his other wish to completely say goodbye to his losses. Thus the refugee avoids the psychological consequences if any of these two wishes are gratified. When a refugee "locks up" in a drawer a coin that has become a linking object, he also "hides" his complicated mourning process in the same drawer. All such a person needs is to know where the coin is and how it is safely tucked away. Such a refugee may unlock the drawer during an anniversary of the dislocation and look at the coin or touch it. But as soon as he feels anxious, the coin is locked up again. Since the linking object or phenomenon is "out there," the mourner's mourning process too is *externalized.* This way the refugee finds a way of

escaping from feeling the painful struggle within himself. Through the creation of a linking object or phenomenon, the refugee makes an "adjustment" to the complication within the mourning process; the refugee makes the mourning process "unending" so as not to face the conflict pertaining to the relationship with the images of what was left behind and new images he is facing in the new location.

Sometimes a linking object is a living being. A Georgian refugee family left their beloved pet dog behind when they fled from Abkhazia and settled at an internally displaced persons' location near Tbilisi. At their new location they saw a black dog roaming this refugee camp, took the new dog into their crowded room, and adopted him. The animal evolved as their living linking object; it became "magical." It represented their wish to go back to Abkhazia and their wish to accept their loss "out there." Since the dog was psychologically so important, the family became preoccupied with caring for and protecting this animal in an exaggerated fashion in their miserable refugee camp [11].

A linking phenomenon refers to a song, a smell, a gesture, an action, or an affect that functions as a linking object. For example, whenever a refugee feels internal pressure to complete her mourning, a song from the old country comes to her mind, and she utilizes this song as a linking phenomenon. An affect, especially nostalgia [16], can also function as a linking object.

Linking objects and phenomena should not be confused with childhood transitional objects and phenomena that are reactivated in adulthood. A transitional object represents the first not-me, but it is never totally not-me. It links not-me with mother-me, and it is a temporary construction toward a sense of reality and security [17, 18]. Linking objects and phenomena must be thought of as tightly packed symbols whose significance is bound up in the conscious and unconscious nuances of the internal relationship that preceded a significant loss such as a forced dislocation. Linking objects and linking phenomena also should not be confused with keepsakes. A keepsake does not function as a repository where a complicated mourning process is externalized. A typical keepsake provides continuity between the time before the loss and the time after the loss or generational continuity if the lost person or item belonged to a previous generation.

Some refugees become pathologically preoccupied with their linking object or phenomenon to the degree that they do not have much energy left to spend on finding new ways of living. I noted in more than a few cases how a psychological struggle over losing and wishing to refind what was left behind was generalized. For example, they would talk about a persistent habit of losing keys for their apartment or car, when such luxury was available to them, and then finding the lost items in unexpected places. On the other hand, other refugees with perennial mourning gain useful time through their utilization of linking objects and phenomena. Keeping a sense of belonging to the past as well as a foot in the future (where the images of lost things, relatives, and friends will be futureless) can provide a helpful gradual transition for these individuals over a period of years. Then these refugees begin to function as healthy mourners as their linking objects and linking phenomena stop being magical. They become able to recognize both the distinction and the continuity between the past, present, and future and develop healthy biculturalism.

On many occasions refugees, without being fully aware of it, may develop their linking objects and linking phenomena as they are escaping from a dangerous place and coming to a safe location. Mental health workers assigned to look after the refugees at the time of their dislocations should have knowledge about linking objects and phenomena [13, 15] and their meanings for the newcomers.

2.4   Age Factor

Some of the refuges are babies or young children who cannot mourn like adults, but later their parents and other psychologically important persons in their environment pass their complicated issues to the youngsters. Becoming a refugee during adolescence incurs extra problems [5, 11]. During the adolescent passage, youngsters loosen their attachments to and internal relationships with their childhood object images, modify them, replace them, or even give them up [19]. As stated by Martha Wolfenstein [20], the adolescent passage is the crucial process that separates one's ability or inability to genuinely mourn in an adult fashion. Dislocation from a familiar place to a foreign one leads to youngsters' combining their internal and external turmoil; they face what Amsterdam psychoanalyst Jelly van Essen called, "double mourning" [21].

2.5   Large-Group Identity

During the adolescence passage youngsters' large-group identity also becomes crystallized [22]. By the term "large group," I refer to hundreds of thousands or millions of individuals who share the same tribal, ethnic, religious, national, historical, and ideological sentiments, even though they will not meet each other in their lifetimes. Large-group identities are the end-result of myths and realities of common beginnings, historical continuities, geographical realities, and other shared linguistic, societal, religious, cultural, and ideological factors. In common language large-group identities are expressed by saying "I am Basque," "I am Lithuanian Jew," "I am Syrian," "I am German," or "I am Catholic."

Being a refugee during adolescence passage often brings the young displaced person's large-group identity problems to the surface. German psychoanalyst Annette Streeck-Fischer's [23] presentation of the stories of three adolescents who were rather recent comers to Germany illustrates these youngsters' large-group identity issues. The first patient was the 15-year-old son of a Polish-German mother and a Turkish father, both of whom came to Germany as adolescents. The teenager's maladjustment to being a newcomer included his glorification of militant ideologies of his father's native country. The second patient was 1 year older than the first one; she had lived in Moscow with her parents until she was 11 years old, where she experienced increasing anti-Semitism. Through her symptoms and actions in a hospital setting, she managed to make her caretakers feel as if they were Nazi torturers or concentration camp guards. The third patient was 15 and a half, the daughter of a

German mother and a black African father. In her case, boundaries between the mother's and the father's large-group identities were blurred, creating severe confusion and difficulty with reality testing.

Not only youngsters going through adolescent passage or completing it but all refugees—except very small children who are still unaware that they belong to a specific large group—face large-group identity problems following their dislocations. Let me now very briefly look at what is personal identity and how shared large-group identity develops. The concept of personal "identity" is defined as, "a persistent sameness within oneself... [and] a persistent sharing of some kind of essential character with others" [24]. There is a consensus that an individual's "identity" refers to a *subjective experience*. It is differentiated from related concepts such as an individual's "character" and "personality," which are usually used interchangeably. The latter terms describe others' impressions of the individual's emotional expressions, modes of speech, typical actions, and habitual ways of thinking and behaving. If we observe someone to be habitually clean, orderly, or greedy, or if he uses excessive intellectualization and shows excessive ambivalence and controlled emotional expressions, we say that this person has an obsessional character. If we observe someone who is overtly suspicious and cautious, and whose physical demeanor suggests that she is constantly scanning the environment for possible danger, we say that this person has a paranoid personality. Unlike the terms "character" and "personality," "identity" refers to an individual's inner working model—he or she, not an outsider, senses and experiences it.

Scientific observations of infants in recent decades have taught us that an infant's mind is more active than we originally thought [25–27]. We now know that there is a psychobiological potential for we-ness and bias toward our own kind. However, because the environment of an infant and very small child is restricted to family and other caregivers, the extent of "we-ness" does not include a distinct intellectual and emotional dimension of large-group identity. Infants and very small children are *generalists* [24] as far as tribal affiliation, nationality, ethnicity, and religion are concerned; the subjective experience and deep intellectual knowledge of belonging to a large-group identity develops later in childhood. Such sharing of sentiments applies as well to those who are members of a politically ideological group to whose ideology their parents and the important people in their childhood environment subscribed.

There is a well-known term in psychoanalysis known as *stranger anxiety* [28]: infants' recognition that not all the faces around them belong to their caregivers. At 8 months of life, the baby fears the stranger/Other who, in reality, has done nothing harmful to the baby. A normal phenomenon in human development, stranger anxiety is a response to the stranger/Other in the infant's mind and becomes the foundation for the evolution of future "normal" prejudice. We realize that the infant starts differentiating between stranger/Other and familiar/Other. However, an 8-month-old baby has no idea of large-group identity; she is a "generalist."

Freud [29] held that parents are the representatives of society to their child.

Individuation and identification processes slowly force children to give up being "generalists." After psychologically separating themselves from the mother and mothering caregivers [30], children identify with realistic, fantasized, wished-for, or

scary aspects of important individuals in their environment and their psychological functions, including these individuals' investments in cultural amplifiers and other large-group investments such as historical images. Sometimes adults "teach" children in indirect ways what large-group identity is. In Cyprus, Greeks and Turks lived side by side before the two communities were divided physically starting in early 1963 and de facto in 1974. As pork is part of the Greek diet, Greek farmers often raise pigs. Although all children are drawn to farm animals, a Turkish child would be discouraged from touching a piglet, as it would be perceived as "dirty" since Muslim Turks do not eat pork. Pigs do not belong in the Turks' large group, and for the Turkish child the pig will be regarded as a cultural amplifier for the Greeks. Children also identify with parents' and other important persons' prejudicial attitudes.

Now let me focus on another concept I call "depositing" [31–34]. In identification, the child is the primary active partner in taking in and assimilating an adult's mental images and owning this person's ego and superego functions. In depositing, the adult person more actively pushes his or her specific images into the developing self-representation of the child and transfers psychological tasks. In other words, the adult person uses the child (mostly unconsciously) as a permanent reservoir for certain self- and other images and psychological tasks belonging to that adult. In addition to children's identifications with adults around them, such adults' depositing images such as historical images with which the child never had an experiential connection, the child starts owning his or her large-group identity.

When refugees find themselves in a location where people have a different large-group identity and start a new life, their large-group identity issues appear, like those observed in Annette Streeck-Fischer's three teenage patients. Many circumstances influence how refugees will handle these large-group identity issues. If their original language evolves as their linking phenomenon, they will have a hard time learning a new language and their adaptation will be very difficult.

2.6 Border Psychology

When there is a surge of refugees, a host country's large-group identity and other large-group concerns also become visible, and huge numbers of individuals may perceive the refugees as the Other. The concept of "the Other" is at least as old as the Biblical confrontation between the Israelites coming out of Egypt and entering what would become the Holy Land where they encountered the Canaanites, the prototypical Others. We do not know what the Canaanites at first blush thought of these intruders into their space, which immediately illuminates one of the problems with the concept of the Other—we usually only see it from one side—side A considers side B as the Other, without our knowing what B thought of A. There is also the problem of the demonization of the Other, as I will illustrate.

We can imagine the unprecedented surge of refugees flooding into Europe and other locations as representing the Other who are threatening the stability of "host" countries' psychological borders. In order to examine this threat, think in terms of how individuals learn to wear two main layers, like fabric, from the time they are children.

The first layer, the individual layer, fits each of them snugly, like clothing. It is one's core personal identity that provides an inner sense of persistent sameness for the individual. The second layer is like the canvas of a big tent, which is loose fitting, but allows a huge number of individuals to share a sense of sameness with others under the same large-group tent. We can visualize large-group identity markers, such as shared images of ancestors' historical events, which I named "chosen traumas" or "chosen glories" [35, 36], as different colorful designs stitched on the canvas of each large group's metaphorical tent. Chosen glories are shared mental images of pride- and pleasure-evoking past events and heroes that are recollected ritualistically. Chosen traumas are the shared mental images of an event in a large group's history in which the group suffered a catastrophic loss, humiliation, and helplessness at the hands of enemies, plus an inability to mourn. Often chosen traumas and chosen glories appear as intertwined. Utilizing chosen traumas and chosen glories for increasing large-group narcissism and conservatism is not dangerous by itself. But its exaggeration and contamination with malignant prejudice against the Other or racism certainly creates severe problems.

Under a huge large-group tent, there are subgroups and subgroup identities, such as professional and political identities. While it is the tent pole—the political leader and the governing body—that holds the tent erect, the tent's canvas psychologically protects the leader, other persons with authority, and all members of the large group. From the view of individual psychology, a person may perceive the pole as a father figure and the canvas as a nurturing mother. From a large-group psychology point of view, the canvas represents the *psychological border* of large-group identity that is shared by tens, hundreds of thousands, or millions of people.

Many individuals in the host countries where mass refugee issues are present or expected are concerned and even terrified that their country's social customs and economies will be damaged and that they will not be able to support the massive influx of the newcomers. But, psychologically speaking, the main fear is the contamination of their large-group identity by the identity of the Other.

Those who are able to keep their individual identities separate from the impact of large-group sentiments become willing to open the tent's gate and accept the huge number of newcomers. Those who perceive the newcomers as tearing holes in, thus damaging, the metaphorical large-group tent's canvas—the border of large-group identity—become anxious and defensively perceive the huge immigrant population as a threat. Earlier I mentioned that our having "normal" prejudicial feelings starts in childhood. Now many persons in the host country may develop hostile, even malignant, shared prejudice. The polarization in the "host" country leads to new political and social concerns and complications. Refugee problems are closely connected with present-day world affairs.

## 2.7	A Look at Today's World

Globalization and incredible developments in communication and travel, alongside their positive aspects, have brought confrontations and conflicts among populations with different cultural, religious, historical, and geographical investments. The

existence of vast numbers of refugees in many locations of the world has added to and complicated such confrontations and conflicts. Kenya has been known as the home of the largest refugee camp in the world on the Kenya-Somalia border. Most refugees there come from Somalia, which has been torn by civil war. Cambodia is filled with refugees from the Khmer Rouge; in fact the whole country is a refugee from the years of slaughter. Over two and a half million persons in Turkey who escaped from Syria have created huge practical, as well as political and cultural, problems for that country. News about Europe's present refugee crisis and its link to terrorism since the 13 November 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris is broadcasted daily. After the Paris attacks, some people in France put graffiti on the walls of mosques or "dirtied" them with pork blood, and there were random attacks in the streets on people who looked "Arab." Terrorism has become connected with newcomers and in turn with refugees.

Let me return to my tent metaphor. I already mentioned subgroups under such a tent. Being a leader or employee of a big business, for example, makes such persons invest intensely in the identity of their business subgroup. However, such business leaders or employees do not lose their first type of large-group identity that was established in childhood. Terrorist organizations, such as Al-Qaeda and ISIS, however, truly illustrate the formation of a large group and large-group identity *in adulthood* [37]. Members of such organizations or lone wolves connected to them function under the dominant impact of this second-type large-group identity. They lose the influence the large-group identity they developed in their childhood—such as their personal moral attitudes—had on their behavior patterns. Terrorists or suicide bombers perform their inhumane acts not simply because of problems their individual identities started to develop in childhood, but primarily because psychologically, they totally become representatives of their adulthood's large groups, and they perceive their horrible acts as a duty to protect or bring attention to their second-type large-group identity.

We have entered 2017 by further linking terrorism with newcomers and, by generalizing it, with refugees. A newcomer murdered people in a well-known nightclub in Istanbul a couple of hours into the year 2017. It is expected that more newcomers, as lone wolves or members of terrorist organizations such as ISIS and Al-Qaeda, will carry out inhumane activities. Shared perceptions of refugees, in general, will continue to frighten large numbers of people in host countries where such shared fear has already led to societal divisions.

I had a chance to examine the beginning of such a division in Finland in late 2016. My knowledge about the situation in Finland comes from my interviews with Finnish colleagues in the mental health field and some academicians in other fields. In the 1970s some refugees from Chile and Vietnam came to Finland. These refugees easily adapted to the Finnish society and their numbers were relatively low. In the 1980s there were not many refugees in Finland, and there was not much interest among Finnish mental health workers about the psychology of refugees and the local population's perception of them. Beginning in the early 1990s however, Finland began receiving more and more refugees from Somalia, the Balkan countries, Afghanistan, the Middle East, and other places. Somalis had more difficulty

adapting to their new location. There are about 11,000 Somalis in Finland, and only around 15% of them are employed. Somalis have darker skin color, are Muslims, and many still wear traditional garments. A center for torture victims was established in Helsinki, and many mental health workers did a good job helping these people. Nevertheless Finland's acceptance of Somali refugees' as newcomers has been complicated.

Over the last few years, thousands of new refugees, mostly from Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan, have arrived in Finland, creating unexpected emotional chaos. Refugees from the Middle East were also Muslims and most of them were men. Some Finns perceived them as "deserters" and developed stereotypical prejudicial perceptions of them. In late September 2016, Finnish officials published a plan to create a special center for those refugees who are considered security threats in order to keep them under control. At that time it was not clear if this plan would be accepted. Some individuals whom I interviewed seemed shocked and embarrassed upon hearing news about the Finnish authorities' intent to use a small island that belonged to Finland to locate newcomers who were perceived as dangerous, even though there was uncertainty about whether or not these perceptions were true. These interviewees thought of themselves, and other Finns who thought like them, as separate from those who had hostile prejudice against the refugees.

Many counties are busy with political, social, economic, legal, cultural, religious, and medical aspects of present-day refugee issues and with finding solutions to border crossing problems, settlement programs, and security matters. Large numbers of people in these locations wish to respond to troubled people from other countries in humane and practical ways. At the same time, another large group of natives are experiencing realistic and fantasized fear of refugees and hostile prejudice against them and are trying to keep their large-group identities from contamination by the Other's large-group identity. Such sentiments become exaggerated by political manipulations and political propaganda.

Brexit, a political movement, is closely related to large-group identity issues. The idea of having an ethnically pure national identity or being a "synthetic nation" [38] composed of only *selected* people from *selected* locations is an illusion in our present-day world. But by supporting Brexit, in a sense, a huge number of persons in England have declared the following: "We can choose newcomers to our country. We can accept people from Canada, for example, but the unwanted Others from unwanted locations cannot disturb our glorious large-group identity." We also know that several political parties in different countries in Europe have become influential not only by supporting conservatism and nationalism but also by exhibiting xenophobia. During the last presidential election campaign in the United States, the now president of the United States Donald Trump even called himself "Mr. Brexit." Trumps' "wall," accompanied by his remarks to keep Muslims out of the country, became a symbol of a protective border of the American large-group identity for a substantial number of persons in the United States.

2.8   Last Comments

In this chapter I focused on refugees' mourning over their losses and the inflammation of large-group identity issues among both refugees and people in host countries. Such psychological information may open doors for dialogue between mental health workers and those authorities in charge of refugee issues and perhaps even with some politicians who may have their own thoughts about dealing with refugee problems. Without making a list here, I wish to express my appreciation for the increasing number of efforts in recent decades by psychotherapists, psychoanalysts, social workers, and other mental health professionals to understand and deal with these issues in communities worldwide.

For some time I have been urging more education about large-group psychology in its own right. Considering large-group psychology in its own right means making formulations as to a large groups' conscious and unconscious shared psychological experiences and motivations that initiate specific social, cultural, political, or ideological processes [32, 33]. Present-day massive refugee problems, and the realistic as well as fantasized ways they are being linked to terrorism and religion, require applications of large-group psychology concepts if we are to understand inflammations of large-group identity issues, various types of border psychology, and the leader-followers interactions associated with them. Meanwhile, I should state that it is beyond my expertise to examine the real, practical aspects of having huge numbers of "outsiders" settling in "host" countries in so many locations in the world. Obviously, credible, realistic, and practical issues and security concerns need to be addressed in the best way possible by authorities assigned to handle them.

Refugees' challenges are not all the same. They arrive from a variety of locations with different availability of funds and other practical matters that must be dealt with. The best and most practical interventions and the nature of difficulties encountered can evolve with circumstances, and interventions would be best considered according to the existing realities of each location. At the present time, I am familiar with the psychologically informed intervention strategy sponsored by the International Psychoanalytic University in Berlin. I met with eight bright and dedicated students in their mid-twenties who have been working in Berlin with refugees from northern Africa, Syria, Iran, and elsewhere for some time. These students are educated about mourning and large-group identity issues, and their work is supervised by two well-known German psychoanalysts. They regularly meet with certain refugees and help them with their language problems, learning German, finding jobs, and adjusting to their new environments. At the same time they try to inform the authorities dealing with these refugees about the newcomers' psychology. What they have been doing is impressive. After some hours with them, I noted that intense transference manifestations of refugees with whom they have been working were directed to the students. For example, a student was regularly meeting with a couple from North Africa. When the wife realized that the student knew French, she began speaking to her in French, a language that her husband did not understand. She told the student how her husband was abusing her physically, and she wanted the student

to do something about this situation. The student did not have the necessary education and experience to be a therapist and was burdened with this situation that was above and beyond her assigned task to help newcomers adjust to their new country. Another student was the daughter of Iranian parents who had settled in Germany before she was born. She knew the Iranian language and had an emotional connection with her parents' original country. The Iranian newcomers "selected" this student as their savior, and, in turn, she developed a burdensome countertransference expectation of herself as a "savior." Fortunately, the German psychoanalyst supervisors were aware of the situation and helped her.

The more I learned about the newcomers in Berlin who were involved in this project, I was reminded of my work in South Ossetia in the early 1990s with youngsters who had escaped from war zones in the Republic of Georgia and become internally displaced youth in Tskhinvali, the capital of South Ossetia. At that time there was not a single person trained as a psychologist in South Ossetia, but intervention with the psychological problems of these children and youngsters was being recommended by outsider psychologists, visitors in Tskhinvali, with only sporadic financial help from Europe.

It is clear that we cannot devise a universal intervention recipe to deal with refugees. For host countries intervention focus should be on developing strategies to lower anxiety within the native population and to find ways to avoid malignant rituals against the newcomers. In efforts to deal with polarization in a host country, focus should not be on "normal" shared prejudices; it should be on preventing political/societal/historical factors that inflame large-group identity sentiments, so that such prejudices do not take hostile or malignant forms.

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