

Disputed Boundaries of the Self, the Group, and their Environment: What We Learn from Refugees about our Psychic Functioning¹

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Abstract

One of Jung's most significant contributions concerns the mysterious, inexplicable and always out-of-reach nature of the self. In this paper, I will focus on the borders of the self and their nature, location and dynamics of maintenance and change in geographically, historically, and culturally situated subjects. Reflecting on the refugee experience, I intend to gain more insights into our psychic functioning and the dynamics of the self in relation to itself, the other and groups. The experiences of some refugees, marked by significant trauma and migration, shed light on how the boundaries of the self are frequently contested and perpetually negotiated with others, and how our subjectivity is shaped by ongoing dynamics of occupation, dispute and/or negotiation, conducted at various levels of our social and individual existence. My argument is that these processes occur at a specific site: the boundaries of the self, involving intrapsychic, interpersonal and group psychological dynamics, with reverberations in the socio-political and cultural spheres, and reciprocal influences between all these levels. This paper aims to concentrate on the shifts in these boundaries, illustrated through clinical vignettes.

Keywords: disputed borders, environment, group dynamics, interpersonal, intrapsychic, refugees, self, trauma

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Jung's Concept of the Self and the Underlying Matrix of Human Interactions

In Jung's theory, the self is conceived as an irresolvable paradox. It comprises a theory of autonomous complexes, the idea of the ego as a master complex, the crucial role played by dissociation in its organization, counterbalanced by a theory of integration and unity of self through its archetype, the Self in capital letter (Young-Eisendrath, 2000; Colman, 2006). For an extensive discussion of the self, including its archetypal nature, I refer to other authors who have extensively explored the topic, opening up important aspects for research on the subject (Colman, 2008; Daniel, 2020; Stein, 2021). Here I simply recall the key components in Jung's theory for the purpose of my argument.

The early foundation of the paradox of self can be brought back to Jung's early empirical research on associative processes (Jung, 1973), when he measured the physiological alterations that accompanied the disturbances in associations to a list of stimulus words. Jung identifies these quantum units of unconscious activity by their psychosomatic, affect-laden, intrapsychic contents, which operate in discrete split-off bundles to become "splinter psyches" with enough internal coherence and autonomy to invade conscious personality as alien states of mind (Jacobi, 1959; Jung, 1934, para. 201). They are "psychological complexes" composed of core arousal states and emotional memories (in representational and non-representational forms) that may be either re-enacted or remembered. The tendency of a complex is that of manifesting itself for relatively short periods as if it were the dominant personality of the individual, who experiences this intrusion on the ego's habitual standpoint with anxiety. Autonomous complexes are generally ego-alien, and only through considerable effort they move into the field of

awareness as elements of one's own personality. Even then, they can only partially be willing to be assimilated into consciousness (Jung, 1934).

For Jung even the ego is a complex among others, albeit the master complex with the capable image of the hero at its core, representing the archetypal tendency toward mastery. Jung saw the ego as the complex at the centre of one's personal consciousness, the unifying and integrating function, favouring a stable identity of perspective, that is, a sense of "I-ness". However, the multiplicity of selves other than the ego—even if they lack the latter's drive to achieve stability—each of these splinter selves has the potential to become a state of mind (Jung, 1920, para. 582), and the ego can feel more or less threatened by them, depending on specific circumstances.

Today, after one century, we can look at Jung's theory of complexes like a theory of healthy and pathological dissociation, according to the degree of autonomy, control and organizing power of the complex and its relation to the complex of ego. Dissociation may have a healthy function to the extent that the complex has some reciprocal relationship to the complex of ego, processing some disconnected, unconscious part of personality performing a completion, restoring role. And it is increasingly pathological to the extent that there is no recognition at all by the complex of ego and it acts as a completely alien part of personality, a case of divided, highly dissociated self (Zoppi & Schmidt, 2024).

On the other hand, Jung counterbalanced this model of the self with a theory of self as integration and unity. He defined the self as an overarching personality structure encompassing the entirety of conscious and unconscious processes. Its nature is complicated, paradoxical, transcendent, and very potent. In *Psychology and Alchemy* he writes:

I call this centre the "self" which should be understood as the totality of the psyche. The self is not only the centre, but also the whole circumference, which embraces both conscious and unconscious; it is the centre of this totality, just as the ego is the centre of consciousness. (Jung, 1944, para. 44)

Given its contradictory nature, the essence of the self remains inherently out of reach and the self can be more easily felt than conceptualized, according to Jung. It can be represented only through symbols that have a numinous nature, producing a sense of wholeness that is self-validating: the king, the prophet, the hero, Christ (Jung, 1921, para. 790), and also "the geometrical structures of the mandala containing elements of the circle and quaternity" (Jung, 1951, para. 352). These symbols have also the quality of "centre" and convey the deeply satisfying sense of an ineffable and inviolable core of personality. This experience is often felt as a mystical experience that results from a shift in the centre from the ego, as the centre of consciousness, to the self, as the centre of conscious and unconscious (Jung, 1928, para. 274). Positioning the centre of the self between conscious and unconscious means

posing it in an undetermined area beyond the consciousness of the ego, in a liminal or transitional space (in-between) that is opened to potentially integrate unconscious material. For this reason, I think the borders of the self are an interesting area on which to focus.

The concept of wholeness of the self is not the same as the concept of unity, even if it does not exclude it. An organized multiplicity is meant to dwell within the self, as the symbol of the mandala suggests. The archetype of self provides Jung with a device to become a “psychological individual” who can be accountable for multiple centres of subjectivity and competing motivations and a predisposition toward unity and integration (Young-Eisendrath & Hall, 1991; Young-Eisendrath, 1997) that is nonetheless, in Jung’s words, a work against nature (*opus contra naturam*).

This article advances the idea that this model of the self is key not only to understand the individual psyche, as Jung’s work illustrates, but to comprehend enigmatic phenomena of the interpersonal and group life, opening up the possibility that the self can be located within a matrix of interconnections with other selves, which expands the Jungian theory, and which is why the boundaries of the self are an area of interest.

The Experience of Traumatized Refugees: The Disputed Borders of Self

My work with a specific sub-population of refugees—those who have survived severe violence, like torture, war, domestic violence, human trafficking, and many other harrowing experiences, has sharpened my understanding of the liminal areas of our psychic experience: the boundaries of the self and how it either binds or dissolves connections with others and the environment.

The tragic events that often drive refugees away from their homes, such as wars, political violence and persecution of individuals or groups, insecure environment, exposure to life-threatening situations may have different effects on individuals, but every single story, and the adaptation of every single person (being it functional or dysfunctional) can be looked at as a process in which the borders of the ego in relation to the self (intrapsychically), and the borders of the self towards other selves (interpersonally), or the group(s) and the environment(s) can be disputed and renegotiated, partially maintained, partially changed, and sometimes painfully or traumatically.

Not all refugees experience trauma, but for those who do, in their post-traumatic suffering, of whatever nature and extent, below or above the imaginary threshold of psychological disorders, the boundaries of the self seem to be in play and their nature, extent and organization are renegotiated. I am using here the term trauma in the psychodynamic sense (Garland, 2018; Herman, 1992; Lazaratou, 2017; Spermon et al., 2010), as a wound in the envelope of the self or of the protective shield of the ego according to

Freud (1920/1950). Trauma can be conceptualized as an irruption into the self—through the wound created by the impact of a traumatic event—of some sort of otherness that cannot be immediately recognized as part of oneself or integrated into a new framework of meaning. That alien content, unassimilated, makes the person experience a compulsion to expel this otherness in the form of symptoms: flashbacks, nightmares, avoidance of situations that risk triggering them, dissociative symptoms, amnesia, etc. It is something that can disturb both the functioning of the self and the “sense of self” (Colman, 2008), the psychosomatic unity that comprises body and mind and the awareness of being a oneself (Herman, 1992; van der Kolk, 2014). In severe cases of complex trauma and dissociative personalities, this otherness had such a huge impact and depth of penetration into the previous organization of the self to deeply change its characteristics and, for this reason, a person’s *self* perception.

K.’s Case

K., 38 years old, arrives at my office, where I am working, in a state of prostration; he looks exhausted, like someone who no longer has a shred of energy. He reports that he has not been well for several years, and now he can no longer cope.

K. comes from Iran and explains that the source of all his problems is his ethnicity. He is a Kurdish man born in Iran and belonging to the religious minority of Yarsanism. He comes from a poor and uneducated family,² but he had had a better chance to study than his brothers. His father was a political activist and moved his family to live, for some years, in Iraq. After political change, his family moved back to the country, but shortly after, many of his family members, his father included, were killed. The Iranian secret police tried to enlist his other brothers, and because of their refusal, the eldest was killed and the second was imprisoned. His wife and daughter were killed by the police in what was reported as an “accident” during a demonstration. K. was arrested too, beaten, tortured and kept incommunicado, remaining in prison for two months with no official charge. This was meant to persuade him to collaborate with them to discover political opponents. When he was released, he fled but with an intense sense of guilt towards the remaining family members who continued living in Iran at sustained risk.

E.’s Case

E. is a 25-year-old Nigerian woman. Upon our first meeting, she presents herself as a well-groomed and attractive woman, with long, colourful braids,

smartly dressed and perfumed. My initial reaction is one of disbelief that she is seeking asylum.

After many months of meetings with a legal advisor with whom I am collaborating to support E. in her asylum application, her very complex and convoluted story becomes clearer. It is a long story, hidden in the folds of her disguises. When she was six years old, E. was entrusted (or more likely sold) by her family of origin to another family that raised her in a sort of ambiguous status of “slave child”, exploiting her for domestic work. She had a childhood marked by neglect, abuse, beatings, exploitation and, as an adolescent, experienced sexual abuse by a family friend, something she could not disclose to anybody in the family.

Her relationship with this family became turbulent during her adolescence and at the age of 20 the family introduced her to a woman who would organize a migration for her to “work” in Europe. In this way she could become financially independent and earn a living for her birth mother and her poor siblings. The long journey that took her from Nigeria to Switzerland via Italy lasted one year and was marked by multiple imprisonments, long stays in places where she had nothing to survive on, beaten by people involved in the trafficking and forced to prostitute herself. She desperately wanted to go home until she realized that that was impossible for many reasons, among which the chillingly painful realization that she had no home to return to. She spent three months in a Libyan prison. The trafficking network made her continue her journey, with stops in various Italian cities where her stay was punctually paid for by prostitution and sexual favours. E. managed to reach Lausanne despite threats of deportation to Nigeria. There, she met a young man who played a crucial role in making her realize that sharing her story would prevent her from being sent back. E. escaped from her last connection house in Switzerland and returned to Italy.

The Intrapsychic Level: Transformations of the Individual Self

In both these cases, the dissociation levels were so profound to become the foundation for a specific functioning of the self. My understanding of the psychological functioning of K. and E. is that that their self has been so much a terrain of conquest by others that the person is left disowned to some extent, deeply fragmented and with the task to reappropriate those parts of themselves that have been deeply altered or othered, to re-signify them with their own unique sense of subjectivity. At times this acquires the tone of a genuine intrapsychic and interpersonal battle, especially following traumatic events. The amount of energy available to engage in such a battle and the ease with which the complex of the ego can be recruited in this fight is always a matter to be determined on an individual basis and should never be taken for granted.

At the intrapsychic level, the self reorganizes itself to deal with intense trauma, particularly when the trauma escalates to catastrophic levels due to its intensity, duration, and being intentionally inflicted by human beings. Its structure and relation to the ego complex and to autonomous traumatic complexes undergo change. The ego's boundaries may become hardened, resulting in a small, rigidly defended ego. This leaves room for traumatic complexes to dominate the personality, either temporarily or permanently. The extent of this dominance depends on the individual's age at the time of trauma, their prior personality structure, and their personal adaption style.

This is particularly evident in the case of torture survivors in which the body and the psyche of the person undergo a process of violent "undoing" (Luci, 2017a, 2017b) that suggests a dispute occurred between the person's self and a group that inflicted a form of collective violence. Torture, in fact, is large group violence by definition, because it is generally perpetrated by someone in an official capacity (the representative of an institution like the police, the army, a secret agent, etc.) (UNCAT, 1984). In the case of a healthy pre-trauma self, the ego tends to leave the parts of the self that have been damaged by trauma outside of its area of contact, rescuing itself and the functional parts of the personality. It entrenches itself behind avoidance and distance from possible reactivation that is experienced as "non-I". In people who have more fragile organization of self, the experience of torture brings in a process of severe alienation, that the self becomes radically changed by that experience. These are the cases that result in complex trauma, such as K. When we met, K. presented a marked state of depression, with intense sadness, loss of weight, lack of energy, social withdrawal, flashbacks, nightmares, insomnia, hyperarousal, back pain, and high blood pressure. During one of the first interviews, he reluctantly admitted self-harm behaviours through burnings and suicidal thinking. K. reported that he felt himself radically changed, he could not recognize himself, the person he used to be and could not imagine any kind of future. "I feel changed for ever. There is nobody that can reach me in the place where I am." He was quite aware that the world had become empty because there was no one to share that level of experience with. "It is like being swallowed up in a dark place in the earth. Not dead, not buried, but dead and alive the same time," he will describe that state of mind some years later. The ego complex helplessly witnesses a complete surrender of the self to overwhelming forces. It is still there, it can reliably observe itself and the world, but it can do nothing, it cannot save, it cannot fight, it cannot cope.

In other studies, based on my countertransference with patients who have endured torture, I have come to understand the complex post-traumatic condition as resulting from a disintegration of the "psychic skin" (Luci, 2017a, 2022), suggesting that the self's container has been severely compromised. The transformations of self, psychic and somatic, go through the skin as the skin is the foundation of self. The skin and the self have a mutual relationship, and this intuition and sophisticated awareness can be

retraced in many theories of mind (Anzieu, 1974, 1989; Bick, 1968, 1986; Freud, 1920/1950; Tustin, 1990). Even though, it is often the corporeality of the body that is most vulnerable during torture, it is not the material body but the psychic body that fragments when the psychic skin no longer offers protection against assaults from the world.

K.'s psyche is overwhelmed by the chaos of his fragmented inner world. His ego has withdrawn, channelling his libidinal energy to retreat itself into a small fortified tower. We cannot say there is no ego, but rather it is besieged by dissociated psychic and somatic fragments resulting from trauma. These pieces are not only ego-alien but belong to an enemy that is persecuting him from inside. They are territories that have been conquered by perpetrators. They belong to "them".

The profound rupture in the "psychic skin" as primal container of self created a mental state in which there is no longer an external to record and an interior to assemble meanings, and no more filter to select what can enter and what must remain outside; the intrapsychic dynamics acquire a persecutory shade; there is a collapse of space and time; some fundamental psychic functions such as memory and a sense of self are compromised, and symbolization becomes an impossible task. Thus, memories are encoded in the most primitive way, as motoric or sensory body memories divorced from cognition, which are easily aroused after trauma.

Psyche and soma have been forced apart, and their cohesion sacrificed for psychic survival. In such a condition the body insists on reporting through symptoms what the mind cannot bear, and depersonalization can be an adaptation to such divorce. K. vividly recounts how, during the torture sessions, his mind could retreat in a corner of the room, allowing him to escape. Today his body still endures the same kind of pain despite no apparent organic cause, and his mind can still play tricks to enable him to be at the same time present and absent in face of traumatic symptoms.

When a significant part of the self is conquered by this "otherness", a pervasive sense of uncontained fragmentation prevails, along with a sensation of surrender. Losing a sense of self as a whole, the glue that binds the multiplicity together, leads to blurred boundaries, obscuring the distinction between a sense of inside and outside, ownership, and the localization of pain and physical sensations. Fragmentation results in only surfaces, no depth. The senses—sight, hearing, smell, touch, taste—are readily imprinted with traumatic memories. The rapid cycling of state-dependent traumatic memories, prompted by a sound, a smell, an affect, a visual cue, or even a particular word, feel as if they are intruding, persecuting, unbidden and uncontrollable. In such a state, hyperarousal and hypervigilance are common. Without a sense of an internal containment, space and time cease to be dimensional, it is no more possible to think of the future; there is no escape from the immediacy of the trauma, through flashbacks and nightmare, which is not located in the past, but relived continuously in the present, not there but permanently here and present.

More often in this condition, the self seeks external containers that can be found in the environment, physical, interpersonal, social, and even material (Luci, 2017a, 2021; Luci & Khan, 2021). These phenomena's traces can be discerned in the therapist's countertransference, reverie and somatic countertransference sensations, as the therapist's body and mind frequently act as a phantasmatic container for the patient's fragmented self. Thus, bodily sensation and phantasies are prevalent, often with a focus on the skin.

Despite the severity of his level of suffering, the intense dissociation, and marked depression, K. conveys the countertransference feeling that he retains some attitude to fight, and for this reason it is possible for the therapist to ally with his microscopic rigidly defended but extremely resilient ego complex. K. smells of moss in my initial sensory countertransference, something inexplicable. It conveys something to do with a childhood memory of mine, made of soft underbrush light, when I used to go looking for moss in a wood near the ruins of a Frederick II tower. K.'s ego is that tower, I realize. It is his fighting spirit but also sealed and strenuously defended in the tower. Over a long period of time, this countertransference connection supported the therapeutic couple to kindle processes that helped K. to regain some energy and to start working towards a slow reintegration of his traumatic complexes.

In the absence of therapy (or other means of healing), the person may seek a primary source of spontaneous healing, with unpredictable results that depend on many aspects of the environment, on the presence of the group and family to offer the necessary containment—that warm embrace that satisfies the primary needs of belonging, protection, material and emotional nourishment and meaning. If this type of self finds a sufficiently stable container, it can begin to recompose the split psyche, for better or worse, adaptively or maladaptively, depending on individual and social resources and the environment.

Refugees that endured traumatic experiences during their childhood and adolescence, like E., and had to adapt to constantly abusive and harsh conditions of living including migration that required “adaptation” as a mean of survival, often develop a highly flexible and adaptable self. This adaptability can lead to a profound despair of ever being able to find their own “true self”. Their survival hinged on the ability to permanently accommodate and co-exist with this “other” within their intrapsychic and interpersonal realms.

When we met, E. was living in a safe house for women who had escaped from sexual trafficking. She suffered from a marked sense of guilt, dissociative symptoms, memory loss, flashbacks and nightmares, social distrust, concentration problems and “overthinking”, a clearly highly dissociated personality, and gynaecological problems.

Her highly dissociated self was perfectly adapted to an exploiting environment. During her therapy it became clear that her appearance was a well fabricated mask due to her long adaptation to a variety of abusive contexts that constantly sought her complacency for the sake of survival. In her case, the other was incorporated into her only superficial and

well-arranged mask of beauty. Therapy developed very slowly over three years, making room for contact with more authentic and “ugly”—unpleasant and repulsive—parts of herself, through powerful dynamics with me as a therapist, but also with other figures of her life. The most difficult countertransference was the strange feeling of the “inauthentic” that hovered in her stories, the impossibility to trust. A bizarre feeling of non-me and the consequent impossibility to decide what was the truth in her story, in herself. “Disguises” were the starting point of our relationship, and the feeling of working with someone who always had to distract and divert the therapist’s attention continued for a substantial part of the first three years of treatment.

The extreme conditions of abandonment, neglect and abuse to which E. had to adapt during childhood made her self highly fragmented. Internally, the ego complex was so weak that it could only orchestrate the split psyches in such a way as to hide itself. Paradoxically, a deeply dissociated identity is a more stable system. The self adapts so much to the conquest of the other that it is difficult to find a point of resistance to the other. This boundlessness can manifest itself in different ways: as surrender and the system is more stably dissociated (like in E.’s case—the trickster’s adaptation), or as battle and the system is more in tension (like in K.’s case—we might call it the hero’s adaptation).

The Interpersonal Level: The Malevolent Other Within and the Defensive Strategies of the Self

At the interpersonal level, because of human intentional violence or coercion in adulthood, or because of neglect and malevolent caregiving during childhood and adolescence, often the victim’s body becomes the theatre where the malignant relationship to the abusers is repeated and made long-lasting. Psychological and physical symptoms reflect how the tormentor has taken possession of the self.

According to Miguel Benasayag (1980), the torturer’s aim—and we can extend this to the aim of a malevolent caregiver—is to bring the person to the point where the personality shatters: for the victim, there is no division between oneself and the other, there is no other “person”, only an experience of fusion in which the victim and the torturer become one body. This creates a confusing interpersonal fusion: the self and the other interpenetrate. Resisting and defending boundaries of self is not possible.

The changes during an abusive experience are registered at an implicit level in bodily states that become the re-actualization of the abusive relationship. From an object relations perspective (Rosenman, 2003) this condition corresponds to a loss of protection by an internal object—the loss of necessary feelings of basic trust and agency, the loss of a protective and empathic other (Bion, 1962; Fonagy et al., 2002; Fonagy & Target, 2008; Winnicott, 1965, 1971). When

this internal linkage to another that gives meaning to thought and action is damaged or destroyed, attachment to others may be perceived as dangerous and withdrawal patterns or other strategies to avoid a true encounter with the other will emerge. This is particularly evident in developmental trauma, like in E.'s case.

K. and E. have different strategies of dealing with interpersonal relationships. At the beginning of a relationship, K. is withdrawn and avoidant, suspicious, rejecting, and elusive. However, upon closer analysis of his relationships, people in his social network rarely abandoned him, suggesting an ability on his part to engage them on a deeper, empathetic level. In contrast, E. tries to go unnoticed with an appearance of self-sufficiency and adaptation, or she fascinates others and leads them astray. She attracts the other but to control them and keep them at a safe distance, "Stay away from me!"

The complex post-traumatic condition following torture or abuse holds several relational implications: good internal figures are crushed and survivors often acknowledge the loss of faith and trust in humanity, God, life, nature, etc. Recurrent fantasies, flashbacks and nightmares suggest the tenacious grasp of the tormentor (Rosenman, 2003). Avoidant responses such as emotional numbing, lack of responsiveness, and amnesia, are also strained efforts to avoid thinking of the calamity and its perpetrators. The survivor often suffers a derealization that jumbles the aspects and markers of the surrounding world such that it no longer looks familiar. The survivor may suffer depersonalization: feeling dead, not real, lost, utterly alone, debased, detached from the situation, or taken over by an alien consciousness.

By remaining ailing or dysfunctional, some injured parts of the body feel foreign to the survivor. In such a state, the person may view these parts as belonging to the perpetrator who has cleaved the body ego and now racks them from within (Scarry, 1985): K.'s back pain and high blood pressure and his self-harming behaviour through burning the skin, E.'s gynaecological problems.

In torture such as that which K. suffered, the assaultive projective identification is made concrete through an invasive attack on borders, a violent intrusion into the body: the zones of interchange between the body's inside and outside are attacked (through electric shocks, beatings, cigarette burns, injuries, sexual violence, etc.), substances that are normally outside the body are forced into it, or back into it through rape and other forms of sexual assault. Sironi & Branche (2002) maintain that making every boundary one that can be transgressed is part of the torturer's repertoire.

Such massive psychic trauma collapses the distinction between the external world and internal experience and a constant battle ensues between what is perceived as "me" and the "other". Often the skin, the container of the self, is under attack through self-harm behaviours as a way to combat against the "other". At one point, K. shares what can be considered a twilight state between hallucination and fantasy, namely that burning his skin can

destroy the parasites on it, a feeling from which he cannot rid himself after his experience of imprisonment and torture. In my understanding, the parasites are now his torturers and persecutors, piercing his psychic skin.

The body is the place of intersubjective meeting (Lemma, 2010, p. 175), including violent meetings. From birth the body is the crossroads of relationships; the territory of the other (recognized or rejected, imposed, idealized or denied); and the platform of our identity (cohesive or perforated). The body is the place where we start drawing our own self-defining borders with respect to the other, the place of identity. However, this process is never completed, and the body continues to work as an object to the subject within both itself and others: a disputed territory between conscious and unconscious, and between me and other in relationship.

Borders and senses are often the areas of activation in the transference-countertransference phenomena in therapy and they can be part of the dispute and negotiations between two selves involved in powerful dynamics. The skin is not the only organ on which countertransference can be somatically recorded, also organs dealing with filling and emptying are activated (Luci & Kahn, 2021; Luci, 2022).

It, then, becomes clearer why the meeting with the other becomes potentially frightening to a survivor, and why the other needs to be avoided or rejected or estranged. Relationships may be felt as complicated and threatening risks for a dangerous fusion, they can be confusing, an immersion in an internal power struggle in which the borders of self are disputed among different subjectivities. Such relationships risk exposure to the repetition of the logic of the conquest; the fixity or plasticity of these dynamics again depend on one's personal story and personal style of adaptation to extremely difficult life circumstances.

The Group Level: The Blessing and Dangers of Group Life and the Environment

Under optimal, desirable living conditions, the group and the social and material environment have a protective function for the self. The self is constituted and contained by the group, the culture and its environment, all of which provide satisfaction of a number of important needs: safety, nurturance, being looked after, organization, meaning—at different levels from sensory to emotional, to cognitive and in actual social practice. They provide the texture and the substance to individual life and relationships.

Feldman (2004, p. 257) extended the idea of the psychic skin to group functioning, elaborating on the idea of the existence of a “group psychic skin”, i.e., a sense of boundary, of who is in and out of the group, that enables the group to react to threats to group integrity and to process new experiences, to integrate or reject experiences into a renewed sense of identity that is functional to group safety and/or development.

Vamik Volkan describes phenomena that fit into this idea of a group psychic skin using the metaphor of a *large canvas tent* to explain large-group identity (2004, 2006). He supposes the existence of individual and group identities as different coexisting layers, comparing them to our wearing two layers of clothing from the time we are children. Volkan noticed that, in our routine lives, we are not keenly aware of our shared second garment. However, if our huge tent's canvas shakes or parts of it are torn apart, we become obsessed with our second garment, and our individual identity becomes secondary and will do anything to stabilize, repair, maintain and protect the tent's canvas.

This level of group functioning is extremely primitive. Anzieu (1989), expanding his skin-ego concept, developed the concept of a *group skin-ego* to symbolically represent the group as an individual body. He distinguishes between a real, an imaginary, and a symbolic group psychic skin (1989): 1) a *real group psychic skin*, delimiting group territory, occupied space, time for the group, and rhythm of meetings, which are perhaps relevant to the holding function; and 2) an *imaginary group psychic skin*, corresponding to fantasies and illusions about the group envelope, to organic metaphors in a language relative to the group, and to the experience of continuity with the skin; and 3) a *symbolic group psychic skin*, which includes signs and rituals pertaining to a sense of group belongingness. I find that Anzieu's tripartition identifies three modes of group functioning that correspond to Ogden's modes of psychic functioning: *autistic-contiguous*, *paranoid schizoid* and *historical* (1989). The most elusive level and the source of the genesis of the group's psychic skin is probably the sensory ground of group identity, what draws and what anchors the sense of belonging of group members to objects, spaces and territories, binding them to the elements of place and their materiality. The fact that the group functioning is sensory-dominated may be why the primary source of group identity is so unconscious and its transformations—the transits of identification between individuals who self-identify with elements of their environment, i.e. a group wrapper—are difficult to grasp. However, the significance of the group psychic skin's sensory level becomes particularly apparent in the experience of refugees, especially those who suffered trauma. It clearly indicates how vital the role of the group psychic skin is in regaining a sense of containment post-trauma, which is crucial not just for their identity at conscious level but also for consolidating a conscious and unconscious sense of self.

The relationship of the psyche with the material environment becomes clearer if we think of the early stages of life, when emotions are not personal or private affairs, but inhabit the space of the world. For Winnicott (1960, p. 586), an infant initially experiences its physiological states, desires, needs and emotions as if they were the fabric of external reality. The inner and outer worlds are confused and intertwined. The intimacy of the connection between a self and its environment is reflected by studies on the concept of home. Papadopoulos

(2021) systematized studies on home and the experience of its loss in refugees. Depres writes, “After the body itself, the home is seen as the most powerful extension of the psyche” (Despres, 1991, p. 100). Perhaps in the Jungian context the clearest illustration of this perspective is Carl Gustav Jung’s claim that he dreamt of himself as a house (1963, pp. 182–183). In the chapter entitled “The Tower” of his autobiography *Memories, Dreams and Reflections* (1963), Jung recounts his personal adventure of building a place-*other*, symbolically connected to his self. The construction of the tower represents for Jung, “what I was, what I am and will be” (1963, p. 252).

And this is valid not only for individuals, but for groups as well. There is always a matrix of perceptual connections of individuals and groups with the environment. The forms of the sharing of these investments can be more concrete and solidified or more symbolic, fluid and dynamic, as the concept of *participation mystique* and the complexity of alchemical processes allude to. In the relationship with the environment lies a form of sensory containment that can be related to the group life and is soothing and healing for individuals and groups as well.

All these concepts combine well with Jung’s idea of an individual self intrinsically dissociable, in which *autonomous complexes*, able to have an independent life, favour the psyche to create links with the material and social environment around it, so that the psyche of the members of a group can be aggregated around material and symbolic objects.

The presence of a multiplicity of centres of subjectivity and the capacity for the self to change its nature, organization and functioning according to external (or internal) circumstances and to bind itself to other partial centres of subjectivity and to objects in the environment mean that its boundaries are always uncertain and indefinite, its functioning subject to change according to circumstances. Its “readiness to bind” is the source of its dynamism, even of excessive dynamism that produces social violence.

Thinking of the psychic life of groups, this can also tend to stabilize itself to produce a certain culture. Tom Singer and Samuel Kimbles’ concept of *cultural complexes*—arising from Jung’s original theory of psychological complexes and Joseph Henderson’s cultural unconscious, refers to:

... repeated historical experiences that have taken root in the collective psyche of a group and in the psyches of the individual members of a group, and they express archetypal values for the group ... filtered through the psyche of generations of ancestors. (Singer & Kimbles, 2004, p. 8)

I tend to understand cultural complexes as part of a group psyche that can automatically recruit whole or partial selves of group members for their purposes. The portion of the self that is surrendered to cultural complexes will decide the functioning of the individual self, and the distance/closeness at

which one positions oneself in relation to the group functioning is also relevant to deciding what their social role will be.

The eruption of group violence, inclusive of torture, has powerful effects on the individual psyche.

The political persecution of refugees is based on dynamics of exclusion, victimization, and deculturalization of a minority group in society enacted by the state or its institutions or its population, often by a majority, generally in a social climate of terror and denial that the violence is happening (Luci, 2017b). In violence, which is the application of force on someone, there is an appropriation of parts of the self of a person by another person or group of people, which results in fragmentation and a sense of dispossession by the other in the individual self of the persecuted person. The violence is often directed to sever the person's social bonds with their ethnicity, group and culture, and their sense of belonging to them—their larger tents. To increase its effectiveness, the target of persecution is also directed at the group and cultural level of the person's psyche, defeating all resistance.

The ritual of making K. undress before torture sessions, in addition to increasing his sense of personal vulnerability, was also aimed at depriving him of those cultural objects and human dignity that might have provided him a minimal protective value. It was a literal excision from the group of origin, a practice of deculturalization.

E's meticulous self-masking in sessions, with her hairstyles and make-up, can be understood as a gesture of "self-protection", the making of a defensive psychic skin that her chameleon-like adaptation had provided her with as a defensive shield, an attempt to provide herself with a shell of beauty that would attract and distract at the same time. The defensive layer covered the wounds of the psychic skin and the absence of a cultural psychic skin, injuries sustained in her childhood, being sold to a family of a different ethnicity due to poverty and misery. This resulted not only in major affective and caring deficits, but also in E's inability to identify with the culture of the so-called adoptive family and the group and environment in which she grew up, nurturing the feeling of herself as an "other" to them, an "other" difficult to define and therefore difficult to defend against their violent massive projections.

Conclusion

The complexity of the dynamic interaction between self and group/environment, and the mediating role of cultural complexes, may help us to understand both unsettling phenomena (war, trauma, terror and violence) and containing phenomena (group membership, culture and religion) that occur at the disputed boundaries between individual selves, between groups, and between an individual self and a group. This research area is replete with potentially important and insightful implications.

Many dynamics, not only observable in the psychotherapy of refugees or in the clinical field in general, but also in social phenomena, can acquire a new meaning in the light of these reflections on the disputed borders of the self. A primary implication of these reflections may be a truth difficult to acknowledge: our personal boundaries are always temporary and depend both on us and the other, on the social and material environment that sustain us both as individuals and group members. The meaning within which the self can live is the result not only of individual endeavour, but also the result of an interpersonal and group weaving that often reshapes the boundaries of the self, sometimes violently. In essence, we are only partially the authors of our self. The self is not just a paradox but a fragile complex jewel interwoven in an embroidery with its interpersonal, social and material environment, all of which it needs in order to write its own story, on which to affix its signature, only being able to aspire, without any guarantee, to the feeling of being the main author with the pen in hand.

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TRANSLATIONS OF ABSTRACT

L'une des contributions les plus précieuses de Jung concerne la nature du soi. Celle-ci est mystérieuse, inexplicable et toujours inaccessible. Dans cet article, réfléchissant à l'expérience de certains réfugiés et essayant d'en extraire plus de connaissances sur notre fonctionnement psychique et la dynamique du soi en relation avec le soi, l'autre et les groupes, je me concentrerai sur les frontières du soi et leur nature, leur localisation, et sur la dynamique de leur maintien et de leur changement chez des sujets géographiquement, historiquement et culturellement situés.

L'expérience de certains réfugiés, qui combine un traumatisme majeur et l'expérience de la migration, est particulièrement éclairante sur la façon dont les limites de soi sont souvent contestées et toujours négociées avec les autres, et sur la façon dont notre subjectivité est le résultat de dynamiques continues d'occupation, de conflit et/ou de négociation, menées à différents niveaux de nos vies sociales et individuelles.

Mon argument est que ces processus se produisent aux frontières du soi, impliquant des dynamiques psychologiques intrapsychiques, interpersonnelles et de groupe, avec des répercussions dans les sphères sociopolitiques et culturelles, avec des influences réciproques entre tous ces niveaux. L'objectif est de se concentrer sur les changements dans ces limites, en les illustrant par des vignettes cliniques.

Mots clés: soi, traumatisme, intrapsychique, interpersonnel, dynamique de groupe, frontières contestées, environnement, réfugiés

Einer von Jungs wertvollsten Beiträgen betrifft die mysteriöse, unerklärliche und stets unerreichbare Natur des Selbst. In diesem Artikel werde ich mich auf die Grenzen des Selbst und seine Natur, Lage und Dynamik der Erhaltung und Veränderung in geographisch, historisch und kulturell verorteten Themen konzentrieren. Dabei werde ich über die Erfahrungen einiger Flüchtlinge nachdenken und versuchen, daraus mehr Wissen über unsere psychische Funktionsweise und die Dynamik des Selbst in Bezug auf uns selbst, auf andere und auf Gruppen zu gewinnen.

Die Erfahrungen einiger Flüchtlinge, die schwere Traumata und die Erfahrung der Migration kombinieren, verdeutlichen besonders, wie die Grenzen des Selbst oft umstritten sind, immer mit anderen ausgehandelt werden und wie unsere Subjektivität

das Ergebnis andauernder Dynamiken der Besetzung, Auseinandersetzung und/oder Verhandlung ist, die auf verschiedenen Ebenen unseres gesellschaftlichen und individuellen Lebens stattfinden.

Ich behaupte, daß diese Prozesse an den Grenzen des Selbst stattfinden und intrapsychische, zwischenmenschliche und gruppenpsychologische Dynamiken mit Auswirkungen auf die soziopolitische und kulturelle Sphäre mit gegenseitigen Einflüssen zwischen all diesen Ebenen umfassen. Der Versuch besteht darin, sich auf die Veränderungen an diesen Grenzen zu konzentrieren und sie mit klinischen Vignetten zu illustrieren.

Schlüsselwörter: Selbst, Trauma, intrapsychisch, zwischenmenschlich, Gruppendynamik, umstrittene Grenzen, Umwelt, Flüchtlinge

Uno dei contributi più importanti di Jung riguarda la misteriosa, inspiegabile e sempre irraggiungibile natura del Sé. In questo articolo, mi concentrerò sui confini del Sé e sulla loro natura, collocazione e dinamiche di mantenimento e cambiamento in soggetti situati geograficamente, storicamente, e culturalmente, riflettendo sull'esperienza di alcuni rifugiati e cercando di estrarre da ciò maggiori conoscenze sul nostro funzionamento psichico e sulle dinamiche del Sé in relazione a se stessi, agli altri ed ai gruppi.

L'esperienza di alcuni rifugiati, che combina un trauma importante con l'esperienza della migrazione, è particolarmente illuminante su come i confini del Sé siano spesso contestati e sempre negoziati con gli altri, e su come la nostra soggettività sia il risultato di dinamiche continue di occupazione, disputa e/o negoziazione, condotte a diversi livelli della nostra vita sociale e individuale.

La mia tesi è che questi processi avvengono ai confini del Sé, coinvolgendo dinamiche psicologiche intrapsichiche, interpersonali e di gruppo, con riverberi nelle sfere socio-politiche e culturali, e con influenze reciproche tra tutti questi livelli. Il tentativo è concentrarsi sui cambiamenti in questi confini, illustrandoli con vignette cliniche.

Parole chiave: Sé, trauma, intrapsichico, interpersonale, dinamiche di gruppo, confini contesi, ambiente, rifugiati

Наиболее ценный вклад Юнга касается таинственной, необъяснимой и непостижимой природы самости. Предметом данной статьи являются границы самости, а также их природа, местонахождение и динамика их удержания и изменения у субъектов в определенных географических, исторических и культурных условиях. Я размышляю об опыте ряда беженцев и пытаюсь таким образом побольше узнать о нашем психическом функционировании и динамике самости в отношении самости, другого и группы.

Опыт некоторых беженцев, сочетающий тяжелую психологическую травму с опытом миграции, особенно наглядно демонстрирует, что границы самости часто атакуются и нуждаются в согласовании с другими, а наша субъектность является следствием постоянной динамики вторжений, споров и/или переговоров, происходящих на разных уровнях нашей общественной и индивидуальной жизни.

Я полагаю, что эти процессы протекают на границах самости, задействуя внутриспсихическую, межличностную и групповую психологическую динамику и отражаясь на социально-политической и культурной сферах, при том, что все эти уровни оказывают взаимное влияние друг на друга. В фокусе моего внимания находится изменение этих границ, что иллюстрируется клиническими примерами.

Ключевые слова: самость, травма, внутриспсихическая, межличностная, групповая динамика, оспариваемые границы, окружающая среда, беженцы

Una de las contribuciones más valiosas de Jung se refiere a la naturaleza misteriosa, inexplicable e inalcanzable del self. En este artículo, me centraré en las fronteras del self y su naturaleza, localización y dinámicas de mantenimiento y cambio en sujetos geográfica, histórica y culturalmente situados, reflexionando sobre la experiencia de algunos refugiados e intentando extraer de ella más conocimiento sobre nuestro funcionamiento psíquico y la dinámica del self con relación a sí mismo, el otro y los grupos.

La experiencia de algunos refugiados, que combina traumas de gravedad y la experiencia de la migración, es particularmente esclarecedora de cómo los límites del self, a menudo son disputados y siempre negociados con otros, y de cómo nuestra subjetividad es el resultado de dinámicas continuas de ocupación, disputa y/o negociación, llevadas a cabo en diferentes niveles de nuestras vidas sociales e individuales.

Mi argumento es que estos procesos ocurren en las fronteras del self, involucrando dinámicas psicológicas grupales, intrapsíquicas e interpersonales, con repercusiones en las esferas sociopolítica y cultural, con influencias recíprocas entre todos estos niveles. La intención es hacer foco en los cambios en estas fronteras, ilustrándolos con viñetas clínicas.

Palabras clave: self, trauma, intrapsíquico, interpersonal, dinámica de grupo, fronteras en disputa, medio ambiente, refugiados

自我、群体及其环境的争议性边界:我们从难民身上学到了什么?

荣格最有价值的贡献之一是关于自性的神秘性、不可解释性和永远无法触及性。在本文中,我将重点关注自性的边界及其性质,其位和维系的动力,以及其在不同地理、历史和文化背景下生活的个体身上的异,本文将反思一些难民的经历,并试图从中提取更多认识,以理解我们的心理功能,以及自性与自我、他人和群体之间的动态关系。

一些难民的经历中包括了重大创伤和的经历,这些特别能说明自性的边界如何经常受到争议,如何总是需要与他人进行判,以及我们的主体性如何来自于一个持续不断的占领、争议和/或判的过程,这些过程发生在社会和个人生活的不同层面。

的论点是,这些过程发生在自性的边界上,涉及心理内部、人际关系和群体心理动态,并在社会政治和文化领域产生反响,所有这些层面之间存在相互影响。我试图将重点放在这些界的变化上,并通过临床案例加以说明。

关键词: 自性, 创伤, 心理内部, 人际关系, 群体动力, 有争议的边界, 环境, 难民