

***Belonging and containing***  
**Gohar Homayounpour**

A seminar on “Belonging and Containing” was hosted in Berlin from September 21<sup>st</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup> 2018, by the *Center for Cross-Cultural Psychiatry and Psychotherapy (ZIPP)* at the Department of Psychiatry and Psychotherapy on the *Charité* Campus Mitte.

In the words of two of our hosts, Ulrike Kluge and Steffen Schödwell:

“This seminar was triggered by political, social and ecological crises, as in the last few years, migration and flight have become central topics in Europe as all around the world. As a response to the recent influx of a large number of refugees in the past two years in Germany, we observed a growing call for further exploration and training *to prepare professionals for treatment of the so called "traumatized refugees"*. *With this seminar we wanted to explore the potentials of group, ethno- and psychoanalytical approaches in the psychosocial care of patients with flight and migration backgrounds by connecting with international experts. We are very much hoping the seminar was a start of an ongoing journey.*”

The clinical discussions in the seminar were focused on the following three topics:

- a. Indication, settings, analytical models & their modification.
- b. Considering support structures & the political, social and legal threats to living in exile.
- c. Working with language and cultural interpreters and/or in second language.

The participants were various national and international colleagues, as follows:

Maja Dekicdjelic, Monika Englisch, Anninka Enseroth, Anna Ferruta,

Robi Friedman, Gohar Homayounpour, Andrea Gaddini, Sanja Hodzic, Ulrike Kluge, Joachim Küchenhoff, MJ Maher, Salwa Meier, Eva Nießen, Tülay Özbek, Jens Preil, Berenice Romero, John Schlapobersky, Steffen Schödwell, Johanna Schorndanner, Oliver Schwald, Judith Strasser, Michael Weiss.

We were divided into three small groups. MJ Maher, Oliver Schwald and Anna Ferruta presented clinical cases in each group, moderated by our hosts.

For the following step to the project the seminar organizers will present their thoughts, insights and elaborations to interested colleagues in the German-speaking countries during their conference “Encounters beyond the Couch - Flight onto the Couch? (Group) Analytical Spaces of Resonance when dealing with Flight and Migration Backgrounds”, which is to be held on October 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> 2018 at Charité Berlin. (<http://belongingandcontaining.de/en.html#idea>).

Now, on a more personal note, I wish to share a few of my thoughts and reflections on the two desirous and stimulating days we spent together, in the comfort of the gracious hospitality that we were offered. I believe a very similar hospitality is being offered by this incredible Centre (ZIPP) and its colleagues to the refugees and immigrants that they work with. It is touching to observe how well the system that they have found works; it actually really works. I truly believe that it should be a reference point for training, especially with regard to how powerful “Group Psychoanalysis” can be in working with such populations.

In a clinical report on a group therapy, there was a delightful moment for all of us, as we came face to face with a Syrian woman who said to the group therapist, “You are too skinny, you are not eating so well; you know this Swiss food is absolutely horrible, I will bring you some Baklava next time”. Without going into the various possible psychoanalytic interpretations of such a communication, there was

something deeply refreshing and deconstructionist about this dialogue. It was refreshing because it fights clichés. Because it is subversive.

At times I felt there was the danger of falling into the trap of “reality” in working with such groups, the brutal reality of it all seducing us all to leave our analytic positions, in order to “do” something, at times, as a defense against the inevitable helplessness of such a real, brutal situation.

At one point in the seminar I had an association to an article I had just read with the title “Things are so bad in Iran that Afghan immigrants are going home”. In Iran, the largest immigrant population we have had over the years has been the Afghan community, and now things are so bad in Iran that they are even leaving in their thousands, waiting at the borders to attempt to get back to Afghanistan. At times, maybe, in the midst of the vast triumphs of right-wing governments in various countries, even of some with fascist politics, when their successful populist discourse so often, at some level, has to do with the flux of immigrants and refugees, when we often hear “It is too much, we have taken too many people in, what about other countries, they have to take their share, these immigrants and refugees are ruining our cities,” to all of these I want to say: things are so bad in Iran that even Afghan immigrants are leaving.

Does this not say it all? They come by the thousands to your land because you have something to offer them to survive, this is a clear sign of prosperity and possibility. Embrace it as such because the day might come that they will leave because you are in a crisis of depletion of your own. I felt jealous of these host countries. They were wondering how to deal with this influx and I was haunted, tormented with the title of this article. It is not immigrants and refugees that deplete us, it is that when they leave, it is a sign of your *a priori* depletion. Their arrival is a sign of your vitality: welcome them, for in this non-humanitarian hospitality you are greeting your own sense of aliveness.

Vitality takes me to the value of containing deadness as well as aliveness. There was a moment when we were told about an incident in a group therapy, where a plant brought in by one of the refugee group members to the group in order for the group leader to keep alive had died. I could feel an immediate sense of despair in all of us, but not in the group analyst. He was delightfully able to elaborate and work through with the group his available interspace for their deadness, and that of his own.

Let me finish with a poem: “*Bohemia Lies by the Sea*” by Ingeborg Bachmann.

Anna Ferruta, the brilliant Italian psychoanalyst, gifted it to our hosts at dinner. It encapsulates our two days in Berlin, a city haunted by many ghosts of its own, by our intense encounter, all of us somehow linked via psychoanalysis, our own sense of dislocation and a continuous search for the bohemian within.

*Bohemia Lies by the Sea*

If houses here are green, I'll step inside a house.  
If bridges here are sound, I'll walk on solid ground.  
If love's labour's lost in every age, I'll gladly lose it here.

If it's not me, it's one who is as good as me.

If a word here borders on me, I'll let it border.  
If Bohemia still lies by the sea, I'll believe in the sea again.  
And believing in the sea, thus I can hope for land.

If it's me, then it's anyone, for he's as worthy as me.  
I want nothing more for myself. I want to go under.

Under – that means the sea, there I'll find Bohemia again.  
From my grave, I wake in peace.  
From deep down I know now, and I'm not lost.

Come here, all you Bohemians, seafarers, dock whores, and ships  
unanchored. Don't you want to be Bohemians, all you Illyrians,  
Veronese and Venetians. Play the comedies that make us laugh

until we cry. And err a hundred times,  
as I erred and never withstood the trials,  
though I did withstand them time after time.

As Bohemia withstood them and one fine day  
was released to the sea and now lies by water.

I still border on a word and on another land,  
I border, like little else, on everything more and more,

a Bohemian, a wandering minstrel, who has nothing, who  
is held by nothing, gifted only at seeing, by a doubtful sea,  
the land of my choice.