

## Chapter 25

---

# Extending Jungian psychology

## Working with survivors of political upheavals

Renos Papadopoulos

---

*At the outset, I wish to salute Andrew Samuels, my friend and colleague of more than thirty years, for the breath of fresh air he brought into the world of Jungian psychology. His considerable contribution includes theoretical systematisation and innovation and organisational development (as an officer of the International Association for Analytical Psychology and a founding member of the International Association of Jungian Studies), as well as extension of Jungian psychology in academic/University contexts. His overall presence in Analytical Psychology has been substantial, assisting significantly its upgrading in the world today.*

Andrew was responsible for strengthening the presence of the social and political dimensions in the Jungian mainstream (e.g. 1993, 1996, 1997, 1999, 2001, 2002). He did this over the years, always emphasising that in parallel to our analytical practice it is important to address the plight of those outside our consulting rooms. Characteristically, he pleaded that ‘Today’s Jungians, and other Western therapists as well, need . . . to stand alongside the materially disadvantaged and the socially frightened, as well as sit down with their educated analysands. To do this, they must open their hearts and minds to that which is “foreign.”’ (2002: 479). It is this very parallel direction that my work has also been addressing.

Considering my own position of being both ‘foreigner’ and ‘local’ in the four countries where I spent large chunks of my life, it is not surprising that my work had to also include the dimension Andrew refers to in this plea. Throughout my professional life I maintained a clinical/analytical practice parallel to my academic positions in universities; then, my clinical work always included another parallel involvement – working in the public sector as well as in private practice. Finally, in the last twenty years or so another direction developed more explicitly when I began working as consultant to international organisations in many countries with reference to refugees and other survivors of political upheavals. It is this last direction that this paper will now address.

## Jungian insights

Although I am never employed as a ‘Jungian’ consultant and my work is never seen as exclusively ‘Jungian’ (because it is also informed by other approaches, mainly systemic, e.g. Papadopoulos 2008), I have nevertheless found that certain Jungian theories have been extremely useful in comprehending the phenomena I have been working with. However, it is important to emphasise that these ideas have to be extended and adapted to fit in with the realm that they are applied to. Andrew’s approach was always sensitive to the need for such an adaptation (e.g. Samuels 2007).

To begin with, it is important to note that the political upheavals that give rise to conflict of the magnitude that causes human casualties are phenomena that are highly *polarised*. These are situations where two factions (e.g. racial, ideological, ethnic-cultural or religious) reach the point that their differences become more important than their similarities and, moreover, the differences acquire a critical and defining significance (e.g. Papadopoulos 2000, 2005a, 2005b, 2006). This oppositionality quickly extends to cover areas well beyond the initial fields of dispute, causing each faction to genuinely believe that the other side is not only wrong in their political positions but, throughout history, they have behaved in a reprehensible way and have no respect for basic human values etc., as opposed to their own side that has always been good, reconciliatory and civilised.

Such sharp *polarisation* at this acute level tends to seep quickly through into every facet of individual and collective realms, affecting at least three distinct and yet inter-related areas: *epistemology*, *positioning* and *action*.

Each particular group’s discourses construct their own clusters of perceiving, knowing and believing that are unique to that group and, under polarised conditions, these clusters acquire their own independence and autonomy, shaping everything around them according to their own logic. If a group feels victimised by another group, its selective perception will be geared towards focusing on incidents that can be interpreted in a way that strengthens the polarised beliefs.

The notion of *positioning* (Davis and Harré 1990, Harré and Van Langenhove 1999) refers to the active effect that discourses have in locating individuals and communities in certain positions. *Action*, then, can only be the consequence of a certain *positioning* given the specifics of the dominant *epistemology* that informs it; in this way, the epistemology, positioning and action keep strengthening and reproducing each other in mutually reciprocal ways.

This means that interventions that ignore the dynamics of epistemology formation and positioning and address only the level of action are not likely to be effective. What is important to remember is that the polarisation tends to continue long after the actual violent conflict comes to an end and it permeates the epistemology, positioning and actions not only of members

of the implicated parties but also of members of the services and organisations that reach out to render assistance.

### **Polarisation, unipolar archetype and complexity**

It is with reference to phenomena of such overwhelming polarisation that Jungian psychology can be particularly useful, especially by extending Jung's ideas about the bipolar nature of archetypes. Simply put, the polarisation phenomena in such situations can be appreciated as manifestations of a state where one pole of the archetype reigns supreme and suppresses almost totally any elements that belong to the other pole (Papadopoulos 1998a, 1998b, 2000, 2002c, 2005a, 2005b, 2006).

Once we adopt this perspective, then our understanding of other associated phenomena can be enriched.

Usually we experience archetypes in diluted forms that combine not only the two polarities (positive and negative) but also both collective and personal dimensions. In occurrences of such acute political polarisation that escalate into violent factional conflict, what dominate are archetypal manifestations that are not only unipolar but also saturated by collective material, thus subjugating personal dimensions. This means that under the blinding brightness of the unipolar archetype, all other differences and conflicts (interpersonal or intrapsychic) tend to fade away. Such expressions of pure archetypal dazzling energy can exert an irresistible fascination, often of a numinous nature, and individuals and groups tend to become totally gripped by their power. 'The purity of a unipolar archetypal image, uncontaminated by any personal dimensions has irresistible powers' (Papadopoulos 1997: 24). In order to convey the overpowering effects of unipolar archetypal manifestations, I introduced the expressions 'archetypal dazzle', 'archetypal radiation' and 'archetypal whirlpool' (Papadopoulos 1998a, 1998b, 2000, 2002c, 2005a, 2005b, 2006). Indeed, it is as if the purity of the unipolar archetype emits radiation that, although it is imperceptible, can be harmful once a certain quantity of it is accumulated in our organisms. The image of the whirlpool is another apt way to express the irresistible force that sucks people into set clusters of epistemologies, positioning and actions, dictated exclusively by the one pole of an archetype.

One of the main effects of being exposed to the archetypal radiation of unipolarity is to be levelled by blanket oversimplification that lacks complexity, e.g. 'we are only good' and 'they are only bad'. Polarisation implies simplistic perceptions – black or white, good or bad. Hence, it could be said that 'the first casualty' of exposure to unipolar archetypes and their resulting polarised situations 'is complexity' (Papadopoulos 2009). Unipolarity has no complexity as everything is either on the positive pole or the negative pole of the archetype. Yet the 'richness of [life] and internal psychological states is

based on the complexity . . . [that is] generated by the various conflictual antitheses and dilemmas' (Papadopoulos 2005a: 37).

The tendency for over-simplification spreads to most areas of functioning. Simplistic becomes the perception of the causes and effects of the conflict as well as what is perceived to be an appropriate response to the conflict. Moreover, the accounts people give about the conflict also become simplistic in order to fit in with the polarised set of clusters of stereotypical formulations (e.g. 'what we did was good' and 'what they did was bad'). It should not be forgotten that this oversimplification tends to overflow beyond the implicated warring factions and also engulfs those who reach out to assist the casualties of the conflict. Staff of the various services and organisations that offer their assistance tend also to get sucked into this whirlpool of over-simplification into sterile and mono-dimensional epistemologies, positioning and actions.

Thus, paradoxically, in working with refugees, by increasing the level of complexity, despite the pressure to keep things 'simple', new patterns can emerge that can produce not only epistemological clarity but also free both therapists and refugees from falling into fixed, sterile and polarised positions.

(Papadopoulos 2001b: 418)

Increasing the level of complexity can, therefore, reduce the grip of the tyrannical hegemony of the unipolar archetype. This can be achieved (a) by restoring its bipolarity, when positive and negative elements are introduced, and (b) by inflicting cracks on the monolithic collective, when personal dimensions are added.

### **'Humanising the archetype' – survivors and helpers**

In essence, the process of counteracting the effects of a unipolar archetype amounts to what could be called a 'humanisation of the archetype'. I first introduced this term in my paper 'Individual identity and collective narratives of conflict' to describe the 'endeavour to "humanise" the purity of the unipolar archetype' (Papadopoulos 1997: 24) in the context of my work with medical evacuees during the Bosnian war. During that long and arduous work, I became painfully aware of the dehumanising effects collective narratives had on individuals; and those narratives clearly emanated from blatantly unipolar archetypal constellations ('we are only good' and 'they are only bad') devoid of any personal experiences that did not fit in with the extreme polarised formulation. Thus, 'humanising the archetype' refers to the introduction of human dimensions to the inhuman purity of a unipolar archetype, allowing the rich diversity of human and individual experiences to inject it with the messiness of real and actual life. Then the

archetype begins to lose its abstract, pure and absolute status and, consequently, its fascinating dazzle. In this way, individuals are enabled to experience their individuality outside the confines of the asphyxiating limits of polarised collective impositions and are enabled to admit exceptions to what they were convinced to be 'the truth', e.g. 'to be honest, I was there when some of us also did terrible things to them', or 'some of them were in fact not that bad to me'. However, often, such complexity is not welcome because the resulting ambiguities and lack of clarity can be unsettling and painful. The simplistic nature of polarisation offers many superficially comforting benefits.

The corresponding polarisation in humanitarian and aid organisations can take various forms; the most obvious one is taking sides, perceiving one faction to be 'right' and the other 'wrong'. Usually, these sympathies follow the same socio-political divisions that gave rise to violent confrontation between the two sides in the first place (e.g. pro- vs anti-American, religious fundamentalism vs secular materialism). In this way, the polarisation that governs the helpers entrenches the original conflict and fuels it further.

However, the polarisation and resulting over-simplification can also affect other dimensions that are not so apparent. Humanitarian organisations and mental health professionals can be equally polarised and their epistemology, positioning and actions can be dictated by over-simplification and lack of complexity in the way they perceive the survivors, the nature and causes of their difficulties and the way help should be offered to them. As the investigations on these matters are carried out by helpers and not by the survivors themselves, the effects of polarisation on the helpers is a neglected area. The usual way that the theory of trauma is used by helpers is one example of how the over-simplification and polarisation can affect helpers (Papadopoulos 2001a, 2001b, 2002a, 2002b).

### **Field work in a refugee camp**

The first time I was invited (in 2006) to consult to the Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya, near the Somali border, was mainly to review the psychological services to refugees and offer appropriate training to staff. The United Nations established the camp in 1991 to offer temporary shelter to 800,000 Somalis who fled their war-torn country. Over the years, the population of the Dadaab camp was reduced to 200,000 but the sub-standard living conditions did not improve. During my visits to Dadaab, I led teams from the 'Centre for Trauma, Asylum and Refugees' (CTAR) of the University of Essex, which included a Jungian analyst, Professor Stefano Carta from Italy.

My work in Dadaab involves consulting to the management team of the camps, consultation to and training of staff (mainly of the counselling services) as well as direct therapeutic contact with refugees. The camp has a

handful of trained counsellors and several teams of ‘para-counsellors’ – young camp residents/refugees who were given brief training to assist the counsellors.

### **Consultation to the management team**

It is always very important to have access to the overall management team of any organisation where one works and it is very fortunate that the Dadaab inter-agency management team always welcomes CTAR input and is very receptive to collaborating with us. Here is one example: during our March-April 2008 visit, there was the issue of a predicted huge new influx of refugees (almost doubling the camp’s population) due to the deterioration of the political situation in Somalia. The camp authorities started planning to address the multiplicity of needs of such an influx (e.g. shelter, sanitation, water and food, etc.) and they had all the required expertise to deal effectively with such an emergency. Our input was to help them to consider the complex implications of such a substantial change to the relative stability of the camp. We suggested that, in effect, they were going to have two distinct groups of refugees – the old and the new – and pointed out that it was likely that this division could create three possible outcomes: that the two groups get on well together, become antagonistic to each other to varying degrees, or join together against a third ‘other’, most likely to be the staff group. In considering various ways of addressing this anticipated polarisation, we suggested that they could seek the assistance of the old group of refugees, acknowledging that they (the refugees) have unique expertise that the staff do not have (i.e. the experience of surviving in the camp for so long). We emphasised the need for staff and old refugees to collaborate to find appropriate ways to share with the new group of refugees their positive and negative experiences of living in the camp, not focusing only on the content of the information but also the best possible medium to convey these experiences, e.g. by enacted narrative stories, information sharing, dance events.

This example illustrates the various realms of polarisation and the type of input that can be offered to counteract its destructive over-simplification. Long after the actual armed conflict that drove those refugees away from their homes, the whole camp milieu still reverberates from its polarised effects in many ways. Refugees are seen as helpless and traumatised and staff are seen as their rescuers and full of endless resources. Many consultation interventions addressed that sharp division with a considerable degree of effectiveness (Papadopoulos 2008, Papadopoulos, Ljubinkovic and Warner 2007). In this particular consultation, we anticipated a possible source of another potentially destructive polarisation which could have then become associated with the existing polarised tendencies. Our suggestions were geared towards increasing complexity, acknowledging the reality

of the actual expertise of the old refugees and enabling them to express it in their own way, and increasing the collaboration between all the implicated parties (staff, old and new groups of refugees).

### **Mother and daughter from Mogadishu**

During one of my visits to Dadaab, I was asked to see a mother and daughter who had just succeeded in fleeing the fighting in Mogadishu, found their way to the border (about 800 kilometres away), crossed it and came to the camp where they were found sleeping under a tree. Both were exhausted but in remarkably good physical condition, given their ordeal. The daughter was in her late teens and looked disoriented and frightened. The mother was composed and calm and told me that they had a harrowing escape and that all the male members of her family had been killed.

This is a typical situation where mental health professionals almost automatically would view these two women as traumatised victims and would proceed to treat them as such. In itself, this would not be wrong but it would be inappropriate if this was the only way the two women were viewed and related to. The 'Trauma Grid' (Papadopoulos 2004, 2005c, 2007, 2008) provides a systematic framework that enables the introduction of complexity in such situations and facilitates the identification of different types of responses to adversity; undeniably, the negative effects can be present (e.g. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) but, in addition, these responses can also include *resilience* (referring to the continuation of existing positive qualities that are maintained despite adversity), and *Adversity-Activated Development* (referring to new positive qualities that are generated as a result of one's exposure to adversity). Consequently, allowing the polarised and over-simplified view to flood one's epistemology, positioning and actions can be limiting and, indeed, dehumanising.

Without going into details about my work with them (due to lack of space), it is important to note that, first, I had to become aware of the grip I felt by the forceful need to help them, save them, make them feel better. Seeing them as victims of such an awful series of tragedies and losses, I was positioned to act based on the assumption that they were just traumatised and totally helpless and I was their rescuer. This is a direct consequence of the dazzling nature of the unipolar archetype. Being aware of this pull, I did my utmost to open up space for the mother to convey the wide range of her experiences and feelings and not only those that fitted within the monolithic image of a helpless victim. Once I created the space within me to view this person in a multidimensional way, the mother was enabled to convey the complexity of her situation and existence. Understandably, she was devastated that she had lost her husband and sons, her home and neighbours and her whole life, but at the same time, she clearly conveyed her immense relief of having survived with her daughter. More specifically, her whole

being was grateful to Allah for the miracle that saved her and her daughter who, one day, with her own children, would continue their family. The mother was not just a victim but also had a remarkable resilience, was not just fixed in a painful past but was also looking to the future, was not just broken by her grief but was also full of gratitude. Her dignity and humanity were just extraordinary. Hence, I was not just the polarised helper who was assisting a helpless victim but felt grateful for her inspiring humanity. This is a way of humanising the archetype that reduces us to pawns of a levelling unipolar archetypal scenario. Jung was fully aware of this complexity. His following statement, although it became a cliché, still conveys this awareness: 'A a psychology of neurosis that sees only the negative elements empties out the baby with the bath water' (Jung 1934, para 355).

## Bibliography

- Davis, B. and Harré, R. (1990). Positioning: The discursive production of selves. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 20/1: 43–64.
- Harré, R. and Van Langenhove, L. (eds.) (1999). *Positioning Theory*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Jung, C.G. (1934). The State of Psychotherapy Today. In *CW 10: Civilization in Transition*.
- Papadopoulos, R.K. (1997). Individual identity and collective narratives of conflict. *Harvest*, vol. 43, 2: 7–26.
- (1998a). Destructiveness, atrocities and healing: epistemological and clinical reflections. *The Journal of Analytical Psychology*, vol. 43, 4: 455–477.
- (1998b) Jungian Perspectives In New Contexts. In *The Jungians Today*, ed. A. Casement. London and New York: Routledge.
- (2000). Factionalism and interethnic conflict: narratives in myth and politics. In *The Vision Thing. Myth, Politics and Psyche in the World*, ed. T. Singer. London and New York: Routledge.
- (2001a). Refugees, therapists and trauma: systemic reflections. *Context*, No. 54: 5–8.
- (2001b). Refugee Families: issues of systemic supervision. *Journal of Family Therapy*, vol. 23, No. 4: 405–422.
- (2002a). Refugees, home and trauma. In *Therapeutic Care for Refugees. No Place Like Home*, ed. R. K. Papadopoulos. London: Karnac.
- (2002b). 'But how can I help if I don't know?' Supervising Work With Refugee Families. In *Perspectives on Supervision*, eds. D. Campbell and B. Mason. London: Karnac.
- (2002c). The other other: when the exotic other subjugates the familiar other. *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, vol. 47, 2: 163–188.
- (2004) Trauma in a systemic perspective: Theoretical, organisational and clinical dimensions. Paper presented at the XIV Congress of the International Family Therapy Association in Istanbul.
- (2005a). Political Violence, Trauma and Mental Health Interventions. In *Art*

- Therapy and Political Violence*, eds. D. Kalmanowitz and B. Lloyd. London: Brunner-Routledge.
- (2005b) Mythical dimensions of storied communities in political conflict and war. In *Balkan Currents: Essays in Honour of Kjell Magnusson*, eds. T. Dulic, R. Kostic, I. Macek and J. Trtak. Uppsala: Centre for Multiethnic Research, Uppsala University.
- (2005c). Terrorism and psychological trauma. Psychosocial perspectives. *The Journal of Psychological Foundations*, New Delhi, Vol. VII (2): 6–15.
- (2006). Terrorism and panic. *Psychotherapy and Politics International*, Vol. 4, No. 2: 90–100.
- (2007) Refugees, Trauma and Adversity-Activated Development. *European Journal of Psychotherapy and Counselling*, 9 (3): 301–312.
- (2008) Systemic Challenges in a Refugee Camp. *Context*, 16–19.
- (2009) L’Umwelt, Jung e le reti di immagin; archetipiche. In *Rivista di Psicologia Analitica*, Nuova series no. 26, vol. 78/2008, pp. 93–128.
- Papadopoulos, R.K., Ljubinkovic, A., and Warner, S. (2007). Report on assessment of psychosocial needs at the Dadaab refugee camps. Colchester: Centre for Trauma, Asylum and Refugees: University of Essex.
- Samuels, A. (1993). *The Political Psyche*. London: Routledge.
- (1996). From Sexual Misconduct to Social Justice. *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, 6: 295–321.
- (1997). The Political Psyche: A Challenge to Therapists and Clients to Politicize What They Do. In J. Reppen, ed., *More Analysts at Work*. Northvale, NJ: Aronson: 155–82.
- (1999). Working Directly with Political, Social and Cultural Material in the Therapy Session. In J. Lees, ed., *Clinical Counselling in Context*. London: Routledge.
- (2001). *Politics on the Couch: Citizenship and the Internal Life*. London: Profile.
- (2002). The Hidden Politics of Healing: Foreign Dimensions of Domestic Practice. *American Imago*, Vol. 59, No. 4: 459–481.
- (2007). Gender and Psyche: Developments in Analytical Psychology. *British Journal of Psychotherapy*, Vol. 1, No. 1: 31–49.