Globalized Mobility and the Loss of the Collective?

Refugees and Global Players- An Ethnopsychoanalytical Study

Ernestine Wohlfart

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Summary
The essay sheds a light on mobile individuals, the motivation behind their movement, and their experience in foreign social contexts. It is based on group analytical and interdisciplinary discourses. The focus lies on possible changings of the collective in globalized worlds-approached by the view of individuals. What could imply the loss of the primary group and the perception of this loss for the individual. What are the mobile individuals (refugees and global players) looking to find abroad, what are the promises, the demands and necessities. Material: I am offering for discussion texts from an ethnopsychoanalytical study focusing on two very different groups of mobile individuals. On one hand, interviews with so-called "global players" or "job nomads" and on the other hand interviews with African refugees. The analysis of the material leads to the first hypothesis: The option offered by a globalised world to find an individual place and freedom everywhere in the world is associated with a lack of intersubjective spaces, a lack of embodiment in a group, less sharing of common meanings, rules and taboos.
**Introduction**

*We find ourselves in a confrontation between the individual live experiences (subjective) and the respective cultural rules and taboos (objective).* (Freud 1930 [1994])

I will begin by reflecting my countertransference in the process of analyzing the interviews and the text production: I feel thrown back upon myself, irritated, I try to put the assumed results in harmony, which however led me to dismiss my text again and again. I feared that my text was too self-contained, too superficial, pseudo-objective, disintegrated by my own ambivalences and preconceptions. I felt as if I had to reveal every secondary thought and give a scientific reason for it. I wanted to describe the objective, historic reality besides the real (*le reelle*, Lacan), the unconscious (Freud), the distinct of the group. Therefore I began to read again using the internet, trying to make sure I had mentioned all relevant theories on the subject in the discourse. Among others, I again read excerpts of texts by Homi Bhabha (1997) and his critics and once again looked into the subject of the third space, the intermediary space. But even in this open thinking space in which I wanted to work on the given subject I remained empty, threatened to disappear. My next inspiration came from another area of social studies: the idea of transnational communities (Clifford 1994, Pries 1997) that are to be designed by the migrants themselves until I discarded these thoughts, too.

I closed down the internet and went through my own library, where I found Kernberg (1983), Simmel (2008) and Giacometti (Brüderlin 2010). I was relieved because none of them explicitly had anything to do with the modern, globalised world of excessive scientific supply and its key words.
Kernberg (1983) worked on object relations, which must be destroyed over and over again, particularly in borderline personalities who feel torn in between idealisation and annihilation of themselves and their counterpart. The inner world has no sufficiently internalised objects, the psyche cannot decide between good and evil. There is no general order in which the basic drives, the tension between Eros and Thanatos can be tolerated.

The famous sculptor Giacometti, with his thin and ever longer figures, symbolises distance from the beholder, an insurmountable space between the bodies, the physical almost disappears, but not entirely. He describes that Giacometti's thread-thin female figures and his walking men suggest precarious rooms. According to him, particularly in the sculpture of the staggering man (*L'Homme qui chavire*, 1950), which he describes as the most emphatic of all of Giacometti's sculptures, the outward staggering strongly provokes the search for inner balance. No other sculptur leads along Brüderlin (2010) to such an immediate transfer of the outer movement to the spectator's inner body consciousness. Nowhere else do space and body invert so directly. And something similar to this process happened to me when I analysed the spoken texts from men we interviewed, in the same way the spectator begins to stagger when he sees Giacometti's sculpture. Had I found "it", which I could not express in words? Is it the fear that subjectivity could disappear in a globalised world, as well as the intersubjective space, the socialisation of the individuals in a specific, distinct group?

Does globalisation in deed produce more possibilities of self creation, or does it rather overburdens the subjects / individuals who meet each other in intercultural worlds, as Nadig puts it.

*Quote Nadig (German): " Produziert Globalisierung tatsächlich ein Mehr an Möglichkeiten der Selbstgestaltung oder überfordert es die*
Subjekte/ die Individuen, die in interkulturellen Welten aufeinandertreffen."

English Translation: "[. . .] the effects of global processes on local cultures [. . .] include [. . .] the dissolution of social communities and a lack of integration of subjects in binding relationships, and a growing abstraction of all processes of the lifeworld." (Nadig 2002)

First, we will hear what the interviewees have to say about mobility, motivation and separation from the familiar.

**Inner World - Global Mobility**

Excursus: Identity – Modernization of the Psyche (Dornes 2010)

According to Honneth (see Dornes 2010), postmodern forms of identity entail a change of psychological structures. Instead of homogeneity and ego-strenght, late-modern subjectivity is characterised by heterogeneity and inner pluralisation. According to the French sociologist Gauchet (ibid), the changed conditions of socialisation provide an opportunity for the development of more democratic personalities, who are less susceptible to authoritarian attitudes. They are not interested in fundamentalism and war. On the other hand, Gauchet (ibid) sees the risk that these same conditions of socialisation that create an anti-war, post-heroic personality may at the same time weaken the social cohesion because of the highly individualised conditions. Dornes states that individuals are no longer held together by identification with a shared symbolic order. Individual self-organisation has taken the place of external supports. Society's unsolved and economic crises are transferred onto the individual. This could lead to increased vulnerability, susceptibility to mental illness – depression, fear of failure, anxiety disorders, feelings of depersonalisation – because they no longer find support in a general order.
The African refugees come from societies where local rules and taboos have a stronger impact. They are associating the move into a European, democratic society with a gain in personal freedom and the development of more self-determination beyond their familiar group (Güc 2009). Inevitably, however, they will at first feel left alone, because their potential for movement is tied to their group-oriented socialisation.

In the following part of the essay, it will be shown how political, cultural and social general orders are represented in the mirror of the studied groups and how these could produce a lack in social cohesion, a feeling of not recognising as well as not being recognised with their needs by the others.

The interviews from two fundamentally different fields of mobile persons do not claim to describe a universal truth. What they do is convey a possible view on subjective experiences and give an idea of the underlying unconscious motivations by deconstructing the spoken text.

The interviews (n= 20) were only conducted with men to eliminate gender differences.

The mean age was 35 years.

The age group composition of the refugees matched that of the "global players".

Both groups had a high level of education as far as school and university degrees were concerned. However, there were great differences between the professions they were actually working in.

**African Refugees**

Objectives: The 10 refugees we interviewed are war refugees and have been in Germany for more than five years. The following is a
summary of the deconstructed texts, including anonymized excerpts from several interviews.

They had fled their countries on the advice of their family or friends, to find safety and avoid being killed or tortured. They were taken to Europe because fleeing to a neighbouring African country would not have been secure. None of the refugees knew where they were going to be taken. The French-speaking refugees had not expected to arrive in Germany. They had assumed to be taken to France or Belgium, because these former colonial powers usually have larger communities from the Francophone countries than Germany. None of them knew anything about the laws governing their reception. They learnt how to apply for asylum by asking other Africans in the street, after stepping off their ship or plane. For the first time in their lives, they felt completely abandoned. They fell into a state of overwhelming fear, an inner chaos, which led to their outward isolation. They applied for asylum and were sent to the respective Federal States. All their applications were initially denied. So far, only one of the interviewees has been granted asylum by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees after an opposition procedure. That means that only one of the refugees presented here is allowed to work. The others are living in Berlin or Brandenburg under a "temporary suspension of deportation" (Duldung) and therefore have to apply for an extension of the temporary suspension of deportation at the aliens registration office.

Subjective Recounts: These visits are accompanied by deep insecurity and the fear of being deported straight from the aliens registration office. Often they are put into a kind of pre-suicidal state by the idea that the fact alone that they went and left their native country for their own protection is an "atrocidad" that can be punished by custody to secure deportation. They are unable to find an attitude that would
allow them to live their everyday life without psychological problems, because innerafrica mobility was a part of the cultural repertoire in African countries.

Excursus on the collective background: Yet, Africa is a continent where there have always been a large number of mobile individuals. Nomadic groups, healers, Koran students, traders, griots (storytellers) and craftspeople are travelling for various and traditional reasons. In Africa, migration has for a long time had more than just a geographical dimension that refers to the movement of persons in space only. Mobility means to make one's living in a non-sedentary way, for example by selling animals on the market in a distant town, and this way of life is integrated in the regional context. As far as mobility within Africa is concerned, it is notable that movement doesn't usually represent a break with the past or the social surroundings. But in Europe they feel they are being punished for something that appeared perfectly normal from their perspective. Sometimes subjective explanation models are developed, which are associated with what they had done in their native countries when they were politically active, or forcibly recruited. This leads to inflated feelings of guilt and depression, impeding all coping strategies for their crisis.

"I felt that I am really inhibited / blocked, can't really do anything, I even wanted to kill myself, hurt myself, because I had asked myself, what am I living for."

"I'm not going to lie, it was hard for me, because the village – first of all well I can't stay in the village, I know somebody, a friend, here there's nobody I can greet, here you sit on the underground train, the person next to you is – no, it's not like that in my country, and if somebody cooks something you go there to eat, you don't just eat at
home, but at your friends' houses. Here people stay by themselves. This here is not a good life. That's what went through my head."

It is impossible for them to mourn the loss of their family or compensate for it by making new contacts.
"What I experienced in my country is not the same as here. Now I have a few strategies for living here. In my country they say, if you are somewhere else, you have to dance the way they dance there."

The underlying pattern was that all the refugees were particularly motivated to adapt to the German society.
"I come from a country where the law doesn't apply for everybody. The law is only for the poor. But the rich – Here I learned that there are human rights, there are laws that one has to follow, to respect the law."

They tried hard, even though they were rejected over and over again by the authorities. Their spoken text made it clear that they had been "different" in their societies of origin. Often they had been sent away by their fathers, while the mothers had been trying to keep them in the country. So they were somewhat ambivalent about their migration from the start.
"I didn't want to just leave the country, it's my country, I wanted to stay and fight. It was during that time that the person in charge of us (chief of quarter) told me – it wasn't my idea to come here – it was the person in charge who told me, be careful about the things that are happening at the moment. You need to leave. My mother told me to stay at home. They said, as soon as I was at home, they would come, because the soldiers, they are illiterate, they don't know anything, they only come to arrest you. That was the point that made me do it, they organised papers. I didn't know that. It was them who organised everything."
By deconstructing their spoken text we were able to locate a source of guilt beyond the current majority society. Hypothesis: They felt rejected or abandoned by their fathers and guilty towards their mothers because they had left?

"I never set foot in Europe, it was the first time. We flew with Aeroflot. In that moment I started thinking. I left my mother, how, where are we going, why did I leave my country. It is my country, we have to fight, they said, yes, I began to think about negative things."

Apparently they were able to compensate this conflict through achievement, until they had to realize that they were not taken seriously here.

"After a month I said to myself, I need to continue my education. They said, no, you have no right to study. I said, if that is the case then I'm going back. Then my lawyer said, why do you want to ask for it, for now, this is a case for the courts. It's the courts who are going to decide over everything else [your fate]. So apparently it was already too late for me, I began to think. It was in 2002 when I started having problems. I told myself that I have to quit, to kill myself in order to forget all that."

Their feelings of guilt and shame were aggravated by the authorities' attempts to punish them.

"It was too late already. I was already having problems, depression, you need to kill yourself. I had no job, you're always home, like a sheep. One day I was taken to court for punishment, for the crime of going away."

May be the strong feeling of shame of the Own could be a result of colonisation and oppression.
Instead of a possible progress, the interviewed refugees are forced to endure years of gruelling conflicts with the authorities just to be granted a residence permit, all the time facing the threat of deportation. The conflicts they have tried to escape from are repeated, this time with the European authorities. They are confined to a transit space. This prolonged situation makes individual and social integration virtually impossible. The effects are frustration, disappointment, feelings of depersonalisation, the feeling to live in a temporary vacuum, and being unable to positioning themselves in the majority society.

**Global Players**

Excursus on the collective background

European graduates looking for a career are forced to be mobile. They may for example be expected to be able to relocate to China as well as to Saudi Arabia. They are on a permanent journey – living in transit spaces the same like the refugees - between the world's financial capitals. This desired form of mobility of a certain group, however, is a new development, and it is accelerated in a globalised world. The ability to relocate to every place in the world is nowadays considered a key qualification for an executive position, whereas in Germany/ Europe, only 20 years ago, the only mobile individuals were those who wanted to "drop out" of the system. Permanent change of location was associated with unfavourable attributes or served as a criterion to exclude nomadic groups in Europe. "Gypsies", the only remaining nomads, were and are still associated with vagrancy and crime. Similarly deprecatory attributes were imputed to circus people, the work migrants of earlier times. The term "Gastarbeiter" (guest worker, immigrant worker) was also used to distinguish between resident and vagrant, respectable and not
respectable. This way, dichotomies were created on all social levels between citizens and non-citizens, foreigners and natives.

(The interviewees from the group of "global players" were not comfortable with being quoted. In the following, I will therefore paraphrase excerpts from their narratives.)

Objectives: Our interviews with the global players and job nomads allowed us to identify groups, even with a number of only 10 interviewees.

There is the group of individuals who live mostly in planes because of the demands of their career, sometimes because they might lose their jobs if they are not flexible enough to react to changing conditions. Their stays in various countries are usually too short to consider moving their families.

Subjective Recounts: Over the course of their non-ego-syntonic mobility this group developed panic attacks and fear of flying as manifestation of the excessive strain they were under. They went for years before seeking psychological help. Some of them started abusing narcotics. They reported that their employers had prepared them for their overseas assignments with classes teaching so-called cultural standards. There, they learnt things like for example the fact that it is not acceptable to show the underside of your shoes to an Indian, or that the Chinese say “yes” when they mean “no”.

Communication in the foreign country only happens in the context of work. The interviews with this group demonstrated that most of these individuals were rather dependent on relationships, committed to conservative family structures with wives and children. Over many years, they managed to compensate for their desire to stay in the same place around the same people by their total identification with their work and the recognition they received from the work context (and from the work context alone).
The other group among the "global players" were those who had already grown up in an increasingly globalised world interconnected through the media. They have a high motivation to spend as much time as possible abroad, beginning with their university education. They have problems reintegrating themselves at home, and the constant urge to leave again. The constellations in their primary families were similar to those in the other group. In most cases, the primary family was characterised by constrictive, clinging relationships with the individual and it almost seems as if this was an attempt to compensate for the detachment or the repeated liberation from this constriction through work and life abroad and far away.

It became obvious that their relationship behaviour was ambivalent. On one hand they reported to be interested in a high degree of commitment. They were maintaining their relationships via the internet or by frequent visits and the repeated promise to apply at home for their next job. However, they didn’t have long-term partners, the relationships mentioned above were just friendships to women or men that provided them with a substitute family of sorts, which they were always afraid could be gone by the time they returned, or they could be forgotten in the meantime. In their countries of (temporary) residence, they tried to be fully committed to the new environment and relationships and spoke the language perfectly. Every new stay abroad offered an opportunity for them to reinvent themselves. However, they were only able to stay as long as the charm and idealisation of the foreign place and the people there continue. Once they encountered disappointments, also of their expectations in relationships, they began to suffer. The same happened as soon as their new relationships became too committed and demands were made from them. It was admitted in the interviews that it is also nice to be the centre of attention. The fact alone that one is considering to leave the country provides a
narcissistic gain. It was also said that friends admitted to be a little jealous, but the issue of staying was also broached. They mentioned the fear of alienation from the familiar, from their family, from the culture. On the other hand, the job nomads saw the opportunity to reinvent themselves abroad, to take only their "good sides" and form themselves abroad without a correcting counterpart. They all saw themselves in transit, which they said impeded their ability to really arrive in one place. This fact is attested by the existence of a diaspora of job nomads. In China, for example, Europeans meet at tango bars and complain about the different way the Chinese regard relationships outside the family. They meet in transit. Another group they seem to have a lot of contact with, namely in China, are former Chinese exiles who returned because of the increasing economic liberalisation in China and are now working for Chinese-European joint-ventures.

According to themselves, they are benefitting from the good reputation of attributes seen as "German", like precise work, mature technical knowledge, as well as humanitarian aspects. They unanimously say that leaving has become an inner urge, because the yearning to leave remains. It is a search for the familiar other.

**Conclusion**

The interviews with the refugees show that the space of freedom and democracy they had been looking for in Europe remains at first interpersonally empty and permanently threatened by rejection by the new group. These individual experiences made by the interviewed persons condense into an ambivalent experience of the world, as described when I mentioned Giacometti (Catalogue 2010), of being torn between abundance and emptiness, appearing and disappearing, life and death.
Obviously for both groups the intersubjective space – the social cohesion – the space between the inner and the outer world (Kernberg) which is filled with relationships that allow the individual to develop a stable identity, define themselves and integrate into society, seems to be empty, but also threatening. The experience of diversity might provoke unconscious super-ego effects like shame and guilt, underlying an internal racism (vgl. Davids 2011) towards one's self, and ambiguity towards the others (Amati Sas 2004).

The psychological problems faced by the "global players", however – the fear of failure, of feeling alone in search of the "good group", the opposite -, differ little from those of the other group. Likewise, this group is also unable to create a familiar social environment abroad. Even though they aren't among the socially marginalised groups in the foreign countries they are staying in, they remain nomads on a permanent journey, just like refugees. Left alone with themselves, in the "global players' diaspora".

Contact with persons from the respective societies produces experiences of foreignness and cultural bias. The question arises under which conditions it is possible for an individual, to become a subject, to perceive the often unnoticeable and highly complex changes of social relations and to integrate them in a creative way, or to symbolically reshape them without giving rise to feelings of helplessness or aggression (Nadig 2002). Living abroad, the unconscious adaptation mechanisms that enable subjects to function in society often fail to take effect (Wohlfart et al 2006, Nadig 2002 and 2006).

Permanent failure can lead to a considerable narcissistic slight, and to intense feelings of shame and fear of self-disclosure. Defence mechanism against these feelings may include deprecation of the majority society and their norms, which often manifests itself in defiant and uncommunicative behaviour. Adaptation mechanisms
normally have a relieving, regulating and thus also a stabilising function. They protect the subject from permanent conflict with the environment. If I am a subject, however, who does not know the rules and taboos of the group, I withdraw and wish to return to the familiar group, where it is possible to recognise and be recognised. I close with the question that I have in fact been trying to approach in this essay. What do these findings have to do with globalisation? Has it not always been a fact that the world was in motion, that those feeling persecuted or looking for a better life migrated?

References:


