FROM BEING AT RISK TO BEING A RISK: WELCOMING REFUGEES IN CHALLENGING TIMES
- FIRST PART -

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Plan of the Presentation
First Part

- A shifting context: we are in the storm

- Advocacy coalitions: addressing the macro-meso and micro levels of protection

- Limits and challenges of a clinical position in this context: powerlessness and strengths
U.N. Awards Medal to Canada for Its Contributions to Cause of Refugees

October 07, 1986 | From Reuters

GENEVA — The people of Canada on Monday were awarded the Nansen Medal, the highest distinction bestowed by the United Nations for aid to refugees, a U.N. announcement said.

The annual award, previously always accorded to an individual, went to the Canadian nation "in recognition of the major and sustained contribution made to the cause of refugees in their country and throughout the world over the years," the announcement said.

U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees Jean-Pierre Hocke will present the medal to Governor General Jeanne Sauve in Ottawa on Nov. 13.

"We are very proud and very honored that the United Nations has chosen to recognize the whole of our community," said Minister of State for Immigration Gerry Weiner, speaking in a telephone interview from Montreal. "We try to show that Canada is a country of a heart and a soul."
Crimes et incidents haineux en 2017 à Montréal

Source: Service de police de la Ville de Montréal
'It was like a nightmare': Police investigate fire started at Toronto hotel housing refugees

Employee found lit gas can on third floor of a Radisson hotel last week

CBC Radio · Posted: Oct 11, 2018 8:00 AM ET | Last Updated: October 11, 2018

Scorch marks were left in the third-floor hallway of a Radisson hotel in east Toronto (left) after a gas can was set alight there on Tuesday, Oct. 2, 2018. (Julie Crysler/CBC)
"It was like a nightmare," said one refugee from Sudan, who is staying at the hotel with her husband and eight-month-old daughter. *The Current* is not revealing her identity out of concern for the family's safety.

"We were holding the children — even other people's children."

- A Sudanese refugee who was in the hotel the night the fire was discovered
THE RISE IN WHITE EXTREMIST TERRORISM ATTACKS

The Rise in White Extremist Terrorism Attacks
In Europe, North America and Australia

A large share of attacks in 2015 targeted migrants in Europe.

Year: 2011, 2013, 2015, 2017
 webpack

- 2011: 9
- 2013: 12
- 2015: 135
- 2017: 88
A SHATTERED PROTECTION?

- At the societal level: discrimination in the host country has more impact for the mental health of refugees than pre-migratory trauma (Beiser and Hou, 2016)

- At the institutional level: shrinking access to social benefits: cut in refugee health care in 2012 (re-established presently)

- At the political level: diplomacy vs protection, the third safe country agreement
A SHATTERED PROTECTION: SHIFT IN DISCOURSES

- From vulnerable persons to fraud, potential criminals or terrorists

- From children in need of protection to possible threats, and criminal parents

- The compassion inversion:
  - The vulnerable host society
  - The children here also have needs
  - “We” are under threat

(Kronick et al, 2016)

Anna Freud and the concentration camp children: the adults as untrustworthy.

Polish Gulag survivors: collective meanings and resettlement climate may buffer the effects of separation (Chalupa, 2019).

Loss of attachment figures and related chain of negative events (Michael Rutter).
OTHER SAD HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

- Parent-child separation during slavery
- Parent-child separation during colonization (the boarding schools)
- Communalities in Othering processes with the present context
WAR, MIGRATION AND PARENT-CHILD SEPARATION: RESEARCH LITERATURE

- Forced separation is a major stressor for refugee families (Miller et al., 2018)
- Family separation may aggravate or reactivate traumatic symptoms
- Parent-child separation may be associated with attachment difficulties, internalized and externalized symptoms, depending on the age of the child
- The availability of acceptable alternate caregivers is a key element in terms of outcome (cultural configurations of attachments)
Migration related separation in the XXIst century: a deterrence strategy

- Emergence-persistence of multiple forms of child-parent separation: in detention for refugee claimants, through delays in family reunification processes, through the criminalization of parents.

- Why is this happening in spite of the International conventions, our laws (on the child best interest/child protection), and our knowledge about child development and mental health?
Migration related separations in the XXIst Century: Othering and Dehumanizing processes

- Upsurge in hate discourses and crimes

- Increased prevalence of dehumanizing portrayal of migrants and refugees (animalized representations: cockroaches...)

- Legitimation of violence toward these “Others”, to defend the in-group

- The progressive shrinking of the right to asylum (the Mediterranean “crisis” vs the Boat people story)
Migration related separations in the XXIst Century: The Protection Paradigm Shattered

- Discrimination as more important then pre-migratory traumas (Beiser and Hou, 2016)

- Minors seen as a “risk” (potential criminals) rather than as vulnerable

- Parents described as criminal, responsible for the adversity
Legality, legal consciousness and advocacy

- Legality as meaning, source of authority and cultural practices which together operates to define, regulate and pattern social life (Silbey, 2005)

- This legal world order is not neutral and favors the perpetuation of majority privileges, but this hegemony is overall hidden

- Claims of legitimacy of the majority norms are supported by invoking higher morality (Benda-Beckman et al, 2012)

- These processes confer acceptability to previously illegal acts, for example suspending civil rights in the name of national security
Health professionals are encouraged to become culturally competent and to promote cultural safety.

We are usually trained to accept the law as a given, even when harmful to our patients, their families and communities.

Legal consciousness is the awareness of the hegemonic dimensions of the law and the engagement with a critical and pluralist perspective (example: refusal of age determination tests by Swedish pediatricians).
Advocacy coalitions are key to policy changes. We may initiate or join a coalition and participate as citizens, as clinicians (witness and experts) or as researchers.

Advocacy coalitions are powerful (change in refugee claimants detention procedures and policy in Canada and in Australia) but public opinion support is short-lived.

Vigilance and international alliances are essential to ensure sustainability.
ADVOCACY

- Mobilizing health professional associations:

- Example: American pediatrician and parent-child separation in the US. In Canada and Quebec: addressing asylum claimant detention

- Protecting family reunification?

- Being witness to the refugee experience: humanizing the Other

- To preserve our own humanity...
Psychological first aid for refugee children in shelters

The premises

- Refugee claimants numbers in Canada have rapidly increased as a result of US migration policies

- Resettlement resources in Montreal have been swamped and temporary shelters opened as a crisis measure

- Temporary shelters are high stress environments which may perpetuate-aggravate feelings of insecurity and losses in children

- Parents are under pressure to find housing and overwhelmed by paperwork

(Rousseau & Miconi, 2018)
TOOLS TO INTERVENE

- Psychological first aid approach (WHO)
- STROP (Structure, Talking and time, Rituals, Organized Play, Parent support) (Gustafsson)
- Creative Expression Workshop (Sherpa)
A SMALL SCALE INTERVENTION

- One year (2017-2018)
- Three shelters
- Play groups for the 2-4 year olds
- Artistic activities for the elementary school children (5–12 years old) and for the youth (12–18 years old)
FINDINGS

- Play and art activities help restore some emotional security for all ages
- They are also a source of comfort for parents
- Activities soothe acute anxieties (and their behavioral manifestations)
- Activities facilitate the detection of major difficulties better than psychosocial assessments with parents
- Small children traumas and developmental problems are usually ignored/missed
LIMITS AND CHALLENGES OF A CLINICAL POSITION: POWERLESSNESS

- Ricoeur conception of responsibility:
  - Criminal
  - Moral
  - Political

- Embodying ambivalence

- Our failures are sometimes useful if we can assume them
LIMITS AND CHALLENGES OF A CLINICAL POSITION: STRENGTHS

- Agency and powerlessness may co-exist
- Micro-practices can sometimes be more effective than political struggles
- Informal networks may circumvent social and institutional obstacles
CONCLUSION

- Protecting migrants and refugees is a way to protect our shared humanity.
- The cost of the erosion in human rights for the majority should be highlighted.
- We need to work together.