CONTEMPORARY FAMILY THERAPY VOL 18 NUMBER 4, DECEMBER 1996 513-521

FORCED MIGRATION AND RESETTLEMENT

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Migration has been described as a process that poses risks for mental health as well as an opportunity for the growth of both the individual and the family . The process of resettlement includes both the adaptation to the new environment and the mourning of the old country (Aroian, 1990). The old environment is not totally given up, as it is often recreated in the new land. Yet, if the individual and the family are to be integrated in the new land, they need to divert emotional energy away from old attachments to new ones.

The experience of forced resettlement among chilean exiles and its impact on the family is the main focus of this paper. It will be shown that the forced nature of their migration interfered with the adaptive processes needed for their successful integration to the new country. Finally, the readaptation of those who decided to return to Chile after the demise of the military dictatorship will be briefly discussed.

The process of forced resettlement is far from unusual in our time. From Africa to Bosnia to Afganisthan waves of forced migrants are leaving their countries of origin and relocating in neighboring countries as well as Europe and the U.S. Even though our focus is on chilean exiles the basic underlying adaptation may not be radically different.

Chile is a country that suffered from the consequences of the military coup in September 1973 that overthrew the democratically elected government of Salvador Allende. During Allende's tenure the country was sharply divided among those who supported him and those who saw him as a risk to their freedom or to their economic interests. Under the military government, the frequent violations of human rights intensified this division, leading to the mutual demonization of the political left and the right. Exile, a form of forced migration, was a penalty frequently imposed by the military regime or a step that many Chileans who were or felt persecuted took to save themselves from imprisonment, torture or death.

Case Vignette

Jorge, a young 30 year old lawyer who under Allende´s government worked for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was persecuted by the military regime solely as a result of his political believes. When interviewed in his country of exile he explained how he decided to opt for exile: He stated that he had reconciled himself to spend some time in jail, but, when he found out that his peers had been killed or had "disappeared", he decided to ask for asylum in a european country. He entered the country's embassy with only a toothbrush in his pocket. He panicked for a few seconds while waiting for the door of the embassy to be opened. He never thought that he would have to escape like a wanted criminal. He suddenly left his wife, parents and friends behind with little preparation as he ran for his life.

Jorge made a conscious decision regarding exile. Many others did not: the military regime put them on an airplane destined to a country they did not choose, without the possibility of making any of the arrangements that voluntary migrants make when leaving their native land. Others were incarcerated and tortured before they were forced to leave Chile and therefore suffered from severe post-traumatic stress, further complicating the migration process.

As arbitrary and insane as these cases are, they are not unusual in contemporary dictatorial regimes, regardless of their ideological orientation. The response of most people throughout the world to such insanity is avoidance and denial. Many in Chile survived such madness using the same defense mechanisms, i.e. they either denied the severity of the human rights violations or simply went about the business of everyday life ignoring these horrendous events.

Many among those forced to leave Chile had never lived outside their birth town or region, let alone abroad. Most had not even traveled abroad, except to neighboring countries, and spoke only Spanish. Both practically and emotionally they were utterly unprepared to leave their country. They arrived to countries they knew little about, where they lacked a social network, without speaking the language or understanding the culture. Many were also penniless. Away from family and friends, living suddenly in unfamiliar surroundings, they were distraught. Such experiences have been conceptualized first as culture shock (Berry, 1980) followed by acculturative stress (Padilla, 1980) and, later, by cultural fatigue (Guthrie, 1975).

Family and Individual Adaptation to migration

Three processes that impact on migrants' adaptation to their

new environment have been described (Aroian 1990): (1) Grieving the loss of country, family and friends, (2) Mastering the practical demands of resettlement, such as mastering the language, finding a job and learning the ropes of the new culture, and (3)dealing with intrafamilial conflict.

Migration is always fraught with ambivalence: The promise of the new land and the hope for a better life have for centuries propelled people to migrate. Yet, loosing access to one's extended family and social network, living in an unfamiliar place and dealing with a new culture, often lead to an idealization of the past and to an intense desire to return to one's native land. Chilean exiles were relieved to be free of persecution and, in some cases, to have survived. On the other hand many felt guilty for leaving Chile instead of participating in the struggle against the military dictatorship. Thus, guilt intensified their attachment to their native land. Many focused on what was happening there, sometimes at the expense of failing to meet the practical demands of resettlement. Participating in the solidarity movement was more important to many Chileans living in exile than learning English or Swedish. Both the intense guilt they experienced and the forced nature of their migration delayed their adaptation to the new culture. Pollock (1989, p. 147) aptly described this phenomenon: "When one is forced to leave one's land or home it is a loss and a severance. As a result ethnic and national identities may become reactively intensified."

Upon arrival to their new country many chilean refugees focused on the eventual return to their native land. Many thought that the military regime would last only a few years. It lasted seventeen. Thus, many among them viewed their day to day existence in the new country only as a parenthesis in their lives. Their view of their exile as temporary was emotionally incompatible with becoming invested in learning the new language and adapting to a foreign culture. They were focused on their past lives. Nostalgia and idealization of their native land prevailed. Since their friends in exile shared the same orientation towards the past, entire communities in exile delayed their acceptance of their new environment. Migrants, when they adapt well to the experience, renounce aspects of their previous identities and acquire new ones. Not all that is old is given up, and not al that is new is accepted. Many among Chilean exiles, because they were forced to migrate, clung to their old identity, refusing to give up any aspect of it, and, at the same time rejecting a potential new identity. Meanwhile their children adapted more rapidly to the new circumstances and the new culture, thus creating an intergenerational gap.

Aroian (1990) described a loss of occupational status as a source of conflict for Polish immigrants. Similarly, some Chilean professionals lost status. A Chilean lawyer became a Taxi driver

in Europe. A middle age surgeon, with 20 years of experience, was told that he had to do an internship and residency if he wanted to qualify as a surgeon in Canada. He decided to limit himself to teaching anatomy in the local medical school rather than participating in a grueling training program. These experiences often intensified their ambivalent feelings toward the migration experience and the host country.

Family Conflict

We have already mentioned that the children of the exiled Chileans adapted to the new country with greater facility than their parents. It has been suggested that, among families who migrate, regardless of age or generational afiliation, some family members are oriented towards the outer world and the future, while others are isolated and oriented towards the inner world and their families (Slusky, 1979). Thus, some family members are more oriented towards the new culture than others. While some members of the families of Chilean exiles adapted to the new culture rapidly, others did not. This led to the emergence of intrafamilial conflict. Some chilean men were unable to accept the newly acquired autonomy and feminist identity of their wives. Separation and divorces were not uncommon when different family members were differentially integrated to the new culture. Some parents were unable to accept their children's newly acquired values.

Young children not only learn the new language faster than their parents but also acquire very soon a sense of what is and is not acceptable in the new culture (Sato, 1991). While the birth country was a vibrant reality to the parents, it was only a mythical dream to children who grew up elsewhere. The new generation acquired new values about dating, drugs, and obedience to adult authority. This discrepancy, between the values of the old culture, retained by the parents, and the values of the new culture, espoused by the children, often became a source of significant intrafamilial tension. When a chilean father living in the U.S. told his 14 year old daughter that "we" do not let "our children" date at that age, she simply replied "now we live in a different country". Their children's newly espoused values, were interpreted by the parents as a menace to their authority and to the integrity of the family. When the level of intrafamilial conflict was untenable, many felt it would hard to find a therapist that would "understand" the language of both the old and the new culture. Thus, the oarents often refrained from participating in family therapy, fearing that the therapist, as a representative of the new culture, would side with their children.

The Second Resettlement

After approximately 15 years in exile many chilean families

learned that they could return to Chile, if they so desired. Such news would have been immediately welcome in the first few months or years of exile. After a long residence in another continent, Europe in most cases, husbands and wives did not always agree about the family's return to Chile. Their children, either hardly remembered Chile or knew about it only through their parents. To many of the parents the mere thought of staying in the new country was ideologically unacceptable. They considered such thoughts as a betrayal of their long held political convictions. The fact that many families were deeply divided among those who wished to return and those who did not, added a more personal layer of complexity to the decision.

Practical considerations also played a role. As years passed many had good jobs, with higher salaries than their peers in Chile. Their children identified with the country where they lived and their newly acquired culture, and attended local schools or universities they did not wish to leave. An exile that started as a tragedy became increasingly comfortable for some or all members of the family. The old conflict between the original roots and the new attachments and adaptations resurfaced, sometimes intensely and painfully. New issues, such the economic stability of the family in exile and the potential financial uncertainties often associated with a return to Chile, were sometime as or more important than the original conflict. Parents who remained strongly identified with Chile had to confront the fact that their children had their own loyalties, e.g. to their new country, to their friends, to a language that was "theirs", and to a culture that was real to them, as opposed to a culture they never experienced or experienced a long time ago. For many among them Chile was a mythical entity, a symbol, almost a fairy tale.

In some cases children felt they had to return to Chile because they did not wish to "betray" their parents, or to undermine the realization of their dreams. Some older adolescents and young adults decided to stay in the new country when their parents returned to Chile. These families were viewed by Chileans as "broken families". Among Chilean families, as in most Latin American countries, children usually remain at their parent´s home until they marry. Thus, what in the U.S. would be considered appropriate and "normal", i.e. that children leave their parents' home to go to a distant college at age 18, is viewed as deviant in Latin America. Thus, returning families that had accepted their children's choice to stay in Europe or the U.S., were viewed as "broken families" upon their return to their homeland. It is hard to find a better example of how culture influences the labeling of events in the family as socially desirable or deviant.

Those who returned to Chile had to face the fact it had

changed since they left, and certainly not in line with their idealized images (Maureira and Del Rio, 1993). Most members of formerly exiled chilean families interviewed by one of the authors have stated that the worst years of their lives were the first year of exile and the first year following their return to Chile. The country they returned to had, as most other countries, changed in 15-20 years. However, in their memories and fantasies, it had not changed. The Chile they left, especially the social network the forced migrants left behind, was intensely politicized, oriented towards the good of the community and highly idealistic. The Chile they returned to was more oriented towards consumption than towards achieving social and political changes. Their old friends, often young idealists who supported Allende, were now busy making a living in a very competitive economy. Some returnees were preoccupied with bringing to justice those who had violated their human rights. Their fellow Chileans often were not. They were invested in achieving political stability, rather than rocking the boat. They wanted to preserve the new democratic freedoms that they had spent years fighting for. Many were afraid that a focus on bringing military officers to justice would risk another military coup or destabilize the country. Their views prevailed and those returning from exile had to readjust their expectations. Most did. Some were disillusioned. They expected a "home country" that would honor them and convict their torturers. Instead, they had to face the fact that their torturers were walking free in the streets of Santiago. A few returned to their country of exile. This voluntary migration closed a cycle of forced migration, resettlement, a return to the idealized native land and a second migration.

Family therapists have the opportunity to develop some interventions, hopefully of a preventive nature. Ideally, family therapists would prepare the family before their departure. Unfortunately, this is seldom feasible. Thus, intervention usually takes place in the country of exile. We suggest the following foci of intervention: (1) Helping exiled families grief their losses, which include the loss of important relationships, loss of status and loss of familiarity (2)To help these families express their ambivalence about the new culture. Family Therapists should be keenly ware of the fact that families of forced migrants often feel more intense ambivalence towards the new culture than families of voluntary migrants (3) Facilitating their introduction to the new culture (4) dealing with the intrafamilial conflicts described above and (5) helping the family dealing with their return to their home country when appropriate.

The purpose of this paper goes beyond describing therapeutic interventions that might be helpful to these families. We hope that it will serve as a reminder of the plight of these families. Hopefully, it will also serve as a challenge to the denial and

avoidance that we all use when dealing with the fact that we live in a world where forced exile, torture and multiple other human rights violations continue to increase. Yesterday it was Chile. Today is Bosnia. Tomorrow, unfortunately, it will be another country. Family Therapists, as well as the entire society in the Western Hemisphere, will sooner or later face these forced migrants.

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