

IRSJA PRESENTATION 2024

Xenophobia summons Wotan: Evolutionary, developmental, and analytical aspects of an archetypal precursor to genocide

One of the core features of genocides is xenophobia, generally held to be (rather imprecisely) the fear of strangers. The Merriam-Webster online dictionary defines xenophobia as the “fear and hatred of strangers or foreigners or of anything that is strange or foreign”. Common examples of xenophobia include fear of those of a different race or religion, of a different belief system, or of those of a different generation or sex. Xenophobia is related to the development and maintenance of social upheaval and genocide, symbolized at least in part by the Nordic god, Wotan, described in Jung’s 1936 essay by that name. Xenophobia can be considered an archetype, a deeply unconscious attitude that seemingly is held to some degree by many, perhaps most, people, and that has been influential (although perhaps unrecognized) throughout human history.

This presentation will illustrate several instances of xenophobia and will describe important features of xenophobia that focus on evolutionary, developmental and analytical aspects of this archetype. The illustrations will be from the Bible, the Armenian genocide (1915-1916), the Cambodian genocide (1975-1979), and from Hitler’s writings in *Mein Kampf* (1925/1999). A power point presentation will emphasize features of xenophobia.

In the following, I will briefly mention some of these lines of interest in describing xenophobia: Xenophobic-like behaviors are reviewed in some detail in Goodall’s (1990/2010) and others’ descriptions of chimpanzee communities in which one group of male chimpanzees patrols indistinct territorial boundaries of its community in search of (and in fear of)

chimpanzees from an adjacent community. If “foreign” chimpanzees are found, violence and death often result. Primate researchers emphasize that the propensity to fear others (and to attack what is feared) is a natural part of the chimpanzees’ innate behavioral repertoire. Given the strong genetic linkages between chimpanzees and humans, xenophobia may have evolutionary precursors.

Xenophobic-like behavior also has been described by psychoanalytic infant researchers such as Melanie Klein (1946/1996) and Rene Spitz (1965) who have described a normal developmental phenomenon in infants that is known as “stranger anxiety” and is characterized by crying and obvious distress if “strange” or unknown people come into the 8 months old infant’s vicinity. Is stranger anxiety an infantile precursor to xenophobia as Parens (2012) suggests it sometimes is?

Jung has provided a model of the psyche that involves “strangers” and the “other” also. He speaks of the “shadow”, an unrecognized and unintegrated part of the individual that contains aspects of ourselves that are denied, hidden, unwanted, and not accepted by consciousness. For greater consciousness to occur and individuation to proceed, these contents of the shadow must be integrated into consciousness. If we think of xenophobia as reflecting external processes of one-sidedness and bias, should we think of the shadow as reflecting related internal processes that are sometimes projected outward, and potentially result in violence or genocide? This question and others will provide material for the group discussion at the conclusion of the presentation.

Questions for discussion:

1. Can the shadow that Jung described be understood to reflect hidden or feared biases within us that sometimes are internal representations of xenophobic-like attitudes that may be projected outwards?
2. Is it appropriate to use evolutionary findings to support the existence and manifestations of archetypal elements of the psyche, such as xenophobia, thus providing support for the relationship of evolutionary psychology and Jungian thought?
3. Leviticus 19: 33-34 says, “When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself...” This verse is an example of xenophilia, or acceptance and love of the stranger. Is this a reasonable attitude for the present day, or is some degree of xenophobia necessary and appropriate in modern life?