

HIGH AND LOW DREAMS OF RECENT REFUGEES OF A WAR-TORN COUNTRY



by

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Abstract

This project investigated the Process Work concepts of high and low dreams and their use with a small group of Iraqi refugees in Portland, Oregon. An accompanying film briefly documents the experience of one refugee family. The contextual essay explores the experience of several Iraqi immigrants as they are becoming active in their new culture, having been displaced from their homes to another place they may have no connection with, and investigates how to keep them connected with their high dreams.

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Preface

There are many catastrophes happening in the world, and most of them are made by human hands. For me personally as a Palestinian, I grew up in a family that suffered from the wars of 1948 and 1967, and suffering is still happening in our everyday life there. Many Palestinians have been displaced from their homeland to the surrounding countries. They have lost everything they own and are not able to go back to their homes. Therefore, they have to somehow live and adjust to the new situation.

Every day as I watch the news, the stories of Iraqis unfold. I can empathize with the devastation they are living daily, and I grieve for every moment I see the people suffering, missing their family members and other loved ones. My heart goes out to them and their families. This makes me look back in time, and I clearly see how war has never been a good choice for human beings or for the earth that carries us.

This educational and social action project took place in Portland, Oregon, United States of America. It utilized Process Work tools including Group Process in a setting where I gave a seminar in which Iraqi people gathered, talked about their experiences, and learned Process Work. My intention was to bring those I worked with awareness of how they had lost their dreams, and to support them to find their dreams again.

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Introduction

This project was created from my desire to bring healing to displaced Iraqi people who are suffering after their experiences, and to bring awareness to them of the importance of their dreams. This project took place in Portland, Oregon, United States of America. The refugees involved in this project are from a group who had been displaced from their homeland. Some of them had the choice of where to go, and some have been forced to come to the US because they had been working with the U.S. Army, and it was not considered safe for them elsewhere. Because of being forced to relocate, they have struggled to adapt to a new culture, language, and lifestyle. By drawing from the Process Work paradigm and its concepts of *high* and *low dreams* in working with them, I sought to address the hopelessness often experienced by immigrants and refugees when coming to the US. In turn, I hoped this would support them in reconnecting with their high dreams, without losing their vision and motivation for their new lives as successful citizens in a foreign country.

My aim was to help these individuals get in touch with their high dreams, while at the same time supporting them in making these dreams a reality. I feel a special connection to these Iraqi people because of my own personal experience of coming from a country devastated by war. Even though Palestinians and Iraqis face different reasons for war, in the end it is all the same. Our countries are being ruined because of others' need for power and domination.

I know firsthand that there are some days when just waking up and getting out of bed feels like a battle. I remember myself going through several mixed emotions hoping that when I wake up there is a better day, and that today will be good, the war will have stopped. At a certain point you realize all hope is gone, and that there is no chance for hope, not for myself, family, or friends. The sad truth is that the idea of being dead like all the other loved ones I lost

seemed to be a better place to be than living afraid daily, with no stability, and no hope of change anytime soon. My purpose in life was lost, several of my family and friends also felt the same way. When your daily routine is to hide from bullets, smell the tear gas that is surrounding you, finding bodies who have been shot in the street, and witnessing first hand their families suffering for the ones they have lost, curfew times announced on the radio, to go inside and stay earlier and earlier, some days you cannot even leave your house at all, what hope is there in this daily routine? Despair and fear should never become a way of life. It was my way of life, just as it had been for the Iraqi refugees or anyone else living in a war zone.

The motivation to try for a better life gets lost along the way, and it becomes unimaginable that there could be anything good left in this world. Each day that passes, brings one deeper into this feeling of despair until it becomes even hard to remember what it felt like to be happy, have goals, or taste success.

My goal with this project was to help wake them up from this state of hopelessness, reconnect them with their dreams, help them to establish a better way of life, and help them find the motivation to discover ways to create what their new daily routine will be, as well as achieve their dreams. With use of the Process Work paradigm during seminars and support groups in this educational and social action project, I was able to assist some Iraqi refugees to begin their journey of healing. The use of film served to capture and communicate the experience of one family more fully than words could alone. As others view the film, it may connect more directly to their experience, and perhaps, empower them to both help themselves, and others in their community. In turn, the ultimate goal is to educate these individuals, so they can continue their peer support to help others in their community.

I feel I was able to help them through this process because I can say for myself that Process Work insisted that I listen to my body, grant meaning to my intuition, and become more keenly aware of my reaction towards things. Navigating according to my own internal compass and attending to the wisdom of my body was one of the best tools I learned in my studies. It has helped me immensely as I am continuing to work through the redevelopment of my own life. In turn, my work with the refugees helped me to become aware and work with aspects of myself that were reflected in their experiences. Again, my engagement with Process Work was the means through which I learned.

Literature Review

In this section, I present theories and ideas from studies done in refugee situations, the effects of that on them, and the culture they are living in. It points out the symptoms the majority of the refugees faced upon their displacement and highlights that the Iraqi refugee crisis is largely under-reported. Burdens the Iraqi refugee displacement has had on the countries that they were sent to are also illustrated. I point out the role of the US in this matter, and what has been done to assist the refugees that have been displaced due to the US invasion in Iraq. Further, I outline the psychological effects the war and displacement has had upon the Iraqis, and the use of Process Work to assist them in adapting to their new life.

Iraqi Refugees

During my research, I explored many articles pertaining to Iraqis and their posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms. One that I found most useful was a study about mental health symptoms in Iraqi refugees (Hikmet, Farrag, M, Hakim-Larson, J., Kafaji, Abdulkhaleq, H., & Hammad, A., 2007). They talk about refugees in general, more specifically the Iraqi refugees, and the need to understand the unique experience in every subgroup of immigrants. Of the Iraqi

refugees who immigrated to the US after the Gulf War in the early 1990s, the majority reported intense anxiety, depression, and many met the DSM IV criteria for PTSD. As with refugees from other countries of origin, Iraqi refugees are in need of culturally sensitive assessment and mental health treatment. Their findings indicate that many refugees often lose motivation and become generally hopeless (Hikmet, Farrag, M, Hakim-Larson, J., Kafaji, Abdulkhaleq, H., & Hammad, A., 2007).

According to C. Eduardo Vargas (2010), project manager for conflict issues and political advocacy for Intersections International, in his report regarding Iraq's displaced population, the Iraqi refugee crisis is one of the most underreported humanitarian crises in recent history. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees report for 2007, an estimated 5 million Iraqis were displaced from their homes. The cause of many of these displacements were alliances with Saddam Hussein's regime and the Ba'ath party, as well as expulsion of Sunni Muslims from Shi'a majority neighborhoods. However, it seems the catalyst for this violence between the two religious sects was the bombing of the Al-Askari Mosque in Samarra, which resulted in millions of Iraqis being in a state of internal displacement or refugees in other countries. Current statistics state that the situation has not changed much, with approximately 4,810,000 million refugees or displaced persons, as of January 2012.

Iraqis were targeted for religious affiliation and socioeconomic status as well as ethnicity. The violence drove large numbers of Iraqis to seek refuge in neighboring countries. Syria received 1.2 million, 1 million went to Jordan, 100,000 to Egypt, 54,000 to Iran, 50,000 to Lebanon, and about 200,000 went to the Gulf States (Vargas, 2010). This large influx of refugees created problems for countries that were already lacking necessary resources, thereby creating a dependency amongst the refugee population on outside humanitarian assistance to

meet their basic needs, which, according to Vargas (2010), is insufficient. Because these countries are so under-resourced, this meant not only did geography change in the lives of the Iraqi middle-class, but so also did the livelihood of the middle class, who were educated and professional citizens. This resource issue is coupled with the politics of countries in which refugees are not considered refugees, but are considered as guests, with the assumption that things in their own country will get better and they can return. For example, the 450,000 Iraqis who were displaced to Jordan were not considered refugees because it would have burdened the Jordanian government. Considering the Iraqis as guests allowed Jordan to not be financially responsible for them, so governmental aid was not given. David A. Korn (2008) offers another example of fear of the Arab world based on their experience with Palestinian refugees. Having borne the brunt of the Palestinian refugee crisis, Arab countries are both wary and mindful of the consequences of accepting large numbers of refugees for long periods (Korn, 2008). These problems are important as it keeps Iraqis from assimilating into their new environments. After all, how can one feel safe when their being in the new environment is thought of as a burden?

Iraqis are denied their basic human rights as refugees in other countries. They cannot work legally. They do not have access to education, nor to basic health and social services. Resorting to more taboo means of making a living, such as prostitution, has become necessary in some households. Vargas (2010) states that among those registered with UNHCR, the school enrollment rates are surprisingly low in countries which offer free education (e.g., Syria at 15% enrollment and Jordan at 40%). Reasons given are the lack of funds for school uniforms and supplies, different educational curriculums, and fears of being identified and therefore deported. Iraqis who do continue with their education in these countries are increasingly dropping out due to stricter requirements for graduation than what they were accustomed to in Iraq. This

subsequently leads to what Vargas (2010) calls a “lost generation of Iraqi children” (para.7) who lack the education and skills to integrate into their respective societies.

Regarding health care and social services, many Iraqi refugees are dependent on charity and civil society to provide them, and the service providers are limited in which services they can use to help the refugee population. Another complication is that all of these problems within the refugee communities are not so transparent. The Iraqis easily blend in to their new environments due to a shared language, religion, and ethnicity. Thus, the humanitarian crisis these people are in is much less visible. The fact that in Iraq itself media is scarce, also contributes to the lack of visibility of the refugees. One fear of this crisis not being addressed is the increasing number of Iraqi children who are growing up without education, which leaves them vulnerable to unemployment, marginalization, exploitation, and fanaticism, according to Vargas (2010). This very problem is what threatens the peace and security between the US and Iraq, which is unfortunately lacking in infrastructure for many refugees to return.

Current Role of the US

In his 2008 campaign, Obama stated that he would seek 2 billion dollars to assist Non-Governmental Organizations and other countries that are currently helping or hosting refugees. Congress has not granted that aid (U.S. Department of State. May 2011). However, American humanitarian organizations have contributed a total of 346 million dollars. Meanwhile, the number of Iraqis resettling in the United States has increased. Although the U. S. government is strongly criticized for not doing more to prevent the vulnerability of Iraqi refugees, it appears it is committed to having a greater leadership role in the crisis at hand in the resettling of refugees, as well as in attempting to shift anti-American sentiment (Vargas, 2010).

Process Work

In the 1970s Arnold Mindell began to develop Processwork, also known as Process-Oriented Psychology. He is known throughout the world for his innovative synthesis of dreams and bodywork that integrates Jungian therapy and group process, with studies of consciousness, Taoism, shamanism, quantum physics, and conflict facilitation. My idea was to use Process Work with the refugees, to use the wisdom of their bodies and dreams to help them out with what they were going through in their new situation. This idea is brand new, and has not been done before in Process Work.

In my research, what I found most common in refugees is the trauma they have suffered. Trauma is no stranger to Process Work, and in fact Process Work's methods of dealing with trauma have helped me personally in dealing with my own trauma in my situation very similar to the Iraqis. What first prompted my idea of using Process Work in relation to the trauma the refugees felt was in *Dreambody* (Mindell, 1982/2013). That book, along with other works of his, described an approach to working with trauma that I was seeking to use with the refugees. One aspect of this is the focus of Process Work on dreams.

Importance of Dreaming

I am talking about dreams in this section because of what they mean to me personally, since I started this project. It was a dream for me to discover a way to make life better for the refugees and others. I chose to work with refugees because I feel more connected with them based upon my background as a Palestinian, as we were scattered all over the world after 1948.

When you ask someone what they are looking for in their future, the most common response I have come across is, "My dream is to be" This answer gave me access to the dream door, which is the doorway to the person's dreams. A dream is not only when you are sleeping. Dreams are beyond that. Dreams are a subtle idea that sparks in the mind, a moment

when you are drinking your coffee, staring at something over on the counter, and your mind drifts away from the coffee in your hand and goes to wherever your mind is taking you. It may be to different places of a future thing to do, or a past thing that happened. Dream is a big term and is used in Process Work as an umbrella for your vision and hopes of the future, even beyond your awareness. It is what is happening inside of you and outside of you, but you may not be aware of it when it happens.

In the following sections, I address the definition of dreams, and the background of dreams in the Arabic culture and religion. Keeping their dreams alive is so important in the daily lives and future goals of the refugees. If they lose sight of their dreams, how will they move forward in their new lives?

Definition of Dream

Dreams are a universal language that everybody knows and has. When I say universal, I mean that everyone dreams in their own language and color. It does not matter what your beliefs or faith, we all have dreams in different colors and themes. Sometimes we do remember them and sometimes not, and to begin, I offer one meaning of the word dream.

According to the *New Oxford American Dictionary* (2010, 3rd ed.),

Dream/drêṁ/>n. a series of thoughts, images, and sensation occurring in a person's mind during sleep: I had a recurrent dream about falling from great heights.#[in sing.] a state of mind in which someone is or seems to be unaware of their immediate surrounding : he had been walking around in a dream all day. A cherished aspiration, ambition, or ideal: I fulfilled a childhood dream when I became a champion | the girl of my dreams |[as modifier] they'd found their dream home.# an unrealistic or self-deluding fantasy: maybe he could get a job and earn some money- but he knew this was just a dream# a person or thing perceived as wonderful or perfect: her new man's an absolute dream | it was a dream of a backhand | she's a couturier's dream. (p. 527)

Dreams in Arabic Culture

In Arabic culture, dreaming has significant meaning in many ways. Interpretation of dreams in Islam is a means to analyze past and future situations, and is one of the 46 parts of prophecy. There are three kinds of dreams in Islam:

- The truthful dream (rahmani)
- The dream stemming from personal desire (nafsani)
- The dream coming from the devil (shaytani).

Dreaming appeared in the Holy Quran over 1300 years ago, when the Prophet Joseph was requested to analyze a dream for two men who were with him in jail.

Now with him there came into the prison two young men. Said one of them, "I see myself (in a dream) pressing wine." Said the other, "I see myself (in a dream) carrying bread on my head, and birds are eating therefor." "Tell us" (they said) "the truth and meaning therefor: for we see thou art one that doth good (to all)." (YUSUF-12-36)

After Islam came, many people learned how to interpret dreams, among them being Abu Bakr Muhammad Ibn Sirin Al-Ansari (AD 653-728). According to Yehia Gouda (1991), in his encyclopedic reference book on Muslim oneiromancy, *Dreams and Their Meanings in the Old Arab Tradition*, he was particularly renowned for his extraordinary skill in interpreting dreams. The Arabs' greatest intellectuals (e.g., Al-Gaheth, Ibn Qutaybah and Ibn Khaldoun) considered his work as crucial in this field. Thus there is a long, respected, and well-established place for dreams in Arab culture.

I am talking about dreams in the Arab culture because I am working with Iraqi Arab refugees. It has an impact on them and their dreams of a better and safer life. That is what brought some of them to the US and to other places, their own dreaming process.

Dreaming in Matter

Process Work talks about dreams, dreamland, and uses many other terms in talking about many different kinds and levels of dreaming. Process Work explains a dream on three levels.

First is consensus reality (CR), considered as what is happening to you in real life (e.g., you have a headache, accident, and/or other symptoms). Dreamland (D) is the second level. Here the headache is considered as how it might be about power, or expressing anger or directness, at a deeper level than CR. Third is Essence level (E), a sentient experience that you can not explain but it is a feeling of something much deeper than your CR life. It manifests as, and often is, an unrecognized feeling. All three levels contribute to dreaming experience.

In her book, *The Dreaming Source of Creativity*, Amy Mindell (2005) talks about the Australian aboriginals and reminds us that dreams do exist in our life even before the existence of the material world, and that dreams did create this world because without the dreams, you would not think of something new to do, like flying. If the first people had not followed their dreams, we would not be able to fly or go to outer space.

Aboriginal peoples around the world have always known that the dreaming lies within matter. The dreaming exists prior to the material world and gives rise to it. Many of us marginalize the dreaming and focus only on “real” part of things. (Amy Mindell, 2005, p. 4)

High Dream

High dream is a term used by Arnold Mindell to refer to our experience of something big and high that we want to reach and be there living it as an ideal vision, or our deepest longings, or dreams of ourselves. Simply, it may be doing or living a feeling of happiness, idealism, and satisfaction. For example, one high dream of Iraqi refugees may be to be safe and secure in the moment. For others, that might be something they do not even think about. High dreaming is different for each person.

High dreams . . . Amy and I created this term to mean your deepest beliefs and highest hopes, your expectation that people will live up to some ideal—for instance, the notion that people will always be sweet-tempered. High dreams describe the world you want to create. (Arnold Mindell, 1995, p. 199)

High dream is a term used by Arny Mindell to refer to how we are buoyed in a sense of confidence, even elation, when we are moved by our greatest ideals. A part of something meaningful, we feel on top of the world, carried by a positive mood and charge. (Audergon, 2005, p. 17)

High dreams make us feel that what we are doing is the right thing to reach where we want to be in the future. We totally focus on it in order to make it happen with a power that makes us feel invincible, euphoric, undefeated in the face of anything, and capable of doing what seems impossible in the eyes of others. In our eyes, when we are deeply connected and believing in our high dream, we become the most powerful creature on earth. As the traditional saying goes, “Anything is possible with love.” When in love, everything feels perfectly placed, everything around is painted in pink, and you stop seeing the black dots. That is one instance of a time when a high dream is happening.

Low Dream

Low dream is a term used by Arnold Mindell (1995) when he refers to our experience of loss of connection with our high dream. This experience makes us feel depressed, angry, and hopeless about our self, world, and others, when what we had hoped for (i.e., our high dream), did not happen exactly as we had wished.

When the high dream is not fulfilled, we enter the low dream zone. The low dream has its roots in childhood hurts and disappointment. Frequently, couples, groups, and organizations get stuck in the low dream because they have little awareness around moods. They do not express positive or negative moods fully, and as a result the process circles around the low dream because the high dream is not happening. Over time this circle around the low dream becomes a reality, fulfilling childhood fears. Hope of reaching the high dream is gone and a mild chronic depression sets in.

Low dream . . . A low dream occurs when you are in shock about the nature of people, group, or life. You get depressed and sick. You lose hope, walk out, go back to drugs, swear you'll never go near human beings again, or feel like killing yourself. (Arnold Mindell, 1995, p. 199)

Low dream states can bring us into contact with death and surrender, discovering life's temporariness and unpredictability, which is in itself a transformative experience. The function of your low dream could well be to bring your high dream to earth, to make it human, and possible. Both high dream and low dream states are relevant for the situations of the refugees. Without their high dreams, they would not have come to the US, seeking a better life for themselves and their families. Facing the actuality of arriving in an unknown country with minimum to no support socially, economically, or psychologically, the low dream state became much more their norm. In the accompanying film, members of one refugee family agreed to be interviewed and speak directly about their experience.

Personal Experience of High and Low Dreams

Prior to being introduced to Process Work, I had a dream to be successful, and that after high school, my dream was to then finish college. It was simple and that was my goal. I only thought of dreams in two ways, the dreams I have during sleep, and the dreams I have for goals in my life. After I became aware of high and low dreams, I thought more about things. Where do I want to go in my life? Where do I want to be? Do I want to be an ordinary person with daily routines and a scheduled life? I found that I wanted something more than that, something I could do that would make a broader impact, something that would motivate people to create something better for their own life, and others too. That became my high dream, and even still, it is not yet clear what that will be.

In my experience, a low dream is seeing my friends and family killed in front of me. Seeing land and homes being taken away from people who have worked it, and slaved on it for

generations, forced out, and into refugee camps with nothing, is another. Having my home invaded by soldiers and being told to stand outside for hours with no idea if we would have a home to go back into, or if we would all be executed on the spot, is yet another. These are just about the lowest I feel there could be to low dreams, and this is just a brief picture of what many refugees have faced as well as myself.

When working with the refugees, I started seeing myself doing something that benefited them, which fulfilled part of my own high dream. By using myself as an example, and relating to them based on our similar backgrounds, it gave me the opportunity to build rapport with the families and opened a doorway with them, so I could begin assisting on a psychological level. I helped them remember what happened in their past, and move them through their low dreams by talking about what happened to them, how it felt for them. I worked from there, connecting them back to their first high dream spark, which was to get away from their war torn environment, and come to the US or somewhere else in the world. Further, I assisted in having them build from there, showing that they reached a high dream, they are in the US now, and kept them thinking of what their dreams to accomplish here are.

Refugees

Refugees are people who leave their homes by force and could not return to them because of a natural disaster, war, or some other circumstances. They are persons who flee their countries “because their lives, safety or freedom have been threatened by generalized violence, foreign aggression, internal conflicts, massive violation of human rights or other circumstances which have seriously disturbed public order” (Jastram & Achiron, 2001).

The admission of refugees to the United States and their resettlement here is authorized by the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA), as amended. Under the INA, a *refugee* is

typically a person who is outside his or her country and who is unable or unwilling to return because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.

The US and Refugees

The United States has touted itself as a haven for political refugees. The words of poet Emma Lazarus (1883)“Give us your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free” are inscribed on the Statue of Liberty, long the symbol of hope for those who wanted to come to the United States. However, as we shall see, the welcome to political refugees has not always been evenhanded. It has even spurred controversies among immigrant communities themselves as indicated in “Deporting Our Souls: Values, Morality, and Immigration Policy ‘Support the Chinese Boat People.’” (Bill Ong Hing’s. 2006)

The United States, insulated by distance from wars and famines in Europe and Asia, has been able to be selective about which and how many refugees have been welcomed. Since the arrival of refugees displaced and uprooted by World War 2, the United States has allowed three groups of refugees to enter in numbers greater than regulation would ordinarily permit: Hungarian, Cubans, and Southeast Asians (Richard T. Schaefer,2010).

Displacement can be defined as the forced abandonment of home due to conditions beyond the control of the individual (F. Jessberger, 2009). It includes leaving the home for any period of more than 24 hours, and is often characterized by an uncertainty about the possibility of return.

The main cause of displacement for Iraqis currently living in both Jordan and Lebanon was the outbreak of war in Iraq in 2003, with a massive outflow occurring after the bombing of the holy Shi’a Al Askaraiyya shrine in Samarra in February 2006. As established in relevant

literature, Iraqis who are currently fleeing chaotic violence by crossing into Iraq's neighboring countries are likely to have experienced previous internal displacement under Saddam Hussein's regime (HRW, April 2007). In other words, they were most likely already out of touch with their high dreams even before they came to the US.

Working With the Refugees

In my work with the refugees, I sought to use Process Work concepts and tools in order to reconnect them to their high dreams. Many were in a very low dream state, as illustrated in the accompanying film and through the stories they told as part of group process. As mentioned earlier, I felt that considering dreaming as well as high and low dream states was essential. In order to try and shift them from their low dreams, I offered individual and group work, in Process Work format.

Process Work Contributions

The goal of this project was to use Process Work and World Work methods and tools to create and develop a way to aid and assist Iraqi immigrants and refugees as they made the difficult transition from living in Iraq to living in the US. I felt that by addressing the hopelessness often experienced by the immigrants and refugees on coming to the US, they could then more fully realize their high dreams without losing their vision and motivation for their new life as successful citizens in a foreign country. Essentially, how to use Process Work to reconnect them with their vision and motivate them to move toward it? This was my challenge.

I gave them basic theory about group process, primary / secondary, edge, and inner work, as part of the introduction to the group process we did. Dreams high and low have already been mentioned.

Implementation

I met with a local NGO interested in community development and peace building efforts to help with promoting, designing, and funding the project, as well as having some official sponsorship. Then, I designed a blend of Process Work approaches for implementation in the targeted group of people, a diverse range spanning university students, community leaders, new immigrants, and unemployed people. A group process was hosted by the Lutheran Community Center, and reports of the stories are in a later section. One Iraqi family agreed to be interviewed, as documented in the accompanying film.

Group Process

I cofacilitated the group with Dr. Baher Butti, a psychiatrist at the Lutheran Community Center in Portland who works with Iraqi and other racial groups in Portland. I sought to create a familiar and safe container, emphasizing that people gathered and those cofacilitating were all from a similar cultural background. Fears of being misunderstood were rampant, and were behind the lack of participation the first few times we tried to meet as a group. Also, fears of being deported by American authorities were in the atmosphere, and consequently, they felt constrained and unsafe about explaining their experience.

Once the container was created, then we (Dr. Baher Butti and I) could focus on making space to come to an understanding of how they think, communicate, and view the world. They could develop a “metaposition” about their own thinking and communicating style, so that they can then meet and appreciate other cultures and groups on their own terms.

Before the Group Process

I received supervision in preparation. Also, I have a connection with an Iraqi doctor in the Lutheran Community Center and they work with immigrants from all over the world. I noticed that most of the Iraqi immigrants were complaining and felt hopeless, outrage, bitterness,

impotence, all signals of low dream state. Because I am learning about and studying high and low dreams, I had the spark of doing some work with them. I suggested my idea to Dr. Baher and he liked it, as he knew a little bit about Process Work. We continued planning, organizing a time frame for it, and what we hoped to get from it. Then, we started by inviting them to a group process to work on their dreams and connecting them with their high dream, and to work on their vision. Unfortunately, at the first meeting nobody showed up.

There is an Arabic saying, “one day honey, one day onion,” so not all the days are honey and good, but there are hard days and good days always, and both are good learning for us. Going all the way into a low dream can awaken us to a realization that we are out of synch with ourselves, that although we may have a dream, the path we are walking may not go in that direction. Low dream states can bring us into contact with death and surrender, discovering life’s temporariness and unpredictability, which in itself may be a transformative experience. The function of one’s low dream could well be to bring a high dream to earth, in order to then make it accessible, and even possible.

That no one showed up for the event we had planned was puzzling for a while until I dreamed into what they might be thinking or feeling, their emotions, hopes, and trust. Especially since they are in a new country and they have been through a lot, it was not easy for them to go and try something new, and trust the new ideas and people at the same time, which for me is a big indication of the low dream they are in already. That focused my work on how to bring their awareness to it, and encourage them to use it in a helpful way to reach beyond their fears.

We next invited them for what we termed a small lecture to talk about their experiences in the US. This did work!

During the Group Process

The first day of the group process, I was not really prepared because I had been trying many times to get them together and it did not happen for various reasons, and suddenly one day I received a call saying come over, they are coming today for the group process. I got there and I waited for a while, then they started arriving around 30 minutes late. They sat and started talking to each another to break the ice between them, and we started a little chatting and discussing their ideas of being in the US and how they feel about it. We had an old retired Iraqi general during Saddam Hussein's regime, and during the new government, they asked him to come back and work for them. He agreed but it was not a good decision, because the militia tried to assassinate him but his brother died on that attempt, so he decided after that to leave the country and have a safe place for his two daughters and wife, and that was just the beginning of his talking about what happened there. Seeking safety for himself and his family was key.

An Iraqi Christian lady talked about her situation here and what brought her, and she felt so shy to talk and take some airtime at the beginning, but finally she did. It was so deep and I could feel her fear when she told us about it. She was going to work one morning in the small bus that took them daily, and while she was in the bus, suddenly they heard a big explosion in the back while they were driving, and they looked behind them, saw the smoke, and heard people screaming all over, and they asked the driver to stop.

But he told her, "If you want to die, stay here, I am not stopping." She began shaking there in the room, and was there in that moment in time, when it happened. What could I do for her other than give her the space and the time to be with us?

After a few minutes, she continued telling her fear for her brother and not letting him go out by himself alone. She wanted him to leave only with family members to make sure he would

not be kidnapped or have any harm come upon him. I noticed that she did not care about herself more than her brother and her family. I saw this when she mentioned an incident in which her brother, who was with her, though he was walking few meters ahead of her. Suddenly, in this moment, Americans in tanks pointed at him to stop, while the soldier in charge pointed his gun at his face, and for no reason at all they wanted to take him. During all of this, the woman (his sister) jumped between them to prevent them from taking her brother, or else he would have been gone forever, as she said.

It is a complete sacrifice of the self for her to put her love for her family before herself. This shows a belief in herself, having such love and devotion in her heart for them. It reminded me of my mother and similar incidents that had happened with the Israeli army, when they tried to take me for no reason, just for being at the wrong place at the wrong time. It showed me her dream for her family to be safe and to take care of them. In that moment she was having her high dream of safety for her family and nothing else. She recounted this story in Jordan during the process to come to the United States, to be safe here and asked for nothing more. Despite how complicated it was, she and her family eventually made it here to the United States, safely and happily. Now she is able to continue to build her life with her family. Again, safety was key.

Another story was from a young participant who is a professional translator. He worked for the American Army for few years in northern Iraq, and everything was going well until he received a letter with a bullet inside. It said, "Leave your job or it is your end." He stopped speaking for a moment, as though remembering his feelings in that moment in time, and then continued to say, "This was a shock and I didn't want to believe it." He confided in a colleague, who assured him that this was not uncommon. However, a few days later, one of his colleagues

was decapitated, and his head was thrown in front of his work place along with a letter that said, “You all are next.” That was the turning point for him, and he decided to move out of the country, and did not care where. That was when he began thinking of what to do, of where to go, for his family and for work to support them. That was when all of his high dreams of being a normal person and living a normal life had all been threatened, and he was in a low dream state.

He had made his decision to leave the country, to live somewhere else. Because he had worked with the U.S. Army, he was allowed to go to the United States, and for him, it was an easy process. He had been here for only about 5 months at the time of this project, when he shared with us his dreams and motivations for coming to the US. For the most part, it was for safety, but one day he came to the group process expressing that “even here it is not safe.”

I asked him why he did not feel safe. He explained that he had been robbed at work at gunpoint, and all the money from his shift had been stolen. It was shocking for him to experience, and he said, “I ran out from Iraq to save my life, and here I saw my life had almost been taken from me again for a small amount of cash.”

That event was profound enough to make him rethink his life: “What should I do next?” At this point, I stepped in and asked for permission to focus on him a little bit and the group agreed. Then I asked him what he had felt during that time that the robber pulled out a gun and asked for the money. He stayed silent for a moment, and then responded, “Scared and foggy,” and that it happened so quickly that he could not remember.

Then I asked him, that if he were able to go back to that moment, in memory, and focus on his emotions that he had had, what would he have felt? He thought about it and said that he was scared of losing his life over nothing, and then proceeded to explain why he moved to the US.

I was helping US Army as translator. It was good money, and for the good to help the country with all that it is going through, I was helping my country as much as possible, until the militia threatened to kill us. It was not safe enough, and the Army could not protect me every hour of every day, so I moved here to have a safer life.

Then I asked him what the word “safer” meant to him. His response was, “To do whatever I want without being threatened!” We worked on this for a while, doing some inner work, and the conclusion he came to at the end was that, wherever you go in life, life-threatening actions can happen. All you can do to stay safe is to continue your life! Yet again, safety was an essential factor in his decision-making.

Here I offer the inner work I used with him. This is modified from a workshop in San Francisco that I attended, given by Max and Ellen Schupbach (2011).

Inner Work

1. *Think of a specific situation in your work, life that was difficult for you and is still on your mind. What happened?* He started talking about what happened to him in his work last night. While doing a night shift, two guys came to rob the shop, pointing a gun at him, and asking for the money in the cash machine. I asked him how had he felt in that moment? He said, I got a flashback from work in Iraq when I was threatened to be killed if I stayed working there.
2. *Voice of the critic: what does the critic say to you about it, what is your self telling you in that moment?* His answer, I do not want to die for a little bit of cash after coming all the way from Iraq, running from death to die here for nothing.
3. *Discover X + U: find the two aspects of the situation, the U energy is going to be the supportive and the X is the aspect of the situation that disturbed you.* He found them and then I told him to put it aside for now.

4. *Reflect on your earthspot: think of a place on earth that you feel very well. Go to that place and see how the two energies, X + U, are somehow present in that place.* He started describing what he saw as the X for him was the sand storm, and the U was the dessert with nothing except the silence.
5. *Become the earthspot: Here I asked him to go there and allow himself to be affected by that place. Become the witness of that interaction.* He spent a few minutes just being there and I could see his face was changing to be more relaxed.
6. *Discover advice and teaching from the earth: Asked him from this viewpoint, look back at the situation that you described before. What do you see from this prospective?* He starts telling us how hard it was for him to be there with the sand storm and stay tuned with the dessert because it is a big disturbance. I asked him, Do you have any advice for yourself from this view? Yes, I have, it is no matter the sand storm is strong and it might move sand dunes far away but it will stay there. How does the critic viewpoint look from here? Very small.
7. *Any advice or practice using the guidance you just received from the earthspot?* He said, Wherever you go, you are going to have fear and scary moments, but trust in yourself and maintain the hope to keep proceeding with what you are doing.

That was, for him, a revelation in that moment. The other participants of the group agreed with him. After that, what he found is that it is not safe, even here, and that is where he almost fell into the low dream state, where his expectation of a safe and secure place in his new environment was no longer his reality. Surviving and having a secure place and being able to keep going is the high dream for him in this moment of his life.

I was actually looking for something higher than that; I was looking for a dream of doing something bigger in life rather than just surviving in life. With no vision for what was to happen during this session, I had assumed that they would be looking for self-esteem and a way to feel accomplished. However, after a few group processes, it dawned on me that they are on different levels from what I was expecting. I began to notice that they had very basic needs, such as physiological support, housing, food, and air. They were also concerned about safety and security, and seemed concerned about employment, neighborhood conditions, health insurance, and many other things that are considered to just be basic to many families. That, for them, is the high dream. They are looking for a safe world, where everyone respects others and where people do not threaten each other.

I am also looking for my high dream in them, by watching them looking for something bigger, and looking to change their lives, by personal achievement, creating better futures than the past, and connecting them with that, because I assumed that was what they wanted. However, now I think that I was trying to give them my dreams and for them to reach what I wanted. I was focusing on that rather than what they wanted to achieve from the session. When the participant concluded that it is not safe even here and nearly fell into a low dream state where his expectation of a safe and secure place in the new home was not true, I remembered that there was most likely trauma in the background.

I also thought of something from my past. From my time at business school, I remembered learning about Abraham Maslow and his theory about human motivation, otherwise known as the hierarchy of needs. His five levels of needs are as follows:

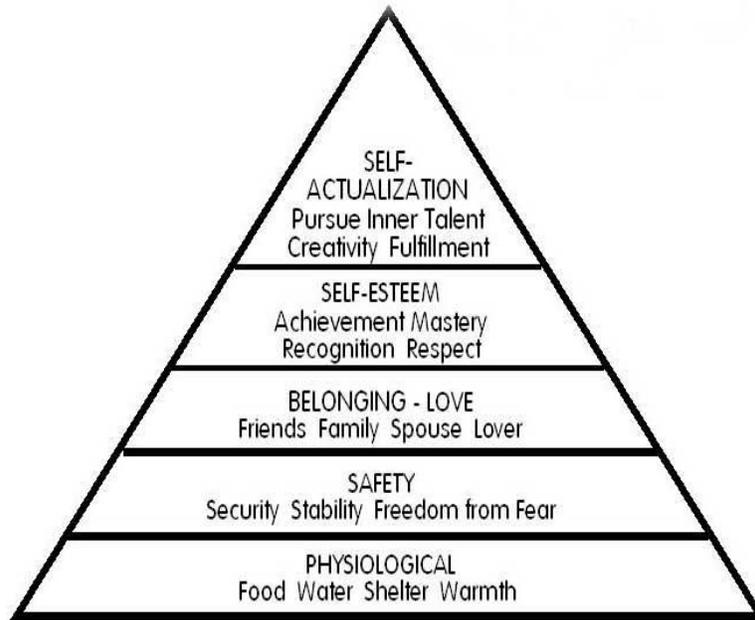


Figure 1. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.

1. *Physiological Needs*: This included most of the basic needs in life, such as the need for water, food, air, and sleep. Maslow believed that this was basic for human beings to live, and that everything above is secondary to that, until these basic needs are met.
2. *Security Needs*: Safety and security needs are important for survival, but not as demanding for survival as are the physiological needs. For example, security needs include a desire for health insurance, steady employment, safe neighborhoods, and a roof over our heads.
3. *Social Needs*: This includes the need for love, belonging, and affection. It is considered to be less basic, according to Maslow, than physiological and security needs. Relationships, such as friendships, romantic attachments, and families help to achieve that.

4. *Esteem Needs*: After the first three types of needs have been covered and satisfied, esteem needs become increasingly more important. These reflect on personal worth, social recognition, and accomplishment.
5. *Self-Actualizing Needs*: It is the highest level of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. People are self-aware, concerned with personal growth, less concerned with the opinion of others, and interested fulfilling their potential. (Maslow, 1987)

What I noticed during these group processes was of the same pattern, while I was trying to resist and do something else. However, you can never organize a group to go as planned. The group process will always lead you, but you can never lead it. In retrospect, I realize that there was very little space between their high dreams and their low dreams. For many if not most, they were at the earlier needs levels, and their experiential reality was essentially focused on safety and survival. Maslow's hierarchy proved useful to illustrate the magnitude of the gap between high and low dreams. It also served as a context for considering one's dreams in relationship to one's situation, pragmatically. For example, for the refugees, safety was a high dream, while for me, I wanted accomplishment and fulfilment for them. Clearly, we were not on the same page.

During one of the group processes, I asked a charismatic young man, what brought you to the US? He told me about why he was here, that it was for security and no law to rule. Another reason was to find a better future for their children, and he then shared a story about the terrible conditions of the security situation there. He gave an example, in which he sent his child to kindergarten, paying \$150 per month, which is high there, but still they sent a letter home with the child saying, "We are not responsible if your child is kidnapped." He then said, with a voice that barely could come out, like screaming, that he had sent them to private school by the bus and

there was still no safety! He looked at his future and his children and decided that his children deserved a better future than his.

These were his words to me and to the whole world coming out from Iraq. His high dream is to get a better life for the next generation, his kids. Here he could make this dream come true.

Another story is from a retired General in the Iraqi Army. His first flirt to come to the US was in 1990 during the Gulf War, but he was worried about his family being executed by the Saddam government at that time if they knew he left. His parents were on his mind when he thought of it and what would happen to them after he ran away, but later in 2006 his mother died after his brother was assassinated for being a Colonel in the Iraqi secret services. People came to his real estate office and he and his brother were there and they started shooting at them. His brother did not make it. The next day after the assassination they came to make sure they were both dead, but they knew he made it so they kept targeting him. I asked him who are they? His answer was not clear, he said they are trying to kill everybody who served during the Saddam period with high rank and every pilot who participated in bombing Iran. They sent him threatening letters, so he moved from the city and hid himself in cousins' houses one by one until in 2010 he applied to US as a refugee with his family. The dissatisfaction was obvious on his face from his current life and when he arrived here. He had a high dream of a different life and style when he moved here and said, "I spent a whole month in the apartment they gave us and nobody knocked on the door to ask us how we doing." This is a clear illustration that his expectation was of receiving a warm welcome and some guidance as new arrivals. Yet, none of that happened.

Arlene Audergon (2005) writes in *The War Hotel* about refugees and the trauma they are facing, and that without appropriate assistance, it makes them freeze in one state and they hardly could move further with their life. They will always follow the dreams of safety. “Our need for safety is easily exploited, if there is a threat to the survival of the family, we are forced into position to go along with anything for promise of safety” (Audergon, 2005, p. 192).

I could see the fear in their eyes, and how they were all looking for safety. Being forced to be quiet and reposition his life and dreams to protect his family is such a great and noble thing to do. To be protective of your family, it became their only high dream for the moment. That is where the facilitator needed to be aware of that part, and follow the group process or it would be the facilitator trying to lead them to something he wanted, but they were not ready for it.

As facilitator, I needed to make sure their feelings were being heard, and understood. Making them feel safe, that would be the necessary first step towards awakening them to the dreams they did have inside them before their life had changed. Becoming aware of it as an idea first, and maybe then their life could change and move towards that dream. Working with their trauma would be essential, and to do so in depth was beyond the scope of this project.

As facilitator, I had to be aware of the field around me or I would be dreamed up by the participants, and my expectation would serve to push them into what I thought was a high dream for them! Or I would be in trouble for pushing them towards something they do not want or are not ready for.

After the Group Process

After we finished the series of group processes, I started looking for what next to do with them. Observing the themes that did show up, they were mostly about safety, better living conditions, having electricity, and all that does exist in the US, yet supportive elements on the

social level were lacking. So, how to keep them active with their dreams and to act on that feeling of need and how to create a support for them after what we have experienced in the group process? First thing that came to my mind was to ask them to draw something to remind them of that dream of safety to keep it with them. However, their feedback was negative. My other idea was to ask them what would remind them of that experience they did have during the process? Some had an old song from the culture of Iraq that reminded them of keeping the faith up while in the new experience you are having abroad, in your new home.

They would benefit from further supportive work and more future research could usefully be done on the topic of high / low dream, because it is a new approach in working with refugees. Most of them had a dream to make it all the way here. Indeed, they did travel across the world for a dream of a better future, which is a great vision of yourself in the future. This in turn, may encourage them to be free to implement what they dream for their future, in the present.

I am in the process of creating a peer support group from that group, if they want to volunteer to help out new refugees, to make their lives easier, and provide them with better help than what they had! For them to support each other in this way would address both their relationships on the social level as well as contribute to community building for themselves.

Film

In addition to the group processes, I was also able to document members of a family who spoke about their experiences in search of safety. Several people agreed to be interviewed and filmed, and their reports usefully supplement the stories that came forward in the larger group processes. It is very clear that for this family, the high dream of safety and seeking a future for their children were the driving forces that led them to leave Iraq and come to the US. (Please see Appendix A for transcript of the film.)

Immigrant Psychology

In this section, I highlight the Iraqi refugees in the US and their experience, and how their psychological needs are not fully understood from a mainstream cultural perspective. I hope to provide humanitarian actors with information and insights that can make them more psychosocially sensitive and aware while providing assistance, and to help psychosocial professionals conceive specific psychosocial programs that target the psychosocial uneasiness of Iraqis displaced. This information also provides the context for the results of my project, and my conclusions.

Among the Iraqi communities and the Middle Eastern cultures in general, psychological suffering, which is not pathological and / or socially unacceptable, is usually disregarded and mainly perceived as a spiritual issue. Only when the suffering brings about behavioral and societal dysfunction, will a mental health professional perhaps be consulted. However, due to the stigmatization of mental health related problems, there is generally little referral to mental health professionals, as mental health is exclusively associated with pathology and social dysfunction. While traditional healing is quite common in rural Iraq, displaced Iraqis can no longer benefit from the services of traditional healers. These healers are reluctant to leave Iraq due to their religious and social roles.

Discussion

Regarding what I actually found in working with the participants of the group and the family I interviewed, I discovered that it is essential to put high dreams into context. For example, early on as I reported my difficulties in getting people to even show up at the group processes scheduled, I realized that I was in fact placing my own high dream onto them. Rather, their high dream was much different. Maslow's (1987) hierarchy of needs was helpful in

orienting me to both differences and similarities in dreams that were shared amongst the refugees, and sometimes, my own. While consulting Maslow's hierarchy served to orient me the level of need present, Process Work offered tools to address both where they were (e.g., in search of safety) as well as how to move from there (e.g., toward a better future for the children).

More specifically, working on high and low dreams seemingly did effect change in the attitude of those who participated, though not all participants spoke of their experience.

During the group processes, I felt a shift in the atmosphere as participants spoke of their experiences, and were heard and witnessed by the others in the group. Afterwards, there was interest expressed in helping others in similar newcomer situations to adapt and adjust to their new culture by cultivating a sense of community. This was definitely an outcome I had hoped for. For those who explored inner work and reported back to me (in itself a self-selected group), to the extent that they were able to shift out of their immediate situation and imagine a different scenario, it seemed to be helpful in allowing them to access options not in the present. It seemed to work less well for those who had difficulty in seeing beyond their immediate needs for safety. This supports my sense that level of need and high / low dream may be related, and this bears further investigation.

Limitations

The limitations that I anticipated included the realization that this sort of workshop might be scary for people to sit in and face their fears of what might show up at some point. One clear limitation is that the facilitator needs training in trauma work, as it is not far from the experience of the refugees.

Sometimes Arab cultures are not very welcoming to a new idea unless they trust the one who introduces it to them. Finding an NGO that would support the idea of initiating this process

was also challenging. Participants were wary of being on videotape, because of their history of needing confidentiality and secrecy from being under government eyes, so many issues of trust were involved. We decided to not videotape the group processes for safety reasons. However, one family agreed to be interviewed and filmed. Because of the limited number of primarily self-selected participants in this project, as well as the one-time open-ended interview of the family, no generalizations can be made to other groups of refugees.

Although there were several group processes, there were only seven participants in total, so no generalizations to other groups can be made given the size of the participant pool. Because of the nature of group process, although every attempt was made to allow space for all voices to be heard, not all may have been evenly represented. Due to this being a group of Iraqi refugees, no generalizations can be made to other cultural or refugee groups. Because issues of trust were clearly present, that I as a Palestinian was able to elicit the trust of the family who allowed me to interview them may not be easily duplicated by someone of another cultural background. As there was only one interview, no generalizations can be made from the experiences presented. Because this was essentially a new approach, to use Process Work tools (e.g., group process and inner work) to work with Iraqi refugees in Portland, OR, this was and is essentially new territory, and based on what I observed and heard, I believe merits further study.

Contribution to Process Work

When I began this project, looking at what had been written about refugees and displaced populations, there was nothing that had been published by Process Work. When I asked the faculty, everyone was surprised that no one had approached this subject.

In this project, my focus was on Process Work and World Work approaches in working with an immigrant group with multicultural diversity. It was the first workshop and program

specifically designed by a Palestinian to fit the needs of Iraqis and perhaps more broadly, Middle Easterners in general, created with an intimate understanding of their whole collective background and diversity.

More specifically, the use of group process and inner work proved to be effective ways of addressing challenges of this population, in a group and individually. Further, from the series of group processes emerged an interest on the part of several participants in working as peer support within the Iraqi refugees, facilitating the situation of new arrivals as well as the cultivation of community. Also, as several participants indicated, bringing the awareness of participants to the importance of dreams and the dreaming process indeed served to support and grow their visions into the future, for themselves and their children.

Conclusion

This project introduced to the Iraqi refugees a different method to deal with depression and hopelessness. Indeed, this approach may well be useful for other populations, when tailored for specificity of diverse backgrounds and cultures.

Moving forward, local NGOs, social workers, government officials, conflict facilitators, and anyone who is interested in diversity work and is trying to connect people with their own dreams and hopes may find it useful. Although this project focused primarily upon the adult members of a particular refugee population, the Process Work tools utilized could also be usefully implemented with teens and / or young adults, perhaps in a school context, as that is often a highly conflicted setting for newcomers. In working with the feeling needs of new immigrants as they encounter cultural shocks, it is essential to keep them reminded of their dreams and hopes when they moved here. Clearly, Process Work can support them to not give

up easily on these dreams, because these dreams are what made them move from their home to this new home.

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Appendix A: Transcript of Film

High and Low Dreams of Recent Refugees of a War-Torn Country

War and sectarian violence in Iraq forced thousands to flee for their lives and seek refuge elsewhere. These people are stranded, unable to return to Iraq without risking their lives. The unstable situation in Iraq meant that the Ibrahim's were unable to obtain the medical treatment they desperately needed. Their situation is shared by many other refugees, who have to leave the country for medical reasons.

The Ibrahim family

The mother: My name is Ekhlas Zaky. I'm from Mosul. I was born in 1972. Married with five kids.

The son: Mustafa. I am from Mosul. (The mom telling him You're in second year.) I'm in second year. The daughter: My name is Tuhama. From Mosul. Second year.

The mom: Ibrahim doesn't talk. Our main reason for leaving Iraq was the children. I'm sure the war is to blame for my children's illness. The doctor talked about the chemicals that had been dropped on Iraq. They said that they affect the kidneys and the heart. So the chemicals affected Tuhama's kidneys. It's a rare disease. Provision of medical treatment was unreliable. Most often Tuhama's fits would happen at night. Getting her to hospital was very difficult. The closest hospital was surrounded by military forces.

So my husband and I had to risk our lives to get her there. Otherwise she would have died in front of our eyes. Ibrahim is unable to speak. And he can't see out of one eye. One day he was with me at the market, a truck drove in, loaded with melons. It drove past and then exploded. Of course, Ibrahim is just a child. The explosion terrified him. He kept screaming and crying. Afterwards, he would not talk. I took him to see the sheiks. They said that the shock had caused him not to speak. Many doctors advised us to seek medical treatment abroad. There medicine is more advanced and equipment is more modern. The doctors said the children would benefit. Even if they found good reason to deny me and my husband resettlement... What about the fate of the children?

With IRAP's help they won their appeal and are now living in Portland, Oregon.

In search of safety

Think about the generation and say

We want to make it a better place for our children and

Our children's children.

So that they know it's

A better world for them,

And think if they can make it a better place.

(Presented by Mohammad Alarja, 2013)