

Moral Injury in Refugee Communities: The Connection Between Displacement and Disorientation



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Abstract This chapter demonstrates the role that displacement can play in generating moral injury (MI) within refugee communities. To better understand the consequences of displacement, it considers how individuals' identities and values are formed through their local communities. While there are many reasons that displacement ought to be understood as a potentially morally injurious experience (PMIE), particular attention is given to the negative effects of disorientation, which are associated with displacement. The chapter uncovers multiple facets of disorientation, such as despair, confusion, and apathy. Understanding the morally injurious consequences of displacement marks an important first step toward better serving refugee communities, particularly those citizens of Ukraine who have been forced to flee their homes in the wake of Russian aggression.

1 Introduction

Moral injury (MI) is a multifaceted form of trauma that can result from participating in or witnessing acts that conflict with an individual's moral or ethical values. It has been labeled a "bio-psycho-social-spiritual syndrome" with wide-ranging impacts that vary primarily based on context (Carey & Hodgson, 2018). MI is often seen in individuals who have experienced traumatic events, such as soldiers who have witnessed or participated in acts of violence during combat. These acts are often referred to as potentially morally injurious experiences (PMIEs) that establish conditions ripe for experiencing the full-fledged syndrome of MI. However, the violence witnessed as a soldier during combat is merely one of many possible contexts where

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MI can be experienced. This syndrome can arise in virtually any domain where situations may create an internal struggle with one's most deeply held values and convictions.

While the MI construct was initially applied to the military domain, cases of MI are now observed beyond the bounds of active-duty service members and veterans. For example, MI has been found among healthcare workers who battled against feelings of burnout, hopelessness, and fatigue while serving patients during the COVID-19 pandemic (Mantri et al., 2021). Most recently, MI has been identified in business communities where spiritual, psychobehavioral, and existential wounds are frequently caused due to failures in leadership that create vicious institutions which sacrifice their prosocial commitment to stakeholders (Abadal & Potts, 2022). These examples mark essential efforts to expand the application of the MI construct. MI research is still relatively new compared to different but related syndromes like burnout and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Consequently, when it comes to the implications of MI in specific contexts, many domains have not yet received due consideration.

One such domain that is particularly relevant for this volume on the Great Power Competition and the Russian aggression against the people of Ukraine is the experience of MI in refugee communities. Refugees are individuals who have been forced to flee their homes due to conflict, persecution, or natural disasters. These experiences can have a profound impact on an individual's beliefs about the world as well as their spiritual values and moral commitments, resulting in a range of PMIEs in their homeland and wherever they migrate to next. With this background in mind, in this chapter, we will consider how individuals' identities and values are formed through their local communities. This allows us to understand the consequences of refugee displacement better. We will then introduce displacement as a PMIE experienced by refugees within the context of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. Next, we discuss the effects of displacement and MI among refugees with a particular focus on disorientation. Finally, we consider two dire concerns that leaders working to support the well-being of refugees ought to consider—their high susceptibility to moral paralysis and suicidal ideation.

2 Identity, Community, and Meaning-Making

In order to fully understand why MI results among displaced refugees, we must first consider how human beings are formed as moral beings. This will be necessary for explaining why community—especially community bound by shared language, values, and geography—is essential to forming an individual's identity and, consequently, their moral purpose. In what follows, we will turn to two scholars who have awakened the modern world to humanity's socially dependent nature—Charles Taylor and Alasdair MacIntyre. First, we turn to Charles Taylor.

Taylor's prolific philosophical corpus is primarily inspired by the famous German philosopher Friedrich Hegel's (1977) social theory articulated within his work on

the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, among other essential volumes. Taylor and Gutmann (1994), like Hegel, emphasize the nature of the self as social—one that develops in dialogue with others and requires recognition from the community in which it is situated to gain the self-understanding necessary for human flourishing. Consequently, Taylor argues that we must acknowledge the “dialogical” nature of our humanity and our self-identity (Taylor, 1992).

As much as we like to celebrate freedom and autonomy as it pertains to the self-construction of human identity in the West, the nature of persons as “dialogical” demands an understanding of the role that others necessarily play in this process (Taylor, 1992). Humans are dialogical insofar as we come to make sense of the world, the possibilities that exist for us in it, and our “horizon of meaning” through lived encounters with others in specific social contexts, so Taylor (1992) argues. As it turns out, therefore, our place in the world, and the people who inhabit that space with us, means that “some of the things I value most are accessible to me only in relation” to those moral communities that have become “internal to my identity” (Taylor, 1992, p. 34). Proximity to those one is in relation with is a necessary condition for maintaining one’s identity, the sense of purpose and meaning bound up with it, and those things that one comes to value in the world.

In this way, the notion of the dialogical self should be understood as a corrective of modern conceptions of the self’s identity formation happening mainly in opposition to community (Taylor, 1989). With the dialogical self in mind, Taylor and Gutmann (1994) articulate the epistemological necessity of community and recognition within one’s community as a “vital human need” (p. 26). In an illuminating and groundbreaking essay on recognition theory, Taylor and Gutmann (1994) suggest, “nonrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being” (p. 25). What is clear is that Taylor places an epistemological priority on an encounter with individuals in one’s community for identity formation. Others within our community, therefore, play an essential role in an individual’s self-recognition and identity formation. Taylor finds that interruptions to this process of recognition and identity formation trap individuals in a reduced mode of being that result in harmful or even oppressive distortions to one’s self-understanding.

This idea that human beings are, in fact, dialogically formed has significant consequences for our moral lives. Suppose Taylor and Gutmann (1994) are right to argue that our identity is not solely established through self-construction but also through our exchanges with those who make up our communities. In that case, we must further consider how those values that make up our identity are also socially dependent. This is the crucial insight that the philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre contributes to our discussion about the connection between identity, community, and the process of moral meaning-making. MacIntyre (2007) explains how the development of our practical rationality, which enables us to morally reason, is contingent upon formative practices and healthy social institutions. In other words, people develop values and good dispositions (i.e., virtues and skills) through formative practical activities that are sustained by healthy social institutions.

For MacIntyre, the protection of practical formation within healthy social institutions is imperative for preserving the traditions that guide our understanding of the life worth living—a project that always happens within specific social contexts. When these communities of memory fall apart, individuals lose the ability to participate in living traditions that help them frame their “quest for the discovery and achievement of the good” (MacIntyre, 2016, p. 36). Thus, he argues based on our nature that “this project [of setting out on a quest for the good life] has to be embodied” within “those traditional forms of human community” that enable us to exercise and extend our capacity for moral reasoning and our discernment of what is good (MacIntyre, 2016, p. 36). Moral formation, MacIntyre maintains, comes through participating in the practices of a well-established tradition and cultivating the virtues in accordance with what specific traditions teach us about the good life.

While many essential practices and institutions must be protected within a society to promote the flourishing of all its members, let us consider only one example here that helps to clarify MacIntyre’s argument about the formation of morality within traditional communities of memory. Consider the role of public education at the local and national levels. Educational institutions introduce students to many different practices and traditions that help them grow in virtues and skills while also learning to discern the shape of the good life. In classes such as literature and history, for example, meaning is mediated through narrative. Through reading and storytelling, children come to know and understand what behavior contributes to the common good and what destroys it. They deliberate with their peers and instructors about what should be imitated and avoided, what incurs honor, and what results in social exclusion. In short, they undergo a formation in what it means to be a good member of their local and national community by engaging with others across various periods. Many historical and literary figures surveyed will have occupied the same geographic context. They can offer unique stories or lessons that the local and national society believe capture what it means to embrace one’s identity as a member of one’s living community of memory. Any disruption to the health of such institutions results in an erosion of the very narrative foundation that is required for students to learn to value and derive meaning from their place of origin. As we shall see in the following sections, this negatively impacts their sense of belonging in the world.

Without giving too many more examples, we can already see the importance of individuals’ specific social contexts and communities for preserving traditional narratives that help frame their identity and values. Narrative is mediated through language, and language is developed, shared, and maintained through geographic proximity. Relocation, even when voluntary, often results in the slow death of one’s native tongue and the stories communicated through it. Similarly, formative practices of all kinds are predicated upon buildings and spaces that embody shared communal values. In this way, space is not merely functional. Instead, it is a medium through which values are communicated and reinforced. Ultimately, human beings are situated among people and places. Though values are often conceptualized in transcendent, immaterial terms, they are mediated and communicated through embodied

practices, relationships, and physical spaces. Therefore, the health of one's community and one's ability to maintain a place in it has a significant bearing on one's identity and moral imagination.

3 Displacement and Moral Injury

As discussed in the previous section, human beings develop moral identities dialogically. This happens through the practices, narratives, rituals, and traditions of the social institutions to which they belong. But what happens when the individual is stripped away from the 'we' that helps make sense of the 'I'? We contend that in these moments, one experiences a potentially morally injurious experience (PMIE). Forcible displacement—as has been the case for so many Ukrainian refugees since the start of Russia's aggression in the region—inherently disrupts the socially constructed identity of the self, which is rooted in particular places and communities with their established values, shared goals, and beliefs. Put another way, refugees suffer the loss of their moral foundation, which is made incarnate through the people and places of their homes. Undoubtedly, this loss is morally injurious as it deprives people of communal deliberations that help them maintain a clear vision of their meaning and purpose, which is necessary for their flourishing and their discernment of the good life.

Joseph Wiinikka-Lydon (2019) discusses this reality, claiming we must “take seriously the embedded nature of the embodied self as a nexus of complex events and forces that make up who we are from moment to moment and day to day” (p. 18). Being a citizen of Kyiv, for example, brings to mind particular networks and communities that make up one's social life and define one's identity. Apart from these networks and communities, the self lacks adequate content to undergo the necessary process of identity formation discussed above, and any sudden or unexpected upheaval of these networks and communities can damage the identity formation of the self that has already taken place.

Another reason that displacement is so morally injurious involves the impact that horrifying acts of political violence in one's geographic context have on one's social imaginaries and impression of feeling at home in the world. Even if one is not removed from one's geographic context or totally plucked from one's moral communities, places and networks of human community undergo fundamental shifts during wartime conflicts that uproot one's former perceptions of these very things. One's formerly tacit social context that grounds their world of meaning becomes a morally problematic object of evaluation and examination (Wiinikka-Lydon, 2019).

Let us reflect further on this by continuing with our example of what it means to be a citizen of Kyiv. It is imperative to highlight the fundamental changes that have occurred for residents since the conflict in Ukraine began. Bloodstained soil, blown-up school buildings, and corpses of community members have rewritten impressions of life together at home. Taken-for-granted values in the city that have been upheld by its social institutions, such as the dignity of a neighbor's life, have been transgressed.

When picturesque images of home become overwritten by morally problematic acts of political violence, PMIEs loom around every corner.

Wiinikka-Lydon's sustained treatment of the political violence experienced during the Bosnian War in the 1990s helps depict the PMIEs that prompt these fundamental changes for refugees. He notes:

An important consequence of these acts was to taint the imaginary of home and land with blood and horror. Where once one's hometown could bring to mind images of friends, families, and networks, in addition to the difficulties of any locality called 'home,' these strategies could rewrite those impressions so that home could inhabit a place of terror in shared social imaginaries. It could make it harder to inhabit or return and re-inhabit such spaces, alienating one from the actual material geography that provided the basis for one's moral community. The strategy of ethnic cleansing, a term coined during the war, was not only to eliminate groups from a political geography but also to make it difficult for them ever to return. Strategies targeting the local moral worlds, then, could make it appear impossible that one could ever have a community that could support the moral life in such areas (Wiinikka-Lydon, 2019, p. 126).

Similar to the conflict in Bosnia, Russia's aggression in Kyiv and other cities in Ukraine ought to be seen as a deliberate strategy targeting the disintegration of local moral worlds. As such, Russian aggression has rewritten impressions of home, disrupting social imaginaries by making it appear nearly impossible that refugees could ever again inhabit these places as the moral communities they once were before the morally injurious acts of political violence began.

Because of these consequences, we argue, again following Wiinikka-Lydon (2019), that cases of MI stemming from political violence and leading to displacement impact not only individual identities and their concomitant social imaginaries but also whole societies. When destabilizing acts of political violence occur, societies undergo a transformation in their "moral architecture" that alienates them from visions of "shared life" together as a community where virtues can be exercised toward the pursuit of the common good in accordance with long-standing social traditions (Wiinikka-Lydon, 2019, p. 9). Horrifying acts of political violence can, in other words, dissolve the social contexts that allow for the pursuit of goodness together as a moral community, and "a world no longer capable of goodness is an alien world where one is no longer sure what horizons are worthy of one's effort" (Wiinikka-Lydon, 2019, p. 10).

Individuals need good societies as much as societies need good individuals to flourish. One of the greatest tragedies of political violence resulting in displacement is that it can undermine both:

Political violence can undermine the moral intelligibility of one's world. Violent conflict does not just destroy lives and buildings. It destroys that which makes meaningful lives and community possible. Experiences of war like these can leave a residue of doubt and even despair about the possibility of a restored moral ability and a world capable of supporting a meaningful moral life. It is, in other words, a moral harm that has a lasting impact on how one perceives oneself and others, and on the ability for one to actively aspire to the visions of goodness and the images of personhood that are central to the moral dimension of life, and so are central to one's existence (Wiinikka-Lydon, 2019, p. 2).

Wiinikka-Lydon's statement above succinctly captures what we have tried to show in this section. Namely, we have argued that political violence leading to displacement can result in MI by facilitating the erasure of social imaginaries, which are necessary for forming and preserving one's identity and values. This results in the very dissolution of society that Taylor and Gutmann (1994) warn will dangerously "reduce one's mode of being" in ways that bring about "oppression" and "harm" (p. 25).

4 Disorientation: A Salient Consequence of Moral Injury for Refugees

Along with MI incurred from displacement comes significant biological, psychological, social, and spiritual consequences. Though these consequences are too numerous to outline here, Wes Fleming's recent article (2022) on the moral emotions associated with MI provides a practical framework with which we can continue our discussion. It will be helpful to explain the purpose of Fleming's work in this article before delving into the specifics. As Fleming (2022) articulates, the article "introduces an infographic tool called *The Moral Injury Experience Wheel*, designed to help users accurately label moral emotions and conceptualize the mechanisms of moral injury (MI)" (p. 1). The wheel is divided into four primary sections, each identifying a primary emotion resulting from a specific type of PMIE. In each section, a host of secondary moral emotions accompany the primary emotions. In what follows, we will further explain the primary emotions and major sections of the wheel. Then we will turn to his treatment of secondary emotions—particularly those secondary emotions that will be relevant to our discussion about displacement and disorientation.

Fleming (2022) describes four primary moral emotions that a victim of MI may experience: shame or guilt, anger, disgust, and disorientation. Disgust is experienced when individuals "witness excessive violence, death, or immoral acts" (Fleming, 2022, p. 13; Also see Currier et al., 2019). Anger results when an individual experiences "a betrayal by a legitimate authority" (Fleming, 2022, p. 13; Also see Currier et al., 2018; Shay, 2014). Shame or guilt occurs when an individual's MI results from a personal transgression or moral betrayal (Fleming, 2022; Also see Koenig et al., 2019 and Litz et al., 2009). Finally, disorientation happens when individuals face "unavoidable, irresolvable moral conflict" (Fleming, 2022, p. 13; Also see Currier et al., 2015a, 2015b, 2015c; Molendijk, 2018).

While much of the secondary literature has explored anger, shame, and guilt as consequential of morally injurious events, disorientation has not received as much attention. This is likely the case because most of the research on MI concerns veterans exposed to traditional combat events. In the course of those events, it may be more common to experience the anger that results from betrayal or the shame that results from a personal moral transgression. Indeed, these seem to be the most salient and debilitating moral injuries for veterans. However, the experience of the refugee is

quite different from the veteran, and a more extended consideration of disorientation is warranted here. In what follows, we will further explore the construct of disorientation as it has been understood in philosophical and clinical literature and then consider some of the most salient secondary emotions associated with experiences of disorientation. Doing so will better position us to understand disorientation and how it may specifically relate to the plight of the refugee and the loss of identity that accompanies displacement.

Defining Disorientation

The most recent philosophical treatment of disorientation is detailed by the philosopher Amy Harbin. As she explains, disorientation involves,

experiencing serious disruption such that we do not know how to go on. To become disoriented is, roughly, to lose one's bearings in relation to others, environments, and life projects. Experiences of disorientation prompt sustained uncertainty: Who am I now? What should I do? How should I relate to others? As disoriented, we can feel out of place, uncomfortable, uneasy, and unsettled. Disorientations are typically spurred by major life shifts to which we do not know how to respond (Harbin, 2016, p. xi).

We can contrast this with being oriented. When an individual is oriented, they are rooted, grounded, and have a clear sense of moral direction. They will feel confident and secure in their agency, the power to make decisions, and the values that direct them.

As Harbin explains, disorientation occurs in response to a myriad of events that all human beings will experience throughout their lives. In other words, disorienting experiences are not uncommon or rare. The loss of a job can cause disorientation. Suffering the death of a spouse or parent can cause disorientation. Confronting new cultures, ideologies, and ways of life can cause disorientation. We may even explain disorientation as an existential crisis in which some pivotal experience or realization makes us question the values and beliefs we thought were secure and certain. Tine Molendijk's (2018) defines it in this way, as the "loss of one's previous certainties about wrong and right; it is the loss of one's moral frame of reference and one's moral self-perception" (p. 7). In short, disorientation involves the felt loss of one's moral bearings, in some way and to variant degrees.

Though it may sound counterintuitive, in some instances, these disorienting experiences yield positive outcomes. For example, let us consider a student in a service-learning course at a university who encounters an impoverished community within their city while on a class trip. The student is shocked to learn that destitute people are living within twenty miles of her apartment—people struggling to find the means to provide for their families, living without electricity, and the modern conveniences that she and her friends never stop to think about. As a result, the student might question her former political views, her beliefs, and how she regularly spends her time. She may wonder how she lived for so long, ignoring these social issues. The encounter is, quite literally, disorienting. As a result, she is inspired to better understand the causes of social inequity and poverty, contributing to a stronger, deeper sense of moral purpose, resolve, and orientation. That is, being challenged and questioning her values can lead to greater clarity, nuanced understanding, and orientation

toward the common good. We would be hard-pressed to describe such instances as being consequential of having experienced MI. In fact, we could easily describe this set of experiences as enlightening for the student.

However, not all disorienting experiences are of the sort that was described above. Many particularly traumatic experiences of disorientation do not lead to greater clarity, depth, and a renewed sense of purpose. As Harbin (2016) cautions, such experiences “can and do interfere with wholehearted, decisive action. They can paralyze, overwhelm, embitter, and misdirect moral agents. They can unhinge us from positive moral orientations we have lived out in the past” (2016, p. xx). Indeed, they may muddy moral vision and never succeed in clearing it back up, leaving individuals in a state of perpetual *aporia*. Imagine someone fighting to keep their head above water as waves crash over them again and again. There is no reprieve—nothing safe to hold onto. This is like the internal struggle of someone who has experienced the disorientating consequences of MI. In what follows, we will explore the emotional facets of this phenomenon more specifically, using the Moral Injury Experience Wheel created by Wes Fleming as our guide.

The Emotional Facets of Disorientation

Fleming identifies over a dozen secondary emotions related to disorientation. Though Fleming does not define secondary emotions, they can be understood as those that accompany some primary or fundamental emotional experience. The secondary emotions Fleming identifies are not necessarily fixed to their primary emotions in some definite, finite way. As he explains, “While primary moral emotions and their relationships to PMIEs were grounded in empirical studies, secondary emotions and their arrangement on the wheel were and continue to be determined by input and feedback from combat-exposed Veterans showing features of MI” (2022, p. 12). In other words, the secondary emotions that Fleming identifies are the result of data received from veterans with confirmed MI. It is worth noting that while the data giving rise to the secondary emotions Fleming identifies was collected exclusively from veterans, it is still applicable to our discussion of refugees. The PMIEs, which elicit the primary emotions of shame/guilt, disgust, anger, and disorientation, are not exclusively tethered to experiences of combat. It is entirely possible, for instance, that the victim of a violent car wreck would experience the same sort of disgust as a soldier who witnessed an explosion. Both might struggle with the image of dismembered or disfigured bodies, etc. What elicits the experience of disgust is “witnessing excessive violence, death, or immoral acts” (Fleming, 2022, p. 12).

In order to evaluate the secondary emotions that correlate with disorientation, we will divide them into three categories or dimensions—despairing emotions, confused emotions, and apathetic emotions. It is important to note that these categories are for our own evaluative purposes and not categories that Fleming himself utilizes in his research. Though these secondary emotions are intimately connected, they are distinct and provide unique insights into how the disorientation consequential of MI impacts victims. Each of the three dimensions of disorientation that are indicative of the emotional experiences of refugees is identified in Table 1, and further discussion about them follows.

Table 1 Three emotional dimensions of disorientation

Facets of disorientation	Associated experiences of refugees
Despairing emotions	Feelings of helplessness, futility, powerlessness, and/or despair
Confused emotions	Feeling confused, perplexed, and/or lost
Apathetic emotions	Feelings of apathy, disillusionment, the sense that life is absurd, surreal, and/or meaningless

First, let us consider the despairing secondary emotions. As Fleming explains, disoriented individuals will have feelings of helplessness, futility, powerlessness, and/or despair (Fleming, 2022). These emotions, we think, speak to the ‘unavoidable’ dimension of a disorienting event. When there doesn’t seem to be a choice or a way out of the moral conflict, it is easy to begin doubting one’s moral agency. Feeling completely out of control and incapable of altering the circumstances causes a loss of hope—a loss that can eventually evolve into despair. One can imagine several instances in which such disorienting emotions could arise. Victims of natural disasters who lose loved ones, their homes, and other possessions can experience complete and utter powerlessness against the forces of nature. Sometimes, even despite preparation, loss and damage are unavoidable. Refugees find themselves in a similar position—completely out of control and subject to the whims of global politics. There is no way their actions can render their homes safe, especially when enemy airstrikes are targeting non-combatants. There is no option but to escape to safety in a foreign land or to remain in a place that no longer feels like home.

The second set of secondary emotions Fleming identifies—confused emotions—seems particularly associated with the ‘irresolvable’ dimension of disorientation. In the face of problems or dilemmas with no clear answers, individuals may feel confused, perplexed, and/or lost. These emotions seem to associate most directly with the intuitive understanding of disorientation. When individuals are disoriented, they lack the direction needed to sustain moral identity and, as a byproduct, the clarity needed to forge a path forward and make moral decisions. In the absence of clear orientation, individuals may feel like their foundation is lost—the very foundation they leaned upon to know how to move through the world. Here, again, we can see the likely struggles that a refugee will face. Forced to leave their homes, their people, and their nation, where can they find solid ground to stand? How do you plan to rebuild if you are not sure you can return home? How do you sustain community when your neighbors, friends, and family are scattered among a handful of countries, provinces, and cities? How do you share your story and find comfort among people who do not speak your language? As discussed in the previous section, space and proximity to those with shared values are essential to our meaning-making as human beings. Since refugees are deprived of these foundations, they will almost certainly feel lost.

Finally, the third group of secondary emotions includes apathy, disillusionment, and the feeling that life is absurd, surreal, or meaningless. This group of emotions

reveals the ‘loss of purpose’ that grows from continued confrontation with the irresolvable and the unavoidable. If no answers to these moral dilemmas surface and trauma continues to mount, it is easy to question the very basis of reality, order, and meaning in suffering. Indeed, for the refugee who has lost so much, it is easy to deduce that the world is an irrational, senseless, and dark place. How can there be so much suffering? How could the world be so cruel? In fact, with the destruction of one’s moral landscape—people, churches, homes, schools, businesses, and traditions—comes the deconstruction of identity. If human beings are, as MacIntyre and Taylor contend, dialogical and community dependent, then it is no wonder that feelings of apathy and absurdity take hold in their absence.

Why Disorientation is the Most Salient Consequence of Moral Injury for Refugees

We have chosen to specifically consider disorientation as a consequence of displacement because we contend that disorientation is the most salient consequence of MI among refugees. We have come to this conclusion because, for the refugee, the loss of their home is not the result of their actions. Rather, they are forced into displacement for fear of their lives. There does not seem to be a clear betrayal by a recognized moral exemplar that produces anger, as may be the case for a soldier who witnesses their superior order immoral actions. Likewise, there is no clear personal transgression that would elicit feelings of shame or guilt. In other words, the refugee does not violate their own moral system. Finally, though some refugees may witness extreme acts of violence or be amidst mass destruction in their flight from their homeland, this is not always and necessarily the case. Thus, disgust may not always accompany the refugee’s experience. However, it is always the case that the refugee will be disoriented—experiencing the confusion, loss, despair, or apathy that accompanies being stripped of significant people, places, traditions, and rituals that comprise an individual’s moral landscape. Leaving all this behind, often indefinitely, uniquely accompanies forced displacement in a profound way. The hope and means to rebuild a new landscape of meaning are impeded by language barriers, hostility, and lack of economic utility in a new land. Refugees are, quite literally, in search of refuge and community; they are uniquely displaced and, as a result, disoriented.

5 Two Dire Concerns for Refugees

The continued persistence of negative moral emotions associated with MI and the effects of disorientation present two dire concerns for Ukrainian refugees. In what follows, we encourage leaders working to support the well-being of refugees to consider their high susceptibility to moral paralysis and suicidal ideation.

First is the threat of moral paralysis. As shown in the previous section, disorientation is a likely consequence of forced displacement. Given this experience of disorientation, refugees may no longer see a point in trying to be good or virtuous in the absence of purpose, clear values, or confidence in some moral order. Though

not tying it to MI specifically, Harry Frankfurt sheds light on the fact that values are essential in ethical decision making. In *Necessity, Volition, and Love*, he says, “Suppose that someone has no ideals at all. In that case, nothing is unthinkable for him; there are no limits to what he might be willing to do. He makes whatever decisions he likes and shapes his will as he pleases” (Frankfurt, 1999, p. 114). He explains, “For a person without ideals, there are no volitional laws that he has bound himself to respect and to which he unconditionally submits. He has no inviolable boundaries. Thus, he is amorphous, with no fixed identity or shape.” (Frankfurt, 1999, p. 114). Frankfurt’s insights shed light on what we lose in a state of prolonged disorientation: moral identity. Without clear values, individuals cannot act *for* some good; their ability to practically reason is fractured. For, the belief that action *x* is good is logically prior to performing action *x* because it is good. Thus, the MI of forced displacement is, quite literally, the deconstruction of moral identity.

Annas also reflects on this in *Intelligent Virtue* (2011). For Annas, it is impossible to imagine a courageous person who does not value acting courageously or an honest person who does not value honesty. Our values drive and motivate virtuous behavior. As Annas explains,

the different virtues can, and should in a good life, be unified by the person’s living their life in accordance with a unified conception of goodness, one to be discovered and exercised by the person’s practical reasoning, which unifies the acquisition and expression of the virtues. The virtues are, then, unified into an integrated commitment to goodness and are exercised in the living of a good, flourishing life. (p. 115).

We can certainly describe this “integrated commitment to goodness” as being oriented or morally grounded. Clarity of values—like acting courageously or honestly—is a necessary condition for acting in accordance with those values. So, again, we see disorientation as a threat to “ideals to aspire to, precisely because of the commitment to goodness which they embody” (Annas, 2011, p. 109). Both Annas and Frankfurt highlight the importance of values in moral identity, moral reasoning, and the maintenance of virtue—values that are hazy and confused due to forced displacement.

It is important to note that we are not arguing here that refugees are unable to act virtuously. That would be a gross and horribly inaccurate generalization. What we are arguing, though, is that because of forced displacement, refugees can be robbed of moral identity and clarity that was instantiated in their community—the narratives, traditions, rituals, and source of belonging essential for cultivating and maintaining values that allow individuals to act *for* some good. This is precisely why, we argue, forced displacement is a PMIE—it has the ability to fundamentally disrupt or damage character through weakening and blurring the values necessary for sound practical reasoning. In short, displacement can be morally paralyzing precisely because it is disorienting.

In addition to this moral paralysis that we have just described above, despair, confusion, and disillusionment correlate strongly with suicidal ideation among refugee populations. A study conducted at a refugee settlement in Moyo, Uganda showed that over 19% of refugee households reported suicide attempts (Bwesige &

Snider, 2021). When exploring the factors contributing to these attempts, many family and community members indicated “isolation,” “family separation,” “loss of meaningful activity,” “hopelessness,” and “absence of livelihood opportunities” as causes (Bwesige & Snider, 2021, p. 225). Another study of Bhutanese refugees also revealed similar contributing factors, finding that “thwarted belongingness” correlated heavily with suicidal ideation (Ellis et al., 2015, p. 50). Perceptions of thwarted belongingness were caused by several factors, including language barriers, separation from loved ones, and fundamental changes in community structure in their new, host countries (Ellis et al., 2015). These studies, of course, demonstrate the intimate relationship between meaning, purpose, community, and moral orientation. In other words, cultural identity and moral identity are intimately linked, placing refugees at increased risk for suicidal ideation.

6 Conclusion

In this chapter, our aim has been to show the role that displacement can play in generating MI syndrome within refugee communities, particularly with regard to disorientation and other associated emotions. This marks an important first step toward better serving refugee communities, such as those citizens of Ukraine who have been forced to flee their homes in the wake of Russian aggression. The combination of displacement and disorientation can lead to a sense of moral confusion and uncertainty in refugee populations. We have shown how this can be especially true if they are exposed to violence or other traumatic events while they are displaced.

It will be important for future research on MI in refugee communities to consider how nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and other institutions can provide support and resources to help individuals cope with the trauma of displacement and disorientation. This may include counseling and therapy to help individuals process their experiences and work through their feelings of loss, guilt, and shame. It may also involve providing resources such as education and job training to help refugees rebuild their lives and find a sense of purpose and meaning in their new communities.

Overall, we hope that demonstrating the potential for MI in refugee communities will promote further consideration of the importance of addressing the psychological, social, spiritual, and emotional needs of Ukrainians and other refugees who have been displaced. By providing support and resources to help refugees cope with the trauma of displacement and disorientation, we can help to mitigate the negative consequences of these experiences and support individuals as they rebuild their lives in their new communities.

Future research on displacement and MI should include the role that religion and transcendent sources of meaning play in the retention of moral identity and purpose. We suspect that meeting religious and spiritual needs might significantly increase resilience and shield refugees from disorienting emotions in the face of PMIEs. If meaning transcends the material, then it can be more readily transferred in the wake of displacement. At the same time, the loss of sacred spaces and the inability to

practice certain religious rituals may leave some refugees bereft as they migrate to new lands. The fact that the world—particularly the West—is becoming increasingly secular renders these questions especially poignant. Thus, examining the role that religion plays more generally, as well as the role that specific religious traditions play in promoting resilience during experiences of disorientation, is a promising area for future exploration.

Furthermore, significant research ought to be conducted to explore how to best provide sources of meaning, hope, and community to refugees. Though some focus has gone to providing economic opportunity and government welfare to those seeking asylum, there has not been enough consideration about how refugees can be supported in maintaining the communities and practices that provide existential purpose and meaning in their lives. As we have shown, the importance of doing so is not only essential for their ability to pursue moral goodness, but also for their psychological safety and well-being. So much of the work currently being done in this area defaults to local religious communities that may not have particularly sophisticated or systematic approaches to addressing these issues. Considering the global crisis displacement has become, it seems that systematic approaches to rebuilding landscapes of meaning for refugees would be appropriate.

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