February 2015

The ‘MA Refugee Care’ and some Human Rights students visited the Hatton Cross Asylum and Immigration tribunal on 18 February accompanied by Professor Renos Papadopoulos and the course administrator Fiona Gillies. This is an annual event that Judge Kyrie James kindly arranges for our students to observe her asylum and immigration hearings and to discuss with them all relevant facets of her work. We observed the hearing of three cases. Then we were privileged to eat in the judge’s mess hall and talk with the judges informally. Then, the Resident Judge Donald Conway met all of us in his office, spoke to us explaining the work of the Tribunal and engaged with us in an open discussion. The visit was most instructive and stimulating. Observing the hearings and talking with the judges and the Home Office Presenting Officers offered us a unique opportunity to grasp the subtlety, complexity and sheer difficulty of these procedures. We were impressed by the integrity and humanity of the judges and we left extremely enriched, much more than any seminar or text could have ever provided.

On 20 February, Renos Papadopoulos chaired the event ‘Great Minds. Think. Differently’ at the Temporary Theatre of the National Theatre at the South Bank. The event was organised by ‘Safe Ground’, a charity that ‘works to reduce the risk of offending and reoffending based on a continually developing understanding of the origins and impact of crime and a commitment to empowering people to change, whether in prison or the community’. The half-day event included an open exchange with a panel of experts (specialists and prisoners), small group work as well as poetry and theatre performance. The theatre was full to capacity and the participants (individuals and representatives of organisations and relevant services) came from all over the country.

March 2015

The Centre for Trauma, Asylum and Refugees hosted an open seminar last week with Stéf Pruski from Kids Company, titled “Never Turned Away”. Professor Renos Papadopoulos, director of CTAR, introduced the event to a packed lecture hall with guests from the social services and human rights sector and also current students. Ms Pruski presented the background of Kids Company and the complex lives of young people she works with. Her highly dynamic presentation took the audience to the streets of South London where we heard stories of gang violence, unaccompanied minor asylum seekers and detention centres. Ms Pruski gave a summary of how to cope with the struggles of these young people, how the government and justice system sets them up to fail, and how working therapeutically allows the young people to have a safe place and change the direction of their lives.

April 2015

Between 15 and 28 April Renos Papadopoulos was in Cyprus involved in three activities: (a) teaching on the module of ‘Mental Health in Primary Care’ of the MSc course in Family Medicine that the St George’s University of London offers in Cyprus in conjunction with the University of Nicosia Medical School, (b) offering training to staff of the Ygia Polyclinic in Limassol as part of a course that he co-designed on Compassionate Care, and (c) continuing his consultation on community projects that address the plight of Cypriots facing adversity from the current economic crisis.

May 2015

The International Symposium on Forgiveness and Healing in the Face of Moral Injury, organised by CTAR and funded by the John Templeton Foundation, took place between 3 and 5 May at Wivenhoe House. Ten world authorities in their respective fields were joined by Professor Renos Papadopoulos (who chaired and also presented a paper), David Alexander (a CPS PhD student) and Mary Ann Meyers from the John Templeton Foundation. The Symposium provided a unique opportunity to examine the effects of extreme forms of violence on both perpetrators and survivors, from a variety of different perspectives and disciplines. The Symposium succeeded in forging new pathways in exploring the interface between science and spirituality, psychology and theology within the context of the themes of violence and destructiveness. A special feature of the Symposium was the fact that each one of the participants is engaged directly in this field as a practitioner and/or researcher and, therefore, each
presentation and contribution was based on sound conceptualisations of direct experience and not on armchair theorising. The traditional way of approaching these phenomena has been from a psychiatric perspective, mainly using the diagnostic category of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. The relatively recent introduction in the literature of the concept of 'Moral Injury' indicated the need to widen the spectrum of understanding of these phenomena. In effect, the Symposium widened further the scope of comprehending the complexity of these phenomena by examining the relevance of spiritual dimensions in this field. The Symposium seems to have achieved its aims and it was very successful. All invited participants expressed their satisfaction by the high quality of the proceedings as well as by the overall organisation. Planning has already started for the following phases of this project, first with relevant publications and then with further research. http://www.essex.ac.uk/news/event.aspx?e_id=7649

Renos Papadopoulos has just been told that his application for an ESRC Impact Acceleration Fund has been successful. The project title is 'Working with adversity survivors in the Pacific Rim and beyond: trauma, resilience, and adversity-activated development.' In effect, this is a continuation and further development of Renos' work that formed his Impact Story that represented the Faculty of Social Sciences for the last Research Assessment Exercise. The new project involves systematic training of American and Japanese leaders and professional trainers who constitute an established Network that operates in the Pacific Rim in the field of disaster relief and humanitarian assistance; they are already familiar with Renos' approach through the trainings that David Alexander (a PhD student supervised by Renos) has been offering to them. Members of this Network are currently involved in the relief efforts in Nepal, following the recent devastating earthquakes. The new project, that will include project-designing, training, supervision and consultation in Japan, Alaska and other places, is scheduled to last until December 2017.

June 2015

Between 5 and 7 June, Renos Papadopoulos was invited to Milan by the Cecchini Pace Foundation to offer training to a group of 35 participants that included professionals who work in various capacities with refugees and migrants. The group also included professionals who are currently involved actively in the rescue services of refugees crossing the Mediterranean sea from Libya, working in Lampedusa and other places as well as on rescue ships.

Renos Papadopoulos submitted a report on ‘Rapid Psychosocial Assessment on Children and Youth in Gali District, Abkhazia; A Community Oriented Research Report’. The report is based on a three-month research project that he was in charge of, as the scientific/research lead. The international community has long been concerned about the ill effects of the frozen conflict in Abkhazia. Following the brief but devastating war in 1992-1993, Abkhazia (on the north eastern shores of the Black Sea) broke away from Georgia and remains a disputed territory, recognised as an independent state only by a handful of countries. The research, commissioned by 'World Vision' on behalf of UNICEF, aimed to gain a clear understanding of the difficulties children and young people experience, especially in the Gali district that borders with Georgia, in order to campaign for appropriate interventions. The characteristic feature of this research, along with an increasing number of other rapid psychosocial assessments in different parts of the world, is that it uses Renos’ ‘Adversity/Trauma Grid’ that addresses the wide spectrum of adversity consequences, not only focusing on the negative effects but also identifying resilience as well as manifestations of Adversity-Activated Development.

17 June 2015: CTAR, UNHCR and The Tavistock Clinic Refugee Week event report

Renos Papadopoulos, director of the Centre for Trauma, Asylum and Refugees, chaired the annual Refugee Week event on 17 June, held at the Tavistock Centre. This year's theme, Surviving the world's most dangerous journeys: Psychosocial perspectives, featured Paul Kenyon of BBC Panorama and included Sarah-Jane Savage from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and Gillian Hughes of the Tavistock Clinic. Mr Kenyon captivated the audience of over 100 participants with his experiences of witnessing the plight of men, women and children crossing the Sahara desert to Libya and documenting their voyages across the Mediterranean. Sarah-Jane Savage discussed current data, positive initiatives and policies relating to asylum seekers and refugees in the UK. Gillian Hughes addressed the Tavistock Clinic's Refugee Team working specifically with children, adolescents and
families. Renos highlighted the importance of avoiding oversimplified positions due to the emotional pressure that these phenomena impose on us and proposed a new framework to grasp their complexity. The evening continued with a lively panel discussion and audience questions and comments emphasizing the psychosocial implications of the breadth and pertinence of the current global crisis of involuntary dislocation. Eric Rindal

July 2015

Between 20 and 24 July, Renos Papadopoulos was in Athens, Greece, offering training as part of the 'Prometheus II', European-funded project. The project aims to develop expertise to work with refugees who enter Greece and are survivors of torture. It involves three organisations in Greece (the Greek Council for Refugees, Médecins Sans Frontières, and Babel – Day Centre for Migrants' Mental Health), one from Turkey (The Human Rights Foundation of Turkey) and two from the UK (CTAR and Redress). Renos' role in the project is to be in charge of the psychosocial training of the group; this involves offering training, consultation and supervision both in Greece as well as remotely via Skype. This CTAR project is directed officially through the Research and Enterprise Office of our University

Renos Papadopoulos will be the first speaker of the international Symposium 'Thinking Home' that will take place on the campus this Friday. This event is open to all and everybody is welcome!

August and September 2015

Between 19 August and 17 September Renos Papadopoulos was in Cyprus involved with the following activities:

- as consultant to the Cyprus Red Cross, he set up the psychosocial programme of assistance to the Syrian refugees that were rescued from the sea and stranded in Cyprus, and offered training to the Red Cross psychosocial team that he will continue to supervise
- continued his consultations on community projects to address the economic crisis in Cyprus, and
- continued his consultations with the University of Nicosia to establish a new Masters course in Psychosocial Care and Humanitarian Assistance (hopefully in collaboration with our university).

October 2015

Between 1 and 5 October, Renos Papadopoulos was in Turkey offering trainings and seminars for those who work with refugees. He was invited by the Trauma Programme of Bilgi University in Istanbul (where he teaches already) to offer extended presentations and workshops at the Second National Trauma Conference attended by nearly 300 participants from all over Turkey who are involved in the work with refugees. No other non-Turkish expert was invited for this event. In addition, he offered workshops to smaller groups of refugee workers from various international organisations and local NGOs, as well as to a project in Kurdistan that assists young girls that have been raped by fighters of the so-called Islamic State in Iraq.

Between 9 and 18 October, Renos was in Greece invited by the UNHCR to offer trainings to those who work with the current movement of refugees/migrants through Greece. As consultant to the War Trauma Foundation (with whom our University's Centre for Trauma, Asylum and Refugees (CTAR) has a Memorandum of Understanding), he offered trainings on Psychological First Aid on the islands of Chios and Samos that are very close to the eastern (Aegean) shores of Turkey and where refugees/migrants land on a daily basis, to unpredictable spots and in unpredictable numbers; in Athens and in Kilkis, a town in northern Greece, close to the border post with the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, where about 6500 refugees/migrants cross daily, heading for northern Europe. The training participants were national police, municipal police and coastal guard officers as well as staff of international organisations (e.g. UNHCR, International Organisation for Migration, the International Red Cross), of international and local Non-Governmental Organisations (e.g. Médecins Sans Frontières, Save the Children, Norwegian Refugee Council), of various local services and many volunteers.

The overall experience was extremely humbling and inspiring. Despite the unthinkable dangers and hardships refugees/migrants experience, it was astonishing to see their indefatigable spirit and capacity to express appreciation for everything they receive, material assistance and emotional support.
Similarly, the response by the local population has been beyond any expectation. Despite the acute economic crisis the Greeks have been experiencing, their selfless generosity, magnanimity and human compassion have been unprecedented and most moving.

Out of the very many powerful experiences, indicative is this one: following Renos’ day long training in Athens, two volunteers went back to the refugee/migrant centre of Galatsi in Athens where they work and that very evening, unexpectedly, a group of 120 Afghans arrived from the port of Piraeus where they had just landed coming from the islands. That evening the entire staff contingent of the Centre consisted of only four volunteers, i.e. the two volunteers who had participated in the training plus two others. Not only were they able to attend to the unexpected arrivals, but the Afghans were so impressed and moved by the efficiency, sensitivity, respectfulness and human touch of their reception, that they spontaneously started applauding and cheering the four volunteers! On Friday morning, the two volunteers mentioned this unprecedented incident, almost in passing, saying modestly that they were able to quickly instruct their two colleagues, conveying to them the principles of the training that enabled them to deal with the emergency.

In addition to the trainings, Renos visited official, semi-official and randomly established centres and sites where refugees/migrants gather, assisting staff and volunteers on the spot, and also offered supervision and consultation to individuals and groups of managers, staff and volunteers.

Between 22 and 25 October, Renos Papadopoulos was in Malta, invited by the Maltese Association of Family Therapy and Systemic Practice. During his stay, he was the main presenter at a working conference on “Working with Refugees, Migrants and Asylum Seekers”. The conference was opened by the Hon. Carmelo Abela, Minister for Home Affairs and National Security who had been directly involved in the setting up of the conference and genuinely values the contribution of the psychosocial perspective. The forty participants were selected members of organisations that work in this field from a variety of different perspectives: legal, administrative, charity, NGOs, international, academic, etc. In addition, Renos offered consultation to some of these organisations in connection with dilemmas they are currently facing.

Between 28 and 31 October, Renos Papadopoulos was again invited to offer trainings to those who work with the current influx of refugees/migrants on the Greek islands. This time he went to the island of Kos. This is the island that the three year old Syrian boy Aylan Kurdi did not succeed to reach and, instead, was drowned and his body was photographed, washed back onto a Turkish shore. This is the same island that only in one month (May) 65000 refugees arrived. The training was attended by members of the police and coastal guard as well as staff from the UNHCR, Red Cross, local hospitals and social services, and from volunteer organisations. On Thursday, some participants had to abandon the training and rush to attend to the refugee survivors of a capsized vessel where 22 persons were drowned.

November 2015

On Thursday 19 November, Renos Papadopoulos was interviewed by BBC Radio Essex about the implications of five Syrian refugee families arriving in Colchester as part of the government’s plan to give shelter to 20000 Syrians within the period of five years.

On Saturday 28 November, Renos Papadopoulos gave a day seminar at Heythrop College in London on ‘Working with Refugees; Trauma, Culture and Belonging’ for the Independent Group of Analytical Psychologists.

December 2015

Between 3 and 6 December, Renos Papadopoulos was in Rome participating in the Second conference on ‘Analysis and Activism’ that was organised by Professor Stefano Carta on behalf of the International Association of Analytical Psychology. Renos was one of the three invited presenters at the opening plenary and he also offered a workshop in the afternoon of the first day, on the same topic ‘Developing a framework for working with adversity survivors’.