



Book Review: “Racist States of Mind”

This past fall, feeling overwhelmed by the increasing expressions of racist hatred in the United States and abroad, I read Neranda Keval’s book, “Racist States of Mind: Understanding the Perversion of Curiosity and Concern.”

Dr. Keval’s argument is that persons in a racist state of mind “are stuck in a nostalgic haze about an idealized past,” which seems lost forever. Racism thrives when this profound sense of loss is experienced as a destroyed sense of individual and group identity. This loss is fueled by a severe sense of grievance, betrayal, and powerlessness, which activates murderous rage and fantasies of revenge. The ethnic other becomes a target whose function is to serve as a recipient for the racist’s unbearable sense of having lost something vital. By attacking the ethnic identity of the other, the racist throws the other’s “sense of self into profound doubt.” The denigration of the other’s identity allows the racist to displace his own experience of feeling destroyed into another.

Furthermore, Keval explains that this toxic interplay of grievance, murderous rage and vengeful fantasies inevitably results in destruction of curiosity and concern. The excitement derived from hurting another further entrenches this process. He believes that restoring curiosity and concern is the only way to weaken the grip of the racist mindset. One has to move from being stuck in “an idealized past” to mourn what has been lost and be open to new experiences. The racist mindset, as described by Keval, is a dynamic typical of individuals who feel weakened and who, therefore, cannot trust their resilience when faced with loss and the unknown.

Dr. Keval’s book is sobering: this psychological process is pervasive and insidious. In the consulting room and in our everyday life we are challenged to resist the onslaught of racist attacks without retaliating in kind or losing our curiosity and concern for the other.

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Psychoanalytic Studies Program Open House

The Psychoanalytic Studies Program for clinicians and scholars is now accepting applications for fall 2017. This two year program can be taken as stand-alone training in psychoanalytic thinking or can become the first two years of training to become a psychoanalyst. An informational Open House will be held May 7, 2017 ([For More Information](#))