

“I’M A GOOD ONE”: REFLECTIONS ON COLLECTIVE AND INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY, GUILT AND ANGER FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF A RUSSIAN MIGRANT

A personal and clinical reflection on the outbreak of war in 2022 and its immediate psychological impact — both personal (panic, somatic symptoms) and collective (shock, silence, disbelief).
Framing the experience within collective trauma.

AUTHOR

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METHOD

In-depth qualitative interviews with Russian emigrants (who left Russia before and after the war).
Clinical observations from therapeutic practice.
Analysis of emotional, somatic, and symbolic responses.

INTRODUCTION

When the war in Ukraine began on February 24, 2022, it tore through the lives of millions — not only through violence and displacement, but through the invisible wounds of moral confusion, shame, and broken belonging. For many Russian migrants, the war triggered a deep psychological rupture: a collapse of identity, alienation from loved ones, and a painful confrontation with collective guilt.

This research is rooted in lived experience — as a therapist, a migrant, and a witness. Through clinical work and interviews, it explores how war-related trauma manifests in the Russian diaspora: somatically, emotionally, and symbolically. What happens when mourning is forbidden, when grief becomes politically charged, and when the self is caught between the roles of bystander, exile, and accused? This work seeks to give voice to that liminal experience — and to explore what healing might look like when one is no longer sure where “home” is.



Ludmila Zinchenko. One blood. A destroyed residential building in Bakhmut., 2023.
“Confronted with the guilt toward the country where I was born and raised, I took photographs using my own blood, discovering that blood is light-sensitive. I documented Russia’s crimes and atrocities in Ukraine.”

KEY THEMES IN THE TRAUMA RESPONSE

- The Burden of Responsibility**
- Split between being Russian and being opposed to the war.
 - Familial ruptures, identity crisis, political and emotional exile.
- Unfolding Trauma (Herman’s model)**
- Shock & numbing
 - Suppressed grief & somatic suffering
 - Shame and moral paralysis
- Psychological Defenses**
- Dissociation
 - Moral splitting (“good Russians” vs “bad Russians”)
 - Transformative mourning (holding ambivalence, complexity)

PROJECTIVE IDENTIFICATION

- Internalisation of external judgment.
- Shame-based identity collapse.
- Risk of self-sacrifice and loss of agency.

LIMINALITY AND IDENTITY RECONSTRUCTION

- Jungian concept of liminality as a space for transformation.
- Letting go of idealized national identity.
- Re-imagining the self beyond nationality, through symbolic and relational work.

OBSTACLES TO HEALING

- Ongoing Trauma
The war continues, and each new event reopens psychological wounds, preventing closure.
- Discrimination in Exile
Experiences of rejection or suspicion in host countries reinforce internalized guilt and isolation.
- Addiction to News
Compulsive news consumption deepens helplessness and keeps the psyche in a state of hypervigilance.

CONCLUSION

Trauma reshapes identity in profound and often painful ways. For Russian emigrants after February 24, 2022, this transformation unfolds within a liminal space charged with guilt, grief, and moral ambiguity. Healing does not mean erasing the past but consciously mourning it — allowing new meanings to emerge.

Healing the psyche is an ongoing journey. From a Jungian perspective, it begins with courageously facing what feels unbearable and, through connection, symbolic action, and inner differentiation, gradually transforming trauma into a lived, integrative experience.

WHAT HELPS? PATHS TOWARDS HEALING

- 1. Relational Safety and Trusted Connections**
Healing begins in safe relationships, where the psyche feels seen without judgment. These connections restore trust in others and reawaken the feeling function, numbed by trauma.
- 2. Embodiment Through Movement and Somatic Practices**
The body holds what the psyche cannot yet process. Movement, breathwork, and somatic awareness help ground overwhelming affect and reconnect ego and body.
- 3. Symbolic Action (Activism, Art, Speech)**
Creative and ethical action offers a bridge between the inner world and external reality. Through art, words, or engaged presence, the individual reclaims agency and transforms pain into meaning.
- 4. Archetypal Awareness — Resisting Identification with Collective Evil**
The psyche is vulnerable to unconscious possession when collective guilt remains unexamined. Healing requires conscious differentiation from projections of archetypal Evil — both from others and within oneself.



Anastasiia Lodde. Fish soup, 2025.
<https://www.loddeart.com/>