

TRANSCULTURAL GLOBALIZATION: On the Societal Responsibility of Psychiatrists and Psychotherapists as Pioneers, Enlighteners, and Bridge Builders in Today's Multi-cultural Europe



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Abstract

Interpersonal problems are a distinctive feature of today's upheaval and crisis. Psychiatrists and psychotherapists are especially needed as experts for problems in relationships and for mental health. Cultural changes and the emergence of a global society have led to fear, aggression, and prejudice in many people. It is important to actively shape the process of transcultural globalization and to provide therapeutic insights into society. This paper will share 14 opportunities for psychiatrists and psychotherapists to have an intensified societal engagement. The focus is on educating the population about psychological mechanisms and social processes, building bridges between people who differ from one another, strengthening transcultural psychiatry and psychotherapy to reduce prejudices, and being a role model for others by increasing their presence in the media and in the social discourse. Our current cultural crisis offers a unique opportunity for psychiatrists and psychotherapists to actively participate in shaping a global society.

Keywords: transcultural globalization, societal responsibility of psychiatrists and psychotherapists, transcultural psychotherapy

"Therapy and psychotherapy and all practical behavior ... are subject to the conditions of state power, religion, the sociological conditions, the prevailing intellectual tendencies of an age, only then, but by no means alone, under the conditions of accepted scientific knowledge."

Karl Jaspers (1995)

Introduction

Since September 2015 at the latest, the global crisis arrived in Germany. The federal government's decision to bring refugees from the Budapest train station to Germany by train "...is a historic decision because it divides history into a "before" and an "after"...It is a momentous and controversial decision that will divide

the country and still split, the rift runs through families, clubs, companies, and institutions... Moments that change an entire continent do not come often. The 4th of September 2015 is one of those" (Blume, 2006). Experts say that after a unique, hopeful 17-year phase in Europe (1991 - 2008), "all certainties in Europe evaporated within six weeks in 2008" (war between Russia and Georgia; US banking crisis) (Friedman, 2015). We are at a crossroads worldwide and especially in Europe - in psychotherapeutic language we would speak of a collective crossroads of life. While every individual citizen can and should consider his or her personal contribution, there are professional groups that are particularly challenged in such times of crises and upheaval.

The socio-political responsibility of psychiatrists and psychotherapists will be discussed below. I would even go so far as to speak of a "payday for psychiatrists and especially psychotherapists". We call ourselves relationship experts, mental health specialists and health professionals who see and understand people in their systems. Psychotherapy is an independent health profession in Germany and some other countries, and it is also probably the only profession with state-mandated self-experience - at some (psychoanalytical) institutes of up to 700 hours. This should make the people who practice this profession particularly sensitive to themselves and their fellow human beings. Therefore, the reaction and response of psychiatrists and psychotherapists to today's social crisis must be different from that of our fellow human beings. "From everyone who has been given much, much will be required; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, even more will be expected." (Bibel, Gospel of Luke 12, 48).

Today`s crisis from a psychotherapeutic perspective

"No two men can be found who may be said to be outwardly and inwardly united."
Bahá'u'lláh (7)

From a psychodynamic-humanistic point of view, the current social situation would probably be described very appropriately with the term relationship crisis. The main symptoms of this intra- and intersubjective relationship crisis are, among other things, a low frustration tolerance, increased irritability and aggression, increasing individualism and egoism, hatred

and prejudice against others, increasing senselessness, and a lack of communication culture, especially in social media. As psychotherapists and psychiatrists, we are confronted with this every day. As psychotherapists, we know that "you cannot not communicate" (Watzlawick) and psychodynamic psychotherapists in particular know about the complexity of human experience and action. So, the real problem is not some eccentric and narcissistic politicians and leaders, but the individual voter who gives these people their power and legitimacy. In Germany in particular, we know from the 1930s that even democratic elections can legitimately bring an unjust regime to power. Now, in daily practice, we experience a large number of people who are afraid: of the new, the unknown, of being different and of change - and are therefore looking for simple solutions. Some voting decisions in 2016 were significantly influenced by "this longing for simple solutions" (Landfried, 2016). So, it is hardly surprising that the word "post-truth" was voted "Word of the Year" by the German Language Society (GfdS). A few weeks earlier, the English word "post-truth" had already been voted "Word of the Year" by the Oxford English Dictionary. "This decision of the jury, explains the Society for German Language, focuses on a profound political change. The artificial word post-factual refers to the fact that political and social discussions today are increasingly about emotions instead of facts. Increasingly large sections of the population, disgusted with "those up there", are willing to ignore facts and even willingly accept obvious lies. It is not the claim to truth that leads to success in the "post-factual age", but rather speaking the "felt truth" (Heine, 2016).

Alongside this fundamental fear of change and of the stranger (in the truest sense of the word) is a fundamental problem, the societal failure to give people vision, orientation, and explanations. It would again be too easy to ascribe the main blame to the politicians, as in psychotherapy, the "emotionally cold mother" is not to blame for everything either. However, over the years and decades, there has been a failure to enlighten the public as to how society will develop in the future, what the multicultural society should look like, what achievements we have made by founding organizations such as the European Union and the United Nations, what freedom really means, what long historical processes we have had to go through to this day, how quickly what has been achieved can be destroyed again, and the role of the individual in today's

society. One term that has particularly led to misunderstandings and prejudices is that of globalization.

Transcultural Globalization

*If you want to bring the country in order,
bring the provinces in order.
If you want to bring the provinces in order,
you have to bring order to the cities.
To bring order to the cities, you must bring
order to the families.
If you want to bring order to the families,
you must bring order to your own family.
If you want to bring order to
your own family, you must bring order to yourself.*
Oriental Wisdom
(cited in: Peseschkian, 1979)

While the term globalization is almost exclusively related to economic cooperation by many people and initially makes one think of tax-saving models of multinational corporations to maximize profits, for psychiatrists and psychotherapists it should primarily contain a human-cultural dimension. In order to convey this dimension to our fellow human beings, we psychotherapists must first deal with this topic ourselves and strive for a deeper understanding of the current social situation. However, this is an existential question, as we know it from everyday psychotherapy. Life is mostly about shades of gray, but sometimes it's just about black or white. Essentially, it is about the fundamental question of whether war and the inability to bring peace to people are part of it - in the last 3,500 years of human history there has been a total of more than 3,250 years of war and only 250 years of peace (12) - and we are currently going through another crisis, or whether "world peace is not only possible, but inevitable as the next stage in the evolution of this planet" (13). This "crossroads of life" is of great importance, especially in the social and political discourse: either we have to erect walls and fences, introduce upper limits for refugees, set boundaries and "protect" our culture; or we must develop a "welcome culture" for the global society with all its challenges. "The central spiritual issue facing all people, ... is that of laying the foundations of a global society that can reflect the oneness of human nature. The unification of the earth's inhabitants is neither a remote utopian vision nor, ultimately, a matter of choice. It constitutes the next, inescapable stage in the process of social

evolution, a stage toward which all the experience of past and present is impelling us. Until this issue is acknowledged and addressed, none of the ills afflicting our planet will find solutions, because all the essential challenges of the age that we have entered are global and universal, not particular or regional." (14).

In one of the few statements by a German psychotherapeutic association at the time of the "refugee crisis", the German Society for Systemic Therapy, Counseling and Family Therapy (DGSF) advocates "a generous admission and integration of immigrants and refugees in Germany" and justifies this with the fact that "it [reception and integration] is unavoidable, humanitarian, just, economically viable and feasible" (15). We need these types of discourses in our societies.

About the social responsibility of psychiatrists and psychotherapists

"We are not naive. From their professional work, DGSF members know about the fears of many people - fear of too much that is strange and unknown, loss of possessions or of cultural change. They know about the conflicts and conversion problems of both refugees and locals alike, and they respect the concerns that come with these fears for many people. They also know about examples of unsuccessful integration in the past decades. But they know that, in a globally connected world in times of crisis, mass population migrations cannot be prevented, only rendered humane or inhumane. The DGSF advocates a humane procedure."
German Society for Systemic Therapy, Counseling and Family Therapy (15)

Our world is changing and with it our concepts. For the first time in human history, a global, networked society is emerging. The process of globalization - not only on the political-economic level, but above all on the mental and emotional level - is not without challenges. We need a new understanding of health in order to be able to adequately meet the demands of today. However, this requires a rethinking: from a mono-cultural and mono-etiological perspective to a multicultural and multi-etiological one. This has a special influence on the 'relationship sciences'. Transferred to medicine, the framework in which the 'therapeutic encounter' between doctor or therapist and patient takes place has changed, so that today, in the age of multicultural societies and mental globalization, we are already at this point of the end of

the era of monocultural psychotherapies and psychosomatic models (Peseschkian, 2008). These changes and challenges have an impact on the individual human being, and above all on individual health. Physicians and psychotherapists always have a social responsibility, even more in a global society in transition that is searching for a new identity and a new view of humanity. Psychotherapeutic approaches and insights can make a major contribution to this in that, in addition to a scientific system, they also convey an image of humans for the individual and society and thus contribute to alleviating social problems (Peseschkian, 2015). Perhaps it is time to give up the conflict between different psychotherapy methods that is thriving in the West and turn to the needs of our patients and society.

Köpp (2012) speaks of three areas in which psychotherapists have a political and social responsibility with regard to undesirable developments in our society: 1) assumption of general political responsibility in connection with developments that do not necessarily require a psychotherapeutic assessment perspective; 2) perception of political responsibility towards social developments and phenomena that may (also) require a psychotherapeutic assessment perspective; 3) the use of psychotherapeutic expertise.

What could the contributions of psychiatrists and psychotherapists look like?

1. As experts and scientists for relationships, psychotherapists and psychiatrists should become more conscious of our **special social responsibility** and accept it. We cannot and should not just hand over this responsibility to politicians. On the contrary, the first paragraph of the 'Code of conduct for physicians in Germany' emphasizes this responsibility for the individual and the society, saying that *"physicians serve for the health of individuals and the entire population"* (19). Becoming conscious of this social responsibility also implies that colleagues in private practice should no longer allow their thinking to be influenced almost exclusively by financial issues but they must take their place as self-conscious members of a free profession.
2. For psychotherapists in private practice who are paid by their patients, a consequence of this

awareness would be the feeling of **leaving their comfort zones**. This awareness could be comparable to the self-realization that comes from self-reflection. Sometimes it is easier to stay contentedly in one's comfort zone and not feel like a failure to society. Our work with our patients (for which we are paid) is no reason not to engage with society as volunteers. The most important thing that we learned in 2016 is that *"democracy and freedom must not be taken for granted but must be defended and fought for every day"* (Fischer, 2016), and that *"nothing in Europe can be taken for granted, freedom of travel, or school or study trips in Europe's neighboring countries. We have all these because generations before ours struggled for them"* (21).

3. **Explaining to the population about complex issues** such as globalization, nationalism, and integration. What is healthy patriotism and when does it become pathological? What needs does a person have for identification and belonging? What role does the social group play? These questions are issues which psychotherapists can say something meaningful about. As William Lacy Swing, General Director of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) said at the World Health Organization Summit in Berlin in 2016: *"The future society cannot be so concerned with identity as with common values and interests. We must learn to deal with differences. In the future all countries will be multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, and multi-religious"* (22).
4. **We need explanations of psychological mechanisms**, for example, manipulation (not only of and before elections), basics of interpersonal communication, the nature and essence of humans (Peseschkian, 2008; Rudolf, 2015; Petzold, 2015), the desire for simple solutions to complex issues, and the origin of anxiety. Psychiatrists and psychotherapists

have great experience with these themes, which other people simply do not have. As psychiatrists or psychotherapists, we often take these insights for granted because they have become so self-evident to us. One is always surprised, for example, that politicians are unaware of the simplest principles of interpersonal communication, and that peace between two nations is often dependent upon the personal sympathy or antipathy between their heads of state. At the same time people often accept such insights more readily from doctors and psychotherapists than from party politicians.

5. **Backgrounds of cultural peculiarities and differences and thus the elimination of prejudices.** *"Supposing we woke up one morning and found that suddenly everyone had the same skin color and the same beliefs, we were guaranteed to have new prejudices by noon."* (Georg Christoph Lichtenberg). The emergence of prejudices, their origin, scientific research into the differences and similarities between people, the need for differentiation - these psychological (unconscious) mechanisms must be explained. An excellent book - written three years before the "refugee crisis" - explores the question of what life would be like in Germany without foreigners, and one of the conclusions is that prejudices against other "minorities" would quickly develop (von Bebenburg P, Thieme, 2012). Who is in a better position to critically question and analyze the cultural characteristics of a certain country than a psychiatrist or psychotherapist of the same country? (Adam. 2007). Of course, an engineer, a proctologist and a tax consultant can also comment on this topic, but the credibility and power of the analysis will be quite different.
6. **Take a public stand and be present.** We have shown enough understanding for our counterpart and - as sometimes in psychotherapy - it is time to draw clear

boundaries and to clearly label inhuman statements as such and to take a stand. You have to hear, see and read us: in newspapers through articles, interviews and letters to the editor, in internet forums; in private and public discussions; and in our professional and trade associations. Short and concise statements from our specialist societies on socio-political issues can be very powerful tools for informing and enlightening our fellow human beings. *"Since Freud, many psychotherapists have felt called upon to illuminate and interpret social events or processes from a psychotherapeutic or psychodynamic perspective. The great opportunity of such an approach lies in making the relevance of the unconscious motives of the actors involved in the events or processes visible and thus able to be influenced. The danger can lie in psychologizing complex processes, whereby the psychological side would only be one of many aspects but would then be clearly overemphasized in this diction (e.g., understanding the crises of the financial market exclusively as an expression of gambling-addicted shareholders). It is also necessary to remain vigilant and active in one's own professional field. Unfortunately, at this point - as shown above - it is occasionally necessary to defend oneself against state authorities, which are actually supposed to protect psychotherapeutic action."*(18).

7. **Strengthening of transcultural psychiatry and psychotherapy.** In the last twenty years the influence of cultural factors has been given an increasing role and attention has been drawn to it. In particular, the inclusion of a corresponding chapter in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV) (28) and the recent publication of the "DSM-5 Cultural Formulation Interview (CFI)" (29) have brought the international discussion (Lim, 2015) to a new level. However, there are still misunderstandings and quite different views as

to what taking culture into account means in practice. Essentially, it is about the difference between a general culture-sensitive psychotherapy and a specific migrant psychotherapy. The term “transcultural psychotherapy” (Peseschkian, 2016) is not only used in this work, but the author is aware that this is a transitional term until every psychotherapeutic approach takes cultural factors into account and every form of psychotherapy is transcultural. In this sense, transcultural psychotherapy must be understood as an overarching term and not just as a comparison between different cultures. The author uses a comprehensive concept of culture here, which, in addition to cultural aspects, also includes ethnic, spiritual, national, and racial aspects. Increasingly, human conflicts are culturally conditioned, i.e., they are due to culturally conditioned misunderstandings. In the age of (cultural) globalization, these also have a socio-political dimension. It is also about working out similarities and differences in working with people from different cultures and raising awareness of them. At the same time, transcultural psychotherapy means developing an approach that can be used with people across cultures and still does justice to their individuality (a kind of 'unity in diversity').

8. Nossrat Peseschkian explains **the (social) dimension of transcultural psychotherapy** in the context of positive psychotherapy: *“The transcultural problem – in the private sphere, the world of work and politics – is becoming more and more important today. With the line of development that is indicated, it is to be expected that the transcultural problem will be one of the essential tasks of the future... In the transcultural approach, we deal with the concepts, norms, values, and styles of behavior, interests and perspectives that are valid in a culture... The principle of transcultural problems*

thus also become the principle of interpersonal relationships and inner mental conflict processing. It becomes the object of psychotherapy.” (Peseschkian, 1979). In summary, the transcultural approach means, on the one hand, taking into account the uniqueness of the patient in the sense of “migrant psychotherapy” and, on the other hand, taking into account cultural factors in the sense of expanding the personal repertoire of actions and thus a socio-political dimension of our thinking and acting.

9. **Promotion of transcultural competence**, which should be taught and learned in all curricula in schools, training courses and universities. When the delegates of the 75th Bavarian Doctors' Day call for the subject `health` to be introduced in schools from the first year of school, so that the students can develop age-appropriate topics from the field of health promotion and prevention, and offer that doctors...can advise and support them if necessary (Utsch et al), could and shouldn't psychiatrists and psychotherapists then demand the introduction of subjects such as `transcultural and social competence`?
10. Education and enlightenment about the **importance of religion for individuals and society**. Hardly any topic has led to more misunderstandings than the role of religion and the relationship of psychotherapists to this great force of human life. Due to the increasing interest of patients in spiritual topics on the one hand and the integration of religious topics in psychotherapy and psychiatry requested by migrants on the other hand, our professional group has to increasingly deal with this complex topic (Utsch; 34). It should be noted that the American research group “DSM-IV and Culture” has required that *“a sincere interest in the culture of the patient means a more sophisticated and sensitive commitment to religious values than psychiatrists generally*

show.” (Kleinman, 1996). Physicians and psychotherapists are in a unique position to explain the interplay between religion and science, the two greatest forces in the life of the individual and society. Especially at a time when people are often frustrated by religious fanaticism and institutions as well as materialism, the question is what role religion and belief can (and perhaps must) have in a global society (Elsdörfer, 2008).

11. **Bring socio-political (not party-political!) issues into the psychotherapy**, as far as therapeutically sensible and appropriate. *“The author advocates “politicizing” psychotherapy, i.e., not only allowing ideological topics in psychotherapy, but also, within certain limits, obliging the patient to deal with social topics... In individual therapy, the patient can certainly be asked questions, how he stands on religion, superstition, militarism, pacifism, nation, authority, humanism, democracy, minorities, art, science, gender relations, Third World, etc.... He must be confronted with free ideas about society, rule, education, coexistence, sexuality etc. This places new and high demands on the therapist.”* (Mackenthun, 1991).
12. In psychotherapeutic training and continuing professional education, **the process of self-experience/self-discovery** (individual and group setting) should prepare prospective psychotherapists much more than before for social responsibility as a psychotherapist (Peseschkian, 2015). The concept of semi-structured psychodynamic educational self-discovery has proven helpful here (39).
13. **From the treatment room to the board room.** The almost enviable thing about our job is that we not only have the experience of our own life and maybe that of our family at our disposal, but also insights into the inner worlds and the experiences of hundreds of people. Unfortunately, this great enrichment and experience remains in the treatment room far

too often. Some colleagues used to publish these experiences in books, which is happening less and less now, partly because hardly anyone would buy and read these books anymore. A leading American magazine has published an essay entitled: "Why the US President Needs a Council of Historians" (Allison, Ferguson, 2016). It explains that many political mistakes, especially when dealing with other states and cultures, are due to a failure to take history into account, and that the next US President should set up an advisory board of several historians who will provide the historical background for upcoming strategic questions and decisions. As a psychiatrist and psychotherapist, one must inevitably think of a counseling team for psychological and, in particular, for cultural issues; a kind of "Council of Cultural Diversity". We have equal opportunities officers, why not cultural advisors for politicians and institutions? Why don't we demand this or don't make ourselves available for this?

14. By leaving the ivory tower, we could deal with topics that are directly related to the reality of many people's lives. More than 100 years ago, Ernst Schweningen, personal physician to German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck, complained: *“The practitioner chained to science and its ever-changing doctrine has long since lost track. Just as man today has been shattered into cells, so the way doctors see things has been split into thousands of hairs and hairs. Almost no one knows what is important anymore, and everyone would like to retreat to a special subject modestly or comfortably and lazily; Yes, do not treat more than individual hairs! Soon more the split ones! Because, as the nice excuse goes: Science today is so comprehensive, so developed that it is no longer possible to master it. This is to be welcomed in the interest of science, which believes it will increase our knowledge. But that is to be lamented in the interest of the suffering people,*

who approach the doctor as human beings, not as a convolute of individual organs, as a conglomerate of cells; degenerate at that!" (Schwarz, 2015). For this reason, many colleagues have not attended professional conferences for years and no longer read the professional journals. Here, too, today's period of upheaval offers an opportunity to concentrate on the whole person again and not just on the sick individual parts. Presentations or "Special Interest Groups" from professional organizations offer a good opportunity to get involved in certain subject areas, such as ethics, religion/spirituality, etc. Perhaps we should rather publish in popular journals read by millions of readers than in scientific journals with a high impact factor. The social impact – in the truest sense of the word – would certainly be greater with the former.

Crisis as an opportunity

In addition to the social responsibility of psychiatrists and psychotherapists, there is the special responsibility of Europe, and especially of Germany. In the 20th century in particular, the world, but also Germany, had to suffer to learn how the "land of poets and thinkers" was involved in the deaths of 100 million people within 31 years (1914-1945). In the words of a famous political scientist: *"Europe was [1914] a colossus on the world stage, possessing wealth, creativity, and power. What happened next surprised everyone. In August 1914, Europe suddenly turned into a slaughterhouse. By 1945, 100 million people had died, an incalculable number were wounded, and the entire planet suffered from war neuroses. The world had never seen a slaughter that even approached this in size and speed. Europe, the center of the Enlightenment, the place where, according to one's own belief, the human spirit was more highly developed than anywhere else - this Europe was the very last place that one would have believed capable of something like that. That this region could degenerate into hell at this point in history was*

unimaginable. This was the place that had begun to transform the world and humanity 400 years earlier! Now Europe threw everything it had achieved overboard in an unprecedented orgy of barbarism within 31 short years." (Friedman, 2015).

As enlighteners, pioneers and bridge builders, our professional group can assume a formative role and offer leadership during this time. If not us, then who? – one could ask a bit pathetically. And what about 'therapeutic abstinence'? *"The duty of abstinence – and with it the value-free behavior of the psychotherapist – refers to the psychotherapeutic context in the narrower sense, not to us as citizens. Psychotherapists can and should dare to take a social and political stand."* (Dohm, 2016). Through our commitment, we would encourage many fellow human beings to stand up for injustice and act as role models...Why don't we apply to ourselves the phrase "crisis as opportunity," that we often use in our therapies for patients? The social events and processes of the last few months offer unexpected chances and possibilities to live more proactively, to become aware of one's abilities and to make one's contribution. Sounds familiar. Maybe sometimes we just have to switch from the therapist's chair to the patient's chair.

*"People today are faced with the alternative:
Decline of man or transformation of man."
Karl Jaspers (1958)*

Conclusion for practice

In the current social upheaval and crisis, psychiatrists and psychotherapists can play a special role as relationship experts. As enlighteners, pioneers, and bridge builders, we can enlighten society with regard to many current issues, eliminate misunderstandings, create understanding for people from other cultures, help to break down prejudices and reduce fears in the individual and society. To do this, however, psychiatrists and psychotherapists must leave our comfort zone, make a public statement, be present, leave the ivory tower and become more involved in socio-political matters alongside our professional work.

By promoting transcultural competence, we can enable ourselves and others to understand the current situation of upheaval as an opportunity towards a global society and to actively participate in shaping it. Due to our experience and insights into human coexistence and experiences, this professional group is not only predestined for socio-political commitment, but also has a great deal of responsibility in the age of transcultural globalization.

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