Can Freud Be Globalised?
It is, however, clear that psychological factors play a very important part in everybody’s life; that while they might find different forms of expression, every culture has behaviours it regards as ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’, and that in certain circumstances people are, or are not, exposed to specific psychological stresses. However, what constitutes psychological stress, what is abnormal behaviour and what isn’t, often depends on context and cultural background. This is where the universality of any form of psychology reaches its limits.

Despite this problematic – or perhaps because of it – we felt it was important to devote an edition of the journal to examining the subject of psychology. The study is a revealing one that tells us a great deal about how different cultural backgrounds affect people’s reactions to psychological stresses.

We start this edition with two articles that address this question from the point of view of psychologists who use a psychoanalytical approach. Do Sigmund Freud’s writings have any meaning for people in India or the Arab world today? Perhaps surprisingly, it seems that the answer is yes. SALMAN AKHTAR, who is one of the world’s leading Muslim psychologists of Indian origin and teaches in the United States, enlightens us on the subject. He explains both where Freudian psychoanalysis has culturally-specific limits, and where it goes beyond these limits to be valid for all people regardless of their culture. In an interview with the Moroccan psychologist JAMAL BENNANI we then examine this issue more closely with reference to a particular example from the Arab world.

It is an obvious truth to state that there is a connection between violence and psychological problems. However, this connection goes in both directions. On one hand, violence causes psychological problems, while on the other psychological problems can both express themselves in and be a fundamental cause of violence.

In any such conflict situation it is the weakest elements of society – women and children – who are most under threat. HOURIA ABDLOUAHID and JAMAL SOBEH look at the civil war in Syria and the utter ruthlessness with which it is being waged as a demonstration of what often happens to women and children in civil war situations, the human tragedies that take place, and the way in which perverse ideologies are used to justify violence against women and children.

But psychological problems are also found in societies that are not at war, and here too the weakest elements are often the victims. Many of these societies find it difficult to talk about these problems, as we see from the discussion about child abuse in Iran.

For its part, the wealthy West has still not clarified where it stands on the issue of migration; and it seems that a psychological element also comes into play where Islamophobia is concerned. Furthermore, immigrants, particularly those from the Islamic world, often have to deal with very specific psychological problems. The psychologists MERYAM SCHOULER OCAK, SIGRID SCHEIFELE and HACI-HALIL USLUCAN demonstrate that a sensitive approach is required, rather than making vocal demands for the unconditional integration and assimilation of immigrants, as right-wing parties in Europe are prone to do.

Psychological issues and discoveries also have an important role to play in art and literature – sometimes as method, sometimes as subject. The Syrian author ROSA-YASSIN HASSAN addresses them convincingly in her novel Guardians of the Air, described here by the scholar of literature STEPHAN MILIC. Meanwhile, we find an intricate and ingenious interplay of psychology and perception in an unexpected place: the MOSQUES OF LAHORE. They contain picture puzzles which teach us that we only see what we think we already know, and what we want to see. In our closing article we attempt to show how we can, nevertheless, look at things with new eyes and in a different way.

We hope you will agree that this is one of the most fascinating editions of Art & Thought / Fikrun wa Fann to date!

Stefan Weidner
Editor-in-Chief
Psychoanalysis originated in Western Europe at the dawn of twentieth century. Its founder, Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), was Jewish and so were most of his early pupils and associates. The Wednesday Psychological Society he founded in Vienna, Austria, (circa 1902) had an exclusively Jewish membership and by the time this select group expanded to become the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society, most members and frequent visitors from abroad were Jewish. While initially congenial, this homoethnic cloister began to worry Freud. He felt that it could preclude a wider acceptance of psychoanalysis. He therefore welcomed the unmistakably Nordic Carl Jung and the thoroughly Welsh Ernest Jones to the psychoanalytic circle. Though his effort to anoint Jung as his successor floundered, the synagogue of the unconscious became open to Christians. The psychic, interpersonal, and sociopolitical ramifications of such admixture were not openly considered, however. An occasional mention of it in analysts’ personal correspondences, bits of gossip, and a rare awkward acknowledgement of the ethnic divide within the profession notwithstanding, little of conceptual significance emanated from the Jewish-Christian amalgam within the psychoanalytic ranks. The new entrants were pulled into the theoretical and technical vortex of psychoanalysis which remained focused upon intrapsychic matters of desire and anxiety to the exclusion of the individual’s sociocultural heritage. Freud repeatedly emphasised that, in the matters of mental suffering, it is the psychic reality that counts, not external reality.

ENCOUNTERING ‘REAL’ REALITY

The impact of Nazi atrocities upon concentration camp survivors and their next generation led to a brutal ethnocultural awakening of psychoanalysis. It became obvious that the individual mind did not exist in isolation from its socio-political envelope and that psychic structure required stimulus nutriment from the outer world for its stability. Moreover, the Jewish diaspora following the Holocaust resulted in European émigré analysts’ clinical encounter with the culturally different patients of North and South America. This made clear that acknowledging the racial and religious differences within the analytic dyad could catalyse the analytic process.

CAN FREUD BE GLOBALISED?
PSYCHOANALYSIS AND THE NON-WESTERN WORLD

BY SALMAN AKHTAR
and disregarding them could complicate it. Psychoanalysis, while mainly concerned with the inner world, began to pay greater attention to external reality.

Matters became more muddled with shifting population patterns throughout the world and, more specifically, the changing demographic make-up of the United States and Western Europe. East to West immigrants of varying nationalities (e.g. Indian, Iranian, Nigerian, Turkish) and religions (e.g. Hinduism, Islam) started joining psychoanalytic ranks as patients, trainees, and practising professionals. Consequently, the applicability of the Western-evolved psychoanalytic theory and technique to an ethno-culturally diverse population came into question. Further impetus to such scepticism was given by the emergence of interest in psychoanalysis in the increasingly urbanised India, China, Japan, South Korea, and to a lesser extent, Turkey. The enrichment of psychoanalysis by regional idioms was becoming inevitable.

A fresh assessment of Freud’s brainchild was thus warranted. However, to accomplish such a task or even to meaningfully undertake it, one needed to underscore that the corpus of his work (and that of his followers) belongs to four categories, namely (i) metapsychology, (ii) hypotheses regarding personality development and its deviations, (iii) therapeutic approach to emotional disorders, and (iv) speculations about creativity, religion, and civilisation at large. A consideration of these four categories of psychoanalytic ideas and their potential validity across cultures follows.

**METAPSYCHOLOGY**

Freud referred to his way of understanding mental phenomena from dynamic, topographic, and economic perspectives as a ‘metapsychology’. The dynamic perspective sought to explain mental phenomena in terms of the interaction of forces. Such forces could be contradictory or collaborative, infantile or contemporary, and progressive or regressive. They can be bodily anchored and have specific sensual aims or can represent the morality that has been internalised during one’s formative years. Interaction between such forces results in intrapsychic conflict. A variety of outcomes are then possible, including compromise formation, deflected and disguised gratification, or stalemates, inhibitions, and psychic paralysis. The topographic perspective refers to the fact that there are conscious, preconscious, and unconscious aspects to what human beings think, feel, and do. The first are known to them, the second can become readily known, and the third exist totally outside of our awareness and cannot be easily brought to the surface. Besides their psychic location, the conscious, preconscious, and unconscious mental phenomena have different operational characteristics. The medium of expression of the conscious and preconscious systems was figurative and lexical, while that of the unconscious was concrete and sensual. Moreover, there existed censorships between conscious and preconscious, and between preconscious and unconscious; the unconscious material had to alter its form from ‘thing presentation’ to ‘word presentation’ as it travelled across these barriers. With the introduction of the ‘tripartite model’ of the mind (id, ego, and superego), defensive operations of the ego and certain moral injunctions of the superego also became traceable to the deeper layers of the unconscious.

The economic perspective dealt with the energy of the forces behind mental phenomena. It assumed that psychic energy determined the nature of mental processes; easy mobility and low discharge threshold characterised ‘primary process’ and stability and high discharge threshold characterised ‘secondary process’. The former seeks immediate relief of tension, allows one object to be replaced by another, permits one idea to merge with another, and does not abide by the constraints of time and contradiction. The latter relies upon verbal representations, is loyal to Aristotelian logic, respects time, and contributes to rational thought. Among other notions subsumed under the economic perspective were intensity of drives, degrees of excitement, tension discharge, and quantum of emotion that was essential for psychic vitality. To these Freudian delineations, two more perspectives were later added. These included the genetic perspective which suggested that all adult emotion, thought, and behaviour is traceable to its primordial form in childhood, and the adaptive perspective which proposed that all human behaviour, including maladaptive behaviour, serves a useful purpose for the individual.

Together these five perspectives of metapsychology (dynamic, topographic, economic, genetic, and adaptive) and the later-evolved list of the mind’s defensive operations (e.g. repression, projection, rationalisation, undoing, negation, splitting) form the touchstone of psychoanalytic theory and its most enduring and universally valid aspect. Psychoanalytic study of fiction, poetry, and biography from all over the world, as well as clinical work with immigrant patients from diverse national and ethnic origins convincingly demonstrated that Freudian metapsychology is as useful in understanding the Eastern mind as it is for understanding the Western mind. The same universality does not characterise the other contributions of psychoanalysis, as the following discourse will demonstrate.

**PERSONALITY DEVELOPMENT**

Freud and his early followers (especially Karl Abraham, Sandor Ferenczi, and Otto Fenichel) proposed a highly-specific view of how a psychically inchoate infant gradually evolves into a well-functioning adult with a sense of autonomy, stability, and personal agency. Tipping their hats to the contributions of heredity, they focussed upon the role epigenetic unfolding of infantile bodily needs (e.g. oral, anal, phallic) played in shaping the ways of relating to parents and the important figures of childhood. Somatic tensions propelled the
mind to seek relief and the environment's response to these efforts governed the levels of comfort entitlement, activity, and psychic agency would evolve. The mind's working was based upon somatic prototypes ('the ego is first and foremost a bodily ego'). Gender difference was crucial and, in early psychoanalytic theory, the female child was doomed since she possessed an 'inferior organ' (hence, 'penis envy'). Since she did not have much to lose to begin with, she had little need to develop moral constraints. Men, who had to face the threat of castration, were superior in matters of ethics and thoughtful judgement. Freud declared that 'anatomy is destiny'. And, though he did acknowledge the powerful role of the child's early relationship with his or her mother, his attention remained focused upon the psychic consequences of the triangular, oedipal configuration of the family. Exposure to 'primal scene' (parental sexual intercourse) was deemed highly traumatic and oedipal strivings contributed heavily to the evolution of subsequent character traits.

This 'classical' model of development was greatly tempered by the corrective influence of feminism and infant-observation data. Prominent analytic thinkers after Freud (e.g. Melanie Klein, John Bowlby, Donald Winnicott, Ronald Fairbairn, and Margaret Mahler, to name a few) brought to fore the profound formative influence of the early mother-child relationship, underscoring the dialectic between the baby's genetically-received, hard-wired affecto-motor propensities ('temperament') and the maternal responsiveness to the child. Attachment and separation were now accorded greater importance than the oedipal desire and castration in the formation of personality. The primacy of body no longer occupied centre stage; relationality did. And, the unblinking phallocentrism of Freudian theory was discarded; women could be seen to possess different forms and expression of morality and ethics but were not lesser than men in this regard. Penis envy was no longer considered ubiquitous; it arose only in families where the mother was devalued and the father and brother were exalted. Another significant development was Erik Erikson's proposal that the challenges faced and rewards reaped by the growing ego emanate not only from the individual's relationship to his or her family but also from the larger, communal (e.g. school, workplace) realm. Society at large was no longer to be viewed as mere externalisation of intrapsychic structures; it existed de novo and exerted influence on the growing personality.

**UNQUESTIONED WESTERN PSYCHOLOGICAL HEGENOMY**

While salutary, these conceptual 'upgrades' still left the Eurocentrism of psychoanalytic theory intact. All theoreticians were white and of European extraction. All patients (and observed children) from whom these developmental hypotheses were evolved were white and of European extraction. It was a closed system that subtly, and not so subtly, implied an Anglo-Saxon and Judaeo-Christian hegemony over the mental development of the peoples of colour, and of the Eastern parts of the world. White, European, North American, Christian and Jewish psychoanalysts declared that certain 'developmental lines' were normal and felt those to be valid for, say, Japanese, or Iraqi, or Sudanese children as well. That this could hardly be true, given vastly different family constellations, living conditions, regional folklore, cultural traditions, and religious beliefs was not recognised or, at least, not recognised for a very long time.

To be sure, the two main developmental tasks of childhood delineated by psychoanalysis (i.e. renunciation of infantile omnipotence and establishment of incest barrier) are important for personality formation across regional, racial, and religious boundaries. However, beyond this point, significant differences exist. The quip by Jennifer Bonovitz, a North American child analyst, asking what would be the shape of the childhood separation-individuation theory had its originator, the Hungarian–born Margaret Mahler, moved to Japan instead of the United States after the Holocaust captures the essence of the issues that occupy this conceptual terrain. All sorts of questions abound. How psychologically separate must an individual become from his parents in order to be considered normal? What degrees of psychically merged states are ‘permissible’ in mental health? How much concern about the family, the elders, and, indeed, even the community-at-large, in making important life decisions is normal? Do ‘transitional objects’ (e.g. a cuddly teddy bear, a soft blanket) that a Western child gets attached to during the second-third year of life reflect normal phase-specific development or are they culture-specific artefacts of societies where children are pushed too early to become autonomous? What is the normal duration of breast-feeding? How much skin-to-skin contact with parents is good for a growing child? Is the psychic structure evolved in a nuclear family akin to that evolved in a large multigenerational family? What happens to the intrigue about the parental bedroom in societies where there is no such entity and children and adults sleep in the same room? Is the Oedipus complex a universal constellation? How graphic must the sexual imagery of oedipal desire be? Does Freudian castration anxiety acquire greater strength among Muslims, who are often circumcised? Must adolescence be full of turmoil? And so on and so forth.

The good news is that literature is beginning to accumulate on such questions and the early colonialism of psychoanalytic thinking is thawing. The Japanese concepts of ‘amae’ and ‘don’t look taboo’ (proposed by Takeo Doi and Osamu Kita-yama, respectively), the Chinese ‘filial piety complex’ (outlined by Ming Dong Gu), and the Indian ‘maternal enthralment’ and ‘Sita Shakti’, ‘Trishanku complex’ (delineated by Sudhir Kakar, Jaswant Guzder, and Shallesh Kapadia, respectively) are among the Eastern newcomers to the chambers of the psychoanalytic lexicon. And the rising interest in psycho-
analysis in Turkey and Iran is bound to have its own concep-
tual yield. Salman Akhtar’s edited volume, The Crescent and
the Couch, has already mapped out some cross-currents be-
tween Islam and psychoanalysis. The writings of Aisha Ab-
bassi (a female Pakistani-American analyst) and Yasser Ad-
Dab’bagh (the only Saudi Arabian-born psychoanalyst in the
world) have taken further steps in such theory-building. Much more, however, is warranted to help psychoanalytic
developmental theory arrive at a truly universal status.

**THERAPEUTIC TECHNIQUE**

Freud’s declaration that ‘hysterics suffer from reminiscences’
epitomised the basic assumption of psychoanalysis regarding
the nature of psychopathology. Essentially, all mental an-
guish was seen to emanate from the experiences, fantasies,
and unresolved conflicts of childhood. Adult suffering was
anachronistic and constituted a disguised and rationalised
expression of the intrapsychic war between prohibited wish-
es and moral injunctions against them. To top it all, most
psychopathology resulted from ‘fixation’ upon the childhood
Oedipus complex, though, in all fairness, it should be ac-
nowledged that the possibility that actual traumatic events
could underlie adult problems was also given some space.
Analysts who came after Freud and focussed upon the ‘pre-
oedipal’ period of development added that disrupted attach-
ment and the subsequent pessimism, mistrust, hunger, anger,
and greed play a more significant role in the anguished psy-
chological life of adults.

The two etiological perspectives impacted upon the amelio-
rate methods that were evolved to deal with psychopath-
ology. The method Freud proposed and which was followed
without question by at least two generations of psychoana-
lysts rested upon the technical tripod of anonymity, abstin-
ence, and neutrality. The psychoanalyst did not reveal him-
self and merely acted like a mirror, reflecting his patient’s
inner goings-on to himself (‘anonymity’). He did not gratify
the patient’s demand for overt or covert erotic indulgences
since doing so would provide substitute pleasures and im-
pede the resolution of the patient’s conflicts by interpreta-
tion (‘abstinence’). And the analyst adopted a non-judgemen-
tal stance and stood equidistant from the patient’s desires,
morality, and reality (‘neutrality’). He merely facilitated the
patient’s ‘free-association’ (uninhibited and uncensored flow
of thought and verbalisation), pointed out resistances to it,
and then interpreted the meanings of what the patient was
saying, linking it to feelings and fantasies toward the analyst
(‘transference’) which were revivals of childhood formations.
This helped the patient gain ‘insight’. He or she could now
live a life free of childhood-derived conflicts. This austere
psychoanalytic therapeutic was later ‘softened’ by the addi-
tion of warmer, emotionally-responsive, bi-directional, and
relational interventions. All this work was, however, based
upon (mostly) white Western analysts treating (mostly) white
Western patients.

How applicable is this methodology to regions of the world
where the patient might not possess a separate, self-observ-
ing self and might have a communally-grounded sense of
identity that overrides personal separateness? Alan Roland’s
concept of the ‘familial self’ among Indians is a case in point
here. Also pertinent are Irmgard Dettbarn’s (a German ana-
lyst who has worked for a long time in China) observations
on Asian collectivism and her statement that the word ‘I’
does not function the same way in Chinese as it does in the
Indo-Germanic language. Calling it a ‘culture of curves’, Dett-
barn emphasises that the direct and open communication
typical of Western patients is not to be found among the
Chinese, who talk in circuitous and indirect ways. Mook Sook
Lee emphasises the heightened role of non-verbal communi-
cation in the Korean clinical context and how the family-cen-
tred nature of Korean culture can often preclude important
disclosures by the patient to the therapist. And Sudhir Kakar,
the pre-eminent psychoanalyst of India, has noted that in
that country the humane interest and respectful empathy of
the analyst needs a more active and open expression.

Kakar also states that the Indian analyst has to be more di-
cadic, at least in the early phases of treatment, to generate
and sustain the ‘biographical introspection’ that is the card-
inal requirement from the analysand and, generally speaking,
not a characteristic of the ordinary Indian mind.

Nuanced modifications of therapeutic technique, with greater
inclination towards relational and intersubjective approaches,
therefore seem indicated for the practice of clinical psychoa-
lysis in the non-Western world. A caveat must be entered,
though: no data exists about conducting analytic treatment
in African and Arabic nations. Given the fact that psycho-
analysis has now existed for over one hundred and fifteen
years, this geopolitical negation is truly incredible. When and
if such information becomes available, the guardians of psy-
choanalytic technique might have to convene and face new
challenges.

**CULTURE AND CIVILISATION**

Freud’s contributions to the understanding of culture were
wide-ranging. He delineated the process by which idiosyn-
cratic and even hideous elements of subjectivity are trans-
formed into creative writing. He highlighted the dialectic be-
tween civilisation and loss of man’s innate, animal nature
due to its exile into the unconscious; repression produced
culture and culture instigated repression. Freud also specu-
lated about the inevitability, if not necessity, of war, and
traced it to aggression inherent in man’s nature. And, most
importantly, he challenged religious belief.

Scientific positivism of the early twentieth century provided
a receptive crucible for Freud’s debunking of God. He had
given voice to what was brewing in the minds of Western in-
telligentsia. The unspeakable atrocities committed in the
name of religious nationalism in Europe ‘confirmed’ that ethnocentrism and its conceptual twin, religious belief, were dangerous commodities. They led to intoxication with in-group superiority and laid the groundwork for oppression of the Other and for cruelty and genocide. Early European psychoanalysts, themselves the victims of prejudice, wholeheartedly followed the ray of hope offered by Freud’s declaration that religion was a hoax and science would sooner or later assure the dominance of rationality in the conduct of interpersonal and communal affairs. Atheism and psychoanalysis became inseparable. God was declared to be a man-made fantasy that perpetuated child-like dependency on external figures and acted as a salve against the disillusionment in one’s own and, later, in one’s father’s assumed omnipotence. Freud insisted that God was an illusion the need for which would disappear as science provides more answers to nature’s mysteries and as man acquires cognitive and material armamentarium to vanquish his infantile dependency. This perspective was adopted by the subsequent analysts who began to consider any and all religious belief contrary to mental health.

Gradually, however, cracks in the armour of such theory began to show. The complete neglect of mother in Freud’s formulation of God was noted by some psychoanalysts. Others wondered if a mind solely governed by rationality would actually be healthy. Don’t human beings need areas of faith and belief, even if these might be illusory? How could one play if the real and unreal did not coexist? If so, like literature, games, love, and creativity in general, religious belief would belong in this ambiguous area of man’s sensibility. Viewed from this vantage point, God turns out to be a majestic poem. Moreover, the God Freud was railing against was the Judaic-Christian paternal figure that resided high above the skies and was mostly scary and punitive. Freud’s God, unlike the god(s) of Hindus, for instance, could not be a friend, a lover, a woman, child, or an animal. Even more remote from Freud’s conceptualisation was the possibility of an utterly de-anthropomorphised view of God as omnipresent knowledge and order that is spread over the universe like a soft blanket over a sleeping baby. Among the post-Freudian psychoanalysts, Wilfred Bion came closest to this perspective on religious belief in some of his proposals.

This tension between Freudian psychology and religion is of importance in transporting psychoanalytic thinking to regions of the world where belief in God is widespread. That psychoanalysis has started taking this potential conundrum into account is evident by the publication of a recent volume in which ten distinguished psychoanalysts have assessed Freud’s book on religion, The Future of an Illusion, and debated his derision of man’s need for God. It is becoming evident that the psychoanalytic interest in religion has shifted from the psychological origins of belief in God to the psychological functions of such a conviction. Moreover, both atheism and theism are seen to be consonant with mental illness (if the former is emanating from a pervasive cynicism and if the latter is serving the sole purpose of paranoid narcissism), as well as with mental health (if the former is based upon a loving identification with atheist parents and if the latter inculcates humility, generosity, and reparative gratitude toward the world). Such mellowing of Freud’s ardent stance against religious belief would go a long way in judicious accommodations between the cultures of the East and the depth-psychology of the West.

CONCLUSION

This wide-ranging discourse has tackled the corpus of Freud’s work (and that of subsequent psychoanalytic ‘greats’) under four headings, namely: metapsychology, personality development, therapeutic technique, and cultural speculations. Adopting both ‘in-discipline’ and ‘out-of-discipline’ vantage points, the discourse had sought to assess the extent to which psychoanalytic ideas are universally valid and applicable. Accommodating the tension between the fundamentally similar nature of man across the world and the differing existential narratives of East and West, the essay has concluded that while Freudian metapsychology has a universal validity, the developmental notions and therapeutic methodology of psychoanalysis are Euro-centric and in need of judicious modifications if they are to be applied to the non-Western world. Freud’s speculations about religion would be found even more alien, if not offensive, by large swathes of the population of Asia and Africa. It is therefore encouraging to see that Freud’s sceptical reductionism vis-à-vis God’s existence has mushroomed into theoretical notions of much larger scope.

To sum up, then, psychoanalysis does have much to offer the Eastern world and can serve as a beacon of light for the burgeoning individualism of mind there. However, it must not be overlooked that the Eastern world also has much to offer psychoanalysis, and inclusion of its traditions, philosophies and wisdom can only enrich the discipline Sigmund Freud originated at the dawn of the twentieth century. A recent book, entitled Psychoanalysis in Asia, edited by Alf Gerlach, Maria Teresa Savio Hooke and Sverre Varvin, with contributions from Chinese, Indian, Japanese, and South Korean analysts, gives convincing testimony to this assertion.

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Martina Sabra: How do you, as a psychoanalyst, see the recent social and political upheavals in North Africa and the Middle East?

Jalil Bennani: It was initially a social uprising against the frustrations, humiliations, repression; a powerful, immediate, radical questioning of the conventional orders and above all the authority of the existing heads of state. Arabs have disproved the widespread prejudice about their supposed submissiveness and passivity. What struck me was that the main figureheads of the revolutions were not charismatic leaders, but wounded human beings. In Tunisia, the crowd identified with an itinerant stallholder: demonstrators recognised themselves in the suffering of Mohamed Bouazizi. This forces us to question the usual explanatory models. We have to recognise that in this instance the crowd was not looking for a hero, but identifying with a suffering individual.

Yet the yearning for a so-called ‘strong man’ appears to be more popular than ever. How do you explain this? In your opinion, why is it that, on the one hand, large sections of society from the Atlantic to the Persian Gulf are in revolt, while at the same time many people are looking for easy solutions and simple identities; that they seem prepared to submit to archaic, patriarchal authorities?

I see this as a kind of resurgence of that which has been repressed. In 2011 the rebellious youth shouted, ‘We don’t want any more bosses,’ and wanted to apply this motto to their own ranks. But it’s hard for an organisation without a leader to survive over a longer period of time and to implement its goals. The dictators have been driven out, but that doesn’t mean that the representations of paternal authority have been erased, or that people don’t need leaders, bosses or men of action any more. This repression is part of the reason why the boss was able to return, in his rigid and archaic form. Driving out fathers doesn’t automatically mean that you get rid of the prevailing forms of patriarchy. However, it must be noted that the traditional representations of manliness and paternal authority have been pretty much debunked. Mindless violence can be interpreted as a sort of psychic defensive reaction, an unconscious admission of this weakness. In
You started your medical studies in Morocco in 1967. In the 1970s you went to France to do your specialist training. Why did you decide on psychiatry, and what sparked your interest in psychoanalysis?

I didn’t decide on psychoanalysis; it was rather the reverse. Let me explain what I mean by that. Whenever we make decisions or choose to go down a particular path, the unconscious plays a part. When I started work in France, after completing my specialist training in psychiatry, many of my patients were migrants from North Africa. All my attempts to treat their conditions with medication failed dismally. I therefore had no choice but to try psychoanalysis. It was absolutely imperative to talk to these people, many of whom spoke two languages. I was able to listen to them and to develop an approach based on the spoken word and its effects. This methodical approach is applicable to all patients all over the world, regardless of their language or cultural roots. However, many of the patients had something specific in common: because of their social and linguistic isolation, it was more apparent in them than in other patients the extent to which silence and suppressed desires can make a person ill.

Historically speaking, we can say that in the 1980s psychoanalysis was much more fashionable among psychiatrists than it is today. It was quite normal for anyone training to become a doctor, like me at that time, to lie down on the couch and allow themselves to be analysed, too. It was only later that I discovered what effects psychoanalysis has on social relationships, norms and values. Psychiatry had interested me because I was curious, and because I wanted to understand people better. Psychoanalysis allowed me to continue on this path by submitting myself to investigation regarding my history, my culture, my language and my unconscious desires.

What status did psychiatry, psychology and psychoanalysis have in Morocco at that time? Were there individuals or groups studying psychoanalysis? Were you in contact with such groups? Did you belong to any?

At that time the psychology did not exist as a study discipline in Morocco, never mind psychoanalysis. There were political reasons for this, too. Psychoanalysis implied criticism of religion and of the prevailing discourses, and was considered subversive. Doctors of psychiatry were also only systematically trained in Morocco from the 1980s onwards. There were very few practising psychiatrists, almost all of whom had completed their specialist training in France. When I went back to Morocco in 1980, I wanted to familiarise people there with psychoanalytic methods and firmly anchor them by means of practice, lectures and essays. In 1985, together with some of my colleagues, I founded Morocco’s first psychoanalytic association: Le Texte Freudien – ‘The Freudian Text’. We weren’t yet able to offer specialist training, but you can say that we did at least make psychoanalysis known in Morocco. Later on, other associations and groups were formed: in 1992 we founded the Association Marocaine de Psychothérapie, in 2001 the Société Psychanalytique Marocaine. The time was ripe for this back then; the country was opening up. We had acquired a lot of experience; there was an increasing demand for specialist training. The presence of a psychoanalytical association enables people to be active beyond their medical practice: to meet up, collaborate on theoretical work – interdisciplinary work, too – and publish. Psychoanalysis spreads via private and public work. For this you need a minimum of freedom and democracy. In 2009 I was one of the co-founders of the Cercle Psychanalytique Marocain, now known simply as Le Cercle Psychanalytique, with the aim of documenting efforts to create an international presence. It takes time, you see. The story of psychoanalysis is a succession of fractures and secessions, a tendency that I myself haven’t managed to avoid, but which did permit me to keep starting afresh and, in doing so, to build on the experiences of the past.

Do you remember your first encounters with the intellectual world of Sigmund Freud?

In 1974 I was working as an aspiring consultant in a psychiatric clinic in France. I was conducting conversations with patients, and was supposed to follow these up by keeping a written record of my medical observations, making diagnoses and substantiating them. The psychopathology that lent comprehensibility and a certain degree of sense to the symptoms was closely connected with psychodynamic psychiatry and psychoanalysis.

Freud’s texts were the basis for me. The books that had a particularly strong influence on me were The Interpretation of Dreams, Psycho-Analysis and The Psychopathology of Everyday Life. I did my clinical training with Dr Tony Lainé. He and his team observed psychic suffering from the psychoanalytical and from the societal and political aspects. There’s a whole philosophy behind this. It was not about sedating people with medication but about healing them, using the best possible means and without locking them up. It was the age of humanist psychiatry, which was a combination of various different disciplines. These encounters and experiences had a decisive influence on my subsequent professional career.
What language did you read Freud’s books in – French or Arabic?

Initially I only had French translations. Later I was able to read The Interpretation of Dreams in Arabic, thanks to Moustapha Safouan’s translation.

THE BEGINNING OF ARAB PSYCHOANALYSIS

Psychoanalysis was founded in Europe: Western doctors ‘brought it with them’ to Morocco in the context of colonialisation. What was the significance of that for the general acceptance of its methods? What did it mean for you? Did you, or do you, regard psychoanalysis as a ‘Western’ concept?

During the colonial period people in North Africa, especially in Morocco, became interested in psychoanalysis. This happened almost without people noticing, and unintentionally, thanks to doctors who initially came for a limited period without intending to introduce psychoanalysis as a method. But their presence left a mark in some psychiatric clinics and departments. In the Middle East, Egypt was the country where a small anglophone group existed from the 1930s to the 1950s, later dissolving as a result of social and political pressure. Lebanon, where psychoanalysis became firmly established from the 1970s onwards, came next.

Not a lot happened in Morocco during this period, because French medical specialists were among those who left the country after independence in 1956 and the withdrawal of the colonial power. French psychiatrists were focussed on Franco-French patients; they had also paid hardly any attention to Moroccan and Arab-Islamic culture. René Laforgue was one of the few exceptions; he had been in direct contract with Freud in Berlin, but he was very controversial after the war. His work was not systematic; he made very crude generalisations, and was cut off from Moroccan reality.

However, a crucial element in the mediation of psychoanalysis is scrutinising the respective cultural context, and working in the context of the language and culture of the respective country or society. From my point of view, I had to ‘deconstruct’ the theories of the colonial age, in the sense of Jacques Derrida, in order to penetrate them critically and situate them in the context of the period. In my opinion it is less a question of adaptation than the reappropriation of knowledge. In this way the cultural specifics, the ‘words’ (mots) of the culture, are capable of enriching the universal symbolic background.

Sigmund Freud worked with representations, images and metaphors taken from ancient Greek mythology and literature, including figures such as Oedipus and Narcissus. Given this background, how was it possible for an adaptation or reappropriation of the central ideas of psychoanalysis to take place in Morocco, with its very different cultural influences?

Psychoanalysis was founded more than one hundred years ago in Vienna. But the concept of the unconscious was and still is a hypothesis that withstands practical scrutiny. We encounter parapraxis, slips of the tongue and repression in individuals of all cultures. Apart from that, every culture has its own stories and myths. Take A Thousand and One Nights, for example. A story like that of the fisherman Jaoudar is a perfect example of how the fisherman is confronted with his incestuous phantasms concerning his mother, and how he frees himself from them. We are dealing here with the same objects as those that constitute the foundation of psychoanalytical concepts.

Psychoanalysis according to Sigmund Freud addressed three great themes: the autonomous individual, sexuality, and religion. Freud came from a Jewish family; he was a confirmed atheist, and considered religion to be a kind of neurosis. What significance does Freud’s criticism of religion have for the way he is received in Morocco, and in other countries in the region?

Psychoanalysis does indeed address the individual. The processes of social change in Morocco have resulted in people increasingly articulating themselves as individuals, questioning authorities, traditions and taboos. They have also been demanding more rights for women. Psychoanalysis has accompanied these developments by creating space for people to be heard as individuals, and by supplying a discourse that questioned the other discourses. As far as sexuality is concerned – traditions may perhaps be able to suppress it, but bans are very often ignored, because it is simply not possible to suppress individual desires. Young people destabilise the bans by evading them, by confusing the codes. We have also seen almost everything being called into question: women’s subjugation to male authority, the restriction of their role to reproduction, and their exclusion from the public realm.

As far as religion is concerned, Freud did indeed describe it as a collective neurosis, but his position evolved in this respect and he did ultimately concede that the dimension of the sacred had its place. Today many practising people of faith come to analysis, Muslims and non-Muslims, all over the world. Analysis helps them to distinguish faith from neurosis.

You have now been working as a psychiatrist and psychoanalyst in Rabat for more than three decades. How have ideas in Moroccan society about ‘insanity’ and ‘normality’, about psychic illness and health, developed in this time?

Ideas have changed dramatically, especially since the 1980s, in many stages. In the 1980s traditional and scientific discourses and forms of treatment still existed alongside one another, whereby the traditional forms of treatment included the field of religion, the realm of marabouts and magic. People believed in the tradition on the one hand and science on the other, and the two intermingled.

Gradually the two realms separated, although the two still existed alongside each other. With the passing of time, complex syndromes involving hallucinations and delirium were no longer interpreted as possession but as a sign of psychological illness. Today, symptoms such as, for example, hysterical crises, phobias, compulsive behaviour, psychosomatic manifestations, are no longer attributed to spirits; instead, people look for individual causes. This doesn’t mean that the traditional practices have completely disappeared: far from it. But scientific forms of treatment are becoming increasingly dominant. At the same time the tabooing of psychological illnesses has diminished. More and more people from all milieus go to see specialists for the treatment of psychological problems.

As far as psychotherapy is concerned, be it behavioural therapy, family therapy or psychoanalysis, it develops primarily in the large cities. It is clear to many people nowadays that medication alone is no solution, but that language, talking, and comprehension of the symptoms are necessary. That’s the context in which psychoanalysis is returning and developing, but we are still right at the beginning.

**THE SIGNIFICANCE OF LANGUAGE**

*How has your engagement with psychoanalysis changed your personal view of the world and of society? How has the method affected your self-image as a citizen and as a person? How has it affected your perception of the power relationships in your environment?*

First and foremost, psychoanalysis made me accord due significance to language, both in my clinical work and in my personal life. Psychoanalysis teaches you to call things by their name, but it also teaches you to be silent if there is nothing more to say, if you need time to think, if you should listen to the other. Psychoanalysis also allowed me to open myself to art and literature. It’s not an ideology, but it taught me to separate the individual from the collective. What happens on the individual level always affects the group. Today, psychoanalysis is more relevant than ever, in view of the constantly recurring primitive instincts, with their attendant cruelty and hatred, that we are seeing now in all the wars and armed conflicts. Dictatorships exist only in order to imprison and nourish hatred. Without the influence of culture and education, civilisation and our humanity will perish.

What status do psychology and psychoanalysis have in Morocco today, as academic subjects and in public debates?

Nowadays psychology is an ordinary subject in the universities in the big cities, in Rabat, Casablanca and Marrakesh. Psychoanalysis is represented by associations, and specialised training is on offer. The medical faculty of the University of Marrakesh has now, for the first time in Morocco, introduced certified further training in psychoanalysis, meaning that it is possible for young psychiatrists to acquire an additional qualification in this discipline. Psychoanalysis is recognised on all levels: as medical practice, but also as a discourse in societal debates, including in the media. It contributes to the opening up of society in that it questions the dominant discourses, whether political, ideological, cultural or religious.

Of course, we will only be able to say psychoanalysis has really arrived when psychoanalysis mixes with the culture, when a Maghreb psychopathology develops that operates in the language of the country. Current work, even if there is not a great deal of it, is heading in this direction.

Psychoanalysis, psychoanalytical terms and categories have become part of the public discourse, also in Morocco. Do you see a difference here between francophone and arabophone milieus?

In Morocco, psychoanalysis has so far certainly remained a privilege of the francophone section of the population. But there are also some levels of arabophone society that refer to it, that challenge and question its methods, and accept the discourse – also where religion is concerned, especially when this is interpreted in a dogmatic, closed way as something that explains and regulates everything. Morocco functions as a bridge. Psychoanalysts in Western countries look to Morocco first in order to understand how customs and traditions function, and to find out how things are progressing with their discipline in this part of the world. I think that psychoanalysis will constantly rediscover itself here.

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**Psychoanalyse Aujourd’hui**

http://jalibennani.blog.lemonde.fr

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For a certain number of years before the eruption of the current bloody events in Syria, I used to go to Damascus two or three times a year to meet with Syrian psychoanalysts and discuss clinical practice. These analysts were hosted by the Cultural Service of the French Embassy so that they could work on analytical texts within the framework of seminars. During my visits there, in addition to the conferences, I supervised the young Syrian psychoanalysts, who provided therapy to Iraqi refugees who had experienced war trauma resulting in, among other things, agonistic experiences, narcissistic suffering, eradication of the subject and post-traumatic psychoses.

At the first Franco-Syrian conference (in 2011), a Syrian psychoanalyst presented the case of Malika, a 37-year-old woman who had been referred by a humanitarian organisation that had taken her into its care ‘after the outbreak of war in her country’. The country in question was, of course, Iraq. Her father and brother had been kidnapped and Malika had had to pay the ransom. ‘It was not only money,’ the analyst said, ‘that she had offered in order to buy back her family. She had also given her body, and she regards this as her secret. She recounted the sexual attack she experienced, crying bitterly; at times lost for words, she substituted them with appeals to God for help.’

The patient reported the following: ‘One of the kidnappers came into my room, after I had given him the money he had asked for. He pointed a gun at my little son’s temple while he slept. That was when I understood that he wanted to rape me. I begged him not to harm my child and to do what he wanted with me. so he raped me.’ Weeping, she continued: ‘Can you imagine, he slept with me while I had my period. I’m not a respectable woman any more. I’m ashamed.’ She never told anyone, ‘out of fear for her family and fear that she would be killed’: ‘What was I supposed to do – let him kill my child?’

**RAPE AND THE FEMININE**

Why do the most abject acts of criminal domination utilise the feminine imago? What rape demonstrates is how sex can be used as the primary instrument and means to nullify women. In this case, sex triumphs over the sexual. It is one of the extreme characteristics of barbarous times. In connection with the masculine and the feminine, desire and pleasure, life and death and temporality (through the question of filia-
tion), sex is utilised for the purposes of violence and control. Instead of death, one is mortified. Instead of pleasure, one is humiliated.

Such an experience induces a massive shock. The shock is so massive because the woman finds herself in contact with the crude drive of the man, in contact not with seduction but with the destructive forces of the psyche. The shock, writes Sandor Ferenczi, ‘is equivalent to the destruction of the sense of self, the capacity to resist, to act and to think for the purpose of defending one’s own Self’.

Confronted with a breach (Freud talks about the breach of the stimulus barrier in his model of 1920), the ego divests itself of living qualities in order not to register that the event ever happened. And in order to protect itself from the drive stimulus causing the breach, the ego becomes itself a ‘drive-neutralisation agent’, which is nothing other than a further variant of the death drive.

Rape brings about a ‘detransitionalisation of reality’. ‘He slept with me’ expresses a duplication in reality of the original fantasy of seduction. The two spaces (the psychic space and the external space) communicate in such a way that the psychic apparatus can no longer perform its function as a container of the internal world. The boundaries have been eliminated. ‘Falling into agony is not an artefact of language’ (Philippe Bessoles).

In fact, the Arabic term ightasaba (to rape) expresses the annihilation of the psyche by this breaching attack. ightasaba means to take by force (implying a play of unequal forces). ightasaba also denotes the act of pulling hair from the skin so forcefully that it causes bleeding. The act of rape is included within the scope of cruelitis, from which is derived the word ‘cruelty’ - wahshiyya in Arabic. In order to say “he raped her”, the Arabic expression is Ghasabahá nafsahá, which can be translated as ‘he annihilated her soul (nafs)’ – or ‘her psyche’ (the Arabic word nafs denotes both psyche and soul).

During her pregnancy, Malika had a dream. Ali placed his hand on Malika’s head and said, ‘You are going to have a son. You must call him Ali. He will be a great man.’ As such, the mother had now become a malika (Malika means ‘queen’). She was a queen, since she was the mother of a boy who would become a great man like Ali. It was for the sake of this marvellous child, the child of the promise that had been made to her, that the mother sacrificed herself. However, this sacrifice was to be the death of her pleasure and pride in having such a special son. The woman was condemned to exile and a life of wandering when she left the motherland that could no longer offer her protection, that had even become a synonym for lack of protection.

In saying, ‘I had my period’, the patient is expressing a perforation of her psychological being and the porosity of the skin-ego: a psychological leak, a physical breach. Her grievance, which constitutes a flayed skin, encompasses the full sense of ightasaba: rubbish, dirt, self-accusation, and responsibility for the guilt (not felt) of the aggressor.

‘I had my period’ becomes the obsessive preoccupation with a leakage that never ends. It is the wound of a mother who came to the aid of her son at the price of killing herself as a mother. The other children do not figure in her discourse; they no longer exist. How does one protect oneself from the erotisisation of the death drive? Does the patient’s sacrifice necessarily entail this compromise of the maternal? The mother will hate this child.

DEMATERNALISATION

Dominique Cupa has referred to cases of cruelty toward women which are in fact attacks on the maternal, as in the case of this Bosnian woman in 1996: ‘One day, he (the torturer) bandaged the breasts of a woman to see how long her new-born child would survive without being fed. She killed her baby herself to shorten his suffering.’ Dominique Cupa talks about a dematernalisation that can be radical when it is combined with extreme cruelty, a mortal cruelty that attacks the mother in her essence and power. She who can give and maintain life finds herself subjugated to a cruel control that forces her to commit infanticide. Thus the gift of life is replaced by the gift of death. In the case of Malika and of other mothers who have been subjected to rape, the flesh of the flesh becomes hated, and the child to be saved becomes the despised object.

‘What is most tragic,’ said one woman, ‘is that they succeeded, with their sadistic and perverse methods, in killing in us any sense of a previous, human life.’ André Green talks about ‘the cold and cruel monster of destruction (that) is found to the light of early agonistic or unprocessable traumatic experiences, or is seen in the light of early agonistic or unprocessable traumatic experiences or of a masochistic core in some women. In the present case, the trauma is rape and war. It is a reality beyond the control of the person experiencing it.

In some analytical works, trauma is connected to early agonistic or unprocessable traumatic experiences, or is seen in the light of early agonistic or unprocessable traumatic experiences or of a masochistic core in some women. In the present case, the trauma is rape and war. It is a reality beyond the control of the person experiencing it.

It would be beneficial to broaden the scope of the notion of trauma by taking into account those extreme situations (bombing, war, natural catastrophes) which cause a breakdown in the psychic envelopes, a state of dereliction, a kind of psychological exteriority, a sense of danger or a constant threat of insecurity and its devastating effects (which con-
The woman is thus victimised twice. A woman who has been raped will say to her husband, 'hatakûlak ʿirdak' ('they violated your honour'). It is no longer a matter of her body and psyche but of the honour of the man. I remember those Algerian women I met when I was a young psychoanalyst who had been raped, even gang-raped, during the events that devastated Algeria in the 1990s, and who had been repudiated, because they were now dirty, and forced to leave the country.

When questioned about the enormity of the transference the Syrian analyst, a young woman and mother, said: 'The same thing could happen to us, too.' Since then, Syria has gone up in flames. Iraqi women can no longer find refuge in Syria, which has become an equally volatile country. 'It' (the id) exist in flames. Iraqi women can no longer find refuge in Syria, which has become an equally volatile country. 'It' (the id) exists, because they were now dirty, and forced to leave the country.

Often, in the Arab world, women who have been raped are repudiated as they are considered to be defiled, dirty, thereby defiling the honour of the husband and the entire family. The woman is thus victimised twice. A woman who has been raped will say to her husband, 'hatakûlak ʿirdak' ('they violated your honour'). It is no longer a matter of her body and psyche but of the honour of the man. I remember those Algerian women I met when I was a young psychoanalyst who had been raped, even gang-raped, during the events that devastated Algeria in the 1990s, and who had been repudiated, because they were now dirty, and forced to leave the country.

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FATWAS

In addition to the terrors of war, mass disappearances, abusive condemnation, a day-to-day reality that has become unpredictable, the suffering of the Syrian people under tyranny, Iraq exploding on a daily basis, the chaos and the desolation, there are the fatwas of the fuqahâ’ (theologians): in order to encourage mercenaries to go to Syria, the Saudi fuqahâ’ authorise the men through fatwas to take the woman of Syria as sabâyâ (prisoners of war). And DAESH (ISIS) is today handing over women and young girls to men to keep up their fighting spirit, thus disregarding the Freudian considerations of ‘war and peace between the sexes’. However, authorising a return to a barbarous archaism that advocates the rape and possession of women as captives and the destruction of archaeological sites (the mausoleum of Fatima is one example among others) flabbergasts the mind, is beyond language and the capacities of translation, and presents the analyst with difficulties of interpretation, because they must go beyond the dimension of fantasy and (interpretable) psychic reality in order to listen to something that is not coming from the subject and her psychic space, but from a chaotic environment.

The patient’s trauma collides with what becomes the analyst’s trauma, when confronted with their estrangement from the ideal cure or the ideal of the cure (benevolent neutrality, associativity, regular sessions, consistent setting, etc.), and in light of their commitment to civilisation and culture. The clinical challenge is considerable. Is it possible to give meaning to this meaningless murder?

Since ‘rape is murder without a corpse’ because it kills ‘through an incessant torture that is constantly inflicted: it condems the victim to wandering and exile in relation to his or her own physical, psychological, social, familial and cultural body’, re-sexualising sex, the psychological processing (reconstruction) of a murder perpetrated in a place which naturally belongs to life and to pleasure, and the reconstruction of the psychic envelopes are what constitute the clinical challenge for any psychoanalyst or psychotherapist.

Given a context that paralyses and petrifies the capacities of representation, the analyst must then dig down into this reserve of creative resources in order to associate, psychologise, and shake off the paralysis. The analyst can, for example, utilise the phrase ‘He slept with me while I had my period’ to remind the patient of the reality of the event, to make her aware that she was a victim, thus allowing her to free herself from ‘the confusion of language’ (in the sense of Sandor Ferenczi) and a mortal guilt. At the same time, the analyst can describe to her the horror of war, which defies representation and causes the death drive to be unbound and set loose, and can attempt to rename the sexual by positioning it on the side of life.

In order to help the patient process the events associated with the trauma, it is necessary to reconsider the trauma in the context of the culture and collective history of which we are the inheritors.

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It may be true that civil war and political violence are devastating to all sectors of society, but there is strong evidence that children and adolescents suffer the lion’s share of the damage, because it will probably affect all aspects of their health and physical well-being. The greatest effect is in fact on psychological and social aspects, in ways that can persist for long periods of time.

Arab and Muslim societies count themselves lucky that they can boast of their youthfulness, with a high proportion of children and adolescents (more than 65 per cent of Syrians are younger than nineteen); but this characteristic can become an appalling nightmare in times of war and overt violence, and in the crises that follow. The experiences that large numbers of children in Syria have gone through over the last three years have been terrifying and devastating.

A SHOCK TOO BIG TO ABSORB

On a hot Ramadan day in 2012 Syrian government warplanes bombed the northern town of Aazaz several times. Just before sunset and the end of the Ramadan fast one of the planes dropped a bomb, said to be a ‘vacuum bomb’, that reduced a whole residential area to a vast pile of rubble. Within seconds the site was littered with parts of dead women and children, and the walls of the houses crumbled like dust from the extraordinary air pressure created by the bomb. Shortly before the raid, a seven-year-old girl had left home in the area to go to her grandmother’s house, a few minutes’ walk away, unaware of what awaited her family and her home. When she came back with her uncle after the attack, she found no trace of the house. ‘They’ve stolen our house, Uncle,’ she shouted between sobs. Since that time...
cent young girl has been unable to speak a single word. The shock was several levels too great for her to absorb.

At the end of 2011 four-year-old Mohammed and his family were forced to leave their home in the countryside near the northwestern town of Idlib to escape shelling and fighting. On their way to a refugee camp in Turkey, the frightening sound of gunfire was clearly audible, and at night the sound of animals and nearby shelling echoed in the ears of all the members of his family. Mohammed is now one of the thousands of children from Syrian families who have settled in refugee camps to avoid daily raids on houses and campaigns of mass detention. Although he had been a fairly normal child in his general psychological development, he has since begun to show symptoms that were not previously evident. He has been wetting his bed and there has been a severe regression in his linguistic ability. For some time Mohammed has been unable to speak. He tries to communicate as much as possible through gestures and temper tantrums.

**TOO FRIGHTENED TO SLEEP: CHILDREN PLAGUED BY HORRIFIC NIGHTMARES**

In the south Jordanian city of Maan, a Syrian family of ten - father, mother and eight children - live in a modest house, in one small room that receives no sunlight. Maryam, 13, is the eldest girl. Like other families in southern Syria they were forced to leave home some months after the revolution broke out, and they took refuge in Jordan after a gruelling journey that lasted several days. Maryam had witnessed violent detention campaigns in the neighbourhood where they were living, her father said. Although they now feel relatively safe in their cramped quarters, Maryam has not been able to sleep properly, either by day or by night, since the family moved to Jordan. During the day she sleeps only one or two hours; she hates the dark, and feels extremely frightened as soon as night falls. She says few words, in a voice that is quiet, warm and sad. On being questioned, Maryam and her mother explain that horrible nightmares have been plaguing her for months. As soon as she nods off, a terrifying giant with blue eyes appears and tries to strangle her. The thing she now fears most is going to sleep.

Khaled, 9, is a handsome boy from the Khaldiye district near Homs. Apart from being handsome and quiet, Khaled has another distinctive feature that is evident on his innocent face: Down’s syndrome. He is one of millions of children across the world who, because of a random genetic mutation, are different from other children. Khaled liked nothing better than the exciting time he spent watching demonstrations day and night in Khaldiye, one of the most active districts in Homs at the beginning of the revolution. He memorised all the songs and chants and hummed them at home with great glee. A while later everything completely changed: the neighbour-

hood came under daily attack and bombardment by militias and the Syrian security forces. His mother had to find a quick way out without Khaled’s father, who had disappeared under mysterious circumstances. It was an arduous journey with several frightening incidents at night, with gunfire audible in the distance. A few months ago the family settled in a village near Tripoli in Lebanon, and Khaled now lives in a small, dark house with five other Syrian families and a large number of children. Although the area is relatively quiet, Khaled shows signs of severe unhappiness. Not only that: he is also no longer able to talk, he has trouble with bladder control and he is always looking for his missing father.

**THE CHILDREN OF GOVERNMENT OPPONENTS: VICTIMS OF A SPECIAL KIND**

An announcement on one of the government’s television channels in early August last year said that the channel would soon broadcast an interview with a ‘princess’ of the opposition Nusra Front who had been detained while engaged in the much publicised activity known as ‘marriage jihadism’. When the interview was broadcast it turned out that this ‘princess’ was in fact a thirteen-year-old girl who looked very frightened and apprehensive. She started talking, nervously and with long pauses, about the sexual services she had provided to the mujahideen opposed to the Syrian government. She looked exhausted and robotic as she forced the words out of her mouth. This unfortunate girl was in fact, according to reports by activists, the daughter of a man accused of commanding a battalion of the opposition Free Syrian Army in the east of the country. Her fate, and even whether she remains alive, is still unknown.

These are various vignettes of the suffering inflicted on children in Syria since the beginning of the conflict. I have not only read about them in reports by activists in the field, by the Syrian human rights organisations that have sprung up, or by well-known international organisations. I have seen most of them at close quarters on the trips I have made from time to time over the past three years, either to parts of Syria that are outside government control or to areas in neighbouring countries where there are large concentrations of Syrian refugees. Although we need the reports for the sake of better coverage and greater awareness about the psychological and social conditions of millions of Syrian children, they serve only to put numbers to the suffering of these young people and their families. They overlook the differences between them, and ignore the experiences that are particular to each individual case and distinguish that case from other cases. Direct contact with the children in their traumatic surroundings provides us with a better opportunity to understand their circumstances more profoundly and in a way that goes beyond the mere recitation of statistics and the vague generalities of the official reports.
MAJOR PSYCHOLOGICAL CHANGES

Many of the families I met spoke about major psychological changes in their children as a consequence of the accumulation of all the bad experiences they had been through. Although the cases observed differed from child to child there was a consensus that a number of symptoms had appeared, though these too differed in their nature and severity depending on the age and gender of the child. It is possible to say that the ways in which the children suffer psychologically can be divided into three main types. The first relates to symptoms connected to states of extreme fear and general anxiety. The children are constantly afraid of people, things, animals and places and are always on the lookout for danger. The signs of fear find fertile ground at night and during sleep, which often brings frightening and alarming thoughts that clearly prevent regular sleep. The second aspect relates to extreme mood swings and emotional instability, with obvious periods of sadness and mourning.

Most of the children I have met showed signs of general psychological breakdown and loss of vitality, while others, whether they are in areas outside government control or in refugee camps, had symptoms such as violent changes in behaviour that took the form of various kinds of angry and emotional outbursts. The third aspect is more related to major and obvious retardation in a wide range of cognitive skills and behaviour that the child learns over time. Many of the children, especially the young ones, show obvious retardation in their ability to express themselves linguistically. They also have big problems with bladder and bowel control, commonly reflected in bed-wetting.

THE ABSENCE OF FATHERS AND OF SCHOOLING

Especially in the Arab and Islamic cultural environment, children do not live as isolated individuals but as a basic component in an overall communal context that starts with the family, then the extended family, then school and society as a whole. Systematic displacement and military operations have forced millions of Syrians to leave their homes, leading to family disintegration, aggravated by very poor economic conditions. The most striking feature of this is the phenomenon of ‘fatherless children’, brought about by the fact that hundreds of thousands of heads of households have gone missing involuntarily, either because they have been killed or detained, or because they have disappeared or joined the ranks of the groups that are fighting. The absence of fathers has a number of negative consequences – children lose the sense that they have a secure provider, who not only provides real and theoretical protection but also acts as a social role model, which is very important for the sound development of children and adolescents.

The absence of fathers threatens to produce not only social and family crises but also severe psychological traumas among children. The phenomenon is aggravated by the absence of school, a social regulator that organises the child’s daily life and encourages the child’s intellectual, emotional and behavioural development. War, shelling, fighting, and the fact that government forces have targeted schools in areas outside their control have forced thousands of children to miss school. Many of the people I have met have said that what hurts them most is the total or partial absence of regular schooling, because their children face a void and don’t know what to do with their time when, for multiple reasons, there are no opportunities for purposeful activity. Conditions in the refugee camps are no better, though there are signs of a slight improvement recently because in some places where there are Syrian refugees in Turkey and Jordan some children have been allowed to go to school or have some form of education, depending on circumstances, but the proportion of lucky children is still very small compared with the number of those who remain without education.

CHILDREN WHO HAVE GROWN UP BEFORE THEIR TIME

The violence and the war have had a devastating effect on the daily lives of a large number of children, as well as on their intellectual and emotional lives. The families generally say their children have grown up before their time and have started to routinely use words that reflect the detailed reality of war. Their drawings are full of tanks, planes, soldiers, shooting, wounded people, blood and all kinds of weapons. Their daily games are re-enactments of the horrors they have been through and the destruction and killing they have seen. All this points to major retardation in their attention and memory functions, as well as conscious and unconscious focussing on specific aspects of unpleasant psychological experiences. Even worse are reports that some Syrian children and adolescents have actually had to take part in the ‘adult war’, either by being forcibly conscripted or by being forced to provide various services to the warring parties. This applies equally to some of the measures the government has taken in the schools that are under its control, and to some of the jihadist organisations such as IS and the Nusra Front.

It’s impossible to predict the likely consequences of the harrowing experiences that this generation of young people in Syria has gone through. The conditions of war, violence, displacement, exile, sieges and shortages of food and healthcare still continue. Harmful social phenomena such as poverty, child employment and early marriage have started to seep into the broken and fragmented communities in which these children live. By analogy with other societies, for example in Vietnam, Bosnia, Afghanistan and Palestine, we can anticipate the consequences of this violence with some anxiety.
and trepidation. The psychological and medico-psychological record related to psychological trauma after wars and armed conflicts, as well as the great increase in our knowledge about the workings of the brain and the nervous system under conditions of hardship and psychological pressure and the effects these have on various aspects of growth, show without any room for doubt that the psychological health of a whole generation of children is clearly endangered.

If we take a closer look, we have good reason to be worried that after experiencing so much violence this generation might, to some unknown extent, carry the seeds for a repetition of the violence in a vicious and possibly endless cycle if matters continue as they are today without any signs of hope appearing on the horizon, and in the absence of any basic services that might help children and their families through these difficult times, as well as rehabilitating this generation and the local communities around them, both physically and psychologically.

In this globalised world, where information is equally accessible to anyone anywhere, there is a new need for decisive international intervention: both to stop the situation deteriorating in Syria, a country with a long history of civilisation, by forcing the regime of the dictator Bashar al-Assad - which is the source of the disaster - to give up power; and to help Syrians and their genuine representatives to decide their own future and the future of their children, in isolation from a culture of terrorism, authoritarianism and despotism. This is more an international responsibility than a Syrian responsibility, if we want to create a world in which children do not die as a result of hunger, violence or deprivation, while politicians look on apathetically. Let’s do something to save the children of Syria - today rather than tomorrow.

JAMIL KHALIL SOBEH works in Aachen, Germany, as a psychologist for children.

Translated by Jonathan Wright · Copyright: Goethe-Institut e. V., Fikrun wa Fann, November 2014

UNICEF’s latest reports on the status of children in Syria
http://www.unicef.org/media/media_74238.html
en, de

Other UNICEF reports on the subject
http://www.unicef.org/arabic/infobycountry/syria_38412.html
ar

A study on the effects of war on children in Palestine
http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736%2802%2908709-3/fulltext
en, de

A study on the effects of war on children in Bosnia
http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/100/5/873.short
en, de

Child Trauma Academy
http://childtrauma.org/cta-library/brain-dev-neuroscience/
en, de

Nour Kelze Photography
www.youtube.com/watch?v=VP8sb4Jb9ts
en, ar, de, fa
Shhh! Girls Don’t Scream is the name of a film by the (female) director Pouran Derakhshandeh, which was shown in Iranian cinemas in 2013 and which touched many people very deeply. Despite all criticism, one important point that must be taken into account: the film brought the subject of the sexual abuse of children right into the heart of society.

THE END OF A TABOO
IRANIAN DISCUSSION OF CHILD ABUSE

BY PARISA TONEKABONI

Shhh! Girls Don’t Scream tells the story of a young woman called Shirin, who kills the caretaker of her building on her wedding day. At first the police assume that the caretaker was trying to blackmail the young woman, but finally Shirin talks about her childhood and about the fact that she experienced sexual abuse as a young child. For years she had borne the burden of this pain alone, and had not found anyone she could have shared her secret with. When she realised that the caretaker intended to abuse a small girl, she lost control and killed him.

Shhh! Girls Don’t Scream won a handful of Iranian and international prizes, but it was also heavily criticised. On the one hand, supporters of the Iranian state were of the opinion that the film presented a dismal portrait of Iranian society and the justice system, while on the other hand it was criticised by women’s rights activists. They said that the film accused working mothers of neglecting their children, thereby indirectly suggesting that the mothers were partially responsible for the sexual abuse of their children. Children’s rights activists were also dissatisfied that the film did not address the topic of sexual violence within the family.

Despite all the criticism, one important point that must be taken into account: the film Shhh! Girls Don’t Scream brought the subject of the sexual abuse of children right into the heart of society. Something that not long ago seemed utterly impossible suddenly became reality. Ordinary people on the street were discussing the topic, not just psychologists or lawyers. The film managed to demonstrate very clearly why the sexual abuse of children sometimes went undiscovered for many years, with the perpetrator never being brought to justice. Traditional views and the fear of losing ‘respect and their good reputation’ compel many victims and their families to keep silent.

SEXUAL ABUSE OF CHILDREN AND THE CONSEQUENCES

Sexual abuse of children means sexual actions perpetrated by adults on or in front of children. The perpetrator uses his position of power as an adult in order to force the child to take part in sexual activities that excite and satisfy him. The sexual abuse of children does not necessarily mean rape; it

Duwa’a, aged two, and Shahd, five. On 13th April 2013 a rocket hit the fourth floor of the house where they were living. Hassan, their father, was on the third floor when the rocket hit the balcony, penetrated through three walls and severely injured his daughters in the bathroom where they were playing. Shahd spent six weeks in a clinic; Duwa’a was there for three months. Amman, Jordan, 2014. Photo: Kai Wiedenhöfer © Goethe-Institut
can also refer to kissing and touching the child, as well as forcing the child to watch films and look at photographs with pornographic content, or using the child to produce such content.

In the majority of cases the perpetrators are not strangers to the child. They are part of the family, or the parent’s circle of friends, or work in the child’s school. In other words, the perpetrators are mostly in a position of trust, with a responsibility to support and take care of the child. They use this position to get closer to him or her.

Sexual abuse causes serious physical and psychic damage to the child and has long-term consequences. Sexually abused children are confronted with a variety of feelings such as guilt, shame, worthlessness, fear, anger and loneliness. In many cases children are unable to speak about their experience. There are various reasons for their silence, including the fear that no one would believe them. Furthermore, children living in societies with traditional cultures learn very early on that they are not allowed to talk about certain areas of their body. Taboos like these result in the child being unable to talk about their experience freely, without fear of being accused themselves.

Children who have been sexually abused struggle with the consequences for years afterwards. Studies conducted by psychologists have shown that the psychic damage can have serious and long-term consequences if it goes unnoticed and untreated. These children may later become perpetrators themselves. Furthermore, field research in Iran has shown that almost a quarter of the prostitutes in Iran were sexually abused as children.

Psychologists and children's rights activists place the emphasis on two issues where sexual abuse is concerned. First of all, children must be educated about sexuality and boundaries. Improving the child’s knowledge and self-confidence when it comes to protecting their own body as well as practising saying no are the most effective methods of preventing sexual abuse.

The second critical point consists in, on the one hand, recognising the signs that sexual abuse has taken place, and on the other the reaction of the parents to the abuse. Sudden changes in a child’s behaviour must be taken seriously. Withdrawing into themselves, lack of concentration, wetting the bed, and fear of physical contact can be some of the indications that sexual abuse has taken place. If a child suddenly starts to avoid a particular person with whom they previously had a good and close relationship, the reason for this should be examined more closely. Parents should create an atmosphere of trust and give the child the opportunity to talk about what has happened without fear of reproach. Early recognition of the signs of sexual abuse can prevent it from continuing, thus also pre-empting more serious damage.

As many Iranian parents don’t know how or at what age they can talk to their children about sexuality, seeking advice from a psychologist or family counsellor can be great help for both the child and the parents, either to discuss prevention, or when sexual abuse has actually taken place. All the steps for preventing the sexual abuse of children depend on breaking the taboo and speaking about the subject within society.

**DISCUSSION IN THE MEDIA AND THE REACTIONS OF THOSE RESPONSIBLE**

It is notable that Persian-language media have recently begun to address the topic of the sexual abuse of children. Not just Persian-language media abroad, such as Deutsche Welle, BBC Persian and Voice of America, which have no need to fear censorship and constraint by the Iranian government: domestic news agencies and newspapers are also dealing with the subject.

Another thing that is noticeable when glancing through news items and articles in the media about the sexual abuse of children is reports about the rape of boys. In the past, if sexual abuse of children was mentioned, the majority of people tended to think of girls. Some experts believe that it is more difficult in Iranian society, for religious and cultural reasons, to talk about sexual violence against boys. It seems that this taboo has also been overcome.

In recent months, one case in particular has attracted a lot of attention: that of a headmaster in a boys’ elementary school in Tehran, who in May this year was accused of sexually abusing a boy, and arrested. The boy’s parents had noticed that their son’s behaviour had changed. They had a conversation with him, discovered that he had been sexually abused, and reported the matter to the police. Some time later the families of other boys also brought charges against the headmaster. So far, forensic medical examinations have confirmed that six boys were raped. The judge has postponed the trial because the number of charges keeps increasing and forensics have not yet processed all the cases.

The Iranian press has been following the case over the past few months, and has also referred to criticism from children’s rights activists directed at those in authority. According to the Iranian newspaper Shahrvarand, some of the pupils had seen the headmaster sexually abusing one of their classmates. However, as they didn't understand what the headmaster was doing, they thought he was disciplining the boy. If these children had had the necessary knowledge and had understood that what they had seen was not an ordinary occurrence, it’s possible that fewer children would have been abused.

Many children’s rights activists have been calling for sex education in Iranian schools for years now. They see education and knowledge as the first step in the fight against the sex-
ual abuse of children. Although experts emphasise its importance, it is extremely difficult to incorporate this content into the curriculum in Iranian schools. The Cultural Deputy of the Iranian Ministry of Education, Hamidreza Kafash, was the first official to speak to the media about the case of the school headmaster. In an interview with Shahrvarz he described sex education as a duty of the family, saying: ‘In Iran we can’t publish topics related to sexuality in books, or teach them directly to pupils. We have to think of some way to educate the pupils’ families.’ Without naming specific people or institutions who reject sex education in schools, he said that the problem lay more with the ‘social realm’ in Iran, not with the Ministry of Education.

To date, the Ministry of Education has seemed unhappy about the news stories that have been published about the sexual abuse of schoolchildren. The families of some of these pupils were told not to discuss it with the media. Hamidreza Kafash justified this with the need to preserve ‘national honour’, and said that, as an Iranian, he didn’t like it that when two such incidents occur in Tehran there are reports about it in the foreign media.

No precise statistics about the sexual abuse of children are published in Iran. These cases are registered under the general term ‘child abuse’, along with other cases such as the corporal punishment of children. However, one can certainly say, with reference to reports in the media and comments from children’s rights activists in recent years, that such occurrences constitute far more than ‘two incidents’.

The reactions of the responsible officials in the current case, their silence, and the attempts to play down the subject give the impression that the problem of the sexual abuse of children is not taken seriously in official institutions – or even that attempts are being made to hush it up.

**‘RECIPROCAL INCLINATION’, AND ANGER IN SOCIETY**

The secretary of Iran’s National Body on the Convention on the Rights of the Child (NBCRC), Mozafar Alvandi, was one of the few people in authority to comment publicly on the case of the sexual abuse of schoolchildren by their headmaster, and caused a stir by doing so. In early August this year, he told the news agency ILNA: ‘I believe that not all the cases resulted from constraint, and that in some cases there was a reciprocal inclination.’ This comment provoked a flood of reactions by Iranian users of social networks, astonishing and angering many Iranians. Astonishment because these words were being spoken in a country in which homosexuality is regarded as a serious crime, and anger, because elementary schoolchildren were being blamed.

Comments like these not only incriminate the pupils who were raped and their families: they may also prevent families who have had similar experiences from talking about sexual abuse and prosecuting such cases. Psychologists and lawyers also agree that, even if in particular circumstances and for specific reasons sexual inclinations continue to develop normally in childhood, one cannot speak of a child’s ‘consent’ with regard to sexual contact with adults, because the child lacks understanding of the significance and consequences of a sexual relationship. Therefore such relationships are also considered to be sexual abuse and the adult is still answerable for the consequences.

It is difficult to find a positive aspect to the controversial case of the school headmaster, but the new awareness of this subject in society and the media, and the families’ courage in not concealing the sexual abuse of their children, represent a glimmer of hope. There is clearly a growing sensitisation of Iranian society to the subject of the sexual abuse of children. It seems that at least a part of society wants to address this problem and find a solution. Nonetheless, there is a considerable gulf between the attitude of official institutions and that of non-governmental organisations about how to deal with the sexual abuse of children.

**NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS AND SECRET SERVICES**

In Iran, efforts to prevent sexual abuse of children and to help children who have been abused are primarily made by non-governmental organisations, social workers, and children’s rights activists. Although the Iranian government has set up a number of facilities since 1999 to address children’s problems, and has acknowledged that these problems exist, it has not yet been able to establish a safe place of trust for abused children. Some reports, for example, have described children running away from welfare homes because the abuse has continued there.

The majority of non-governmental organisations that work independently concentrate on children from vulnerable social classes, such as child workers. The main problem organisations like these face is finding their budget through personal donations. Their work is made more difficult by the scepticism displayed towards them by the Iranian security services. For this reason, non-governmental organisations reject financial aid from foreign sources. Previous experiences have shown that accepting foreign aid could provide the security forces with an excuse to accuse non-governmental organisations of counter-revolutionary activities and ‘ties to foreign states’. The same is true of interviews with the media outside Iran, addressing the topic of social problems, and criticising the work done by the government, all of which could be interpreted as ‘propaganda against the state’ and incur legal consequences. In recent years a number of children’s rights activists have been arrested and given custodial sentences.

The official institutions have always been sensitive where social activities by non-governmental organisations are con-
cerned: because, on the one hand, addressing social problems also entails criticism of the government and of certain laws, while on the other government agencies are worried that their position in society is being weakened, and are afraid of losing control over the social sector. This is also why obtaining permission to set up and run a non-government organisation is a long and difficult process.

**SEXUAL ABUSE AND THE LAW**

There is a fundamental difference between the view of children’s rights activists and Iranian law with regard to the sexual abuse of children. In Iran, the law allows girls to get married at thirteen and boys at fifteen. The marriage of younger children is also allowed, if the father applies to a court for permission and a judge agrees to grant it. Children’s rights activists believe that laws like these contravene the children’s rights and constitute a licence for sexual abuse, as a child cannot make a free or conscious decision to marry. For the Iranian state, however, these laws are consistent with Islamic principles, and criticism of them is not accepted.

According to official statistics, in the first nine months of last year, 29,000 girls between the ages of ten and fourteen and 1,500 girls under ten were married. Since some provinces do not make a note of the ages of those getting married, and traditional marriage ceremonies without registration are also common in many parts of Iran, this statistic is only a fraction of the real figure. The true number of children forced into marriage every year is far higher.

Although for some years now the age at which people get married has been increasing in the middle and upper classes of Iranian society, for families with very little income and a large number of children, marrying off their daughters is still a way of relieving the burden on the family. Social injustice and the lack of a law that sets a minimum age for the marriage ceremony in accordance with modern norms, international law and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child have essentially provided an official and legal framework for sexual abuse.

Changing these laws in Iran may well take many years, but this only reaffirms the importance of efforts by children’s rights activists to ensure that society is sensitised not only to sexual abuse, but also to the problem of child marriage.

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*Translated by Charlotte Collins - Copyright: Goethe-Institut e. V., Fikrun wa Fann, November 2014*
While politicians (in Germany at least) try to play down the subject of Islam, because all parties are equally divided over the question, the media – as illustrated by the case of Thilo Sarrazin – have put the issue right at the top of the agenda, creating the impression that anyone with the slightest interest in the weal and woes of the German nation – nay, even of the European continent and the entire Western world – should adopt a stance on Islam. It is very hard to decide whether the emotionalisation of the subject really does reflect the needs of the population, or whether it is the media that have ignited this need.

The fact is, however, that most Germans have relatively little contact with Muslims, with the exception, perhaps, of the occasional purchase at the proverbial Turkish greengrocer’s, or a holiday on the beaches of the predominantly Islamic southern shores of the Mediterranean: in other words, experiences that will very rarely result in a blanket negative opinion of Islam. Because of this rudimentary contact with Islam and with Muslims, it seems reasonable to assume that there is much of the imagined, a great deal of projection in people’s assessments.

Yet Islam is indisputably in the top three of the most pressing issues at international level, alongside climate change and the financial crisis. This triad of problems is not coincidental; rather, it is the almost classical trinity of nature, economy, and culture. In all three areas, processes of change are viewed as potentially apocalyptic, as life-threatening. We are told that urgent action is needed in all three areas. Nevertheless, we know that in most areas nothing, or at least very little, is actually being done. Only the fight against Islam seems to be making promising progress, and is in any case being conducted – at least in Iraq and Afghanistan – with such

**ISLAM AS A PROJECTION SCREEN FOR OUR ATTITUDES AND FEELINGS**

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL BACKGROUND TO ISLAMOPHOBIA

**BY STEFAN WEIDNER**
The situation seems all the more frustrating because the reasons for a feeling of unease about Islam are certainly not only psychological but also objective, and can quite easily be listed: the threat posed by terrorism, migration that is difficult to control, the political instability in some Islamic countries, our dependence on oil from the Middle East, and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, which of course the West helped to cause. But the problems are not restricted to the political, they are of a cultural nature too: the virtually indisputable theological decline of Islam, which a handful of outstanding reformist thinkers are not managing to stop, and the identity crisis being experienced by many Muslims, which often leads to a dogmatic hardening if not to religious fanaticism.

**OBJECTIVE PROBLEMS CONCERNING ISLAM**

The situation seems all the more frustrating because the reasons for a feeling of unease about Islam are certainly not only psychological but also objective, and can quite easily be listed: the threat posed by terrorism, migration that is difficult to control, the political instability in some Islamic countries, our dependence on oil from the Middle East, and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, which of course the West helped to cause. But the problems are not restricted to the political, they are of a cultural nature too: the virtually indisputable theological decline of Islam, which a handful of outstanding reformist thinkers are not managing to stop, and the identity crisis being experienced by many Muslims, which often leads to a dogmatic hardening if not to religious fanaticism.

**THE MYTHS PEDDLED BY CRITICS OF ISLAM**

All of these problems exist. They are, however, all extremely different in nature, are not necessarily related, and cannot simply be put down to Islam as such. Rather than religion being responsible for the crisis, it is much more probable that the political and economic situation in the Islamic world is responsible for the decline – including the decline of religious life. And there we have the most striking difference between the so-called critics of Islam and their opponents: for the critics of Islam, all problems relating to Islam and Muslims can be traced back to the religion founded by Mohammed on the Arabian Peninsula between the years 610 and 632 and the poor foundation on which this religion is built.

However, it is safe to assume that this opinion is born of the naive belief that there is such a thing as one uniform Islam. No one needs to have read Islamic Studies at university to understand this point. The fact is that, as a religion, Islam is no less varied than Christianity: an American evangelical has as little in common with the average German Catholic as a Saudi Arabian Wahhabi has to do with a Moroccan Sufi Muslim or the beliefs of a Shia Muslim. Even within the boundaries of a single country, these differences are often insurmountable. Take Turkey, for example, with its Kemalists, Alevis, Kurds, Sunnis... They are all Muslims, but their world-views are so drastically different that the threat of conflict is ever-present.

Anyone who seeks to deny that such differences exist among Muslims is ascribing magical powers to Islam: it would be the only world religion to have remained entirely unchanged, not only over a massive geographical area and despite contact with a wide range of other faiths, but also over a period spanning 1,400 years. The self-identity of Islam, of which both critics of Islam and Islamic fundamentalists speak, is, quite simply, a myth. The latter, in turn, believe that there is only one true Islam, which only has to be rediscovered and propagated in order to eliminate all evil from the Islamic world. Thinking such as this reduces the complex reality of the Islamic world to a simple formula, and enables people to project all possible problems – regardless of their root cause – onto Islam and to trace them back to it. Naturally, this is what makes such thinking so attractive, and ostensibly so convincing.

**THE NEED TO TAKE A MUCH CLOSER LOOK**

Unfortunately, such generalisations are not helpful. The approach required to deal with Islamic terrorism is entirely different to that of dealing with evolving ghettos in districts with large migrant populations, and the lack of integration that goes with it. However, neither of these problematic issues have their roots in the Islamic religion as such. If they did, all Muslims would be potential terrorists and incapable of integration, which is patently not the case. The fact is that Islamic terrorism – just like any other terrorism – is a primarily political problem, while a lack of willingness to integrate is a social problem. The counterexamples illustrate this point clearly: an Iranian doctor or a left-wing Turkish intellectual will integrate easily, although they are no less Muslim than the ghetto kids in Berlin-Neukölln whose parents hail from Palestinian refugee camps or farming villages in Anatolia. The same can be said of terrorism. The terrorists of 9/11 were outwardly better integrated than most Muslims living in the problem areas of our cities: they went to university, they spoke both German and English, were educated, and came from good homes. They had nothing in common with Lebanese drug dealers. Moreover, the fact that Islamic terrorism happens mainly in the Islamic world itself – currently above all in Iraq and Pakistan, in the 1990s mainly in Algeria – and that the vast majority of victims are Muslim points to the fact that Islamic terrorism is about political disputes within Islam and not about the hostility of an allegedly united Islam against all infidels, as is often suggested.

**THE MIRROR EFFECT**

Given this abundance of problems, which are at least superficially associated with Islam, it comes as no surprise that Islam provides an easy surface onto which to project attitudes and feelings. However, it is more likely that we will find the real motives for such projections in ourselves than in Islam. This is not surprising. Even if the public debate ostensibly focuses on a foreign culture, the intensity of the debates can only be understood if we realise that they are first and foremost about ourselves and the way we see ourselves.

To this end, we need a mirror. Without such a mirror, we cannot see ourselves as a whole (in the cultural sense), just as we cannot see our entire bodies without a full-length mir-
ror. There have always been mirrors that allow us to find ourselves culturally. In the case of Germany, these mirrors have, down through history, come in the form of Germany’s arch-enemies, France and England, but also the Jews and the Communists. Naturally, all of these mirrors also reflect part of our own culture. This is problematic. If, for example, we seek to define ourselves by distinguishing ourselves from Judaism, we have to block out the fact that Judaism has always been a part of ‘us’ in the form of the Old Testament and the Jewish contributions to German culture. Islam, on the other hand, is seen as something completely different or is portrayed – at least by critics of Islam – as being completely different, as being diametrically opposed to the West. However, by distinguishing ourselves from this negative image of Islam that has been constructed in this way, our own culture appears in an opposite, positive light, an image with which it is all the more easy for us to identify because our otherwise obvious problems are temporarily blotted out from this mirror image.

THE CONTROVERSIAL THEORIES OF THILO SARRAZIN

Using the well-known example of Thilo Sarrazin’s book Deutschland schafft sich ab (Germany Is Doing Away with Itself), it is easy to illustrate how projection works and how one set of problems relating to our own self-conception is suddenly transferred to a different subject, namely Islam. Many of the theories Sarrazin advances in his book have nothing to do with Islam. One of the central claims in the book is that in a socially permeable society like German society, which offers many opportunities for advancement to the intelligent and the diligent, the underclass gradually and inevitably becomes made up of those who are more stupid and not willing to work as hard. According to Sarrazin, intelligence is inheritable. This, he claims, coupled with the fact that the lower classes have more children because the social transfer rewards people for having lots of children, means that it is logical that, as time passes, the intelligence, competitiveness, and diligence of the population decreases.

Strangely enough, very little airtime and column inches were devoted to this core theory in Sarrazin’s book. Instead, the focus was directed more at Islam. And so the public debate created the impression that the way we deal with Muslims, i.e. five per cent of the population, determines whether Germany is now ‘doing away with itself’ or not, whereby even Sarrazin himself admits that the established problems (lack of integration, high birth rate, and dependence on social security systems – but not lower intelligence!) only apply to a small part of this five per cent.

A CASE OF REPRESSION

Those who hadn’t read the book were left thinking that it was a contribution to the debate about Islam, even though it was in fact questioning the existing welfare state model. It is an ideal-typical case of repression, which notably affects both those who defend and those who oppose Sarrazin: after all, his critics attack him primarily for his attitude to Islam, not for his broader theories on the welfare state. These theories are explosive enough to bring our self-conception and indeed our entire way of life crashing down around our ears. If the book is reduced to the discussion about Islam, its impact is (in accordance with the rules of the Law of the Mirror outlined above) exactly the opposite: by distinguishing ourselves from Islam and the Muslim immigrants, we confirm our image of ourselves. The dangers rooted in our own self-image, on the other hand, are reduced to problems with Islam and with Muslims. The real hot potato in Sarrazin’s book, namely his radical call to abolish welfare benefits and Hartz IV unemployment benefit for the long-term unemployed, is not addressed.

In this respect, the situation is similar to that of climate change and the financial crisis. Because neither seem to be solvable in the short term, the debate shifts instead to an ostensibly more tangible, more easily solvable problem, namely the way we deal with Islam and Muslims. The fears and frustrations, which are fed by a number of sources, then culminate in a typical knee-jerk, scapegoat reaction to a minority in society. Some observers, such as the anti-Semitism researcher Wolfgang Benz speak in this context of a ‘new racism’. This is a very real danger. There is, however, an even greater danger.

THE DANGERS OF PROJECTION

Even if – or indeed most particularly if – one does not like Islam and the Muslims for whatever reason, one should take care not to project onto a culture or a group of people problems that should be tackled from a completely different angle altogether. Instead of questioning and correcting our vision of the world and our self-image, as would seem to be appropriate in the current situation regarding the economy and the environment, an attempt is being made to confirm our mentality one more time by comparing it to an apparently much worse mentality, namely Islam. But however well the enlightened West might be performing in comparison with the economically and culturally depressed Islamic world, this does not help us to solve our problems.

There is another thing about the excessive focus on Islam that is striking, namely that the tangible – i.e. economic and environmental policy – questions are being pushed aside with the help of a ‘soft’ (i.e. cultural) issue. There are two probable reasons for this.

Firstly, it is easier to talk about culture: you don’t have to know anything about Islam to have an opinion on it; it is enough to consider yourself different, which generally means that you consider yourself better. When it comes to environmental and economic issues, on the other hand, it is clear that every individual is part of the system, a cog in the wheel
(whether he or she wants to be or not), and that without specific expertise, he or she is not really in a position to say anything about it.

Secondly, at the same time, the shift towards the cultural theme is an indication of the return of what has been repressed, namely the sense that unless we make a cultural change, i.e. a change in our values and vision of the world, it will not be possible to psychologically overcome the economic and environmental problems in a reasonable manner, let alone get a grip on them and find appropriate solutions for them. In short, we shift the focus of the debate from the hard to the soft issues, not least because we intuitively know that this is the only thing we can truly change: ourselves.

A CHANGE OF MENTALITY IS WHAT IS NEEDED

In view of this fact, the heated debates about Islam seem to be a kind of rear-guard action or proxy war, whose job in our psychological make-up it is to repress the bitter realisation that no environment and no state can be saved by a frenzy of consumption and the maximisation of profits. This realisation is, incidentally, presented very bluntly in Thilo Sarrazin’s book: the more successful someone is in the traditional sense of career and profit maximisation, the less likely it is, Sarrazin correctly surmises, that he or she will be motivated to have children. However, in order to stop this development in its tracks, Sarrazin does not seek a cultural change and a change in prevailing mentalities. Instead, he seeks to solve the problem using the very tool of profit maximisation, by proposing that every mother under the age of thirty with a university degree be given €50,000, so that having children would be ‘worthwhile’ not only for those living on welfare benefits.

It would make much more sense – and would be much less costly – to seek a cultural change in values that would steer our self-image out of the one-way, dead-end street in which it finds itself, and that would help us to deal with our dwindling resources and be happy nonetheless, not only in a material sense but also in a cultural and psychological sense. But naturally it is much easier to confirm one’s self-image one last time in a dispute about a crisis-ridden Islam.

The truth is, however, that there are lessons to be learned from Islam and from Muslims: namely, precisely the values that we lack right now but which are often kept alive and fostered in the Islamic world. Not least among these is a positive attitude towards children – as even the most fervent critics of Islam will admit is the case!

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*Translated by Aingeal Flanagan · Copyright: Goethe-Institut e. V., Fikrun wa Fann, November 2014*
Alem Grabovac: Could you tell us about the psychotherapeutic care available to people with a Muslim background in Germany?

Meryam Schouler-Ocak: There are far too few psychotherapists providing care for these people. Because of the cultural, linguistic, and perhaps even religious differences involved, it can take a person years to find a suitable psychotherapist. There is a massive shortage of care.

How many Arab or Turkish psychotherapists are there in Germany?

I only have figures for Berlin, but these in themselves are very revealing. There are between ten and twelve Turkish-speaking doctors in the field of psychiatry and psychotherapy in Berlin. Three psychiatrists have their own practices. But there are 180,000 people with a Turkish migrant background living in this city. Just calculate the ratio! There is a massive deficit in this area. Now look at this ratio from a gender perspective: for a women with a (Muslim) migrant background who would like to see a female therapist, the likelihood of her being able to find a female psychotherapist is smaller still.

Are Muslims allowed to see a non-Muslim therapist?

It depends on the interpretation, on the way someone interprets religion. In general, however, there is nothing to say that they are not allowed to. Strict Muslim women would go to neither a German psychiatrist nor a psychiatrist with a migrant background.

Who helps these women?

Friends, social environment, family and religion all play an important role in this respect. Many people find support,
identity, and protection in religion; perhaps it even gives meaning to their lives. These people will go to a hodja, an Islamic religious scholar.

Can traditional healing methods be integrated into psychiatric treatment?

I always ask my patients whether they are undergoing any traditional forms of treatment. If someone reads the Koran and finds that helpful: well, then that’s great. If someone has rituals, that’s absolutely fine with me. That said, it must not be allowed to cross a certain line. As soon as I notice that traditional healers are interfering in the therapy or choice of medication, that’s where I draw the line.

Are psychological illnesses a taboo issue for people with a Muslim migrant background?

Certainly more so than they are for native Germans. An important factor here is the social milieu from which they come. It certainly makes a difference whether someone comes from a village in Anatolia where little importance is attached to education or from a Kemalist family in an urban environment where education is considered important. In Germany, people of Turkish origin are overrepresented in two milieus in particular. The first is the religiously-rooted milieu with archaic traditions: conservative, religious, strict and rigid ideals where the preservation of cultural identity, family honour, religious obligations, strict morals and iron discipline dominate. The second is the hedonistic, sub-cultural milieu, which describes the non-conformist second generation, whose identity and prospects are deficient. They want to have fun and refuse to conform to the expectations of the majority society. What is important here are values, participation, approval, money, success, consumption values, fun and action, leisure, ‘partying’, community/belonging to peer groups, subcultures. Unlike those who belong to the patriarchal-religious milieu, the people in this milieu are more open to the findings of modern psychotherapy.

How do people with a Turkish or Arab migrant background describe their mental illnesses?

Very frequently through physical complaints. Back pain, headaches, migraines, etc. occur more frequently among people with a migrant background than they do among native Germans. I think that the reason for this is that there is more tolerance of physical complaints than of mental complaints. It is easier for them to get support and sympathy if they are physically ill than if they say they are about to crack up. People who are physically ill are seen as being in need of protection, while those who are mentally ill - the ‘mental’ - don’t usually get such support. They also use more metaphors and paraphrase things more. For example, there are patients who say ‘I have a chill in my mind’, by which they mean that they are afraid of cracking up. There are also uncontrolled fits of crying and forms of behaviour that are seen as histrionic. All of these things are expressions of suffering. These descriptions and presentations of pain differ from those given by native Germans.

So it is about understanding ciphers or body-related signals.

In the Turkish context, for example, one can say: ‘My lungs are bursting’. That means: ‘I cannot withstand the pressure any more, I cannot breathe, I cannot fit anything else into my chest’.

THE ART OF INTERPRETATION

Can German psychiatrists correctly interpret the mental illnesses of people with a Muslim migrant background?

Do cultural differences not lead to diagnostic and therapeutic errors?

The symptoms, the explanation of the illness, and the expectations regarding the treatment vary greatly from one cultural context to another. Depending on which cultural context I am in, I may not be able to understand the other person at all. Take, for example, the case of a female patient who might tell me that she wears lots of amulets because someone has bewitched her, put the evil eye on her, or cursed her. A Western psychologist, doctor, or psychiatrist might be misled into diagnosing something like a psychosis. Another example is patients who say that they hear the voices of their ancestors. This is immanent to their culture; as a psychiatrist, I have to know this, otherwise I cannot interpret it properly. In this case, a psychiatrist might incorrectly diagnose schizophrenia. In order to avoid such misinterpretations, I should as a psychiatrist hone my intercultural skills. In other words, I have to know what is considered normal, borderline, or pathological in the other culture.

What is transcultural psychiatry?

It used to be the case that people tried to impose Western knowledge on other cultures. We prefer the term intercultural psychiatry, which means ‘between the cultures’. In principle, it is the theory of psychiatry in various cultural contexts.

What distinguishes it from classical psychiatry?

Intercultural psychiatry refers to the interaction between the cultures, for example migration psychiatry. People with a migrant background have other disorders and have to be treated differently because of their cultural context. There are codes, internationally recognised classification systems. However, some disorders that occur in some regions are not contained in these codes. For example, in some regions of South-East Asia there is a disorder whereby men are terri-
fied that their penis will retract into their abdomen and they will die. Seized by panic, they grip their penis so that it cannot disappear. How can this disorder be classified in Western psychiatry? Is it an anxiety disorder? It doesn’t really fit neatly into any one category. The same can be said of a disorder that occurs in South America where a fright is believed to cause the soul to leave the body. Certain rituals are then used in an attempt to bring the soul back into the body. People living in an Oriental context have, for example, a different way of thinking that does not correspond to the Western dichotomy of the body-soul distinction. They believe that illness is holistic.

What consequences does this have for therapy?

Western medicine takes its lead from evidence-based medicine. One has to either verify it or prove that it is wrong. In contrast to this, there is also a medicine that is shaped by cultural influences. Here, entirely different aspects play a role. For example, the expectations regarding treatment can vary hugely. In Western psychiatry and psychotherapy, the aim is to teach people to be self-confident, to assume responsibility for themselves, and to be autonomous. They should be able to manage their lives themselves. This works very well in the individualistic concept that is shaped by Western ideas. However, you can’t do that with someone from the collectivist Oriental region. For example, if you use an individualistic concept such as this to remove a young woman from her family and cultural structures — if, in other words, she loses the bond with her community and family, she could end up with even more problems. It is important to be very careful; this can really backfire.

Do you mean that a German psychiatrist might see Islam as a problem in a case like this?

Yes, they might. You have to integrate the cultural circumstances or values — and that includes religious circumstances and values too — instead of viewing them as problems. In an interview, Margarete Mitscherlich once said: ’I believe that traditional Islam and psychoanalysis are like fire and water. Psychoanalysis, where you call everything into question and question motives, is not possible without enlightenment.’

I subscribe fully to that opinion. With religion, rules are imposed and they cannot be questioned. Nevertheless, these people can be reached. After all, analysis is not the same thing as psychotherapy. In the case of behavioural therapy, for example, there are very clear structures for providing concrete assistance. The basic idea here is that bad behavioural patterns can be learned and unlearned again. The aim is to try and help the patient adopt more appropriate thought and behavioural patterns. Enlightenment is not necessarily essential for these therapeutic measures. However, people with a Muslim background who do not interpret the Koran in a dogmatic manner — and that, incidentally, means most of them — can of course be treated using psychotherapy.

THE LANGUAGE PROBLEM

In psychotherapy or trauma therapy, absolutely everything is linked to language. In cases where the person being treated is not a native speaker of German, how can the treatment processes be guaranteed?

Intercultural therapists have to be able to work with professional interpreters. Interpreting is a skill that has to be learned. There has to be a preliminary meeting with the interpreter to discuss the setting: the fact that the interpreter is bound to observe confidentiality, where the interpreter should sit, how the interpreter should interpret. The interpreter has to be made aware that everything has to be interpreted, nothing should be left out, nothing added, nothing read into what has been said. It is also always necessary to have a follow-up meeting with the interpreter. Could it be that this story is immanent to the culture? You also have to give the interpreter the chance to let go of the emotion, especially if the case is a traumatic one. And – and this is something I consider very important – you always have to work with professional interpreters. No children, relations, neighbours, partners, or friends. You never know what the relationship between the patients and the amateur interpreter is, what power structure, what kind of complex emotional structures exist. And you never know whether the question you have just asked has really been relayed to the person in therapy or whether what he or she has said is ever relayed back to you.

Religion, tradition, and family: on the one hand, they help protect people from psychological illnesses; on the other, they can also trigger them.

We know that religion and family are protective factors. But families can just as easily make someone ill, for example if they feel boxed in. I’m thinking here in particular of young women who have to adhere to specific traditions and values, but who live completely different values outside the family in their peer group and in their circle of friends. Many of them cannot manage this balancing act. Some female patients have told me that they feel like puppets in their families, that they are steered by others, and can never be themselves. That, of course, is problematic.

Do women and men react differently to psychological illnesses?

For men, the stigma is greater. They talk less, wait longer than women before seeking help, and are much less inclined to avail themselves of psychotherapy. Men in environments influenced by the Orient are still the lords and masters. Sex-
There are now 15 million people with a migrant background. The suicide rate in this group is also much higher than it is for men. There are several reasons for this, generally speaking, it is because of escalations in crises caused by the family or cultural context.

**How do men and women differ when it comes to cases where there are several different mental illnesses involved?**

Women with a migrant background, and also those with a Muslim background, are twice as likely to suffer depression. The suicide rate in this group is also much higher than it is for men. There are several reasons for this, generally speaking, it is because of escalations in crises caused by the family or cultural context.

Are migrants more likely to be depressed? And is their depression different to that experienced by others?

Both. They are also more likely to suffer psychosomatic complaints than native Germans are. The problems that can arise in the course of the migration process – for example, the separation of family members, financial difficulties, the children not doing as well as the parents had hoped, the experience of being the subject of discrimination – all of these things are additional burdens to those experienced by native Germans and can promote depression.

Can you give some exact figures on this?

There are none. There are no epidemiological numbers on this for people with a migrant background in Germany. In the German national cohort, 200,000 people are regularly examined for psychological and somatic illnesses over the course of several decades. And what happened? Migrants with language difficulties, who might also have been illiterate, were excluded from the study because it was too expensive to collect this data. Millions are spent on this study, but there is not enough money for people with a migrant background. I think it is scandalous. We are missing a huge opportunity here.

There are now 15 million people with a migrant background in Germany.

This is exactly why, at the Charité, we have made it obligatory for students in the second semester to complete practical training on barrier-free access for migrants and introduced a lecture on migration and psychological health. In other words, every student has to complete this practical training. Our awareness of culture has to be heightened. What kind of culture-specific problems do people with a migrant background face? Where do they face discrimination? How can we increase their access opportunities at third level? In other universities, this option is unfortunately only an elective. That is regrettable.

What, in your opinion, should be done?

Many facilities say that they are in favour of intercultural opening. But they are just paying lip service. The necessary preconditions are just not being met. Staff are not interculturally open; they are not trained. They lack knowledge, willingness, and perhaps even the right attitude. Stigmatisation plays a major role in the health care system. We lack even basic things like information leaflets in a variety of languages. This hostile attitude to people from Turkey or the Arab world, for example, exists in medical circles as well. Some colleagues even admit this quite openly. They don’t really want anything to do with Turks.

**WOMEN IN POSITIONS OF AUTHORITY**

And what is the situation with German patients?

There are patients who refuse point blank to see the woman with the Turkish name. On the other hand, there are also men with Turkish roots who refuse to see me or to be assessed by me because I am a woman. Some men with a Turkish migrant background have even addressed me during therapy as Herr Frau Doctor instead of just Frau Doctor. The woman disappeared behind the person of authority and became Herr Frau Doctor Schouler-Ocak, and then it was all right for them.

How are people with a Muslim background dealt with in practice?

There is still a lot to do. There are no prayer rooms for Muslims. There are Bibles on many wards. Why are there no Korans? Why is there no indication of the direction in which Mecca lies? It is important to ensure that no female carers are present when male patients with a Muslim background are being washed. And what about care for the terminally ill? We should also work with imams. Then there is the problem of the headscarf. I find it very problematic when people see religion or a symbol of oppression in everything. While I myself don’t wear a headscarf, I really do think that we could take a more relaxed attitude to it. There are still some facilities and institutions that do not hire women who wear a headscarf.

When I look out the window of your office, I see a Christian cross. You work in a Catholic institution in co-operation with the Charité university clinic. Do they have Korans here? Are you allowed to leave Korans in the ward?

We have never asked. However, we do inform our patients about pork products in medication, make sure that pork-free meals are available, explain to them that they do not have to observe the fast if they are ill during Ramadan. An intercultural hospital should observe all these things. Returning to medicine for a moment: low doses given to patients with
Turkish roots can lead to considerable side effects. There are genetically-determined factors that influence the breakdown of an active ingredient. Depending on the genetic variants patients have, their metabolism can react slowly or quickly to certain substances. Some medication has to be given in small doses to people from some ethnic groups and in high doses to others. One in three Ethiopians, for example, is a super fast metaboliser.

Does intercultural psychology exist in Turkey? For Syrian refugees, for example.

Although Turkey is a country of immigration, there are no translation services and there is no awareness of the need for intercultural psychiatry. Unfortunately. Not yet.

The Arab Spring and Gezi protests: were they both cases of young people, rising up against their patriarchal über-fathers?

Well, I have my own political opinion on this which I would rather not express in public. I am speaking to you today as a doctor.

Are you a practising Muslim?

I am a Muslim, but I am not a strict practising Muslim; I respect the religious rituals of community and, naturally, the feelings of believers. However, I have no time for fanaticism.

Would you go on a pilgrimage to Mecca?

If I decided that I would be able and willing to follow the rituals associated with it on my return, then I would go. Those who go on a pilgrimage to Mecca accept a life philosophy that they must then adhere to afterwards. At the moment, I’m not sure that I could observe these guidelines: wearing a head-scarf, for example, or many other different things. It’s about developing an internal attitude and then being able to live it.
People with roots in North Africa or the Middle East have been coming to my psychoanalytic practice for many years. Among them are war refugees, migrant workers, and people who have moved to Germany to be with their wives (who either come from the same culture as they do, or may have their roots in Germany). I also see young adults who migrated or fled to Germany as children with their parents, or followed them to Germany once their parents had established some kind of stability in their lives here, as well as young adults who came to Germany to study. These people are able to come to my practice because of an achievement of the German health system, namely that anyone with health insurance, regardless of their income, can access psychotherapy.

THE CHALLENGES FACING IMMIGRANTS

There are many reasons why people leave their native countries, two of the most important being the dream of a better life and the desire to liberate themselves from unbearable circumstances and misery. Immigration deals a blow to one’s sense of self, a blow that makes itself felt over the course of many years. Coping with everyday life in a different language, indeed the very act of speaking a foreign language (many immigrants only take their first steps in the German language when they arrive here), requires a constant, extra mental effort over a long period. Moreover, the hierarchies here, which are less pronounced or different to those in the Maghreb or the Middle East, can be disconcerting.

Migration always raises social questions too. As a rule, a person’s social status remains evident in their country of arrival. Those who belong to the affluent, educated classes have other means of developing a new life-world for themselves than those who hail from rural communities in the Rif Mountains of Morocco or the mountains of eastern Anatolia. That said, in the country of immigration relationships do develop between people from different classes – relationships that would be frowned upon in their home countries. Many adults have to put up with social degradation in their host country because their educational or professional qualifications are not recognised, or because the social relationships that ensured them a good reputation in their native countries are either broken or at least irrelevant here. Cultural differences between the country of origin and the host country influence...
the way migrants find their way into society here. Their arrival is also shaped by fantasies: both the fantasies of those who are arriving about their new place of residence and the fantasies of those who already live there about the new arrivals’ country or region of origin.

THE IMPACTS ON CHILDREN

I would like to turn my attention to what I consider to be a most significant aspect, namely the very specific influence migration has on a child’s development. What influence do emigration and immigration during childhood have on the relationship between children and their parents, on their sense of self, and on how they learn to assess their own strengths? Regardless of the situation, children, who are not asked whether they want to stay or go, are affected by the decision to migrate. This is something that is common to all children who lose their familiar social environment when their families move away. However, there are differences between a move from Frankfurt to Munich and a move from a village in the Rif Mountains to Munich. The parents themselves are disrupted in very different ways by the new everyday life in which they find themselves. This in turn influences the grounding and security they can offer the child, who also has to find their way around a whole new life-world. I treat adults, but what makes these adults different is that at a certain point in their lives – a time when, ideal-typically, children form a provisional understanding of the world on the basis of all that is familiar to them, and when things change only gradually – they experienced an external rupture that had cumulative impacts. These children’s childish faith in the safety of the world has been destroyed while they were still very young. To a certain extent, they have been banished from childhood at an early age; in severe cases, they are traumatised by this change. Boys and girls develop different strategies for dealing with this situation and with their mothers’ and fathers’ uncertainty. In this article, I would like to focus on female development.

Example 1: Early separation from the mother

A married, 29-year-old political scientist came for psychotherapy sessions to address an eating disorder. She told me that she was unsure she had chosen the right profession and ultimately doubted whether her husband still loved her. She asked herself whether she wanted to risk having a child with him and even whether she really wanted to be a mother or whether she was just feeling the pressure from her family, which grew with every passing year.

She was less than a year old when her mother left her with her grandparents. Her parents were both teachers in eastern Turkey. In the mid-1970s, her mother decided to respond to the recruitment drive for female workers in Germany. Her father subsequently followed. When the daughter was a good three years old, her parents sent for her. She told me that during the period of separation her parents recorded messages for her on cassette tapes and sent these to her with letters. She told me a family anecdote. One day, during the period of separation, she drew on the white walls of her grandmother’s house with a pen. When her grandmother asked her what she was doing, she replied that she was writing a letter to her mother. The grandmother sympathised with her granddaughter’s pain at the separation: she burst into tears and didn’t scold the little girl for scribbling on the wall. As soon as the daughter was old enough, her mother promised her that she would pay for whatever her daughter’s first-born child needed in the first three years of its life. During the course of psychotherapy, the patient became pregnant and considered her mother’s offer carefully. Feelings that had remained hidden deep inside for a long time, feelings that she had not understood but that had plagued her for many years, were brought to the surface once again: her anger at her mother, her distress at having been left alone, and her desire for absolute independence. The outcome of this process was that she decided to accept her mother’s offer.

Example 2: The victim of repatriation

A 45-year-old, married, working mother-of-three sought psychotherapeutic help for severe insomnia, a variety of physical complaints for which there was no organic diagnosis, and debilitating depression. When asked about her childhood, she told me that her father, who worked as an industrial labourer in Germany, left his wife and two first-born children (of which she was one) at his mother’s home in a mountain village in eastern Turkey. He eventually agreed to send for his wife and children. The patient was five years old at the time. Some time later, when her grandmother found it too difficult to live alone, the now eight-year-old girl offered to go and live with her grandmother so that her mother could stay with her younger siblings and her father in Germany. Living in straitened circumstances, and under her grandmother’s strict regime, the girl tended sheep and goats and went to the village school. Her parents visited once in five years. At the age of thirteen she lost so much weight that she was sent to a female doctor. The doctor was insistent that the girl’s father should take the child to Germany because her life was in danger.

Reunited with her family, she discovered that she was estranged from her mother, father and siblings. She could no longer speak German. After a period of rebellion, she decided to assume responsibility for her young siblings and her mother. At school, she began to work harder. One of her teachers saw that she was making an effort and arranged for her to switch from a special school to a regular school. After another change of school, she passed the school-leaving exams needed to attend a university of applied science. The pattern of assuming responsibility has continued until this day, undermining both her physical and mental health.
Example 3: A small child on the run

A young woman sought my help just before she was due to complete her studies. When she was eighteen months old, she and her parents fled civil war in a country in western Asia. She was unable to complete her studies for a number of reasons, one of which was the fact that she could not bear the thought of working in a lovely, big office at the company where her father was doing shift work in the basement. Whenever her father described this situation to her in hopeful anticipation, she was filled with searing pain. Once she had gained her diploma and got a job where she was doing work that was commensurate with her qualifications, (it was not, incidentally, a full-time job, but a job that meant she was earning just enough not to have to take on any other work), she began to fantasise about all the things she wanted to buy for her father and mother.

At the same time, her parents seemed to her to be boasting or even lying whenever they spoke of all the land they had owned in their country of origin. Her parents came from an affluent, educated background. The young woman’s self-image fluctuated between that of what she eventually referred to as a ‘ghetto child’ and fantasies about being a princess; after all, her great-grandmother had lived at court. Over the course of a long and intense course of treatment, she increasingly became able to integrate divergent internal images and life plans and to endure the tension in those cases where the divergence was still considerable. She also learned to bear the feelings of guilt with regard to her mother and father when she was at last able to improve her own life reality.

INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL PRESSURE

These examples may give the reader an impression of the feelings, tensions, and actions children have to deal with when their lives are marked by migration: feelings of being deserted, feelings of separation (in some cases even from the mother and father), sacrifices (both in the uplifting and the agonising sense). Parents, for their part, experience feelings of guilt that are sometimes accompanied by efforts of atonement, are sometimes denied, or are obscured by demands. Children instinctively have a keen sense of their parent’s insecurity.

The intertwining of inner psychological and external constellations is all too rarely adequately recognised and understood. The inner orientation to diverging social expectations regarding roles, which harbour enormous potential for inner tension, is also all too rarely understood. Not only do children and young people remain alone: sometimes the inner tension is even intensified by the reactions of their German environment or the immigrants’ environment. Using another example, I would like to illustrate in more detail how this inner tension continues to make itself felt throughout the course of a person’s life.

The scent of a foreign land

A woman in her mid-thirties came to me because of her increasingly depressive moods. She originally hailed from northern Africa. She told me of a failed relationship with a man and her desire to have children. A short time previously, her grandmother, who still lived in the country from which this woman came, had died. She was the last of the grandparents’ generation to pass away. With pride, the patient spoke of her work in a home for children and young people where she, a qualified educator, had a job that was usually reserved for people who had graduated from a university of applied sciences. She was now afraid of jeopardising everything that she had achieved at her place of work as a result of her listlessness and inattentiveness. She told me about past major conflicts with her family, which even led to her running away from home at the age of fifteen. Despite the fact that she often complained (about herself) that she was not good enough (‘can’t do anything right’), it was clear to me that the person sitting opposite me was a strong, bright woman. We got along well with each other, so I did not hesitate to suggest a course of psychoanalysis, which she readily agreed to, despite the amount of time involved.

She is the oldest of six children. Her father was already living and working in Germany at the time of his marriage, doing a succession of simple jobs. Latterly, and right up until he retired, he had a secure job. When the patient was eleven, her mother left her husband’s parents’ home and moved to Germany to join her husband, taking her daughter and her two younger sons with her. Three more children were born in Germany.

The image that the analysand (i.e. the patient undergoing psychoanalysis) painted of her life-world was clearly polarised:

- She associated the North African world with characteristics such as backwardness, self-interest, hypocrisy, slander, and social control;
- By contrast, she saw the German world as open, interesting, and desirable. When speaking, she used German expressions and proverbs with relish. She had enjoyed the sound of the language ever since, as a child, she heard her cousins speaking to each other in German during their holidays in the country of her birth.

The fact that many of her own personal experiences did not correspond to this black-and-white image did nothing to shatter it. Whenever she was overcome by the feeling that she was not good enough, her mood would become depressed. This resulted in her making an even greater effort at work and not daring to refuse to meet exaggerated demands. It soon became evident that the greatest demands did not come from her colleagues, but from inside herself. In order to question this ingrained mechanism, which had become a major shackle, it was absolutely essential that she become aware of it. It was equally essential that she access the good memories that she
had buried deep inside. Over the course of time, a more vivid image of her life plans emerged, as too did the ability to pinpoint more precisely the various conflicts for which no sustainable solution had been found and that had fallen prey to repression or the split into a black-and-white picture.

Scene 1: The princess and the patriarch

Memories of her early childhood resurfaced, revealing a lively, wild girl who had held a special place in her paternal grandfather’s heart. From early in the morning she would be at his side, playing nearby while he went about his work in the fields. She was allowed to sit on his knee, and he regularly brought her sweets from the weekly market. She realised from an early age that she could get away with quite a lot because she knew without a doubt that her grandfather would take her side in any confrontation with her mother. Everyone was afraid of her grandfather, who had been a stern disciplinarian in raising his sons and daughters: only his little granddaughter felt loved and protected by the patriarch. Bolstered by this sense of certainty, she felt emboldened to brush off her father’s attentions on his visits home and ignore the gifts he brought her. Instead of missing him, he became in her imagination a man who disrupted the peace in her grandfather’s house. She recalled one incident when she was punished for her unruliness and her rejection of him: her father brought her to a tree in the garden and told her she would have to sit underneath it until he allowed her to come back into the house.

Scene 2: Absent fathers and the scent of a foreign land

Nevertheless, she could not banish from her experience a painful feeling about her father, who had always remained a stranger. Her demonstrative lack of interest in her father was also an attempt to unfeel the pain of the notion that she was not important enough to him for him to stay with her. She interpreted his long absence, which was impossible for a small child to understand, and the time he spent away from the house during his holidays as a sign of his lack of interest in her. She was six years old before she grasped for the first time that other fathers were absent too (at least one son in every family in the village was in Europe). She understood that there were different kinds of foreign countries, countries that she could identify by the scent of the things people brought with them. ‘Germany smelled of gummy bears; Belgium smelled sweet, like waffles.’

She also discovered something else around this time. One day, she and her mother visited a distant relation who lived with her daughter in an old house that even the child realised was shabby. Without thinking, she pointed out to her relation, who was the same age as herself, that she had a hole in her slippers. The reprimand that followed was swift and angry: ‘At least you have a father who will send for you!’ The little girl’s reaction troubled her. She eventually understood that the father of the little girl had another family abroad and was no longer interested in the family he had left behind in the village. He sent neither money nor presents. But even before she understood, she was immediately ashamed of the pain she had unintentionally caused the other child.

Scene 3: Discipline is introduced

Going to school in the village became a loathed obligation: the little girl, who was otherwise so self-confident, became afraid in class and began to wet her bed. She understood nothing and was held up to ridicule – and even beaten – by the teachers. Other children stole the beautiful pencils and copybooks her father had brought her from Germany. She didn’t want to go to school any more. Finally, one morning, she refused to put on the lace-up shoes her father had given her specially for school, and didn’t want to set off for class. This time, her grandfather intervened: he roared at her and slapped her. She had never seen him so angry before. She was terrified – a feeling that returned when she recalled this long-buried memory in one session – and had no choice but to obey.

She then found other ways of defiant self-assertion. When she was supposed to do her homework, she would do so out of doors, where she would regularly fall asleep in the sunshine. No reprimands had any effect on her. Things were very different in Germany: she enjoyed going to school here; she suddenly found she was able to do sums; everything was interesting. Her teacher soon recommended that she switch to a class better suited to her age. Although she was still only speaking broken German, she was able to follow the class. She maintained this level of curiosity throughout her time at school and into her professional training; it was also the motor that drove the analytical process.

Scene 4: From ‘everything was harâm’ to a mediator between the family and German officialdom

She told me about the increasingly strict dress codes that were imposed on her, about the beatings she and her two younger brothers received for minor offences or misunderstandings. Home became a prison for her. There were many chores to be done at home and opportunities for meeting friends outside the flat were limited. She enjoyed going to school in Germany and wanted to go on learning, do her school-leaving exams, and study. Her parents had other ideas: even though they had considered education important when they lived in their country of origin, and even though some of her aunts there had studied, they now felt that she should become a wife and mother at the earliest opportunity.

When the family conflict escalated, the fifteen-year-old girl ran away. The subsequent meeting between a representative of the Youth Welfare Office and her parents made two things possible: she was allowed to return to the family, and to continue
The establishment of the family in the new country – more
than ten years after the parents’ marriage – took place in the
midst of a complex process of change. The arrival of the first
child born in Germany was a whole new beginning for the
family. The position of the mother was in many respects sim-
ilar to that of her first-born child in the first few years they
lived together. Germany was a whole new world for them both
neither could speak the language they needed to complete
everyday tasks; both were living away from their large family
for the first time. However, with her pregnancy and the birth
of the child in Germany, she gradually assumed the position
of family matriarch. Since the reunion of the family, her father
had also been searching for a new self-image. He found secur-
ity in a deepening of his faith, gradually gave up habits he had
previously acquired (such as smoking and drinking), and began
to pray regularly. The eldest daughter had to submit to out-
dated moral ideas of what a young woman should be: she was
repeatedly told about the importance of remaining a virgin.
For her part, she had to deal with the typical instincts and
urges of puberty, and wanted to keep up with the more pro-
vocative clothes and hairstyles of her generation. An attempt
to wear the headscarf in order to take some of the tension
out of her relationship with her father and mother failed; she
stopped wearing it after a short while. She spent more and
more time with a friend and her family, seeking guidance and
even refuge there.

Scene 5: The parents’ ‘German’ and ‘North African’ children

The birth of the family’s first child in Germany was a painful
experience that reverberated for a long time. The now twelve-
year-old girl suffered when she witnessed her father’s tender
affection for his newborn daughter and the way he held the
infant in his arms and gave her a pet name. The newborn in-
fant had the father’s unconditional love, and made him hap-
py. No matter how much effort the elder daughter put into her
household chores, she never got the love the baby received just
for being there.

This experience revived both the loss of her grandfather’s pro-
tective presence, which she had hardly mourned, and the fam-
iliar life-world with all its solaces and attractions – her
playmates, the adults, the alleyways, houses, fields, animals,
smells, and the light – that she lost when she emigrated to Ger-
many. As would become evident in the course of her life, all of
this created a much more profound split.

The establishment of the family in the new country – more
than ten years after the parents’ marriage – took place in the
midst of a complex process of change. The arrival of the first
child born in Germany was a whole new beginning for the
family. The position of the mother was in many respects sim-
ilar to that of her first-born child in the first few years they
lived together. Germany was a whole new world for them both
neither could speak the language they needed to complete
everyday tasks; both were living away from their large family
for the first time. However, with her pregnancy and the birth
of the child in Germany, she gradually assumed the position
of family matriarch. Since the reunion of the family, her father
had also been searching for a new self-image. He found secur-
ity in a deepening of his faith, gradually gave up habits he had
previously acquired (such as smoking and drinking), and began
to pray regularly. The eldest daughter had to submit to out-
dated moral ideas of what a young woman should be: she was
repeatedly told about the importance of remaining a virgin.
For her part, she had to deal with the typical instincts and
urges of puberty, and wanted to keep up with the more pro-
vocative clothes and hairstyles of her generation. An attempt
to wear the headscarf in order to take some of the tension
out of her relationship with her father and mother failed; she
stopped wearing it after a short while. She spent more and
more time with a friend and her family, seeking guidance and
even refuge there.

A German woman who lived in the same house as the girl’s
family became a kind of mediator for them all. Even the
father listened to her. It was this woman who, together with
the other people living in the house, prepared a welcome for
the mother and her children by painting the stairwell and dec-
oring it with balloons.

REBELLION, RESPONSIBILITY, AND THE GIFT OF
BEING ABLE TO ACCEPT SUPPORT

An attentive and experienced instructor noticed the young
woman’s anxiety in the run-up to her final submission. Over
and over again she asked how work on the submission was
progressing, until one day the young trainee admitted to her
that she hadn’t even started working on it. At this stage, the
deadline for the submission was drawing near. So the instruc-
tor asked her to explain what it was she wanted to write.
Every day, she listened to what the young woman had to say
and passed remarks on it. This helped the student straighten
things out in her mind and enabled her to start writing them
down. She received an award for her work and its clear un-
derstanding of pedagogical theory, and was the envy of the
others in her class. She hardly dared to be pleased about her
success.

She would have loved to go to university and get a degree.
However, in order to do so she would have had to lead an in-
dependent life in her own apartment in a distant city. Now
that relations within the family have relaxed somewhat, the
mother recently said, to the surprise her eldest daughter’s
surprise, ‘It wasn’t a good thing for you that we came to Ger-
many so late, otherwise you would have gone to universi-
ty.’ Of the three children in the family who were born in Ger-
many, one is just completing her university degree, another
has just started one, and the youngest is still at the acad-
emic high school. All three of the children who were born in
Morocco completed apprenticeships.

CONFLICT CONSTITUTIONS

These scenes contain a number of themes and conflict con-
stellations that are typical for children of immigrants from
North Africa and Western Asia:
- The big mysteries as to why the family is not living together.
- The polarisation of life-worlds, which does not appear to the children affected by it to be problematic and, therefore, changeable.
- The polarisation of their own inner state, which they cannot grasp.
- The confrontation with parents who, in their uncertainty, become rigid, thereby triggering conflicting reactions in the children: the desire to resist this rigidity, and at the same time to protect their weak parents.
- The early assumption of responsibility in the family, a role in which they have no models to look up to. On the one hand, this intensifies fantasies of their strength and importance; on the other, it triggers the fear of making a momentous mistake. This constellation is akin to a banishment from childhood.
- The different status of the children born in the new country intensifies sibling rivalry, which is partially obscured by the early assumption of a mother role.

Those who come from a culture that is clearly dominated by men, and where instincts are restrained by the demureness and veiling of women in the public realm, will themselves succumb to a greater instinctual pressure in a more liberal culture that has other forms of instinct suppression. This makes them feel insecure. It increases the worry that their children – in particular the girls – will lose all restraint. Both often lead to countermeasures that can result in rigid behavioural and relationship patterns. In some family constellations, the severity of the uncertainty, the conflicts, the violence, and the rebellion take on unbearable forms, sometimes even leading to the most extreme acts of violence. Unavoidable conflicts run a much milder course when the parents respect and love each other, and when the first years of a child's life are spent in a largely stable life context, and are characterised by the certainty that he or she is loved. Naturally, it is helpful if they have creative power and curiosity and can maintain both throughout all the crises. In these cases, the broadening opportunities of migration will transcend the traumatising aspects.

CONCLUSIONS

1. Children rely on the care and protection of their parents and the wider family environment for many years. Only gradually do reason and cognition develop, becoming more independent of direct experience and linguistically accessible (Sigmund Freud's term for this was 'rehearsal of behaviour'). No child can decide whether it wants to leave a familiar life-world and familiar faces. No child can appreciate what it means to leave its native country; even adults cannot imagine how profound the change is! This is why it is all the more important to speak to children – even to infants – about important facts and changes right from a very early age. The point is not that their minds grasp what is being said to them, but that they are given the feeling of being well cared for. This mitigates the unavoidable severity of the things that life throws their way, such as migration – that of the entire family, of one parent, or of both parents – with all the associated separations, uncertainties, and feelings of being forsaken. At best, the child will develop without any major problems and will learn to turn the constant internal and external conflict to its creative advantage (consider here the strikingly high number of authors, filmmakers, artists, musicians, and scientists of non-German origin in Germany). At worst, the child will be traumatised, which has serious consequences on their psychological and physical development.

2. The development of the child's instincts is also affected by the mysteries thrown up by migration. Internal agitation, which always goes hand-in-hand with sexual desire, intensifies the tension in encounters with the external life-world; children and young people cannot always distinguish between the two. This can result in a variety of behaviours. Some will block the desire; others will set out on a restless search for satisfaction without being able to engage in an emotional relationship.

3. Throughout childhood, the child gradually develops the ability to realise and to bear the realisation that the people it loves most have their dark sides, and that it doesn't always love its mother and father, but sometimes even hates them. The ability to tolerate the ambivalence of one's objects of love and of one's own feelings towards them is a sign of a developmental progress with regard to the initial inner division into good and evil. The absence of a central object of love, or of both – because of migration, for example – has an inevitable influence on this process; as does a life in a new country with disconcerted parents and a deluge of countless new impressions that sweep over the child at all once. The result is a particularly striking tension between the here – the familiar, its smells, noises, language, colours, light, places offering security (the parents) – and the there – the unknown, which is exciting and terrifying and yet stimulates curiosity. This shapes all current and future relationships to other people, to oneself, and to one's own actions. The result is a split that can at best be overcome and transposed into a conflict so that a tolerable solution can be found. At worst, the split cannot become permeable, but solidifies and is denied, with damaging consequences for the individual and his or her relationships.

4. Living together with their family in a new country means that the children and young people are confronted with parents whom they also experience as being weak, because they are unfamiliar with so many things. On the one hand, this leads to an appreciation of their own position and the depreciation of their parents. On the other, it generates a fear of making mistakes that could possibly have unforeseen, dire consequences. The development and inner growth of children
and young people requires the image of strong parents and a gradual discovery of their weaknesses. If these weaknesses are too obvious, both children and parents will be marked in their dealings with each other. Parents will be ashamed that their children have witnessed their weaknesses and may try to hide them by being particularly strict; children will rebel against this, while at the same time unconsciously wanting to avoid making their parents any weaker. This explains why young people sometimes block out their opportunities for success and unconsciously neglect their intellectual abilities, because they cannot bear the thought of progressing further than their parents, who suffered degradation as a result of migration or exile or have worked extremely hard to gain a modest place in the new society. A strong, unconscious feeling of guilt develops, preventing free development in private relationships and in the workplace. It often happens that such children and young people end up in exploitative constellations in which they overexert themselves mentally and physically without being able to enjoy the fruits of their labour.

5. Problematic conclusions are often drawn and are rarely seen as being problematic. The inevitable conflicts between young people and their parents are often viewed by immigrant children, or children of immigrants, in terms of their parents’ supposed backwardness. In fact they are part of what young people in changing societies (what Lévi-Strauss referred to as ‘hot societies’) generally thrash out with their parents’ generation. The sensation of the delusions of strength and importance that come with puberty combines with the premature assumption of the role of mediator in their new environment to create a disparaging image of their parents’ potency. The identification during psychoanalysis of this image as problematic is often greeted with resistance. The effect, however, is liberating: instead of a conflict that devalues the (parents’) origin, a typical parent-adolescent conflict emerges. Sometimes, a new view of the parents’ abilities also emerges, namely that their parents were able to provide for them and their family.

CONCLUSION

Psychoanalysis can make a helpful contribution to releasing the libidinous and creative forces of children and young people, and of those who are now adults. As I have illustrated, the ‘analytical space’ can provide a calm atmosphere where individuals can experience and consider the often intensified tension and polarisation in their life plans, without any pressure to take action. This opens up the opportunity to rethink one’s own wishes and fears and old solutions to conflicts, to mourn partings and losses, and to internally liberate oneself for the search for solutions more appropriate to the individual’s current life. The English psychoanalyst D. W. Winnicott spoke of the ‘potential space’ that is key to the development of human creativity. Naturally, society can contribute by providing cultural spaces for children and young people where they can test themselves and where high-intensity polarisations are not forced.

If the inner opening and the mitigation of the tension between the old and the new country succeeds, the individual can finally arrive, in a way that still maintains a link to the old country. In this respect, immigration opens up an incredible opportunity to leave external hardship behind, while at the same time following curiosity and dreams. Diversified life-worlds open up a broad free space for all, even for the indigenous members of society. Even the most cursory glances at the names of those who have won literary, artistic or scientific awards reveals just how much people who do not have German roots are now enriching the culture of the Federal Republic of Germany. Personally speaking, my psychoanalytic work with immigrants has been the source of incredibly stimulating encounters and discussions.

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Translated by Aingeal Flanagan · Copyright: Goethe-Institut e. V., Fikrun wa Fann, November 2014
The German Romantic poet Novalis (Friedrich von Hardenberg) once asserted that all philosophy was homesickness. He subsequently qualified his remark by explaining that philosophy was the endeavour to be at home everywhere.

And indeed home, homesickness, and also a yearning for foreign parts – the endeavour to find happiness outside one’s own limited province – were dominant themes in the Romantic era. However, to speak of homesickness in the modern world seems somewhat anachronistic when one considers that the duty of the modern, flexible person – particularly in today’s capitalist brand of economic activity – is, as Richard Sennett so aptly illustrates, precisely not to have a home in the narrowest sense of the word, not to be bound to any specific place or to friends and relations, but to be completely mobile and universally deployable, in other words not to be held back by any social or territorial boundaries in one’s will to advance. At most, we permit primary school children to feel homesick, for example when they want to come home from an extended summer camp to Mum and to the home and environment they know and love. But what happens when the ‘soul becomes homeless’? When one becomes paralysed by homesickness? And how can one make a place one’s new home?

Are we not perhaps making things too easy for ourselves by rashly rejecting homesickness as a legitimate emotional state for an adult human being? Anthropologically speaking, Karen Joisten characterises humans as a way home, as being on the way home. By describing them in this way, she is highlighting both the need for home, for a feeling of security and safety, but also for the process of being on the way to one-
self. After all, humans have always been wanderers. From an anthropological point of view, humans were wanderers who became socialised throughout the course of their history. The term homo migrans – not homo sapiens – is the most appropriate term for them.

HOME AS A SOCIAL PLACE

Homesickness, however, is an expression of the lack of this very feeling of security, confidence, and existential safety, which emanates from specific places. Yet to reduce homesickness to places would be to do the phenomenon an injustice; home is not a territorial but always a social place. This is why homesickness should be understood as a backward-facing desire, as a yearning for home, for familiar places and things, but above all for people. This is quite possibly all the more true today in view of globalisation, global networking or global homelessness.

And so homesickness is generally felt in the mode of loss, namely as a loss of beloved and familiar objects, people, and places, above all when people are in exile, on the run, or living in a certain place temporarily. Right now, for example, in view of the situation in the Middle East, it is something that is being experienced by millions of people. The feeling of homesickness always entails a depreciation of the reality in which one is living and an imagined appreciation of the past. The longer a person is removed from their home, the more stylised and distorted are the images and the myths that he or she constructs around home. In the act of homesickness, the potential for satisfaction in the present and the future is transferred to the past. ‘Back then, at home, when everything was still so wonderful …’ is an example of how people introduce narratives about themselves.

HOMESICKNESS IN HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY

It is reported that Ovid considered home to be the place where one’s native language is spoken. In other words, home is the place where one is understood in the emphatic sense and the place where one understands the world because one is familiar with it.

Studies on homesickness are a classic theme in research into the mental health of foreigners. Homesickness has been known since the seventeenth century. Initially it was referred to as ‘nostalgic reaction’. The word ‘nostalgic’ is a compound of the Classical Greek terms ‘nostos’ (past) and ‘algos’ (pain).

The Swiss doctor Johannes Hofer in particular is considered one of the ‘modern discoverers’ of homesickness. At the very least, he is the man who presents the most interesting deductions on the subject. For him, the ‘essence of the illness’, was a deranged faculty of imagination leading to an aberration of the spirits, which, instead of moving through a person’s entire mind and fulfilling their biological vital functions, only ‘wandered along the strip of land where the notion of the fatherland is rooted’. In this way, they incessantly trigger the idea of home, making it impossible for the person to move on to other moods and states of mind. In 1688, he believed that this was the ‘sickness’ he saw in the different types of reactions of Swiss soldiers who were serving abroad and were immediately transported in their minds to their Swiss home upon hearing cow-bells for the first time.

THE LOST PARADISE OF CHILDHOOD

In the philosophy of the twentieth century, it was above all Ernst Bloch, who was influenced both by psychoanalysis and Marxist historico-philosophical thinking, who at the end of his monumental work The Principle of Hope picked up the ideas of homesickness and home and developed the utopia of a home for all humanity. According to Bloch, once they have cast off the shackles of alienating capitalist economic activity, humans, who are still living in prehistory, will find themselves and create a world which ‘shines into the childhood of all and in which no one has yet been: home.’

In psychoanalytical terms, homesickness can be interpreted as the desire for the lost paradise of childhood. In this conception, the person suffering from homesickness idealises the life-world that they consider they have lost and that seemed so familiar to them, and calls the place where they were happy as a child – and the place where they had all they needed during childhood without having to make an effort - ‘home’. In an extreme form, i.e. when it becomes a psychiatric disorder, homesickness can be both an expression of a pronounced regressive tendency as well as a protection against a psychosis, the impending collapse of the self, or suicide.

PSYCHOLOGICAL Contexts

The question as to possible links between migration and mental disorders has existed for more than a century. As far back as the 1920s, studies were written on psychogenic disorders in ‘foreign-language environments’: psychopathological studies on uprootedness and homesickness.

The philosopher Karl Jaspers drew attention to the link between homesickness and delinquency: his doctoral thesis from 1909 was entitled ‘Homesickness and Crime’ and explored how the fact of having been uprooted from their parents’ home led young girls, in desperation, to commit the most serious criminal acts such as infanticide and arson. Above all, early studies on homesickness focussed on the worryingly high rates of endogenous psychoses and suicide. In the early stages, research into migration was dominated by two contrasting beliefs. The first of these was the so-called ‘selection hypothesis’, i.e. the belief that people who showed signs of psychiatric difficulties in their host country had already demonstrated pre-psychotic characteristics in their home country,
had been plagued by agitation, had reacted to stressful situations in a pathological manner, and had gone abroad as a way of seeking remedy. In contrast to this, in the late 1930s, Faris and Dunham put forward the theory that cultural isolation and socially unfavourable life-worlds in large cities in particular harboured the serious potential threat of mental illnesses for foreigners.

Focussing on homesickness, it can be noted that aspects of homesickness touch on a broad range of psychological issues, such as separation and loss, bonds, etc., because homesickness is always also an expression of a loss of control: a person has to begin by appropriating the new environment and assimilating it into familiar patterns. It is possible that homesickness is also a form of escapism, the flight from the demands of everyday life as a way of emotionally coping with concrete, everyday worries.

**HOMESICKNESS IS NOT A SICKNESS**

Although homesickness correlates with certain mental symptoms, such as brooding that focuses on the past, fear, and increased depressiveness, it must be emphasised that homesickness is not a classic, clinical illness. Experiences of homesickness can most likely be explained within the context of changes in motivation and mood.

In her studies about Welsh students in England, Shirley Fisher noted that in people who suffer from homesickness visual images dominate, whereby the thoughts of those who are not homesick focus more on concrete problems. She noted that the differences in cognitive activity were significant. Homesickness is, therefore, presumably also a form of escapism because daydreams and reflecting on the pleasant sides of the past help to avoid confrontations with current problems. Fisher also showed that homesickness does not depend on external factors such as age and gender and that feelings of homesickness occur more in the morning and in the evening, in other words that daytime activities and concrete, physical work had a moderating influence on the form of homesickness. Not least, or in correlation with that, feelings of homesickness occur more frequently in phases of mental passivity.

In terms of the psychology of learning, homesickness can be predicted on the basis of the discrepancy between a person’s home environment and his/her new environment (dissimilarity between where they live now and where they used to live). In this way, it can be assumed that people who move from rural agricultural environments to big cities will experience greater homesickness than people whose previous life context was also an urban one.

**DIFFICULTIES IN ADAPTING AND STRESS**

People from provincial settings, who have grown up in a restricted, modest, remote and simple environment and consequently had a different work rhythm, a different relationship to time, and a different perception of human and social spaces, and whose socio-cultural habitus has made them less able to adapt to new life circumstances, have always been considered predisposed to homesickness and difficulty in adapting to a different culture. This aspect is particularly relevant for people who have emigrated from Turkey to Germany: Kursat-Ahlers & Ahlers assume that about two-thirds of the first generation of this group come from villages in the provinces of Anatolia.

In this context, it is relevant whether they emigrated voluntarily or whether they were forced to do so by family or economic circumstances or pressure. After all, voluntary migration makes it much easier for a person to appropriate and accept their new environment as their new home than forced migration. Those who make a conscious decision to move away are probably more likely to engage with their new environment and to accept it as their new home. The situation for many migrant labourers was compounded by the fact that this change was not intended to be permanent but actually turned out to be so.

In addition, there are concurring findings that show the people who move with their families are better able to cope with the situation in their new home than single or divorced people. People who have previous experience of moving from one place to another in their native country also cope better with the situation in their new home.

When it comes to explaining homesickness, stress theory approaches seem to offer the best answers: when immigrants are confronted with demands such as the organisation of everyday life in a modern society, integration into a majority society without giving up their own convictions, and coping with the deficits in modernity of their own culture, coming up against the limitations of their own abilities in the process, then this situation is perceived as being stressful. The challenge of mastering life in a foreign country, in a new home, then gives way to the feeling of being overwhelmed. Lazarus and Folkman, two renowned theoreticians of stress, said that stress occurs when people do not have sufficient resources for coping with challenges that arise in areas that are important to them, such as family, career, or social relationships. According to this concept, stress can be understood as a process of multiple stages, at the start of which are the perceived situational demands and the appraisal of resources. These determine whether a concrete event or a concrete situation is deemed a challenge, a threat, a loss, or a benefit. This is followed by attempts to cope with the situation, which on the one hand seek to change the problematic situation for the better or to improve the emotional state of mind. The degree of stress – and consequently of homesickness – can be reduced by social and personal resources. Personal resources include individual characteristics such as self-efficacy and self-esteem, but also formal education.
Social resources include social networks such as relationships with family and friends that a person either has or of which they are able to avail themselves. These help the person to reduce the unpleasant and negative consequences of threatening requirements. Only if the demand and the available resources are comparatively assessed and found to be unequal does stress occur, i.e. a fear of being overwhelmed develops.

**THE SOCIO-POLITICAL DIMENSION OF HOMESICKNESS**

To conclude, the homesickness of people who have emigrated from Turkey to Germany will be considered on the basis of the brief theoretical outline above. So why this group in particular? Are people from Turkey the only ones who get homesick?

First of all, it is important to remember that homesickness and the significance of home are always felt when one is elsewhere, which is why immigration, emigration, and exile are a constituent element of homesickness. Secondly, there are three million people of Turkish origin in Germany, which means that they constitute the largest single group of immigrants in the country. The third, but by no means least important, justification for focusing on this group is the fact that, by their own account, suffering from homesickness is one of their most striking mental states of mind, especially for older people of Turkish origin in Germany. In the case of immigrants of Turkish origin, how long they have already lived in Germany rarely plays a role, i.e. homesickness is not an acute emotional mood that can be traced back to the recent change in environment: rather, it is their soul’s constant companion, just like the famous quote from the fourteenth-century Turkish mystic and humanist Yunus Emre: ‘I am not elsewhere: elsewhere is in me’.

For this reason, some findings in the ‘culture shock hypothesis’ must be called into question. A large number of studies were conducted on this in the 1990s. These studies show that the frequency of mental illnesses does not, as the culture shock theory assumes, increase in the first three to eight months; it tends instead to increase with the duration of the stay.

In addition to the health aspects, however, focusing on homesickness also has some socio-political implications. It also concerns the ability and willingness of immigrants in Germany to integrate. Homesickness must probably be understood as a decisive obstacle on the road to successful acculturation, an appropriation of cultural orientations. After all, those who still feel a strong mental bond to their home, their place of origin, will have greater difficulty engaging with the place where they now live, opening up to it, putting down new roots, and assuming responsibility for this place where they now live and reside. It must be assumed that homesickness could lead to a lack of involvement in the new home, to hesitancy in establishing contact with new neighbours and others, which in turn leads to greater homesickness and yearning for familiar places and people in the person’s region of origin.

Even the fact that some immigrants of Turkish origin have already taken on German citizenship and count as Germans does little to change this fact. After all, changing a passport and taking on a new citizenship is not the same thing as acquiring a new home, as sober realists might perhaps assert. This is especially evident in older, first-generation Turkish immigrants. However, it is important to note one critical point: in many cases, the imagined warmth and security offered by the original home turns out to be an illusion. Many repatriates are very familiar with this phenomenon. They sense the dwindling of the stylised feeling of security in their original home: suddenly, home becomes an ordinary biotope, stripped of all its valency, a dismal place just like any other. And so with time it often happens that, for people of Turkish origin, their home becomes foreign without the foreign becoming home at the same time.

As we have been able to establish in our own investigations, it is above all those people of Turkish origin who have a low level of education who experience strong feelings of homesickness. It is to be assumed that the complex, obscure life in a big city is particularly strenuous for them and seems overwhelming, thereby triggering in them all the more strongly the desire for familiar places, people, and contexts. Presumably, they also experience a stronger self-depreciation in German society, where formal education is an elementary status characteristic, because other strengths that they have, such as social skills, solicitousness, and loyalty in interpersonal relationships are not considered as important in German society.

**RELIGION AS A CRUTCH**

We have also noticed that religious or more devout Muslims experience less homesickness. How can this be explained? One might expect these people to experience greater homesickness because of the more strongly perceived cultural and religious distance between the two societies.

The possible reasons for this are twofold. Firstly: together with their faith community, people with a strong bond to religion create a ‘symbolic home’ for themselves, often feel ‘in good hands’ in their faith abroad, and often have a dense network of social relationships within their own religious group, which is why they suffer less from homesickness. In these cases, religiosity acts like a personal resource. Secondly: it is possible that many devout Muslims for whom the practice of their faith is a characteristic feature of their identity and their idea of a ‘good life’ are able to live out this faith in a much freer manner in Germany than is the case, for example, in Turkey. Presumably this is the reason why their desire to go back is less pronounced.
Finally, it is essential to ask how Germany can become a new home for immigrants. First of all, we should recognise and respect the fact that immigrants have much more complex development tasks to overcome than both native Germans and their former compatriots who have not migrated. They have to develop a bi- or multicultural identity; they have to rearrange their family relationships; they have to assume new career and social roles; and they have to mourn – and be allowed to mourn – what they have lost in an appropriate way, i.e. everything that they left behind in the native country, such as part of their family and their social networks.

To this end, in addition to the concrete strengthening of equal societal opportunities for their participation, an emphatic attitude on the part of the host society could be helpful. Such an attitude would also grant them the regressive free space they need, without reminding them at every turn of the ‘integrative added value’ of their actions and attitudes.

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The Art of Wissam al-Jazairi
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Until recently, modern research into trauma concentrated on cases in the ‘white’ and Western world, taking as its point of reference everyday realities in industrial societies. But which forms and kinds of traumas develop in colonised or post-colonial societies – and in which contexts is it justified to speak of trauma? These questions are also valuable for the field of Arabic literary and cultural studies.

TRANSLATING THE UNFORGOTTEN
TRAUMA IN CONTEMPORARY ARAB LITERATURE

BY STEPHAN MILICH

Usually trauma is perceived as a single biographical or historical event, resulting in damage to a person’s or society’s organism, self-image, and mental disposition. The event is over, but its effects still disturb the life of the individual or community and ask for treatment. If the makers of this theory, however, had from the start also devoted attention to people suffering from a colonial situation or its consequences, in which traumatisation and the struggle for survival had at times become the norm, and not the exception, another concept of trauma might have become more prominent. This other understanding of trauma would not so much be centred on the diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder, but rather concerned with forms of cumulative or manifold traumatisation.

FANON AS A STARTING POINT

A text from the early 1960s, based on an Arab society under colonialism, could have played an important part here. It could have steered research in a direction that would have done greater justice to other global realities. In *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) Frantz Fanon undertook an initial categorisation of trauma in the Arab world and warned against the harmful long-term consequences of colonial violence by pointing out that, in colonial contexts, violence and trauma had become the normality. The first three pages of the fifth chapter constitute a direct attempt at comprehending the experiences and reality of French colonialism in Algeria as trauma. For Fanon, colonisation was not just ‘a great supplier of patients for psychiatric clinics’ – which still have not been built to this day because of a lack of both resources and awareness – it also resulted in ‘unhealable wounds, inflicted on our peoples by the scourge of colonialism’. In his thoughts on ‘psychological disturbances’ and case studies of affliction among both Algerians and French, Fanon does not, as would still be usual today, define a trauma as being caused by a unique violent event but rather as ‘the sum of harmful stimuli’ that lead to the ‘breakdown of the colonised person’s defence mechanisms’. According to Fanon, the main trigger appears to be ‘the brutal and pitiless atmosphere, the general prevalence of inhuman practices, and the inescapable impression of experiencing real apocalypse’.

The path entered by Fanon was not seriously pursued either by European psychologists or by Arab intellectuals in a way that would have permitted a precise evaluation of the complex consequences of traumatic colonisation in the decisive phase of post-colonial independence and the rapid establishment of dictatorships and new oppressive systems, as
for example in Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, or Syria. Instead, alongside the post-traumatic repercussions of the Shoah, international trauma research focussed primarily on American Vietnam veterans and, more recently, 9/11 (with the exceptions of South Africa and Rwanda, frequently mentioned as non-European reference points) – as if only the traumata of ‘white people’ around the world were worthy of investigation.

In recent years, the call for a ‘decolonization of trauma studies’, a term coined by Michael Rothberg, became louder. José Bruner, for instance, gives a description of a traumatic situation similar to that given by Frantz Fanon more than fifty years later in his monograph Politik des Traumas (The Politics of Trauma). Referring to work done by Palestinian psychologists, he writes: ‘The occupation itself has mutated into an active, permanent, and all-embracing stressor whose inescapable violence permanently traumatises the Palestinian population.’ From this perspective, post-colonial ought to be partly replaced by colonial. And as in the Palestinian case as well as in many Arab and other post-colonial societies, a recovery from a violent past is prevented by continuous cultural, economic, and political interference from outside.

STATE OF EMERGENCY AS NORMALITY

Trauma can thus no longer be viewed today as a single event. In many societies in the Middle East, and in other regions too, it must be seen as a state of emergency which has become normality. A definition of collective trauma could be formulated as follows: If a considerable number of individuals (and families) within a society are traumatised, this can lead to initially imperceptible, suppressed or ignored disturbances, to changes in behaviour and attitudes, which become the social norm and for a long time prevent the affected society from recovering a kind of equilibrium, even though the traumatizing sources and causes do no longer exist. All possible means must be deployed to resolve this situation, in order to bring healing and an end to violence.

This urgent demand has been a common motif in contemporary Arab poetry of exile since the 1980s, especially in that of writers from Iraq and Palestine. Not only psychological research into trauma and socio-psychological perspectives but also Arab literature, art, and cultural scholarship, with its work of interpreting and creating understanding, are faced with the task of throwing light on the concealed and not easily accessible mechanisms, forms of expression, and consequences of trauma.

THE ROLE OF LITERATURE

Modern Arab literature has since long taken up two of Fanon’s concerns: the problem of the disintegration of identity as the result of external intervention, and the mechanisms of dehumanisation by repressive political systems together with possibilities of recovery by way of literary expression. However, unlike in European, American, and Israeli literature and scholarship, trauma (usually translated into Arabic as sadma nafsiyya) has scarcely been an object of immediate interest up to now, even though in the second half of the twentieth century some poets such as Mahmoud Darwish (Palestine) and Saadi Yusuf (Iraq), and writers like Sonallah Ibrahim (Egypt), Ghasan Kanafani (Palestine), and Elias Khoury (Lebanon), took this as a leading theme and basis for artistic narrative and metaphor. That has conspicuously changed in recent years – certainly driven by the ‘memory boom’ in international scholarship, but also because of the violence affecting the region, as for instance in Gaza.

For over two decades now more and more prose texts, poetry, and plays by male and female authors from various Arab countries have been part of a trend towards combining documentation and fiction. They refer to traumatic events or everyday circumstances, and find convincing narrative expression for this. This new Arab literature of trauma instigates reflection about appropriate possibilities for literary writing during and after human catastrophes and under traumatic living conditions (and the difficulty of depicting and narrating these adequately), thereby both raising the issue of literary texts’ referentiality in the context of modernism and its collateral damage, and at the same time challenging the ‘West’s’ position of hegemony.

SYRIA AS EXEMPLIFICATION

At the centre of the novel Hurras al-hawa’ (Guardians of the Air – 2009) by the Syrian writer Rosa Yassin Hassan, born in Damascus in 1974, is Anat Ismail, who works for the Canadian embassy as an interpreter in interviews with traumatised asylum-seekers from various Middle Eastern and North African countries.

Years earlier she had met Jawad, a leftist opposition activist. They had only just become a couple when he was arrested and, as a political prisoner, vanished into Syrian jails for fifteen years. After his release it soon becomes clear to them both that the period of separation has left profound wounds. Fatefuly, the couple find themselves unable to speak about these changes and the new needs they have as a result. Jawad increasingly withdraws into himself and one day he decides to migrate to Sweden, confronting his wife with a difficult choice. Either she comes with him to Europe and becomes an asylum-seeker herself, or she stays behind on her own. Anat decides to remain with her father, who has a heart condition, and in the night of her husband’s departure she becomes pregnant. During the months of her pregnancy she recalls key events in her life, tells her family story, especially that of her father and of her mother, who, confined against her wishes in an intensive care unit, dies an inhumane death as a result of cancer. Anat also recollects what happened to other couples, friends who similarly came to grief as a result...
of the invisible consequences of political detention, brutal torture, and years of separation. Increasingly solitary, she gives birth to her father a third heart attack. His fate and the future of the other main characters are left open, and the novel ends with the young mother sinking into a deep sleep where she worries and anxieties are, for the moment, relieved.

As in several other recent Arab prose texts (for instance, Hassan Blasim's story 'Documentation and Reality', al-Arshif wal-waqi'), the deathlike state of sleep – and thus a short-lived forgetting – becomes the last remaining means of healing and a way out of an agonising reality. Like her Canadian superior, Jonathan, who essentially makes the decisions about the asylum applications, Anat's work makes her a witness to numerous accounts of the individual suffering experienced by refugees from the Mashriq and North Africa, victims of dictatorship, civil war, and rape. In this setting the author succeeds in weaving into the narrative various stories of trauma as a reminder of invisibility and 'silencing', so as to describe as tangibly as possible the consequences for those affected.

Soon, however, the young interpreter, excessively preoccupied with the feelings and affects triggered both by her own story and by the traumas of others, can no longer cope with the challenges of her work. She senses how the boundaries separating her from the refugees' stories are becoming increasingly blurred, with their traumas duplicated in her own existence, as the world is transformed into 'one great torture chamber'. The last interview described in the novel - with Fathia, a proud and attractive Iraqi Kurd – sparks off in the young, overwhelmed interpreter an inextricable amalgam of admiration, hatred, and feelings of inferiority, which in psychanalyst terms could probably be called a form of 'counter-transference' and which ultimately leads Anat to hand in her resignation.

This secondary traumatisation leads to assistants or other helpers in such situations being no longer capable of coping with their own problems when the feelings of the traumatised become, as it were, 'contagious'. Towards the end of the novel Anat's Canadian superior Jonathan admits to her that 'he will never forget what he has experienced here; he will never be able to get over this bitter experience. He may well have to go to a psychologist for the rest of his life in order to feel somewhat safe again.'

As far as I know, Rosa Yassin Hassan is among the few Arab novelists in using knowledge of psychological trauma and incorporating it into the narrative – albeit sometimes a little schematically. Interestingly, however, the author avoids ascribing explicitly traumatic symptoms to the Syrian characters in her book. That becomes particularly clear in Anat's retelling of her family story, which is full of potentially traumatic events (too early marriage for her mother Jamila, early death for her sister Saniya, and the suicide of her daughter Sabah), but these are not viewed as traumatising in the same way as refugees' experiences. Nevertheless, these events in the lives of family members exert a lasting but invisible and uncomprehended impact.

**BREAKDOWN OF NORMALITY**

The novel Hurrâs al-hawâ is not just to be read as a settling of accounts with the politically-generated conditions of life in Syria and the oppressive dominance of the Ba'ath Party. The fact that the protagonist can no longer master her task of mediating the traumas of refugees from Iraq, Sudan, and other countries from the region, because the shocks and burdens in her own life exceed the limits of her capacity to cope, finally leads to a breakdown of the always precarious but hitherto maintained dividing-line between Syrian 'normality' and traumatic circumstances in the Mashriq and North Africa. Through the interviews the interpreter becomes increasingly aware that invisible wounds to the psyche are not officially recognised, neither in the case of the Syrian wives of political prisoners nor that of traumatised refugees who must demonstrate external, visible bodily harm in order to be granted official asylum.

'Bodily symptoms were constantly described in medical reports by expert witnesses. [...] However there were also many refugees who had been mutilated, their innards torn, and their psyches profoundly damaged without any kind of trace being left on their bodies. Their chances of asylum were thus greatly reduced. Everything they recounted was from the start shadowed with doubt. [...] The problem is that we are only convinced of misfortune if it has left bodily traces. [...] But who asks about the psychological wounds many women like myself have suffered?'

According to my interpretation of the novel, it is not these visible wounds that play the decisive part in the breakdown of relationships, in people whose existence and human worth is called in question and who struggle hard, after a period of imprisonment or illness, to find their way back into life. The continuation of violence and further damage appear to shape more likely the future than overcoming the vicious circle of violence, and recovery.

Written in 2009, this novel seems to be a sombre presentation of the events that got under way in 2011 when the Ba'ath regime staked its survival on an escalation of violence, taking Syria into war and a catastrophic refugee crisis. A land which itself once took in refugees has become the country with the largest number of refugees in the world. That current development has already been described by Rosa Yassin Hassan in a new novel, Alladhina massaḥum as-sihr (Those Touched by Magic), published in summer 2014 by Riyad El Rayyes (Beirut). The psychological impact of decades of Assad's dictatorship and the brutal suppression of
the Syrian revolution must be comprehended on both the social and the individual level if new, disastrous developments are to be avoided. In an interview with Dima Wannous, the author expresses concern about the current situation, which already carries the seed of more destruction: ‘What truly fills me with anxiety is the fact that all this death has become a normal daily occurrence, and thus seems acceptable and legitimate. [...] All this killing in Syria has so intensified the hatred in people’s hearts that it will not easily be made to disappear again.’

This text is a revised version of an article which will appear next year in an anthology entitled Commitment and Beyond (Reichert, Wiesbaden).

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Islam’s supposed hostility towards images is one of the great narratives of art history, regardless of whether this history is written by authors from a Christian or a Muslim cultural background. As for the latter, it is not always possible to distinguish whether the animosity towards images is understood descriptively or normatively: whether it is intended to describe the reality of Islamic art, or whether it is just a postulate, a legal prescription. Full enforcement of the ban on images can only be verified for a few periods and in a few places, and the emergence of photography and new media have rendered it completely unenforceable.

As a result of this, however, there is an increased desire, or normative pressure, to cling to the narrative of the imagelessness of Islam. It is therefore part of the core ideology of Islamic fundamentalist movements. The art-historical and political consequences of this ideology are devastating, as demonstrated by the destruction of the Buddha statues of Bamyan by the Taliban in March 2001.

For Western art historical writing on Islam, the Islamic ban on imagery, however inconsistently it has been applied, remains a central feature that helps to distinguish the mainstream of Islamic from the mainstream of Christian art. One would not wish to assert that this distinction is fundamentally wrong; but it is, shall we say, trivial, and impedes differentiated description and the perception of deeper associations. The Western fixation on the lack of images in Islamic art clouds the unbiased view, thus performing the same function as Islamic fundamentalist wishful thinking. The result is the enforced standardisation of our perspective: the reduction of seeing and understanding to that which we have always seen and understood.

A further aspect of the problem of distinguishing between Christian versus Islamic, image-friendly and image-hostile art, culture and religion, is the question of whether we un-
understand ‘Islamic’ and ‘Christian’ in the narrower sense of religious significance or the wider sense of cultural significance. If the first, then miniature painting, which has always subverted the prohibition of images, cannot in fact refute the established notion of Islam’s hostility towards them. The greatest examples of miniature painting in the Islamic world were created in contexts that do not have Islam as their focus; rather, they illustrate myths, legends and chronicles that are primarily non-religious in nature, though Islam does have a function in these other contexts or is incorporated into them, like the illustrated editions of the Shahnameh. On the other hand, it is highly unusual to find miniature paintings in religious works from the Islamic world, like the illustrated Ottoman version of the biography of the Prophet (Siyer-i Nebi) from the year 1595, which can be found today in the museum of the Topkapi Palace.

The further we venture into the realm of the religious – in the literal sense – art of Islam, the more limited the range of what may be figuratively represented becomes, and the more precisely the dictum of Islam’s hostility towards images seems to apply. This is especially true if we take as our starting point art that is explicitly public. Miniature painting, which had a courtly-representative function, was not public – i.e. accessible to anyone who wished to see it – and tolerance of images apparently ended at the gates of the mosque. Insofar as there have ever been figurative depictions in mosques, the motifs are taken from nature, as in the famous mosaics in the courtyard of the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus or the depiction of flowers in Mughal mosques. Another motif that could be portrayed in mosques is architecture itself, as also in the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus. Individual animal motifs are also occasionally found in religious architecture, for example the relief of a lion on the portal of the mosque of Diyarbakir in Turkey: ‘Here, however, they are always incidental and can in no way compete with other forms of architectural decoration.’

The most unusual examples of figurative representation in Islamic religious architecture are suns and moons with human faces, found in Central Asia – the sun-face positioned between two images of the simorgh, a mythical bird, on the pishtaq, or gateway, of the Nadir Divan-Beghi Medressa in Bukhara, for example – or the tiger in the Sher-Dor Madrasa in Samarkand that bears a face on its back.

An artistic syncretism with the pre-Islamic religions of Central Asia becomes apparent here, a discreet, transformed version of which we also find in Lahore.

Thus, the dialectic of the prohibition of images on the one hand and the yearning for imagery on the other led Muslims to find solutions which so far have been only inadequately appreciated, or else overlooked entirely. This is particularly true with regard to the golden age of the Mughal dynasty on the Indian subcontinent in the seventeenth century.

SYNCRETISM AND COURTLY ART

The epitome of this golden age is generally considered to be the Taj Mahal in Agra, the mausoleum for Mumtaz Mahal (Arjumand Banu), wife of the fifth ruler of the Mughal dynasty (Shah Jahan, 1592–1666), who died in childbirth at the age of thirty-eight. Anyone studying this period soon encounters the Mughals’ love of images of all kinds. The Mughal rulers continued the interest in miniature painting they inherited from the Mongols and Iranian tradition, but in many ways they far transcended it.

This was made possible by a number of sociopolitical factors. As rulers of a territory with a very wide variety of religious traditions, the Mughals cultivated a tolerant attitude towards other religions: partly out of inclination, partly because of political considerations. In particular, Akbar (1556–1605) and his great-grandson Dara Shikoh, the eldest son of Shah Jahan, promoted a syncretic philosophy. Akbar was said to have founded his own court religion under the name ‘Din-i Ilahi’ (The Religion of God), which, as far as we are able to reconstruct it, blended Muslim, Hindu and Zoroastrian traditions. Dara Shikoh’s text Majma al-Bahrain has survived, an attempt to synthesise (Sufi) Islam and Hinduism; and mystic traditions played a significant role in the Mughal worldview. Another factor was the extension of contacts with the European maritime powers in India, with their ambassadors and missionaries. As in the Ottoman Empire, the contemporary European fashion for painting also caught on in Mughal cultural centres. Unlike in the Ottoman Empire, we do not know of any European painters who were themselves active at the Mughal court, but we do know of individual images, motifs and techniques that found their way to the Indian subcontinent, which were obviously admired by the Mughal rulers and received and adopted by artists.

As undisputed as these artistic contacts are, it is also clear that this reception of European painting and the rise of Mughal painting in general was predominantly a court phenomenon in which the majority of the population had no part. ‘For the privileged few’ was the apposite title of an exhibition of Islamic miniatures at the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in 2007. In Europe, on the other hand, the abundant presence of painting in churches and the love of the growing middle classes for this art form had, at the latest since the Renaissance, resulted in large sections of the population becoming familiar with pictures. If we compare the two different image cultures, one could speak of an elite and a non-elite, an esoteric and an exoteric approach to imagery. The Mughal court culture, as elite-esoteric as it was, was nonetheless so strongly permeated by imagery and influenced by the fascination with images that many traces and aspects of this fascination can also be found in sacred, and thus publicly accessible, works of the Mughal period – albeit, as we shall see, often in abstracted, veiled and enigmatic form.
The tiled walls of the Lahore Fort with their portrayals of elephants will serve as one example. These portrayals transcend the realm of the court insofar as they decorate the outer wall of the fort. However, only those who had got close enough to the fort itself, which was protected by wide trenches, could really have recognised the elephants. The ability to see the motifs in detail and recognise them was thus an indication of proximity to the court circle, and a mark of distinction. As we will see below, this is similarly true of the paintings in the Mughal mosques. Only those who were in the know and part of the esoteric knowledge society of the Mughal court could fully comprehend their meaning.

In other, individual cases, too, the Mughals were prepared to blur the boundary between courtly and public handling of imagery – and the depiction of living creatures and people in particular. We find an astonishing example in the Diwan-i Amm (Hall of Audience) in the Red Fort in Delhi, with a pietra dura panel depicting Orpheus singing to the beasts. Admittedly it must be noted that, despite its name, the Diwan-i Amm, like the palace as a whole, was accessible only to a select few, such as foreign ambassadors.

Also worthy of note is a coin embossed during Jahangir’s rule with the sovereign’s head, although one would have to refer to numismatics to establish how widely such coins were actually circulated. In the image on the coin, the ruler has a goblet in his hand that is hardly likely to have contained water. The presence of the wine glass is explained not by our knowledge that Jahangir was very fond of drinking, but rather when we consider that wine, as a spiritual drink, can likewise be a symbol of the intoxication of God’s love, as in the famous Wine Ode by the Arab Sufi poet Ibn al-Farid (1181–1235), or in the Persian poems of Hafiz Shirazi.

In this essay I will demonstrate, with reference to the Wazir Khan and Dai Anga mosques in Lahore, the creative way in which the Mughals extended the narrow boundaries, drawn by traditional understanding, for dealing with imagery and illustration, to include the realm of sacred architecture that was open to the public – in particular, mosques and mausoleums.

**IMAGES IN MOSQUES**

The most striking visual element of Mughal architecture is the flower motif. Flower and plant decoration took the place of the previously favoured “typical Islamic” geometrical patterns. These motifs are, for the most part, executed in three variations: the pietra dura technique, i.e. inlay work, often using precious stones; al fresco painting on plastered walls (like the frescoes in the Wazir Khan Mosque represented here); and faience mosaic using glazed clay tiles. The costly pietra dura technique was restricted – at least in Lahore – to palace architecture and a few carefully-selected funerary monuments: it is not found in the city’s mosques. The Dai Anga Mosque has inlayed tilework, while the Wazir Khan Mosque is decorated with painted frescoes. The illustrations are sometimes reminiscent of still-lifes (this is especially true of the decoration on the first floor of the entry vestibule). In addition to flowers we can also make out fruit, bottles and cups, often depicted very sketchily. Although the character of the flower motifs is inspired by nature and often based on European models, they are in fact abstractions and, in some cases, flowers of the imagination. This is worth noting, as less abstract depictions of the same motifs were also being circulated at the Mughal court during the same period, for example the leaves and miniatures painted by Ustad Mansur, which did indeed aspire to be mimetic, replicating nature with almost scientific precision.

The flower and vase motifs accessible to a wider public in the mosques and mausoleums form a common thread, a significant link to the esoteric aesthetics – accessible only to an elite – of palace architecture and its decorative elements. Unlike depictions of animals and people, for example, which belong to the realm of the court, the flower motif is found equally in both spheres, thereby symbolising the continuity of sovereignty over both the worldly and the religious sphere. It succeeds because the flower motifs can be read on both levels: as figurative-mimetic and as decora-
tive-ornamental. This is also why the motif of the bouquet of flowers in a vase is so well-suited to be a general symbol of Mughal rule: ‘The image of the garden and its flowers was the main metaphor of Shah Jahan’s imperial symbolism.’ It is an aesthetic reflection of the continuity of this rule through the various spheres of the public and non-public realms. It becomes apparent that the flower (vase) motif can also fulfill other functions.

**THE WAZIR KHAN MOSQUE**

The most unusual depictions of flower vases in Mughal architecture, and thus de facto in the whole Islamic world, are to be found in the Wazir Khan Mosque in Lahore. According to the inscriptions in Persian and Arabic on the main portal, the mosque was built in 1634–163514 by the man after whom it was named, Nawab Hakim Ilm ud-Din Wazir Khan, who was made governor of the Punjab by Shah Jahan in 1631. The mosque was thus built during the golden age of Mughal architecture. The mausoleum of Jahangir, Shah Jahan’s father, was being built at the same time in Shahdara near Lahore (1628–1638), and the seventeen-year works on the Taj Mahal began in 1632. The Wazir Khan Mosque was built inside the city walls, in the middle of Lahore’s market district, around the grave of the Sufi Sheikh Sayyad Muhammad Ishaq Gazruni (d. 1348), which can still be seen today in the courtyard of the mosque.

The eye is already captivated from the outside by the main portal of the mosque with its unusually diverse and variegated colours. When the visitor, having passed through the gateway and crossed the courtyard of the mosque, finally enters the prayer room, the impression of abundance, vitality and colour reaches a crescendo. There can scarcely be another work of Islamic sacred architecture that boasts such a kaleidoscopic variety of colour, both inside and out, as the Wazir Khan Mosque. All the different colours and coloured surfaces seem to animate the architecture, simultaneously bewildering the observer, who finds it hard to decide which surface, which element, his eye should rest upon, which detail should be the object of his contemplation.

For however harmonious an overall impression they make, the different colours, motifs and calligraphies all demand individual attention. Thus the emphasis seems to be on distinct elements rather than on the ensemble. At the same time, an interplay and a tension are created between the separate design elements and the overall effect (which, of course, the building does nonetheless have) that are not found in the more formal decoration of the majority of other Islamic (and Mughal) sacred buildings.

**ISLAMIC BAROQUE?**

On the basis of this impression, we could be talking about an Islamic Baroque – which would, incidentally, be chronologically parallel to this style in Europe. This baroque character is evoked by the multitude of colours and forms, by the opulence and attention to detail of the material presented, by the dynamics and vitality of the overall effect, as well as by the fact that, however often we look at it and however familiar we think we are with the sight, we are constantly discovering new things and learning to see familiar things in a new way.

In the prayer room of the mosque, another aspect comes to the fore. The stark contrast with the brightness of the mosque courtyard and the fact that the prayer room as a whole never gets enough sunlight at any time of day mean that the almost incomprehensible profusion of ornamental, calligraphic and illustrative-painterly decoration evokes an atmosphere of mystery, of solemnity, of holiness, and thus of the interior, esoteric (Arabic: batin) in contrast to the external, exoteric, visible (Arabic: zahir).

Wazir Khan thereby conveys the impression, far more than other mosques, that it is in fact a shrine – that it is a temple. To the modern observer, the pictorial worlds already seem mysterious because they are so unexpected, and because one’s ability to absorb and interpret them is only fragmentary, even if one is conversant with Islamic culture.

We may, however, assume that there are many aspects of the mosque that the Mughals’ uninitiated contemporaries were also unable to interpret, or of which they too had only a fragmentary understanding. The observation made about the calligraphy in the Taj Mahal thus similarly holds true for the paintings in the Wazir Khan Mosque: ‘These inscriptions are aesthetically attractive, but not easily readable: some are placed in obscure areas, others are too high and too far away to be read, and most are so intricately composed that the ordinary visitor would not be able to decipher them.’

Yet whereas researchers have certainly shown considerable interest in individual calligraphic inscriptions, including those in the Wazir Khan Mosque, the majority of authors and observers perceive depictions of plants and vases as purely ornamental, i.e. in terms of their relationship – which certainly also exists – with the overall decoration, but not as individually interpretable, explorable images.

**DETAILED CONSIDERATION**

However, an essay by Kamil Khan Mumtaz, published in 1992 in the Lahore Museum Bulletin, demonstrates how fruitful a detailed consideration of individual images actually is. The author raises the obvious question of what is depicted in one of the framed frescoes, in a niche in the prayer room. In order to decipher the puzzle, the author turns to the sura al-Fatha, which adorns the entrance to the prayer room; he also refers to the biography of the Prophet, and what the tradition has to say about the circumstances in which this
sura was revealed. He thus arrives at the conjecture that the black tufts over the boughs of the tree depict the hair Mohammed shaved off in Hudaybiyah and threw over the acacia with his followers, according to the story as told in Ibn Ishaq’s biography of the Prophet.

As reasonable as this interpretation may be from a religious standpoint, it does raise a number of questions. The sura that frames the entrance to the prayer room is not directly linked with the picture in a way that is apparent to any observer. The chain of association from the sura to the picture can only work via a bridge, namely the biography of the Prophet. Even if we can assume that the biography of the Prophet was known to religious scholars in seventeenth-century Lahore, such an association can only be established if either similar pictures were commonly used to illustrate the biography, or the pictures were explained to visitors (selected visitors, at least). Neither is likely, and in any case one would want to know who thought up an iconographic programme so badly in need of elucidation, and why. However, as Kamil Khan Mumtaz writes, it is unfortunately not even possible to say with certainty who the architect of the Wazir Khan Mosque was.

In view of the questions raised by Mumtaz’ interpretation, let us here attempt to identify a reading that is less filled with conjecture – one that assumes we are dealing with a more or less mimetic representation. What can we recognise if we contemplate this picture without background religious knowledge? What aspect of reality might be portrayed here?

A realistic-mimetic reading of the picture reveals itself if we assume that living creatures (plants excepted) were not, as a rule, depicted in mosques or other religious contexts. They are not shown in this picture either, in a realistic sense. They are, however, suggested.

Let us start with a minor detail. Are the white swirls at the top of the picture really clouds, as Mumtaz says? They could just as well be birds. The fact that it was not actually permitted to portray birds, and that they are not portrayed realistically, does not make it impossible that birds are what is intended – they are just not explicitly there. The bird association also seems likely because in less compromising contexts they are often depicted in the same location in the picture, whereas clouds seldom are. This is true, for example, not only of Ustad Mansur’s miniature paintings at the Mughal court but also of flower vase motifs from the temporal and geographical context of the Wazir Khan court. Still visible today at the entrance to the Shalimar Gardens in Lahore is a door featuring a similar motif. Instead of swirls, birds are portrayed here quite clearly, which obviously was not considered problematic in the non-religious context of the gardens.

But what does it mean if birds are being suggested here rather than clouds depicted (whereby every observer must make up his own mind about this)? Presumably it would be an expression of nothing more than what is conveyed by every form of mimesis, namely: delight in what exists in the world, too, rather than exclusive reference to the world beyond – the assumption all too sweepingly and simplistically made of Islamic culture.

In a similar way, the courtly painting of Ustad Mansur expresses, above all, enthusiasm for that which exists in the world, its variety and beauty. In the prayer room of the Wazir Khan Mosque, the abstract picture of the birds would at least suggest this feeling – or, to be more precise, this way of looking at the world, with the emphasis on this world rather than the next. It should also be mentioned in this context that the Wazir Khan Mosque is and has always been a place where the doves of Lahore nest and congregate, and that for the people of Lahore the image of the mosque is characterised by the doves that circle its minarets and kiosks.
Given that in Biblical tradition (as incorporated into both Christianity and Islam) the dove was ascribed a religious dimension, we come full circle, and the secular reality of mortal birds simultaneously introduces the possibility of reinterpreting them in the context of a spiritual worldview.

But what could the Prophet’s swatches of hair (in Kamil Khan Mumtaz’ interpretation) represent, if we were ignorant of the religious background and had to rethink them as mimetic depictions? Here too comparison with other material provides the key. There is a surviving picture by Ustad Mansur dated 1610, only thirty years before the construction of the Wazir Khan Mosque. The picture shows squirrels fleeing a hunter and seeking refuge up a tree. Their long, dark tails – which are also depicted larger than life – are strongly reminiscent of the swatches of hair in the picture in the Wazir Khan Mosque. Or, to put it another way, the swatches of hair look like abstract depictions of squirrels.

Let me be quite clear: I consider the spiritual interpretation of the picture put forward by Kamil Khan Mumtaz to be perfectly plausible. But I would like to point out that it could be interpreted just as well in a realistic-mimetic way, if this is what the observer chooses to do. This observation is an important one, because the other motifs in the Wazir Khan Mosque depicting flowers in vases are usually only read on the mimetic level – as if they represented nothing more than flowers, which are then interpreted, according to established theory (one might also say: cliché), as symbols of the Garden of Paradise. This excludes from the outset any other interpretative possibility, and constrains the observer’s imagination and associative pleasure within perceived Islamic norms.

Framed Images

Furthermore, analysis of this picture raises the question of whether there is a relationship between it and other pictures that are similarly positioned (all in all there are six of those framed pictures in the prayer hall), and if so, what this relationship might be. Unlike the remaining wall surface and the other frescoes, all these pictures sit in small niches about fifteen centimetres deep. This creates the impression of a frame and is immediately reminiscent of pictures from the Western tradition. The six niches or frames, which must have been included in the architectural plans from the very beginning are clearly intended to make the individual picture stand out, and to emphasise its individual character – or the individual character of what it represents – much as the frame around a painting does in the Western tradition. It therefore does not seem completely unreasonable to assume that this indicates a Western influence. There are six of these ‘framed’ pictures, in landscape format, in the passageways leading to the prayer chamber.
This method of using a recess to create a frame is something we also encounter in the frescoes on the side walls of the entry portal. Here the framed pictures are positioned one above the other, creating a similar impression to paintings hung above one another in Baroque European churches, or a very full gallery where the walls are covered in paintings. One striking effect of the recessive positioning is that the edges of the paintings often lie in shadow. If this effect is intentional – and in an architectural masterpiece like this we can assume that all the effects are intentional – we may interpret that intention as being that the pictures should never all be visible simultaneously or in their entirety. The shadow cast by the recess, which varies according to the position of the sun, is like a veil that partially conceals, as it might a woman’s face. At the same time, this veiling points to a secret that lies beneath it, and – as for example with the veil of the goddess Isis in Egyptian and Hellenistic mythology – to something sacred that must be concealed. In atmospheric terms we have already been made aware of this in the half-dark or, to be more precise, the light/dark prayer chamber. This chiaroscuro, here an effect not in a painting but produced on the painting by a particular incidence of light (and therefore by architectonic lighting design), again reminds us of similar (though painted) effects in Baroque art. Finally, it should be noted that, with these exceptions, recessed paintings of this kind are found only in the famous Shish Mahal, or Hall of Mirrors, in the Lahore Fort.

PLANTS OR ANIMALS: THE PICTURE PUZZLES

Let us take a closer look at the ‘framed’ picture on the wall opposite the one analysed by Kamil Khan Mumtaz. There is a reflective similarity in that they share the same dark red background. What is striking is that these two pictures contain neither flower nor vase motifs. Instead, they portray trees. In the picture opposite the one with the ‘hair of the Prophet’ we see not one tree but four. Even if we assume that the cypresses represent the Insan al-Kamil – the perfect man, personified by the idealised Prophet Mohammed – the spiritual meaning is hard to decipher.

If, instead, we stick to what it actually looks like, perhaps we can see something else in the picture. With a little imagination, instead of four trees and a couple of flowers we may be able to make out, on the left-hand-side, in place of the tree’s strangely-shaped crown, the abstract head of a horse (or similar hoofed creature).

The idea that we might be able to see a horse’s head in the crown of a tree is not as absurd as it at first appears. There is no reason why the fact that animals and people are not supposed to be depicted in sacred buildings should prevent us from pursuing this concept – because all it is is a concept! At the initial, superficial level, what we see is indeed four trees and their foliage. Thus it would not be the picture that violated the ban on images, merely the observer’s imagination. We can, however, argue that the more we have studied and engaged with the pictures in the Wazir Khan Mosque, the more our imagination has already been encouraged to see more than is visible on a superficial level. Didn’t we believe we had found a representation of the hair of the Prophet – an attribution that, plausible though it may be, requires a degree of imagination and associative zeal? Likewise, we were also able to find squirrels and birds in the frescoes.

The following is also an indication that these pictures contain not just flora but fauna as well. If we examine them more closely, we can establish that what are superficially portrayed as flowers are by no means naturalistic, and that if they were intended to be naturalistic, they would be badly painted. The fact that they are not naturalistic does not, of course, mean that they are merely intended as symbols – of the flowers

‘Framed’ niche painting, situated opposite the picture with the hair of the Prophet. The leaves of the birch tree on the left of the painting can be interpreted as the head of a horse with a feed-bag on its muzzle. The darker, larger leaves constitute the eyes, while the muzzle is the noticeably pale, drooping foliage.

Photo: Stefan Weidner © Goethe-Institut
of Paradise, for example. Rather, the majority of these motifs are patterns which, like modern painting styles such as Cubism, prompt the observer to reassemble the abstractions, distortions and perspective displacements to create familiar forms, i.e.: to recognise and mentally construct things that are by no means clearly portrayed.

Of course, we run the risk of anachronism in applying our gaze, schooled in modern art, to a completely different context. Yet as soon as we tentatively assume that we may indeed be dealing with this kind of aesthetic, the picture world of the Wazir Khan Mosque reveals itself in a new, and better, way. We are now able to recognise what were previously freestanding, floating flowers, artistically meaningless, mere space-fillers, as butterflies. However, several flowers with strikingly large pistils immediately suggest bees – and perhaps such a motif is intended to depict both: bees and pistils. We encounter similar phenomena outside the Wazir Khan Mosque as well. In the passageway leading to the cenotaph of Jahangir in Shahdara, Lahore, the two handles of a vase culminate in swans’ heads. In another picture it seems we can discern flying swans.

Anyone is free to deny themselves such associations, as people will do who reject the portrayal of animate nature in the sacred buildings of Islam on religious grounds, or for other reasons. However, those who dare to transcend this kind of self-censorship, prejudice, or prohibition on thinking can read such elements into the paintings. And it is precisely this, namely the ambiguity of visible and invisible, or – to embrace two key concepts of Islamic theology – the interplay of zahir and batin (apparent and hidden meaning), that seems to be a central function of this type of painting.

Those who choose not to engage with this approach will see a reference to a Paradise depicted as stiff and lifeless. Those who do choose to engage with it have already, the moment they entered the prayer chamber, arrived in a shimmering, living Paradise full of fluttering butterflies and buzzing bees. A famous quotation from the Prophet’s cousin Ali, patriarch of the Shi’a, says: ‘People are asleep, and when they die, they awaken.’ The entry into the prayer chamber as if into a paradisiacal Heaven on Earth is an awakening of the liveliness and productive imagination of our perception, which we could describe as having been asleep. Another striking, unnatural trait of certain flowers or blossoms in the frescoes should also be mentioned, at least in passing. Many of them feature a peculiar, unnatural rotation that is reminiscent of a swastika. To name just one of many possible examples, we also find a swastika motif in the tiling at the Tomb of Akbar in Sikandra. We also see a three-armed variant in the ornamentation of the Maryam Zamani Mosque in Lahore.

In all these instances we could assume that the motif, whether in the ornamentation or the rotation of the flowers, is a coincidence: but coincidence is less likely here than intention. If we take the symbolic content of the painting in the Wazir Khan Mosque seriously and assume, for example, as most interpreters do, that the cypresses are symbols of the Insan al-Kamil, it seems reasonable to see swastika-shaped flowers, which do not exist in natura, as a discreet reference to Hindu traditions, thereby including them in the iconographic programme of the Wazir Khan Mosque. In view of the syncretism mentioned above and the religious tolerance of many Mughal rulers, such an interpretation appears highly likely. Both Muslim and Hindu astrologers were employed at the Mughal court, and Hindu notables had a significant role in the governance of state. It would be strange if the religious plurality that characterised Mughal rule, and which was also mirrored in the multi-faith composition of the population, had left no traces in the religious architecture – even if research on the Wazir Khan Mosque makes no mention of it, and perspectives like these may be unwelcome from a Pakistani-Muslim standpoint. Traces of this syncretism are, however, more subtle than in the Sher-Dor Madrassa in Samarkand (mentioned above), for example, where the calligraphic lettering ‘Allah’ clearly takes the form of a swastika.

THE AMBIGUITY OF THE PICTURES

However, even if one admits that intimations of living Nature can indeed be found in the Wazir Khan Mosque, interpreting the ‘framed’ picture (opposite the one with the hair of the Prophet) as a tree with a horse’s head may still seem audacious. Yet I believe that this impression is unlikely to be a co-
incidence. We could only consider the picture’s effect to be unintentional if the other pictures did not also suggest a certain degree of animation; if the remaining iconographic programme ruled out any ambiguity. However, if the frescoes exhibit an aesthetic that can be read on many levels and, simply by virtue of their mysteriousness, present a challenge for interpreters, the ambiguity of the horse-head-tree cannot be excluded a priori. This would mean that we have here an example - rare in Islamic art - of a picture puzzle.

A picture puzzle is a picture that can be seen as two quite different things, ideally in such a way that one image ceases to be recognisable as the other comes into focus. There are, of course, many hybrid forms. One famous example is the allegorical faces in the paintings of Arcimboldo (1527–1593), composed of objects with a particular theme. It cannot be a coincidence that Arcimboldo’s paintings and those in the Wazir Khan Mosque date back to the same era: the start of the Modern Age, the late Renaissance, Mannerism. In Arcimboldo’s paintings, though, the ambiguity, unlike that of the paintings in the Wazir Khan Mosque, is very obvious. Presumably every viewer sees in Arcimboldo’s paintings both the face and the individual elements of which it is composed. There is no great secret here.

However, perhaps it is precisely the transparency of Arcimboldo’s paintings, the fact that they are easily understood, that is most interesting about them. After all, his contemporaries were not flooded with pictures and trained in how to look at them, as we are today. While for the likes of us Arcimboldo’s images seem transparent, almost without secrets, we must assume that there was much for his contemporaries to discover in his paintings.

Furthermore, the direction in which Arcimboldo’s allegorical faces are understood is the opposite of the ambiguous paintings in the Wazir Khan Mosque. With Arcimboldo, we see the overall image first, i.e. the face. Only then (and in coming closer) do we realise what it is composed of. In this sense, these pictures are lessons in aesthetic constructivism: they are didactic in that they make us aware of the act of seeing and the functioning of perception. Perhaps it is not a coincidence that the philosophers René Descartes (1596–1650) and George Berkeley (1685–1753) wrote their texts on the philosophy of perception just a few decades later.

What we see in Lahore is not the didactic ambiguity of Arcimboldo’s picture puzzles. Here, the observer only recognises the picture puzzles if he already knows what he is looking for - and presumably only those contemporaries who knew about them would have been able to see or recognise the other, hidden picture or symbol beneath the surface of the picture puzzle. These people possessed a knowledge and pictorial experience that in the Mughal Empire of the time was available only to the courtly elite.

However, substantiating the theory of the picture puzzles in Lahore requires better examples than the above-mentioned horse motif, or the interpretation of individual elements in the pictures as little animals, insects or symbols. We find these examples in an unexpected place: the Dai Anga Mosque, outside the city walls of Lahore, in the Naulakha district near the train station.

**PICTURE PUZZLES IN THE DAI ANGA MOSQUE**

Lahore’s Dai Anga Mosque is far less well-known than the Wazir Khan and is presumably seldom visited by tourists, not many of whom come to Lahore in any case. Once situated on one of Lahore’s main arterial roads (the road to Delhi, in fact), since the railway network was built by the British it has stood directly beside the train tracks, not far from the station, but difficult to find: at the end of a dead-end street leading onto the tracks, and in the middle of a slum.
The point, though, is not to be able to say for certain what exactly they represent. This is left to the beholder’s imagination. However, it cannot simply be denied that it is indeed possible to interpret these tile mosaics in such a way. It would be strange if this were merely coincidence or, alternatively, just the product of modern ways of seeing. Heightened aesthetic attraction and increased profusion of meaning argue in favour of our approach – increased in comparison with the assumption that we are dealing simply with abstract floral motifs.

What is also striking about these picture puzzles is their positioning. It is impossible for anyone entering or anyone praying to overlook them. Anyone bowing down towards Mecca and facing the prayer niche says his prayers under the eyes of these big cats. They keep watch over prayer and faith in much the same way as the Mughals saw themselves as guardians of the religion – unorthodox though the Mughal comprehension of religion may have appeared to some. It is as if the eyes of the big cats are acting as proxies for the watchful eyes of the Mughal rulers, which in turn are proxies for the eye of God in this world. Given the cliché of Islam’s hostility to images, it is not surprising that this has gone unnoticed to date by art historians, nor that the knowledge seems to have been lost locally as well, as we see from the restoration work undertaken in recent years in the lower part of the prayer room. However, where this restoration has – presumably unwittingly – followed the traditional pattern, the original, ambiguous pictorial impression is maintained, even where the intention of ambiguity has been forgotten. During my visits to the mosque I was able to observe a craftsman going about his work of cutting tiles for the ongoing restoration, little suspecting that he could be violating the ban on images.

THE TRANSITION FROM ORNAMENTATION TO IMAGE

In this context, it is helpful to make a fundamental consideration of the relationship between ornamentation and image. It would be shortsighted to see an ornamental structure as nothing but ornamentation or, at most, an abstraction of naturally-occurring structures such as plants or tendrils. The possibility of a transition from ornamentation to concrete depiction is always there: it is inherent in every ornamental structure. Even if this possibility is not realised in the ornamentation, the door is always open for an extension into the concrete. The transition is fluid: the precise point at which ornamentation becomes image cannot be determined objectively but lies in the eye of the beholder. Works by M.C. Escher inspired by Islamic art, exhibited in the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam in 2013, are illustrative of this insight and contribute to our understanding of the Mughal art of picture puzzles.

Or do such reflections indicate that we have been deceived by a peculiarly modern misunderstanding? Schooled in the polyvalence of modern art, are we the victims of our own, highly complex viewing habits? What argues against this is that there is another famous example of the transition from ornamentation to figurative illustration that dates from approximately the same time as the Mughal architecture, but at the opposite end of the Islamic (or by this time no longer Islamic) world. It is significant not only because of its contemporaneity with Mughal architecture, but also because it too draws on syncretic sources and is indebted to a special mix of cultures.

The example is from so-called Mudéjar art in Andalucía after the Reconquista. It is the tilework in the Salon of Carlos V in the Alcázar Palace of Seville, from the workshop of Cristóbal de Augusta, manufactured between 1577 and 1583. Here, floral ornamentation, faces, and depictions of animals blend into one another and can only be differentiated if examined very closely, with careful attention to detail. The different socio-cultural and religious-ideological conditions in the Mughal Empire resulted in different aesthetic solutions for creating illustrative ornamentation. The possibility that such illustration exists is not, however, the product of modern viewing habits or viewing requirements. The tile ornamentation in the prayer chamber of the Dai Anga Mosque realises this possibility in an ingenious, unobtrusive manner. Anyone who wishes to can see in it the animals’ heads. But nobody must. The conflation of ornament and picture is thus incor-
Ceramics ornamentation often works similarly to Escher’s, whether on actual ceramic objects or their depictions. One example of the latter from the Mughal period is the picture of a vase in the tomb of Itimad-ud-Daula in Agra. It is decorated with fishes – ornamental entwined, but unmistakably fishes. The same principle is also often found in tiles used as wall covering; some Iranian examples are on display in the Museum of Islamic Art in Berlin. Early examples of a similar technique are found in the frieze in the Umayyad palace of Mshatta, which dates back to the mid-eighth century. In all these examples, the interplay of ornament and image is an integral aesthetic element, whereby the image is always part of the ornament, the ornament part of the image.

We know from calligraphy that picture-puzzle-style phenomena in the stricter sense (the interplay of ornament and image alone does not constitute a picture puzzle) are not entirely foreign to Islamic tradition. I would like to make particular reference to two calligraphic images found in the manuscript room of the Lahore Museum. One obviously depicts a head. The face, too, is clearly recognisable. According to Annemarie Schimmel it is a ‘calligraphic head with the names of Muhammad and his family members, by Bahadur Shah Zafar’. A second work is the calligraphic abstraction of a vase motif, similar to some of those in the Wazir Khan Mosque. This calligraphy makes apparent something that is initially concealed by the vase motifs with their lavish coloured illustration. The vase with flowers can be interpreted as a caricature of a human figure, and the calligraphy indubitably takes this association into account; it may even be its specific intention. The appeal of this image lies in its three-fold interpretability, from concrete to abstract in the following order: letters – vase of flowers – human figure.

FLOWER CREATURES AND OTHER FIGURES

Given the examples cited above, it no longer seems far-fetched to anticipate picture puzzles, or at least pictures that can be read and interpreted in multiple ways, when contemplating interior decoration in Mughal architecture. This is especially true of the numerous frescoes with flower and vase motifs in the prayer room of the Wazir Khan Mosque. While in certain instances the Mughal artists’ objective may have been for their depictions of plants to imitate nature as faithfully as possible, this was certainly not the case with the frescoes in the Wazir Khan Mosque. These peculiar flower arrangements are far removed from any figurative realism. The most talented florist would be unable to recreate them.

The first thing that makes it possible to read faces or figures into the pictures of flower vases is the simple fact that they are almost entirely symmetrical. This corresponds to the symmetry of bodies and faces. Symmetry may have been an artistic requirement. However, it would have been easy to avoid symmetry if one wished at all costs to avoid any association with figures and faces. There are also pictures of vases that exclude any possibility of an alternative reading, such as the flower motifs in the Badshahi Mosque in Lahore or the Mahabat Khan Mosque in Peshawar, as well as many asymmetrical depictions of plants. The association can also be avoided in simple depictions of flowers, i.e. flowers on stalks, without a vase: we often come across these when flowers are portrayed using *pietra dura* technique.

However, if we discern figures or faces in the flower vases, and are perhaps supposed to discern them because this is the artists’ intention, this poses the question of what exactly may be depicted there and what the purpose of such depictions might be. One thing, at least, is clear: the flower-vase creatures – for want of a better name – can hardly be read as animal ciphers, like the tiles over the prayer niche in the Dai Anga Mosque. They also cannot be translated back to other concrete models or entities in the real world. Nonetheless, they are faces or figures, as the descriptions in the individual illustrations accompanying this article make clear. As faces or figures, they are symbolic of something; they represent something, much as the hair of the Prophet in the branches of the acacia represents the Prophet himself.

We cannot, however, clearly establish what it is these ‘vase creatures’ symbolise. Inasmuch as they are not figures taken from reality, they may be creatures of the imagination and demons (djinns), like those found in mythology and in the world of Oriental fairytale. One could, though, also see the vase creatures as a kind of coded heraldry: as the Islamised version of mythical or real heraldic animals in the Occident. There are two possible frames of reference: the religious, and the courtly-imperial, which should not be seen as strictly separate. Rather, it seems reasonable to assume that the core intention of these images and their dual readability may be precisely the conflation of these two spheres.

This would fit with the Mughal rulers’ intention not only to legitimise their rule on a religious basis, as most rulers attempt to do, but also, as mentioned above, to develop their own courtly-religious agenda, and for this to reflect, at least to some extent, the religious heterogeneity of the Mughal empire. It is common knowledge that this understanding of religion also found expression in Mughal painting, and it is easy to demonstrate the influence of Hindu painting on Mughal miniatures. We know, for example, that there were Mughal copies of the *Ramayana* epic for use in the house of the ruling dynasty. The pictorial world of this epic differs from that of the miniatures with their epics from the Persian region, some of which were Islamised. Particularly striking in it is the depiction of demons.

The idea of what a demon might look like, and the fact that one was permitted to depict it, may thus have been adopt-
There are some specific idiosyncrasies in the portraits of Mughal rulers that are deserving of mention, irrespective of any such influence from other, non-Islamic pictorial traditions. The rulers were regularly portrayed wearing an eye-catching string of pearls, and we may assume that they did indeed wear such a necklace, at least for certain occasions. Sometimes their turbans are decorated with feathers, or again with pearls. When the rulers are portrayed seated, as is often the case, they are frequently sitting on their lower legs in a kind of lotus position, and are slightly elevated. With their clothing, they form a triangle.

The effect is often similar when they are portrayed standing, as they are then frequently wearing a bell-like, oddly transparent skirt. Judging by these miniatures, their clothing was also decorated with ornamental plant motifs and flowers, such that the ruler – if the comparison is permissible – himself resembled a flower, radiating his aura to all those around him. And if the ruler himself resembles and creates the effect of a bouquet of flowers, it seems reasonable to interpret a bouquet of flowers as a cipher for the ruler, or as a symbol of the aura of authority.

If we identify the vase paintings in the Wazir Khan Mosque as faces, we observe that they are looking straight out at the viewer. They encounter us on a level; it is almost as if they see and recognise us better than we do them – especially if we really do see them as nothing more than flower motifs. This direct gaze coming straight at the viewer out of the painting means there is something slightly hypnotic, hypothesising about them. The pictures also communicate with the viewer, in that they assign us puzzles to solve and play with our perception. They mislead perception, whether by persuading the viewer to believe that they are not merely flower vases but faces, or by pretending to be nothing more than flower vases. They play with the viewer’s perception in that they do not allow themselves to be defined and stabilised as a fixed, definitive visual impression, and because they cannot readily be seen or recognised, but are, despite their individuality, easily confused with one another. And because they must constantly be rearranged in the eye of the beholder, like a Cubist painting. These paintings are themselves living creatures in the sense that they interact with the viewer, who reacts to them in his own specific way, does so differently at different moments and in different moods, and sees in them different things.

There is, incidentally, an anthropological constant that accounts for the capacity and desire to see faces in an apparently abstract pattern. In post-modern French philosophy this is referred to as visagéité – ‘faciality’ in English. In their essay on the subject, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari interpret this phenomenon as a specifically Western-Christian phenomenon: ‘The face is not a universal. (…) The face is Christ. The face is the typical European.’ However, the media scientist Laura Marks, who takes up this theory in her book about the Islamic roots of new media art, emphasises that faciality can hardly be culturally specific: ‘Other bodies and body-like things make us aware of our own being. Even a religious convert (to Islam) cannot erase the meaning of bodies and their stories from her experience. (…) The figurative tendency occurs when the visible begins to vibrate with potential.’ In both Deleuze/Guattari and Marks, the visibility of the face expresses the relationship to a higher power, whether institutional or abstract-discursive. If we assume, on a trial basis, that this theory is correct, we can say with reference to the picture puzzles in the Wazir Khan Mosque that this power – namely that of the Mughals – is what we see when we perceive abstractions of faces in the vase paintings.

It is my contention that the central concept of the iconographic programme in the prayer chamber of the Wazir Khan Mosque consists of immediate and at the same time unconscious communication with the viewer in an almost hypnotic interaction with his subconscious. The vase paintings do not depict a ruler or a higher being himself: rather, they are representatives of higher powers in an alternative cosmos, one that can no longer be portrayed using the usual mimetic means. They represent the essence, the aura, the nature of authority, purified of everything pictorially concrete in a similar sense to the way the Muslim mystic or Hindu ascetic passes through numerous levels of disembodiment and spiritual enlightenment in order to get closer to God (or Brahman). When the visitor walks first through the entry portal, then into the courtyard and prayer chamber of the Wazir Khan Mosque, it is as if he is passing through a lock: past a gallery of spiritual and worldly authority and their symbols, in which the Prophet also figures as a central element, or is represented by a proxy – by his hair, and possibly, in the picture opposite, by his horse, Buraq, on whom he is said to have undertaken his nocturnal ride through the heavens to Jerusalem, concealed here in the foliage of the tree. However, this also means that it is only if we recognise the vase paintings as picture puzzles and representatives of worldly and spiritual Mughal rule, in the sense of a translatio imperii from the Prophet Mohammed, that Kamil Khan Mumtaz interpretation of the framed painting with the hair of the Prophet can appear plausible, even obligatory.

**MICRO COSM AND MACRO COSM**

A comparison with miniature painting can help us better to understand the aesthetic concept of the Wazir Khan. Miniature painting is a self-contained world, in which the figures only ever look at each other, not usually out of the paint-
ing at the viewer. Miniature painting constitutes a microcosm, as we are intended to understand from the smallness of the depiction: a world you can hold in your hand, or open like a book. The 'vase creatures' in the Wazir Khan Mosque, however, encounter the viewer at eye level, or even stand above him. They represent a macrocosm that simultaneously encroaches upon the world of men and looms above it, like the tent of the sky, which we also find in the ceiling decoration.

Entering the prayer chamber of the Wazir Khan Mosque means entering an intersection, an overlap of the human cosmos and the macrocosm. As incommensurable as the macrocosm is for the world of men, the flower figures, and with them the entire decoration of the prayer chamber, are as incommensurable for the observer. He senses that this has a meaning, and he will know, understand and see more depending on the level of his religious and esoteric-mystical initiation: but he will never be able to understand everything. The imagery in the mosque ultimately remains bigger than he is – as was probably also the case for its builders, craftsmen and painters, who at best were skilled at and understood only their particular aspect of the design.

**DRUGS AND DEFECTIVE EYESIGHT**

Finally, I would like to mention two aspects that contemporary art historians, for the most part, tend to overlook, but which must for centuries have made a crucial difference to observers. The first is uncorrected defective vision (which is still not corrected as widely in the Orient as it is in the West). Defective vision means that the observer has a different view of the flower creatures, a view that the unhindered observer can get a sense of if he looks at these pictures from very far away, or in a very small reproduction, such as the miniature electronic photos known as thumbnails. If one does this, the resemblance between the vase creatures and figures or faces becomes far more clearly apparent: indeed, only then does it really, unequivocally, appear – as some of the frescoes, deliberately reproduced here in very small format for this purpose, should demonstrate. So in this sense, too, the decoration is alive: no two people see it the same way, and even for the individual observer it may change form in the course of his lifetime, as his eyesight and vision change.

Another aspect that is also seldom considered, but which should not be underestimated as far as the aesthetics of perception are concerned, relates to the effect of intoxicants. We know the Mughals liked to partake of these – often, indeed, to extremes: primarily alcohol, but also opium and its derivatives. The scholar of Iranian studies and ethnologist Rudolf Gelpke writes: ‘Hemp drugs have so often inspired Islamic artists in a wide variety of fields (poetry, storytelling, architecture, painting, music, and especially the all-pervading Sufi mysticism) and have had such a deep, broad and lasting impact that the effects of the drug on mind and spirit have entered into these works of art, influencing their form and content.’ I have already suggested, in speaking of its rather hypnotic effect, that the prayer chamber of the Wazir Khan Mosque could be construed as a psychedelic room, and that it can impact on the observer in this way. For someone under the influence of drugs, this impression would obviously be intensified in all kinds of ways. To this day the consumption of hashish, although officially strictly forbidden, is widespread in Pakistan, not least in Sufi circles. The experience of drugs described by twentieth-century Western writers such as Henri Michaux and Aldous Huxley could also be taken as an handbook for a perception-psychological interpretation of the prayer chamber in the Wazir Khan Mosque – though only, of course, if one is prepared to engage with its ambiguity and vivid picture puzzles, and in so doing to acknowledge the Mughals’ cosmological vision, their blending of spheres, and the syncretism of their spiritual worldview, instead of reducing the interpretation to a few commonplaces according to the Sunni orthodoxy of our times (which, when referring to the Mughals, can only be an anachronism).

Nevertheless – or for precisely this reason – it seems important to stress in conclusion that the picture puzzles in Lahore do not contradict the orthodox ban on images: rather, they ultimately confirm it. They may provide expression for people’s need for images; however, they do not satisfy this need objectively, but only through the subjective perception of the initiated and willing observer. In a certain sense one might describe it as an iconographic taqiyya – concealment of the true, heterodox convictions of those who commissioned this mosque, the purpose of which was to reconcile contradictory worldviews and aesthetic expectations. Because if we look at them superficially, all we ever see are flowers and vases. The ban on images thus remains broadly inviolate in the realm of Mughal sacred architecture.

There is no need to rewrite the history of Islamic art – these remarkable exceptions simply add to its wonders.

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