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**Third Themes: MHPSS services/interventions available in the Gaza Strip;
gaps to be bridged.**

**TITLE:
PSYCHODRAMA IN THERAPY AND PSYCHOSOCIAL WORK IN
GAZA – IN ORDER TO ‘BREAK THE SIEGE’**

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ABSTRACT:

For 20 years the NGO ‘Medico international Switzerland’ supports our Training Project in the method of Psychodrama with colleagues from the GCMHP and PMRS; I am the trainer, together with Dr. Maja Hess; now we are active as Supervisors for the Gazan trained group.

Psychodrama reenforces individual and social resilience capacity to resist the violence of Israeli occupation, and the increasing political and social pressure and stress situation of the COVID-19 Pandemic. The population of Gaza suffers a double enclosure, which strikes mostly women and children.

As a group method Psychodrama has proved its relevance in clinical and psychosocial field, as well as in educational and community work, with adults and children. Depression, domestic violence and suicide are increasing symptoms of the cruel situation in Gaza.

Mental health work is very exhausting; the colleagues need permanent supervision and support in order to resist the challenges in their work and renew their energy, beside of the continuing learning about the method in theory and practice.

KEY WORDS:

Psychodrama, re-traumatization, group therapy, resilience, supervision, virtual therapy, politics and psychology, break the siege is the necessary condition for any therapy goal.

1. INTRODUCTION

PSYCHODRAMA METHOD IN GAZA

Why I concern Psychodrama as a very useful method for groups in a context of violence, trauma, and social insecurity?

I give some references from my paper for the GCMHP'S 6TH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE, GAZA CITY-PALESTINE; 19th-20th of April 2016, which had the title *SIEGE AND MENTAL HEALTH ... WALLS VERSUS BRIDGES*

My paper was called 'SILENCE AND SHAME'.

With the method of Psychodrama, we are focusing a group method, which includes possibilities of working through the traumatic events. Using the 'surplus reality', we can enact and dramatize situations of fear and shame, without that the patient him/herself has to expose directly. With the method of Playback Theater or in mirroring during a psychodrama, the victim of violent human treatment might look at the scene that is repressed. The therapist together with the whole group gives the containment and helps the patient to overcome the resistance and to look at the terrified experience, first like in a surrealistic theater, then proposing changes and getting relief through catharsis.

This is a long and complicated process, and mostly first comes the body expression and the movement in the group, as expression of pain, suffering and shame, before the patient can find the words and begin to talk. During the 20 years that Maja Hess and I from 'medico international Switzerland' are giving the Training Workshops at the GCMHP, we can evaluate this method as highly appropriate for the situation in Gaza. I am using this method also in other contexts of violent and traumatic situation (El Salvador, Nicaragua, Guatemala, México, Costa Rica, Cuba, Uruguay) with very good results.

As in Psychoanalyses we never push a person to be protagonist, only when she or he wants to be protagonist and work about an issue, and the group is identified with the main theme, we start a psychodrama process. By the end, during 'sharing', the

individual experience of the protagonist becomes a collective group therapy, because every participant shall talk and share his/her own experience. During this process, together with direct therapeutic effect, also the process of collective memory is important, in order to search for the truth in individual and social life history. Shame and guilt feelings cover up the truth and give the way free for false interpretations of the history. Impunity is transformed into the knowledge about the real facts, if the protagonists of the action talk about.

To overcome shame feelings and break the silence is a painful and complicated process, which is only possible if we can build up a relation of confidence and honesty. If the therapist comes from another culture and is from the opposite sex of the protagonist, there are additional difficulties, conflicts and possibilities to work on. Transference process is based on an unconscious repetition of infantile feelings and experiences, with the significant adult persons like Mother, Father, Grandmother, Grandfather, brother, sister etc. In our case, we are European women, we are representatives from the old colonialist world, which nowadays is repeating unjust and coward attitudes towards Palestine. What influence does this historical background mean in the collective unconscious of the participants of the therapy? If we are able to make it conscious, and give names to the violent history, we can become real partners in the relationship. However, if this matter is not verbalized and recognized, impunity might lead to a situation of re-traumatization.

The goal of this paper is to point out, how difficult is psychotherapy work in the context of violence and war, and how important is the issue of counter-transference, which means that the person of the therapist also is a subject to include in the process.

For this reason we are very happy that the NGO 'medico international Switzerland' continuously supports **SUPERVISION WORK** with the graduated Psychodramatists in Gaza, who realize a wonderful work with many groups of traumatized children, women and men!

By that means, it can be possible, that violence turns into hope, that 'the other' is not only experienced as enemy, and that 'myself' and 'we together' can become more human.

Psychological thinking focuses on human relationships, as individuals, as collective processes, always within a specific cultural and social frame, which uses to regulate our behavior without that the moral and religious values become conscious. Only through therapy work and social investigation, these unconscious values might become conscious and by that mean questionable, which is the condition for making changes. We need a critical distance in order to be able to recognize our own unconscious behavior, and to avoid the automatic repetition of behavior and thinking values. We know about the transference of prejudices from generations to generations, and how these values may become an iron law, thus mostly in patriarchal societies where the monotheist religion might strengthen authoritarian cultural and social structure, which oppresses women.

2. PSYCHODRAMA SUPERVISION DURING THE PANDEMIC SITUATION

Since March 2020 we all suffer from the danger of the contagious COVID, which is of course much more serious in the situation of the densely living population of Gaza than in other parts of the world, where the problems of health and poverty also strike people very much, and increase the injustice and discrimination of the rich and the poor world. However, in GAZA there is a multiple deadly threat and a highly dangerous reality on all levels: existentially, physically and emotionally!

The latest attack by the Israeli army in May 2021 maybe was the cruelest, because in the midst of the pandemic victims and daily loss of beloved people, the bombs were thrown on the civilian crowds who have no way where to flee. A criminal and coward action against almost 2 million of persons who live in a big prison, surrounded with walls, illegal occupation and long-term humiliation!

OUR TASK AS PSYCHOLOGISTS MUST INCLUDE SOLIDARIAN SUPERVISION AND INFORMATION FOR THE WORLD OUTSIDE THE WALLS!

How can we work and give support in these difficult times? Not the best therapy work can really help and be successful for our aims; meanwhile this political and social oppression goes on. Therefore, we need to build up a solidarian **INTERNATIONAL NETWORK**, beside of our professional support with supervision. We try to do this with our **NETWORK PSYCHODRAMA SOUTH - SOUTH WITHOUT BORDERS**, a

movement we founded in 2012 in Cuba, in order to exchange our experiences in different countries, mostly from Latin America! These countries suffered dictatorships, oppression and persecution in the 70es, and the traces of traumatic events strike the generations since then and must be worked through, for instance with Psychodrama group therapy and work on consciousness and historic analyses. The collective traumatic experiences give the possibility of identification with the people in Gaza, as we have seen it during the international zoom sessions and the personal meetings, even though only by Internet.

Positive and negative sides of INTERNET are well recognized in the situation of GAZA: on one side, thanks to the virtual communication we could accompany our groups during the attacks with regular zoom meetings; not all of the colleagues, but some of them could attend the meetings and inform us, and at the same time get support from us, a limited containing work was possible. But on the other side Psychodrama is not possible in a virtual way, except of some techniques and of course to see the colleagues and make them feel, that they are not alone.

Our work must include beside of the clinical therapeutic work to tell the truth outside, even though we are just a few voices, but we must strengthen the information about this criminal situation, in order to give support for the international HUMAN RIGHT organizations and make pressure in order that the laws must be respected! A long way already is trying to reach this; but unfortunately, the war is a good business in the capitalistic world and human beings are not considered important, just the profit and hegemonic power 'game'.

Our professional position so fare includes a political responsibility, as well with our personal presence and virtually; we never must lose the contact but strengthen the communication with Gaza! Fortunately, there are now good Psychodramatists working in Gaza, to whom we could give an internationally recognized training, thanks to the NGO 'Medico international Switzerland', but themselves the colleagues are re-traumatized.

Beside of our formal supervision sessions we organized monthly the NETWORK SESSIONS, including Psychodramatists of Costa Rica, El Salvador, Cuba, Guatemala, Uruguay, Argentina, Switzerland; more than 20 colleagues participated, who multiplied the information in their countries; so fare a big group of professionals were linked to Gaza and expressed their solidarity.

3. CASE STUDIES

During last months and with our virtual supervision sessions, we focused on the resilience forces of our colleagues. During the attacks, some of them expressed that they are paralyzed, cannot go out of their houses, have nightmares, and feel stressed permanently, consequently it was impossible for them to listen to the patients. Every colleague of the group in the zoom session gave her/his idea, how to deal with this problem, and of course myself as therapist. The focus was put on BODYWORK, YOGA, TALKING WITH THE CHILDREN, SINGING, LOOKING FOR SOMEBODY TO TALK, and most of all, searching for 'a safe place'. Where can they find a SAFE PLACE IN GAZA? This is a complicated psychological, social and political task to learn.

CONCLUSION

Now more than ever we focus the importance of supervision and support for the professional staff who is working in psychosocial field. The repeated attacks by the Israeli army and the social and political insecurity, which the Gazan Population is suffering, increases MENTAL HEALTH problems and the need for psychological health. Our colleagues who are trained in psychodrama group therapy work are wishing to continue, as soon as the COVID pandemic is lower and they can work personally; by zoom it is not possible to do psychodrama work except some exercises and to accompany the group, giving continence. The high responsibility which in these days is so big that there is a risk for the psychologists and social workers, to reach their limits with the own strength, physically and emotionally! The great demand for psychotherapy and community work signifies a big challenge for

the health institutions as the GCMHP and other institutions. As well as the work of the colleagues is a huge effort and human commitment, they never can 'save' all the traumatized people of Gaza. There is a huge need for training of new colleagues, and more support for PSYCHODRAMA GROUP WORK, which in these past 20 years show good results.

Finally yet important, I repeat the initial call for **FREE PALESTINE and SOCIAL and political JUSTICE for GAZA!**

BREAK THE SIEGE and give an end to the chain of traumatizations, is the cry of thousands of civilian people of Gaza; we promise to spread out this cry in our countries, as we constantly are doing.

**THE RESILIENCE FORCES AND THE STRENGTH OF HUMAN RESISTANCE
IN GAZA IS THE SPRING OF HOPE, AND INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY
MUST INCREASE ALL OVER.**

THANK YOU!