

**Sibylle Rothkegel, Berlin**

## **Competence in intercultural contexts**

Review of

**Janine Radice von Wogau, Hanna Eimmermacher, Andrea Lanfranchi (Hg.), *Therapie und Beratung von Migranten: Systemisch-interkulturell denken und handeln*. Weinheim / Basel, Beltz Verlag, 2004. 279 pp.**

***Therapie und Beratung von Migranten: Systemisch-interkulturell denken und handeln* [Therapy and counseling for immigrants: systemic-intercultural approaches to thinking and acting]**, is a handbook for practitioners and a very worthwhile volume for anyone interested in intercultural contexts.

For colleagues who have opportunities to work on a practical level with immigrants, this book must be recommended; indeed, it seems indispensable. The editors and authors adopt a systemic-theoretical perspective as an orientation for understanding the specific situation and the experience of immigrants. In discussing the political and psycho-social context, problems are addressed quite clearly, for example, the fact that the Federal Republic of Germany continues to avoid defining itself as a country of immigration and thus has not created space for new, multicultural identities. Opportunities in the educational system and the employment market also continue to be unequally distributed. Despite the fact that immigrant families make up more than ten percent of the German population (official statistics, 2003), the national health care system also fails to pay suitable attention to their needs.

In Germany today, it is seen as “politically correct” to refer to “people with an immigrant background”, but this terminology appears to reflect the tendency to overlook the “many faces of migration”. With respect to therapy, counseling, and day-to-day life in schools, however, people’s actual origins, their religious affiliation, the question of how long and under what conditions they have lived in Germany, and their legal status is are all significant factors that must be taken into consideration. This volume provides important information and numerous examples from practical work that are relevant in this context.

The texts reflect on the opportunities and resources that immigration can offer in various life cycles but also consider the effects of a static concept of culture, of reciprocal cultural attributions, of simplifications, of the production of stereotypes, and of individual prejudice in working with immigrants. Also discussed are the possible implications of marginalization and discrimination for immigrants and the potential for developing creative strategies for survival. The authors also consider individual, biographical explanations for blockades that hamper the way a person approaches the new society and problems that practitioners face in their dealings with immigrants such as backwardness, radical segregation from society, and self-elected isolation.

These contributions compile reports from a wide variety of contexts, including intercultural experience in systemic therapy for individuals, couples, and families; the practice of a family doctor; **treatment of traumatized refugees and victims of torture**; care of children with life-threatening illnesses; in school counseling and school psychologist services; social work at a *Hauptschule*; a special center offering counseling in marriage and family affairs and other general issues.

In view of current German discussions about the “foreigner problem” and the increasingly audible voices that intone the “swan song of multicultural approaches”, this book is all the more valuable. Testifying to the authors’ serious engagement with the realities of “lives in migration”, as the sites of transformation and the production of new relations, the theoretical level of these texts as well as their language reflect approaches that are anything but simplistic. The volume describes appropriate forms of intervention from various practical fields and offers valuable impulses for self-reflexion and for enhancing one’s competence in intercultural contexts.

Translation from German: Paula Bradish

### **Short biographical note**

Dipl. Psych. Sibylle Rothkegel, psychologist and psychotherapist, has a private practice offering individual and group therapy to traumatized refugees and migrants. From 1989 to 1994 she worked in a shelter for traumatized homeless girls and young women. A staff member of the Behandlungszentrum für Folteropfer, Berlin (Center for the Treatment of Victims of Torture) from 1994 to 2001, she became its deputy director in 1996. From 1995 to 2005 she worked for Coordination of Women’s Advocacy, an organization that focuses on the protection of female traumatized witnesses in international courts. She also worked in Kosovo, held seminars on dealing with traumatized people in Sierra Leone, and from 2004 to 2005 she was a consultant for the development of a project designed to prevent domestic violence in Palestine. She also works for the Office for Psychosocial Issues, INA, at the Free University Berlin (see URL [www.opsiconsult.com](http://www.opsiconsult.com)) and is engaged in an interdisciplinary training project for social pedagogues at the Institute "Recht würde helfen" ("Justice would help"). In 2003 she became the head of the Office of Psychological Counseling for Victims of Right-wing Extremist, Xenophobic, and Antisemitic Violence.

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