MARGINALIZATION

exploring the edge of consensus reality

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After the second call for papers for this congress, one night I awoke

excited with the word „marginalization" in mind. When more awake I

realized that this was an aspect of the topic „facing multiplicity" which I

didn't want to miss. Since that night my lecture has continuously

developped.

I will start by defining marginalization and discuss the potential that

awareness of and knowledge about marginalization can have for our

work.

Then I will present you an example of my work with an individual client and talk afterwards about the effects of creating space for marginalized parts in groups.

The term marginalization has etymological roots in the middle ages, when „marginalia" meant comments, which monks added in the margins of the manuscripts they copied.

Since the 1960's, the word has been used as a sociological term referring to research on people and groups of people who are driven to the edge of a given society.

I want to present you also a mythological description of marginalization:
„Once upon a time there was a queen and a king. After some difficulties they had their first child, a girl. The king was very happy and ordered a great feast. He also invited the Wise Women who lived in his kingdom, hoping that they might be kind and well disposed to the child. There were thirteen of them, but as he had only twelve golden plates for them, one of them had to stay at home."(1)

The king in this fairytale marginalized the thirteenth fairy, which had a disastrous effect on his kingdom. We could also say that he stayed within the limitations of his tableware and got stuck in a closed system.

The medieval monks crossed the border of the codified knowledge of their time when they added personal notes to the codices they copied in the monasteries. In this way they expanded the edge of the description of the world they lived in.

I use two different terms in order to describe the edge at which marginalization happens:

- the term „consensus reality" is philosophical and connected to the social context in which a group lives. People who do not share the group's agreed definition of reality, or don't correspond to it, get marginalized.

- the term „conscious identity" is psychological and describes the part of our reality which our ego identifies with. If you ask people „who are you?" you will get a momentary description of their conscious identity. The parts we are not momentarily identified with get marginalized.

So marginalization is a process and a phenomenon which necessarily

happens when our identity forms and reality gets defined. In order to

feel safe we need a good grounding in a continuity of ego and in a

shared worldview.

But for individuals, as well as for groups, there will be times, when their

established identity has to be widened, or even crossed, to enable

adaptation to new situations and growth. Today, „facing multiplicity" in

the world, we are often challenged to do so, regardless of our personal

preferences.

In classical Jungian theory you will find no references to the term

„marginalization", neither in the index of Jung's collected works nor in

the writings of his collaborators.

Yet Jung himself often described feeling what we might call today

"marginalized" among his colleagues and in the academic world. The

same happened to his followers and to depth psychology in general.

As you all know, the basic concept of growth and transformation in

Jungian psychology, individuation, is based on the work around the

„edge of the known world", the dynamic between the conscious and the

unconscious parts of the psyche. The core interest of Jungian Psychology

in the products of the unconscious and especially in active imagination

can also be described as an interest in the marginalized and the

unknown territories of the soul.

But even if all this is the case, why introduce a new term and concept at

all?

I see four reasons to consider this:

1. The term „marginalization" is more phenomenological and less

judgmental than for instance „shadow", „complex" or „inferior

function".

2. The concept „marginalization" implicitly assumes that there are two

parts, the „marginalizer" and the „marginalized". This stimulates study

and reflection of their relationship.

3. In his eighties Jung was deeply concerned about the future of humanity. He saw that a new psychology would be needed in the coming astrological age of Aquarius (a huge Anthropos figure) and that this would mean more focus on groups and the interconnectedness of the field. I hope to show you, in the second part of my presentation, that the concept of marginalization is helpful for the work with those „big bodies" on all levels.

4. Including the concept of marginalization in our work and thinking could also support links between psychology, sociology and politics, thus enabling us to provide even more Jungian contributions to interdisciplinary cooperation around the difficult collective situations of our time.

Let's now investigate the effects of marginalization more closely:

Being marginalized is mostly a painful and traumatizing experience. If affected by marginalization, you feel and often are excluded in many

respects: your experiences are not taken seriously and valued and often

you have no right or opportunity to speak out and be heard. This

situation can cause despair, altered states, serious illness, chronic

exhaustion and a suicidal state of mind as well as a burning wish for

revenge.

Being on the marginalizing side can sometimes lead to a state of being

cut off from growth and new inspiration and result in a feeling of low

energy, standstill and a chronic mild depression. This situation can

cause serious illness and a suicidal state of mind as well as aggressive

behavior out of frustration and boredom.

Both the marginalized and the marginalizing parts may feel cut off from

something, miss something, get one-sided and lack wholeness.

In short:

Individuals, groups and societies depend from time to time on their

marginalized parts in order to grow.

Inner and outer marginalized parts need an opportunity to be seen and

define themselves and to be met with their experiences of reality.

I said in the beginning that marginalization is a process. Being marginalized can be a temporary experience we all have from time to time. And it can also be a state, forced on individuals and groups for a longer time. Those who are being marginalized today will probably marginalize others tomorrow and constitute the next mainstream. More awareness and work around this issue could possibly help to get beyond these painful opposites and the dangerous back and forth between them. To see marginalization as a process and not mainly as a polarization of two opponents could be a step towards integration into the unifying field in the background, where diversity can be lived.

As I stated before, being marginalized is mostly a painful state of isolation and being deprived of the right of self-determination, of speaking out and being seen. When working with clients and groups who have experiences of marginalization and have to live with inner figures that marginalize them, it is crucial to enable them to become visible and express themselves. I hope to illustrate this by the following vignette from my work with Clara.

Clara

Clara, a young woman, was referred to me by a clinic where she stayed

after a break down. Before the break down, she had lived in a world

which was a mixture of professional success, exploitation, drugs,

abusive relationships, ecstatic dancing, her sensitivity and the

devastating effects of her obvious beauty. During our work, we also

dealt with her painful experiences with her single mother, who had

manipulated and emotionally abandoned her again and again during

her childhood and adolescence.

Clara was very motivated to work on her situation and was able to

change her life and her attitude step by step. It was a difficult process

bringing her into situations in which she was marginalized on all

possible sides: she couldn't go back to her former life, friends and habits,

she was and still is dependent on health insurance and social welfare,

she is an immigrant and is still not able to work in a regular job. The

most frightening and painful questions for her are: does my suffering

have any sense? and: will I ever be able to live a self-determined life

again? She cried a lot and often just collapsed, when yet another obstacle

showed up.

After about three years of hard work she had the following dream:

I am in a disco, where one of my former boyfriends is the DJ: the music is

divine.

I wear an absolutely wonderful, gorgeous dress with a free back which fits me

perfectly. My long shining hair is put up. I walk over a very special marvelous

floor. I realize that my back is full of scars and open my hair in the hope that it

will cover my scars. But as soon as my hair is open a wind comes and blows it

away so that my scars are plainly visible.

When Clara worked on that dream with me, she was very touched to

find out that her scars are an important part of her personality, even

when she tried to move away from them (they are on her back). When

she wanted to hide them by opening her hair, the wind uncovered them.

They are a part of her beauty. We both felt, that we had reached a deep

place.

I thank Clara that she allowed me to share this dream with you. It expresses beautifully the dignity of having survived an almost unbearable pain and effort. It is a special treasure, which these traumatized clients can bring in some – in their own - way back to the world. I think that the effects of their arduous work on growth and transformation contribute to what Jung calls „*the general raising of consciousness*" (2).

Groups

In groups, the sensitivity for and awareness of the margins of the group's identity are of prime importance. I want to emphasize here the difference between psychology and social activism. When we work as psychologists, our goal is not primarily future action, but to create the necessary conditions for the group to express and share the whole spectrum of experiences, stories and realities present in the diversity of its members. When we work like this, we encourage all levels of consciousness to come in and welcome what is happening in the

moment. We include also the unconscious material in the background,

as we do when working with individuals.

Arnold Mindell, the founder of Process Oriented Psychology and a

former Jungian analyst, has been developing, testing and writing about

this work since the 1980's. He calls this attitude „deep democracy".

In his book „The Deep Democracy of Open Forums" he writes:

„*The philosophy of deep democracy claims that all people, parts, and feelings*

are needed. Deep democracy appreciates present democratic forms but adds to

them the need for awareness of feelings and atmosphere in moment-to-moment

interactions and institutional practices."*(3).*

When we look back to the king and his twelve golden dishes in the

Grimm tale I mentioned earlier, we can say, that Mindell works on

having dishes for everybody: "deep democracy" is an open system.

Right after this quote Mindell describes a meeting of Aboriginal people

and non-Aboriginal government officials about a conflict over land

rights. The Aboriginal people tried to explain their situation, while the

government officials wanted to call a vote on the situation. An

Aboriginal woman stopped this attempt to force a one-sided procedure, which did not include the rules and feelings of the tribal people. She came forward and started to speak very emotionally about the long story of abuse and suffering of her people and her concern for the future of the tribe. She was almost singing and used her whole body in an expressive way. After her speech the atmosphere in the room changed. Mindell writes: „*a deep sense of community was created between diverse people, at least for that time and space. We all decided to work together … and could then proceed in linear fashion to create new directions, to which all agreed". (3)*

Let me present three vignettes from my own experiences as a group leader and supervisor. They are different from Mindell's example. But I hope that you will see the common ground of trusting in what is happening in the moment, as well as a special sort of attentiveness to the resources of each group and some shared tools to unfold them. The work itself is as multi-faceted as the people who do it.

More than twenty years ago, something happened, which has influenced the way I have worked with groups ever since:

I sat, as a facilitator, with a group of about 60 people from all over the world.

At a certain moment, I became very insecure and unhappy about myself. Out of

pure desperation I asked: „maybe there is somebody who didn't speak up yet

and still has something to say?" Surprisingly a woman, who had said nothing

until then, began to speak and talked about her feeling of being a failure. Even

more surprisingly for me at that time, the whole atmosphere in the room

changed and the group members began to share their feelings and speak about

what really mattered for them.

This experience taught me two things: 1. how important it is to perceive
and trust my own feelings as being a part of the group's process and 2.
at the same time to trust the group's diversity and to invite what is
present to unfold. The sustainability of groupwork does not depend
primarily on the cuteness of the facilitators, but on their ability to pick
up what is present in the group in the moment. Especially the
marginalized people or parts can help a group to become more real and
to get in touch with its essence when they are supported to bring in their
reactions and express their feelings.

Some years later, the director of an NGO asked me to lead a weekend retreat for all his employees and freelancers including himself. The group had many different problems, including, that they were divided by language, being French- and German speakers, a general atmosphere of jealousy and mistrust between the departments, stress about finances and dissatisfaction about the leadership style of the boss. In the end, I worked with the group three times over a five year period, but I will focus only on the first two seminars.

In the first seminar, I worked mainly on establishing what I introduced earlier as" deep democracy" and on creating a safe vessel for our work. In the beginning I asked questions as a personal inner work. Then the participants shared in groups of three what had interested them and we collected these themes in the big group. I also worked with the whole group with movement in the room and helped them find out which different "parts" and "roles" were present. In addition, they solved creative tasks in subgroups. Another element was teaching: I introduced the theory of group process and gave a lecture on communication style and rank signals. In the end the director and the heads of the departments worked in the middle of the whole group on their relationship.

This work went really well, as they could understand and transform some

patterns which had created their troubles .

At the beginning of this seminar, I had realized that some people from the

organization's administration were missing. Their colleagues complained that

they felt marginalized by the "more important" rest of the organization.

When the next retreat came, the atmosphere of the whole group was more

relaxed, people were more willing to participate, but again, some office staff

were missing.

This time, the roles of the various departments and the strategy of the whole

NGO were the main issue and the director presented their performance figures.

In the end we had a process with the whole group about their position among

other similar NGOs. Most participants considered the others to be more

modern, more dynamic and more successful and people started to complain and

express frustration. Finally some of the „leader types" started to attack each

other. While I was still observing the situation, a young man from the

administration unexpectedly started to cry that they should stop. The fighters,

as well as others in the group, were shocked. I went to the young man's side

and encouraged him to talk about his feelings. After a while he started to

formulate, how important the work in this institution was for him. More and

more intensely he reminded the group of the deep sense and essence of the work

which brought them together.

The group was silent, evidently touched. I saw some wet eyes around me. After

what seemed a long period of silence, people started to reach out for each others

hands and sat for a while meditating silently.

By sharing his feelings this young man brought together all participants

in a deep place. A member of the administration (probably the youngest)

became an elder for the whole group. Office people are often poorly

paid, but their commitment and mood create an atmosphere, which is

important for the whole institution. Looking back to the beginning we

can say: kingdoms can either be ruined or supported to grow, even

forced to grow, by their marginalized parts.

In 1950 Jung ordered some stones for building in Bollingen. When the

stones arrived, it turned out that the cornerstone had altogether the

wrong measurements. Jung decided that he wanted to keep this stone

and later chiseled an alchemical quote into it:

„Here stands the mean uncomely stone,

'Tis very cheap in price!

The more it is despised by fools,

The more loved by the wise" (4)

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Quotations:

(1) „The Complete Grimm's Fairy Tales" (1972), Little Briar-Rose, p. 237

(2) Jung, MDR, p. 343

(3) Mindell (2002), „The Deep Democracy of Open Forums", p. 13/14

(4) Jung, MDR, p. 253, Latin verse of Arnaldus de Villanova (died 1313)

Book list:

Mindell, A. (2002), „The Deep Democracy of Open Forums", Hampton

Roads, Charlottesville

„The Complete Grimm's Fairy Tales" (1972), Pantheon Books, New York

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