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**“Disturbances and passionate involvement take precedence“ (Ruth C. Cohn).**

## **Experiences in conflictive interreligious groups based on Theme-Centered-Interaction**

### *Issue*

As a scholar in Religious Education as well as a graduate teacher of TCI (Theme-centered-interaction) at the Ruth Cohn Institute International I have increasingly come into contact with the interreligious scenery in Austria, India, South Africa and other countries across the world. In these contexts the „Disturbances and Involvement Postulation“ of Ruth Cohn’s concept became progressively more important to my work and provides a key focus for the workshop. Examples of my personal experience in this area include facilitating workshops on themes like this:

- „Female Empowerment and my Religion“,
- „I am woman/man in my Religion: What does it mean, how do I feel?“ etc.
- Religions: Exclusive forts of truth or joint seekers after truth in a common pilgrimage? Let’s explore alternatives.

These workshops include people from a range of religious backgrounds: Hindus, Muslims, Christians. In addition, co-facilitators in this workshop are normally not Christians. Also I do seminars with an interreligious group at my faculty. Participants of the workshop are invited to share the own experiences of disturbances in interreligious communication.

### *Methodology*

Experiences like this can help us to understand and to work with Ruth C. Cohn’s postulation on disturbances in interreligious groups.

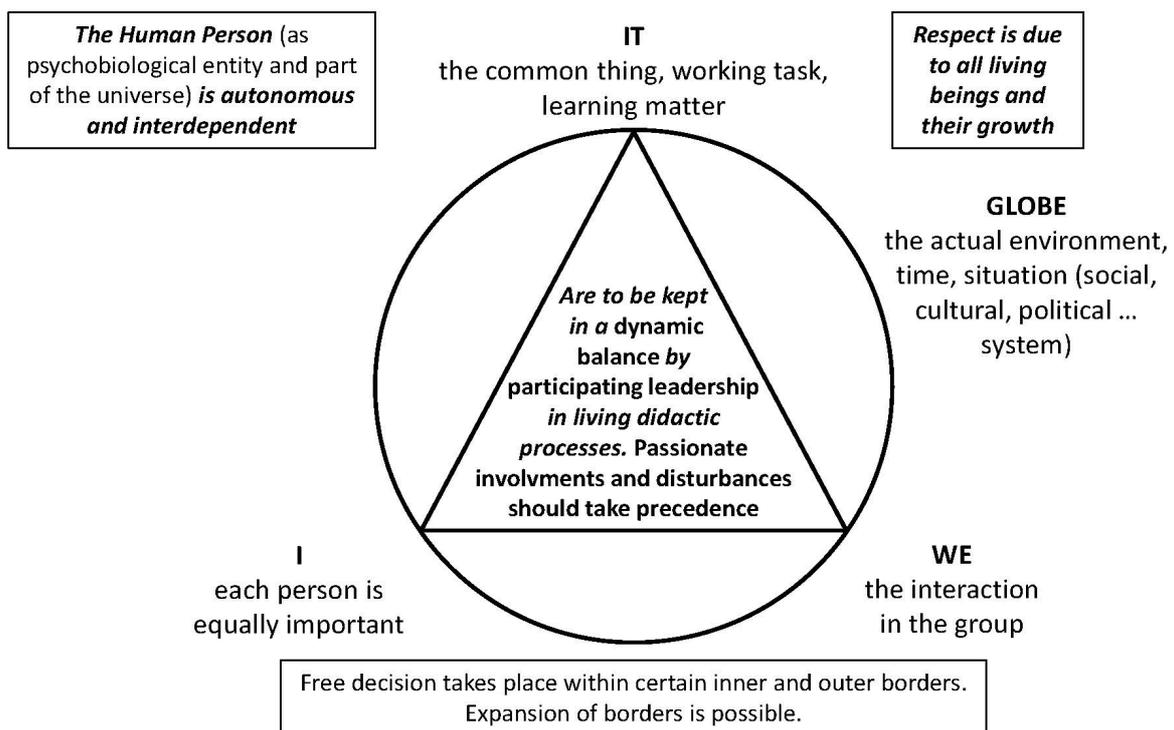
Who was Ruth C. Cohn? Short information about the founder of TCI

The Jewish R. Cohn born in 1912 in Berlin, emigrated from the Nazi terror initially to Switzerland, and then to the U.S. Her understanding of "living learning" is the self-responsible step of the seduction of inhumanity. "Dead learning" takes a very limited or often just a sham communication: 'something', a task, a learning object, a content, a piece of tradition is a quasi-neutral object, as matters without personal reference without considering the dynamics in (learning) groups and independent of contexts in which learning processes will communicate. "Dead Learning" R. Cohn suspects mainly occurs at universities and schools. Dry knowledge as an anonymous product, isolated from its background, without personal reference, far from any real social context and without anthropological and ethical basis, is characteristic of Dead Learning. Not only in learning but in any human communication, single-line transfer distinguishes the multi-dimensional information and increasingly intimate human communication. Therefore, it makes sense not only to speak of living and dead learning, but equally to distinguish "living communication" from "dead communication." (J. Hilberath/M. Scharer: *Kommunikative Theologie*. Ostfildern, 2012, 63-141).

TCI combines an anthropological reasoned, values-based approach of human communication with the know-how to design practical communication processes with the intention of living learning. It includes the formal elements or dimensions which characterize any linguistic communication:

- The I of each and every participant as an autonomous-interdependent subject.
- The WE expressing the dynamics of groups/communities; has not only instrumental significance.
- The IT as the thing or concern around which the interaction turns.
- The Globe representing the spatio-temporal and the social context, which encloses the first three dimensions and which is implicitly present in every process.

Cohn represents the interconnection of these dimensions by way of an equilateral triangle within a sphere. This figure expresses not only that the dimensions belong together but also that they are of equal value. The symmetry and dynamic balance of all dimensions is the hallmark of TCI-Communication. TCI is neither a typical therapeutic approach dealing with the inner psychological problems of people, nor is it a purely group-dynamic process focusing only on what happens inside the group. Theme centering means that the “matter” of interaction is assigned the highest value. Cohn never tires of maintaining the inseparable interdependence between human and spiritual values in her specific methodological approach. Thus, she has always resisted attempts to reduce TCI to a mere technique for directing group processes, as TCI is sometimes used in Europe. The value reference is most clearly expressed in the “axioms” of TCI, which formulate the “irreducible” of the TCI approach and contain “elements of faith”



### Primary sources

It is crucial to human communication, especially to interreligious communication, that they do not take place without disturbances, that is, without inner and outer resistance, conflict, etc. and without varying degrees of involvement. As an academic psychoanalyst, Cohn recognizes the learning opportunities that people have in the face of overcoming resistance and conflicts. The formula „disturbances and passionate involvement take precedence“ or, in other words, „disturbances and passionate involvement claim their precedence“, recalls the

counter-transference workshop in which TCI was born. This postulation refers to an observation about the human reality, especially of interreligious, interaction: disturbances do not ask for permission; they are simply there as pain, fear, aggression, joy, distraction, etc. If they remain unexpressed or are rarely suppressed, they give rise to „the kind of impersonal, disturbance-free' classrooms, factory halls, auditoriums, conference rooms“ that are „filled with apathetic and submissive "or desperate and rebellious people, whose frustration ultimately leads to their own destruction and that of their institution.“ (R. Cohn: *Von der Psychoanalyse zur Themenzentrierten Interaktion: Von der Behandlung einzelner zu einer Pädagogik für alle* Stuttgart, <sup>5</sup>1981, ibid 122.