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Preface

The fact that a prestigious, specialized book series such as *Advances in Psychosomatic Medicine* decides to publish a volume devoted to cultural psychiatry is eloquent and revealing. The explanation for this is not the celebration of a particular event related to cultural themes, it is not a financially booming enterprise or the promise of commercial success, and it is not an anniversary, not even because of the generous friendship of Tom Wise with this undeserving Guest Editor. To me, the reason is basically an awareness that today, more than at any other point in the history of psychiatry, culture is recognized as truly impregnating every medical or scientific topic, every clinical experience, every diagnosis and every treatment in medicine. Today, more than ever, the perception of wholeness or totality, of integration and honest comprehensiveness in our work as physicians or health professionals, seems to be marking the end of reductionisms of all kinds, and the renewed search for and provision of help to the entire humanity of our patients. That human entity, threatened by bacteria and violence, by viruses and aging, by vascular accidents and by natural disasters, by osteo-muscular and by moral degenerations, by cancers and social stressors, suffers in toto when any of these morbid agents disrupts a sometimes fragile health balance. And culture, being at the primary roots of that humanity, deserves to be managed with the same knowledge and dedication that microorganisms, genes, pathophysiological mechanisms or biochemical formulas receive.

Such being the essential emphasis of this volume, the task of structuring its chapters and finding the right authors with the right credentials was both a pleasurable search and a complex endeavor. The need to present a clear conceptual basis and specific, practical management points dictated part of that search. The principle of balance, invoked above, meant that the chapters should be neither theoretical exercises bordering on academic, preaching-like exhortations nor technical, jargon-charged clichés. Furthermore, the call was for opening the scope, making the issue truly global – culture is, indeed, a global process – and truly international, free of the confessional-like segmentations of schools of thought or national leanings. The roster of authors and the quality of the articles are positive factors in this publication. The mistakes or omissions are the responsibility of the Guest Editor.
After offering a general perspective of the field, an urgent and historically important topic nowadays is, undoubtedly, the connections between culture and psychiatric diagnosis. Two key players in the deliberations on cultural issues related to the development of DSM-5 (Dr. Roberto Lewis-Fernández and Dr. Neil Krishan Aggarwal, both from Columbia University and the New York State Psychiatric Institute) were asked to write the chapter and share their lucid reflections on the topic. The next section expands onto the examination of Cultural Psychiatry realities in the United Kingdom, Sweden, Norway, Germany and France. Dr. Kamaldeep Bhui, Professor of Queen Mary University of London and President of the World Association of Cultural Psychiatry, himself an immigrant, born in Kenya to Indian parents, and educated in the UK, shares his experiences and observations on Cultural Psychiatry in England. Drs. Sofie Bäärnhielm, Cecile Jávo and Mike-Oliver Mösko write objectively about the topic in two Scandinavian countries (Sweden and Norway) and in Germany, considered by many as a geographic key, a political force and a multifaceted door to European culture. They were asked to describe similarities and differences, pluses and minuses of their diverse views on culture and clinical psychiatry. Dr. Joseph Westermeyer, a Professor at the University of Minnesota and distinguished researcher on cultural psychiatry, also presents his unique perspective on the French and Francophile developments in the field.

An important chapter in a volume like this is the one dedicated to transcultural aspects of somatic symptoms, more specifically identified in the context of depressive disorders. Under the direction of Dr. Javier I. Escobar, Associate Dean for Global Health at the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey, Drs. Issa P. Bagayogo and Alejandro Interian, both also from UMDNJ, coauthor a detailed review of, probably, the most culturally influenced set of symptoms in every region of the world.

The cultural aspects of treatment are presented in the next two chapters. Psychotherapy and its many cultural implications are exemplified by demoralization, a driving force of universal relevance in the help-seeking process of psychotherapy. The chapter is written by Dr. John de Figueiredo from Yale University (himself, a disciple of Jerome D. Frank, the iconic Hopkins researcher who coined and first explored the intricacies of the term) and Sara Gostoli, MA from the University of Bologna, Italy. Ethnopsychopharmacology and pharmacogenomics, two basic sciences with the most extensive scope of clinical research applicability and therapeutic implications are the subject of the chapter written by Dr. Hernán Silva from the University of Chile, a pioneering figure in this field, in Latin America. The goal of these texts was to emphasize more practical implications of the culture-psychiatry interactions.

As it could not be otherwise, the closing chapters deal with research and bioethical considerations in contemporary cultural psychiatry. Research is expectedly complex and truly transcendental, more so in the years and decades ahead. The lead author of the corresponding chapter is Dr. Laurence Kirmayer, Professor of Cultural Psychiatry at McGill University, Chief of the Culture and Mental Health Research Unit of the
Institute of Community and Family Psychiatry in Montreal, Canada, and Editor-in-Chief of Transcultural Psychiatry, the most important journal devoted to this field in the world. The bioethical dimensions, substantiating the need for an ethical research approach in psychiatry and cultural psychiatry, are the topic of Dr. Fernando Lolas’ chapter; Professor of Psychiatry and Director of the Interdisciplinary Center for Bioethics at the University of Chile, he also served for many years as Director of the Bioethical Division of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO).

The chapter ‘Cultural Psychiatry: A General Perspective’ and the ‘Epilogue’ of this bird’s eye view testimony about cultural psychiatry and its contemporary status, both written by the Guest Editor, end with thoughts about the best ways to teach the discipline to practitioners, trainees and even the general public. This is a crucial step if the objective is to maintain the relevance of the discipline and its clinical and academic impact. The volume attempts to be both an updating summary of current achievements in the field, and a call for steady action in its many areas of work now and in the future.

The Guest Editor wishes to express his gratitude to all the distinguished contributors to this volume of Advances in Psychosomatic Medicine. Furthermore, it could not have been materialized without the initiative, encouragement and continuous support of Dr. Thomas Wise, Editor-in-Chief of this book series, and the help of the staff at Karger Publishers. We sincerely hope that the genuine interest of our readers will allow them to see the positive features of the issue, and excuse its deficiencies, the exclusive responsibility of its Guest Editor.

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