

Peace psychology at the European Congress of Psychology in Oslo 2009

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“Peace, conflict, and human rights” was one of the special strands at the European Congress of Psychology in Oslo, Norway from the 7th to the 10th of July 2009. The International Network of Psychologists for Social Responsibility (INPsySR) convened six events on peace psychology: three scientific symposia, an NGO meeting, a film screening with discussion, and the Network General Meeting.

Kjersti Fiveland and Venke Aerehun gave a report on their psychosocial work in the Gaza Strip and in refugee camps in Lebanon. Both are trained psychiatric nurses and have been project managers for the Norwegian Aid Committee for many years. INPsySR invited them to share their experiences in the field of applied peace psychology. The presentation was received with great interest especially from the members of the Finnish Psychologists for Social Responsibility, who work in projects in Lebanon and the Occupied Territory as well.

INPsySR presented the film “Interrogate This” by Marianne Galvin, which questions not only the role of US American military psychologists in Guantanamo, but also the handling of detainees in the so-called war on terror in general. Are psychologists legitimizing mental violence towards detainees which are not covered by the international conventions? What is the position of the American Psychological Association (APA) towards these accusations? The film reported debates within the APA. A group within the association demanded that psychologists should withdraw from working in any detention facility that does not meet international conventions. The ethical principle for psychologists and health professionals, to refrain from doing harm to any human being was the basis of their demand. The film was followed by a discussion moderated by Jancis Long, member of the steering committee of INPsySR.

Ethical guidelines for psychologists were discussed in three symposia. The main themes were ethical principles for psychologists (Chair: Tom Strong, Canada), the universal declaration of ethical principles (Chair: Janel Gauthier, USA), and ethical issues for psychologists in addressing social justice (Chair: Joan Pettifor, Canada).

The three symposia hosted by INPsySR were well attended. Scientific studies as well as interventional models from different countries were presented. The symposium on psychological dimensions of preventing violent conflict was chaired by Ferdinand Garoff (Finnish Psychologists for Social Responsibility). Topics of the contributions were intergroup

contact motivations (Alexander Lameez, South-Africa), body oriented interventions in refugee camps (Sirkku Kivistö, Finland), as well as research on the acceptance of apologies (Johanna Kirchhoff, Germany).

“Consequences of human rights violations” was the title of a symposium chaired by Miriam Schroer (Forum Peace Psychology, Germany). Initially, two case studies were presented; a Finnish study on the psychological effects of school shootings on school staff (Nina Lyytinen, Finland), and a discussion of consequences of military violence and structural violence on Afghan women’s lives (Nahid Aziz, USA). The second part of the symposium focussed on interventions. Virpi Lähteenmäki (Finland) introduced a group therapy model for traumatised children in the occupied territories of Israel. Jancis Long (PsySR USA) examined roles of psychologists in the military and discussed the problems of ethical guidelines for clinicians in the military, tasked both with clinical principles of “do no harm” and crucial assistance to the essentially harm producing activity of war.

Psychological perspectives of peacebuilding were discussed in the third symposium (chaired by Paula Green, USA). Paula Green (USA) presented a reconciliation model developed and field-tested at the Karuna Center for Peacebuilding, which describes steps towards breaking cycles of revenge. Inger Agger (Denmark) discussed a method of short term testimonial therapy for victims of torture which is successfully being applied by human rights defenders in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, India. Miriam Schroer (Forum Peace Psychology, Germany) presented a model of theory-based evaluation of peace work including empirical findings on the construction of non-violent, non-nationalistic masculinities in post-conflict Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The General Meeting of INPsySR was attended by 30 interested participants from seven countries. Anthony Marsella (USA) held an introductory speech. Miriam Schroer (Forum Peace Psychology) explained that organisations working as psychologists of health professionals in the field of peace, human rights or social responsibility can become official members of INPsySR. Membership is free. Individual persons who are not part of a member organization can also engage in the network by joining or launching working groups of the network. There was a particular interest of individual persons contributing to the network. For the second part of the meeting participants gathered in small working groups to discuss certain topics. There was a group on a curriculum on peace psychology, a group on academic research, a group on internships, and a group on ethical guidelines. Jancis Long emphasized the triple focus that has developed for INPsySR in the past two years: A) Its function as a network of peace and justice focussed psychology organizations continues, with much remaining to be developed concerning the ways how the network can be of benefit

to its participating members; B) Its housing of topic listservs for interested individuals; and C) as a force in raising the status, possibilities and problems of peace psychology in conferences across the world.

Within the peace psychology strand there was also a special focus on the position of children in war. Central themes of the keynote talks were children's rights in the context of conflict (Lisbet Palme, Sweden) and the support of children in the aftermath of armed conflicts (Magne Raundalen, Norway). A symposium dealt with the question of children afflicted by armed conflict (Chair: Eva Lloyd, UK).

Congress highlights were of course the lectures at the Nobel Institute in Oslo as well as other peace psychology keynotes. Nora Sveass (Norway) gave an account of ethical topics for psychologists and social justice. Sath Cooper (South-Africa) discussed psychological perspectives of trauma, truth and reconciliation in South-Africa. Antony Marsella (USA) held a moving lecture on global poverty, human rights, insisting that poverty is a form of humiliation. He emphasized the demand for psychologists to be at place. In a joint symposium Sveass, Cooper und Marsella discussed psychological aspects of trauma, truth, and reconciliation.

Johan Galtung (Norway) presented examples of conflict mediation according to the Transcend method. Within the strand of feminist research, Ann Phoenix (UK) gave a fascinating lecture on the construction of identity in visibly multiethnic families in Great Britain. In the feminist strand, Eva Magnusson (Sweden) gave a keynote address on "Psychologies for theorizing diversity in everyday life". She discussed intersectionality as a central concept for the psychological analysis of identities and diversity. Intersectional perspectives were applied in the presentations of the symposium on "Fathering and Masculinity in Changing Times: social, personal and relational dimensions of identity" (Chair: Caroline Drydon, UK).

A number of other symposia covered topics of interest for peace psychology, for instance "Training psychologists in disaster, crisis, and trauma psychology" (Chair: Salli Saari, Finland) and conflict resolution strategies in multicultural groups (Smaranda Boros, Netherlands).

Critical community psychology was covered by another strand with Wolfgang Stark (Germany), Ibrahim Makkawi (Occupied Territory), and David Fryer (UK) as presenters. Community psychology influencing social change was the topic of the symposium hosted by José Ornelas (Portugal).

Another symposium dealt with psychosocial rehabilitation of survivors of torture and other gross human rights violations. Examples were an intercultural approach to the treatment of complex traumata in the Netherlands (Boris Drodzsek, Netherlands) and an integrative psychosocial intervention in Asia (Inger Agger, Denmark).

The Oslo congress offered stimulating perspectives on a broad range of peace psychology research and practice. The large attendance of lectures, symposia, and discussions proved peace psychology to be of great interest to professionals in the field of psychology and mental health.