

President's Remarks at our IFPE Membership Meeting on 11/5/2015:

In preparing for this year's conference on the theme of Vulnerability and Its Discontents – the meaning of that title began to take on an additional meaning for me. While it may seem that the valance of the title is toward the negative, in actuality, the range of this year's presentations will not only reflect on the tender spots that leave us hurting and discontent, but also might inspire us to contemplate the expansive realm of shared vulnerability that can bring us closer together. Over the past year, I came to think of discontents as a necessary ingredient for inspiring an uprising against bad conditions, whether psychologically, relationally, societally or globally.

Also in the past year, a few important and newsworthy events occurred, wherein discontents has meant the uprising of activism and, specifically in some cases, have relevance to psychoanalytic activism on behalf of the vulnerable. As we settle into the rich experiences of this year's conference, I am pleased to tell you about a few related social justice endeavors in which IFPE has played a role, and to share some recent correspondence, addressed to you, our membership, from participants in that psychoanalytic activism including some words from our past IFPE award winners.

At IFPE, we have gone about such "activism" or, from a certain perspective, "dialogue as a subversive activity" in our own way and totally in keeping with how we define psychoanalysis in our dialoguing, exploring, humanitarian, egalitarian, empathic/compassionate, sharing, open and safe forum. A forum wherein we strive to dissolve the barriers and boundaries that not only limit our growth as individuals but such barriers also limit the reach of psychoanalysis and limit society and civilization itself.

I have developed my own personal theory about the freedom of thought and the dialoguing safe space towards which we strive at IFPE, and about the importance of the natural progression to psychoanalytic activism that "goes with..."

I have come to believe that gathering annually for the special pleasure of dialoguing with each other, and with the goals of sharing and self-expression, giving voice to the usually unspoken, and supporting each other in the spirit of egalitarianism and exploration... is no small thing and the fruits of which do not remain contained in our meeting space but go beyond.

I have also come to believe that meeting in this way is the natural bridge to activism and to freedom of all kinds, extending far beyond the intra-psychic and the dialogic.

I say this after looking back at the meetings we've had in which themes discussed also led to participation and consciousness raising. Open and free dialogue is a "direct connect" that leads to the good of humanity and social justice. Here are some statements offered by key participants in social justice movements about which IFPE has dialogued, raised consciousness and more, to add synergy to action beyond our meetings.

My first example relates to Syria. The tragedies in Syria and the flow of refugees to Europe have been in the news. In our conference in Lago Mar, in 2011, when I was appointed the chair of IFPE's Social Responsibility Committee by then-President Douglas Maxwell, we joined with our colleagues around the world, especially in France and the Middle East, in an effort to free one of our psychoanalytic colleagues who had been unjustly imprisoned.

That year, our psychoanalytic colleague Dr. Rafah Nached, head of the Psychoanalytic School in Damascus had been arrested and was being held in a Syrian detention prison outside of Damascus. She was arrested and imprisoned for months even though she had recently undergone cancer treatment. It was speculated that her arrest was connected to the fact that Dr. Nached was the first female psychoanalyst in the country. Even in prison, she was unceasing in applying her psychoanalytic work with the women prisoners, and, always the compassionate analyst, asked her husband to bring toys for the children imprisoned with their mothers on his visits to the prison.

Hundreds of European psychoanalysts and psychotherapists signed a petition for Dr. Nechad's release. On November 9, 2011, the IFPE Board unanimously voted to support a letter writing and petition campaign to support the release of Rafah Nached, and the then-President of IFPE, Douglas Maxwell submitted a letter indicating to the appropriate national and international organizations and authorities communicating IFPE's full support of her immediate release.

Today, you will be relieved to hear, that she is safe and practicing in Paris, and Dr. Nached wrote to me in advance of our conference to update us on her thoughts about the horrible events and genocide in Syria with the following letter, Paris, October 23rd 2015:

"I am deeply moved by your attention towards me and I would like to thank you for offering me the opportunity to share with you my concerns and some of the questions that haunt me as a Syrian psychoanalyst.

I start with Syria. My home country has turned into a playground for an international proxy war. Its airspace is constantly violated, its land devastated and its people torn apart. The heritage of humanity, which provided us with an insight into ancient civilizations 5,000 years ago, is wiped out.

As intellectuals, we regard the deafening silence of the world as a serious and very telling event. Humankind is collectively and knowingly accepting the turning of a blind eye away from this tragedy and devastation. In so doing, we are collectively complicit in a mass murder of historic dimensions. What Syria shows us is the ugliest face of humankind in the 21st century.

To my fellow psychoanalysts [at IFPE] on the other side of the ocean, I would like to share with you my deepest interrogations:

Why do we tolerate this endless repetition of horrors: two world wars, Nazism and the Shoah, the Rwandan genocide, the so-called “pacification” in Chechnya, the mass murders in Bosnia, the Iraqi wars, Syria, and [violence in Israel/]Palestine.... I could go on for hours. What is leading us to repeat and tolerate the repetition of the same savagery?

Why do we need this level of destruction?

Why horror and savagery trigger so much jouissance within ourselves?

Why are we ready to accept falsehoods such as the need to barter freedom for safety?

Why are we obliged to create faith in ghosts like ISIS (ISIL)? Do we believe we can use them as we please?

...Dozens of additional questions in my mind.

As far as psychoanalytical practice is concerned, we pursue our seminars with our Syrian colleagues from Paris through Skype. I guess working through Skype allows us to keep some distance from the daily horrors of the Syrian tragedy. But we go on considering psychoanalysis as a lifelong statement, an act of resistance with a truly revolutionary dimension: free humankind within ourselves and within others. We do it for one basic reason: we want to keep on existing as a Subject, as a person in search for his/her freedom.

We would like to warmly thank you [and IFPE] for your friendship and your open-mindedness. It helps us keep faith in humanity, in spite of the bloodshed, in spite of this on-going tragedy.

Your support has so much value for the Syrian people today.”

Rafah Nashed

The next example, comes from my realization that, in IFPE’s selection of both our Hans W. Loewald Memorial Awardees and our Distinguished Educator Awardees, intuitively,

IFPE has utilized our forum as a way of standing behind leaders in psychoanalytic activism on many an occasion, along with honoring other great psychoanalytic minds, teachers, and leaders that our awards have celebrated.

Another social justice issue in the news over this last year, has been that of the work of activist psychoanalysts in raising consciousness about the complicity of the American Psychological Association in the design and conduct of torture of detainees during the Bush administration. Recently, I received the following communication from IFPE's 2011 Distinguished Educator Awardee Stephen Soldz, who had been one of the leaders of the fight to unmask the American Psychological Association's complicity, and a central figure in the fight to create reform and commitment in the APA to insure that the basic ethic of "do no harm" is never violated again.

After a decade long battle, Stephen sent me this update and report on the success of psychoanalytic activism, since it is important to note that psychoanalysts were among those leading this battle for ethics and decency, and he writes to us as follows:

To my IFPE Colleagues,

As psychoanalysts, we are aware that people harbor diverse impulses, desires to construct and to destroy. Post-9/11 developments in psychology have unfortunately demonstrated this yet again. In the wake of the terror attacks, our nation gave in to destructive impulses as it turned to "the dark side." "Enhanced interrogations," aka "torture," became official policy.

To the shame of the helping professions, psychologists were brought in to design, implement and train others in the ways of torture. Prominent psychological theories were used to provide a scientific patina on age-old techniques of torment. Leaders and officials of the American Psychological Association, concerned with currying favor with the powerful, colluded with CIA and Defense Department officials to change and interpret psychology's ethics code to protect the torturers.

Fortunately, other psychologists [and especially psychoanalysts across the country] were more driven by loving and protective urges. They cried foul and vigorously struggled for a decade to oppose the torturers and their colluders. Psychoanalysts played major roles in this transformation of psychology. The APA's psychoanalysis division, Division 39, provided a number of the leaders and support for public activism and reform initiatives. Psychoanalysts stood on the side of truth and humanity against the powerful, the destructive, and the lies. It is important to remember, however, that these psychoanalysts were joined by many others, by social and behavioral psychologists, and by many outside of psychology from human rights attorneys to reporters and military and intelligence professionals of conscience and honor.

In the past year these efforts led to a rare victory for decency and human rights. The APA's torture collusion got exposed by the APA's own Hoffman investigation that was supposed, instead, to vindicate the association.

In the dramatic aftermath, the APA Council of Representatives voted overwhelmingly to ban psychologist participation in any national security interrogations and in sites judged by UN agencies to be in violation of international law. This began what will hopefully be a long struggle to transform psychology from a profession collusive with abuses to one on the forefront of human rights advocacy.

Also important, as we learn the lessons of this struggle, is that psychoanalysis has not always been on the side of human rights and social justice. Like our patients, if we are to become transformative agents, we must master the lessons of our past, including those lessons we would rather forget. In the cold war many psychoanalysts were among those hundreds of behavioral and social scientists aiding the CIA as it sought the dark secrets of interrogation and mind control. And our profession's history with women who failed to accept then current stereotyped gender roles, gays, the families of schizophrenic and autistic patients and many others makes clear that we are no more immune to the illusions of the age than our non-psychoanalytic colleagues.

I hope that each of you will take these lessons to heart and strive to uncover truth and dispel illusion, not only with our patients, but in the wider society. Human rights and social justice are never definitively won. Rather, they require continuous struggle and continuous awareness on our part.

Stephen Soldz

This letter came to IFPE a week or two ago, and soon after a report was issued that a landmark event marking the winning of this battle had occurred. Stephen wrote to me last Friday with the news that APA sent a letter to President Obama, the CIA, the Defense Department, the High Value Detainee Interrogation Group, other federal agencies, and relevant Congressional Committees. The letter informs them of the new policy banning psychologist involvement in national security interrogations and at sites, including Guantánamo, held to be in violation of international law by explicitly named UN authorities.

There are many more examples, but, I will give you just one more “for instance” to support my theory that the kind of freedom of thought and dialogue that takes place at IFPE, gives rise to or contributes to the inception of psychoanalytic activism and has impact outside the walls of our conferences.

2015 was also landmark year in social justice in that on June 26th, the Supreme Court ruled that same-sex couples are entitled to marriage equality, “equal dignity in the eyes of the law” and to marry and celebrate “love, fidelity, sacrifice and family.” The ruling creates powerful momentum for LGBTQ community, in declaring the values of freedom, justice and equality. The Supreme Court ruled 5-4 that same-sex couples have the freedom to marry the person they love in their home state, or in any state. As a result of this historic ruling, same-sex marriage is now legal in every state and in U.S. territories. States must perform marriages and recognize them from other states and same-sex couples who choose to get married will gain access to all of the rights, protections and

responsibilities associated with marriage, including health care, Social Security, housing and income security.

When celebrating this victory for love itself, I reflected back on IFPE's steadfastly dialogic version of psychological activism, which can not only be seen in our rainbow of membership, but also in the many presentations over the years that have bearing on LGBTQ issues in the consulting room and in the society.

Once again, this impetus can be seen in our choice of awardees. For instance, in 2011, our Loewald Award went to Richard A. Isay. His presentation was entitled: *Opposing Anti-Gay Bias in The American Psychoanalytic Association: A Personal Odyssey*. Dr. Isay was a tireless and courageous leader in the fight against the tenor of past times during which psychiatric associations demeaned and labeled homosexuality as an illness. His presence with us at IFPE is a credit to the work of IFPE's Awards Committee chair, Samoan Barish, who contacted and visited Dr. Isay until he understood the ethos of IFPE and then agreed to accept the award. I am also grateful that we honored him when we did, since he passed away a few months later.

Dr. Isay's battle for social justice took place at the height of the AIDS crisis and it was hard fought and ultimately successful in psychiatric de-stigmatization. In typical IFPE fashion, the most memorable part of his presentation for many of us here was, as past IFPE President Judy Vida put it, his "striding over" to his husband, Gordon Harrell, and embracing him at the end of his presentation as a heartwarming testimony to love and support.

Dr. Isay was a clear opponent to the commonly accepted goal at the time that psychoanalysts trying to change the unchangeable sexual orientation of their patients. He made it clear that this approach was not only misguided but, as we know today, very injurious. His activism and his books on self-acceptance and the inborn identity that we now know to be true, made him the center of attacks and controversy, but he did not relent and became the first openly gay member of the American Psychoanalytic

Association and an early proponent of gay marriage. It is incredible to realize that it only as recently as 1991 that the Association approved admission and training analysis or supervision from LGBTQ members.

IFPE has continued to dialogue about this struggle again and again, as demonstrated in our recent awards to Alison Bechdel and to Gayle Salamon. Plus, our current Loewald Award recipient, Dr. Deborah Britzman, whom you'll all have the wonderful opportunity to hear speak on Saturday, brings us a revolutionary psychoanalytic view of, and understanding of, education, and has, within her purview, also striven to create a queer pedagogy as well.

So, (and yes, you can rest assured that this is my "in conclusion" paragraph), and coming full circle to my opening comments, it is my strong belief that what we do here, our dialogue in a free and safe space, our "just" coming together with the goals of self-expression, giving voice to the usually unspoken, sharing and supporting each other in doing so, the spirit of egalitarianism and camaraderie seems to automatically trend towards psychoanalytic activism as a natural outcome and possibly "just" helping to change the world for the better.

Thank you for coming to IFPE, for presenting, for participating in the dialogues, and for supporting this dialoguing space in the psychoanalytic world. And without further ado, I will not keep us from our Cocktail Reception in the Hamilton room any longer and know that you will enjoy the conference days to come.