

**WHAT PRODUCES CHANGE?  
THE FORCES IMPACTING ON RELATIONSHIPS**

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**KEYNOTE PAPERS AND CHAIRMAN'S REPORT**

**THE INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION ON  
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in collaboration with

**Evangelisches  
Zentralinstitut  
für Familienberatung**

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für Familie, Senioren,  
Frauen und Jugend**

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## **ABOUT THIS BOOK**

The International Commission on Marriage and Interpersonal Relations (ICMIR) of the World Family Organisation (IUFO) has been organising an annual meeting in the form of a professional conference since 1953. In the year 2000, this conference was held in Berlin-Wannsee. 140 professionals from 24 countries working in family counselling, therapy and mediation, family law and family policy discussed the subject "What Produces Change?" This publication contains the opening speech of German Federal Minister Dr. Christine Bergmann, the keynotes papers, some of the workshop presentations and the report of ICMIR Chairman Paul Tyrrell (Australia).

The texts included are not necessarily a verbatim record of the conference presentations: it is the custom of the Commission Meetings to provide a written text to accompany a free presentation.

The Commission would like to thank all presenters for their contributions to this publication. We would also like to acknowledge gratefully the help of Michaela Bärthel, Tammy Eberhard, Roswitha Ginglas-Poulet, Elaine Griffiths, Derek Hill, Silvia Koch, Margaret A. Pater, Gerlind Richards and my wife Françoise Koschorke who were involved in translating and producing the book.

Berlin, November 2000

Martin Koschorke  
Editor

## WHAT PRODUCES CHANGE?

Families and relationships, individuals and societies are constantly changing and developing. The political events of the last 12 years have heightened the awareness of this process of change in society. Ritual occasions - such as the celebrations of the year 2000 - offer opportunities to reflect on the conditions of change, on the perception of accelerated change, on the impact of the process of change on different areas of life.

### QUESTIONS

The conference subject in Berlin will be the question: what leads to change ? For a Commission that focuses on interpersonal relations, the following three questions will be central:

- \* Which political and societal forces lead to change in the family ? Which conditions and measures in politics and society can impact in a positive way on changes in families and their environment? (1st Keynote Paper)
- \* Which changes have been recently prominent in interpersonal relations, in families and couple relationships? Which factors further or impede change? Which changes are necessary, desirable, and why? Which changes are imminent? How do changes in families and in interpersonal relations impact on societal processes ? (2nd Keynote Paper)
- \* What leads to change in social, counseling, therapeutic work with couples and families ? Which forces can we see ? (3rd Keynote Paper)

### FOCAL POINTS

**Berlin** is a place and a symbol of change between east and west, a change which has had an enormous impact on the area of interpersonal and social relations. Therefore we have invited Federal Minister Ms Christine Bergmann who originates from the eastern part of Germany. Berlin is to this day a bridge between eastern and western Europe. Workshop presenters from Poland, the Czech Republic and Russia will discuss experiences and models of change.

**Africa** is a continent of great social upheavals. Dr. (Ms) Mphala Mogudi, Chair of the Family and Marriage Society of South Africa will talk about the transition process against the background of South Africa's political change and national reconciliation initiatives and her own counseling and therapeutic work in the community. Presenters from Congo and from Nigeria will introduce transition models from their own regions. A presentation from India will add to the North-South perspective from an Asian view point.

**Women** are the motor of constructive changes in interpersonal relations, all over the world. We will therefore focus especially on the contribution which women have made to changes in the family and within the couple.

**THE PROCESS OF GROWING TOGETHER IN GERMANY -  
Political and Social Effects**

**Dr. Christine Bergmann**

**Federal Minister for the Family, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth  
Germany**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to be able to welcome you here in Berlin. You have chosen a place for your conference that is a symbol of change and so fits in beautifully with your topic.

Over ten years ago, on 9 November 1989, we witnessed the fall of the Wall that had divided not just Berlin, but the whole of Europe, for 28 years. The months before and after this event were the most exciting of my life. As a former citizen of the GDR I remember only too well how much we longed for democratic freedoms like freedom of opinion and freedom to travel, and for an opening in the Wall that seemed insurmountable. In summer 1989 GDR State Council chairman Erich Honecker talked about the Wall standing for another 100 years. And he said that socialism could not be held back by any "ox or donkey". He was right there – it was the citizens of the GDR who brought down "real socialism", as it was called. They were brave, they had the courage of their convictions and were stubborn in calling publicly for freedom and democracy; ultimately it was the civil rights movement in the GDR and the resolution of the people that led to the opening of the border on 9 November 1989.

Many helped to pave the way: the Solidarnosc movement, the Czech civil rights activists, *glasnost* and *perestroika* and, last but not least, the visit of Gorbachev to mark the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the GDR.

For those of us who lived there the years before 1989 had shown ever more clearly that the GDR as a state was economically finished and morally long gone. We had seen a shattering of our youthful illusions that a totalitarian system could be changed if only enough people at their respective place could provide a more open, a more tolerant climate.

In the days and weeks before 9 November the conviction grew that we could now succeed in doing this, if only we could overcome the fear that had paralysed us for so long. "Democracy – now or never" was the slogan on all sides at the different demonstrations. For me it was clear: these people would never turn back, would not be intimidated and humiliated again; they were happy about the newly won self-confidence and every bit of independence. "We are the people" was the cry of the hour from those who wanted to stay in the GDR and bring about change there.

Today, in the tenth year of German reunification, everything that belongs together has not yet all grown together, to recall the famous hope expressed by Willy Brandt. What we call internal unity is also a process requiring time, since our lives have been shaped by decades of different experience. Yet the fact that East Germans brought about a peaceful revolution has been their unique contribution to the process of unity.

The communication difficulties between the two parts of Germany that we still note today are also due to the fact that this achievement of former GDR citizens – except in the short, euphoric days of late autumn 1989 – have not been appropriately appreciated by many people in the western part of Germany.

Many people in eastern Germany sense a lack of respect for what they have achieved in their lives. The GDR was, alongside all that belongs in the dust-bin of history, a web of human

relations. It was a system of everyday behaviour with everyday conditions which we had adjusted to. Life in the East could also be enjoyable. We knew sorrow, happiness, despair and led intense lives. A life in the East was also a whole life. To vary a quote by Theodor Adorno, it was a right life in a wrong context.

The fall of the Wall made the change visible for the whole world. The subsequent reunification of Germany was for me an automatic consequence. Of course, another important question, still unanswered, is about how the two Germanies were put back together again. And it asks what mistakes were made, that still make it hard for eastern and western Germans to feel like one people?

I do not want here to talk about the trials and tribulations of the unification process, nor about the bitter consequences for people who lost their jobs - although I know a great deal about it after many years with responsibility for employment affairs in the Berlin senate. I will only mention one example that, in my view, is typical. That is the constitution.

The central Round Table of the GDR had drafted a new, very ambitious constitution that unfortunately was never implemented. After the accession of the GDR to the Federal Republic of Germany no new constitution was drawn up for the whole of Germany; instead, the Basic Law was extended to the five new Länder. Key politicians in the old federal republic considered it simply superfluous to think about a common constitution. In Berlin at the federal state level we decided differently, although there was the same discussion about the whys and wherefores. But for us on the East Berlin side it was important not to go into unity empty-handed; we wanted to undergo a process among ourselves first, and reach agreement on a common constitution. We pushed that through and that was a good thing. The current Berlin constitution emerged from the two constitutions: it is a joint effort. Something like that creates a common identity. And a common identity is something which is still lacking in our country.

We Germans are one people - a people with a different recent past and a common future. Our relation to one another is still frequently characterised by mutual resentment, which we sometimes passionately nurse. We should remember more often that it was not an achievement of Germans in the Federal Republic and not the fault of Germans in the German Democratic Republic that they lived in different social systems and thus had different opportunities in terms of way of life and personal development.

We often hear that the East Germany have not yet arrived in democracy because, according to polls, they would prefer maximum equality to maximum freedom. They are implicitly assumed not to have yet put aside their "real socialist" fetters. Here people forget that German unity is primarily rooted in the desire for freedom of the citizens in the new Länder.

In my view these polls are not an expression of a lack of appreciation for freedom, they just express the fact that the individual economic difficulties of people and high unemployment have led to a disappointment with the hard won political system. That is certainly also linked with the fact that eastern Germans have far higher expectations of politics than those in the West and their disappointment at unfulfilled wishes is also much greater. We grew up with the feeling that there is an ideal society waiting for us somewhere. And the yearning for this has survived the GDR. We should not forget either that the economic miracle in West Germany in the 50s favoured the acceptance of free, liberal democracy over the long term. The learning process undergone by eastern Germany in the 90s, by contrast, took place against the background of a socio-economic crisis linked with unemployment and job insecurity.

It is clear that work alone does not yet make people into democrats. We should beware of monocausal explanations. Nevertheless, I consider it obvious that economic instability and fear of losing one's job do not create the climate in which democratic civil virtues thrive - like plurality of opinion, a readiness to face conflict, and tolerance. Studies show that it is chiefly social grounds that determine whether Germans in the east are happy or unhappy with a reunified Germany. Anyone doing well is more likely to affirm the unified State. Unemployed people see themselves first as the ones who lost out when unity came.

Work is also the key to increasing the degree of satisfaction with the system in the eastern part of Germany. We still have a lot to do here. The unemployment rate in the eastern states is still double that of the west. Differences in income are still considerable too. In manufacturing industry one employee earns a gross DM1436 less than an employee in the west, who earns an average of DM5350. Western Germany have on average over three times as many savings as east German households. In western Germany every second household owns landed property, whereas in eastern Germany it is only every fourth. The distance between eastern and western Germans is not based merely on the consequences of a 40-year separation, but also on the experiences of social inequality and the lack of recognition of eastern Germans in the transition process.

People in eastern Germany have undergone changes to an unprecedented degree. Almost overnight their previous social and occupational skills were devalued. That had repercussions on all areas of life, changing people's behaviour right into their private lives. This became particularly clear in families. Much importance was attached to families and having your own children in the lives and values of people in the former GDR. That was largely connected with the family being a place of refuge from the state which encroached into almost all fields of life.

The process of founding a family in the GDR started not just earlier than in the West, it was also concluded a lot earlier. Early marriage and parenthood were propagated and fostered by the GDR regime; that was for men and women the "normal" course of life. At the end of the 80s the average age for women's first marriage in the former GDR was 22.7 and for men 24.7. About half of the women had had at least one child by the age of 22. Towards the end of the GDR there were considerably fewer single people, compared with West Germany and a considerably lower share of childless couples.

People reacted to the social upheavals with uncertainty. Directly after reunification there was a drastic collapse in the birthrate and there were far fewer marriages. The uncertainty about how things would develop understandably had a direct impact on people's plans for their lives. This development shows that the economic and social conditions have to be predictable for people to opt more easily for children. For the first time for six years, in a total of over 100 000 children were again born in the eastern Länder in 1997. But this only a good half of the figure for 1989.

I think it can be generally stated that the GDR society was much less exposed to the individualisation process that has been taking place in western society for many years. Of course that was a lot to catch up in the last few years but there are still clear differences in behaviour patterns and values. This is shown e.g. with reference to childcare. A comprehensive network of all-day childcare facilities was a matter of course in the former GDR. It was also an essential precondition for the integration of women into working life. Children were looked after in public creches, nurseries and play centres. Basically this dense network has been maintained in the last ten years, while the childcare system in western Germany is still very inadequate. This different childcare situation is still a fundamental structural difference between East and West. It is an important assignment for the whole of society to expand the range of childcare for children under three and of school age in western Germany and to safeguard the standard in the east.

The topic of childcare is an important point when it comes to the question of the involvement of women in working life. The GDR was certainly not an ideal equality-oriented society but it must be said that it had a real edge in relation to sharing work. For me as a woman, who lived through the first to the last day of the GDR, it is important to point out that we women in Germany were in very different situations. For us in the GDR it was normal to combine working life and a family; we did not ask for this double career but just went along with it. And this normalcy, which still displeases many in the west, is something women still do not give up.

To date the employment rate of women in eastern Germany is higher than in the west. Women's income makes up just under 50% of the household income; in the old Länder it is about 30%. Paid employment is not just the basis of financial independence, it also leads to personal autonomy. Women in the new Länder are still harder hit by unemployment than

men. But women from that part of Germany still believe that the normal life of a woman should involve employment, like that of a man.

Despite all difficulties confronted by east German women – and men – on the labour market, there is no turning to a traditional gender model. That naturally influences the relations between the sexes in families. As the minister with responsibility for women I consider it an important task to contribute to avoiding a backward trend and to ensuring that the sharing of work does not go to the detriment of women.

Let me just add a word on the situation of young people in eastern and western Germany. For many young people in the east the time of change was a difficult phase; often they saw both parents losing their jobs overnight. Or they saw older people having trouble adapting to the new conditions. For many young people, however, the change of system was naturally also a great opportunity for them to determine their own lives.

Today, ten years later, the difference between eastern and western German young people are still clear noticeable, as shown by the latest Shell study on young people issued in spring. Many young people in the east see their situation as being more frustrating, sometimes even depressing than their peers in the west, due to the poorer training and labour market opportunities in eastern regions. But the study also clearly showed that many eastern German young people – particularly young women – are keener to get ahead and more mobile than young people in western Germany. That is encouraging, but also shows that the younger generation can only grow closer to one another if the process of economic alignment is further pursued with energy and commitment.

The process of learning to handle democracy in eastern Germany has been marked by shortcomings; indeed, these are unavoidable in view of the different development of society there. It cannot be denied that xenophobic behaviour is more pronounced in eastern Germany – not just with young people. This fact must be confronted. Certainly one factor is the lack of experience of older people in eastern Germany with regard to people from different countries and cultures. The GDR was a closed society.

However, it is above all a question of educational level. Xenophobia is far less frequent among students at universities than among those in vocational courses or with low educational qualifications. This is where we must start. We must ask what political and cultural education can achieve and how we can particularly reach young people. I consider this to be one of the essential challenges for the future of Germany. We must also inquire about why people who ten years ago deposed a dictatorship with their longing for democracy now turn away from it in disappointment.

The people who ten years ago went into the streets shouting "Democracy – now or never" tell me today that again they cannot change anything in the face of cemented structures and majorities. I can only reply that it is always better to have tried one's best. Democracy lives from the participation of many. But a society based on the commitment of its citizens also has to see to it that there is a place for people in this society.

Commitment presupposes that they feel integrated. Anyone who is excluded will not be willing and able to make an active contribution. Therefore an urgent social task in Germany in the next few years will be to work to transform disappointment into involvement. Democracy is not a state of affairs, it is an ongoing project.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I hope that for all of you who have come to Berlin from so many countries this conference will be stimulating and interesting. Many of you have known and worked with one another for years – you will be able to continue on your cooperation in discussions and dialogues. But I also hope that you will have an opportunity to see and experience something of the new capital and that you will take home many new impressions.

**FROM CHAOS TO ORDER IN FAMILY LIFE:  
Lessons from Southern Africa**

**Dr. Mphala Mogudi**

**Chair, Family and Marriage Society of South Africa**

***Introduction***

South Africa has successfully negotiated the transition from a minority government into a multi-party democracy. The focus has shifted from the political arena to societal systems and structures to ensure that the gains realised through the liberation process, are firmly entrenched as a positive legacy to future generations. The challenge is for us to apply and practice the values of democracy in our daily lives and everyday interactions.

As a multi-cultural society, we acknowledge our existing differences and strive to respect and recognise that these differences are of equal validity and do not detract from our essential and common humaneness. Years of systematic separation have left most of us ignorant of the cultural norms, values and traditions of other groups.

Despite a definite sense of national unity and cohesion, inter-personal contacts and interactions are still clouded by biases and prejudices. The tragic impact of past political policies on family life have been well documented and discussed (most recently in the Truth Commission hearings). Now in Southern Africa the greatest challenges to family stability are poverty and the HIV/Aids pandemic. How we as a country/continent address and contain these threats, will determine our future.

In October 1999, our National Minister for Welfare, Population and Development engaged more than 70 national organisations in a consultative process to identify social welfare needs and priorities. In his report, the minister acknowledged that our welfare system is failing those who are most in need, i.e. women and children, the elderly and disabled. While these needs are well articulated and identified, the necessary interventions are hampered by a lack of resources. In his own words: ...."these needs have the potential to reverse the democratic gains made since 1994..."

In the next five years the government's welfare policies and programmes will be based on the following priorities:

1. Restoration of the ethnics of care ... rebuilding of family, community and social relations
2. An integrated poverty eradication strategy
3. A comprehensive social security system
4. To respond to the effects of violence against women and children
5. HIV/Aids

The key strategy in addressing these priorities, is to enable individuals/families/communities to identify, plan and address their own needs i.e. capacity building.

Although the state pledges it's support and a sense of responsibility, increasingly the burden of care still falls on the (extended) family, community structures, and non-governmental organisations.

### ***Model of change***

In this discussion, I will refer to the model of change as a dynamic process focussing on the following aspects:

- 1) FROM: What needs to change?  
What is the target situation?
- 2) TO: the desirable Goal or Vision.
- 3) HOW: do we get from ..... to .....
- 4) WHY: What motivation is there to strive for this vision?
- 5) WHEN: the pace/time frame of change.

In 1996/1997 the University of South Africa conducted a study which revealed that the majority of people in all racial groups felt they were exposed to **too much** change in **too short** a time; as a result they were stressed and disorientated (Prinsloo 1998). The areas of change discussed in the study were as follows:

- Technological and economic progress;
- Demographic shifts and ecological changes;
- Changes in the career world;
- Changes in the patterns of communal life and in norms and value systems;
- Changes in recreational pursuits.

The factors that impact on the stability of marriage and family life are by no means discussed comprehensively but I will talk to the impact of **Leadership, Values, Workplace and Education** in moving from chaos to order in families in South Africa.

In my experience, people are better able to articulate and express the target situation rather than the vision. Often there is no clear vision of the goals or the process of achieving it. Strong leadership plays a vital role in articulating visions and goals, and also mobilising and motivating communities towards such ends.

### ***Leadership***

In Dr Nelson R Mandela, South Africa was blessed with such a leader, who in his personal capacity, charisma and moral integrity, was able to mobilise **all** cultural and racial groups into a "rainbow nation", a term coined by another great leader and Nobel Laureate, Bishop Desmond Tutu. This strong sense of allegiance is reflected in media discussions on "**who is an African**"? Some European descendents have strongly objected and were offended not to be included or called African. Our primary allegiance is to our country: we **are** South Africans **first** then Jewish, male, Muslim, Xhosa, second. Social tensions and friction is less between racial groups but more between us and Non-South Africans/Foreigners.

Another strong unifying factor is sport, particular the support behind our national soccer and rugby teams, which historically enjoyed predominantly "Black" and "White" support respectively.

### ***Values***

Having a leader with vision is not sufficient to ensure family and societal stability. Throughout world history, there have been many charismatic leaders who mobilized and led their countries astray. Another key factor is the societal value system which should be able to withstand scrutiny by the international community; e.g. the notion of racial superiority has not survived the test of time.

Values not only inform the vision but also address the issue of motivation: why people make particular choices or behave in a particular way. In his work with violent youth in the United States of America, Dr James Garbarino (1999) highlights the importance of spiritual, psychological and social anchors in preventing such behaviour.

Two values which are central to African communities, are respect and “Ubuntu”.

African tradition holds that an individual can only realise and fulfill her human nature in relation to other individuals in the community:

**“I am because we are. And since we are, therefore I am”.** (Perspectives 1997 )

This awareness of relatedness leads to patterns of behaviour and actions which facilitate harmony, cohesion and sound interpersonal relationships. When one is loving, humble, considerate, thoughtful, generous, polite and virtuous, we say that she exemplifies the spirit of Ubuntu. This concept has many similarities with systems theory of interpersonal relations.

In African culture the needs of the community take precedence over those of the individual. One is expected to behave in a manner which reflects **self** respect and respect for others, especially one's elders; this moral obligation acknowledges the authority and wisdom which comes with age/maturity.

Adults in the community share the responsibility for socializing, nurturing, nourishing and enlightening children. Our vision of becoming a more caring society, includes re-incorporating some of these traditional values in order to address our societal needs, e.g. the increasing number of Aids orphans. The reality is that most families are caught between conflicting Western and African norms and values.

### ***Workplace***

One of the major factors which impact directly on the quality and stability of family life is the economy/work place. The current government has passed several laws and bills to redress the issue of poverty and to empower groups which have been economically disadvantaged.

1. The Employment Equity Act prohibits unfair discrimination and prescribes affirmative action. The purpose of the act is to achieve equality in the workplace by requiring employers to eliminate unfair discrimination and to implement measures to address the disadvantages experienced by Africans, Coloureds and Indians, women and the disabled, and to ensure that these groups are equitably represented in all levels in the workplace.
2. The Preferential Procurement Policy Framework bill gives preferential government tenders and contracts to the historically disadvantaged.

Many white families are justifiably concerned about the future prospects for their husbands and children. There is recognition that these steps are necessary at this time: the long term needs of the nation take precedence over present individual needs. Organisations like FAMSA offer diversity training and change management workshops to companies and individuals, to help them adjust to, and to facilitate, the necessary changes.

With increased career and financial opportunities, families battle to maintain a balance between meeting the material and emotional needs of family members. This is particularly critical for single parent families in the absence of strong extended family networks and support systems. Counselling services are confronted with a growing number of children who are emotionally deprived or neglected, yet come from economically sound families. The workplace is often one of the first places where people meet others from different cultural backgrounds. Despite the fact that people of Colour are in the majority, the organisational culture is predominantly Eurocentric; there is insufficient recognition and inclusion of different

cultural norms and traditions in the workplace e.g. acceptable dress codes. Interpersonal contact is not equal status and few genuine congruent friendships are formed.

Another disturbing work ethic or expectation is that work takes precedence over family matters : parents complain that they are not supported when needing to take time off for sick children, or they are considered with suspicion.

As companies struggle to fulfill the requirement of the employment equity act, historically disadvantaged individuals are rarely given sufficient support to succeed within the organisation; often they are isolated, become stressed and frustrated and are bound to project these feelings onto the family. The incidence of substance abuse and of domestic violence in Southern Africa is unacceptably high. In recognition of this, the Domestic Violence Act was passed in 1998. It provides for the issuing of protection orders, addresses issues of physical **and** economic neglect and abuse for people in domestic relationships.

Botswana is one of the most stable countries in Southern Africa – socially, economically and politically. It is interesting to note that as part of their work ethic, the nation observes the lunch period when the whole family generally gathers at home for a hot cooked meal together.

My hope is that as more women take up managerial positions, the work place will become more family friendly. The image which comes to mind, is of the African woman, farming in the field with their babies on their backs!

### **Education**

Public Education in South Africa has changed from a racially segregated system based on rote learning to non-racial outcome based education which is skills based and learners are expected to apply knowledge versus memorising facts. Properly implemented outcome based education is a partnership between the school and parents, who together establish norms and values and facilitate respect for different cultures. Parents now have more responsibility and greater input into their children's educational development. While some parents welcome this, many who are themselves products of "Bantu" education, feel ill equipped to fulfill this role.

Unlike our generation, our children have an incredible opportunity to be exposed to and to learn about the values and traditions of other cultures. This type of equal status contact will hopefully lead to mutual respect and acceptance and will prepare them for the broader international community of mankind.

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**The Family:  
A Symbolic Construction on a Social Foundation**

**Professor Rémi Lenoir**

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The predominant, legitimate definition of the normal family (a definition which may be explicit, as in the legal context, or implicit as, for example, in research questionnaires dealing with the family in family therapy) is based on a constellation of words: *maison*, *maisonnée*, house, home, household – which, while appearing to describe a social reality, in fact serves to construct it. According to this definition, the family is a combination of related individuals, linked to one another either by a bond (marriage) or by consanguinity or, more exceptionally, by adoption (parenthood) and living under the same roof (cohabitation). Some social science experts would even go so far as to maintain that what we consider to be a reality is a fiction created in fact by the vocabulary which we use to describe it. And they refer to “reality” (which, even from their point of view, is not without its problems), objecting that many of the groups which are called “families” nowadays do not correspond to this dominant definition, and that the normal family in the majority of modern societies is a minority structure compared with the couples who live together without being married, the one parent families, the married couples living apart, etc. The new forms of family ties which are evolving before our very eyes remind us that the family, which we are inclined to consider *natural* because it seems always to have been like that, is in fact a recent invention (as demonstrated in particular by the work of Ariès and Anderson on the genesis of the private, or of Shorter on the invention of the family sentiment,) and it may also be destined to disappear rapidly.

### **The Family is a word**

But, even if one accepts that “family” is no more than a word, a mere verbal construction, it is still important to analyse the conceptions people have of the thing they call “family”, of this kind of “family of words” or – rather - of paper, whether in the singular or the plural. Certain experts in the social science field see the talk about the family as some kind of political ideology referring to a configuration endowed with valuable social relations. They identify a number of assumptions common to such discourse, whether ordinary or scholarly.

The first group of features: by means of a kind of anthropomorphism which consists of attributing the properties of an individual to a group, the family is seen as a reality that transcends its members, a transpersonal character enjoying a common life and spirit and having a particular view of the world.

The second group of features: what the definitions of the family have in common is supposed to be the assumption that it exists as an autonomous social universe separated from other universes and geared to valuing the inside (in contrast to the outside). This secret universe, with the doors closed on its intimacy, cut off from the outside world by the symbolic barrier of a sacred threshold, perpetuates itself, its own separation and its *privacy*, its private realm. This subject of *privacy* can be linked with a third issue, that of the *dwelling*, the *home* as a stable place and the household as a permanent unit.

Thus, in *family discourse*, the discourse of the family about the family, the domestic unit is seen as an active agent, endowed with a will, capable of thinking, feeling and acting, and founded on a composite whole made up of cognitive presuppositions and normative prescriptions concerning the right way of practising domestic relationships. As a universe in which the ordinary laws of the economic world are suspended, the family is a place of trusting

and giving – in contrast to the market and to the giving giver, or, in the words of Aristotle, of *philia* – a term which is often translated friendship and which refers in fact to rejecting a calculating spirit; the place in which one can suspend interest in the narrow sense, namely the search for equivalents in exchange.

Ordinary discourse often, and no doubt universally, draws its ideal models of human relations from the family (e.g. with concepts such as fraternity) and family relationships according to their official definition tend to function like principles for constructing and evaluating all social relations..

### **The Family is a word, a well established social fiction**

While it is true that “family” is merely a word, it is also true that it is a word related to *order* or, rather, to a *category*, or in other words to a collective principle for constructing the collective reality even of a collective group. Without contradicting oneself, one can even state simultaneously that social realities are social fictions deprived of any other basis than social construction, namely all the social work which they imply in order to exist symbolically, and that they really exist to the extent to which they are socially recognised. Every use of concepts for classifying, such as that of the family, involves both a description and a prescription which may not be recognised as such because it is (more or less) universally accepted and taken for granted; we tacitly assume that the thing to which we give the name “family” is a *real* family.

So, if we can agree that the family is a principle for constructing social reality, we must also remember that this construction principle is itself socially constructed and that it is common to all the actors socialised under the same conditions in the same universe. In other words, it is a common principle for vision and division, which we have all internalised because it has been passed on to us via a process of socialisation at work in a universe which has itself really been organised on the basis of division into families. This construction principle is one of the constitutive elements of our way of behaving, a mental structure which is both individual and collective, having been inculcated into all the minds socialised in a particular way; it is a tacit law governing perception and practice and the basis of the consensus on the meaning of the word “family” and that to which it refers. This implies that the initial ideas of common sense and the *folk categories* of spontaneous sociology, which must first be challenged according to good scientific methods, may be well founded, as they are here, because they contribute to forming the reality which they evoke. When dealing with the social world, words make things by producing the consensus about the existence and meaning of things, the common meaning or *doxa* which everyone takes for granted.

Thus, the family as an objective social category is the foundation for the family as a subjective social category, a mental category which is the principle of thousands of representations and actions (e.g. marriages) that contribute to reproducing the objective social category. It is this circle which is the reproduction of the social order. The almost perfect agreement then established between the subjective categories and the objective categories forms the basis for experiencing a world *taken for granted*. And for this reason there seems to be nothing more natural than the family: this arbitrary social construction seems to be part of nature, the natural and the universal.

### **The Work of institution**

While the family may appear to be a most natural social category, and while it is therefore devoted to supplying the model for the groups we call the body (*of society*), this is because it also works as the classifying scheme and construction principle for the social world and the particular group which is the family, or which comes into existence within the family itself. In fact, the family is the product of a real *work of institution* both ritually and technically, aiming at imbuing each member of the unit established in a lasting way with the sentiments required to

guarantee the *integration* that is the condition for the unit to exist and to persist. The rites of institution aim at constituting the family by setting it up as a united, integrated, single unit which is hence stable, constant and relatively indifferent to the fluctuations of individual feelings. The inaugural acts of creation (imposition of the name “family”, marriage, etc.) have a logical continuation in the innumerable acts of reaffirmation and reinforcement which aim, by some kind of continuous creation, to produce the *affections defined by society* and the *affective quasi-obligations which solidify the family* (conjugal love, paternal and maternal love, filial love, brotherly/sisterly love, etc.). This work of constantly keeping feelings alive serves to reinforce the performative effect of simple *nomination* by constructing the affective object and socialising the *libido*. So the proposition “this is your sister” comprises the imposition of the form of brotherly/sisterly love as de-sexualised *libido*.

In order to understand how the family moves on from being a nominal fiction to a real group, whose members are united by strong bonds of affection, account must be taken of all the symbolic and practical work which transforms the obligation to love into a loving disposition, and which tends to impart to each member of the family a “family spirit”, a sense of the family which gives rise to devotion, generosity and solidarity. There are also the innumerable ordinary, continual exchanges in everyday life, exchanging services, assistance, visits, attention, kindness, smiles, etc., as well as the extraordinary, solemn exchanges of family festivals – frequently ratified and eternalised by photographs and films as evidence of the integration of the family thus gathered. This work belongs particularly to the women who are given the responsibility of maintaining relationships (with their own family but also frequently with that of their husbands) by means of visits and also by correspondence and telephone calls. Parental structures and the corresponding collective provisions which make the family a *body*, namely the most integrated group possible, cannot be perpetuated without the continual work of producing family sentiments, the affective principle of *cohesion*, in other words the adhesion vital to the existence of a family group and of its interests.

This work of integration is all the more indispensable because the family, if it is to work as a body to exist and subsist, always tends to undo itself by means of its relationships of physical strength, economics and above all of symbols which evolve with the passage of time and the changes which affect the position of the members within the family. In short, the forces of fusion (mainly affective) will inevitably constantly conflict with or compensate for the forces of *fission*.

### **The Place for social reproduction**

But the naturalisation of something which is socially arbitrary has the effect of causing people to forget that, in order for this reality called “family” to be possible, a number of social conditions have to be combined which are in no way universal and, in any case, are not uniformly distributed. According to its legitimate definition, the family is a privilege elevated to a universal norm. A privilege in fact which implies a symbolic privilege: that of being as one should, within the norm, and thus having the symbolic benefit of being in conformity with what is considered normal, the symbolic benefit of normality. Those who have the privilege of having a family in line with the norm are able to demand this of everybody without having to ask the question of the economic, social and moral conditions possible for having or experiencing this type of family (e.g. a certain income, a flat, etc.).

Privilege is, in point of fact, one of the major conditions for accumulating and transmitting privileges, be they economic, cultural or symbolic. The family does indeed play a determinative role in maintaining social order, in reproduction – not only social but also biological, in other words in reproducing the structure of the social context and of social relations. It is one of the places *par excellence* for accumulating capital in its different forms and transmitting it from one generation to another; it safeguards its unity for transmission and by transmission, in order to be able to transmit and because it is able to transmit. It is the main “subject” of reproduction strategies. This is clearly seen, for example, in the transmission of the *family name (surname)*, a fundamental element of symbolic hereditary capital: the father is no more than the apparent subject when naming his son because he

names him according to a principle of which he is not the master and because, when transmitting his own name (the *father's name*), he is transmitting an *authority* of which he is not the *author* according to a rule which he did not establish.

The same applies *mutatis mutandis* to material inheritance. A considerable number of economic acts have as their "subject" not the individual *homo oeconomicus* in isolation but rather collective groups, one of the most important being the family. Whether it be a matter of choosing a school or buying a house. For example, in the matter of houses, decisions to purchase property often mobilise a major proportion of the relatives (e.g. the parents of one or other of the couple who lend money and, in return, give advice and influence the economic decision). It is true that, in this case, the family operates as a sort of "collective subject" and not merely as a collection of individuals. But this is not the only case in which the family is the place for a sort of transcendent will expressed in collective decisions and where its members feel bound to act as parts of a united body.

Having said that, not all families and, within one and the same family, not all the members have the same ability or the same inclination to conform to the prevalent definition. As can be seen particularly clearly in the case of societies "with houses", where the perpetuation of the house as a conglomerate of material possessions guides the whole existence of a household to perpetuate its existence by ensuring its integration and is inseparable from the tendency to perpetuate the integrity of its inheritance which is always in danger of dilapidation or dispersal. The forces of fusion, and in particular the ethical dispositions which serve to identify the particular interests of the individuals with the collective interests of the family, have to reckon with the forces of fission, namely the interests of different members of the group who are more or less inclined to accept the common vision and more or less capable of imposing their "own", "egoistic" point of view. One cannot talk about practices in which the family is the "subject", such as "choice" on questions of child bearing, education, marriage, consumption (especially property), etc., unless one takes account of the structure of the forces at work between the members of the family group (and thus of the history of which this state is the outcome), a structure which is always involved and a stake in the struggles within the domestic context.

One of the features of the dominant class is that they have particularly extended families (the great have great families) which are highly integrated because they are united, not only by a similar education but also by a solidarity of interests, in other words by capital and for capital – meaning economic capital, of course, but also symbolic capital (the name) and above all, perhaps, social capital (which we know is the condition for and effect of successful management of the capital in the collective possession of the members of the domestic unit). "The family is not only a social bond but also a social possession in which each member has its share and all have the whole," as Victor Hugo said about the mother and her children.

In France, for example, the family plays a considerable role among employers, not only in the transmission but also the management of the economic inheritance, especially through business ties which are often family ties. Middle class dynasties function like select clubs; they are places for the accumulation and management of capital which is equal to the sum of the capital held by each of the members, and the relationships between the various holders make it possible, at least in part, to mobilise capital in favour of each of them (the extremely diversified nature of this capital, as historians have shown, can undoubtedly explain how the large aristocratic and bourgeois families have survived revolutions so successfully).

In the process of instituting the family, the state – at least in the case of France – has a considerable role. As a consequence of all the operations of the state registry, entries in the family record and, more generally, by virtue of all official documents, the state performs thousands of acts which constitute family identity as one of the most powerful principles of identification and perception in the social world and makes the family one of the most real social units. A social history of the process of state institutionalisation of the family would reveal that the traditional opposition between the public and the private obscures the point to which the public is present in the private, even when understood as *privacy*. As the product of a long process of juridico-political construction of which the modern family is the outcome, the private is a public affair, as witnessed among other things by all the measures of family policy.

The view which the state and the public institutions have is profoundly linked with our view of domestic issues, and even our most private behaviour often depends on public actions, like the housing policy or, more directly, family policy.

Thus, one may certainly consider the family a fiction, a social artefact or an illusion in the most ordinary sense, but it is a “well founded illusion”, because, having been produced and reproduced with state protection, it receives its symbolic and material means of existing and subsisting at every moment from the state.

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## HOW CAN COUNSELLING AND THERAPY HELP FAMILIES TO CHANGE?

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*This text was the basis of Prof. Fürstenau's presentation. \*)*

In recent years, one of the most important findings in evidence-based psychotherapy has been the significance of a "helpful" therapist-patient relationship in predicting the success of the therapy. "Helpful" relationships are characterised by the **patient's** conviction that the therapist, or therapeutic team, will be able to help him or her. The first important task for the therapists is therefore to convince the patient that they will be useful and helpful as the therapy progresses.

This task focuses on the communication skills of the therapists, and their ability to establish and sustain a rapport with their different patients, so as to have the intended influences on them. In practice this means that the purposes of patients and therapists must be compatible. The earlier a patient becomes convinced about the existence of an appropriate and constructive relationship, and the firmer that conviction is, the better. And the sooner an unsatisfactory relationship is recognised and the therapist is changed, the better for both parties. The requirements for appropriateness and constructiveness are referred to as **non-specific** factors in the therapist-patient relationship. Their significance may be neglected and are often underestimated in comparison to **specific** relationship factors relating to the therapist's diagnostics and adopted method of treatment.

Other observations about the nature of the therapist-patient relationship, drawn from seminars and supervision on methods of treatment, are considered briefly.

Analytically-oriented therapists are frequently rather laboured and detached in their interactions with patients. This is particularly noticeable in the central task of psychoanalytic therapies: the identification and resolution of patients' transferences which incorporate pathological beliefs and forms of interaction. Even the characterization of transferences and defensive behaviours presents difficulties. Knowledge of the guidelines for the characterization of relationship conflicts or patterns of pathological adaptation developed in brief analytical therapy is not very widespread in practice (see "Arbeitskreis OPD" 1996, p.48 et seq.).

A further problem is faced when working with the patients' transferences. Therapists often find themselves exposed to their patients' massive, pathological relationship manoeuvres and face the task of starting to enable those individuals to withdraw their projections and to resolve their earlier pathological beliefs and defences. Their fear is about distressing or harming their patients, or about reducing them to depressed, despairing states. They therefore think that they should keep their powerful counter-transference experiences to themselves or, at most, that they should disclose them to professional colleagues in the hope that it may be possible to work on them with their patients at a later stage. This thinking is based on Bion's concept of "containing" which was developed for the description of mother-baby relations and refers to the mother's empathy in intuitively understanding, absorbing, and responding in an appropriate way to the emotional content of her baby's pre-verbal communications. In the cases discussed here, instead of "appropriate" reactions, containment leads to a denied relationship, a non-reaction involving the therapist controlling anger, with difficulty, or regulating it by withdrawal.

In discussion with colleagues, the therapist often reacts further by naïvely and concretely attributing to the patient the negative characteristics experienced in counter-transference in the relationship. The patient's behaviour is perceived as evidence of powerful resistance, if not of strong aggression, or even as being untreatable.

Frequently, the treatment goes on to develop into a major power struggle between the therapist and the patient. This makes it less and less possible for the therapist to sustain the desired approach to therapy; that of exploring the patient's world through use of professional objectivity in interpretation of their unconscious associations. The therapeutic process being interactive, the patient's presentation and behaviour will be strongly influenced by the stance of the therapist. This makes it important that the therapist should not continue to engage in such struggles but should use an awareness of the nature of the process described as a reason for changing their stance and regaining a neutral position with respect to the patient. Seeking the "positive" meaning (connotation) behind the patient's apparently "negative" behaviour can facilitate that change in stance. That effort is required because the patient must be respected as an individual and because of the professional obligation to make every effort to offer effective treatment.

These considerations apply particularly to short-term therapy such as that offered to inpatients. The shortest therapy possible does not mean therapy at any cost, such as engagement in power struggles.

These difficulties, such as avoiding power struggles or the attribution of negative characteristics, and unproductive or malign treatment processes, are considerably aggravated by a peculiarity of psychoanalytic therapy: the singular focus on the patients' deficiencies ("deficiency orientation"). Psychoanalytic diagnosis is "one-eyed" in contradiction of the word's actual meaning of "an undoing into all its parts" (i.e. a holistic therapeutic perspective). It teaches the therapist to see only the pathological side of the patient clearly and distinctly. It is blind in the other eye and overlooks the healthy aspects of the patient's ego and personal resources. (See a recent discussion in "Operationalized Psychodynamic Diagnostics", Arbeitskreis OPS, 1996).

That singular focus on the diagnosis of sickness and disturbance prevents therapists from developing and training a "positive eye" for those attributes of the patient's personality which might be relevant to recovery. The strong "deficiency orientation" rapidly results in the therapist experiencing powerlessness, overwhelming demand and perplexity because perceptions of pathology are not counter-balanced by an eye for attributes conducive to health and recovery. As a result, the therapist's confidence in his ability to help patients is reduced.

This highlights the importance of the "positive eye" for the success of psychotherapy. Instead of talking with the patient largely about his pathology, as happens in psychoanalytic therapy, it is vitally important to the success of the treatment that the patient's reflective (healthy, observant) ego is engaged and that both pathological aspects and the resources relevant to recovery are focused upon. This kind of treatment helps the patient to place his regressive tendencies in context. This is not only good for the patient but also for the well-being of the therapist. For both, this approach can offer relief and the opportunity to concentrate on a productive therapeutic collaboration. Both are able to gain more confidence in the treatment and use the pointers available to focus work on the patient's wishes, goals and plans that will enhance his/her self-worth. In the context of such work, discussion about the obstacles in the way of achieving life-goals (earlier pathological beliefs and forms of interaction) would be appropriate, and would be perceived by both patient and therapist as a natural, motivated and promising part of the process.

If, in this sense, therapy is conducted as a "two-eyed" process three questions will arise for therapists in different therapeutic settings:

**The first question is:**

**At their specific developmental stage, which of the tasks of coping with life frightens the patient?**

Dealing with this question involves a shared exploration of the patient's current life situation, of their networks of relationships, their intentions and plans, and of the difficulties being experienced (including the difficulties [negativism] in dealing with these questions). By demonstrating a concern about these matters the therapist affirms that it is vitally important to address them in order to help improve the patient's sense of well-being.

**The second question is:**

**When facing particular life tasks, which regressive solutions (coping strategies, transferences, pathological beliefs and forms of interaction) does the patient adopt?**

The response to this question can lead to an understanding of the patient's current levels of coping and to their modification during treatment. It can also provide contextual material with which to identify and understand the patterns of projection used as coping mechanisms. That material can also help in addressing those projections in a manner which is acceptable to the patient.

As regards dealing with the patient's initial regressive coping strategies - the presenting difficulties and behaviours - direct therapeutic interventions to relieve symptoms hold little promise. The patient clearly needs those symptoms to sustain his (limited) ability to function in the current situation. As a result, the patient will experience a more or less urgent need to be rid of the complaints, and will put pressure on the therapist to achieve that. But, on the other hand, he will have powerful anxieties, of which he may or may not be conscious, about not being able to cope with specific life tasks or situations without the aid of those symptoms.

In those circumstances, anxieties and distress can be considerably relieved by the therapist's assurances that the patient's previous experiences have taught them that their current (pathological) beliefs and behaviour patterns are indeed the best solutions to coping with life, and that they should be sustained until the patient is certain that they can replace them with better coping strategies. And that this would take some time. This time can then be used to draw the patient's attention to the situations and circumstances in which their presenting problems are less apparent. That is, when they are not "needed". This, in turn, can lead to consideration with the patient of ways to create conditions in situations which have formerly been feared or avoided which make the unwanted coping mechanisms unnecessary. Dealing with presenting problems in this way leads to a deepening understanding of their functions within the interactions in the patient's life situations and reduces the pressure for unrealistic forms of change. The patient thereby gains greater freedom to focus attention on their own personal goal-setting, and on new and better experiences within and outside therapy.

**The third question is:**

**How can we use our perceptions and interventions to help the patient to overcome the obstacles faced and take the developmental steps that are necessary? Which of the patient's, the therapist's or the clinic's resources can be mobilized to achieve that end?**

This question sets a direction for further work with patients: the exploration and activation of their own resources. It is also a challenge to choose and provide the most appropriate of the therapist's/clinic's resources for the patients, including the therapeutic strategies to be adopted. Furthering and strengthening new and positive experiences for the patients, and a careful regulation of the negative ones, are of foremost importance in this.

Consideration of these three questions provides an outline of a treatment programme. It also provides a therapeutic message for the patients - to look at previous experiences and behaviour critically, on the basis of personal wishes, goals and resources, and to make and judge new experiences as experiments whether they happen during inpatient or outpatient therapy, or in differing external settings. In this regard all team members share a clear basic

attitude and an intention to orient work with patients toward the improvement of patients' health and their coping skills for their future lives. This approach is not tied to a particular form of psychoanalytic expertise and is easy to present to colleagues trained in other therapeutic approaches. It embodies the concept of the "helping" therapeutic relationship and offers a context for the treatment of patients which emphasises the confrontation of conscious wishes and goals, and of the difficulties created by life events. As mentioned before, it encourages and strengthens the motivation to examine the pathological beliefs and patterns of interaction, which are no longer relevant in order to deactivate them as described by Weiss and Sampson (1968), and to replace them with healthier ones.

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**CHAIR'S REPORT ON THE MILLENIUM CONFERENCE OF THE INTERNATIONAL  
COMMISSION ON MARRIAGE AND INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS  
Berlin, Germany 2000**

## **Introduction**

Once again our annual conference has gathered our members from across the world to analyse and debate a topic that is relevant and contemporary to all, both professional and volunteers, who work with couples and families to improve their relationships.

Over one hundred and forty participants from approximately thirty countries took part. We believe this is a record number to attend our commission's conference and many positive comments were heard in conference rooms about the quality of the information presented and the professional and enjoyable conference format.

I would like to acknowledge the brilliant efforts of Martin Koschorke in organising the conference and the post-conference seminar. In addition I wish to thank Professor Siegfried Keil, Chairman of the Evangelische Aktionsgemeinschaft fuer Familienfragen for his organisation's sponsorship of the conference.

The opening address by Dr Christine Bergmann, the Federal Minister for Family, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, immediately connected the conference to its topic through her eloquent description of the fundamental social and economic changes taking place in Berlin. We are very grateful that Dr Bergmann was able to open the conference and I wish to acknowledge publicly the support of the German government for the conference.

I thank Mrs Gerlind Richards for her wonderful efforts as our General Secretary. In an entirely voluntary capacity Gerlind devotes an enormous amount of time to ensuring that the running of the Commission and our annual conference occur efficiently and expeditiously. As always she has been very helpful as both an innovator and as a sounding board for ideas throughout the past twelve months.

I wish to acknowledge the inspirational efforts of our keynote speakers, Dr Mphala Mogudi from South Africa, Prof. Dr. Remi Lenoir from France and Prof. Dr. Peter Fuerstenau from Germany. In addition I would like to thank especially all the workshop presenters; Prof. Dr. Lina Kashyap (India), Olga and Paul Racoveanu (Romania), Don Burnard (Australia), Prof. Dr Andre Masiala Ma Solo (Congo Democratic Republic), Werner Martens (Germany) and Suzie Thorn (USA), Dr. Ryszard Praszkiar (Poland), Prof. Dr. Wilhelmina Kalu (Nigeria), Jean Phillipe Cobbaut (Belgium) and Dr Gisela Maehler and Dr. Hans-Georg Maehler (Germany). Our group leaders were Gabrielle Bastian (France), Simone Bavery (South Africa), John Chambers (United Kingdom), Genevieve Dind (Switzerland), Dianne Gibson (Australia), Derek Hill (United Kingdom), Dr Friedrich-Wilhelm Lindemann and Sabine Mundolf (Germany), Ulrike Odenthal (Germany) and Elisabeth Weiser Hormann (Austria). These are not easy tasks and they were all performed to a very high standard.

## **Our Debate**

In this report I have the daunting responsibility of distilling the rich and complex conversations/presentations that occurred during our time together. The task is almost impossible but I humbly submit to the reader my impressions and thoughts on a very engaging topic. When attending a conference with so many cultures and languages represented, one must take nothing for granted and be open to challenging and even

conflicting viewpoints. This is not an argument for relativism but it gives a context to the environment in which the debates took place.

The diverse conversations of the groups and the debates occurring throughout the conference have informed this report. In fact I hope that many readers will recognise some of the issues/ideas that were discussed within specific groups. There is no doubt that the groups were once again the heartbeat of our conference and I was privileged to listen to a number of the discussions, albeit too briefly.

There is little doubt that Berlin was the ideal setting for the conference. Lying at the crossroads of eastern and western Europe the city is experiencing fundamental and significant change. These changes are not without pain but at first glance, appear to be positive and vibrant.

One of the emerging themes of the conference was that change often occurred within relationships following some significant event. People are generally ambivalent to change and thus some jolt to the relationship's homeostasis is required to give impetus to the need for change. As a rule people resist change and only seek it if something significant has occurred within the relationship that requires a re-assessment.

It is common for individuals to draw comfort from stability within a relationship in that the stability allows the relationship to flourish. The issue of relationship stability versus relationship change demonstrates an interesting paradox in that it is quite possible to have significant change within a broadly stable relationship. This issue was debated in a number of the conference groups yet it was a paradox that many felt went to the heart of successful relationship development. As our eminent Co-Chairman Dr Herman Pas has noted on a number of occasions, we must continue to astonish one another.

Our conference is diverse in its perspectives. We were cautioned politely not to always consider relationship change from our own cultural perspective. A number of participants from eastern or African traditions spoke eloquently of marriage as a joining of families as well as the couple. The forces acting on the relationship between the couple and the families can be complex. If change is desired then an understanding of the need for that change may involve many parties. This perspective is quite different to the emphasis on relationship privacy apparent in most western cultures. This in some ways explains why some migrants feel so cut adrift when they have moved away from their family of origin or marriage family. Complex extended inter- family relationships can give confidence to the couple in that they feel part of a social framework. This issue connects with a theme expressed at last year's conference where the African concept of 'ubuntu' was discussed, in that, we are what we are through our relationship with others.

We must be careful not to always see the forces acting on relationships as linear. Even the word 'force' with its linguistic links to the physical sciences can lead us to consider an action-reaction model of relationship change. While this has appeal in some western intellectual traditions it was acknowledged by many participants that relationship change can be oblique, fragile and influenced by forces from myriad directions.

The conference acknowledged consistently that positive relationship change did occur if sufficient time was given to enable the change process. It was noted that men and women might, in general, have different adaptability levels to change with the consensus being that men required more time to adjust to significant relationship change. In its worst manifestation insufficient time may lead some men to reject the need for change entirely and see relationship stability as a right, even a possession. This has on occasions lead to terrible consequences for some women who have sought legal insistence on relationship change or dissolution.

The role of public policy and its ability to produce change in relationships caused considerable discussion. It was felt that rights with respect to relationships could be legislated so as to enshrine certain privileges and protections for individuals and family members. This is particularly useful where significant power imbalances have developed within relationships

such that one or more parties to the relationship could be suffering psychological, economic or even physical distress. This is change being mandated through legislation although it was acknowledged that for such change to have significant impact it needed to be embraced by both men and women. It was noted that men in particular seemed willing to test a legal system's will where that legal and policy system was impacting on a family or significant personal relationship. Some men did not acknowledge the law's right to act as a shield from a relationship that had become punitive or destructive.

In addition, public policy intrusion into the therapeutic process can have its difficulties if the policy changes are at odds with the professional orientation or training of the therapist. This tension is apparent particularly when program funding is tied closely to the public policy position. This more pro-active or possibly manipulative role of public policy development was seen to be an emerging issue for therapists and researchers from Europe, the USA and Australia. It was debated that it was possible that the therapist could be compromised as a relationship change agent because the government of the day was attempting to engineer a particular ideologically or economically driven family policy outcome. This issue, in terms of the forces impacting on relationships, was considered to be emergent and one that will require ongoing consideration by organisations such as our commission.

A significant issue raised throughout the conference was that there might not be enough education around the rhythms of our lives in terms of accepting that change is a natural process occurring constantly. Our paradoxical need for relationship stability is juxtaposed by lives that are in a process of constant change through ageing or experiences. These natural rhythms are life's signposts by which people can judge their progress and hopefully develop some wisdom that will add to their enjoyment of their relationships and their lives. However it was put forward by a number of participants that some people have little understanding of the relationship challenges that life will inevitably produce. Some may need a form of relationship map that could assist them navigate these inevitable challenges. It is reasonable to propose that some relationship decisions or paths are so fraught with danger that an educative process that assisted with the recognition of obvious risk areas would be beneficial. More positively put, an educative process could be constructed that proposed life enhancing relationship models and possibly a process by which relationships could be sustained and strengthened.

Some innovative concepts on enhancing relationship change were put forward by participants from countries with large populations such as the Republic of the Congo and South Africa. These countries cannot afford the high degree of couple and family therapeutic specialisation so apparent in many other countries. Basic training in couple and family therapies could be given to teachers, nurses and doctors as an adjunct to their normal professional skills. In addition it was noted that many citizens of these countries do not have much control over their time because they are working constantly. Therefore the counselling assistance may have to occur while they are travelling to work or even at their place of employment. As Dr Mphala Mogudi, our keynote speaker from South Africa mentioned during the conference, we all have the gift of 24 hours.

The therapeutic models do not always have to be top-down but can be adapted to suit lifestyles that have very little spare-time and limited control over time in general. In a sense this could be viewed as re-connecting relationship assistance with the individuals, families and communities it seeks to serve. This could be a creative way of helping couples and families whose relationship and economic rhythms are quite different to those in other countries. It is in fact an example of innovative service delivery that could have application in all countries.

Change in intimate relationships often requires the individual to re-work their self-image sometimes at considerable emotional cost. In a short space of time an individual can feel he/she has moved from being a significant player in a relationship or family to an outsider or even a failure. The psychological adjustment is large and many people need assistance to re-build their self-image. The counsellor is often in the role of giving perspective to the forces impacting on the relationship. This is critical where an individual's viewpoint is so influenced by the emotional changes being experienced that reason and judgement are considerably impaired. In addition the counsellor is often dealing with the more subtle forces impacting on

relationships such as learning about engagement with others, commitment, valuing difference and knowing who your partner is.

It was clear throughout the conference that most participants felt that it was very difficult for some individuals to adapt to relationship change using their own psychological resources exclusively. We need supportive social networks that will assist the individual with any adjustment required. The building of these networks, whether they be community, professional or volunteer, is essential in meeting with life's inevitable relationship and emotional challenges.

There is little doubt that economic and life-style choices are having a significant impact on relationships and their ability to adapt. Individuals are changing employment more frequently than ever before and many are seeking that employment further afield. While this may mean a higher salary it will also cause considerable time away from family and significant relationships. What identity changes occur to the individual who is forced to work far from home? If the individual can travel home frequently and easily then the effect overall may be negligible but if returning to the family home is difficult and infrequent then the effects are more problematic.

The international phenomenon of outsourcing has introduced fluidity into the labour market that may be good for global capital and profit margins but has made it difficult for employees to develop a sense of belonging to a firm or enterprise. Long-term loyalty between an employer and employee was seen as a positive concept by generations in the recent past. Over the last ten years labour has been required to become increasingly mobile in that it is tending to be treated as a commodity to be moved about, similar to the components or materials used in manufacturing. The information technology industry appears to embrace this culture particularly. In one sense this could heighten the importance of family and relationships as a reliable source of psychological stability and continuity. If employees are to be seen as micro businesses selling their labour to a market of employers the workplace will retreat as a place of social interaction where meaningful friendships can be developed. It will be important to monitor the effect that increasing globalisation of labour and capital will have on family and significant relationships. This is possibly an area of future inquiry for our commission.

## **Summary**

One of the positive tensions of our commission's history is the role of volunteers and professionals in the therapeutic process. Both groups are attempting to assist couples and families to respond actively to the forces acting on relationships. An important view that emerged during the conference was that volunteers and professionals are part of a continuum of support to couples and families. They are part of the forces acting on the relationship. It was acknowledged however that for some particularly intransigent relationship issues a degree of training and specialisation was required.

It seems agreed by all at our conference that the dream of long-term relationships is still alive but, in reality, this dream is often not realised. The new technologies are creating new economic models and people appear stressed by the rate of change. This may be a period of societal adjustment as occurred after the Industrial Revolution but it will be necessary for those working in the field of relationship support to be cognisant of the emerging technological revolution.

To paraphrase the words of a past chairman of this commission, Dr Christopher Clulow, do we choose treason or revolution? Do we embrace government policies that appear to decrease the quality of support to couples and families while acknowledging the realities of government funding? Are we hanging onto old support models when in fact couple and families have moved on?

As the conference's debates explored its topic more extensively it was acknowledged that all who work in the field of relationship support need to understand that change can be positive.

It is not always too difficult and that we should spend at least as much time searching for the health of a relationship as we spend analysing its pathology. Is it possible that a deficit model of relationship analysis and support has influenced us? Is it possible that there is an imbalance of effort between affirming the positive aspects of a relationship and measures to alleviate difficulties? There is probably no substantive way of dealing definitively with this question but it is reasonable to continue its consideration.

If our efforts to assist couple and families are to be relevant and to elicit positive outcomes all that work in our field will need to constantly re-assess their efforts. This is of course the challenge of all the helping professions and organisations but when these bodies have become institutions in their own right a structural inflexibility may develop.

Change in intimate relationships is always difficult and encourages ambivalence. There appears to be a considerable difference in the way men and women want this assistance to change. The collective wisdom of the conference appeared to indicate that men wanted advice, solutions and they wanted it now. Women also wanted advice but were prepared to take more time to understand the advice and internalise it.

But is this a problem? Do we make too much of difference? Even if men are generally focussed on solutions exclusively and women are interested in the quality of the process, both are definitely interested in resolution.

It is apparent in analysing the forces impacting upon relationships and the changes they produce that we cannot afford to be too esoteric. Couples and families need to have positive and stable economic, social and political contexts if they are to thrive. It is mistimed to speak of relationship growth if a person feels constant hunger, exhaustion, and emotional or physical threat. At the same time couples and families can feel under siege by the rate of technological and economic change. As workers in the field of human relationships we are part of this continuum. Our challenge is to assist couples and families to be engaged positively with those forces having a significant impact in order to regain some control and stability.

**Paul Tyrrell  
Chairman  
International Commission on Marriage and Interpersonal Relations  
Canberra, Australia  
June 2000**

## Programme of the Conference Workshops and Presenters

Workshop 1:

### **COLLECTIVE IDENTITY IN TIMES OF POLITICAL CHANGE: THE CASE OF RUSSIA.**

Presenter:

**Natalia MIRIMANOVA, Moscow (Russia) and Fairfax (USA)**

The presentation will focus on the transitions in social identities, i.e., ethnic, national, political affiliation and others, that were triggered by the dramatic changes in post-Soviet countries. Psychological and societal indicators in the quest for collective identity will be discussed. One example will be the impact of war in Chechnya, broadcast by television and other mass media, on Russian identity. A short documentary will illustrate the example.

*Workshop language: English*

**Natalia Mirmanova** studied medicine at the medical institute of Moscow and the cardiological research centre of the Academy for Medical Sciences, Moscow (Russia). Besides working in Europe, she has been a researcher at the Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution of George Mason University, Fairfax, Virginia (USA), since 1997. As trainer in conflict resolution, she has designed and conducted a number of training-for-trainers seminars on cooperative planning and coalition building for political parties and public dialogue for civic groups in states of the former Soviet Union.

Various publications (a.o. Traumatized Societies, Ethnic Conflicts in Georgia).

Workshop 2:

### **"SAME PLAY - DIFFERENT STAGE" - DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES IN FUNCTIONAL AND DYSFUNCTIONAL MARRIAGES OR FAMILIES**

Presenter:

**Prof. Dr. Ivo PLAŇAVA, Brno (Czech Republic)**

What has changed in the structure and dynamics of today's families and marriages - what has remained unchanged? Functional / dysfunctional cohabitation - what does it mean? Where is the difference? What form of gender roles exist in so-called happy and unhappy marriages? What do men and women appreciate in each other, what irritates them? What are the main marital problems clients bring up? These are amongst the questions to be discussed against the background of research, to see how far the workshop title "same play - different stage" applies.

*Workshop language: English*

**Professor Dr. Ivo Plaňava** is a psychologist with many years of experience in marital and family counseling and therapy. He is professor of psychology at Brno University (Czech Republic) and the author of a number of research papers.

Workshop 3:

### **MEETING THE NEEDS OF FAMILIES WITH MARITAL PROBLEMS IN THE CHANGING INDIAN SOCIETY**

Presenter:

**Prof. Dr. Lina KASHYAP, Mumbai (India)**

The twentieth century brought cataclysmic changes in all aspects of Indian society including changes in the family structure, functions and roles of its members as well as the changing perceptions towards marriage and marriage practices.

This Workshop will highlight the changes that have occurred in Indian families and the factors that have brought about these changes. As marriages in India are between two families and not merely two individuals, interventions with families with marital problems have also to take into account the Third Force Effect. A new initiative in India in helping families with marital problems are the Family Courts whose scope and role will be discussed in this Workshop.

*Workshop language: English*

**Prof. Dr. Lina Kashyap** studied sociology, cultural anthropology, political sciences and social work in Bombay. For many years she worked in research and social work. She has been a lecturer at the Tata Institute for Social Sciences in Mumbai for the 16 years and is Head of the Department for family and paediatric social work. Numerous research projects and publications.

Workshop 4:

**WHEN TWO WORLDS MEET**

Presenter:

**Prof. Dr. André MASIALA ma Solo, Kinshasa (Congo)**

In the Congo, no area of life escapes the upheavals. The country emerges from dictatorship and war to fight poverty, unemployment, a growing population, starvation, lack of medical supplies and schooling. It has to struggle with extensive refugee and population migration. Economic factors and consumer and media influence further the dissolution of traditional social, value and reference systems, desacralisation and disorientation.

"Dad" loses his authority over his family together with his economic power. His position is socially and even sexually weakened. "Mum" on the other hand is gaining influence as a breadwinner in the informal economy - in the course of the factual dissolution of law and order. This workshop will talk about the conflicts arising and the consequences for the children and the extended family system.

*Workshop language: French*

**Prof. Dr. André Masiala ma Solo** teaches psychology and practical theology at the Protestant university of Kinshasa (Congo), and clinical psychology and educational sciences at the National Pedagogical College of Kinshasa. He is Head of the Congo Centre for Children and Families in Kinshasa. He is also involved in promoting and defending children's rights at an international level. Numerous publications and research projects.

Workshop 5:

**STATUS OF CONTRACTS RELATING TO INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS IN THE USA, EUROPE AND ELSEWHERE**

Presenters:

**Werner MARTENS, Munich (Germany)**  
**Suzie S.THORN, San Francisco (USA)**

Contracts governing intimate relationships, including prenuptial agreements, post-nuptial agreements, living together agreements, joint venture agreements, partnership agreements and contracts to make a will are under scrutiny in this international workshop presented by two Fellows of the International Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers.

*Workshop languages: English/German*

**Werner Martens** is a solicitor in Munich (Germany) and specialises in international family law. He is Correspondent of the International Family Law Journal and was Chair of the International Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers until recently.

**Suzie S. Thorn** is a Senior Attourney-at-Law in San Francisco, California (USA). She specialises in American and international family law and has been involved in American and international family law organisations for many years. She was co-organiser of the Second World Congress on Family Law and the Rights of Children and Youth.

Workshop 6:

**OPENING THE MIND TO CHANGE: THE MAGIC OF MENTAL CREATIVITY**

Presenter:

**Ryszard PRASZKIER, Warsaw (Poland)**

We build our family, marital and social relationships up to rigid patterns and rituals. The family may be seen as an ancient tribe, full of ritualised dances and patterns. To overcome this magic net of symbols, rituals and spells we have to do something miraculous: we need to become magicians of our own and IMAGINE dancing a different dance.

New images of family and social bonds CANNOT BE EXERCISED through realistic psychodramas they can however be achieved through allowing oneself to IMAGINE DIFFERENTLY maintaining a delicate balance between status quo and change.

The Workshop will be interactive and will include guided imagery and powerpoint presentation.

*Workshop language: English*

**Ryszard Praszki** is a licensed psychotherapist and family therapist, and a Polish National Health licensed clinical psychologist, a licensed group trainer and supervisor of group training. He is on the Polish Psychiatric Association's Register of Psychotherapy National Supervisors and an appointed supervisor of the Polish Psychological Association.

Workshop 7:

**CHANGE AND THE FAMILY: THE NIGERIAN EXPERIENCE, 1960 - 1999**

Presenter:

**Prof. Dr. Wilhelmina KALU, Nsukka (Nigeria)**

The Workshop addresses historical developments in the process of change evident in the contemporary Nigerian Society, and the impact on dynamics of family relationships. It focusses on the interplay of three main factors, religion, politics and economy in producing cultural and social changes. It also discusses how the resultant mental culture impacts on material culture and social structures, particularly the family. The response of the family and women to these changes are highlighted and illustrated in a brief video.

*Workshop language: English*

**Prof. Dr. Wilhelmina Ka1u** qualified in Ghana, Canada and the USA as clinical family and social worker, child therapist and educational psychologist, and supervisor in family and pastoral counselling. She teaches child psychology and educational sciences at the university of Nigeria in Nsukka. She is Chair of the African Association for Counselling and Pastoral Psychology. Numerous publications and research

Workshop 8:

**THE EVOLUTION OF THE FAMILY AND SOCIAL POLICY**

Presenter:

**Jean Philippe COBBAUT, Brussels (Belgium)**

The evolution of society, forms of life and family models raise questions on how public policy is shaped and managed in our democratic states. How to conceive - in complex and changing societies - social policies that meet the combined democratic ideals of freedom, equality and social solidarity? This question will be considered, taking as a starting point today's family realities.

*Workshop language: French*

**Jean Philippe Cobbaut** is a solicitor and director of studies with the Belgian family organisation Ligue des Familles. He is lecturer at Leuven University (Belgium).

Workshop 9:

**THE HISTORY OF CHANGE IN FAMILY MEDIATION**

Presenters:

**Dr. Gisela MAEHLER and Dr. Hans-Georg MAEHLER, Munich (Germany)**

Family mediation is a method of conflict work which focusses primarily on dealing with the consequences of separation and divorce. It is preferred by couples who wish to make their own decisions. The dynamics of separation and the fear of losing out frequently obstruct the solution. Mediation helps overcome the dilemma of these negotiations. Its chances of success increase as the partners venture through levels of accusation, backward orientation and legal claims and prepare for a value-creating future in the interest of all concerned. The workshops will highlight the different steps of change which mediation can offer.

*Workshop language: German*

**Dr. Gisela Maehler** and **Dr. Hans-George Maehler** are solicitors in Munich (Germany) specialising in family, inheritance and economic law. Their mediation work as practitioners and researchers is also part of their own training institute. Mr. and Mrs. Maehler are pioneers in family mediation in Germany and have set up the German Association for Mediation. Mr. Maehler is Chair of the Association.