

INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION ON COUPLE AND FAMILY RELATIONS

53rd International Conference

FAMILIES AND DEMOCRACY Compatibility, Incompatibility Opportunity or Challenge?

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CONFERENCE REPORT

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Chair's Report on the 53rd Conference of the International Commission on Couple and Family Relations, Lyon 2006.

These remarks set out here are not meant as resumé of keynote speeches, workshops or groups at the 2006 Conference in Lyon. They are the results of the connections and resonances for me, as one of a number of participants at the Conference, as the event progressed and impacted on my thinking. They are meant as the *entrée* for what follows in the publication from the Conference later in the year, where the keynote speakers effectively speak for themselves. It is a challenge always to comment on what others have said and, I believe, far better to share one's own experience. It is neither correct nor incorrect but it has truth and meaning, even if only for one person!

Opening Session

The opening of the Conference was facilitated by three excellent speeches from Professor Bernadette Barthelet, from the Institute of Family Sciences, of the Catholic University of Lyon; M. Hubert Brin, President of UNAF (Union Nationale des Associations Familiale); and, M. Dominique de Legge, ministerial delegate from the French Ministry of the Family, representing M. Phillipe Bas, the French Minister for the Family. The first two speakers represented partner organisations with ICCFR/CIRCF in the development and running of the Conference. It was interesting to hear three separate but intertwining examples of family policy and action in France. Whilst obviously the three presentations were rooted, so to speak, in French society, culture and history, they were nevertheless transferable to the respective cultures and nationalities present at the Conference. Indeed, the challenge and difference was a good start for this international meeting of minds, politics, culture and thought.

Keynote presentations, Wednesday

After this formal opening of the annual Conference, we settled down to in-depth presentations. Chantal Lebatard, Board member of ICCFR and also of UNAF, led the opening discussion and presentation by setting the Conference within the context of its theme, Families and Democracy: compatibility, incompatibility, opportunity or challenge. She spoke from her enormous experience in working for UNAF. She presented us with the challenges of those engaged in supporting families in France today and, similar to the opening three speeches, offered us an opportunity to consider our own culture, thought and practice. She reminded us that some years ago sociologists had noted fifty-seven different types of family form, and that this had now probably increased markedly. What we heard later in the Conference seemed to bear this out.

Her comments, in setting the backdrop to the Conference theme, focused on the dualism of democracy and freedom, and explored the dilemmas that thought and social policy initiate for the family in today's world. It is clear from her presentation, and a theme returned to often during the Conference, that long-held and cherished beliefs about what is family have been challenged by laws, lives and cultural shifts that are a consequence of equality of opportunity and freedom. Whilst it is clear that the values enshrined in these principles are ones that this Commission would support and actively develop, they also do challenge the thinking and ways of life for many of us. It reminded me of another major dualism, agency and structure, that age-old tension between individual rights and freedom, and the needs of the group or community.

Chantal introduced Professor Georges Eid, from the Institute of Family Sciences, who offered delegates a reflection on Family, Democracy and Citizenship. He noted how democracy had grown over the last century defining this as the process of allowing people to take part in the political life of the country. Georges used Greek mythology to explore and explain his perspective, juxtaposing the hierarchical *Oedipal* theory, and story, with that of the more democratic myth of *Psyche and Cupid*. I found it interesting to note that we are still driven by these archetypes, and they still hold powerful sway in our thinking and emotions so much so that we are willing to debate and argue them long after their *publication* (vis. the question thrown at Georges suggesting that he had misinterpreted the myth!). I was reminded of Bruno Bettelheim's book, *The Uses of Enchantment*, where he took the archetypal images from Grimms fairy tales and offered a psychoanalytic interpretation of these stories. Claudio Deschamps later in the Conference suggested that the *psychoanalytic* was in some sense anti-democratic with its reliance on the *Oracle*, again a link with the world of Greek mythology and the way in which it is has been used to give meaning to our respective but similar worlds.

Finally, Georges reminded me of that paradox of where increased freedom has a way of also locking me up. His focus on the tension between the private and public, referred to by me earlier with my comments about agency and structure, allowed for a reflection on the struggle today for all of us in the field of family support where the demise of Grand Theory in the face of post-Modernism has offered a freedom of a kind whilst also creating anxiety from the loss of long-held beliefs and certainty. This, for me, was one of the most interesting elements of the presentation, where I had to struggle with this internal dialogue.

It was clear, when we broke for dinner, that we had already been fed well, at least intellectually, given what I took to be the energy in the entrance hall and patio at Valpré, as well as the dining room when we were feeding ourselves in a different way! The way delegates remained in the dining room, with the last remnants leaving well after 11.00.pm, spoke of the enthusiasm and interest generated by the whole of this first day.

Keynote Presentations, Thursday

Thursday morning dawned bright both in climate and Conference offerings. Judge Ina Gyemant's presentation, from the perspective of law and its impact today in California, continued this intriguing theme of the struggle and tension between the personal/private and the public. Her examples of what constitutes *family* today were intriguing and challenging, not least in relation to traditional views of who should and could be parents. She told us of the developments in parenting, particularly for gays and lesbians, and what impact that has had on basic and traditional matters, such as who is a father, who is a mother and who has rights over the child.

I was struck by her comments about seeing the best interests of the child as paramount, within the context of judgements she has made in family courts. This principle has been enshrined in Children's Law in England and Wales since 1989 but, as with many good intentions, has not been the perfect solution that those who drafted it thought it might be. What was missing from that legislation, to my mind, was the absence of clarity about parental rights and responsibilities, the very issues that Judge Gyemant offered us as evidence that making decisions and creating family policy is no easy matter.

She further touched on domestic violence and the roles, rights and limitations for grandparents. It was amusing to hear of how confusing a modern family might be

where a child can possibly have eight grandparents! However, what was also in there was the potential confusion, pain and upset for the child in trying both to understand and negotiate a passage through this modern family morass. This was also further evidence of how democracy might not be such a perfect solution for many people, especially children, using Georges's idea of participation in political life, since children are excluded from this opportunity worldwide (this matter interestingly raised itself in one comment from the Group Discussions)! And, considering the cross-cultural impact and incidence of domestic violence, I was reminded of how we are all similar, in our many cultures, if we only but scratch the surface. Whilst there is a comfort in some of this, it nevertheless does not solve the problem of what to do about such worldwide phenomenon, with most violence directed by men at women and children. Again, a return to the concerns and images of patriarchy and power, tempting anyone to wonder whether the institution of marriage is possible in a democracy, whilst noting, as Claudio Deschamps suggested, that the post-modern description of this age-old institution is better described today as a *relational network*, certainly an expression that might better describe the new family structures that Ina Geymant offered us.

The final keynote speaker on Thursday was Professor Claudio Des Champs, from Argentina who addressed the Conference from the context of therapeutic work and family life much attacked by a regime that was far from democratic in its operation. Claudio spoke to us of the disruption of family life, in all its guises, as a result of state violence, thus setting out the impact of the breakdown of democracy. The familiar stability that many of us take for granted had been removed violently and the net consequence of this disruption was the increase in drug abuse, violence and the breakdown of relationships. It's an interesting concept – that the macro-community is responsible for creating the conditions for micro stability and order. Interestingly, with strains of Orwell's *1984*, Claudio also described the attack on thought and intellectualism.

I found myself reflecting on my gratitude for not having suffered any of this in my life. It put into perspective the debates and disagreements about different therapeutic approaches that I had witnessed and taken part in. None of it had any meaning or reality compared to that which Argentineans had suffered in recent times.

In relation to the theme of the Conference, Claudio then introduced an interesting notion – the rise of couple and family therapy as a representation of the rebuilding of democracy and openness. He cited the basic presumption of family therapy, that an individual is unlikely to be the problem, at least on his or her own, and that this therapeutic approach has something inherently democratic in its perspective and operation. As further evidence, and making a link with Georges Eid, he noted how psychoanalysis, going to the *Oracle* or expert, seemed at odds with this democratised therapeutic intervention.

The notion of democracy as an eco-system is an interesting development not least since all of nature seems to opt for homeostasis, or balance. Our problem is in not understanding that balance means just that – it doesn't mean level. But, an increase towards a healthy balance is critical for therapeutic work, and there is, therefore, the question of whether the state has a responsibility to provide this basic human need. The increase in therapeutic work in Argentina reflected by the increasing balance at the level of State should not surprise us. I was reminded of being criticised some time ago, when working in the Child Guidance service, for dealing with a benefits issue for one of my clients – it wasn't purely therapeutic I was told. I had reasoned that unless there was food in the stomach and a certain lessening of levels of financial anxiety, then food for the intellect and emotions would be inevitably ignored!

It's a somewhat prosaic example compared to the issues prevalent in Argentina but I think it makes the point.

At this point in the Conference programme, we moved to the more active involvement of delegates in the Workshops and Discussion Groups. It is invidious, even foolish, to try to reflect here what happened experientially in these diverse settings. However, I will offer some selective comments gleaned from the Workshops, based on what those moderating the events have said. I invite you to reflect also yourselves on your own experiences and enter into a debate (this is democracy after all!) or reflection on what happened.

1. Mediation and its impact on families breaking down, led by Liliana Perone.

It is within the framework of relationships that individuals learn to be human beings. In effect, relationships enable those individuals to internalise rules, norms and the law. Those processes of 'apprenticeship' are necessary if the individual is to acquire a personal capacity to live within society. It is only in those ways that the individual is able to become an agent for the communication of a culture or, alternatively, for breaks with it. Family mediation is one of the means which society offers in order to safeguard (key) relationships and thus help to maintain them.

Comment: One striking and interesting perspective that was offered was of not making the mistake of assuming that any couple are at a similar stage in their own personal and relational development. Many problems arise because couples are at different stages and this is compounded if the mediator fails to take note of this.

2. Deprived Families in Europe – 4th World Families? led by Matt Davies.

The workshop focused on the situation facing families experiencing long-term poverty in Europe as highlighted in a recent pan-European report published by ATD Fourth World, "Valuing Children, Valuing Parents". There was an overview of the challenges poor parents face in bringing up their children, particularly the difficulties they face in accessing preventative support services, leading to families experiencing persistent poverty and living in fear of being separated due to child protection intervention. The workshop also looked at examples in Europe of how poor children and parents can be supported to remain together as a family unit to meet the challenges of poverty.

Comment: The question of relations between families and democracy is more difficult for families experiencing long-term poverty. The need to ask for social work support and services puts such families under a kind of social control. Social intervention, in a certain way, disqualifies the parents and makes it difficult for them to behave as parents, as they constantly fear separation from their children. Offering a place for children in a care institution, unfortunately, remains the only option in offering some respite for deprived families. The workshop gave a good opportunity to measure how social and economic problems, the environment, may interfere with family relationship and limit, or even reduce, the autonomy and democracy within the family.

3. Civic Marriage and Community Support to counterbalance certain impacts of democracy, led by Dagmar Kutsar.

During the second half of the twentieth century, the family as an institution underwent a number of major changes in Western societies. Nuclear families replaced multi-generational families as the dominant family form. The

patriarchal model of the working husband (head of household) and housewife was progressively replaced by a more egalitarian family with both partners in employment. Remaining single and living in one-person households became an acceptable alternative to founding a family. New principles of child centered-ness have gradually been introduced into family policy in several European countries. Children are more than ever given a priority and power in family-based decisions while decision-making has gradually become individualised and stayed over community interests. The marriage-based family is, however, likely to remain as a traditional construct. The family is where we learn to be human and to be citizens. How does the democracy work in the family decisions? How human rights are respected or violated in the family? Can a child's voice be heard between the family and the community? Can responsibility and control be balanced in the family, between family group and the community? What are the links between community support and family organising? Can civic marriage and community support counterbalance certain impacts of democracy?

Comment: The workshop did indeed offer the opportunity to reflect on the issues set out above. However, what was striking was a statement that finds its form in many different cultures and societies in relation to the definition of family policy, the "best interests of the child". Another important matter, possibly tapping into a concern expressed in the Discussion Groups was policy and service determined by the "State helping those who help themselves". Finally, it is noteworthy that, possibly again, women are becoming more visible, with men disappearing!

4. The impact of Democracy on traditional African Families and Communities, led by Zama Mabaso and Simone Bavery.

This South African model is based on a negotiated democratic constitution having as a foundation the Bill of Rights and the Freedom Charter. The workshop focused on the rights and freedom enjoyed by traditional families and communities ten years after the first democratic Government of National Unity was elected. The workshop also focused on: the traditional families and communities values (Ubuntu); their basic human rights; their rights to free education and health care; their rights to land, housing, water and sanitation; the pursuit of a culture of democracy in communities; and, in social relationships and family life. In relation to this, the role of NGO's and CBO's in educating families and communities towards democracy was explored.

Comment: The workshop leaders gave a social and political history of South Africa from pre-historic times to the present, illustrating what was called "a double-barrelled country in transition", moving too fast to assimilate. Within the workshop, and related to a comment from one of the Discussion Groups about the importance of siblings, it is striking that the terms *brother* and *sister* are used more than *uncle* and *aunt*, perhaps stressing the importance of close family. Also, whilst there have been some big and helpful changes, some things remain the same, for example, children having to walk long distances to school. And, the ever-present problem of domestic violence is prevalent, with no immediate and obvious solution, as is the problem of HIV/AIDs. The political democratic solution is also different from many Western processes in that elected individuals are responsible to their Party not to those who elected them.

5. Enriching couple relationships through understanding gender roles and equality – developing new models for marital distress prevention, led by Helena Hiila and Vuokko Malinen.

Finland's marital laws are liberal and gender equal. The large number of divorces has made marriage a secularized institution. Although there is information about the characteristics of sound relationships, couples in each generation have to solve their marital cultural problems themselves. Finnish society promotes an active role of the father in children's lives from the very beginning. However, only a small percentage of fathers use the opportunity to share the parental leave although numbers are slowly growing. The latest research shows that good marital relationship improves good fatherhood whereas fragile marital relationships also weaken the man's role as father. The Family Federation of Finland strives to enhance and support good marital relationships as the "first home" of a child. This workshop presented project activities and how these activities meet the needs of male and female clients.

Comment: The workshop leaders described how they brought a trainer from the Gottman Institute to Finland to help them develop a programme in educating couples in Relationship skills. This programme had been piloted recently and was held over two subsequent Saturdays. The feedback from the couples was extremely positive even after the first session. As a result they were intending to run the programme for couples in several centres throughout Finland. The participants were curious as to how the programme was marketed, as it is often very difficult to get couples to participate in programmes seen as supporting relationships. It is believed that the success of the programme was because it was described as skills training, and this was seen as less threatening than Marriage Enrichment.

Keynote Presentations, Friday

The Conference thematic structure, shadows and light, was leading us, by Friday morning, away from the penumbra (not a reflection at all on the enlightened and vibrant presentations of Thursday!) into the *glow* of solutions to these well documented social issues that practitioners, the judiciary, academics and policy makers were having to struggle with.

Professor Jan Walker, from the UK, addressed the Conference on the subject of family support that focused on public concerns set against the realities of everyday living. Whilst the perspective was drawn mainly from the current situation in the UK, it appeared as if Jan spoke to most delegates, mirroring their experience in their own culture. A major UK concern is the level of divorce and family breakdown and it is interesting to set this fact against that presented by Claudio Des Champs, that political and societal unrest make for family breakdown. Indeed, Jan suggested that much of the current situation might be because of democracy, or more choice. What was noticeable about her presentation, however, was the first real and sustained focus on children in the Conference. Whilst relationship break-up may not be so pleasant for adults, they have at least some choices and options in the situation. Children are different in that they are always the unwilling victims of adult breakdown. The picture offered was inevitably driven by concerns and policy directions in the UK at the moment, where the *Every Child Matters* agenda is driving most family welfare intervention.

Another difference offered by Jan's presentation was the focus on the growing phenomenon of the roles and rights of fathers in the UK. In many ways, this element of family structure is related to the themes returned to by other keynote speakers, that of the massive changes in family structure and power. Many of these shifts are

a consequence of more than one element in current society – changes in the law, equality of opportunity, the economy and the pressure on both parents now to earn.

The future suggests that the traditional family will tend to continue to diminish in structure and Jan offered the statistic that 20% of couples could be cohabiting by 2025. The Civil Partnerships legislation in the UK, offering similar rights for gays and lesbians to married couples where a partnership is entered into, is possibly being followed up by similar changes to support those who cohabit. Does this matter? From one point of view, it is questionable whether it does. What is clear is that these changes are driven by the search for *family* and, by those who make the laws, an opportunity to achieve this. And, in this, there is some comfort and hope, in that family structure may change, but the concept of family as the fundamental unit in society remains constant.

The second keynote of the morning, offered by Professor Anandalakshmy, of Chennai, India, provided me with a number of poetic and philosophical reflections on family. She noted how the word *parent* has become a verb! I was reminded of Paulo Friere's work and ideas, especially iatrogenesis, making me pause and consider my own, and my own organisation's possible contribution to family and adult breakdown by its unwitting practice and developments. She gave us a new disease, that of *Affluenza*, or the pursuit of more. And, I felt a certain level of nervousness in the laughter from the audience when she suggested that Democracy is a semantic problem! With such a diverse group of people from so many cultures, maybe we all missed an opportunity to wrestle with this idea at this point.

However, she also offered something of a counter to what we had heard thus far, telling us that marriage was still a great fixture in Indian society. She noted that globalisation is, though, taking its toll on tradition, especially language that is losing out and disappearing. She also seemed to agree with Jan Walker in reflecting on the economy and its impact on family life. Indian parents seem to have similar pressures that their Western counterparts have, in terms of having more, giving more and expecting less back.

I was, however, taken by her notion of that which marks us out from other animals. We have the longest childhood, and whilst that might have some negative connotations in relation to dependence, it does allow for the inculcation of ideas and culture. It offers hope in terms of what we, as parents, can teach our children and, in turn, what they can teach theirs. The notion of sharing parenting, in many informal ways, certainly part of the society that I grew up in and now mainly absent, also gave me some hope for our future in the work we all do to sustain family and relationships. It also offered an antidote to yet more parenting programmes!

The afternoon workshops on Friday followed the theme of light and the solutions being offered in different parts of the world. Again, I offer the reader a short extract or comment to provide a flavour of the experience.

6. *Democracy as an Opportunity for the Family, led by Paul de Viguerie.*

Democracy is doubtlessly the political regime which best enables the principle of the support system to function that naturally puts the family at the centre and origin of all economic, social, cultural, educational policies. "Support system" means respect for and acknowledgement of the capacities of each community to act and express itself. Therefore in France the multitude of family movements, far from being a handicap, highlights the capacity of the family to be responsible for itself and to take care of education and inter-generational solidarity. Democracy in its turn allows each family to make free

choices between the responsibilities of family life and professional life, between the parent's role as educators and as partners. This reciprocal acknowledgment of families and democracy is never obvious but requires constant efforts of vigilance and governance, so as to insure a growing trust even towards the poorest families. Without it, the family and democracy both lose out: the family becomes dependent and democracy drifts towards a latent totalitarianism. This workshop allowed for a discussion on these themes.

Comment: One particular aspect always of ICCFR has been the concern to create an environment conducive to sharing and learning between the representatives of families, social policy advisors as well as those directly involved in family support. This workshop created both practical and ethical opportunities which allowed efficacious working and the space to share problems that are present in the everyday lives of families. It was shown that the French system, from within a first-rate democracracic system of family support, had great merit. The basic question related to well functioning organisations giving aid and representing families is the democratic organisational structure that allows the expression of the needs and rights of families.

7. Relationships between the print media and families in the context of democracy, led by Agnes Rochefort-Turquin.

How does a press group like Bayard Press which publishes newspapers and magazines for readers of all ages from small children of the age of 1year (Popi) to seniors aged 85 years (Notre Temps, Vermeil, Pelerin) see it's role in relation to family structure? How does a Catholic publishing group envisage contributing to the strengthening, the support and democratization of family ties within democracy in which family models are evolving rapidly? The options available when tackling such issues, and the editorial decisions taken, were examined through the use of case studies.

Comment: There is an energetic and fascinating response being made by Bayard Press to aiding the family and their members of all ages in France today. What was particularly striking was the number of cartoon books for young children focusing on relationships and their difficulties, and possible solutions. It offered a creative, substantial and unusual response to family difficulties, and a challenge or support for traditional family interventions. How many of us adults now get a story read to us? It reminds us of the importance of story-telling and the impact it has both as information exchange and also an intimate time between children and parents.

8. Democracy and Change: solutions found by the family system through migration and flight, led by Charles O'Brian.

We live in a world where migration is a common occurrence. Whether forced or voluntary, millions of people every year leave their homelands to live elsewhere. Families have to adjust to different social, economic, cultural, religious and political systems. The stress and disruption to the family system and to family life cannot be underestimated. The family is an open system with permeable boundaries, in turn influenced by the external world and in some small part having an influence on it. This relationship between the family and the ecology that it inhabits is one that develops over time and across generations. This leads, in some part, to a synchronicity between family life and the world outside. For example democratic social norms such as gender equality and the rights of the child are values replicated in the family system. What sense does the family from a very different tradition transplanted into this new ecology make of these values? Do they experience

them as liberating or persecutory? This workshop through the sharing of information and ideas, case discussion and structured exercises gave participants an experience of what it is like for the migrant family in our democratic world.

Comment: The presenter contextualised the workshop by sharing information with the group on his own experience of immigration. Most immigration generally reflects families seeking better circumstances, often economic in form. Refugees, on the other hand, are those immigrants who are seeking escape from life-threatening circumstances (poverty, violence, famine, etc.). For families who do migrate, first generation immigrants tend to be pre-occupied with survival and family stabilisation with resulting *secondary trauma* issues arising in second or later generations.

9. Approaches to apply Brief Strategic Family Therapy for drug users in Russia, led by Olga Toussova.

BSFT is a therapeutic approach based on structural family therapy that deals with early drug abuse among teenagers. It was developed in the USA, and as any intervention should be adapted to a new cultural setting for its successful implementation. The workshop provided a short introduction on the current situation of family structures in Russia, as well as an outline of BSFT, research findings and explanations on why this approach is useful when working with families in transition and how it can be applied and adjusted in Russia.

Comment: The workshop presented a study identifying comparative factors in the Russian population (moving from a socialist system to a market economy) to the Latin American migrant population of the USA - on the basis that the drug use was a 'dis-adaptive behaviour pattern'. It was suggested that there is a need for effective brief interventions, which have an educational component, about dangers of HIV/Aids and viral hepatitis and which focus on harmonising relationships between parents and the adolescent drug users. The family therapy approach has been found to be more effective than individual counselling and group work because of the family involvement and assistance provided to all family members - improving communications within the family; parenting practices and parental leadership in managing adolescent conduct problems; associations with anti-social peers, allowing for a greater sense of connectedness for the adolescents and encouraging more accountable behaviour.

Keynote Presentation, Saturday

Professor Marie-Claire Foblets, from Belgium, delivered the final keynote paper, on Saturday morning. The Vienna Open Forum had suggested that it would be useful to have a synthesis of the Conference, and Marie-Claire bravely agreed to attempt this task. She arrived, therefore, at the Conference without notes, slides or the usual paraphernalia associated with a keynote presentation. She attended keynotes, workshops and discussion groups to gain a flavour of what was being discussed and digested. Her presentation was remarkable in its clarity and also provocative, in that she offered her own reflections but, in a true democratic style, asked delegates to offer their own, and thus provide an even more rounded synthesis.

Naturally, such a presentation is difficult to represent – it is possible only to offer a reaction, so what follows is certainly not a synthesis of a synthesis! I invite you, the reader, to continue this dialogue either with colleagues, other Conference delegates that you are in contact with, or with your self in an internal dialogue.

I would agree with her opening remarks, that the Conference topic was too large or wide. The boundaries were difficult to define, leading to an inevitable diversity of definition, characterised either by absence or over complication. The richness of the cultural mix of delegates also meant that the many different experiences of democracy made for a problematic, if fertile, meeting of minds.

It seems clear, though, that for families and the couple, the increase in democracy has generally meant an increase in levels of equality and the liberalisation of roles, and a general increase in secularisation. The role that religion has played, for example, has decreased and with it some elements of certainty, even if there was an oppressive element to some of these.

Clearly, the democratisation of thinking about family and couple has led to the development of other models, with the consequent wane of the nuclear family, itself a seemingly problematic structure in many cultures not too long ago. However, the new ways of thinking have led to flexibility of family structure, in part chosen but also driven by this flexibility. It is ironic how these new structures, themselves innovative and creative at inception, become quite quickly *traditional* sociologically and demographically, if not emotionally also! This maybe alludes to the exponential nature of change in our lives in the last one hundred years, and the difficulty of holding onto some kinds of certainty, though the pursuit of this latter element has not diminished.

She had noted also the increased number of family models in our societies, with different family members taking on increased responsibilities. Notably, and mentioned often by speakers and participants, was the role of grandparents today. The impact of migration on families cannot be underestimated either, with some family structures thrown into a form of chaos, at least initially, when coming to terms with a new environment particularly where the political system was different.

I found very interesting her references to the impact of the technological revolution, and the impact of the *electronic age* on life, culture and role definition. In that, she mentioned the seemingly growing rise of autism, and its consequences. I was reminded of a young boy I know who lives in the north of England where there is a very strong northern regional accent. This boy speaks with an American accent though he has never set foot in the United States – his language all comes from Disney and other cartoon channels he watches on TV! I was left feeling that we minimise these impacts on our ways of life at our peril, and it did bring to mind again, Ananda's comment about the apparent strength of marriage in India still, but of the growing impact of globalisation and subsequent problematic change that will ensue.

It is also true that the increase in democracy has also led to a rise in the number of different therapeutic approaches. The keynote speeches and workshops themselves were testament to this fact. If democracy has choice as one its inherent elements, then the *customer* certainly has more opportunities nowadays. Quite how this choice is made though is difficult to infer.

Interestingly, she commented on the democracy in action she had found in the Group Discussions. I found this a notable comment, as I have been one who has at times questioned the role and function of these settings. The rich reflection and the opportunity for all to contribute in a smaller setting, and be listened to, perhaps is something we should guard carefully.

The loss of certainty and order that she commented on, particularly in Europe, probably touching the majority of people present given the preponderance of

Europeans at the Conference, is notable. She coupled this with the problem of how people can commit which might be a reflection on the increased levels of relationship breakdown prevalent across the world, but certainly a European phenomenon.

In the UK at present, there is an increase in the involvement and a development in the impact of fathers' groups on policy, family life and debate generally about family. I had noticed in this Conference the discussion about the process of filiation, focused on identity and identification. The place of the child was very much part of our discussions though often by implication rather than direct comment. However, for good reasons, and for ones that are not so good (viz. paedophilia) children remain the focal point for adults. Many if not all of our family laws, and policies, tend to be driven by the needs of children rather than those of adults.

It would seem that a corollary of democracy is the increase in definition and codification of Human Rights. The increase in laws and subsequent rights has been driven by different identifiable groups in the last few decades – women, children, gays and lesbians, significant others, etc. The challenge, it would seem for all of us in the Commission, is to try to second-guess the next grouping so that maybe, for once, the law is not playing *catch-up* with life. For me, also, I have to continually remind myself that changes in law do not lead directly to changes in behaviour or thinking. One of the strengths of this Commission is its opportunity to allow for such a change in attitude when reflecting on the experiences of others within the Conference setting. Another precious element of ICCFR/CIRCF, I think.

Finally, I thought that her reflection on the role of the State was fascinating. How do we define the dynamic relationship between life and law – set out in the four normative orders that Marie-Claire suggested (accepted, negotiated, imposed and rejected)? How do we curb the worst excesses of over-intervention whilst enjoying appropriate protection? It is clear, from her observations, that all of us are struggling in our own communities with these dichotomies. And, the richness of the Commission's membership clearly allows us to continue to struggle, debate and learn from each other in that small *democracy* that comes into being each year with the Conference.

Group Discussions

The Group Discussions ran throughout the *life* of this Conference and yet again provided the time and opportunity to debate, think, listen and learn from others. As with the Workshops, I have no intention of attempting to record what happened in these settings. You needed to be there! However, the Group Leaders did collate findings, reactions and reflections that I set out below, for you, the reader, to engage with in whatever form seems appropriate:

- The group structure itself allowed for an information flow and the sharing of ideas in a safe setting. This was important as there were strongly held and divergent views in some of the groups.
- Does democracy naturally lead to debate or dialogue, and which is preferable?
- Democracy is difficult to define, is not conflict free and does not necessarily lead to equality;
- Setting a balance between the private and public can be very problematic, and open to debate. For example, how far should services or development go in the search for fertility?

- Relationships need investment all of the time, from a number of different perspectives - social policy, education, individuals, etc;
- The impact of new technology on relationships should not be discounted, aiding the process of remaining in touch with others, or never being out of reach (?!);
- Should children be part of ICCFR or have their input into Conferences?
- Does the family actually allow for democracy because of the struggles between roles, for example, between parents and children, men and women, parents and grandparents, etc?
- Is the family inherently undemocratic as an institution?
- Multi-parenting is an important element, but the role of siblings and grandparents must also be given credence and support;
- It is very difficult even painful to talk about the different roles that men and women have as parents;
- The issue of filiation has become very important, as well as the matter of trust between parents – how do fathers ever really know if they are the father?
- There is a need to explore the differences and similarities between mutuality of “genetic” and “social” parents;
- There is a great value in the difference between the genders, and it must be remembered that both focus on different but equally important perspectives;
- Regardless of the high incidence of family breakdown, children are very resilient to change;
- Attachment theory is important but it must also be remembered that there are other attachment relationships that are as important as the parent-child one;
- It is important that the focus on troubling or troublesome families does not lead to stable families being left behind or under-resourced;
- How can democracy be achieved between service providers and clients?
- There is an inherent problematic feature related to family support in that the power dynamic is always present thus potentially denying genuine, shared meeting between practitioners and families;
- Service provision needs to be examined in the light of new thinking – for example, men appear to access services dubbed skills development but not those called counselling, suggesting a marketing problem at the very least;
- There is a need to understand how globalisation is affecting everyone in relation to social and family policy, but clearly some more than others;
- It is obvious that creativity and flexibility are present in families and family structures but this is to different degrees in different parts of the world;
- Gender inequality still seems to be a real feature of life particularly in the Third World so how is democracy compatible in families;
- The conservative view that the family is dying; the liberal view that the family is changing and adapting.

By way of process, the bi-lingual group had decided to feedback in a different way from the other four groups, by giving all members of the group a *voice*, democracy in action possibly, where all had the opportunity to speak, some for different lengths of time, and some using innovative methods of feedback. My very favourite comment from the feedback provided by the Group Facilitators, and one that could provide us with a very useful if not provocative Conference theme for the future was: *Every man and woman is a civil war!* Even a brief reflection on this phrase leads to all kinds of thoughts and ideas in relation to family, policy, relationships and the law.

Conclusion

My conclusion for this report mirrors the few words that I shared at the final plenary. The Conference, and thereby the Commission, provides a wonderful and unique opportunity to wrestle with ideas and be challenged by difference, be it culture or language. It is always a great opportunity and privilege to spend these four days within this *learning community* to grow together in our own relational network. It is a useful experience to remember that the law and policy does play catch up with the existential reality of family life and that, meanwhile, there is pain in that gap between. But, and without trying to diminish our differences and culture, I am reminded and filled with hope that we are all of one race and that this goes beyond ethnicity, religion, politics and culture.

Acknowledgements

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge a number of major contributions to the Lyon Conference. It would appear to have been a great success, having had a quick look at the Evaluation Report Analysis, provided for me by Simone Bavery in the last few days.

Firstly, this event would not have been possible without our two partner organisations, UNAF and ISF. In particular, at UNAF, Mme Liliane Liebovitch toiled endlessly on our joint behalf to ensure a successful conference. Chantal Lebatard, Board member and member of UNAF supported her in this work. As you will be aware, if you have ever produced a conference or similar event, there were many hitches and upsets generally, and this conference was no exception. However, the team at UNAF worked on as if these occurrences had not happened! Similarly, Professor Bernadette Barthelet, from ISF, filled the gap left by Professor Pierre Benoit admirably and worked with her colleagues prior to the event, and during it, to make it all happen.

The keynote speakers provided a special anchor-point for all of us, and so I am most grateful to the six people who offered presentations: Professor Georges Eid, Judge Ina Gyemont, Professor Claudio Des Champs, Professor Anandalakshmy, Professor Jan Walker, and Professor Marie-Claire Foblets. This work was further enhanced by the Workshops and we are indebted to the Workshop leaders for the time they took to prepare their events, and for the work they then put in during the conference. Equally, the five Group Facilitators provided that final link between presentation, work and discussion to make for a well-rounded event.

The opening session was also a success and we are, again, indebted to Professor Bernadette Barthelet, of ISF, for providing the opening talk during that particular part of the conference. Then, M. Hubert Brin, President of UNAF came for the opening and returned for the final morning session so I am grateful to him both for that expression of support but also for the support he gave before the event by allowing the two UNAF members, noted above, to work so tirelessly for a successful conference. I am also grateful to the French Government, both national and local. M. Dominique de Legge, representing the French Minister for the Family, spoke at the opening event, and then Monsieur Albéric de Lavernée, Vice President of the Rhone General Council graciously received us all at the Rhone Department Hall on the Friday evening. Both expressions of support made a great difference to the Conference since having such a firm support from the host country is very important to this International Commission. During the opening session, and on the Friday evening, I would also like to thank members of UDAF Rhone for their welcoming and then helpful work as *tour guides* in the Friday evening walkabout in Lyon itself.

The venue proved most welcoming and hospitable and we are all indebted to the Director of Valpré, and his staff, for the attention to our needs.

Finally, I would like to thank colleagues on the Board of the Commission for their support during the year, and for the work they put in at the Board meetings involved in the planning of the event. During the Conference, all worked tirelessly to ensure that matters moved smoothly for participants. In particular, I would like to make mention of Chantal Lebatard and Simone Baverey who both worked hard together, and separately, to make our Conference in Lyon happen. The General Secretary of ICCFR/CIRCF, Gerlind Richards, is the person who held everything together both during the year and during the Conference itself, so my particular thanks go to Gerlind for all of this unstinting work.

As I said at the final plenary, all of the work of the above would have been wasted but for the hard work of another group who have gone without mention, the Conference participants themselves. The enthusiasm and energy, humour and compassion were palpable and so, yet again, ICCFR/CIRCF held another wonderful Conference because a disparate group of people came together in time and place, drawn by common interests and concerns, to produce a memorable event.

Terry Prendergast
Chair, ICCFR/CIRCF
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