

introduction

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The conference War, Terrorism, Cultural Inequality and Psychotherapy was conceived by the PCSR organising committee as PCSR's contribution to the debate regarding the global crisis following the destruction of the two towers in New York. We understood this crisis to be a culmination, or at least a marker on the path, not only of cultural misunderstanding, but of many decades or even centuries of cultural inequality and exploitation.

To address this we invited four psychotherapists with different cultural perspectives to speak and to dialogue with each other and with the conference. We hoped this would set the tone for a conference in which participants would be able to dialogue with each other and with the speakers. We chose this method, partly because it is congruent with psychotherapy as a discipline and partly to encourage a stance of 'not knowing' rather than 'opinionated knowing'.

In the event the four speakers spoke for 15 minutes each as they had been requested. After coffee I expected to chair a dialogue between the speakers with a fifth chair for any member of the audience who wished to join in. In fact this fifth chair was much used and there were even queues! The speakers spoke little at this time and then mostly in response to people speaking from the fifth chair. Many interesting, challenging and moving things were said during the session as you will be able to read for yourself in these pages. Rather than 'being' a dialogue it seemed more to provide a space in which people could speak, often moving and powerfully, their

truth. Within that I think that 'moments of dialogue' occurred and these 'moments' were no doubt different for different people.

For most people the enduring memory of the conference will be the passions that arose concerning Israeli and Palestinian viewpoints. It was certainly hard to keep a dialogic perspective with such violently different points of view. As conference organisers we had to face the fact that we had put an Israeli on the platform leaving a Palestinian to be on the floor thus perpetuating the political power difference found in the outside world. We had tried to find an Islamic speaker but had we tried hard enough? It was pointed out to me afterwards that if we cannot remain dialogic in this situation how can we expect the politicians to do so in the 'real' situation where loss of life and freedom is commonplace?

After lunch there were small groups. Certainly it seems easier to be dialogic in small group situations and I think most of us found this to be the case. A plenary ended the day where the experience was reflected on though further passions arose, particularly where people were felt to be not properly responded to.

I am left feeling that we tried to accomplish something very difficult where much courage and wisdom was needed. It did not work perfectly but most of us learnt a lot to take forward to another conference, to our work as psychotherapists in this uncertain world and more generally into life.

Judy Ryde, June 2003