

EDITORIAL

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Gaia, Lovelock's name for the personification of Planet Earth, is seriously ill. As António Guterres (Secretary-General of the United Nations) put it, on opening the COP27 gathering of world leaders in Cairo on 7 November 2022, "Many of today's conflicts are linked with growing climate chaos [...] Humanity has a choice: co-operate or perish. It is either a Climate Solidarity Pact—or a Collective Suicide Pact".

Guterres rightly points out that climate change is a major public health emergency. But another one is violence and this special issue of *The International Journal of Forensic Psychotherapy (IJFP)* presents contributions by colleagues to the thirtieth anniversary conference of the International Association for Forensic Psychotherapy (IAFP) held in London in May 2022 where the theme was "Violence as a public health emergency: preventing, treating and humanizing the dangerous mind". There was such a wealth of talks from that riveting and relevant conference weekend that we couldn't accommodate them all in a single issue so you will have more to look forward to in next year's issue in July. The principal papers in this issue are also a tribute to our founder, Professor Estela V. Welldon, who has done so much to professionalise the field of forensic psychotherapy. Never has there been a more critical time for those of us involved in the field of forensic psychotherapy to make our voices heard.

In the last six years alone, we have witnessed alarming developments around the world, namely a rise in extreme nationalism, an increasingly large gap between the rich and the poor, both intra- and internationally, and a global pandemic which has stretched governments to breaking point, both politically and economically. Then there is the fighting in Syria, Ukraine, and over thirty-five armed conflicts in Africa. All these factors have led to a rise in violence worldwide, especially against children and women, who disproportionately suffered in pandemic lockdowns and always suffer in war.

Despite the World Health Organization producing their *World Report on Violence and Health* two decades ago (Krug et al., 2002), hoping to revolutionise violence prevention worldwide through a public health approach, many of its recommendations have not materialised. Complacency and the lack of national and international political commitment to this major public health emergency have sadly contributed to the paucity of preventive measures being implemented. We must make our voices on this subject much louder and, thankfully, the articles in this *IJFP* issue do much to contribute to this essential campaign.

Brett Kahr's opening article, "Let the great axe fall", is a comprehensive and insightful journey through the diverse and gruesome ways humans have found to punish each other over the centuries. In his article, Kahr emphasises

how forensic psychotherapy is the most humane attempt humans have yet developed to help society ensure justice is done. It is far removed from the overwhelmingly sadistic responses to criminality that so-called “civilisation” has produced to date, which, as we know, stoke further violence. This way of understanding and thinking, as it is applied both to large groups and also to individual psychopathology, is emphasised in the articles which follow Professor Kahr’s.

American Professor of Psychiatry and Law James Gilligan reminds us of the dire consequences of homicidal behaviour not being included in mental health classificatory manuals. He points out that suicidal behaviour is considered in need of ongoing psychiatric research, treatment, and prevention whilst homicidal behaviour is not. To quote him:

My point is that this new field [forensic psychotherapy] is in a unique and unprecedented position to enable us to understand, for the first time, why we have failed so spectacularly to solve the most important problem facing our species today—namely, the human inclination to kill other human beings, which often requires, or results in, their own deaths as well. (p. 119, this issue)

He explains why forensic psychotherapy is a key means of understanding how to reduce the epidemic of violence in the world and how his research in prisons supports this hypothesis.

Australian psychoanalyst and forensic psychotherapist Professor Timothy Keogh injects some hope for those in our profession by exploring some of the significant past and current developments that have impacted on our profession, taking stock of our strengths and prospects, and further elaborates on how we might enhance these. In the midst of such alarming developments all over, it is important to be reminded of what it is we can offer and to never give up making our voices heard.

Next is the Russian forensic psychotherapist Konstantin Nemirovskiy, who examines why people commit heinous crimes and the various theoretical approaches we can employ to understand the roots of human aggression, including philosophical, theological, biological, and psychoanalytical ones. He quotes Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn describing how the line separating good and evil runs through every human heart, which is an important reminder of the unhelpful split so commonly employed to repudiate “them” (violent people) from “us” (the “good” ones). This (psychotic) split is also used to deny the severity of climate change by media outlets who, for example, focus on the microscopic, “inconvenient” behaviour of fossil fuel protesters, whilst ignoring the telescopic, catastrophic view.

The three articles following Nemirovskiy are clinical illustrations of patients suffering from violence but the psychoanalytic defences described are nevertheless similar to those made use of, for example, in climate deniers—denial, splitting, and projecting, and even disavowal. First, the Russian doctor and psychoanalyst, Natalya Frolova, describes her challenging work with a female patient accused of murdering her sister in the pre-trial detention unit of a Russian prison. Her patient suffers a serious psychotic breakdown and

ensuing destructive behaviours. In the second clinical article, the British psychoanalyst Stephen Blumenthal examines the complex transference/countertransference dynamics which operate in a patient whose psychic retreat employs the mechanism of disavowal over the course of an eight-year, twice-weekly therapeutic engagement. Ronald Doctor, a British psychoanalyst, explores the paranoid and aggressive features of his violent female patient and how these features were underpinned by a persistent and profound use of projective identification.

American psychiatrist Bandy Lee writes about how “societal disorder” is a precursor to dangerous minds in politics and stresses the importance of turning our attention to how decades of tolerating structural violence and violent policies *leads* to malignant leaders as manifestations of this societal disorder. One senses Bandy Lee’s exasperation, which James Gilligan echoes, at just how much resistance there is in applying what we know works. This could be a helpful way of understanding how leaders emerge from a disordered society-at-large and might avoid psychotherapists and psychiatrists taking political sides, as warned against by the Northern Irish politician, and now Oxford academic, John Alderdice, in the final article of this issue.

Alderdice, also a psychiatrist, psychoanalyst, and member of the House of Lords, asks: can a focus on the importance of relationships help us address the pandemic of violence? Not surprisingly, he captivates us too with his proposal of a three-pronged paradigm to help political leaders resolve intractable conflict and find their way to peaceful coexistence in an increasingly unstable, uncertain, world order. He stresses the importance of retaining a therapeutic “neutral” stance to large group conflicts and not to “take sides” even if one’s personal politics are more aligned to one side or the other. Otherwise, you as dedicated conflict-resolver simply become part of the conflict. This is a huge challenge to us all, to keep up the struggle to bring psychoanalytically informed contributions to society’s ailments and to heal our sick earth, both currently in need of intensive multi-disciplinary care.

In our regular commentary section, rather than reflections on a major psychoanalytic paper, we have the personal thoughts of American psychiatrist and psychotherapist (as well as Director of Confer) Stephen Setterberg, regarding how he believes World War III began virtually some years ago (hence WW3.0) and how an assault on reality-testing is well underway in this terrifying cyber-psychological war.

The regular column *A Day in the Life* features an ex-gang member named Rosca who spoke so generously and movingly at the conference this summer about his life trajectory, including extreme traumas as victim and also as perpetrator. His narrative offers hope to traumatised youngsters who might end up in serious trouble by showing them that there are alternative reparative routes and how important their own lived-experience contribution can be.

As for recently published books pertinent to our field, Kate Salucci reviews *Psycho-social Explorations of Trauma, Exclusion and Violence: Un-housed Minds and Inhospitable Environments* edited by Christopher Scanlon and John Adlam, where global social justice issues such as climate disaster, racial

trauma, and human mobility are addressed thoughtfully, along with recommendations for how places and spaces in which reparative conversations can occur, could have a positive impact.

Hessel Willemsen reviews *Gender Dysphoria: A Therapeutic Model for Working with Children, Adolescents And Young Adults* by Susan Evans and Marcus Evans. This most thoughtful book on such a controversial subject is a substantial psychoanalytical contribution to our understanding of gender dysphoria. The former UK-based Tavistock Clinic psychotherapists show just how important it is for mental health professionals involved with youngsters suffering distress of this kind to retain a neutral psychoanalytical stance, neither affirming nor opposing their patients' gender identities. Interestingly, this connects with Alderdice's insistence on the importance of therapeutic neutrality in working with intractable national and international conflicts. Only this hard-to-maintain position can provide the basis for real, thoughtful engagement, in the context of a therapeutic relationship.

As always, on behalf of all our contributors, we would like to thank the patients and prisoners who continue to inspire us, as well as our teachers and colleagues who support and encourage us, during these increasingly worrying times for us all. Progress is often followed by regression. When these more intense provocations are experienced, individually and in groups, nationally and internationally, there may be an increased tendency in us all to abandon the "depressive position", a reality-based stance, for the relief of splitting and projecting what we cannot bear. As all the articles in this special issue emphasise, however, the forensic psychotherapeutic stance is all the more essential in facing the connected, catastrophic issues of climate change and violence. We would do well to remember we are all at risk of wanting to mis-see and mis-hear them.

Reference

- Krug, E. G., Dahlberg, L. L., Mercy, J. A., Zwi, A. B., & Lozano, R. (2002). *World Report on Violence and Health*. Geneva, Switzerland: World Health Organization. http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/42495/1/9241545615_eng.pdf