

HOW PSYCHOANALYSIS IS TAKING ROOT IN SOUTH AFRICA

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The history of psychoanalysis in South Africa is a story of tenaciousness. It began after Wulf Sachs emigrated there in 1922 with his family. Born in Lithuania in 1893, he had trained at the Psycho-Neurological Institute in St. Petersburg (under Pavlova and Bechterev), at the University of Cologne, and at London University, where he took a degree in medicine. He began as a General Practitioner in Johannesburg but his interest in psychology was intensified by the experience of working with black schizophrenic patients at the Pretoria Mental Hospital from 1928. In 1929-30 Sachs underwent a six month analysis in Berlin (possibly with Brill) and he came into contact with Freud, whose diaries indicate that Freud, Anna Freud and Ernest Jones were all well disposed towards him, and 'intrigued' by the idea of a South African Study Group under his leadership. (Dubow, 1993; see also Molnar, 1992, pp. 173, 215-216, 294). Sadie (Mervis) Gillespie added that at this time Sachs spent some time in New York getting supervision from Helene Deutsch and Grete Bibring.

After returning to South Africa, Sachs gave a series of lectures on psychoanalysis which were organized by Professor Hoernle of the Wits University philosophy department. These lectures formed the basis of his introductory book on psychoanalysis 'Psycho-Analysis: Its Meaning and Practical Applications' to which Freud himself contributed a commendatory foreword (see Dubow, 1993).



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In 1935, Freud proudly announced the establishment of a South African Psychoanalytic Society (in a postscript to his 1924 'Autobiographical Study'). Wulf Sachs was appointed as a Training Analyst by the British Psychoanalytical Society, and in Johannesburg he gathered a group of interested young people around him and took on cases, including the analysand who became the hero of his book *Black Hamlet*. The original group was composed of Anne Hayman, Max Joffe, Eric Levine, Esmond Gaynor Lewis, Sadie Mervis, Louis Miller, Joan Phillips, Ismond Rosen, Bill Saffrey, and Saul Udwin. Clarissa Bernstein served as honorary secretary.

The advent of Apartheid and sudden death of Sachs in 1949 aged 56 put a premature end to the Society's fledgling training programme, when most of his group emigrated to England. Thereafter, South Africans wishing to undertake accredited psychoanalytic training of any kind had to do so abroad. Few returned. Wally Joffe did come back, and set up a practice in Johannesburg after completing his training in London, and soon became the focus of a small discussion group, hoping that this would develop into an official Psychoanalytic Study Group. But feeling professionally isolated he returned to London after three years and sadly, that group disintegrated.

The South African Institute for the Study of Psychoanalysis was the next development. The remarkable happened. A wealthy South African by the name of Sydney Press approached Professor Lynn Gillis offering to establish a fund for analysts to train abroad. A non-profit foundation called the South Africa Institute for the Study of Psychoanalysis was formed and registered as such in 1962. It was supported by several prominent South African academics and members of the Medical Council and was approved by the British Society. William Gillespie, the then President was brought out to help with advice and arrangements and a committee was formed to interview applicants. Amongst those supported were Anton Obholzer (who felt compelled to return the loan), E Smit, Fakhry Davids, Ronnie Doctor, Mark Solms. [Gillis, personal communication].



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Since such training typically extended over several years, practical considerations and the unfavorable political situation at home meant that few indeed returned when qualified. But quite a few visited to give workshops and lectures to the flourishing body of home grown psycho-analytical psychotherapists both in Johannesburg (see Hamburger, 1992) and Cape Town. From 1979 onwards contributors included Isca Salzberger Wittenberg; Henry Rey; Michael Feldman; Iain Dresser; Martin and Sheila Miller; Judith Jackson; Steven Dreyer; Edna O'Shaughnessy; Eric Brenman; Anne Hayman; Sadie Gillespie; George Pollock and myself.

In the wake of the momentous political developments of the early 1990s a group of expatriates in London formed the South African Psychoanalysis Trust (SAPT) with the singular aim of bringing South African psychoanalysis into line with international standards through the establishment of an accredited training institute. As Mark Solms wrote, 'We fully realized from the outset that psychoanalysis as a mode of treatment (perhaps especially in a developing country) cannot flourish in the absence of the wider practice of psycho-analytic psychotherapy. However, since the latter already existed in South Africa, and since the reverse is also true (i.e., psychoanalytic psychotherapy cannot flourish in the absence of psychoanalysis), we decided to focus our efforts solely on the formation of an IPA-accredited institute. The further alignment of psychoanalytic psychotherapy training programmes in South Africa with international norms and standards would – we thought – naturally flow from this, as would many other potential benefits related to the broader application of psychoanalytic knowledge' (2010).

The SAPT did significant groundwork by organizing two international conferences in South Africa. Mark Solms recalls that at the first of these, held in 1997, David Sachs (Philadelphia-based grandson of Wulf Sachs and then Chair of the New Groups Committee of the IPA) made an important announcement informing local delegates that the IPA had recently established procedures for psychotherapists working in countries (such as in the former Soviet bloc) in which the normal development of psychoanalysis had not been possible, but whose



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standards of training were nevertheless roughly equivalent to those laid down by the IPA, to become 'Direct Members' of the IPA. This initiated a dialogue between Dr Sachs and several local psychoanalytic psychotherapists who met the IPA's minimum criteria – in terms of personal training analysis, supervised control analyses and theoretical instruction. Following the second conference, and shortly after Karen Kaplan-Solms and Mark returned to South Africa, the SAPT, having fulfilled its mandate, was dissolved. The baton was now passed to the two of them to take the training effort forward.

Mark Solms again: 'The immediate task was to attain the magical number of four IPA members living and working in South Africa. This makes it possible for a local group to apply to the IPA for official 'Study Group' status, which is the first step toward the establishment of an accredited training institute' (Solms, 2010).

Following meetings with representatives of local psychoanalytic organizations in both Cape Town and Johannesburg a series of didactic seminars began in 2003 focusing on basic psychoanalytic concepts, led jointly by Katherine Aubertin (a Paris-trained member of the IPA who had returned home in 1986) and Mark. This was followed by a second series of theoretical seminars in which the basic concepts were applied to a study of published clinical case reports. Later the seminars were transformed into several clinical seminar groups in both Johannesburg and Cape Town to accommodate the demand for membership and the inevitable boundary problems that arise in psychoanalytic organizations, where therapists and patients are sometimes also colleagues.

In 2006 all the Johannesburg and Cape Town groups were consolidated to form a single national organization, called the South African Psychoanalysis Initiative (SAPI) currently consisting of about 160 members which also offers clinical seminars for newly qualified psychologists and mental health practitioners working in community settings. It offers clinical seminars for newly qualified psychologists and mental health practitioners working in community settings since each



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student in South Africa is required to complete one year of community service to register as a psychologist. In addition, intensified collaboration between psychoanalysts and neuroscientists has occurred as a result of Karen Kaplan Solms, psychoanalyst and a speech and language pathologist and neuropsychologist, and Mark Solms relocating to South Africa. As Head of the Psychology Department at the University of Cape Town, Mark has created a Masters Programme in Neuro-psychology and the 14th Annual Congress of the International Neuro-psychoanalysis Society was held in Cape Town in August 2013, with the 'integration of brain and mind' hailed as a new frontier. SAPI also runs a research group in Cape Town that focuses on the implications for clinical work of recent neuroscientific revisions of instinct theory and the comparison with Freudian drive theory. The University of Cape Town offers a PhD programme in psychoanalysis and two of the students form the core of the Cape Town and Johannesburg SAPI Research Groups.

The 14th Annual Congress of the International Neuro-psychoanalysis Society was held in Cape Town in August 2013

Meanwhile the South African Psychoanalytic Association (SAPA) achieved IPA Study Group status at the IPA's 46th Congress in Chicago in July 2009. This has been expensive, involving bi-annual visits by three members of the IPA to oversee its progression from Study Group (with a minimum of four local IPA members), to Provisional Society (once a minimum of 10 members has been reached), to Component Society (when fully independent status is achieved) – at which point the Sponsoring Committee will be dissolved.

So, formal psychoanalytic training is now being offered in South Africa. To date there are seven training analysts/supervisors (Barnaby B. Barratt, Gyuri Fodor, Karen Kaplan Solms, Sue Levy, Mary-Anne Smith, Mark Solms and Elda Storck. Alan Levy, who joined the Study Group in 2011, left for London at the end of 2015). All qualified overseas – four in London, and one each in



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Vienna, Zurich and the USA. They also share administrative and teaching tasks across the two cities, Johannesburg and Cape Town with three recently qualified home-grown psychoanalysts, and two other IPA Direct Members form part of the SAPA Study Group with 22 candidates. New intakes occur every three years and there is ongoing interest in the admissions procedures.

In 2010 South African Psychoanalytic Confederation (SAPC) composed of around 40-odd member groups representing more than 500 individuals, a consolidation of the years of steady work in a complex political climate. Dozens of groups joined and worked at creating the constitution and ethical code – from small rural reading groups to large institutes of psychoanalytic learning. It was also a vote of confidence in the future of psychoanalysis in this country and a reflection of the wish to normalize the local situation in an international context.

Finally, SAPI has an annual weekend congress in February, previously held on the Solms-Delta wine farm in Franschhoek, and now in Johannesburg at Ububele (the brainchild of Tony and Hillary Hamburger, who have created a center for community outreach services, education, training projects and psychotherapy on the threshold of Alexandra, a local township). This two-day colloquium was originally convened by Sharon Raeburn with 12 people and headed over many years by Jonathan Sklar (both from London). It has grown exponentially to over 120 participants in recent meetings, and usually attended by some international colleagues, including Alexandra Billingham, Vice President of the IPA in 2016. Over the previous 10 years these conferences have focused on complex and exciting topics such as The Embodied Mind, led by Marilia Aisenstein in 2014. The 2015 keynote address by Irma Brenman Pick was on Creativity and Authenticity, and previous conferences debated issues of race, trauma, reconciliation, and forgiveness and most recently, 'splits and divides in societies'. The atmosphere that pervades the organization is one of people courageously engaged in a radical pioneering project. Attending these meetings as I have done from the start is a heady mixture of new discovery and



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extraordinarily honest yet troubled self-examination in the context of a slowly recovering traumatized society.

As Mark Solms remarked in 2013 'seeing psychoanalysis taking root in South Africa is not for the faint-hearted, but taking root it is!'

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