

Reflections on WAIMH Congress Cape Town, South Africa

By Maree Foley, New Zealand

It is September and spring is winging its way here via the Tui's who have re-turned, and who are now nesting and relishing in dawn song. Their singing accompanies ever-present memories of the WAIMH congress in Cape Town, captured in part by a photo, pinned onto my office wall. The photo was taken at the WAIMH congress dinner in the Nyanga Arts Centre, in the Nyanga Township. I am standing with WAIMH friends, and three women, referred to as "the mama's" who are each dressed in bright orange. These three women are artists, chefs, and cultural ambassadors for their township.

I have looked into this photo often. It brings such warming and joyful memories, and it unsettles me. Amidst the blissfully unaware cheer of her visitors, one of the mama's in orange seems saddened, perhaps weary? I project this affect onto her, knowing nothing about her, her story, or her dreams; it is just what I see: a complex picture of joy and weary wrestlessness.

This photo captures my experiences of the WAIMH congress where I was simultaneously uplifted and disturbed by what was on offer. For example, Professor Mark Tomlinson, presented a harrowing statistic: approximately 21,000 children died, every day, in 2010, with expected current statistics to be even more harrowing. This is an unbearable statistic requiring courage to hold in mind. In my endeavours to do so, the picture of the "mama in orange", returns. Her presence intertwines with the stark statistics, keeping me awake. Awake with mindfulness of a global picture of infant mental health: of life and death and all that lies between health and struggles for our global infants and their families. It's challenging, it's uncomfortable, yet their collective message is clear and strong.

Alongside Professor Tomlinson and the "mama in orange", Dr Astrid Berg presented a snapshot of her work with local colleagues, in the Townships. This is the work and life of every-day saints. Dr Berg's capacity to hold the tension of multiple paradoxes with patience, generosity and efficacy, was extraordinary. It was a lesson for me from a voice-lived. These lessons tend to linger in consciousness over time as they soak into ones bones.

I thank Professor Tomlinson and the "mama in orange" for keeping discomfort close-by and my complacency somewhat at bay; Dr Berg and colleagues for their raw inspiration; and I acknowledge and treasure the deep friendships forged with WAIMH members, who are such good company to journey with, in the field of infant and family mental health.



By Elizabeth Tuters, Ontario, Canada

When I reflect on the WAIMH Congress in Cape Town, I think about beautiful weather, luscious flora and fauna, the azure sea and the wide blue sky. I think of the ambiance and the atmosphere of delegates across the globe coming together in a part of the world once ripped apart by the horrendous years of Apartheid, whereas now there is a sense of hope, of working together, of reconciliation. All of this was reflected in the Opening Ceremonies through the oration of the speakers, and the voices of the choir rich with the diversity, rhythm, and harmony of the place we were visiting.

The committed work of the WAIMH Affiliate Local Organizing Committee was evident everywhere throughout the Congress. The elegant, state-of-the-art venue provided space and time to meet others during the breaks and the luncheons. The congress program offered a rich variety of choice from a menu of clinical practice in the field of infant mental health, and current infant research.

All of this being said, I also was aware of the inequities in South Africa that were very evident as we visited different places. It is our human nature that we must become aware of the full range within our sensibilities. We also must become aware of these inequities within our WAIMH family of Affiliate organizations. Some of our WAIMH Affiliates have significantly fewer resources than others, especially those in the emerging and developing countries. In 2009 I had an opportunity to go on a professional visit to South Africa. Astrid Berg took me to Khayelitsha. I was impressed to see how under these severely disadvantaged conditions so much effective and innovative work was being done.

We must do our best to work with these emerging Affiliates, as we now have the new By-Laws to include the Affiliates within the governance of the WAIMH structure. We now have two elected Affiliate Presidents who sit as voting members of the WAIMH Board of Directors. At the WAIMH Cape Town Congress we had a social event for the WAIMH Affiliate Representatives to meet each other. This was organized by our two Affiliate representatives elected by the Affiliate presidents in the Leipzig WAIMH Congress in 2010. The elected representatives are Martin St. Andre and Maree Foley, who chaired their first meeting of the Affiliate Council in Cape Town. This was attended by representatives of the global WAIMH Affiliates, who were encouraged to engage in active participation in the structure of the WAIMH Affiliate Council.

I look forward to the outcomes of this enthusiastic Affiliate meeting, and the interest generated in the members to participate in the development of initiatives between economically established countries and between emerging countries. The primary focus was on communication, sharing of resources and training within the context of the countries. I left feeling hopeful that we have developed a family of Affiliates who can engage in creative dialogues with each other and assist in further development of WAIMH's vision and aims, brings us all to the crossroads of culture, science, art, creativity, and most importantly mutual respect.