

Winter 2017

FIRST LIGHT

On Trauma



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First Light, which is published semi-annually, is intended to inform the interested reader about torture, its effects and what we can do in aiding survivors to overcome their experience of torture and war. The CCVT views itself as part of a larger global community and is committed to the struggle for human rights, justice and the end of the practice of torture, war, genocide, and crimes against humanity.

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Mandate: The Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture aids survivors in overcoming the lasting effects of torture and war. In partnership with the community, the Centre supports survivors in the process of successful integration into Canadian society, works for their protection and integrity, and raises awareness of the continuing effects of torture and war on survivors and their families. **The CCVT gives hope after the horror.**

Editor's Note: The information provided in this publication is not controlled by the CCVT and therefore may not reflect the Centre's views.

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Minister
of Immigration,
Refugees and Citizenship



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de l'Immigration,
des Réfugiés et de la Citoyenneté

Ottawa, Canada K1A 1L1

DEC - 7 2015

Mr. Mulugeta Abai
Executive Director
Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture
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Dear Mr. Abai:

Thank you for your congratulations and good wishes on my appointment as Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship.

I am honoured by the confidence the Prime Minister has shown in me and I will do my very best to live up to his expectations and those of Canadians.

Immigration is, of course, central to Canada's future. I look forward to continuing our government's efforts to address many of the challenges facing our system. I will also work diligently with our officials and partners to ensure positive integration of newcomers to Canada.

Canada was built by generations of immigrants and their descendants. Our generous immigration system is the envy of the world, and a key to unlocking our economic potential. I am excited by the challenges that lie ahead and look forward to this task with enthusiasm.

I also appreciate your generous offer of support with regard to resettlement of displaced persons from Syria and the Government of Canada's commitment to resettling 25,000 Syrian refugees. I appreciate your Centre's willingness and commitment, and look forward to continuing to work together.

We will be holding consultations with our counterparts in as we implement this significant, complex and compassionate humanitarian initiative. I and my departmental officials are working diligently to reach out to all partners who will be key to successfully resettling the Syrian refugees. The resettlement will be accomplished in cooperation with provinces, territories, and cities, and with the relevant security authorities.

We remain committed to responding swiftly to the ongoing crisis, and also to ensure that the health and security of the arriving refugees – and of all Canadians – remains paramount, and is not compromised in any way.

Needless to say, the Government of Canada recognizes it is critical to have ongoing engagement and co-ordination with other levels of government, stakeholders, partners, and the Canadian public for the successful implementation of our ambitious immigration and refugee plan.

My staff will contact you should there be an opportunity for a meeting in the foreseeable future.

Yours sincerely,

John McCallum, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship

Canada

Historical Trauma: A Window into Changing the Trauma Discourse in Rehabilitation of Survivors of Human Rights Violations.

By Mehr-Afarin Hosseini, MD, FRCPC



This essay is an extract from my talk at the Canadian Center for Victims of Torture and Amnesty International's event on the International Day for Survivor's of Torture, June 26, 2015.

I was seeing a young man at the Canadian Center for Victims of Torture (CCVT), who had lived through imprisonment and extensive physical and psychological torture as a result of his political activity. He was extremely preoccupied with these experiences to the point of having flashbacks and nightmares on a daily basis, which made a diagnosis of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) fairly clear to me. In addition, this patient expressed symptoms of depression, predominantly extreme hopelessness and suicidality. There was no doubt in my mind of the “traumatic” nature of his experiences at that time and the patient was also compliant with the proposed conceptualization and discourse as he tried to work through his suffering. He focused on the terrible aspects of his captivity and nodded every time I confirmed his sense of defenselessness and helplessness in that situation. Until one day, possibly out of feelings of either closeness or frustration, he admitted with some shame and embarrassment: “Is it crazy if I tell you that I wished I was back in that prison?”

This was an unsettling question for both of us because we did not understand how anyone would wish to return to conditions of captivity and torture. It seemed “crazy” because it did not fit within the mainstream discourse that framed torture as one of the most traumatic life events. Could captivity and torture ever be framed in a way other than “traumatic”? What was about this terrible experience that he actually missed? And what was it that *I* was missing because this clearly did not fit with my formulation and diagnosis of PTSD? This was a pivotal moment that challenged my preconceived notions of the trauma of torture. I will return to this patient after a short detour.

As psychiatrists, we are trained to make diagnoses based on symptoms and propose treatments accordingly. From a psychiatric perspective, captivity and torture can be categorized as repeated chronic Trauma. Psychiatric disorders most often seen in torture survivors are PTSD, depression and anxiety. Different studies have found that anywhere between 15-60% of torture survivors develop PTSD and this diagnosis is associated with the severity of torture. But they have also found that secondary factors such as loss of family, unemployment, post-captivity stressors, low social support, etc. play a significant role in whether someone develops PTSD. [2,3,5,10,13,14,19] These studies indicate that there is no linear link between torture and PTSD, and other factors need to be taken into consideration. In this talk, by drawing on the concept of Historical Trauma, I would like to offer a more holistic perspective that goes beyond treating psychiatric symptoms in psychological rehabilitation of survivors of torture.

Most studies on rehabilitation have focused on therapeutic approaches for reducing symptoms of PTSD, such as Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (TFCBT) or Narrative Exposure Therapy (NET). [5,10,11,13,14] These therapies center on the traumatic incident with the aim of symptom reduction, and usually attain good results. The drawback is that these therapeutic modalities, similar to my approach

to that patient, reflect the dominance of a ‘western trauma discourse’ [9], which frames the experience of torture mainly as a *traumatic* event that necessarily leads to psychological disturbances.

Some survivors of torture *do* develop PTSD, depression and anxiety and there *are* benefits in treating these conditions either with medication or psychotherapy, but the story does not end here. It is important to acknowledge the limitations inherent in an overly medicalized approach to rehabilitation:

The assumption that human rights violations, such as torture, not only cause suffering, but also necessarily result in psychiatric disturbance risks re-victimizing and over-pathologizing survivors by putting them in the category of psychiatric cases [9].

This approach ignores the psychosocial aspects of the experience. Factors such as loss of employment, poverty, disruption of families, displacement, migration, loss of social support and others often accompany the experience of being in captivity and have significant impacts on the well-being of individuals. So the cause of distress may not be the actual traumatic incident but the psychosocial stressors happening as a result of it.

This approach ignores the ‘historical’ aspect of the experience, which plays an important role in how the individual frames or conceptualizes his/her experience of captivity and torture. And by ‘historical’, I do not just mean the individual/personal history but also the *collective* history. This point takes me to the concept of Historical Trauma.

The concept of Historical trauma was originally developed in the 1960’s in an attempt to explain the collective distress described by the holocaust survivors and their children (intergenerational trauma). It was later on expanded to describe the effects of colonialism on the psychological wellbeing of the native populations. [7,15,16,17] According to native psychologist Yellow Horse Brave Heart, Historical Trauma is the “cumulative emotional and psychological wounding, over the lifespan and across generations, emanating from massive group trauma experiences” [4]. This concept suggests that history of a people –which can also be understood as their collec-

tive narratives [6], has an impact on the psychology of the individual. In other words, the way an individual makes meaning of their trauma is not only dependent on the personal experiences they had growing up, but also on the *historical milieu* that they were situated in from birth. These spheres (ie. individual and collective/historical) are not separate from one another and there is indeed a *dialectical* relationship between the two, meaning that each informs the other.

I want to propose that the notion of Historical Trauma can be effectively utilized in the trauma discourse of asylum seekers. This notion moves the discourse away from focusing merely on the individual trauma and places it in a broader historical, social and political context. There is a paucity of literature in this area, but I would like to illustrate my point with a few examples.

In a Turkish study examining the psychological effects of torture, the authors found that those survivors who had political affiliations were less likely to experience psychological distress compared to those who were not activists. They proposed that political activists were more ‘immune’, possibly as a result of their political affiliation or because they were fighting for a cause (ie. psychological preparedness). This study suggests that survivors of torture frame their experiences differently based on the ‘historical’ context (eg. the events leading up to their captivity, their perceived reasons for being arrested, the sociopolitical situation, etc.). [1,12]

Other examples come from works of literature created by survivors of torture, who were also prominent writers or poets in their country. Take the following excerpt from the contemporary Turkish poet, Nazim Hikmet, who spent much of his life in prison due to his political beliefs:

*And every night, doctor,
when the prisoners are asleep and the infirmary is deserted,
my heart stops at a run-down old house
in Istanbul.*

*And then after ten years
all I have to offer my poor people
is this apple in my hand, doctor,
one red apple:
my heart.*

*And that, doctor, that is the reason
for this angina pectoris--
not nicotine, prison, or arteriosclerosis.*

*I look at the night through the bars,
and despite the weight on my chest
my heart still beats with the most distant
stars.”*

*—excerpt from ‘Angina Pectoris’, translation
by Mutlu Konuk & Randy Blasing [8]*

Having grown up in post-revolutionary Iran, I was personally exposed to many works of literature by activist writers about their experiences in prison and the heroism of their comrades under torture. Most of these individuals became significant popular icons for the sectors of society that they represented, who did not see themselves as “victims” of torture, but rather as “heroes” fighting for a humanitarian cause. This is an excerpt from a poem called ‘*Death of Nazli*’ by Ahmad Shamlou –perhaps the most popular contemporary Iranian poet, who was exposed to extensive torture as a young adult, including a fake execution:

*“Nazli! Speak!
The bird of silence is brooding
a dreadful death in the nest!”*

*Nazli did not speak;
with the sun
rose from the dark and sat in blood and
went...*

*Nazli did not speak
Nazli was a star
twinkled in the dark a moment and went...*

*Nazli did not speak
Nazli was a Violet
blossomed
and revealed, “Winter is gone!”
and
went...
—Excerpt from ‘Death of Nazli’ [18], translation
by me*

Both of these poets conceptualize imprisonment and torture in a way different from the medicalized view of trauma. The focus is on the cause, resistance, and camaraderie, rather than victimization.

Nazim Hikmet’s heart beats for the people he is fighting for behind the bars and Nazli becomes a martyr by resisting under torture. For each of them, the historical context informs the meaning of the experience.

These and many other examples (an extensive survey into which is outside the scope of this talk), similar to the findings of the Turkish study mentioned above, speak to a need to change the trauma discourse in rehabilitation of asylum seeker and survivors of human rights violations to include the notion of Historical Trauma. The question we need to ask ourselves is: If the trauma does not merely lie in the actual experiences of captivity and torture, then what else do we need to address in those individuals who are seeking treatment for psychological difficulties?

I would like to approach this question by returning to the patient that I discussed at the beginning of my talk. As we tried to understand what it was that he actually missed about the prison, we came across an important aspect of his experience as it related to his political activity. At the time of his arrest, this patient was fighting for a cause that had become very central to his identity. By being a part of this cause, he felt himself to be a part of an important moment in the history of his society and this was very meaningful to him. There was a sense of camaraderie, altruism and collective resistance due to this political affiliation that had become a source of strength and resilience for him, especially when he was in captivity. For example, he remembered countless moments when his cellmates looked out for one another despite the repeated torture and poor prison conditions. The camaraderie and humanity had moved him under those extreme conditions of deprivation and we came to appreciate that this was the part that he actually missed. Focusing only on the terrible events of torture overlooked this very important aspect of his experience.

I found the notion of Historical Trauma to be very constructive in formulating the patient’s current symptoms and suffering following these revelations. I realized that the trauma this individual had faced was not just the actual physical and psychological torture that he endured, but the pain and grief over the loss of his cause, the destruction and fragmentation of his society, the injustices done to him and his comrades by an oppressing institution, and now displacement and loss of identity in a foreign land. This was a per-

sonal as well as a collective suffering. In fact, he had started to question his cause in general and label it as “futile” or “pointless”. He found himself to be completely defeated and demoralized and this was at the root of his despair and hopelessness.

It was by acknowledging these issues, instead of only focusing on his symptoms of trauma that I felt there was any hope for re-integration of past and present for this patient, which would then lay the ground for moving towards the future but without giving up meaningful aspects of the past.

In conclusion, even though making psychiatric diagnoses and treating psychiatric illnesses is an essential component of rehabilitation for survivors of human rights violations, this should not come at the expense of overlooking other dimensions of the experience. It is critical for mental health professionals to keep an open mind and consider the psychosocial and historical aspects in an attempt to place the experience within a context. Every individual creates his/her own narrative of what each has lived through and these narratives are shaped by many different personal and *collective* factors. If we open up a space that allows for these narratives to be safely shared and heard, we would give the individual another chance to regain control and start creating freely again –which are the main things that are taken away from a person in captivity, under torture and suppression. Rehabilitation lies in helping the individual form a coherent narrative that brings together past and present, thus opening a window of possibilities for the future.

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Separation

Separated

In my room there were 200 people.

It was so crowded.

I was also separated from my son and husband that I loved.

And finally I was landed.

But not my family.

What Pain?

By Arash Ghiassi

The summer that I scratched the surface of the city and saw that what was seeping out was blood.

In a sun-filled room that could barely fit all four of us, I sat across from a woman from Syria who gently dabbed her tearful eyes with a tissue as she spoke in a firm, resolute voice. Her daughter translated for us what turned out to be a painful story of torture and survival in a war-ravaged Damascus. The story included windows shattered by bombs, bodies piling up on the streets, and humiliating interrogations. She



Pain in addition to vulnerability and destitution

was seeking asylum in Canada.

The Canadian government's response to the Syrian refugee crisis has been abysmal. A handful of people are sponsored by the government to come here from overseas, but those who make it to our shores without such sponsorship must go through an often re-traumatizing adjudication process. The process, meanwhile, has been sped up for "efficacy", but in practice leaves little chance for refugee claimants to build their case. The Damascene woman I met, for instance, only had a couple of weeks to find a psychiatrist to evaluate her mental state and testify to her Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and fear of persecution. She was ultimately unable to do so. But where I met her, at the

Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture (CCVT), she was offered a helping hand. A nonprofit, the CCVT is dedicated to providing “hope after the horror”. It delivers quality mental health counselling, settlement support, and various education programs, among other services.

I was acquainted with CCVT in the course of a research project I was involved in last year with Ezat Mossallanejad, a longtime Trauma / Settlement Counselor and Researcher at the centre. Later, finding extra time on my hands before heading to law school, I decided to make myself useful there. For a few months, I became Ezat’s assistant in an unpaid internship of the sort that’s become a staple for fresh-faced Humanities graduates.

II

Over the course of the summer I encountered a city of pain in Ezat’s office. I met a man fleeing a country struggling with religious intolerance. He had left the country because the person with whom he had authored a book on atheism had been murdered and he had received threats that he would be the next. He was shaking when he said that his wife was still back home, still in danger, and pregnant.

I met a woman from another country, whose neighbours began sexually harassing her as soon as she became a young widow. But when she started to change her religion, they began writing death threats on her wall and chanting them through the night. She fled to her relatives’ houses, but they kicked her out and pushed her back onto the streets, on her own.

I met an Afghan schoolteacher who was a mother of three. When the Taliban attacked her school with rockets, two of her children who were also there were killed. Because of her gender and her line of work, the Taliban threatened to kidnap her remaining son and use him as a child soldier. She ran, she sought asylum in Canada with her youngest, and she lost all contact with her husband.

I met a wheelchair-bound activist for peace and disability rights who was prevented from accessing our building because the elevator was out of service. Tortured by warlords in his country of origin, he had also lost family members and limbs to unending wars.

III

Sadly, theirs weren’t unique stories or ones that one wouldn’t expect to hear at a place like CCVT. And I had thought I was ready for their stories because I had read up on dire human rights situations around the world. But, in Ezat’s small office, the words were made flesh. It was there that I truly encountered pain and I realized that I was still in denial.

I hadn’t yet come to believe in pain. Sure, I knew that people could theoretically languish in pain and suffering. And I, too, had suffered a fresh loss. But all of that paled in comparison. As I sat across from many CCVT clients, I had to face the gravity of what was undeniably present. I was so struck that I would find myself unable to move and forgetting that I was there to help. And when I would remember, I would be lost as to how.

The Centre, like most small nonprofits, was cash-strapped and limited in what it could offer. Financial help, for instance, was out of the question given the number of people we saw every day. Yet, almost all of our clients had fled their countries of origin with next to nothing but the clothes on their backs. Many of them suffered from various physical and psychological disabilities resulting from torture that made it impossible for them to work, at least in the short term. And very few spoke English.

I met a middle-aged man, for instance, who was a successful accountant in his country of origin. Here, he couldn’t find work. He told us, shaking with shame and humiliation, that he had been caught stealing groceries.

IV

As I watched the first federal leaders’ debate leading up to the October elections, I was struck by the fact that no one was talking about pain. It was as if it didn’t exist. Buried in hollow romantic odes to Canada, straight-faced praises of our faltering economy, and dramatic vows to fight for the middle class, I saw a denial of pain.

Denial is what it must have been. The pain of the magnitude that runs in our streets cannot be acknowledged without forcing an urgent response. But there was no urgent response from our politicians. Can it be that when the people of this country

come together in the Parliament for self-governance, relieving each other's pain is not their top priority?

In fact, we seem awfully reluctant to help. To receive provincial benefits under the Ontario Disability Support Program, for instance, you would typically get rejected twice before being possibly accepted the third time on appeal to the Social Benefits Tribunal. It's a long and expensive process that wastes taxpayers' money and forces people with disability to wait in poverty and fight for their case for many months—that's if they get it in the end.

And we aren't investing in affordable housing either. The waiting list for Toronto Community Housing—in a city of skyrocketing housing costs and increasing homelessness—is a decade long. I met many CCVT clients, especially among those who identified as LGBTQ, who had to endure abusive relationships just to have a place to sleep, and many more who had to stay in overnight shelters.



V

But it's not just that we are failing to alleviate pain. We are also in the business of causing pain, and lots of it. I met a contractor, for instance, who used to work with Americans in Afghanistan. The Taliban didn't take too kindly to that cooperation, threatening him and killing members of his family. He fled to Canada and his family went into hiding in neighbouring Pakistan three years ago. For unknown reasons, Canada hasn't even started considering his refugee claim since then. His file may well have been lost, and

he can't apply again. He is in that all-too-prevalent predicament that is sometimes called *limbo*.

While in limbo, he has no status in Canada. He can't work, he can't study, and he can't grow roots here, not knowing whether he will eventually be allowed to stay as a refugee. All he can do is wait in uncertainty. This excruciating limbo can go on indefinitely—as in the case of another man I met who was in it for 22 years. That's as long as I have lived.

Worst of all, he can't sponsor his family to come to Canada before the limbo ends. So they will have to stay apart, his family somehow surviving, illegally, in a foreign country where they meant to stay only temporarily in order to get away from the Taliban. Of course, the longer he waits in anxiety over his and his family's future, the worse it will be for his mental health.

The federal government, meanwhile, has been trying to cut what little healthcare coverage is afforded to those who are kept in limbo by the federal government. These are the same cuts that were slammed by the courts as "cruel and unusual". So we are essentially trying to subject torture victims who come to us for protection to more torture.

VI

That was certainly the case for an asylum seeker I met who stopped over in a European country on his way to Canada. In order to escape his country of persecution, he had to use fake papers. For him, this created a history of immigration offences in Europe. In Canada, his refugee claim was ultimately rejected and he was sent to an immigration detention facility ahead of being removed from Canada.

In this country there's no trial for detaining someone for immigration issues. An officer can unilaterally send someone to jail on a mere suspicion that they might not show up for removal. Indefinitely. And when a detainee like Abdurrahman Ibrahim Hassan mysteriously dies in detention, the Canadian Border Services Agency covers it up.)

For this person, however, the issue in Europe resurfaced as a criminal history—even though it wasn't. Suspected of being "dangerous", he was soon

moved to Maplehurst Correctional Complex, a facility meant for criminal offenders. There, he was beaten up multiple times and deprived of food by other prisoners. He was afraid of reporting these incidents, and the guards did nothing to protect him.

There's no reason that people seeking Canada's protection should be arbitrarily sent to prison or subjected to violence. There's no reason that they should be kept in limbo for years or denied basic healthcare. They shouldn't be kept from reuniting with their families, and their case shouldn't be rushed through the adjudication process.

VII

Federal elections are coming up. October 19th could be a crucial turning point for those who live in pain in our country. Either our next government's policies will continue to hurt them more, or there will be a change of course. Those of us with a conscience must take it upon ourselves to face the pain that lives among us. If we do, we will inevitably be moved by its rightful pull in determining our votes and our policies.

Are we going to stand by while refugee claimants are kept indefinitely in detention on our own dime? Are we going to let our government continue to embarrass us by waging expensive court battles to keep its cruel and unusual policies? Or are we going to start investing instead in much-needed social programs like affordable housing?

Harper's Conservatives seem steadfast on their ever-tightening immigration rules and a fixation with balanced budgets and austerity measures. The New Democrats present themselves as equally concerned with balancing the budget, leaving little room to fulfill their promises in the wake of an economic downturn. The Liberals, meanwhile, have little to offer to the most vulnerable among us in their campaign for "Real Change" so far.

But we can—and must—make compassion an election issue for those living here in pain. Or else their pain is on us.

Arash Ghiassi was a placement student at the CCVT. He is studying law in the United States of America.

Song of Exile

Exile is the emptiness—for however much you brought with you, there's far more you've left behind.

Exile is the ego that shrinks, for how can you prove what you were and what you did?

Exile is the erasure of pride.

Exile is the escape that is often worse than the prison.

Exile is the xenophobe—for every single one who like you,

you'll find ten in whom there is nothing but hate.

Exile is the xanthippe nagging you for thoughts unthought

and for words unspoken.

Exile is the infinitive you cannot help splitting—

the intention that is never equalled by the execution.

Exile is the invasion that can never succeed—

for you can never conquer your inhibitions—

it is the incubus riding your pillow.

Exile is the loneliness in the middle of a crowd—

Exile is longing never to be fulfilled,

it is love unrequited, the loss never replaced—

the listless, loveless, long wait for the train

that never arrives, the plane that never gets off the

ground.

Exile is the end and never the beginning—

Exile is the eruption whose lava stream carries you away

-

it is the eternity measured in minutes, the eyes

that never enjoy the familiar sight,

the ears that listen to alien music.

Exile is a song that only the singer can hear.

Exile is an illness that not even death can cure—for how

can you rest in soil that did not nourish you?

Exile is the warning example to those who still

have their homes, who belong.

But will you take heed of the warning?

PAUL TABORI

1908-1974

June 26th

The International Day in Support of Victims of Torture

In commemoration of International Day in support of Victims of torture, on June 23, 2016 in partnership with Amnesty International Canada, the Canadian Centre For Victims of Torture held a thought provoking panel discussion.

The title was “*Global Repression, Conflicts, Peace, and Canada’s Role*.” The program also included photo exhibition, client Art display, client/ volunteer performances and screened the film *The look of Silence* by Joshua

Oppenheimer. The event was held at Innis Town Hall, in Toronto. Over 100 participants attended the event including survivors of torture, volunteers, activists, teachers, politicians and concerned citizens. This was a day to stand with the community in solidarity to raise awareness and to show the resilience, determination and strength of survivors. The day was filled with entertainment, civic engagement as participants signed the Amnesty International’s petition asking the Canadian government to ratify Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture (OPCAT). The highlight of the day was a skit written by a CCVT Settlement/ Trauma counselor Ezat Mossallanejad “Retributive Justice” (see pp. 43-49).



Innis Town Hall participants attend panel discussion and dramatic performance

On Dec 10, 1948, the General Assembly of the United Nations recognized the need to call for an end of the widespread use of torture. In Article 5 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights it stated, “No one shall be subjected to torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.” In 1966, this prohibition was restated in Article 7 of The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. On December 10, 1984, the UN General Assembly adopted the *Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or*

Degrading Treatment or Punishment, which came into force on June 26th, 1987. This Convention was the latest and most important effort by the international community to emphasize the urgent need to bring to an end the criminal practice of torture.

1998 was the first year in which the *Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture (CCVT)* celebrated June 26th as the *International Day in Support of Torture Survivors* with an evening of solidarity with the survivors. Since then, we have celebrated June 26th on a regular basis. It is unfortunate that today

torture is being practiced in two-thirds of the countries in the world, including advanced industrial nations of the North.

Let us act today; let us make all our efforts to stop torture; let us expose oppressive and torturing regimes in any part of the globe; let us identify torturers and bring them to justice; let us not allow torture to continue and take innocent lives.

Refugees and the Emotional Trauma of their Children

By Fataneh Naghavi

Introduction

When we watch the news and read the papers regarding the refugee crisis that is taking place around the world we see the fighting, the death, the despair, and the destitution of men and women travelling across war torn countries. What we do *not* see are the children and the emotional trauma that they are experiencing living through these dreadful conditions. Children, while fleeing their countries with their families, frequently find themselves separated from their families - leaving them vulnerable to sexual predators, hunger and diseases while in refugee camps. These dangers contribute to the trauma that children experience. These traumatic experiences also leave many of these children with mental health issues and clinical disorders. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is the most common condition found amongst refugee children along with high anxiety and depression. When children and their families do reach their new country, children find it hard to connect to their new surroundings, in the school system and at home. As a result of their emotional trauma, some children mistrust authorities and find it harder to make friends. School therapists are another source of recovery for many refugee children and their families, but because of their experience many children find it hard to open up. The family tendency is to try to forget what happened or to keep the past hidden.

Impact of Trauma on Refugee Children

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has reported that approximately 44% of the world's refugees are children under the age of 18. Children are also the most defenseless in protecting themselves against the elements of their situation. According to The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (2013) "traumatic experiences include physical or sexual violation of the body, witnessing of violence, serious injury, or grotesque death." A young child can feel deeply threatened by separation from parents or caretakers.

Refugee children experience various forms of trauma while fleeing their war torn countries with their families or alone.

Many unaccompanied children fleeing from conflict zones in Romania, Ukraine, Nigeria and Sierra Leone are forced into sex trafficking. About 1.2 million children are trafficked worldwide. Refugee children choose to leave their homeland due to poverty, political crisis, conflict and violent conditions. While fleeing their country of origin many unaccompanied children are forced to travel with human smugglers who attempt to exploit these children as sex workers. (Vargas, 2008)



Refugee children are also often targeted and abducted and turned into child soldiers during the time of war (Naghavi, 2015). These children are held witness to death and torture at very young ages and desensitized to their surroundings and conditions. Their participation in a conflict has both immediate and long-term effects. They fear their own death and the death of those around them (Australian Human Right Commission, 2015). Children who experience the death of others find it painful to live with. Refugee children are affected by poverty when displaced in refugee camps, with their families or alone, and are witness to disease and death. Poverty affects both the physical and mental health of children. It is also an important factor when characterizing mental illness in refugee children because it is intrinsically alienating and distressing (NSW 2011).

The Refugee Health Service also looked at the mass population movements, the destruction of health services, water systems and sanitation, malnutrition, and overcrowding in refugee camps – all of which encourage the spread of disease. In several of these war torn countries, where children are already vulnerable to diseases, those under 5 years are at particular risk. All these situations have a negative impact on children, and may lead to more severe mental health conditions when they are finally removed from these traumatic experiences (Naghavi, 2015).

Effects of Traumatic Experiences amongst Refugee Children

Forced migration from their home countries and the traumatic events that they have experienced has left many refugee children with mental disorders. Traumatic experiences long after they are over continue to take priority in the thoughts, emotions and behavior of children, adolescents and adults. Fears and other strong emotions, and intense physical reactions may be diminished by a new way of looking at dangers in the world, but events and reminders may bring them to mind again. These very symptoms and reminders lead to refugee children developing Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The diagnosis of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is rendered when posttraumatic stress reactions are serious, continuous, and interfere with the daily functioning of children and adolescents. Traumatized and bereaved children and adolescents may also develop symptoms of Depression and Separation Anxiety Disorder (Daud, Klinteberg, and Rydelius, 2008). The events that refugee children have experienced as children of war and slave workers can leave many of them with not just PTSD and depression but also with survival guilt.

How as a child are you able to overcome these terrible experiences? The American Psychiatric publications on PTSD identify the triggers to PTSD – one trigger being the direct personal experience of the traumatic event(s) and another the witnessing of the traumatic event. Refugee children often have

firsthand encounters with the sex trade, violence, death, war, soldiers as well as more extreme experiences. One controversy noted throughout the literature relating to refugee children, adolescents and PTSD is whether it is solely the exposure to war related stress that is harmful, or whether in fact trauma responses are dependent on the nature, type, amount and duration of exposure to stress (Rossi, 2008). It seems symptoms of PTSD are mentally and physically draining on any child ranging from 2-18 years of age.



Families come to terms with the overwhelming realities of a refugee camp

Children and adolescents who present with PTSD may exhibit symptoms of confused and disordered memory about events, repetitive play themes related to trauma, personality change, limitation of violent behavior and pessimistic expectation regarding survival (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2003).

Many child refugees who do not explicitly meet the diagnostic criteria of one of these psychiatric disorders show elevated post-traumatic, depressive, anxiety or somatic symptoms. However, many refugee children do overcome their ordeal with therapy and family support. (NCBI 2008).

Refugee Children and the Effect of Resettlement

Children, when trying to recover from their traumatic experience, may find it more difficult to adapt to their new home and country. Refugee children who flee with families are under more stress when faced with acculturation. Acculturation stress occurs when families expect refugee youth to remain loyal to ethnic values while mastering the host culture in school and social activities. In response to this demand, children may over-identify with their host culture, their culture of origin, or become marginalized from both.. It is difficult for children to stay loyal to their place of origin, and to be responsible for language support for their parents as well. They may also become translators for their parents. With all these stressors children find it very difficult to function in their new school and to make new friends because of

the language barrier.

Upon arrival in their host country, refugees encounter language barriers, a lack of culturally-competent care, cost complications, a lack of public awareness and access to information about available resources and health care (News Refugee Health Services, 2015).

School counselors, along with family psychotherapists, play a key role when helping refugee children and families adapt to their new surroundings. They help overcome the disorders that so many of these refugee children suffer from. North American schools are agents of acculturation and help refugee children to become “absorbed” into Western society. Successful educators help children process trauma they may have experienced in their countries of origin while supporting their academic adjustment. (Wikipedia.org)

Unfortunately, it is not always the case that the refugees get the support they need from school systems and families. Those children who find themselves alone in a country find it harder to adapt to their new way of living while trying to overcome the trauma that they experienced as slave workers and war-affected children. Unaccompanied refugee minors are less likely to access mental health care services than their accompanied counterparts. (Wikipedia.org)

Conclusion

Children play a key role in the family dynamic, and every child deserves to grow up in a world where they feel safe and secure. The Syrian crisis that is evolving around the world and the image of the Syrian boy’s lifeless body pulled from the water, make it clear that children are just as much in danger fleeing these war torn countries as any other man or woman, and may in fact be more traumatized. The emotional trauma that the refugee children are encumbered with is undeniably a tragic way for a child to have to grow up. This paper has clearly outlined the issues associated with refugee children when they flee with their families or alone. Female children are easy targets for sexual predators; young males are often recruited into warfare and children are often faced with traumatic experiences by witnessing the death of family members from disease and malnutrition in refugee camps. Not only are these events traumatizing on the young psyche of a child, the events are extremely difficult for

them to forget.

It is evident that refugee children suffer with these disorders due to the experiences that they have had, witnessed, and endured. Nevertheless, in spite of the fact that many refugee children experience deep trauma while fleeing their home, many are able to adapt and move past the pain and trauma that life has dealt them, as a result of the support they receive in their new country.

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Fataneh Naghavi, Ph.D is a Psychotherapist, College instructor and a former client of CCVT. She is the internationally-published author of Emotional Intelligence, What Families Can Influence? as well as numerous research articles on psychology and mental health.

Reflections from a Syrian Refugee in Canada

By Mulham Hantouch



I am from a city in the central location in Syria called Homs. Protesting started peacefully on March 2011 among school and university students who were asking for freedom and dignity. They were inspired by the Arab spring in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, and how people there managed to get rid of repressive regimes. Hope of a better life started spreading among the city residents (an estimated 3 million, most of whom joined the protests. People who participated were from all levels: educated, illiterate, businessmen and students. Police used live bullets and guns to disperse demonstrators fearing that protesting might spread in other provinces.

Gradually, protests expanded to all provinces simply because what pushed people to protest in Homs was the same for people in all Syrian cities and provinces. People were protesting peacefully, carrying flowers and olive branches, and police met their peacefulness with guns and weapons.

I was one of the many people who were kidnapped by one of the regime militias. I was held for one month during which I was severely tortured - I had no hope I would survive. During that time, there was a campaign of arrests targeting educated people and businessmen, aiming to terrify people with months of suppression and continual fierceness towards peaceful protestors. The regime released many criminals from jail to help the regime in terrifying people. After the defection of huge numbers of military personnel who refused to attack peaceful protestors and chose to form a free army to protect army to protect their families and people from the violent practices of the regime, violence escalated. The regime was supported by some

militias from Lebanon and started using tanks and other heavy armament to break into residential neighborhoods and destroy many of our homes, churches and schools, killing hundreds of civilians including women and children.

Nowhere was safe in Syria. I fled with my father, three brothers and their families, with 10 children under the age of 10 to Lebanon. Although the journey was extremely dangerous, we are lucky that we made it and I will always be grateful to Canada for offering me and my family a safe place after struggling for 2 and half years in Lebanon. I am safe but millions of Syrians are not. 11 million Syrians have been forced to flee their homes and are internally displaced. 4 million Syrians are refugees, living outside of Syria. 400 thousand victims of conflict and more than 200 thousand prisoners are missing. Thousands are trapped in Syria with no food, water, or electricity, and are dying of hunger and cold.

Staying in a refugee camp in a tent that offers little protection from a cold harsh winter makes you think of the questions that have no answers: why is this happening to me, why am I suffering? When will this end?

When someone takes the risk of throwing himself and his family in a boat with the hope of reaching safety, they are actually trying to find an answer to these questions. They sacrifice their lives for the hope of a future. They trust that the harsh sea will either be their route to rescue, or will put an end to their tragedy.

The tragedy that started with hope for a change, ended up in years of war, destruction, killing of civilians, and siege, and the brutality of ISIS, Bashar's regime and other international and regional players. The Syrian tragedy is more than the number of people who have been and are killed or tortured and could not make it. It is more about people who are suffering and struggling but still have a hope that one day they be lent a hand and they will make it. At the end, I wish to thank the CCVT for their support and for giving me that chance to speak today and thank you all for having me..

Languages for victims of War and Torture

By Yury Jakymec



On Wednesday January 11th I had the opportunity to attend the Annual General Meeting of MCIS Language Services. As always, I have the opportunity to share with friends while listening to speakers who kindly collaborated with the event. There were several speakers, but today I will write about one of them and some of the points he exposed, I am writing about Mr. Ezat Mossalanejad, who spoke on behalf of Canadian Centre of Victims of Torture, CCVT. More information about this organization can be found in their web page <http://www.ccvvt.org>

Mr Mossalanejad spoke about the challenges existing when survivors of Torture try to learn English, being Newcomers in Canada. He said that survivors of torture face additional problems like feeling distrust of other people they don't know, fear to groups and to authority. There are other psychological barriers that make more difficult to learn the language

of their new environment and to integrate to their new Home Country. In the Web page of the organization, An interesting paper can be read regarding this subject, and is called "Transformative Learning among victims of Trauma, The impact of English language program on transformative learning Experiences among victims of Trauma".

For me personally, this was the speech that had the most impact. Being myself and immigrant and after teach more than 5 years in an ESL department, I have to confess that I never thought before about this. Generally speaking, immigrate to a different country is not easy. Even for people who speak the language of their new home, they are not always prepared to deal with new expressions and accents. But if we think about people who were forced to migrate, with very little or no previous knowledge of the language of their new country, the amount of work they must do to integrate is even more. Some governments are trying to provide help to refugees to integrate, and as a part of this help, assistance with language classes is included. But they are not always prepared to deal with immigrants who also are victims of Trauma, due to torture or violence.

I decided to make a quick research through the Internet. Fortunately, there is information available in the World wide web for those who want to know more and want to introduce improvements in their language classes to better assist students with traumas. Most of the researches come from institutions in the US and Canada

But when I researched about this same subject using other languages, less information was

available. I have to say that I did not find any article in Spanish, Italian or French.

Generally speaking, to immigrate to a different country is not easy. Even for people who speak the language of their new home, they are not always prepared to deal with new expressions and accents.

In my opinion, generally speaking, not only there are many Language teachers who are not aware of the unique challenges that present having students who are victims of Trauma from Torture or any other kind of violence, but professionals involved in the organization of language courses founded by different governments are not aware of this.

For an immigrant, to learn the language of the new Home country is key to a successful integration. If professionals who are involved in this process are not fully aware on how to deal with this particular situation, what we can say about the rest of society in countries who are accepting refugees?

More research is needed, and this should be available to any language professional, no matter which language they work with. I personally think that learning a language, using the right tools and the proper motivation, can be therapeutic. This is something that right now I am unable to demonstrate, but I think that more research can lead to a situation where a problem can be transformed in a solution. Wishful thinking? Maybe a reality, yet to be discovered.

Yury Jakymec is an interpreter Spanish-English with a wide background, as a teacher in an ESL department to adult learners. He has applied his knowledge in IT for research and Training. Currently, he has a blog where writes about different topics involving languages.



A Journey of Hope

By Luxsiga Ambigaibagan



The Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture has been a big part of my experiential education and has brought me a wide range of knowledge. I became involved with the centre as a volunteer at the Scarborough location in September of 2009.

Then, only in the ninth grade, I would never have imagined that my future was set to serve a unique and ever growing population of new immigrants who have experienced war and/or torture. At CCVT Scarborough, I was heavily involved with the Homework Club, Women's Sewing Classes, Computer Basics and the occasional interpretation.

As my high school experience was coming to an end, it was time for me to look into post secondary education. After much thought and seeing the hard work and commitment of the staff at CCVT, I knew that Social Work was the field for me. Upon entering university, my ability to volunteer as I did in the past was reduced to the occasional interpretation for clients. Yet, I knew that my relationship with CCVT would be one that would remain ongoing. In order to complete the degree, students are required to select an organization in which they would complete their placement. I set my heart once again on CCVT and successfully secured my placement.

Through my placement experience, I had the opportunity to learn and expand on my skills to serve survivors of war and/or torture. I was given time to build on my skills and to apply them to cases, with

supervision of course. I read and heard unbearable stories of individuals' experiences but, through the process also learned how to take care of my own well being in order to prevent vicarious trauma. This allowed me to become confident in my abilities to support the survivors who come to the centre. I was fortunate enough to gain experience in both serving adults and the child/youth population throughout my duration at the centre as a placement student. I completed my placement with CCVT in April 2016, and graduated from York University in June 2016.

Presently, I am a Child and Youth Counsellor at the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture. In this position, there is a lot of consideration that needs to be put into the programs that are geared to this unique population. As someone who supports with children and youth, I need to take into consideration each individual's experience. Furthermore, I need to consider the interconnectedness of their emotional, behavioural or psychical well-being and to know how it ties into their involvement in social groups, family, school settings, place of employment, etc. Support is crucial to address with the younger population as without adequate support, children/youth lose their sense of self, which can either cause them to mature at a rapid rate or stagnant their growth and mental development. In order to support this group, my aim is to provide a non-judgemental yet, encouraging environment, which will foster individuals' ability and allow them to flourish.

Throughout my volunteer and placement experience at CCVT, I have gained some valuable practice skills that I presently utilize when interacting with clients. As a Child and Youth Counsellor, I believe it is crucial to identify your supportive role in their development and set the necessary boundaries in place while supporting clients. It is beneficial if we focus on our clients in the present moment and encourage them to set realistic expectations that can be achieved. Also, It is important for us to create an ally type relationship and allow the client to take control of the information to be disclosed at their own pace. Especially, with children and youth, in order to be supportive we need to take a step back as professionals and approach very situation an ally. This will allow for a safe space for clients and permit them to control the direction of the discussion.

Moreover, my vision is to support children and youth survivors as individuals and gradually bring

them together as a collective support system for each other. My hope is that this collective support system will transcend the centre and enter various institutions to support the growth and development of other survivors who have had similar experiences. I would like to see the taboo attitudes towards survivors of war and/or torture disappear and see their experience brought to light and presented to the community as lived experiences instead of hidden secrets. I know this will take a lot of training and even more so, a lot of collaboration with other service providers. With the ongoing support of social service, health care and legal professionals, I know clients will be able to support one another in this capacity in the near future.

Luxsiga Ambigaibagan | BSW (Hons) is a Registered Social Worker (RSW) who works as the Child and Youth Trauma Counselor at the CCVT.



Hope

Keynote Speech by Tony Burman: November 13, 2015 – First Light Celebration



Tony Burman

Thank you very much. I appreciate the kind introduction. And I appreciate the invitation. I feel quite privileged to be part of this very important evening. In particular, I join with you in honoring tonight's award recipients. Through their actions, their fierce commitment and their dedication, they remind us what *needs* to be done – and can be done – to make this a better world. But...so do you all.

Many of you in this room have devoted your lives to working with survivors of torture. Others among you have worked tirelessly to support them. To the rest of us – and I certainly include myself, as a journalist – the efforts of this organization and its supporters are inspiring. So thank you all. But there is another reason for us – as Canadians – to feel inspired and optimistic – in spite of so many global challenges.

On this Friday night in Ottawa, and throughout this weekend, we know that our political leaders and their officials are working late to ensure that thousands of Syrian refugees can come to Canada. Finally! What an absolutely glorious development.

Until now, it seemed the official Canadian position has been to ignore the world's most serious humanitarian crisis in a generation. After all – or so it was argued – this worldwide refugee crisis really doesn't involve Canada directly, and really doesn't matter to Canadians.

Wasn't this the country that initially looked

the other way when the torture of Maher Arar and Omar Khadr was placed in front of it? Then, something changed. I write a weekly column on world affairs for the Saturday edition of the Toronto Star. But my deadline is actually on Wednesday.

On Wednesday, September 2, I was writing a column about Syria's refugees – trying to make the point that this was everyone's problem and it was horrendous that this issue was being ignored in Canada's endless election campaign. As I wrote my column that day, I kept checking various websites to see if there were any new developments. I then saw the photo of little Alan Kurdi – his lifeless body lying face down on a Turkish beach. It was heart-breaking. The three-year-old was wearing a bright red T-shirt, blue pants and sneakers. He had drowned trying to escape Syria's bloody civil war.

I alerted the Star and told my editors that I would be referring to the photo in my opening paragraphs. But shortly after I submitted my column that afternoon, they told me that it would not be printed in Saturday's paper. It would appear on page one the next day – in Thursday's Star.

I'll let historians make the final judgment on this. But I believe that Canada's election was decided on the overwhelming power of that single dramatic image. None of us could turn away at the sight of this toddler's lifeless body. I believe that, as of that moment, Canadians told their leaders that – yes – **we can do better**. Through much of my journalistic career, I have worked outside of Canada – both with the CBC and Al Jazeera. This has been a fascinating journey for me.

From the frontline, I have been able to reflect on Canada's changing role in this changing world. From this, I have come to at least a few conclusions. People beyond our borders have very high expectations of Canadians – and a clear sense of what they regard as Canadian values. But more than ever, I have learned they rely mostly on *individual Canadians* and on *important Canadian organizations* such as CCVT to reflect and promote these values.

In the mid-1980s, Canadians led the world in responding to the horrific famine in Ethiopia. Nearly a million people died in that famine. Working with Brian Stewart, I was the CBC producer of that coverage. The scenes we witnessed were unforgettable, but so was the outpouring of assistance from individual Canadians. It was breathtaking. Canadians pressured the Canadian government to intervene in spite of arguments in some Western capitals that Ethiopia's Marxist regime should not be helped. Looking back, one has to marvel at the power, empathy and determination of the Canadian people to reach out to Ethiopia.

After my career at the CBC, I worked for nearly four years with the English network of Al Jazeera, most of it in Qatar in the Gulf. And I marveled at how many Canadians I kept bumping into. In my travels with Al Jazeera – throughout the Middle East, to Africa, China, Europe and the Americas – Canadians – *individual* Canadians – seemed to be everywhere. At all levels. In so many different situations. Taking on a multitude of fascinating and critical challenges: Canadian doctors and nurses working in the remote highlands of Africa, south Asia and Pakistan; Canadian teachers, lawyers and business people helping to shape emerging democracies; And Canadian men and women taking the lead within international NGOs to give voice to the voiceless and comfort to the victims of persecution.

In our history books, due deference is paid to the official achievements of the Canadian story – the efforts of our military and our governments in helping to make the world a better place. We honor them often, as we should. But less known, and less celebrated, are the many Canadians who over the years have worked at home and abroad to make a difference in this complicated world.

And I certainly include those of you in this room who work with – and support – the crucial mandate of the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture.

In many ways, I think it is them – it is YOU – not our governments – who have brought the immense goodwill that exists throughout the world towards Canada, and Canadians. I first learned this when I was in my mid-20s. I spent more than a year travelling by bus throughout the towns and villages of South America. This was a time when virtually all the governments in Latin America were military dictatorships – most notably the one led by General Augusto Pinochet of

Chile. I remember being amazed at the number of Canadians – doctors, nurses, nuns, priests and students – who were working there, often in clandestine conditions.

The shantytowns, or *barriadas*, around the Chilean capital of Santiago were being organized by Canadian priests and nuns – always under threat by Pinochet's security agents. The favelas around the slums of Rio de Janeiro had clinics for the victims of Brazil's secret police. And years later, on another continent in the refugee camps of Ethiopia, our CBC team relied on Canadian social workers and medical staff.

About 25 years ago, I was in the black township of Soweto in South Africa with the late, beloved Barbara Frum of the CBC's *The Journal*. We were witnessing a transformational event: the release from jail of Nelson Mandela. A few years earlier, I had done a documentary about Mandela, which included a re-enactment of the 1963 Rivonia Trial – the trial that convicted him on bogus terrorism charges and sent him off to 27 years in jail. Winnie Mandela saw the documentary, and liked it. And because of that, the CBC was one of the three networks in the world to get an interview with Nelson Mandela the day after he was released in February, 1990. That was Mandela's first experience with freedom since 1963. As we were setting up for the interview, he kept quizzing us on where we had been. Barbara said the two of us had recently come from Moscow where we had done a series of programs on the looming demise of the Soviet Union. Mandela went out of his way to thank Canada for leading the struggle against apartheid. The Canadian government at the time defied both Britain's Margaret Thatcher and U.S. president Ronald Reagan in calling for sanctions to bring down the South African regime. But Mandela told us something else. He said that he knew it was really the Canadian people – through their protests, through their values, through their "goodness" as he put it – who made all of this happen. I was thinking of Mandela's words as I marvel at what *this* organization – and those of you in *this* room – have achieved. It seems that Canadian "goodness" – as Mandela would have put it – is back in fashion. Isn't it about time?

Thank you for your work.

Trauma and Social Inclusion: An Interactive Panel Discussion

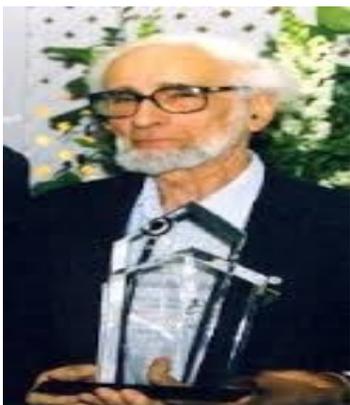
By: Diviya Lewis, Volunteer



The atmosphere was welcoming, with refreshments served, and Dr. Ezat Mossallanejad, a Counsellor and Policy Analyst with CCVT, greeted attendees warmly, introducing and connecting individuals to each other. The evening began with a profound feeling of gratitude, as Mbalu Lumor, the Manager of Community Engagement, and Aron Zaltz, the moderator, extended their gratitude to each of the panelists, and the attendees. After a moment of silence to mourn the lives of the honourees, Aron highlighted a tribute to a theory that Ursula advocated for (i.e. the earthworm theory of civic engagement) and it set a wonderful tone for the conversation that followed.

So, what is the *earthworm theory*, you wonder? It is the premise that before anything has an opportunity to grow, the soil must be prepared. It provides hope to what might seem like an endless process in the fight for human rights, for “unless there is that prepared soil, no new thoughts and no new ways of dealing with problems will ever arise”. This notion of hope echoed in the contributions of each panelist, each unique and each bringing a valuable perspective to the discussion.

The Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture (CCVT) hosted an interactive panel discussion on December 6th to discuss Trauma and Social Inclusion in honour of three deceased friends: Fred Franklin, Peter Meier, and Ursula Franklin.



Fred Franklin (August 6, 1921 - September 19, 2016)



Ursula M. Franklin (September 16, 1921-July 22, 2016)



Peter Meier (1944 – September 21, 1916)



Mbalu introduces the panelists

Paulina Wyrzykowski, a renowned lawyer, both in Canada and overseas, began by introducing her 92-year-old grandmother, and sharing her personal story of trauma, describing the circles of silence that trauma can create. Whether it is their choice not to rehash their past, or a difficulty recalling (i.e. accurately recalling) their memories, some trauma survivors face what is called the “incommunicability of trauma”. At the same time, as a mother, and as someone who has heard some of her grandmother's stories, she poses that trauma can give us guidance, and it is important to carry that knowledge forward, into our future generations. I am a firm believer in the power of awareness, and while timing differs for each person, there is a healing power of awareness, both for the person suffering, and for those who witness and acknowledge their truths.

Dr. Haleh ‘Azar’ Doulatyariazar began by summarizing her experience working with victims of trauma into one word. Amazing. She recognized and acknowledged the strength of those who have survived disasters and their ability to put it behind them. When victims of torture first meet her, trust is a key component, specifically gaining and maintaining their trust. She emphasized the importance of listening, being patient, thanking them, and being

mindful of your body language. Her role as a physician requires careful consideration of their symptoms, and consideration for biological, psychological and social components of distress. She conveyed so much gratitude for her work with these patients, and provided insight into the importance of trust in these populations. When we think about trust, it is something so integral in each of our relationships, and while the betrayals of trust we have experienced are nothing compared to those of trauma survivors, we can empathize how important it is, and can find a common ground with each person, on our search for trust in those around us.

Chas Lawther, a long-time volunteer and Befriender with CCVT began with a sentiment that he felt “out of place” on the panel, and began by describing his serendipitous introduction to CCVT in 1991. Besides the support and providing insight into nuances of Canadian culture, one his main lesson involved learning how to be a good befriender, and he related three anecdotes along his journey. As a new immigrant to Canada, he remembers “that woman”, who extended her kindness, comfort, and conversation to his mother during their first month in the country that played a role in his understanding of how to befriend other newcomers. Next, one of his childhood friends, Mike, played a crucial role in his acclimatization and social inclusion at his school, and impacted his journey.

**...before anything
has an opportunity
to grow, the soil
must be prepared.**

Lastly, he recalls his hitch-hiking adventures and feeling the connection to a man that extended beyond languages, and the generosity and compassion that was extended to him, simply as another human being. He concluded by saying everyone is different, unique, and that one of the most important lessons he has learned as a befriender, is that it isn't about you. I think his message resonates with those who wonder, *'do I have what it takes?'* and assume they will never be able to relate to this population.



From left to right Aron Zaltz, Paulina Wyrzykowski, Dr. Haleh 'Azar' Doulatyariazar, Chas Lawther and Ezat Mossallanejad

Along our lives, each of our experiences brings us to the place we are today.

The final panelist, Dr. Mossallanejad introduced the audience to the concept of *collective trauma*, and described the psychological, emotional and physical impacts. Collective trauma, either man made, or caused by a natural disaster, is described as an event that has shocked or traumatized *everybody*. Each person faces unexpected, and beyond a reasonable amount of stress to be able to handle it. He describes some of the impacts of collective trauma: shock, deterioration of the community, or of their values, denial, and in some examples, he describes, results in the culture discontinuing (i.e. it ceases to exist). He describes healing to encompass empowering clients with a coping capacity, to understand their trauma, and help them live with their trauma, and celebrates CCVT's holistic model of helping, encompassing not just the physical, and

psychological, but social and culturally cognizant help. He enlightened the audience to many examples of collective trauma, and its social, political and psychological impacts throughout history, but emphasized the importance of the role each volunteer plays in the fight for human rights.

The audience was engaged, and provided rich discussion, including new research on trauma, discussion around implications for the next generation (i.e. the children), considerations around trust, and last, but not least, the concept of **hope**. One attendee described her work as a documentary filmmaker, and how hope is manifested in those she films.

Aron, summarized the discussion eloquently, when he reminded us that the word *trauma* is derived from the Greek word for dream. To be traumatized, is to live in a horrible dream. A lot of what trauma survivors endure is a "taint of knowledge". They live with the knowledge that another person is capable of doing something so horrible. Befriending, one of CCVT's programs in their holistic model of healing challenges this, and strives to set a new norm for trauma survivors.



How Youth Work Has Affected Me

By: Samina Zubairi, Youth Worker, CCVT



I have been in the field of youth work for over 6 years now and employed with CCVT since July 2015. Over the years, I have come to realize the importance of working with young people

and playing a dominant role in their lives, and the fact that the skills and knowledge of front-line youth workers are in demand to help support the youth on various issues that affect their day-to-day lives and well-being.

I have always had the passion to help the emotional and social development of young people in an informal setting, but at the same time utilizing educational workshops that are relevant and beneficial to the youth. I have learned to develop and foster positive and supportive relationships with young people, while also opening their eyes to new experiences. At the same time, I have learned a lot from the youth themselves from hearing about the challenges and barriers that they face. This has helped me to understand their needs better in order to provide them with services and design programs that will impact their lives in a positive way and also help them transition smoothly into adult life.

Currently, as a Youth Worker at CCVT, I am coordinating a Peer Leadership Project for youth survivors ages 14-24. Many of the youth that come to the centre and attend programs have limited English language skills, never held a previous job in Canada, and experience feelings of isolation and difficulty making friends in school. The peer leaders that are contributing towards the facilitation of the program have also faced similar barriers. However, this program is helping them benefit in the sense that they are noticeably improving their English and communication, allowing them to make new friends and be more social, and at the same

time, getting work experience at a recognized organization in Canada. The program is assisting them to improve their self-confidence and build on their existing skills while developing new skills in leadership, which will help them improve their resumes, get beneficial opportunities in the future and do well in school. Furthermore, through the delivery of workshops, other newcomer youth are benefitting by learning life and social skills from their peers who share similar experiences with them.

At CCVT, my hope is to continue to provide engaging activities for the youth and to create opportunities for them to learn, grow and reach their goals. The work that I do can sometimes be challenging, however, it is a rewarding role when one gets the chance to address the issues that affect them and make a difference in the lives of young people.

Client Testimonial

“The peer leadership program has done a great impact in my everyday life. I learned a lot in the one-month training we had and each session we had so far. This program has helped me to develop my self-confidence, communication skills and teamwork spirit, and from each workshop topic that we developed, I learned a lot from it. For example, I have learned how to have a healthy relationship with others and more about money management. I used to not be very good in my money management but now I have gained some skills on how I can manage my money efficiently. Overall, I have gained a great experience working in this program that has influenced my daily life as well as my relationship with others’

Christine Uwibambe

Collective Trauma and Its Impacts

By Ezat Mossallanejad & Megan Porter*

Introduction

In this article, a modest attempt will be made to study the nature of collective trauma by tracing its roots. Special attention will be given to the impact of collective trauma on individuals, communities and the entire society. Finally, suggestions will be made for alleviation of the devastating after-effects of the evil of collective trauma.

What is Collective Trauma?

A horrible, widespread, multifaceted and pervasive event or accident makes the entire community or the whole society traumatized – a peculiar complication that can be called Collective Trauma. War, colonialism, slavery, genocide, crimes against humanity, gross human rights violations, generalized violence, occupations, technological catastrophes and natural disasters (tsunamis, earthquakes, floods, etc.) can lead “to collective trauma. Collective trauma event,

injures in one sharp stab, penetrating all psychological defense barriers of participants and observers, allowing no space for denial mechanisms and thus leaving those affected with an acute sense of vulnerability and fragility (Alexander L., Veerman, A.L & Ganzevoort, R.R., 2001).

Collective trauma occurs when the trauma is experienced by the larger population for a lengthy period

of time, and as an extreme long-lasting burden. According to J. C. Alexander (2004), it,

occurs when members of a collective feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks on their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways (p. 1).

A horrifying event with tragic impacts on the lives of a section of the community may act as trigger to develop into a collective trauma with devastating effects on the entire society.



The community gathers together to mourn

On April 19, 1995, for example, a truck-bomb explosion outside the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City left 168 people dead and hundreds more injured. This horrifying event caused panic across the United States of America. It “reached far beyond the direct victims and their families.” (Neria, Y, Gross, R., Marshall, R. &

Susser, E., p. 144). More recently, in September 2010, a poor street vendor in Tunisia, named Mohammad Bouazizi, was harassed and humiliated by a municipal police and his wares were confiscated. His tragic self-immolation on September 17, 2010 and his consequent death on January 4, 2011, acted as a trigger for the uprising of hundreds thousands of people against President Ben Ali’s autocratic rule.

Sudden death, murder, assassination or execution of charismatic, popular personalities could lead to a nationwide or even global collective trauma.

The grief is not limited to those who intimately knew the public figure, but extends beyond to the members of the greater society who feel bonded in grief by sharing in a national trauma. Before the first World War in the year 1914, the Austrian Crown Archduke Franz Ferdinand was assassinated by a Serbian nationalist.

The trauma that quickly followed from that day in Sarajevo is undeniable. By the first week of August 1914, Europe was at war.... War and revolution, loss of homes and exile, terrified flight from invading armies, and torture at the hands of brutal dictators all became unwanted companions as the twentieth century progressed (King, G. & Woolmans, S., 2013, p. xxxiv).

Following the independence of India, the great leader Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated by some extremist elements.

India's leaders still reverentially place flowers on the hallowed ground where his corpse was cremated.... India's peasant poor and landless Harijans squat to mourn him every day (Wolpert, S., 2001. p. 262).



Twin Towers NYC September 11, 2001

It is unfortunate that collective trauma, by its nature is cumulative and is transmittable in space and time. The war in Europe, for example, developed into the World War II with the consequent collective trauma in many countries. This is true about the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001 that rapidly traumatized the whole world. In the course of time, the continuation of war and genocide lead to other traumatizing events such as mass exodus of civilians, enforced dislocation, massive imprisonment, abject poverty, sexual violence, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, massive discriminations and other types of horrible crimes against humanity.

Collective trauma is not the sum total of individual traumas. Rather than approaching it at the individual level, it should be studied as a complicated socio-anthropological phenomenon. It, however, leaves a large number of highly traumatized individuals within the affected community. Their tormenting pain, in turn, adds to collective trauma of the community. In late August 1979, following the military occupation of the Iranian Kurdistan by the order of Ayatollah Khomeini, a Kurdish gentlemen told the author, "no one in the world is more miserable than Kurds."

The group suffers from feelings of terror, anxiety, dissociation, powerlessness, humiliation, or dehumanization, symptoms which can lead to a collective experience of pain, anguish, and hopelessness. Not everyone has to have directly experienced the trauma; however, a sense of that trauma is developed through oral history, education, secondary experience and the media. It is not wholly negative in its manifestation as it may drive attempts at achieving equality or social change to improve future prospects for the affected group of people. This, of course, comes at the tremendous cost of human loss and suffering.

Impacts

Collective trauma might have different impacts on the affected population depending on the nature of the traumatizing events, preparedness, culture, historical precedence, the future prospects of victory or defeat, collective fortitude as well as local, national and international solidarity and relief activities as well as collective memory and consciousness of affected people. Following are some common impacts of the tragic events that lead to collective trauma.

Shock, Confusion and Feeling of Helplessness

Events of collective trauma may have shock, confusion and denial as its first outcome: "... in the collective one, they appear as one, with shock, disbelief, grief, and pain being the most dominant during the first week of the acute phase, followed by disorientation and denial" (Zinner E.S. & Williams, M.B., 1999, p. 127). Survivors may not initially understand the extent of loss and damage that have been inflicted upon them. As most of the collective trauma events are sudden and unprecedented, they make affected population initially speechless and thoughtless.



Massive Fear

Chronic fear is a byproduct of collective trauma, specifically when the traumatizing events come one after another and the survivors are incapable of responding to ongoing risks and danger and are always in a state of hyperarousal. Under the conditions of war and repeated bombardment of civilian targets, people are afraid of the future. Air raids and terrorist attacks could be followed by more terrorist attack and create ongoing collective fear.

Collective fear may reach a point that makes survivors hypervigilant and extremely sensitive to trivial issues because so many times in their daily experience of war and conflicts, a trivial issue has led to a catastrophe. Consequently, fear becomes part and parcel of their personality. A personal recollection

might be useful here; during four years of my imprisonment in Iran I used to jump with every small sound, feeling that they had come to take me to torture.

Silence



The ominous outcome of fear and intimidation is silence at a massive level. The celebrated Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire has made frequent remarks about culture of silence in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. In Iran the silence that comes out of collective trauma is referred to as 'graveyard silence'. Tyrannical regimes in countries like Saudi Arabia, Jordan, North Korea and Iran have imposed mass silence on the entire population by iron fists.

Let me a personal recollection here. News of the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 reached the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture a few minutes after the attack. A graveyard silence haunted the whole centre and paralyzed all doctors, counsellors, managers, staff, teachers and clients. Some two hours later, clients came to my office and with low shaking voice asking me about the consequences. As almost all our clients have refugee backgrounds, they asked me whether they would be deported back to torture, detention and execution. Few people had guts to analyze the tragic attack. The same night I was invited to a program by Canada Broadcast Corporation (CBC). I found the speakers divided into two camps: those who called for a war against the so-called axis of evil, and those who begged for restraint. I shared my opinion as follows; violence brings more violence and leads to a vicious circle of perpetual violence. I called upon the US government to go with a tremendous amount of restraint. A deep silence followed when I said that vio-

lence should be pacified by non-violent means.

Damage to the Community and Values

Under conditions of collective trauma, community links might be disrupted. A kind of struggle for survival may appear with its fatal impacts on resorting to the community for support. People may try to take care their own skins without bothering about others. The American sociologist Kai Theodor Erikson has gone too far to define collective trauma,

a blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of communality. The collective trauma works its way slowly and even insidiously into the awareness of those who suffer from it, so it does not have the quality of suddenness normally associated with 'trauma'. But it is a form of shock all the same, a gradual realization that the community no longer exists as an effective source of support and that an important part of the self has disappeared (Erikson, 1995, p. 233).

This is in our opinion the impacts of collective trauma rather than its definition. Under condition of collective trauma, people may distrust one another and find themselves unable to trust the social structure. Collective trauma "ruptures social ties, undermines communality, and destroys previous sources of support" (Veerman, A.L & Ganzevoort, R.R., 2001, p.145). The Jesuit priest and social psychiatrist Ignatius Martin-Baro has depict-



ed destruction of community ties under the condition of war marvelously:

"A critical split is produced in the framework of coexistence, leading to a radical differentiation between 'them' and 'us'...People, actions and things are no longer valued in and of themselves....Thus the basis for daily interaction disappears" (Aron & Caron, 1994, p. 112).

Cultural Bereavement

Collective trauma may result in a phenomenon that is referred to as "cultural bereavement" – alienation from one's values, culture and identity and the tragic loss of community structure. It may impose a destructive impact on the integrity of the cultural system and reduce cultural values to absurd traditions, meaningless ceremonies, empty rituals and fragmented collective memories. Services for dead people for example, loses its meaning and value when hundreds of innocent people die on a daily basis, in a whimsical manner by hostile forces. In the context of daily carnage and devastation, cultural consistency will cease to exist. What is at stake here is the destruction of humanitarian system of values. According to the Irish writer, William Butler Yeats:

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
the blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and every-
where
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity. (Vendler,
2007)

With the passage of time, it might be possible to reconstruct human and material damages. It is, however, next to impossible to repair the universal values that once united us. The community may lose making differentiation between the things that are acceptable and those that are unacceptable. In conditions of war and genocide, for example, the systemic massacre of vulnerable civilians (women, children and elders alike) and the destruction of houses, crops and livestock are justified by both sides as "collateral damages," or the inevitable price that must be paid for "freedom." Humanity loses ground in the process of the dehumanization of human beings. Torture, war crimes, and multi-

ple crimes against humanity are sanctioned and justified as necessary evils with almost no respect for customary international law.



The destruction of culture, according to one author, “inevitably gives rise to fierce nationalism, tribalism, and fundamentalism. All regressive forces act to release individuals behaviorally and ideologically from intolerable complexity that cannot be managed or used in a more productive way. When culture no longer can provide identity and meaning, it is these kinds of regressive forces that rush in to fill the vacuum.” (Alayarian, A., 2008, p. 53) The psychological impact of disintegration of culture is horrible; “paranoia substitutes for trust; aggression replaces nurturance and support; identity confusion or a negative identity substitutes for a positive identity.” (McKenna, B., 2003. p. 19)

We should not, however, make cultural disintegration in the context of the instances of collective trauma an absolute. Collective trauma acts both as centrifugal and centripetal force. While it has a tendency to push traumatized community away from its cultural centre, it can also “bring people together in a kind of social interaction” that will give a capacity to recreating the culture. History has proved that common pain and suffering could lead to people’s cultural cohesiveness. People are capable of collect-

ing pieces of their fragmented culture and reconstruct a new one during and after the termination of trauma. Cultural richness can always facilitate the process of community healing.

Identity Crisis

Identity crisis is a peculiar mental and psychological disorder under the condition of collective trauma. The affected population may feel their personality split, but worse than that, they are at risk of losing every shade of their personality. A person who goes through this process, may ask him/herself questions such as who am I? What is the philosophy of my absurd life? Is there any place and position for me in the society and in the world? Is there any use in speaking against injustice? Lewis Carroll illustrates this condition in his satirical masterpiece *Alice in Wonderland*. Alice is pretty sure that something terrible has happened to her: “Who in the world am I? Ah, that's the great puzzle!” She feels that something terrible has happened to her, “I cannot explain myself, I am afraid sir, because I am not myself.” (Carroll, L., 1869, p. 60)

Collective trauma can be overcome if affected people see the horizon bright. With the consecutive repetition of traumatizing events, the sky may turn dark and people find themselves in a vicious circle of misfortune. Identity crisis may lead affected population to feel humiliated by the atmosphere around them and by themselves. They may reach the point of unconditional denial of the positive aspects of all cultures. Cynicism as such is fatal because it denies the spiritual dignity of humanity and the standards of morality and justice elaborated by human race. Uneasiness, pessimism, lack of patience, ambiguity about everything, hatred, isolation, loneliness and frustration are only some symptoms of this crisis.

Feeling of Pessimism, Humiliation and Apathy

In massive traumatizing events, affected community may lose its faith on the meaning attached to human existence and the inherent goodness of human race. People may stop believing on their own competence, dignity and value. Collective trauma may lead to extreme pessimism:

The experience of trauma, at its worst, can mean not only a loss of confidence in the self but a loss of confidence in the scaffolding of family and community, in the structures of human government, in the larger logics by which humankind lives, and in the ways of nature itself (Erickson, K., 1995, p. 242).

Humiliation due to the defeat and helplessness could be another effect of traumatizing events. German unexpected defeat during World War I, for instance, acted as a fatal blow to the national pride. The massive feeling of confusion and humiliation prompted certain groups to justify the defeat by attributing it to conspiracy of external forces: Jewish people, socialists, communist and other “subversive elements”. This, among others, ultimately produced grounds for the rise of Hitler. According to an author:

Many historians view Hitler as a logical consequence of deep-seated flaws in German historical development. Yet Hitler's rise to power was more a consequence of the German defeat in the First World War than anything else. Without the war - and the fact that Germany lost it – it is almost certain Hitler would never have entered politics and the Nazi party would never have needed to exist” (Mc Donough, 2012, p. 33).



Apathy is another by-product of collective trauma. When human life loses its value and people witness hundreds of deaths and the killing of their loved ones, they may focus on their day to day surviv-

al and become indifferent to death and human calamities. In Nazi concentration camps, CAPOS were ready to commit all sorts of crimes to survive one more week. This situation has eloquently been illustrated by Shakespeare in his masterpiece, *Julius Czar*:

Over thy wounds now do I prophesy, –
 A curse shall light upon the limbs of men;
 Domestic fury and fierce civil strife
 Shall cumber all the parts of Italy,
 Blood and destruction shall be so in use,
 And dreadful objects so familiar,
 That mother shall but smile when they behold
 Their infants quartered with the hands of war,
 All pity choked with custom of fell deeds;
 Cry Havoc and let slip the dogs of war,
 That this foul deed shall smell above the earth
 With carrion men, groaning for burial
 (William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, Act III, scene 1, lines 255-275).

Violence and Revenge

In the atmosphere of man-made collective trauma hate can be developed by both victims and victimizers. One example is demonization of Palestinian and Arabs in general by Israeli fanatics and hate for Jews by average Palestinians. In a situation where violence speaks the last word, even victims of violence resort to violence and revenge to resist or resolve their problems. Terrorism can be explained as a violent reaction to State terror.

Under a shroud of collective trauma, survivors might find revenge as a psychological reaction. Following the September 11 attack, the U.S. government tried to appease public outrage by using war and violence against Afghanistan as the illusory enemy. This aggressive means resulted in more violence and terrorism – the state of war and terror in Afghanistan and Iraq. Media creates a hysteria at the national level reminiscent of what Mark Twain said in his piece entitled: “War Prayers”,

...nightly the packed mass meetings listened, panting, to patriot oratory which stirred the deepest depths of their hearts, and

which they interrupted at briefest intervals with cyclones of applause, the tears running down their cheeks the while; in the churches the pastors preached devotion to flag and country, and invoked the God of Battles, beseeching His aid in our good cause in outpourings of fervid eloquence which moved every listener (Twain, M., 2006, p. 739).

Children under generalized violence, war, or genocide may approach violence as a short cut and enact violence in their adulthood.

Violence brings more violence and entraps the whole community into a vicious circle of perpetual violence. It is the biggest risk to future peace efforts. According to Martin Luther King:

The ultimate weakness of violence is that it is a descending spiral begetting the very thing it seeks to destroy, instead of diminishing evil, it multiplies it. Through violence you may murder the liar, but you cannot murder the lie, nor establish the truth. Through violence you may murder the hater, but you do not murder hate. In fact, violence merely increases hate. Returning violence for violence multiplies violence, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that (As quoted Chang & Terry, 2007, p. 356).



Martin Luther King

Impacts on Women

Instances of collective trauma like war, genocide and crimes against humanity have heavy tolls on women. They may be the first victims of casualties. In a state of war or ethnic conflict, where certain people are regarded as enemies, all sorts of war crimes, genocide or heinous crimes against humanity are justified and even sanctioned by both the belligerent governments and extremist groups. Women suffer due to the inequality with which gender is treated and as means of retaliation and putting shame to the other party.



World War II Japanese comfort women

During World War II, for example, 200,000 'comfort women' or 'ianfu' from Korea, China, Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia, Vietnam, Taiwan, the Dutch East Indies, Indonesia, and Japan were enslaved. They were forced into sexual servitude to Japanese Imperial Armed forces before and during the war. Girls, as young as 12, were taken from homes through coercion, intimidation and deception. Most came from poor, rural backgrounds. As a result of multiple rapes many of the women were later unable to bear children and were never able to marry (Nobe, 2009, p. 25). Years later, a handful of these women broke silence by organizing the Women's International War Crimes Tribunal that in year 2000 found Emperor Hirohito of Japan guilty of crimes against humanity posthumously (Hawkesworth, 2006, p. 79). During the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988), military and paramilitary forces from both sides raped women in

their occupied zones, easily finding moral and religious sanctions for their actions. *Women were raped or gang-raped* during Rwandan genocide of 1994:

In almost every case, these crimes were inflicted upon women after they had witnessed the torture and killings of their relatives, and the destruction and looting of their houses. Some women were forced to kill their own children before or after being raped (Nowrojee, 1996, p. 39).

Rape was also used as a weapon of war during genocide in former Yugoslavia. Serbian forces raped women publicly in the presence of friends, relatives and family members “in a pattern of intimidation and abuse focused on forcing the Croatian or Bosnian population to flee” (Bames, 2005, p. 300).



Rape, *sexual slavery*, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilization, and many other forms of sexual violence have been widespread in many war-trodden regions of the world including Sierra Leone, Uganda and Sudan. In Sudan, for example, large numbers of militia and government forces killed civilians and abducted and raped dozens of women and girls due to their ethnic origin calling them ‘slaves’ as they “beat them with whips, gun butts or fists” (Human Rights Watch, 2007, p. 38).

In situations of collective trauma, women suffer from all sorts of health hazards. They live in constant fear and harsh conditions with all sorts of diseases untreated. Miscarriage and dying from pregnancy are widespread. Mothers’ hope for the future of their children is shattered by witnessing them play the games of combatants using stick guns. With husbands gone, surviving women have to deal with everything single-handedly: collecting wood, cooking,

washing, taking care of children, etc. Millions of women in sites of collective trauma have lost everything: their husbands, children, siblings, relatives, homes and lives. Millions more are forced to live a sub-human life in camps inside and outside their home countries. Among clients at the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture (CCVT), there is a woman from Afghanistan who has lost her husband, six children, siblings and parents. At the age of early 40s, she looks like an octogenarian woman. She is one of our scores of clients coming from war-ravaged regions of the world.

Refugee and displaced women may continue to suffer after the instances of collective trauma are over. Starvation and destitution may force them to exchange sex for their and their children’s sheer survival. This has resulted in their infliction with HIV-AIDS and other contagious diseases.

Despite their tormenting experiences of torture, inhuman atrocities and irreparable bereavements, I have found women survivors, who are my clients at the CCVT, highly resilient. I have seen them demonstrating astonishing power, braveness, courage and life-force in promoting their coping capacities to overcome their traumas. One of our clients, who has lost all her family members in war, attends our English classes enthusiastically and shares her meager resources with other survivors generously.

Impacts on children



Trauma reflected in the face of a child

A great human tragedy is the recruitment of children by armed groups and government forces to fight in wars. They use children because they can easily brainwash them to obey orders and engage in fearless killings. The phenomenon of child soldiers is an ever-increasing problem. There are currently 36 countries where it is reported that children under 18 are participating in armed conflicts. (Barnitz, 1999). The exact number of child soldiers is unknown, but it is likely to run into more than 300,000, despite the Optional Protocol to the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* and the *Rome Statute for International Criminal Court* that have prohibited the participation of children in armed conflict. Children are conscripted, kidnapped or pressured into joining armed groups. Warlords have converted thousands of innocent children into partici-



A group of child soldiers

pants of armed conflicts by providing them with lightweight weapons and turning children, even those under 10 years of age, to effective killers.

Collective trauma events take their toll on children and robbing them of their childhood. In some conflict zones, the fighting is older than the children are. There are children of war who have never experienced any other life. In some areas of heavy bombardment, when the bombs begin to drop, children run to shelters in pairs, one or two with their father and others with their mother. They are never run together: if a bomb hits, the whole family will be wiped out.

Disruption of children's education and destruction of schools is another sinister by-product of massive traumatizing events. The tragic memory of the massacre of Beslan children in their school is still

fresh in minds. In September 2004, the hostage taking tragedy at a school in Beslan (a city in southern Russia) by a Chechen armed group and the counter attack of the Russian security forces resulted in the massacre of more than 350 people, 150 of them small children. This tragic event speaks to the outrageous disdain for the most basic principle of human decency by both the government and rebel forces.

Children are innocent victims of war, genocide and crimes against humanity. Childhood plays a crucial role in building the personality of each and every individual. Horrible traumas leave negative impacts on the social and emotional development of children. Devastating psychological effects may appear later in their adult lives. Younger children suffer more due to their vulnerability. Children's trauma may later develop into a collective trauma at the social level. Surviving children are at great risk. By being direct witnesses to the massive slaughter of their families and the destruction of their community, they may constantly blame themselves for not doing enough to protect their loved ones. This feeling of absolute helplessness and guilt of conscience may remain with them throughout their lives.

It is a well-known fact that children have a powerful sense of imitation. In conflict zones, they are at risk of imitating violence committed by belligerent forces. They see a gun as a source of power and therefore the solution to all problems. They internalize the indoctrination that killing is a shortcut to overcome all difficulties. This is a great danger to the future peace within communities when children of war grow into a generation of adults. They may approach war or violence as the universal solution to all problems.

Children affected by instances of collective trauma rarely trust others and are not normally capable of establishing close relationships at the social and individual levels. The trauma may remain with them for many years after its initial experience. They may lose the joy of childhood and behave like gloomy old persons with a strong sense of cynicism.

*With special thanks to Claudia Rameriz and Lara Blanch

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Our Understanding of Trauma Experience and its Effects

By Jala Rizek



Our understanding of trauma experience developed through domestic disorder and public upheavals. What is perceived as traumatic has varied depending on the social context, the ruling party, the targeted group, and most prominently the political, public and financial consequences. The effects of trauma on victims however, were overlooked for the longest time.

Freud brought up childhood sexual abuse and women victims of rape at a time when patriarchy ruled and “no man had sinned”. It was not until World War I that trauma’s effects on male veterans became a major concern. Even then, the trauma that was assessed in war veterans was not to be compared to the trauma Freud had described earlier and termed “Hysteria”. Despite the overlap of symptomology seen in women victims and the symptoms seen in male veterans, no connection was made between the two, and the syndrome observed in male veterans was termed “shell shock” by Charles Myers. Relating Hysteria to veterans’ symptoms was absurd; men are psychologically immune and such an insinuation would have been infamous. Kardiner, a psychoanalyst in New York, ventured further into the study of combat neurosis or shell shock, ultimately recognizing that war neurosis is a form of Hysteria. However, these associations were stigmatized and victims were blamed.

Pending the Second World War, interest in combat neurosis was revived and it was then acknowledged that all men are at risk of being psychologically affected, or traumatized by exposure to

war. Nonetheless, it wasn’t until 1980, after the Vietnam War, that the effect of trauma was officially taken up and a pattern of symptoms was formally included as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders Third edition (DSM-III). The diagnosis included the triad symptoms of re-experiencing, avoidance, and hyperarousal, observed in both male veterans in the Vietnam War and women survivors of rape in the 1970s. Both of these experiences, being a veteran and a rape victim, were and are still considered as an out of the ordinary human experience, which is infrequent and rarely experienced in daily life.

The celebrated psychiatrist Prof. Judith Lewis Herman (born 1942) has contributed towards understanding and treatment of trauma. She is the author of *Trauma and Recovery*. Modern views of trauma however, would argue that it is more common than was once thought, and closer to home than one would



Prof. Judith Lewis Herman

like.

The work of Judith Herman introduced complex trauma to include chronic and prolonged stressors, which go beyond what acute stressors, or single traumas cause. Herman’s work emphasizes that what makes trauma unique is its effects on people’s adaptive systems and coping mechanisms. Survivors of childhood trauma are likely to have been exposed to

multiple and repeated stressors, to them trauma is not unique, it is the stressors' interactions with development and their interference with adaptive living that makes them unique.

Today, we know that millions of children have witnessed and experienced domestic violence and abuse at home, millions of children are labourers, millions of children are in residential care, hundreds of thousands are child soldiers, more than one billion children live in countries with civil war, and by the time we measure trauma in adulthood, 80% of the people have been exposed to at least one traumatic experience in their lifetime. Even though these numbers put together may seem inconceivable, it is only rational to conclude that trauma exists in many shapes and forms and is not restricted to occasional natural disasters, unfortunate motor-vehicle accidents, or atrocious rape cases. One then cannot address the wide prevalence of trauma without reaching out to global policy making. Still, one can acknowledge the lingering, persistent and complex effects that prolonged and multiple traumas have on its victims.

Trauma exposure's effects are diverse, depending on the age of the victim, the degree of exposure, the frequency of exposure, existing strengths and support system, and environment as a whole. The effects are complex due to their multiple manifestations and multidimensional nature. They can come up in individuals at different levels through various systems including, but not limited to, behaviour, emotion, thought processing, decision-making, relationships, self-regulation, biology, and neurology. These difficulties or impairments, however divergent, should not misguide our attention from trauma, because we would then risk overlooking the original source, the trauma.

To address trauma we have to understand the context surrounding it, is it a one time event (e.g. earth quake), or an ongoing event, has it begun and ended or is there no end point in sight (e.g. war zones)? Is the individual dependent on the source of trauma (e.g. child domestic abuse), and many more concerns to be addressed of which are cultural, familial and individual. Our understanding of trauma might have developed in a male-dominated field, with criteria based on male veterans' experience, but trauma as understood nowadays is certainly neither a

specific experience nor is it a trigger of a specific pattern of symptoms.

The majority of people growing up today are likely to directly or indirectly experience a traumatic event. We can help people overcome and cope with these experiences by proactively implementing strength-based community wide intervention programs, which help enrich the society and maintain mental health. Negative experiences are inevitable, but psychopathology is not. If ending a war is not an option and having been neglected and abused is an unchangeable past, society is the one domain we are in control of, one that we can build to foster sources of support and resources of enrichment so that individuals can grow beyond their adversities.

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Living with Vicarious Trauma

By Carolyn Filteau, MA, LLM, PhD



1. Introduction

There is increased awareness in the therapeutic field that indirect or secondary exposure to traumatic events experienced by another can have an impact on the personal and working lives of those involved in their support as well as the quality of care delivered. An important step in trauma work, therefore, is recognizing and accepting that secondary or vicarious trauma is a not infrequent occurrence. (Pearlman and Saakvitne, 1995)

Such indirect trauma on counsellors has been defined mainly in terms of *secondary traumatic stress (STS)* and *vicarious traumatization (VT)*. STS describes the potential negative impact on the functioning of those who are exposed to trauma indirectly, such as family members or the therapist who works with trauma victims (Bride, Radey & Figley, 2007). This paper is mostly concerned with VT experienced by those who work with trauma survivors. Vicarious trauma presents a serious threat since it can result in disruptive and painful psychological effects that can persist for months or years if left untreated (Hensel et al, 2015). While STS has been known to occur rapidly and without warning, it is not so with VT, which results from exposure to survivors over time (Rae Jenkins et al, 2011).

Symptoms of VT in therapeutic work are characterized by Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)-like intrusive imagery, including flashbacks, dreams and intrusive thoughts (McCann and Pearlman, 1990). VT can have a deep effect on counsellors' world-and self- view, sense of meaning, identity, professional functioning, and personal relationships (Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995; Sexton, 1999) and thus poses a danger to those working in the field and potentially impacts negatively on those in need of support. This makes it important for organizations offering support to trauma victims to recognize individual and organizational factors that could influence onset and to ensure there are coping mechanisms available for the counselling staff.

According to Laura Jacobsen Wrenn, the DSM-IV-TR (APA 2000, 463) definition of trauma is the most widely accepted in the field. Trauma is defined as

Exposure to an extreme traumatic stressor involving direct personal experience of an event that involves actual or threatened death or serious injury, or other threat to one's physical integrity, or witnessing an event that involves death, injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of another person, or learning about unexpected or violent death, serious harm, or threat of death or injury experiences by a family member or other close associate. (Wrenn, 2005, 11)

Figley's (1995) definition of secondary traumatic stress refers to the natural, consequent behaviors and emotions resulting from knowledge about a traumatizing event experienced by a significant other. It is the stress resulting from *helping or wanting to help* a traumatized or suffering person. Baldwin (1995) suggests a traumatic event typically involves the actual or threatened death or injury to one's self or others, around which feelings of fear, helplessness or horror were present. According to Hesse, traumatic events

can include things like war, rape or sexual assault, physical or emotional abuse, or the death of a loved one. (Hesse, 2002) Seven major schema have been identified by Hesse as the most prone to being altered by experiences with trauma: “ 1) frame of reference about the self and the world, 2) trust; 3) safety; 4) power and control, 5) independence; 6) esteem; and 7) intimacy.” (Hesse 2002, 298).

Frame of reference refers to the world view of an individual, and may cause the individual to question their own identity (Hesse 2002, 298). Learning about cruelty, deception or betrayal may cause the therapist to become suspicious or cynical



and lead to a lack of trust. At the same time they may experience increased vulnerability and fear towards their own safety along with a loss of power or control and/or independence. Other effects of vicarious trauma may include a loss of self-esteem and a lowering of one’s feelings of self-worth. A loss of faith in humanity may also block the therapist’s feelings of intimacy (Pearlman and Saakvitne, 1995; McCann and Pearlman, 1999).

Therapists may become plagued by images of the client’s traumatic event(s). If a therapist begins to lose trust in their own professional expertise, they may overmedicate or overhospitalize clients (Hesse 302). There is a moral and ethical imperative for

health workers to acknowledge and address the secondary trauma before they begin to “jeopardize the best interests of clients” (Hesse 2002, 309).

Recent revisions to the diagnostic criteria for posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in the fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) have made explicit that repeated exposure to the aversive details of a traumatic event during the course of one’s professional duties qualifies as a Criterion A stressor. (American Psychiatric Association, 2013)

Various conceptually overlapping terms including STS, compassion fatigue (CF), vicarious traumatization (VT), and burnout have been used to refer to the effects of secondary trauma exposure. STS and CF closely reflect the symptoms of PTSD. VT relates more to the transformation of the helper’s inner experience resulting from empathic engagement with a client’s trauma and the resultant shift in cognitive schemas about onset, other, and the world. (Bride et al., 2007)

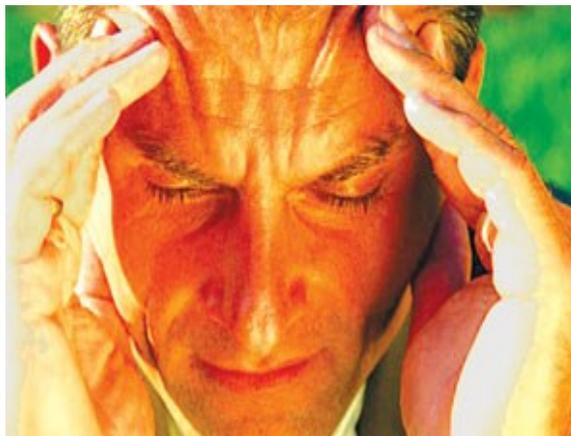
Vicarious traumatization is described by McCann and Pearlman (1999) as the psychological changes in self that occur as the result of work with trauma victims. Vicarious traumatization is defined by Pearlman and Saakvitne (1995) as “the transformation in the inner experience of the therapist that comes about as the result of empathic engagement with client’s trauma material.” (Ibid, 31)

Vicarious trauma can be seen as an occupational hazard which can come about as a result of a worker’s significant exposure to a client’s traumatic experience. Exposure can cause psychological and/or physical symptoms which are similar to what clients are feeling; e.g., nightmares, nausea, behavioural and performance impact, absenteeism and sick days. It can affect their organizational capability and capacity and the management of their time. It can range from an occasional experience to very serious. Those affected can experience low moods, and hypersensitivity. A lot of the symptoms are sometimes present in depression or Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) so that there could be some confusion about what it is. If counsellors are not well trained they may not understand what is happening to them. VT affects behaviour beyond the workplace and can affect the relationship between the support worker and their spouse, children and/or friends.

Vicarious trauma means the re-experiencing of the symptoms of another person's traumatic experience. This can occur when someone has heard, seen or read traumatic material and is being affected. It can also occur when one's own personal trauma is retriggered when exposed to another's trauma. The trauma does not have to be identical; for example, it could be triggered by hearing about the loss of a baby which triggers grief about the death of the worker's father. It is almost as if the counsellor puts themselves in the shoes of the other. Counsellors hear horrible stories every day and their own experience sometimes weaves into the experience of the client. Cunningham (2003) conducted research to investigate the effect of different kinds of trauma and changes in the cognitive stream. The research showed that therapists working primarily with sexually-abused clients "have more disruption in other-trust and other esteem schemas than therapists working with cancer."

2. The Difference between Vicarious Trauma and Other Workplace Stress

There is a difference between vicarious trauma and other workplace stress. However, other workplace stress can mitigate or exacerbate VT. A lot of symptoms look the same as VT. Burn out is stress that happens when the workplace demands are beyond the resources available. Burn out generally affects someone at work only. They may be able to feel good on the weekend, for example, or out of work. It is not about being exposed to trauma. It can happen in any kind of work place. Burnout is defined as "A state of physical, emotional and mental exhaustion caused by long term involvement in emotionally demanding situations." (Pines and Aronson 1988, 9). A Type A perfectionist may often feel stress symptoms. There is also compassion fatigue which can affect workers who have a homogeneous client load. Because they see the same problems all the time, the worker can start to feel less compassion for their clients coming in. The signs and symptoms are similar. One of the



effects of VT that is different from burnout is that it has an effect on a person's cognitive world view. The individual begins to think differently about safety, and trust, and this can have a negative impact on how the person perceives themselves.

Workplace stress is not necessarily vicarious trauma – it is stress. It can be brought on by the workplace environment; e.g., doing reports which have a deadline, heavy caseloads, not enough downtime, and a lack of proper self-care during the day and juggling different projects at the same time. It does not necessarily mean the worker is re-experiencing someone else's trauma. One can, however, easily turn into the other. Too much stress can easily lead to compassion fatigue or Vicarious Trauma. Vicarious trauma specifically occurs with caregivers who work with survivors. Workplace stress can usually be left at work, but VT is taken home and can affect the

worker even if they don't think about it. VT can bring about depression, sleepless nights, a general feeling of sadness, or bad dreams.

Burnout, on the other hand, is not specific to exposure to traumatic material and can affect individuals in any professional role as it develops in a setting of prolonged exposure to stressful demands in work. (Cieslak et

al, 2014)

3. Trauma Studies

Qualitative research on vicarious trauma conducted by Wrenn (2005) reveals the kind of conditions that are traumatic for social workers in the workplace along with factors that help workers to protect themselves from vicarious trauma. Questions asked include (1) "What things do you do to manage workplace stress?" (2) What circumstances would you describe as being potentially traumatic for social workers in the workplace?" (Wrenn 2005, 75)

Responses to question (1) can be divided into stress management techniques in the workplace, stress management techniques employed outside the work-

place, and maintaining good boundaries between the two. Good time management skills were emphasized along with limited hours, vacations and leave time. Other themes related to caseload management and referring to colleagues. Peer support was a strong theme, along with staff meetings, debriefing with the team and “venting to administration.” (Wrenn 2005, 76). Retreats, staff building events and trauma consultation were also cited as helpful in reducing stress. Workers also stressed the importance of continuing education and training “especially related to safety and stress management issues.” (Wrenn 2005, 76) Outside the workplace it was found that some social workers reduce stress by leaving work at work, through exercising self-care, maintaining outside interests, having support from friends and family and spirituality. (Wrenn 2005, 76)

Regarding Question (2) What circumstances would you describe as being potentially traumatic for social workers in the workplace? seventeen percent described work setting or environmental issues as potentially traumatic. Eight percent (N=16) described compassion fatigue or STS as being potentially traumatic. Eight percent (N=15) described management or administration related issues as potentially traumatic. Ten percent described exposure to client violence as potentially traumatic (N=19). Others described suicide exposure, co-workers’ inappropriate behaviour, client violence and a lack of available resources as potentially traumatic (N=19).



Personal tactics for preventing vicarious trauma include rest and relaxation, healthy eating and exercising, self-reflection and creative expression. (Conrad and Perry, 200) Contact with nature, or caring for pets or plants can be restorative. Spirituality, including meditation and yoga or participation in a religious or community group, can be helpful. Some have found personal psychotherapy very nurturing (Hesse 2002). A team approach involves regular meetings to cover administration and clinical issues.

Organizational methods include professional training or development of staff, peer support groups, and supportive supervisors. Providing therapists with safe, private and comfortable space in which to have sessions is very important (Pearlman and Saakvitne, 1996; Yassen, 1995). Workers require adequate benefits, and opportunities to express themselves in staff meetings. Administration should be encouraged to implement an open-door policy by which administrators are easily accessible. Policies should include benefits and rights for workers who experience secondary trauma.

4. Concluding remarks

In the field of the support worker, exposure to trauma is a not infrequent threat. Part of the professional identity is to work directly with disenfranchised populations in direct contact. Social workers are exposed to profoundly serious trauma. The necessary empathetic engagement makes workers vulnerable to vicarious trauma. This is an area that deserves

a great deal of research and the development of knowledge to aid in the recognition of its existence and measures by organizations working for the support of trauma survivors to protect and assist their workers. If this area is ignored, or not adequately addressed, not only will the support worker suffer but so will clients, jeopardizing the important work that has been mandated.

Dr. Carolyn Filteau recently completed a PhD at Osgoode Law School and recently completed an international research project for the York Centre for International Security Studies (YCISS). Her thesis title is Rights and Responsibilities: What are the Prospects for R2P in the International/Transnational Arena? Her research interests include International law, humanitarian intervention, legal theory, global conflict, sovereignty, the responsibility to protect,

global governance, nongovernmental organizations and conflict resolution. She is currently devoting her time pro bono to the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture.

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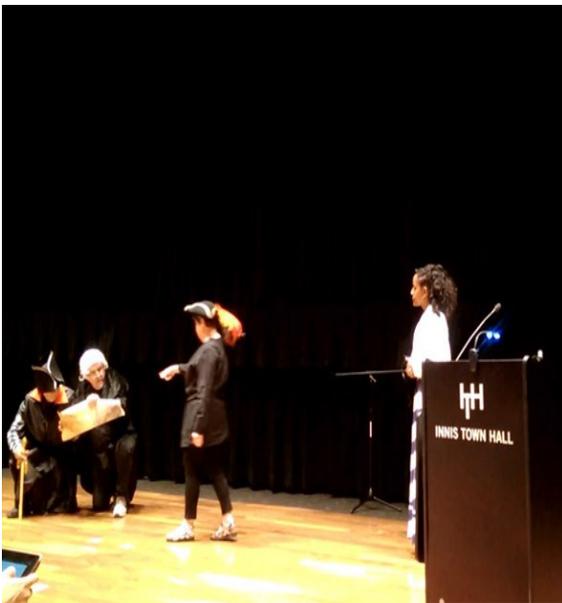
Retributive Justice

By: Ezat Mossallanejad

Characters:

1. Chief Justice – David Burt
2. Sheriff – Ezat Mossallanejad
3. Housewife – Elena Solokhina
4. Peasant's Daughter – Kubra Zaifi
5. Petty Landowner - Carlos Ruiz Ibanez
6. Petty Landowner's wife - Domine Rutayisire
7. Sister - Maheen Hyder
8. Woman Survivor of Torture - Sara Nesib
9. Emperor's Envoy – Donna Midanik

(The scene shows a courtroom. A table and a chair are seen in the highest section of the scene with a big picture of the angel of justice with a scale in its hands and a very big picture of the emperor. The sheriff enters with red uniform, a big hat and a long sword in his hand)



Emperor's faces the Sheriff & Chief Justice and convey's the Emperor's command

Introduction / Scene 1:

Sheriff *(with a loud voice)*: O' you free citizens of the land, rise! Respect and bow! His most highness the honorable chief justice, the judge of all judges is arriving.

(Everyone stands. The chief with a garment and a hammer in right hand arrives)

Chief Justice: *(He puts the hammer on the table, faces the court, raises his hands)*:

In the name of His Majesty, the King of Kings, the Emperor of East and West, I now begin this court. You may be seated ... Justice is our number one concern. Bring your grievances to my attention. I ... look into your complaints carefully, and I will make sure that justice is served. Sheriff, come forward and raise your sword!

(Sheriff obeys).

Chief Justice: ... and what is this?

Sheriff: This is the Sword of Justice Your Most High.

Chief Justice: Justice is *the* best guarantee for the smooth functioning of the society. Justice can never be served without sword. Justice is served when the offender suffers equally to his or her offence. *(to the sheriff)* Now, bring the first plaintiff or defender to me!

(Sheriff leaves and returns with a middle-age woman)

Scene 2:

Sheriff: She is a housewife who lives with her husband and five small children in a rundown house, neighboring the most respected merchant of our city. She has a complaint against her neighbor

Chief Justice: *(to the plaintiff)* Don't be afraid. Lodge your complaint with this court of justice. The court is impartial -- justice is blind.

Housewife: Your honor, my rich neighbor orders his servants to throw dirt and garbage into my small house with the intension of forcing me to sell my beloved inherited home to him.

Chief Justice: *(To the Sheriff)* Such gross injustice is a crime against His Majesty our loving emperor. *(To Sheriff)* Send a garbage expert to measure the amount of dirt and garbage in the house of this poor woman. Then, order your enforcement officers to scatter the same amount of garbage in every corner of the merchant's house.

Sheriff: Blow to blow. This is the best judgment, your Most High.

Housewife: This is not what I want. I want him to stop and compensate for the damages that he has done to my home.

Sheriff: Don't argue! Don't protest! Justice is Justice!

Housewife: This sort of judgment does not serve anyone . . .

Chief Justice: You are offending the court. I can order your arrest. However, I forgive you due to your ignorance. *(He hits the table with his hammer)* Your case is dismissed.

(Sheriff takes the woman away by force).

Chief Justice: Next?

Scene 3: *(Sheriff enters with a young girl)*

Sheriff: This is the daughter of a peasant whose lord blinded her father by sheer accident. She is seeking justice from the honorable court.

Chief Justice: Come forward! Don't panic! Tell me when and how this tragedy happened.

Peasant girl: It happened yesterday during the twilight when it is hard to distinguish between a lamb and a wolf. We had just finished our work. My father



The last scene of the skit

was far behind. The lord took him for a beast and threw a stone toward him that hit his left eye. He is now completely blind, as my father lost his right eye in an accident during his childhood.

Sheriff: Our investigations confirm the plaintiff's claim. The lord has agreed to compensate for his mistake.

Peasant girl: Your honor, we have lost the breadwinner of the family; the amount our lord is proposing is not enough to support our family.

Chief Justice: The goal of punishment is retribution for the wicked actions. Any other role that punishment may serve for the individual or community is absolutely immaterial.

Sheriff (Bows): Your wisdom is supreme, Your Highness. Please let us know the verdict so I can enforce it immediately.

Chief Justice: *(To the peasant girl)* My daughter, do not worry about the lord, everybody is equal before the rules and verdicts of our Great Emperor. Now tell me -- do you have the stone that blinded your father.

Peasant girl: No, your highness

Chief Justice: Can you go and find the same stone in the field?

Peasant girl: No, your highness. There are hundreds of similar stones scattered . . . everywhere.

Chief Justice: Go and get a similar stone in terms of weight and size. Tomorrow at twilight go to the field. Your Sheriff will bring your lord there. Take your father with you and ask him to throw the stone from the same distance towards the lord repeatedly till one hits his left eye.

Peasant girl: Your highness! First of all, my father's stone will not hit the target because he's blind. Secondly, the blindness of our lord will not help us at all. We will lose another supporter.

Sheriff: (*While turning his sword around*) Do not bargain! Do not plea! Ours is retributive justice. It has its own logic. Eye for eye!

Chief Justice: The verdict is straightforward and irreversible!

Peasant girl: Then, with your kind permission. I withdraw my complaint.

Chief Justice: (*While hitting the table with his hammer*). The case is dismissed! (*Peasant girl leaves*)

Chief Justice: Next?

Scene 4: (*Sheriff leaves and brings a man, clean and neat, with respect*)

Sheriff: Your Most High, this man is a petty landowner with a good record of paying his taxes regularly. He is on the verge of collapse, because his land partner has crossed the sacred boundary of friendship and has raped his wife with no shame and regret.

Chief Justice: Horrible! Dreadful! Rape is not tolerated in this great land under the rule of His Imperial Majesty, the King of Kings, the Emperor of the East and West. (*To the man*) Do you have the courage to enforce the court's verdict yourself?

Petty Landowner: (*Put his hands on his eyes and bows*). Yes, your honor, for sure.

Chief Justice: (*to Sheriff*) Take this man to his partner's house with six strong enforcement officers

and supervise the entire process of the implementation of this sacred verdict and report back to me.

Sheriff: (*keeling before the judge*): Your Most High, everybody is duty-bound to obey your orders. Please guide us -- What action should be taken?

Chief Justice: Let this oppressed man deliver equal punishment to his victimizer by raping *his* wife.

Sheriff: Tit for tat! Praise with you Your Most High.

Petty Landowner: It is impossible, Your Highness!

Sheriff: Impossible is impossible. Why impossible? Why do you block the path to justice?

Petty Landowner: His wife is my sister.

Chief Justice: Justice must be served anyhow. In this exceptional case you are sanctioned to rape his sister or his mother or any women close to him -- Whomever you choose. We are on the side of the victims.

(*A woman from the audience shouts*)

Petty Landowner's wife: "Liar! Liar! Shame on you." (*She finds her way to the courtroom. She stares at the petty landowner and turns her look to the chief justice and his sheriff*)

Petty Landowner's wife: This man is my husband. His land partner, whom he accused of raping me, is my brother who has married his sister. Greed has blinded my stupid husband. He has fabricated the non-sense of the raping of "*his wife*" (*with emphasis*), *me*, to appropriate half of the land my brother owns.

Chief Justice: (*angry; shouting at the sheriff*) Why did you give me this other story?

Petty Landowner's wife: I regret to say that my husband has bribed your wonderful sheriff.

Sheriff: Your Most High; God is supreme! I just repeated what this man told us. I did not add or de-

lete anything from his allegations.

Chief Justice: The partner (*Looking at the man*) and brother (*Looking at woman*) and his wife, this man's sister, should testify in this court. We need to make further investigations. The case is deferred. (*He hits the table with his hammer. Sheriff takes the man and his wife out the court*)

Chief Justice: (*To himself*). The narrow path of the justice is complicated and it spirals. It is like the sharp edge of a razor.

Scene 5: (*Sheriff arrives with a young girl*):

Sheriff: Your Most High! This girl is the sister of a dangerous . . .

Sister (*Interrupts Sheriff loudly and angrily*): You shut up! Stupid magistrate! I have a few words that I want to share with the Chief Justice in the name of our Great Emperor.

Chief Justice: (*With a kind and gentle voice*) Raise your concerns my child! Be as open as possible! Justice is above all: me, the sheriff and everybody else in this court. Speak, my dear child, loudly and articulately! There will be no prejudice and negative consequences against you.

Sister: Last year during a trial in your court of retribution, you sentenced my innocent brother to death for murder . . . and your sheriff carried out the verdict on the same day. This shattered my family: My brother's wife committed suicide, my mother died of a stroke and my father could not tolerate his great losses and he passed away tragically.

Sheriff: Her brother was the most cruel and dangerous murderer of the city . . .

Sister: Didn't I tell you, idiot, to shut your mouth? I have not yet finished my submission.

Chief Justice: I empathize with you, my child. You must understand that justice must be served . . . and to have justice we must all pay a price.

Sister: What you serve is not justice; it's a mockery of justice. My brother was totally inno-

cent. He was beloved by everyone. We were shocked when everybody believed your judgment about him.

Sheriff: This is a blatant lie Your Highness.

Sister: Shut-up!

Chief Justice: (*To the sister*) How do know about your brother's innocence?

Sister: The real murderer is dying now. He confessed to his murder today and asked for my pardon as the only survivor in the family. He has explained everything in this written statement that is signed by him and endorsed by one hundred neighbors.

(*The sister opens a scroll and hands it over to the Sheriff who hands it over to the chief justice who starts reading it carefully. A disturbing silence prevails the court*)

Chief Justice: Your poor brother sacrificed his red drops for the cause of justice. He is a martyr enjoying the bliss of God's eternal paradise – the Garden of Eden. You must be joyful about that. (*Silence*)

Sister (*Breaks the silence*): I don't care about Garden of Eden. I want three things from you: First, I want you to publish a declaration that states



Introducing the new Sheriff and Chief Justice

my brother did not commit any crime, second, a public apology and third, compensation for the distress you have caused.

First, publishing a post-mortem declaration

Sheriff: Your Most High, the young girl before your highly respected court of justice does not believe in life after death. What punishment you suggest for her?

Chief Justice: Yes, Mr. Sheriff, this is an outright blasphemy. It is a crime against God Almighty and against His Majesty King of Kings the Emperor of East and the West. However, she is young, sentimental and ignorant.

Sheriff: *(Kneels)* What is your verdict Your Highness.

Chief Justice: I shall remain merciful and give her the opportunity to think. Keep her under house arrest 'til she comes back to this court and repents.

(Sheriff takes the sister away with violence and humiliation. He returns agitated, breathing loudly)

Chief Justice: *(To Sheriff)* It has been a hectic day; we have heard four cases. Anybody else?

Sheriff: No one, Your Most High. Under the shadow of your justice lambs and wolves drink water side by side from the same stream.

Scene 6: *(A woman from the audience shouts)*

Woman Survivor of torture: "I have a serious complaint. I am a survivor of torture"

(She is haggard with lots of bruises in her face. Her right hand is broken. She tries to reach the court. The sheriff struggles with her to prevent her approach.)

Sheriff: *(To the woman)* This is the sacred court of justice. You cannot disrespect the court by jumping in it without due permission.

Women Survivor: My complaint is against you, Mr. Sheriff, and I don't need your permission. *(Staring at the Sheriff)* You ordered my arrest, detention, and torture out of sheer suspicion . . .

Chief Justice: Everybody is equal before our justice system. I can hear your complaint against sheriff without prejudice. Now tell me how long you were in detention and why?

Woman Survivor: He locked me incommunicado in solitary confinement for seven months. He never told me the reason, and when he came to know that he had taken me for another person, he kicked me out of jail with outrageous humiliations.

Chief Justice: *(To woman)* If you prove your claim, you will be entitled to the torture of your victimizer in the same way and to the same proportion that he perpetrated against you. *(To Sheriff)* What do you say, Mr. Sheriff? You are now sitting on a hot spot.

Sheriff: This woman has a great sense of fantasy. We have an excellent system of registration in our detention centres. You may check for yourself Your Most High. She has never been in our detention facilities. I have never seen her in my life. God is Supreme and omnipresent. . . .

Woman Survivor: *(To Sheriff)* Look at my eyes!

Chief Justice: *(Interrupts the woman)* Do you have any proof? Any witness?

Woman Survivor: Torture always happens behind closed doors. My proof is in the scars all over my body plus my broken hand and ribs.

Sheriff: God knows the reason. She might have fought with her husband or fallen down from a height or received these injuries while trying to break into a rich man's house.

Woman Survivor: Your Highness, torture is surrounded with secrecy and denial. It is strictly prohibited by the very transparent decree of our beloved emperor. I want you to be transparent and just in your judgment. Will you?

Chief Justice: It's interesting. What we have here are two witnesses with two opposing testimonies.

Woman Survivor: Your Highness, in such cases, the benefit of doubt should be given to victims rather than the victimizer.

Sheriff: Your Most High, *I* am the victim – the victim of a blatant slander.

Chief Justice: In a complicated case like this, I decide on the basis of the credibility of witnesses. *(a pause)* On the one hand, we have a woman who is unknown to me and to the community ... On the other hand, we have a gentleman, well known to me for years for his honest services to the community. *(to the woman)* What would **you** do if **you** were in **my** position?

Woman Survivor: First and foremost, I would have educated myself about the idea of justice. Then, I would have learned about the method of making sound, impartial and objective judgements.

Sheriff: She is shamelessly offending you, Your Highness.

Chief Justice: *(Ignores the Sheriff, to the woman)* Why? Is there any flaw in my judgement?

Women Survivor: There is nothing in your judgement except flaws.

Chief Justice: Elaborate on your allegation!

Woman Survivor: Your honor, you made four judgments today: the first one was garbage to garbage. The second one was eye for eye. The third one was rape for rape and the last one was distortion of justice for your own self-interest.

Chief Justice: And now?

Woman Survivor: And now, you are panicky to look into my case because you don't want anyone to touch immunity and impunity enjoyed by you and your sheriff, because of the power endowed to you.

Sheriff: How dare to accuse the judge of all judges in his courthouse. Are you a judge?

Chief Justice: *(to woman)* I repeat, if you come up with any evidence about your experience of torture, I will order you to torture the sheriff in return.

Woman Survivor: *(Interrupts)* You are repeating your obsessive urge for retributive justice, sir. What you call justice is not justice; it is the worst type of cruelty. It is torture and degradation against a fellow-human person; you don't serve any purpose except

satisfying your own ghoulish instinct for revenge. You justify yourself by saying that justice is blind. Let me tell you, sir, that justice is not blind. It has sharp eyes and very strong ears, ready to listen all the time. It is revenge that is blind. With your retributive justice, you spread rancor and revenge in every corner of this great land; you contaminate minds and corrupt souls and reduce humans to the most savage of beasts. Let me tell you that even beasts are not as revengeful as you are . . . *(Sheriff interrupts)*

Sheriff: *(Interrupting)* You are a dangerous agitator.

Woman Survivor: And you? You are a beast with no mercy; a jerk, a rascal, a dirty pawn in an unjust system.

Chief Justice: *(Hits the table with his hammer three times)* Stop your insults; keep them for yourself. Beware, madam! Insulting the court's magistrate is insulting the court. Rather than insulting, please share your idea of justice.

Woman Survivor: Love and forgiveness are the main pillars of justice. Justice is life not death. Retributive justice is a gate to hell. The purpose of punishment is reform, correction, cure, rehabilitation and prevention of wrongdoing. A Justice system should look back into the nature of the offence and look forward into the future of the offenders.

Sheriff: *(To the Chief Justice)* I feel shocked. What this vagabond woman says is against everything I believe in

Chief Justice: *(To the woman)* What you state is heresy. It destroys the whole structure and the integrity of the justice system . . .

Woman Survivor: *(interrupts the Chief Justice)* Your structure is decadent, rotten and morbid. It should be discarded and replaced by a modern, progressive and humanitarian system.

Chief Justice: *(To Sheriff)* This woman is a danger to the public and a risk to the state security. Keep her in jail and report her to the supreme authorities!

Woman Survivor: Cowards, shame on you!

Scene 7: *(Sheriff struggles to arrest the woman. Woman resists with all her might. Shouting from both sides. Struggle continues. A man from the audience jumps to the scene with a scroll in his hand, saying . . .*

Emperor's Envoy: "I am His Majesty's Special Envoy. Leave this girl alone!" The woman stands upright and proud.

(Sheriff and Chief Justice are scared, moving to a corner deaf and dumb. Emperor's Envoy gives the scroll to the Chief Justice)

Emperor's Envoy: This is my credential, signed and sealed by His Majesty, the Emperor, who has received many complaints about you both.

(Chief Justice and sheriff kneel before the Emperor's Envoy)

Chief Justice: *(With broken words):* W...w...we a...a...are a...a...all servants of o...Hi...hi...His Ma... Majesty.



The Cast

Emperor's Envoy: As is specified in this scroll, His Majesty has given me full authority to monitor your activities and decide about you – something that I have been doing for weeks.

Chief Justice and Sheriff (Together): What is your decision, Your Magnificence?

Emperor's Envoy: In the name of His Majesty and in the name of people of this great land, I depose you both and deprive you from engaging in any kind of public service for your lifetime. *(He turns to Sheriff)* Give me your sword!

Sheriff (Obeyes while shaking): I obey your order, Your Magnificence, from the bottom of my heart.

Emperor's Envoy (To Chief Justice mockingly): And you, your highness, give me your hammer!

Chief Justice (In a pleading voice) Please, Your Magnificence, give us another chance.

Emperor's Envoy: You have developed an unjust system that is creating a dangerous pattern of behavior. You have had plenty of opportunities in the past to reform this broken system. (

She grabs the hammer from the Chief Justice. She then passes the sword and the hammer to the woman survivor)

Woman Survivor: What's the use of these for me, Your Magnificence?

Emperor's Envoy: You put them in a public museum with a big sign: "instruments of injustice in the past"! *(She then turns to the Chief Justice and his sheriff and shouts)* Leave this court immediately!

(Hand in hand, they ran out)

Emperor's Envoy (W Shile looking at audience): According to His Majesty, justice . . . ultimately, belongs to the people. Please, select your next . . . Chief Justice and Sheriff. *(Envoy leaves the scene.)*

Woman survivor puts down the sword and the hammer. The light goes off for few seconds. As the

CCVT Programs and Services

1. **Mental Health**
 - **Counselling**
 - **Individual and Group Therapy, Mutual Support Groups**
 - **Crisis Intervention:** suicide attempts, breakdowns, family problems, etc.
 - **Art Therapy**
 - **Coordinated Professional Services:** doctors, lawyers, social service workers provide treatment, documentation and legal support.
2. **Settlement Services**
 - Includes information/orientation, interpretation/translation, counselling, employment-related issues, and referrals to resources relating to the economic, social, cultural, educational and recreational facilities that could contribute to the initial settlement of the client.
3. **Children/Youth Program:**
 - Intake/assessment, settlement services, mental health services and recreational and empowerment activities that incorporate conflict resolution, mentoring, peer support and story-telling.
4. **Volunteer Program**
 - **Befriending** to assist survivors in rebuilding their connections to others as well as to the greater community.
- **ESL Tutoring and Conversation Circles** to help students learn and practice their English.
- **Escorting and Interpreting** for survivors at different appointments (medical, legal, social).
5. **Public Education**
 - responds to numerous requests for information, assistance and consultations on torture and the effects of torture as well as regularly producing resource materials
6. **Refugees in Limbo**
 - Providing services to refugees in limbo that include counselling, assisting in sponsorships, family reunification and other immigration-related issues.
7. **Language Instruction and Training**
 - LINC/ESL classes specially designed to address the needs and realities of the survivor of torture (concentration, memory, depression, triggers)
 - Computer training: basic and intermediate levels
8. **International Projects:** CCVT is associated with a coalition of Centres which support victims of violence, repression and torture, in exile or in their own countries

Any comments or thoughts about *First Light*?
We warmly welcome letters to the editor!

Just mail your comments to:
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Canada

Or email them to: The Editorial Committee c/o ezat@ccvt.org or mabai@ccvt.org

and we'll do our best to publish them in the next issue. We reserve the right to shorten any letters due to space requirements.

YES!

I want to help CCVT respond to the needs of survivors of violent oppression who have sought refuge here in Canada.



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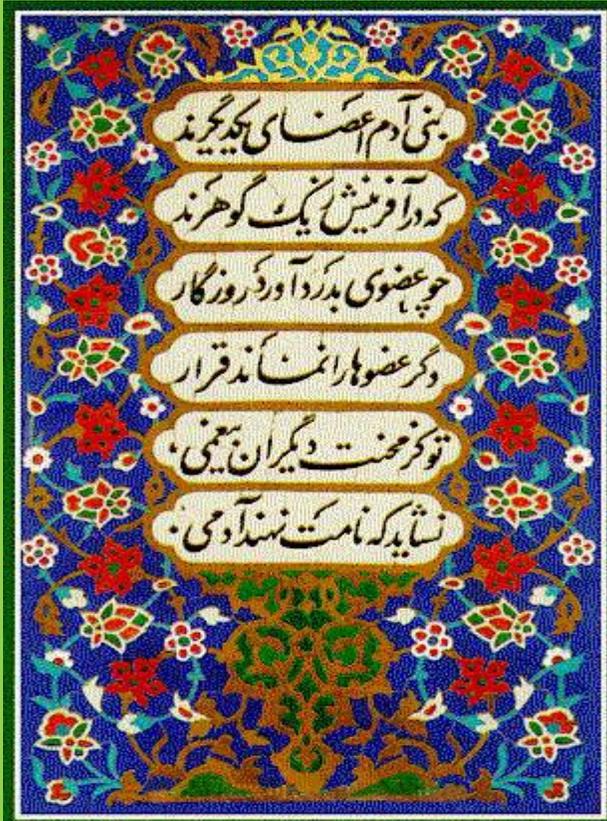
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*"All human beings are members of one frame,
Since all, at first, from the same essence came.
When time afflicts a limb with pain
The other limbs at rest cannot remain.
If thou feel not for other's misery
A human being is no name for thee."*



Saadi of Shiraz (1210-1292)

