

Voices from a long journey: Introducing the 30th anniversary special issue

Pau Pérez-Sales

This issue is an exceptional one. Coinciding with the celebration of the 30th anniversary of the Torture Journal, we wanted to have a commemorative collection of essays written by authors who have either had a long trajectory in the fight against torture or have uniquely accompanied the history of the Journal.

Our selection, always limited and just a glimpse of the field's richness, aims to represent very different viewpoints and perspectives - from the anthropological to the epidemiological, the legal to the clinical. Each author contributes to the overall picture from the wisdom of their experience. I would go so far as to say that this collection deserves to be a book, both for its length and depth; it is one of those works that should be read from cover to cover.

We have divided the 25 works into three blocks: 1) Learning from the past; 2) Understanding the present; and 3) Preparing for the near future

Learning from the past

Although all three sections are essential and provide relevant food for thought, I would like to highlight this section in particular. It is essential reading for anyone who wants to understand the history and perspectives of the many people who have gathered around and contributed to the Torture Journal.

The monograph - and this section - starts with a text by Hans Draminsky Petersen, a

person who has been a true guide and lighthouse for all those breaking new ground in the medical documentation of torture over the last 40 years. Hans is, undoubtedly, one of the souls of the Torture Journal. A gastroenterologist by training, he has been responsible for many pioneering articles since the mid-1970s. Professor Petersen writes his piece about his experience conducting monitoring visits to detention centres in the many countries in which he has worked. In his sober style and with a touch of bitterness, he shares a critical view of the elements that perpetuate torture. Furthermore, he shares the lessons - some from painful mistakes - that are often learned in that complex work. We know this text comes from a long and deep reflection.

The following text by Professor Mahmud Sewail is also exceptional and unique. Born in Ramallah (Palestine), Professor Sewail's life trajectory is that of someone with a passion for truth and justice, which has been denied to him, and to his patients who live under military occupation and are victims of both individual arbitrary detention, torture, and collective and community suffering. In a moving and profound text, brimming with wisdom and dignity, Professor Sewail writes about some of his childhood memories, including his brother's death, that shaped his character and the way he advocates the rejection of all forms of violence. As well as the early institutional be-

ginnings of the TRC Center in Ramallah, he describes the subtle forms of daily abuse that a doctor working in Palestine must endure. It is a must-read.

A very different perspective from the following author: Hernán Reyes, a doctor who visited the world's worst prisons for several decades as a medical coordinator for the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). Those who know Dr Reyes are aware that he is a brilliant speaker. Recently retired and freed from the pledge of confidentiality and silence that followed his visits, Dr Reyes presented us, as editors, with a dilemma: he delivered about 100 pages of memoirs - far beyond what was demanded. Several months of work have resulted in a distillate of 40 pages. Often based on anecdotes and interviews with people in harsh detention conditions, he has recounted lessons and advice for young doctors and researchers.

This is followed by a text previously published in *Torture Journal* by June Pagaduan Lopez, who unfortunately passed away in November 2021 just as she was correcting the final proofs of her text. Seriously ill, she had started a survivors' group in her native land of the Philippines to reflect on life experiences and what both torture and the healing process meant from a lifelong perspective: an open and informal space with people she trusted. Her idea was to develop a broader text that combined personal experiences with the voices of those she had worked with throughout her life. We will miss her very much and cherish the good work she did for the *Torture Journal*.

In her piece, psychologist and feminist Inger Agger gives a brief overview of a career focused on therapeutic approaches in working with victims. Inge discusses the 1980s, a time in which the gender perspective was innovative, and the debates of the 1990s around the concept of trauma and the need for a psycho-

social perspective. She explores contemporary reflections on how it is possible to integrate spirituality and culture and new forms of mindfulness-based therapies. Finally, Inger shows us the difficulty of combining a rehabilitative perspective with a holistic view in which, without forgetting the political context of torture, we can develop treatments based on evidence but which avoid reductionist biomedical and behavioural models.

Vincent Iacopino, also recently retired, gives us some flashbacks to the beginning of his career in the anti-torture field, when many people were working against torture in the Global South, but very few in the Global North. He reflects on when the first waves of refugees from Latin American dictatorships were arriving in the United States and all the groundwork was still to be done. It is a text that suggests more than it says.

Continuing on are three texts on the historical origins of the IRCT, albeit with opposing views. In his short text, Dr Peter Vesti reminds us of the origins of the first rehabilitation clinic for torture victims in Copenhagen under the leadership of Inge Genefke, as well as the enthusiastic group of young professionals who discussed how to work in a permanent dialogue with exiles and authorities. He recalls the many difficulties in funding and growing the clinic and the network of associated centers while keeping up spirits and teamwork. The same enthusiasm is also recalled in the following text by Professor Christian Pross, but with a less rosy vision of the past. In a sincere, honest, and sometimes harsh text, he talks about his ambivalent experiences of Dr Genefke's strong leadership and the problems that arise when, in his words, charismatic historical leaders find it challenging to accept other ideas or are unable to promote a necessary generational change. Professor Pross also discusses the difficulties and dynamics

of burnout in anti-torture organisations and in the supplementary materials of his paper, readers can download a manual on the issue produced at that time at the IRCT under his coordination. Finally, Henri Docker closes this series of connected texts. He was one of those behind-the-scenes figures who are indispensable to the birth and development of any project. A Danish journalist who was recruited to take charge of what was then called the International Newsletter on the Prevention and Rehabilitation of Torture, Henri conducted interviews, wrote editorials, and chronicled congresses and meetings. Now long retired, he still has the sparkle and strength in his eyes. In his concise text, he gifts us some glimpses of what those early, enthusiastic years were like from his point of view.

If there is a famous family in the anti-torture movement, there is no doubt that it is Diana Kordón, her husband, Dario Lagos, and their daughter, Mariana Lagos. Their story is that of the formation of the first support group for the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo and the pioneering Argentinian studies - (from a systemic and psychoanalytic perspective) - on the individual and family impact of enforced disappearance and torture, and the therapeutic ways to address it. Writing from the EATIP, the centre they helped create, their texts paved the way for others to come. In their contribution, they recall this path, how networks were woven with centres in other parts of the world, and the beginnings of the IRCT. Diana Kordón was the author of the first article to appear in Issue 1 of the Torture Journal in 1988.

The next article comes from Professor José Quiroga - he was Chilean President Salvador Allende's personal physician and was at the presidential palace on the day when a United States-sponsored coup d'état ended Allende's life and ushered in the bloody dictatorship of General Pinochet. José Quiroga

was forced into exile that same year. Once in Los Angeles, he started one of the first programmes documenting and caring for victims of torture in the United States. Honorary president of the North American network of centres for rehabilitation of torture survivors and author of some of the most influential theoretical reviews in this field, at 86 years of age he maintains a lucid and unique perspective on the realities of Chile, his native country, and the international context of the fight against torture. His work, the fruit of more than a decade of documentary analysis and personal research, offers for the first time a panoramic view of how the international community and the United Nations reacted to the Chilean military coup. He does this work in partnership with Elizabeth Lira, whose name speaks for itself. She was the author, under a pseudonym, of the first texts written on psychotherapy with victims of political violence from inside Chile during the dictatorship, with all of the risks that this entailed. In an environment of mistrust and fear, Elizabeth developed a theoretical framework on how these elements are introjected into society as a whole and transform it. In the text, together with José, she develops a chronology of the first care centres for victims, mainly under the protection of the different churches in Chile and in conditions of permanent threat, showing that there was a strong rehabilitation movement well before European and US centres began to develop their theoretical models.

Lilla Hardi, former editor-in-chief of Torture Journal and a pioneer in psychoanalytic work since the 1990s, recalls the origins of the Cordelia Foundation in Hungary from an intimate and personal point of view that conveys her deep and exceptional humanity.

Finally, this section closes with a paper from Jorge Aroche and Mariano Coello, mi-grants who arrived in Australia more than

three decades ago. They have recovered for this compilation an unpublished historical text from 1994 in which they reflect on the conceptual framework of care for torture victims in the then-embryonic Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors (STARTTS). Integrating a Latin American socio-political perspective with evidence-based knowledge, Jorge and Mariano outline a perspective that time has shown to be immensely fruitful and effective.

Understanding the present

The struggle to consider solitary confinement as a form of torture has been long and complex. There is now widespread recognition of this fact, and different international sets of rules on minimum conditions in detention make this clear. Professor Sharon Shalev, a lawyer by training, has been engaged in a well-known personal battle against solitary confinement for more than 30 years. A prolific author, she reviews the slow progress and challenges ahead in her contribution, specifically from the framework of the Nelson Mandela Rules and the criteria for the UNCAT definition of torture. As she concludes, solitary confinement has been successfully associated with the idea of suffering and harm, but its practice remains extensive and normative in many countries. There is, unfortunately, still a long way to go before it is completely abolished.

In 1998, Edith Montgomery authored a special paper, later reprinted in *Torture Journal*, on the situation of Middle Eastern refugee children in Europe. Since then, she has regularly published research and reflections on the impact of migration and resettlement on children's development and mental health. Based primarily on her publications, and in light of available data, Edith gives a comprehensive overview of the different historical paradigms to conclude that today's sit-

uation for refugee children in Europe is the same or worse than it was 25 years ago. She reflects on how the countries of the Global North have increasingly tightened their migration policies and created environments of discrimination and marginalisation. Her text is complemented by that of Mikel Wessels, who reflects on the reality of child soldiers as victims of torture and the need for a psychosocial perspective based on the idea of damage to identity, avoiding Westernised clinical approaches.

Nora Sveass and Felice Gaer present the history of how the gender perspective has made its way into the UN Committee against Torture. Composed chiefly of men, there has been an ongoing open debate in the last decade as to whether gender-specific violence should be covered by the Convention Against Torture and discussed in the Committee, or be left to the deliberations and more general works of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). In their style, and based on their first-hand personal experiences, Nora and Felice illuminate the difficulties of the debates concerning CAT's General Comment 2 and General Comment 3. The authors warn that with the recent renewal of half of the CAT's membership, debates that had once been settled have been reopened, and warn of the real risk of regression in women's rights regarding the fight against sexual and gender-based torture.

Stephen Soldz was one of the psychologists who led the fight from within the American Psychological Association (APA) to ban the involvement of psychologists in the interrogation of detainees at Guantánamo. This struggle has been described in other texts and is well known. In his reflections here Stephen goes further and talks about Operational Psychology, i.e. the use of psychology for military purposes, and the need for clear regulations of professional ethics in this field. He con-

siders that the recent publication of an APA draft 'Guidelines for Operational Psychology' has opened up the free participation of psychologists in practices prone to human rights abuses, undoing several decades of work in establishing an ethics-compliant professional regulatory framework. Furthermore, it opens the door to developing similar documents by professional associations in other countries.

Masha Lisitsyna has spent half her professional life doing strategic litigation in her native Kyrgyzstan and later as a Senior Lawyer within the Open Society Justice Initiative. In her brilliant contribution, she reviews some of the cases she has advised on in her long career, highlighting one learning takeaway: many of the organisations that do strategic litigation see domestic courts as a step to be left behind before beginning international litigation, where real success and change can be achieved. Contrary to this view, Masha seeks to show that it is possible to achieve transformative change in national legislative systems and offers some valuable pointers and lessons from her work and perspective.

Preparing for the near future

Professor Derrick Silove is the man of a thousand faces. Clear-sighted and multifaceted, his wide-ranging bibliography covers everything from clinical and psychopathology to epidemiological and service planning research. However, there are at least two common denominators in his academic production. First, a holistic vision of the human being, including social and political dimensions; and second, an attempt to push reflections beyond established limits. On this occasion, Professor Silove has produced a methodological text, a dry read, perhaps, for those who work in day-to-day survivor support, but a very timely reflection for those who combine science with service planning in working with victims of

torture. Despite all that it seems, epidemiological studies are necessary for service planning, as each social and cultural context and human group is different. It is necessary to hear the voices of survivors each and every time.

Nimisha Patel and Amanda Williams are among the most recognised and cited academic duos in researching the rehabilitation of torture victims. Both have authored and co-authored texts and reviews over the past decades, most notably in psychotherapy, outcomes assessment, and chronic pain management. Their paper here addresses the permanent and challenging dilemma of the type of experimental support that should be given to evidence studies, while trying to dismantle some of the myths that have turned longitudinal case-control studies with standardised protocols into the only tool that would allow solid conclusions to be reached. Their rigour, so necessary in a field where disciplines are often challenging to operationalise, has always been a light.

Professor Metin Basoglu has spent a lifetime proposing and advocating for his therapeutic model for victims of political violence and disasters. This model is centred on the idea of deprivation of control as the critical element in understanding psychological harm associated with torture and takes exposure with response prevention as the therapeutic core of the healing process. He gives us a synthesis of this trajectory and a reanalysis of data, gathering the different samples he has worked with over the years, and seeks to give more robust support to his model by increasing sample size in a meta-analytic exercise. A prolific and essential author, the text is an excellent and necessary synthesis, and a step ahead in providing support to the model.

Finally, we have three short conceptual contributions, sharing ethical reflections on where we are and where we should go next.

Tony Reeler, with his exceptional view from Zimbabwe and his more than 30 years of work as a therapist and researcher, many of them within the IRCT Executive Committee, provides a somewhat bitter reflection on how the organisations in general, and Torture Journal as its expression, he argues, consistently devoted efforts towards the 'rehabilitation' component of their mandate. In contrast, the 'prevention' of torture component of the mandate - the political and human rights aspects linked to advocacy and policies for change - has been neglected. He reflects that while the focus on healing is legitimate, history shows that changes occur when 'prevention' is forefront, and thus challenges the IRCT and Torture Journal to be more clearly involved in the work to denounce perpetrators, support strategic anti-torture work and achieve justice and reparation.

Carlos Madariaga, one of the fathers of clinical work with torture survivors in Chile, and following a recent book he has published, makes a short reflection on the relationship between the impact of torture on society and victims and the realities of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Stuart Turner, a key figure in the origins of the Medical Foundation for the Care of

Victims of Torture in the United Kingdom, and a prolific author in the trauma field, reminds us of the barriers and lack of solidarity imposed by the Global North on survivors of torture arriving in Europe and the US. He argues for a more humane and compassionate political position from authorities and the duty of professionals to persevere in lobbying for it.

Finally, Pérez-Sales closes this Section with a review of new technologies as applied to human right abuses and torture: from non-lethal weapons to nanotechnology and neurowarfare, including some of the emerging civil society initiatives to face it.

All of this makes for a unique issue in the 30 year history of the Journal. We are proud that those who are here are here, and even prouder to know that there are a significant number of colleagues who deserve to be in this compilation, which is a small sample of the plurality of voices that have found their space in the Torture Journal. This issue represents the many challenges we have overcome together over the past 30 years, and acknowledges the vitality of a field that has countless challenges still to face.

Contributors

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