Psychologists and Interrogations: What’s Torture Got to Do with It?

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In an article that has been endorsed by SPSSI, Costanzo, Gerrity, and Lykes (2007) argue that “psychologists should not be involved in interrogations that make use of torture or other forms of cruel, inhumane, or degrading treatment” (doi: 10.1111/j.1530-2415.2007.0018.x). Their statement is ironic, for torture is illegal in the United States. But even more importantly, it seems to come from and apply to a world that no longer exists, and that simplifies issues so that they can be as one might like them to be. As recent events in England illustrate (August 2006), Islamic militants seek to kill us and undermine if not destroy our way of life. We have only to listen to what they say and watch their actions in order to know that regardless of how we would like things to be, they mean us harm. We also know from findings of the 9/11 commission that this problem did not start, nor will it likely finish, with the current presidential administration. An important point that is illustrated is that we no longer live in a world where people agree on what is ethical or even acceptable, and where concern for other humans transcends familial ties. When adolescents carry bombs on their bodies and plan suicides that will kill others, we know that shared values no longer exist. In the words of Scottish comedian Billy Connolly, “It seems to me that Islam and Christianity and Judaism all have the same god, and he’s telling them all different things.”

A prominent challenge for psychologists is determining how narrowly or broadly the field should prescribe what is acceptable behavior for professionals working with diverse populations, for increasingly psychologists come from differing backgrounds and hold varying beliefs. Effective practice with one population may be totally ineffective with another; we as a profession have not yet thoughtfully addressed how we balance what one culture defines as ethical against what another

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could view as necessary to be successful. The comment by Costanzo et al., and its
rejenders, provide a good illustration, namely, how does one balance standards of
behaviors against results. What if, hypothetically, Middle Eastern psychologists
told us that in order to successfully obtain information from suspected terrorists
we would have to use approaches that we found inappropriate or unethical? I
reject the idea that it is somehow unfair to use what we know about psychological
science to protect our families and defend our lives and culture. Many areas of
psychology owe their advancement in large part to research conducted under the
auspices of the military and supported by it. Clinical psychology has roots in the
military and the OSS, and many psychologists have proudly defended their country
with honor. In this context, the SPSSI policy statement by Costanzo et al. is both
unnecessary and gratuitous. It is unnecessary because torture is already illegal in
the United States. It is gratuitous because it feeds the egos of those who endorse
it. It gives the illusion of possessing a higher moral ground, when in fact what is
left unsaid and unreadable between the lines reveals it to be ideological and political.
As parallels, SPSSI might put out policy statements against rape and murder, for
those also are illegal, and we would not want our members participating in such
behaviors. But murder and rape do not occur despite being illegal, and similarly, behaviors
that are classified as torture may periodically occur. But that does not mean
that torture is a government-sanctioned tool for conducting interrogations or even
acceptable to use. There are specific and strict federal guidelines regarding what
constitutes a legal and acceptable interrogation. I submit that there is no evidence
that psychologists were involved in cases of torture—certainly not at Abu Ghraib
prison.

A second issue of import is whether or not psychologists should be involved
in legal interrogations. Again, the position of the authors is too simplistic. I take
exception to the suggestion that all psychologists should be banned from assisting
in legal interrogations. It is one thing to “ban” psychologists who are members of
APA from engaging in torture, but quite another to prohibit them from consulting
or advising during legal interrogations. First, there are many types of psychologists
(social psychologist, industrial/organizational psychologists, and experi-
mental psychologists, for example) who are not licensed mental health professionals
and therefore should not be bound by the doctor/patient relationship code of ethics.
Yet they bring information from their fields that help exert influence. Second, I ob-
ject to the “psychocentric” and seemingly arrogant position that receiving training
in psychology trumps all other roles a person may choose to pursue, or because
of circumstances, are obliged to fulfill. Is it not possible for someone to receive
training in psychology and then decide to pursue a career in law enforcement and
engage in legal interrogations? Should being a psychologist as well as a law en-
forcement agent prohibit their participation if psychologists are prohibited? And,
third, how is psychology accountable to society—should it withhold information
about ways in which to protect our population or to influence terrorists to disclose
information? What does psychology owe society? Should we focus exclusively on individuals with whom psychologists come in contact? What about helping to protect communities from terrorism? I simply do not believe that at a policy level we should decide that the "rights" of an individual count more than the rights and safety of society. APA and SPSSI should do something positive to fight terrorism rather than merely sit on the sidelines and criticize others who are trying to protect the United States from another senseless 9/11 attack. Honorable men and women are at war with those who seek to harm us, and the rest of us are at risk from terrorists. If psychology wants to make a positive contribution, the profession should accept that it is sometimes necessary to get information from those who would harm us and are intentionally withholding information that could stop attacks. If we as a profession do not like the use of coercion to obtain actionable information, then we as a profession should be willing to step up to the plate and suggest reliable and effective alternatives that do not rely on psychological or physical coercion. Have we as professional organizations of psychologists committed resources to develop ethical, non-punishing approaches that improve the quality of information that we can extract from individuals who are not willing to share it?

I also find it ironic that SPSSI can so readily become exercised about cruel and degrading treatment of suspected terrorists, yet conduct only limited research on similar behaviors that are manifested all too frequently in military boot camps, in legal police interrogations, in U.S. prisons, and government psychiatric hospitals. Indeed, even college fraternities and schoolyard bullies engage in cruel and degrading behavior. Why is it so easy for SPSSI to react so adamantly about illegal interrogations, yet do so little about domestic kinds of cruel and degrading treatment?

I also wonder how Costanzo et al. would feel if the "ticking time bomb scenario" that they attempt to render as "implausible" were to occur. Would they feel responsible for telling U.S. citizens that it won't ever happen? The "ticking bomb" scenario may be implausible for many APA members, but it was very real for those individuals interrogating Khalid Sheik Mohammed or Abu Zubdayah. Instead of focusing on decades old research that may no longer be relevant, Costanzo et al. might have cited the Jose Padilla case that was covered by the press. As readers may recall, Jose Padilla was a trained al Qaeda operative who was arrested as he tried to enter the United States in Chicago on May 8, 2002. He had accepted an assignment to destroy apartment buildings and had planned to detonate a radiological device commonly referred to as a "dirty bomb." As reported by CNN (June 11, 2002) and Time (June 16, 2002), Padilla was arrested directly as a result of an interrogation of captured senior al Qaeda member Abu Zubaydah. The Padilla case is a prime example of how a legal interrogation of a known terrorist led to the prevention of another terrorist attack.

Similarly, imagine that al Qaeda leader Abu Mussib al Zarqawi has been captured alive in Iraq rather than killed by bombings. Is there anyone who believes
that he would have no potentially worthwhile knowledge of attacks planned to occur in the days following his capture? Costanzo et al. create a scenario that is not grounded in current knowledge of terrorism in general and terrorists in particular when they attempt to (mis)lead us into thinking legal interrogations do not yield actionable intelligence.

The prototypical "expert" on interrogation asserts that information is more reliable when voluntarily given rather than coerced. Well, of course it is. The expert then may assert that the way to elicit voluntary provision of information is to build a relationship with the terrorist so that the terrorist likes you or to appeal to common values so the terrorist sees your interests as converging with his/hers, and then the terrorist will tell you what you need to know. Such reasoning ignores the demand characteristics of both the prototypical law enforcement interrogation and the terrorist's values and operational intent. Are we to think the terrorist has the following thoughts: "You know, nobody has ever been as nice to me as these people—I'm going to turn my back on my God and my life's work and tell them what they want to know." Alternatively, maybe the terrorist will think "What a clever way of asking that question. Now that they put it that way, I have no choice but to tell them what they need to know to disrupt my plans." Unfortunately, it is difficult to envision scenarios where useful information will be forthcoming.

For many Westerners caught after committing a crime, the psychological pressure of trying to influence whether or not they are charged, what they are charged with, and the kind of punishment they are likely to receive coerces them into working with the person who seems to understand them to make the best deal in a bad set of circumstances. The "experts" assertion that rapport and liking are the keys to obtaining information, ignore the coercive pressures inherent in the circumstances. To pretend that these coercive pressures are not present does not make them go away. For terrorists who do not care if they live or die and have no fear of prison, there is little or no incentive to work with interrogators. And, to our discredit, we as psychologists have contributed little to increasing our understanding of circumstances like these and techniques of persuasion that might be effective.

Lastly, I found the call for an independent investigation of the extent to which psychologists have been involved in using torture or other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment during an interrogation unwarranted. Costanzo et al. present virtually no evidence that psychologists have been involved in even a single case. APA/SPSSI has no authority by which to sanction non-members. Many psychologists are choosing not to join APA or to allow their memberships to lapse, believing that as it does not represent their interests and values. In my opinion, APA and some of its divisions have drifted from a being a professional organization advancing the science of psychology and translating research to action and policy, to a point where they are promoting a social and political agenda.
Psychologists and Interrogations

I am opposed to torture. But I endorse the use of interrogation when used consistently with current federal law and conducted by trained interrogators. And I certainly see no reason why psychologists cannot assist in developing effective, lawful ways to obtain actionable intelligence in fighting terrorism. If the information can be obtained noncoercively, all the better. Social psychology taught us how to use social influence in getting people to do things they ordinarily would not do and buy things they often do not need or want. In my view, it is common sense that you would want psychologists involved in the interrogation of known terrorists. As psychologists, rather than decrying illegal use of cruel and inhumane treatment to obtain information, we should work to develop reliable noncoercive ways to get people to tell us about terrorist activity of which they have knowledge and are attempting to withhold. We need to take a proactive stance in saving lives and preventing acts of terror. The Costanzo et al. article does not appreciably help psychology to move forward, for it limits opportunities for psychologists to gain first-hand knowledge of the nature of the challenges interrogators face, and focuses on current approaches rather than on developing new ones that apply and improve current psychological knowledge.

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Torture and the borders of humanity

Françoise Sironi and Raphaëlle Branche

This article is the joint production of a psychologist and a historian: when the history of the group violently crosses the path of the history of the individual, that process calls for such an interdisciplinary approach, which turns out to yield undeniable benefits for the study of the deliberate injuring of one human being by another.

To engage in such a study, we intend to tackle some of the questions raised by one extreme kind of violence, torture. What are its aims? What underlies its methods, and what are its mechanisms, once we look below the surface? Who are the torturers, and how are they trained? What escape is there from torture, not just from the victim's point of view, but the torturer's as well?

The aims of torture

Contrary to received opinion, the real aim of torture is not to make people talk, but to make them keep quiet. There are many proofs of this: the preparation of "confessions" beforehand by the torturing institutions, the false information contrived in advance by opposition groups against the eventuality of arrest, and the utter confusion that torture produces, which makes any information largely unreliable.

Whatever the circumstances, whatever the culture, the words of torture victims are astonishingly standard: "I can't talk about it. I'm afraid... It is too hard... I'm ashamed... You can't understand..."; these are generally the things said by people who have undergone torture. "If you talk, we'll be back" say the torturers to their victims. Whatever the circumstances, whatever the culture, the words of former soldiers and those who have taken part in acts of political violence are also identical: "I can't talk about it... I'm ashamed... You'd have to be there to understand...". Torture shuts up both torturers and victims in a uniform silence.

Through the torture victim, the aim is to reach the group to which the victim belongs. The main objective of systems of torture is the destruction of cultural identity, "deculturization" (Sironi 1999, 2001); torture works through the individual on its real target, the group, whether occupational, religious,
This distinction lets us pass over in silence the essential feature of all torture: its psychological consequences on individual people. Over and above any ostensible purpose such as (maybe) intelligence-gathering, the primary effect of torture is not to make people talk, but to make them keep quiet. Why does it keep people quiet, and how? The answer lies in the methods used and in the mechanisms that sustain torture: the methods that bring about real psychological destruction and cultural alienation.

The agents of psychological destruction and cultural alienation

Torture always remains present in the minds of those who have lived through it: a few months after the event, or 10 years later, or 40. Why? The psychological content associated with torture-induced trauma always keeps its “encysted” status, a fixture within the sufferer’s mind, an inert, lifeless, mechanical object that cannot mingle or combine with the rest of their thoughts; and for good reason: it is neither more nor less than a pure “fragment of negativity” (Nathan, 1994) which has been “inserted” in the patient. How is this done? To answer this, we have to analyse the methods of torture, on the one hand, and on the other to turn our attention to the torturers, and how they are “made”.

The methods used by torture systems show unmistakable evidence of the deliberate and malevolent nature of those systems. Wherever torture has been used, the methods have been more or less the same. They can be classified as follows:

- Deprivation of food, drink, medical care; prolonged isolation, etc.
- Terror deliberately induced by mock executions, repeated murder attempts, forcing prisoners to torture one another or family members (child, father, mother), forcible witnessing of the torture or rape of loved ones, etc.
- Pain induced by systematic beatings, electricity, the “telephone” (systematic blows to the ears), the drawing of fingernails, cigarette
burns, or the bastinado (blows to the soles of the feet).

- Breaches of taboo and humiliations by means of rape or various forms of sexual abuse, forced eating of excrement or drinking of urine, mockery of the genital organs' size or shape; forcing the victim to bark like a dog or jump like a toad, etc.

- Sophistically-contrived stage-setting, such as the "jaguar" or the "spit" (hanging up by the wrists and ankles bound together), heated plates on either side of the body, the "bathtub" (where the victim's head is plunged into a bath full of excrement and vomit), etc.

The fact that similar methods are so often used is not to be attributed to the universality of certain perversions and their scenarios; on the contrary, these resemblances are the reflection of intergovernmental military and police cooperation agreements for training in interrogation techniques and the handling of law-enforcement and torture equipment (Amnesty International 2000, 2001a, b).

### What are the mechanisms underlying torture?

Psychological damage, or even destruction, can be caused in an almost experimental manner. Torture is what affects the way a victim thinks by the stamping of a physical and psychological imprint.

Self-destructive behaviour can be induced by acting on the body in this way. This is what happens in the case of the frequently used "suspension" method: Françoise Sironi has observed, regardless of the country, a far greater prevalence and immediacy of self-destructive and self-denigrating behaviour in victims who have been tortured in this particular way than in those who have not. The connection is this: the unbearable pain felt after a number of hours' suspension is caused by the weight of your own body. You feel pain inside, and all due to your own organs.

Torture is used to manipulate the mind by acting on the body. The mechanisms at work in this process of transformation illuminate quite conclusively what is going on in torture: these mechanisms are inversion, the prevalence of a binary order, the breaking of cultural taboos, and redundancy.

To take the first mechanism, inversion: making every boundary one that can be transgressed is part of the torturer's repertoire of intentional acts. The torturer sets about giving internal bodily substances an existence outside the body, and extraneous substances an internal status. Substances that are normally outside the body are forced into it, or back into it, in the forced swallowing of liquids and solids which belong inside the body (vomit, urine, faeces). Electric shocks and cigarette burns have the same function. The zones of interchange between inside and outside are "harrowed" and assaulted in this way.

The second mechanism that operates in torture is that a binary order is made to prevail: there is a systematic alternation of phase periods in the cell alternate with sessions of torture, isolation with interrogations, the "good cop / bad cop" alternation of two diametrically opposite torturers' attitudes. Torture in this way establishes an obsessive, total regime. The alternation is so contiguous, the phase change so frequent, that the discrimination of logical distances breaks down, producing confusion, perplexity, sometimes clinical sideration. This is illustrated in the account given by one of Françoise Sironi's psychotherapy patients: he had been beaten bloody many times, and tortured with electricity (electrodes on the fingertips, on the soles of the feet, on the nipples and on the glans). "But the worst thing" he said, "was at the end, when they came to take me away to prison. It was the same ones that had tortured me: the very ones – but unrecognisable: they were kind; they looked after me so: they were even concerned for my health, and they gave me cigarettes, food, drink. In the cells, the food had been over-salted on purpose, to make us feel worse; but here, everything was really good. They slapped me on the shoulder, all friendly: they talked to me as if I was their little brother, gave me advice: 'Now don't go and start all that again – just drop it: it's stupid. You've seen how you like it, haven't you?'".

The third mechanism of psychological destruction for which torture is the vehicle concerns the breaking of cultural taboos. In order to undo the ties between the individual and the collective that are entwined within each of us,
and to cause an individual to be isolated within a community, the torture system stage-manages transgressions of cultural taboo. Context is all-important here: the use of procedures that have specific cultural significance for the torture victim is often deliberately orchestrated. In Tibet, for instance, vegetarian Buddhist monks held in prison camps by the Chinese are put on kitchen duty and obliged to cook meat as well as eat it. Another example: to hang a weight on to the penis of a Western man constitutes torture, though there is nothing in essence that makes it so, in itself, or under completely different circumstances: in India, for instance, some Sadhus hang weights to their penises as an act of self-transcendence. Every assault on elements that are coded with cultural meaning either produces damage to cultural identity or, on the contrary, a rigid closing-in of the cultural groups concerned around elements that have great significance for them. Fanaticism has its roots in this type of scenario, deliberately designed by the masters of psychological destabilisation.

The fourth mechanism is redundancy. The exact, one-to-one correspondence between bodily impressions and mental ones is also made use of by these systems for psychological destruction. The act, and the verbalisation of the intention behind the act are, in this instance, concomitant and redundant. We have to work with the sufferers to rediscover the words spoken by their torturers at the time, and we often find that the torturers say “You’ll never be a man again” or words to that effect, when using sexual tortures. These are real injunctions, words that work. “If you talk, we’ll be back”. “You’re just nothing – a piece of shit”. “You’re going to be broken inside”. “We have ways to destroy you”... These words are still effective, years after the torture; this is why the torturers’ injunctions have to be gone over in minute detail in the course of psychotherapy.

Who are the torturers?

Torturers form a group, one of whose foundations is the shared practice of torture. This practice rests on a transgression of generally accepted values, including those of warfare, concerning ordinary acts of combat. Torture is possible only if the individuals who perpetrate it have certain ideas in common. What are those ideas?

In the case of the 1954–1962 war between the French security forces and the Algerian independence movement, we find some answers in the historical context. First of all, torture was undeniably one of the products of a long colonial history (Branche 2001). It is connected with the construction of a hierarchical view of humanity. One particular version of this was colonial law; despite the fact that it was the universalism of the French Revolution’s message which provided the basis of the “civilising mission” behind French colonisation in the nineteenth century, the French colonial empire in fact rested on many distinctions, among individuals and among communities. All of these were organised under a value system decided on by the French; and this instigated, supported, and nourished a view of the world in which different individuals had different rights. One version of this racist way of construing the world crops up in certain writings investigating, for instance, “the way the various races relate to pain” (gradation, from the Yellow to the Black... and from the mental to the physical).

Within this imaginary scheme of things, the Algerians had their own particular place; and in their case there were also the imaginings born of violence: often pictured wielding a knife, the Algerian was associated with the image of the cutting blade, the sudden danger. This image was extensively used during the war in the publicity built around FLN atrocities or internecine violence among the Algerian nationalists, in France as well as in Algeria. Throat-slitting and castration enabled publicists to emphasise the “barbarity” and “cruelty” of the enemies of France.

This mindset resulting from colonialism was fertile ground for the development of certain forms of violence used on people seen as not belonging entirely within a common humanity. It was mobilised, fed, and used as part of a strategy for dealing with what the French military described as “revolutionary war” or “subversion”.

Let us give another example of the weight of ideology as ancillary to the practice of torture. Roberto Gareton, a Chilean lawyer and champion of human rights, once said: “Freedom
as being whistled away day by day in Chile – at a time, oddly enough, when the military are killing much less than before. Now, people have become their own enforcers: every journalist carries out self-censorship; there is very little informing, because nowadays the fear has been internalized. What we are witnessing is the emergence of a double identity in a people. It is no longer possible to tell what Chile really is. The effect of the dictatorship is that we now say: "That’s Chile – it has nothing to do with me any more". 1

This creation of a double identity was linked with the subjective motivation of the forces of law and order that had been given the job of repression; for in their view the issue was always 1) dealing with "subversion". The recommended way of tackling this was to wage a war within the population itself, by means of systems of informers, infiltration, torture and disappearances. The thinking was based on the need to seize power and to retain power; and here it is clear to see that the war within the population was at the same time a war against the population.

The same may be said of the practice of torture by the French army, even though this aspect was not always apparent to its practitioners. What happened was that the French military theorists who were the predominant influence in the most significant years of the Algerian war were convinced they could "separate the fish from the water" and conduct a strategy for convincing the populace that was based on a good dose of fear and a counterweight of terror to balance that of the FLN. In the dictatorships of Latin America, the lessons of these methods – combined with other theoretical sources and practical considerations – were learned, and adapted to politically radical purposes.

We come now to the last of the ingredients that promote the development of torture: the military structure, an ordered structure where refusal to obey is in practice impossible. In Algeria from 1954 to 1962, the war was one of surprise attacks; fear was omnipresent, feeding on the air of foreignness given off by the whole of the country where the French soldiers were operating. The military structure consisted of a small group of combatants: these formed the individual soldier’s primary setting. The need to keep this group together was vital; survival depended on it; and here the leader’s role is fundamental, as is that of group pressure. It is particularly difficult, in such circumstances, to dissociate oneself.

After the war, things are different. True, the group may be maintained in one’s own mind; silence over what was hushed up during the war, over what one did, can become a habit. But breaking silence is possible; and it can be part of a move in the direction of civilian life that marks a return to another way of being human. Speaking of it can help shatter the effect of torture on the soldier, but it is also a risk for him: the risk of exposure to the judgement of others – or even to that of the law.

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The testimony of Colonel Thomas

Some former combatants have insisted on testifying about the use of torture, especially during the Algerian war. Colonel Pierre-Alban Thomas is one such. "Courage is the primary quality of any military man; and courage today must take the form of saying what one has seen and done, even where that brings much pain and little glory. To conceal it is an act of cowardice", he declared at the launch of the Amnesty International campaign against torture in October 2000. After taking part in the communist Resistance, he had chosen the army as a career; he served in Indochina, and then, with the rank of Captain, was sent to Algeria, where his colonel put him in charge of the Deuxième Bureau, the intelligence section. It was in that capacity, and in that war, that he came across the practice of torture, and made efforts to restrict what he regarded as the war’s excesses. His desire to bear witness concerning the forms of violence used by the French army in Indochina and Algeria caused him to keep diaries during the war, which he later edited and published in the 1990s and in 2002. There is no doubt that he saw this as keeping order in his life, reorienting what had on occasion gone astray in the shifting sands of war and its imperatives.

The testimony of former combatants can help us cast light on how it is that a person
becomes a torturer. For people do become torturers, they are not born to it; this we state, not in an attempt to exculpate them, but as the result of research work on the making of torturers (Sironi 1999). Various methods have been identified, three of which will be introduced here: the application of traumatic techniques to the “trainee”; the destructive, murderous influence of a background of violent destruction of cultural identity; and training through action (in the case of war situations).

First instance: the use of traumatic techniques

One way a person can become a torturer is by initiation. Traumatic initiation is aimed at inducting the torturer into an affinity group with a strong sense of belonging (army unit, paramilitary cell, etc.), using traumatic techniques to accomplish this. One example of the traumatic technique is very well illustrated in the documentary made by Joergen Flindt Peterson and Erik Stephensen in 1982, consisting of interviews with former Greek torturers, with much emphasis on discussion of the training these torturers received in the Greek secret police under the Colonels’ dictatorship. It reveals how traumatic techniques succeeded in transforming young Greek army recruits into torturers. The training lasted four months, and was organized in three stages:

- First stage: an initial boosting of the subject’s identity by boosting certain qualities such as strength, bravery, discipline, endurance, etc. We may note that the instructors fully participated in the training, the marches, the endurance exercises. Whatever their age, they were the toughest, and always remained so.

- Second stage: at this stage, the recruit’s original identity is taken apart. The same instructors suddenly become abusive, humiliating and unpredictable: their orders are totally incoherent and absurd; they deliberately destroy the recruit’s every personal link with his former world (such as photos of a girlfriend).

- Then comes the third stage: the reconstruction of a new identity. The emphasis is once more on strength and bravery, and on a theoretical indoctrination based on a sharp dichotomy: us and them (the enemy). The initiation ends with an official ritual ceremony: the presenting of the cap that betokens membership of the special police corps. The initiation is organized in such a way that the first thing the new recruits must do, once they get back from an evening on the town to confirm they are above the common rules (binge drinking, breaking speed limits, etc.), is to torture a prisoner.

"And we didn’t need telling twice", commented one former torturer.

Second instance: overwhelming circumstances tending to loss of cultural identity

National or cultural groups which have in the course of their history undergone repeated, violent processes of cultural assimilation can provide highly fertile nurseries for the making of torturers. An ideology acts as a violent cultural assimilation when it leaves no link between the original culture and the new culture it seeks to impose; and repeated violent efforts at cultural assimilation frown the emergence of humans utterly dissociated from their affinity group, people who have become “pure fragments of negativity”. This is the situation of the child soldiers of Mozambique and Sierra Leone, or the Khmer Rouge children in Cambodia who have been forced to kill father and mother. In such ways, every trace of the past is rubbed out, and these children are reduced to a state in which they have no other sense of belonging than to the army or gang that recruits them and keeps them as killer slaves. Rwanda is another instance showing the impact of violent processes of forced cultural assimilation, which in this case was a matter of becoming something other than what you thought you were: we mean the processes by which ethnic identities were manufactured in the course of Rwanda’s colonial history.

Third instance: action makes torturers

In this case, the making of the torturer is in action and by action: it is determined by the combat situation, a product of wartime, manufactured during a conflict. Here we may take the example of the Red Army veterans monitored by Françoise Sironi at Perm, in the Urals.
Cover drawing by Willette from the French periodical *L'Artiste au bateau*, December 1902. Musée d'Histoire de la Concorde. 808C
Marcel: the long-term scars of the Algerian war (Case history)

Françoise Sironi: "When I began to treat Marcel, it was the sixth time he had been admitted to hospital. He was in a psychiatric hospital in the Paris region, where he had been admitted at the request of his mother and brother. He had been a ship's engineer in the merchant navy, but because of a brawl with a naval officer after a heavy day's drinking he had been sacked and "left on land". After many years spent hanging around various shipyards, doing "odd jobs", he still could not forget the very special world of life at sea in the merchant navy. He decided to go and look for work on the dockside, but without much conviction; his heart was no longer in it. Shipyard layoffs, then their final shutdown, were too much for him, and he joined the 'long-term unemployed', with no hope of a job; once he was past fifty, the verdict "too old" sounded like a death knell. Too old? Him? With so much knowledge to hand on? And where would he find work, then? The whole region was blighted. Marcel had been married, but his wife had had enough of his drinking and fits of violence. He turned in on himself, sullen, with not much in common any longer with those around him; he would spend hours, sitting over a pint, reliving his travels like a film and reminding himself what his ship's engines had smelled like. With nothing to do, he went back to live with his mother, on the outskirts of Paris. She took him in, she told us, to try and halt his downhill slide.

Marcel was very aggressive each time he was sent to hospital, feeling it an intolerable injustice. I grew weary of his endless, commonplace ramblings; the rigid, unchanging nature of our therapy sessions was starting to be more than I could bear. I was looking all the time for some basic element I suspected must be there, something that would turn out to be at the root of his present behaviour. We had already worked on the psychological impact of lost worlds, in his case the world of shipping. There were economic reasons why the ship

he had worked on had been lying in port for many years, and the closure of the shipyards had made a whole world vanish: it would never come back again. But what had gone before? An "ordinary" childhood offered no clues. Then the way through came to me as I was thinking about his age. Marcel was well over fifty; I asked him, had he been in the Algerian war? He looked straight at me a while; then he blew his top. "What the hell business is that of yours? That's got nothing to do with it! You can bloody shut up about all that". He protested so vehemently, I grew more confident. "No, on the contrary, it has a lot to do with it. The Algerian war didn't end with the peace agreements. It went on a great deal longer - it still is going on - in the heads of the ones who were there... the ones who lost". Again, Marcel looked steadily at me, suddenly quieter; I went straight on: "Would you like to start telling us about it?". From that day on, our sessions were all devoted to accounts of what happens in war, of "his" war. We brought in his mother and brother; and, sometimes, one of the department's "chronic" patients who had also fought in Algeria. Marcel was a different man from that point on. He never came into the psychiatric hospital again; I saw him a few times at the outpatients clinic, and then he went to live in Saint-Nazaire.

Comment: From Algerian Djebel to the death of the shipyards, Marcel's story is an accumulation of traces of our collective history - political, social, and economic history - all of which have "produced" psychopathology. There can be no obscuring the influence of internal psychological conflicts, the vicissitudes of the father/son relationship; but they provide an additional dimension of causality which cuts across our psychological lives, bending them and stamping on them the impress of our collective history: political, economic, social, normative, and so on. This collective history leaves its traces on life, painful scars which affect not only the individual concerned, but also the family and the surroundings, at work and in society.
They had learned they were going to serve in the Afghan war just three hours before landing in Kabul. The logic of war was: "I kill you, or you kill me", endlessly repeated in combat.

The torturer's training also depends on a training in inaction, in peacetime or during intervals in the fighting. In the Soviet-Afghan war again, scout units were composed of conscripts who had completed the first part of their service as border guards along the Sino-Soviet frontier. Inaction was central to their mode of life; and they had become inured to the stresses of the sentinel's job. Training by action/inaction is a pattern of alternation present in the [French] Foreign Legion as well: the legionnaires must always be in action. Regardless of what they do, even if they have nothing to do, they have to be in action — yet, paradox though it might seem, nothing happens in the barracks: nothing, all day long. The unending tension of inactivity (apparent, but effective), gives an edge to their warlike potential.

**Torture: how to find a way out?**

Torture continues for a long time to work on those who have experienced it, for it consists of the deliberate wounding of one human being by another. It is impossible to treat a torture victim effectively without mentally confronting, along with the patient, the intention of the aggressors, without engaging, with the patient, in a search for the intention to destroy that is inherent in the methods of torture. The most important thing, in the psychotherapy of the victims, is not so much the work on the emotions. The central object is to get the thinking mind going again, where it had broken down under torture because of the relationship of total dominance, along with the pain and the presence of death.

The therapeutic work done with former combatants (the experience of Perm in the Urals, and work treating former legionnaires or conscripts from the Algerian war) is in answer to the question: how does a person get away from war, once he has been turned into a warrior? In psychotherapy we cultivate contemplation of the system, rediscovery of the motivations underlying the system that has made our patients what they are, killers or torturers. It is assuredly necessary to take care of traumatized war veterans, if only for reasons of prevention: for if they are left with their hermetically-sealed memories, they may become real human time-bombs, or flare into domestic or communal violence in civilian life.

Torture is a situation of extreme violence. The victims of torture have had access to things that are usually hidden, to the darker side of humanity — yet so have the torturers! Torture is a deliberate attempt to destroy and dehumanise, conducted by people who are in a situation that allows no empathy whatsoever with their victims. This renunciation of empathy has been deliberately induced, manufactured, crafted by the systems of torture and the unseen controllers. The position of the researcher or the clinician who works on the "darker side" of the human psyche is one of commitment. Analysing, trying to understand, treating the victims and the perpetrators of political violence is not a neutral activity, whether in a psychologist or in a historian. Research and the publication of findings are indispensable in this domain: they are activities with a political function, in that they try by illuminating to "undo"; to disassemble, to peel bare, to draw aside the veil and let in the daylight upon the historical, political, and psychological mechanisms of torture.

Joint work in these two disciplines, history and psychology, is possible and, indeed, necessary for the undeniable enhancement it brings to the task of seeing in greater detail the lasting human consequences of the violence in our collective history.

*Translated from French*
Notes

1. Programme entitled "Passerelle" (Gangway), broadcast on France-Culture, 26 March 1988.

2. Film documentary: Le fils de ton voisin (Your neighbour's son).

Available from the Amnesty International video documentation centre. The young recruits were at the ESA training centre, which trained the intake of the KESA, a special corps within the Greek army.

References


The Truth about Torture
It's time to be honest about doing terrible things.
by Charles Krauthammer
12/05/2005, Volume 011, Issue 12

DURING THE LAST FEW WEEKS in Washington the pieties about torture have lain so thick in the air that it has been impossible to have a reasoned discussion. The McCain amendment that would ban "cruel, inhuman, or degrading" treatment of any prisoner by any agent of the United States sailed through the Senate by a vote of 90-9. The Washington establishment remains stunned that nine such retrograde, morally inert persons—let alone senators—could be found in this noble capital.

Now, John McCain has great moral authority on this issue, having heroically borne torture at the hands of the North Vietnamese. McCain has made fine arguments in defense of his position. And McCain is acting out of the deep and honorable conviction that what he is proposing is not only right but is in the best interest of the United States. His position deserves respect. But that does not mean, as seems to be the assumption in Washington today, that a critical analysis of his "no torture, ever" policy is beyond the pale.

Let's begin with a few analytic distinctions. For the purpose of torture and prisoner maltreatment, there are three kinds of war prisoners:

First, there is the ordinary soldier caught on the field of battle. There is no question that he is entitled to humane treatment. Indeed, we have no right to disturb a hair on his head. His detention has but a single purpose: to keep him hors de combat. The proof of that proposition is that if there were a better way to keep him off the battlefield that did not require his detention, we would let him go. Indeed, during one year of the Civil War, the two sides did try an alternative. They mutually "paroled" captured enemy soldiers, i.e., released them to return home on the pledge that they would not take up arms again. (The experiment failed for a foreseeable reason: cheating. Grant found that some paroled Confederates had reenlisted.)

Because the only purpose of detention in these circumstances is to prevent the prisoner from becoming a combatant again, he is entitled to all the protections and dignity of an ordinary domestic prisoner—indeed, more privileges, because, unlike the domestic prisoner, he has committed no crime. He merely had the misfortune to enlist on the other side of a legitimate war. He is therefore entitled to many of the privileges enjoyed by an ordinary citizen—the right to send correspondence, to engage in athletic activity and intellectual pursuits, to receive allowances from relatives—except, of course, for the freedom to leave the prison.

Second, there is the captured terrorist. A terrorist is by profession, indeed by definition, an unlawful combatant: He lives outside the laws of war because he does not wear a uniform, he hides among civilians, and he deliberately targets innocents. He is entitled to no protections whatsoever. People seem to think that the postwar Geneva Conventions were written only to protect detainees. In fact, their deeper purpose was to provide a deterrent to the kind of barbaric treatment of civilians that had become so horribly apparent during the first half of the 20th century, and in particular, during the Second World War.

War. The idea was to deter the abuse of civilians by promising combatants who treated noncombatants well that they themselves would be treated according to a code of dignity if captured—and, crucially, that they would be denied the protections of that code if they broke the laws of war and abused civilians themselves.

Breaking the laws of war and abusing civilians are what, to understate the matter vastly, terrorists do for a living. They are entitled, therefore, to nothing. Anyone who blows up a car bomb in a market deserves to spend the rest of his life roasting on a spit over an open fire. But we don't do that because we do not descend to the level of our enemy. We don't do that because, unlike him, we are civilized. Even though terrorists are entitled to no humane treatment, we give it to them because it is in our nature as a moral and humane people. And when on rare occasions we fail to do that, as has occurred in several of the fronts of the war on terror, we are duly disgraced.

The norm, however, is how the majority of prisoners at Guantanamo have been treated. We give them three meals a day, superior medical care, and provision to pray five times a day. Our scrupulousness extends even to providing them with their own Korans, which is the only reason alleged abuses of the Koran at Guantanamo ever became an issue. That we should have provided those who kill innocents in the name of Islam with precisely the document that inspires their barbarism is a sign of the absurd lengths to which we often go in extending undeserved humanity to terrorist prisoners.

Third, there is the terrorist with information. Here the issue of torture gets complicated and the easy pieties don't so easily apply. Let's take the textbook case. Ethics 101: A terrorist has planted a nuclear bomb in New York City. It will go off in one hour. A million people will die. You capture the terrorist. He knows where it is. He's not talking.

Question: If you have the slightest belief that hanging this man by his thumbs will get you the information to save a million people, are you permitted to do it?

Now, on most issues regarding torture, I confess tentativeness and uncertainty. But on this issue, there can be no uncertainty: Not only is it permissible to hang this miscreant by his thumbs. It is a moral duty.

Yes, you say, but that's an extreme and very hypothetical case. Well, not as hypothetical as you think. Sure, the (nuclear) scale is hypothetical, but in the age of the car- and suicide-bomber, terrorists are often captured who have just set a car bomb to go off or sent a suicide bomber out to a coffee shop, and you only have minutes to find out where the attack is to take place. This "hypothetical" is common enough that the Israelis have a term for precisely that situation: the ticking time bomb problem.

And even if the example I gave were entirely hypothetical, the conclusion—yes, in this case even torture is permissible—is telling because it establishes the principle: Torture is not always impermissible. However rare the cases, there are circumstances in which, by any rational moral calculus, torture not only would be permissible but would be required (to acquire life-saving information). And once you've established the principle, to paraphrase George Bernard Shaw, all that's left to haggle about is the price. In the case of torture, that means that the argument is not whether torture is ever permissible, but when—i.e., under what obviously stringent circumstances: how big, how imminent, how preventable the ticking time bomb.

That is why the McCain amendment, which by mandating "torture never" refuses even to recognize the legitimacy of any moral calculus, cannot be right. There must be exceptions. The real argument should be over what constitutes a legitimate exception.
Let's take an example that is far from hypothetical. You capture Khalid Sheikh Mohammed in Pakistan. He not only has already killed innocents, he is deeply involved in the planning for the present and future killing of innocents. He not only was the architect of the 9/11 attack that killed nearly three thousand people in one day, most of them dying a terrible, agonizing, indeed tortured death. But as the top al Qaeda planner and logistical expert he also knows a lot about terror attacks to come. He knows plans, identities, contacts, materials, cell locations, safe houses, cased targets, etc. What do you do with him?

We have recently learned that since 9/11 the United States has maintained a series of "black sites" around the world, secret detention centers where presumably high-level terrorists like Khalid Sheikh Mohammed have been imprisoned. The world is scandalized. Black sites? Secret detention? Jimmy Carter calls this "a profound and radical change in the . . . moral values of our country." The Council of Europe demands an investigation, calling the claims "extremely worrying." Its human rights commissioner declares "such practices" to constitute "a serious human rights violation, and further proof of the crisis of values" that has engulfed the war on terror. The gnashing of teeth and rending of garments has been considerable.

I myself have not gnashed a single tooth. My garments remain entirely unrent. Indeed, I feel reassured. It would be a gross dereliction of duty for any government not to keep Khalid Sheikh Mohammed isolated, disoriented, alone, despairing, cold and sleepless, in some godforsaken hidden location in order to find out what he knew about plans for future mass murder. What are we supposed to do? Give him a nice cell in a warm Manhattan prison, complete with Miranda rights, a mellifluent lawyer, and his own website? Are not those the kinds of courtesies we extended to the 1993 World Trade Center bombers, then congratulated ourselves on how we "brought to justice" those responsible for an attack that barely failed to kill tens of thousands of Americans, only to discover a decade later that we had accomplished nothing—indeed, that some of the disclosures at the trial had helped Osama bin Laden avoid U.S. surveillance?

Have we learned nothing from 9/11? Are we prepared to go back with complete amnesia to the domestic-crime model of dealing with terrorists, which allowed us to sleepwalk through the nineties while al Qaeda incubated and grew and metastasized unmolested until on 9/11 it finished what the first World Trade Center bombers had begun?

Let's assume (and hope) that Khalid Sheikh Mohammed has been kept in one of these black sites, say, a cell somewhere in Romania, held entirely incommunicado and subjected to the kind of "coercive interrogation" that I described above. McCain has been going around praising the Israelis as the model of how to deal with terrorism and prevent terrorist attacks. He does so because in 1999 the Israeli Supreme Court outlawed all torture in the course of interrogation. But in reality, the Israeli case is far more complicated. And the complications reflect precisely the dilemmas regarding all coercive interrogation, the weighing of the lesser of two evils: the undeniable inhumanity of torture versus the abdication of the duty to protect the victims of a potentially preventable mass murder.

In a summary of Israel's policies, Glenn Frankel of the Washington Post noted that the 1999 Supreme Court ruling struck down secret guidelines established 12 years earlier that allowed interrogators to use the kind of physical and psychological pressure I described in imagining how KSM might be treated in America's "black sites."

"But after the second Palestinian uprising broke out a year later, and especially after a devastating series of suicide bombings of passenger buses, cafes and other civilian targets," writes Frankel, citing human rights lawyers and detainees, "Israel's internal security service, known as the Shin Bet or the Shabak,
returned to physical coercion as a standard practice." Not only do the techniques used "command widespread support from the Israeli public," but "Israeli prime ministers and justice ministers with a variety of political views," including the most conciliatory and liberal, have defended these techniques "as a last resort in preventing terrorist attacks."

Which makes McCain's position on torture incoherent. If this kind of coercive interrogation were imposed on any inmate in the American prison system, it would immediately be declared cruel and unusual, and outlawed. How can he oppose these practices, which the Israelis use, and yet hold up Israel as a model for dealing with terrorists? Or does he countenance this kind of interrogation in extreme circumstances—in which case, what is left of his categorical opposition to inhuman treatment of any kind?

But let us push further into even more unpleasant territory, the territory that lies beyond mere coercive interrogation and beyond McCain's self-contradictions. How far are we willing to go?

This "going beyond" need not be cinematic and ghoulish. (Jay Leno once suggested "duct tape" for Khalid Sheikh Mohammed. See photo.) Consider, for example, injection with sodium pentathol. (Colloquially known as "truth serum," it is nothing of the sort. It is a barbiturate whose purpose is to sedate. Its effects are much like that of alcohol: disinhibiting the higher brain centers to make someone more likely to disclose information or thoughts that might otherwise be guarded.) Forcible sedation is a clear violation of bodily integrity. In a civilian context it would be considered assault. It is certainly impermissible under any prohibition of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment.

Let's posit that during the interrogation of Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, perhaps early on, we got intelligence about an imminent al Qaeda attack. And we had a very good reason to believe he knew about it. And if we knew what he knew, we could stop it. If we thought we could glean a critical piece of information by use of sodium pentathol, would we be permitted to do so?

Less hypothetically, there is waterboarding, a terrifying and deeply shocking torture technique in which the prisoner has his face exposed to water in a way that gives the feeling of drowning. According to CIA sources cited by ABC News, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed "was able to last between two and 2 1/2 minutes before begging to confess." Should we regret having done that? Should we abolish by law that practice, so that it could never be used on the next Khalid Sheikh Mohammed having thus gotten his confession?

And what if he possessed information with less imminent implications? Say we had information about a cell that he had helped found or direct, and that cell was planning some major attack and we needed information about the identity and location of its members. A rational moral calculus might not permit measures as extreme as the nuke-in-Manhattan scenario, but would surely permit measures beyond mere psychological pressure.

Such a determination would not be made with an untroubled conscience. It would be troubled because there is no denying the monstrous evil that is any form of torture. And there is no denying how corrupting it can be to the individuals and society that practice it. But elected leaders, responsible above all for the protection of their citizens, have the obligation to tolerate their own sleepless nights by doing what is necessary—and only what is necessary, nothing more—to get information that could prevent mass murder.

**GIVEN THE GRAVITY OF THE DECISION,** if we indeed cross the Rubicon—as we must—we need rules. The problem with the McCain amendment is that once you have gone public with a blanket ban on
all forms of coercion, it is going to be very difficult to publicly carve out exceptions. The Bush administration is to be faulted for having attempted such a codification with the kind of secrecy, lack of coherence, and lack of strict enforcement that led us to the McCain reaction.

What to do at this late date? Begin, as McCain does, by banning all forms of coercion or inhuman treatment by anyone serving in the military—an absolute ban on torture by all military personnel everywhere. We do not want a private somewhere making these fine distinctions about ticking and slow-fuse time bombs. We don't even want colonels or generals making them. It would be best for the morale, discipline, and honor of the Armed Forces for the United States to maintain an absolute prohibition, both to simplify their task in making decisions and to offer them whatever reciprocal treatment they might receive from those who capture them—although I have no illusion that any anti-torture provision will soften the heart of a single jihadist holding a knife to the throat of a captured American soldier. We would impose this restriction on ourselves for our own reasons of military discipline and military honor.

Outside the military, however, I would propose, contra McCain, a ban against all forms of torture, coercive interrogation, and inhuman treatment, except in two contingencies: (1) the ticking time bomb and (2) the slower-fuse high-level terrorist (such as KSM). Each contingency would have its own set of rules. In the case of the ticking time bomb, the rules would be relatively simple: Nothing rationally related to getting accurate information would be ruled out. The case of the high-value suspect with slow-fuse information is more complicated. The principle would be that the level of inhumanity of the measures used (moral honesty is essential here—we would be using measures that are by definition inhumane) would be proportional to the need and value of the information. Interrogators would be constrained to use the least inhumane treatment necessary relative to the magnitude and imminence of the evil being prevented and the importance of the knowledge being obtained.

These exceptions to the no-torture rule would not be granted to just any nonmilitary interrogators, or anyone with CIA credentials. They would be reserved for highly specialized agents who are experts and experienced in interrogation, and who are known not to abuse it for the satisfaction of a kind of sick sadomasochism Lyndie England and her cohorts indulged in at Abu Ghraib. Nor would they be acting on their own. They would be required to obtain written permission for such interrogations from the highest political authorities in the country (cabinet level) or from a quasi-judicial body modeled on the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court (which permits what would ordinarily be illegal searches and seizures in the war on terror). Or, if the bomb was truly ticking and there was no time, the interrogators would be allowed to act on their own, but would require post facto authorization within, say, 24 hours of their interrogation, so that they knew that whatever they did would be subject to review by others and be justified only under the most stringent terms.

One of the purposes of these justifications would be to establish that whatever extreme measures are used are for reasons of nothing but information. Historically, the torture of prisoners has been done for a variety of reasons apart from information, most prominently reasons of justice or revenge. We do not do that. We should not do that. Ever. Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, murderer of 2,973 innocents, is surely deserving of the most extreme suffering day and night for the rest of his life. But it is neither our role nor our right to be the agents of that suffering. Vengeance is mine, sayeth the Lord. His, not ours. Torture is a terrible and monstrous thing, as degrading and morally corrupting to those who practice it as any conceivable human activity including its moral twin, capital punishment.

If Khalid Sheikh Mohammed knew nothing, or if we had reached the point where his knowledge had been exhausted, I'd be perfectly prepared to throw him into a nice, comfortable Manhattan cell and give him a trial to determine what would be fit and just punishment. But as long as he had useful information, things would be different.

Very different. And it simply will not do to take refuge in the claim that all of the above discussion is superfluous because torture never works anyway. Would that this were true. Unfortunately, on its face, this is nonsense. Is one to believe that in the entire history of human warfare, no combatant has ever received useful information by the use of pressure, torture, or any other kind of inhuman treatment? It may indeed be true that torture is not a reliable tool. But that is very different from saying that it is never useful.

The monstrous thing about torture is that sometimes it does work. In 1994, 19-year-old Israeli corporal Nachshon Waxman was kidnapped by Palestinian terrorists. The Israelis captured the driver of the car used in the kidnapping and tortured him in order to find where Waxman was being held. Yitzhak Rabin, prime minister and peacemaker, admitted that they tortured him in a way that went even beyond the '87 guidelines for "coercive interrogation" later struck down by the Israeli Supreme Court as too harsh. The driver talked. His information was accurate. The Israelis found Waxman. "If we'd been so careful to follow the ['87] Landau Commission [which allowed coercive interrogation]," explained Rabin, "we would never have found out where Waxman was being held."

In the Waxman case, I would have done precisely what Rabin did. (The fact that Waxman's Palestinian captors killed him during the Israeli rescue raid makes the case doubly tragic, but changes nothing of the moral calculus.) Faced with a similar choice, an American president would have a similar obligation. To do otherwise—to give up the chance to find your soldier lest you sully yourself by authorizing torture of the person who possesses potentially lifesaving information—is a deeply immoral betrayal of a soldier and countryman. Not as cosmically immoral as permitting a city of one's countrymen to perish, as in the Ethics 101 case. But it remains, nonetheless, a case of moral abdication—of a kind rather parallel to that of the principled pacifist. There is much to admire in those who refuse on principle ever to take up arms under any conditions. But that does not make pure pacifism, like no-torture absolutism, any less a form of moral foolishness, tinged with moral vanity. Not reprehensible, only deeply reproachable and supremely impractical. People who hold such beliefs are deserving of a certain respect. But they are not to be put in positions of authority. One should be grateful for the saintly among us. And one should be vigilant that they not get to make the decisions upon which the lives of others depend.

WHICH BRINGS US to the greatest irony of all in the torture debate. I have just made what will be characterized as the pro-torture case contra McCain by proposing two major exceptions carved out of any no-torture rule: the ticking time bomb and the slow-fuse high-value terrorist. McCain supposedly is being hailed for defending all that is good and right and just in America by standing foursquare against any inhuman treatment. Or is he?

According to Newsweek, in the ticking time bomb case McCain says that the president should disobey the very law that McCain seeks to pass—under the justification that "you do what you have to do. But you take responsibility for it." But if torturing the ticking time bomb suspect is "what you have to do," then why has McCain been going around arguing that such things must never be done?

As for exception number two, the high-level terrorist with slow-fuse information, Stuart Taylor, the superb legal correspondent for National Journal, argues that with appropriate legal interpretation, the "cruel, inhuman, or degrading" standard, "though vague, is said by experts to codify ... the commonsense principle that the toughness of interrogation techniques should be calibrated to the importance and urgency of the information likely to be obtained." That would permit "some very aggressive techniques ... on that small percentage of detainees who seem especially likely to have potentially life-saving information." Or as Evan Thomas and Michael Hirsh put it in the Newsweek report on McCain and torture, the McCain standard would "presumably allow for a sliding scale" of torture or torture-lite or other coercive techniques, thus permitting "for a very small percentage--those

High Value Targets like Khalid Sheikh Mohammed--some pretty rough treatment."

But if that is the case, then McCain embraces the same exceptions I do, but prefers to pretend he does not. If that is the case, then his much-touted and endlessly repeated absolutism on inhumane treatment is merely for show. If that is the case, then the moral preening and the phony arguments can stop now, and we can all agree that in this real world of astonishingly murderous enemies, in two very circumscribed circumstances, we must all be prepared to torture. Having established that, we can then begin to work together to codify rules of interrogation for the two very unpleasant but very real cases in which we are morally permitted--indeed morally compelled--to do terrible things.

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Humiliation: The Lasting Effect of Torture

Guarantor: COL Hans U. Baer, Swiss Armed Forces
Contributors: Meike Vorbrüggen, MD Armed Forces; COL Hans U. Baer,

Although the physical effects of torture on surviving persons are well known, psychological wounds are lesser known and investigated. A new aspect of considerable impact is the notion of shame, self-humiliation, and the ensuing problems of degradation. Further research on the evolving concept of post-torture illness should be performed.

Introduction

The words of Jean Améry, a victim of torture, summarize the lasting effects of torture on the human mind. "Anyone who has been tortured remains tortured. Anyone who has suffered torture never again will be at ease in the world. Faith in humanity, already cracked by the first slap in the face, then demolished by torture, is never acquired again." Jean Améry, born as Hans Maier in Austria in 1912, was tortured by the Nazis in Auschwitz, Buchenwald, and Bergen Belsen. In his book At the Mind’s End, which describes his experience as a torture victim in Auschwitz, he deals with a central topic, namely, the state of mind of a victim. Unfortunately, torture is a worldwide phenomenon that affects humans in nearly all cultures and countries, ranging from physical methods up to psychological persecution. All forms of torture are clearly and unequivocally condemned and banned by the Third Geneva Convention. Despite an unprecedented and strong human rights movement that monitors and collects data, misdeeds, torture, punishment, and ill treatment continue to be recorded in at least 111 countries around the world. In this context, it is a sad fact that only 129 of 189 U.N. member states have become parties to the Convention Against Torture. Most governments and most lawyers referring to the Law of Armed Conflict agree that, even in critical situations (for example, provoked by terrorist attacks), torture, in terms of “a bit of torture,” must not be tolerated. Today, the suspicion exists that, in some contemporary armed forces, torture or forced interrogation has been permitted by the senior command. It is true that the topic of torture remains an important issue not only in times of war but also in times of peace. In addition, there is increasing evidence that torture creates a lifelong trauma that never leaves the memories of those who survive it.

In this article, one of the most important aspects of torture is discussed, i.e., the profound impact that humiliation has on the later life of tortured persons; it was recently discovered to be more important than physical torture itself. Investigations regarding the effects of humiliation through torture, both physical and mental, are in process.

One of the central objectives of torture is to humiliate, which generates deep feelings of shame and inferiority. Humiliation may affect individuals but it can also involve social groups or specific ethnic groups. When such humiliation affects entire societies, the reaction of those societies may lead to and culminate in genocide, as happened in Rwanda, for example. The 20th century is often termed the “Age of Genocide,” brought forth by the brutal genocidal assault on the Armenian population by the Turks between 1915 and 1923 (not acknowledged by the Turkish government) and the Nazi extermination program for European Jews and other ethnic groups in the Holocaust between 1939 and 1945. There were also genocides in Indonesia (1965), Burundi (1972), and the former Yugoslavia (1991–1995). Recent literature evaluating the role of humiliation in torture or genocide is rare. The few researchers who have pursued studies on humiliation during past years have arrived at interesting conclusions. Apart from the important effects on individuals of humiliation caused by torture, it was found that the effect of humiliation exercised on groups in armed conflicts plays a very important role in the emergence of genocide. Today, it is broadly accepted that the main cause of World War II lay in the humiliation Germany suffered from the Treaty of Versailles, which concluded World War I.

History and Changing Methods of Torture

Throughout the world, in the past and in the present, torture has been carried out against both the body and the mind of the victim. History offers us various examples of concentration camps that gained notoriety. In the former Soviet Union, forced-labor camps existed from 1917 as part of the Soviet penal and repressive system. During the 1930s, the secret police (Gosudarstvennoye Politicheskoye Upravlenie) established the main administration of the gulag and built hundreds of “corrective labor camps,” in which thousands of prisoners were detained after mass arrests. To terrorize society, their families were left ignorant of their whereabouts. These camps served as systematic slave-labor projects. For instance, the canal between the White Sea and the Baltic Sea was built by prisoners of such camps, under appalling conditions. The prisoners suffered from monstrous workloads, hunger, cold, exhaustion, fear, and brutality. Hundred of thousands of them died in agony. Concentration camps were also an essential part of the Nazis’ systematic oppression. There were concentration camps, forced-labor camps, and extermination or death camps. The living conditions in these camps were brutal andinhumane. Approximately 3 million Jews, political opponents, and others considered socially or racially undesirable were exterminated in the gas chambers. Ever since, the prevailing torture techniques have been notably brutal. It is quite evident that, in the 1970s, a farther-reaching change in torture methods took place; more subtle procedures, showing less-apparent physical marks of brutality, were used, so that the signs of torture would not so be evident. A historic view of torture techniques shows a clear change from physical to psychological torture throughout the 1970s. During that time, the term “la tortura proper” [the clean torture] came into use. Psychological torture was recognized to be more effec-
The Lasting Effect of Torture

are not justifiable by the medical, dental or hospital treatment of the prisoner concerned and carried out in his interest. Likewise, prisoners of war must at all times be protected, particularly against acts of violence or intimidation and against insults and public curiosity.

The 1984 U.N. Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment provides a regular definition of torture as follows.

For the purposes of this Convention, the term "torture" means any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity. It does not include pain or suffering arising only from, inherent in or incidental to lawful sanctions.

Torture trauma, persecution, and war-associated trauma, as well as the resulting psychophysiological responses, have been the subject of research for several decades. Scirgnar described the "traumatic principle" as any environmental stimulus that poses a realistic threat to life or limb, affecting one and sometimes all five sensory pathways to the brain. It is perceived as a serious threat to one's life or physical integrity, whether it produces physical injury or not, and it can be regarded as a trauma and precipitate post-traumatic stress disorder in a vulnerable individual.

Post-traumatic stress disorder was recognized in the 1980s, and its definition has been revised several times. It is now defined as "an anxiety disorder precipitated by an event that falls outside usual human experience and is characterized by symptoms of reexperiencing (flashback), avoidance and numbing (avoidance of reminders, psychogenic amnesia), and arousal (difficulty sleeping, exaggerated startle) that persists longer than 1 month after the trauma." The aim of torture is to force the victim into extreme powerlessness. The possible confusion on the part of the victim establishes the torturer as sovereign. At the same time, the resistance and personality of the victim are broken. Not to speak under torture is the only possibility for the sufferer to maintain his personal identity. If the perpetrators destroy the ability of the victim to experience his own identity, then a feeling of tremendous humiliation will hit the victim. The different aspects of humiliation, with respect to the individual but also on a collective level, are the subject of the following discussion.

Humiliation

One recent example of how humiliation works and the effects it has on prisoners is the Abu Ghraib prisoner abuse. Prison guards, who were badly trained and not well led, threatened male detainees with rape and mock suffocation of naked prisoners, forced detainees into certain explicitly sexual poses, and told the detainees to masturbate. These acts clearly show what humiliation is about and how it works. It starts with rendering

Definitions of Torture and Effects on the Mind

Since World War II, many authors have tried to answer the question of why so-called civilized men are able to commit extraordinary atrocities against their own kind, trying to search for the origins of human evil. The philosopher Hannah Arendt coined the term "Die Banalität des Bösen" (the banality of evil) during the Israeli against Adolf Eichmann, one of the organizers of the Holocaust. The Third Geneva Convention, regarding the treatment of prisoners of war, states in Article 13.

Prisoners of war must at all times be humanely treated. Any unlawful act or omission by the Detaining Power causing death or seriously endangering the health of a prisoner of war in its custody is prohibited, and will be regarded as a serious breach of the present Convention. In particular, no prisoner of war may be subjected to physical mutilation or to medical or scientific experiments of any kind which

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concerning the reasons for the Holocaust. At the beginning, social researchers such as Theodor Adorno suggested a specific type of fascist personality that is able to commit such atrocities. Are there certain personality structures that characterize people who commit unthinkable evil? Hannah Arendt’s book, Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil,1 suggested for the first time that people who commit crimes against humanity do not differ fundamentally from ordinary people like you and me. Adolf Eichmann, the executor of the “Endlösung” (final solution), stated in his defensive statement at the Jerusalem Trials, “I acted on command,” and psychological evaluation of his personality showed that he simply was an average person. Two famous experiments were carried out by P.G. Zimbardo and Stanley Milgram during the 1960s. Especially Milgram’s experiment shows, as does Eichmann’s statement, that a man feels responsible only to the authority directing him and feels no responsibility for the kind of actions that the authority expects him to carry out.

Shame

Shame may grow out of the experience of humiliation. Humiliation and shame, as well as guilt and embarrassment, have been referred to as the self-conscious emotions. These emotions are called this because they force us to reflect upon ourselves. Shame is defined as “a painful sensation excited by a consciousness of guilt or impropriety, or of having done something which injures reputation, or of the exposure of that which nature or modesty prompts us to conceal.” Shame is also a social condition implying social control, social experience, and roots in the interrelationships between people. It can be described as an impetus that controls people’s thoughts, feelings, and behavior. “It causes us to reflect upon ourselves in relationship.” The feeling of shame, with its self-focused quality, is experienced by the individual concerned as a fundamental defect with no hope of recovery. Victims of torture are not able to communicate their experience of humiliation because they feel so deeply ashamed about it. Because shame is such a painful emotion, leading to social and interpersonal deficits, it damages a person deeply, making recuperation a long process for survivors of such torture. P.101owarzycyk et al. even found that shame is a strong indicator for the development of symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder.

Humiliation on a Collective Level

Severe historical trauma lives on in the memory of people and transmits shame and humiliation from generation to generation. In the 20th century, shame and humiliation on a collective level played an important role in the development of wars. Thomas Schell, a professor of sociology, wrote in his essay on Norbert Elias’ famous book, The Civilizing Process. Elias’s argument was that the Germans, both as persons and as a nation, historically have been unable to respond to humiliation in any other way than fighting. His argument is quite similar to my analysis of the humiliated fury that arose during the period of the three Franco-German wars, 1870 to 1945. I was unaware of this similarity until I had published my book. I proposed that because of the French defeat in 1871, unacknowl-
Acknowledged shame was a key element on the French side leading to the First World War and following their defeat in 1918, on the German side leading to the Second World War. Like Elias, I propose acknowledged shame as one source of protracted conflict.

Demagogues such as Adolf Hitler or Slobodan Milosevic used such shame, combining them with current feelings of injustice, to exercise absolute power and to divide people into friends and foes. Categorization of the “other” according to class, religion, nation, or race is the beginning of violence and dehumanization against groups or individuals. The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, outline the global implications that accompany long-buried feelings of religious, cultural, and personal humiliation (on either side). If humiliation and the resulting shame of torture are able to destroy a person completely, what could be the outcome of humiliation that affects a group of people or a part of a society over a longer period of time? In this context, it is worthwhile looking at Rwanda. How do so many people arrive at committing such extraordinary and thoroughly planned atrocities to erase a different ethnic group? Certainly, it is not only humiliation that leads people to commit genocide. Worldwide studies have clearly shown that there are many determinants that can trigger genocide, including ethnocentrism, xenophobia, cultural influences, and moral exclusion (“the other”). Besides these determinants, what role did humiliation play in the development of genocide in Rwanda? There were primarily two groups in Rwanda, the Hutu and the Tutsi. Both groups speak Kinyarwanda, and the two groups have the same cultural background. The Hutus traditionally worked as farmers and represented - 85% of the population. The Tutsis, who raised cattle, accounted for 15% of the population. A Hutu from northern Burundi stated in an interview with the ethnologist Evelyn Lindner in 1999, "The concept of humiliation is related to tradition and culture: Tutsi are convinced that they are born to rule; they cannot imagine how they can survive without being in power. A Tutsi had learned that he could kill a Hutu at any time." When the Belgian colonists arrived in 1916, they saw these two groups as distinct entities, and they produced identity cards classifying people according to their supposed ethnicity. The Belgians considered the Tutsis superior to the Hutus. A hierarchical and ethnically based system developed for a long time in Rwanda. A quota system for Hutus was established, but only after World War II were they able to participate in politics and public life. Political and social discourses in Rwandese society were carried out only at the level of ethnic conflicts. In 1959, a revolt of Hutus against the Tutsis took place, and thousands of Tutsis had to flee to Uganda and Burundi, where they formed the Rwandan Patriotic Front, a guerrilla party. In the subsequent three decades, Hutu influence and power increased, forcing the Tutsi minority to leave the country. Everyone knows the result of this development.

Conclusions

Although modern people think of themselves as being civilized and enlightened, it is a sad historical fact that no other species is capable of torturing its own kind as is Homo sapiens. During the entire history of mankind, torture has played a role in almost all cultures, in wars, and in political or religious conflicts. Although the brutal force of medieval torture, which aimed at destroying or mutilating the human body to extract confessions or secrets, has been well known for centuries, its use now is strictly forbidden by international law and the Geneva Conventions. Most civilized countries have signed these treaties, but it is a sad fact that some countries did not sign these protocols or have reservations about them. Although we think that today torture is banned and is used only in dictatoral countries, we must acknowledge that, even in the most modern and democratic states, a tightrope walk seems to exist between simple interrogation of imprisoned persons and actual torture. If persons survive, then torture scars and mutilation may be noticed and reported as proof of torture. Therefore, torturers have tried to move away from brutal physical force to more subtle psychological and mental forms that are less detectable but are as effective as physical torture may be. In this context, an important aspect that has only recently been described is the effect of humiliation and shame on the victim. This humiliation is produced by self-inflicted degradation under brutal pressure and resulting loss of resistance to the torturer. The ensuing feelings of guilt and shame seem to have longer-lasting and more deadly effects on the soul and mind of the tortured than does physical torture. Humiliation and degradation of the individual may lead to a completely destroyed personality whose recovery is practically impossible. Although bodily scars may heal, mental scars stay forever. Not only individual humiliation and degradation have these long-lasting and destroying effects; groups or even entire societies may be affected by feelings of humiliation and shame. These feelings may be passed on from generation to generation until they reach a point at which a brutal aggression without limits breaks out. In this case, no individual is recognized any longer as a human being, which makes killing easy. These facts are thought to have led to the disasters of World War I and World War II and to the atrocities between Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda. Because these mental scars and disturbances may continue for the entire life of an individual and because they may induce entire nations to go to war, it is important to prevent such forms of torture. In fact, this is the purpose and the intention of achieving the international acknowledgment of the Geneva Conventions. It is worthwhile in every level of society and in every country to fight for the maintenance of these principals. Violations must be made public by everyone, by the individual, by the press, by international organizations, and by diplomatic services, so that abuses can be pointed out and the international community can take measures to prevent them. In any case, it should be one of the most important obligations of the medical community, and foremost of medical doctors, to take care of victims and to stand up against any form of torture, whether physical or mental. Only this guarantees that the abuse of human beings by other human beings may be stopped today.

References


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Section: Keynote

TORTURE--NEVER FORGET

Dinyar Godrej listens to a messenger for lost blood.

'Life is a mirage, you know. You are walking to reach the water, but it keeps flowing back and back. You begin to count the minutes and seconds, waiting to see what will happen.'

In the light of the life experienced by the speaker of those words, they appear somehow less desolate. They could almost be consolation.

Babek, were he not flesh and blood, might be a mirage too. He is careful not to use his name when I introduce myself and, in the story he recounts, all the names of his family members are similarly suppressed. I have no telephone number for him, no e-mail address and I promise to destroy the tapes of our interview. When we finish and he leaves, there is a sense that we will never see each other again. He has come to treasure anonymity.

But there is other evidence that he is real -- quite apart from the fact that he has been vouched for by the London-based torture-survivors charity the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture. It's in his bolt-upright bearing and control, as if all hell would break loose if he let that slip. And it's in the tears that track silently down his face as he continues to speak as calmly as he can. And it's in his apologies for his tears.

'I used to be a teacher of literature in Iran. The reason why I was arrested was because I was trying to stop children going to war and dying for nothing. I was also like other people trying to talk about our rights and asking the government to deliver on its
promises. So that's why I became suddenly, overnight, a communist. They have to find a label to stick on you.' It was 1980 and Khomeini's reign of terror was taking hold. The dreaded Revolutionary Guard were becoming a law unto themselves and, with the advent of war with Iraq, people found themselves imprisoned and awaiting execution for the vaguest of charges, sentenced in secret without access to defence lawyers or a jury. Khomeini believed 'criminals should not be tried; they should be killed'. In the first four years of the war half a million Iranians left the country, a further two million became refugees, 10,000 were executed in wave after wave of terror (though Babek insists the true figure was closer to 40,000), thousands died in the Kurdish rebellion and nearly 100,000 were killed in the war with Iraq.

Babek knew it was only a matter of time before they came for him. It first happened at three in the morning. He had taken a sedative to help him sleep and suddenly the door was kicked open, breaking it to pieces. 'There were these four Revolutionary Guards in my room. They just pushed me and said: "We are going to search the house." And when I said: "You have no right to search my house; where is your warrant?", one of them pulled a gun and said, "This is our warrant; don't talk too much."' He was kicked in the stomach and dragged to jail without being allowed to dress. He was released a few weeks later. 'That time it wasn't very difficult because they weren't a very established regime, so there was a fear that they might lose their control of the people.' By the time of his last arrest things were very different. Babek had already seen one of his brothers destroyed both body and soul after 48 hours of continuous torture. He died of his injuries.

The Guards came for Babek at a relative's house, saying: 'We just want to talk with him for a minute, then we will bring him back.' 'They dragged me out, blindfolded me, put a hood on my head, tied my hands and put me into a van. The Revolutionary Guards were insulting and kicking me, saying: "You fell into the trap like a mouse."' They drove to another city where he was herded into a yard with other prisoners. When the hood and blindfold came off, he saw that his 14-year-old brother had also been picked up. They were immediately separated and Babek was taken for questioning.

A gun's barrel pointed at his head, he was commanded to remain stock still. The slightest movement and one of the guards suggested chopping off a finger. They found his salary in his pocket and accused him of receiving money from a communist organization to fight against religion and the regime. When Babek tried telling them it was his salary he was put into a narrow, low-ceilinged room that had formerly been a toilet. 'There was dirt on the floor and blood stains on the wall. Later on I was told a prisoner who had been shouting anti-regime slogans had been shot in the head there.

For five days they didn't open the door for me or give me any food or drink. My stomach felt like it was bleeding. I was bursting to go to the toilet. There was a cup, a milk cup with the name of a city on it. That's when I knew where I was. I urinated in it.' On the fifth day when a guard finally opened the door, he was made to drink it.

He was then taken to a place they called 'the basement', a word which has forever been sullied in his mind. 'They tied my hands and feet and I was on the floor. They attacked me. I was thinking, "Oh God, they are going to do the same thing to my brother. He cannot survive, I cannot survive." I thought they would kill me.'

He regained consciousness to find a guard leaning over him giving him water. 'He said, "Drink it, my son." And I remember the words I said: "I'm not your son, I'm just a prisoner." He said, "Drink it. Don't let them torture you. Tell them the truth." I said, "What
truth? There's no truth. The truth is I am just a teacher and I haven't done anything, I haven't taken arms against the regime, I haven't killed anybody. I'm a human being. If that's a crime, you have to kill the entire country, kill everybody."

Perhaps without realizing it, Babek had voiced the essential truth about torture. Whatever the stated aims might be (such as the extraction of information or punishment), the real reason it is used is to murder the spirit, to subjugate, to show who's boss. Babek was shown many executions and the bodies of the executed during his incarceration and told he would end up like them. Executions were also carried out in public places, the victims sometimes trussed to the arches of bridges, warnings as ancient as Calvary. The terror repeats itself today in the hacked-off limbs of men, women and children in Sierra Leone, the rapes of Kurds in Turkey which their loved ones are often forced to witness, the branding of criminals or ethnic minorities in Iraq or Kosovo, the shattered knees of teenagers in Northern Ireland. (Jane Caple writes of the intimidation of ordinary Tibetans on page 26 of this issue.) It is a modern tragedy that no continent is free of torture today and regimes of all political persuasions have used it -- in fact it's on the rise.

Torture is sometimes justified as a means of getting vital information during wartime, but in reality the torturers are likely to hear only what they want to hear. In Babek's case, he was called to write down answers to a list of questions. The torturers, suffering from delusions of omniscience that often plague the power-crazed, decided what was truth and what a lie and demanded alternate answers. Eventually, 'one of them said: "Take him downstairs and kill him. Empty 20 bullets into his headstrong communist head." I was back in the basement and they asked me if I wanted to write something to my family. So I said I wanted to write to my mother. I wrote: "Sorry I haven't been a good son and gave you a lot of pain." And I gave her my love. I was blindfolded and my hands and legs were tied together. Then they started firing, they were shouting: "God is great."' Babek listened to the shots ringing out, thinking his life would end at any minute.

In the interview room he asks me to stop the tape for a minute. It is now nearly 20 years since the event, but he feels he is in a time machine, reliving the experience. 'It is always fresh. You cannot say that it stops, it doesn't matter if one is tortured physically or mentally. The physical pain you suffer for a while and it disappears, but the mental scar in your mind and in your heart -- it doesn't leave.' Babek remembers watching programmes about Jewish Holocaust survivors before he had experienced torture himself and wondering why these elderly people couldn't just forget about something that had happened so long ago. Now he knows why.

But his and their continuing horror says something about why victims of torture often don't rush to tell the world or even their nearest and dearest about what has happened to them. Accepting what has happened to them takes time. They have to learn to manage 'a constellation of psychological consequences', prominent among them being survivor guilt, shame, anxiety, suspicion and fear of authority. (Gill Hinshelwood writes on page 14 of the long road from victimization to survival.) Sometimes the boundary between the mental and the physical gets broken, as when prolonged beatings so damage the nervous system that it keeps sending messages of pain to the brain even when there is no physical stimulus.

There is another rupture as well -- of family and relationships. Babek's own family is left behind in Iran, out of touch. His mother is a shadow of her former self; his father, a once-proud man who never bowed his head to anybody, aged almost overnight when catastrophe befell his sons -- he died four months after Babek's flight from the country.
For other survivors, their experiences have echoed down the generations, bequeathing dysfunction to their children. Survivors of sexual torture have witnessed relationships wither away.

The rupture goes further still -- into communities that get divided into victims, perpetrators and bystanders. The web of torture spirals outwards from the torturers and their victims to the staff that work in their prisons, the people who dispose of bodies, the medical staff who either have to treat 'torture cases' or are actually accomplices; to the wider community including members of the fourth estate who know what is happening but don't or can't speak out, to the PR advisors who spin the political angles and the politicians who sanction the torture or do business with torture regimes, to the trainers of torturers and traders of equipment (see Michael Crowley's article on one aspect of the trade, page 16), to... Eventually this web reaches you and me, in the form of media reports and survivor's stories. The choice then is, do I turn the page or switch the channel because it doesn't really concern me, or do I break the silence?

For silence is the intended goal of the torturers. Even though they need to get the message across to the communities they terrorize, they are aware of the evil they do and don't really want it observed by an audience other than the one intended. (Tom Morris examines the denial syndrome that afflicts modern torturers on page 28 and John Conroy looks at the kind of people they are on page 20.)

First, we must recognize torture for what it is. The definition adopted by the 1984 UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment includes severe physical or mental pain or suffering inflicted with the consent of people acting in an official capacity in order to obtain information or confessions, to punish or intimidate. Torture doesn't just affect prisoners of conscience and human-rights defenders, it also targets criminals, members of discriminated-against ethnic groups, lesbians and gays, the socially disadvantaged and those unfortunate who happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. The rape of women in wartime and extreme persecution that makes life unbearable are also being recognized as instances of torture. The torturers can also be private individuals who believe the people they assault are worthless or deserving of such treatment. Legal sanction doesn't alter the fact -- for years Israeli law has permitted the use of 'pressure' during interrogation (though there have been some changes for the better recently) and death row in the US is, as one writer put it, 'a torture chamber in which no-one has to lift a finger to hurt the inmates.'

In order to act against torture we must be ready to bear witness to it, no matter how insignificant we may consider our contribution to be. When an organization like Amnesty International launches letter-writing campaigns they rely on thousands of people acting as individuals to ensure that the torturers know that they are being watched. And though not every fight they take up ends in success, there are people all around the world today who owe their freedom to this work. Sometimes just knowing that people are voicing their support can help detainees. Bebek remembers the way his captors kept him and twelve others boxed-in in a cell designed for three, leaving them unable to think beyond the four walls that bore messages from prisoners who had died before them. He believes knowing someone from the outside world was thinking about them would have made all the difference.

Next month Amnesty International begins a year-long campaign against torture. Alongside action on individual cases they will be stepping up their lobbying of governments and
international bodies to act on torture. Because, let’s face it, when even a country like Saudi Arabia with its blatant disregard for human rights can sign up to the UN Convention against Torture, then we are living in a world where ‘torture is prohibited, but not prevented’. Demand that your own government take torture into consideration when doing business abroad. Agitate -- a handful of priests, nuns and students succeeded in stopping the US Army-run School of the Americas that had provided military training for Latin American officials who went on to unleash terror. Their campaign goes on to stop a clone of the School to which US Congress has given the go-ahead.

Support the work of human-rights defenders, who often face great danger themselves, and organizations working for the treatment and rehabilitation of survivors. Deplore the horrendous treatment of asylum seekers by the rich world with its ‘detention centres’. Australia, which in April forcibly sent back hundreds of ethnic Albanian refugees to Kosovo in a manner described by local media as ‘torture’, declared a week later it’s receptivity to offering refuge to white farmers fleeing violence in Zimbabwe.

Impunity is the burning issue for survivors and their families (David Ransom’s report on one such struggle for justice appears on page 24). When regimes topple, torturers often negotiate the amnesty they so patently failed to grant their victims. But both internationally and nationally the law has a duty to try torturers, if only to prevent the violence coming full circle when those they have brutalized take matters in their own hands. The message from a country like Argentina -- whose human-rights record still leaves much to be desired but where successful prosecutions against members of the former military government have occurred -- is that though the odds are usually stacked against change, demands that it occur are still essential.

Babek knows that the situation in Iran still prevents justice being served against the men who ripped apart his family. He has come to view justice differently. ‘I managed to achieve what I wanted, studying, having a job, marrying and having a family of my own and also thinking positively. My torturers took so much away from me, but I managed to take the smile away from them. They lost, they missed me.

‘I will be the messenger for the lost blood. I am going to talk about it. I will never let people forget -- what happened and what is still happening. People have to be reminded all the time.’


Some of the excellent organizations offering treatment and other help to torture survivors. For more addresses in these and other countries look at www.irct.org under 'Rehabilitation network'.

**Aotearoa/New Zealand**
The Auckland Refugees as Survivors Centre, 85 Wakefield Street, Auckland; Tel: +64 9 377 8185; Fax: +64 9 309 5090.

**Australia**
Association for Services to Torture and Trauma Survivors, 3rd Floor, Bon Marche Arcade, 80 Barrack Street, Perth WA 6000; Tel: +61 8 9325 6272; Fax: +61 8 9221 5092; E-mail: asetts@iinet.net.au Web: www.asetts.org.au

**Britain**
Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture, 96-98 Grafton Road, London NW5 3EJ; Tel: +44 20 7813 9999; Fax: +44 20 7813 0011; E-mail: info@torturecare.org.uk Web: www.torturecare.org.uk

**Canada**
Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture, 194 Jarvis Street, 2nd Floor, Toronto, Ontario, M5B 2B7; Tel: +1 416 363 1066; Fax: +1 416 363 2122; E-mail: ccvt@icomm.ca Web: www.icomm.ca/ccvt

**US**
The Center for Victims of Torture, 717 East River Road, Minneapolis, MN 55455; Tel: +1 612 626 1400; Fax: +1 612 626 2465; E-mail: amyers@cvt.org Web: www.cvt.org

**Web resources**
- [www.hrw.org](http://www.hrw.org) Human Rights Watch, an organization that monitors human rights and campaigns to establish an international criminal court and improved prison conditions.
- [www.apt.ch/cinat.htm](http://www.apt.ch/cinat.htm) The Coalition of International NGOs Against Torture which pools resources of member organizations on issues such as prevention, direct action, impunity and rehabilitation.
- [www.apt.ch](http://www.apt.ch) The Association for the Prevention of Torture which seeks to ensure the implementation of international laws forbidding torture.
- [www.redress.org](http://www.redress.org) Redress, which is dedicated to helping survivors obtain reparations.

Addresses for Amnesty International are on page 18.

aPHOTO (COLOR): Flying the flag: children were sent to fight in Iran's war with its neighbour.

aPHOTOS (COLOR): Keeping memory alive: the photograph is of her husband who disappeared in the massacre in Guatemala in the early 1980s (above); co-opted: accused of genocide, this boy is held in a Rwandan detention centre (right).

aPHOTO (COLOR): Cruelty as spectator sport: a public flogging in Saudi Arabia (right); child's counsel: a therapy session at the Medical Foundation (below).

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By Dinyar Godrej