When the Rules of War are Broken

by Nina K. Thomas, Ph.D., ABPP
Co-chair, Relational orientation, NYU Postdoctoral Program; private practice, New York and Morristown, NJ

"(The) best guarantee against tyranny... is a heightened public sense of why it is repulsive. Trials that explore and enforce the idea that torture can have no defense may encourage that sense. Allowing known torturers to remain in positions of authority, unchallenged and uncondemned, can only weaken it." (Dworkin, 1986, p.xxviii.)

On May 24, 2004 President George Bush, addressing the Army War College offered this prescription among his list of plans for the future of Iraq: “America will fund the construction of a modern maximum security prison. When that prison is completed, detainees at Abu Ghraib will be relocated. Then with the approval of the Iraqi government we will demolish the Abu Ghraib prison as a fitting symbol of Iraq’s new beginning” (New York Times, May 24, 2004, emphasis added).

There are many ways we might deconstruct Bush’s prescription. What is most telling for my purposes is to consider his proposal to destroy Abu Ghraib. His “out of sight, out of mind” approach is a common response on the part of those for whom remembering is inconvenient. Were it as easy to destroy the memories of those subjected to the war crimes that occurred there. We are left to wonder if he would have said the same about Dachau or Auschwitz or for that matter, Robben Island.

When the needs for justice for victims of war crimes go unaddressed or incompletely addressed, the memory of the brutality survivors suffered is unalloyed. If there is no opportunity to remember safely and to memorialize, then experience cannot be transformed but only enacted, as we see repeatedly in the cycles of violence as are now occurring on the streets of Iraqi cities.

Among the several things that fuel revenge are not only the wounds inflicted but the absence of acknowledged of and justice for those wounds. This is the legacy that many countries are currently dealing with in the wake of the military dictatorships, ethnic conflict and political repression that took hold within them, often accompanied by years of atrocities that constituted crimes against humanity.

There has been long debate within international law circles about what serves as a deterrent to would-be perpetrators of crimes against humanity. Can trials of such criminals serve in that regard? Continued on page 4

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FROM THE EDITOR
by Steve Botticelli, Ph.D.

We lead off this issue with a timely piece by Nina Thomas on the experience of victims of war crimes called to give testimony at the trials of their perpetrators. Nina’s work with survivors of the war in Bosnia from 1992 through 1995 has provided her with rich material for considering questions such as the possibility for a measure of repair subsequent to trauma, in one of the most extreme contexts imaginable. As Nina points out, while we read in the papers about the details of the proceedings of war crimes tribunals and truth commissions, little is said of the meaning that giving testimony has for those who do so. Here Nina shares with us some of what she has learned, and makes connections to the currently unfolding story of American torture of Iraqi prisoners at Abu Ghraib.

Also in this issue we introduce a new feature, “Embedded Lives.” Karen Rosica, who will serve as editor for the series, offers us material from her interview of a man in her community. Presented plainly, without theoretical formulation, her piece gives us an opportunity to reflect freshly on the linkages between the psychic and the social in the context of one man’s life.

Finally, Lynne Layton describes the creation of a syllabus on culture and psychoanalysis, selections from which we will be reading and discussing over the next year. Already underway online for all members of our section, the project is providing a stimulating way for us to educate, and generate discussion among, ourselves. And we have a message from Nancy Hollander, in her new role as president.

As always, I welcome feedback. Contact me at srb224@nyu.edu.
I begin my term as President of Section IX at a time when the focus of our section on psychoanalysis and social responsibility could not be more relevant. Before I report on the current activities of the Section and of our individual board members, I would like to briefly share several observations about how the current world situation demonstrates the impossibility of separating psychic and social reality and the challenge it represents to us as psychoanalytic practitioners and citizens.

Without a doubt we psychoanalysts and our patients are experiencing the psychological impact of multiple social and political forces that loom ever larger in our private lives. For example, I have had occasion through the experiences of two of my patients, to see how globalization touches us personally. One aspect of globalization that has been affecting people in this country for some years, but is only now making news on a regular basis, is the phenomenon of outsourcing: the corporate shift of jobs from this country's working population to the cheap labor of the nations of Africa, Central and Latin America, and most of Asia. Once restricted to manufacturing and assembly line jobs, this phenomenon now includes middle class service sector occupations. Increasing numbers of professionals as well as blue collar workers are now jobless as a result of outsourcing. I have witnessed its tragic impact on the lives of my patients, each of whom worked for years for an employer who restructured his business so as to employ low-waged workers in India. Each suddenly found himself and his fellow employees jobless, facing a dramatic decline in their standard of living and an insecure future. Given the decline in the size and scope of organizing vehicles like labor unions, few constructive outlets remain for the expression of helplessness and rage generated by job loss due to outsourcing. My patients’ reactive depressions are very difficult for them and their families to deal with. I suspect that similar emotionally disturbing and financially disastrous results of outsourcing are being reproduced among thousands of working people and their families throughout the country.

In many ways, the political world is directly affecting our psychological experience, blurring the customarily assumed boundaries between public and private life. Since 9/11, what we read in newspapers and see or hear on news programs can be profoundly disconcerting. Today, in unprecedented ways, we realize that the political and military crises taking place thousands of miles away can have sudden personal catastrophic consequences for any of us. Given the strategy of terrorism on the one hand and the prevailing domestic and foreign policies of the current administration to combat it on the other, we now fear becoming the victims of future terrorist attacks and the erosion of our civil liberties. It seems to me that we are living with an intensifying sense of threat; for some of us it has become chronic, while for others it surfaces when particularly dramatic events overwhelm psychological defenses against the anxiety provoked by danger. A case in point is the recent exposure of the mistreatment, humiliation, abuse and torture of Iraqi prisoners by U.S. service-men and women in Abu Ghraib prison, and the disturbing possibility that these activities are the result of institutional policy, not the aberrant behavior of a few “bad apples”. These events are shocking and unsettling in and of themselves, but they are also disconcerting because for lots of people, they explode the comfortable assumptions underlying the U.S. government’s simplistic discourse that bifurcates the world into good (us) and evil (them) to justify its preemptive military strikes against other countries. When so many need to feel they are being protected by a righteous government—sympathetic with a good parent—Abu Ghraib forces them to confront, if only for a moment, the disillusioning reality that our government, like the dehumanized enemy, may be evil as well as good and that our country also partakes in human rights violations and contributes to the escalating cycles of violence in the world. Another example of the psychological impact of political events is the related event in Iraq of the horrific decapitation of a private U.S. citizen by an Islamist extremist group. In this case, we become virtual witnesses to murder and must negotiate the deeply disturbing emotional impact of seeing such cruelly perpetrated by human beings upon other human beings. I believe that these expressions of brutality and sadism often produce a state of dread that the escalating cycles of violence in the world could ultimately involve us all.

As I’ve talked about this with colleagues, many report that their patients are increasingly preoccupied with politics in their sessions, expressing critical views of the government and anxieties about the rising violence and its impact on other people and potentially themselves. In this situation, psychoanalysts are faced with the task of understanding and responding to the psychological meanings of political life within the psychotherapeutic setting. A contrary challenge arises from what my colleagues and I also note, which is that a surprising number of patients do not talk about these disturbing political developments at all. As psychoanalysts, we are aware of the various psychological maneuvers people utilize in the face of traumatic situations, including rationalization, denial, identification with the aggressor and dissociation, in order to defend themselves against an intolerable sense of vulnerability and helplessness. So what do we do with patients whose narratives exclude any apparent apprehension of what is happening in the political realm, much less any expression of how they feel about it? Do these patients reflect the effective internalization of the cultural assumptions around the public/private split that have constituted the political ideology of this society since the late 19th century, so that they actually experience the public realm as a discrete world apart from their personal lives? Are they complying with an unspoken rule of psychoanalysis, which itself has all too often subscribed to the principle that there is, indeed, a separation between psychic and social reality, the former being the only appropriate domain of psychotherapeutic inquiry? I think a very important question is how we as psychoanalysts might collude with the absence of the social/political in our patients’ discourse because we, too, have been trained to think that psychoanalytic treatment should focus on our patients’ personal lives.

Since the unlinking of internal and external reality is becoming less tenable, members of
He is a beautiful guy. He's not the studied, self-conscious kind of handsome but definitely the kind you look at. And if the looking had not somewhere become conflated with women clutching their purses to their chests when they passed him, or crossing the street to avoid passing him at all, he could have even become vain. R is black...and gay.

He was born in 1960 in Floralla, a small, quiet, rural town just 100 miles south of Montgomery, Alabama, a really rough neighborhood. The year of R's birth, George Wallace was governor of Alabama. His birth took place six years after the Supreme Court ruled that public school segregation violated the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment, and the day that Rosa Parks refused move to the rear of a bus; four years after the order that desegregation proceed "with all deliberate speed," and the beginning of the 381 day Montgomery boycott. The decade of his birth began with a wave of lunch counter sit-ins, followed in 1961 by "freedom rides" challenging segregation at bus stations. In 1963, four young black girls were killed, the result of a bomb planted in their church. Their murders prompted Martin Luther King to organize a protest campaign in Birmingham, Alabama. President Kennedy called racial discrimination a "moral crisis" and introduced a civil rights bill prohibiting segregation in public accommodations; President Johnson signed it into law in 1964. R was four, as hundreds of volunteers went to Mississippi for "freedom summer" despite the murder of three civil rights workers, Mickey Schwerner, James Cheney, and Andrew Goodman by Klansmen. In 1965 the Selma-to-Montgomery march was followed by the passage of the Voting Rights Act.

This is the official story. But, it is not R's story. He remembers very little of these events. His family was more focused on the exigencies of every day living. He was the youngest of eight children in a close-knit matriarchal family. A shy boy, he kept things to himself, particularly emotional things. Except for occasional beatings for which he had to provide the switch, he didn't have much interaction with his father; his mother did most of the talking.

R's family members were simple working-class people whose focus was the family. "They were good people, didn't want to make any trouble and tended to their own. We were just trying to figure out how to get to the next step." Both his parents worked full time on an air force base not too far from where they lived. His mom was a chef and his dad was a heavy equipment operator. They worked on the base for 35 years together. They are still alive, married for 55 years.

Floralla was a town divided; blacks on one side of the tracks and whites on the other. From kindergarten through fourth grade, R attended an all black school. When the Supreme Court abandoned the "'all deliberate speed' standard and ordered the immediate desegregation of Southern schools, R was nine. He had to repeat fourth grade "because" of being bussed to an all white school. R did not clarify why he was held back; he presented it as just a fact of life. He will never forget that first day at his new school. "When I first walked into the school it was really scary. Until then, I had only gone to school with people who looked like me. I had never been exposed to that many white kids. Of course I had seen them on the streets and riding in the car but to actually be in a class learning the same things with white kids was weird. I didn't know if I were smart enough. We were always checking each other out; me looking at their skin, them looking at my hair. And we talked so different. I had never even touched white skin. I had never touched a white person."

"The first day I was nervous the whole time. I didn't know how to take it all in. I was young. There were seven or eight black kids with me in class. I knew them from school but I wasn't friends with them. We were all separated around the class room. I had always had black teachers and this teacher was white. I stayed to myself. As time went by it got better. Students started to open up to each other. I started liking my teachers more and more.

"My principal didn't like black kids. He had a cold stare in his eyes when he looked at us. We always noticed that black kids were in his office being beaten with a paddle. He even had one of those electric paddle machines. We had to bend over and put our hands on a chair and let this thing whack us. I never saw this happen to white kids. We didn't really do anything much—just simple things like having an argument with a kid in the classroom. The teachers were always saying that our behavior was very difficult to deal with. But, really, the white kids behaved just as badly as we did."

R's most profound memory of this time was the assassination of President Kennedy and the murder of Martin Luther King. The family just sat mute in front of the television. R's mother cried. On both occasions he remembered thinking that it was as if she had lost her best friend.

"The whole family was in the living room as if we couldn't move. It was just quiet throughout the house. Now I wish that my mom and dad had participated in helping the movement; then I was just worried about her. She just said we had to hang in there and stay strong as a family.

"By seventh grade we started mixing. It took that long. I started developing friendships with the white kids too. I wanted to find laughter. I didn't want to be depressed all the time. I could see a lot of black kids were depressed all the time. The looks on their faces didn't seem happy. I think a lot of the [white] teachers and students didn't open up to them because of that.

Music and the church were central to R's family life. "The thing I love about my people is that we always looked to the church for guidance. The church was a safe haven for us. That's where we would get our strength. Whenever we felt down and out we would go to the church and sing and pray. It always made us feel better."
Who should be prosecuted -- the perpetrators, usually low-level enlisted personnel, or the authors of the policies that direct such activity? Who should conduct such trials? What are their political costs? Do truth recovery processes like the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa and other countries serve as adequate alternatives? These are among the issues that are weighed. They have particular relevance again as the world confronts the actions of the United States in Iraq.

While considerable attention is paid to the political importance of such legal questions, little if any has been accorded to the psychological significance for those individuals whose willingness to testify is critical to a country’s political fortunes. Invariably the needs for political stability have trumped the individual concerns for recompense. Such was the justification for granting amnesty to the Argentine generals responsible for the military dictatorship during that country’s seven year “Dirty War.” Amnesty, while politically expedient for reconstructing civil society, serves to effectively appropriate victims’ stories to the sociopolitical aim of political stability (Thomas, 2004).

For the past seven years I have been researching the intersection of war and justice and their psychological consequences in Bosnia. My focus has been on what it means for survivors to testify in the judicial processes that have followed in the wake of that war. What relationship is there between the processes involved in reconstituting a civil society and individuals’ needs to stabilize their inner world? What meaning does testifying have for survivors? What relevance do they see in the process for their futures? To that end I have attended the proceedings of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) at The Hague and visited Bosnia to interview survivors of the war.

The war in Bosnia raged from 1992 until 1995. During that time out of a population of 4 million, 2 million people were made refugees either internally within the country or displaced around the world. Concentration camps in which thousands of men and women were sadistically brutalized, starved and raped littered the landscape. Mass graves continue still to be found throughout Bosnia. The fate of thousands of people remains unknown to their loved ones. Such are the stories of every war.

The ICTY has been prosecuting war criminals for their commission of crimes of genocide and crimes against humanity, among other charges, since 1995. The men and women survivor-witnesses I have met with are uniformly ambivalent about the relevance of the ICTY for their lives. Having the chance to tell their stories within so august a body affords an opportunity to restore some of their shattered dignity even as they see the sentences meted out to defendants as inadequate. As one concentration camp survivor noted: “he didn’t get enough considering all the things he did. He should have got the death sentence. He should be shot in a public place.” Another, a survivor of months of brutal rape while held in a concentration camp, said about being in the same courtroom with one of those charged with raping her: “If I had the strength I would just go and strangle him.” Still another witness who had been starved while in a concentration camp and brutally beaten, requiring 2 years of hospitalization in another country, stated unequivocally that he did not have a sense that “justice” had been served. Even so, he reported: “there is no other place where we can tell this truth.”

The opportunity for survivor-witnesses to testify promotes a space for ambivalence to develop. When the experience of the victim is acknowledged and recognized it is possible that survivors and perpetrators may become three dimensional to one another rather than the container for each other’s projections. Certainly that was the intention if not always the achievement of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Sadly, the adversarial nature of the tribunals can serve to concretize the paranoid universe of good vs. bad.

Momir1 is now a good looking 29 year-old soft, gentle voice. He was 19 at the start of the war, from a small village outside of Sarajevo, full of a 19 year-old’s dreams of having a pretty girlfriend, owning a car, playing sports. Now he is wan and frail and walks with a decided limp. With apparent difficulty he drags his left leg, the residue of a particularly brutal massacre in which he was one of the sole survivors, and the only surviving member of his extended family. Serb soldiers had taken him along with more than 50 other men in an exchange of prisoners. Instead of exchanging the men, Serbs slaughtered them. Momir had been left for dead. With great difficulty he managed to extricate himself from the tangle of slaughtered bodies of his best friend and fellow villagers, most of them family members, to drag himself away, when the Serbs returned. He watched as one took out a rifle and again opened fire on the pile of dead and dying men. He vainly called out to them: “kill me. Kill me,” he screamed at them, only to watch them pull away.

Unable to work because of his injuries, Momir makes do on a barely subsistence level with aid from a non-governmental organization and provides help to other survivors of concentration camps. When I met with him in August 2003 he had not yet testified before the ICTY though he had given his testimony to their investigators. He is motivated by the wish to tell “the truth about what happened, so the world will know.”

In many cases, survivors were brutalized by people who had been their neighbors. Repeatedly in my interviews I heard that one woman knew this man from her village, another had been a judge in the canton in which the victim lived, still another had played on the opposing soccer team. (See also Neuffer, 2001.) Consiciously and unconsciously, survivors believe they can reinstate their narcissistic intactness, their sense of agency, by holding their torturers publicly accountable. The experience of torture dehumanizes both parties to the transaction. Indeed, being made into a “thing,” an object of insignificance, is in part its intent. So phrases like “you are nothing,” “no one knows or cares where you are,” “we are God here” are the frequent litany that accompanies torture (Nunca Mas, 1986). By having their voices heard, their experiences acknowledged and recognized through their testimony, survivor-witnesses become active subjects, no longer passive objects.

As I have for other interviewees, Momir is a pseudonym I am using for this man who generously agreed to share his story with me.
Section 9’s Education and Training Committee (Lynne Layton, Chair; Rico Ainslie, Christine Kieffer, and Frank Summers) has been working on creating and “marketing” a syllabus on Culture and Psychoanalysis. As we contemplated what contribution our committee could make to the efforts of psychoanalysis for social responsibility, we first thought of canvassing institutes to find out whether or not courses on culture and psychoanalysis were being taught and what they might look like. This proved too daunting a task, and preliminary research suggested that not many institutes did teach such courses. Given this lacuna, we thought that our most valuable contribution to the Section, the Division, and to institutes across the country might be to develop a syllabus that could serve as a template for such courses, and this is what we did in our first year. The course we created is almost entirely clinical, because, in our experience, candidates prefer to read material directly relevant to their clinical work. Writings about culture and psychoanalysis have been present from the earliest days of the movement—Freud’s papers on war and the discontinuities of civilization, Fenichel’s papers on anality and capitalism, and Reich’s attempts at a Marx-Freud synthesis, to name but a few. But, until recently, very little has been written that directly relates theorizing about culture to our work in the clinic. Happily, in the past ten or fifteen years, there has been enough good clinical writing on class, race, sexuality, gender, and political events to generate a 14-week syllabus.

The syllabus opens with two papers by Elizabeth A. Danto on the early history of class and psychoanalysis—Danto reveals a rarely acknowledged piece of our history, in which many early analysts dedicated time and money to provide free treatment to their community. With Freud’s imprimatur, they sought to bring their exciting new findings about the mind to all classes and professions of their (left-wing) Viennese and Berlin societies. Another paper in that first week, by John Demos, speaks of the peculiar fit between Freud’s theories and a changing 19th century American culture. The following weeks of the syllabus take up contemporary writings on treatment with the working class and the poor, “class conflict” in the treatment setting, the multiple ways that gender, race, and class, or gender and sexuality intersect and play out in treatment.

In the early 90’s, Andrew Samuels wrote about the occurrence of political material in the content of sessions; the syllabus includes excerpts from his book, The Political Psyche. Samuels’ book has particular resonance after 9/11, when world events so rocked Americans’ psyches that political material could not be kept OUT of the consulting room. One week of the syllabus is devoted to particular cultural crises, 9/11 and Columbine, and another week looks at the way that psychiatric diagnoses, in this case satanic ritual abuse and multiple personality disorder, coalesce from and express particular cultural anxieties. The syllabus addresses the relation between large group and individual identities, large group and individual defenses. There is a section on applied psychoanalysis, featuring work by Ricardo Ainslie and Kalina Braback on the impact of James Byrd’s murder on blacks and whites in Jasper, Texas, and work by Vamik Volkan on the way the traumas of ethnic and national conflict are enacted and, with much effort, can be worked through.

This is only a sneak preview of what is on the syllabus. Many of the authors whose work is featured here are Section 9 members, and we hope that others in the section will add their voices to it. We tried to make the syllabus as comparative as possible with regard to psychoanalytic schools—featuring papers drawn from relational, Kleinian, self psychological, object relational, and Lacanian paradigms. But there is a definite tilt towards relational material because, in the particular realm of application to clinical work, this is where much of the writing on psychoanalysis and culture is found (in academic writing on social issues, on the other hand, most work is either Lacanian or Kleinian).

The syllabus, I want to repeat, is meant to be a template, and we would encourage people who might want to use it to modify it as they see fit. Which brings us to the next phases of the project. For the next year, we will use the syllabus to educate ourselves about what has been written about culture and psychoanalysis. Every month, a member of the Section 9 board will lead a discussion over the listserv on one of the readings from the syllabus—in May, Rico Ainslie is initiating the project with his thoughts on Danto’s paper on the Vienna free clinic. As I write, we are one week into that discussion and the entries have been stimulating and rich. They make me feel part of a club of which I really want to be a member. Indeed, the worse things get in the world, the more I need that club. We hope all of you will join in on this and future discussions.

The next phase of the project, which we can work on simultaneously, is to find people, maybe ourselves, to teach the syllabus in institutes. We’ll need all the members of Section 9 to join in this phase of the project. Currently, I am teaching a version of the course to third year candidates at the Mass Institute for Psychoanalysis, and the response has been very exciting. In these times of “terror,” it is more and more obvious that the practice of psychoanalysis should not and cannot be compartmentalized from the world within which it is practiced. As Vamik Volkan’s work has shown, psychoanalysis has a lot to offer just our understanding of world conflict but its resolution; and as Samuels and others have shown on the more intimate level of an individual analysis, we, patients and therapists, do not, cannot, and ought not leave our political psyches at the waiting room door.
And we listened to a lot of music. We always sang. We always had Diana Ross and the Supremes, Gladys Knight and the Pips, The Platters, all the Motown singers and gospel music. We were churchgoers. So we always had music through those troubled times. Because it was healing for us. It was therapeutic. I don’t know. I guess we were in denial.

“I grew up watching American Bandstand and Soul Train. I used to live for Saturday morning because I wouldn’t do anything till I watched them. Then I would go and practice some of the dance moves that I saw in my bedroom. After I got the moves down I would go to my friend Joan—she was my dance partner—and I would go and show her the moves and we would practice. We were always getting ready to go to the sock hop. On Saturday night. We were the trend setters. That’s how I started. I taught myself. My mom noticed the passion in me and put me into a lot of dance contests. My dad noticed it too but he didn’t know how to help me express it. He probably thought, ‘Why didn’t my son play sports or something?’

“There was no future in Floralla for me. All they had there were peanut fields. I was not going to do this; so I decided to move after I graduated in 1970. I had been dancing since I was 8 years old even though there was no dance school in my home town.”

R moved to Denver and started working at a hospital in the dietary department. One night he went out to a club and one of his soon-to-be teachers came up to him on the dance floor and asked if he had ever thought about dancing professionally. It was almost as if the man were speaking a foreign language to him. He had no idea that dancing could be a career or a source of financial support.

“It was a Saturday night when I met him and I was there on Monday. I walked in. At that time I didn’t even know what a plie was. I didn’t know what leotards and tights were. I didn’t know anything. I was in awe. I saw eight women. One was white; the rest were black. All seven of the male dancers were black. I could not believe my eyes. Black men did this? I sat there all day long. I watched how these people moved their bodies. All I wanted was to be able to get my body to move that way. And to see the social aspects of it. How men and women danced together in that way. Because growing up I went to cafes and we did what we called slow drag. You saw bumping and grinding but these people were doing that and dancing by themselves at the same time. They moved through space as if they were gliding. I had to do that.

I started out in the training group program and I worked my way up to training group A. I got a merit scholarship. I got my first contract with the company in 1986. I had found home.”

R remained with the company for twenty years, the last five functioning as a principle dancer and assistant rehearsal director. He didn’t tell his family anything about what he was doing until he signed his first contract. He didn’t know how they would react to it. “Even though my family knew that I enjoyed dancing…I don’t know…for some odd reason I kept it to myself.”

One year the company was scheduled to perform in Atlanta. “I invited them all to come even though I imagined their eyes rolled up.” Most unbelievably, R’s dad came as well. R didn’t know which he felt more, nervous or excited. He had had to do radio interviews all day prior to the performance. Even the dean of Alabama University wanted to talk with him because he was from Alabama. “They were very proud that one of their own…made it to the stage.”

“I tried not to think about the fact that my family was out there but I was nervous the whole time. I wanted them to be proud of me. It was a wonderful performance. I did a good job. After the show, the head of the company always introduced us to the audience. It was like being Michael Jackson at a concert. The crowd went wild. It was one of the most beautiful experiences I could ever have imagined. Afterwards we met in the back and my dad was standing there and tears were just coming down his face. Of course, me being a wimp, I cried too. That was the first time he had ever acknowledged something I had done. He told me how proud he was. I’m almost teary-eyed right now telling you this story.

“That was all I ever wanted—his appreciation and his love. After that he was one of my best supporters. He always wanted to know where I was going, how my career was doing. He always asked me to call them every time I went out of town. I sent pictures and gifts from everywhere I went in the world. He loved it. He started intro-
For those who have lived within a repressive regime as in Argentina, South Africa, Iraq, it has been a continuous part of daily life. And for many it is still.

When people live in the context of ongoing fear they are less able to make their suffering a thing of the past. Recognition and acknowledgement are prerequisite to working through the dehumanizing circumstances of surviving torture. The Bush administration cavils over the applicability of the Geneva Conventions on the Conduct of War to the prisoners (called “detainees” by the administration) in Abu Ghraib and other prisons. Even more outrageous, the administration actively seeks to legitimate its use of torture. While countries that have survived brutal regimes attempt to restore some semblance of civil and moral order, the U.S. in contrast attempts to justify unconscionable acts. For the U.S. to do so gives license to every would-be tyrant around the world to engage in what everyone else would consider the acts of a war criminal.

While the atrocities committed against them become part of the public discourse, the shame of the victims fuels the revenge that is being enacted on the streets of Falluja and Najaf and other Iraqi cities.

“For Fallujans it is a shame to have foreigners break down their doors. It is a shame for them to have foreigners stop and search their women. It is a shame for the foreigners to put a bag over their heads, to make a man lie on the ground with your shoe on his neck. This is a great shame, you understand? This is a great shame for the whole tribe.

It is the duty of that man, and of that tribe, to get revenge on this soldier—to kill that man. Their duty is to attack him, to wash the shame. The shame is a stain, a dirty thing; they have to wash it. No sleep—we cannot sleep until we have revenge. They have to kill soldiers.” (Danner, 2004. Emphasis in the original.)

Conclusion
In the absence of a place and a time for creating the narrative of their survival, victims are left with their experience unmetabolized. Trials and truth commissions, while flawed methods to be sure, not least because their aim is to pursue a political agenda, nevertheless offer a context for witnesses to reclaim some sovereignty over their lives. Equally, they establish the intent to take public account of the experiences of those who have suffered in writing a history of the period and making those responsible accountable.

The United States’ pursuit of a military investigation of the atrocities that were committed in Abu Ghraib is like the fox guarding the hen house. It is inadequate to the task of providing a transparent system for establishing what happened there and for offering its victims the opportunity for justice. If the authors of the policy of torture are not to be held publicly accountable then yet another population is left to wish: “If I had the strength I would just go and strangle him.”

References


Section IX, Psychoanalysis for Social Responsibility
C/o Ruth Fallenbaum, Ph.D
3120 Telegraph Avenue, #1
Berkely, CA 94705-1964

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Section IX are interested in these questions, as well as the general issue of how open a space to enable the exploration of politics and personal life that permits similarities as well as differences between analyst and patient to emerge in a non-threatening way. Related to these issues is the question of how psychoanalysts can bring our psychological insights to our activism as citizens. Some of these themes were taken up in our Section-sponsored Panel at the March 2004 Division 39 meeting. The two co-authored papers, Lynne Layton and Gary Wells’ “Attacks on Linking: The Unconscious Pull to Dissociate Individuals from their Social Context” and Susan Gutwill and my “Class and Splitting in the Clinical Setting: The Ideological Dance in the Transference and Countertransference,” were followed by an enthusiastic and animated discussion among the audience and the presenters. Participants agreed that it was a good experience to be able to share concerns and different points of view with colleagues concerned who are concerned with these questions.

This last year Section IX’s Education Committee, with Lynne Layton as Chair, created an outstanding syllabus on Psychoanalysis and Culture, which board members hope will become a pilot course in many institutes. We have arranged for a monthly online discussion based on readings from the syllabus that will involve board members and any interested members of Section IX. Our first reading in May was “The Ambulatorium: Freud's Free Clinic in Vienna,” by Elizabeth Ann Danto, a fascinating look at the community clinics established in Vienna and Berlin in the interwar years by Freud and colleagues. Our on-line discussions among the participating members of the Section have been stimulating and informative.

Finally, I am on the organizing committee of a three day conference co-sponsored by Los Angeles’ seven psychoanalytic institutes and groups that will take place on October 29-31, 2004 at the Skirball Cultural Center. The conference, called The Uprooted Mind: Psychoanalytic Perspectives on Living in an Unsafe World, features keynote speakers Robert J. Lifton (opening Friday night plenary), Jessica Benjamin, Andrew Samuels, and myself. Break-out groups will be co-facilitated by psychoanalysts and community activists. Anyone interested in obtaining more information on the conference may contact me at nchollander@comcast.net.

I invite all of you to join us in our on-line discussion of material from the Psychoanalysis and Culture syllabus and encourage you to propose including the syllabus in your institute, department or study group curriculum. If you have ideas regarding how the Section can be responsive in additional ways to your interests in psychoanalysis and social responsibility, please contact me or one of our board members.