

Center for the Victims of Torture

Torture, Former Combatants, Political Prisoners, Terror Suspects, & Terrorists

<https://www.cvt.org/blog/healing-and-human-rights/my-bubble>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

Read this article in [Arabic here](#).

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During five years of direct work with torture victims at CVT, I have listened to and experienced many different human situations, which showed me feelings and thoughts that I had not previously experienced. Before, I did not imagine that it would be possible to visit a place in a neighborhood without physically visiting it, or that a person may personally witness an event that they didn't actually experience. This has happened to me as I listened to an event described by members of one family or different people who lived through the same situation. I have read and worked with many people who have experienced different traumas but it is a unique experience to hear about one traumatic event from different people. Watching the different reactions among these clients was a distinctive experience for me, as with time, you can visualize the event from all emotional and psychological aspects. With time, it became easy for me to smell the smells, see the people, and look at that place as if it was in front of me.

There is a neighborhood in the city of Homs, Syria, which has become part of my memory (what I think of as my red memory). I heard this neighborhood described many times from clients who lived there before it disappeared forever. Clients described their old neighborhood full of life where ancient ruins embraced the homes of residents, the large mosque square where hearts never stop beating. Street vendors, shoppers, visitors who come to take a whiff of the vintage jasmine flowers, warmth that may not return, at least to some who may not return to their neighborhood. Meters have turned into miles, to the point of no return.

It was a morning unlike any other, a beginning that caused a lot of change, a beginning that changed the features of the beautiful city. There was a lot of destruction, a lot of strangers who would one day become symbols of terror for years to come, moments of fear lived by oneself and loved ones, and a memory of the future. Clients told me, It is our neighborhood, this is my home and this is my safe place. This is the voice of my neighbors from far, far away. They described where they lived and what they saw, how on one corner was their brother's house, but now everyone seems so distant. As I heard from client after client about this neighborhood, these descriptions became views that I experienced from the heart of the event.

I could feel it. The place was frightening to look at from underneath the rubble, but the voices of the soldiers from above were even more frightening. As this entered my red memory, I understood that the thought of dying was better than living, and that the worst was yet to come. People did not try to move or ask for help; they froze in place. One client's story blended with another's.

On the other side of the neighborhood, it was much more frightening. People were face to face with the soldiers, tall men with long beards I heard dozens of terrifying descriptions of the attackers who were similarly horrifying but different in description. As a client spoke, I could feel it as if I was there. *Their voices were terrifying, they were strangers, they weren't from our country. I couldn't understand their language. They blindfolded my brother and father and took them away. They struck my mother. I had mixed feelings of joy, because they left. . . and fear for the unpredictable fates of my father and brother.*

As she went on, I felt as if I was hiding in my house near the city center. *I heard cries for help at the door. It was a familiar voice . . . It was my brother's wife, who was trying to escape hell with my brother. My brother was driving away from the clash until a sniper's bullet from a nearby roof blocked his path. I cannot forget his blood scattered all over her clothes, panting, trying to say that it's too late, he isn't coming back.*

It is not doomsday, and this white color is not paradise. It is one of the hospitals in that city. I have worked in it for several years, but this is a different day, it was full of blood. This is the day after which I will feel upset every time I see the color of the white tiles stained red with blood. Several minutes after the arrival of the wounded and the dead, I did not imagine that my four-year-old daughter would be one of these bodies. I was not ready for that.

Not far from the neighborhood and in one of the detention centers near the city, I spent a week trying to help someone beside me, whose voice I could not distinguish, nor could I see his face since I was beaten and tortured until my eyes got swollen shut. A constant moaning sound was asking for water and I felt a source of water coming from the wall, apparently running down from an AC unit. I took a piece of cloth, dampened it and put it on his lips, but that was not enough to keep him alive. It was my brother moaning all this while beside me, without my knowing it. I wish I hadn't opened my eyes again. Suddenly, he fell silent and was no longer in pain. The next morning I was able to open my eyes to see my brother's body lying beside me.

These are the stories that became part of my own memory. As a psychologist, it was not strange for me to listen to and empathize with these stories, but it was difficult for me to go back to repeatedly listen to the same story from a different person. This brought up a lot of difficult and complex feelings, but the most difficult for me was directly linking events every time I heard the name of the street or place. It was a massacre and I've become an eyewitness.

My strong memory was a characteristic that helped me in many situations in my life, but now it is different. This memory is tired and

flooded with blood and destruction. When this occurs, I realize that I need more self-care and that empathy and work with the clients is my noble cause, but not enough to stay well. I need my own bubble that can bring out empathy and support, but it is a buffer for conveying difficult feelings and storing them inside me. It was not easy to do this, but it has become a necessity to remain strong and loving of my noble job, as we must help ourselves first to be able to help others.



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