



WHAT WAS THE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF VIOLENCE: VICTIMS AND PERPETRATORS?

■ ENRICHMENT 1

What was the psychological impact of violence: victims and perpetrators?

This unit looks at the psychological trauma experienced by victims violence and by the perpetrators of violence. The first sources provide insight into the many ways in the detainees responded to detention and torture, both while they were in detention and more long-term effects. Psychological studies on perpetrators have found that many people who engage in intense violence against others also suffer from trauma caused by their own actions. This trauma takes many forms. The last sources in this unit give some indication of the way in which perpetrators were affected.

VICTIM STORIES:

Source 1:

Zwelinzima Sizane was detained in the 1970s.

At about that time one had witnessed some of the comrades who had been tortured, broken, but not permanently broken, who would implicate others such that when I began to write that statement I used to recall Fanon's writings on detainees, the torturer and the victim. The psychological interactions, psychological battles as you get interrogated, how do you stand up to your torturer, what mistakes not to commit as a person being interrogated. That assisted me a lot. I think I picked that up in his book called "The Wretched of the Earth" and, well it's about the Algerian experience. And what I told myself was that let me not play it ignorant. I was national organizing secretary...

Whatever I had to write had to talk to my interrogator in a sense that I had to assume leadership as the only national leader in detention then of the high school student movement and begin to position myself politically. Engage them in what Black Consciousness was, but of course my politics were beyond Black Consciousness I think by then I was schooled in Marxism and Leninism and Black Consciousness was just a façade to undertake all that political work and I engaged them around those issues. They would try and want to put names to them but there was nothing incriminatory about talking about black people beginning to fight against any inferiority complex. Nobody could be charged for that and at the end of the day, after finishing, they brought in some commissioner and I signed the statement, it was not incriminating anyone.

Source 2:

Jabu Ngwenya was part of the Black Consciousness Movement and was detained in the 1970s.

Q: *How have your experiences in this place affected you emotionally and physically?*

A: Emotionally I would say it has affected me in such a way that you don't see it immediately but you'll see it after a long time in most cases because there are times that you are in isolation and you want to be alone. You don't want anybody next to you. So for your family it's tough for them to understand that you are in that level, in that state of mind. You feel withdrawn, that you need to be alone. And you moved but you came back and you are OK. But it's not in terms of the family. And secondly because of the electric shocks that I used to have, so anybody if I'm sleeping, even my wife, as she touches me at the back, I jump. So those are physical things, I just jump and wake up. So those are the kinds of things that I'll say physically are still there. Even if I try. If can feel anything on top of me, a hand, or anything I just jump because I think there is electric shocks on me.

Source 3:

Barbara Hogan was detained in 1981. She was brought to trial and sentenced to 10 years imprisonment.

I think that every prisoner will tell you that being in a cell is almost like your protection. Once that cell door is open then there is no protection. When you're in those interrogation rooms there's no protection.

My sensory impression then was just the sounds of the interrogation room, because they picked up quite a few friends of mine, hearing friends of mine being interrogated, hearing people shuffling with chains because people were chained on their legs and hearing those chains going about, hearing people being hit. So that was one sensory impression. In my cell it was just the sense of calmness in the cell itself. Its audio mostly your sensory impressions because you don't have access to much. You can't see colour much, you can't see anything else. I remember hearing the call to prayer from the local mosque in the early morning and in the evenings and that was incredibly calming, just hearing those calls to prayer. Hearing the sounds outside also was very normal. Hearing the prostitutes teasing men downstairs in the road and all the kind of rich language that went on with that.

But the endless clanging of doors and I think late at night , in later times when the interrogation was very fierce for many of us, you might not be able to sleep at night and you'd hear the doors that were the linkage doors between going up to interrogation or going back from interrogation and coming back to your cells and staying awake to hear who was being kept at night and then clambering up and looking through the windows to see who was being interrogated and if they'd been tortured and what state they were in. Night time was often the time when nasty stuff was done so it was just waiting for the clanging of that door to see them.

Other times hearing pigeons on the windowsills and their cooing and having this incredible acoustics of pigeons cooing. You'd cling to anything that was outside because you were in solitary confinement and I was in solitary confinement for six months during my detention period so any form of life becomes important....

Isolation always means that you everything becomes more intense, you become more scared, you start to live in your own world. It's an ordeal. Finally all you have left is your body so you spend your time exercising that body, thinking about things...

I was sentenced to ten years after I stood trial and then I was on my own for another year because there weren't any other white women prisoners. On and off I was in solitary for nearly two years. So I had a lot of other things to deal with besides what was happening in John Vorster. So most of my recuperation probably took a number of years, when I was a prisoner.

I haven't had lasting effects of prison or detention. I think I'm far more of a social hermit than I ever was before. I have unexplained emotional moments when something can just get to me....

To give you an example of the extent of the terror that you finally find yourself, I tried to commit suicide at one stage. In fact it was the day before they took me to Vereeniging when I knew that they were going to take me out of the jurisdiction of this district surgeon. I knew that I would be beaten up elsewhere and I knew that I had nothing more to say and it was this terrifying notion that they could kill you for nothing further that they had to say. By that stage, when you'd been interrogation for six or seven weeks, everyday and all day and the real nasties had started I just lost all sense of proportion. I know now why people commit suicide. For me it was absolutely clear, this was my way out. I stole tablets without them knowing it. I first tried to cut my wrists by sharpening the end of my toothpaste tube, you know it's made out of aluminium, and that wasn't strong enough to get to my vein. I'd tied a thing around my neck, very tight, and at that stage, it was after the assaults, they'd been forced to give me a bed because of the district surgeon. So I had a bed with iron bars at the back and I tied whatever I'd tied around my neck to the iron bars so that I wouldn't be able to release myself. So I was virtually choking and I hoped then that I would suffocate myself while being under sedation. The next morning I woke up and I was alive so I must have managed to rip the thing off my neck. That was the lowest moment in my life. I knew what I was going in for and I knew how vulnerable I was and I knew they hated me and I was suffering the consequences of isolation.

Source 4:

Jaki Seroke was a member of APLA. He was detained in the 1980s.

Q: *What kind of effect did your detention have on you emotionally and physically afterwards?*

A: At first I try not to talk about detention and I'm not sure whether I'm doing it consciously or it's a form of denial but I never really openly sit down and discuss this issue because today people think that those who were detained were heroes or they were good freedom fighters and things like that but there are so many stories about detention; that this is where your dignity and your humanity is trampled down and your sense of self worth is really destroyed. And you can never really come out of that situation as a person thinking that "Look this was good I mean at least I was detained." It's not like that I mean it's really that you were tortured. You were brought to your weakest point and I think that the guys who applied torture used this. You first start by standing your ground, then they take the challenge and say, "Jy sal buig! You'll definitely crumble down! We will get to you!" and because you are in their hands they have at least 6 months to deal with you and they could do that and they could torture you with almost simple things like telling you that, "We just heard that your child died" and sometimes it's not true you know. And because you are in jail it is true and you want to know what is further information and they will tell you all this. And they will tell you how your friends have turned against you and all that. Mental torture which is the worst form of torture. So I really think that some people who come from prison and have been tortured have really revealed a lot of information. They sang like canaries some of them and they don't want to confront that issue directly. And I don't think I'm special or that I was a hero too. This was a time when I feared for my life and when you are in detention you don't know what tomorrow brings, that you could die or you could spend a long time in prison. That element of fear really gets to you. The only thing that makes you survive is because we were on high moral ground. We were fighting for freedom, democracy and it was a good cause and then you say to yourself, "Whatever happens to me at least it was a good cause," I think that was the saving grace, that above everything else. But at a personal level, ja, very tough.

Source 5:

Cedric Mayson was older than most detainees when he was at John Vorster Square. He was a Christian minister and a member of the SA Council of Churches and was first arrested while driving back from his honeymoon with his wife.

Q: *And what kind of effect did it have on you emotionally and physically?*

A: Well you better ask my wife. My wife was a bit shattered because one of the things we had concealed at that stage was that the Christian Institute had been receiving a lot of money from outside which we'd being able to pass on for various projects and things inside and we'd realized that eventually we would be interrogated about this and so I got two lots of books, one which I could quite legitimately be interrogated about and one which was the records we kept. That book was always on my desk and when my wife went through things after I had been taken in, she thought it was probably secret so she hid it away somewhere so they never got it. So I said did they find it on my desk and they couldn't so they took me home to get this book And I managed to convey to my wife what had happened and eventually she found it and produced it but she said at that stage I was hardly recognizable because I was totally involved with what they were doing and what they were saying and I hadn't had sleep you see. So I think I was affected physically in a sense that it wears you down a bit but spiritually and mentally I was very much on the ball.

I remember one of those, I don't know if you ever had any of those moments, of real spiritual perception, which one of the few that had happened to me in my lifetime was here, after I came round after that first interrogation and I was all alone in that cell, just like this except the walls were green and I remember walking around that thing and being absolutely convinced that we were going to win. There was no question, they might kill me, they might do anything to me but we were going to win the struggle. It was a tremendous experience of faith which buoyed me up tremendously all the way through but mentally, intellectually, I always like playing chess, and the challenge of the questioning and answering I found quite stimulating and not the other way around.



“The only thing that makes you survive is because we were on high moral ground. We were fighting for freedom, democracy and it was a good cause...”

~ Jaki Seroke ~

RESIDING magistrate at the Timol inquest, Mr. De Villiers, found yesterday that nobody was to blame for the death of Mr. Ahmed Essop Timol.

Timol died, he

able motive was Mr. Timol's political ideas and the events since his arrest on the night, October 22, 1972, of incriminating documents in his possession, until he heard that "Quentin and Henry" had died.

At the stage of his life the city was there and he

General Buys, collapsed in the witness box while being cross-examined by Mr. I. A. Maiseh on May 4.

Mr. S. A. Chiers (for the police) said that according to General Buys's medical adviser, his health was such that he should not submit himself to any strain. He might be in a better state of health in a few months, but the doctor was unable to give a definite prognosis.

Mr. P. A. J. Kotze, who was leading the evidence, said General Buys had been sent home

He had been extensively cross-examined and was corroborated by Captain Bean.

Captain Bean was a truthful witness, Mr. De Villiers said, and he had no difficulty in accepting the evidence of the captains Gloy and Van Niekkerk. They gave their evidence in a calm manner and were extensively cross-examined.

Captain Gloy had told the court Mr. Timol's eyes were bewildered and staring when he heard the three names from Mr. X.

Captain Van Niekkerk had

When he heard that "Quentin and Henry" had died.

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De Villiers said he wanted to recommend that in future a person under the Terrorism Act should be examined by a district surgeon as soon as possible after arrest. The doctor should then be able to find out the state of health of the person and whether there are any signs of assault. This would rule out long

death from the 10th floor of John Vorster Square on October 27, last year.

Mr. De Villiers said that he had to establish if Mr. Timol had been murdered, if he had accidentally fallen out of the window, or if he had committed suicide.

"To think of murder is ridiculous. He was a valuable find for the Security Police.

"To come to any other finding but that Mr. Timol had jumped through the window, is also ridiculous."

He then turned to find that

Mr. P. A. J. Kotze, who was leading the evidence, said General Buys had been sent home by his medical adviser on Wednesday.

Mr. De Villiers: This matter is in my discretion. I feel it is in the interests of justice and the public that the inquiry should be concluded as soon as possible. No good purpose will be served by postponing it.

He thanked Professor I. W. Simson, "for assisting him in a very competent manner". With- out referring to a medical

MRS. HAWA TIMOL . . . "not very truthful".

identified but was called Mr. X, entered the interrogation room on Wednesday afternoon. He told Captain J. Gloy and Cap- tain Van Niekkerk that he

court Mr. Timol's eyes were bewildered and staring when he heard the three names from Mr. X.

Captain Van Niekkerk had agreed that there was "public disquiet" immediately after Mr. Timol's death. Although he admitted that notes made during an incident were of value, he did not find it necessary to keep his concept statement, he had told the court.

He had said he was not to assault a detainee with false evidence. An inter- view had to be patient and win a detainee's confidence. He

PERPETRATOR STORIES

Source 6:

This is from an interview with **Paul Erasmus**, former Security Branch policeman. He was answering the question: Were there any periods or moments that you can recall where you felt that this is just not worth it?

There was. You know, I started developing nervous problems, as such, in the early eighties after I went to Namibia to the bush war and I came back, I think a totally different person. I had the classic vestiges of early stage posttraumatic stress or I don't know how bad it was but it was never acknowledged then there was no counselling for anything like that. But I was a different person, my own father who went through a second world war, found it hard to relate to me and he'd had similar experiences having being in combat or whatever, not that I was any hero on the border, far being from that, but I couldn't easily or readily adjust to a civilized way of life in a city after having been in Ovamboland and being involved with Koevoet and security branch up there. I think that affected me for lot of years, it affected a lot of people. And I think certainly if you look at what happened later years like Vlakplaas and Eugene De Kock, these people were ripe to take from a situation like that and put them in a more orderly situation and it was in effect a recipe for chaos. I mean hence Vlakplaas people going berserk, Eugene himself getting away with murder literally and this sort of phenomenon of taking people that should have been deprogrammed, certainly in Eugene's case maybe even in my case, all of us that were exposed to the barbarity of what we saw up there to come back and read just wasn't easy and there was no mechanism. The only thing that you could do then because God help you, if you said, "Look I have a psychiatric problem," you're in trouble, they would have posted you off to Putsonderwater and you would have rotted away there without any promotion for the next thousand years.

The sort of standard feeling about post traumatic stress as what it was in the Second World War where you had a guy that had been in combat, couldn't handle it anymore or went to pieces and they called it lack of moral fibre and the South African police had very much the same thing. If you felt that you couldn't cope anymore you had to go and see the dominee and in my case there certainly wasn't any Methodist minister that I could go and speak to, firstly, and secondly what could you say to them because whatever you said would relate to the Official Secrets Act? So everybody kept his bottled up...

In 1988, in my case it was so bad I wanted to leave. In fact I went and I started a business. My son had serious health problems and I couldn't but there was another aspect to this, I knew too much and it was a major decision to try and get out of this. My marriage was under pressure, I was starting to fall apart, I was drinking like a fish. Lost friends, the rest of it, just focused on this work and it was killing me but any indication and certainly in my case, when I started to rattle cages about, "I'm going to apply for a discharge, I'm going to leave," there was, "Ja, but you know but what about what you might say after you've left here?" So there was a definite threat and once again the rumour mill churned out stories, it was like the Hotel California, you know, "You can check out anytime you like but you can never leave," type of stuff. I remember one of my bosses at that time, I went through a period where the business looked like it was gonna succeed and I was about to leave, saying to me "You'll still be involved here, even if you go and run a business or whatever, because of what you know."

So as it transpired I eventually just came to some sort of conclusion that I would have to stick it out but I did do something radical, I went to see a psychologist, under an assumed name and you might find this interesting, I didn't even mention the police, although he kind of gathered that, being a very astute old man. I said to him that I work for a very secretive organization and we are involved with politics and stuff like that and I told him that I was having nightmares and I'd had this exaggerated startled response and some of the classical manifestations of Post-Traumatic Stress and he sat back and he said to me "My boy," you are complaining about your feet, when your shoes are the problem," he said, "Leave, get out." And even from my own family and from my ex-wife they were very anxious to see me get out of the system but I didn't think it was possible.

Source 7:

Dr Liz Floyd in this source talks about perpetrators and post-traumatic stress disorder.

If you take someone like [Paul] Erasmus. Those people who were involved in those things at that stage who've now been dumped with the guilt and the responsibility and the public profile – they start turning to their ex-detainees for support because the ex-detainees are the only people who really understand what it's about. It's very interesting stuff; where the perpetrator looks to their victim for recognition of what it was about. I think the detainees were clearer than the people outside about what was going on. It was a battle and that was the sharp edge of it....

The majority of the interrogators have gotten away with it. Except for their consciences. Very few of them have retained normal family relationships. Erasmus perhaps is a very good example of it. Erasmus went from being kind of a wannabe in the security team, trying to please his seniors to get promotion and then he had doubts. He says it's because he had an English mother. Once he had the doubts and he pulled away from it he was then subjected to the treatment that he had subjected others to. So I think the guilt is really what destroys people. He was a perpetrator who then experienced what it was like to be the victim and broke down completely. He got lost in the middle and is actually quite desperate for attention from his previous victims. One of the people he harassed was Winnie Mandela and somehow she's given him support. He harassed me for ten years. Maybe he functions better these days. I find him irritating because he wants to do it to me and I just feel, "Take your baggage elsewhere, thank you very much." He wants a huge amount of attention. If you look at post-traumatic stress syndrome, which is what he has, part of the therapy is to make sense of the experience. When you have very, very senseless crime it's almost impossible to make sense of it but in a political context there's more of a process to do that. His particular role is obviously embarrassing and carries loads of guilt so he can get some meaning from helping to tell the story and help with bringing out what actually happened.

