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NEUTRALIZATION OF THE ABSOLUTE EVIL?

A very important discussion is taking place at present. The question about attitude to the absolute evil: the extermination camps with their torture, the holocaust.

The question is not so much whether one can describe the absolute evil, but rather whether one should try to describe it, knowing well that one can never imagine the terrible gruesomeness and those horrors. Should one try to tell how terribly people can behave toward each other, as in Steven Spielberg's new film Schindler's List, and as in the Holocaust series some years ago? Or is Claude Lanzmann, previous member of the French resistance and creator of Shoah, right when he thinks that it should not be attempted? He does not think that actors can act as prisoners who have been exposed to months and years of unhappiness, humiliation, gruesomeness, and fear of death. There is a limit which should not be passed; only the individual can take his own position on the absolute evil.

Lanzmann is deeply convinced about the impossibility of showing this in pictures. Both Holocaust and Schindler's List “violate the law” by “trivializing”, and thus removing, the uniqueness of the holocaust.

“General Awareness”

The most essential point for me in this debate, and a big question in RCT's work, is this very central problem: How does one create awareness about gruesomeness? What in English is called “General Awareness” — public awareness that is extremely important in the work against gruesomeness, but which in our experience is very difficult to create.

Why is it so difficult to communicate not only the horrors of torture, but also all that can be done to abolish torture in real life?

Why do we meet people again and again who cannot imagine that torture creates both physical and psychological problems for the victim? After all, a lot has been written about this subject, and it has been dealt with by radio, TV and films.

Why do we meet people so many times who do not know that it is possible in a good way to help people who have been through this gruesomeness? This has also been described a lot. Why do we often meet even influential people who we know must have seen the documents, the proof, and other things, but who can or will not understand these problems?

Anti-torture programmes

One question arises: How can it be that an anti-torture programme such as the very strong programme which, not least thanks to the efforts of the Danish Foreign Ministry in Vienna at The World Conference on Human Rights in the summer of 1993, was passed by all 183 member states – how can it be that today nothing at all has been followed up by the UN?

How can it be that there was only the ridiculously small amount of two million dollars in the UN's Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture in 1993 – what an insult for the victims – and that so far this year only 800,000 dollars have been collected, even if there is already need for more than 5 million dollars? And even need for much more. We are many who avoid overburdening this Fund so that the poor countries can get most of the wretched coins available.

The attitude of the sceptics

Of course sceptics such as Lanzmann are right – the absolute evil cannot be described. The author Eva Forrest, human rights champion from Spain, who herself was severely tortured, said: “What happens under torture can never be explained or told: a new language has to be invented”.

The tortured have been in another world. And perhaps therefore it is not possible to give an account so that other people really understand, listen, and react. The language of the inconceivable evil does not exist.

The psychiatrist Leo Eitinger, who himself spent three years in Auschwitz, said: “One loses a feeling of innocence, of chastity, which can never return”.

One might think that the reason why people do not want to see films, to hear about this gruesomeness, is that they are only a pale reflection of the truth, of what really happened. Therefore in some way or another something false is introduced in the account.

The attitude of the victims

When the victims explain what happened to them, neither language nor pictures are sufficient. The absolute evil cannot be explained; it becomes something else from what really happened. And this something else is wrong, even if it is meant to be right. Perhaps the explanation is different – films like Schindler’s List and Holocaust make a deep impression on us. It is their horrible and unpleasant impression that makes one depressed, disgusted; one does not really want to know that these horrors were and still are so present in the world. One’s conscience is touched too much – it is difficult to “enjoy” life knowing that there are people in such horrible situations. One prefers not to dwell on these thoughts.

On the other hand, there are people who are moved, who become involved, when they see these films. I remember what the late author Elsa Gress said about Holocaust – that it was good it was made, that it was good for new generations at least to get an insight into some of the cruelties.
Being close to torture victims and trying to help them, it is very important to let them talk about the incomprehensible, about what can’t be told about their inconceivable sufferings. I feel of course that we are in a professional therapy situation, but at the same time something else is happening. An attempt is made to share the absolute evil with another person (doctor, psychiatrist, psychotherapist). It is not only a sharing process, but we are approaching an understanding, previously thought impossible, of the substance of evil – the absolute evil – so that the responsibility for the evil can be correctly placed. Thus we start to “dilute”, to neutralize, the evil – and that is felt as a relief.

“The dilution effect”

But this “dilution effect”, the neutralization effect, would of course be far greater if many more took part in it. And all could part take in it by being occupied and engaged in these problems. And this is free for all. It really is possible to do something actively, not just waving one’s arms around. It can be quiet help for a stranger who has come as a refugee. It can be support to the many rehabilitation centres/programmes that now exist round the world. The attitude that we have to those people who have been through such horrors is a reflection of our genuine involvement. I do understand Lanzmann’s fears that the suffering will be vulgarized – but I believe that we should listen to what the victims say themselves because: “It is always in the cells of the suppressed that the new truth is created” (Antoine de Saint Exupéry – Letter to a hostage).

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Doctors as accomplices to the crime of torture:

The Torturers “in White”

“Contradictory” medical certificates ... Some take part in the torture ... Standard certificates to 159 persons ... Permission to isolation ... The hobby of extracting sound teeth ... A ‘psychiatrist’ supervising torture ... Names of 62 doctors who have taken part in torture confirmed ...

By Yasemin Öztürk

A symposium on the subject Torture and the Medical Profession was held in Istanbul from 22-24 October 1992. Behind the arrangement were The Medical Association of Turkey, The International Council For Human Rights and The International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims in Copenhagen (IRCT). The main subjects discussed were how to support torture victims in their future life, and which methods to apply to help them return to life again.

It was stressed at the symposium that the rehabilitation of these people, shattered physically and psychologically, was the humanitarian duty of the medical profession. The fact that this symposium was held in Turkey was interesting from another viewpoint.

At the military coup of 12 September 1980, prisons, police headquarters, and police stations were turned into torture chambers. Torture gradually became an institution in our country. By means of laws passed and hearings at court, those taking part in torture were protected and supported. According to what was known to public opinion, the torturers were not just a few sadistic policemen or soldiers. Some from the medical profession, who in the Hippocratic oath had sworn that "even under pressure or threat I will show deep respect to human life and dignity and I shall not apply my medical skills contrary to the laws of humanity", have been issuing "clean" health certificates to cover up torture and at times some have even taken part in torture. In this way they have become accomplices in the crime of torture.

Thanks to documents and personal experiences, all this is beginning to be uncovered. Today some of those who have been tortured cannot get a health certificate, and in the death certificate of those who have been killed during torture it is even stated that they died from "normal" causes. It has come so far that lawyers no longer trust certificates from the medico-legal institute, even when signed by medical experts.

When these facts became known, Şenal Saruhan requested the Medical Council in Ankara on 2 March 1991 to reexamine the autopsy report from the medico-legal institute on his client Imran Aydin, who had been killed during torture. The report of the Medical Council of Ankara provided an answer that left no doubt about the question whether Imran Aydin "died during torture".

After examining the autopsy report on Imran Aydin, the Medical Association of Turkey, to protect its professional reputation, speeded up its efforts to find and identify the physicians called "the torturers in white coats". A list was prepared as a result of the efforts of the Central Council of the Medical Association of Turkey.
List of “Torture Doctors”

The number of doctors on this list is rather long: Prof. Dr. Rafıf Saygun, Prof. Dr. Alieddin Akçau, Prof. Dr. Nevzet Baban, Prof. Dr. Şeref İnceman, Prof. Dr. Şadi Sun, Prof. Dr. Hüseyin Dinç, Ass. prof. Dr. Ertaşrul Sayın, Ass. prof. Dr. Cevdet Selveli, Dr. Cavit Midirgın, Dr. Fuat Bırkardes, Dr. Hüseyin Kalyoncu, Dr. Özmr Ayakça, Dr. Metin Sarıç, Dr. Vakar Sağın, Dr. Vehbi Kutlu, Dr. Ferruh Görenek, Dr. Sami Aksu, Dr. Refik Tercan, Dr. Erıcımen Eper, Dr. İsmail Dinç, Dr. Kiriton Dinçmen, Dr. Sevim Ölmz. Apart from the names on this list, the following names can be added as a result of our own investigations:

Prof. Dr. Telia Baki Aykan, chairman of the medico-legal institute in Ankara, Dr. Şemsi Özköök, and Prof. Dr. Cihat Özen, who gave contradictory reports concerning Mustafa Asum Hayrullahoğlu while at the medico-legal institute; the medical superintendent at the national hospital in Kirşehir, Dr. Coskun Mahmutoğlu, Dr. Gülal Aydikan, and Dr. Rustam Engin Battıhan, having been found to have applied torture to a group of young people; Dr. Erdem Gürrolu, accused of having used torture on Berk Pınar and İrfan Güre at the police headquarters in Istanbul; Dr. Osman Nagaroğlu, whose name has been mentioned in connection with cases of torture in Kahramanmaras; Dr. Sefi Sahan, Dr. Cavit Evliya, and Dr. Mehmet Ulaş, who gave a medical certificate according to which Hamit Kapanar was “not tortured”, although he had been exposed to torture according to the words of police officer Sedat Caner and proofs of torture were presented to the court by his lawyers; Dr. Mahmut Ulaş and Dr. Akif Saraçoğcu, who partook in torture by helping the police during torture at the national hospital in Kahramanmaras; Dr. Cetin Kıcıksarıer, Dr. first lieutenant Ensr Şentürk, Dr. first lieutenant İhsan Kasapçıır, Dr. Nilüfer Aksel, and Dr. Serap Karasalıoğlu, who have been covering up torture by presenting standard medical certificates in connection with 159 persons in Istanbul, stating that “no traces of blows or violence” were found.

The medical superintendent at the military hospital in Haydarpuşa, Dr. Erdoğan Erendal and assistants to the superintendent at the same hospital, Dr. Feyyaz Mete and Dr. Hikmet Us, who put psychological pressure on prisoners on hunger strike by insulting and threatening them when they were taken to hospital. The medical officer of health in Yenimahalle, Dr. Gängör Kaynak, who issued a clean health certificate to Hayrettin Doğan and M. Hanefi Özdemiş who had been arrested charged with smuggling and subsequently tortured. Although Dr. Kaynak was suspended and banished to Kastamonu, he was later reinstated as medical officer of health in Yenimahalle. Prof. Dr. Celal Sungur, who hindered the doctors who treated Becet Dindıpkr and put pressure on them not to disclose that he had been exposed to torture; Dr. Azmi Özç and Dr. Sedat Doğan, who as physicians in the same case failed to do what was necessary and became accomplices to torture; the physician connected to the prison in Bayrampaşa, Dr. Mehmet Bilgin, who used abusive language to prisoners on hunger strike; the medical superintendent at Bayrampaşa National Hospital, Dr. Kemal Narodemirıcı, who said to a prisoner named Oğuz Arıtan: “We have a law of remorse. Make use of that and get out of here. Then you can have treatment outside. We are not looking after you.” The medical superintendent at the national hospital in Van, Dr. Ertuçğer Yegnältay, who did not issue health certificates to the students beaten up in connection with the murder of a student in Van named Mehmet Şirin Tekin; the specialist in internal diseases at the national hospital in Sinop, Dr. Ömer Dönker, who issued a health certificate with the effect of keeping the imprisoned Garbis Altınböl in isolation although semi-annual control had been decided; university teacher on the medical faculty of Dicle University, Dr. Kemal Balci, who suggested the use of medicine to make torture more humane; dentist Ayyık in the Metris Prison who extracted healthy teeth from the prisoners instead of diseased teeth; medical officer of health in Horsan, Cengiz Bilgin, who by means of health certificates covered up evidence of torture on certain villagers who had been taken into custody for theft of sheep; Dr. Cahide Bayal, who issued clean health certificates to eleven university students who had been released after detention; on the issuing of these certificates the students were arrested and transferred from the prison to the medico-legal institute where it was attested that they had been exposed to torture; Dr. Uğur Tanaçan employed in the Kadıköy branch of the medico-legal institute, who issued a clean health certificate to Halis Korg after interrogation at the police headquarters; when Halis Korg was later reported unfit for work for 15 days, a complaint about Dr. Uğur Tanaçan was filed with the Medical Council in Istanbul; the physician employed at the prison of Aydin, Dr. Osman Özen, who while prisoner Sedat Kardaş was tortured said：“Carry on. He can take it!” and in between personally partook in the torturing and thus became one of the physicians who are guilty of the crime of torture.

Because of the health certificates they issued, Dr. Lale Korkmaz, Dr. Gängör Kaynak, and Dr. Cahide Bayal, all employed in Yenimahalle Health Department, are accused of bringing 6 Palestinian students in danger of execution. After the Palestinian students had been tortured at the police headquarters in Ankara, the three physicians issued a health certificate stating that “no sign of blows, violence or maltreatment has been found on their bodies.” On the basis of confessions extracted under torture, the 6 Palestinian students were tried; capital punishment was demanded. The Palestinians were later rescued from execution by a certificate issued by the medico-legal institute to the effect that they had been subjected to torture.

Torturers “in white” whose names could not be established

Apart from those mentioned in this list, there are certain persons who have been involved in various events, but whose
names it has not been possible to ascertain. They can be listed in this way:

Certain physicians in Diyarbakır Military Prison who in their death certificates on prisoners who had died for various reasons wrote: “Died a natural death.”

The physicians who are present in “the confession chamber” in the prison of Diyarbakır and take part in the interrogation.

The physicians who, in Diyarbakır Military Prison on 3 January 1984, during the beatings in connection with the attempt to make everybody dress in uniform, with sphygmomanometers in their hands and stethoscopes round their necks “examined those who had collapsed on the floor”, ascertaining whether they could stand torture or not and “pointing them out to the officers.” Also the psychiatrist in Diyarbakır Military Prison who was present as an observer in July 1982 when a prisoner named Hayri Durmuş was tortured.

The physician in the prison of Diyarbakır who, when a prisoner named Cemal Kılıç was going into coma, said: “Nothing is wrong with you.”

The physicians in the prison of Metris who are present during torture and give warning when death is approaching and torture is to be discontinued.

The physicians in the prison of Metris who examine people, arrive at a diagnosis, and prescribe medicine through the keyhole in the door, not entering the ward of prisoners who are left naked for refusing to dress in uniform.

The physicians of Metris who refused to hand over the medicine for tuberculosis that the prisoners had brought from the prison of Sağmûcilar, but destroyed it instead.

The physicians of Metris who did not take precautions but were indifferent when a prisoner named Hakkı Hoçeoğlu asked for help for his depressions; they were thus responsible for his suicide.

The physician in the prison of Metris who, when a prisoner named İsmet Taş had a heart attack, without even looking at the patient sent some medicine like “Kompensan” with a soldier and thus caused the death of the patient.

The physicians in the prison of Metris who during “buttock bastinado” indicate whether the bastinado is “enough” or may continue.

The physician in the prison of Metris who postponed prescription of medicine to Adil Can when he refused to dress in uniform, but instead at the last moment gave him serum and one or two sorts of medicine and sent him back to the ward.

The physician in the prison of Metris who insisted that the stomach cancer of the imprisoned Hüseyin Aydın was some “psychosomatic disorder”.

The physician who caused the death of Ahmet Çetin by not sending him to the hospital when he was suffering from kidney failure.

A major from the medical staff on the Health School in Samsun who, with reference to a prisoner who lay bleeding on the floor, said: “There is nothing wrong inside him and there is no trace of beating on him. He just cannot stand

A concrete example of how death by torture is covered up by a certificate:

**How did İmran Aydın die?**

During the night between 1 and 2 March 1991, İmran Aydın, who was under arrest in the police headquarters in Ankara, was heard by those in the neighbouring cells to be crying out slogans. He was later seen being taken away, dragged along on the floor. Aydın was dead.

In their explanation to the press, spokesmen for the police headquarters said: “We had taken İmran Aydın along to the village of Bağlum to identify some location. While on rough ground he tried to get away under the cover of darkness, but fell and hit his head against a stone and died.”

According to the autopsy, the cause of death was haemorrhagic pancreatitis, which means inflammation of the pancreas with bleeding. It was especially mentioned in the death certificate that this death was due to natural causes. The physicians who performed the autopsy were Prof. Dr. İbrahim Tunali, Dr. Tolat Yurtman, and Dr. Tilay İhsan, all specialists in forensic medicine. This death certificate was later handed over for investigation by experts in forensic medicine attached to the Medical Council of Ankara. This was the result of their investigation: “No relationship between haemorrhage in the pancreas and running can be established. Haemorrhage in the pancreas has been caused by heavy trauma (in the literature from 50 to 75% of the cases). There is no relationship between death and running.”

On the background of the report, prepared by his own organization, Dr. Ümit Erkoli, who is a member of the administrative committee in the Medical Council of Ankara, provided this interpretation of the case: “It is called a natural death. Whatever may be called natural must still be explained and verified beyond doubt. Now that we have received the report of our colleague whom we appointed, we believe that İmran Aydın probably, yes, nearly certainly, died because of torture that he was exposed to while under arrest. He had a haemorrhage because of the beatings and did not have medical attention in time. This is the impression we got from the report.” He adds that “the later scenario may have served to whiten the death that had taken place earlier,” and that those who had handed in the report on the autopsy had abused their office and been accessories to the crime of torture. Following new evidence of “death by torture”, lawyer Tolat Yurtman is now preparing material to present to the public prosecutor. The cases of Prof. Dr. İbrahim Tunali, Dr. Tilay İhsan, and Dr. Tolat Yurtman are being examined by the Central Disciplinary Committee of the Medical Association of Turkey.