

The Therapist as Advocate

Understanding the sense of injustice with survivors of human rights violations¹

Helen Bamber

Abstract

In this interview, Helen Bamber discusses the *sense of injustice* experienced by people who are 'politically traumatised'. This sense of injustice originates in the home country, but it can be continued and compounded in host countries where safety is sought, due to a political climate of denial against refugees. The author reflects on her therapeutic work with people who have suffered interpersonal violence and exile from political persecution. She emphasizes the importance of acknowledging their experiences through careful documentation. She explains how the 1998 arrest in London of Chilean dictator Pinochet became the focal point for a group therapy process for Chilean survivors with whom she worked. She uses this and other case examples to clarify the meaning of the *role of the therapist as an advocate*.

As well as consideration of the political realm, Helen Bamber believes it is equally important to acknowledge the sense of injustice which may originate much earlier from within the family, community and culture. She explains how addressing this in therapy with clients in practical ways can be an empowering process, effecting gradual and progressive change in their lives and the lives of their children.

Keywords

sense of injustice, political traumatization, right to health, acknowledgement, documentation, testimony

¹ Corrected version, 25.01.16.

Der Therapeut als Fürsprecher

Zur Bedeutung des Unrechtserlebens bei Überlebenden schwerer Menschenrechtsverletzungen

Zusammenfassung

Helen Bamber diskutiert in diesem Interview das *Unrechts- und Ungerechtigkeitserleben von politisch traumatisierten Menschen*. Dieses Unrechtserleben stammt ursprünglich von Erlebnissen aus dem Heimatland, es setzt sich aber fort und verbindet sich aufgrund eines Klimas der Abwehr gegen Flüchtlinge mit entsprechenden Erfahrungen im Exilland, in dem doch eigentlich Sicherheit gesucht wird. Die Autorin reflektiert über ihre psychotherapeutische Arbeit mit Menschen, die im Zuge politischer Verfolgung extreme Gewalt und Vertreibung erlitten haben, und betont die Bedeutung der Anerkennung dieser Unrechtserfahrungen durch sorgfältige Dokumentation. Sie schildert, wie die Verhaftung des chilenischen Diktators Pinochet in London 1998 zum Dreh- und Angelpunkt eines gruppentherapeutischen Prozesses mit chilenischen Überlebenden wurde, und zeigt an diesen und anderen Falldarstellungen die Bedeutung der *Rolle der Therapeutin als einer Fürsprecherin* auf.

Helen Bamber macht deutlich, dass es neben Ungerechtigkeitserfahrungen im politischen Bereich ebenso wichtig ist, das Unrechtserleben aus früheren Erfahrungen in der Familie, der Gemeinschaft und der Kultur anzuerkennen. Sie führt aus, wie das alltagsbezogene Bearbeiten dieser Themen in der Psychotherapie zu einem ermächtigenden Prozess werden kann, der in kleinen Schritten positive Veränderungen im Leben der Klienten,innen und ihrer Kinder bewirkt.

Schlüsselbegriffe

Unrechtserleben, politische Traumatisierung, Menschenrecht auf Gesundheit, Anerkennung, Dokumentation, Testimonio

Introduction

Helen Bamber OBE passed away on 21 August 2014 aged 89. She began her career in 1945 aged 20, working with survivors of the Nazi Holocaust in the former concentration camp of Bergen Belsen. She then dedicated her life to people who have experienced torture, trafficking, slavery and other forms of extreme human cruelty. She was renowned for her energetic compassion, for helping thousands of men, women and children to confront the horror and brutality of their experiences, and for assisting them in their pursuit of dignity and human rights.

Helen's focus on the individual needs of each person she worked with gave her the ability to navigate the complexity of trauma and human responses to it. She pioneered methods to enable her clients to achieve what she termed '*Creative Survival*'. This is delivered within a Model of Integrated Care which includes provision of therapy, medico-legal documentation, access to medical services, legal representation, housing and welfare advice. It also provides the opportunity for clients to engage in a Creative Arts and Skills Programme and receive support for the challenges of integration through further education and employment. These methods are in practice today at the Helen Bamber Foundation (HBF), the London human rights charity which she founded in 2005.

This interview with Helen Bamber was conducted by Freihart Regner as part of his doctoral thesis on "normative empowerment".² It took place at the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture in London on 18 September 2002 and at the Evangelische Akademie, Bad Boll, Germany on 2 October 2002.³ The interview has been edited by Rachel Witkin of the Helen Bamber Foundation in London, in collaboration with the interviewer. It has been organised to form a lecture in keeping with Helen Bamber's spoken words.

2 "Normative Empowerment describes a basic conceptual attitude for psychosocial and therapeutic practice with politically traumatised persons based on the values of human rights. The main theme is that of empowering people who have experienced traumatogenic powerlessness and injustice and supporting them in claiming their rights. Therapeutic efforts should be made within the framework of and permeated by this political and legal conceptualisation." (www.diss.fu-berlin.de/diss/receive/FUDISS_thesis_000000001964?lang=en, 04.04.15)

3 Client cases that are described in the course of this interview have been adjusted where necessary to ensure that confidentiality is protected.

Acknowledgement through Documentation of Survivors' experiences

"An important task for a therapist working with this client group is to recognise what a person has suffered through the careful documentation of their experiences, as well as verbal affirmation. There is no acceptance by perpetrators that torture has been inflicted, so there is a climate of denial. It is such a shameful and difficult subject for people that they repress their feelings about what has happened to them. Therefore the first thing that I do is talk about their experience, acknowledge it and document their story, their injuries and their psychological difficulties.

The taking of history, the taking of testimony, the documentation by doctors, therapists and others of suffering, whether there are physical signs or not, is important because it is an acknowledgement and a validation of survivors' experiences. It can support their claim for asylum, and it also becomes a historical document which could eventually be used in the International Criminal Court at the Hague or other legal forums where perpetrators are brought to justice."

The Therapist as Advocate

"I am talking about the therapist as an advocate, not solely as a therapist. When a person sees that the therapist is part of their search for justice, and not simply working with their internal world, a different relationship is formed between them. As therapists who work with survivors of human rights violations, we are operating within a political arena, so I think it is important that we declare this through our work and the documentation of our clients' experiences.

Survivors present to us with many physical and practical problems that need to be addressed. As an advocate the therapist will take up the practical and legal issues of a client's case, as well as looking at the clinical treatment that they need. I recommend a combination of therapy, practical skills and adaptations. You cannot begin to treat a person appropriately if they are desperately concerned about their future, about the past, and about the present. What your client brings to you from the refugee world are the practical things: lack of housing, lack of money, not being able to work or study, being separated from their families. I help them to register with good National Health Service (NHS) general practitioners (UK doctors) and we will take up the case at various levels: housing, welfare, health, asylum, education, occupation, the legal procedures for family reunion.

The question of justice then becomes one for your own society: do they have, for example, the right to access appropriate medical care as asylum applicants and refugees? Will they be

treated with the same respect as other people? If not, the sense of injustice may be carried on from the country of origin to the country in which they find themselves. Many of them have a sense of injustice not only about what has happened to them and the political dilemma from which they came, but also about their situation now. Their backgrounds are often disbelieved by government officials, and they may be refused registration at NHS medical practices due to a reluctance to accept them and the challenges which are integral to working with them, for example having to use interpreting services.

Then of course there is their claim for asylum. They usually have to face many legal obstacles before they can – if they are lucky – be granted leave to remain in the UK. Many are refused by the Government at the first stage due to a stated disbelief about their case so their sense of injustice becomes magnified: they feel that they have come to a country in hope of receiving justice and recognition and have found that there is none. I am sure it is the same in Germany and throughout Europe."

The sense of injustice of political activists in exile: The Chilean Group

"I am working with a group of middle-aged Chileans who took part in the political struggle against Pinochet's regime in the 1970s. They lost that struggle, they were tortured and some of their relatives were 'disappeared'. When they arrived in the UK, we documented their cases at the Medical Group of Amnesty International. I had been working on Chile for Amnesty International at that time. When Pinochet was arrested in London in 1998,⁴ they had been living in the UK for over 20 years and I had begun to work with them once again, this time as a therapist. Many had been university students or trade union leaders in Chile, but they had not found a rightful place for their skills in our society. They said they wanted me to run a group for them because they were finding it difficult. They still had one foot in Chile, one foot in this country; their children did not always understand what had happened and why they had come to the UK. When I first went to their centre in the North of England, they sat me down at a table with a pen and paper. Everyone had bits of paper and it was like a trade union or a political meeting. I went along with

4 "General Augusto Pinochet was indicted for human rights violations committed in his native Chile by Spanish magistrate Baltasar Garzón on 10 October 1998. He was arrested in London six days later and held for a year and a half before finally being released by the British government in March 2000. His arrest in London made the frontpage of newspapers worldwide as not only did it involve the head of the military dictatorship that ruled Chile between 1973 and 1990, but it was the first time that several European judges applied the principle of universal jurisdiction, declaring themselves competent to judge crimes committed by former heads of state, despite local amnesty laws." (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indictment_and_arrest_of_Augusto_Pinochet , 08.04.15)
See also www.amnesty.org/en/articles/news/2013/10/how-general-pinochets-detention-changed-meaning-justice/ (19.04.15)

this and I didn't change it. We just talked about what was worrying them. So I think the group I ran was a mixture of a political meeting and a therapeutic group, although they never saw themselves as a therapeutic group at first. They just wanted an understanding of how to go forward.

For years they had crushed and submerged a great deal of their longing for justice. They had not acknowledged it, they did not know it existed anymore. They were struggling in a fairly hostile society to find a way to bring up their children, to battle with the schools about remarks made about their children, to keep alive something that was very special in their own culture. People cried a lot, they were grieving, and I said to them, 'Do you understand that you have never really grieved? This is why you are finding it so difficult. You have never cried, you have never grieved for all your losses and you have never grieved communally. You have fought each other about your political views and your different political positions in Chile, but you haven't grieved'. ... So the group started this way. We kept the group going over a period of a year before Pinochet's arrest, and one day a man said, 'This is a therapeutic group!' *He* said it, I didn't say it. So one aspect of the process was their grief, and saying goodbye to Chile, realising that they would not go back, that there was no place for them there. They knew that they would now be called 'gringos' in Chile and they wouldn't feel at home there. They didn't feel at home in England really either. I think therapy is always about reality and here it was about coming to terms with who they were, what they had, and how to speak to their children. The main problem that the group brought to me were the children. ... What they often say is 'I live only for the children', and that is dangerous.

Another aspect of the process was to give them back a sense of resilience and to reflect upon whether they could accept their position. One woman in the group who was teaching Spanish part-time in the university cried a lot about her child. She said 'I can't even speak English as well as my child does'. I asked her, 'But how many languages does your child speak?' She said, 'Well she speaks English'. I said, 'And how many languages do you speak?' She spoke about four! I didn't say anything else but everybody laughed of course, and she laughed. There were tears and laughter! So you can do quite small interventions in a group, it was charming, she is actually a very intellectual woman.

The man who had first called it a therapeutic group had realised that they were dealing with their feelings rather than their political concepts. He understood this because he had cried a lot in the group, and it was something that I have rarely seen in a communal setting, except at a catastrophic event where you get sobbing and screaming and crying. Here you got sustained, uncontrollable sobbing, by everybody there, and it was a *releasing process*. This was before Pinochet was

arrested, it was nothing to do with him, it was to do with the beginning of the group. It was not easy to run that group because of their political positions. Just imagine starting a group with everybody with pens and papers, to where it became understood that we were dealing with our feelings."

Pinochet's arrest in London, 1998-2000: "When Pinochet was arrested in London, the Chileans were already in a group, but now they mobilised. They had always maintained a community base with a building where they put on Chilean activities, taught their children Spanish and so forth. Now they formed themselves into a committee with computers and telephones. I managed this situation from the therapeutic point of view by being very open with them. I had known them first when they were on hunger strike, when they had been tortured and needed our help. Instead of being the victims upon whom we called for assistance, they became active in trying to bring Pinochet to justice.

The early documentation of their cases became highly significant: if we had not documented the cases of these Chilean exiles when they came to the UK, we would not have been in a position to take part in the legal case against him. The group also knew of people living in other countries who came to us so we could document their cases, and they gathered new information from Chile. Our aim has always been to use whatever advocacy we have, based largely on evidence that we have produced. In other words, we do not just speak, we speak only if we have the evidence and we had a good deal of evidence. We had many documented cases of torture and we had with us people who had been tortured, some of whom I was still working with. I think that sometimes therapists lose the capacity to see their client as a person who has potency and strengths and resilience, and we have to work with that, as well as with victimhood. I had worked a long time with some of the victimhood in this Chilean community, and I saw the possibility of something else. We began to work together, joining with Amnesty International and human rights lawyers in order to provide evidence.

The Chilean group was invigorated by this event. Although Pinochet was not brought to full trial, their sense of injustice was alleviated to some extent because they were able to see him appear in a magistrates' court in London to hear the allegations against him. They felt he had been shamed and reduced, and that was very important for them. The whole world, and the world's media, was speaking and writing about Pinochet's crimes. People do not generally use the word 'justice', but they did in the Pinochet context because the word 'justice' was being used publicly all over the place: 'Bring Pinochet to justice, bring the torturers to justice' and it is still being used

because torturers are being pursued in Chile. ... Suddenly Chilean people who had submerged their feelings in order to survive within family and work settings in the UK began to feel potent.

I asked those who felt able to speak if they were prepared to take part in interviews. I think that one has to use people's own sense of advocacy when it is appropriate and if they feel able to do it. You have to be open with people about what an interview means though: it has expectations, you want change to come from it and change does not always come. You have to be very honest, but you are also speaking to people who have been politically active and who have not lost their capacity to be realistic and understand the limitations. I accompanied them to all the interviews that took place – CNN, BBC, the World Service. For them, being able to speak to the media was empowering. I was with them during the interviews and I was interviewed many times myself.

It was a very difficult thing for them to do. They spoke about their dreams, their shattered dreams and their torture, but it was a – I am not keen on the word 'healing' any more – it was a *healing process* for them. This is where the therapeutic aspect came in, because it was upsetting and it brought back many memories and a lot of pain. It was important that we had the time and space to talk about what it was doing to them and to be open about whether they'd had enough, and if they felt what they had done was sufficient.

I accompanied the group in the role of therapist and advocate. I have never been able to separate the two because I find that advocacy is part of the therapeutic process. Whilst I dealt with a lot of their tears, their pain and their anger, I was also able to accompany them to speak publicly, to go to the House of Lords and to hear what the results of that were, to go on the streets and see the public interest in the case. By the time Pinochet came to London a lot of work had been done about the children and about the injustice felt within the group. So there had been preparation for Pinochet, and I suppose – I have to be honest – I am a political activist as well as a therapist. It is a double act which you have to be very careful about and you have to be very honest about it. In any case, everybody was prepared for the interviews, and the whole group did very well."

Aftermath of the Pinochet event: "The dynamics of the group changed after the Pinochet event: immediately afterwards there was a sense of realism. They were politically aware enough to know that there was not going to be a full trial in the UK despite enormous efforts. However they felt that something of a victory had been obtained because they had been *acknowledged* and they now felt there was a future for justice. They knew some torturers in Chile had become frightened and fled South. There had also been a subtle change *for them*: they had spoken and they had un-

derstood each other better. Now of course they have had to return to rather mundane lives but I do think it was a helpful exercise for them. Much anger and many tears came during our discussions because they had internalised so much feeling and bitterness. It came out in our group: they were very angry, they cried, they shouted, some could barely speak because of their emotion about what had happened all those years ago. Nevertheless, it had great value.

Pinochet had left the UK; he had been humiliated but the group still had many of the problems that they had before. But *did* they? Had there been a change? We looked afterwards at what had happened for *them*: did they have more sense of justice? I think they did. ... They personally had more sense of justice and recognition. For the victim, justice is not only about the legal process, it is about acknowledgement. They had been able to speak publicly about being tortured and persecuted, they had been in the press, they had spoken and been *heard*, acknowledged by politicians on all sides. True, they had to go back to being cleaners, or teaching Spanish or living off benefits – and many had been seriously damaged physically and psychologically by the torture they had suffered.⁵ However there is something about political and legal justice that recognises what has happened to you. This is what asylum applicants whom we see suffer every day: a total lack of acknowledgement. ... So it is to do with justice in emotional terms.

Speaking to their children had formed the essence of the therapeutic group from its beginning, because they felt they had lost contact with them. They were keeping many of their Chilean characteristics going, but the children were not so interested in what their parents had to say: they wanted to integrate, wanted to be like every other child, to play football. This changed when Pinochet was arrested in the UK, because the children saw their parents in a different light, and we were able to work with a lot of the issues that emerged.

I suppose what also came out of the group concerned their differences from each other. Some were originally from very simple backgrounds and others from far more sophisticated backgrounds. Their politics had varied depending on which political organisation they had belonged to, which always matters terribly to them of course. So they had other difficulties in being thrown together as a community, which we ought to understand. Had they remained in their own environment they would have kept within their own social structure, whereas this group, because they were Chilean émigrés, exiles, stayed together. They had enormous differences though. So this was something else we needed to think about in the group: the differences between them which they had never thought about because they had always seen themselves as Chilean *políticos*.

5 en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_rights_violations_in_Pinochet%27s_Chile, www.amnesty.org/en/articles/news/2013/09/life-under-pinochet-they-were-taking-turns-electrocute-us-one-after-other/ (19.04.15)

This also touches the question of justice, because there was envy in the group, and we had to acknowledge it. As we got deeper into the therapeutic content, we began to talk about the anger and envy that existed within the group and the feelings that members had towards each other. There was also a 'hierarchy of suffering', as to who had suffered the most. ... So there was injustice within the group and we were able to resolve some of this together."

The Pinochet event in retrospect: "It was such an extraordinary event, Pinochet being arrested by policemen in London – which is crazy, which is wonderful! However, I do believe that the work we did in the group, which was hard, grinding work, was good preparation. They had become more mature, I would say. Who knows how they would have reacted if it had been earlier? It could have been a negative experience with the group and their difficult feelings with each other. I do not think that we could have achieved all we did without the opportunity presented by Pinochet coming to London.

We spoke a lot in the group about being defeated and what 'defeat' means. One day a man said, 'I'm not going to be able to go back to Chile to live. I will visit, I will be called a gringo and I will come back again. My dream of Chile for me has gone.' So they were able to let go of a dream. However he said something interesting: 'There was a defeat but it wasn't mine or our defeat'. He meant that Chile had lost something good in losing *them* but that they had each kept their integrity. This is what the group really achieved: the sense that there was integrity in the group and in each individual. It had not been lost. This helped them in quite a profound way."

Recognising lack of justice: Turkish-Kurds

"Of course we see many people in this country who have not had the opportunity the Chilean group had. Sometimes you need to recognise with a client that they may never get the justice they want, and that their country may not move towards something that they wanted to see happen. It is a difficult job for the therapist to do but it is important. I see Turkish-Kurdish people who have been persecuted since they were children. Their villages were ransacked, their cattle were killed, they were persecuted in the schools and not allowed to speak their Kurdish language. They have a long history of persecution and tragedy and they find living in exile very difficult. Some go on hunger strike when there is a protest in Turkey or when people are killed. It is a collective sense of injustice and they carry it with them like a flag, a kind of emblem.

Many of them make a living here. Once they are established, they set up their workshops and their kebab shops and they become quite competitive. They do very well sometimes, although not always; we are working with an impoverished group of Turkish-Kurds, many of whom face enforced return to Turkey. I am fighting their cases.

Having their stories told means a great deal to them. I think that the people I work with carry a sense of loss and injustice that they will always carry. It is not the only thing that they bring to the consulting room, but it's an inevitable part, I think. They are very impressed that there is a file with their *history* – not only their injuries, not just their suffering and the medication that their general practitioner gives them, but their history, their story. They know that there may be a time when this can be used, when torturers from Turkey are brought to trial. We cannot be sure of that, but we have to work for it together."

Moving from a political struggle to a human rights struggle:

A woman from the Middle East

"Making an issue of the sense of injustice is, in a way, therapeutic too. It can be quite empowering. I am working with a woman from a Middle Eastern country who was very political and had joined a hardline, militant opposition group. She was tortured, raped, all of it. She is now beginning to realise that their way of trying to fight here in exile is not changing anything in her home country, it is just hurting them a great deal. I think many people move from a more militant political struggle to a human rights struggle once they are living in exile. They need to think in terms of establishing their rights under the various UN Conventions. I believe it is our job to help them to do this, to understand that there are Conventions that are there to protect them.

It is not that she is giving up her political beliefs – I would be the last person to expect that – but what I have looked at with her is how she can empower her community here to get what they need; to be able to speak their original language, to teach the children that language so they do not lose it, to have a community that keeps alive many of the things that were important to them. These are not just the political issues, but can be food, music, fun, anything. We helped this woman to get asylum eventually, and now she is taking up a childcare course so that she can empower fellow women here to do other things while their children are being taken care of. They do not have to just be a servant in the home, but they too can learn English, go and study, or do other activities.

It has given her a tremendous sense of justice for women. She does not use the word, and I am not sure she thinks about it in that way, but she thinks about women becoming more creative and having a place and a voice in their society. It is not just about women being able to join a political struggle anymore, because many women of her ethnic group have played a very strong role in that. I think she will always feel part of it, but she is doing something now which is giving her the courage to see herself in a much broader way, doing challenging things on her course, continuing with her study. At the moment it is the men who go to the coffee house and into the community and the women who stay at home. This way she is doing something quite imaginative for the future of her community here, which is actually about justice."

Injustice in family, culture and politics: A woman from Europe

"I think it is a mistake to only consider the political arena though. I have clients who bring a sense of injustice which originates from their home life, so the therapist needs to consider their childhood, to go through the experience of their family home, their school and – only then – their political life. I am not sure you can simply separate each of these out, or look only at the political injustice. I am working with a European woman who was abducted and raped by soldiers during a war in her home country. Such was the tragedy of her experience of the war that she has never been able to disclose it to anyone. She says that because of her community's patriarchal culture she could be rejected, or possibly even killed. Now there are two areas of injustice here: one is the terrible tragedy of war, in which innocent people can be taken and abused. Another is the fact that, having experienced this tragedy, she cannot receive the normal sympathy, care and understanding that one would hope for from her community – quite the contrary. We must look at this as well and explore it with our client.

This woman also experienced injustice in her home from childhood: she was not allowed to do the things she wanted, not permitted to study, and she was treated as a kind of servant in the household. She had to be extremely obedient, any sign of deviation from expected behaviour would result in a beating. Dancing, singing, all the things that young people like to enjoy were denied to her. Then there was an arranged marriage imposed upon her. So it would be a mistake to look only at the political scene and the tragedy that happened to her. Did she think that it was unjust that because she is a woman she had to be obedient, that she had to take off her father's coat and serve him? I find that people do not use the word 'justice' very much, but they do seek it in

different ways. ... There is not always an expectation of justice in the region that they were brought up in. She just said to me 'This is how it is in my home country'.

My work then was in finding out how she *felt* about it. Without using the word 'injustice', how did this make her feel as a young person? What did she feel then about her parents, about her home, about her society? I think she feels that the situation for women in her country and in other countries is terrible, but she is not looking for political justice for herself. She has grown up in a system which was imposed upon her by her own community, quite apart from the brutality of the war. She had felt that there was no one to help her in her predicament. I would use the word 'right' in my discussions with her: did she feel it was *right*? What was *wrong* in that situation, for her?

I wanted her to be able to express her feelings, because she has two children and she does not believe that she can be a good role model for them. My great concern is about generational perpetuation of trauma, so I explored with her how she felt when her needs were not acknowledged by her family members, and how we can begin to change how she reacts to her own children; how she feels about herself and about them. She loves her children very much, but she would shrug and say, 'Well that's how it is'. I might then say to her, 'Well do you think we can change that, and if so, how?' 'Do you want to change things for your children or do you want to go on in the same way that you knew before?' I would not rush to look at how we can make changes, but rather allow her to express herself, and enable her to do it herself, without guilt feelings. Everybody has some feelings for their parents, no matter how questionable their actions may be. I always work with clients who have suffered this kind of injustice within their communities on the understanding that their parents did not know anything else. They were born into a situation in which everything they did was simply what everyone else did, and it was acceptable. There is no need to blame her parents or even her community, that is just 'how it is.' However now she is in a different situation, in a new country, how does she feel about what she wants to do?

She is an extremely bright woman, very clever. It would give her a tremendous sense – whether it's justice, it may be – to fulfil her dream to go to university. It is possible for a mother in a Western society to go to university. I do not know whether her husband would allow it, but I believe it would be a recognition of all that she has lost in the course of her early childhood in which she was forbidden to study. I hope that by working with both the husband and the wife there may eventually be recognition on his part that she should go to university. This does not put right the early injustice in her family or the terrible injustice of the war which assaulted her so badly, but it is one way of looking at how she can achieve something that was absolutely denied to her. She

was told by her community and by the events of the war itself that she was nothing, and deserved nothing. So in this case working with the inner world is not enough, certain practical things need to be put in place. It is worth considering that there is an Open University which enables people to study at home. There are many other things that are needed for her, but I think that being able to pursue her education would give her a sense of recognition and justice.

Change – and this is a political word really – change can be made. She is excited by the idea of change. Although she does not feel she can get justice for herself, she might be able to provide more justice for her children. She is interested in looking at the ways I have been able to work with her in relation to her husband. When she married him she was very young and she wasn't able to assert herself. Now she has told him – not asked him, but told him – that she is coming to see me because she thinks it will help her with her asylum claim, her future and her poor health. She also believes that it helps her to manage her children better. This did not happen overnight, it took time. I go very slowly and it's difficult. You could not put on paper what you have achieved in one session because it is so small. However there are little areas of change, and recently she has brought her children to a session with me for the first time.“

The concept of justice

"I think my irritation towards the concept of justice when we started with this interview was really to do with the fact that as therapists working in Europe with people who have been tortured, abused, who have been war victims, misused as slaves – we are ourselves working in such an atmosphere of injustice towards our clients. I mean the injustice of the rhetoric that is used politically and publicly against them, the asylum legislation that becomes more and more punitive, the harsh decisions to send people back when we know perfectly well that they are likely to be tortured or 'disappeared' when they return. So the question of justice applies to us as much as it does to the client, and it forces us into the role of being an advocate for them. So it is irritating because it brings out the advocate in us, the sense of the injustice on behalf of the client and on behalf of ourselves.

I have never really been preoccupied with what my father called 'the enemy'. He once said to me, 'Don't waste your hatred and your time with the enemy. You'll recognise the enemy, you'll work against the enemy, so don't waste your energy. Attend to the bystander, attend to the people who allow these things to happen!' And I think that in a way my anger and my irritation about injustice is most definitely towards my own Government and government policy. What the client

brings to me in many cases – not all, I am not going to generalise here – is the injustice of the system in which they now find themselves, and the final disappointment and disillusion from believing that the United Kingdom is a country where they will be given a full and fair hearing. This is, for them, a final piece of the destruction in their belief system.

I think a sense of justice becomes applicable only when people are more settled and stabilised. They may have obtained their safety in the country, which is something, they may still be fighting for housing and the right to work and to be accepted, but they will be in a better position now to look back upon their original tragedy. It is then that you are able to unravel some of the most difficult feelings that people have about what is, very often, their lost political cause. Most refugees have lost the political battle, the change that they wanted to bring about in their country. This is a good point to talk and listen, flush out and try to disentangle the complicated feelings that people have about lack of justice.

So justice is an essential component of therapy in such cases, perhaps the most important component, but we do not verbalise it very much. I think we should try to explore it more. ... We do not often see the *original* search for justice, but I believe that search goes on with people in some way. With the Chilean group for instance, they do not expect to have justice in the way that they wanted it originally. They have had a success with the Pinochet event, they saw him humiliated and they got a lot from that, above all a sense of recognition. However justice is also about the public, the host community, about an understanding of who they are and what they are. For example, there is an 'Artists in Exile' group, which has exhibitions, music, art and theatre. This is one way of expressing to the public whatever they want to express. ... Public recognition is terribly important and it is the denial of public interest that accentuates that sense of injustice.

It is difficult for some therapists to see themselves as an advocate and it is important to recognise this. It goes against their training and it can cause a conflict. There is a jump to be made: you need to accept that we are working in a political and social environment which not only affects the lives of our clients, but our own lives as well. We can acknowledge their suffering but often we can't bring that justice that would make the difference. We can be a part of the pursuit of it though, and I think it is important for therapists not to feel powerless as they often do, but to think a little bit 'side-laterally', to see whether there is a way in which they can work more with the judicial system or make challenges through the use of recorded evidence of psychological and physical injuries, and not only through feelings. This way we can be more powerful as therapists."