VOICES Against Torture

A publication of Vancouver Association for Survivors of Torture

LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Voices Against Torture is published on the Unceded Homelands of the displaced xwməθkwəy̓ə m (Musqueam), selí ̓lw̓ itulh (TsleilWaututh), and sḵwxwú7mesh (Squamish) Coast Salish peoples. We pay respect to the Elders past and present and are grateful for the many diverse Indigenous peoples who, over generations, cared for these shared Traditional Territories. We recognize the truth of violence, the painful history of genocide, and the forced removal that took place on this Ancestral Land. We are committed to the everyday actions that can help transform colonial impacts and help us move towards a culture of healing. This also means to us deeper alignment with the values rooted in anti-oppression and universal trauma-informed care, supporting a society based on equity, equality, and justice. We hold ourselves globally accountable to all human rights and to all Traditional Custodians of the Land wherever they now exist or compelled to co-exist. We comprehend that this Land Acknowledgement is a small but essential step in our ongoing process of remaining in right relations and continuum towards transparency and accountability.

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Theme of the issue: Humanity at the Time of War

Editorial

In times of war, the fragility of human life and the strength of human dignity come into sharp focus. War devastates societies, tearing apart families, destroying institutions, and leaving millions displaced. Yet even in these darkest hours, humanity continues to emerge not only in acts of survival but in gestures of compassion, resilience, and solidarity that defy the logic of violence.

This issue of *Voices Against Torture, International Journal on Human Rights,* reflects this paradox. While conflicts expose the worst violations of human dignity—torture, forced displacement, sexual violence, and mass incarceration—they also call forth urgent responses that reaffirm the values of justice, empathy, and peace. From the displacement of millions across continents to the struggles of survivors seeking recognition and accountability, the stories and analyses gathered here underline one enduring truth: humanity cannot be extinguished by war.

The contributors in this volume examine war from diverse vantage points: the role of justice in migration policies, the persistence of cultural frameworks in shaping violence, the psychological scars borne by survivors, the spiritual resources communities draw upon, and the ethical obligation to resist dehumanization. Each article, whether rooted in law, psychology, spirituality, sociology, or lived testimony, illuminates the same central message—that in moments of destruction, the defence of human dignity becomes not optional but imperative.

The mental health consequences of war are equally devastating. Survivors carry wounds that are not always visible: post-traumatic stress, depression, grief, and moral injury. In Gaza, Afghanistan, Ukraine and other war zones, people endure trauma layered upon trauma, with little access to psychological support. Refugees arriving in new countries bring with them these burdens, often to societies ill-prepared or unwilling to respond with compassion. To speak of humanity in the time of war, then, is to acknowledge that the struggle is not only for food and shelter but also for memory, dignity, and mental well-being.

One of the contributions to this issue, "Perspective: A Case Study of Kurdish Sufism Through Divers' Mysticism," explores alternative approaches to conflict resolution, particularly in the Muslim world, where violence remains a persistent challenge. It highlights the role of spiritual leaders and authentic spiritual practices in promoting peace and reconciliation, an approach that aligns closely with Voices Against Torture's core theme of ending torture and violence through nonviolent, humane, and ethical means. The article also brings a rare perspective from a region currently affected by active conflict between Iraq and the Kurds, offering valuable insight into how spiritual frameworks can contribute to conflict transformation.

The images accompanying the poems "Humanity at the Time of Wars – When the Earth Splits Open with Fire" and "Finding Sanctuary While in Refuge – Insight" were provided by the respective authors, deepening the personal and emotional expression of their poetic reflections.

Readers will also notice that the volume of this issue is smaller than that of previous editions. This is intentional because the current issue is theme-based, focused entirely on the human condition during times of war, and does not include separate sections as in earlier volumes.

Our task as scholars, practitioners, and global citizens is to recognize and amplify these voices. By doing so, we not only document suffering but also nurture hope. We confront the structures of violence with a vision of humanity grounded in justice, compassion, and solidarity.

This journal stands as a reminder that humanity at the time of war is not an abstract ideal; it is a lived, daily practice. It is present in the courage of survivors, the dedication of human rights defenders, and the unyielding pursuit of peace. Let these pages encourage us to continue this work with clarity, integrity, and a shared commitment to uphold human dignity in the face of conflict.

Farooq Mehdi and Frank Cohn

Uploading Justice and Protecting Survivors: Critical Considerations for EU Migration Policy

Richard Burchill

There is an almost ironic, if not tragic, turn when large groups of people flee from conflict. While victims of persecution can find safer places like Europe, perpetrators of such persecution may also find ways to leave their country of origin and evade accountability elsewhere. This is an entirely unintended consequence, as the focus of asylum and immigration policies must remain on victims fleeing conflict and avoid the false assumption that terrorists or other 'dangerous' actors are the majority of those seeking asylum (Han, 2022). The circumstances, as has been seen in relation to the Syrian conflict, may result in victims safely settling but then fearing they may see their abusers in the streets. At the same time, many states in the EU are showing a willingness to prosecute those accused of war crimes and torture, providing a degree of justice for victims of torture (Aboueldahab & Langmack, 2022).

Most recently, the Frankfurt Higher Regional Court passed a guilty verdict in June 2025 against a Syrian doctor, Alaa M., for crimes against humanity, war crimes, and torture; he was sentenced to life imprisonment with the court finding "particular severity of guilt" in this case (news sources summarized in Appendix B). Scholarly literature specifically analyzing this very recent judgment is not yet available; early commentary and primary reporting provide the factual record while academic analysis is expected to follow (see Appendix B). Alaa M. was alleged to have worked in Syrian military hospitals during the early years of the Syrian civil war (2011-2012) and was accused of administering lethal medicines and committing acts of torture and sexual violence; around 2015 he left Syria and entered Germany on a skilled worker visa and practised as an orthopaedic surgeon before his arrest and prosecution (see primary reports in Appendix B).

Alaa M.'s case follows several European, primarily German prosecutions through the use of universal jurisdiction, where victims of torture have received some measure of justice through convictions of alleged abusers (Aboueldahab & Langmack, 2022; Han, 2022). This

process began (in its most prominent form) in October 2019 when charges were filed against two former Syrian officials, Anwar R. and Eyad A., in Germany. Their arrest and subsequent prosecution marked the start of a new era in accountability, utilizing universal jurisdiction to address atrocities committed far beyond European borders (Aboueldahab & Langmack, 2022).

The so-called Al-Khatib trial, conducted at the Koblenz Higher Regional Court from April 2020 to January 2022, was a landmark case prosecuting Syrian war crimes under universal jurisdiction. It targeted two former Syrian intelligence officers, Anwar Raslan and Eyad Al-Gharib, for crimes against humanity committed at the Al-Khatib Branch (Branch 251) in Damascus between 2011 and 2012 (Aboueldahab & Langmack, 2022; Han, 2022). The trial addressed systematic torture, murder, and sexual violence against detainees during the Syrian civil war's early phase, and it marked the first global conviction of Syrian officials for such crimes (Aboueldahab & Langmack, 2022). The Koblenz proceedings were notable for combining rigorous criminal-law adjudication with survivor-centred testimony drawn from refugees and survivors now living in Europe, a feature repeatedly highlighted in scholarly commentary on universal-jurisdiction trials arising from Syria (Aboueldahab & Langmack, 2022; Han, 2022).

In February 2021, Al-Gharib received a sentence of four-and-a-half years for aiding and abetting crimes against humanity; in January 2022, Raslan was sentenced to life imprisonment for complicity in crimes against humanity, with the court finding particular gravity that precluded early release (Aboueldahab & Langmack, 2022).

Subsequent European cases have continued the trend of domestic prosecutions. For example, in February 2023 the Berlin Regional Court convicted Moafak D., a Palestinian-Syrian former member of a pro-regime militia, for war crimes and murder connected to events in the Yarmouk refugee camp; he received a life sentence (academic analyses and case summaries of related prosecutions are emerging in the literature on universal

jurisdiction and Syrian accountability; see Aboueldahab & Langmack, 2022; Gilchrist, 2023).

Similarly, the Netherlands prosecuted a member of the Liwa al-Quds militia, Mustafa A., and the Hague District Court issued a conviction in January 2024 (case reporting and ongoing legal commentary are discussed in scholarly reviews of European prosecutions; see Aboueldahab & Langmack, 2022; Gilchrist, 2023). France's May 2024 convictions of three individuals in absentia at the Paris Criminal Court involving complicity in crimes against humanity and war crimes related to enforced disappearances and torture were an early example of how different European jurisdictions are approaching accountability for Syrian atrocities (scholarly literature that situates the French approach within broader European trends is developing; see Langer & Eason, 2019; Han, 2022). Swedish proceedings against Mohammed Hamo in 2024 (where he was charged with aiding and abetting war crimes for acts alleged to have been committed in 2012) exemplify how a range of national legal systems have been engaged in investigations and prosecutions (legal commentary on these national efforts is collected and analyzed in recent scholarship on universal jurisdiction; e.g., Aboueldahab & Langmack, 2022; Gilchrist, 2023).

Other ongoing cases (for example, indictments in Brussels in 2024 and referrals to Swiss courts in 2025) illustrate the dispersed, multi-jurisdictional approach to accountability that has emerged in Europe. These processes have relied heavily on networks of investigators, NGOs, and survivor testimony to assemble evidence that would otherwise be difficult to obtain (Aboueldahab & Langmack, 2022; Gilchrist, 2023).

These trials have had a wider-reaching impact on victims of torture and other crimes against humanity. Survivors can see their suffering recognized and their stories validated in a court of law. The legal proceedings not only held individual perpetrators accountable but also documented the scale and nature of abuses suffered, providing a measure of justice and public acknowledgement that had long been denied (Aboueldahab & Langmack, 2022; Han, 2022). The ripple effects extend beyond the courtroom: these prosecutions reinforce the legitimacy of asylum claims and challenge states to bring to justice those accused of crimes against humanity. While no legal system can bring every suspected individual to account, the cases give survivors a measure of agency and mark a historic advance in the struggle for human rights and accountability (Aboueldahab & Langmack,2022; Gilchrist, 2023).

The importance of survivor testimony in securing arrests and convictions is a recurrent theme in the literature. The availability and protection of survivors who can provide detailed evidence and witness statements are indispensable following atrocity situations; losing access to survivors (for example, through premature return or curtailed protections) would severely hamper future prosecutions (Aboueldahab & Langmack, 2022; Gilchrist, 2023; Han, 2022). European states demonstrated an openness in 2015 to Syrians fleeing the conflict, a strong demonstration of humanitarianism, but more recent shifts toward restrictive return and protection policies risk undermining accountability. If survivors are returned to insecure zones, opportunities to assemble evidence and pursue justice through domestic courts will be diminished (Aboueldahab & Langmack, 2022,Han, 2022).

For policymakers, these developments underscore several non-negotiable imperatives: the continued protection and support of survivors is essential not merely as a humanitarian obligation but as a cornerstone for accountability and the rule of law. Rolling back protections or prematurely deeming conflict zones "safe" for return undermines both justice and the potential to build comprehensive cases against those responsible for atrocities. Policy decisions must ensure that survivors remain able to participate in judicial processes, contributing vital evidence and testimony (Aboueldahab & Langmack, 2022; Gilchrist, 2023; Han, 2022). The pursuit of justice for victims of war crimes must not be seen as optional or secondary to other political objectives. Maintaining open pathways for survivor-driven justice sends a clear message that Europe remains committed to accountability and will not provide a safe haven for perpetrators of serious international crimes.

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Gilchrist, H. (2023). Universal jurisdiction in domestic courts (Research paper). SSRN. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4463840 Han, Y. (2022). Should German courts prosecute Syrian international crimes? Revisiting the "dual foundation" thesis. Ethics & International Affairs, 36(1). https://doi.org/10.1017/S0892679421000666 Langer, M., & Eason, M. (2019). The quiet expansion of universal jurisdiction. European Journal of International Law, 30(3), 779–800. https://doi.org/10.1093/ejil/chz051

Additional scholarly reviews and collected analyses referenced in the text include selected reports and academic commentary on universal jurisdiction and Syrian accountability (see Aboueldahab & Langmack, 2022; Gilchrist, 2023; Han, 2022).

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Appendix A -Notes on scholarly coverage
• The Koblenz (Al-Khatib) trial and related German cases are well covered in the peer-reviewed and academic literature (see Aboueldahab & Langmack, 2022; Han, 2022; Gilchrist, 2023). These sources provide detailed legal analysis, discuss the role of survivor testimony, and assess the implications of universal jurisdiction trials for transitional justice.
• For a number of the most recent convictions and proceedings referenced in the article (notably the June 2025 Frankfurt judgment in the case of Alaa M. and some 2024–2025 national decisions), peer-reviewed academic analyses have not yet been published because the cases are still recent. In such instances, the factual record currently resides primarily in high-quality news reporting and official court communications. To preserve the user's request for scholarly sources, this draft cites academic literature where it provides contextual or analytic support and flags where only non-scholarly primary reporting was available (see Appendix B).

Appendix B - Primary (non-scholarly) reporting used for very recent case facts
AP News. (2025, June). German court sentences Syrian doctor to life in prison for torture and war crimes in his homeland. Associated Press. Retrieved from https://apnews.com/article/68f0d04ab66f82df6a032434c631c498
The Guardian. (2025, June 16). German court sentences Syrian doctor to life in jail for crimes against humanity. Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/jun/16/german-court-sentences-syrian-doctor-alaa-mousa-to-life-in-jail-for-crimes-against-humanity

Cultural Conditioning and Moral Frameworks in Violence: Muslim Communities in Canada

Shawal Pall and Saadia Akram Pall

Violence, including intimate partner violence (IPV) and domestic violence (DV), remains a serious global issue with pervasive consequences for the victims' health, safety, and well-being. IPV and DV are not unique to any one culture or faith; their perpetuation is shaped by inappropriate conditioning, development of diseased role models, unhealthy social reinforcements/ cultural norms, and religious (mis)interpretations. This article examines IPV and DV within Canadian-Muslim communities, exploring how migration, acculturative stress, collectivist values, and patriarchal traditions intersect with religious (mis)interpretations to sustain cycles of violence through diseased role models and inappropriate social reinforcement. To dismantle these cycles of violence, this article suggests: (1) drawing on classical and operant conditioning, as well as psychodynamic frameworks, to better understand the roots of IPV and DV; and (2) exploring how healthy role models and positive social reinforcement patterns can be developed and transmitted across generations.

Domestic violence (DV) refers to abusive behaviour in any personal relationship where one partner seeks to gain power and control over the other (World Health Organization [WHO], 2025). Family violence encompasses abuse by spouses, parents, children, siblings, or extended relatives, whereas intimate partner violence (IPV) refers more specifically to abuse between current or former spouses, common-law partners, or dating partners (WHO, 2025; U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2024). Importantly, IPV occurs not only in heterosexual relationships but also in same-gender and gender-diverse relationships, which can involve a range of domestic and partner dynamics, including intimate partners, in-laws, and other familial or cohabiting individuals (Drouillard & Foster, 2024; Machado et al., 2024; Workman et al., 2022).

Here are some statistics referring to such issues, though not limited to, the Muslim communities. According to the World Health Organization (2025), violence against women and girls is universal, prevailing across countries, cultures, and religions, and rooted in social norms that privilege men over women. The World Health Organization (2024) estimates that 30% of women globally experience some form of abuse during their lifetimes. Canadian data reveal similar trends. Statistics Canada reports that nearly 6.2 million women have experienced domestic violence, and 60% of female homicides are linked to family violence, which is alarming (Government of Canada, 2025; Statistics Canada, 2005).

IPV and DV are not limited to women; men and all genders can also be victims. However, for the purpose of this article and to ensure clarity for readers, the term "victim" will be used to refer specifically to women. This focus is supported by various studies that consistently show women comprise the majority of victims in such cases. For example, Beeby (2012), in their *Globe and Mail* article, quotes the Annual Statistics Canada telephone survey in 2009, which found that approximately 336,000 Canadians were victims of some form of violence perpetrated by their spouse and shared that more than 80% of those cases were women who were the victims. The report also highlights that the financial cost of domestic violence for that year was around $7.4 billion.

As previously mentioned, IPV and DV occur across all religious groups; however, this article closely examines Muslims, who represent the second-largest religious group in Canada, numbering approximately 1.8 million people (4.3% of the population) (Statistics Canada, 2022; Statistics Canada, 2025). The majority (68%) are foreign-born and navigate processes of migration, resettlement, and acculturation (Environics Institute for Survey Research, 2016). For many immigrant Muslim families, collectivist traditions intersect with Canadian individualist norms, complicating how IPV is understood, reported, and addressed.

While working closely with 48 clients from Muslim backgrounds in a clinical setting, Dr. Akram-Pall (2025) conducted a survey and found that patterns of IPV and DV could be explained by classical and operant conditioning. These learning mechanisms help account for the development of diseased role models and inappropriate social reinforcement patterns, which contribute to the persistence of IPV and DV across generations. In a conference presentation (Akram-Pall, 2025), she explained that these patterns can be replaced with healthy role models and positive social reinforcement by applying classical and operant conditioning frameworks. This approach, she suggested, can ultimately reduce—and potentially eliminate—the development, persistence, and intergenerational transmission of such behaviours. During her presentation, she emphasized the importance of healthy

parenting and societal norms in preventing and eliminating IPV and DV in our society. Classical conditioning explains how survivors of IPV and DV may develop conditioned fear responses to cues associated with abuse. Over time, neutral stimuli (tone of voice, gestures, household sounds) become paired with threat, eliciting anxiety or compliance (Grant, 1964). As for perpetrators, aggression becomes conditioned to elicit outcomes such as submission or silence, reinforcing its use. Eventually, due to societal, cultural, and patriarchal norms, dominating and controlling behaviour becomes associated with notions of "masculinity" and a "diseased role model," a connection further reinforced through operant conditioning and social reinforcement. Operant conditioning highlights reinforcement cycles: perpetrators receive positive reinforcement (such as power, control, or status) or negative reinforcement (the cessation of arguments), which strengthens violent behaviours. Survivors may learn submissiveness through negative reinforcement (avoiding harm by compliance), thereby perpetuating the cycle (Grant, 1964). These contingencies create deeply ingrained behavioural patterns that sustain IPV across generations unless disrupted. This interplay of classical and operant conditioning is illustrated in Figures 1 and 2.
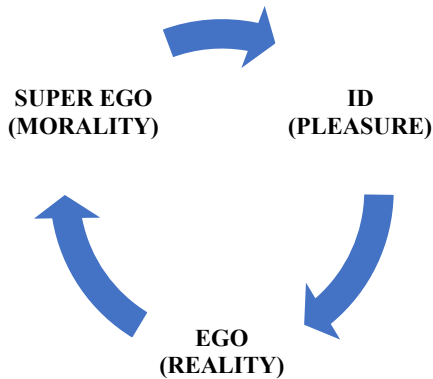
Figure 1

Interplay between the id, ego, and the superego in personality development
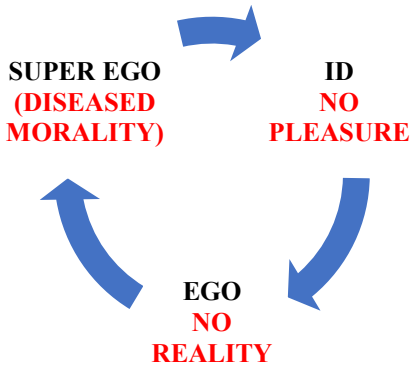
Figure 2

Interplay between the ID, Ego and Super Ego for the development of diseased morality

Drawing on Freud's tripartite model (Id, Ego and Superego), many women in abusive contexts present with a repressed id (denied pleasure), an underdeveloped ego (limited capacity for reality-testing), and an exaggerated superego dominated by fear (see Figure 1) (Boag, 2014; Freud, 1923/1961). Whereas many men in an abusive context exhibit the id (pleasure principle), a confused ego (blurred vision based on societal configuration of reinforcement from society and continuation of role models), and an overpowered superego (Figure 2). This diseased morality produces internalized guilt and anxiety, often manifesting in depression, obsessive-compulsive tendencies, and other mental health challenges, which lead to the continuation of abuse and violence in a society. There are several examples of IPV and DV of honour killing where diseased morality played a critical role rather than logical thinking and cognition (Gabbay, 2023).

Figure 3

Overlap of classical and operant conditioning in the development of diseased morality and fear

Collective Cultural Values and Norms, Religious (mis) Interpretations, and Role Models in Muslim Social Contexts
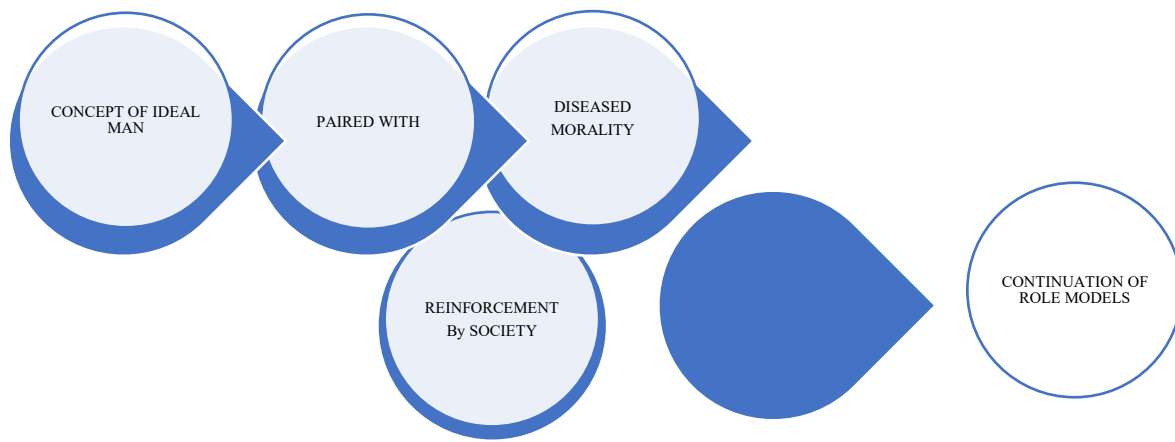In this section, a few related factors are discussed to explain the role of collective cultural values and norms, religion (mis) interpretations, and Role Models in Muslim social contexts based on personal observations and life experiences.

Development of Moral Values Based on Fear and Religious Misinterpretations
Fear-based morality arises when religious texts are (mis)interpreted to enforce submission, silence, and obedience among women. Rather than cultivating moral consciousness and healthy personality development, these frameworks lead to segregation, oppression, and violence.

Role Models and Social Learning Context
When children are raised in social contexts where IPV is accepted and normalized, these learned social patterns are passed on to the next generation from an early age, and they continue to strengthen over time through positive reinforcement and appreciation. This social learning process cultivates and supports IPV in close-knit cultures. For example, boys are appreciated when they may exhibit dominance and control, and girls are respected when they are submissive and vulnerable. Eventually, these role models and social learning contexts contribute to increased IPV over time.

Psychogenic Mutism
Psychogenic mutism also refers to selective mutism/silence, where individuals interactively participate and communicate in specific issues, but for others, they are mute and non-participating. In collective cultures, women are expected to remain silent to preserve family values and cultural traditions, as they are considered responsible for holding the family together. If any woman attempts to raise her voice against violence, which is not approved by the collective culture, she can be socially abandoned, which makes her feel segregated

and alienated. At times, due to social abandonment, she ends up returning to the cultural norms and prefers to tolerate violence and transfer the message of silence to the next generations.

Migration and Cultural Integration Stress

Migration adds complexity to IPV experiences. Homeland traditions and cultural expectations are brought to the Canadian context with migration. Women are often forced to follow the same traditions and norms that were practiced in their original homelands, including dress codes and family rules. However, for men, these rules are often more lenient and flexible, depending on the weather and situation. If these traditional norms are not followed, women may be labelled as liberated and excluded from the cultural network, leading to segregation.

This article attempts to deconstruct diseased moralities rooted in fear and misinterpretations of religion in the Muslim community and elaborates on the importance of healthy parenting and the development of societal reinforcement patterns that can support equity, mental health, and social harmony. The roles of parenting and societal pressure are highlighted, as they play a critical role in developing, nurturing, and strengthening the diseased morality. This is achieved through classical conditioning and operant conditioning frameworks, which aim to unlearn these patterns by learning ways to generate healthy role models. This will eventually lead to the elimination of abuse and violence by cultivating respect and dignity. It is recommended to conduct future studies to analyze these patterns, which persist in continuation of IPV and DV, and to educate society, particularly Muslims, about these patterns to eliminate the curse of IPV and DV, which is a heavy cost on the entire society, both psychologically and financially.

Empirical Insights

Research on Canadian Muslim women experiencing IPV by Alghamdi, Lee, and Nagy (2021) highlights themes of:

- Childhood exposure to trauma and violence.

- The "iron cage" of societal expectations.

- Fusion of love and violence in intimate partnerships.

- Post-migration challenges, including limited social support.

- Severe psychological and physical consequences of IPV.

Straus' General Systems Theory (1973) situates IPV as a product of cultural, societal, and familial values. For many Muslim immigrant women, adverse childhood experiences, poverty, and illiteracy shape adult vulnerabilities, while collectivist norms complicate disclosure and intervention.

Toward Healthier Role Models

The perpetuation of IPV through conditioning can be visualized as two parallel pathways:

Distorted Model

- Classical Conditioning: Pairing male dominance with authority and female submission with virtue.

- Operant Conditioning: Reinforcing men's aggression with social approval (e.g., honour killings, control).

Healthy Model

- Classical Conditioning: Pairing respect, compassion, and equity with family and marital success.

- Operant Conditioning: Reinforcing nonviolence and gender equity through community recognition, legal protection, and religious education.

Morality Framework

- Early childhood experiences lead to personality development
- Healthy parenting leads to healthy morality

To dismantle IPV, societies must reinforce healthy models and disrupt distorted ones through:

1. Religious reinterpretation is rooted in compassion and equality.

2. Policy and laws that penalize violence and reward equity.

3. Community activism that normalizes women's participation in decision-making.

4. Clinical interventions that address fear, trauma, and conditioning cycles.

5. Future studies to explore these conditioning cycles and morality frameworks.

Conclusion

Violence (IPV and DV) among Muslim communities in Canada reflects a convergence of behavioural conditioning, patriarchal norms, migration stress, and religious misinterpretations. Violence (IPV and DV) is sustained not only by individual pathology but also by role models and reinforcements that valorize domination and submission. By reorienting conditioning processes toward healthy role models, grounded in both religious teachings and modern equity frameworks, we can promote lasting change. Violence is not inherent to Islam or Muslim communities, but results from diseased moralities that must be challenged through collective, cultural, and psychological transformation.

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Secondary Trauma of War: Impact on Work Functioning of Media Professionals

Noreeta Suleman and Rubina Hanif

Abstract

War has been associated with direct trauma—physical injury, displacement, and loss. However, the reach of war extends beyond those who are physically present in conflict zones. Through news media, social networks, and cultural narratives, people around the world are exposed to the horrors of war, often experiencing emotional and psychological distress as a result. This phenomenon, known as vicarious or secondary trauma, is increasingly recognized as a significant public health and social issue. Media professionals who are indirectly exposed to news and pictures of war conflicts may experience war trauma. This is secondary or vicarious trauma. The findings of a survey conducted in Pakistan are analyzed critically to see the psychological indicators of trauma and how secondary experience influences the work functioning of the media personnel.

Introduction

War has been a persistent companion to humanity throughout history, leaving deep scars on societies, economies, and cultures worldwide. It is a state of armed conflict characterized by violence, loss, and displacement, often raising profound questions about its causes, consequences, and impact on human lives. War's effects on humanity are multifaceted and far-reaching. Some of the most significant consequences include loss of Human Lives (Armed conflicts result in the deaths of soldiers and civilians alike, leaving behind grieving families and communities). Loss of life in war is not only tragic on a personal level but also has a profound impact on the social fabric of a society. Physical and Psychological Trauma (War inflicts severe physical injuries and psychological trauma on individuals, often leading to long-term mental health issues such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and anxiety), further, displacement and Refugee Crises (Wars force people to flee their homes, leading to massive displacement and refugee crises. Displaced individuals face uncertainty, hardship, and often, a loss of identity), finally, economic Instability and Poverty (economic consequences of war are staggering, with governments spending billions of dollars on weapons, soldiers, and logistics. This money could be used for education, healthcare, and infrastructure development, but instead, it is diverted to the military.

The economic ramifications are substantial, encompassing destroyed infrastructure, disrupted trade, and long-term developmental setbacks. Furthermore, war profoundly affects the psychological well-being of individuals, leading to a range of severe mental health issues, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and anxiety, which can persist long after the conflict ends (Khan & Altalbe, 2023). The extensive exposure to such traumatic events, even indirectly through media, can lead to chronic psychological distress among populations far removed from the direct conflict (Al-Ajlouny et al., 2025). This phenomenon, often termed vicarious or secondary trauma, highlights how continuous media exposure to war-related content can significantly impact mental health, even for those not directly involved in the conflict (Fekih-Romdhane et al., 2023). For media professionals, this indirect exposure is an occupational hazard, often leading to significant psychological burdens and affecting their work functioning (Shilpa et al., 2023). Recognizing the ubiquity of armed conflicts globally (Williamson & Murphy, 2025), understanding the psychological consequences for various professional groups, especially those who mediate public understanding of these events, becomes paramount. This study aims to critically analyze survey findings from Pakistan to identify psychological indicators of trauma and assess how secondary exposure to war influences the work functioning of media professionals (Fekih-Romdhane et al., 2023).

Dynamics of Secondary /vicarious Trauma

The history of wars has established that, long-term or short-term, the effects of wars end in unprecedented loss, and the experience of such traumatic events on all segments of the community is devastating. The experience of any trauma has direct or indirect effects. Literature has well established that indirect experiences may also cause trauma among the masses. This kind of trauma is called secondary trauma or vicarious trauma. War has historically been associated with direct trauma—physical injury, displacement, and loss. However, the reach of war extends beyond those who are physically present in conflict zones. Through news media, social networks, and cultural narratives, people around the world are exposed to the horrors of war, often

experiencing emotional and psychological distress as a result. This phenomenon, known as vicarious or secondary trauma, is increasingly recognized as a significant public health and social issue. Vicarious experiences of war refer to the indirect exposure to war-related trauma through secondhand accounts, media, or relationships with affected individuals. Unlike direct trauma, which results from personal involvement in conflict, vicarious trauma is experienced by those who witness, hear about, or empathize with the suffering of others. Research shows that vicarious exposure to war can lead to symptoms similar to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, depression, and emotional numbing (Figley, 1995; Dekel & Baum, 2010). Children and adolescents are particularly vulnerable, as they may lack the cognitive and emotional resources to process distressing information. Communities exposed to war narratives may experience heightened fear, mistrust, and changes in social cohesion. These impacts can manifest as increased prejudice, solidarity, or shifts in collective memory and identity (Bar-Tal, 2007).

Secondary trauma is transmitted through:

- Media coverage (television, internet, social media)
- Interpersonal relationships (family, friends, community leaders)
- Cultural rituals and commemorations

Bandura's Social Learning Theory posits that individuals learn behaviours and emotional responses by observing others. Media and community narratives about war can shape attitudes, beliefs, and emotional states, even in the absence of direct experience. Collective trauma refers to the psychological impact of traumatic events shared by a group or community. War, as a collective trauma, can alter community identity, values, and social norms (Alexander, 2004). Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory emphasizes the interconnectedness of individuals and their environments. Vicarious experiences of war can affect individuals at multiple levels—personal, familial, community, and societal. The following table best illustrates the mechanism through which secondary or vicarious trauma impacts the community and systems:

Table 1. Mechanisms of Vicarious Trauma Transmission

Mechanism	Example	Impact
Media Exposure	Watching war footage on TV	Anxiety, desensitization
Social Media	Sharing/seeing distressing posts	Empathy, fear, helplessness
Family/Friends	Hearing stories from refugees	Secondary traumatic stress
Professional Caregivers	Therapists treating war survivors	Compassion fatigue, burnout
Community Storytelling	Memorial events, oral histories	Collective trauma, identity formation
Cultural Art	War-themed films, literature	Emotional resonance, memory activation
Community Environment	Living in refugee-hosting areas	Shared anxiety, social tension
Empathy/Identification	Shared cultural background	Heightened emotional response
Neurobiological Response	Physiological stress from hearing stories	Physical symptoms, stress disorders

The process of transformation becomes more convenient for professionals who are exposed to traumatic content or material as part of their profession or responsibilities. Journalism or Mass communication is one of the professions which are exposed to traumatic material, and individuals working on their jobs can not avoid the traumatic experiences embedded in such material, where news of brutal attacks, pictures of dead bodies, bloodshed and violence everywhere is a common factor.

Empirical Findings

A survey conducted as part of a large-scale project in Pakistan (Suleman, Malik, Hanif, 2023) focused on media personnel who work on war- or trauma-related

news in any capacity, whether as a field news reporter, a desk or office bearer, etc. A total of 300 media persons were selected for the survey. Major objectives of the survey were:

1. To measure the psychological indicators as an impact of war trauma on media personnel
2. To investigate the relationship of secondary trauma with the work-related functioning of media persons.

Secondary/Vicarious trauma was measured using the *Vicarious Trauma Scale* (Vrklevski & Franklin, 2008), an eight-item self-report measure rated on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*).

The scale assesses cognitive, emotional, and psychological impacts of exposure to work-related traumatic material, with higher scores indicating greater vicarious traumatization.

Work functioning was assessed using the *Work-Related Functioning Impairment Scale* (Marx, Schnurr, Lunney, Bovin, & Keane, 2018), a 21-item self-report measure rated on a 7-point Likert scale. Seventeen items are reverse-scored. The scale evaluates impairment across multiple domains of occupational functioning in individuals exposed to work-related trauma, with strong internal consistency ($\alpha = .91$ in the original validation study).

Table 2. Prevalence of Psychological Indicators Among News Reporters (N=300)

Psychological Indicator	Frequency	Percentage
Exposure to distressing material	225	75%
Indirect trauma exposure	199	66.3%
Emotional distress	213	71%
Coping difficulty	156	52%
Psychological burden	137	45.7%
Helplessness	199	66.4%
Work-related stress	117	39%
Compassion fatigue	133	44.3%

The findings in the table highlight the substantial psychological burden news reporters experience due to their occupational demands. The majority of respondents reported exposure to distressing material (75%), defined as the repeated contact with graphic or traumatic content through reporting, which was the most prevalent experience among crime reporters, consistent with the nature of crime journalism that routinely involves covering traumatic events such as violence, accidents, and victimization. This aligns with vicarious trauma theory, which posits that repeated exposure to traumatic content, even indirectly, can have significant emotional and cognitive consequences for professionals (McCann & Pearlman, 1990). Indeed, more than two-thirds of reporters also reported indirect trauma exposure (66.3%), hitch refers to experiencing trauma symptoms vicariously through victims' narratives and stories, highlighting the strong presence of secondary traumatic stress in this group, suggesting that their contact with traumatized clients and victims frequently translates into secondary traumatic stress, a well-documented phenomenon among helping professionals and journalists (Buchanan & Keats, 2011, Simpson & Coté, 2006).

Closely tied to this exposure is the high rate of emotional distress (71%), understood as intense negative emotional reactions such as sadness, anxiety, or fear in response to their work. And helplessness (66.4%), which reflects the internalization of trauma narratives and the frustration of being unable to intervene directly in victims' suffering. This mirrors findings from research on compassion fatigue, where emotional involvement with others' pain often results in psychological exhaustion and loss of efficacy (Figley, 1995). Moreover, more than half of reporters acknowledged coping difficulties (52%), meaning challenges in using effective strategies to manage stress, while nearly half experienced psychological burden (45.7%), the subjective sense of mental heaviness and exhaustion caused by prolonged exposure to suffering. These indicators underscore the difficulty many reporters face in managing occupational stressors, echoing literature which suggests that maladaptive coping strategies exacerbate the impact of vicarious trauma (Keats & Buchanan, 2012).

Interestingly, compassion fatigue (44.3%), the emotional exhaustion resulting from sustained empathic engagement with others' trauma, was reported by nearly half of the reporters, consistent with research on burnout

and secondary traumatic stress in journalism and other caring professions. Work-related stress (39%), which refers to pressures from deadlines, workload, and organizational demands, was somewhat less prevalent but still significant, reported by a considerable proportion, though at somewhat lower levels than direct emotional distress and trauma exposure. Compassion fatigue, conceptualized as the convergence of burnout and secondary traumatic stress (Figley, 1995), appears as a significant risk for nearly half of the sample, reinforcing previous evidence that journalists in trauma-related beats are vulnerable to emotional exhaustion and detachment (Pyevich, Newman, & Daleiden, 2003). The comparatively lower proportion reporting general work-related stress suggests that while organizational pressures such as deadlines and workload remain relevant, the more salient challenges for crime reporters stem from the psychological toll of repeated exposure to human suffering rather than logistical or structural work stressors alone (Dworznik & Grubb, 2007).

Taken together, these results emphasize the need for interventions that strengthen resilience, enhance coping strategies, and provide organizational support systems for crime reporters. Structured peer support, trauma-awareness training, and workload management policies could help mitigate the risks of secondary traumatic stress and compassion fatigue. Consistent with theories of vicarious trauma and compassion fatigue, these findings demonstrate that journalistic exposure to violence and suffering is not merely a professional challenge but a profound occupational health concern that requires recognition and preventive action.

Table 3. Correlation of Work-Related Psychosocial Functioning Impairment with Secondary Trauma (N=300)

Indicator	r
Apathy	.14*
Communication difficulty	.46**
Conflict Resolution inability	.34**
Impatience	.41**
Irregularity	.39**
Work Dependability	.40**
Time mismanagement	.22**
Tardiness	.19**

Note. **p <. 01, *p< .05.

The correlation table highlights work-related functioning impairment's psychological indicators that are significantly associated with vicarious traumatization. Apathy (r = .14, p < .05), defined as a lack of motivation or emotional responsiveness toward work, shows only a weak relationship. This suggests that while apathy can influence outcomes, it is not the strongest predictor in this context. Research has shown that apathy is often linked to disengagement and burnout, but it usually interacts with stronger predictors such as poor communication or time mismanagement (Le Heron et al., 2022).

The strongest association emerges with communication difficulty (r = .46, p < .01), which refers to challenges in expressing ideas and emotions effectively. This indicates that individuals struggling with communication are significantly more vulnerable to negative outcomes. The importance of communication is well documented; for example, poor communication in workplace and healthcare contexts has been linked to stress, errors, and interpersonal strain (Ting et al., 2023). Similarly, the inability to resolve conflicts constructively (r = .34, p < .01) shows a moderate correlation. Inability to resolve disputes increases stress levels and impairs group functioning, consistent with the literature linking conflict management skills to overall psychological well-being (Park & Kim, 2022).

Emotional regulation issues also stand out. Impatience (r = .41, p < .01), defined as a low tolerance for delays or frustration, shows a strong relationship with the outcome, highlighting how emotional reactivity contributes to stress and performance decline. Alongside this, irregularity (r = .39, p < .01) and inconsistency in behaviour or routine further predict difficulties, aligning with evidence that irregularity undermines self-regulation and productivity (Shah et al., 2021). Interestingly, work dependability (r = .40, p < .01), defined as reliability in fulfilling duties, also shows a positive correlation. Depending on the outcome variable, this may suggest that highly dependable individuals could be more susceptible to strain, perhaps because they overcommit or take on disproportionate responsibilities, a phenomenon supported in occupational stress literature (Peiró et al., 2020).

Indicators of behavioural discipline further emphasize the role of self-management. Time mismanagement (r = .22, p < .01), or poor planning and task prioritization, shows a weaker but still significant association, suggesting that inefficient scheduling undermines outcomes, though less strongly than interpersonal skills. Similarly, tardiness (r = .19, p < .01), defined as habitual lateness, correlates weakly but significantly, indicating its contribution as a minor yet relevant factor. Together, these indicators highlight that while apathy, time mismanagement, and tardiness have weaker effects, the strongest risks lie in difficulties with communication, conflict resolution, impatience, and work dependability. Overall, the findings align with theories of occupational stress and burnout, which emphasize the combined influence of interpersonal skills, emotional regulation, and time management on performance and psychological well-being. Strong associations with communication and emotional regulation support existing evidence that these are key mechanisms underlying workplace strain, while weaker but significant associations (apathy, tardiness) suggest they may act as secondary or compounding risk factors.

In conclusion, this article has shed light on the pervasive and often overlooked issue of secondary trauma among media professionals in Pakistan operating within war-affected regions. The findings underscore a significant impact on their work functioning, manifesting in various psychological and professional challenges. By highlighting the unique vulnerabilities of these individuals, this paper emphasizes the critical need for robust psychological support systems, organizational interventions, and policy reforms aimed at mitigating the adverse effects of prolonged exposure to traumatic events. Future research should explore longitudinal studies to track the long-term impacts of secondary trauma and evaluate the efficacy of different support mechanisms in improving the resilience and well-being of media professionals in similar high-risk environments. Ultimately, safeguarding the mental health of those who report on conflict is not merely an ethical imperative but also essential for maintaining the integrity and effectiveness of informed public discourse.

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Humanity at the Time of Wars

When the earth splits open with fire,
and cities fold into dust,
It is not only the stones that shatter
but the tender bonds that make us human.

Children grow old overnight,
their laughter stolen by sirens,
their dreams rewritten
into maps of exile,
paths traced by bare feet
searching for shelter.

Mothers hold their silence
tighter than their breath,
rocking emptiness in their arms,
singing lullabies to memory,
because the cradle is gone,
But the song refuses to die.

And yet amid broken streets,
hands still reach across rubble.
A stranger lifts a stranger,
a neighbour shares the last drop of water,
a doctor stitches wounds in candlelight,
not because victory waits,
But because compassion cannot surrender.

Humanity survives in the smallest gestures
In the bread divided,
in the tear wiped away,
in the words whispered
to remind the lost
that they are not forgotten.

War can unmake nations,
burn books, erase names
but it cannot bury the stubborn root of mercy,
growing even in scorched soil.

For every wall that collapses,
a hand is raised to rebuild.
For every life taken,
a prayer is whispered to protect another.

Humanity at the time of wars
is not the roar of guns
It is the fragile, defiant whisper:
We still belong to one another.

Ghazlia

Dislocation of Meaning

Wiola Rebecka

The concept of dislocation of meaning is not a metaphor; it is a wound. It describes what happens when the original context of violence is stripped from the survivor's story, and her suffering is reinterpreted through a lens that erases its historical, political, and relational origins. For survivors of war rape, this dislocation is not simply intellectual. It is felt in the body, in the rupture of narrative, in the silence of community, and in the failure of systems that should have protected, believed, and honoured them.

At its core, dislocation of meaning refers to the severing of trauma from its source. It is the process by which a politically inflicted wound becomes privatized, a structural failure is redefined as personal pathology, and the survivor's testimony is translated into symptoms. In this act of dislocation, the survivor is not only forced to carry the pain of the trauma

but also the burden of interpretation. She must speak in diagnostic codes. She must express her suffering in the language of affect regulation and cognitive restructuring. She must make herself legible to a therapeutic system that was never designed to understand the geopolitical horror written into her skin.

This is especially true when trauma occurs in the context of militarized sexual violence, occupation, or genocide. War rape is not merely an act of interpersonal cruelty; it is a strategy. It is a form of warfare, a mechanism of colonial domination, a tool for erasing identity, kinship, and future generations. When this is later described as "a traumatic event" leading to PTSD, the meaning is violently dislocated. The violence is made private. The community's betrayal is ignored. The state's complicity is omitted. The world is allowed to move on.

Judith Herman (1992) spoke of trauma as a disruption in narrative coherence. But dislocation of meaning goes further: it is the deliberate replacement of one narrative with another of political violence with medical dysfunction, of collective harm with individual disorder. It is a form of epistemic violence, a term scholars such as Gayatri Spivak and Veena Das have used to describe what happens when dominant knowledge systems erase the voices and lived truths of the oppressed. In this sense, PTSD is not only a diagnosis—it is an act of mistranslation.

This dislocation becomes institutionalized through trauma therapy that insists on symptoms but not systems, on safety but not truth. The therapist may offer grounding exercises, but not the space to speak of the soldiers who raped the survivor in front of her children. She may be invited to regulate her nervous system, but not to name the betrayal of her community, the silence of her church, the exile from her home. Her trauma becomes something to be treated, not something to be heard, remembered, and witnessed.

This is what WRSS radically restores: the relocation of meaning. War Rape Survivors Syndrome does not pathologize the survivor's grief, rage, or dissociation—it situates them. It places her responses back in the context from which they were torn: the battlefield, the refugee camp, the ethnic cleansing, the failed asylum system, the inherited silence of generations. It sees the trauma not as a disorder, but as a testimony, not as a deviation from normalcy, but as a coherent response to structural rupture.

In WRSS, dislocation of meaning is not just a theoretical concept—it is the foundation of trauma itself. Because when trauma cannot be located—when its causes are denied, its agents unnamed, its aftereffects privatized, it cannot be healed. The survivor becomes trapped not just in memory, but in misinterpretation. And there is no deeper violence than to be wounded by the world and then told that your wound is yours alone.

To heal, then, is not only to reduce symptoms. It is to re-anchor the story. It is to return meaning to the body, to the family, to the archive. It is to say: this happened, not just to me, but through a system that must be named. It is to say: I am not broken, I was broken open by history, and I carry the truth of it in me.

In this way, reversing the dislocation of meaning becomes the most urgent and ethical task of trauma work. Not just for the survivor, but for the society that silenced her. Not just for the therapist, but for the field that has, for too long, confused pathology with truth.

Trauma-informed therapy, while often built on compassionate intentions, consistently fails survivors of war-related sexual violence when it individualizes their suffering and strips it of its political, historical, and collective dimensions. Particularly for those violated during war, occupation, ethnic cleansing, or state-sanctioned terror, the act of rape is not simply personal; it is profoundly political. It is an assault not only on the body, but on lineage, community, sovereignty, and memory.

And yet, trauma therapy, especially in its mainstream Western clinical form, continues to frame such experiences as disorders within the individual. Survivors are offered therapeutic models that emphasize emotional regulation, verbal disclosure, and symptom reduction. They are asked to process, to adapt, to "move on." But rarely are they invited to name the betrayal: of the state, of militarized masculinities, of systems that failed to protect and later failed to remember. This exclusion of the political creates not just a clinical shortcoming—it constitutes an ethical rupture. It mirrors what Frantz Fanon (1963) described as the colonial logic of psychiatry: a system that seeks to treat the wounds of the colonized without acknowledging the colonial regimes that inflicted them.

By medicalizing trauma through the lens of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), survivors of war rape are forced to carry their pain alone. The language of PTSD reduces their experiences to a clinical taxonomy: intrusive thoughts, avoidance, and hypervigilance. It pathologizes what are, in fact, morally and politically coherent responses to dehumanization. The diagnosis says nothing of the systemic violence—the ethnic cleansing, the weaponized rape, the betrayal by families or religious institutions, the bureaucratic abandonment. It is not the state or society that is rendered ill, but the woman herself.

This is what War Rape Survivors Syndrome (WRSS) identifies as a dislocation of meaning. The survivor's agony is severed from its origins, transposed from a world of political betrayal and historical memory into a sterile domain of psychological symptoms. The rape is made invisible, even as the survivor's body becomes hyper-visible as a patient, a case, a disorder. The therapist may listen, but the world around the survivor remains unchanged. The war ends, peacekeepers withdraw, transitional justice fails, but she remains diagnosed, categorized, and explained.

This dislocation of meaning is not accidental. It is a feature of how dominant psychological discourse preserves the status quo. It allows societies to acknowledge the existence of trauma while disavowing the structures that caused it. It produces what Summerfield (1999) called the humanitarian language of "trauma universalism"—a flattening of suffering that allows institutions to claim benevolence without grappling with their complicity.

Survivors often experience this disconnect somatically. They may enter therapy and feel the weight of being misunderstood—not because they are resistant, but because the clinical space does not accommodate their truth. They may reject the PTSD label not from ignorance, but from clarity: because it implies that their suffering is internal, individual, irrational—when it is in fact communal, political, and entirely sane. They may feel that therapy expects closure when their world is still fractured, that it wants coherence when their trauma is rooted in silence, exile, and a collapse of meaning.

This is why individual therapy fails as the sole response to war rape. It isolates what was inflicted communally; it privatizes what was meant to terrorize publicly; it treats the survivor as a site of repair while the system remains untouched. This is not healing; it is containment. And it is precisely this containment that WRSS challenges.

War Rape Survivors Syndrome, developed by Dr. Rebecka, is not a psychiatric label; it is a social indictment. It insists that the survivor's body is not a symptom of pathology but a living archive of state failure, colonial history, and patriarchal dominance. WRSS repositions trauma not as an internal malfunction, but as a witness to the disorder of the world. Dissociation, rage, infertility trauma, broken attachment, narrative silence—these are not merely clinical symptoms. They are embodied testimonies of ancestral grief, interrupted belonging, and systemic abandonment.

WRSS offers an entirely different framework. It does not seek to reduce pain to fit a treatment plan. Instead, it restores meaning. It affirms that what is commonly called "disorder" in the survivor is often an intelligent response to profound betrayal. WRSS honours silence not as avoidance but as an encrypted truth. It does not pathologize fragmentation; it reads it as a relational wound that needs recognition, not regulation.

Where PTSD asks: "What's wrong with you?" WRSS asks: "What happened to you and what continues to be erased?"

Where therapy seeks closure, WRSS embraces the unfinishedness of trauma.
Where therapy asks for coping, WRSS asks for collective witnessing.

To treat war rape with individualized therapy alone is to abandon the survivor once again—this time behind the walls of diagnosis. The ethical task before us is not simply to treat trauma, but to re-situate it. To hold the survivor's pain not in isolation, but in relation: to history, to community, to justice. Only then can meaning be restored. Only then can therapy become not an act of adaptation, but an act of resistance and repair.

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About the Author

Dr. Wioletta Rebecka is a psychologist, psychotraumatologist, and internationally recognized expert in trauma recovery. She is the author of Rape: A History of Shame – Diary of the Survivors, a groundbreaking work that amplifies the silenced voices of wartime sexual violence survivors across multiple continents.

Dr. Rebecka is the creator of the SERS Method (Stabilization, Education, Redirection, Self-Awareness), a trauma-informed, culturally responsive framework designed to support survivors of torture and war-related sexual violence. She is also the author and creator of the War Rape Survivors Syndrome (WRSS) framework, which offers a multidimensional lens for understanding the complex psychological, social, political, and intergenerational impacts of conflict-related sexual violence. Her work integrates clinical expertise, survivor testimony, decolonial approaches, and policy advocacy to advance comprehensive care and recognition for survivors worldwide.

Dr. Rebecka has worked extensively with survivors in post-conflict regions, including Rwanda, Bosnia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ukraine, and Poland. She also serves as Vice President of the Polish Center for Torture Survivors and is an active trainer, researcher, and consultant for international human rights organizations. Currently, she is located in NYC.

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Perspective: A Case Study of Kurdish Sufism Through Divers' Mysticism

 Hiwa Raheem

Abstract

The approach of sociology is one of the remarkable and unique doctrines used today to understand the phenomena around us; the nature of humans is not to close their eyes to these phenomena, including religion. Hence this paper attempts to describe the issue of Sufism from outside the lens of Islamic Sharia and bring it through in the sociology of religion perspective, because the approach of sociology of religion is a supportive doctrine to explain Sufism as human phenomena and rescue it from the boundaries of religion, in this aspect the role of individual, groups, society culture, norms play the vital role in shaping, introducing Islamic mysticism generally and Kurdish Sufism / Islam especially. In this sense, this study examines Sufism from a human perspective; it is an inner practice aimed at understanding divinity and establishing a direct relationship with God beyond the limitations and boundaries of Sharia. Meanwhile, all Salafists and Islamists assert that Muslims should base their rituals strictly on the requirements of Sharia. This interpretation (taqlid) narrows the scope of Islam and closes off broader human perspectives on religion, including Sufism, philosophy, and Islamic cultural or traditional practices. Hence, this paper argues that the misunderstanding of Islam originates primarily from the Salafist and Islamist perspectives. These groups rely on an abstract interpretation of Sharia, whereas Sufism, in contrast, seeks to approach it through socialization. Sufism facilitates the integration of Sharia with social and individual values, norms, and even pre-Islamic beliefs. In this respect, this paper argues that imposing Sharia strongly in diverse Islamic societies leads society to violence, discrimination and extremism because each one of Islamic societies has its own culture, values and norms, which have been integrated with Islamic Sharia. In this respect, to justify this idea, I will argue this topic through Kurdish sufism/ Islam, which is different from other forms of Islamic belief because it is reshaped by Kurdish culture and values.

Therefore, this study believes Islam is a cultural phenomenon and we can find it within Islamic Sufism, while Sufism has been placed in the main place in all kinds of Islamic societies except Saudi Arabia. To analyze it, this paper relies on the socio-critical paradigm on the one hand, and on the sociology of religion, which is based on people's values and norms rather than metaphysics.

On the other hand, I will debate on how Islam has been transformed into a solely religious phenomenon.

To civilization, especially when Islam came to the peninsula and faced with alien beliefs. The areas covered in my explanation are cultural Sufism, Salafism, political Islamic ideology, and Kurdish Islam and Sufism.

Keywords: cultural Islam, Kurdish Islam, western scholars, values, political Islamic ideology, Salafism, Islamic philosophy, Kurdish Sufism.

Introduction

Islamic Sufism, as one of the most controversial groups within Islam, has been a subject of debate and discussion, especially in the last three decades. It has also attracted attention in many fields. One of the reasons that has brought Sufism into academic fields and made it an intensive subject of study is the rise of terrorism and radicalism among Muslims in recent decades. Since then, Islamic radicals have been perceived as a new threat to the international community. Therefore, Sufism is being observed as a new transformation approach for diverse cultures and the promotion of a peaceful culture. Despite many studies on Islam by both Western and Eastern scholars, Islam is still presented as a unified religion. However, suppose we conduct deeper research and engage closely with Muslim traditions and people to discover what is actually happening in Muslim societies. In that case, we will realize that Islam is not a unified religion. Alongside Islam, there is also Sufism in Islamic societies, and each society has its own form of Sufism and its own form of Islam, different from others.

Presenting and introducing Islam in the unified package has created a huge misunderstanding on hand and left Islam under the control of Muslim claimants and preachers/mullahs on the other hand. Meanwhile, religion and Sufism are also social phenomena that operate within society and adapt to its norms and values. To understand this category of analysis, we need to study Sufism in the social sciences, especially through the sociology of religion. This approach will attempt to place the role of religion on individuals and vice versa. Hence, I will try to bring Islam through in re-socialization to facilitate understanding of Sufism and its vital role in enhancing peace in a diverse society. For instance, if we analyze Islam in several countries, we will see that Islam has many forms that each has its distinct views on issues such as worship, spirituality, tolerance, women's rights, secularism, and democracy. This takes me to the same question that ' is Europe religiously different, if so, why' (Berger, P. L., 2001, 443). Now, let's change this

question: Is the Islamic world religiously different? If so, why?

Therefore, understanding Sufism as a human phenomenon helps to reveal what is happening in Muslim societies on one hand, and to expose the mistakes that were made by some Western scholars in the past on Islam on the other hand, when they fail to recognize the significant role of Sufism in transforming violent cultures into cultures of peace in many Islamic societies. In chapter one, I will first define Islam as a historical event that occurred in the fifth century in a part of the Arabian Peninsula. Then I will discuss the time when Islam expanded outside the Peninsula and encountered other cultures and civilizations. For example, in 636, Islam encountered mysticism, Zoroastrianism, Mithraism, Manichaeism, and paganism in ancient Persia and Kurdistan, where a rich and diverse intellectual tradition flourished. (Stephen Schwartz, 2002-2003).

In this respect, this research intends to discover "Kurdish Islam/Sufism as an approach that attempts to analyze and introduce Islam as a social phenomenon. Hence, this study presents Kurdish Sufism through the lens of cultural Islam, as Kurdish Sufism has evolved into a distinct form of Kurdish Islam. Kurdish people have expressed Islamic values and rituals through mysticism. In this paradigm, Sufism is based on culture, values, and norms in a private society, not on interpretation as Salafis and Islamists call. Moreover, the scholarship of sociology and the philosophy of religion supports the role of culture in shaping belief and religion.

In the same chapter, I will also debate a new form of piety that emerged in Islam: mysticism. Then, how did Islamic philosophy, as one of the most outstanding and flourishing thought systems, originate within Islam and force it to open more than in the past?

In chapter two, I will discuss political Islamic ideology and Salafism as two groups that claim Islam as a unified religion, and they also oppose cultural Islam, Sufism, including Kurdish Islam and other forms of Islam, which present Islam as a single package and whose explanations are limited to political Islamic ideology and Salafism. Therefore, they could not see the diversity and plurality of Islam that still exist within the religion. In the end, I will write the conclusions and bibliography.

Methodology

Sociology is one of the unique approaches that offer crucial analytical tools and methods for individuals, especially researchers, to observe phenomena in social life. It provides more than eye to grasp and uncover the sheets on the social behaviours and treatment. After the Second World War, new analyses emerged in schools and academic fields in the West, especially, which gave a new speech on the role of religion/ Christianity in society.'' After World War II, a new branch of sociology (sociologie religieuse) developed in Western Europe and did so rather rapidly (Dobbelaere, K., 2000, p. 1).

> Today, we witness a lot of confusion in people's minds; it is difficult to render an exact account of the situation and of religious life in particular. But those who have the mission to evangelize should know before they act; for this reason, consider the real situation with the help of social observation methods, which yield precise results. (Dobbelaere, K,2000,p.2).

In this sense sociology of religion brought Christianity under the hand of its self, the sociologists in west used data to understand religion for instance they concentrated on religious life not church, they gave more attention on ritual, norms, values, law, ethics, they intended to understand Christianity and its role by religion life not what does the church intend to tell us. Hence, the sociology of religion through religious life, they study values, norms, economy, demography, law, and culture. In contrast to Christianity in the West, Islam remained under the hand of Mullhas, Islamic Ulama, / preachers. In this sense, the phenomena of Sufism are always covered by Islamic Sharia, and it is limited and far from all doctrines and approaches, including sociology. Hence, this topic relies on socio-critical theory and the sociology of religion, which are suitable for identifying the norms, values, and cultures of a society and how they establish, differentiate, and reshape Islam from other societies, as we see today in Kurdish Sufism. The sociology of religion also encourages freeing Sufism from the hands of mullahs and preachers and entrusting it to sociologists, who can examine how Sufism is grounded in people's beliefs and values, even pre-beliefs, rather than interpretations. Moreover, socio-critical theory aims to define Sufism as a human phenomenon rather than a metaphysical subject. In this regard, humans redesign and reshape beliefs to accommodate a sect's integration into and adaptation to society.

Islam from a closed peninsula to its golden age

Islam is an Abrahamic monotheistic religion that emerged and developed in Mecca in 610, at the beginning of the seventh century, under the leadership of Muhammad. Islam remained in the Arabian Peninsula until Muhammad's death. After the death of the Prophet Muhammad, a new term emerged in Islam: the Rashidun Caliphate. Under the Rashidun Caliphate, Islam began to expand its power outside the Peninsula. Thus, Islam moved to Iraq and fought against the Sassanid Empire. It also moved to Syria and fought against the Roman Empire. Moving out of the Arabian Peninsula was one of the most glorious periods in Islamic history because it

radically transformed Islam from a closed to an open religion, from a poor to a rich one.

That movement enriched Islam with philosophy, mysticism, and other cultures distinct from those of the Peninsula. Therefore, when they entered Islam, they established themselves within it. In that way, they created a Cultural Islam, including Kurdish Islam.

In this regard, Islamic scholar Stephen Schwartz states that "The large populations that came under Muslim domination from Persia through Central Asia. Some of these were Zoroastrian, some were involved in Gnostic cults or Asiatic Christianity (Nestorians), some were Buddhist, and some followed shamans. The dervishes provided their greatest service to Muslim rulers as agents of goodwill between adherents of the ruling faith and those of the ruled. But this syncretism has always been suspected by Islamic fundamentalists" (Stephen Schwartz, 2002-2003, p.33).

Mysticism
when Islam moved to Syria and Iraq, this period is marked of appearing mysticism/Sufism inside Islam, As Fazlur Rahman mentioned ''For the first two centuries Sufism remained a spontaneous individual phenomenon but, with the development of the formal disciplines of Islamic law and theology, and the gradual emergence, with them, of the class of 'Ulama', it rapidly developed into an institution with a tremendous mass appeal" (Rahman, F,2020,p.102).

From an individual, inner experience to a movement, Sufism attracted followers. Hence, many people gathered around it and pledged loyalty to the Sufi clerics. The beloved preachers (clerics), also known as storytellers, were influential people who could sway society and masses by relying on Qur'anic stories on one hand, and by enriching themselves by borrowing and bringing inner powers from other religions, such as Gnosticism, Christianity, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, and Buddhism on the other hand. (لەشکری،٢٠١٢)

Each one of these religions and beliefs left a profound impact on Islam and Muslims, too. Sometimes, the beliefs of Sufi masters and clerics faced brutality and extreme measures, because they were not accepted by the orthodox and mullahs/imams. For example, the execution of al-Halaaj in Baghdad (911) because of hlool and the killing of al-Suhrawardi in Syria. Therefore, mysticism was sometimes and in some places considered infidelity or even paganism.

Overall, mysticism could be considered one of the outstanding religious beliefs in Islam; it was close to Zoroastrian, Mithraic, Mazdakite, and Manichaean beliefs. For example, Sheikh Shahabadin Suhrawardi, a Kurdish Sufi, presented his Sufi movement under the name of illumination; meanwhile, many scholars believed that illumination was a Mithraic thought that influenced Islamic religious thought for many years and remains alive today. Illumination became the main source for many Sufi movements in Islamic history. (حیجازی، ٢٠١٢) Suhrwardi's century—the half of the 11th century—was not a typical one for Islam. There were many forms of religion, including Islam, which debated God's nature, logic and religion, prophecy, and the confrontation between Mu'tazilites and Hanbalites, which had begun in the early centuries and continued to influence the eleventh century. In this regard, all these ideas and beliefs influenced Islam, radically changing it and leading to its development into a civilization, transforming it into a human phenomenon that can be critically examined and observed through the lens of social science. (شێخ موحەمەد، ٢٠٢٣)

Under this light, Sufism became a new independent movement and organization within Islam and Sharia. Sufis added another law and ritual to Islam. For instance, in Sufism, every Muslim needs a Sheikh (cleric) to get closer to God. Every Sufi needs a Sufi master (sheikh) like a mediator. Having a sheikh is one of the main principles of Sufism. The sheikh is seen as a bridge between God and the Sufi, and even as an intercessor for the Sufi on the last day. Meanwhile, Islamic Sharia/law refused mediation totally. Sufism also added some rituals to its Islam, such as dancing and singing. Meanwhile, both political Islamic ideologies and Salafists denied these rituals extremely and saw them as renovation/bid (Weismann, I. (2009). Political Islamic ideologies and Salafists claim that. When Islam was in the Peninsula, the only ritual that was accepted was prayer in the mosques.

Philosophy of Islam
The philosophy of Islam, as a system for thinking and understanding metaphysics, life, being, and morality, did not exist or appear in the Peninsula when Islam was born, and there was no evidence to support this. (حسێن، ٢٠١٩) When Islam conquered Syria and Iraq, it faced both the Sassanid and Byzantine civilizations. When the capital of the Islamic Caliphate moved from Medina to Damascus under the Umayyad dynasty (660–750), the Muslim rulers were surrounded by an alien culture. This process posed questions for Islam, such as how Islam should engage with and respond to these civilizations, what attitude Islam should adopt towards these traditions and beliefs, how much it should integrate with them, and how much it should reject them. (Reilly, R. R. 2014).

At that time, Greek philosophy was banned throughout the Roman Empire, including the Byzantine capital. Still, in the eastern capital of the Byzantine Empire, Constantinople, Greek philosophical texts were translated into Syriac. Then, during the caliphate of al-Ma'mun, in the Islamic Abbasid caliphate, many Greek

philosophical texts were translated into Arabic. The Abbasid caliphate led Islam to its golden age. Islam during the Abbasid caliphate opened itself toward Greek, Indian and later Roman thought. All of them helped Islam to undergo reformation. During that era, the most prominent rational group, the Mu'tazilites, emerged. Enrique Dussel says that "the Aristotelian logic was studied by Arab people in Baghdad." (Dussel, Krauel, & Tuma, 2000). The Mu'tazillites presented new ideas that were seen as revolutionary within Islam and faced Islamic sharia / orthodox like the Hanbali.

Free will versus fate

One of the controversial debates presented by the Mu'tazilites was free will versus fate. In the pre-Mu'tazilite period, Islamic thought was based on fate, meaning that humans did not have the freedom to choose what to do in life, as their lives were predetermined by God. The Mu'tazilites criticized this notion, calling it illogical. It contradicted human freedom and implied God's absolute determination of human destiny. The Mu'tazilites argued that without human freedom, God's justice was incomprehensible.

Reason ('aql) versus interpretation (naql)

The Mu'tazilites also paid more attention to reason. They valued the role of reason to analyze subjects and concepts. They thought that, for this reason, we would be able to understand morality, justice, and goodness. Only by using reason can we find out God's justice. That is why human free will is the main principle for the Mu'tazilites to use reason. "At a very basic Socratic and Aristotelian level, they embraced the propositions that the mind can know things, as distinct from having opinions about them." (Reilly(2014).

God is a power of goodness and justice.

According to the Mu'tazilites, God does not act against his truth and justice. For the Mu'tazilites, God is subject to his justice, and he cannot act outside of it. He cannot be corrupt. The Mu'tazilites were the only theological school to use the term' obligation' (wajib) in reference to God. Neo-Mu'tazilite Harun Nasution (1919–1998) stated that "because He is completely perfect, God cannot do that which is not good." Hence, the Mu'tazilites went further and said that the concept of unity (tawhid) as an essential doctrine for Islam is contradictory to the notion that the orthodox claim that God is an aggressive and honest power at the same time. The orthodox claim to possess the qualities and attributes of God. Under this light, they claim that God has ninety-nine names. But the Mu'tazilites say that this idea is the opposite of monotheism. In this respect, the Mu'tazilites asked, "If God is one, how could he have this number of attributes that somehow coexist separately with him?" (Reilly,2014). In this respect, the rise of philosophy

within Islam challenged Islamic orthodoxy and brought Islam into the realm of social science. It opened the door for scholars to advance new arguments about Islam, grounded in concepts such as freedom, eternity, and destiny. All of these developments made religion accessible as a social phenomenon on the one hand and, on the other, helped transform Islam toward peace-oriented education.

Cultural Islam: Kurdish Islam is an example

After the emergence of mysticism and Islamic philosophy, the third and most remarkable fundamental change in Islam occurred. It could be called cultural Islam. If we try to find a new definition of cultural Islam, it could be understood as a form of Islam grounded in people's culture, norms, values, and traditions rather than in interpretation.

Above all, Kurdistan had its own rich culture, including music, clothing, language, and values. As the German philosopher Herder called it, "the spirit of the nation. From this perspective, we can understand that every nation has its own spirit, distinct from others'. Maintaining and preserving that spirit depends on how the nation works and resists protecting itself from aggression on one hand, and how rich that spirit is on the other hand. In this regard, Kurdistan was not easy for Islam to conquer culturally, as it had difficult terrain, many mountains, and rich agriculture. Because of that, the Kurds relied on themselves to survive. They did not enter the process of urbanization, which is one of the ways that facilitates assimilation. As Ernest Gellner explained in his theory of nationalism, according to him, nationalism is a new form of socialization that emerged after modernism., which is based on the standardization of language and the transition from an agricultural society to an industrial society Therefore, Gellner thinks that to create nationalism, every group of people should move and change from agriculture to industrialization/urbanization society. (O'Leary. 1997). Therefore, Kurds remained rural and did not build cities or undergo urbanization. According to Gllenar, modernization has ended the culture of tribalism or rural exhibition through the urbanization process. Consequently, the standardization of language and nation started. In contrast to modern society, the Kurds still have a stronger connection to their rituals and traditions than other people do. As Fareed Zakaria says, "Islam, like any religion, is not what books make it but what people make it" (Zakaria, F. 2007, p 78). In this respect, Kurdish Islam is another kind of Islam as Kurdish people are strongly working to preserve their traditions and cultures. They are not yet ready to enter the process of urbanization, as Gllenar portrayed.

Because Islam brought new norms, traditions, and values, and Kurds also had their different norms, values, and traditions. After many struggles and conflicts, Kurds accepted Islam, but they incorporated their ideas, values, and norms into Islam. Eventually, they created a new form of Islam that integrated with their values. For instance, in the early 8th century, Kurds embraced Sufism. Kurdish Sufism is a blend of Islamic and Zagrosian mysticism, based on Mithraism, the ancient Kurdish religion (or pre-Islamic Kurdish religion), dating back to 2000 bc. Kurdish Sufism became an umbrella for preserving Kurdish culture, allowing them to maintain their traditions. For example, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when the orientalists travelled to Kurdistan, they said that Kurdish Islam was not like Arab Islam. For instance, Claudius Rich in his book, mentioned and clarified the role and influence of Kurdish women in Kurdish society during the eighteenth century, when he said ''women in the Jaf a Kurdish tribe lacked the slightest pretension to a veil, nor had they even a handkerchief round the lower part of the face like Arab women." They did not even attempt to "hide themselves" from foreigners, and there "were as many women as men. Rich,1836, p.181**).**

The followers of United Islam or true Islam
 The political Islamic and extremist Islamic ideologies, such as Salafis, Muslim Brotherhood, and other forms of political Islamic ideologies and jihadists, these groups take the role of culture to shape religion; they separate religion from culture, and they also deny Sufism, while every culture puts its values and norms in religion, as I have recently explained in the first chapter. For instance, Islam in Egypt is different from Islam in Pakistan; Islam in Saudi Arabia is different from Islam in Kurdistan.
Islam in Saudi Arabia is inspired by Salafism and Wahhabism, which are strict and closed Islamic ideologies that were created in the eighteenth century by Mohammad Abdul Al Wahhab. Abdul Al Wahhab promoted his ideology and movement by drawing on Bedouin Arab culture in Najd. The ideology of Arab Bedouin in Najd, where Muhammad Abdul Wahhab grew up, was a closed and extremist culture that hated art, music, and any ritual that came from other nations and groups outside Najd within Islam. Wahhabism also hates other groups and movements of religion that live outside and inside Islam, such as Sufism and Shia.
 Also, the Muslim Brotherhood, as an extremist Islamist group, was founded by Hassan al-Banna in Egypt. Both Wahhabis and the Muslim Brotherhood have been working hard to justify their ideology in all Muslim societies on one hand and remove all norms and values which are embedded in Islam by different Muslim societies on the other hand. They claim that Islam is a united religion, and they stand against any rituals that come into Islam from another culture or people,

including Sufism. They claim the purity of Islam to achieve that; they justify one form of Islam and impose it in all Islamic countries, from Africa to East Asia and Europe.

The French sociologist Oliver Roy defined and displayed this form as "holy ignorance," where religion and culture part ways. Oliver Roy warns and presents the threat of an Islamic fundamentalist form as a religion that is separated from culture. Today, this form of religion imposes a profound threat to cultural Islam (Roy,2014).
This form of religion attempts to erase all norms and values that are still alive in the religion. For example, Said Qutub did not consider Islamic societies to be Muslim. He said that they are not true Islam and not pure Islam. Hence, he asked that they should be radically changed to Islam, through the process of re-Islamization, and the only way to achieve their glory and the golden age is to return to pure Islam. (Qutb, 2019).
In this regard, some Western and Eastern scholars can't go deeply and profoundly into Muslim societies to see the differences between different Muslims. As the Palestinian author Edward Said mentioned, there is no true Islam, and he also points out that Islam has diverse meanings for different people. He says, "Within my own family, hugely different kinds of Islam are practiced" (Said 1997). Said maintained and stated that in practice, there is no "true Islam"; there are only Muslims, as many as there are individual Muslims. Moreover, differences among Muslims can be vast. (Bar, 2004).

Conclusion
Although religion has a metaphysical root, it cannot remain in the abstract; it enters society and confronts individual norms and values. These norms and values force and encourage religion to change radically from its original form. Therefore, socio-critical theory not only helps to understand and criticize Islam as an untied religion, but it also proposes an alternative to it: the alternative is Cultural Islam, instead of united Islam or true Islam. I supported my argument with the example of Kurdish Islam as a unique and distinct form of Cultural Islam. Hence, Cultural Islam could be used as a scholarship and approach to examine the differences that are still alive in Muslim societies, and it could also be explained by the socio-critical and sociology of religion paradigms; it's impossible to find in Sharia.

Living, observing, and researching Muslim daily life is the best way to understand the diversity of Muslim societies. It provides a clear and true picture, closer to Islam. This way could also be an important tool to deal with Islam, hence the lack of knowledge and direct contact with different Muslim people and societies. However, if you have lived in a place where Islam is

common, you have probably observed some of this diversity and may even take it for granted.

However, some Western and Eastern scholars cannot see the differences which have existed for many thousands of years inside Muslim societies. They are too lazy to search for what is happening in reality in Muslim societies. These scholars depend on Islamic ideology to prove their explanation; they take Islam as one package and one religion, but Islam is not a united religion. There are many types of Islam, and each has its own views on religion, human rights, gender equality, democracy, and diverse cultures, such as Sunni, Shia, Salafism, Sufism, and Islamic political ideology. Every nation has its own form of Islam, distinct from others'. For example, Kurdish Islam is different from Saudi Islam. Saudi Islam is inspired by Islamic ideology and Salafism, but Kurdish Islam is inspired by Sufism.

The majority of Kurds are Muslim, but this kind of Islam is shaped and enriched by their beliefs, norms, and values; these beliefs came into Islam and obligated Islam to integrate with them. Kurdish Islam has traditions, values, and norms that are different from other forms of Islam. It would be better called Kurdish Islam/ Kurdish Sufism, which is rejected by political Islamic ideology and Islamic fundamentalist groups. Because these groups believe that Islam is a united religion, Islam has sharia/ law, and this law should be applied to all Muslims from everywhere, and all Muslims must obey it. They work to present a single form of clothing, worship, and style for all Muslims across Asia, Africa, Europe, and America. Those groups claim that Muslim countries are not pure Muslims; they claim that they should go through an Islamicization process, and it will be fulfilled through removing diverse cultures in Islam.

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عیرفان موستەفا، ٢٠١٠ ، بونی نەتەوەیی کورد لە نێوان فەلسەفەو سۆسیۆپۆلەتیکدا.

حیجازی، ٢٠١٢، شوناسی ئولی فەلسەفەی نەتەوەیی کورد.چاپ و بڵاوکردنەوەی سلێمانی.

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The Role of Spirituality and Emotional Well-being in Healing the Psychological Impact of War

Fizza Sabir

This article begins by citing a book, then extends the discussion of how spirituality and well-being are intertwined and the roles they can play in healing the psychological impacts of war. The article is not a research paper, nor a traditional book review, and AI assistance was used to create the image and to conclude some ideas.

While wars may be fought on physical battlegrounds, their repercussions extend far beyond the visible scars. The aftermath of war often lingers in the psyche of individuals and communities, manifesting as emotional disorientation, grief, and a deep sense of loss. Even when the violence ceases and peace is declared, survivors continue to carry the weight of war memories that echo in silence, and wounds that remain unseen. The transition from war to peace is not merely a political or physical process; it is an internal journey that demands emotional and spiritual reconciliation.

For these individuals, while the physical war marked by bloodshed and death may have ended, an internal war often continues indefinitely. The brutality, profound loss, and enduring loneliness do not fade easily. These emotional wounds linger long after the visible ones have healed. Recovering from such trauma is not simple. Achieving emotional healing and making peace with both what remains and what has been lost is an immense, deeply personal challenge.

In this context, pursuing spiritual and emotional well-being becomes essential. Spiritual reflection offers a framework for making sense of suffering, searching for purpose in loss, and fostering a sense of connection and hope. Emotional well-being, on the other hand, provides the tools for resilience through self-awareness, empathy, and the development of coping strategies. Together, they create a path toward healing: not by erasing trauma, but by integrating it into a larger narrative of growth and meaning. For individuals recovering from war, this inner work can be the most profound form of resistance—a reclaiming of peace within, when the world outside has long been at war.

A friend recently brought along two books by the same author as a thoughtful gift when she visited me a few months back. I was immediately drawn to *Healing the Emptiness: A Guide to Emotional and Spiritual Well-being,* a title that resonated deeply with me. Authored by

Yasmin Mogahed and first published in 2022, the book offers profound insights into emotional recovery and spiritual growth. In this article, I aim to explore how the themes in Mogahed's work closely relate to the process of healing from the trauma of war, particularly the journey toward internal peace after profound external conflict.

The book starts with a few powerful messages I want to share as we continue the discussion. The following paragraphs include a few quotes from Mogahed (2022).

We are misled when we believe that the emptiness we feel can be filled by fulfilling our endless needs. These needs may be exhibited in various forms that may be healthy or unhealthy, such as the need to be loved, to be rich, to have a high status, and a high education or refuge in drugs, online life or activities that may be destructive for us and others. These are all tranquillizers, not ways to heal the emptiness. The wound of Divine separation cannot be healed by any of these. We believe that all such paths can lead to fill our emptiness, whereas 'we can never be whole without Him' p.5. 'Our heart is starving for God.' P.9.

Acknowledging the wound itself is the first step to healing. How can we start an effective treatment without an accurate diagnosis? Before discussing any other wounds, the first wound considered is the wound of separation from God. 'We were chosen to come down to this world. It was not a punishment. It was an honour given to humans…and what greater honour could there be than to be a deputy of God, a carrier of God's light and love in this world?' p.3. Consequently, the author describes the separation from God as a wound that needs healing: …this is the wound of Divine separation. Even beneath our own consciousness, we have an undeniable need for our deepest wound to be healed by God. It is the very essence of humanness, and our need. Our need for love.' P.4. Mogahed (2022) further explains that it's not the need for love only, but also 'security, acceptance, appreciation, understanding, and significance' p.4. All our actions and behaviours are driven by these needs. Hidden beneath all these needs is the need to fill the hollowness created by separation from the Divine.

Mogahed (2022) advises that we can heal this emptiness by recognizing that purity and love for God are the only paths to healing. 'God wants every one of us to be healed and whole in peace.' P.5. Nonetheless, we have to walk our path to reach the destination of healing. Walking this

path is not easy. We may experience pain and pleasure, despair and hope, defeatism and resilience and the capability to thrive while on this journey.

We believe we know what is best for us, but the truth is that only God knows what is best for us! Many times, we are unable to understand the whys of our pain and losses, yet those are the essential parts of our journey toward healing the emptiness.

This concept is similar to what many scholars and philosophers have advocated in the past as well. However, the current author presented her thoughts in the context of Psychology and with real-life examples, making it easier for readers to connect with her explanations.

The human heart was not created for the weight of worldly affairs and pains, especially the traumas of war. If it keeps filling up with desires, love, hatred, envy, jealousy, ego, and other negative feelings —feelings of satan —it cannot establish a good connection with God, as explained by Mogahed (2022).

The advice here is to keep the heart clean for spiritual and emotional health. The heart was created for God, not for people, money, career, status, etc. The heart was created for all positive feelings, so that it stays connected to God and He can have a good space in our hearts. How can we keep God's house, our hearts full of negative feelings? Our desires, especially wealth and status, are the biggest enemies of a pure heart!

Healing the Heart: A Journey Towards Spiritual and Emotional Wellbeing

The human heart was never designed to carry the weight of this world's burdens, not the pain of betrayal, the cravings of unchecked desires, nor the poison of envy, ego, jealousy, or hatred. When overwhelmed with such feelings, the heart becomes clouded, its true purpose concealed beneath layers of worldly distractions.

Our hearts were created for something far greater: a deep, unwavering connection with God. They are sanctuaries meant for love, gratitude, compassion, humility, and sincerity. These are the qualities that allow the Divine to reside within us. When we fill our hearts with worldly attachments — wealth, status, and power — we unknowingly invite their harmful consequences into our lives. These attachments become the heart's greatest enemies, pulling us away from our Creator and from inner peace.

When we step outside the boundaries set by God, we don't harm Him; we harm ourselves (Mogahed, 2022). His rules are not burdens, but safeguards for our hearts and souls. Consider this: if God is the ultimate Physician, His guidance and commandments are the prescriptions for a healthy heart. When we ignore these divine prescriptions, we invite spiritual illness. The trials and

tests we face in life are not punishments but reminders — gentle nudges from our Creator — to return to Him before our hearts harden beyond recognition.

It is often in moments of crisis that the true condition of our heart is revealed. Pain and hardship expose what lies beneath the surface. And as any good physician would tell us, healing begins with diagnosis. We must be courageous enough to examine the root causes of our spiritual ailments. Only then can we begin the journey toward genuine healing.

The Path to Healing the Heart

1. **Diagnose the Root Causes**
   Understand what truly burdens our hearts. Is it pride? Anger? Fear? Loss? Are we holding onto past wounds or chasing fleeting worldly gains? Awareness is the first step toward healing.

2. **Remove the Barriers**
   Like a wound that cannot heal if infected, a heart cannot heal if cluttered with toxic attachments. Let go of resentment, grudges, envy, and harmful desires. Create space within for God's light to enter.

3. **Treat the Wound with Divine Connection**
   Prayer, reflection, gratitude, and sincere repentance are the medicines for a broken heart. Lean on God in our weakness, and we will find strength. He may not always change our circumstances, but He will surely transform our hearts if we allow Him.

4. **Guard the Heart with Mindful Living**
   Once healed, protect our heart with conscious choices, guard our words, intentions, relationships, and actions. Don't let old wounds reopen by falling back into harmful patterns.

5. **Knowledge That Transforms**
   Knowledge isn't just information; it's a means of transformation. When we learn about God, ourselves, and the true purpose of life, we begin to treat others with more compassion, patience, and understanding, reflecting divine mercy in our everyday actions.

6. **Compassion Beyond Cruelty**
   Choosing compassion in the face of cruelty is not weakness; it is a profound resilience. It reflects the ability to maintain one's values even when tested by injustice or suffering. It encourages a culture where goodness is proactive rather than reactive.
   Compassion has the power to heal not only others but also us. It breaks cycles of harm and fosters environments where reconciliation and

growth are possible. Whether in personal relationships, social justice, or global conflicts, this principle applies universally. It calls for a higher ethical standard that does not mirror cruelty but transforms it.

7. **Trust in Divine Timing and Mercy**

Patience (Sab'r) is more than passive waiting; it is active submission to God's perfect timing. True patience means doing our best while trusting wholeheartedly in His plan, even when the outcomes differ from our desires.

Remember, no sin is too great for God's mercy. His forgiveness surpasses our comprehension. Shift our focus from the weight of our mistakes to the vastness of His compassion. The journey isn't about how far we've fallen but about how earnestly we turn back to Him.

8. **The Power of Gratitude and Service**

Gratitude is a powerful key to happiness. When we learn to be thankful in all circumstances for the blessings, the challenges, and the lessons, we unlock peace that transcends understanding. Serving others with love and sincerity strengthens both our hearts and our spirits. Giving meaning to our lives builds resilience and a sense of purpose that no hardship can shake.

Even in loss, God is giving. Even in hardship, He is present. He waits for our call, always ready to respond with love and mercy.

9. **The Heart's Resilience**

Be like a tender plant in the storm, soft, flexible, and able to withstand harsh winds. A rigid tree breaks under pressure, but a gentle plant survives because it bends without breaking. The heart, too, must be humble and adaptable to endure life's trials with grace.

When overwhelmed, pouring our hearts out can help, but only to Allah. His embrace is the safest refuge. The world and its fleeting attractions are temporary; let our hearts be attached to the Eternal instead of the perishable.

Healing the heart is a journey of intentional transformation—one that begins with honest introspection and leads to divine connection. By removing inner barriers and embracing spiritual remedies, we allow God's mercy to mend what the world has broken. Compassion beyond cruelty becomes not just a choice, but a reflection of divine strength within us. As we guard our hearts and deepen our knowledge, we cultivate a life of purpose, resilience, and grace. Trusting

A JOURNEY TOWARDS SPIRITUAL AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING

divine connection relying on God in weakness

removing barriers letting go of toxic attachments

diagnosis assessing root causes of pain

knowledge transforming through learning

gratitude expressing thanks in all circumstances

service serving others with love and sincerity

patience trusting in God's timing

guarding the heart protecting healing with conscious choices

in divine timing and embracing gratitude empowers us to serve others with sincerity, even in hardships. Ultimately, the heart's resilience lies in its ability to remain soft, humble, and anchored in the Eternal-thriving not despite trials but through them.

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From Ashes, We Build Tomorrow
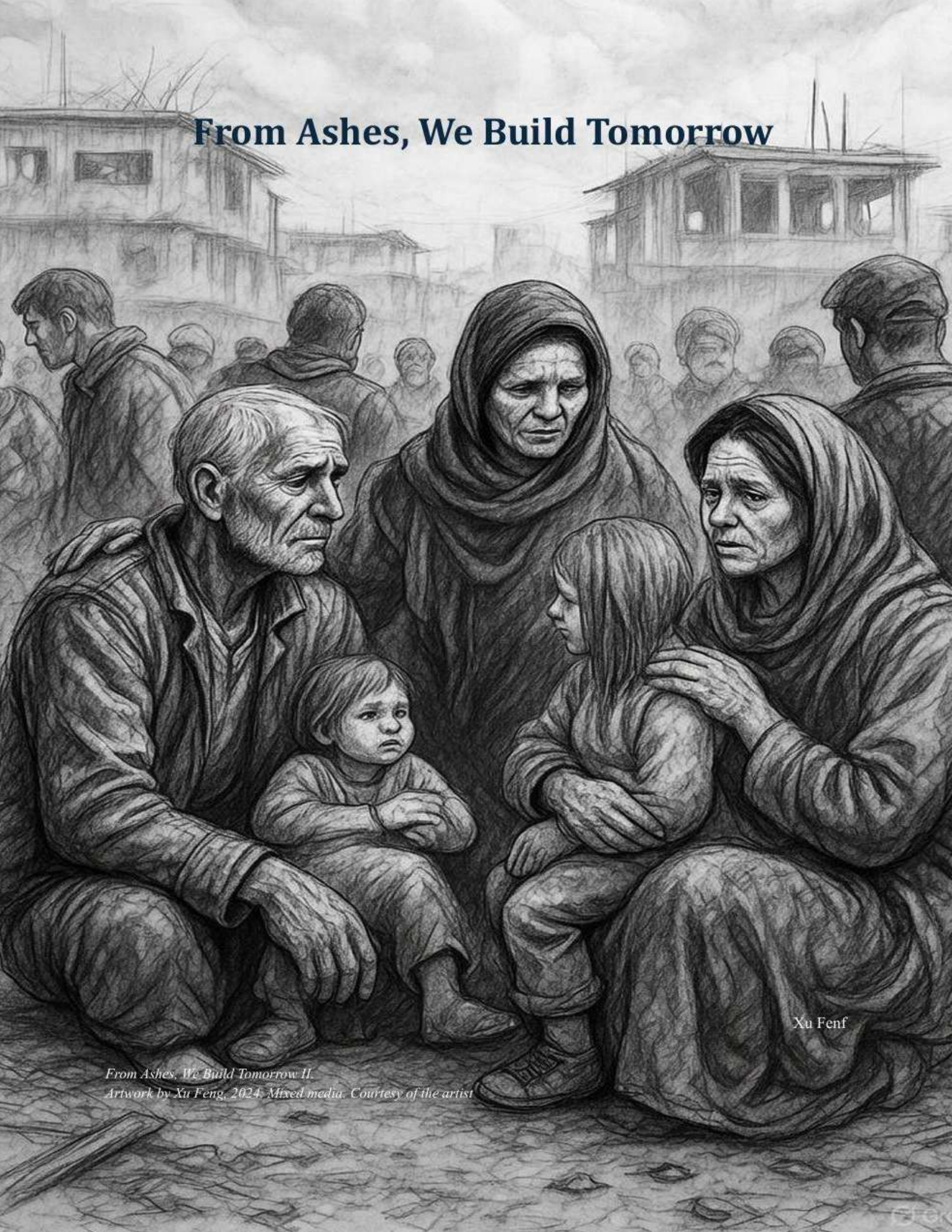
From Ashes, We Build Tomorrow II.
Artwork by Xu Feng, 2024. Mixed media. Courtesy of the artist

Xu Fenf

Nonviolence as a Daily Discipline: Healing a World in Conflict

Basir Bita

Global peacefulness, according to the Global Peace Index (GPI), has experienced a downward drop for the sixth consecutive year (Vision of Humanity, 2024). As many as 87 countries experienced some regression in peacefulness, compared with 74 that improved during the past year. 59 active state-based conflicts are ongoing worldwide, the highest since WWI. Almost 152,000 people lost their lives because of these conflicts in 2024 (Vision of Humanity, 2024).

Embracing nonviolence is not just some lofty dream; it's the deepest mode for our survival at this point, which makes choosing to live it as a way to bring peace back home. In a world that feels it's falling apart at the seams, even very small acts of nonviolence can feel like releasing some pain momentarily towards greater healing. Nonviolence is not a mere miracle cure, but a coming home start.

Defining Nonviolence

Mere passivity is often attributed to nonviolence, an act in which people take no measures to resolve an issue. Yet rooted in ancient Sanskrit traditions, it means the elimination of the willingness to commit violence. The word ahimsa in Hindu and Buddhist philosophies encapsulates the multifaceted nature of nonviolence. It's not passivity but an active, ethical stance of not inflicting harm (Buddhist Inquiry, 2018).

The term "Satyagraha" was coined by Mahatma Gandhi, meaning "truth force" and referring to resistance through nonviolence (Gandhi, as cited in Wikipedia, 2025). Satyagraha is a series of principles that honours the attitude of nonviolence, the ability to overcome desire, the conduct of fearlessness, and the unconditional respect for all religions. Gandhi claimed unity between means and ends and declared that unjust ends cannot be obtained through violent means. Similarly, Buddhist teachings emphasize nonviolence, not merely as refraining from harm, but as a transformation to be lived out in practice, grounded in compassion, free of hatred, and based on mental purification. Here, nonviolence becomes an everyday discipline rather than a metaphor for a strategy to be employed temporarily.

Violence, Disconnection, and Suffering

Whether wars in Gaza, escalating conflict in Ukraine, or enduring repression of Afghan women, violence fractures connections, amplifies suffering, and leaves communities traumatized. The violence in Gaza, for instance, has led to not only immense physical suffering but mass displacement, breaking trust and hope across generations.

Martin Luther King Jr. argued: "Returning violence for violence multiplies violence, adding deeper darkness…" (Time, 2017). In Charleston, South Carolina, following a racially motivated massacre, a congregation's choice of forgiveness over retaliation showcased the transformative power of nonviolent response (Time, 2017).

Pioneering research by Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan reveals that nonviolent campaigns are significantly more effective than violent ones. Their study covering the 20th century showed nonviolent resistance had a roughly 53% success rate, compared to 26% for violent campaigns. Moreover, countries with nonviolent movements were 10 times more likely to transition to democracy within 5 years, regardless of initial success. These outcomes highlight nonviolence not just as ethically sound but also as pragmatically powerful, reducing suffering and laying the foundations for sustainable peace.

Randy Janzen, writing about Ukraine, argues that nonviolent action minimizes human suffering and offers strategic alternatives such as civil resistance, boycotts, and unarmed civilian protection, thereby preventing escalation and promoting democratic recovery.

Why Nonviolence Belongs in Daily Life

Wars and large-scale conflicts make headlines, and non-violence is a quieter yet equally powerful channel through which change can manifest, allowing connection, presence, and healing to evolve. It can start by reducing family or personal suffering by choosing empathy, active listening, and staying in the present moment rather than reacting. Nonviolent behaviour involves meeting frustration without anger, slowing

down to be fully heard, and responding in ways that secure dignity and trust.

The other way non-violence manifests is through acting out compassion, especially when moments of anger or conflict arise in relationships or workplaces. If you meet countless other occasions with patience and understanding rather than escalation, you set an example for others to follow, beginning an endless chain of more peaceful, respectful interactions.

Anchoring our mental and spiritual well-being is what nonviolence does. Practicing mindfulness, self-care, kindness toward others, healthy boundaries, and other practices that cultivate inner calm and power keep us afloat through tough times so we are not consumed by them. This reduces suffering for ourselves and those around us.

Beyond the personal reflections, nonviolence strengthened civic resilience. Peaceful protests, acts of mutual aid, and honest dialogue among diverse groups work together to build trust, foster shared values, and make communities more able to face crises together; all these activities demonstrate that root-level strength lies in cooperation, not domination.

Lastly, nonviolence also plays a healing role concerning social injuries. It gives back dignity to marginalized or injured people while accepting trauma without reinforcing it, and brings back a bit of humanity to divisions that have grown deeper with violence. Through the slow and intentional work of nonviolence, a promise of reconciliation and healing is extended, given that the world is already so divided.

Nonviolence and Immigration

Nonviolence plays a crucial role in shaping compassionate, just, and dignified responses to immigration, both on the part of societies and on the part of migrants themselves. When individuals are forced to leave their homes due to conflict, poverty, or persecution, the way communities and systems respond deeply impacts everyone's experience of safety and belonging. Instead of weaponizing fear or exclusion through border militarization and harsh detention policies, nonviolent approaches prioritize humanity, dialogue, and inclusion. The Sanctuary Movement of the 1980s in the United States showcases how faith-based communities consciously embraced civil disobedience to protect Central American refugees, a deeply nonviolent act rooted in moral convictions. More recent data affirms that sanctuary policies do not increase crime, and in some cases, sanctuary jurisdictions experience lower property crime rates (Otsu, 2021), stronger economies, higher labour force participation, and greater community trust.

In California, a study that uses special research methods suggests sanctuary city policies might actually help Latinx immigrants' mental health. This could happen because these policies create environments that feel safer, leading to real health benefits. It's like a non-violent approach that makes a real difference (Nieri et al., 2022). Across the United States, groups of people with strong religious beliefs are still actively fighting back against anti-immigrant laws using non-violent methods. For instance, religious leaders in Los Angeles have organized prayer vigils, taught people about their rights, and even stood between Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents and members of the community who are especially vulnerable. All of these actions are based on spiritual beliefs and the principle of non-violence (Associated Press, 2025). Likewise, in an initiative recently carried out by Quaker groups, a 300-mile non-violent march from New York to Washington, D.C. was completed to protest immigration policies. These groups marched in tandem with their long history of fighting for social justice, refusing to accept the way migrants are sometimes treated as though they aren't human (Associated Press, 2025).

Organizations such as the Northwest Immigrant Rights Project (NWIRP) and Americans for Immigrant Justice (AI Justice) model nonviolence through legal representation, advocacy, and community education, transforming structural injustice without resorting to confrontation (Nieri, T et al, 2022). Collectively, these actions illustrate how nonviolent immigration movements—whether through sanctuary policies, legal support, faithful activism, or organized protest—nurture societal empathy, strengthen civic infrastructure, and uphold the dignity of every person crossing a border, fleeing conflict, or seeking a better life.

Conclusion

News about hatred, violence, genocide, political issues, and deep-seated injustices is everywhere now if one opens social media pages or traditional news outlets. In this situation, cultivating the seeds of nonviolence isn't some never-come-true dream; it is something we need to focus on right now, both morally and practically. The numbers from the Global Peace Index really hammer this home we call the "world": here, peace isn't merely putting an end to war across the globe. This pattern is

affecting our lives, our workplaces, and our neighbourhoods too. Whether it is a prolonged war, an invisible discrimination, or personal enmity with the "other", it all eats away at trust, breaks apart the relationships, and makes cycles of suffering even more vicious. On the other hand, nonviolence offers a better path, one that prioritizes human dignity, healing, and rebuilding trust in ruptured relationships. This pathway is about thinking differently and acting creatively about how big problems —like what's happening in Gaza, Ukraine, or with women in Afghanistan —could be managed, and it also holds space for us in how we act in our everyday moments. These seemingly small steps can plant seeds of kindness; otherwise, the current path will lead us to further hostility that takes a toll on the planet, human beings, and other beings.

Human beings are creative in coming up with new ways to address daily challenges; one way that can support cultivating nonviolence in daily life is choosing to respond with empathy rather than reacting immediately during family arguments, and backing immigration policies that safeguard the less fortunate. Through this, an individual and a collective show how nonviolence can be both a personal practice and a public promise. Bravery becomes routine when it comes to pushing back against the urge to retaliate, and patience becomes the roadmap for talking through differences with people we disagree with and for embracing the power of creativity to come up with solutions that do not rely on force. While the path of nonviolence does not guarantee a prompt win, history, studies, and real-life stories have proven that it leads to deeper, more lasting change where long-lasting wounds heal, and compassion pervades. When communities of people step up and gift this approach to their hearts, shifting the world from a pattern of hatred and violence to one of caring, sharing, and healing, where living peacefully is not only the absence of conflict, but a space where equality, togetherness, and freedom among people truly flourish, could become a possibility.

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Sexual Orientation and Torture: A Global Struggle for Justice

Author: Ezzatolzaman Pezeshkzad (Shahla)
Reviewers: Mossallanejad, E. & Samsarar, A.
Publisher: Mosaic Press
Year of Publication: 2025
Pages: 250

Overall Assessment

This is an ambitious and necessary work that fills a critical gap in human rights literature by examining LGBTQI+ persecution through multiple lenses: personal testimony, historical analysis, religious scholarship, legal frameworks, and therapeutic practice. The book's greatest strength lies in its refusal to approach the subject from a single disciplinary perspective, instead weaving together lived experience with rigorous documentation. It is ultimately a work of moral philosophy as much as human rights documentation—a passionate argument for radical social transformation grounded in compassion and hope.

Synopsis

This book examines the experiences and struggles of LGBTQI+ individuals through nine comprehensive chapters. It begins with Arghavan Shasara's personal journey of gender transition, highlighting both the oppression faced by non-heterosexual individuals and their remarkable resilience. The Arghavan's co-author, Ezat Mossallanejaf, shares his transformation from hostility to acceptance, then analyzes how major world religions view sexual orientation and gender identity.

The book explores the historical prevalence of same-sex relationships and intersex individuals in various societies, contrasting this with their long history of persecution. It examines how religious and traditional beliefs have criminalized expressions of sexual orientation and gender identity, often through brutal practices including castration and slavery-related torture.

Later chapters analyze homophobia as part of broader systems of oppression, present case studies from the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture (CCVT) and discuss the inadequacies of international law in protecting LGBTQI+ rights. The book concludes by tracing the LGBTQI+ emancipation movement from the 18th century to today, offering both a historical perspective and a call for holistic, community-based approaches to supporting survivors of gender-related persecution.

Strong Points

1. **Dual Narrative Structure** The decision to open with both authors' personal journeys is powerful. Arghavan's testimony of gender transition under persecution provides emotional immediacy, while Ezat's honest reflection on his transformation from "apathy to advocacy" models the kind of consciousness shift the book seeks to inspire in readers. This vulnerability establishes credibility and emotional resonance from the outset.

2. **Historical Depth and the Central Paradox** The book's historical scope (Chapters 3-5) is exceptional. By tracing same-sex relationships and intersex participation in political life throughout history, the authors expose the book's central "dilemma": the coexistence of widespread same-sex practices with ongoing persecution, torture, and hypocrisy. This paradox becomes the book's organizing principle, revealing homophobia as historically contingent rather than natural or inevitable.

3. **Structural Analysis of Oppression** The book situates LGBTQI+ persecution within a larger framework of interconnected injustices. The authors explicitly link acceptance of LGBTQI+ rights to economic prosperity, education, democracy, secularism, and women's freedom—while connecting persecution to illiteracy, philistinism, tyranny, and patriarchy. This systemic analysis elevates the work beyond single-issue advocacy to a comprehensive critique of power structures.

4. **Non-Pathologizing Therapeutic Approach** Chapter 7's significance becomes clearer in light of the emphasis that "community support of the LGBTI people must be devoid of any kind of pathological approach." The book makes the crucial argument that mental and physical health problems among LGBTQI+ people stem from discrimination and torture, not from their identities. This reframing has profound implications for healthcare, asylum processes, and social services.

5. **Nuanced Treatment of Religion** The book acknowledges that religious violence against LGBTQI+ people is scripturally grounded in most major traditions, yet also recognizes reform movements and the diversion of religions "from the teachings of their founders." Rather than simple condemnation, the book calls for philosophical enlightenment and pluralism—a more sophisticated and potentially effective approach than outright rejection of religion.

Weak Points and Shortcomings

1. **North-South Binary** The call for "collaboration between enlightened people of the North as well as the South" risks reproducing problematic geographic binaries. Does "North" mean the Global North/West? If so, this framing may inadvertently reinforce narratives about "backward" Southern countries needing Northern enlightenment—precisely the orientalist logic the book elsewhere resists. More precise language about power, resources, and solidarity would strengthen this argument.

2. **The "Radical Transformation" Question** The conclusion calls for "radical reordering of society's views of reality" and "radical transformation of despotic patriarchal cultures," invoking Paula Ettelbrick's vision. Yet the book doesn't fully articulate what this transformation looks like or how to achieve it beyond "consistent efforts towards self-awareness" and creating "public awareness." The gap between the radical vision and the modest tactics may frustrate readers seeking concrete strategic guidance.

3. **Limited Engagement with Critique from Within.** The book doesn't substantially engage with internal debates within LGBTQI+ movements: tensions between assimilationist and liberationist approaches, conflicts over Hom nationalism, disagreements about marriage equality versus more radical restructuring of kinship, or debates about the politics of inclusion in the acronym itself. The book treats LGBTQ+ movements as relatively unified, whereas in reality there are significant internal disagreements over goals, strategies, and priorities. These omissions may reflect the authors' practitioner rather than activist positioning, but they limit the book's engagement with contemporary movement discourse.

4. **The Technology Question** The conclusion's optimism about how "the scientific and information revolution of today has opened new horizons" for LGBTQI+ rights deserves more critical examination. While digital organizing has enabled connection and visibility, it has also facilitated surveillance, outing, and persecution. Social media platforms have amplified both liberation and backlash. A more nuanced treatment of technology's contradictory effects would strengthen this section.

5. **Insufficient Treatment of Intersectionality.** While the book links LGBTQI+ persecution to other forms of oppression (racism, sexism, economic inequality), it doesn't deeply explore how these systems intersect within LGBTQI+ communities themselves. How do racism and colonialism shape queer experience? How do class dynamics affect access to transition-related healthcare? These questions of intersectionality could be more central.

Contributions

1. **Documentation of State-Sanctioned Torture.** By centring torture explicitly in the title and throughout, the book makes an important legal and moral claim: this is not merely "discrimination" but systematic, state-sponsored violence that violates jus cogens norms. This framing has implications for asylum claims, international criminal law, and advocacy strategies.

2. **The Practitioner's Perspective** The book's reflections on CCVT clients, "highly compassionate people with great moral integrity" and "unbelievable talents," provide a counter-narrative to victim-focused discourse. By emphasizing what society loses when it persecutes LGBTQI+ people, the book makes a pragmatic as well as moral argument for inclusion.

3. **Witness to the "Spiral Journey" Both authors'** emphasis on spiralling journeys—Arghavan's "spiralling and torturous journey from manhood to womanhood" and Ezat's path "from the realm of darkness to the territory of light"—offers a more honest model of transformation than linear progress narratives. This acknowledges setbacks, complexity, and the ongoing nature of liberation struggles.

4. **The Iran-Canada Transnational Lens** Both authors' connections to Iran, combined with CCVT's Canadian base, provide a unique perspective that challenges Western exceptionalism (Chapter 6 includes the United States among persecuting nations) while also avoiding cultural relativism about Iranian persecution.

5. **Linking LGBTQI+ Rights to Democracy Itself** The conclusion's framing of LGBTQI+ freedom as "the criterion for gauging the level of democratization in a given society" makes a bold claim with significant implications. This positions LGBTQI+ rights not as a "special interest" but as central to assessing any society's commitment to human rights and democratic governance.

6. **A Holistic Model for Service Provision**. For practitioners, Chapter 7's community-based holistic approach—explicitly rejecting pathologization—offers an alternative model that other torture rehabilitation centers and refugee service providers can adapt.

Critical Questions Raised

1. **Who Is the Audience?** The book seems to address multiple audiences simultaneously: general readers seeking education, practitioners needing guidance,

scholars wanting documentation, and activists seeking historical context. While this breadth is admirable, it may mean no audience gets exactly what they need.

2. **Can Transformation Happen Through Consciousness Alone?** The conclusion's emphasis on "self-awareness" and "public awareness" as the primary mechanisms of change may underestimate the role of structural barriers. Can consciousness-raising overcome material incentives for persecution? What about situations where homophobia serves political functions for authoritarian regimes? The book might benefit from more attention to material and political-economic factors.

3. **What About LGBTQI+ People Who Don't Seek Integration?** The book's emphasis on LGBTQI+ people as "highly compassionate" with "great moral integrity" and "unbelievable talents" risks creating a politics of respectability—suggesting LGBTQI+ people deserve rights because they're exceptional rather than simply because they're human. What about queer people who are difficult, unproductive, or antisocial? The universalist human rights framework should protect everyone, not just the "talented."

Concluding Remarks

Sexual Orientation and Torture is a courageous, necessary work that succeeds in making visible a crisis that too often remains hidden. Its combination of personal testimony, historical sweep, and practical experience creates a unique resource. The conclusion reveals this as ultimately a work of moral philosophy— an argument that LGBTQI+ liberation requires nothing less than "radical transformation of despotic patriarchal cultures" and the creation of a genuinely pluralistic global society.

The book's greatest achievement may be its implicit argument that LGBTQI+ persecution cannot be understood through any single lens—it requires simultaneous attention to theology, history, law, psychology, economics, and lived experience. By refusing disciplinary boundaries, Mossallanejad and Shamsara model the kind of comprehensive approach that the movement for LGBTQI+ emancipation itself requires.

However, the book's ambition occasionally exceeds its execution. At 220 pages, it cannot fully develop all the arguments it initiates. The conclusion's call for "radical transformation" deserves more concrete elaboration. The treatment of globalization, North-South dynamics, and technology could be more nuanced. And the book's sometimes liberal-reformist approach may frustrate readers seeking more radical analysis.

These limitations notwithstanding, this is pioneering work. By centring torture explicitly, combining Iranian and Canadian perspectives, grounding analysis in actual service provision to survivors, and modelling personal transformation, the book makes contributions that outweigh its shortcomings. Most importantly, it issues a moral challenge: in a world that claims to value human rights, how can we tolerate the ongoing torture of LGBTQI+ people? The book's final words—"Love will ultimately overcome hate"—function as both prophecy and demand.

Empathy in Wars and Media Approach

Hammad Ahmed Hashmi

Abstract

Empathy — the ability to understand and emotionally connect with others — is both disrupted and essential during wartime, especially in socio-political contexts. This article examines the psychological limits of empathy, its portrayal and mobilization through media, its use and neglect in conflict planning, ideological opposition to empathetic thinking, and the potential for empathy-based peace initiatives. Drawing on psychological theory, historical context, humanitarian narratives, and media studies, the article argues that empathy remains crucial for ethical leadership, humane policymaking, and conflict resolution. Yet it is often weakened by cognitive biases, ideological resistance, and institutional neglect. Strengthening empathy within strategic, educational, and civic frameworks is vital for preventing future conflicts and fostering reconciliation.

Key Words: Empathy, humanity, conflicts, reporting, peacebuilding

Psychological Constraints: Compassion Fade and Ethnocultural Biases

Compassion fatigue refers to the human tendency to feel less empathy as the number of sufferers increases a cognitive bias that diminishes prosocial behaviour in mass crises. Coupled with ethnocultural empathy, which suggests that people more readily extend empathy to those perceived as similar in ethnicity, culture, or identity, these biases severely limit empathy during times of war.

In armed conflicts, this dynamic emerges when distant or unfamiliar victims elicit weaker emotional responses than those closer in identity or geography. The outcome is uneven empathy and unequal distribution of resources. This disparity is not confined to one region or cultural bloc; rather, it reflects a global challenge of selective compassion. Humanity, when tested by the magnitude of suffering, often falters under the weight of numbers, leaving countless unseen victims without acknowledgement or aid.

Media, Empathy, and the Power of "Witnessing"

Media plays a profound role in shaping empathic responses. Images, stories, and reports from conflict zones can either mobilize compassion or dull it through repetition. Research into war photography reveals that empathy is not uniform: it ranges from vicarious trauma to detached sympathy. Among these, the act of "witnessing," in which audiences bear empathetic testimony to suffering, holds particular promise, as it can ignite moral responsibility and political action.

Yet, media representation is shaped by choices about what is shown and what is omitted. Some crises receive extensive coverage, while others remain overshadowed or neglected. This uneven spotlight results in compassion for specific populations, while others suffer in silence. What matters, therefore, is not merely that suffering is documented, but that it is presented in ways that respect dignity, inspire solidarity, and underscore our common humanity. When empathy is guided by dignity rather than shock, it fosters deeper and more sustained human connection.

Strategic Empathy and Decision-Making in Conflict

Empathy in strategy can be a double-edged sword. On the one hand, strategic empathy—the capacity to understand adversaries' perspectives—enables better-informed decisions. History shows that the absence of such empathy can result in catastrophic miscalculations, from punitive peace treaties that sow the seeds of future wars to interventions that disregard cultural and political realities.

Academic discourse underscores that strategy and emotion are interlinked: successful conflict management must account not only for military or political metrics but also for human feelings and aspirations. Soldiers and decision-makers who apply empathy are less likely to fall into cycles of dehumanization. Conversely, neglecting empathy risks perpetuating injustice and fuelling hostility. Empathy, then, is not weakness but a moral clarity that can temper the excesses of war.

Ideological Pushback: Framing Empathy as Weakness

Despite its value, empathy often faces ideological resistance. Some political discourses dismiss empathy as a liability, portraying it as indulgence or moral weakness that undermines strength. Others argue that empathy is indispensable to international cooperation and warn that rejecting it risks repeating past mistakes of isolationism and hostility.

This tug-of-war reflects a broader cultural tension: empathy is seen either as a strength that fosters cooperation and peace or as a hindrance in an era of hard power politics. Recognizing empathy as a source of resilience, rather than fragility, is central to sustaining humanity in the face of war.

Empathy as a Constructive Force in Peacebuilding

Empathy's transformative power is evident when embedded in peace processes and education. Peace can

be taught as a practical skill just as societies teach negotiation, law, or technology. When empathy is cultivated early, it helps societies move away from fear and retaliation and toward compassion and dialogue. Practical examples include dialogue initiatives between divided communities, educational programs that emphasize nonviolent conflict resolution, and humanitarian organizations that humanize adversaries rather than demonize them. Early empathetic engagement within the first stages of a conflict has proven effective in preventing escalation. Here, empathy is not an abstract sentiment but a tangible instrument for building trust and reducing violence.

Health Under Fire and the Moral Dimensions of Empathy

One of the starkest betrayals of humanity during war is the deliberate targeting of healthcare systems, a phenomenon sometimes called "healthocide." Hospitals, ambulances, and medical workers become casualties, depriving entire populations of essential care. Such actions not only inflict physical suffering but also erode the moral expectations that healthcare should remain neutral in conflict.

Beyond statistics, the human cost is immense: children left without vaccinations, mothers without maternity care, the injured untreated, and psychological trauma compounding physical wounds. Stories of doctors performing surgeries under bombardment, or nurses tending to the wounded with dwindling supplies, highlight both the fragility and resilience of humanity in war. These stories remind us that empathy is not abstract; it is lived daily by those who risk their lives to protect others.

Empathy in the Long View: Rationality and Decline of Violence

Despite recurring conflicts, history also reveals a gradual widening of empathy across cultures and centuries. Societies have, over time, extended compassion beyond tribal or national boundaries, fostering norms of humanitarian law, refugee protection, and the protection of Civilian rights. Neuroscientific studies, however, remind us that empathy

is not flawless. It often favours those closest to us, our kin, culture, or nation. At times, unchecked emotional empathy can even conflict with justice, leading to biased judgments. Thus, empathy must be paired with rational ethics and a conscious effort to expand concern beyond in-groups. When nurtured deliberately, empathy has the potential to reduce violence and guide societies toward reconciliation.

Humanity at the Time of War: A Shared Responsibility

War tests humanity in profound ways. It reveals the depths of cruelty but also the capacity for solidarity. In refugee camps, strangers share scarce resources; in destroyed cities, volunteers clear rubble side by side; in shattered families, communities provide shelter and hope. These moments affirm that, though fragile, empathy is not extinguished by conflict. To sustain humanity during war, empathy must move from fleeting emotion to deliberate practice. It must inform policy, shape media, and inspire everyday acts of care. Most importantly, it must remind us that behind every statistic is a human life, someone's child, parent, or friend.

Conclusion

Empathy is a fragile yet indispensable element of human survival during times of war. Cognitive limitations, such as compassion fatigue and ethnocultural bias, undermine empathic responses. The media has the power to either foster meaningful witnessing or dull moral urgency. Strategically, empathy guides more humane planning and decision-making. Ideological debates may weaken it, but history and life experience confirm its necessity. In times of war, humanity is judged not only by how conflicts are fought but also by how compassion is preserved amid destruction. Strengthening empathy through education, peacebuilding initiatives, and protection of humanitarian spaces offers a path forward. Empathy is not sentimentality; it is a strategy for peace, an ethical compass, and above all, a reaffirmation of what it means to be human. In every war, the greatest struggle is not merely for territory or power, but for the survival of humanity itself.

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Finding Sanctuary While in Refuge - Insight

Finding sanctuary while in the Refuge
Carrying a load of scars within
fled with shadows visible but unidentified,
A world on fire behind my thoughts.
The walls I found do not belong to me,
Yet they stood firm beneath torn skies.
Refuge-unseen and uncertain journey
A borrowed breath, a borrowed bed.
But in the hush of my fears,
A whisper rose up instead,
With the sighs of assurance.
Sheesh, not silence, no- but something near,
A lullaby beneath the ache,
A whisper stitching soul to skin,
A light no one could ever dim,

Time fled with all odds and events.
Though found a borrowed safety and shelter too:
A root to plant I didn't choose,
A spark turns flame that learned to dance in the winds,
A heart beats unrhyme that it could not measure,
I found more and more while it lasts.
Finding Sanctuary While in Refuge
Carrying a load of scars within,
Fled with shadows — visible but unidentified,
A world on fire behind my thoughts.
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A spark turns flame that learned to dance in the winds,
A heart beats unrhymed that it could not measure
I found more and more while it lasts.

Naseem GH

From Finding Sanctuary While in Refuge III.
Artwork by Naseem GH, 2024. Mixed media. Courtesy of the artist.

Behaviour Support for Refugee Women in Australia: Barriers and Pathways Forward

Shazia Munir

Supporting refugee women in Australia requires behaviour practitioners to navigate complex barriers involving language, culture and trauma. Refugee women's experiences of displacement, gender-based violence, and marginalization demand culturally responsive, trauma-informed practice. *"To know the road ahead, ask those coming back.",* Confucius. Building on the author's personal and professional insights and recent research, this article examines the barriers to effective behaviour support for refugee women in Australia and presents evidence-based strategies to enhance culturally responsive and trauma-informed practice.

Behaviour support professionals in Australia play a vital role in helping refugees, but their effectiveness is often prevented by a plethora of challenges rooted in cultural, linguistic and trauma-related factors. These obstacles require a different understanding of the complexities this vulnerable demography faces.

Cultural differences pose a fundamental challenge, as professionals must navigate the various cultural landscapes that shape refugees' experiences and expectations. Pereiro et al. (2023) emphasize that service providers should be particularly sensitive to the intersection of disability and cultural identity, highlighting the specific challenges faced by deaf refugees who have undergone gender violence. Such individuals can experience composed marginalization, and understanding the cultural context is fundamental. Traditional approaches to behaviour support may not resonate with individuals of cultures where social norms differ significantly.

In addition, the influence of sociocultural norms around gender roles complicates the dynamics of trauma expression and the willingness to engage with support systems. Segrave et al. (2024) and Papoutsi et al. (2022) illustrate that these norms usually dictate how women should behave in response to their trauma and victimization experiences.
Trauma creates change you don't choose. Healing is about creating change you do choose." – Michelle Rosenthal.
In some cultures, women can be socialized to remain stoic or not disclose their trauma due to fears of shame or stigma. This cultural conditioning can make it difficult for professionals and refugees to build trust, thereby

complicating evaluation and intervention processes. Consequently, professionals may encounter resistance or reluctance, which can complicate their ability to provide effective support.

Linguistic barriers further exacerbate these challenges, as many refugee women may not speak English fluently or lack access to interpreters who can navigate the complexities of emotional dialogue. Limited language proficiency can obstruct effective communication, preventing professionals from accurately evaluating their clients' needs and experiences. A
As reported by Papoutsi et al. (2022), misunderstandings arising from language differences can lead to incorrect diagnoses or ineffective interventions, potentially negatively affecting the well-being of clients involved. The inability to effectively communicate not only promotes feelings of isolation but can also trigger additional trauma, reinforcing the vulnerabilities between refugee populations.

In addition, the historical and social contexts of violence by an intimate partner must be considered with the utmost seriousness. According to Damra and Akour (2024), many women refugees come from origins where violence by an intimate partner was predominant, either due to armed conflicts, socio-political instability or patriarchal cultural structures. Anterior trauma baggage can significantly affect a woman's self-perception and her ability to get involved with support systems. Professionals have the task not only of recognizing this story but also of ensuring that their interventions are informed by trauma and culturally competent. Treating symptoms without addressing underlying historical trauma can lead to surface solutions that do not facilitate a real cure.

By navigating these multifaceted obstacles, behavioural support professionals must adopt a culturally responsive approach that acknowledges the intersectionality of culture, trauma, and language in their practice. This approach not only enhances the relationship between refugee professionals and women but also increases the overall effectiveness of support strategies. In addition, continuous education and training focused on cultural competence can enable professionals to better interpret diverse expressions and cultural practices, thereby

promoting a more inclusive and supportive environment for refugees in Australia (Nickerson et al., 2021).

"Breaking the silence is not just about speaking; it's about being heard and understood.", Unknown

Linguistic barriers pose an important challenge for behaviour support practitioners working with women who are refugees in Australia, which has an impact on the effectiveness of their interventions and the global therapeutic relationship. Effective communication is fundamental to the assessment of needs and the provision of appropriate support services; however, practitioners are often faced with obstacles associated with limited mastery of customers' English or, in some cases, with a complete lack of familiarity with the language. This disconnection can lead to erroneous interpretations and false declarations about customers' emotional states and psychosocial needs, complicating practitioners' ability to provide adequate support (Walker, Schultz, & Sonn, 2014).

KeBSI (2023) Glossary Linguistic difficulties specific to Iraqi refugee women, illustrating that these individuals frequently encounter a complex interaction of cultural nuances that language alone cannot transmit. The inability of practitioners to engage meaningfully with their customers can lead to essential information being neglected or poorly understood. Consequently, assessments of mental health needs and the provision of services can be altered, leaving customers without the necessary support which is proportionate to their unique experiences and horizons.

In addition, the implications of these linguistic misunderstandings extend beyond immediate communication challenges. Mathisen (2024) maintains that linguistic barriers can exacerbate feelings of isolation and alienation in refugee women. When practitioners cannot communicate effectively, customers may feel unknown or undervalued, which can lead to a negative impact on their mental health and well-being. The emotional distress resulting from this disconnection highlights the need for practitioners to engage in the development of solutions that deal with linguistic challenges.

A promising avenue to fill the linguistic gap is the involvement of trained interpreters who are not only competent in the languages spoken by refugee women but also trained in cultural competence and trauma-oriented care. As suggested by Featherstone et al. (2023), interpreters should understand the cultural contexts and trauma that these women have experienced to ensure precise and sensitive communication. This could involve specialized training programs focused on the nuances of intercultural communication and the subtleties of the language of trauma, thereby considerably improving the interpretation process.

In addition, practitioners can adopt strategies such as using visual aids, simplified language, or culturally relevant metaphors during customer interactions to facilitate understanding. Creating a welcoming environment that encourages spontaneous conversations in several languages, including dialects prevalent among local refugee populations, can also offer pathways for more efficient communication and relationship-building.

The integration of technology, such as translation applications or platforms that provide multilingual online support, can also serve as a valuable resource for overcoming linguistic limitations. However, practitioners should remain vigilant about the precision and cultural contextualization of these tools, ensuring that they complement rather than supplant human interaction.

In summary, noting linguistic challenges is crucial for practitioners helping refugee women in Australia, as it directly affects their ability to provide effective support. Thanks to targeted training for performers, the use of inclusive communication strategies and the incorporation of technology, practitioners can promote an environment that promotes understanding, ultimately improving the therapeutic efficiency of their interventions., To meet the challenges with multiple facets faced by behaviour support practitioners to help refugee women, in particular in the context of cultural, linguistic and trauma problems, several exploitable solutions can be proposed. Continuous training in cultural skills is essential for practitioners to improve their understanding of cultural shades that influence responses to violence and sex-specific trauma. This training should include comprehensive modules that reflect the various horizons of refugee women, allowing practitioners to engage with them with sensitivity and effectiveness. Dixson and Dixson (2022) highlight the importance of such training in promoting empathetic relationships, which can improve the outcomes of behavioural support interventions for this demography.

In addition, the creation of a systemic journal that examines the socio-cultural foundations affecting women's sexual and reproductive health could serve as a pivotal resource for practitioners. Such a review would synthesize existing research, including the ideas of El Ansari et al. (2025), to shed light on behaviour support approaches adapted to specific cultural contexts. By acquiring an in-depth understanding of beliefs and practices surrounding health and well-being within different cultural groups, practitioners are better equipped to provide services that resonate with the lived

experiences of refugee women. This culturally enlightened approach can improve the relevance and efficiency of interventions, thus potentially attenuating the impact of trauma on the provision of services.

Effective community commitment strategies are crucial to cultivating relationships and confidence between practitioners and the communities they serve. As Kasherwa (2024) points out, these strategies include participatory awareness initiatives that involve refugee women in the co-design of services and resources. Such efforts not only empower women by validating their voices and experiences but also facilitate a more accessible service model. The integration of community leaders and cultural brokers into the awareness process can further improve efficiency, enabling refugees to navigate the complexities of available support systems more easily.

In addition, advocacy for the protection of denunciators in the context of exploitation is necessary to establish a safe and confident environment for practitioners and the women they support. As discussed by Berg et al. (2023), creating a framework that encourages reporting without fear of reprisals can help mitigate power imbalances that often permeate service provision. The empowerment of practitioners to denounce systemic injustices enables them to effectively advocate for the rights and well-being of refugee women, fostering an environment where both parties can engage honestly and transparently.

In addition, the use of interpreters or cultural bonds can considerably mitigate linguistic barriers which hinder communication between practitioners and refugee women. Ensure access to professional interpreters who are not only competent in the necessary languages but also culturally competent to alleviate misunderstandings and promote more fruitful interactions. The training of performers in trauma-oriented practices can further improve the quality of communication, allowing a more nuanced understanding of trauma stories than many refugee women carry.

Finally, the technology update can provide innovative solutions to fill cultural and linguistic gaps. Digital platforms offering multilingual resources and remote services can facilitate accessibility for refugee women who face mobility or transportation barriers. Thus, integrating technology into service provision can not only rationalize access to support but also empower women through platforms rich in information that respect their cultural contexts (Nickerson et al., 2021; Walker, Schultz, & Sonn, 2014).

This article examines the complex challenges faced by behaviour support practitioners in supporting refugee women in Australia, particularly in overcoming cultural, linguistic, and trauma-related barriers. It proposes culturally responsive, trauma-informed, and linguistically accessible strategies to enhance the effectiveness of support services and foster empowerment, resilience, and social inclusion among refugee women.

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Call for Contributions and Peer Reviewers

Voices Against Torture-VAT journal is a semi-annual journal launched in 2020 as an organic extension of the education, advocacy, and community-building mandate of the Vancouver Association for the Survivors of Torture (VAST). VAT aligns with the values and vision of the VAST community and hopes to lift the voices of torture survivors further to support resilience and dignity.

VAT aims to provide a platform for discussing torture prevention, improving awareness of and support for refugee and immigrant mental health, and highlighting global human rights concerns.

As an interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary journal, VAT invites submissions from various academic disciplines and actively seeks collaboration and cross-disciplinary conversation. This approach intends to link theory and lived experience to social change, bringing together academics, activists, educators, therapists, healers, and those directly and indirectly affected by torture.

The Journal will consist of the following sections:

- Research Articles (6,000 – 8,000 words)-our first publication will not have this section; the later publication will
- Review Essays (<6,000 words)
- Notes from the Field (<4,000 words)
- Policy Review (<3,000 words)
- Creative Interventions and Embodiment Practices (1,000-3,000 words)
- Book Reviews (1,000-2,000 words)
- Letters to the editor(s)

Submission Requirements

- Typed in the English language and double-spaced
- Font style: Times New Roman and Font Size:12
- Text submissions should be 500-700 words
- Manuscript only in MS-Word (*.doc or *.docx) format
- Image files (if any) in .jpg format, 300 dpi.
- References/bibliography need to be numbered if provided with the article
- Authors are encouraged to follow the APA 7th referencing and citation style

- Tables and figures should be inserted within the body of the text

Expression of Interest for Peer-Review

Voices Against Torture journal invites experienced peer reviewers in human rights and torture to join the journal peer review panel. Since promoting human rights is a public good, we encourage volunteers to join the panel. Their contribution in this regard shall be formally acknowledged.

To register your interest, kindly send your detailed CV along with your expression of interest to farooq@vastbc.ca

The editor, however, retains the right to suggest any style changes if required.

Date of Publishing: Biannual: April and October

Submission: Open

Submission Deadlines: 31st December and 30th June

Please send your submissions and feedback to the Editor-in-Chief at farooq@vastbc.ca

EOI: Peer-Review

Voices Against Torture
journal invites experienced peer reviewers in the area of human rights and torture to join the journal peer review panel. Since the promotion of the cause of human rights is a public good, we encourage volunteers to join the panel. Their contribution in this regard shall be formally acknowledged.

To register your interest, kindly send your detailed CV along with your expression of interest to farooq@vastbc.ca

Help Eliminate Torture: S.O.S. Appeal

Dear Patrons and Friends,

We, the Members of the Editorial Board of the Journal on VAT (Voices Against Torture- a newly incepted policy research communication organ of Vancouver Association of Torture Survivors (VAST), are gravely concerned over the worsening and deepening state of Torture in many parts of the world- Prohibition of Torture Index 2019-20 (Statista- https://www.statista.com/statistics/1131048/prohibition-of-torture-index-in-cis-by-country/)

As rightly maintained by the World Organization against Torture, "Nothing can justify torture under any circumstances (OMCT- https://www.omct.org/), for it is tantamount to imprisoning both mind and soul. Not only does Torture leave a lasting scar on the bodies and the minds of its victims, but as its psycho-social sequel, it also becomes a weeping wound for generations. In the recent past, an exodus of refugees (UNHCR - https://www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html), from many countries; and violence perpetrated against women (BBC- https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-53014211) and neglect and abuse of the elderly during the Contagion COVID pandemic (AGE Platform Europe- https://www.age-platform.eu/press-releases/elder-abuse-has-been-rise-during-covid-19-pandemic-it-high-time-take-it-seriously) signifies the emergent need to help arrest torture becoming endemic, as stipulated in humanitarian and human rights law, which has unfortunately taken a contagious proportion. In this backdrop, the emergent need for evidence-based/ informed policymaking & advocacy around human rights, and rehabilitation & mainstreaming of torture victims needs hardly any emphasis. VAST, mindful of this emergent need to cultivate respect for human rights as an underpinning of human security and the containment of Torture worldwide, has chosen to reach out to global stakeholders through the VAT Journal.

Alongside VAT Journal, we plan to hold international & regional workshop(s) via both in-person and online platforms. With this initiative, we aim to raise awareness of trauma recovery and further educate civil society, academia, and the public sector to develop Human Rights advocates and empower practitioners to lead from the front lines in eradicating Torture from our world.

We at VAT Journal Editorial Board, through these lines, seek the support of the international community to join their heads and hands in this noble and emergent cause for the public good.

Sincerely yours,

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AN INTERNATIONALLY PEER REVIEWED JOURNAL