

Editors Guest

I am honored to welcome Michelle Ritterman as the Journal's first Editor's Guest.

Michelle Ritterman, Ph.D., is an American clinical psychologist and family therapist who published the first book on the integration of family therapy and hypnosis. In recent years she has lectured round the world on this subject and more particularly against the abuse of psychological methods by socially violent governments, and on survival techniques of families experiencing torture. She is currently writing a new book *Children and Families under Siege*, on the resilience and resourcefulness of families that endure and survive under terror. She has published some twenty papers and founded or cofounded three organizations giving medical and social aid to people in Third World countries, who would not otherwise receive it because of their political status.

An interview with Michelle will be appearing in a forthcoming issue. Meanwhile, readers interested in her projects may contact her at Suite 206, 484 Lake Park Avenue, Oakland, California 94610.

MAX CORNWELL

Editor

INHUMANITY AND THE HUMAN FAMILY

During my brief visit to Australia I have been privileged to meet several therapists who share my fight against torture. I expect that, in the coming year, you will hear more about their work with immigrants from countries where torture is common practice. I also hope you will encourage and support these therapists, because the use of torture cannot be fought in isolation.

Much is talked and written about violence in families. The field has realized that violence reflects and creates many problems, but we don't look enough at what makes families violent. This is an age of violence, where there is willingness and means at a global level to annihilate entire populations. Torture is one microcosm of violence as an orientation to problem solving, as is family violence.

We live in an era of a well-documented, international epidemic of psychological warfare, where governments of many ideologies systematically administer torture against their own peoples, as one way of exerting terror, along with exile, staged executions and "disappearances". According to Amnesty International, at least 98 countries exercise torture on an administrative basis against political prisoners. Amnesty believes the practice is actually more widespread even than this.

Torture not only violates individuals. It may often be used on entire families, or as one

means to brutalize and destroy whole communities. Torture is relational — an Us and Them mentality is used to separate the population, so that torture is a symptom of fundamental breakdown in social cohesion, with one polarized group terrorizing another. Information and realities are carefully manipulated and controlled to maintain this polarization.

It is not enough only to work with the survivors of torture as individuals or in their family contexts. Our therapies are determined by the symptoms of our clients. The experience of torture, no matter how privately conducted, is an assault committed by organized representatives of government and society. When people bring in a problem where without question an organized social institution has intentionally and willfully assaulted their bodies, personalities and families, and isolated them from the basic decencies of social living, we have to derive a community treatment. We have to be able to find community redress to the social crime that has been carried out in private. For example, we need to promote supportive and affirming social networks to whom survivors can tell their story, and where it can be respectfully and compassionately documented as an injustice. We need to build social structures that will enable re-integration.

We must also speak out collectively against systems that foster and condone the use of torture for political ends, and we must be willing to arouse communities against it. Silence actively permits torture to continue.

We as therapists can and should make a special contribution to public outcries against torture, not only as humanitarians opposed to the deliberate breakdown of civilization, but also because torture is the antithesis of therapy. Torture is the systematic perversion of physical, psychological and social processes in order to destroy individuals, families and their social contexts — it uses our own hard-won knowledge base and our own professional colleagues to create the very opposite of what we intended. We must stand against it.

One means is for our learned and professional societies to denounce torture publicly. Another is for these societies to refuse licenses, employment and honors to colleagues who have been involved in the planning or implementation of torture programs, and to give our reasons for so doing.

MICHELLE RITTERMAN
Editor's Guest