Poetic resistance: Witnessing Bahman's resistance to torture and political violence

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This writing presents an orientation to work alongside survivors of torture and political violence centred in witnessing resistance and an activist informed ethical stance for decolonising and anti-oppression practice (Reynolds & polanco, 2012). This includes descriptions of what constitutes torture and political violence, and understandings of witnessing, and resistance as ever present and useful despite the fact that resistance is often not enough to stop oppression (Wade, 1997; Reynolds, 2010a). This writing highlights Bahman, a survivor of torture from Iran, and illuminates his poetic resistance to torture, including poems that Bahman wrote during our therapeutic work together. I will provide enough context of the political situation and particular acts of violence and torture so that the acts of resistance in Bahman's poems are understandable, and make visible structures of safety (Richardson & Reynolds, 2014, in press) and accountability practices. Bahman's poems are interspersed throughout the text and following each of his poems there is a link to Gwen Haworth's film of the poem read by Bahman in Farsi and Colin James Sanders in English. Bahman then reflects on the experience of re-visiting his resistance, our therapeutic work together, and his poems through an interview with Colin. Finally, Sekneh Hammoud-Beckett offers a reflection of this work from her location as a woman from a Muslim background and as a therapist with a commitment to creative resistance (2007).

Keywords: witnessing resistance, torture, political violence, poetic resistance, therapy, activism

INTRODUCTION

This writing presents an orientation to work alongside survivors of torture and political violence centred in witnessing resistance and an activist informed ethical stance for decolonising and anti-oppression practice (Reynolds & polanco, 2012). This includes descriptions of what constitutes torture and political violence, as these terms have been used colloquially and informally in ways that obscure the violence of political terror. Some of the political and activist traditions behind this witnessing practice will be described, as well as understandings of acts of resistance as ever-present and useful despite the fact that resistance is often not enough to stop oppression (Wade, 1997; Reynolds, 2010a). Witnessing acts of resistance and looking for sites of resistance amplifies the person's spontaneous and strategic attempts to restore their dignity and to seek justice. This writing highlights Bahman, a survivor of torture from Iran, and illuminates his poetic resistance to torture, including some of the poems that Bahman wrote during our therapeutic work together storying his resistance. I will provide enough context of the political situation and particular acts of violence and torture so that the acts of resistance in Bahman's poems are understandable. I will make visible structures of safety (Richardson & Reynolds, 2014, in press) and accountability practices. Bahman's poems are interspersed throughout the text and following each of his poems there is a link to Gwen Haworth's film of the poem read by Bahman in Farsi and Colin James Sanders in English. Bahman then reflects on the experience of re-visiting his resistance, our therapeutic work together, and his poems through an interview with Colin. Finally, Sekneh Hammoud-Beckett offers a reflection of this work from her location as a woman from a Muslim background and as a therapist with a commitment to creative resistance (2007).

SETTING AN INTENTION

Bahman is the pseudonym of an Iranian man who is a survivor of torture and political violence who successfully claimed refugee status in Canada after his escape from Iran. Bahman was a political activist, poet, and student. He was in jail for seven years in Iran where he was brutally tortured. He was a Marxist and was raised Muslim, but is now an atheist. He found me through my website over a decade after we worked together therapeutically at a centre for survivors of torture. He asked me if I remembered the poems he had written for me during our work together, and wondered if I still found them useful. We had discussed publishing our work together and these poems someday if it was safe-enough. Bahman gave me permission to share the poems and transcripts as part of my teaching and writing, as he hoped to be of use to both therapists and survivors of torture and because he wanted the poems to be witnessed. I assured him that many people, including activists and various community workers and therapists had found the poems moving and inspiring. For me, Bahman's poems are a beautiful illumination of the usefulness of attending to acts of resistance as opposed to centring the work on details of torture.

Our collective intention is to make public a way of working with witnessing resistance to traumatic experiences that has been useful to Bahman and other survivors of torture. We had decided not to publish the poems at the time of our work together because of the risks to people still alive and at risk in prison, and also to avoid potential harms to Bahman. We decided collaboratively to publish these poems now, almost fifteen years later, as Bahman's life is stable, safe enough, and his family has been safely reunited in Canada. Bahman's intentions in making the work public at this time are to provide him with a wider networked community of witnesses (Lacey, 2005), as a further act of resistance against the torture and suffering he experienced, and as a resistance to the political disappearance of his murdered comrades.

ACCOUNTABILITY & STRUCTURING SAFETY

Structuring safety for this therapeutic work and this writing was not something to get out of the way in order to get onto the real work: Structuring safety is the real work. Accountability required that this entire project follow Bahman's pace, foster his containment, and not re-traumatise him in the re-tellings (Bird, 2006). Everyone involved in this work agreed that if at any time Bahman withdrew his permission, the project would be discarded. There had to be a believability that I would not only hear Bahman's no, but confidence that there would be no punishment or consequence. I knew that as a white settler Canadian it was important that I not write this work up alone, as I could easily transgress in multiple ways. I worked in partnership with my Solidarity Team (Reynolds, 2011) for this project, which included Colin James Sanders – a poet and my former clinical supervisor, trans activist and filmmaker Gwen Haworth, and Sekneh Hammoud-Beckett a colleague with a Muslim background from Australia whose ethical stance for the work I have a great affinity with. This team's role was to invite accountability in the writing of this work, and to collectively hold Bahman's dignity and safety at the centre.

Bahman edited these poems with Colin's assistance. He decided on the boundaries of what would be shared from our therapeutic work, what would be revealed, held back, and what details required obscuring, which shaped and constrained this description. He has created the pseudonym 'Bahman' as a testament to remembering the lives and sacrifices of his comrades who were murdered by state agents as part of political terror. Safety required that Bahman's real name not be revealed, and thus he is named as a co-author of this work through a pseudonym. This does not smooth over the ethical messiness (Reynolds, 2014) and discomfort I experience for participating, even in a required way, in the disappearance of Bahman's true identity in this project.

CAUTIONS

While we have been careful about what we will keep our own counsel on, some details of torture are revealed here as that is required in order for Bahman's acts of resistance to be made transparent and understandable (Wade, 1997). A caution about romanticising Bahman's resistance – this is an horrific tale of experiences outside of human understanding. Honouring Bahman's resistance cannot replace the requirement for

justice, which is not delivered in this work. We cannot conflate honouring resistance with delivering justice, and it is important not to be romantic or sentimental about this. As well, because of our professions' inclination to pathologise, it is important to name that Bahman's decision to make this work public is not an 'effect of survivor guilt' but an enactment of solidarity and activism against disappearance.

UNDERSTANDINGS OF TORTURE & POLITICAL VIOLENCE

Torture is defined by the United Nations Convention (1975), Article 1, as:

'... any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity.'

Human Rights organisations work to address concerns that the violence of torture may be sanctioned or condoned by the state or government, and impunity for the violence promised to the perpetrators by the state (Amnesty International, 2000).

'In torture, the power of the torturer in relation to the tortured approaches the absolute ... we hold that the power at play in torture is malignant on multiple levels. Rooted in our capacity for cruelty, ... in the desire for political hegemony – torture is a reprehensible, unjustifiable act that deforms the individuals who enact as well as suffer it, and *also the societies that ignore or allow it to take place'*. (my emphasis, Binder et al., 2011p. 182).

It is important that we use the word torture specifically, and not slip into loose language, such as surviving torturous families or childhoods. This is not to adopt a competitive hierarchy of pain and suffering (Reynolds, 2002), but to use language in critical and intentional ways, putting words to deeds (Coates, Todd & Wade, 2003; Coates & Wade, 2004, 2007). Political violence and torture are specific because of the state's involvement in possibly sanctioning, perpetrating and benefiting from the violence. Torture has become a tropé in popular culture, and is used as an archaic marker of our collective histories of past atrocities. This is a dangerous misreading of the current practices of state sanctioned violence. The use of torture metaphors needs to be closely examined and never engaged in lightly in therapy, especially as we risk relegating torture to a fictitious past or a metaphorical present by doing so, and may obscure our own governments' involvement.

CANADIAN CONNECTIONS TO TORTURE

It is important to be critical and aware of our own countries' involvement with political violence and torture when working with refugees and asylum seekers. We can easily slip into binary language that constructs the governments of Global South countries as perpetrators of torture, and creates false images of western democracies as bastions of civil rights and refuge. Twenty years ago, as activists involved in the international campaigns against torture, we could not imagine that western democracies would publicly make a case for using torture, and yet that is the world we have been in since the events of 9/11 in the USA. Practitioners who do not have a complex political analysis risk seeing torture as something that happens 'over there in countries who cannot be trusted with power'.

As activists enacting decolonizing practice (Akinyela, 2002; Razack, 2002; Smith, A., 2002; Smith, C., 2007; Walia, 2012; Reynolds & polanco, 2012), we begin with accountability to the Indigenous people of the territories we live and work in for all of our organising. Indigenous activist, Gord Hill (2010), describes the Canadian context of colonisation as made of four components: invasion, occupation, genocide, and assimilation. As part of assimilation, Canada's 'residential school's'[1] perpetrated state sanctioned violence against Indigenous children with impunity. Indigenous activism has resulted in some government apologies and tribunals, yet they omit words such as 'torture' 'genocide' 'racism', and 'white supremacy' from the discourse used to describe this deliberate political violence against Indigenous peoples in Canada (Richardson & Reynolds, 2014, in press).

The Canadian government has been accused of complicity in torture by the United Nations currently, particularly in Afghanistan and in the case of several Canadian citizens, such as Maher Arar (Commission of Inquiry into the Actions of Canadian Officials in Relation to Maher Arar, 2006) and Omar Khadar (Amnesty International, 2012; Milewski, 2012). The federal government has also passed drastic legislation that shapes refugees as illegal persons, and denies people legitimate refuge. Government officials collapse the language of 'terrorist' onto 'refugee' widely and in openly racist ways without corporate media critique in Canada (van Dijk, 1992; Dhamoon & Abu-Laban, 2009; Henry & Tator, 2002), often in-genuinely representing refugee claimants as 'criminalised immigrants who are skipping the line illegally'. The Canadian government has recently passed drastically harmful legislation to deny health care and other necessary services with enormous consequences in suffering and life-threatening situations for refugees (Toronto Star, 2012). The government has also begun to intern refugees without trial for indeterminate times, and uses security certificates, heavily critiqued by the Supreme Court of Canada, that allow the government to hold people without trial or charge in indeterminate detention. Recently the government of Canada has arbitrarily conferred 'safe country' status onto countries we will not receive refugees from, such as Hungary, where people who are Roma are continuing to experience persecution (Kueng, 2012). While the focus of this writing is Bahman, and his resistance to torture, it is important to understand the context in which this work occurred, and to problematise the image of Canada solely as a country with a solid and proud reputation of honouring our international obligations upholding the Human Rights of refugees.

The political context in which Bahman and I worked occurred prior to the unfettered Islamaphobia that followed 9/11, but we need to resist nostalgia for those 'good old days'. Racism and anti-immigrant hate (Canadian Council for Refugees, 1999) were very prevalent in Bahman's experience, but also experiences of genuine compassion and solidarity, as well as his own gratitude

for being accepted into Canada, and for the efforts of many Canadians and the Canadian government to successfully reunite his family.

PRECARIOUS CONNECTIONS

Bahman came to me as a refugee claimant. Bahman's lawyer sent him to me at our centre's office in a cab following a horrific experience in a Canadian refugee hearing. Bahman arrived at the office shaken, distraught and with a thin veil of containment over his just anger. As part of a refugee claim, survivors of torture need to present a Personal Information Form (PIF), which documents the horrific details of torture they experienced. Because he had been in jail for so long and tortured so extensively, Bahman's PIF was lengthy and detailed. Bahman said that when his lawyer presented the Canadian official with this torture story they threw it on the desk and pages of it went all over the floor. The official said something to the effect that they had previously informed this lawyer they did not have time to read through all of this and had requested that PIFs be kept much shorter.

When Bahman relayed this story to me in our initial meeting, one detail of the telling took my breath away and continues to haunt me. Bahman said that he had been in military courts, in courts that did not deliver justice in Iran. He said that as he watched the Canadian official humiliate him and discard his experiences of torture he saw the Canadian flag turn into an Iranian flag. Later he responded to this experience with the following poem:

A COUNTRY WITH NO FLAG

A country with no flag
A country with no national anthem
A country with no smile
A country that any robber
who took power
brands his sign of cruelty
on her chest
In the black clothes
Ready for crying
Ready for mourning
Mourning for robbers
Mourning for cheaters
A mournful country

(Link to Gwen's film of Bahman and Colin A Country with No Flag: http://youtu.be/Batg8-YUzN4)

Bahman said that he wanted a Canadian-born Canadian to 'witness' what happened to him at his refugee hearing and to witness his PIF. We had an Iranian therapist, and Bahman's decision to see a therapist not from his culture was awkward for us but useful for him. Sometimes refugees and survivors of torture do not want to see members of their own communities in professional capacities because they fear for their confidentiality. Often the torturers are from the survivor's own culture, which can be a barrier to trust and to safely belonging in community (Mashid Esfandiari, personal communication). This was a useful though painful teaching for our team.

Initially, Bahman had wanted me to read the PIF, as he felt that justice required a Canadian-born Canadian bear witness to all of the details of the torture he had endured. While I am willing to hear all of the details of torture, if that is what a survivor of torture believes is required, I have huge concerns about revisiting stories of what is referred to as trauma, and the possibilities of re-traumatising the person and the helper. I collaborated with Bahman around witnessing the PIF, which I referred to as torture's story of Bahman. I caught Bahman up on ideas of honouring resistance and suggested that we track his many acts of resistance against torture, which were not part of his official document.

Here I will depart from Bahman's story and illustrate a stance for witnessing and some theoretical understandings of resistance that are at the heart of this work.

AN ETHIC OF WITNESSING

In both community work and activism I describe my stance as witnessing. The hope in using witnessing is to bridge the worlds of community work and therapy with a stance for social justice activism that is decolonising and anti-oppressive (Reynolds & polanco, 2012; Reynolds & Hamound-Beckett, 2012). Although the term witnessing comes from diverse cultural, spiritual and religious traditions, I connect my engagement with witnessing practices to activist cultures.

Activist practices of witnessing hold governments and other bodies to account for abuses of power. These abuses include executions, torture and other violent strategies to silence dissent and terrorise populations into submission. Witnesses confront these human rights abusers, call for accountability, and resist political killings and the disappearance of activists. The presence of the witness can be a resistance against oppression and the political repression of voices of dissent. Many former political prisoners and survivors of torture have given testimony that attests to the power of witnessing to address injustice. The presence of an international activist community is a profound act of faith in the power of witnessing.

Political terror and torture are social projects designed to paralyse communities and thwart overt resistance. Activist communities resist political violence by remembering their dead loved ones openly, calling for political accountability. The Madres de Plaza de Mayo are Argentinian mothers whose children were 'disappeared' during the dictatorship of 1976-1983. They marched and protested publicly outside the presidential palace overtly defying the government's attempts to use political terror to silence all dissent. Their public witnessing inspired global activists, including the movement of Families of the Disappeared, and was connected to histories of resistance (Guzman-Bouvard, 1994; Amnesty International, 2008).

Witnessing also serves to resist the individualisation and isolation of survivors of torture. El Salvadoran Liberation psychologist, Martín-Baró[2] (1994), believes that torture is best understood from a perspective that is both psychological and sociopolitical, meaning that the path to liberation lies not in the individual psyche of the victim, but within social relations. The meanings given to the acts of torture are social, not individual. Torture dis-members, dis-connects, and removes people from their sites of belonging – with refugees this happens in very geographical and physical ways as well. In resistance to this dislocation, witnessing

work is situated within networked communities. Witnessing attempts to re-member (Myerhoff, 1978, 1982; Madigan, 1997), and re-connect with particular attention to cultural meanings (Prowell, 1999) and practices that belong survivors in community. I believe, along with many others across time, that culture is a site of healing (Richardson, 2012), as I believe justice-doing can promote healing.

RESISTING AUDIENCE POSITIONS, CHARITY AND NEUTRALITY

The practice of interrupting audience positions is informed by German playwright Bertolt Brecht, a committed Marxist, who began creating theatre in the 1920s with an aim to use theatre as a forum to explore political ideas (Brecht, 1964). He wanted to interrupt the audience feeling collapsed onto, or subsumed by the characters, and purposefully brought down the fourth wall separating audience and actor, sometimes showing all of the behind-the-scenes action, and showing the work of the stage crew. He wanted the audience to understand his characters' dilemmas and the social contexts of injustice behind the drama. Brecht's hope was not primarily to entertain, but to encourage theatregoers to develop a political understanding of the contexts of social injustice. Brecht believed in the possibility of theatre to inspire what I would call witnesses to work to change the world both socially and politically. Brazilian liberatory theatre maker, Augusto Boal (2000), developed the Theatre of the Oppressed expanding Brecht's ideas by having the audience become the actors, dissolving the audience position. Boal was profoundly influenced by Brazilain critical pedagogue Paulo Freire (1970). Boal exclaims, 'Spectator is a bad word ... *The poetics of the oppressed* is essentially the poetics of liberation: the spectator no longer delegates power to the characters either to think or act in his place. The spectator frees himself; he thinks and acts for himself! The theatre is action!' (p. 155)[3]

My work is informed by both Brecht and Boal, as I overtly reject neutrality, make public both where my questions come from and my political stance, and invite positions of active witness not audience.

Witnessing invites a response, something not required of an audience. Discerning positions of witnessing from audience positions is important. A position of audience does not invite accountability and can invite practices of judging, applauding (White, 1999), diagnosing, educating, explaining, and cheer-leading. The person being seen does not see the audience – in a witnessing practice the person being witnessed sees the witnesses and therein lies the duty to act, to respond and participate in dialogue with the person, seeing them as other than passive, innocent or powerless. Starving children in Africa pictured in what Oxfam calls 'poor-nography', do not see me as I watch them. I can feel that I am interacting with them – but I am not. American filmmaker and cultural theorist Susan Sontag (2003) offers a critique of viewing representations such as photographs of suffering, and challenges the neutrality of this audience position:

'The imaginary proximity to the suffering inflicted on others that is granted by images suggests a link between the faraway sufferers – seen close-up on the television screen – and the privileged viewer that is simply untrue, that is yet one more mystification of our real relations to power. So far as we feel sympathy, we feel we are not accomplices to what caused the suffering. Our sympathy proclaims our innocence as well as our impotence. To that extent, it can be (for all good intentions) an impertinent – if not an inappropriate – response. To set aside the sympathy we extend to others beset by war and murderous politics for a reflection on how our privileges are located on the same map as their suffering and may – in ways we might prefer not to imagine – be linked to their suffering, as the wealth of some may imply the destitution of others, is a task for which the painful, stirring images supply only an initial spark.' (p. 102 – 103)

A witnessing stance for the work requires that we take a position for justice as opposed to charity. Workers can become overwhelmed by complexities of the political contexts, especially when responding to torture and political violence, and replicate benevolent charity at best, and what Nigerian-American writer Teju Cole (2012) eloquently names 'the White Savior Industrial Complex' at worst; 'The White Savior Industrial Complex is not about justice. It is about having a big emotional experience that validates privilege'.

Conversely, witnessing has profound ethical and practical implications for the work. It requires a response that engages accountably with power and resists the helping professions' connections to ideals of neutrality and objectivity (Cushman, 1995; Dyer, 2002). Franz Fanon was a psychiatrist from Martinique who worked in France and fought in the Algerian war of independence. His writings, which are critical in the formation of anti-colonial and decolonising theories, unmasked the myth of neutrality in psychiatry. Fanon is part of a tradition of anti-colonial theorists who always addressed the power of the helping professions. As a psychiatrist he wrote specifically of the psychopathology of colonisation (1967). In *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963) Fanon addresses the collective psychological impact of torture on Algerians by the colonizing French military forces.

Witnessing conversations move from private pain to public issues (Waldegrave & Tamasese, 1993; Waldegrave, 1990; McCarthy, 1995, 1998; Hanisch, 1970). They resist the privatisation of pain and invite collective, just responses. A commitment to witnessing in activist cultures includes the duty of the witness to move beyond hearing individual pain into collective accountability to take actions against injustices. Witnessing, as I am using it from activist cultures, exists in relationships of solidarity, meaning shared ethics and an overt position for justice-doing which requires the witness to respond by taking actions to change the conditions that support and promote abuses of power with action.

In contrast to a positioning as audience, a witnessing stance in community work can foster relationships that say, 'In this moment, I experience myself as respected, understood and accompanied – you get me'. Witnessing is not the sole territory of professionals, as clients also bear witness, and serve as witnesses to each other and to the community worker. For Bahman, as with many asylum seekers, witnesses were scarce as he was extremely isolated, and almost everyone who had witnessed his most poignant and meaningful acts of resistance were either executed or imprisoned in another country. The absence of his most useful witnesses was yet another cost to Bahman of being a refugee.

Alongside many social justice oriented practitioners, I am skeptical and critical of locating the origins of abuses of power inside of the people who are the victims of oppression (Reynolds, 2013). For example, torture is an abuse of power that is a form of social action by people who can be called perpetrators. Torture should not be cast as a problem in the minds of people who can be called victims. American social construction theorist, Ken Gergen, critiques the field of psychology for making sense of experience as if it happens in the landscape of a person's brain (1989). In practice, this would invite us to describe Bahman as someone who is somehow broken on the inside. Similarly, Canadian response-based practitioner Allan Wade critiques the helping professions' 'continuous drift into the mind of oppressed people' (personal communication). I am more interested in addressing the actions of people oppressing others in the physical world than in finding damage in the minds of the people who are oppressed. Seeing Bahman as a person suffering with PTSD might be accurate, and even helpful in terms of some medical responses to his suffering, but it positions him in particular ways that hide his resistance and see him as acted upon by powerful others, disappearing his intelligence, autonomy, and responses.

In my work with Bahman, I found it useful to keep my attention on the ways problems are created in the social world, where power is wielded and people are harmed. I resisted being curious about both what is wrong in Bahman's mind and the minds of the torturers (Madanes et al, 1995). I am, however, committed to making sense of Bahman's responsive acts of resistance to abuses of power.

I have been informed by understandings of resistance originating from multiple activist traditions and cultures. The ever-present nature of resistance and cultural histories of resistance are hard to reference, but have been passed along within connected groups of activists within every culture. The voices of subjugated cultures of resistance are often missing, silenced, or unable to be named in what is constructed as legitimised literature (Spivak, 1988) and must be scrutinised when interpreted by western scholars (Said, 1979; 1993) especially because of the colonialism and imperialism of many euro-centric academics and institutions.

Resistance, as I am using it here, refers to all of a person's or peoples' responses against abuses of power and oppression, and the many ways that they maintain their dignity and try to move towards justice. Allan Wade's excellent article *Small acts of living: Every day resistance to violence and other forms of oppression* (1997) gives a solid understanding of this way of working with resistance. Allan's work has had a profound influence on my own understandings and practices of witnessing resistance.

In *Asylums*, Canadian-born sociologist Erving Goffman (1961) wrote about people's resistance to being held in 'total institutions' (pp.181), such as psychiatric institutes and prisons, where power is overt, and the holders of power dictate most human behaviour. He witnessed people's responses to these institutions and their nuanced and small forms of resistance, such as sticking out their tongue, walking slowly, and pretending to be unintelligent. Goffman's ideas are important because they question what usually gets attended to as resistance, which is often socially constructed as fighting back and speaking up. Instead he amplified these 'small acts of living' to describe the nuanced and multiple ways people resist violence and humiliation and work to address abuses of power.

Overt acts of resistance against oppression are the least common forms of resistance, as the adverse consequences of such resistance can be extreme (Scott, 1985). Often, people who are subjected to abuses of power cannot safely and openly protest abuse. People fight back against oppression in multiple ways, but not always in ways that are easily noticed or understood as resistance (Richardson & Wade, 2008).

This analysis is informed by American political scientist James Scott's work which focuses on the resistance of oppressed people to domination. He wrote about Southeast Asian peasant resistance to authority (1979, 1985), and then expanded on the resistance of all oppressed peasants and their 'everyday' acts of resistance in a book entitled *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: The Hidden Transcripts of Subordinate groups* (1990). Scott asserts that oppressed people always resist their oppression.

Witnessing resistance is informed by three basic understandings of resistance:

1. Wherever there is oppression there is resistance;
2. Resistance ought not to be judged by its ability to stop oppression, rather;
3. Resistance is important for its ability to maintain a person's relationship with humanity, especially in situations outside of human understanding.

We witness resistance, not because it stops the abuses of power, but because attending to resistance amplifies the person's sense of autonomy and their attempts to keep a grasp on their dignity (Richardson & Wade, 2010). As practitioners, we serve as witnesses to the person's resistance despite the success or failure of the struggle. While Bahman and I focused on his many creative, insightful, inspiring and courageous acts of resistance, it is important to hold these celebratory revelations in a tension alongside a knowing that he was not even remotely able to keep himself safe in prison. Witnessing these acts of resistance was extremely useful to Bahman though, as it honoured his ability to 'stay human' in an environment of terror and extreme degradation and suffering.

It is important not to fetishize resistance or to get taken up with romantic ideas of resistance, as our collective purpose is to promote possible lives of justice, not to have rich practices of resistance. Practitioners need to be careful not to name all acts as resistance, and assign meanings which do not fit for the person (Wade, 1997). An act can only be understood as resistance if the person performing it would describe it as such. Resistance is often inadequate in terms of addressing unjust situations. Acts of resistance can maintain a person's relationship with humanity, but they do not always stop people from being oppressed.

While I am open to bearing witness to all of the details of torture if that is what the survivor finds meaningful and believes is necessary, my ethical position is witnessing resistance. I am looking for the sites of resistance against torture, and the particular practices Bahman created or borrowed to maintain connections with his own dignity and humanity in contexts that are outside of human understanding. Other survivors of torture have taught me that practices of witnessing informed by activist cultures bring forward sites of resistance that assist the person in moving out of torture's totalising story. Witnessing can re-member survivors with more meaningful and connective ways of being.

These understandings of witnessing resistance are the centre of my therapeutic approach to work with survivors of torture and political violence. Here I will return to Bahman's story and poems to illustrate our witnessing of his poetic resistance.

WITNESSING BAHMAN'S RESISTANCE

Our witnessing of Bahman's resistance began with asking these kinds of questions:

- Bahman, many people die under torture. I wonder if you can teach me how you survived.
- When you say they had total power and you couldn't do anything to stop them, what did you do?
- You've said you were in a fight for your life, yet powerless with no weapons against armed enemies. How do you understand your ability to still be alive?
- Is it a possibility that you won a battle for your life against seriously powerful enemies? How do you make sense of this?

Bahman seemed excited by these questions. He responded by sitting up, looking me in the eye, moving his shoulders back, and telling me no-one had ever asked him about his resistance, although he had been repeatedly interrogated about every detail of the torture. His embodied response to these simple questions began my profound education of his 'repertoire of resistance' (Allan Wade, personal communication). He referred to himself for the first time as a member of a prison study group and a poet. He wondered if I might be interested in hearing the stories of his resistance through poetry. Throughout the next years, Bahman and I visited pieces of torture's story of him, but more importantly, we engaged in a 'poetic resistance', storying Bahman's resistance to torture.

Through these poems, Bahman expresses his own responses and understandings: They do not purport to provide an accurate description of events. Poetry provided Bahman the vehicle to decide what would be paid attention to in relation to his imprisonment and torture. This is reflective of Colin's teachings, which he refers to as a 'Poetics of Resistance' (Sanders, 1999; 2007), that in compassionate dialogue alongside suffering others 'Meaning is evoked, not prescribed or represented' (1995, p.44).

REFUGEE STATUS & 'PRECARIOUS LIVES'

Distinguishing Bahman's refugee experience from experiences of torture and incarceration possibly conflates more than it reveals, as for Bahman the experience was fluid. He experienced terror throughout the refugee process. The real risk of return and being tortured and possibly executed extra-judicially was not over. Bahman's poem *Sitting and Waiting* speaks to refugees' un-ending terror of torture, the ever-present fear of being denied refugee status, and being handed over to the torturers by unaccountable host countries. There is always the possibility of becoming a victim of torture by proxy, as Canadian officials have contributed to the torture of their own citizens at the hands of other governments' agents. There is also the oppression of internment, and the possibility of being held without charge or trial by security certificates while in Canada as a host country. In 2010 a third of all prisoners incarcerated in Canada were asylum seekers (CBSA, 2010; Fortier, 2013). These situations constitute the fabric of the precarious lives (Butler, 2004; Walia, 2013) of refugees in general and Bahman in particular:

SITTING AND WAITING

Sitting and waiting
in the line of a slap
while your hands are tied
Standing in front of waves of accusation
while your mouth is shut
And the eyes which are blindfolded
with a black cloth
And I am watching the future
Future is unknown.
Escaping from a threat
and being trapped in another threat
Where is the safest place
in the world?
Where is the end of being
a refugee?

(Link to Gwen's film of Bahman and Colin reading Sitting and Waiting: http://youtu.be/kwYPJcv5p1s)

Initially Bahman was taken with despair, an absence of spirit, and spoke of a profound sense of 'emptiness'. Given his horrific experiences, and the terror of uncertainty he was facing as a refugee, it was easy for emptiness to tell him that all that he had done as an activist working for justice in Iran was for nothing. He was convinced that the best of his comrades were dead, and that he would be unable to honour their lives or work in meaningful-enough ways. His faith in the possibility of having a useful life after surviving torture and incarceration was diminished. Bahman said, 'Emptiness drags me into the corner, telling me that everything you did, everything you suffered, it was for nothing'. This was a particularly long, dark and painful time for Bahman. He articulated his experience of despair and emptiness in this poem:

I KNOW A GOD

I know a God
I know a God who is old now
In a wheelchair
Careless
The God that could tear up the sea
changing a stick of wood to a snake
Now in silence
I know a handicapped God
A devil rules over him
I know I handicapped God that when
His children are being tortured
He doesn't feel any pain
And when their mothers
Are crying and screaming Why? Why?
He doesn't listen
He doesn't care
I know a handicapped God
A devil rules over him
And every day brings him warm soup

I know a devil
His friends are ruling all over the world
They are even ruling over
Your God

(Link to Gwen's film of Bahman and Colin reading I Know a God: http://youtu.be/m80rMXQ9c3A)

RESISTING OPPRESSION AND RESTORING DIGNITY: THE STORY OF 'THE 19'

Bahman's resistance is revealed in particular responses to oppressive acts. I tell survivors of torture that I need to know what they think I need to know in order to understand, and do not intentionally focus primarily on details of trauma, as I am more committed to making sense of their acts of resistance. However, I do need to know the specific details of oppressive acts so that the acts of resistance are made transparent and meaningful. In Bahman's situation the oppression was overt and nameable. In some other contexts, such as violence within a heterosexual marriage, the violence may pass for normal, resistance may pass for, 'not doing anything' and may need to be brought forward more skilfully and intentionally (Richardson & Wade, 2008, 2010).

In our therapeutic conversations, Bahman and I used the word 'pressures' to mean the actual acts of torture, when Bahman was being purposefully harmed and experienced extraordinary pain. We used the word 'pressures' so that our conversations would be less painful, enabling Bahman to experience enough-containment, and so that torture did not become all that was talked about. We chose to speak of torture as 'pressures' as a liberatory language practice (Reynolds, 2010b), not as a means of minimising, distancing or sanitising the experience. As well, I followed Bahman's diction and language choice on such words as 'solidarity' and 'comrades'.

Bahman shared many acts of resistance with me, and has chosen to share this particular example here, a horrific experience that was terrifying and possibly life threatening. Several guards arbitrarily decided that the prisoners in Bahman's prison block could no longer go outside for physical exercise apparently related to false claims against members of the group. The block had an open format, during the day prisoners were not locked up individually. In response to this arbitrary collective punishment, 58 prisoners defied the guards, and forced their way onto the exercise grounds. The guards retaliated by wielding weapons and hurting people indiscriminately. Subsequently, the next day fewer prisoners ran the gauntlet of violent guards. As the number of prisoners participating in the resistance action diminished so did their relative safety, in particular some anonymity in terms of who may have pushed or even touched a guard, and their physical proximity to being hit. Bahman continued in this resistance every time the prisoners forced their way onto the exercise field. The consequences were immediate and violent, with risks of unknown future punishment that were more dangerous and terrifying. When the number of prisoners participating in this resistance plummeted to 19 the prisoners consulted and decided to end this action informed by a prudent reading of the escalating risk. These prisoners had gone out seven times, each experience more terrifying than the last as the guard's violence escalated and the prisoners' relative safety diminished.

Bahman spoke of the resistance of 'The 19' as a restoration of his own dignity, but more-so he spoke of affirming the humanity of the entire prison population and their collective dignity, including prisoners who did not overtly participate in these particular acts of resistance. Bahman also resisted judging the participation or non-participation of any prisoner, as he tried to share with me his hard-won knowing that you cannot know what is going on for another person. Within this prison context, Bahman was mindful to always uphold the dignity of others, even when their public acts might invite judgement. In this he is mirroring Scott's writings about 'hidden transcripts' (1990) and how resistance is often not read as such for good reasons, one of which is that much resistance is successful because it is never overt enough as resistance for the oppressors to name it and react punitively with seeming legitimacy (2012).

Conversations to make Bahman's resistance transparent and apparent were detail based and specific. As Allan Wade says (2007), this does not require huge, intricate, theoretical questions, but questions like; 'What did you do?'. 'What did they do next?'. 'So then what did you do?'. The purpose of this dialogue is to get a full, rich and illuminating account of the acts of resistance, not an accurate account of events as might be needed for court. It is important that the dialogue bringing forward these details does not replicate interrogation, especially with survivors of torture and political violence.

These kinds of questions were used to enrich the storying of Bahman's resistance:

- How did you co-ordinate your responses as a group immediately in the face of the guard's violence?
- How were you able to respond collectively in the moment without discussion and consultation?
- What pre-exsisting points of unity made these collective responses possible?
- How were you able to continue moving in the face of what you call 'paralysing fear'?

Questions like these were used to understand the meaning of Bahman's resistance and how it was inextricably connected to dignity for him:

- What does it mean to you that you were a member of 'The 19'? What does your resistance with these prisoners say about you as a person, then and now? What does it say about your comrades?
- What did it take for you to participate in this resistance? What qualities does your solidarity with 'The 19' speak to?
- Bahman, you have told me many stories of daily acts of resistance you took part in both collectively and on your own. Why does this particular story of 'The 19' hold so much meaning for you?
- You've said 'The 19' restored your dignity, possibly saving your life, tell me more about this.
- What does this restoring of dignity mean for you? For 'The 19'? For other prisoners?

Bahman wrote this poem to honour the resistance of 'The 19':

FROM A SCRATCH

From a scratch
To a bullet wound
From a whisper
To a scream
From a slap
To whiplash
We went all the way
To prove our innocence
To prove our truthfulness

(Link to Gwen's film of Bahman and Colin reading From a Scratch: http://youtu.be/1TKvHZY8TOI)

WITNESSING BAHMAN'S RESISTANCE TO HORROR

Bahman had a great friend in prison, Amir, who was executed. Amir was a hero and mentor to Bahman because of his literary and strategic intelligence, courage, lifetime of activism, commitment and vision of a possible just world. While Bahman was not present at Amir's execution he was taken with an horrific and gruesome image of his dear friend hanging at the end of a rope. This image haunted Bahman through night terrors, flashbacks, and despair. In response to Bahman's suffering, we engaged in conversations that resisted these images, as well as resisting the disappearance of Amir by political murder, and the state's attempt to sever the relationship between Amir and Bahman with political killing.

Activist traditions of resisting the disappearance and silencing of activists who suffer torture, political violence and political killings (Guzman-Bouvard, 1994; Amnesty International, 2008)[4] have a profound influence in a witnessing orientation to the work. The following is a re-telling of our therapeutic conversation from a transcript we made, and that Bahman agreed to let me use in teaching. This conversation was painful, beautiful, spirited, and filled with profound and rich silences in which Amir's presence was almost palpable. This conversation was collaboratively constructed as Bahman's responses to my questions evoked further inquiry (White & Epston, 1990; Anderson, 1993, 1997; Madigan, 2011). The dialogue evokes Bahman's resistance to the horrific image of Amir's execution:

- Bahman, you've spoken of your friendship over years in prison with Amir. What does 'friendship' mean in this prison? How many friends might Amir have truly named?
- What qualities and ways of being did Amir witness and respect in you? What meaning does your shared participation in 'The 19' hold?
- Is it possible that Amir might have thought of you at the end of his life? What difference might your respect and love have made to Amir in those moments (Tomm, 1985)?

We sat in mournful silence for a long while. Eventually Bahman spoke into the silence, 'I never thought about this before ... and I'm thinking now, did you think of me in those moments before you died, (turning to me) because he knew they were going to kill him ... (looking back across the room) ... could I have been one of your last thoughts facing death ...'. Bahman has evoked Amir's presence, and speaks across time and death directly to his friend, with sideways references to me and the present. The conversation occurs across the fluidity of time, from past to present, evoking a possibly different future for Bahman, and for his ability to bring Amir and their friendship into his future without paralysing horror.

This exchange illustrates my orientation to visiting what is sometimes referred to as traumatic material. We visit the past from the relative safety of the present with an intention of creating possibility for a different and preferred future with less suffering (Reynolds, 2010a). The work is future oriented, not focused on the past (Stephen Madigan, personal communication). For Bahman this experience changed the relationship he had with the horrific image of Amir's execution. While we cannot know what difference Bahman's love and solidarity made to Amir at the tragic end of his life, this resistance left Bahman with better, more honouring, and hopeful questions about Amir and their love and profound respect for each other.

HONOURING BAHMAN'S RESISTANCE

Bahman had always dreamed of winning an Olympic medal as a child. He said that one resistance strategy he had was emulating that childhood desire. Bahman concluded that, 'If I can keep my silence, if I have the strength and power to not name anyone, it will be as good as a gold medal'. The following quote is from our therapeutic transcript:

Bahman: 'When I think what I went through it was not that hard, because some people died ... well for me it was hard enough. But sometimes I think how many people, what percentage of people could go through that hell and come out without saying anything. Without giving a name. Throughout all those years ... (silence). You know everything has been revealed when you have been arrested, and they offer it, to give the names of others. All through these many years, I had always this fear that someone is going to talk about you, give your name to save themselves. It's very hard ... (silence).'

The following details of one incident of torture Bahman suffered are required in order for his acts of resistance to be revealed. Following a session in which he was tortured and while he was again able to not give anyone's name to the torturers, Bahman was dragged to his cell and hung by his wrists for eight days. When he was released from these bonds he was physically unable to stand, and was in excruciating pain. As with every experience of torture, Bahman did not know if he could survive another episode, and he could not know if he would be able to withhold giving anyone's name again.

It is important to Bahman for readers to understand that the following poem is not a metaphor:

AT THE TIME I WAS DOWN ON MY KNEES

At the time I was
Down on my knees
With swelling feet
Exhausted
Thirsty for sleep
At the time they were
Powerful and angry
I was the winner
Of that battlefield
My weapon was my silence
I was the champion
No crowd
No witness
But my reward was more than
A gold medal
My reward
Was the safety
Of my friends

(Link to Gwen's film of Bahman and Colin reading At the Time I Was Down on My Knees: http://youtu.be/NNfeHLBb7W0)

Bahman engaged in a diversity of acts of resistance throughout his imprisonment, and much of our work tracked this diversity

of responses. Acknowledging acts of resistance is important not because these acts are successful in mitigating harm or stopping oppression, but because they keep the person connected to humanity and their own dignity. Bahman's silence was not the apex of some hierarchy of resistance, nor something he would describe as heroic, as he would not want to engage in or invite competitive judgements of his comrades' responses to torture. This could inadvertently contribute to shaming and judging the many survivors of torture who did give names. In fact, many activist communities have agreements about ways to delay divulging information, such as names, if a member is arrested so that others might have time to escape. The fact that activists strategise around the giving of names under torture attests to the inevitability of speaking. We have shared this experience of Bahman's silence to give context to this powerful poem that tracks this particular example of Bahman's resistance.

LAST WORDS FROM BAHMAN

This project is part of Bahman's on-going political activism. It embodies the commitments he made to his comrades who died under torture and by executions, that if he could live and survive, he would carry their legacies, and resist the disappearance of their sacrifices and murders. Colin posed these questions for Bahman following Gwen's filming of his poems.

Colin: Therapists don't often get to catch up with people over time about our work together. You were tenacious in locating Vikki after over a decade, why was it important for you to reconnect with her?

Bahman: Even after fifteen years I never forgot Vikki. My wife and I always wanted to reconnect with her. Thinking about her always, and trying to find her, then finding her website was amazing to us. She looks older with short hair and more tattoos, but I knew her smile and was so pleased to be able to contact her again. We have lost so many people that to find her again meant much to us.

Colin: Was there anything particularly that helped Vikki be useful for you?

Bahman: Vikki was important because she understood me, and my wife, our politics, our sacrifice, why we made decisions that led to suffering, but resistance too. She helped me in one of the most desperate and crucial times in my life. There was a picture of Che Guevara, who I love, in Vikki's office and immediately I knew she would understand us, why we had to take risks for justice. Others judged us for our activism, I knew Vikki understood us and she never questioned my ethics, why I sacrificed. She was a witness and that was meaningful. Also she understood that I was a father and a husband, even if I was exiled and isolated from my family. She helped my family reunite in Canada as part of our work which was maybe the biggest thing. I want to show her that our respect and appreciation for her will never end.

Colin: What was important or beneficial in the work you and Vikki had done together?

Bahman: We didn't really do psychotherapy I don't think, there was no medication or diagnosis or treatment really. More like two activists witnessing each other from very different lives. This is international, with ideas of solidarity. It was important as a refugee that some Canadian cared. It made me proud of our ideas, and meant we're not alone – that my sacrifice was worth it. My wife remarked that it was important I worked with a woman, as gender equality matters in our analysis and politics. I think if Vikki had said we needed to focus on my trauma and acts of torture, and gone into that again and again, I think I would be traumatised now, but I am not. It's not like that, I remember my resistance more, especially because of the poems.

Colin: What was it like reading the poems, hearing me read them to you?

Bahman: Well, honestly I am proud of my resistance, that it matters to you, to Vikki and our friend Gwen, that you get me. It is useful to hear your voice and my words, and you are so artistic and caring with the poems, like they really matter, that's important too. And seeing Gwen filming us, how she artistically cares for the poems. About the recent project, I feel the pain of those hard times, but at the same time I'm happy that for the first time my thoughts and feelings are being recorded in a very effective way. I hope that many people can benefit from it.

Colin: How has it been useful for you to re-visit your resistance through this project?

Bahman: I always was afraid my sacrifice wouldn't matter, that I've done nothing. This project, especially Gwen's films, means that something of me will stay, that's so important. The level of sacrifice, what I endured you know, well not just me, all those people who were tortured and died, and are suffering now. The poems are a legacy for my child, and this project holds them for my child, and for the families of my lost friends.

IN-CONCLUSION

Bahman's poetic resistance centred our conversations around his and his comrades' courageous, intelligent, tactical, collective, and prudent knowledges. Understandings of resistance are at the heart of my work alongside community workers and clients who struggle in the margins and at the intersections of domains of power. Witnessing resistance always gives us a hope-filled place to go in our work with clients, as there is always a protest against abuses of power and oppression. Ideas and practices of witnessing resistance have been of use to victims of abuses of power in constructing identities that resist pathology and are wise, prudent, and resourceful, as well as resisting therapeutic

conversations that can be re-traumatising for the person. Witnessing resistance is also a useful practice for the sustainability of community workers as it invites us into hope-filled conversations, which can be transformative for both workers and clients. Bearing witness to Bahman's poetic resistance has been useful, and so much more than merely useful, for my own relationship with sustainability, offering what Yukon activist and community worker, Renee-Claude Carrier, refers to as 'vicarious resistance' (personal communication).

RESPONSE: THE POETICAL STANCE IN RESI**STANCE**, BY SEKNEH HAMMOUD-BECKETT

'Every Iranian artist, in one form or another, is political. Politics have defined our lives'
Iranian exiled artist Shirin Neshat (2011, May).

The regime had understood that one person leaving her house
while asking herself:
Are my trousers long enough?
Is my veil in place?
Can my make-up be seen?
Are they going to whip me?
No longer asks herself:
Where is my freedom of thought?
Where is my freedom of speech?
My life, is it livable?
What's going on in the political prisons?

Marjane Satrapi, Iranian author of *Persopolis, The Story of a Childhood* (2007, p.305).

Dear Bahman and Vikki,

Vikki, your collaborative and respectful project with Bahman and his family is a testimony of the endurance and legacy of attending to acts of resistance. The work skilfully highlights the movement away from the sanitised dominant trauma lingo that often subterfuges peoples' responses in the face of adversity.

Bahman, in witnessing your poetic resiSTANCE (Hammoud-Beckett, 2010) through visual, auditory and written means, we are invited to actively participate in a stance that resists the political oppression you endured. The poetry evokes a visceral experience of injustice, juxtaposed with words of remonstration.

Bahman and Vikki, your profound work together exemplifies a 'poetic resistance', a re-storying of dignity in the face of unfathomable torture and human suffering. Bahman, your poetry echoes through my mind's heart and ears, your words a rhythmical protest. The prominent author Salman Rushdie who continues to resist the effects of a fatwa, asserts that, 'A poet's work is to name the unnameable, to point at frauds, to take sides, start arguments, shape the world, and stop it going to sleep'.

Bahman, I was fully awake on this poetic journey of resistance – imagining the isolating experience in a capricious country with no flag and no smile, or bravely naming and knowing an ailing God who has succumbed to the Shaytan's (devil) insidious ways ruling over the world. And the poignant question that calls for justice: where is the end of being a refugee? Bahman, these words echo over the seas to me in Sydney, and they speak of an admirable refusal to accept the status quo.

I give thanks to you Bahman and to Vikki for inviting me to bear witness to your resilience and resistance in the face of oppression. It fondly connected me with my father who would profess in his heavy Lebanese-English accent, 'My daughter, you must remember one thing and one thing only – the pen is mightier than the sword'.

With profound respect,

Sek

DEDICATION

For all of Bahman's comrades in prison and in the movements for justice; those who protected him, those he protected, and most especially those who died under torture and by extra-judicial executions – and in their final acts of resistance took his name, and others, safely to their graves.

For Frances MacQueen (1947-2012) who committed her life, creative energy and enormous passion to generations of refugees. I once asked Francis how she reconciled being a mother to Sarah, John and Peter, and her heartbreaking work resisting torture. She responded, 'I'm a mother – how could I not?', offering me another lesson in feminism as well.

This work and writing occurred on Indigenous territories of the Musqueam, Skxwu7mesh-ulh Uxwuhmixw (pronounced Squamish) & Tsleil-Waututh nations which were never surrendered.

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NOTES

1. The term 'residential school' is a colonial euphemism for institutions of internment and resocialisation for First Nations, Inuit and, in some cases, Métis people in Canada (Logan, 2001). Residential or mission schools were instituted under Canada's Indian Act (Department of Justice Canada, 2011), a piece of racialised legislation designed to assimilate Aboriginal people into white settler Canada (Leslie, 2002), strip them of their rights, and take their lands illegally (Harris, 2002, 2004). Attendance in residential schools was mandatory and the method of transporting children often resembled kidnapping (Miller, 1996). Christian churches were given contracts to run the facilities that housed over 150,000 children who were separated from their families and communities. The goal was to remove the Indian from the child (Campbell Scott, 1920, cited in Regan, 2010). The last institution was closed in 1996 (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2010). The violence perpetuated against the children was rampant and largely ignored by those who knew about it. Between 48% and 70% of children incarcerated were sexually abused (Feldthusen, 2007). The non-sexual physical abuse was often barbaric and indicates that the violence was systemic and deliberate, that those in charge were aware and that this was no well-intentioned mistake (Feldthusen, 2007).

2. Ignatio Martín-Baró was a Jesuit priest, liberation theologian, and also a psychologist who believed in the possibility of psychology taking a position against neutrality and addressing its collective power accountably and constructively. Following his murder by a Salvadoran death squad which was American trained, Martín-Baró's writings were posthumously collected under the title: Writings for a Liberatory Psychology. Martín-Baró said 'to achieve the psychology of liberation demands first that psychology be liberated' (1994, p. 25).

3. Both Bertolt Brecht and Augusto Boal were subjected to political violence. Brecht was forced into exile from Nazi Germany. Boal was a victim of torture in Brazil, and later forced into exile.

4. Enforced disappearances are not relics of Latin America's 'dirty wars', but occur presently in many regions of the world. In 2006, then American President Bush openly admitted the use of political disappearance by the CIA, often in foreign nations. Bush authorised these disappearances officially in 2007, and this is part of why there is a call for him to face charges of crimes against humanity (Amnesty International, 2008).

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APPENDIX

Exercise:
WITNESSING RESISTANCE IN COMMUNITY WORK

Consider these 'Understandings of Resistance':

- Whenever people are oppressed they resist
- Resistance ought not to be judged by its ability to stop oppression, rather;
- Resistance is important for its ability to maintain a person's connection to humanity, especially in situations outside of human understanding. (Wade, 1997; Reynolds, 2010a)

Think of a position of resistance you have taken in your life in response to oppression or being the victim of someone's abuse of power-over. Pick a particular event, not a generalised feeling. Choose something that you can experience and re-member with enough-containment, not necessarily without pain.

Share the story of your resistance with a witness – someone you know or trust as safe-enough. The witness's role is to ask questions to bring forward an account of your acts of resistance.

- How did you respond? What did you do?
- How did you choose this course of action? What were you paying attention to?
- What resources and knowledges were you able to access in this moment (Bird, 2006)? How was this possible? Did other events/teachings prepare you for this resistance?
- What was going on in your body in this experience? How were you experiencing your body that was useful in terms of your resistance?
- Did you have any allies in this act of resistance? Who could you count on? What differences did it/ would it make to have an ally?
- How did you attend to power in this experience? If you had had less access to power, how may you have responded? More power?
- Can you connect this act of resistance to other experiences through your life – what Allan Wade refers to as your 'repertoire of resistance'?
- How does this act of resistance serve as a resource to you in community work?

Reflexive questions to consider following the experience:

- How is it different for you to be positioned as a witness to your own resistance?
- How does witnessing resistance change your relationship to the oppressive event?
- What does this experience bring to your work as a community worker? How will it inform your theory/practice about community work that is accountable to power?
- How can you use your body's knowledges in your work now?
- What differences might your history of resistance make for:
    - The people you work alongside?
    - Your experience of yourself as a community worker?
    - Other aspects of your life?