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## **Impunity and Democratic Reconstruction**

### **Introduction**

Our experience with young groups, women and workers shows us that impunity extends in the time the traumatic effects of the violations to the human rights. From our experience we state recommendations to work with this problem at the community level.

We will start quoting Bruno Bettelheim's<sup>1</sup> definition of the extreme situation:

“ We find in an extreme situation when soon we are thrown to a series of conditions where our mechanism of adaptation and values are no useful any more and when even they can put in danger our lives that it has been entrusted to protect “

This conceptualisation shows that the traumatic nature of Terrorism of the State can not be valorised in terms of how many persons were affected by violence.

This restore the collective level of the daily experience of fear, uncertainty and threat is to have to face a social reality where the sharing social values give sense and rule the coexistence which they have been destroyed.

The persons are found defenceless, without protection and abandoned in front of a power which is exerted without limits. The social organisations, the network of support are separated. The trust is destroyed and utopia and hope are disappeared.

The elaboration of this traumatic experience pass on recognising the existence of harm, it gives significance and puts it into the objective terms in the social context which it gave origin to the such a violence. This is established as central task for fighting in favour of truth and justice.<sup>2</sup>

However, in so far “ the chosen governments are succeeded by the vote, the search of justice starts to be faded away; this confirms once more that it is no possible to trust in the institutions and it feeds back the effects of Terrorism of State. Fear, hopeless and submission became chronic. It prevails passivity, no interest, apathy and disown”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bettelheim,B.(1981) Sobrevivir. El holocausto una generación después. Editorial Grijalbo. Barcelona.

<sup>2</sup> Neumann, E. Y Monreal, A. (1990) “Asumir Colectivamente el Pasado Dicatorial: Una Tarea Ineludible”, en Para Romper el Silencio. Fasic. Santiago, Chile.

<sup>3</sup> Neumann, E. Y Monasterio,H. (1991) “La impunidad: Elemento Simbiótico del Terror”, en Actas de la III Conferencia Internacional: Salud, Represión Política y Derechos Humanos, (ed) Neumann, E. Santiago, Chile

Thus, it affects the democratic development in one of the most essential dimensions, in relation to the citizen participation in the search of both dignity and social welfare.

### **The experience**

To give an example of what it has been mentioned above we will show the lived process in a group. We were asked to collaborate because they want to be consolidated as a group and to convoke more young people to participate.

At the beginning of the process they show hope and trust. They make comments on their plans and projects. However it appears rapidly the complain on the institution which it doesn't take into accounts what they demand and distrust grows in the group. One of the participants brings into the group his experiences from another group.

“ I couldn't go on participating. I was told they were afraid on my philosophy. And if is there is more than one philosophy, the institution can break apart”

Fear rounds at unwitting level among people and in the institution. Difference is not tolerated. Homogenising is sought.

The official speech says that everyone has a place, the institution is for serving young people's interest.

As long the group can recognise its fears and distrust, they start to recognise how the authoritative power is not only outside the institution but also inside of it. The requirements are answered automatically, without thinking and so they awed.

“ We try to be different, of doing different things... But something happens..... then I received a memo, I saw it and I did it. It is always the same, without think about it”

So far as they recognise their fears and submission is internalised, young people start with a little bit of fear some actions. The institutions ask for names, they want to know who leads them and they say they want to consider it.

Young people arrive lively and content.

“ It doesn't matter what it happens... We stop being silent”...

“ We have won in the sense that we get to be united, and constitute a movement..... we are a group”.

They talked what it has happened to them, they are excited, they get in touch with the possibility to do things. Nevertheless, hopeless is installed again among them.

“ This group is what we are.... It is a dim”.

Hopeless is just a manifestation of what it is being installed from a long time ago. A fear which is no spoken about, it has hardly an existence , but nevertheless it works.

“ We feel afraid to go against the institution, they attack us, we get hurt..... There is one thing, there is a wound, there is a knowledge gained from experience. That makes you not to be so a participative person”.

During this process new persons integrate the group. It was something wished and expected. However, the young people remain for a long time in silence. They hardly move and they don't dare to even look at each other.

One of them says:

“There are things which they can no be dealt with new persons”

“It is hard to speak in front to of new persons”

It seems as if young people want to go on thinking, commenting the events, their “rebelliousness against the institution “ It can not be because there are unknown persons,  
“ What are you afraid of.....to the accusation? I can not stop thinking, and here it appears the installed fear during the dictatorship, the hardest problem to be treated, to do to the other, someone who one has to suspect to.

They manifest:

“We function under distrust... new people produce on us distrust”

And from this, it is possible to start to treat the own difficulty of trusting in another person, and tolerate and integrate the difference. It appears fear of the group to the division, to disintegration, and that the difference and the conflict turn out to be always in a dissolution.

It is referred to a past experience: “ It is not the same ...this group is new... Last year we were beginning and it didn't finish.... A politic thing was produc ed... The same discussion, people who were during 73 and those who were not there in those years.”

The group asks itself how to construct group identity, how to belong and integrate those who suffered during repression and those who didn't suffer. Under the experience of this group, this problem results in discussions and recriminating each other. Building group identity, it demands to be located in history which it should be current and shared by everyone. However, this is an avoided theme and it is whisked away.

Here it appears the theme of guilt. In spite of the age and the fact not to have lived the events which surrounded the coup d'état, young people point out:

We have a history for our own fault, we are victims and the person responsible for somebody's suffering.

Thus is how one of the member of the group react facing the history because his father is a missing person in those days. It seems as there is no justice, it can not be achieved the guilty persons, it can be discriminated and everyone end feeling guilty, too.

## Comments

In Chile exists an increasing concern by the young people. The problems are:<sup>4 5 6</sup>

- the alarming increase of violence and delinquency
- adolescent pregnancy, and
- limited participation in the voting process.

These problems are approached as if there is no relation to our recent past, and the programs are oriented to the development of social abilities and self esteem as a factor of protection.

We consider these phenomena must be understood as the result of dispersion and desegregation of young movement. As its base the lost of utopias and hopes are found, then the impossibility to participate in collective projects of social transformation. Everything prevents the development of a relation more constructive with oneself and the social reality.

But this demands that those in charge of planning, implementing and co-ordinating these programs have the capacity of listening so as to understand the derived process from impunity to the violations of human rights.

Nevertheless, dissociation has been produced at the social level. On one hand, the human rights organisations have reduced their interventions on the directed people. On the other hand, social organisations have not take in account this reality. Which it makes impossible working through o the traumatic experiences.

It seems important to open a space to the dialogue and the meeting among those who have devoted more than two decades to the problem of human rights and those who approached to the so called social problem. It's means treat to understand the phenomenon of social dispersion and the lose of the social values in both aspects, effects of the neo liberal model and the result of the difficulty and fear to be organise. This will make possible to open space for the elaboration of the harm produced by the violation of human rights and its impunity.

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<sup>4</sup> INJ. (1997) Segunda Encuesta Nacional de la Juventud. Santiago, Chile, 1997.

<sup>5</sup> CONACE. (1996) Estudio Nacional de Consumo de Drogas. Santiago, Chile

<sup>6</sup> Letelier, a.M. y Lobos, V. (2000) Sistematización de la experiencia de Trabajo Psicosocial con Familias en Extrema Pobreza. SENAME. Santiago, Chile