

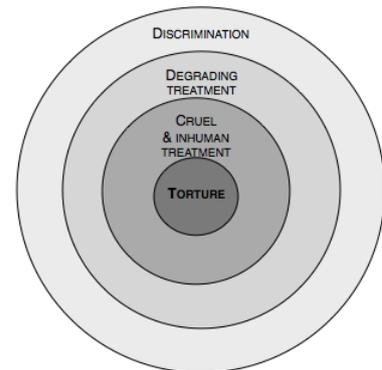
MUSIC TORTURE: RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES

SUMMARY REPORT ON THE WORKSHOP HELD ON 29 APRIL 2011 IN GÖTTINGEN

The workshop “Music Torture: Research Perspectives” was organised by the Free Floater Junior Research Group “Music, Conflict and the State” with generous financial support from the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft and the Lower Saxony Ministry of Science and Culture.¹ The workshop aimed to establish both the current stage of research and priorities for further work. Particular focuses were as follows: the current legal understanding of torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment (CID punishment); the impact of using music in connection with torture on both survivors and perpetrators; challenges facing survivors of this type of torture in making valid their experiences; perspectives from the fields of music psychology and music therapy; and possible priorities for awareness-raising.

In an introductory presentation on *Torture and Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Punishment: Definitions and Concepts in Human Rights Law*, **Stefan Kessler** (Chair, Amnesty International Germany) stressed the importance of stating whether torture and CID punishment is to be defined in line with international law, or another definition. The UN Convention Against Torture (CAT) gives an extensive definition of torture² but is less clear on the topic of CID punishment. An EC Council Regulation (No. 1236/2005, 27 June 2005) defined CID punishment as any act “*by which significant pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is inflicted on a person, when such pain or suffering is inflicted either by or at the instigation of, or with the consent or acquiescence of, a public official or other person acting in an official capacity. It does not, however, include pain or suffering arising only from, inherent in or incidental to, lawful penalties.*” The difference to torture is portrayed here as a difference of degree relating to the pain inflicted; there is, however, no “Richter scale” for pain to distinguish “severe” from “significant” pain. Former UN Special Rapporteur on Torture Manfred Nowak has argued that cruel and inhuman punishment (excluding purely degrading treatment) need not be distinguished from torture on the basis of the intensity of the pain inflicted, but the purpose of the conduct, the intention of the perpetrator and the powerlessness of the victim. Torture is a particularly serious attack on human dignity because severe pain is deliberately inflicted to a particular end and where the victim is completely powerless. These distinctions do not necessarily apply in the case of CID treatment.

The distinction between torture and CID treatment can be represented by a series of concentric circles (see diagram, over). In the discussion it was noted that the definition given in



¹ Further information on the group, on previous workshops, and on the Article 5 Project on music and torture can be found at <http://www.uni-goettingen.de/en/84354.html>

² Viz., “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. It does not include pain or suffering arising only from, inherent in or incidental to lawful sanctions.”

human rights law, e.g. in exempting domestic legal sanctions, is in some ways limited, but by no means useless. The US government, for example, tried in vain to argue that water boarding is legal according to US domestic law.

In the first of three presentations dedicated to specific examples of the use of music in connection with torture and CID punishment, **Dr. Juliane Brauer** (Max Planck Institute of Human Development, Berlin) spoke on *Music and Violence: Cultural Manifestations of Absolute Power in the Concentration Camps Sachsenhausen and Auschwitz*. Dr. Brauer distinguished between three distinct forms of musical violence typical of the camps:

i. playing music as violence: musicians in the many camp orchestras realized the harsh impact their music had on other prisoners, and this was a source of shame/pain to the musicians; in addition, since playing badly could have fatal consequences, this type of forced music-making constituted forced labour; music thus became a source of fear, pain and despair - rates of suicide were very high amongst members of the Auschwitz orchestras.

ii. hearing music as violence: military marches demonstrated absolute power (physical and social) over the prisoners; the mindful body (a holistic term used to stress physical as well as psychological aspects) was attacked in the form of musical violence, generating an intense emotional conflict between positive memories and the current situation as evoked through music.

iii. forced music-making as violence: forcing people to sing or play was a form of no-touch torture, even though the term had not yet been invented. Almost all survivors of Sachsenhausen recall being forced to sing, and many recall this specifically as a form of bodily distress. It was a demonstration of total power on the part of the guards, was used to collectively humiliate certain groups of prisoners, and also had a devastating physical impact: forced singing during hard labour for example accelerated the destruction of prisoners' physical and mental health. Non-Germans forced to sing in German were at particular risk of punishment if they got words wrong. Forced singing was also a particular act of violence against German Jews, traditionally seen to be musically talented; the musical skills of Jewish musicians in the camps were deconstructed and turned against them, thus removing a potential source of resistance and psychological survival.

Dr. Anna Papaeti (University of Göttingen) presented initial results of her research into *Music and Terror in Greece under the Junta*. Transcripts of the trials of people accused of torture during the Junta make it clear that music and loud noises were used to break and humiliate prisoners. Judges however tended to downplay musical references in survivors' testimonies, interrupting them and asking them to concentrate instead on "important" information. Some songs popular at the time, including a veiled anti-Junta song called "Tarzan", were repeatedly reported to have been used during imprisonment and punishment. For example, they were heard when soldiers returned to prisons drunk, and would stage what they called "tea parties with toast", during which they would beat prisoners in their cells while singing "Tarzan". Other prisoners suggested hearing the songs continuously, indicating that they were played on a tape loop rather than from the radio. Forced singing was also used: in this case prisoners who had been deprived of water were forced to sing with their heads forcibly held back, increasing the friction and pain on their very dry throats and in some cases causing people to choke on their own saliva. Music was also used to mask acoustic evidence of torture. It is also reported that civilians living close to police stations where people were tortured, played loud music to mask the cries of those being tortured.

The US government was influential in helping the Junta learn various methods of torture (this much can be surmised from a CIA manual issued in Greece in the 1960s). Trial transcripts indicate that music, sounds and forced singing were strategies used to mask torture, cause sleep deprivation, mental exhaustion, and to humiliate prisoners. Many questions remain unanswered, for example, what was the source of the songs (radio or recordings), who selected them and why, and how was the music played back? Interviewees who had mentioned the use of music during trials subsequently sometimes forgot this aspect of their treatment, possibly due to the passing of time,

because they suppressed the memory, or because during the trials they were not encouraged to talk about music.

During the discussion of these two papers, it was asked whether the music itself, or the context, or the interplay between the two had the most violent impact. In response, it was suggested that prisoners' individual situations and perceptions were also a key factor. For example, musicians forced to play music they knew and loved in NS camps often experienced a breakdown of their musical identity and could not cope, but others were able to reinterpret the music on their own terms and use it as a tool of survival. It was noted that psychologists struggle to define emotions generally, and especially emotions relating to music and to the aesthetic experience. In the case of Greece it was noted that one prisoner reported being able to reformulate the meaning of the songs played indicating that whenever prisoners are able to take any active part to fight their feeling of powerlessness, this can be an effective strategy to cope with the situation. It was stressed once again that in the instances discussed, music was used to inflict not only psychological but also physical violence.

Following this discussion, there was a screening and discussion of the film *Musik als Waffe / Songs of War* made by **Tristan Chytroschek** (a & o buero Filmproduktion GmbH). The film, shortly to be broadcast on ARTE, presents extensive material on the use of music in interrogation methods used in US detention camps including Guantánamo Bay. Music used included songs from the children's programme *Sesame Street* as well as country music and metal music. As well as reports from former prison guards and interrogators, and former prisoners, the film also covers other uses of music in a military context, including the most recent developments in so-called sonic warfare. The US military use of music was discussed further in the presentation *Music Torture in US Military Detention Centres* by **Prof. Suzanne G. Cusick** (New York University). This presentation was derived from her most recent research into the topic, and was based on three of four interviews with men now freed from US custody. This research reveals just how systematically music has been used in US detention camps. Nearly all released prisoners have talked about music, and reach a point where words cannot describe their feelings: "you feel as though you are going mad". Prof. Cusick suggested that music effects a destruction of prisoners' subjectivity: sound blasts away their sense of privacy, they live in an un-private isolation. The exact usage of music differed in each case. One interviewee who spent five to six months in Guantánamo described how loud music, strobe lights and stress positions alternated with interrogation – with music functioning as a surrogate for the interrogators when they left the room. In the case of Bagram detention center, as recounted by another interviewee, music and weird noises were played on a loop throughout the prison with only brief periods of silence; which prevented prisoners, amongst other things, from making audible contact with each other. All interviewees emphasised the physical nature of the violence committed through music: one interviewee relating how the constant music prevented him from distracting himself from the physical pain he was experiencing; another stressed that when loud enough, music has a physical impact on the body in addition to the extreme disorientation and confusion that persistent music causes.

According to Prof. Cusick, the use of music torture is only infrequently cited in the cases of those seeking recompense from the US government. This may be for two different reasons: first, because this form of torture is experienced differently by different prisoners - some react worse to it than others -; and second, because the US government officially continues to deny that there is such a thing as psychological torture (the US lodged a reservation to this effect when signing CAT). The interviewing process itself highlighted the ethical issues connected with research into this topic, given the need to clearly differentiate the interview process from the experience of interrogation.

In the first of two presentations dedicated to the effects of torture and the implications for rehabilitation, **Sibylle Rothkegel** (Office for Psychosocial Issues, FU Berlin) discussed *The long-term impact of physical and psychological torture*. This impact is felt not only by victims

themselves, but in many cases also by family members over several generations. Thus, it is not uncommon for survivors of torture to ask for treatment because they in turn direct aggression towards their family members. The trauma of organized violence is exacerbated where those in authority - be they trial judges or those managing asylum applications - do not take the issue seriously.

Music therapy is sometimes used in treating trauma. Responding to a question on whether this could be counterproductive in the case of people who had been tortured with music, it was pointed out that since those being treated have control over the therapeutic situation, the difficulty is not likely to arise. On the other hand, certain triggers, particularly sound and smell, can prove dangerous when survivors encounter them outside of the therapeutic context. Ms. Rothkegel also suggested that the situation for asylum seekers has improved in the last decade or so, since their accounts of trauma are more likely to be taken seriously. She also argued that it is a fallacy to suggest that psychological damage from torture cannot be proven, since it is possible to make a clear diagnosis.

Prof. Gunter Kreutz (University of Oldenburg) introduced his presentation entitled *Does music provoke evil? Psychological perspectives on music and torture* with a quotation from Ming Ti, Chinese minister of state police around 3000 BC, who suggested that people be executed by subjecting them to persistent loud music. Prof. Kreutz listed a number of factors and mechanisms by which music may be harmful, including physical characteristics (sound intensity, duration and spectral composition), psychological impact (sensory and cognitive processing, attention/associate memory, emotional impact), and possible health consequences (acute and chronic hearing loss and other damage to the auditory organs; stress and impact on cardiovascular system including through sleep deprivation; induction of negative emotions such as anger/fear/sadness). The exact impact will depend on the individual and also on the context. Further, he discussed research on the connection between music and manipulation, including the impact of coordination action (e.g. marching) on peoples' willingness to commit certain acts (good or bad). Evidence suggests that coordinated action between individuals enhances subordination and obedience in performing certain tasks. The experiments referred to did not specifically use music. In the discussion, it was pointed out that in the case of people suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, sounds associated with trauma are stored deeply in the brain and can affect "fight or flight" responses. Evidence of this type could be used to strengthen the case for the harmful impact of music in connection with torture.

The closing discussion began with a summary of the points raised, in the context of the lead question posed at the beginning of the workshop. Amongst other points, it was noted that there is less information currently available on the impact of music on perpetrators than on victims of torture, and that the role of "bystanders" - including the companies that make sonic weapons - needs to be considered more. Regarding the difficulties faced by survivors in making their case, there are significant regional differences. More research is needed to consolidate existing perspectives from the psychology of music on possible impacts of music torture. A number of suggestions were made as to forums in the fields of music and medicine, music psychology and cognitive science of music, and health/therapy generally, as well as existing databases and research centres that could hold relevant information. It was also noted that as therapists become more sensitive to the issue, more information on music torture and its impact may emerge during therapy. A priority for further work must therefore be to raise awareness of the issues among members of the legal profession, human rights advocates, therapists etc. For this purpose, more quantitative and qualitative work is needed, including precise descriptions and analysis. In addition to addressing experts, it was pointed out that more general public awareness of the issue is needed as well.