

Tina Minkowitz - The relationship between spiritual and political resistance to psychiatric assault: Exploring torture issues, militance and non-violence

As a survivor of psychiatric assault, I have had to struggle both on the spiritual level with the consequences and my healing and transformation - and on the political level as an activist and now as a human rights lawyer. My personal experience has shaped my advocacy for forced psychiatric drugging and electroshock in particular to be seen as forms of torture or ill-treatment. This has now been accepted by the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, drawing on language invented during the drafting of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. I had originally sought a more personal healing and tried unsuccessfully to find collective healing with other survivors. My questions such as: how is it possible to learn to come through torture whole, with dignity? and, what can you do if you have in fact been broken? I struggled to answer, first witnessing and experiencing a more directly political repression firsthand, which was a retraumatization. Then, in a process of spiritual opening and exploration that continues to this day and can never finish. One of my questions now is, how can I (or, can I) be true to both the political and the spiritual dimensions of my own struggle? I believe that survivors of psychiatric assault have a rich knowledge of human nature from having had to confront its depths: not only or primarily the depths of "madness" for which we may have been incarcerated, but the "madness" of society and humanity around us that thinks lockup and bodily invasion is an appropriate response to someone in pain or elation. Society creates madness by institutionalizing it in more ways than one. This presentation is more personal and exploratory than I have been accustomed to doing in the past. Indeed it will be a challenge to see if there is any meeting point between the legal and the spiritual. When working on the legal norms, this becomes a way of expressing the truth in my experience and, I have hoped, in our collective experience. What happens when we express the truth directly? Does it help to have the legal norms to make a social space for discourse about psychiatric assault as torture? Shall we leave the legal behind and take flight into creating knowledge together in whatever might evolve?