

Chapter 9

Examining the Circle of Attachment Trauma, Shame, and Marginalization: The Unheard Voices of Young Kutchi Girls

Manasi Kumar

Abstract This chapter offers a psychological understanding of the experience of social marginality as viewed from the perspective of young girls from the Indian province of Gujarat. Secure attachments are one of the primary ‘capabilities’ that have direct bearing on an individual’s sense of identity and freedom. Insecure attachments, particularly dismissing kinds, lead to inhibitions in personality development and build up layers of shame and self-doubt. The author examines how the psyche is tormented by repeated experiences of social marginalization in the form of dismissal at the hands of family, and how shame becomes an abiding emotion—creating further doubts, disenfranchisement, and alienation.

Keywords Psychological attachment • Emotions • Identity • Freedom

9.1 Introduction

Let me start by explaining how I arrived at this undertaking. I am neither a development practitioner nor an economist; rather I am a psychologist interested in social issues such as poverty, gender inequity, environmental degradation, violence, etc. My interest in real-life events and their ramifications entail a bifocal examination: one aspect pertaining to how the *outside* world changes and impinges on the individual and another on how individual mental frames and ways of thinking, emoting, and feeling change behaviors and perceptions towards the world. My doctoral work at University College in London from 2005 to 2009 examined the differential impacts of natural disasters and social violence on the mental health of children, particularly

M. Kumar (✉)
Department of Psychiatry, College of Health Sciences,
University of Nairobi, Nairobi, Kenya
e-mail: ucjtmku@live.ucl.ac.uk

on the attachment representations of children. I was particularly interested in understanding how massive trauma events trigger further trauma and psychopathology in children, and whether social trauma has distinctive clinical signatures in that change among communities, families, and individuals from both the *inside* and the *outside*. The findings of that work are not the focus here, but rather I present a subset of findings about post-disaster adversity and the social marginalization of young girls who I interviewed in the Kutch district of the western Indian province of Gujarat. I worked there with children who had survived the debilitating 2001 Gujarat earthquake. In order to better understand childhood in the rural Gujarati/Indian context, I interviewed children from both working-class and middle-class families, which also offered a control sample that I needed for my disaster trauma research.

Visiting schools in the villages of Lodai and Khengarapur, the city of Bhuj, and in Adriyana in the Surendranagar district was an eye-opening experience for me. While the young boys played with my laptop and camera, and surrounded me asking questions about where I was from, what I would do in my research, and generally sharing with me about their lives in the schools and villages; the girls seemed disinterested, withdrawn, and rarely came forward to greet me. In my ignorance I overlooked this for a while and thought that perhaps the boys were simply less inhibited and that perhaps the girls were not as well-educated or accustomed to outsiders. My 'attachment interviews' were video recorded and those involving girls were uneventful, as they spoke very little there were often long pauses, and a profound silence would accompany anything they described. They did not make eye contact, there was no liveliness in their tone or discussion content, and I was always struck by something heavy building-up inside myself when I listened to these children. Besides practical details such as the video camera losing power, the interviews were getting accomplished without much content and I was getting behind schedule because single interviews lasted more than an hour. One interview after another felt similar. After nearly 30 interviews with the girls and three to five group exercises with the children my experiences confirmed to me that something was indeed problematic with the girls here. My first reaction was to get irritated by their reluctance, thinking of them as somehow less intelligent or engaging than the boys, who seemed more free spirited and childlike. In psychology as in other disciplines such as anthropology, a researcher's own feelings and intuition are powerful tools for understanding individuals and social interactions.

There were other difficulties that contributed to this situation, such as the impossibility of hiring a female translator for the work with the young girls. No female translator could be contracted because women in this region do not normally travel or work outside their homes or the confines of their own village or town. There was a local saying, "no women stepping outside the *darbargarh*" (an ancient fort inside the nearby city of Bhuj), that also seemed to be an obvious boundary for women, symbolizing their confinement inside the old city. Several girl participants were hesitant to be interviewed or tested by a male translator, and the translator, as an adult male, brought a certain power dynamic and unique cultural angularities into the testing situation that appeared to me as if they could potentially interfere with deriving the information needed from the participants. On several occasions I realized that a

benign question such as inquiring whether the child remembered when the quake had occurred was instead put to the child as a general knowledge question, requiring the child to reproduce the exact time, date, and epicenter of the quake. This approach made the children more anxious, making the assessment more difficult; however, becoming aware of such dynamics motivated me to intervene myself. I decided after three or four of such interviews that I would do the remaining testing myself despite the language barriers and this approach was successful in the long run.

Even though no gender differences were found in the psycho-social adjustment of the children as a result of the actual testing, the young girls appeared much more fragile and needed more time to think and provide answers or form opinions than the boys. At times it appeared that they had never been asked to share their personal experiences or day-to-day problems, and that sudden testing on psychosocial adjustment seemed to puzzle them. Some girls were so nervous that their hands would shake and I was aghast to see them covering their faces before me, making me feel as if I too became perceived as a 'domineering male presence' before them. For these reasons I pulled out the interviews with the Kutchi girls and studied them carefully after I returned to my office in London.

9.2 Attachment: The Concept and Its Social Application

Attachment in this research context is understood as a concept that permeates culture and is embedded within a dialectical intrapsychic/intersubjective matrix (Green 2000). Attachment is part of a sense of self that is developed through the influence of the *other*. It is not only the need for the other, but also about what kind of presence the other has had or made in a person's life. As children mature, attachment security becomes an attribute of the person rather than of relationships (Fonagy 2001, 2005; Thompson and Raikes 2003). Attachment is an innate need and also one of the important capabilities that sustain human relationships. At the same time it is also embedded within an interpersonal equation, since the presence of a vital other is needed to animate and activate relational ties. In their work on moral philosophy Nussbaum (2004) and Lear (2007) have discussed how social values and organization can be understood by examining the emotional capabilities of individuals.

Attachment research over the last 30–40 years has shown that a caregiver's presence, contact, and comfort efficiently appease a child's emotional state (Harlow 1959; Bowlby 1969; Sroufe and Waters 1976; Ainsworth et al. 1978). In this process the adults around children endow them with cultural information and meanings that not only pass on language, social skills, and traditions etc., but that also provide a safety net to survive in a complex world. Children listen to and are greatly influenced by the stories narrated by their significant others and the adults around them (Bruner 1990), and soon adopt this experienced quality of storytelling. This capacity to share information and narrate, exchange, and negotiate ideas and experiences forms the basis of later socio-emotional development.

Research on emotions has shown that negative emotions stimulate social comparison, narration, and conversation to fuel cognitive work and to allow a metabolizing process. The social-representation theory of Moscovici (1984) and the social-constructionist approaches of Bruner (1990) are examples of how distressed individuals seek social contact and how conversations provide a medium to digest unfamiliar or threatening situations or objects. In distressing situations the attachment mechanisms get activated (Bowlby 1969) and serve two purposes: direct anxiety reduction and increased cognitive clarity. It is thought that the proximity and care of caregivers can restore these functions when such are required. An emotional experience, particularly a negative one, stimulates social sharing of the experience in both interpersonal as well as collective contexts. Repetitive communication allows an emotional experience to get registered and lends itself to the evolution of its mental representation. It is hypothesized that the quality and amount of sharing of one's experiences, especially negative experiences, reveal how children have dealt with these issues in their interpersonal and social environments. Researchers working on emotions of shame and guilt have also found that unshared emotional episodes elicit more intense feelings of shame and guilt than shared ones (Finkenauer and Rimé 1998).

9.3 Insights on Attachment Trauma, Shame, and Poverty: A Discourse Analysis of Interviews with Young Girls in Kutch

9.3.1 Methods

I quantitatively analyzed Child Attachment Interview (CAI) narratives of 12 selected girl participants from the earthquake group. I selected the participants on the basis that their narratives provided a broad sweep of themes that represented the entire CAI sample. For this chapter a simple treatment of narratives using thematic analysis (using actual sentences as themes), in keeping with principles of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967) and a phenomenological approach extended by psychological anthropology (Rosaldo 1984; Shweder and LeVine 1984; Shweder 1991; Berry et al. 1997) were favored over other qualitative techniques. Phenomenology seeks the psychological meanings that constitute a phenomenon through investigating and analyzing past examples of the phenomenon within the context of the participant's lives (assuming that the capacity to live through events or respond to different situations greatly exceeds the capacity to know exactly "what we do" or "why we do what we do"). Narratives are also seen as the performance of the self or as a story of identity (Parker 2004). The analysis of the CAI transcripts helped unfold processes where identity and self were threatened and/or a certain kind of identification was either denied or affirmed.

9.3.2 *The Child Attachment Interview: The Tool*

The CAI explores the way young children (8–14 years of age) think about themselves and how they represent relationships with their parents. It includes about 19 semi-structured questions to be pursued with the child during the course of the interview. Shmueli-Goetz et al. (2008, 4) presented the CAI as an instrument where “a better compromise between indirect assessment of representations and simply using an adult interview and coding system” has been reached. Additionally, it is designed to overcome the ‘measurement roadblock’ in attachment (i.e., the lack of validated assessment instruments and clinical interventions with pre-pubescent children). The interview helps assess children’s internal models of attachment relationships by directly questioning them about their experiences with, and perceptions of, their primary caregivers.

The majority of the CAI scales are intended to assess the child’s overall current state of mind with respect to attachment, a state of mind that is assumed to be reflected in the narrative as a whole (Target et al. 2003). These scales are: Emotional Openness, Preoccupied Anger, Idealization, Dismissal, Self Organization/Disorganization, Balance of Positive and Negative References of Attachment Figures, Use of Examples, Resolution of Conflicts, and Overall Coherence. Three of these scales (Preoccupied Anger, Idealization, and Dismissal) are rated separately for mothers and fathers. All scales have value ranges from 1 to 9 denoting the lowest to highest score respectively. All scales were coded from 1 to 9 with anchor points at odd values illustrated with examples of episodes characteristic of that level, as well as a description of the ways in which that aspect of the child’s representations was manifested across an entire interview. In a nutshell, the CAIs help illuminate both the contents of the mind and its conversation with the *other*.

9.3.3 *Sample Characteristics*

Approximately 12 interviews were conducted with girls from rural Gujarat. The mean age of the interviewees was 11.7 years old (range=10–14). Interviews were typically conducted in schools at four locations across the district of Kutch: Bhuj, Lodai, Khengarpur, and Khavda. On some occasions (such as during school holidays) interviews were conducted in other places such as local community halls. The first few interviews were done with the help of a translator and subsequently my limited but increasing familiarity with Kutchi and Gujarati enabled me to conduct them myself. Although all 12 girls were selected from the earthquake affected areas of Kutch, none of them were severely affected mentally or physically by the quake. The children lived in *kutchi* (makeshift construction) houses and worked at home doing household chores, looking after younger siblings and embroidering cloth at home to help make ends meet. The average monthly income of the girl’s parents was around 3,000 rupees (US\$800) for households with an average of five to six members. Approximately 500–700 (US\$133–187) additional rupees were contributed by

children who are old enough to embroider or engage in other paid work such as making wristbands, brooms, local cigarettes, etc. Physically the girls appeared very weak and severely anemic, and they often suffered from conditions such as chest congestion, cough, ‘chikungunya’ (*Alphavirus*) infections, or were recovering from waterborne parasite infections.

9.4 Analysis of the Attachment Interview Material

The section below highlights key themes that came up in the 12 interviews with the Kutchi girls. In comparison to those conducted with young boys, the girls’ interviews were more cryptic, hesitant, and shorter. The nonverbal gestures and facial expressions of these girls by contrast conveyed a lot more than their speech did. What were revealed in the interviews were multiple narratives strewn with shame; uncertainty about one’s identity, fate, or future; and the inhibited speech conveyed their status as disenfranchised units of the family and community in general. Names of the participants have been changed below and abbreviated, and the numbers indicate the ages of the children interviewed.

Characteristic questions and responses on CAIs: shame, inhibition, and uncertainties.

- How would you describe yourself? Who are you as a person?
 - “I am expected to get along well with my family and be kind to them.” (FB, 12)
 - “I don’t like to fight with others.” (FB, 10)
 - “I am a quiet girl.” (FB, 10)
 - “I am a good girl.” (FK, 12)
 - “Sometimes I think and sometimes I don’t think.” (FB, 11)
 - “I would like to study so that I never feel that I did not realize my potential like even if I get married no one is able to boss or maltreat me.” (FB, 13)
 - “I do not like to be fashionable.” (FB, 13)
- How would you describe your relationship with your mother?
 - “Doesn’t give me any money (but she buys me things).” (FB, 14)
 - “I never go out without her.” (FB, 14)
 - “I do whatever she tells me to do.” (FB, 10)
 - “She is happy when I behave well.” (FB, 11)
 - “Like if mummy tells me to collect all the trash, I do that. If she tells me to wash the utensils I do that too, and if she goes out and she gets late and tells me to do the entire house work, I do that as well.” (FB, 9)
 - “When I don’t play with my little brother, then she scolds me.” (FB, 9)
 - “It’s good. I sweep and do all the work.” (FK, 10)
 - “I am my mother’s daughter.” (FB, 11)
 - “I like working with her in the kitchen.” (FB, 11)

- “Mum likes it when I work in the house.” (FB, 11)
- “I like sitting and talking with mother (about) household gossip.” (FL, 13)
- “When papa tells me not to come to school and mummy sends me—I like that.” (FB, 12)
- How would you describe your relationship with your father?
 - “It’s good, I don’t know more.” (FB, 11)
 - “Papa keeps on saying that girls can’t do anything ... he doesn’t understand. Papa doesn’t believe that a girl can do something. I want him to realize that we can.” (FB, 13)
 - “Whatever I say, my father gets it for me.” (FK, 12)
- In what ways would you like to be like your mother?
 - “My mother never wishes ill for others, listens to others, keeps me with her and keeps her pain to herself, doesn’t tell anyone that I have this problem.” (FB, 10)
 - “Yes, but I would not want to remain a housewife like her.” (FB, 12)
 - “Yes, I don’t know.” (FB, 10)
- Do you feel loved by your parents?
 - “I have never felt this with papa, but with my mother yes,...whenever she talks so—I feel she wants to push me out of the house...that she doesn’t want me there.” (FB, 15)
- Do your parents fight? How does that make you feel?
 - “Never.” (FK, 11)
 - “I don’t know about that.” (FB, 10)
 - “When father shouts at mother, I feel very scared.” (FB, 11)
 - “Yes my father doesn’t listen to my mother. He drinks and there are many other things that he doesn’t listen to what mummy says to him—so they fight.” (FB, 15)
- Do you have any wishes?
 - “No.” (FL, 10)
 - “I don’t know.” (FL, 12)
 - “I want to be a madam (*memsahib*, which literally means an English dame).” (FB, 12)
 - “I want to be a teacher, pilot, and scientist.” (FB, 10)
 - “I want to be an inspector. The rest is up to God. I want to be someone, let’s see where my destiny takes me. Because my parents want me (to become) married. I want to do any work—though I want to be an inspector—but actually I will take up any work as long as there is some work available. I want to be someone.” (FB, 15)
 - “I want to study till 10th grade.” (FK, 12)
 - “If my father lets me study, then I would like to do a job.” (FL, 12)

Common patterns and trends that emerge from the case vignettes described above are:

1. Paucity of material/discourse—reflecting a reality of life?—or an issue of the ease and agency in qualitative research?
2. Absent gazes, prolonged silences, smiles, and monosyllables
3. Difficulty in putting very basic everyday activities or problems into words or a comprehensible narrative (poor literacy/educational background, verbal facility)
4. Lack of imagination—inability to garner enough material to express needs, thoughts, desires, or wishes
5. Idealized responses—Ferenczi's (1988) 'wise baby'—traumatized child—particularly on questions about parents
6. Psychic equivalence (Fonagy et al. 2002)—“symbolic equation” (Segal 1988)

9.5 Discussion: Explorations into the Aporias and Absences, Re-examining Subjectivities

The patterns of response here suggest some sort of deficit in thinking and emoting. Both of these capacities are compromised in situations of high stress or amidst continual negligence and dismissal of personal needs.

9.5.1 Particular Quality to the Narratives of Absence

If the interviews are seen as 'forms of self-telling,' then at least two formations of self can be discerned from the material above. Freud's psychic reality was not so much about how life was, but rather how it was recounted and interpreted to be. So the stories here also provided fodder to look beneath the mask and see the layered nature of these young girls' psychic reality. Two response patterns could be discerned through an attempt to differentiate narrative modes of thought based on narrative discourse.

9.5.1.1 Embalming of Absence and Invisibility

This narrative response was mentally and bodily connected to shame—concreteness and invisibility—compelling mental numbness. Shame, like any self-conscious emotion, requires an organism's own sensitivity, is related to external appearance, and is directed externally. Shame becomes a heightened consciousness of self, an unusual and distinct form of self-perception. The self is seen as small, helpless, frozen, and emotionally hurt (Lewis 2003). Such a self-perception or internal attribution often emanates from harsh socialization or when there exists a high degree of punishment for failure (or reward for success). The experience of shame makes the

self both the subject and the object: the self is embroiled in a battle with itself only. Research also shows that there tends to be less sharing when people feel shame acutely (Shweder 2003; Rimé 2009).

Another quality of their narratives was the concreteness of metaphors (Grubrich-Simitis 1984), in that an open-ended quality of fantasy life or imagination was absent. Fixed gazes and expressions carry an object-like, unalterable quality. “Metaphorization” and “mentalization” are possessions of the ego, and when these are impaired it speaks about the functioning of the ego. Their absence then is also colored with ‘real’ mental capability deprivation.

9.5.1.2 Daunting Presence of Dismissive Defensive Strategy

It is important to differentiate here that the latter is different from dismissive attachment. It is not that the children were dismissive of the relationships/parents, but that they were dismissive of their own neediness, desires, and the disturbing things that were happening around them. The style of functioning could be dismissive—not in terms of undermining the relationships, but in dismissing the need to be cared for and the feelings of loss associated with it. This is what the sample showed. There seems to be a precocious ‘wise-baby’ who deflects the emotional life to a place where it cannot be felt (Winnicott 1970; Ferenczi 1988) and takes on a maternal function in an inverted way. The loss of mental states (Lear 2007), the lack of openness, and a certain solipsism are also about problems in this relational matrix, where parenting and socialization experiences have been hurtful, insensitive, frightening, etc.

9.5.2 *Is Inhibition a Symptom or Different from a Symptom?*

The responses above also allude to restrictiveness, constraint in the ability to express and share stories of their lives. This may be due to either a paucity of vital experience or a marring of the ability to make sense and engage with one’s experiences. It may also be due to both of these factors.

One text that engages with this restricted ability is Freud’s (1926) “Inhibitions, symptoms, and anxiety,” where he began by discussing how inhibition is different from a symptom (or symptom formation). According to Freud, inhibition has a special relation to function, where it is a normal restriction of a function and at times may be closer to being a symptom and carry a pathological dimension. Inhibitions akin to symptoms are products of disturbed functioning of the ego. Apart from disturbances in the ego, functioning due to sexual or nutritional needs, ego strength is known to get disrupted when in conflict with the demands of either the super-ego or the id. Freud (1926) traced the generalized inhibitions of the ego to impositions on the ego as a measure of precaution, or as brought about as a result of depletion in energy. He was emphatic to point out that, unlike a symptom, inhibitions take place and act upon the ego itself. This might also mean that inhibitions are closer to the

conscious (or belong to the domain of the pre-conscious) than symptoms per se. In this sense one's socialization and familial surroundings might play a more active role in causing or exacerbating such restrictions in the sense of self. It seemed that these young girls were fighting their own selves and inner persecutory parents/family in this process.

Freud (1926) conceptualized shame as an inhibiting emotion that led to repression, therefore giving it a central importance in the development and maintenance of psychopathology. In a bid to solidify his drive model (*eros* and *thanatos* as "life" and "death" drives), he underplayed the role that shame/inhibition plays in repression (Scheff 2000). As his model became more and more intrinsically driven, shame ceased to occupy a place in the literature.

9.5.3 Domesticity and Docility—(En)gendered Identifications

It is not in doubt that the norms and practices that affect adults also affect children; cultural practices inhibiting women's movement and access to resources are examples. The responses given by these girls depicted the burgeoning unpaid work burden and in many ways their narratives are also ways in which culture and its practices transmit themselves. What might vary is the cultural and linguistic perspective or narrative form in which it is formulated and expressed (Bruner 2004). Whether it was paid or unpaid domestic work or work outside the house it was clear that work was a critical factor in the lives of these children. The largest inequality took place in household work. The interviews made the enormous burden of work on these girls quite explicit, apart from highlighting the rewards/punishments that are associated with it. Love, care, and acceptance were bartered for work. The excessive exposure to household work in many ways obstructs other potential functions, such as knowledge seeking, education, hygiene, health, leisure activities, etc. It was quite explicit from the children's narratives that the gendered social norms and traditions gave preference to boys and prioritized education for boys over girls. It leads to the question of whether being a girl was something shameful or at least culturally devalued. Being respected and treated with dignity also belong to the domain of well-being, and prolonged discrimination weakens ego strength, trust, and a sense of security that is crucial for secure attachments.

9.6 Intergenerational Import and Transmission of Attachment, Trauma and Poverty

The Kutchi girls that I interviewed seemed to face a continual disenfranchisement of their voices, needs, and desires. Attachment trauma in the young girls of rural Gujarat was precisely this inability and failure of their families to adequately nurture psychological and social capabilities in the girl children, and this trauma was

transmitted intergenerationally. A few implications of the points described above need to be made clear:

- The literature on both poverty and trauma points out that these two themes are multidimensional and intergenerational in their import. Psychologists studying massive trauma events such as the Nazi atrocities against the European Jews during World War II, describe how the third and fourth generations after the original survivors continue to suffer from pain, guilt, and loss. Similarly development economists have shown how poverty is a trap in which people live in poverty, die in poverty, and pass it on to subsequent generations. Attachment also is intergenerational in that, if not dealt with, insecurities keep repeating and the same relational patterns pass them on from one generation to the next. This intergenerational cycle of the transfer of poverty/trauma/attachment needs to be studied altogether and in-depth.
- Considering that poverty is understood today as capability deprivation, attachment at least as described in this paper is offered as a concept that denotes basic human well-being or a need, and one that is akin to a capability that family/caretaker/society nurture in an individual. As a capability it endows an individual with a sense of security, safety, and relational contentment that are essential for a healthy sense of self, identity, and purpose in life. Attachment trauma of the kinds that these Kutchi girls exhibited suggests a life where shame and self-doubt were prominent emotions. So acute was the feeling of shame that it annihilated the self into a complete dismissal of personal needs—right from the need to be loved, to be cared for, to the need for autonomy and identity. Development research could potentially enrich the discourse on poverty by looking at attachment trauma as a capability deprivation akin to how poverty and social marginalization are understood today. A young child’s mind and its capacities are marred in an environment that generates constant conflict between needs and discrimination, and along with the lack of love, care, or warmth, takes away any possibility of viewing oneself as a capable human being.
- Shame has not been examined adequately in either psychological or other social-science literature. Amongst the few contributions made to our understanding of this emotion is the work of Cooley (1992), who talked of shame as a social emotion. In his concept of the “looking-glass self” Cooley talked about the process of self-monitoring, where the processes involved are: the imagination of our appearance to others, the imagination of their judgment of that appearance, and some sort of self feeling—like pride or mortification. In the young girls, a deep sense of inferiority developed due to continual discrimination and disengagement that is also partly mirrored by their mothers (or other female figures) who likewise are not necessarily able to reflect a sense of identity and independence. The “looking-glass self” then only senses lack, inadequacy, and absence in one’s self, and that is what these interviews captured. Something that these interviews conveyed was that the change had already happened—the self was absent and silence echoed around these young girls of Kutch. Shame is isolating, it is a disconnection from social bonds because it is also an evaluative emotion unlike guilt, which is an

individualistic emotion (Chodorow 1996). Lewis (1971) further explains shame as a social emotion—where a social bond is threatened, calling it a “bodily and/or mental response to the threat of disconnection from the other.” In this sense the girls in my study were in such strong identification with the authority that minimized their freedom and existence that any thinking or reasoning that differed caused them great shame or discomfort.

Nurturing attachment also implies nurturing or developing a certain ‘intelligibility,’ which is a combination of sensitivities and capabilities in the parents’ mind about the larger concerns for their child. Research evidence (Harper et al. 2003; Robeyns 2003; Baneerjee and Duflo 2012) shows that sensitization and empowerment of women enables them to act on their general preferences in making decisions that are in the best interests of their children’s well-being. The transmission can be positive (such as resilience). What is important is how and whether the real and perceived negative effects can be overcome over the course of a lifetime and/or between generations, and if not, what is it that prevents these outcomes.

The capabilities approach developed by Sen (1982) insists that the focus should be on the real freedoms that people have for leading a fulfilling and meaningful life. This approach refuses to make normative judgments based exclusively on income, commodities, or material resources. Capabilities are considered people’s potential function or their ability to exist and act. Thus as a means of enhancing the well-being of its people, a society also needs to focus on the freedom of individuals to achieve their intrinsic capabilities. Attachment can be seen as a function of a person’s capabilities that are intergenerationally nurtured and passed on. Psychologists think that children are endowed with the need to seek secure attachments, though at the end of the day it is also the family and social milieu that instill and reinforce attachment security. So there exists a dual process of initiation of the capability for secure attachment—one which a human being is programmed to strive towards (like love, trust, empathy, etc.), and on the other hand it is also to be harnessed and developed over the course of one’s lifetime through socialization. It is in this domain that these young girls were contesting their struggle for survival, identity, and freedom to achieve what they desire.

9.7 Post Disaster Adversities: A Coda

One measure of the long-term damage post disasters is to examine personal and social adversities in the lives of survivors. The severity of post-event adversities then is one index of ongoing and often compounded traumatization. Medical anthropologists Kleinman (1995) and Young (1995) have argued that the actual appreciation of the influence of social conditions has been compromised due to the extreme popularity of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as a psychiatric/medical diagnostic category and the consequent “pathologization” of the person as a whole (see Caruth (1996) review of PTSD for a critical commentary on this theme).

This tendency towards “psychologization” undermines the role of structural forces, and how institutions and social systems control and exert tremendous influence on individual lives (Scheper-Hughes 1992; Leys 2000; Parker 2007).

That life after trauma is more painful and difficult to lead than the traumatic event itself is well known to psychologists. But in instances where individual or communal trauma is made more potent by a breakdown of socio-economic or political security, or by a lack of access to basic entitlements, rights, and privileges, the psychological damage is manifold (Nieuwenhuys 1990; Scheper-Hughes 1992; Erikson 1995; Young 1995; Kaplan 2005). Essential elements for recovery from such experiences include:

- a healthy family environment where one is able to communicate their needs (since every other need becomes subservient to the struggle for survival)
- the ability to empathize with the pain and suffering of others (without meaning to underrate the quality of care that poor or materially less able parents may provide to their children or the daily survival takes a toll on time, energy, and resources that can be channeled towards a child’s well-being)
- the ability to think about moral and ethical choices associated with decision making on family issues, such as forcing a child to drop out of school in order to work.

When the secure socio-cultural field around which the family is supposed to function collapses, the adults and children in the family may experience an enormous sense of loss and disorientation. Therefore along with the morality that emanates from internal family structure, a social structure is needed to enforce ethical and child-rights oriented decision making on behalf of parents and caretaking adults.

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