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Introduction

Many articles in *Intervention* are about lessons learned during psychosocial interventions in (post) conflict areas. So far, the editorial staff has not received many contributions from central and South America. It is therefore a pleasure to open this issue with two articles from this continent. Both papers are based on interviews with former combatants who took part in a voluntary individual disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration programme implemented by the Colombian government. The first one, by Liliana Anaya, stresses, besides all sorts of practical problems related to the government programme, the psychological problems of the former combatants and the difficulties they experience in regard to finding a place in civil society. The second one, by Marianne Moor, in many ways confirms the findings of Anaya and goes one step further. The lessons learned from the government programme have been put into practice in a local reintegration programme in the department of Cauca. This programme is meant for former combatants that used to live in that area. It is less standardised than the government programme and more adapted to the circumstances of the individual former combatants. The family members of the former combatants are also involved in the programme, which includes activities such as community meetings and providing services to the community. These activities are aimed at reconciliation. The programme includes both traditional rituals and psychological counselling.

The theme of former combatants and reconciliation also is central to the article by David Alan Harris on former boy soldiers in Sierra Leone. He gives an extensive, detailed

description of a dance/movement therapy group he facilitated, together with three local counsellors, to 12 adolescent orphans. The intervention resulted in the participants creating a public performance that highlighted their dual roles as victims and perpetrators in the war, and that contributed to their reconciliation with the local community.

In many conflict areas, there are hardly any professionals who can provide forms of counselling and psychosocial support in which helpful active listening is an important ingredient. In such a situation, volunteers can be an important resource. Josi Salem-Pickartz takes us to Jordan, where she trained peer counsellors in refugee camps. She gives an inspiring description of her training approach. Her article also shows that volunteer counsellors may be as much subjected to the influences of ongoing stresses and occasional trauma as the people they are trying to help. They may experience the same deprivation of basic needs, the same lack of opportunities for actively building a future, and the same ongoing stress. Yet, these volunteers are still able to learn, to grow, and act for the common good, even though some of them could neither read nor write.

The field report by Ann Lorschiedter is also about the important role of volunteers. Moreover, it touches on the problems around reintegration of former combatants. Lorschiedter describes the experiences of community volunteer workers in northern

Uganda, who give psychosocial support to formerly abducted children (a euphemism for child-soldiers) and their families.

Intervention regularly publishes articles on therapeutic interventions that include the discussion of traumatic experiences. However, not all people affected by traumatic experiences are ready to talk about their plight. In an article by Marian Tankink, based on experience in Uganda, (*Intervention* 2.1, downloadable from: <http://www.interventionjournal.com/index4.html>) it was explained that this might happen when people have no public space to share their memories of the war. Moreover, economic, political and psychological factors may contribute to a situation where keeping silent might be the best thing to do. Our last field report, by Janus Oomen, continues in this theme. It discusses the legal procedure refugees requesting asylum in the Netherlands have to endure. It shows that, even in a country where people are generally well educated and where the public awareness of the psychological consequences of war is high, there is a tendency to ignore the painful experiences of refugees. Stories of trauma and torture are met with disbelief by the authorities, and medical evidence of torture is often ignored. Sometimes refugee and civil servants collude in a joint denial because of the burden of these memories.

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