

From Private Pain Toward Public Speech

Poetry Therapy with Iraqi Survivors of Torture and War

*Shanee Stepakoff, Samer Hussein, Mariam
Al-Salahat, Insherah Musa, Moath Asfoor,
Eman Al-Houdali, and Maysa Al-Hmouz*

INTRODUCTION: THE CLINICAL SETTING AS A SITE FOR REGAINING WORDS AND RECLAIMING VOICE

For many victims of ethnopolitical violence, the clinical setting serves as a context for finding words to narrate experiences that seem indescribable and unsayable (Rogers 2006; Van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela 2008). From our clinical work we have developed the view that in the process of regaining words and reclaiming the capacity to give voice to the experience of violation, "victims" gradually become "survivors." Further, consistent with Herman's (1992) assertion, we have observed that for a sizeable portion of survivors, an important component of recovery is the decision to participate in constructive action that contributes to the wider community.

Among the various forms of action that might be considered, we have found that many survivors feel a desire to share their experiences in some type of public forum. Options for public expression include talking with journalists, testifying in post-conflict tribunals and truth commissions, participation in speak-outs and protests, visual arts exhibits, performances of music/drama/dance, and so forth. Likewise, many psychotherapists working in contexts of torture and war feel a sense of moral responsibility to contribute to the promotion of accountability for past violations of human rights, and the prevention of future ones.

Our belief is that as long as the step to speak in the public domain is freely chosen, the forms of self-expression that occur in psychotherapy and those that occur in public venues are not necessarily at odds with each other. In fact, if sufficient psychological support is provided, the benefits of private and public expression can be mutually reinforcing. Public recognition of the reality and impact of experiences of violation can contribute to personal healing; conversely, as individuals achieve a greater sense of wholeness and psychological health, they may feel a deepening desire to draw on their experiences in order to make a difference in the society at large.

Thus, the psychological repair and reclamation of the capacity for speech that occur initially in a protected, clinical setting (e.g. a psychotherapeutic relationship or a professionally facilitated group) can provide a foundation for later truth-telling in public venues. In this chapter we present a variety of specific methods, derived from poetry therapy, by which we promoted self-expression among Iraqi survivors of torture and war trauma who had taken refuge in Jordan. All of the survivors cited in the present chapter were clients in a treatment clinic. The clinic was established and directed by the Center for Victims of Torture (CVT), a non-governmental organization (NGO) established to provide individual, family, and group therapy for survivors of war-related trauma and/or politically motivated torture.

The overall treatment model was based on a combination of psychodynamic, cognitive-behavioral, humanistic, and trauma-focused therapies (Stepakoff *et al.* 2006, 2010). We integrated these approaches with methods derived from poetry therapy. We found such methods to be particularly salient for our population. More specifically, most torture survivors do not readily find words to describe their experiences and emotions, particularly not in the early stages of recovery. Further, their efforts to describe their ordeal are seldom listened to respectfully and sensitively by others. In addition, larger socio-cultural and political forces discourage – and even actively suppress – the verbal narration of experiences of violation.

This long-term silence about their experiences often leads survivors to feel isolated, burdened, and overwhelmed. One view of clinical work is that "what is mentionable is manageable, what is not mentionable is not manageable" (Stepakoff *et al.* 2006). That is, finding the words to describe one's experience in the context of a safe, caring relationship usually brings about feelings of comfort, relief, connection (with oneself as well as with another person or persons), and hope.

Although traditional psychotherapy, which indeed in its early days was known as "the talking cure," usually relies on some amount of verbal expression, poetry therapy places a greater emphasis on the significance of words and voice than do mainstream approaches or other creative arts modalities. Moreover, poetry therapy methods allow for a form of truth-telling that can readily be transmitted in the public domain. Namely, in comparison to works of music, dance, drama, or visual art, and in contrast to purely oral expression, poems and other written works are far easier to preserve, reproduce, and circulate.

CENTER FOR VICTIMS OF TORTURE, JORDAN: CLINICAL TREATMENT AND COUNSELOR TRAINING

CVT's Jordan program comprises both direct clinical care in individual, group, and family modalities, systematic training, and live, on-site clinical supervision of the local psychosocial counselors by experienced expatriate psychologists. Along with training and clinical supervision, the expatriate psychologists also work alongside the local counselors as co-therapists for individual and family therapy clients and as co-facilitators of ten-session counseling groups.

The clients were Iraqi survivors of torture and war trauma who had fled Iraq for refuge in Jordan. The first author, who is both a licensed clinical psychologist and a registered poetry therapist, provided specialized training, supervision, and co-therapy to support interested CVT counselors – including the co-authors of this chapter – in the conceptualization and implementation of poetry therapy approaches, and in the integration of poetry therapy with other clinical methods.

From February 2009 to February 2010 the first author together with the co-authors – who were her trainees, co-therapists, and clinical supervisees – developed ways of incorporating poetry therapy methods and techniques in individual, family, and group counseling for Iraqi refugees. Clients embraced these approaches, and derived important psychological benefits from the use of preexisting literature and from the expressive writing activities. Counselors, too, enthusiastically embraced the therapeutic utilization of poetry and expressive writing.

RECEPTIVE AND EXPRESSIVE APPROACHES

Receptive methods of poetry therapy are those that rely on the utilization of preexisting material (Mazza 1999). This usually refers to poems that

have been published in collections, anthologies, literary journals, and so forth; it can also refer to songs. The poems or songs to be used in clinical work with survivors do not have to specifically mention torture or war; in fact, most do not. Rather, they capture particular aspects of the experience of suffering, loss, and grief.

There are a wide variety of receptive techniques. The major division, however, is between techniques in which the client selects the preexisting material and those in which the counselor selects the material. Stepakoff (2009) has suggested the terms "client-directed" or "client-initiated" to indicate the former category.

Receptive methods of poetry therapy are usually combined with expressive methods. The latter are sometimes referred to as "expressive writing" (Lepore and Smyth 2002; Mazza 1999) or "poem-making" (Fox 1997), and can be understood as the process whereby survivors engage in their own, original writing. This can take various forms: the most common are journaling, letter-writing, and the creation of poems. It can also include oral and improvisational poem-making (Spring 2003; Stepakoff and Marzelli 2007).

Example of a receptive method: Client-initiated selection of preexisting poem

In a counseling group for men there was a client, "Burhan," whose brother had been brutally murdered in an act of ethno-political violence. Burhan had rigid psychological defenses against discussing his emotions about his brother's death, even during sessions when other group members shared about their losses with the group. During one session, about midway through the ten-session cycle, though Burhan still had great difficulty talking about his feelings directly, he shared with the group the following passage from a poem by Al Khansa, a renowned seventh century Arab female poet whose brother had been killed in war in the year 615 A.D. Burhan had committed the poem to memory, and as he read it aloud, it became clear to the counselors and participants that by sharing the poem, Burhan was able to express his own feelings more fully and accurately than he had been able to do on his own:

*Every sunrise reminds me of my brother, Sakhar
And I continue remembering him until the sun descends
And if it were not for the presence, all around me, of so many other people
who are also mourning their brothers
I would kill myself.*

Hearing this preexisting poem led to a fruitful group discussion of the experience of grief, and of the ways that forming connections with others who are also grieving, and thereby feeling less alone in one's sorrow, somehow made the anguish more bearable. Indeed, this "kinship of grief" (Stepakoff 2009) is a key component of what we seek to achieve in counseling groups for participants who are struggling to cope with traumatic bereavement.

Combining receptive and expressive methods: Example of client selection of preexisting poem followed by expressive writing in response to the poem

In the previous example, the client spontaneously thought of the preexisting poem and opted to share it. Another way of working with a preexisting poem is to specifically ask clients to bring in a poem that they find meaningful or moving. We used this approach in a group of men.

In response to our invitation, one of the clients brought in the following poem by an Iraqi poet:

Reproach

*I came to you carrying in my soul
our shared story, intimate and long,
which has been slaughtered.*

*I came with a tear of longing on my cheek,
with wounded dreams,
and the wish to blame you.*

*And the arteries of my heart – after you have abandoned me – tighten and
release like a swing
as a result of my yearning.*

*Searching: for whom? and on which door must I knock?
In all the houses of Baghdad, each person is
wrapped up in his or her own calamities.*

After briefly reading the poem ourselves, as professionals, to ensure it was appropriate for the group, we suggested that the client read the poem aloud in the session. We were silent for some moments, to allow time for the poem to have an emotional impact on the group members. We then invited them to choose a line from the poem, copy that line onto a fresh

sheet of paper, and write some of their own thoughts and feelings in response to their chosen line.

Below are some examples of the clients' written responses, accompanied by the line or phrase they selected:

"Coman"

Phrase selected: "And the arteries of my heart tighten and release like a swing as a result of my yearning."

Written response: This reminds me of my children who are away from me, my children and loved ones and friends who are upset about our departure [from Iraq]...and also, the plight of living as refugees, as foreigners in another country.

"Gadil"

Phrase selected: "With a tear of longing on my cheek, with wounded dreams, and the wish to blame you."

Written response: These words make me think of my ordeal and the time I am passing through like a drowning person..., afloat...in a sea..., not knowing my destiny, so too do I walk toward an unknown fate and I can do nothing about this. I dream about the future, and about the past which my family and I shared, and I imagine a tear falling slowly down my cheek, but it is a useless tear, just as the dreams I dream are useless, because something precious has been broken and smashed.

Therapist-selected poems

Although survivors are quite adept at choosing poems that are meaningful to them and that they feel capture important aspects of their experiences and emotions, there are many situations in which the facilitator or therapist may be better equipped to select poems than are the survivors. In these situations, the facilitator or therapist uses a preexisting poem as a catalyst to increase clients' willingness to talk about their own experiences and concerns. Registered poetry therapists, who have undergone a rigorous process of study, practice, and credentialing, are specially trained to identify poems that are likely to serve as safe and effective springboards for individual and group exploration.

Facilitated or therapist-guided receptive approaches (Stepakoff 2009) refer to situations in which the therapist or group facilitator carefully

chooses a poem that he or she feels — based on his or her own life, experiences with other individuals or groups, input from other clinicians, and/or intuition — will help survivors focus on and grapple with particular aspects of their experience. In these approaches, the facilitator/therapist supports the client/group in using the preexisting poem as a springboard for deepening the clients' dialogue and exploration of a designated theme. This method is described in detail in the classic text *Biblio/Poetry Therapy: The Interactive Process* (Hynes and Hynes-Berry 1994).

Poems are selected with the intent of achieving four main therapeutic goals:

1. To describe, in a fresh and creative manner, common aspects of the experience of trauma and violation.
2. To model exceptionally honest and brave self-expression, thereby freeing the clients to express themselves more frankly and fully.
3. To give external form to internal, difficult-to-articulate emotions and perceptions, thereby helping clients contain their psychological pain.
4. To serve as objects of aesthetic beauty, thereby instilling in clients renewed feelings of vitality and hope.

Also, the poems chosen by the counselors or group facilitators are used to stimulate a process of expressive writing in the participants.

Combining receptive and expressive methods: Example of expressive writing in response to therapist-selected preexisting poem

During a time that we were searching for a poem or proverb to use in one of our counseling groups for elderly men, a middle-aged man in individual treatment spontaneously quoted the following rhyming couplet; we decided to use it in the group because we felt that it would have strong resonances for the clients:

*Not all that a person desires does he or she obtain:
The winds blow without regard for the wishes of the ships.*

(Al Mutanabbi, 915–965)

We typed these lines (in Arabic) on a sheet of paper, and distributed it to each of the group members. The Iraqi facilitator (second author) read

the poem aloud three times, in order to enhance its impact. Clients were then invited to respond by "free-writing." "Free-writing" is a technique in which clients are asked to write non-stop for a specified number of minutes, without thinking, without censoring themselves and without lifting their pens from the page.

Below are two examples of clients' free-writing from this session:

The future was mine and now I am set in oblivion. I do not know where my future lies nor that of my family, and I have a sense of fear, of being terrified and unstable and without safety... My thoughts have become hazy and I have no clue what to do. ("Jalen")

This proverb reminds me of the current situation we live in, where fate plays the larger role in our lives: fate is similar to the strong wind that wreaks havoc and pushes all boats off their course. Despite the ship's plan to reach a shore that had been intended by the captain, the winds lead it to deviate from its course to another shore, which may be a safe shore that one may stay on for a lengthy period, but it may also turn out to be a barren island without water or vegetation and you will be forced to stay there and wait for a glimpse of hope by the passing of other ships or a rescue boat. The proverb makes me think of the plans for the future that we used to imagine, plans for a happy and pleasant life for the whole family, but this is not what has occurred. ("Laith")

We were struck by the strong responses engendered by this couplet-poem. We have continued to use this proverb and this method in several other groups, with consistently positive psychological effects. We believe that the utilization of a carefully selected preexisting poem stimulates in clients a deep desire to give voice to their own truths.

Expressive approaches

As indicated in the examples above, receptive methods of poetry therapy can be used to stimulate oral or written self-expression. Expressive methods encompass the writing of poems by individuals as well as collaborative writing by dyads, families, groups, or communities (e.g. in which each person contributes a line or phrase). The theoretical foundations of expressive methods include the concepts of catharsis and externalization, that is, the human need to symbolize or represent, via external form, emotions and images that have been purely internal. As with receptive methods, expressive approaches can be self-directed or professionally facilitated.

An example of self-directed expressive writing occurred in an Iraqi family with whom we worked, in which the mother, who had survived a severe episode of politically motivated torture, was accepted for resettlement in a Western country, while her teenage daughter was forced to remain behind as a refugee in Jordan for over a year. "Cantara" (the mother), a sensitive woman with a natural literary inclination, began to regularly compose brief poems in which she expressed her love for her daughter and her hope for their eventual reunification, utilizing text messaging on a cellular phone. It was clear that composing and sending these poems helped Cantara to cope with the painful feelings resulting from her having had to leave her daughter in refuge in Jordan. The daughter seemed to gain strength from reading these message-poems, and often shared them with the therapist during her individual counseling sessions.

In contrast to this kind of spontaneous, self-directed poetic expression, "facilitated" or "guided" expressive methods take place in the context of a formal therapeutic relationship (Stepakoff 2009). The particular clinical approach may vary, as long as writing and other expressive verbal techniques are employed. Such techniques have been used effectively in mutual support groups, cognitive-behavioral therapy and psychoanalysis, but are most closely associated with the creative arts therapies, which, indeed, are also known as the "expressive therapies." In many instances, intermodal approaches are utilized, in which survivors combine verbal and non-verbal techniques (Levine and Levine 1999; Rogers 1993).

In therapeutic work with survivors of torture and war trauma the goals of expressive writing essentially parallel those for the receptive approach: reducing isolation, encouraging free expression, giving form to painful emotions, and fostering hope. The writing assignments have varying degrees of structure and guidance. It is common to integrate expressive writing with the utilization of preexisting poems. More specifically, after devoting a portion of the session to dialogically exploring participants' responses to a preexisting poem, they are given a writing exercise, after which they are provided with an opportunity to share what they have written. A common exercise is to ask the group members to choose a subjectively meaningful word, phrase, or line from the preexisting poem and to use that as a starting point for their own writing, that is, as the title or first line of a new poem. This is, essentially, the method used in the above-mentioned examples of clients' responses to the proverb by Al Mutanabbi.

Example of an expressive method: Client-generated poems as a springboard for group exploration of areas of clinical concern

Below is an example of a poem written by "Kalila," a client in a women's counseling group. The client generated this poem during a session in which the clients had been invited to compose poems on themes that had been emerging in the counseling group over the course of the preceding sessions:

To The Lovely Baghdad (excerpt)

*You will be high as a tree.
You will be who you are with all your great history.
You are the land of Harun al-Rashid...
Your light will continue to shine and will not be extinguished
because you are a land of education and science...
Your name will stay present in all times
And you will be the love of all Iraqis.*

After Kalila read her poem aloud, the other group members shared the memories and feelings that the poem evoked in them. This led to a rich discussion about the deep and passionate ties that many Iraqi refugees feel for their homeland, and, concomitantly, the feelings of sorrow and longing they must contend with daily as refugees in Jordan.

Example of an expressive method: Therapist pre-structuralization as a means for supporting clients in writing poems

Another common method of promoting the creation of poems is to provide group members with a page that contains a preliminary structure to guide their expressive writing. Usually, this consists of word-stems or sentence completions, which leave a substantial area blank so that the clients can fill in their own words. We utilized this approach successfully in several groups.

The preliminary structure should be created with a theoretical rationale and/or a specific therapeutic goal in mind. In groups for Iraqi survivors of torture and war, we found it helpful to find ways of supporting clients in reflecting on the psychological impact of their victimization. This view was rooted in the idea that traumatic experiences change people, and

that one component of recovery is the ability to constellate a new sense of self that encompasses the reality of the trauma but is not completely dominated by it.

As a first step in such a process, we felt it would be useful for clients to be able to bear the painful consideration and verbalization of the differences between who they are today and who they were before they were subjected to torture. Thus, we listed a sequence of four couplets on a sheet of paper, each with the phrase "I used to" [blank] (first line) "but now" [blank] (second line). The provision of this type of preliminary structure can serve to create a sense of containment, while at the same time allowing for honest exploration and self-expression. Further, honest self-disclosure on the part of clients about the psychological impact of torture and war trauma is a prerequisite for supporting clients in finding ways to attenuate some of the more difficult components of that impact.

Below is an example of a poem created by a client when we used this method in a counseling group for Iraqi women.

"Dirran"

I used to go out in the street to go anywhere without thinking about what time it was

but now I have to think about each hour and each minute, and about whether it's a good time to go out or not.

I used not to think about what would happen to my children during the school-day,

but now I'm afraid for them – I worry about them from the time they go to school until the time they return.

*I used not to think so much and not to be ill,
but now I am ill in my body and mind.*

*I used to be a calm person,
but now I lose my temper easily.*

*I used to be happy on every occasion, even with the simplest things,
but now I feel a sadness inside, even when I'm happy.*

*I used to be open and self-confident, talking with my family and friends
but now I can't be that way anymore, because I don't know the people I'm talking with-*

or how much of what I'm saying they will understand.

As this method worked well in the women's group, we subsequently utilized it in a group for elderly men, and found that it was similarly effective with that population:

"Jala" The Life I'm Passing Today (excerpt)

*Before the war, I was close to my relatives and visited them often.
But now I'm far away from them, and I wish that they were nearer.*

I used to go each morning to my job.

But now I don't work, I just sit at home...

I used to have warm, caring contact with my neighbors

But now I am in a country where I don't have friends.

I used to not think much about the present turning into the future.

But now a hundred times a day I wish the day would end.

Example of an expressive method: Therapeutic letter-writing

Letter-writing is another expressive technique that can be systematically incorporated into therapy sessions (Vance 1998). Usually, the counselors give the client(s) a suggestion regarding to whom the letter should be directed and/or what issues it should explore. In counseling groups for Iraqi survivors of ethnopolitical violence, we used letter-writing in a variety of ways, particularly as a tool for working with traumatic grief. It is important that clients not only write a letter in which they express their own thoughts and feelings, but also that they imagine how the person receiving the letter would reply.

There appears to be an archetypal healing function in the psyche that is activated during the imagined reply. More specifically, the responses are almost always reparative and life-affirming. Typical messages include remarks such as "Take good care of the children," "I want you to be happy," "I forgive you," "I'm sorry," "I am not with you physically but I remain with you spiritually," and so forth. These reply letters, and their healing messages, are in some ways similar to the kinds of replies that occur when a client switches chair in the Gestalt/psychodrama technique known as "the empty chair."

Below is an example of a letter that a client wrote to her deceased father, who had been tortured and killed in Iraq. After composing the letter and the imagined reply, the client read both letters aloud in the sixth session of a women's counseling group:

Dearest Father:

How I miss you, I have wished that you were by my side, but fate hastened your demise. I have gone through many difficult and frightening days in my life: they kidnapped me, kidnapped my son, and he is still missing. How much I am in need of you, need to hear your voice and speak with you. I have been through difficult times, but your death has been the most difficult of all. May God have mercy on you and reserve a place for you in paradise.

"Myiesha"

IMAGINED REPLY LETTER FROM CLIENT'S FATHER

My Dearest Daughter:

Although my body is not near yours, my soul is with you wherever you go. I know what you are going through; try to be patient. I know how much you need me. May Allah help you. Take care of yourself and your children and I will be satisfied and at peace.

Father

A WAR-TRAUMATIZED CHILD'S LETTER TO HIMSELF

We also used letter-writing in counseling groups for child survivors of torture and war trauma. In one such group, the children were invited to use the letter-writing as an opportunity to address anyone to whom they had something to express. Some of the children chose to write to their perpetrator, articulating in the letters their feelings of anger and betrayal. Others chose to write to their lost loved ones, giving voice to their feelings of grief and longing. In one group, a particularly creative and precocious 12-year-old boy decided to write the letter to himself:

Dear "Talib,"

You've lost everyone who you like, toys, love, freedom, and friends, you've lost the person who was the most beloved and important to you. You have been beaten, and cursed, and you've been made to feel ashamed... You've been displaced, you had to leave your country, and your heart was very close to your country... I wish for you a pleasant life, and to overcome all the obstacles and problems, and for you to find someone who can help you to solve those problems... I wish for you new friends, like the friends you have found in this group. I wish you a happy life, and I wish peace and renewal for your country, and I wish you success in your hobbies. Thank you my secret friend, I know that you live in my heart.

Example of an expressive method: Collaborative poem-making

Another expressive technique, used in group treatment modalities, is referred to as "collaborative poem-making." This technique can be helpful at various stages of a group's existence, but is particularly empowering at the end of a group cycle. It is a technique that is widely used in poetry therapy, and empirical research has indicated that it enhances group cohesiveness (Golden 1994; Mazza 1999).

In this technique each member of the group is first asked to write about his or her own feelings and thoughts. Then, each member looks over what s/he has written, and selects a line or phrase that is particularly meaningful to him or her. Next, one by one, according to readiness, each person contributes his or her line or phrase, such that one "group poem" emerges.

The group poem weaves the participants' diverse feelings into one coherent whole, and serves both as a container in which the full range of feelings can be "held," and as a transitional object that participants can keep with them after the group has ended. As with any form of creative expression, there is usually a sense of satisfaction and wonder at having been able to successfully transform inner truth into outward form.

We used this technique in the final session of a ten-session counseling group for Iraqi men. The resultant poem is provided below. Most of the line-breaks, as well as each place where there is a double space, indicate a different client's contributions. The title was generated by all of the clients together after a few minutes of discussion.

For the Sake of Life

The future –

but I do not know where the future is.

I still have the hope of building a better future for my family and myself to make up for the days and years we've missed out on and to forget the past

I wish to sit with my family and children, I wish to see them and hear their news in a place far from violence, terrorism, and bodily needs

*A safe shore where I feel at peace and out of harm's way
where I can think of a bright future*

*a future with happiness, security, and love
Human capabilities are limitless
if the will is strong.*

CONCLUSIONS: FROM PRIVATE PAIN TOWARD PUBLIC SPEECH

In the aftermath of large-scale, ethno-political trauma, recovery entails not only the healing of the individual psyche but also repair of the individual's relationship to the larger society. The latter goal usually requires public recognition of the reality of the human rights violations and the suffering that resulted from these violations. Such recognition can only occur if a subset of survivors are willing and able to share their stories in public domains. Poetry therapy methods can contribute substantially to this process by helping survivors regain the words to describe experiences that have felt indescribable, and in developing the psychological capacity to bear and give voice to private pain. We believe that in the act of permitting their writing to be published in the present volume, the survivors with whom we worked have taken an important step toward enhancing public awareness of the realities of suffering and resilience among Iraqis who have been forced to seek refuge in other lands.

AUTHORS' NOTE

The first author would like to dedicate this chapter to the memory of her cherished mentor, Dr. Kenneth Paul Gorelick (1942–2009), who instilled in her an appreciation for the transformative power of poetry, and who, by his kindness, supportiveness, and generosity of spirit, gave her both the desire and the confidence to share this power with others.

Major portions of this chapter were presented by the first author as part of an invited lecture arranged and hosted by the Center for Victims of Torture, Amman, Jordan, on August 6, 2009, under the title "The utilization of poems, stories, proverbs, and expressive writing in the psychotherapeutic treatment of Iraqi survivors of torture and war trauma," for staff of NGOs providing psychosocial care for Iraqi refugees in Jordan.

Contributions to this chapter by the fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh authors were approximately equal. Thus, the order of authorship among the fourth through seventh authors was randomly generated.

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to publish their writings so that the experiences and feelings of Iraqi survivors of torture and war would be more fully understood.

Notes

All client writings contained in this chapter have been used with the permission of the clients who produced them. The letter by the 12-year-old boy was used both with his permission and that of his parents.

Throughout this chapter, all client and clients' relatives' names have been replaced with pseudonyms. The pseudonyms were randomly drawn from a list of male and female Arabic names. Any connection between the pseudonyms used here and actual individuals from Iraq, Jordan, or elsewhere in the Arab world is purely coincidental.

Harun al-Rashid (763–809), referred to in the poem by "Kalila" that appears on p.137, was the fifth caliph of the Abbasid Dynasty. Under his reign and that of his son, al-Mamun, the Abbasid empire reached its apogee. During his reign Baghdad stood as a rival to Byzantium in both splendor and power. Harun was a munificent patron of the arts and his court became a center of learning and culture (Nissen and Heine 2009).

Arabic-to-English translations of the preexisting poems and client writings used in this chapter were the product of shared efforts among the seven authors, with additional input provided by Dr. Yousef Al-Ajama, except for the poem entitled "Reproach," which was jointly translated by Marwan Al-Rawi, Shanee Stepakoff, and Samer Hussein.

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