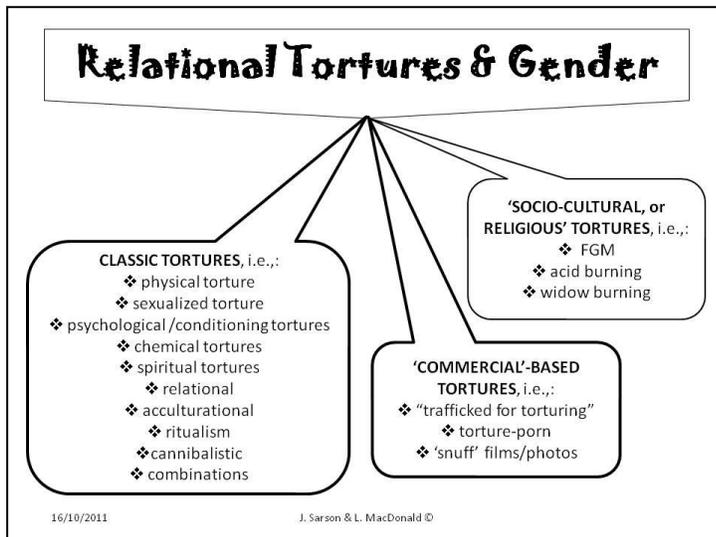


## Please Take My Hand: Stepping into the Reality of Victims of Non-State Actor Torture

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Webster's dictionary may define culture as "the behaviours and beliefs characteristic to a particular group" however, our position is that there exists one dominant culture—a patriarchal misogynistic one. How the patriarchal misogynistic beliefs and behaviours are uniquely moulded, these can be defined as specific to the culture of a particular group. When stepping into the reality of women and girls who suffer many forms of non-state torture (NST) the destruction patriarchal misogyny has on them becomes apparent.

To render visible the destruction we suggest NST employs the following three perspectives: (a) **classic**



**tortures** is the term used to express acts of torture thought to occur only in the public sphere perpetrated by State actors, however, these same acts of torture are perpetrated in the private sphere including electric shocking, severe beatings, being hanged, cut, burnt, whipped, caged, suffocated, starved, sleep deprived, forcibly drugged, water tortured, degraded with body waste, multi-perpetrator, object/weapon and/or animal rapes and forced impregnations and abortions and much more. Torturers often combine their violent acts, for

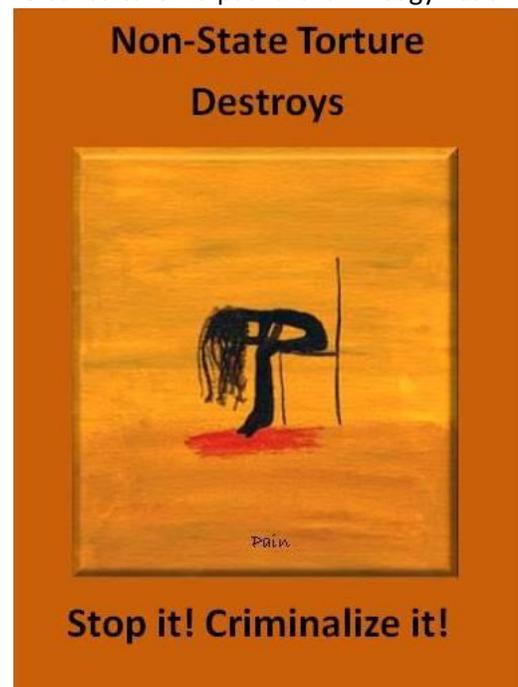
example, sexualized torture also involves spiritual and physical torture, as do tortures that use rituals (i.e., ritual abuse-torture); (b) **commercial based tortures** exposes the financial interest of the non-state torturer, the organized crime activities include human trafficking and exploitation, torture-porn, and snuff films/photos; and, (c) **tortures embedded in socio-cultural and religious violations**, for instance, United Nations Special Rapporteurs on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment have already identified FGM, acid burning, and widow burning as examples of torture perpetrated by non-state actors.

The NST of the women included in group (c) has been globally pre-identified and pre-defined as belonging to `their` so-called unique cultural spaces. We suggest, however, that `their` cultural spaces are basically no different than the cultural spaces of the women identified in the other two groupings. All are victimized by the global universal patriarchal misogynistic cultural space which has a patriarchal divide that has for centuries dismissed the NST inflicted against women and girls in the private sphere 'simply' because they are women or girls. This patriarchal divide has preserved classic torture as being a human right violation, meaning that warring men needed to be protected from suffering or militarily toughened-up to endure, while, when the same classic acts of torture were/are inflicted against women or girls these have been normalized as private matters and ignored. Or, as in Canada, misnamed and

minimized as an 'assault' of some kind, therefore making a cultural space whereby gendered NST is deemed not to occur. The *Criminal Code of Canada* only criminalizes torture that is inflicted by State perpetrators, for instance federal police, military personnel or embassy staff because of their "official" status as being representatives of the Canadian government. When a spouse, a parent, grandparent, guardian, human trafficker, for example, commits the same acts of torture as the State perpetrator not only are these torturers not held legally accountable for torturing but their crime is minimized to an assault therefore misnaming and minimizing the NST that a woman or girl has suffered. When there is no specific and distinct NST law NST victimization is deemed not to occur—it becomes invisibilized as does the NST women and girls survive.

Commercial based torturers have also benefited from the patriarchal divide. Because the patriarchal divide deemed that acts of torture only existed in the public sphere, this meant, as stated previously, that all other forms of non-state inflicted torture were made invisible. This, in effect, permitted commercial based torturers to occupy the dominant patriarchal cultural space to define and normalize the sexualization and objectification of women and girls, and to commodify women and girl's bodies. The patriarchal divide facilitated the cultural space whereby pornography has become freedom of expression and where, for some perpetrators, sexualized torture and snuff images are 'pleasure trophies'. So, to answer the question, "Can this culture of patriarchal misogynistic universality be re-claimed?" Should it be re-claimed? Re-claimed meaning restored, cured, repaired, redeemed, put back together—there are no universal cultural spaces, there are no group-particular cultural spaces that can be re-claimed, both are unsafe. Both have proven to be dangerous spaces for women and girls because the foundations of these cultural spaces are built on patriarchal misogyny.

Can these cultural spaces be re-defined? They most certainly can. How? Firstly, by truth telling. By a global socio-cultural admission that there exists a dominant universal culture—a patriarchal misogynistic one in which women and girls are the predominate victims of widespread and gross acts of torture inflicted by families, guardians, spouses, traffickers, 'sex' tourists, and like-minded individuals/groups, for example. Secondly, by embracing a new socio-cultural-relational responsibility of human rights and women's equality, including speaking loudly of NST victimization until a relationally safe cultural space is created for women and girls who suffered NST feel comfortable venturing into with dignity because they know they will be listened to respectfully and believed. Thirdly, politicians who serve to shape socio-cultural-legal spaces must declare that NST is a distinct human rights violation that requires specific criminalization. Fourthly, the powers held by international hands, for example United Nations Committees, must not act in ways that reflect or reinforce the discrimination of patriarchy. For example, when the Committee on the Convention on the Elimination of All



Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) is presented with women's stories of NST it should immediately implement their General Recommendation 19, 7(b) that states no one—no woman or girl—shall be subjected to torture and hold States socially accountable. The same responsibility falls on the Committee against Torture because it holds the definition of torture victimization that acts of violence must meet to be recognized as torture whether perpetrated in the public or private sphere, whether perpetrated by State or non-state actors.

We envision a universal culture that eliminates the global boundaries of patriarchal misogynistic domination that has held women and girls victimized by acts that constitute NST in a state of gendered captivity. A culture that eliminates women's relationship with her-Self dehumanized and distorted to the point where she has `grown` to normalize or Self-blame her pain. Let us create a culture of inclusive equality and dignity so that every time we speak or write of violence against women we will include non-state actor torture (NSAT) victimization and say that it is not and never was 'her fault'!