Narrative Reconciliation as Rights Based Peaced Praxis: Custodial Torture, Testimonial Therapy, and Overcoming Marginalization

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This paper looks at how marginalized communities utilize discursive practices to contest against an unresponsive state malfeasance and hegemonic bureaucracy to ensure basic rights and state services for the marginalized. Focusing on the People's Vigilance Committee for Human Rights (PVCHR), a member-based human rights movement in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, the paper aims to tell the unique story of PVCHR's work to combat custodial torture through an innovative method called "testimonial therapy." The testimonial therapy process is aimed at producing both legal testimony and cathartic release of suffering among torture survivors. In underscoring the importance of attention to narrative practices, the paper, while not overlooking narrative's risks, focuses on the practical opportunities that narrative practices create for peacebuilders.

"No one ever thinks a story that is wholly original to that person, and no one ever thinks a story alone."

-Arthur Frank, Letting Stories Breathe, 20101

"I make no attempt to define stories. The emphasis is on watching them act, not seeking their essence."

-Arthur Frank, Letting Stories Breathe, 20102

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