

Jasmine Gideon (Birkbeck, University of London)
Living with lifelong exile: Reflections on the Chilean case
23 January 2016

The event was well attended with around 45 participants on the day, comprising of members of the Chilean community, academics, NGO workers and students. The day started with a presentation from Dr Felicity Thomas (University of Exeter) who provided us with a clear overview of the mental health challenges potentially faced by migrants in the UK and how the NHS is able to respond. This provided a helpful framework for looking more specifically at the case of Chilean exiles and other Latin American groups in subsequent discussions throughout the day. Jasmine Gideon (Birkbeck) offered insights from the Chilean community in her presentation, drawing on interviews conducted with exiles across London and South Yorkshire her analysis highlighted the coping strategies many have adopted to deal with the long term effects of exile and trauma and the impact on health and well being.

In the second session speakers Angela Burnett offered insights into the work of Freedom from Torture, an NGO working specifically to meet the needs of victims of torture, and reflected on how the organisation responds to the mental health challenges experienced by refugees arriving in the UK. Perico Rodriguez, also from Freedom from Torture, reflected on the work that had been done in the 1980s with Latin American refugees arriving in the UK, many of whom came from Chile and Argentina. After this, inputs from Cristina Navarrete from the Association of Chilean Women Ex Political Prisoners and Pedro Fuentes, Chilean Community in South Yorkshire gave invaluable perspectives from different exile groups and fascinating comparisons of the experiences of exile in London and Yorkshire.

The third session shifted the focus to consider transitional justice processes and potential linkages to the health and well being of exiles. Cath Collins (University of Ulster) provided a fascinating discussion of official efforts in Chile to prosecute perpetrators of past human rights violations as well as programmes of official reparations and truth-telling for survivors. Clinical Psychologist Cristian Peña spoke

about forgiveness and reconciliation following human rights abuses and both papers led to a fascinating discussion of what justice might really look like in the Chilean context and how far 'justice' can lead to better mental health outcomes for those who have been negatively impacted by torture and exile.

The workshop finished with a showing of the film '*La Hora Chilena*', introduced by Camila Iturra, herself the daughter of Chilean exiles. The film explores the story of those Chileans who arrived in Cambridge in the 1970s and revisits the people and places that were critical to this story from the perspective of 2nd generation Chileans in the city.

Overall the workshop generated considerable rich discussion and reflection around questions of torture and exile and health and well-being. The wide range of participants ensured that a diverse variety of viewpoints were considered, with many people speaking from personal experience – something which brought significant emotion to the day as well. Alan Phillips, the ex-director of the Refugee Council and an active member of the World University Services as well as Alan Angell, one of the founding members of Academics for Chile, were also present and Alan Phillips spoke about the establishment of an archive of Chilean material at the Modern Records Centre at the University of Warwick. An important outcome from the meeting was an agreement to encourage the Chilean exiles to donate material relating to exile in the UK to the archive and Jasmine Gideon and Cath Collins will liaise with colleagues at Warwick to pursue this work. We have also created an email group to keep people up-to-date of further developments – this is open to anyone that might be interested (j.gideon@bbk.ac.uk).