

TESTAMENT

"Isn't every human born innocent into this world?"
- Peter Lindbergh

Los Angeles, March 2014

A few years ago while discussing with friends, my attention got caught about how to deal with the concept and reality of the death penalty. Was it right? Was it wrong? Was it necessary or was it revenge through justice? It struck me that giving any kind of thought to the perpetrator's roots and past conditions seemed to be dishonoring the victims.

I had started to read court cases of people who ended up on death row, with a focus on the United States. After studying about 300 documents, reporting unimaginable abuse and violence, I felt the need to know. What makes a mother beat her six-month-old baby with a baseball bat to the point he becomes unrecognizable, just because he was crying?

I came to the realization that the motives for many of these horrendous acts were oftentimes minor. In fact, they defied and surpassed any possible understanding of how they could even trigger such violence. Most of the death row inmates expressed how they experienced a positive identity in their early childhood, stating for instance "I knew I was a good person".

Yet, quite similarly, it was repeatedly reported that an external factor found its way in during childhood, transforming them slowly and inexorably into someone else. None of them was actually able to identify or name that said "external factor" precisely...

I am convinced that everyone can feel and relate to the innocence and beauty of a newborn. The years following one's childhood, the life conditions you face will decide on which side of the prison walls you may end up for most of your life. You become what these conditions - and the people creating them - have inflicted on what once was your shining innocence.

It seems to me there is no right answer and no escape, neither for "them" - the perpetrators - nor for "us". Starting and trying to understand might be the only way...