

Zitierhinweis

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BOOK REVIEWS

Ivana Maček (ed.) Engaging Violence: Trauma, Memory and Representation.

London, New York: Routledge, 2014 (Cultural Dynamics of Social Representation). XV + 198 pp., ISBN 978-0-415-83169-7, € 132.72

This exceptional book tackles a topic that is rarely openly talked about: what research on genocide, torture, and mass violence does to the researchers. How do scholars, anthropologists for instance, who have worked in the former Yugoslavia, deal with the emotional stresses that such research provokes. One reason why they may not want to discuss this topic is because their responses to the research they *choose* to do, out of free will, can surely not be compared to the horrific unwanted and involuntary experiences of their collocutors. Their view is, quite rightfully, that they belong at the bottom of any hierarchy of suffering, yet that does not make the psychological burden of dealing with such topics less real.

There is some research on what exposure to emotionally burdening material does to psychiatrists and humanitarian aid workers, but not what it does to researchers, neither in the traumatization nor methodological literature. Hence this book provides a welcome first step in the exploration of this field. Twelve insightful chapters, including Maček's introduction, all written by experienced researchers, explore various responses to long-term engagement with distressing material. It shows what are the benefits and pitfalls of empathic research; such as in anthropology and other disciplines where researchers or therapists

get close to informants' intimate experiences. In fact, there is hardly a person better equipped for the task of editing this book than Maček: she is an anthropologist who grew up in Yugoslavia and wrote an excellent ethnography of everyday life in besieged Sarajevo (Sarajevo under Siege. Anthropology in Wartime, Philadelphia 2009). Maček is also a psychotherapist and one of the founders of the network on Trauma and Secondary Traumatization (TRAST) at Uppsala University's Hugo Valentine Centre. In 2012, she held an international symposium on "Trauma and Secondary Traumatization in Work with Genocide and Mass Political Violence" of which this book is the outcome.

The contributors come from a range of disciplines (anthropology, sociology, history, refugee studies, religious studies, social psychology), and what they have in common is that they have done extensive research on politically motivated mass violence, covering the Holocaust and genocides in Armenia, Bosnia and Rwanda. Every single chapter draws from personal experiences, which are presented in an extraordinarily honest and self-reflexive manner. Many observations made in the book resonate with my own experiences in the former Yugoslavia, and hence reading the book triggered painful and confronting memories but also offered helpful insights into my responses while carrying out research in Kosovo and Bosnia during the 1990s.

This is difficult research, especially for scholars who get close to people: the anthropologist Nerina Weiss, in her chapter

"Research under duress", refers in this context to James Clifford's definition of ethnography as a "means for producing knowledge from an intense, intersubjective engagement" (127), which cannot be stressed enough here. Hence anthropologists, oral historians and others who use ethnographic methods may not be used to set boundaries and keep a distance, as most professional psychotherapists learn to do for instance by containing the threat, creating a sterile and "artificial" therapeutic environment between the four white walls of a therapy room and for a set period of time. Those employing ethnography do interviews in homes or refugee shelters, and during these interviews, which may take many hours or days, collocutors share their experiences with them. Intimacy is an important part of their work: the intimate stories of excessive violence and suffering may later become intrusive, involuntary and sometimes cannot be willed away, as Maček writes in her introduction "Engaging violence" (11). Also the ambiguities and ethical problems of the material, where one discovers, for instance, that victims and perpetrators may not always be clearly separable categories, or where perpetrators too may be traumatized, creates all kinds of moral dilemmas (see for instance Giorgio Doná's contribution "Intersectional traumatization", and Anne Kubai's chapter "Conducting fieldwork in Rwanda").

When doing this kind of research scholars need to be prepared to pay a price, in terms of experiencing strong emotions such as anger, sadness, hopelessness, helplessness, loneliness, and depression. There may be involuntary bodily symptoms, such as insomnia, anxiety attacks, nausea, vomiting, headaches, and trembling, and one may also easily head off in substance abuse, overeating and overworking. The symptoms may be so serious that they start

resembling primary traumatization in the shape of intrusive or haunting emotional states. Researchers immersed into such topics may become blind and insensitive to "normal" suffering (see Weiss's contribution). Yet there may also be enriching effects on one's private and professional life, such as on one's parenting practices, as Debóra Dwork shows in her text "To work with the history of the Holocaust", or an altruistic engagement with the wider world as a response to psychic numbing, as Ervin Laub writes in his contribution "Life in the trenches: hope in the midst of human tragedy". Exposure to extreme violence can have both destructive as well as gratifying consequences for the researcher.

The book draws on concepts from psychodynamic theory, a field which explores diverse forms of intersubjective communication, such as *transference* and *counter-transference*, which refers to researchers picking up and responding unconsciously to non-verbal clues and signals of traumatized collocutors; or *projective identification* where people communicate their traumatic experiences in a direct manner without using language or symbols (powerfully illustrated by Weiss); or *containment*, where researchers process overwhelming material and communicate it back to collocutors in a less disturbing and threatening form; or *parallel processes*, where scholars unconsciously replicate certain negative phenomena that they find in their research in institutional and private contexts; or *the logic of the inner*, which is based on Freud's notion of the unconscious, where researchers insert their topics and findings into their own everyday lives, confusing the two.

One core distinction proposed by Laurie Pearlman in her chapter "Vicarious traumatization in mass violence researchers" is between (involuntary) secondary traumatization, which refers to trauma transmis-

sion between family members and loved ones, and (voluntary) vicarious traumatization, which happens in professional relationships, between researchers and collocutors for instance. These may blend in some cases: indeed one of the book's recurring themes is that scholars who do research on violence, and may experience vicarious trauma as a result of that, may also have been subject to forms of primary traumatization, sometimes in combination with traumatic family histories, for which Doná proposes the concept of "intersectional traumatization" (91). This is akin to the notion of multiple or complex traumatization in clinical psychology, which is often the rule rather than the exception. Several contributors to the volume are living examples of intersectional traumatization, demonstrating how the choice to do this type of research is often driven by strong personal motives to come to terms with aspects of one's own biography or one's family history.

One of the most salient themes of the book is the institutional and academic context in which this research is embedded, where colleagues and administrators often poorly understand the difficult nature of the research. The combative and judgmental behaviours displayed by colleagues, for the sake of "scoring points" in a debate for instance, are unhelpful practices that deprive researchers of the much needed support, and these typical competitive academic practices are potentially more upsetting than in other kinds of research. Because of the increased financial pressures academic institutions are under, some recommendations the book makes, such as changing the organizational culture, or organizing regular counselling sessions with trauma therapists to be provided by these institutions, seem unlikelier than ever.

Pearlman's last chapter is nevertheless helpful in terms of offering useful tools to remedy some of the issues, the crux of which is that researchers take care of themselves while doing this kind of research. One should keep a healthy balance between identifying with and distancing oneself from one's research topic, allowing one to recuperate physically and psychologically. Researchers should train themselves in "exquisite empathy" (177) which enables them to get close to informants without fusing the client's experiences with their own. Putting something in-between oneself and the horrific material, through note-taking and photographs for example, and finding alternative preoccupations, such as musical and artistic pursuits, are all very helpful strategies. In short, this is a courageous book that is potentially of great help to those who do research on extreme violence.

Ger Duijzings (Regensburg)

Enikő Dácz (ed.), *Minderheitenfragen in Ungarn und in den Nachbarländern im 20. und 21. Jahrhundert*. Baden-Baden: Nomos 2013 (Andrássy Studien zur Europaforschung 8). 393 pp., ISBN 978-3-8487-0779-9, € 69.00

This book is volume eight of the relatively recent and commendable series *Andrássy Studien zur Europaforschung*, launched in 2013 and edited by a collective of professors of the Andrássy University Budapest (AUB), a small, research-oriented graduate university. The AUB enjoys financial support from Hungary, Austria, Germany, and Switzerland, as well as from Bavaria, Baden-Württemberg, and the autonomous region Trentino-Südtirol. The university has emerged as a centre of expertise in political science, history, and cultural studies