

# **THE (IN)COMMUNICABILITY OF PAIN: Some Issues for the Anthropology of Violence**

*by*

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Pain defines violence; without pain, there can be no violence. Yet, in anthropological works on violence, the pain which is produced by conflicts and which lingers on long after conflicts have ceased, have received scant analytical attention. Anthropologists of violence have so far preferred to examine the political, economic and cultural factors which have given rise to acts of violence – an important enterprise, to say the least – but have unfortunately neglected the visceral, emotional and somatic aspects of violence’s aftermath. There is a silence, according to Gerald Sider, “at the center of the anthropological vision – our attempt to give voice to our sight – a profound void, a destructive silence: a silence about suffering” (1989:14). Linda Green echoes Sider’s view, observing that anthropologists “have traditionally approached the study of conflict, war and human aggression from a distance, ignoring the harsh realities of people’s lives” (1999:56). Because pain brings about profound and usually enduring material consequences in people’s lives, failure to attend to this pain – to prolong what Sider terms a destructive silence – would amount to doing injustice to the victims of violence. The silence about pain might have partly been due to the pervasiveness of the idea that pain is unshareable, is resistant to language, and is therefore ultimately unrepresentable (Scarry 1985; see also critique in Kleinman et. al. 1997). I would suggest that we should not remain mired in this theoretical conundrum if the silence on pain

is to be broken. By shifting our lines of questioning and modes of engagement, we can find ways in which pain can be paid attention to in anthropological studies of violence.

This paper examines the ways in which pain can be examined in anthropological studies of violence. What are the methods that anthropologists can turn to when studying pain? How can anthropologists represent pain? Apart from looking at theoretical and methodological questions in the study of pain, this paper also discusses the kinds of possible contributions that analyses of pain can make. Many of the texts referenced in this paper have been written by medical anthropologists, a group which has recently been at the forefront of attempting to give voice to the silence that Sider have characterized. Additionally, the kinds of theoretical and methodological apparatuses which medical anthropologists have developed in studying the body in general can be applied in very productive ways in the study of violence and pain.

Because the book *The Body in Pain* by Elaine Scarry (1985) has been very pivotal in how many anthropologists conceptualize pain, I begin this paper with a brief discussion of the pertinent ideas in the book. Scarry's most influential idea is her characterization of pain as being incommunicable. "Physical pain," according to Scarry, "does not simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned" (1985:4). Thus, pain isolates sufferers and robs them of cultural resources, particularly language. Additionally, Scarry argues that knowledge of pain is an experiential form of knowledge. According to this perspective, to experience pain is to be certain about this knowledge; to describe another person's pain, on the other hand, is to be in doubt about its existence. This

theoretical perspective is a paralyzing and debilitating one for anthropologists of violence, for it disables one from talking about the pain that victims of violence bear. For Scarry, pain is mainly conceptualized as physical pain, something which is experienced at the level of the individual's flesh. However, it should be emphasized that in situations of violence, pain does not only arise from devastating injuries to the body, but also from other kinds of assault to the individual's subjectivity. In other words, pain can also be mental or emotional. It would therefore be incomplete to examine only physical pain which has been produced by violence.

Recently, there have been some works which I think provide alternative models to get around Scarry's unproductive approach to pain. Although not all these works are concerned with the anthropology of violence, it is useful to engage with the ways in which pain is treated in these works. One such work is Loïc Wacquant's ethnography *Body and Soul: Notebooks of an Apprentice Boxer* (2004). This book is concerned with understanding the sensuous, visceral and emotional elements involved in the acquisition of boxing skills, and the research was conducted mainly in a boxing gym in Chicago's largely black inner-city. According to Wacquant, one of the most important ways in which a boxer develops a "pugilistic habitus" is through the experience of pain: the more a boxer gets hit, the more he gets used to the pain, and the more he will internalize the rational objective of boxing which is to inflict pain on the opponent while minimizing his own pain (2004:94). To understand the pain boxers feel, Wacquant joins in the boxers' training sessions. After one particular training session, Wacquant writes about how he feels: "Tonight, as I type these lines, I'm dead tired, my hands are numb, my forehead and nose bone are on fire (as if my entire face were throbbing in the manner of a ventricle) and I've got aching spots across my chest that stab me at the slightest movement" (91). Although these descriptions of pain have a certain

clarity to them because Wacquant had felt them on his own flesh, there are some problems to this approach of investigation. One major limitation is the extent to which Wacquant's methodology can be applied to studying other forms of violence. In trying to understand the experiences of amputees after a war, for instance, surely it is unthinkable that the ethnographer has to mutilate his own limbs? Additionally, it seems that the model that Wacquant provides does not really depart far from Scarry's in the sense that it is based on the assumption that knowledge of pain can only be experiential.

Another example of an ethnography which provides an alternative to Scarry's conceptualization of pain is Linda Green's *Fear as a Way of Life: Mayan Widows in Rural Guatemala* (1999). This book examines the lives of Mayan widows whose husbands have been murdered by the Guatemalan military in a state-sponsored campaign of political violence designed to wipe out a left wing revolutionary insurgency in the 1970s-80s. According to Green, many of these widows live in fear of the military even after the war has ceased, and her main concern in the book is to examine how fear shapes the lives of these women. Green's recognition of fear as a product of violence is important, as it highlights the fact that pain can also be mental and emotional, and not, as Scarry sees it, just physical. As Green correctly acknowledges, fear is elusive, and difficult to study and describe in words. Fear undermines what Anthony Giddens (*Central Problems in Social Theory*, 1979) calls "ontological security," in that it creates a situation where one cannot trust oneself, one's own judgements and one's surroundings. Given that fear is largely a phenomenon of interiority, Green turns to her own feelings of paranoia and mistrust of her fieldwork environment to understand how fear works. Green's own experiences demonstrate how the undermining of one's ontological security forces one to self-censor and be overly-cautious. Fear therefore

coerces one to be submissive in the face of power. Clearly, Green's self-reflection is helpful in terms of casting some light on the experiences of the Mayan widows. A potentially thorny issue here is the extent to which Green's own feelings and experiences can be said to be representative of the Mayan women's, a question that we could also direct at Wacquant. Additionally, like Wacquant, Green's method do not depart far from Scarry's theoretical perspective on the certainty of embodied experiences of pain.

In contrast to Wacquant and Green, there are some authors who do not rely on their own embodied experiences of pain in order to understand another person's pain. In the article *Language and Body: Transactions in the Constructions of Pain* (1997), Veena Das argues that there is a need to shift the way in which we look at pain in order to move away from Scarry's position. One important point that Das makes in her article is her focus on Indian women's mourning laments as a communicative practice that can function to convey pain (1997:80-81). Laments differ from regular speech in that they are usually characterized by excess and hysteria. Even if Scarry is right in her point about the inadequacy of words in communicating pain, Das's analysis suggests to us that there are alternative forms of language and mediation that we can rely upon in order to understand pain.

Das's point makes a significant intervention in terms of shifting away from Scarry's perspective on pain in the sense that it enables us to look at language use which may not be assume form of coherent speech, but which may seem unintelligible, garbled downright nonsensical in the expression of pain. But when we encounter such language forms, what are we to do with them? João Biehl's ethnography, *Vita: Life in a Zone of Social Abandonment* (2005), provides a useful model. The book centres on Catarina, a nearly-paralyzed woman

whom medical authorities regard as mad and who has been left by her family in Vita, an asylum for the destitute, the ill and the uncared for. Catarina, who have been declared by medical authorities as mad, records her recollection of the past and laments her abandonment by her family in the form of a “dictionary”, a poetic but somewhat incoherent collection of words and phrases. To get at some of the meanings of Catarina’s dictionary (and hence her thoughts, emotions and perspectives), Biehl juxtaposes it with other texts: Catarina’s medical records and the stories told by her family members. Biehl’s method raises interesting questions on what counts as legitimate sources of data anthropologists can use in ethnographic projects. His enterprise urges us of the importance of taking very seriously the practices of our subjects, even though it might seem utterly incomprehensible to us.<sup>1</sup> People deal with pain in different ways – Catarina deals with it through her writings – and if we do not attend to these coping mechanisms, we would not be able to tell the story of violence from our subjects’ perspective. Biehl’s method also reminds us that important knowledge do reside in those frequently brushed off as ignorant. An example that illustrates this poignantly is Catarina’s frequent reference to rheumatism in her writings (2005:188-189), showing her acute awareness of what was going on with her own body, but medical experts have consistently refused to pay attention to her complains about her legs given that she was thought to be mad and hence unreliable.

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<sup>1</sup> Another work that urges the importance of taking seriously communicative practices which might seem absurd is Louise White’s *Speaking with Vampires: Rumor and History in Colonial Africa* (2000), which tackles a truly bizarre social practice – vampire rumours – that emerged in the colonial context. For White, the significance of these vampire stories is not in whether the vampires truly existed or not, but in what they signify. Even though White does not directly deal with pain in the context of violence, the usefulness of her text is that it provides us with a framework for dealing with weird and peculiar forms of storytelling after the occurrences of violence. Acts of terror often create fear, uncertainty, suspicion and paranoia, and these may lead to narratives that do not seem to be rational at the surface.

Several works conducted in post-conflict societies have shown that people develop illnesses after having gone through a violent experience. Illnesses become useful tools with which victims of violence apprehend and express their own trauma and pain. Following Das's argument regarding the existence of alternative forms of mediation through which pain can be expressed, we can regard illnesses as a site at which we can try to understand another person's pain. Doug Henry's article *Violence and the Body: Somatic Expressions of Trauma and Vulnerability during War* (2006), which examines the nature of bodily illness during the political violence in Sierra Leone in 1991-2002, is one work which resonates strongly with Das's perspective. Henry examines the occurrence of "haypatensi" (hypertension), among people who have been displaced by the conflict. According to Henry, the narratives that the refugees produce about haypatensi suggest that it carries very different meanings from the Western biomedical notion of hypertension (usually regarded as a genetic disease with no manifesting symptoms). In contrast, haypatensi results from too much anxiety and dwelling on losses suffered during the war: it arises, as Henry's informants suggest, "when you worry so much, your heart doesn't sleep, it doesn't rest" (2006:389). Thus, during a violent outburst when a village is attacked by enemy forces, a villager could suddenly develop haypatensi: "the heart could begin to beat heavily or quickly, to burn and cramp, or simply to hurt" (2006:388). The examination of illnesses like haypatensi, therefore, enables us to get a sense of the kinds of pain (e.g. feelings of fear, vulnerability and exposure) that are ailing the victims of violence. In other words, illnesses function as a form of memorialization of violence, one that is perhaps more visceral and instinctive than it is a product of conscious thought.

Das makes two other important contributions that depart radically from Scarry's conceptualization of pain. Firstly, in her article, Das suggests that instead of being overly preoccupied with whether a person's pain can be understood by another, we should think about a person's pain as something that can either be acknowledged or denied by another (1997:70). In this theoretical move, the certainty of pain is less important than the moral sensibility that is displayed with regards to pain. In other words, the statement "I am in pain" is seen less as a declarative one than a performative one in which the listener is interpellated to give a response (c.f. J.L. Austin 1962). "Denial of the other's pain," therefore, "is not about the failings of the intellect, but the failings of the spirit" (Das 1997:88). Although Das's point about the recognition of another's pain is primarily directed at the Indian state and historians, it seems that her comments are also applicable to anthropologists. If anthropologists do not take into account of pain, like the state and the historians, they have failed not intellectually but morally. This link between the acknowledgement of pain and morality, as we shall see later, also resonates in some analyses of pain, which tend to bring with them a strong sense of compassion for the victims of violence.

Secondly, together with her co-editors in *Social Suffering* (1997) Arthur Kleinman and Margaret Lock, Das also suggests that we should move away from looking at pain as a phenomenon experienced by the individual to looking at the social dimensions of pain, or how pain can be experienced by a collectivity. Kleinman, Lock and Das call this social aspect of pain "suffering." Like pain, there can also be many types of suffering, and can vary from the "brutal extremity in the Holocaust" to the result from the "soft knife" of routine processes of ordinary oppression." Regardless of the type of suffering which results from violence, suffering "greatly damages subjectivity" (Kleinman et. al. 1997:x). Examining the

interplay between the consequences of violence at the individual and community level helps to overcome the individualizing and somewhat anti-sociological view of pain proposed by Scarry.

How do we attend to both the individual and social aspects of pain? João Biehl's technique of writing an ethnography of one person offers one useful model in which this can be done. In *Vita*, Biehl is interested not just in Catarina per se, but in how Catarina can also function as a kind of heuristic tool for us to understand the experiences of people like her. Biehl argues that Catarina's state of abandonment is not unique to her, but forms part of a larger pattern where the sick from the poorest of the poor segment of Brazilian society are left to die on their own without proper and adequate medical attention, and family support. In other words, the study of one person's pain can be extrapolated in order to understand social pain. Thus, pain is not just a sensation that merely resides in the individual body, but it is also a condition that has been produced by overarching structures of power in the society. The occurrence of illnesses after a period of violence demonstrates the interconnectedness between individual and social dimensions of pain. As Doug Henry's article (2006) suggests, illnesses like haypatensi does not simply occur due to genetic deficiencies but due to the intricate interactions between the individual and the environment/community in which he resides.

Pain not only exists at the individual and social level, but can also assume different forms (c.f. Kleinman et. al. 1997). Pain can be attributed to the injuries, deaths and trauma caused by political violence, or the poverty, powerlessness and marginalization caused by

long-term structural factors. It is important to consider the multiple dimensions of pain in order to discern the multiplicity of factors causing them.

One example that illustrates this point is the analysis of war rapes which took place during the 1994 Rwandan genocide. During the genocide, which involved mostly members of the Hutu targeting the Tutsis, rape against Tutsi women was one of the main strategies of annihilation that was employed (Human Rights Watch 1999). When analyzing the pain of the rape victims, a narrow and somewhat ahistorical perspective attributes their plight to the ethnic conflict between the Hutus and Tutsis. However, the perpetration of gender violence during the genocide might also have been facilitated by the social structure in Rwanda. Traditionally, women have occupied a subordinate position to men in Rwandan society. A study conducted by the Human Rights Watch listed some of the challenges faced by Rwandan women in their everyday lives prior to the genocide. For instance, there were limited economic opportunities for women outside the home (women were generally thought to be childbearers and little more); women were under-represented in education and politics; and there were discriminatory policies which denied women access to credit and landowning (Human Rights Watch Africa 1996). This overarching structure of discrimination against women, combined with a murderous nationalist crusade, might explain why gender violence was committed on such a massive scale during the genocide. The extremist Hutu nationalist project requires *Tutsis* to be obliterated, and when it coalesces with and builds upon the pre-existing social structure which promotes the domination and silencing of *women*, it then becomes possible for *Tutsi women* to be targeted.

A similar perspective is offered in Linda Green's ethnography *Fear as a Way of Life: Mayan Widows in Rural Guatemala* (1999). Green regards the recent political violence as significant not just in itself, but also in terms of its relationship with the long-term systemic violence (or the everyday forms of violence associated with gender, class and ethnic divisions) faced by Mayan communities. Briefly, among the historical factors leading to the structural violence (e.g. marginalization, poverty and powerlessness) of the Mayans, especially of the women, include: the patriarchal system within Mayan communities; the privileging of whites and ladinos as a consequence of colonization; the introduction of mercantile economy which destroyed Mayans' traditional subsistence economy; and changes in the land tenure system which dispossessed Mayans of their lands. These factors then created a space for the occurrence of the recent political violence. For instance, urban elites were not outraged at the massacres of Mayans at the hands of the military because the Mayans were not regarded as a valuable or important community in the country.

What advantages do these kinds of analyses of pain offer us? One usefulness of the approach of looking at the multi-dimensional aspects of pain is that it renders visible or brings to the surface (c.f. Janelle Taylor 2005) the kinds of "forgotten" forms of violence (e.g. marginalization) which serve as foundations for the occurrence of overt forms of injustice (e.g. political murders). This has important consequences for activists and policymakers who are working towards rebuilding efforts in post-conflict societies. If one conceptualizes pain as something that is caused only by the political violence that occurred, then addressing the political violence would be deemed as an adequate solution to the suffering. However, such solutions are often inadequate. In the case of the Guatemala, for instance, the 1996 Peace Accords take little account of the indissoluble link between political

and structural violence and even if it managed to stop the occurrence of armed conflict, it failed to address questions of exploitation and powerlessness of Mayan communities (Green 1999). In the case of Rwanda, the persistence of the patriarchal structure in the post-genocide period is one reason for the stigmatization of rape victims which has made it difficult for women to come forward and seek help for their affliction. By taking into account the existence of different kinds of pain, and by examining the intersection between political and structural violence that have given rise to this pain, therefore, a more holistic understanding of reconstruction and rebuilding can emerge.

In analyzing individual and social dimensions of pain, one obviously has to grapple with the kinds of devastation that violence has brought to the community. In examining deaths, injuries, illnesses, destruction to the landscape, and people who have been transformed into orphans/widows/widowers as a result of violence, it is all too easy for the discussion of pain to slip into E.V. Daniel calls the “pornography of violence” (1996), or accounts of violence characterized by gratuitousness and excessiveness. Some might argue that what is gratuitous and excessive is debatable, but for me, the first few pages of Michel Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* where he describes the spectacle of public executions exemplify what Daniel means by the pornography of violence. In these pages, Foucault describes, for instance how the convicted murderer will have “the flesh torn from his breasts, arms, thighs and calves with red-hot pincers... and, on those places where the flesh will be torn away, poured molten lead, boiling oil, burning resin, wax and sulphur melted together...” (1977:3). This manner of description of violence is graphic and sensationalizing. One undesirable effect of this form of writing is that its shock factor distracts us from focusing on the pain that people bear as a result of violence.

Therefore, in the analysis of pain, the challenge is how to go about telling the story of affliction in a humane and humanizing way. Instead of focusing on the deaths, the severed limbs and the blood, one might prefer to err on the side of caution and focus on the narratives and texts (e.g. stories, art etc.) that people construct in response to those acts of destruction. Pasty Spyer's article *Blind Faith: Painting Christianity in Postconflict Ambon* (2006, work in progress) on the gigantic murals and billboards of Jesus which appeared recently throughout Ambon City, Indonesia, after a terrible three-year Christian-Muslim war is an example of a sensitive treatment of a community's pain. According to Spyer, one dominant theme in the Jesus artwork is the assertion by the Ambonese Christian that God did not abandon the community during the war. This theme of abandonment is a way for people to grapple with the fact that neither the Indonesian government nor the international community intervened during the war, basically leaving Ambonese Christians and Muslims to fight out their conflict themselves. The huge paintings also function as a way of staking out territory in a city which have been divided into Christian and Muslim segments after the war. The paintings, therefore, bear witness and give material form to the pain that Ambonese Christians feel – especially anxieties about invisibility – while also attempting to alleviate the condition of being unseen. Unlike Foucault's description of pain, Spyer's treatment of it is very subtle but effective; her account does not shock, but poignant and moving.

Images are a popular media form used (by anthropologists, members of the media etc.) to represent pain and violence (c.f. Arthur and Joan Kleinman's *The Appeal of Experience; The Dismay of Images: Cultural Appropriations of Suffering in Our Times*, 1997). If textual

representations of pain, as suggested in the discussion on the pornography of violence, can be tricky to resolve, the use of images are also equally (if not more) problematic. On the one hand, images of violence can commodify real pain on the ground into grotesquely entertaining objects that simultaneously titillate and disgust readers. On the other hand, images can be extraordinarily helpful in the representation of violence, given that they have a more powerful impact than texts alone: “Visual evidence ... can hold a deceptive immediacy and tends to overwhelm purely verbal arguments. It lends itself more easily to the creation of outrage, horror and indignation” (Gregory 2006:203). One problem in the use of images lies in its quality of excess, in that it is difficult to contain the range of possible interpretations that images give rise to. In order for images to be used productively and with great sensitivity in the representation of pain (in anthropological texts), the anthropologist has to be able to guide the reader’s interpretation of the images and therefore putting a constraint on the images’ quality of excess.

João Biehl’s *Vita* (2005) does a wonderful job in this regard. In terms of representational techniques, the photographs in the book assist the text to make us better understand the violence in *Vita*. Many (but not all) of the photographs consist of individual persons alone in the frame, thus conveying a sense of isolation, loneliness and abandonment. Many photographs also focused on faces of the subjects, with their eyes looking straight at us. In his essay *On Visual Interaction* (1924), Georg Simmel argues that the eyes play an important sociological function as they facilitate connection between people and help to reveal one’s interiority to the other. If this is indeed the case, then those photographs help to convey some of the emotions and thoughts of *Vita*’s residents. But the affect that photographs produce is not one of shock or outrage. Instead, grounded in a sober text

which seeks to identify the complex causes of the violence, which refuses to freely attribute blame and which is rather restrained in its descriptions of abjection (for instance, Biehl rarely, if ever, discussed his own emotions in the book), the photographs make us feel moved by the pain of Vita's residents. The intended effect of the photographs (and the text) is perhaps not one where we go out in revolutionary fervour to change the world, but one of quiet contemplation of what we should do next.

Two additional points should be brought up with regards to representations. Firstly, although this paper is concerned only with the representations of pain that is done by anthropologists in their ethnographies, it should be noted that anthropologists are not the only actors concerned with the task of representation. As Arthur and Joan Kleinman's article (1997) demonstrate, members of the media are also at the forefront of representation. It is important, as the Kleinmans do, to engage with the kinds of politics of media representation, given the broad reach that the media have and the influence the media wield in shaping responses to violence.

Secondly, while the question of how to represent pain is a central one in the anthropology of violence, it should be emphasized that the job of analysis cannot just stop there. As Veena Das has suggested, the analysis of pain should be not merely be an intellectual concern, but that it should be a moral one. Nancy Scheper-Hughes's ethnography *Death without Weeping: The Violence of Everyday Life in Brazil* similarly articulates the importance of commitment to and compassion for the victims of violence in the study of pain. "What prevents us," asks Scheper-Hughes, "from becoming 'organic' intellectuals, willing to cast our lots with, and cleave to, the oppressed in the small, hopefully not totally meaningless

ways that we can?” (1992:172).<sup>2</sup> Following Das and Scheper-Hughes, then, the analysis of pain should not be an autonomous or disembodied activity, but should be able to contribute in whatever small ways to the alleviation of people’s pain. From this perspective, one way through which we can cast our lots with victims of violence is to have our analysis of pain open up the possibility for questions of healing and therapy to be explored subsequently. Since communities devastated by violence are often visited by policymakers, activists and medical practitioners working on projects of rebuilding and reconciliation, an analysis of pain that is committed to lives of the victims of violence could engage with the work of these actors.

One of the main arguments made in this paper is that there are ways in which we can examine, analyze and have a sense of another person’s pain. The identification of that pain opens up the possibility for treatment to be administered to the pain. (In contrast, of course, the view that one can never be certain of another person’s pain somewhat forecloses the possibility for treatment). How should treatment be administered? In her article *Short-Term Intercultural Psychotherapy: Ethnographic Inquiry* (2004), Karen Seeley argues that therapeutic programs need to be sensitive to the cultural particularities of the persons needing treatment. Seeley argues that it is important for psychotherapy clinicians to abandon the one-size-fits-all model of mental health services because “clients from other societies, as well as clients from various ethnic and racial groups in this society, may not be well served by therapeutic models and techniques designed for the treatment of mainstream Westerners.” Instead, Seeley advocates that clinicians take serious account of inter-cultural differences when planning

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<sup>2</sup> Though both Das and Scheper-Hughes engage with the question of the anthropology’s ethics and moral commitment, it should be pointed out that their works cited in this paper examine different forms of violence. Das’s article is concerned specifically with political violence, while Scheper-Hughes’ book examines the violence of poverty and hunger.

therapeutic models. Interestingly, Seeley urges clinicians to learn from anthropologists and conduct a mini-ethnography of the patient in order to get some understanding of the person's cultural background during the treatment process. The point here is not whether psychotherapy is an appropriate mode of treatment for individuals from all post-conflict societies (it might not be). Rather, I would suggest, along the same lines as Seeley, that anthropological knowledge of local understandings of pain can be useful for medical practitioners in planning modes of treatment in particular communities devastated by violence.

While the treatment of individuals are important, it is crucial to note that their route to recovery cannot be divorced from processes of healing and rebuilding that have to take place on the societal level. As I have argued earlier, in situations of violence, the pain experienced by the individual is intimately linked with the collective pain that exists in society. Some current treatments for survivors of conflict, however, tend to focus largely on the individual. For instance, in the treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), trauma is regarded as an event that is located inside an individual's head rather than a social phenomenon. Therapy for PTSD is often very individualizing: survivors of violence are encouraged to draw, paint and talk about their own personal experiences of the violence (Petty and Bracken 1998). By conceptualizing the key to the successful treatment of the individual in pain as located in his head, this approach ignores the kind of community resources which could be tapped upon in the recovery of the individual. An anthropological analysis of pain that highlights the inter-connections between individual and social pain could be helpful in terms of persuading medical practitioners to construct a more holistic plan for healing.

Another way in which the study of pain can create space for the possibility for the exploration of issues of healing and therapy is the examination of not just at how violence has damaged people's lives, but also at the kinds of actions that people have taken in response to their affliction. The point here is less about being celebratory of the human capacity to resist and persist amidst adversity. Rather, the identification of small spaces for agency and dignity opens up the possibility for weaving these indigenous strategies of healing into rebuilding programs planned by policymakers, activists and medical practitioners (Green 1999, Henry 2006). Rebuilding efforts that are shaped by cultural assumptions from the outside (policymakers, activists and medical practitioners often come from outside the community) might ultimately be less effective than one that is attuned to local cultural sensibilities.

One example that illustrates this point is Liisa Malkki's article *Speechless Emissaries: Refugees, Humanitarianism, and Dehistoricization* (1996), in which she studies the plight of Hutu refugees in Tanzania who have been displaced by the 1994 Rwandan genocide. According to Malkki, the United Nations decided that the best solution for these Hutu refugees is to repatriate them to Rwanda. For these refugees, even though life in refugee camps is hard, going back home to Rwanda constitutes an even greater pain. When the refugees protested the UN's decision, their reaction is construed as a reflection of their irrational and hysterical frame of mind. However, Malkki argues that the refugees are not being over-dramatic; rather, their protest is based on the accumulated historical knowledge of the ethnic violence that has repeatedly occurred in Rwanda for many decades. Thus, the taking account of how these Hutu refugees perceive of their pain may open up the possibility for an amenable and

responsible solution. A similar situation was also described in Doug Henry's article. Western medical practitioners working in the Sierra Leone villages often misdiagnosed haypatensi as identical to the Western clinical conception of hypertension. Instead of commenting on the war directly, these medical practitioners often faulted people's diet and located the sickness entirely inside the individual. By attending to local narratives on pain – for instance, when a young woman says that “only peace can cure haypatensi, there's no medicine for that” (2006:391) – treatment for the condition should be tied up with the coming to terms with one's grief and losses, instead of just pharmaceutical prescriptions.

To conclude, I have argued in this paper that while questions of pain have hitherto been under-analyzed in the anthropology of violence, it is an endeavour that anthropologists can ill-afford to neglect further. Although the predominance of the notion of the inexpressibility of pain might have been a barrier for analyzing pain, recent studies have shown that there are several productive ways to get around this conundrum. One useful, though limited, way is for the anthropologist to use his own embodied experience of pain to get some understanding of the other's pain. Another way is the conceptualization of pain as not just a personal experience but as a collective one. Yet another is to shift the grounds of engagement completely and turn the enterprise of understanding pain from an intellectual to a moral concern. There is a lot of stake in the analysis of pain, for if pain cannot be described, discussed and examined, then there is no way in which questions of how to eradicate the pain can be explored. While anthropologists' main business is not the planning and execution of rebuilding and healing programs in situations of violence, the analysis that anthropologists produce can speak directly to the actors orchestrating these activities. In this

regard, an examination of pain, straddling between academia and activism, can potentially contribute to the alleviation of that pain.

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