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The Limits of Trauma Discourse

Women Anfal Survivors in Kurdistan-Iraq

Studien 34

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To

Shazada Hussein Mohammed

Dirk Peters

and

my late father Helmut Mlodoch

Acknowledgements

This book is based on my doctoral thesis submitted to the Department of Social Psychology, Ethnopsychoanalysis and Psychotraumatology at the University of Klagenfurt, Austria. It brings a work process of seven years to an end. For me, what follows is more than a summary of a research project. It documents the lives of Anfal women in Rizgary over the last twenty years; it also documents a significant part of my own work and life in Kurdistan-Iraq in this period. Many instances left me feeling that it is impossible to describe the multi-faceted reality of Kurdistan-Iraq and the tremendous and rapid transformation it has gone through in two decades. And in even more instances, I felt unable to really grasp the abysses Anfal women have gone through and the enormous strength they have shown to survive and to be the wonderful women I know today. I continued to work with Anfal women throughout the writing process; and every time I came back from a visit to Kurdistan, I felt I had to add new observations and aspects: a never-ending process. Presenting the book now, I try to calm myself down by considering it just a stopover in a process of working with Anfal women that I hope will continue.

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Berlin, November 2014

I cannot cry for all of you

Mam Pola, 2010[i]

(…)
Please forgive me that I cannot cry for all of you.
I only cry for one of your children:
The child that sensed the smell of cucumber before its death.
That longed for a cucumber until the very moment it died.
Ah, God, how could Azrael[ii] take the soul of this child?
And, God, have you given a cucumber to this child in that world?

I cannot cry for all of you.
I only cry for one of your beautiful girls.
Ay, Mariam.
Ah, God, was Azrael not ashamed to take Mariam's soul?
And, God, forgive my question:
Has Mariam found her fiancé in that world?

I cannot cry for all of you.
I only cry for one of your old men, Haji Mohammed.
My eyes are full of tears for him.
Ah God, he came to Your house.
He had become a Haji, he was a guest in Your holy house.
But the Moslems of Your house killed two of his sons in front of his eyes.
Black dogs have eaten their bodies.

Forgive me that I cannot cry for all of you.
As I am also a human.

I cannot take up all your pain.
But tonight I write the names of all of you,
One by one,
On the stones
And on the leaves of the trees in Paradise.
So that your offspring will not forget Anfal, and Nugra Salman, and the
road of Ar Ar[iii] and
Hajjaj[iv]!

i   My translation from Kurdish
ii Angel of the Death in Islamic theology
iii The road to the prison of Nugra Salman
iv Ruthless notorious Iraqi guard in the prison of Nugra Salman

Content

1   Introduction

Iraq: Dealing with the legacy of the past
under conditions of ongoing violence

Eleven years after the US-led invasion of Iraq in March 2003 and the collapse of Saddam Hussein's Baath-regime, the world's eyes are once again on Iraq: the 2014 brutal advance of the »Islamic State« terror militias into large parts of Iraq marks the failure of the country's national political process. This is, on one hand the result of decades of sectarian policy under the Baath regime and the regimes following it, and, on the other hand further escalates the sectarian conflicts in Iraq and the fragmentation of the Iraqi society along ethnic-national and religious boundaries.

Violence and conflict in Iraq cannot simply be explained – as frequently occurs in public debate – as the impact of the US-led invasion and occupation, but instead reflect also decades of dictatorship under the Baath regime, which exposed large swaths of the Iraqi population and members of different ethnic, religious and regional groups to savage violence and human rights violations, destroyed individuals and social structures throughout Iraq and compelled the population to withdraw to its narrow ethnic, religious and regional frameworks.

Three hundred mass graves have been found throughout the country after the demise of the Baath regime. In the shadow of on-going violence and conflict, the legacy of the Baath regime remains largely unaddressed: Kurdish survivors of

poison gas attacks and the genocidal Anfal Campaign, Shia survivors of massacres in the south, Marsh Arab victims of mass deportation and the relatives of the disappeared and executed opponents of the regime from all regions of Iraq wait vigilantly for the opening of the mass graves and demand evidence, justice, compensation, and the political acknowledgement of their ordeal.

The debate on how to deal with past crimes, pushed forward by the US-led Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) and Iraqi opposition groups in the immediate aftermath of the invasion in 2003, has long been side-lined from the political agenda by on-going political conflict and the more recent waves of violence. When the term »reconciliation« is used in Iraq today, it refers to the urgent need for a national compromise that includes also former perpetrators and that ends current violence. The current national political debate in Iraq is characterized by contrasting and conflicting memories and narratives of past and present violence; competing factions use victimhood as a significant argument to legitimize power claims at the national level. Frequently exploited for political aims and played off against each other, a policy that fosters hierarchies and competition between different victim groups, survivors feel increasingly marginalized and alienated from the political process, at both the national and the regional level.

The Anfal campaign in Kurdistan-Iraq 1988

My research in this broader context goes back to one of the most heinous Baathist crimes: the so-called Anfal Campaign against the Iraqi Kurdish population in 1988.

Anfal is the name given to the 8th Sura of the Qur'an entitled »the spoils of war« and was the code word the Iraqi regime used for an extensive military operation in the Kurdish rural areas in Northern Iraq in 1988, planned long beforehand and publicly justified as punishment for the Kurdish »collaboration« with Iraq's war enemy, Iran.

From February to September 1988, thousands of Kurdish villages in eight different rural areas were destroyed. The inhabitants were herded together; more than a hundred thousand young men and women (Kurdish sources figure the number of victims as 182,000) were segregated and deported. Only some of them have meanwhile been identified in mass gravesites; the individual fate of most of them is uncertain to this day.

Tens of thousands of elderly people and women with children were held prisoners for months in humiliating conditions in the notorious detention camps of Nugra Salman and Dibs; many, especially children and elderly died here from starvation and exhaustion. In September 1988, the survivors of the Anfal Campaign were granted, what the regime called an »amnesty« and transferred to so-called collective towns (*mujamma'at*) or resettlement camps, which the Baath regime propagated as a step in the direction of modernizing the backward Kurdish farmers. Up until 1991, Anfal survivors lived in these camps under the direct control of the perpetrators.

When in 1991 – after the first US-led invasion of Iraq – the Kurdish region gained provisional autonomy, the reconstruction of the destroyed areas began, many families returned to their original villages. Other survivors, and especially the large number of women with children, whose husbands, siblings, parents, sons and daughters were missing, stayed out in the collective towns in uncertainty and precarious socio-economic situations, awaiting the return of their beloved ones. Many live there until today.

Access, methods, research topic

I came to Kurdistan-Iraq in December 1991 as a team member of the German NGO medico international engaged in rehabilitation projects in the destroyed rural areas. In 1993, I came to the collective town of Sumud in the Germyan area in the southeast of the Kurdish region, which was struck in

April 1988 by what is seen as the cruellest of the eight operations that made up the Anfal Campaign. More than fifty per cent of the deported and killed Anfal victims from this region were women and children; and the majority of survivors were subjected to months of detention.

Here I met a large group of women Anfal survivors and was struck by their situation: Shocked and disoriented by the experience of extreme violence they had gone through, torn by grief and uncertainty on the fate of their missing beloved ones, they lived in extreme poverty, but developed enormous energies to survive and grow their often numerous children. They were reluctant to resettle to their villages or to engage in any other economic initiative; instead they were daily awaiting the return of their missing relatives. They seemed to me as if »frozen in the past«. There was a complex blend of inner paralysis, socio-economic constraints, traditional gender concepts and public victim discourses that kept these women in the role of mourning and waiting women and that prompted me to henceforth focus on women Anfal survivors in my practical work and to initiate in-depth research on their psychosocial situation, which ultimately led to the doctoral thesis published here.

In the Kurdish language women Anfal survivors are referred to as *bewa-jin-î Enfal* (Anfal women without men), *daykan-î Enfal* (Anfal mothers) or *kes-û-karî Enfal* (Anfal relatives) and are thus defined by the disappearance or loss of their relatives, side-lining their own experience of extreme violence and loss.[1] In the following I will refer to the women as Anfal women (*jin-î Enfal*, Plural *jine Enfalakan*), a term

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1 The English translation »Anfal widows« usually used in international publications is yet another incorrect definition of their legal and social status. With reference to the use of the term »survivors of violence« in the international human rights and transitional justice debate, some researchers and the media have begun to use the term *peshmawakan-î Enfal*. Literally, however, this term means »the remnants of Anfal« and is used to describe (food) »leftovers« in ordinary language. Many intellectuals and survivors reject the term for this reason. I have recently heard the terms *najadbun-î*

that they use themselves and that encompasses the entire Anfal experience.

At the centre of my research is a group of Anfal women, who still live in the former resettlement camp of Sumud, today a middle-size town renamed Rizgary. I had the privilege to know, work with and closely follow them over a period of meanwhile more than twenty years. I worked with them in rehabilitation, income-generating and psychosocial counselling projects and have been involved since 2008 in what is called the Anfal Women Memorial Forum Project where Anfal women engage for a self-designed memorial site. My study is based on my working experience and interviews made in various time periods between 1999 and 2012. For the analysis of the material I adopted exclusively qualitative methods, namely Mayring's (2000) qualitative content analysis.

The analysis of Anfal women's narratives and activities is at the heart of my research and allows me to grasp their own subjective perspective on their Anfal experience and their coping process in the aftermath. Tracing their memories, narratives and coping strategies and their transformation through the political and social changes in Iraq over the last twenty years, the study examines which factors have blocked and which have stabilized the women and thus underlines the close interweavement of individual coping with trauma and the societal and political responses to the violent experience. It explores the collective dimension of Anfal women's experience, their strength and resources, and documents their long and painful path from victims to survivors. It thus gives a powerful example of coping with extreme violence under conditions of ongoing conflict that evolved beyond discourses of trauma and healing.

Enfal, rizgarbun-î Enfal – both meaning: »those who have been spared by Anfal« and *auan ka djemabun le Enfal,* »those who remained after Anfal«.

Current state of research

Although the Anfal Campaigns against the Kurds in Iraq stand among the greatest crimes against humanity of the late twentieth century, the Anfal case has hitherto remained under-researched. Until 2003, publications on Anfal on an international level were rare, not least due to the unstable security situation and the isolation of the Kurdish region until 2003. The Iraqi author Kanan Makiya was the first to speak about Anfal to an international audience in an article in the US *Harper's Magazine* (Makiya, 1992) and, in greater detail, later in and in his book *Cruelty and Silence* (Makiya, 1993). Throughout the 1990s, Anfal was addressed for the most part by human rights and humanitarian organizations working in the region (e.g. the German branch of the Society for Threatened Peoples – GfBV, medico international, Human Rights Watch), by journalists visiting the Kurdish region (Randal, 1998; Power, 2003) and by Kurdish and Iraqi exile organizations (Kurdish Institute Paris, Kurdish Human Rights Project London, International Alliance for Justice Paris). Ziad Abd ar-Rahman's (1995) data collection *Tuni Merg – Death Crematorium* and the two ground-breaking books by Human Rights Watch, *Genocide in Iraq* (1993) and *Bureaucracy of Repression* (1994), were then the only examples of systematic research on the Anfal events. *Genocide in Iraq* has been translated into Kurdish three times[2] and has become the standard reference point for other local and international publications.

Since the fall of the Baath regime in 2003, local Kurdish publications have increased steadily. A variety of personal Anfal testimonies has been published by Kurdish politicians,

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2 *Genocide in Iraq* has been published in Kurdish language, translated by Siyamend Muftîzade (Middle East Watch/Human Rights Watch, 1999) and Jemal Mirza ʻEzîz (Middle East Watch/Human Rights Watch, 2000). There is a third translation by Mohammed Hama Tawfiq that has not been authorized by Human Rights Watch, but circulates in Kurdistan-Iraq.

former resistance fighters and male civilian survivors (Mehmud, 2002-2004; Serkani, 2009). To my knowledge, no such biographical texts have been published by women survivors, apart from Mahabad Qaradaghi's (2010) personal report about her detention prior to Anfal, which touches only marginally upon the Anfal experience. Academic publications on the topic have likewise increased, many of them supported by the Ministry of Martyrs and Anfal Affairs, which is in turn interested in underpinning Kurdish claims for international recognition of Anfal as genocide. Most of these publications are based on quantitative studies and deliver statistics on victims and destroyed villages (Dizeyi, 2001; Aziz, 2005; Mohammed, 2009); they aim to underline the genocidal dimension of Anfal (Gull, 2002). They rarely address the survivors' situation in the aftermath of Anfal, nor do they reflect the latter's own views or testimonies. Arif Qurbany's four volumes of *Witnesses of Anfal* (2002 to 2007) based on narrative interviews with eyewitnesses remain the exception.

The concentration on »victimhood« literature in Kurdistan is undoubtedly a response to the hitherto lack of international attention to the Kurdish plight and, at the same time, an expression of the significance of Anfal for the current Kurdish national struggle for autonomy and political power. Growing inner-Kurdish opposition and the development of independent media have more recently enabled critical voices on the current situation of Anfal survivors to enter the public debate (see for example the magazine *Anfalistan*, edited by Omar Muhammad) and young researchers to tackle sensitive issues such as Mohammed Azadeen Sadradeen's research on how the impunity enjoyed by Kurdish collaborators affects Anfal survivors.[3] Additional research that embeds Anfal in broader sociological and political discourses has more recently been added by a new generation of young

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3 I met Mohammed Azadeen Sadradeen in Sulaimania in October 2012 to talk about his research, which was based on qualitative interviews with Anfal survivors, but not yet finished at that time.

Kurdish researchers in the diaspora (see for example Lana Askari's work on memorial sites in Iraqi Kurdistan).[4]

On the Iraqi national level, Anfal remains unaddressed both in the media and in academic publications. The silence on Anfal is an expression of on-going conflict and mistrust among the various population groups and the competition between victims' groups.

The number of international publications on the subject is limited to what can be considered an inner circle of long-standing Anfal researchers who regularly meet at international conferences. Some of them work on the political background and impact of Anfal and the poison gas attack on Halabja (Hiltermann, 2007), others on the perception and political exploitation of Anfal in Kurdish society and Kurdish politics (Fischer-Tahir, 2012). More recently Anfal has been addressed in the context of international law and transitional justice (see Fazil Moradi's research project at the Max Planck Institute in Halle).[5]

Some articles have specifically addressed the situation of Anfal survivors from a psychological trauma perspective. Ahmad et al. (2000) have published results of a quantitative study (partly done in Sumud/Rizgary) on trauma in children survivors and diagnose 87 per cent of the interviewed children and 60 per cent of their caregivers as suffering from PTSD. Daloye (2008) found PTSD prevalence in 144 women Anfal survivors, based on the Davidson-PTSD questionnaire. Both studies are based exclusively on quantitative methods and a clinical PTSD framework. To address Anfal survivors' suffering, Daloye (2008, p. 173) recommends »cognitive therapy combined with exposure, imaginable exposure therapy, psychoeducation and vivo exposure therapy«, Ahmad (2008, p. 222) advocates for »both professional help and political efforts to find out the truth and obtain redress«.

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4 See Askari, 2012.
5 See http://www.eth.mpg.de/cms/de/people/d/moradi/project.html. Last acessed March 2013.

Drawing instead on a contextualized trauma concept, I have myself focused on the psychological situation of Anfal women in the 1990s in my diploma dissertation (Mlodoch, 2000) and several subsequent publications (Mlodoch, 2006, 2011, 2012a, 2012b).

Adalat Omar (2010)[6] and Choman Hardi (2011) have presented comprehensive studies of the specific experience of women Anfal survivors during and after Anfal; they, too, touched on psychological aspects.

The study presented here is the first long-term research on women Anfal survivors from an explicit psychological trauma perspective. It is also the first study that places the issue of women Anfal survivors in the larger context of strategies for dealing with the past in post-Baath Iraq.

Conceptual frame

The psychological concept of trauma is a key concept in my research. It is not my intention, however, to identify individual trauma symptoms in women Anfal survivors. Maintaining a critical stance on the clinical and, in my view, reductionist concept of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), I draw instead on a politically and socially contextualized trauma concept, as first discussed in response to the *extreme situation* (e.g. Bettelheim, 1943) experienced by Holocaust survivors and further developed in the 1990s in the work with victims of political violence in Latin America (e.g. Martín-Baró, 1990; Becker, 1992) and with women victims of gendered and political violence (e.g. Herman, 1992). Within the abundant literature from research and work with victims of extreme violence, I refer specifically to the impact of disappearances for the relatives of the miss-

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6 Results of Adalat Omar's research were presented at the 3rd International Conference on Mass Graves, Erbil, April 2011.

ing (e.g. Kordon et. al., 1988; Lagos et al, 1994, Boss, 2006; Preitler, 2006).

To counterbalance the victimizing tendencies when approaching survivors of violence through the trauma perspective, I pursue agency-focused approaches as developed in Critical Psychology (Holzkamp, 1985) and draw on concepts of empowerment as developed in community psychology (Keupp & Zaumseil, 1978) and resource-oriented approaches in psychotherapy (for example Reddemann, 2001). Indeed, my work with Anfal women and the discovery of the immense strength under the surface of their socially defined role as victims taught me the importance of focusing on their resources and the stabilizing factors in their lives rather than focusing on the trauma itself. The constant tension between victimhood and agency that Anfal women struggle with is a common thread throughout my thesis.

Relating to this framework my research shows the long-term destructive impact of violence on Anfal women's individual lives and social structures and pays particular attention to their specific grief caused by the uncertainty about the fate of their missing relatives. It explores how, in the aftermath of Anfal, political, economic, social and traditional and patriarchal gender concepts perpetuated their suffering. It highlights how instead certainty on the fate of the missing and political and economic stabilization after the downfall on the Baath-regime in 2003 helped them to recover and reconstruct their social and family structures.

While in psychological research and practice we are currently witnessing an increasing focus on neurobiological approaches to trauma and – in consequence – on individual short-term and »quick-impact« therapies, my research reconfirms the social and political embeddedness of trauma. The example of Anfal women foregrounds the importance of a stable and secure economic, social and political environment for the coping process and advocates for integrated long-term gender-sensitive assistance projects that combine therapeutic approaches with political and human rights ac-

tivities for social justice and better life conditions for survivors of violence.

By exploring the collective dimension of Anfal women's narratives and drawing attention to the conflicts and contrast between the women's memories and narratives and their public representation in regional and national discourses, the study links the psychological trauma debate to interdisciplinary debates on collective memory and adds to psychological attempts to grasp the collective dimension of trauma (LaCapra, 2001; Volkan, 2006; Kühner, 2008).

Finally, my study addresses the importance of truth, justice and social and political acknowledgement for the women's coping process and the alienating impact of the delay in addressing these needs on both the Iraqi national and the Kurdish regional level. It highlights the persistent tension between the women's individual and collective coping processes and institutional processes of dealing with the past. It thus adds a psychological perspective to the broader debate on political reconciliation processes in societies recovering from conflict and war.

Structure

What follows takes the reader to a journey through more than twenty years of a group of Anfal women's lives. The study is structured along various perspectives: biographical, along categories and on a time axes.

Chapter 2 of the study outlines the theoretical framework, and details my understanding of the core concepts trauma, memory and reconciliation.

Chapter 3 is dedicated to the historical, political and social context relevant to understanding Anfal women's situation over the last decades.

Chapter 4 details my personal access to women Anfal survivors and introduces the methodological framework and operationalization of the research.

Chapter 5 introduces the research location and the key persons of the research.

Chapter 6 focuses on Anfal women's narrations of their Anfal experience and discusses the trauma-protective function of their collectively shared narratives.

Chapter 7 to 11 depict the lives of Anfal women from 1988 to 2003: the years of repression between 1988 and 1991 (chapter 7), the agonizing impact of uncertainty about the fate of their missing relatives (chapter 8), and the social, political and economic constraints as well as the traditional and patriarchal gender concepts that perpetuated their suffering (chapter 9). Chapter 10 is devoted to the resources and strengths Anfal women mobilized to survive and raise their children despite all constraints. This is followed by a summary of their situation from 1988 to 2003 in Chapter 11.

Chapter 12 to 16 deal with the changes, that occurred after the downfall of the Baath regime in 2003.

Chapter 12 discusses the tension between Anfal women's desire for evidence and justice and the transitional justice process undertaken on the Iraqi national level.

Chapter 13 describes the role of Anfal in the Kurdish regional public discourse after 2003 and the representation of Anfal women in the Kurdish national victimhood narrative, which conflicts with their own experiences and needs.

Chapter 14 illustrates the socio-economic changes in Anfal women's lives after 2003 and their efforts to reconstruct family structures and social practices; it likewise shows how the reconstruction of social networks along traditional patterns tends to erode the women's collective structure.

Chapter 15 discusses how the socio-economic and political changes affect the women's situation and coping strategies, and how – in a changing context – their memories, narratives and claims transform and challenge regional and national victim discourses.

Chapter 16 sheds light on Anfal women's ongoing struggle between victimhood and agency and discusses practical working experiences from the Anfal Women Memorial Forum Project in Rizgary.

Chapter 17, ultimately, summarizes my research findings and discusses the conclusions.

The research for this book was completed in 2013. More recent developments in Iraq such as the brutal advance of the »Islamic State« terror militias into parts of Iraq in 2014, could not be addressed. The current front line between IS militias and Kurdish *peshmerga* fighting them lies in the immediate neighbourhood of Sumud/Rizgary. The Anfal women described in this study are once again facing political instability and conflict, which adds yet another layer of violence to their lives. Once again they have to bury sons and other relatives killed in the fighting. Once again their memories of extreme violence are stirred up and blend with new pain and grief. At the same time, thousands of Sunni Arab families are escaping from the fighting areas and seeking refuge in the Germyan region. Anfal women find themselves torn between their resentment towards the displaced families who for them represent the former perpetrator group, on the one hand and feelings of compassion, on the other. Once again Anfal women meet and try to find collective responses, consoling each other, supporting the Kurdish struggles against the »Islamic State«, and engaging in neighbourly aid to women among the displaced

2 Conceptual framework

My research on women Anfal survivors touches upon three conceptual realms – trauma, memory and reconciliation. It shows the long lasting impact of extreme violence and loss on the women's psychological state and social lives and the extent to which their suffering and coping strategies have been shaped by social, political and economic factors and gender roles in the traditional society of the Germyan region. It thus contributes to a politically and socially contextualized and gendered trauma concept. It explores the interwoven character of the women's individual and collective memories and narrations and their transformation through the social, economic and political changes in Iraq and Kurdistan over the last twenty years and outlines how the women's individual and group narratives on Anfal contrast and conflict with political narratives and victimhood discourses on Anfal at both the Kurdistan regional and the Iraqi national level. Here my research links the psychological trauma discourse to concepts of *collective memory* and *collective trauma* in sociology, anthropology and cultural studies. It ultimately addresses the tensions between the women's claims for truth, justice, reparations and political acknowledgement, on the one hand, and the current political strategies of addressing past crimes in Kurdistan and Iraq, on the other. It contributes to the larger sociological and political debate on political reconciliation from a psychological perspective. Certainly all three conceptual realms I touch upon are vast and »booming« fields of research and marked by multiple and often controversial notions and debates.

Given the inflationary use of the above mentioned concepts not only in psychology, but increasingly also other disciplines such as anthropology, historiography and cultural and literary studies, in the following I will roughly delineate the psychological concepts and debates relevant to conceptually framing and situating my research.

2.1 Trauma – a contested concept

The inflationary use of the trauma concept

The concept of psychological trauma is highly contested. Its ambiguity begins with its use as a definition for a violent event or experience and at the same time as a description of the psychological impact of such an event on an individual, group or society. An event cannot be defined per se as traumatic detached from its specific perception by the affected person and his or her subjective reaction to it. Similarly, a subjective reaction cannot be considered traumatic isolated from a violent event or shock. Trauma is therefore marked by the relationship between an external event and a specific individual response to it (Fischer & Riedesser, 2009). Following Lorenzer (1966), I use the term *traumatic experience* to describe this subjective perception of an objective event.

The notion of trauma has massively entered media debates and public discourse since the mid-1990s and has seen inflationary use ever since. Today, media coverage of natural disasters, plane crashes, hostage taking or armed conflict rarely takes place without a commentary from a television trauma expert on the long-term consequences for the survivors, the relatives of the victims and the rescue personnel. This excessive use of the term trauma feigns empathy with those who suffer. However, it levels incomparable experiences, thereby decontextualizing trauma as a concrete experience of suffering and rendering it trivial. Today the use of the trauma term is commonplace. People say that they are traumatized by a failed exam or the end of a relation-

ship. Moreover, the habitual tele-diagnosis of whole populations affected by war and conflict as traumatized suggests that personal experience of violence automatically leads to psychological disorders, stigmatizing those concerned in the process.[7]

On the academic level, the psychological trauma concept has gradually found its way into the discourse in cultural and literary studies and even historiography. Here it is frequently used in the metaphorical sense to characterize historical ruptures or cultural and literary representations of suffering, and occasionally in a quasi mystical sense to grapple with the *uncanny* or the *unspeakable* (Caruth, 1995). Such use of the trauma concept is often disconnected from concrete personal experience of suffering and tends to erode the notion of trauma as a useful analytical concept.

Given the ambivalence of the trauma concept itself, its inflationary use and its propensity to trivialize or mystify suffering, I found myself at odds with the notion itself at various points of my research and considered abandoning it altogether and instead referring to alternative concepts such as *social suffering*, developed by Arthur Kleinman and Veena Das (Kleinman et al., 1997). Discussing my doubts with Professor Ottomeyer, he argued that, while blurred in the academic discourse, the specificity of trauma becomes immediately apparent in the practical work with survivors of violence. Indeed, in my own practical working context with Anfal survivors, the trauma concept proved to be an important category for understanding the specific dynamics and lasting impact of extreme violence and loss on individuals, social structures and the survivor community.

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7 As Ottomeyer (2011) points out, compassion and understanding for victims of conflict in distant places is finite and ceases abruptly when they seek asylum and assistance in Europe.

The social and political brisance of trauma

Trauma is an overwhelming experience of shock and a violent rupture in the stream of a person's life. Trauma is the experience of powerlessness and the victim's loss of control over his or her physical and psychological functions (Herman, 1992). It not only destroys the psychological and physical integrity of the victims, but also shatters their assumptions about the world and themselves. Trauma deactivates the victims' social networks and their awareness of belonging to a system of relationships, values and meanings.[8] Judith Herman (1992, p. 33) describes trauma as the »affliction of the powerless«.

Trauma is not solely a psychological, academic or therapeutic concept. It is a political and moral issue, a provocative concept of political and social explosiveness because it deals by definition with the impact of outside events on the individual (Lennertz, 2006). To deal with trauma means to approach the latent fragility of human existence, which is constantly threatened by unforeseeable catastrophes and the dark side of human nature: extreme violence and war. »To study psychological trauma means bearing witness to horrible events« and »has lead repeatedly into realms of the unthinkable and foundered on fundamental questions of belief« (Herman 1992, p.7). »Extreme traumatization,« says Klaus Ottomeyer (2011, p. 87; the author's translation from

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8 Fischer and Riedesser (2009, p. 84) define trauma as »a vital experience of discrepancy between threatening situational factors and individual coping capacities, accompanied by feelings of helplessness and defenceless exposure and creating an enduring blow to concepts of the self and the world« (the author's translation from the German). There are also other psycho-economic definitions of trauma that describe it as an experience that utterly overwhelms the individual's normal ability to deal with shock, stress or loss: »In economic terms, the trauma is characterized by an overwhelming flood of stimuli that exceeds the subject's tolerance and his or her capacity to process these stimuli« (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1999, p. 513, the author's translation from the German).

the German) »is a nightmare that became reality and deeply shatters our trust in the world, when we get in touch with it.«

The concept of psychological trauma has been highly contested since German neurologist Hermann Oppenheim (1889) first introduced the originally medical term to describe the physical and psychological reactions of survivors of railway accidents in England in his book *The Traumatic Neuroses*. Historically, the development of the concept of psychological trauma is closely related to social and political change, with phases of »episodic amnesia« (Herman 1992, p. 7). Pierre Janet, Sigmund Freud and Joseph Breuer came under enormous social pressure towards the end of the nineteenth century when they contended that traumatic childhood experiences of premature sexual seduction and sexual abuse were at the origin of *hysteria* in adult women, hitherto considered malingerers (Janet, 1894; Breuer & Freud, 1895; Freud, 1896). Their early ground-breaking studies of memory phenomena such as the *dissociation* of traumatic memories and their persistent *somatic representation* and *deferred activation* after periods of *latency* were rejected by the academic community of the day, since the assumption of widespread sexual and domestic violence against women constituted a social scandal and challenged the prevailing concepts of family and society (Venzlaff et al., 2004, p.10). Whereas Janet was marginalized in the academic community for his insistence on the presence of real experiences of sexual violence as the background to the phenomena of hysteria, Freud later saw them as fantasies and imaginary acts *(seduction theory – German: Verführungstheorie)*. The debate on whether this shift in interpretation was the result of new insights or social and political pressure is on-going (Herman, 1992; Lennertz, 2006; Venzlaff et al., 2004, pp. 10-11; Schriefers, 2008).

The next waves of trauma research and trauma debate emerged with the First and Second World War, when psychologists and physicians were confronted with soldiers suffering from severe physical and mental disorders as a result of their war experience. Trauma research was then primarily dominated by military psychiatrists and the political inter-

est in finding quick solutions that would make it possible to redeploy the concerned soldiers, commonly discredited as cowards and *Kriegszitterer*.[9] Accordingly, approaches to trauma from these periods concentrated on discovering effective short-term therapies to cure the symptoms. With the end of the respective wars, the debate ceased to exist (Herman, 1992; Schriefers, 2008).

The experience of the Holocaust, the unimaginable *break of civilization* (Diner, 1996),[10] generated rich and multi-layered research on trauma among Holocaust survivors, though only after a period of shock, denial and silence in the 1950s and early 1960s. Today trauma is closely associated with the Holocaust (Lennertz, 2006). Psychoanalyst Bruno Bettelheim, himself a survivor of the concentration camp in Auschwitz, defined the prolonged experience of violence, humiliation and death in the camp as an *extreme situation* (Bettelheim, 1943). Later the term *extreme traumatization* was introduced to describe the experience of victims and survivors of massive man-made violence and to convey its incomparable nature (see e.g. Grubrich-Simitis, 1979; Becker & Calderon, 1992). The Freudian concepts of *latency* and *deferred action* were confirmed in research on Holocaust survivors, who often developed severe symptoms of trauma triggered by events that occurred long after their release from the concentration camps. In his work on Jewish orphans who survived the Holocaust by hiding in foster families in the Netherlands, Hans Keilson (1979) was the first to emphasize the strong correlation between the development of traumatic symptoms and post-trauma social and political realities. He developed the concept of *sequential traumatization*.

9 The literal translation of *Kriegszitterer* is »those who tremble in face of war«. The English translation »shell-shock sufferer« does not fully convey the disdain expressed by the German term.

10 Dan Diner's use of the term »break of civilization« refers less to the dimension of systematic violence exerted by the Nazi regime to persecute and annihilate the Jews than to the associated general breakdown of ontological certainty and trust in the limits to human nature's capacity for evil.

Further research was carried out on the transgenerational passing down of trauma to second- and third-generation survivors (Bergmann et al., 1995; Kogan, 1996, 1998; Bar-On & Chaitin, 2001) and on the impact of trauma and suffering on the constitution and self-definition of the nation state of Israel (LaCapra, 2001).

The PTSD concept – achievements and curse

In the 1970s, the anti-Vietnam-war movement in the United States produced a fresh wave of trauma research and debate. US soldiers who had returned from Vietnam physically and psychologically devastated by the war scratched the heroic image of the American soldier. Painful reminders of the colossal American defeat in Vietnam, they were marginalized in their own society. Vietnam War Veteran associations fought for social and political acknowledgement of the trauma the soldiers had suffered and their qualification for pension schemes. It was in response to their claims that finally, in 1980, Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) found entrance into the DSM III (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders) as a clinical syndrome, subsumed under anxiety disorders (American Psychiatric Association, 1980). In 1992, PTSD was included in the ICD-10 (International Classification of Diseases) Manual of the World Health Organization (WHO, 1992). The concept of PTSD is based for the most part on stress-oriented trauma research and defines a series of events, such as violence, sudden loss, accidents, natural disasters or sexual abuse, as *traumatic stressors* that overburden the individual's capacity to cope with stress. The PTSD diagnosis relies on the presence of identifiable symptoms: the avoidance of trauma-related stimuli with parallel intrusive symptoms such as nightmares, flashbacks and obtrusive images, as well as sleep disorder, irritability, anxiety, nervousness and lack of concentration.

Apart from all critical aspects of the PTSD concept, its ground-breaking historical achievement was the finally wide-

spread recognition of external events as etiological agents for psychological disorder. For the victims and survivors of violence, this represented significant progress in terms of recognition of their suffering. Up to the 1980s, Holocaust survivors in Germany were obliged to undergo humiliating procedures to prove that their psychological problems had effectively begun with their detention in concentration camps and were not rooted in genetic dispositions or pre-war family issues. Kurt Eissler's (1963) essay, entitled *Die Ermordung von wie vielen seiner Kinder muss ein Mensch symptomfrei ertragen können, um eine normale Konstitution zu haben?* (English: The murder of how many of his children must a person be able to bear without developing symptoms, in order to be recognized as having a normal (psychological) constitution?) became a metaphor for the denial of the massive and long-term psychological consequences of the Holocaust and – more generally – of violence and war in post-war Germany.

The classification of PTSD as a clinical syndrome paved the way for survivors of violence to qualify for treatment, pensions and compensation and to take legal action. Today, for asylum seekers fleeing to Europe and the USA from war and conflict situations, the PTSD diagnosis is useful when it comes to taking legal action to gain asylum and prevent deportation to their country of origin (see e.g. Rafailović, 2005; Bundesweite Arbeitsgemeinschaft der psychosozialen Zentren für Flüchtlinge und Folteropfer, 2006). In Germany the growing number of PTSD diagnoses in German soldiers returning from military deployment in Afghanistan has recently led to heated public and parliamentary debates on the moral and political legitimacy of Germany's military presence in Afghanistan, demonstrating once again the close link between political debate and trauma discourse.[11]

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11 See for example: »Afghanistan im Kopf«. In: DIE ZEIT, 2 Feb. 2009; »Afghanistan-Einsatz: Zahl deutscher Soldaten mit Trauma steigt dramatisch«. In: SPIEGEL ONLINE, 3 Feb. 2009

Nonetheless, the PTSD concept has been the subject of biting criticism in the psychoanalytically oriented trauma literature and among practitioners working therapeutically with victims of political and gender-based violence. The principal bone of contention is the concept's tendency to reduce the complex impact of violence to a catalogue of standardized symptoms, to subsume such incomparable experiences as accidents and man-made torture under *traumatic stressors,* and thus to decontextualize and depoliticize violence and its impact. It has been criticized for its concentration on individual symptoms and its neglect of social and political dimensions of suffering. Critics moreover maintain that the PTSD concept medicalizes and pathologizes »normal reactions to an abnormal situation«[12] and as such stigmatizes the victims. In 1997, medico international published a collection of critical voices on the PTSD-concept under the title of *Rapid Deployment Force »Soul«,* and thus contributed to a critical trauma debate in Germany (medico international, 1997).

Since the 1990s, the PTSD paradigm and attendant therapeutic approaches to victims of violence have become an essential component of US and European humanitarian aid and development interventions in societies recovering from the impact of war, conflict and mass violence. Practitioners, however, found PTSD inadequate for explaining the specific impact of political and mass violence and developing services to support the survivors (medico international, 1997 and 2005; Weine & Chae, 2008). They also criticized the export of Western individualistic therapy approaches and their imposition on conflict situations worldwide for ignoring concepts of suffering and strategies of coping specific to the

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12 The phrase goes back to Viktor Frankl (1982), psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor. In his report on survival in the Nazi concentration camps written in 1945 *Und trotzdem Ja zum Leben sagen. Ein Psychologe erlebt das Konzentrationslager,* he says: »In an abnormal situation an abnormal reaction is normal behaviour« (Frankl 1982, p. 30, the author's translation from the German).

cultures concerned. Radical critics like David Becker and Derek Summerfield see the PTSD concept as a »Western« invention. They deplore the growth of a global »trauma industry«, the attendant »help business« and the mushrooming of psychosocial counselling activities that ultimately serve to depoliticize violence and conflict and to individualize its victims (Becker, 1997, 2007; Summerfield, 1997, 2001).

The impact of political violence – psycho-social trauma or socio-political traumatization processes

I concur with the critique of the PTSD concept outlined above. My own research is situated in a context of extreme political violence, deliberately used against a group of people in order to torment, humiliate and annihilate them and accompanied by legitimating strategies of devaluation. Women Anfal survivors have gone through multiple experiences of violence and loss during Anfal and have suffered from additional political, social and gender-based violence in the aftermath. The clinical PTSD concept falls short in grasping the complex nature of their traumatic experiences, on the one hand, and the multiple influence of socio-economic, political and gender conditions in the aftermath on their suffering and coping, on the other. It is not my research interest to investigate clinical trauma symptoms in individual women Anfal survivors. Instead, I demonstrate the complex interweaving between their individual suffering and their life circumstances. I draw on and contribute to a socially, politically and culturally contextualized trauma concept as developed in work with victims of extreme political violence in other contexts: in research and therapeutic work with Holocaust survivors (for example Keilson, 1979; Grubrich-Simitis, 1979; Laub, 1992; Bar-On, 1995), with victims of political violence in Latin America (Kordon et al., 1988; Becker, 1992; Lagos et al., 1994) and South Africa (Hamber, 2009), with victims of gender-based violence and sexual abuse (Herman, 1992) and in psychosocial assistance projects in various contexts (medico international, 1997 and

2005). I also draw on discussions and publications within the International Trauma Research Net.[13] Various terms have been used to describe the specific impact of political, gender-based and thus man-made violence: *extreme traumatization, complex traumatization* and *political traumatization*. Based on his work with victims of torture, detention and disappearance in El Salvador, Ignacio Martín-Baró (1990) developed the concept of *psycho-social trauma*; David Becker and his colleagues working with ex-detainees and relatives of missing persons in Chile proposed the concept of *socio-political traumatization processes* (German: Sozialpolitische Traumatisierungsprozesse) (Becker, 1992). Judith Herman (1992) offered a comprehensive, contextualized approach to violence and its social impact in her landmark book *Trauma and Recovery*, based on psychoanalytical and feminist theory and Herman's extensive practical work with victims of political terror, gender-based violence and child abuse.

All these concepts refer for the most part to psychoanalytical theory. They define trauma not purely as an individual but also as a social and political experience, and underline its processual character. They make a sharp distinction between an experience of shock following natural disasters or accidents, on the one hand, and the experience of man-made violence, on the other. They highlight the specific victim-perpetrator relation in experiences of man-made violence and

13 The International Trauma Research Net goes back to the International Study Group on Trauma, Violence and Genocide founded by Dori Laub in 1996. It gathered researchers and practitioners in the field of man-made violence and its impact and aimed to promote exchange and networking. The Network published several readers, organized three international conferences and published a newsletter in the web (http://traumaresearch.his-online.de). Unfortunately, the Network terminated its work in December 2007. The Network had been a forum of academic and professional exchange for further developing a socio-political perspective on trauma – an endeavour that one badly misses in today's psychological debate.

its long-term impact on the victim's psyche.[14] They stress the social, political and cultural embeddedness of the violent experience as well as the close correlation between individual coping strategies and the prevailing socio-economic and political realities and gender roles in the aftermath.

In psychological and psychotherapeutic praxis, this contextualized understanding of trauma translates into integrative assistance approaches that combine individual therapy and counselling for victims of violence with educational, economic and development assistance.

It also prompts psychologists and psychotherapist to engage in broader human rights and political issues and to work towards changing and stabilizing the life conditions of survivors of violence. Psychologists, who assisted relatives of disappeared in Argentina, actively engaged in the struggle for justice and accountability of the perpetrators (Kordon et al., 1988; Schmolze & Rauchfuss, 2009); European psychotherapists and counselling centres assisting victims of torture and violence seeking asylum in Europe find themselves struggling against hostile asylum laws in their efforts to gain secure life conditions for their clients (Peltzer et al., 1995; Ottomeyer, 2011).

The neurobiological turn – confrontation or stabilization

With the recent »neurobiological turn« in psychological research, however, a disturbing tendency to decontextualize and individualize trauma looms large. Based on brain research findings, approaches such as *Narrative Exposure Therapy* (NET), which was developed at the University of Constance (Schauer et al., 2005), focus on individual short-term and quick-impact trauma therapies. The authors hold

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14 Referring to the 2006 earthquake in Turkey where the impact of natural disaster was intensified by the structural insufficiencies of buildings and state services, however, Vamik Volkan (2006) shows that the boundary between natural disaster and political violence can be blurred.

that intense and repetitive confrontation with the traumatic experience fosters its integration in the narrative memory and as such »heals« the trauma. They downplay the importance of stabilizing a trauma victim before confronting him or her with the traumatic situation (Neuner, 2008) and the significance of economic and socio-political factors for the coping process. Furthermore, they export standardized therapies to various contexts of organized violence, regardless of the prevailing social, political and cultural conditions (Schauer, 2008).[15]

Against this background, my research on women Anfal survivors in Iraq accentuates once again the need for a socio-political and gender-sensitive perspective on trauma and, relatedly, a psychosocial praxis that combines therapeutic aspects with human rights and political engagement.

Trauma, agency and resilience

Approaching an individual or group from the trauma perspective always runs the risk of centring on their suffering and thus further labelling them victims and disempowering them. To counterbalance these tendencies, I draw on subject-centred concepts of agency as developed in the school of Critical Psychology (Holzkamp, 1985). Drawing on *activity theory* as developed in Soviet Psychology (Leontiev, 1978, 1981; Vygotsky, 1962, 1978), Critical Psychology defines agency as the very process of relating to the outside world and puts it in the focus of psychological research; it emphasizes that the individual, who is on one hand conditioned by and, on the other hand, produces the outside world, always has a range of actions to choose from. Indeed, my work with Anfal women has taught me that, however desperate their situation was, they never ceased to struggle against the ad-

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15 For a critical review of NET see Mundt et al., 2011; Ottomeyer, 2011.

verse conditions and found many creative ways of coping with their experience of violence, loss and marginalization.

There is a widespread assumption that those who have undergone the experience of extreme violence and loss must be traumatized in the psychological sense. It is beyond dispute that no one survives what the Anfal women went through, for example, without retaining deep psychological scars; at the same time, this does not mean, that the women have automatically developed symptoms that qualify as traumatic or lead to traumatization.[16] Individual reactions to violence are manifold and, as already indicated, shaped to a greater extent by personal resilience and social conditions after the event than by the nature and degree of the violence experienced (Keilson, 1979). In what follows I will avoid applying the term *traumatized* to women Anfal survivors. I will instead describe their manifold and complex individual and collective response to the suffered violence.

Psychological research on *resources* and *resilience* has increased since the 1990s. Both terms are defined as the balance between a person's strengths and potential, on the one hand, and their vulnerability, on the other. Resilience is more commonly used in relation to individual/personal dispositions and resistance; the term resources is used in a more comprehensive sense to signify the social, economic and political factors that reinforce the recovery process. Stable and affectionate family bonds and social ties as well as self- confidence and social competency have been evaluated as primary resilience factors, as have intelligence and emotional intelligence (Bonanno, 2004). In Luise Reddemann's (2001) approach, imagination and creativity are powerful sources of strength. Aaron Antonovsky's (1979) model of *salutogenesis* underlines the protective impact of the individual's *sense of coherence*, based on *comprehensibility,*

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16 Epidemiological research shows that 25-40 per cent of survivors of violence in post-conflict situations show symptoms of traumatic responses (Beristain, 2006; Hamber, 2009).

manageability and *meaningfulness*. Beyond these individual resilience factors, physical and economic security, stable social networks and the existence of empathic listeners and trusted people in the environment can foster recovery, and social and political acknowledgement of the suffered violence adds to the survivor's ability to cope. I contribute to this discourse by outlining the strong influence of external factors on the suffering of Anfal women and their coping capacities. Throughout my research and practical work, it has been one of my core concerns not to look at women Anfal survivors from a deficit perspective, but instead to focus on their resources, strengths and capacities and thus regard them as – in Luise Reddemann's words – »persons who are always more than their trauma«.

2.2 Individual trauma symptoms

Although political violence is frequently a shared experience, it remains primarily an individual and lonely experience for each single victim. Across the different trauma concepts and schools, there is general agreement on a series of key individual-level symptoms and dynamics that are necessary to define a response to stress and suffering as traumatic.

Avoidance and intrusion – the central dialectic of trauma

Judith Herman (1992, p.1) describes »the conflict between the will to deny horrible events and the will to proclaim them aloud« as the »central dialectic of psychological trauma«. The contrasting tendencies of avoidance and intrusion, and the alternating of related symptoms are considered a key dynamic in the traumatic process by both stress-oriented and psychoanalytic trauma concepts (see Horowitz, 1976, Reddemann & Sachsse, 1997). On the one hand, the affected person summons up enormous energy to avoid people, places and situations related to or reminiscent of the

traumatic situation. The repression or even complete dissociation of the memory of the traumatic event is a frequent mechanism of avoidance, but can also be interpreted as a mechanism of self-protection. On the other hand, the person is haunted by images and memories of the traumatic experience and relives it in nightmares and overwhelming flashbacks whose emotional and sensual intensity resembles that of the traumatic occurrence itself. Repressed or dissociated memories of the traumatic event can re-emerge after even long periods of latency, triggered by situations or just a smell, a gesture etc. reminiscent of the traumatic event. The unconscious persistence of traumatic memory often leads survivors to »search« for and re-enact the traumatic situation in behavioural scenes or relational patterns in a form of *compulsive repetition* (van der Kolk, 1989).

While this dialectic process of alternating symptoms of avoidance and intrusion is largely considered a tormenting trauma symptom, Reddemann and Sachsse (1997) interpret it instead as a component of the coping process and underline the protective character of dissociative processes: the individual dissociates unbearable memories until he or she is sufficiently stable to confront them.

The »devil inside« – the introjection of the perpetrator

In contexts of political and gender-based – and thus man-made – violence, the act of violence is often accompanied by the perpetrators' attempt to devaluate and dehumanize the victims. In addition, the perpetrator forces the victim into a relationship of submission and at the same time physical intimacy and dependence. In a desperate attempt to survive or mitigate the aggression, victims attempt to understand and identify in part with the logic of the perpetrator and internalize the latter's devaluating perception of themselves. This complex perpetrator/victim relationship leaves a long-lasting imprint on the victim's psyche, an »alien body« or »inner devil«, which Sándor Ferenczi (1933) defined as the

introjection of the aggressor or the implantation of *perpetrator introjects* (German: *Täter-Introjekte*). Ferenczi drew on his work with children abused by close relatives, who tend to feel responsible for having caused the aggression or »deserved« it. Taking the responsibility seems more bearable than accepting the evil of a person of trust they depend on. Thus, paradoxically, the suffered violence turns into intense guilt feelings in the victim (Hirsch, 2000).[17]

Guilt

Guilt is a prominent and complex feeling in survivors of man-made violence. Apart from the above mentioned diffuse self-blame implanted by the introjections of the perpetrator, survivors of violence tend to feel guilty about their failure to have done the »right« thing to prevent or mitigate the violence they suffered or, in the case of a collectively shared experience such as mass detention, to have protected their relatives, friends and co-prisoners. William G. Niederland (1968) has introduced the notion of *survivor guilt syndrome* to describe the feeling of guilt for having survived, while others perished, that was common among Holocaust survivors (Grubrich-Simitis, 1979); the syndrome has even found entrance into the catalogue of PTSD-symptoms (WHO, 1992).

Guilt feelings of survivors are often reinforced by their social environment's reactions in the aftermath of the suffered violence. »Blaming the victim« for alleged »wrong« behaviour is a well-known strategy to remain distant from the victims' suffering; the victims' counterparts tend to identify

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17 »Massive experiences of violence and loss leave an alien body in the self, an introjection that causes a sense of guilt. The paradox that the innocent victim (...) suffers from intense guilt, while the perpetrator neither feels nor acknowledges guilt, can be explained only by the fact that the victim vitally needs the perpetrator« (Hirsch 2000, p. 457, the author's translation).

with the »strong and victorious« perpetrator rather than with the weak victim. Across different cultural and political contexts, for example, women victims of sexual violence are frequently held responsible for having provoked the aggression. My own findings on the stigmatization of women Anfal survivors for alleged sexual and physical violence suffered during Anfal add to the abundant research in other traditional and patriarchal social contexts on female victims of violence who faced similar stigmatization (see for example Das, 2008).

However, feelings of guilt and self-blame can have a »real« background, as when victims of violence become guilty of betrayal of or aggression against others during the traumatic experience. Primo Levi's (1947) autobiographic testimony on his detention in Auschwitz, *If This Is a Man,* gives a disturbing insight into the inhuman logic of the concentration camps, where the struggle for survival led to hierarchies and aggression in the ranks of the prisoners and ultimately to what Levi describes as the dehumanization of the latter. There is a risk in the victims' counterparts' reactions, including eventual psychotherapists, of easily subsuming guilt feelings in victims of violence as an element of the dynamics of trauma and to overlook a possible genuine portion of responsibility and guilt on the part of the survivor, who feels tormented by it (Ottomeyer, 2011).

Shame

Shame is another prominent feeling in survivors of violence; it is frequently related to a diffuse sense of personal responsibility for the violence they experienced (»Why me?«). Feelings of shame are particularly strong in victims of sexual violence (Herman, 1992) and sexualized torture (Becker 1992). Perpetrators use sexualized violence deliberately to violate the sense of honour and shame that prevails in traditional and more religious communities, as in the case of the mass

rape of Bosnian Muslim women by Serbian soldiers between 1992 and 1995 (Mirvic-Rogge, 2005).[18]

Shame is an emotion that is particularly shaped by cultural, social and religious values and thus greatly differs across the various contexts. As my work will show, in the traditional patriarchal context of the Iraqi Kurdish rural society, sexuality and the body are taboo issues. Women's experience of physical and sexual violence is not only met with silence, but also turns as social stigma against the very women who suffered it, thereby intensifying their sense of shame.

Shattered assumptions

Experiences of massive violence not only destroy the victims' psychological and physical integrity, but also their assumptions about themselves and the world. Their belief in a meaningful and benevolent world and a basically good social other are deeply shattered as well as their trust in their own invulnerability, *self-efficacy* (German: *Selbstwirksamkeit*) and self-worth (Janoff-Bulmann, 1992). Survivors of extreme violence feel homeless, cut off from the normal stream of life and from others. Jean Améry, who survived Nazi concentration camps in Auschwitz, Buchenwald and Bergen-Belsen, wrote in *At the Mind's Limits* in 1965:

> Whoever has succumbed to torture can no longer feel at home in the world. The shame of destruction cannot be erased. Trust in the world (...) cannot be regained. That one's fellow man was experienced as the anti-man remains in the tortured person as accumulated horror. It blocks the view into a world in which the principle of hope rules (Améry, 1986 [1965], p. 40).

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18 Jasmila Žbanić's prizewinning film *Grbavica – Esma's Secret* (2005) gives a disturbing insight into the relationship between a Bosnian mother and her daughter who was born out of rape by a Serbian soldier, and shows the destructive power of the violence experienced and the subsequent social stigma and silence.

Based on his extensive work with Holocaust survivors, psychoanalyst Dori Laub sees the destruction of the inner representation of a social other as one of the central experiences of trauma. He consequently points out the vital need of survivors of violence, in the aftermath, to reconstruct the social other with counterparts who empathically listen to and assume the role of witness to the survivor's experience. In their book *Testimony. Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, Dori Laub and literary scholar Shoshana Felman examine the nature and function of testimony and stress the importance of finding a »living voice« and of verbalizing the allegedly unspeakable experience of the Holocaust (Felman & Laub, 1992) in the survivors' coping process.

Revenge

The experience of massive man-made violence is characterized by an overwhelming sense of subjugation, helplessness and powerlessness (Herman, 1992). In a situation of detention, torture or rape, the perpetrator has unlimited power over the victim. This loss of control over physical and psychological reactions haunts the victim in the aftermath and can lead to an enduring sense of powerlessness in the face of challenges in ordinary life. Feelings of guilt alternate with fantasies of revenge. From classical literature and music to contemporary hero or vigilante justice films, revenge is a prominent motif in cultural representations of conflict. In the psychological literature, however, comparatively little attention has been given to feelings and fantasies of revenge in the wake of trauma. Judith Herman (1992) describes them as the wish to overcome – at least in imagination – the sense of powerlessness felt during the violence. The social acceptance of revenge varies in different cultural contexts, but is socially sanctioned in most as a negative and destructive

feeling.[19] In most therapeutic approaches, it is understood as an immature feeling that must be overcome and transformed into a more »civilized« search for justice. Others argue against such normative perspectives on revenge feelings (Reemtsma, 2002) and stress the importance of social and therapeutic spaces to express these feelings (Hamber & Wilson, 2002).

Mourning

Traumatic situations are life-threatening. The victims feel close to their own death and/or witness the death of others, often close relatives and beloved persons. Hence trauma is strongly linked to mourning. In most of the trauma literature, going through a process of mourning is seen as crucial to processing a traumatic experience.

Mourning processes are marked by several phases: after an initial phase of shock and denial, the loss is gradually accepted as real. The mourning process leads a person through grief and phases of delving into the past to acceptance of a symbolic representation of the person lost and reintegration into the present.[20] For survivors of organized violence and often multiple losses, the process of mourning is complicated, disturbed and prolonged by the sheer quantity, sudden-

19 As I will illustrate later, the concept of revenge enjoys greater social acceptance in Iraqi society than in most of Europe and translates into a mostly retributive concept of justice and punishment as, for example, in the tribunals against Saddam Hussein and his followers after the regime change in 2003.

20 Attachment theorist John Bowlby (1980) distinguishes four phases of mourning: 1. shock and numbness, 2. yearning and searching, 3. disorientation and disorganization and 4. reorganization and resolution. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross (1969) describes five stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance, which can overlap. And Theresa Rando (1984) introduces the six Rs of mourning: recognize the loss, react emotionally, re-collect and re-experience the lost relationship, relinquish the lost person and ultimately readjust to the daily life and reinvest in present and future.

ness, injustice and incomprehensibility of the losses. It can develop into melancholia and depression (Freud, 1917) and into what is defined as *pathological, abnormal, complicated* or *traumatic grief* (Kogan, 2011).

Prolonged and disturbed mourning processes are specific to relatives of disappeared persons, as in the case of women Anfal survivors in Iraqi Kurdistan. The specific impact of uncertain and ambiguous losses will be outlined in more detail in Chapter 8.

In the psychological trauma debate, the dynamics of mourning refers not only to the loss of a person, but metaphorically to the loss of hope, of assumptions about a good world and social other, and the loss of dignity and self-worth. It is considered a vital landmark in trauma therapy when victims begin to acknowledge the pain and damages they suffered and to mourn for what they lost: a peaceful family life or – in case of victims of childhood abuse – a protected childhood and youth.

2.3 Trauma memories – trauma narratives

Like trauma, memory is a booming category of research. Memory studies are blossoming throughout various disciplines of human and social sciences, cultural and literal studies and even historiography. Being a realm at the interface of social and natural sciences, memory research and debate have been accelerated also by recent progress in the neurosciences and related insights into how our brain stores and selects memories. David Berliner (2005) has pointed at the »danger of over-extension« of the notion of memory and the increasing tendency of its entanglement with notions of identity and culture. Though not discussing memory discourses in detail, in the following I briefly delineate those notions of individual and *collective memory* that are relevant to my research and present findings on the specificity of traumatic memory.

Memory – a social category

Beyond its individual function, memory is both a social activity and a social category. Memory activity is never simply a recollection of the past; it is a dialectical process of remembering and forgetting; what we remember and what we forget hinges on our current perspective, needs and interests. Memory activity is hence a permanent process of re-construction, reinterpretation and transformation of the past from a perspective in the present. It is shaped by sociopolitical and economic factors as well as gender and cultural patterns. By reconstructing our past experiences we become – in the words of Pierre Bourdieu (2000, p. 52) – »ideologists of our own lives«. Reconstruction of the past is discursive; it occurs in narratives.

The sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (1950) introduced the concept of *collective memory* and gave prominence to the dialectic between individual and collective memories. Social psychologists use terms such as *conversational, social and collective remembering* (Middleton & Edwards, 1990) or *memory talk* (Nelson, 2006) to highlight the interactional character of individual remembering. Jan and Aleida Assmann (Assmann, J., 1992; Assmann, A., 1999) distinguished between memories constructed in interaction between subjects – *communicative memory* – and symbolized and ceremonialized memories such as myths and commemorations – *cultural memory*. Social psychologist Harald Welzer (2001) added the category of *social memory* to distinguish unintentional remembering through daily social practices. And social anthropologist Paul Connerton (1989) developed the category of *habitual memory* as a part of social memory to describe the inscription of societal memory into bodily practices, ritual performances and habits.

My analysis of Anfal women's narrations from different time periods calls attention to the communicative character of memory and the intertwining of individual and collective memories, as well as their continuous transformation as a result of changes in their social realities.

Traumatic memory

As outlined above, traumatic experiences impact heavily on the structure of memory and the individual's capacity to remember. Likewise, the dialectic of trauma, the oscillation between between avoidance and intrusion, is largely a memory phenomenon. Parts of the traumatic memory may be suppressed or even dissociated; they persist unconsciously and return episodically in flashbacks, nightmares or somatic representations – like bodily imprints of the traumatic event. Sigmund Freud and Joseph Breuer (1895) referred to conversions of psychological arousal into physical symptoms as memory symbols (German: Erinnerungssymbole). And Bessel van der Kolk (1994) writes, »The body keeps the score«. These memories exist merely as fragments and are not accessible to narrative or autobiographical memory.

Recent progress in neurobiological research has produced insights into the chemical and biological processes that underlie memory phenomena and indicates that memories of shock and violence are indeed processed differently from other memories. They are stored in the limbic system, that is, in the sensomotoric, visual and affective memory. Hyperarousal in the traumatic situation and the attendant elevated release of stress hormones hinder the memories' transfer to the neocortex and consequently their cognitive evaluation and semantic presentation. Thus, traumatic memory is encoded not as a narrative but as an affect. This explains the vividness and intensity of intrusive trauma memories in flashbacks. Interestingly, neurobiological research largely confirms the early psychoanalytical and primarily assumptive conceptualizations of traumatic memory phenomena by Janet, Breuer and Freud (van der Kolk, 1994, 2006).

Traumatic memory is fragmented and disrupted memory. Unprocessed fragments of traumatic memory embody what Ottomeyer (2011) describes as »eingeklemmtes Leben« – snagged or trapped life; they are bits of the past that protrude into the present. They are of uncanny timelessness and intensity. Indeed, many African cultures perceive trau-

matic memories as inextricably bound up with beliefs in restless ghosts and spirits of ancestors and the dead (see Boia, 1997; Merk, 2006).

The unspeakable – mystifications of traumatic memory

This uncanny inaccessibility of traumatic memory inspired countless literary works on the ghostly presence of a traumatic past, from Shakespeare's Hamlet to Toni Morrison's work on slavery and contemporary Argentinian authors who use the ghost story genre to symbolize the unresolved issue of disappearance.[21] Jan Philipp Reemtsma (1996, p. 10) referred to ghost stories as »literary representations of trauma«.

Traumatic memory is repeatedly referred to as *the unspeakable* and is sometimes seen as offering access to an unprocessed and therefore more authentic historical truth (see e.g. Caruth,1995, 1996). These metaphors have been criticized, however, for legitimizing the blanket of silence laid over traumatic experiences. Holocaust survivor Ruth Klüger (1994) considered the mystification of the Holocaust as the unspeakable to be an alibi for the refusal to face its brutal reality.

Like all memory, traumatic memory is not static. From a psychological perspective, the reconstruction of fragmented traumatic memory, its transformation into a tellable narrative and thus the integration of the violent experience into their biographies is a major step for survivors on the path to coping with a violent past (Herman, 1992). The reconstruction of a meaningful trauma narration lies at the core

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21 See Silvana Mandolessi's research project: The Spectral Politics of Memory in Contemporary Argentinean Novel at the University of Constance: http://www.litwiss.uni-konstanz.de/en/fachgruppen/kulturtheoriekulturwiss-methoden/erc-narratives-of-terror-and-disappearance/people/detailpage/mandolessi-silvana-1396/23799/23557/ (last accessed 1 April 2013).

of most trauma therapy approaches (ibid.). My research shows, how – beyond any therapeutic setting and in a communicative process – women Anfal survivors wove constantly transforming trauma narratives, which took on a trauma-protective function. The reconstruction of traumatic memory, once again, greatly depends on external factors such as a stable and safe environment and empathic counterparts.

2.4 Can a collective suffer? Approaches to the notion of »collective trauma«

The term *collective trauma* is frequently used in the psychological debate, as well as in social and cultural sciences and historiography, to define the social and political dynamics that succeed massive violence. While it seems obvious at first sight that a violent experience shared by a group of people will have a traumatic impact on the entire fabric of society, from a psychological point of view the notion of collective trauma is as yet very sparsely conceptualized. There is no evidence on the way individual psychological mechanisms occurring after an experience of extreme violence and loss might be transferred to a social body, a collective or even a nation. In the following I present a number of different approaches to grasp the collective dimension of trauma.

Contagious emotions – vicarious traumatization

Generally speaking, emotions are contagious and individuals react to the suffering of others with emotions of their own. The notion of *indirect traumatization* describes traumatic symptoms in direct witnesses to traumatic events. The term *vicarious traumatization* has been used for the development of mechanisms and emotions similar to traumatic symptoms in medical, psychological and rescue personnel who deal professionally with those suffering from trauma and shock (Pross, 2009).

Transgenerational traumatization

Much work has been done on how traumatic experiences of individuals are »passed down« to or impact on other family members and subsequent generations. Research ranges from Karl Mannheim's (1964) and Aleida Assmann's (2002) considerations on *generational memory* to the more specific and extensive research on the transgenerational impact of the Holocaust experience, both on victim groups and perpetrator societies (Bergmann et al., 1995; Kogan, 1996, 1998; Bohleber, 1996; Bar-On, 2004). It illustrates, however, the difference in substance between the direct experience of a violent event and its representations and dynamics in subsequent generations. Although the offspring of Holocaust survivors often suffers from traumatic symptoms or tends to re-enact traumatic scenes experienced by their parents or grandparents, this cannot simply be explained as a »trauma transmission«. It can also be interpreted as a consequence of the grandparents' and parents' difficulties of dealing with their own traumatic memories that might translate into a wary and depressive family atmosphere and overprotective or emotionally detached relations within the family context.

The collective use of trauma – chosen trauma

Research has also been carried out on how large groups, societies or even nations refer to traumatic memories and narratives as constituent elements of the group identity. Combining historiographical research with elements of psychoanalysis, Dominick LaCapra (2001) has explored how the Holocaust narrative became a founding constituent of the state of Israel and explains the seemingly unsolvable conflict between Israelis and Palestinians with the powerful references to the contrasting historical traumas underlying the group identities of both sides.

Similarly, Vamik Volkan (2006) examines the exploitation of historical traumata for political and national aims and de-

velops the concept of *chosen trauma*. Referring to the example of Milosevic's use of the Serbian defeat in the Battle of Kosovo against the Ottoman Empire in 1389 to stir up anti-Muslim resentment among Serbians and prepare them for the forthcoming aggression against Bosnian Muslims in the 1990s, he demonstrates the political instrumentalization of trauma and its mental and emotional presentations independent of and centuries after any concrete or personal experience of suffering.[22]

Conceptualization of a collective or social psyche

Sigmund Freud was the first to draw broader analogies between individual psychological processes, traumata and neuroses, on the one hand, and collective and cultural dynamics, on the other, in *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur* (1930) – (literal translation: The Uneasiness in Culture)[23] – and in *Moses and Monotheism* (1939). He himself described his considerations as »speculative«, but his works unfolded »great interpretative power« (Bloom, quoted from Windt, 2006, p. 3) and inspired later works such as *Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern*, Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich's (1967, English: *The Inability to Mourn*) ground-breaking analysis of the post-Nazi development of German society.[24] Ethnopsychoanalysts like Paul Parin, Goldy Parin-Matthèy and Fritz Morgenthaler (1963, 1971) and Mario Erdheim (1982) used psychoanalytical categories for comparative social and cultural studies and understood culture as »society's uncon-

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22 Volkan describes this mechanism of political exploitation not merely of traumatic experiences but also of triumphs – *chosen glories* that can be mobilized for political and national purposes.

23 The title of the English edition is *Civilization and its Discontents*.

24 The title of Margarete and Alexander Mitscherlich's analysis of collective behaviour in German society after 1945 does not refer to Germans' inability to mourn the loss of lives, but rather the loss of the »Führer« figure and thus the loss of their own ego ideal.