15   Atrocity and Non-Sense: The Ethnographic Study of Dehumanization

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The second half of the twentieth century was characterized by brutal insurgency and counterinsurgency wars; civilian populations experienced extreme violence on an unprecedented scale. A challenge for anthropologists working in such war-torn societies across the globe is that of paying attention not only to rapid sociocultural change but also to processes of dehumanization and local redefinitions of what it means to be human. The non-sense and inhumanity of war thereby challenge the very definition of "anthropology," as informants claim and fear that some of those affected are no longer human. The ethnographic method is not necessarily geared toward capturing such a mood of inhumanity and lack of sense. Nonetheless, significant numbers of ethnographers are being sent to hot spots of extreme violence and asked to write narrative accounts of such zones of dehumanization. This critique of ethnography carried out in times of crisis explores the consequences of the ethnographic study of dehumanization.

In terms of research methodology and ethics, a common question relates to the ethnographer's capability to interview and work with traumatized survivors. Here, however, I move beyond this level of critique and consider the impact of the wider cultural and linguistic consequences of twentieth century waves of extreme violence on the ethnographic method. The notion of a "traumatized" population easily leads ethnographers toward understanding their findings as narratives of the traumatized, reenactments of violence, or symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder. This approach envisages the provision of a therapeutic moral framework to a selected few within the community, while obscuring important cultural processes related to dehumanization and its reversal. In view of the moral devastation of certain communities, rehabilitation is more than a question of participation in NGO programs or traditional healing. In parallel to the reestablishment of a social order, people need to find ways to feel human again and transcend cultural meaninglessness. Such a cultural moment is not easily captured within a discourse on trauma and readily elides ethnographic representation.[1]

My argument, therefore, does not concern the cycle of violence or the trauma of survivors and their communities, articulated in psychological or sociological terms. Rather, my entry points are "culture and language" and their articulation with processes of dehumanization. A key element of this analysis concerns the simultaneous presence of contradictory moral frameworks in which wartime subjectivities are engulfed. Such contradictory moral frameworks can be exemplified in a number of ways. For example, the two conflicting realities that exist for families of the disappeared: loved ones who are at the same time both dead and alive. Indelible contradiction also emerges in the coagulation of family life and horror, revealed in the denunciation of relatives to death squads, sexual forms of torture, and more generally the intimate nature of many forms of extreme violence. For perpetrators, such contradictions are experienced as the ludic nature of killings, the festive ambience of violence, or the experience of being forced to carry out orders, including killing, against one's will. In general, I summarize such conflicting realities as the coexistence of a prewar morality with a violent new reality in people's hearts and minds. In an affective sense, this translates as a continuous oscillation between feelings of humanity and inhumanity, normality and atrocity.

The tension between such opposing perspectives and affects, experienced simultaneously or in rapid oscillation, is not just a matter of individualized mental health but constitutes pervasive cultural realities. The simultaneity of opposed affects is here not a sign of madness or psychiatric illness, but a cultural consequence of the intimate nature of twentieth century insurgency and counterinsurgency warfare. The pervasive tension between opposing realities, forced upon people through extreme violence, has cultural and linguistic consequences. I explore the potential role of anthropology in documenting such moments of dehumanization and the fragile cultural processes of rehumanization and reconstruction of language.

Case Study: Inhumanity and Non-Sense in Southern Sri Lanka

– the sound that broke the back of words (Morrison, 1987, p. 261)

This case study of dehumanization and its ethnographic exploration is based on fifteen months of fieldwork (1996–8) in a community in southern Sri Lanka. Plagued by chronic low-intensity violence and poverty, the rural South constitutes a reservoir of violence, used by the Sri Lankan national army to recruit soldiers to fight a war against the Tamil minority (1983–2009). The condition of extreme violence was, however,

already established before the well-publicized war against Tamil sepa-
ratists and Tamil Tigers (LTTE) began. A much less well-documented
civil war or Sinhalese insurgency (by the People's Liberation Front or
JVP – Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna) led to a regime of terror and vio-
lence throughout the villages of southern Sri Lanka. This youth move-
ment, which grew out of the Peking wing of the Ceylon Communist
Party, quickly resorted to guerrilla warfare and during the first insur-
gency (1971) almost managed to topple the government. After years
of severe repression, they reappeared in a more violent form, and their
struggle against state security forces and other paramilitary bodies led
to the extreme violence and dehumanization of the civil war of 1987-9.
Atrocities and massacres were committed at the hands of the Special
Task Force (the Sri Lankan state's counterinsurgency commandos) and
a staggering number of people – about forty thousand according to some
sources (Chandraprema, 1991) – disappeared or were killed extrajudi-
cially (Amnesty International, 1993). The social fabric of communities
was severely affected by a global culture of terror and counterinsurgency
warfare (see Mahmood, 2000; Sluka, 2000) as cordon and search opera-
tions led to concealed apprehension technique (CAT) commandos forc-
ing local villagers to take part in the selection of people to be executed
or disappeared.

I conducted ethnographic fieldwork seven years after the end of the
civil war of the late eighties, known as the second JVP insurgency. A
horrendous war against the Tamil Tigers (LTTE) was still raging in the
North and East of the country. Many Sinhalese soldiers had deserted
the army and were roaming the rural countryside, armed and unemploy-
able, perpetually hiding from security forces. Rumors circulated in the
national press that an estimated twenty thousand such deserters par-
ticipated in the cycle of low-intensity violence in the midnineties; at the
same time the youth suicide rates (age fifteen to twenty-four) were the
highest in the world (LaVecchia, 1994). My research was carried out
through participant observation in the village of Udahenagama, a pseu-
donym for a conglomerate of five neighborhoods in a densely populated
rural-urban area, more accurately described as a rural slum. At the time
of the population census of 1993 this area comprised about three thou-
sand inhabitants. People belonged to the drummers', cultivators', or jag-
gery makers' caste; a survey of each neighbourhood revealed dynamics of
revenge, as well as the number of disappeared people and victims of sui-
cide in the research area. Strikingly, perpetrators and victims continue to
live in close proximity to each other and reconstruct their moral universe
to include neighbors responsible for the killing of loved ones. During the
civil war of the late eighties, local conflicts became the breeding ground

for extreme violence, as family members denounced each other to death
squads.

The ethnographic research method was primarily based on participant
observation and sociolinguistic analyses of discourses on violence. A key
focus of the research was on cleansing or healing rituals (*tovil*). These
thirty-hour-long rituals galvanized the community and allowed me to
observe spontaneous discourses on pollution, moral malaise, dehumani-
zation, and cultural reconstruction.

The category "youth" as I use it in this paper is polysemic. The first
layer of meaning sedimented into the notion "troublesome youth," relates
to the atrocities committed by local youngsters during the JVP insurgen-
cies. Youths denounced kinsmen to death squads and engaged in brutal
killings. But it was not enough to kill: Youngsters subjected corpses to
mutilation – a fact that still shocks elders.

A second layer of meaning, which affects young men in southern Sri
Lanka, is summarized in the expression "good for nothing" (*rastiyādu
pëte vëtilā*). Both traditional occupations and chronic unemployment
are shameful for a generation of volatile underemployed rural youths.
This situation reflects the global predicament of youth: The margin-
alization of young people may be seen as a structural consequence
of the global spread of neoliberal capitalism (Comaroff & Comaroff,
2005, p. 27). Ethnic warfare in the North and East and recruitment
into the Sri Lankan national army provide a rare economic opportunity
for impoverished Sinhalese youths. The predicament of rural Sinhalese
youth is a cornerstone of the socioeconomic formation of chronic "eth-
nic" warfare (Winslow & Woost, 2004). However, a significant propor-
tion of youths become deserters, live in fear of arrest, and are unable
to search for employment. The crisis of masculinity initiated through
the neoliberal transformation of an agrarian economy is deepened by
militarization and desertion; all this is reflected in the term "good for
nothing."

A third metaphor attached to this broader category of troublesome
youth is the notion of people who behave like unsocialized wild spirits
(*yakā vage minissu*). Despite the fact that most participants in the last
insurgency were eliminated, chronic low-intensity violence continues to
taint the image of village youth. Sinhalese soldiers who commit atrocities
at the front in the North and East of the country regularly spend their
holidays in their villages, and armed deserters return to theirs to hide.
Rape, homicide, and suicide are part of a cycle of low-intensity violence
perpetrated by unsettled youth and give rise to a potent metaphor of
dehumanization. The inhumanity of violent youngsters is encapsulated
in the appellation "spiritlike people."

Three key meanings thereby qualify the notion of troublesome youth: war criminals, "unemployable," and "spiritlike people." These metaphors coexist within the collective imagination even though they do not necessarily coincide within the individual lives of contemporary youths. Many men between the ages of fifteen and forty simply fit within the category of "good for nothing." Either unemployed or deserters from the army, they embody the potential for violence within the collective imagination: Their image is constructed in a mirror shattered by youth violence. As their potential violence and chronic unemployment are lumped together, meanings coalesce and a potent image emerges of spiritlike beings, lacking certain defining characteristics of humanity.

Theravada Buddhism has been the major religion on the island of Sri Lanka since the second century BC. The Sinhala Buddhist pantheon constitutes a cosmic hierarchy of Buddha, deities, humans, and spirits. Sinhalese Buddhist culture now plays a crucial role in the articulation of both nationalism and class dynamics. While the middle classes focus on the Buddha and the deities, the ritual practices of the working class and peasant Sinhalese include the lower reaches of this pantheon (Kapferer, 1983, p. 48). Traditional healers or "exorcists" (*ëduro*) engage in elaborate rituals (*tovil*) at moments when the cosmic order has been subverted by "demonic intrusion" (p. 57) and people have become possessed by evil spirits.

Traditional healers I encountered in the late nineties observed that spiritlike men are rarely afflicted by spirit possession. Unsocialized spirits or demons, "the terrors which prowl at the base of the Sinhala Buddhist cosmic hierarchy" (Kapferer, 1983, p. 51), simply do not attack such people because they are horrified by them and "shiver away" (Argenti-Pillen, 2003b, p. 113). Terrified spirits of the Sinhala Buddhist pantheon fled a human world engulfed in civil war (pp. 111–14). Such understandings reflect a pantheon in turmoil, where the relative position of humans and evil spirits is presented as potentially reversed, with some humans occupying a position below traditional monstrous beings.

I now question how such inhumanity and cosmological turmoil are reflected in linguistic and performative expressions and how this challenges an ethnographic method. This set of questions builds on the notion of inhumanity and concerns non-sense, or absence of meaning. Not only do violent people in southern Sri Lanka occupy the position of unsocialized spirits within collective representations of a postwar cosmos, but their position is consolidated by the fact that it is not threatened by beings from below. Their problematic acts sometimes extend into the arena of ritual, when they mock ritual specialists and disrupt sacrificial rites.

In the aftermath of the civil war, troublesome but innovative young men have added an element to traditional sacrifice: They themselves now offer an effigy to the spirits, despite never having been apprenticed to a ritual specialist. They thereby attempt to bring about ritual change within Sinhala Buddhist healing rituals, traditionally performed by ritual healers to cure a possessed patient. In the youths' version of the ritual, however, the effigy is cajoled like a toddler, treated like a sexual object, addressed with superior-to-inferior pronouns, and ritually abused and murdered. Bystanders attempted to placate the anthropologist and dismiss such acts as mere "nonsense" (*anang manang* or *vikāra*). Such words refer to the non-sense of people who are drunk, yet also connote the disoriented speech and confusion of the terrified who have witnessed or committed an atrocity.

Yet, as such non-sense spills into the ritual arena, and spiritlike people engage in a mockery of sacrificial acts, they as it were participate in what Malamoud (1996) called "the sacrificial definition of humanity or the ritual circumscription of violence" (pp. 98–9). I argue that by disrupting and participating in healing rituals, young men attempt to reintroduce certain aspects of their everyday world within the contours of Sinhala Buddhist civilization. In the aftermath of the ineffable violence of the civil war, innovative forms of sacrifice may represent an attempt to rebelong to society, and above all to be considered human.

Yet I would caution against ethnographic overinterpretation and optimism, as I try to discern processes of rehumanization on the basis of existing ritual and sacrificial theory (see also Argenti-Pillen, 2010). After all, my informants experienced such violent incursions into the ritual arena as yet more instances of senseless violence, and indeed non-sense. During sacrificial rituals, the young men in Sri Lanka begin by taking care of the effigy as loving fathers, but this image of intimate care is quickly replaced by an image of sexual abuse and death through murder. They thus create a tension between emotions, a rapid oscillation between the opposed meanings of family life and horror, which cannot coagulate into a single emotional state. It is this simultaneity of opposed moral frameworks and affects that the audience experiences as an instance of non-sense.

This leads to questions about the cultural definition of non-sense in the aftermath of widespread extreme violence when a culture is being threatened at its core. Such a state of not knowing – of not being able to make sense – has consequences for the ethnographic method. Informants who respond with "Don't know" or "This doesn't make sense" commonly tend to be underrepresented in the final ethnographic representation of their cultural community. Equally, a transcript's non-sense passages – the

places where language breaks down – are not often selected for inclusion in a final ethnographic text. Such methodological routines might thus inadvertently turn the ethnographer away from important expressions of dehumanization and senselessness.

I propose to summarize this case material on the local definition of spiritlike people, absent spirits, non-sense, and dehumanization as an instance of "cosmological damage" in the aftermath of the extreme violence of twentieth century civil war. Cosmological damage is hereby defined as dehumanization brought about through a reattribution of monstrous and human characteristics, or a reconceptualization of the interaction between human and spirit worlds.[2]

Cosmological Damage on a Global Scale?

This case study's themes of inhuman violence, dehumanization, and cosmological damage are not unique. Theidon (2003) depicts the discursive dehumanization of Shining Path guerrillas in Peru. During the 1980s and 1990s, the refrain "living and dying like dogs" could be heard throughout the highland communities of Ayacucho, as guerrillas killed people in ways villagers would not use even to butcher their animals. The extreme violence of Shining Path guerrillas led villagers to consider them as "fallen out of humanity" and to imagine them as bodily different; literally otherworldly beings with, for example, three belly buttons, genitals in odd parts of their bodies, and green eyes all testifying to their monstrosity (pp. 11–12). Wartime cosmology thereby redefined such people as nonhuman, echoing the cosmological damage that occurred in wartorn Sri Lanka.

De Berry's (2000) work in northern Uganda allows me to take this comparison a step further. Among the Karamajong, wartime degradation and perversion of humanity are expressed as the departure of spirits. During the civil war certain categories of spirits were terrified of the noise of gunfire, ran away, and had little to do with the fighting (p. 103). De Berry points to a "disjunction" in which wartime suffering is not experienced as part of a continuum with other forms of affliction and negotiation with the realm of traditional spirits (p. 106). That even spirits should be frightened and chased out of the world testifies to a cosmology damaged by war.

A. Hinton's (2002b, 2005) work on dehumanization and Khmer Rouge genocidal ideologies reveals another example of cosmological damage, seen in the redrawing of the line between the human and animal species. In the aftermath of the carpet bombing[3] of the countryside and other atrocities committed by the Lon Nol regime, city people were robbed of

their humanity, addressed as "Comrade Ox," and harmed, discarded, or disemboweled like animals by the Khmer Rouge.

I now turn to a more difficult example, which concerns the experience of the dehumanization not of others, but of oneself. Fahy's (2009) work on the North Korean famine offers a haunting glimpse at testimonies of dehumanization. With the famine came corruption, and corruption turned people into beasts; thus a "beast society" (*chimsung sawi*) emerged in North Korea (p. 236). Starving people use the metaphor "fuel" for food; living beings regard themselves as fueled (or unfueled) machines or vehicles (p. 217). Beasts, machines, vehicles – these are not comments made about a loathed other, but by themselves about their own state of dehumanization.

These examples I have commented on, from Sri Lanka, Peru, Uganda, Cambodia, and North Korea, provide a global context for the development of a definition of twentieth century cosmological damage. I propose a narrow, historically grounded definition[4] linked to the postcolonial insurgency and counterinsurgency violence of the cold war era and its immediate aftermath.[5] In other words, the notion of cosmological damage engenders questions of etiology and an imperative to investigate the cultural impact of twentieth century mass violence. Such an analysis necessarily goes beyond the historical contingencies of the dehumanization caused by colonialism or Nazism; instead it focuses on the widespread experience of extreme violence among civilian populations, and its cultural effect.

The Ethnographic Study of Dehumanization.

You forgot who you were and couldn't think it up. (Morrison, 1987, p. 251)

Working in a community where people fear they are no longer able to make sense poses additional methodological problems. The modernist techniques of contextualization and meaning making used in anthropology – being drawn into a global system of knowledge and interests – might be at odds with the local, subtle forms of rehumanization and reconstruction of everyday life. Statements such as "I don't know," or "This doesn't make sense" should be regarded extremely seriously rather than taken as a cue for the anthropologist to search further afield for another context or a "better" informant. A cultural formation of temporary doubt needs to be carefully observed as a moment the entire community needs to go through, a cultural breathing space, which requires ethnographic respect.

Within this volume, the current chapter and chapters by Kidron and Kwon all concern spaces of relative nonintervention[6] and thereby provide

a complementary image to the realities of trauma counseling, psychosocial interventions, and conflict resolution. In ethical terms, such an approach is justified, as a majority of survivors live within the interstices of the web of interventions. My analysis resonates with Kidron's chapter, which calls into question expert interventions in "silent" survivor populations that function to elicit public articulation for the purpose of therapy or national reconciliation. I suggest we add "ethnographic intervention" to Kidron's causes for concern and list ethnography as a method for the elicitation and public discussion of memories of violence.

Ethnography is an intervention in its own right, and in addition to its favoring of the most meaningful informants, ethnography has other implicit methodologies for "manufacturing sense."[7] These implicit research methods, used to "give voice" to survivors and provide meaningful observations, are of a linguistic nature and as such are determined by the ethnographer's linguistic ideology. Existing anthropological codes of ethics for ethnographers of extreme violence do not question such implicit linguistic technologies. This case study and analysis highlight the ethics of an extensive and mandatory training in linguistic anthropology as a prerequisite to the study of survivors.[8] Detailed sociolinguistic records and theoretical questions about the imposition of the semantic structure of ethnography and the linguistic ideology of European languages[9] in contexts of extreme violence become thereby the cornerstones of a revised code of ethics. Rather than selecting the most meaningful passages from observations or conversations among survivors, the ethnographer becomes a witness to the senseless nature of dehumanization[10] and the subtle reconstruction of language and humanity.

In the aftermath of the Holocaust, the poetry of Paul Celan offers a lyrical interface between non-sense and reconstructed language:

While poetry itself seems to collapse under the pressure of "this time," it also reasserts itself as the medium that recovers speaking, that moves, however tentatively, to reunite the solitary words of mad un-language to the fragile structure of poetic speech – a process during which poetry disintegrates into mad babble at the same time as it turns this mad babble back into poetry. (Weineck, 1999, 267)

What strikes Weineck is the simultaneity of opposites that emerges in the poem's advance toward madness (p. 264). The poems include quotes from one who stopped speaking (p. 265) and at times constitute a total refusal of meaning – any meaning in any ideological services (p. 266, my emphasis).

Interestingly, many ethnographers implicitly share their informants' distrust of superimposed meanings that come to the rescue at nonsensical

times.[11] In Kirmayer's terms (personal communication, September 2009) this argument can be encapsulated by a question:

Can we rebuild cosmology not by asserting the grand sweep of a totalizing narrative (that may contain the seeds of a future round of mutually assured destruction), but through the more fragile, tentative, essays of lyric that invite us to a moment of trust, of intimacy and connection with another consciousness or way of being? (My emphasis)

Yet the difficulty for ethnographers is that such incipient expressions and minute processes of rehumanization are not necessarily earmarked as artistic or poetic and are therefore not easy to discern. An ethical awareness of the linguistic technologies of ethnography and an extensive training in linguistic anthropology thereby become even more essential when studying violence and dehumanization. The methodological entry point is thereby reoriented to grassroot linguistic creativity at the interface of nonsense and sense.[12] The experience is of a continuously displaced anthropology as the ethnographer moves on from one context to the next, not being able to make immediate sense of cultural and semantic insecurity. The mood becomes one of a postponed ethnography, which awaits meaning within an indefinite time frame.

The simultaneity of contradictory moral frameworks in the aftermath of extreme violence[13] cannot be fully understood within a theoretical framework guided by notions of dissociation, trauma, or psychiatric illness. I therefore opt for an anthropological discourse and theoretical analysis to summarize key aspects of this case study. Kristeva's (1980) notion of ambivalence and Deleuze's (2004) definition of displaced subjectivity both provide a set of points of comparison for further analysis. The fact that poetic or ambivalent language has considerable consequences for its subject leads Kristeva to refer to the questionable subject-in-process (p. 135). A blurred subjectivity yields to ambivalence (p. 68), or the painful tension between opposed meanings. In terms of the case material under study, I argue that the tension between humanity and experienced inhumanity or the senselessness emerging from this tension creates an ambivalence grounded in the disturbing political processes of an era of mass dehumanization.

Deleuze (2004) coins the term "displaced subjectivity," a subjectivity that is always being displaced in relation to itself (p. 261). He argues that a subterranean principle of countersense is imposed on sense, and that this is not just a momentary reversal of perspectives but a continuous motion and tension between perspectives and affects (pp. 83, 87). Deleuze's focus on the fragmented subject, lost identity, and the copresence of sense and non-sense helps to explore further the ambivalent

affect and rehumanization I try to describe. The frameworks of Kristeva and Deleuze not only question the subjectivity ethnographers project upon survivors, but query the nature of ethnographic language, and the potential importance of adequately recording both ambivalence and countersense.[14]

The process of rehumanization involves a linguistic dimension, an articulation of the non-sense of one's degradation, and of the ambiguous and uncertain nature of many wartime realities (e.g. Argenti-Pillen, 2003b). A move to a more certain order of language entails the "trauma" of leaving such experiences behind, as contradictory affects are confronted with a unitary and consolidated narrative, which might not fit them.[15] It is this kind of suffering I would like to highlight: the experience of being forced in particular semantic directions without being given the space or freedom for a cultural pause in the aftermath of carnage and violence. Such a cultural pause includes an articulation of non-sense and reflections on inhumanity at the margins of recognizable forms of communication.

Such comments inevitably lead to a consideration of ethnography as a set of cultural negotiations through which ethnographers are keen to construct a swift cultural image of a postwar context. The result is an ethnographic objectification or imposition of the semantic structure of anthropology, which many might intuitively not trust in the aftermath of elite-led atrocity and violence. The easily accessible imagery of an "ethnography of suffering" thereby constitutes a type of imprisonment in understanding, an understanding that occurs all too quickly.

In such instances the cultural or political contextualization of extreme suffering through ethnography might seem rather meaningless to survivors – the ethnographic manufacture of sense experienced as infinitely less important than local microprocesses of rehumanization. Moreover, populations who still question what it means to feel human again might at times refract the image of ethnography as senseless. Following Burnside (2006), I use the term "senseless" in both a semantic and a perceptual sense. Within a philosophy of aesthetics, the notion of senselessness also connotes a numbing or anesthetic (p. 149). While I have used "non-sense" in a predominantly linguistic sense, senselessness expands the analysis to include its sensory counterpart, numbness. The risk of a senseless superimposition of meaning in the aftermath of dehumanization reverberates to ethnographers as senselessness in a sensorial sense, a much needed cultural anesthetic for haunted elites.

Yet this is not the final point in this critique of the ethnographic study of dehumanization. Ethnography can indeed be a gift for the safeguarding

of a cultural pause or breathing space, but such an endeavor requires a degree of ethnographic freedom. This freedom itself requires not only detachment from the fast semantic demands of peacetime ethnographies, but also a critical consideration of the implicit linguistic methodologies deployed to construct ethnographies. A rigorous training in linguistic anthropology is thus not a mere subdisciplinary option, but a sine qua non for ethnographers of extreme violence to capture and reflect moments of precious cultural freedom[16] when addressing dehumanization and its reversal. Ethnography needs to take a step back and record cultural creativity in the aftermath of twentieth century cosmological damage. As is extensively demonstrated in Kwon's chapter in this volume, such cultural creativity extends far beyond an interaction with well-intentioned modernist interventions or paradigms. Anthropology thereby entertains the possibility that twentieth century global forms of inhumanity will lead to rehumanization and cultural reconstruction, which may well bypass the points of reference of Euro-American culture, civilization, and empire.

Acknowledgments

Notes

1 My work is akin to the contributions by Kidron (this volume) and Kwon (this volume). Intervention or the notion of trauma is not the point of departure, but its relative absence leads to a consideration of the role of Holocaust memories in everyday life (Kidron, this volume) or the trauma endured by the dead (Kwon, this volume). I too advocate a decentralization of the discourse on trauma.

2 This case study from southern Sri Lanka can be placed on a continuum with case material by Theidon (this volume), Kohrt (this volume), and Taylor (this volume). Theidon discusses the value of an ethnographic grassroots perspective to complement integration orchestrated from above. Kohrt (this volume) and Taylor (this volume) provide a critical analysis of the potential role of

indigenous mechanisms of reconciliation. By comparison, the entry point of my analysis does not concern explicit forms of rehabilitation mediated through existing social institutions such as indigenous healing or an NGO. My case study concerns the *as yet unmediated* contributions to rehumanization initiated by people who have fallen out of humanity, or people who operate within an everyday cosmology damaged by war.

3 American warplanes were responsible for death and destruction among rural Cambodians on an unprecedented scale (A. Hinton, 2002b, pp. 267, 271). The resulting grudges and uncontrollable hatred against the urban elites were a source of motivation for unspeakable Khmer Rouge atrocities rooted in an ideology of dehumanization.

4 I therefore distinguish this cosmological damage from earlier forms of dehumanization. The prototypes of a cosmology based on dehumanization are of course colonialism and Nazism. Kuper (2002) describes the process of dehumanization of indigenous people: the common phenomenon of "equating hunting and gathering people with animals" or "hunting them down in the same way as animals" (p. 68). Likewise dehumanization (e.g., Wolf 2002, p. 195) was an essential ingredient of a Nazi cosmology and "cosmic struggle" for domination as a master race (pp. 200, 203). Another prototypical example is the genocide in Rwanda (Taylor, 1999), framed within the context of the enduring effects of colonialism (p. 177).

5 My argument is thereby framed by the insights of Sluka's (2000) important contribution to the ethnography of violence. His work reveals striking cross-cultural similarities in the practice of state terror (p. 9), and the fact that the global rise in state terror was concentrated among Third World states in the U.S. sphere of influence (p. 8). Cycles of violence based on the phenomenon of death squads are thereby understood as a manifestation of U.S. cultural influence.

6 I am indebted to Kirmayer's suggestion (personal communication, September, 2009) to explore this approach further in relation to Sebald's (e.g., 1993) oeuvre. Sebald's prose slowly draws the reader toward a moving glimpse of absences, silences, fragmentary memories, and desolation of survivors of the Holocaust: "With every beat of the pulse, one lost more and more of one's qualities, *became less comprehensible to oneself*, increasingly abstract" (p. 56, my emphasis). Only hindsight allows Sebald to evoke the emigrants' lives in this particular manner.

7 This expression evokes A. Hinton's (2002a, 2005) anthropology of genocide. Several contributors highlight anthropology's role in the genocidal projects of modernity and its business of "manufacturing difference," a prelude to "annihilating difference."

8 Key introductory texts for ethnographers of violence are Brenneis & Macauley, 1996, and Duranti, 2009.

9 For an introduction to the notion of linguistic ideology see Woolard, 1998, or Kroskrity, 2000.

10 Nowhere did I come across a starker depiction of this predicament than in the work of the Dutch anthropologist Van de Port (1998), who set out to describe Serbian atrocities. Van de Port describes his tormenting sense of

incomprehension (p. 13) when Serbian society confronted him with a lack of concepts (p. 21), or a bewildering miscellany of opposing accounts, a cacophony of stories, a fragmented, disintegrating world (p. 22). He asks whether we really would like to read an academic text that is disturbing (p. 28). It is his informants' acquaintance with a world of inhuman experiences that leads them to highlight their ethnographer's lack of knowledge and sense of reality (p. 101). Van de Port highlights the damage war can cause to stories when a *fundamental trust in a meaningful world* has been destroyed (p. 109, my emphasis). The ethnography itself thereby becomes ironic: "The informants cannot be understood until they have been admitted to the bleak landscape of the university building, with its insipid *Ficae benjaminae* stuck in PVC plant-pots with clay grains and self-regulating moisturisers" (p. 26).

11 Fahy (2009) documents how the language that articulates suffering in North Korea is influenced by the discourse of a political elite and ideology *"which produced the suffering in the first place"* (p. 160, my emphasis). For a comparable analysis concerning Sri Lanka, see Argenti-Pillen, 2003a.

12 Fahy (2009) comments on her translation effort: "There will be the use of expressions and references which are contextually safe, and perhaps even so culturally bound as to *make little sense* outside of those settings, or they are *grammarless, fractured, without form*" (p. 233, my emphasis).

13 What I gloss here as "contradictory moral frameworks" features prominently in the chapter by Behrouzan and Fischer (this volume), as they depict "double-sided catacoustics" (hating and blaming but still loving the beauty of *nouheh*). The senselessness of a double-edged reality is best encapsulated by the phrase "this man I have nothing in common with, and who scares me; but knows how to spell my name!"

14 Lemelson's (this volume) case study of a survivor in Bali reveals this dynamic among contradictory moral frameworks, symptoms, and the ethnographic record. A familiarity with both the reality of the massacre and postmassacre social appearances is articulated as a "sense of living in two worlds," yet one of these worlds is given meaning as a spirit world. Lemelson's detailed ethnographic record reveals a typical example of the ambivalent non-sense expressions I accentuate:

When I asked whether he believed that someone was practicing sorcery that caused his problems, however, Nyoman responded in Indonesian in a way that suggested either ambivalence or difficulty expressing himself in that language ... *Definitely not, but the possibility exists.* (my emphasis)

15 This idea is raised in recent work with survivors of the Communist repressions in Poland (Witeska, 2009):

Last year Leszek felt proud when an invitation for a presidential palace reached him. At the same time though, he feared going for the high rank official celebrations. His *doubts* made his legs cold and unable to move the night before. His dreams made him tired and nervous. His desire for resolving his *sense of guilt*, and his dream of belonging made him go. After the event, he *interpreted* his fears as a *legacy of the repressions* he went through. (p. 138, my emphasis)

The symptoms related to objectification can thereby be very similar to symptoms of trauma in the conventional sense. In other words, this linguistic or

cultural unease and tension cause a distress, which can easily be lumped together with the distress caused by painful memories.

16 As in Fischer's (2007) analysis: "more forms of agency exist than witnessing and testifying ... witnessing and testifying are themselves *genre forms* within hierarchies of power and adjudication" (p. 437, my emphasis).

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