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ETHNOGRAPHY: NEGOTIATING IDENTITIES AND REINVENTING MEMORIES

Abstract

As anthropologists and psychotherapists we make identities within and between the moment by integrating observations and anecdotes and forgetting 'it'. Struggles, suffering and resistance are shaped and unpicked by the language of collective memory. Acts of remembrance are described by the ethnographical method of thick description (Geertz 1988) through the social practice of storytelling and narrative (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Irigaray 2013). The psychotherapist also brings from the edge of awareness moments of noticing gestures, expressions, utterances, silence, emotions, smells, thoughts, feelings, objects, visuals and soundscape or what Severi (2015) refers to as the 'ambiguous ways of organising differences'. Better understanding of each other's attachment patterns allows for a space for recognition and remembrance of difference (Said 1979; Deleuze and Guattari 1988; 1994) rather than be a passive observer. There can be mutual learning from interdisciplinary relating.

This seminar presentation will explore my own journey as an anthropologist in the therapy room working with the fragility of the decaying memory and how each client and informant lose, imagine, replace or reinvent the moment, event or encounter (from a cultural, psychic and socio-political context). This will be familiar for you as an ethnographer when you return from the field and write up the encounter as something intense and fragile. The ethnographic memory functions as a recording device, collecting experiences recovered from headnotes (Sperber 1985; Jackson 2005) from the field, repeated in our minds like an old audio recording and reinvented by writing up as an aesthetic testimony/ witness account to producing a realistic fiction. Maybe what the psychotherapist can offer the ethnographer is affective attunement and to encourage the notion of bringing all of ourselves as an ethnographic resource into the process of research.

Salma Siddique, PhD, is the Director for Counselling, Psychotherapy and Experiential Therapies in the School of Education at the University of Aberdeen, Scotland. She obtained her doctorate in anthropology from the University of St. Andrews and later qualified as a psychotherapist and clinical supervisor. Her main research interests are based on the dialogue between psychoanalysis, psychotherapy, and anthropology and are influenced by her clinical experience working with people in trauma resulting from torture and fleeing conflict zones. Salma continues to practice as a volunteer psychotherapist. She supervises trainees and qualified psychotherapists and counselors in their practices.

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