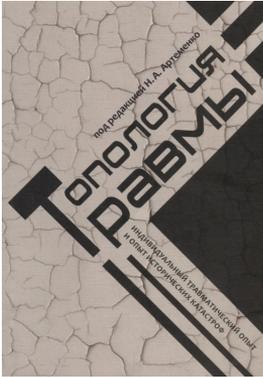


## BOOK REVIEWS

### A PHILOSOPHICAL INQUIRY OF TRAUMA STUDIES



Natalia Artemenko (ed.) 2020. *Topologiia travmy: Individual'nyi travmaticheskii opyt i opyt istoricheskikh katastrof*. Collective monograph. St. Petersburg: Renome. 248 pp. In Russian.

The collective monograph titled *Topologiia travmy: Individual'nyi travmaticheskii opyt i opyt istoricheskikh katastrof* (The Topology of Trauma: The Individual Traumatic Experience and the Experience of Historical Catastrophes) comprises articles written by a group of St. Petersburg scholars. Trauma studies have deserved more interest in Russia today, so it could be expected that the key events in Russian and Soviet history will further provide topics for analysis in this field. However, an essential objective the authors put forward

in their work is not an inquiry into painful moments in the national past, but rather the examination of the theoretical foundations of trauma studies or, as it is formulated, “a comprehensive philosophical elaboration revealing the theoretical origins of those concepts, methods, and strategies which underlie this research direction”.

It might seem quite surprising that the authors do not put emphasis on the traumatic experience in Soviet and post-Soviet history, and rather prefer delving into Western examples. It could be due to the claimed theoretical bias of the issue, and we should accept the fact that trauma studies in Russia are still under development, and therefore the empirical material needs to be borrowed along with the theoretical apparatus. However, the articles represented in the monograph analyze not only the key concept of trauma studies, but also propose new ones; for example, the concepts of “creative repression” (A. Brodsky), “unfinished time” and “cataleptic consciousness” (N. Artemenko), and “the syntax of loss” (S. Troitsky). So, the authors do not simply borrow the terminology already developed within the Western humanities, but make attempts to elaborate their own analytic language, as well as an authentic vision of many issues, even when there seems to be a consensus on some issues in Western academia. Even though some of the proposed statements are contestable, such attempts might stir essential discussions.

The monograph comprises three parts, composed of articles written by different scholars.

As the title of the first chapter, “Cultural Traumatology: Posing a Question”, implies, it represents an attempt to clarify the notion of “cultural trauma”. This chapter comprises articles written by A. Brodsky, N. Artemenko, S. Troitsky, and K. Kapelchuk, who delve into a number of methodological issues, such as the problem of trauma representation in culture (Brodsky, Kapelchuk), the interrelation between trauma studies and psychoanalysis (Kapelchuk, Brodsky), and the issues of oral history (Artemenko).

The second chapter of the book, “Trauma and Construction in National Self-Consciousness”, comprises three articles written by A. Brodsky, who considers the stated issue in terms of Jewish, Polish, Russian, and Ukrainian cultures. This part also embraces the work of A. Smirnov, who analyzes the relations between memory studies and the new history of French intellectual tradition.

The third chapter, “An Aesthetic Field of Trauma”, embodies articles by S. Nikonova, A. Sidorov, and A. Novikova, referring to such various subjects as Kant’s aesthetics, modernist literature and music. The book also gives an overview of the key publications in trauma studies, which is undoubtedly a major asset for a Russian-speaking reader wishing to study up on the field.

When discussing the theoretical sources essential to the authors, it is necessary, first of all, to mention the tradition of continental philosophy, especially the modern German philosophy (M. Heidegger, Th. Adorno, H. Arendt), as well as psychoanalysis (S. Freud, J. Lacan, S. Zizek). Also special mention must be made of the authority of V. Podoroga, a Russian philosopher, whose pioneering book, titled “The Time After”, remains one of the most significant philosophical works on the traumatic experience and totalitarianism of the post-Soviet thought. At the same time, the authors delve into some ideas of American cultural sociology (J. Alexander, C. Caruth), German memory studies (A. Assmann), and French new history (P. Nora). Thus, we deal with a combination of rationalistic humanism, existentialism, fundamental ontology, psychoanalysis, and contemporary social and cultural studies, which does not remain consistent all through and, although this book is of undoubted interest, it comes across as certain heterogeneity.

The philosophical frame of the issue is set by the works of N. Artemenko, the editor of the monograph. Following V. Podoroga, who has elaborated the concept of “the time after”, she treats trauma as the essential establishing moment for subjectivation, i.e., “trauma itself conceives a human subject”. Thus, trauma is understood as a consolidating event, “that what creates us”, and engenders “the experience of the Self becoming the Other”. The uniqueness of the traumatic experience is related to the fact that such experience represents the impossible and, therefore, the forgotten, repressed, unspoken. It represents the main methodological problem of oral history dealing with a speaking subject, unable to express one’s own traumatic experience. The idea of the specific traumatic temporality is another key aspect for Artemenko. The traumatic experience has a peculiar mode of being in time. It presupposes incompleteness, the continuity of time deprived of eventuality, the endless present. Trauma blurs the lines between the past, the present, and the future.

The themes of repression and oblivion persist in the book, especially in the works written by N. Artemenko, A. Brodsky, and K. Kapelchuk. The authors refer to Freudian psychoanalysis, which treats trauma as a condition necessary for a subject’s existence. A. Brodsky, who elaborates his own vision of the trauma problem, also builds on a conception posed by Igor Smirnov, a Russian philologist and philosopher, as well as on the ideas of Soviet psychophysicists, namely, S. Davidenkov, a member of the Pavlovian school. Following Smirnov and Davidenkov, Brodsky underscores that trauma is a condition necessary for anthropogenesis; hence, it is of fundamental meaning for the human culture.

Posing the concept of creative repression, Brodsky contests the widespread political interpretation of trauma and the phenomenon of so-called social amnesia. He claims that, in order to perform its construction function, trauma does not need to be represented in culture explicitly. K. Kapelchuk adheres to this thesis in her article, talking of the importance of investigating trauma from the psychoanalytical standpoint, not in the order of the Symbolic, but in the order of the Imaginary. Brodsky argues that considering oblivion equivalent to the political oppression seriously simplifies the case. He suggests correlating trauma with the primordial principles of consciousness. According to Brodsky, trauma is a creative factor that produces a human subject, makes the subjectivation possible. He agrees with psychoanalysis as far as it claims that trauma should be searched for in the Unconscious, and this is the trauma that “launches the selection of meanings” as the basis for cultural identity. Thus, it is trauma that underlies the individual self-consciousness, as well as the collective (national) one. All of this enables us to speak about the fundamental significance of traumatic experience.

This review does not suffice to delve into every article in the collection in more detail. In summary, I would like to mention that the majority of the authors express a certain skepticism towards the mainstream direction in contemporary trauma studies, that is to say, towards the research focused on discourse analysis and identity policy. I cannot absolutely agree with the critique of social theory for reducing trauma studies to the ideology expressed in discourse and unnecessary politicization; in other words, for the lack of ontological depth, which makes it possible to discuss trauma in correlation not with a community but with a human subject. I believe that here we deal with the collision of two incompatible positions, leading us to the insoluble question of whether a human subject or a social structure is primary. Yet, it is beyond any doubt that a strive for philosophical reflection of traumatic experience is a significant endeavor; thus, the presented monograph is worth comprehensive reading and discussing.

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## ROMANIAN EVERYDAY LIFE IN THE UNITING EUROPE

**Agnieszka Chwieduk. *Rumuński sposób na Europę. Antropologiczne studium społeczności lokalnej z Săpânța*. Poznańskie Studia Etnologiczne 22. Poznań: Instytut im. Oskara Kolberga, 2019. 309 pp. In Polish.**

This book is a result of many years of field research carried out in Romania by Agnieszka Chwieduk, a philologist, ethnographer, and anthropologist, affiliated with the Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Poland. In her monograph, she presents the latest problem of small local entities in the uniting Europe: how they operate on a daily basis, how they conceptualise Europe. Another issue is how to define their idiosyncrasies if they operate on peripheries while their economic, political, and cultural status depends – in a specific way – on a very complex situation of the Old Continent after 1989. The researcher has referred these major problem questions to Romania and, to be more specific, a small village of Săpânța, located in Maramureș region. The faraway village is poverty-stricken as reflected in significant emigration. At the same time, it is a tourist destination where the locals are exposed to people from other countries, to other values and capital. As a result of a long-term stay in the area, the author has managed to capture the local divisions (denominational, national, and ethnic), the relations and dependencies. She has also shown the daily, bottom-up strategies, practices, and rules which organize people's lives and affect their attitude toward the broadly-defined Europe. The village has become an example of living everyday life which, contrary to the main discourse on the continent's unity and integration, is spent in "contemporary Europe" in different, own, and sometimes surprising conditions.

The arrangement of the chapters is as follows: 1. The local aspect; 2. Europe in (con) texts; 3. The venue of research and methodology; 4. Maramureș and Săpânța – beyond the peripheral nature; 5. Local divisions; 6. Practicing freedom – for the local to prevail? and it is aimed at balancing off the theoretical and empirical parts. However, balance has not been achieved because in the monograph strong emphasis has been placed on methodology, according to which the Romanian village is an area where statements can be verified. Of key importance is the methodological differentiation between "anthropology at home" and "anthropology of Europe". This is of special significance to researchers from Europe, involved in research "at home", i.e. in Europe. However, the following question should be posed: whether and to what extent are we engaged in othering (Kristen Hastrup) our interlocutors in different parts of Europe? To what extent is the opposition between the east and west of Europe (defined not only in geographic terms) distinct in the approach to the field and the interlocutors? The very concept of Europe and the European Union has been formulated by politicians, journalists, writers, representatives of culture, etc., from Western Europe, while Southern Europe is to them a "familiar" other. Besides, Europe is defined here primarily as the so-called "old" European Union, excluding the post-communist countries in Central and Eastern Europe and the Baltics.



Special methodological importance has been attached to participant observation and the so-called 'ethical compassion in the course of participant observation'. By referring to consistent basic questions 'who', 'where from', and 'by means of what', the author describes her assumption of the role of a researcher. To a large degree, she conditions the question '*who*' on the patterns prevailing among the respondents rather than the researcher's planned intention. This leads to healing a sharp division between the respondent and the researcher and to them co-creating a text. As a result, by answering the question 'who', the reply reflects: 1. the researcher (with all his or her social conditioning, sex, age, cultural experience, etc.), 2. his or her idea of the text, and 3. an empowered participant of a conversation. In other words, the text itself is included in the group of observers; the text is defined (following Michel Foucault) as a strategy of living a life. Considerations of the anthropological dimension of the text category and inclusion thereof in an ethical aspect of research results in understanding reality as available only in the course of a message. Everyday life in Săpânța is represented by the locals' stories and talks accompanied by the researcher's constant awareness of the fact that she is affecting the conversation and participant observation. Hence the stress placed several times on breaking down the ethnographic situation into an activity (co-stimulated by the researcher, recorded and written down) and the text (the final effect). As a result, the author of the book keeps emphasising her co-participation as well as her otherness despite the long stay and the many returns to the place of research. She defines the final written text as property shared by the researcher and the interlocutors/locals.

The question '*where from*' represents a description of the observation venue referred to as "a theatre of memory" (p. 61). Notably, each observation place is described in minute details from the point of view of ethnography, accompanied by respective graphic material which makes it possible for the readers to manoeuvre freely in the spatial dimensions of the village under scrutiny and its geographic European contexts. '*Where from*' indicates, therefore, coexistence of the observer, the observed entity (social actors), and the resulting text, placed against the background of everyday life. As a result, the local aspect has been defined as recreation of a space, as a practice, an activity, an action imposing limits. Consequently, this logical and well-justified assumption leads to dynamic locality. The limit of activities and narrations, be it metaphorical or not, becomes a spacious place of establishing and recreating identity. Even if this identity is no longer reflected in the space, the limit is continuously "produced" to satisfy a group's needs (e.g. in the case of festive celebrations). Hence all the attention devoted to establishing the tourist infrastructure (B&Bs, souvenir shops, restaurants serving "traditional" regional food) and placing emphasis on elements of rites and behaviour which connect with tourists' expectations, e.g. displaying openness and hospitality, spectacular and extended wedding and funeral celebrations. The latter undoubtedly distinguish the village from all other locations. The Merry Cemetery (protected by UNESCO) with its colourful sculpted tombstones and rhyming and oftentimes witty epitaphs reflects a rather peculiar attitude toward death, which is not observed as taboo. Of importance is the relation between a cemetery plot and an individual's social/financial status. Poor families cannot afford burying their members in the cemetery which is well taken care of and visited by tourists. As a result, the burials take place in another cemetery where the plots are much cheaper. The Merry Cemetery is among the village's main tourist attractions. The local

shops sell the characteristic miniature blue gravestones with drawings and inscriptions, while the local artists compete for the title of a “genuine” heir to S.I. Patras. Everybody observes the traditional funeral rites where the body of the deceased remains at home for three days. While the rites defy EU directives, the locals cannot be bothered. To some extent, it is the essence of the villagers’ attitude to Europe. They are more than willing to receive European tourists, sell to them whatever they can, and leave to work abroad, but when at home, they follow the traditions. The locals are placed on an axis connecting the centre and the peripheries, which is referred to as the concept of a European. The locality of Săpânța is geographically, politically, and economically peripheral (migration and unemployment). The peripheral nature is related to the specifically defined modernisation of the societies of Eastern Europe expected to “catch up with the West” with respect to economy, politics, and society (world views, culture). The inhabitants of Săpânța and Romania in general have their own local way of overcoming their peripheral status and these efforts reflect their “method for coping with Europe” and, more specifically, Romanians’ “ability to transform foreign patterns into their own ones, in their own time, according to rules emerging in a long process” (p. 245).

In this book, *‘by means of what’* indicates linguistic practices. Written texts are a special form of these practices, with academic texts enjoying a special position. The operations of a small local entity in the uniting Europe are related to an academic discourse conjuring up a specific vision of Europe. The author concludes that “academic discourse conjuring up a specific vision of Europe co-creates a field of science in the most intense way. On the other hand, in this field is included a universe of individuals who do not contribute to an academic discourse but affect its content” (p. 67). Consequently, this has led to capturing the discourse-related dimension of reality as prevailing in everyday relations among individuals who identify themselves with Europe, yet emphasise their autonomy.

Bearing in mind the topicality and significance of the discussed subject and the methodology behind it, the book should be published in major languages including English. As a result, the readership would significantly grow, attracting anthropologists, folklorists, philologists, sociologists, and political science academics. It would also connect more to the European and global research into locality.

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