

\*\* CALL FOR PAPERS \*\*

**Writing Ethnography, Writing Trauma: Anthropological Reflections  
on the Narration and Theorization of Trauma**

Panel at 2017 American Anthropological Association Conference — November 29 -  
December 3 in Washington, D.C.

Panel Organizers:

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Preliminary Abstract:

“Trauma” is a uniquely ambivalent signifier, a term subjected to the regulatory foreclosure of diagnostic authority that also finds a growing currency in various discursive spaces.<sup>1</sup> Trauma has indeed been framed as a determinative narratological-psychological element; it profoundly shapes the making (or, through the pain it elicits, unmaking)<sup>2</sup> of worlds, both material and poetic.<sup>3</sup> Inquiries have also evaluated trauma’s political valence in local contexts,<sup>4</sup> or traced, through its social history, the broader imprints of moral genealogies.<sup>5</sup> This panel recognizes such insights into trauma’s polymorphous means and ends, and seeks to explore what anthropological writing can reveal about, and contribute to, its agentive-like potentialities.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Allan Young, *The Harmony of Illusions: Inventing Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder*, 3rd pr., 1st pr (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997).

<sup>2</sup> Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1985).

<sup>3</sup> Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

<sup>4</sup> David Jones Marshall, “Save (Us from) the Children: Trauma, Palestinian Childhood, and the Production of Governable Subjects,” *Children’s Geographies* 12, no. 3 (July 3, 2014): 281–96, doi:10.1080/14733285.2014.922678.

<sup>5</sup> Didier Fassin and Richard Rechtman, *The Empire of Trauma: An Inquiry into the Condition of Victimhood* (Princeton ; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009).

A strategic refusal to narrowly define “trauma” clears a path towards inventive analytical interventions of anthropology *with* trauma, by thinking about how trauma shapes, and is shaped by, ethnographic writing. Rather than an empty reflexive gesture, we seek to engage with modes of listening or narrating otherwise, in line with innovative methodological/theoretical approaches to trauma such as Stefania Pandolfo’s mode of “drifting aside”,<sup>6</sup> or historian Dominick LaCapra’s commitment to narrating through an “empathic unsettlement”.<sup>7</sup> Here, trauma becomes an ethical device, asking from the writer an engagement with, and textual maintenance of, the radical alterity, gaps, and fissures that trauma creates.

Recognizing that trauma contours the tasks of documentation and representation, this panel imagines ethnography as a possible space to resist and/or indulge in processes of transference between interlocutor and anthropologist, while remaining keenly aware of questions of power, authority, and the violence of writing and representation.<sup>8</sup> We reflect on the potentials and risks of an analogous identification between the positions of victim/witness and author/reader, and ask what such an association could contribute to destabilizing the traumatic event’s historicity in ways that *matter*. We therefore seek papers engaging with the following questions, or other relevant themes:

- Is the emic/etic distinction adequate in fieldsites saturated with trauma, and what other avenues of theoretical, ethical, and political engagement across, or beyond, this binary can be thought of through trauma?

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<sup>6</sup> Stefania Pandolfo, “Testimony in Counterpoint: Psychiatric Fragments in the Aftermath of Culture”, *Qui Parle* 17, no. 1: 63-123.

<sup>7</sup> Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, Parallax: Re-Visions of Culture and Society (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014).

<sup>8</sup> Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1995); Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History, European Perspectives* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).

- How do anthropologists negotiate, contribute to, or even share interlocutors' phenomenological experience and instrumental uses of trauma?
- How can trauma's warped spatiality and temporality be effectually translated or transformed into ethnographic narrative and interpretive arcs?

Confirmed participant:

Prof. Allan Young (McGill University), author of *The Harmony of Illusions – Inventing Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder*.

Submission deadline for abstracts (no more than 300 words):

March 16, 2017.

Submission Guidelines:

Interested participants are invited to contact the organizers with any questions or to submit an abstract. Submissions should include the presenter's name(s), e-mail, affiliation, and current status (Professor, PhD Candidate/Post fieldwork, Post-Doc, Adjunct, etc.), paper title, and the abstract.

Finalized panel abstract due:

April 14, 2017

Note on organizers' stance regarding potential boycott of this year's Annual Meeting:

The organizers recognize there has been mobilization towards the boycott of conferences held in the United States as a response to the Trump Administration's

Executive Order banning from entry citizens of seven predominantly Muslim countries, and as a gesture of solidarity to those it affects. There remains persistent uncertainty on whether the judiciary will have continued success in suspending this Order. There is also debate about the effectiveness of boycotts in voicing dissent and effecting change. In the spirit of full disclosure, the organizers want to make explicit this panel may be cancelled before the submission deadline if the Executive Order is reinstated, if new political developments affect the safety or mobility of participants and colleagues, or if traveling to the United States is deemed irreconcilable with principles of justice and solidarity. In the case of a cancellation, the organizers are committed to finding a new event or venue for this panel.