

## Book reviews

***Art Therapy and Political Violence. With art, without illusion* (2005). Edited by Debra Kalmanowitz and Bobby Lloyd. London, New York: Routledge**

This book is about art and its potential in healing. It addresses the possible role of art making and art therapy in providing support for people affected by political violence. It is written primarily for therapists and mental health professionals working in areas of armed conflict, or in countries where victims of armed conflict are in exile. It brings together contributions from the former Yugoslavia, the Palestinian territories, Israel, Sri Lanka, Sudan, South Africa, the UK and the USA. All of the authors but one are active as art therapists.

Art therapy was invented for use when experiences, or feelings, defy description. You can, therefore, hardly expect an art therapist to have a facile pen. Unfortunately, as a result, most chapters in this book lack a clear structure, and are therefore hard to summarise. For example, Chapter 7 (by Imelda McGeehan) has, after the title, not a single heading. Chapter 8 (by Stephanie Wise) ends with a paragraph under the heading 'conclusions', yet this paragraph is full of unanswered questions.

If I have followed the associations of the ideas presented by the various authors correctly, then they all agree on the following: art therapy is about expression, experiencing contact in relation to the expressed emotions, and transformation of problems and pain in hope and vitality. If this is true, it raises a lot of questions, such as: how do you use art

therapy in the context of victims of political violence? Is the application the same as with victims of domestic or sexual violence, or is it different, and how? When is art therapy better than other forms of therapy? Why does it work, and do the experts agree with this conclusion? What forms of training and materials does an art therapist require? What are the specific pitfalls when carrying out art therapy with victims of political violence? What can art therapists learn from working with people within different cultural contexts?

The main question, 'How do you carry out art therapy?' is sadly also not answered. *Art Therapy and Political Violence* is not a cookbook. The examples provided by the authors only provide a glimpse of what is happening in this kitchen. They all work in their own way, and the reader is left to guess what are the main ingredients.

Answers to other basic questions are also difficult to find. Chapter 1, written by the editors, is meant to explain why art therapy works for victims of political violence. It states that art making and art therapy is about moving the boundary between the conscious and the unconscious. Conscious matters, such as overwhelmingly painful feelings, are expressed step by step in this process. This expression results in meaningful personal contact, first with the therapist and after that, with other people. Sharing painful memories and feelings also allows the person to make peace with his/her past and give meaning to their painful experiences. This, however, is my interpretation of the chapter as it does not present a single crystal-clear argument.

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The second chapter (by Renos Papadopoulos) is a theoretical essay on the contradictory consequences of political violence. In brief, it says that political violence may bring out the best, as well as the worst, in people. Survival of political violence may result in psychiatric disorders in one group, while in a second group it may lead to increased resilience, and in yet a third group perhaps even bring about personal growth. At the same time, it is also true that some people may experience a range of these outcomes. How this may impact the art therapy is left to the imagination of the reader.

The other chapters describe experiences in areas of armed conflict, or with refugees from such areas. These chapters are full of examples; in most cases descriptions of people affected by political violence, occasionally mixed with the odd sentence on the therapeutic method used by the art therapist. The exception to this lamentable lack of detailed information is found in Chapter 5 (by Tamar Hazut) who describes her approach step-by-step, complete with the effect of each step on the participants.

One of the chapters is about a counselling centre in Palestine. There, art therapy is only one of the therapeutic approaches offered to clients, along side debriefing and EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing). Once again, the basic questions are left unanswered. When is art therapy the preferred choice over EMDR or debriefing? What happens when it is offered in combination? Or, perhaps, first art therapy, and then EMDR for conquering very persistent symptoms? None of these essential issues are discussed.

Chapter 13 (by Truus Wertheim) is a readable discussion of art therapy within diverging cultures. The author concludes that the idea of art as a healing agent is embedded in most cultures, and that art therapists need to

search for this idea within the local context and connect the therapy to it.

Yet, for all that is wrong with this book, there is much that is also right. Concerned people wrote *Art Therapy and Political Violence*, with their heart in the right place. They are also courageous people who have had the guts to begin to improvise in seemingly hopeless situations. They know art therapy works and they allow us to witness their confusion, their struggle and their successes. The main pitfall is that some of them also try to convince us that their work is justified by psychological theory, and when this fails, their writing can be boring.

As a result, *Art Therapy and Political Violence* is not a classic page-turner. However, it should be bought for the valuable, and sometimes moving, case histories. Don't miss, for example, the story of Pathum, a Sri Lankan soldier (Chapter 11, Siobhan McElroy): it is an unforgettable portrait of a seriously traumatised man who, thanks to the attention and care of his therapist and an interpreter, finds joy in his life once more.

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***Children of Palestine: Experiencing forced migration in the Middle East (studies in forced migration) (2005). Edited by Dawn Chatty and Gillian Lewando Hundt. New York: Berghahn Books***

This book focuses on Palestinian children that are living both inside and outside of

refugee camps in the Middle East. It explores Palestinian refugee children's perceptions of themselves and their futures within the context of a lifetime of forced migration within the specific setting of the Middle East. Unlike psychological and psychiatric-based studies that focus on the individual in isolation, this study considers the lives of Palestinian children and young people precisely in the context of the family, the community, and the wider social, economic and political arena. It explores the ways in which children and young people in family households are changed by past and current episodes of forced migration. This book includes an examination of the ways in which individual rites of passage from childhood to adult status are affected by forced migration and impoverishment. It also examines the transformations that impact family organization and structure. The book further examines the changes in informal and formal education, and differential access to labour markets and its significance to these children and young people. It also studies the transformations in Palestinian community cohesion in the refugee camps, and the way in which social institutions such as marriage, employment and care of the elderly are both changed and adapted to suit new circumstances.

This study was conducted in five separate sites with high concentrations of Palestinian refugees: Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, the West-bank and the Gaza strip. The justification for a regional, rather than a single-country, approach was built on the assumption that the different political and economic experiences of each site would impact significantly on the way in which the experience of forced migration was felt by the individual communities.

The study from Lebanon shows that children and young people often have a negative outlook towards the future and suffer declining

ambition. On the other hand, many are resolute about improving their lives. They derive strength from support networks available in their social and communal environments. They have strong nationalistic sentiments, which give them a clear sense of self. They have learnt to adapt and shelter themselves from unpleasant realities, or opt for alternatives. Psychological services to help children and young people are mostly de-emphasized and, on some levels, seen as a taboo.

The research in Syria and Jordan show a similar picture. They also show that Palestinian refugees are not victims of 'brainwashing' by Islamic groups, as Western media often portrays them; rather they mix and integrate, reject and reproduce, reinvent and reshape ideas and social norms.

The West Bank study concludes that Palestinian youth *'have used education to raise public awareness, to enable people to critically understand their reality, and to liberate themselves economically, socially and politically. For them, schools and universities were not only educational institutions, but also political establishments'* (p. 137). Education also served as a tool for identity building. The violence during the Al-Aqsa Intifada caused a lot of fear in children; many of the interviewees openly expressed their fear of Israeli soldiers. Moreover, many children noticed that the relationships between them and their parents became tense under Intifada and siege conditions. These events led to the children's glorification of martyrdom for the liberation of their country. Media coverage also had many psychological effects on children and youth, which included anxiety, nightmares, and sleep difficulties.

The data from the Gaza Strip show a strong awareness among young people of their social and cultural identity. According to the investigators, early marriage seems to be a common practice through arranged

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marriages. Relationships between the young generation and their families are often tense. Many young interviewees said that their parents do not care about them, while parents say that the younger generation does not respect adult authority.

The book gives detailed descriptions of the plight of Palestinian children and their continuous traumatization. It also portrays them as resilient human beings struggling for survival and a future.

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*Reviewed by Dr. Mohamed Farrag, clinical director and Dr. Adnan Hammad, director of the ACCESS Community Health Center, Dearborn, Michigan, USA.*

***Speaking of war. War Rape and Domestic violence in the Former Yugoslavia; trainers about their Work for Care (2005). Edited by Admira. Utrecht: Pharos/Admira Foundation***

This book reflects the personal experience of trainers who have worked in former Yugoslavia training psychosocial care workers to aid victims of rape. Each chapter is a personal epic, almost a diary, of individual trainers who have worked in the area. Their accounts encompass feelings of powerlessness and their doubts about their 'mission', about added value to the care of rape victims, and their own learning experiences. In each contribution, the issues of secondary

trauma, burnout and counter-transference are mentioned.

Scattered through out these testimonies are brief descriptions of training topics, techniques and a few practical exercises. The described training seminars are clearly embedded in the political, social and cultural context of the former Yugoslavia, but they still offer a different point of view and way of thinking about the issue of training. However, there is no clear or uniform training approach presented.

Challenges of training care workers in a non-safe context, and with trainees who have their own personal experience of war and violence, are addressed. In every chapter, war rape is described and approached as a specific war crime, as a political issue and as an instrument/tool of war.

This book will prepare trainers and health workers only partially for their first training mission in a war-affected area. While it does highlight the multiple challenges on both professional and personal levels that may confront them, it does not offer a profound reflection on the content, method and basic principles of training care workers in areas of armed conflict.

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