

BOOK REVIEW

Expanding the Edges of Narrative Inquiry

Laura E. Reimer, Katerina Standish, and Chuck Thiessen (eds).

Lanham: Lexington Books, 2020

260 pp. ISBN XX

Conflict Analysis and Transformation. An introduction for students, activists and Communities

Randy Janzen

Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018

131 pp. ISBN XX

War or Peaceful Transformation: Multidisciplinarity and International Perspectives

Marek Celinski and Kathryn M. Gow (eds)

New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2020

626 pp. ISBN XXX

Reviewed by Valerie Rosoux

Intractable conflicts on all continents remind us of the tensions, contradictions, and dilemmas faced by third parties eager to favour a sustainable rapprochement between enemies. Their initial aim is security. Without it, measures such as disarmament, return of displaced persons, holding elections, or promotion of the rule of law cannot be implemented. Once this primary goal is achieved, it is vital to transform the relationships between the parties. To do so, we must not only demobilize armed security forces; we also need to 'demobilize minds'.

The three books under review address this complex question. In *Conflict analysis and transformation*, Randy Janzen shares the lessons learned from his experience as a community mediator. Students, activists, and communities will appreciate his ambitious and pedagogical approach. In *Expanding the edges of narratives inquiry*, Laura Reimer, Katerina Standish, and Chuck Thiessen suggest adopting an "engaged ethnography" to better understand and act towards peace and social justice. Contributors to the volume consider storytelling as a peacebuilding process, questioning a series of expressions such as poetry, theater, photography, or even signed language. The two editors of *War and peaceful transformation*, Marek Celinski and Kathryn M. Gow, propose a much broader perspective since they question "dysfunctional and regressive characteristics of human nature" leading to unending wars (p. 25). The twenty-four chapters collected in this volume cover an immense research field, from Graeco-Roman ideas about war and peace to Jihad, wars on drugs, or Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD).

Admittedly, the respective plus-value of these works greatly varies according to each reader's profile, expertise, and expectations. However, these three books might interest psychologists in at least three ways. First, they all refer to the intensity and persistence of emotions related to war, such as fear, anger, hate, resentment, shame, guilt, and grief. The three books share the premise highlighted by most social psychologists, namely that emotions can be divided into "positive" and "negative" emotions. Hatred, for instance, is systematically labeled as a strictly "negative" emotion. Yet, such categorization could be questioned. Fifteen years ago, I was in Paris to interview a Colombian survivor. After a long description of what she had endured, she stopped for a while. We remained silent. She then adopted a lower tone and said: "Don't touch my hatred.

That is the only thing that's left. They took all I had—except my hatred". She then started crying. Her powerful sentences invalidate the positive/negative distinction in this matter. In fact, emotions are fundamentally ambivalent. They are, as such, neither positive nor negative. They just 'are'. Clearly, the purpose of conflict resolution cannot be to call for hatred, but does it have to crush it by all means?

Second, the books under review stress that building trust takes time. All case studies underline the strength of resistance to change. The development of empathy is an ongoing process that does take not years but generations. Such a process must not be imposed on a population that is still deeply hurt by stigmata of the past. Therefore, scholars and practitioners should take into consideration the intergenerational transmission of memory: emotions and narratives do not vanish with the death of the witnesses. They are transmitted from one generation to the next. Then, the core question is: what do we do when emotions are transmitted without the text? Silence can be chosen or imposed, but the absence of words does not prevent memory transmission. On the contrary, it often reinforces its impact.

Third, the three books present education as a priority to raise awareness and elevate consciousness. They highlight different methods that are not always compatible (problem-solving, active listening, A-Priori Modal Analogies (APMA), or "indigeneous methodology"). Beyond this variety, all authors agree on the crucial importance of education to "imagine tomorrow"¹ and establish bridging narratives². In this respect, one chapter devoted to the memories of Ukrainian women is particularly emblematic³. Their interrogation could not be more timely: how can we use memory to grow and not harm?

¹ Laura E. Reimer, "Storytelling research for and as conflict transformation", in *Expanding the edge of narrative inquiry*, op. cit., p. 221. See also the notion of "collective future thinking" developed by Meymune Topcu and William Hirst ("Remembering a nation's past to imagine its future: the role of event specificity, phenomenology, valence, and perceived agency", *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory, and Cognition* 46(3), 2020, pp. 563–579).

² See Fen O. Hampson and Amrita Narkilar (eds), *International Negotiation and Political Narratives. A Comparative Study*. London, UK: Routledge, 2022.

³ M. P. Flaherty and S. Stavkova, " 'I remember everything' . Anchoring dialogue in cultures of peace", in *Expanding the edge of narrative inquiry*, op. cit., p. 17-35.

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