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Provincializing Trauma?

A Case Study of Family Violence, Media Reception, and Transcultural Memory

Writing about psychological trauma, cultural history, and literary theory in the year 2011 requires conceptual precision. It seems that the field of literary and media studies is finally in the process of substantially revising a powerful paradigm of cultural trauma analysis that has been with us since the early 1990s. As we have tried to show on other occasions, this deconstructive tradition of cultural interpretation embraced trauma on an abstract, metaphorical level as a theoretical vantage point offering insights into the opportunities and limits of human self-reflexivity. But its protagonists displayed little interdisciplinary curiosity about the suffering of actual trauma victims and the knowledge of people treating them. Moreover, they held an apodictically negative view of the cultural effects of narrativizing traumatic experiences – which is an essential element of therapy – and were also otherwise uninterested in the complex empirical interplay of violence, trauma, and media experiences. As a result, some scholars developed ambiguous ontologizing statements claiming for instance that trauma is »always already inscribed in (any) memory« and that any conscious representation of trauma is essentially »inadequate« because »trauma is the inaccessible truth of remembering«.

Viewed from this perspective, disciplines like philosophy and history supposedly simply »make us forget about the traumatic flipside of all memory« (Weinberg 1999, 204–206; cf. Weilnböck 2007c; 2008b).[1] By aestheticizing and valorizing trauma in such a fashion, the paradigm has raised a lot of questions about the empirical foundations and ethical implications of its analyses, especially concerning the representation of actual victims of violence (cf. Weilnböck 2008a; Kansteiner/Weilnböck 2008; Kansteiner 2004).

[1] The deconstructive trauma paradigm was certainly originally launched with the best of intentions seeking to develop new critical perspectives on contemporary culture. But the philosophical reflections often evolved into rather vague – and from an interdisciplinary point of view even counterproductive – aesthetic and aestheticizing speculations. Consider for example Manfred Weinberg's emphatic quote of Friedrich Kittler in the former's 1999 essay on trauma, psychoanalysis and cultural interpretation: »In the forgetting of the word ›forget‹ the expressed concurs with the expression. And the delirium of this concurrence is the truth« (Weinberg 1999, 203).

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In the meantime, the deconstructive trauma paradigm has been resoundingly rejected (Rothe 2011) as well as substantially revised, for instance in an effort to historicize the paradigm and understand cultural responses to 9/11 and Abu Ghraib with greater precision (Luckhurst 2010, also Luckhurst 2008). Moreover, a number of cultural and literary studies experts have begun to integrate the results of clinical-psychological research projects about trauma and trauma therapy (e. g. Hirsch 2002; 2004; Fischer/Riedesser 1998/2009) into their analyses of cultural artifacts.[2] Further helpful adjustments have been suggested from a constructivist point of view. These interventions remind us that perceptions of trauma and the status of victims and perpetrators are subject to substantial social, regional, and historical variations (Alexander 2004). Finally, scholars like Michael Rothberg have particularly thoroughly historicized the trauma paradigm by arguing that the founding moment of Western trauma studies, the formation of Holocaust consciousness, is best understood as the result of complex processes of cultural negotiations including important contributions developed from post-colonial perspectives. Having thus decentered trauma, the contributions of Rothberg and others deserve critical attention because they help us develop forms of genocide memory that avoid the ethno-centric focus of past strategies of Holocaust remembrance (Rothberg 2009; Craps 2010).

But the field of cultural trauma studies still focuses on detailed analyses of textual and filmic representations of trauma and the intellectual traditions reflected in these cultural artifacts and suffers from a concomitant shortage of empirical work about the actual effects of trauma culture. In short, we possess many interesting models about how trauma might work culturally but none of them have been applied in the study of actual reception processes. We know little about how people engage with trauma culture, what it may mean to work through trauma on a cultural level, and how societies and social milieus may acquire resilience against dynamics of violence through cultural practices. By the same token, we may miss out on important insights about pursuing cultural studies in empirically sound ways and teaching it through pedagogically innovative and responsible methods. Similar challenges persist in the field of memory studies which has paid a great deal of attention to the representation of the past in various media and cultural contexts but not yet developed similarly successful methods for the study of reception processes (Kansteiner 2006, 22–25).

Studying the complex relations between violence, trauma, and culture in a transnational and transcultural setting, while also trying to address the problem of reception, raises particularly interesting questions about the empirical reach and universal applicability of Western concepts of trauma. Dipesh Chakrabarty

[2] E.g. Neukom 2003; 2005; Boothe/Matthys 2008; Fischer 2005; Fraisl et al. 2004; Kopf 2005; Anz 1998; 2000; Stein 2001; 2006; 2007; 2010; Stein et al. 2010; Jaeggi et al. 2003; and the work of the Freiburg group of literature psychology studies (e. g. Fischer/Mauser/Pietzcker 2000).

has developed the spatial metaphor of provincializing Europe in his efforts to develop critical perspectives on processes of modernization and contemporaneity in India with the help of Western concepts of modernity and capitalism (Chakrabarty 2001). For Chakrabarty, the encounter between the concepts and the complexity of colonial and postcolonial history, and the challenges of translation that this encounter entails, transformed in subtle yet decisive ways both his perception of Indian history as well as his understanding of the Western analytical concepts he employed. It is certainly possible that the narratological-psychological analyses of interviews conducted with migrants who have lived in substantially different social contexts requires similar adjustments in methods and harbors similarly decentering insights about the limits of our analytical instruments.

We are introducing the framework of Literary and Media Interaction Research (LIR) in an effort to address some of these challenges through empirically rigorous research methods. LIR seeks to understand what people actually do – mentally and psychodynamically – when they interact with fictional or non-fictional narratives. LIR asks how far an individual, when s/he is personally engaged in a mediated story (a film, a novel), associatively establishes – probably more unconsciously than consciously – a mental connection to personally lived-through experiences from her/his biography.[3] How does a media consumer engage with important biographical experiences and how does s/he deal with the biographical and developmental challenges which are inextricably attached to them? To what extent does the person set up mental defence mechanisms in an effort to avoid revisiting important events of his or her past? Furthermore: What does the person's individual mode of coping with or avoiding such challenges imply for her/his further real-life conduct, for the decision s/he makes and the stances s/he takes? In other words, the question is how interactions with media texts, i. e., the processes of media-biographical work, take place on a personal and on a societal level and to what extent they influence and support the individual's continuous efforts to achieve sustainable personal development?[4]

The analysis of media reception processes assumes a particular relevance when consumers relate media texts to past experiences of emotional stress and violence. The intersection of media and memory might have positive effects and help people come to terms with past episodes of troublesome violence and develop individual resilience and capacities. Alternatively, the use of media texts might hinder sustain-

[3] LIR methods were originally developed in the context of a research project financed by the European Union (2006–2008) focusing on the use of fictional media narratives in literary and media education (Weilnböck 2008; 2009; 2010; 2011).

[4] The second phase of LIR research deals with the narrative itself (aside of the person absorbing it): Given its specific content and form, what role does a particular narrative play in its interaction with the recipients? More precisely: What are the narrative's ›textual interaction potentials‹ regardless of how any empirical person actually interacted with it? (for more details see Weilnböck 2008a; 2011d; Stein 2007).

able personal growth and even lead up to additional stressful events. Moreover, these reactions can occur on an individual or a collective scale. In the latter case, media interaction and the pedagogical use of media narratives could have direct effects on the respective society's sustainable societal development. A given film might offer textual interaction potentials that tend to elicit anti-social reactions, or significant segments of its audience may be biographically and mentally predisposed to respond in non-sustainable ways. Alternatively, audiences may be prone towards more pro-social reactions and a movie might help set into motion positive communication processes which can be rightfully called socially constructive, for instance in the sense of strengthening social resilience against resentment and violence and building capacities for peaceful conflict resolution (Baer/Weilnböck 2012; Weilnböck 2012).[5]

The stakes are particularly high for narratives which its consumers consider compelling and emotionally engaging stories about the victimizations of social groups. Depending on the quality of the audience's emotional involvement, the violence on the screen might go a long way in de-escalating or further exacerbating existing cycles of violence and (self-) destructiveness. LIR is thus designed to shed light on the all important but rarely studied question of how today's audiences use the many media outlets available to them to engage with the emotional highlights and challenges of their lives. The research should yield empirical data about pairing media audiences and media texts in ways that foster personal awareness, self-reflexive growth and emotionally productive confrontations with the more disturbing aspects of their past.

LIR is based on the assumption that people constantly, unwittingly, and inescapably establish associative mental connections between their (un)conscious life experiences and developmental challenges and the narratives they read and watch on an everyday basis. These mental connections and processes influence a person's actions and behavior and thus have an impact on her/his further life – as well as on the communities and discourses s/he forms a part of. However, while it seems pretty commonsensical to assume such mental connections, little research has been devoted to studying them in any systematic and interdisciplinary fashion. Most academic analyses of contemporary culture avoid engaging with concrete individuals and societies and stay clear of any psychologically informed research efforts (Weilnböck 2007a). In fact, many colleagues continue to appreciate the alleged aesthetic autonomy of the work of art and implicitly subscribe to the notion that the media world of fictional stories and the real world of actual people belong to two entirely different paradigms (Boothe et al. 2011).

[5] To be sure, any assessment of what is ›sustainable‹ in a person's or society's development must not be issued from a subjective or ideological point of view but has to be based on insights and findings from generally accepted psychological and/or socio-historical research.

Promising innovations were therefore often developed in the periphery of established academic disciplines and by researchers who are at a disadvantage in the competition for scarce research support. Noteworthy interdisciplinary initiatives have for instance emerged in the fields of qualitative media research (Mikos/Wegener 2005; Ayaß/Bergmann 2006), empirical literary and media studies (cf. the IGEL association and the pertinent sections of *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*), and empirical literary psychology (e.g. Groeben et al. 1999; Groeben/Hurrelmann 2002; 2004; Andringa/Schreier 2004). Moreover, LIR might be particularly relevant for colleagues conducting research about processes of literary socialization and the evolution of reading-biographies.[6] Finally, the task of fine-tuning LIR's second key methodological component – the textual analysis of media narratives – is made easier by recent developments in the field of literary narratology and more specifically by publications pertaining to the analysis of implied audiences of narrative texts.[7]

But even these positive initiatives rarely systematically integrate psychological insights into their research design and generally take no note of methodological developments in the fields of psychodynamic, clinical, and life-course psychology which appear particularly pertinent to the research questions at hand.[8] Even particularly promising advances in media biography research refer to psychological concepts only in passing, without consulting clinical knowledge in greater detail and developing psychodynamically informed perspectives on peoples' media interaction (cf. Sander/Lange 2005). As a result, media biography researchers focus on peoples' so-called ›reading or viewing biographies‹ and fail to fully explore the interdependencies between the person's media consumption and his/her biography, psychological profile, and coping skills.[9]

Literary narratologists seem to entertain similar misgivings about delving into psychodynamic and clinical areas of knowledge. If they develop any interest in psychological methods at all they appear to prefer the selective application of the-

[6] E.g. Charlton et al. 1992; 1993; 1997; 2007; Eggert et al. 2003; Graf 2004; Schulte Berge et al. 2002; Pette 2001; Garbe et al. 1999;, 2009; Weilnböck 2003; 2008; 2011.

[7] Nünning/Nünning 2002a; 2002b; Heinen/Sommer 2009; Meister et al. 2003; Neukom 2003; Stein 2007; Herman et al. 2007.

[8] Two recent handbooks of qualitative media studies might serve as illustrations since none of the many contributions in the two volumes systematically engage with current psychological methodologies (Mikos et al. 2005; Ayas et al. 2006).

[9] Many media biography researchers appear to pursue intrinsically philological projects that yield few new insights into personal reception processes. They tend to ask their subjects what texts/films they read/viewed in their lives and how they felt about them. This line of questioning rarely generates rich narrative autobiographical material suitable for developing succinct hypotheses about the psychological and social relevance of media consumption (cf. Weilnböck 2008, 2011). Instead, the projects produce more or less canonical chronologies of media texts, i.e., ›reading biographies‹ or personal ›reading histories‹ which resemble traditional philological literary histories (Schulte Berge et al. 2002; Garbe et al. 1999; 2009; Sander/Lange 2005; Weilnböck 2003).

oretical models developed by cognitive psychologists (Meister et al. 2003; Schönert et al. 2007; Heinen/Sommer 2009). But there are notable exceptions. Malte Stein has recently created a full-fledged interaction-theoretical design for the narratological analysis of fictional media texts (cf. Stein 2007; Jesch/Stein 2007; Weilnböck 2009; 2011). Moreover, there are a number of narratologists working in psychology departments who have founded their own tradition of non-deconstructive psychoanalytic literary studies.[10] Especially Stein's approach enables us to identify the specific interaction potentials of a media narrative and therefore represents a crucial theoretical reference point for LIR research. But none of these interdisciplinary efforts, helpful as they are for our purposes, have generated a methodological foundation and compelling research design for an integrated analysis of media narratives and personal life experiences, which constantly intersect in people's everyday lives.

LIR aims at closing this gap by providing a new methodological approach to studying the ›biographical-historical work‹ of individuals, including the concrete responses to important developmental challenges, which people accomplish in the course of their media consumption. We pursue these goals by way of the following case study about the media interaction of a 25-year old woman whom we call Mila.[11]

Mila's Life Story and Experiences of Violence

The first analytical step of LIR research consists of reconstructing a person's life history by way of biographical-narrative interviewing (Rosenthal 1995; Rosenthal/Fischer-Rosenthal1997; Rosenthal 2004; Weilnböck 2003; 2007b). However, the interview questions as well as the reconstructive analysis of the transcripts also draw on key psycho-diagnostic criteria from the OPD interview (cf. OPD 2001) and similar resources from the fields of narratological psychology, systemic/relational analysis, psychodynamics and psycho-trauma research (cf. Lucius-Hoene/Deppermann 2002; Herman et al. 2007; Angus/McLeod 2004). The biographical interview should provide answers to the following key questions: How has Mila's life proceeded until now? What is her family and biographical background and what concrete experiences have played a particularly important role in shaping her life's trajectory? Finally, what psychological consequences have arisen for Mila from her experiences, i. e. what psychodynamic behavioural rules does she follow in her everyday life and what developmental challenges does she face as a result of these experiences?

[10] Neukom 2003; 2005; Boothe/Matthys 2008; Fischer 2000 (also see footnote 2).

[11] A significantly longer discussion of this case study has been published in German, see Weilnböck 2008c.

At the end of the biographical interview, Mila was asked to name a literary text, a film, or some other media experience that, for whatever reason, has had a personal impact on her. The second methodological component of LIR research, the narrative media-experience interview, focuses on this media text and was carried out after Mila had a chance to view/reread the text in question. The interview technique is designed to capture the ideas and fantasies Mila developed as a result of her encounter with the figures and events portrayed in the narrative.

The transcript analysis of both interviews is based on a rigorous process of hypotheses systematic hypotheses formation and falsification/verification. The systematic hypotheses testing includes contrastive comparisons of three potentially conflicting dimensions of human interaction and mental activity: (1) the person's actual experiences and behaviour in certain concrete situation of her biography, (2) her subjective – partly unconscious – perception of these experiences and behaviour at the time and (3) the narrative account given by the person at the time of the interview.[12] The analysis of the biographical interview identifies Mila's specific developmental challenges while the analysis of the media-experience interview attempts to answer the question of how Mila mentally deals with these challenges while she views/reads the media narrative she has chosen, i. e., how she uses this narrative's specific interaction potentials in light of her personal life span development. Thus the results of the narratological analysis of Mila's media product are already integrated into the media-experience interview. The narratological analysis represents a separate and independent procedure which focuses in particular on the interaction potentials which a given narrative provides for its viewers/readers as a result of its specific content and form.[13]

Thus the first question is: How did Mila's life proceed until the time of the interview? What psychodynamic behavioural-structural rules and challenges are characteristic for her biography?

At the time of the interview, Mila studied in Austria. She immigrated from Kosovo where she spent the first seven years of her life in a rural setting as the youngest of eight siblings. The family was marked by patriarchal structures and a Muslim cultural background. The household in Kosovo consisted of Mila, her mother, her paternal grandparents and their sons and daughters-in-law, i. e., Mila's paternal

[12] For a more extensive discussion of LIR methodology see Weilnböck 2009 and 2011.

[13] The analytic procedure takes into account a methodical linguistic assessment of (1) the ›informational completeness and choice‹ of a narrative text, according to the basic sequential phases of human action (i. e. a (fictional) action's ›causal situation‹, the character's ›motivation‹ and ›specific intention to (re)-act‹, the concrete ›implementation‹, and its ›(un)intended effects‹ as it is arranged by the narrative) and an assessment of the (2) verifiable ›incoherencies‹ of the narrative on an (a) internal and (b) external level of narrative coherence and (3) by consulting resources from clinical and psychodynamic psychology in order to account for these incoherencies and deduce the narrative's interaction potentials which result from them.

uncles and aunts, with each family occupying one room. Mila's father had been working in Austria since before she was born.

All in all, Mila describes her childhood as happy and lively and affording her many opportunities to enjoy her rural environment. But she also states, somewhat cautiously at first, that her grandparents were »really nasty«.[14] Scenes of anger and violent attacks, directed especially towards the aunts but also the children, appear to have been part of everyday family life. It seems that even by local standards, her grandparents were quite rough: »Grandfather with his stick could be pretty nasty; he used to chase us (children), […] I ran away and locked myself in for three hours until he went away, otherwise he would have beaten me.« Mila's grandmother was apparently also a bad-tempered, unpredictable individual who was prone to violent outbursts and could be cruel to children and animals. When an uncle died prematurely from an illness, his wife was so badly treated that she felt forced to move out of the house but had to leave her son behind since he was considered the property of the grandparents.

Mila's mother had entered an arranged marriage with Mila's father at the age of eighteen. She also had a hard time living in the house of her in-laws since her husband returned home just once a year to deliver part of his Austrian salary. Mila's mother visited him in Austria two or three times a year. During her 27 years living with her parents-in-law she gave birth to eight children. There must have been a great deal of humiliation and violence in Mila's mother's relation within her in-laws, which sometimes resulted in Mila's mother being »beaten black and blue« and »bleeding all over«.

Mila's father began working at age 14 and, as the eldest son, bore responsibility for his brothers and sisters but did not receive much respect from his parents. Even in old age, Mila's grandfather clearly expressed contempt for his son, who, he said, »has always been a piece of shit and will always remain one«. Mila's father replicated patterns of aggression and violence in the relationship to his wife and children although Mila also tells stories of paternal affection and pride. Mila emphasises today that the physical attacks and beatings endured in her family »cannot be judged by Western standards«. She adds that even at the time »you also saw that your parents were always there for you, unconditionally, you sensed that it couldn't be true that they didn't love you, that's stronger in the end«. And yet, in Austria at age ten, Mila witnessed firsthand how her father and older brothers brutally beat up one of Mila's teenage sisters because she had not returned home on time and the eldest sister had insinuated that she was involved with a man. The young woman received serious head injuries and was hospitalized for three months. Before the interview, twenty five-year-old Mila had hardly ever talked to anyone about the incident.

[14] The interviews with Mila were conducted in German, all translations are the authors'.

Mila relates details of another incident reflecting a family atmosphere of pervasive fear and unpredictable, violent disruptions. When Mila's mother was hospitalized after displaying symptoms of a heart attack she made her husband promise not to tell the children to keep them from worrying about her. Much later it was determined that her mother suffered from long-term chronic anxiety but at the time Mila and her siblings harboured more serious suspicions: »we knew how aggressive he [the father] is, we thought he had killed her or taken her somewhere – and didn't want to say anything«. Today, Mila's parents appear to be alienated from one another and Mila takes care of her mother.

Mila's life story raises the key question to what extent she has been able to work through and neutralize her negative childhood experiences or has repeated patterns of violent and destructive behaviour. Any acting out in the latter sense could be directed against herself or her environment causing unwelcome psychosomatic or psychosocial consequences. (Fischer/Riedesser 1998/2009).

At first sight, Mila's biographical interview attests to her considerable psychological resilience and resourcefulness. As the youngest daughter and »pet of the family«, Mila was considered particularly »talented« from an early age and did indeed turn out to be a gifted individual. She was able to read and write at age four and occasionally accompanied her sisters to school long before she became a pupil herself. She also dealt very successfully with the family's emigration to Austria. In her Austrian hometown Mila was one of only two pupils in her class who managed to transfer from primary to secondary school. At the new institution she stood out as a migrant and served for several years as class spokesperson. In addition, she joined various youth subcultures (hippie, punk, hip-hop, etc.). Having successfully finished high school, she pursued a degree in communication studies and landed an internship with a TV station, where, at age 20, she assumed full editorial responsibility for a weekly two-hour youth programme. However, just over a year before the interview, she abruptly abandoned her job and her studies, returned to her Austrian hometown, and took courses in social pedagogy, claiming to have »discovered her social streak«.

Mila's Biographical Behavioural-Structural Rule

What findings did the narrative analytical reconstruction of the comprehensive transcript of Mila's interview reveal (cf. Weilnböck 2009; 2011)? Mila's life trajectory seems to have followed the central biographical and behavioural-structural rule of the »talented and energetic pursuit of the prevention of and compensation for violence and injustice«.

Biography research tends to state its insights, for instance regarding biographical and behavioural-structural rules, in straight-forward, even seemingly colloquial language. But its short analytical formulas nevertheless represent highly com-

pact explanatory models which are supported by extensive evidence derived from rigorous hypotheses testing on different analytical levels of the interview. The testing is conducted by two researchers who effectively falsify alternative hypotheses that might have seemed plausible at first sight. Therefore, these formulas have been painstakingly questioned. In addition, they integrate into their causal explanations a maximum of ostensibly heterogeneous biographical phenomena which is why they frequently focus on more than one topic[15] (Rosenthal 1995, 2004; Weilnböck 2003). As a case in point, Mila's behavioural-structural rule helps to explain behaviour seemingly unrelated to the thematic cluster ›violence, injustice, prevention, compensation‹. In this way Mila's interest in social pedagogy, pursuing her »social streak« and seeking to prevent violence and injustice through alternative venues, as well as her engagement in youth cultures and her work in youth television, appear as parts of one single motivational context.

In the same vein, the rule also adds complexity to some of the characteristics attributed to Mila. For example, the trait ›energetic‹ indicates not only Mila's general ability to strongly assert herself, but also highlights the fact that in her manifold and sometimes impulsive acts of ›engagement‹ she tends to enter into escalatory conflict dynamics and overstretch her personal resources and those of her friends. Similarly, the attribute »talented« indicates a high degree of general aptitude for goal-directed behaviour and refers to the fact that as a child Mila was considered ›talented‹ and performed very well in school. However, in the case of Mila, ›talented‹ also implies – in a psychodynamically more profound understanding of ›talent‹ (Miller 1979) – the potential for over-exertion, parentification[16] and developmental risks and setbacks. For example, the biographical analysis revealed that from an early age Mila's special talent involved her carrying out the far-reaching familial-dynamic function of stress prevention. As the youngest child and her bad-tempered grandfather's favourite granddaughter, Mila assumed the role of childish-ludic moderator of tension which entailed severe risks for her sustainable personal development. Finally, biographical rule formulas, broadly defined and used as structural analytical tools, shed light on various phases of a person's biography. For instance, in Mila's present life as a young adult, being talented and engaging in the prevention of stress and injustice explains her willingness to look after her sick mother almost single-handedly, while her father and her seven siblings remain distant, disengaged, and otherwise occupied.

[15] For example, at the initial stages of the hypotheses testing procedure it seemed that Mila's biographical principle is best defined as an unrelenting quest for personal creativity and social connectivity. But that assumption was disproven in later phases of the procedure. At the same time the importance of the component of ›talent‹ was reconfirmed and became one element of the behavioural-structural rule.

[16] I.e. being obliged as a child to adopt adult and parental functions and becoming able to exert them at too early an age and as a result having to sacrifice other more age-relevant developmental issues.

Behavioural, biographical-structural rules should be supported by evidence from different stages of a person's life that is directly relevant to the rule in question. With Mila, for example, many elements of the rule are validated by her reports about her school career. Already in primary school, Mila sided with outsiders subjected to collective ridicule. In secondary school, she used her job as class spokesperson for the pursuit of social justice in a very forceful, at times highly confrontational, but always very resourceful style of engagement. Moreover, Mila identified strongly with various youth cultures, for example hippie, punk, and hip-hop cultures that subscribe to an ethos of tolerance, social justice, and political activism (cf. Baer/Weilnböck 2012). Finally, Mila's penchant for causes of social justice is also reflected in the choice of her boyfriend who is not a Muslim and whom she admires for his tireless opposition to all forms of social prejudice.

Mila's Dependency-Autonomy-Conflict

Biographical-structural rules reach the limits of their explanatory value when it comes to the task of assessing the sustainability and socio-ecological health, both on a personal and a social level, of the concrete actions described by the categories ›talent‹, ›violence prevention‹, and ›social engagement‹. One has to bring additional psychological resources into play in order to explain that Mila's conflicts with authorities or the arduous task of looking after her mother, notwithstanding all the ›talent‹ and ›engagement‹ invested in those causes, have long-term development-retarding and even psycho-traumatic effects. In the end, Mila's behavioural pattern will appear to be a direct result of the high levels of stress, conflict and violence she experienced throughout her life.

The non-sustainable, development-hindering elements of Mila's biographical-behavioural patterns are best illuminated by a theoretical concept that the psychodynamic literature describes as dependency-autonomy-conflict (cf. Mentzos 2000; Rudolf 2008; OPD 2001). These are mental conflicts caused by strong unconscious dependencies on (parental) relationship figures. They manifest themselves in behaviourally well-defined phenomena termed ›pseudo-autonomy‹ or ›fragility of boundaries/detachment‹ and cause suffering for oneself or others on a continuing basis. As Mila's life story illustrates, such conflicts are likely to produce impulsiveness or aggression whenever detachment and autonomy actually take place and may also otherwise be considered burdensome for a person's development.[17]

[17] Any references to psychological concepts such as pseudo-autonomy, parentification etc. only have the heuristic status of hypotheses. They do not preclude other hypotheses and do not represent conclusions/diagnoses. Quite the contrary, such concepts broaden the researcher's scope of observation by accessing a wealth of empirical knowledge attached to the concepts and thus facilitate

The actual consequences of what has been heuristically conceived of as Mila's pseudo-autonomy and her dependency-autonomy-conflict manifest themselves particularly clearly at the juncture in her life story at which she broke off her successful and much enjoyed work in youth television, returned to her home town, and began to study social pedagogy. As far as Mila is concerned she committed to these quite far-reaching personal changes because she »increasingly discovered her social streak« and developed a desire to »make the world a better place«. But the transcript analysis reveals that other reasons played an even more significant role. Mila's elderly mother had again fallen ill and had to be taken to the hospital. In addition, her father, who spoke little German and was inept in bureaucratic matters, had omitted to pay his health insurance premiums, and was also otherwise of little help.

Such were the – at first untold – reasons which caused Mila to feel obliged to move closer to her parents and to take responsibility for the care for her mother. Mila changed her major because the university in her home town simply did not offer courses in media studies. Clearly, Mila's abrupt and disadvantageous career move, which required her to forfeit her independence, was not a sovereign decision taken in response to her commitment to various social causes but a subjectively perceived obligation to assume once again her position as ›parentified‹ child (cf. footnote 15) and act out her particular talent for emotionally stressful family dynamics.

In the margins of her report, Mila inadvertently reveals what tremendous psychological risks she ran by returning home. During her years attending secondary school and during the time spent in various youth movements she, as she puts it herself, »was finally able to break out of the two worlds I had always lived in«. She »had been divided« into »two personalities [and] was completely different as a person at school and also at home«. At home, she experienced herself on the whole »reserved«, mostly »down«, and quite often also »grumpy«; at school and with friends she felt on the whole »up« »happy«, »open«, and »energetic«. She also often played the role of the clown in school. What Mila calls being »divided« shows parallels with what, in psychodynamics, is described as a tendency towards a »bi-polar, manic depressive position« in which a disposition of depression and/or chronic anxiety is compensated – compulsorily but also unstably – by auto-suggestive bouts of high spirits and energetic activity.

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further hypotheses building. Pseudo-autonomy is a frequently used concept in developmental and adolescent psychology and describes a condition in life in which the person subjectively feels to be completely autonomous and independent from anyone and anything (and engages in various strenuous activities emphasizing this independence). Upon closer examination, however, strong dependencies on family and peer groups or patterns of substance abuse persist of which the person is completely unaware (cf. Mentzos 2000). Lack of boundaries often coincides and describes a condition in which the person routinely displays behaviour which is perceived as intrusive by others.

Moreover, the tension in Mila's personality can be further understood as part of a trauma-compensatory pattern evoked by her family experiences (cf. Fischer/Riedesser 1998/2009). Unbeknownst to Mila, the high spirits and clown-like role she displayed in relations to her schoolmates corresponded to behaviour she had already adopted as a child, when, as the youngest and favourite granddaughter, she carried out the function of a childish-ludic tension-reducer – and did not yet feel »reserved« and »grumpy« as she then did during her adolescence. Moreover, in a different segment of the interview Mila revealed how this change came about: Her family appreciated her playfulness when Mila was a child, but systematically repressed and exorcised her spontaneity once she grew up. Apparently, breaking Mila's playful spirit occurred by means of specific culturally induced feelings of shame and denigration, whose impact, as Mila intimated, could not be assessed »through any Western concept of affect« but required a deeper understanding of Muslim culture.

Clearly, by returning home, Mila not only lost a significant degree of personal autonomy and gave up a promising and enjoyable professional career, but also risked more serious psychological injury. The parts of her narrative testimony attesting to her feelings of »dividedness« imply substantial risks for her personal well-being. Towards the end of her second narrative interview, Mila described her ›dependency-autonomy-conflicts‹ and her feelings of dividedness in particularly explicit terms. »I couldn't decide – family or study«; »at that time I would often burst into tears in the middle of town, then I couldn't go on any more«.[18] Mila mentioned furthermore in passing that her »dividedness« was »a characteristic that I sometimes still have to fight today« and that she does regularly experience moments of crisis when she has »had enough« and »when things fall apart […] above all in wintertime [when] the days are too short«. It proved almost impossible to have Mila describe these experiences in greater detail although the available testimony already provides ample evidence for her struggles with bouts of depression caused by her family history.

At the time of the interview, however, Mila felt calmer and was enthusiastically and diligently engaged in her new field of studies; she was again quite successful and applied her talents in a productive fashion. But her specific biographical burden remained significant. Mila took classes and works part time, looks after her mother, and tries to keep the family of cousins together. At the same time, she did not allow herself to conduct her relationship to her pre-marital boyfriend in public. Moreover, now in her mid twenties, Mila was poised to take on an even greater burden: She said she had talked to her (Austrian) partner of a year »about every-

[18] To determine the extent to which this phase of Mila's life was also influenced by the (first) Bosnian war and the extent to which family-historical issues from the Second World War came into play here, would have required additional explorations in interview and transcript analysis.

thing«, by which she meant that, if they do get married, her mother would move in with them.

Mila's Psychodynamic Developmental-Challenge

The analytical-evaluative procedures of LIR integrate the mental and psychodynamic perspectives of life-path development and thus transcend the primarily descriptive methods of state-of-the-art biography research (Weilnböck 2009; 2011). Considered from an LIR perspective and expressed in psycho-biographical terms Mila's behavioural principle can be defined as a ›trauma-compensatory pattern‹ (Fischer/Riedesser 1998/2009) and be traced back to experiences within her family. These had caused Mila's psychic structure and mental sensitivity to be profoundly marked by (1) an unconscious deeply rooted *›dependency-autonomy-conflict‹*, an inclination towards *›pseudo-autonomy‹,* and at times a trauma-compensatory *›fragility of boundaries‹.* More broadly understood, Mila's personality displays (2) some affinity toward *›bipolar‹* mood swings; (3) a family-based relationship structure of *›parentification‹,* predictably accompanied (4) by intense *›detachment conflicts‹* and impulsiveness.

So, what can be deduced as Mila's ›psychodynamic developmental challenge‹ from these analytic findings? The answer to this question does not intend to predict concrete individual decisions and actions let alone prejudge them. Instead, it seeks to illuminate possible long-term processes of mental structural change which may be seen as helpful in light of Mila's sustainable personal development and the obstacles she faces on her path. Mila might choose to become more involved with her family or follow a course of greater independence and keep her distance from her parents and her siblings, or somehow strike a balance between both alternatives. But whatever option she chooses, given her occasional fragility of personality boundaries and her risk of being mired in dependency-autonomy-conflicts, she would profit from putting a premium on achieving greater psychodynamic self-detachment and acquiring increased relational independence from internalised outside pressures. Such gain in genuine personal autonomy could be rightfully assessed as being sustainable and advantageous for Mila's future because it would reduce her risk of suffering from depression, getting into heated and unproductive conflicts, and over-exerting herself and over-burdening others.

Mila's Chosen Film Experience

Which media-narrative experience did Mila choose for the second interview? She selected the Hollywood production *I Am Sam* (2001) that she said moved her whenever she watched it causing her to feel an intense and curious combination

of »sadness« and »joy«.[19] Sam is a retarded adult man with the mental age of a seven year-old, living with his seven year-old daughter Lucy whose mother disappeared after her birth. Sam is loveable, helpful, and endearing as a person, but, as might be expected, at times naive and quickly out of his depth. He does odd jobs in the local franchise of a restaurant chain and is well integrated into the social fabric of colleagues and guests. He also belongs to a stable circle of male friends, a self-help group of variously handicapped men, all of whom are bizarre but very likeable all the same.

Sam had always been delighted with having a daughter, and the film portrays him as a father who, though ineffective in practical matters, is happy and caring. With some help from his friends and especially his well-meaning, single neighbour Annie, Sam manages to provide a pleasant home for his charming daughter Lucy. Soon, however, Lucy becomes smarter than Sam and can read and count better than her father, while trying hard not to exhibit her superiority. Emotionally, too, Lucy is far more stable than her father, who sometimes reacts nervously and angrily in new surroundings. Some powerful scenes show how the alert and gifted daughter accurately assesses the abilities and limitations of her father and adjusts her own behaviour accordingly. All in all, though, Lucy seems to be very satisfied and happy with her emotionally attentive and playful father. The film's subtitle says it all: »All you need is love«.

But there is danger on the horizon. Childcare authorities become understandably concerned about the family situation and begin to take action. Court hearings take place which result in the separation of father and daughter. Lucy is removed to a foster family and Sam only receives limited visitation rights. After the separation, Sam is at first depressed and does not manage to keep his appointments with the foster family. In the end, however, everything turns out well: the foster family and Sam move homes close to one another, and after a few small scale and charming upsets and complications they agree to look after Lucy in a responsible and selfless manner since neither the foster family nor Sam can raise Lucy without each other's help. The loving father-daughter relationship is simply irreplaceable. Finally, it even appears feasible – one of the more unrealistic twists in the story – that Sam might somehow grow out of his handicap and establish a close relationship to a woman.

Mila's Media-Experience Interview

What precisely happened during Mila's media consumption? What did she do mentally as she repeatedly viewed this film? More precisely: What conscious or unconscious biographical work did she accomplish? In an effort to answer these questions the media-experience interview is subjected to an interdisciplinary

[19] Mila watched the German dubbed version *Ich bin Sam.*

transcript analysis (Weilnböck 2008a; 2011) that integrates all empirical areas of LIR research: (i) the person's biography, (ii) her mental interaction with a fictional media narrative, and (iii) the content and structure of the narrative itself. The first step of this analysis consists of developing a number of hypotheses about the potential biographical challenges and psychological needs that might be reflected in Mila's viewing experience.

The frequency and openness with which Mila talked about the character Sam, his daughter Lucy, and their relationship gives rise to the probable but by no means self-evident assumption that a central emotional component of Mila's film experience relates to her own personal relationship with her father – or, more precisely, as it later turned out, with a single parent who in Mila's case happened to be her mother until age seven. This assumption was confirmed by Mila's extensive discussion of the figure of Annie, the single neighbour and Lucy's godmother, who despite psycho-traumatically induced anxieties helps Sam care for Lucy as best as she can. Mila also talked a lot about Sam's pleasant workplace environment and the self-help group he belongs to. It seems obvious and was later corroborated that Mila's reactions were informed by experiences in her extended family and within her peer-groups at school and in various youth cultures.

There are some striking parallels between the narrative world of *I am Sam* and Mila's life which suggest that her movie experience evokes for her scenes from her childhood. The protagonist Lucy and her father face the most severe crisis of their lives at age seven which represents Lucy actual age and the level of her father's mental capacities. Precisely at that age Mila moved from Kosovo to Austria and, in the subsequent three years, experienced one of the most taxing and violent phases of her life. Mila's retrospective mental processing of unresolved conflicts is based on other parallels especially regarding Mila's image of herself and her perception of the figure of Lucy. In the same way that Mila perceives Lucy as a highly competent and unusually talented child who is able to deal with her challenging family situation (living with a retarded father), Mila, in her biographical interview, describes herself as exhibiting similar competence and talent in a variety of private and public settings. In light of Mila's specific developmental challenge, the reconstructive evaluation of her interviews should therefore address the question of whether issues of over-exertion, parentification, idealization and sporadic depression, which were found to be linked to Mila's status as a ›talented daughter‹, also guide her mental engagement with the film and what psychological consequences her interaction with the film might have had for her dealing with this very challenge.[20]

[20] It is worth noting that the obvious similarities between Mila's experiences as a seven year old child and the challenges faced by the film character – seven-year-old Lucy – constitute neither a prerequisite nor a desirable coincidence in media interaction research. Far from highlighting resemblance in content, LIR methodology analyzes structural patterns and parallels concerning a person's/character's mode of interaction vis-a-vis their specific life circumstances and the person's mental response to these structural similarities.

A major finding, the importance of the memory of familial violence, emerged early on in the data analysis through a thematic omission. Despite the fact that violence was a central aspect of Mila's biography, she had only rarely mentioned the topic and then only discussed it in relatively terms. This circumstance is all the more astonishing since the film – while portraying a non-violent father – contains many plot elements which directly address the topic of domestic violence against children especially during the many courtroom scenes. First, the lawyer for the adoption agency suggests that Sam is prone to violent behaviour because he was raised in a special-care home and probably himself abused during his childhood. In a particularly moving scene the camerawork highlights Sam's intense emotional discomfort caused by this line of reasoning since he was indeed subjected to corporal punishment as a child. Another equally moving passage focuses on the helpful neighbour Annie who suffers from serious chronic anxiety and has not left her flat for over two decades, most likely, as the film strongly insinuates, because she experienced psycho-traumatic events of paternal violence during her childhood.

However, in her media interview, Mila did not even mention these two powerful allusions to acts of serious familial violence which are so reminiscent of her own family biography. Even targeted narrative enquiries by the interviewer did not cause her to touch upon this topic (the significance of which Mila must also have been aware of through her training as a social worker). Likewise, Mila did not refer in any way to Annie's chronic anxiety disorder which constitutes a further striking parallel between the film character and Mila's own mother and again invokes the theme of familial violence. The thematic omissions in the media interview corresponded to the tone of Mila's biographical interview insofar as Mila recounted her personal experiences of violence in an entirely unemotional manner. Given these and similar results of the transcript analysis, it made sense to conclude that at the time of the media interview Mila was in a phase of her life in which she was not yet in a position to take these interaction potentials of the film as an opportunity to process her biographical experiences of violence and preferred to avoid any sustained mental encounter with the topic. Psychodynamic resources indicate that the mental processing of violent experiences will likely contain phases characterized by an inability to mourn and prevalent feelings of melancholy, depression, and anger, which constitute significant obstacles to a person's well-being and emotional growth (Mertens/Waldvogel 2000; Fischer/Hammel 2003; Weilnböck 2002). This observation seems to hold true for Mila. She did not relate her feelings of "sadness" which she had acknowledged in general terms in her biographical interview to the sequences of the film invoking episodes of family violence. Instead »sadness« for Mila seemed to signify an emotional response of melancholy/nostalgia and pertain to entirely different scenes of the film dealing with the theme of father-daughter separation that, in Mila's own words, made her »sad« in the sense of »unsure whether to laugh or cry«

At the same time, however, Mila appeared to be able to receive a great range of developmental impulses from the type of mental activity that may be viewed complementary to grieving: she clearly engaged with the scenes depicting Lucy's and Sam's emotionally uplifting, subjectively joyous, and non-aggressive interactions with friends and supporters. These dimensions of Mila's mental film experience were reconstructed in regard to Mila's reactions to the scenes depicting the broader circle of Sam's supporters and helpers. Transcript analysis strongly suggests that Mila associated these scenes with her own biographical experiences within lager social groups (extended family and home village, school, youth cultures, fellow students). Clearly, such a capacity for mental and social action provides personal resilience and furthers important resources for handling all kinds of biographical impediments. However, the analysis also revealed that Mila did not connect with one important subtopic of this thematic cluster. She appeared disinclined to engage with the theme of conflicts among friends, her own tendency to idealize and overburden them, and her predisposition for over-exerting herself in supporting others.

Mila's Film Experience in Light of her Dependency-Autonomy-Conflict

Up to this point, the narrative analysis dealt with fairly narrowly circumscribed and therefore perhaps even obvious parallels between Mila's life story and the representation of related themes in *I am Sam.* Consequently we still have to demonstrate with more precision and in greater detail how Mila has constructed meaningful links between the film and her most prevalent personal developmental challenge, i.e., the dependency-autonomy conflict which appears to cause so many unfortunate frictions and blockages in her present life. Mila's comments about Sam's failed attempts to visit Lucy at the home of her foster family are particularly revealing in this context.

The carefully crafted scene amounts to a picture-perfect staging of a dependency-autonomy conflict. The scene opens with Sam approaching the house with a bouquet of flowers in his hands. From a distance he notices Lucy in the garden, her supportive foster mother at her side and an easel and boxes of paint within reach. Lucy is clearly restlessly waiting for her father to arrive. Sam observes the scene for a moment, then turns around and goes home. Lucy remains disappointed for a while, but then sets out to paint a striking picture employing techniques and colour combinations she has never used before. The next scene depicts Sam sitting in his dark flat showing signs of depression, although shortly thereafter he strikes up a promising new relationship with a woman.

At this point in our discussion the analysis of the narrative structure of the film, *I am Sam*, and its specific interaction potentials assumes particular relevance. This analytical step constitutes the second key component of LIR methodology and

represents a separate and entirely independent research module – the interaction theory based narratological text analysis (cf. Stein 2007; Jesch/Stein 2007; Weilnböck 2009; 2011). The structural analysis revealed that the film in general and this scene in particular seek to offer the viewer a number of specific interaction experiences and insights about the unusual father-daughter-relationship unfolding on the screen. One of the film's specific interaction potentials suggest to the viewers that inserting a measure of distance in the all too close relationship between father and daughter, although seemingly heartbreaking at the moment, would, in the long run, accord Lucy and Sam much required space for personal growth. In this way, the seven-year-old child, or better both children, could enjoy increased personal boundaries and creativity at work and attain greater relational autonomy and freedom of action. Obviously, this developmental agenda corresponds perfectly to the challenges faced by Mila in her real life.

How then did Mila interpret and mentally appropriate this central scene of the film? Mila expressed above all regret and disappointment about the failed meeting between father and daughter. When prompted to elaborate, Mila expressed sympathy for Sam – and she also indicated that Sam in this scene must have »felt ashamed« because he was once again forced to recognize »how inadequate he is as a father«.

Clearly, Mila does not empathise either cognitively or emotionally with the daughter's detachment from her father. Lucy's gain in personal autonomy and freedom of action played no role in Mila's mental interaction with the film.[21] Instead, she appeared psychologically to resist the strikingly presented central theme of the film; she simply eluded its ›specific interaction potential‹. To begin with, Mila seemed to identify much less with the daughter position – including her own mental self-representation as child – than with her parental counterpart. In other words, Mila placed herself in a highly parentified position when she sympathised with Sam and worried about his alleged feelings of shame. (It is interesting to note in this context that the visual codes of the film suggest that Sam experiences feelings of depression – which is significantly different from shame – and that he respects the foster mother's positive influence on his daughter, thus being a good father indeed.) In the same vein, Mila completely overlooks the strong possibility that Sam himself – like Lucy – might experience considerable personal growth as a

[21] Mila's reaction, or better lack of reaction, to the scenes of the film which highlight Lucy's premature role as an adult (i.e. her parentification) offer further proof for this conclusion. Consider for instance the scenes in which seven-year-old Lucy speaks to her father in a distinctly premature and adult manner telling him that tomorrow is her first day of school and that she wants to get a good night's sleep and therefore cannot, as Sam wishes, read her favourite children's book one more time (which Lucy had been knowing by heart for quite some time). The film stages the scene as both eerie and charming and Mila took it as proof of Lucy's talent. In psychodynamic terms, this means that Mila's developmental issues and challenges stemming from the area of her own biographical experience of ›early talent‹ and parentification remain unaddressed.

result of their separation and might become capable of entering into a mature relationship with another adult. Hence, Mila's personal reading of the film deprives her of an opportunity to gain a more profound understanding of her own experiences of depression and their biographical origins.

According to the transcript analysis, Mila's resistance against one of the film's most prevalent ›interaction potentials‹ is itself a consequence of the experience of domestic violence which impedes the development of a stable sense of personal autonomy. That effect is further exacerbated by the important counter-developmental impact of shame, which has been such an important biographical and cultural factor in Mila's life.

To conclude, by choosing *I am Sam* and investing considerable emotional energy in the film (»it moved me«/»sadness«/»joy«), Mila placed herself directly at the centre of her personal psychodynamic developmental challenge. In her affection for this film, Mila pays tribute to her own life trajectory and through her media consumption exposed herself to memories/experiences of domestic violence and shame as well as to challenges of dependency-autonomy conflicts and personal resilience formation. In this sense, she is psychologically on a good track of sustainable development. But the specific form of Mila's interaction with *I am Sam* also indicates that she is currently still not taking full advantage of the developmental opportunities this film and others like it afford her. Consequently, she does not seem to be engaging in the kind of mental work that would allow her to work through her history of dependency-autonomy conflicts which constitutes her central developmental challenge. By the same token, Mila seems not to have engaged in much mental biography work pertaining to her inclination to occupy positions of parentified ›talentedness‹ that causes her to overburden, idealize, and get into conflicts with her friends.

If Mila is indeed on a good track of sustainable development with *I am Sam*, there are still a lot of growth opportunities waiting for her in her future viewings of her favourite film.

Conclusion

What are the implications of this case study for literary theory? What insights can be gleaned from Mila's personal struggles and her use of popular media about academic research and teaching? First and foremost, such case studies may serve as an appeal to scholars in the humanities to integrate qualitative-empirical analytical methods into their research projects and discuss them as part of the curriculum of future teachers. The case study also illustrates that literary and media narratives are primarily about the persons who use and produce them. Moreover and more important, in interacting with narratives readers, viewers, and authors unwittingly deal with key biographical experiences and historical events and that mental work

influences their personal and political decisions in critical ways. This insight calls for empirical research with people and not only with texts.

The case study of Mila highlights the stakes involved in this paradigmatic shift in very concrete terms. Mila was not yet able to take full advantage of the opportunities for mental, psycho-biographical processing and personal development which were available to her as part of her emphatic media experience. She seemed drawn to the task of confronting these issues, but, completely left to her own devices, she presumably could not – and perhaps should not – confront the psychological challenges directly and immediately. She probably was still affected by long-term effects of her experiences of violence and still has to cope with her likewise affected family. However, a teaching approach which systematically focuses on a media narrative's specific interaction potentials and on the corresponding developmental challenges of its readers/viewers could facilitate personal growth provided that two conditions are met: the intervention should offer students ample opportunity to provide narrative input and express their personal points of view and it should take place in a psychologically safe pedagogical environment (Weilnböck 2007b). Personal borders have to be respected and the differences between fictional narratives and real life need to be fully acknowledged.

Mila herself certainly found the in-depth narrative interviews inspiring. Chances are that they raised her self-awareness and may even have triggered some initial processes of posttraumatic growth and personal development. Other students would most likely profit in similar ways from this kind of psychologically informed research and teaching strategies. In fact, Mila's specific developmental challenge assumes a particular social relevance in contemporary Western societies. Engaging with and successfully resolving dependency-autonomy-conflicts is of pivotal importance for any person growing up in modern liberal societies which are based on the personal freedom – and civil right – to make autonomous choices between various options in life. The task of dealing with dependency and autonomy is a pervasive modern experience and assumes particular political relevance in authoritarian settings in which people relinquish a great deal of their personal autonomy.

Clearly, Mila's situation raises pertinent questions about media education and the chances for pursuing meaningful cultural-historical research in the classroom. Perhaps these issues are best explored through a set of open questions: How would teaching look like which presents factually accurate narratives about events and phenomena of (cultural) history but also effectively engages with developmental challenges of its addressees? What would it mean to seriously address – empirically, historically and pedagogically – problems of violence, victimisation, and psycho-trauma? What kind of additional qualifications would teachers need to adequately deal with this task since they certainly should not attempt to conduct trauma-therapy in the classroom but would greatly enhance the social relevance of their profession if they succeeded in paying more attention to their students' sub-

jective points of view and psychological interests? Would reform efforts of this kind endow the humanities with new tools for meeting their social responsibility, for instance in the sense of the European Commission's funding requirements for academic research to be societally useful (Weilnböck 2007a; 2007b; 2012)?

Finally, Mila's case and her personal experience of migration and cultural difference raise yet another set of important and disturbing questions: To what extent and in what ways should the researcher respond to Mila's insistence on the incommensurability of Austrian and Kosovar moral standards for the assessment of parent-children relationships? How should we comprehend the feelings of shame operating in a Muslim context about which Mila says that they »cannot be fathomed by any Westerner«? Do we have reason to wonder whether our Western methodologies of research and intervention can grasp and produce answers for what is said to be so incomprehensible to Westerners? The frequency and intensity of incidents of family violence – and feelings of shame – might or might not have increased as a result of the family's move to Austria, but by being immersed in different social contexts and consuming different media narratives, Mila probably began to see her childhood experience in a different light. This transformation, while granting her a degree of personal freedom, autonomy, and career opportunities which would not have been available to her in Kosovo, might also have complicated relations to her parents and caused her significant additional conflict and mental anguish. One never knows, of course, how or whether at all Mila will master these challenges. Nor can one tell to what extent any adoption of modern Western standards of family and friendship relations will be immediately helpful for her personally. It is quite possible, after all, that Mila ends up profoundly shaken and disappointed by what she brought about by her quest for more personal fulfilment. She might in the end even want to return to a more traditional Muslim life style. What we were able to reconstruct, however, is what some of her pivotal challenges and aspirations were at the point in time when we met her and what coping mechanism she applied to handle them.

In this sense, Mila's experiences provide a welcome reminder of the psychological complexity linked to migration and call into question the comfortable methodological assumption that these complexities can be fully grasped by way of transculturally valid psychological analytical frameworks. Clearly, concepts such as trauma need to be carefully calibrated on the basis of empirical data and, when dealing with issues of migration and globalized media consumption, this empirical commitment helps revise psychological concepts in a scientifically fruitful manner. At the same time, none of these insights should detract from the realization that the right and skill of personal autonomy is not just another Western bias but an empirically valid venue for developing sustainable and peaceful modes of social-cultural interaction (Bear/Weilnböck 2012; Weilnböck 2012). Or, put differently, in interpreting the interviews conducted with Mila, which did not take place in a therapeutic setting, the authors did not see an immediate need to substantially re-

vise their theoretical analytical framework. That conclusion might reflect the degree to which Mila has arrived in Austria or it might reflect unconscious limitations on the part of the analysts. Either way, as Chakrabarty might phrase it, the provincializing of trauma has only just begun.

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