

Carol Hagemann-White and Bianca Grafe (eds), *Experiences of Intervention Against Violence: An Anthology of Stories. Stories in Four Languages from England and Wales, Germany, Portugal and Slovenia*, Cultural Encounters in Intervention Against Violence, Vol. 2, Barbara Budrich: Opladen, 2016; 356 pp.: ISBN 9783847420439

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In the literature on interventions against violence, the voices of experts and academics tend to occupy centre stage. This is not the case in the book *Experiences of Intervention Against Violence: An Anthology of Stories. Stories in Four Languages from England and Wales, Germany, Portugal and Slovenia* edited by Carol Hagemann-White and Bianca Grafe and based on the research project 'Cultural Encounters in Intervention Against Violence' (CEINAV). This book foregrounds the voices of those impacted by violence and interventions against it, with particular focus on the voices of women and young people in the four countries mentioned in the title: England and Wales, Germany, Portugal and Slovenia. Moreover, the women and young people whose experiences of intervention the book focuses on are those from minority ethnic groups or immigration backgrounds, and who therefore occupy particularly vulnerable positions as victims of violence (e.g. Menjivar and Salcido, 2002). Indeed, one of the major contributions of the book is that it not only focuses on the voices of the marginalized but also engages with their entwined vulnerabilities due to migration and violent abuse, and illustrates some of the heightened complexities and the hurtfulness of these entwinements. In an era of increased immigration and hostilities and anxieties related to it, this is doubtless a timely endeavour.

The book does not follow the path of typical academic writing; apart from a short preface and afterword, it consists solely of stories about intervention against violence told from the viewpoint of its victims. To be precise, as the authors note, the stories are amalgams of both the researchers' voices and those of the victims of violence interviewed by them, the researchers having compiled and condensed the stories on the basis of interview transcripts. The stories fall into three different categories based on the type of violence retold in them, each of which is allotted its own section in the anthology: domestic violence experienced by women, child physical abuse and neglect, and sexual exploitation of trafficked women. Some of the stories have been translated into English, in which cases also the version in the original language appears side by side with the translated one. This decision to include the stories in multiple languages importantly disrupts the taken-for-granted hegemony of the English language, and makes the process of translation and its impact more transparent. It is another example of the ways in which the book attempts to counter marginalization and subtly to challenge the status quo.

Being stripped of the conventions of academic writing, the stories have the empathic power to stir emotions. Standing on their own, they invite the reader into close engagement with the experiences retold in them. This also means that the reader is afforded an active position in making interpretations and drawing conclusions that are not directly provided by the researchers. Thus multiple readings of the stories are enabled, which is typically not the case, at least not to the same extent, with more traditional academic texts. Another benefit of this style of presentation is that it makes the anthology accessible to those not familiar with the field of violence studies both within and outside the

academia, while also provoking new thought among those with more prolonged engagement with the topic. The only downside of the chosen format is that it does not allow for any contextualizing information about the four different country contexts and their relevant institutions. That information would have assisted readers with the interpretation and locating of the stories.

The stories mainly focus on encounters between victims of violence and the officials or other actors who have intervened in the violence and provided help. Alongside these descriptions they also draw a picture of the various forms of violence encountered by the victims, showing both multiplicity and patterning in their experiences. The forms of violence described in the stories range from physical and psychological abuse, threats against one's life or family, financial abuse, ethnic and racial discrimination, forced prostitution or marriage, bullying, police brutality and neglect. The narratives focusing on these forms of violence distinctly illustrate the often reported dynamics of intimate abuse described and theorized in the vast literature on gendered violence; its escalation, cyclical nature and gradual normalization, as well as its paralyzing and embodied effects on its victims and their agency. They also illuminate the dilemmas and affective tensions often faced by victims of intimate violence (e.g. Towns and Adams, 2016) that complicate the processes of help-seeking and leaving abusive relations. These dilemmas are often accompanied by shame and self-blame attached to being abused, which become vividly evident in several of the stories. In addition to the emotional aspects of help-seeking, also material ones such as lack of housing or other resources play a central role when fleeing violence, and as the stories illustrate, are intimately linked with the heightened vulnerabilities of victims with immigration or minority background. Many of the stories also expose – besides overt victim-blaming – the activity and persistence that appears to be often required of victims of violence in getting help, as well as the still existent divide between private and public that hinders interventions into abuse assigned to the realm of the private.

Essentially, these are stories about fear, despair and desolation, about challenges of living amidst various cultural norms and customs, about struggles for independence and its obstructions, as well as about hope, empowerment and rebuilding a sense of security. The interventions against violence reported in the stories and described as significant in the victims' lives include a variety of concrete actions such as: assistance in getting a place to stay, in proceeding with a divorce or a restraining order, in obtaining visas or residence permits, in getting benefits, with access to language courses or other education, and giving general advice and psychological support. On the basis of these stories it is clear how important it is to address the varied needs related to immigration in violence interventions, along with an understanding of the delicateness of the marginalized victims' situations. In particular, the stories show the importance of a shared language and of professionals' understanding of, and familiarity with, cultural differences and of taking these into consideration while simultaneously avoiding their offensive reiteration. They also show the importance of confidentiality and respectful treatment, as well the value of a gender sensitive approach in interventions.

The stories show how complex networks of various actors may become part of violence interventions. Help is provided in the stories by actors such as women's advisory centres, crisis centres, The Salvation Army, friends, children, parents, NGOs, youth

welfare officers, school social workers, police, lawyers, doctors, shelters, psychotherapists, counsellors and foster families. However, in some stories these same actors are those who have been reluctant or unsuccessful in providing sufficient help. Indeed, a significant portion of stories is about failures in the process of intervention. These failures have to do, in particular, with being treated disrespectfully or not being listened to by the officials, with lack of staff and resources in the intervening organizations, as well as lack of training and understanding of the traumatic effects of abuse among professionals. The stories suggest that due to such failures interventions may not always be experienced positively but rather may be encountered as intrusions that shatter one's autonomy, which in the context of its previous violations can be severely harmful. It is these failures that are most informative as to the ways needed to improve violence interventions within the country contexts described in the anthology and beyond, and thus through which the book's practical contribution becomes most evident. Indeed, the authors point out that the stories of this anthology were highly significant in helping them formulate guidelines for ethical practice in interventions based on the CEINAV project. It is particularly as a complementary companion to such discussions on the ethics of violence interventions that this anthology and its stories make a unique and valuable contribution.

References

- Menjívar C and Salcido O (2002) Immigrant women and domestic violence: Common experiences in different countries. *Gender and Society* 16(6): 898–920.
- Towns A and Adams P (2016) 'I didn't know whether I was right or wrong or just bewildered': Ambiguity, responsibility, and silencing women's talk of men's domestic violence. *Violence against Women* 22(4): 496–520.