

Abstract

Based on longitudinal ethnographic fieldwork in Bosnia and Herzegovina I trace ontologies of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and their enactments among veterans of the 1992–1995 war. My aim is to problematize and rethink social constructionists' approaches in medical anthropology that discuss war trauma and PTSD in relation to naturalistic models and treat them as constructed realities not determined by the nature of things. I argue that such a standpoint produces a particular epistemological/ontological side-effect: it allows medical anthropologists to craft a purely social ontology of trauma and PTSD by claiming that the realness of these “constructs” is a result of psychiatric discourse, moral economy of contemporary societies or Western (intellectual, political, and medical) hegemony. Considering the ontology of PTSD as an empirical question I analyze the enactments of PTSD in four settings: the ethnographic genre itself, the organization of war veterans with PTSD in the city of Tuzla, the veterans' welfare system in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Bosnian public arena. I argue that PTSD is practiced as a heterogeneous and multiple reality that cannot be situated solely either in the realm of human organism (and explained by naturalistic models) or society and culture (and explained by social constructionist approaches). Instead, enactments of PTSD make it possible for the Biological and the Social (and their configurations) to emerge as effects. To understand how particular enactments of PTSD – as therapeutic solidarity, as morally justifiable earnings from the war, as an embodied disposition to violence, as a proof of postwar injustice, and as care of the self – allow a group of precarized Bosnian war veterans to live for the good I develop the notion of therapeutic heroism.