Trauma Ordinariness

Tracing the Everyday Experience of Trauma through Two Encounters, Four Memoirs.

S. B. Visser 3863891

Reader I: dr. E. Midden
Reader II: dr. M. A. Górska

Gender Studies
Utrecht University

"I've learned that people will forget what you said,
people forget what you did, but people will never forget how you have made them feel." - *Maya Angelou*

"What is relegated to the margins is often […] right at the centre of thought itself." - *Sara Ahmed*

ABSTRACT

This thesis researches and reconceptualizes trauma through starting from my own, lived experience of trauma. It reconsiders and rewrites trauma according to my lived reality. In doing this, I move away from the hegemonic theorization of trauma; one of disruption, one of catastrophe. I move away from trauma as the catastrophic because I do not live a catastrophic life. My trauma affects me deeply, but I am not destroyed by it. I am able to live my ordinary life. My trauma has become ordinary. I came up with the term "trauma ordinariness" in order to describe this.

Up until now trauma has (as good as) exclusively been conceptualized as the catastrophic. And the catastrophic is untranslatable, unrepresentable. Trauma as the catastrophic stops me from staying where I am situated. It stops me from staying with my ordinary life. This thesis, then, aims to counter the dominant narrative of trauma, a narrative based on pathologization, and to reconsider and rethink trauma through focusing on ordinary life. An ordinary life that is marked by ordinary feelings.

But the experience of trauma is not simply the product of ordinary life, of ordinary feelings. Even when you carry your trauma with you, at any time, at any place, it does not always show itself. Trauma *does* show itself, however, in moments that are ordinary, yet overwhelming. It is in these moments of trauma ordinariness, then, that the traces of trauma are to be found. In writing memoirs based on encounters with someone close to me, memoirs called "the Tales of Trauma Ordinariness", I trace the remains of my trauma. My trauma that makes me feel "bad", my trauma that makes me feel "different".

Four feelings are traced from the Tales of Trauma Ordinariness.

Four feelings; envy, anxiety, uncomfortableness, fear. Four feelings, that, all in their own way, confronted me with *what* I felt and *how* I dealt with these feelings. But my story about trauma does not stop here. It is not just my story. I am not alone in what I feel and how I deal with it. I am part of socio-cultural structures. Structures of privilege. Structures of marginalization. With this thesis I refuse to comply with these mechanisms. With this thesis I question these mechanisms.

ACKNOWLEDEMENTS

Finalizing my thesis meant more than the sheer finalization of any thesis. It has been a tremendously loving, hating; energizing, tiring; shared and lonely journey. The seasons changed, in the broadest sense of the word. There have been moments where the sun was shining but my mind was heavily clouded. There have been moments where the rain was pouring but my mind was bright. There have been moments where I was ashamed. There have been moments where I was proud. And now all of this —at least all of what is related to this thesis (which is *a lot*), has come to an end.

I might have felt lonely at times. I sure as hell was not. I have been surrounded by so much support. I have been surrounded by so much sympathy. It moves me deeply; the people that surrounded me when I was glowing, the people that surrounded me when I was miserable. People surrounding me regardless of my condition. People that believed in me when I did not believe in myself. And amongst these people there are a few who I particularly want to thank.

I want to start by thanking my supervisor dr. Eva Midden, who, throughout the process of writing this thesis, has done much more than just supervising. She showed unconditional understanding, taught me the importance of self-care and -love, and taught me the value of thinking outside the box —as long as you believe in your own thoughts. Furthermore, I want to thank Sandy van Helden, for creating this stunning cover, and for being a friend I could always talk to, who always showed interest in my thoughts. Also, I want to thank Eva Boomstra, for creating this lovely lay-out at a time when she had a lot on her mind herself. I want to thank all of you for being more than just a helping hand. I want to thank you for being a friend.

And finally, I want to thank my partner and the rest of my dear friends. My partner, who was (and is) closest to me; whether it was at my lowest low or at my highest high. Who gave (and gives) me so much love that I still struggle to receive, that I still struggle to accept that I am loved this much. My friends, who I could share anything with, anytime. Who shared interests who shared thoughts, and most importantly —who did not judge me when I judged myself.

There is a lot more love around me than I sometimes see —when my vision is blurred.

And for that I want to thank you.

INDEX

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

I have been struggling with feelings of worthlessness for as long as I can remember. Psychologists, doctors, an occasional deep conversation with someone close; all taught me that I excessively worry about not doing enough, about being a failure. It affects my life. An ever-present tension has settled in both my mind and body —so omnipresent that it almost has become unidentifiable. Being tense has become my status quo. It has become forgettable. Yet, at times when it *does* show itself, I get so overwhelmed that I think I will never forget feeling this way. And then I do forget, silently waiting for the next outburst.

This structural tension I endure most often gets connected to my childhood. Oftentimes I was (and am) told that I was put under such an unusual amount of stress while growing up that I incorporated that stress into my being. In short, I am traumatized. This makes me experience everyday life as life threatening while nothing terrifying is happening. I cling onto tensions of the past, turning them into ten-sions in the present. Tense feelings remind me that the past is not over yet, even though I will never be able to revisit that past. Traumatic feelings of the past thus become relived as feelings of the present. A kind reminder that things were not as they should have been and therefore things are not as they should be now.

Three psychologists have not been able to teach me how to manage my tensions. At my lowest I got prescribed medication. Three pills to get through the day and one to fall asleep. I felt like breathing was the only thing keeping me alive. I searched for understanding, for recognition. I secretly searched for more than understanding, for more than recognition. I searched for that magic solution, that one thing that would provide relief. The more I searched the more I got lost. My tensions remained, but everything else got more and more disorientating. I could not find affirmation. My tensions became mine, and mine alone.

I thought I would never stop feeling this way. But then, with time, my tensions did not control my life anymore. It came naturally. Nothing particular happened. And to be honest, I did not even notice that the tension decreased. I was about to forget feeling as tense as I did while I was on medication. I was about to continue life as though nothing ever happened. Continuing life until my tensions would take over my life —again.

Continuing life and finally start writing my thesis, or so was the plan. I had postponed my thesis, in great part because I felt too anxious in my daily life; in great part because I felt too anxious about writing it altogether. Even though my tensions were not taking over my life anymore I continued to come up with new conditions that needed to be met in order to start writing. I continued to come up with new things that needed to get "better" before I could possibly start the process. Whether it was the requirement of having a good night of sleep, or the requirement of having not too much of a hectic day; there was always a reason not to start. At first I needed to feel "better", I needed to feel less tense. Then I needed to *be* "better"; I needed to be perfectly capable.

The anticipation of being (my) "better" (self) could have continued forever. Maybe, in hindsight, I was trying to protect myself. Because already for quite some time I had known that I wanted

to write my thesis based on my own feelings of worthlessness; my own tensions; my own trauma. The subject matter came to me because while I have lived with trauma for most of my life, I yet had to make sense of how and where it specifically shows itself. And I wanted, I wished to make sense of this. Every path, every attempt; it all resulted in a lack of recognition. A lack of recognition of how my trauma was lived; a lack of recognition of how my trauma felt.

I wanted to find recognition. And if I could not find it then I would write in a way that, at least, I could recognize. But in order to write about a heavy subject like this "properly" and academically, I thought, I had to overcome my trauma; I had to distance myself from the hardships I endured. As result, I stiffened. In wishing to be better I felt worse. The more I tried to distance myself from my trauma, the more I was confronted with its presence. It was the only trauma I knew. All other conceptions seemed off. After a while I learned that for me, there was no distancing in trauma. For me, there was only one trauma; *my* trauma. A trauma that cannot be "cured"; a trauma that cannot be wished away like that.

In my attempts to distance myself from my own trauma I pathologized myself. I approached my trauma as a medical condition, a disease as it were. In approaching my trauma as a thing that had to be "cured", a thing that had to be overcome, I got lost. Pathologization drove me away from my real, lived experience of trauma, while simultaneously reinforcing my feelings of worthlessness and my tensions. While being lost I realized that I had to rethink and rewrite my beliefs about trauma if I ever wanted to write about it affirmatively. Furthermore, I realized I had to rethink and rewrite my own relation to my own trauma.

Up until then researching trauma had invariably led me to understanding it as the catastrophic, as the disruptive. Concepts of violence, abuse, and suffering were central to everything I read about trauma. Trauma, according to the theories I read, was twofold; it was either the disruptive, catastrophic event, or the re-experience of this disruptive, catastrophic event. Both moments of temporality that should be overcome. Both so catastrophic, so disruptive that they turn out to be unrepresentable and untranslatable. But both in need of treatment regardless. Whether it was through therapy or medicine; as long as the traumatized subject got "better". As long as the traumatized subject could find distance.

It turned out that I pathologized my own trauma because pathologization was the only thing I knew about trauma altogether. And my experience of trauma *can*, actually, at times, be disruptive and catastrophic. But the disruptive, catastrophic moments are far outnumbered by everyday moments. Moments where everything seems ordinary, where everything can even seem dull. Moments where trauma does not take control over my being, yet moments where I did not overcome my trauma. Otherwise it would not metabolize as the disruptive, as the catastrophic —somewhere later on.

Instead of waiting for the next outburst of tension I decided to move away from the catastrophic and disruptive understanding of trauma. I decided to stay; to stay with the here and now, with the seemingly ordinary. In doing so, I am inspired by Lauren Berlant, who introduced the term "crisis ordinariness" to argue how crisis is nothing exceptional, but rather a "process embed

ded in the ordinary" (10). I, in turn, want to argue how trauma is nothing exceptional, but rather something ordinary, hence coining the term "trauma ordinariness".

Trauma ordinariness considers trauma to be more than a mental disorder, to be more than a disease. Trauma ordinariness considers trauma to be a reality. More specifically, trauma ordinariness considers trauma to be my *personal* reality, one that differentiates and differs. A personal reality experienced differently by everyone, moving and fluctuating, yet a reality (oftentimes) located at the everyday and ordinary. And the everyday, the ordinary, is something all of us know, something where recognition can be found. A recognition that opens up space to talk about trauma alternatively, to talk about trauma as embedded in encounters of the everyday, as embedded in encounters of the ordinary. Embedded in encounters where nothing particularly memorable, nothing particularly noteworthy is happening. This is where my trauma is most often located. This is my personal reality. This is trauma ordinariness.

Accordingly, with this thesis I will focus on trauma as trauma ordinariness; as trauma that metabolizes not just in feelings not just of disruption, of catastrophe, but rather in feelings of the ordinary. In doing so, I ask myself the following questions: *How can trauma be approached alternatively by considering it as being embedded in ordinary feelings of daily life? And what can these ordinary feelings teach us about trauma as a lived reality?* We are so used to thinking about it in terms of how to "get over it", to "move on" that feelings of trauma can become invisible, while remaining invincible. And when trauma does show its persistence —whether it is through feelings of worthlessness or through feeling nothing at all— we will do anything to get rid of those feelings. So what happens before the traumatized subject is defeated, what happens before trauma takes control? What do feelings of the everyday, of the ordinary, actually teach us about our experience of trauma?

The aim of this thesis, then, is to counter the dominant narrative of trauma based on pathologization and to rethink trauma through focusing on ordinary feelings. By doing this, I want to envision trauma according to actuality; according to my own, personal, lived reality. In staying with my trauma, in opening up to others, I want to uncover how something so ungraspable, so unimaginable, is made livable. Even if it means living with the unlivable (Ahmed, 4). Because the unlivable *is* livable; it is lived. Otherwise I would not be here —me and all those others. In the transition from unlivable to the livable, trauma gets internalized; trauma gets ordinary. And within this livability, within this ordinariness, I trace my trauma.

Everyday encounters, narrowed down to two, will form the basis for my writings on trauma ordinariness. Writings that, in letting my intuition take over control, eventually have taken shape in the form of memoirs. Although the memoirs are the product of intuition this product might not be as coincidental as I initially thought. For I was able to revisit the everyday encounters through writing the memoirs. Memoirs, then, became my way of translating the feelings embedded within the encounters (then *and* now) to words. The feelings that were recalled, after digging deep into my memory. The feelings that somewhere, deep down, lingered. Even when the encounters were everyday and ordinary.

I trace feelings through memoirs because feelings make us stop and stand still, reflecting on the changes happening in both mind and body. Feelings are where something significant is happening, where the unlivable is made livable (Ahmed, 4). Feelings are where the ordinary gets overwhelming;

where it gets overwhelming ordinary. In its overwhelming capacity, yet hiding within the ordinary, that is where feelings are stored. In revisiting the encounters, then, feelings are uncovered. Feelings hiding within speech, within silence, and everything in between.

The feelings uncovered through the memoirs are not just mine. They are the product of encounters, of exchanges, between me and someone significant. Someone who, with her story, made me reconsider my story. Someone who, by being open, (slowly) made me open up. Someone who, throughout this process, I could always talk to; at the times when trauma took control over my being, at the times when everything was ordinarily dull. In writing about the encounters between her and me, about *our* encounters, my trauma became less my story. It became ordinary; it became a story that could be about the both us —and, furthermore, about many of us. In writing about the encounters I found recognition, not in similarity, but in shared deviance. I was not alone in my experience of trauma, in feeling different. I was not alone in trying to feel "better", in trying to *be* "better". I was not alone in attempting to overcome my feelings, my feelings of trauma ordinariness.

But I will not attempt to "cure", nor to overcome, my feelings of trauma ordinariness anymore. Rather, I will look at what is already there, uncovering what trauma ordinariness tries to teach us. Uncovering these lessons will consist of the following steps. The first part, the theoretical framework, theorizes trauma through ordinary feelings. The second part, the methodology, finds a suitable method to translate my conception of trauma to words. The third part consists of the memoirs, which are accompanied by an introduction and afterthoughts. The fourth part, the analysis, traces and analyzes the feelings embedded in the memoirs.

Feelings we are, as it turns out, all familiar with. Ordinary feelings.

CHAPTER 1

THEORATICAL APPROACH TO FEELINGS

TRAUMA AND THE ORDINAIRY

Thinking about trauma differently calls for a different theorization of trauma. Trauma, up until now, has predominantly been theorized as the untheorizable; as the disruptive, catastrophic forces that transcends all understanding; that transcends writing; that transcends words. This does not, however, mean that theorizing trauma is futile. Theorizing trauma differently, I argue, results in a different story about trauma. A story about trauma that *can* be expressed, that *can* be shared. In all its complexities and ambiguities.

The following chapter elaborates on my theorization of trauma. Starting with (feminist) Affect theory, I show how feelings can be the starting point for theorization, therewith uncovering an inherent relation between feeling and theory. This inherent relation between feeling and theory opens up space to theorize trauma differently, as the second paragraph moves away from its understanding as disruptive and catastrophic, towards an understanding of the overwhelming ordinary.

But the shift from the understanding as disruptive and catastrophic towards an understanding as the overwhelming ordinary cannot just unproblematically be made like that, as the third paragraph shows. The third paragraph, then, explains how the current, prevailing understanding of trauma results in the prevailing pathologization of traumatized subjects. In order to discard this, prevailing, pathologizing understanding of trauma, the fourth and last paragraph focuses on a different theorization of trauma; trauma as feelings that are overwhelming, yet ordinary. Overwhelming, yet ordinary feelings that are, in turn, encapsulated by my introduction of the term "trauma ordinariness".

(FEMINIST) AFFECT THEORY

Even though trauma knows no particular, singular feeling, its manifestations are always felt. It is at these moments that trauma shines through; moments ranging from the overpowering torment of severe distress to the mundanity of ordinary dullness. Whether noticeable or unnoticeable. Theorizing trauma differently, therefore, means theorizing feeling differently. In my case, it means theorizing the feelings of trauma according to Affect theory. I draw on Affect theory because it centralizes emotion, feeling, and affect, considering it to be starting points for academic criticism (Cvetkovich, 4). And I want to make feeling, more specifically feelings of trauma, central to *my* analysis.

Affect theory is a wide-ranging, broad field, and therefore it needs some further explanation. To be "affected by something" is a familiar phrase, and these intensities serve as the background for Affect theory (Ahmed, 6). Affect theory focuses on the "theory of affect as force, intensity or the capacity to be moved" (Cvetkovich, 4). The diversified workings of affect thus become the source of knowledge production. The knowledge that lies behind the capacity *to move* something or someone. The knowledge that lies behind the capacity *to be moved* by something or someone. Altogether quite a remarkable approach for theorization. In order to generate more insight into the field of Affect theory, I will draw closer to this crucial notion of affect as being integral to theoretical insight. Because in Affect theory affect comes first and theoretical insight comes later, as theory arises from affect.

First affect itself. Affect is the pre-personal, pre-cognitive sensation that moves us, or through which we are able to move others (Atkinson and Richardson, 7). Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth explain in *The Affect Theory Reader* on a more elaborate note how affect can be conceptualized as "the name we give to those forces — visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally *other than* conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion — that can serve to drive us toward movement, toward thought and extension, that can likewise suspend us […] across barely registering accretion of force-relations, or that can even leave us overwhelmed by the world's apparent intractability" (1). In its essence, then, affect is about the capacity to affect and the capacity to be affected.

It goes without saying that affect is an ambiguous concept. Affect will not let itself be categorized as singularity but is "rather a complex and often contradictory, jostling of theoretical approaches" (Atkinson and Richardson, 7). Placed outside of consciousness, affect will never be fully realized through language, leading to the impossibility of conceptual clarity (Shouse, 1). But that does not imply that the (multi-)conceptualization(s) of trauma as affect is therefore futile. On the contrary, the varied definitions of affect all account for its complex nature and share an open end that is centered around its equivocality (Atkinson and Richardson, 7; Cvetkovich, 7; Gregg and Seigworth, 1). Affect theory is equivocal, which makes it unlike many other fields of theory. Different and distinct theories emerge from the workings of affect. Theory and affect, then, become indistinguishable, as both are characterized by their multi-faceted, multi-interpretable meanings that teach us what it is like to live life (human, non- and post-human) in an affective world (Górska, 132).

Affect, as Gregg and Seigworth confirm, knows "no single, generalizable theory […]: not yet, and (thankfully) there never will be" (4). Their use of thankfully, even when bracketed, is noteworthy. Gregg and Seigworth praise the "infinitely multiple iterations of affect and theories of affect" over an unitary and enclosed meaning. Since "encounters with bodies, affects and worlds" are in itself "highly particular", they argue, theories on affect need to be diverse as well (Gregg and Seigworth, 4). Writings on the basis of Affect theory thus make up what Gregg and Seigworth beautifully define as "an inventory of shimmers" (1). Shimmers subverting the need for a demarcated theory according to the logic of "Truth". Shimmers advocating the production of countless of narratives that describe the subjective state of being a subject; of being subjected to the logics of the world. Logics that have —from the viewpoint of *all* subject positions— individually and collectively, their own differentiated truths.

The different and distinct theories of Affect theory are not associated with affect exclusively. Affect theorists regularly trace the effects of affect through its resonances, most often through feeling and emotion (Shouse, 1). Feeling is the cognitive sensation that is grappled mentally, through the mind (localizing and identifying feeling) (Cvetkovich, 4; Shouse, 1). Emotion, in turn, is showing that cognitive sensation through the psychical body (projecting feeling) (Cvetkovich, 4; Shouse, 1). So feelings are "the personal and biographical practice of interpreting and labeling sensations", while "emotions are the projection/display of a feeling" (Shouse, 1). That is not to say, however, that there is Cartesian-like split between body and mind where feelings are invariably attributed to the mind and emotions are invariably attributed to the body. Displayed emotions can differ from the process of identifying feelings, and the processes of identifying feelings can differ from displayed emotions (Shouse, 1). You can feel sad yet

still smile.

Feeling, emotion and affect (affect as the pre-condition of both) are thus inseparable entities with no clear conceptualization; no beginning, no middle, no end. You may already have noticed how, in writing about trauma, I favor the use of feeling over emotion and affect. In doing this, I follow the footsteps of Ann Cvetkovich in *Depression: A Public Feeling* (1-212). Like Cvetkovich, I favor the use of feeling "in part because it is intentionally imprecise, retaining the ambiguity between feelings as embodied sensations and feelings as psychic or cognitive experiences" (4). Feelings are imprecise, are ambiguous. Which, in turn, is how I experience my trauma; as imprecise, as ambiguous. Whether dulling or distressing.

THEORIZING TRAUMA

I will continue here by citing Cvetkovich for another moment. In *Depression: A Public Feeling*, Cvetkovich attends to her own experience, an experience of depression, therewith bringing together feelings and academic theory (1-212). Feelings thus serve as the endpoint for intellectual practice, an intellectual practice that derives socio-cultural critique from Cvetkovich' own, lived experience of depression (Cvetkovich, 78). In taking my own, lived experience as starting point, I will follow Cvetkovich. I will take my feelings of trauma as the endpoint of my own theory; as the endpoint of my own socio-cultural critique. I specifically will follow Cvetkovich' way of deriving socio-cultural critique from feelings that are personal, because I believe my feelings of trauma are more than just *my* feelings. They are feelings that can teach something not only about myself, but also about the world I, the world *we*, live in (Cvetkovich, 78).

In doing so, in bringing together my feelings of trauma and socio-cultural critique, I deliberately stick with trauma instead of introducing a new term. Trauma, over the years, has become highly pathologized, making "traumatized" subjects think that something is wrong (with them) (Cvetkovich, 87; Górska, 232). So while I can introduce a new term, one that glosses over the powerful reality of pathologization, it will never take away the thought of being different; of being wrong. Not for me and not for others. As soon as one gets familiar with my personal history, the impression of being a traumatized subject will be made. Intrinsically and irrevocably. And instead of ignoring these associations, these attributions, I start from the very position of pathologization, subverting this position from below.

In subverting my position of pathologization from below, a position ascribed by others and furthermore (formerly) by myself, I want to rethink the intrinsic, irrevocable association between trauma and mental disorder, between trauma and disease. I want to rethink what it means to be traumatized; what it means to live life with trauma. As someone who lives with trauma I experience it as ordinary, as feelings that are there but might as well could not be there as well. Trauma, as my lived reality, is hence marked by a diffusion of confusion —yet remaining seemingly dull. Trauma, considered this way, has no clarity nor explanation. Trauma becomes about taking into account all its contradictions and complexities, and what it *can* teach us about how we live our daily lives.

Before moving to the traceability of trauma in the fabrics of daily life, *my* daily life, I will first move away from my own, personal perspective and consider the conceptualizations of trauma by affect theorists. In bringing together trauma and theory by means of affect, feeling, and emotions —not by means of clinical features, a new perspective on the intersection between trauma and theory might appear. In *Traumatic Affect*, Meera Atkinson and Michael Richardson define trauma as "a form of experience that is a rupturing of the capacity to make sense of the world; it recognizes the impossible event as existing, lived in the catastrophic, the everyday and every gradation between" (4-5). Atkinson and Richardson consider trauma to be caused by disruption, by catastrophe; a life before and a life after the traumatic event (4-5). This rupturing quality of the catastrophic constructs trauma a something indefinable, since the self cannot understand how and why such a happening would occur, yet

(occasionally) reliving the traumatic moment.

Berlant disputes this widely shared definition in *Cruel Optimism*, stating how "a traumatic event is simply an event that has the capacity to induce trauma" (10). With this (again) ambiguous description of trauma Berlant broadens the scope of moments that are (potentially) trauma-inducing. Trauma becomes not tied to the catastrophic per se, but to the idea that trauma gets induced by the *experience* of the event (Berlant, 10). Not by the event itself. Berlant continues to describe trauma as a happening that forces people to adapt to an unfolding change, *whatever* that change may be (10). Trauma, viewed in this manner, "is not exceptional to history or consciousness but a process embedded in the ordinary that unfolds in stories about navigating what's overwhelming" (Berlant, 10). Trauma, then, is not to be found in the catastrophic, but in the ordinary. The ordinary, yet overwhelming.

The catastrophic is intrinsically overwhelming. The overwhelming is, however, not intrinsically catastrophic. Ordinary moments can also be overwhelming moments (Berlant, 8). In rethinking trauma as the ordinary, then, I will trace the traumatic not in the catastrophic, not in the disruptive, but, like Berlant, in the "overwhelming ordinary"; in the overwhelming, yet ordinary moments that otherwise might be forgotten (8).

Ordinary moments may hide something extraordinary, something unexpected. Something unthought of before. Unthought of before because it does not correspond to the widely shared belief about what living life with trauma is like. The next paragraph will elaborate further on the social consequences of the pathologization of trauma, of the pathologization of the traumatized. Because trauma is closely related to specific ideas and ideals about what lives are considered to be "valuable", or "proper", and what lives are considered to deviant; lives that "require" fixing (Górska, 323). And with this designated deviance, with this imposed identity, subjects, bodies, become estranged, become denormalized (Baumann and Michalski, 4). Become alien.

TRAUMA, PATHOLOGY, AND "PROPER" HUMAN SUBJECTIVITY

I argued above how I want to bring together feeling and academic theory. More specifically, I argued how I want to bring together my feelings of trauma and socio-cultural criticism. Starting from my own, lived reality of trauma I will try to uncover what my trauma tries to teach me, what it tries to teach *us*. In staying with feelings, I theorize trauma as not just the disruptive, the catastrophic, but as the everyday, the ordinary. I will search for trauma in the unexpected, in the (usually) unquestioned, uncovering trauma through feelings that are overwhelming, yet ordinary; the overwhelming ordinary.

But what is ordinary, or even overwhelming, might not be ordinary or overwhelming to someone else. We all differ, in our conceptions and in our convictions. The common conceptions and convictions about trauma, however, do not differentiate *that* much. Currently, trauma is most often thought of as the apparatus of (a variety of) mental disorder(s) —most commonly associated with Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome. Trauma, following this, becomes anything but ordinary; it becomes abnormal. It becomes ascribed only to the unfortunate, unlucky ones. The ones (regularly) unable to cope with their trauma. The ones presently defeated by the past. The ones who are trapped in their own minds.

Associating the traumatized with the inability to keep up with time, with mental difficulties, thus results in the pathologization of trauma, hence, in the pathologization of the traumatized. As if trauma is a disease whereby the adjustment of the mindset magically treats the manifestations of trauma. Of course, I will not deny that therapy, or even medication, can be helpful to some (Cvetkovich, 16). First off, it can relieve someone from, as Cvetkovich puts it, "delibitating forms of responsibility and self-blame" (16). And I will not deny that, at times, therapy and medication have been relieving for me as well. But there is more to trauma than pathologization. In thinking of trauma as the overwhelming ordinary it can be considered as a condition related to feelings we *all* to go through, one way or the other. As result, sharing feelings of trauma can generate a renewed understanding of trauma; not as a mental disorder, but as a struggle to keep up with the pressures of ordinary life.

But depathologizing and rethinking trauma does not entail that its negative associations are bluntly overthrown, transformed into something more positive. In fact, the dichotomy between "good" and "bad" feelings will ultimately prove itself to be unproductive (Cvetkovich, 2). That is to say that such a distinction is based on the assumption the "good" can only emerge from "good" feelings and the "bad" can only emerge from "bad" feelings, therewith implying that "bad" feelings merely need to be re-conceptualized as "good" feelings (Cvetkovich, 2). Moreover, as feelings are personally differentiated, what is considered to be "good" by one subject might be experienced as "bad" by someone else. Instead of "glossing over" the "bad" by the "good", then, I will question the consequences of categorizing trauma according to this distinction altogether (Cvetkovich, 3).

Questioning the distinction between the "good" and the "bad" generates further insight into trauma as a condition subjected to the everyday "operations of hegemonic social norms and power relations" that establishes the normative scripts of subjectivity (Górska, 23). Trauma often remains invisible, often purposely, as trauma is subject to prevailing, pathologizing ideas of what and "who counts as a proper human subject, […] and who deviates from the norm and "requires" fixing" (Górska, 232). In *Breathing*

Matters: Feminist Intersectional Politics of Vulnerability, Magdalena Górska explains while discussing panic attacks how "the fear of breakdown and failure […] is not only related to the fear of public humiliation but also enacts the break and failure of Western normative standards of "proper human subjectivity" (of the normative ideas and ideals about what constitutes, and who counts as, a valuable human subject)" (Górska, 273).

The pressure to fit in as a "proper" human being is, as Górska points out, related to societal systemic inequalities such as "racism, ableism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, classism and more forms of social discrimination and their relations" (Górska, 23). Systemic power relations construct "normative practices of privileging and depriveleging, in which vulnerability is one of the central aspects of those dynamics" (Górska, 24). As a result, trauma cannot be thought of without thinking of vulnerability, and vulnerability cannot be thought of without thinking of social inequalities. Living at certain margins (for example living in poverty) can play a crucial role in the perception and experience of trauma. Thus, while trauma is considered here as something lived and shared by everyone, it is important remain attentive towards the systemic, social power relations behind it.

Cvetkovich also touches upon the relation between "proper" human subjectivity and vulnerability, arguing during an interview in *Feeling Bad: Magazine* how "it seems that vulnerability is a condition or a notion that is close to "queer" insofar as being vulnerable seems to be the precondition of strangeness, of denormalization" (Baumann and Michalski, 4). Although the history of the word queer is widely disputed, I agree with the adoption Cvetkovich takes on. Vulnerability is proximate to being queer insofar as both fail to live up to certain standards, getting cast away as the very thing that haunts many of us —a failure. Judith Halberstam takes up this designated failure in *The Queer Art of Failure* and subverts it as a state of being socio-critical (88). Failure, Halberstam argues, can also be recognized as a "way of refusing to acquiesce to dominant logics of power and discipline and as a form of critique" (88). In theorizing my vulnerability, then, I might be strange, I might be abnormal, I might be a sensitive outcast, but I am also resisting to comply with dubious normativity.

I feel like I will always fail to live up to expectations if I continue to accept daily life "as it is". What is necessary, maybe now more than ever, are stories that subvert the ubiquitous striving to become a certain, normative subject. Different ways of tellings stories. Stories about ordinary life. Stories we can feel.

Let it be a story about non-compliance.

Let it be a story about deviance.

Let it be a deviant story.

TRAUMA ORDINARINESS

In the previous section I mentioned that, while I will uncover trauma through the ordinary, the common conceptions and convictions about trauma revolve around the unordinary; enstranging and denormalizing traumatized subjects. Trauma is most commonly considered to be a mental disorder, resulting in the pathologization of the subjects who are being identified as traumatized. And while pathologization does not necessarily *have* to result in a stigmatization that abandons the traumatized (it can lead to help, by means of therapy or medication, which *can* be helpful), it does, unavoidably, result in a separative stigmatization between the traumatized and non-traumatized. A separation that thinks in terms of the "good" and the "bad". A separation unable to show how each one of us, in our own way, (has to) deal with the pressure to fit in as a "proper" human being.

The pathologization of trauma can, then, actually function to help the traumatized. The pathologization of trauma does, however, also unavoidably lead to the stigmatization of trauma; not in terms of unworthiness but in terms of separation. The separation that divides feelings in terms of the "good" and the "bad". Feelings of trauma, consequently, become attributed to the latter, as "bad" feelings that have to be reduced, or even have to be recovered. In rethinking trauma I move away from thinking about trauma in terms of the "good" and the "bad", towards an understanding of trauma in terms of the ordinary. The ordinary trauma that is just there. Nothing more, nothing less.

Trauma as the ordinary, the *overwhelming* ordinary does not judge its feelings; not in terms of the "good", nor in terms of the "bad". Instead, trauma as the overwhelming ordinary regards its feelings in terms of the complex and the ambiguous. Writing in terms of the (lived) complexities and ambiguities of the overwhelming ordinary feelings of trauma means writing about my feelings in a way I have never done before. It means staying with my present feelings of trauma instead of fixating on a "better" future without trauma. It means coming to terms with feelings I have judged for so long. And I will share this process, this process of coming to terms —with my feelings, with the judgement of these feelings. The next step, then, lies in finding a suitable way to make the stories about the the feelings trauma not only overwhelming, not only ordinary, but, most importantly, writable.

Focussing first on the complexities and ambiguities of feelings, Cvetkovich serves as a suitable example on how to translate these complexities and ambiguities to words. In *Depression: A Public Feeling* Cvetkovich shows how at different periods, in different intensities, her depression produced "feelings […], sometimes extreme, sometimes throbbing along at a low level, barely discernible from just the way things are" (14). Her feelings of depression, being integral to daily life, confronted Cvetkovich with the very norms, structures, and expectations of daily living. Cvetkovich writes about these confrontation by means of memoirs, focussing on the interplays and interactions between mental and physical feeling (29-74). Mentally, the most mundane tasks, like buying groceries, triggered an enormous, paralyzing struggle (Cvetkovich, 45-46). Physically, minor inconveniences, like spraining her ankle, triggered a cluster of overwhelming feelings that transcended the isolated happening (Cvetkovich, 29-31). Cvetkovich illustrates with her memoirs how minor happenings can trigger hidden, unexpected feelings. Both mentally and physically.

The feelings Cvetkovich describes are, however, predominantly disruptive, predominantly cata-strophic. Feelings that left her, as she states, at "impasse"; at "a state of being "stuck", of not being able to figure out what to do or why to do it" (20). So while feelings might be integral to daily life, this does not have to mean that ordinary life continues. Feelings can put ordinary life to a halt. The feelings Cvetkovich describes are therefore unordinary, depriving her from the ordinariness of living and confronting her with (some of) her incapacities, a confrontation that led to a state of impasse (20). I depart from this sense of impasse, from the disruptive and catastrophic manifestations of the feelings Cvetkovich describes. I am not saying that I have never experienced my feelings as such. I do believe, however, that feelings similar to the feelings Cvetkovich describes appear outside this state of impasse, in the continuation of ordinary life. That is at least how my trauma appears; in a state where everything is seemingly "normal"; where everything is seemingly ordinary.

Focussing, now, on the seemingly ordinary, on ordinary feelings, yet still feelings that are overwhelming, I move to Berlant, who, on a more specific note, theorizes the overwhelming ordinary as "a zone of convergence of many histories, where people manage the incoherence of lives that proceed in the face of threats to the good life they imagine" (10). Trauma as the overwhelming ordinary, following Berlant, is about the present history, where the realities of the past merge with the threats to the "good" life of the future. Realities and threats that could, at first site, trigger feelings of disruption, feelings of catastrophe. Realities and threats that could result in a state of impasse, as with Cvetkovich. But trauma as the overwhelming ordinary is where ordinary life continues, where these realities and threats are taken in as part of daily life, as ordinary feelings.

In anticipating threats to the "good" life that is envisioned, trauma as the overwhelming ordinary furthermore becomes about, what Donna Haraway calls, "staying with the trouble" (1). In *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, Haraway states how staying with the trouble is a practice of "intensely inhabiting specific bodies and places as the means to cultivate the capacity to respond to worldly urgencies" (7). Feelings that threaten the "good" life, feelings otherwise overlooked —or consciously repressed— are at the centre of this practice, as these feelings become worldly, teaching us not only about ourselves but furthermore about our world(s). Staying with the trouble, then, opens up a platform to share the complexities and ambiguities of trauma, while simultaneously accounting for their shared, collective applicability (Haraway, 4). Because we all have our threats, we all have our troubles —and there might be more similarities with others than we initially think.

In staying with the trouble, we inevitably stick with the pain behind the trouble. Sara Ahmed explains in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* how, in staying with the pain that comes along with the trouble, it becomes apparent how we actually make this pain, *our* pain, livable (4, 29). Trauma is often, in its essence, described as the unlivable —the ungraspable, the unimaginable, not of this world. But the unlivable, *is*, as Ahmed illustrates with her story about her terminally ill mother, lived (29). The pain of her mother seems unworldly, Ahmed argues, yet is simultaneously, inherently, of this world (29). Her mother lives with her pain, back then and there, as people live with their pain, in the here and now. The pain of her mother that is, in turn, taken in by Ahmed herself, as she is in pain because her mother is in pain; because her mother suffers. As both are in pain, they share similarities, yet they experience their pain

in divergent ways. For Ahmed life goes on, life continues —transforming the unlivability of her mothers pain into de livability of her daily, (and what over time will return to) ordinary life (29-30). Yet an ordinary life that carries this pain, somewhere. And in this somewhere, in this pain of a future threat that has become a present reality, a present reality that is, over time, made ordinary, trauma resides.

I theorize trauma as the overwhelming ordinary, therewith saying that it is about staying with overwhelming, non-disruptive, non-catastrophic moments that make us reflect on our troubles, that makes us reflect on our pains. Whether past, present, or future (potential) troubles and pains. In staying with the trouble, in sticking with our pain, yet continuing life as if nothing noteworthy, nothing memorable has happened, is happening, or is going to happen, trauma becomes ordinary. In *Cruel Optimism*, Berlant coins the term "crisis ordinariness" to illustrate how the unlivable is made livable, how the overwhelming ordinary produces a constant state of crisis, yet a crisis that is so incorporated into ordinary life that it is not exceptional and extraordinary, but everyday —and even unexciting (10).

Following Berlant, I close this theoretical approach to trauma by presenting my own term: "trauma ordinariness". Trauma ordinariness a trauma that does not have to result in a state of impasse. There does not have to be a sense of disruption, there does not have to be a sense of catastrophe. At least not in terms of the feelings that are experienced. The feelings of trauma ordinariness are everyday, are ordinary. Feelings that are part of, embedded in, daily life. Feelings that we all feel, all in our own way (Ahmed, 4). Feelings that can be shared, but only if we remain attentive to their diversified and diffuse logics. Feelings showing that an unlivable history is adjusted into a livable present. Feelings showing how the unwritable can be writable; writable in stories that approach feelings in a different, deviant way.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH TO TRAUMA

HOW TO UNCOVER HIDDEN FEELINGS

Earlier on I theorized trauma in another, alternative way. Trauma, I argued, is not solely embedded in the disruptive, in the catastrophic. Trauma is also, maybe *even more so*, ordinary. In theorizing trauma as the ordinary, I argued, a different, deviant story about trauma arises. A story about feelings, feelings that are generally considered to be ordinary. But ordinary feelings, ordinary scenes, might be far from the sense of the ordinary we know and live by. Ordinary feelings, ordinary scenes, create stories. And amongst these stories are the ordinary stories of trauma, or as I term them; the stories of trauma ordinariness. Ordinary stories baring the traces of unordinary moments —moments of trauma.

These ordinary stories cannot, however, be aimlessly written down. It is not just a matter of phrasing whatever, whenever. Trauma ordinariness not just about the ordinary. Trauma ordinariness is about the *overwhelming* ordinary; moments that are ordinary, yet overwhelming. Moments where feelings take control only to, most likely, fade later on. What I am searching for now, then, is a suitable methodology to identify and translate these moments of the overwhelming ordinary, a suitable methodology to identify and translate these feelings that, in all likelihood, would otherwise disappear from memory. To find a suitable methodology to actually *write* the story about trauma ordinariness.

The following chapter focuses on finding a suitable methodological approach to translate the overwhelming yet ordinary feelings of trauma ordinariness to words. The first paragraph critiques the (un)knowledgeability of trauma when trauma is researched "objectively", and supports an alternative epistemological approach for researching trauma. Building forward on this alternative approach which is based on personal, subjective experience, the second paragraph elaborates on the (feminist) autoethnographic methodology in order to write about trauma not only personally, but furthermore evocatively.

The third paragraph, then, searches for a more specific way to execute the personal and evocative narratives about trauma, finding it in an adapted approach to the "critical memoir" (Cvetkovich, 23). The fourth and last paragraph concludes this chapter by focusing on (feminist) intersectional theory and thinking, stressing the importance of socio-cultural systemic inequality when writing about the experience of feeling. For privilege and marginalization are in direct relation to feeling, determining *your* experience, *your* approach, to trauma ordinariness.

(UN)KNOWING TRAUMA

In approaching trauma alternatively, according to feelings that are overwhelming, yet ordinary, I depart from the hegemonic understanding of trauma —trauma as an intrinsically rupturing force destroying "normal" life (Cvetkovich, 12). Instead, I approach trauma as being embedded within this "normal" life, within the fabrics of the considerably ordinary. This is how, I believe, trauma is lived. Trauma is not just the inexpressible, the unexplainable. It *can* be expressed, it *can* be explained. The only question is how. How can trauma as the ordinary be expressed and explained, when trauma has the (in)famous character of being untranslatable and unrepresentable altogether, regardless of its approach (Berlant, 43). It is true, trauma will not let itself be *fully* captured; not as the catastrophic, not as the ordinary (Berlant, 43). That does not imply, however, that trauma is nowhere expressed nor explained *as if* it is fully captured.

In academia trauma is, unsurprisingly, predominantly represented in the same manner as it is considered by most; as the catastrophic, as precisely the thing that destroys any sense of a "normal" life (Cvetkovich, 12). This conception —trauma as the catastrophic— is, in turn, adopted by most theorists in search of a more comprehensive conceptualization of trauma (Berlant, 6). Previously I mentioned how approaching trauma as the disruptive, as the catastrophic, contributes to the prevailing pathologization of trauma. In academically approaching trauma as the catastrophic, trauma not only becomes pathologized, but, correspondingly, trauma becomes clinical. As a result, clinical models often serve as the start- and ending point for conceptualizing trauma within contemporary academic theory. Clinical models that express and explain trauma on the basis of several "treatments", therewith generalizing the different and diversified experiences of trauma (Krystal, xi). This solution-orientated approach, fully fixated on "treating" and "curing" trauma, does not only have profound implications for the widely accepted academic theorization of trauma. It also bares important implications on the widely accepted academic methodologies for researching trauma (Krystal, xi).

The widely accepted academic methodology for researching trauma does not assume that trauma, in itself, is untranslatable and unrepresentable. Instead, these methodologies research trauma according to the unrepresentability and untranslatability of trauma *by* the subject dealing with. Trauma, this way, might be inexpressible and unexplainable to the traumatized subject, but not to the researcher (Krystal, xii). The traumatized subject thus becomes pathologized while the researcher simultaneously assumes to be left unaffected by the "mental disorder", the "disease", that is called trauma (Krystal, xii). The researcher, therefore, is apparently able to define trauma in a way the traumatized subject cannot (Krystal, xii). But if we approach trauma alternatively, as trauma ordinariness, it becomes impossible to be left unaffected by trauma; both by the traumatized subject and the researcher of trauma. And if trauma becomes ordinary, it also becomes omnipresent, since we all live an ordinary life, one way or the other. Established epistemologies on trauma neglect these ordinary, omnipresent aspects of trauma. As result, the researchers of trauma, consider themselves to be, perhaps unknowingly, "God-like"; present in terms of "objectivity", absent in terms of (ordinary) feeling (Haraway, 582).

There are two things implicated when trauma is "objectively" researched; trauma, as mental

illness can be "treated" and hence can be known. Being capable to define trauma this way means to "master" it, to step outside of its mechanisms and manifestations. I wonder, now, how trauma can ever be "treated" when the theorists that come up with these "treatments" stand outside the mechanisms and manifestations of trauma themselves. For me, knowing trauma this way actually leads to a kind of *un*knowing, because the researchers distance themselves from their personal relation to trauma as something lived and felt. But to know trauma —in all its (im)possibilities— inevitably means to (personally) face it. To know how trauma feels. To know how *you* feel, as researcher *and* subject. To begin with the personal story —however different and differentiated it may be in form and intensity. Trauma ordinariness is *your* story. A story (that does) not (have to be) centered around disruption and catastrophe, around misery and suffering. A story depicting the surprises of the seemingly ordinary.

Living with trauma is, more than anything, a matter of individuality, of subjectivity; it cannot be explained, nor expressed, exactly as experienced. As a matter of subjectivity, then, it becomes impossible to generalize, let alone to "treat" trauma. There is no solution, no magical "cure" for the mechanisms and manifestations of trauma, not when they are approached as being subjective. There *is*, however, an alternative knowledge that arises from approaching trauma as subjective phenomena; as lived and felt realities; as trauma ordinariness. Trauma ordinariness departs from the (futile) search for solutions. In contrast, trauma ordinariness focuses not on the future, but on the here and now; on overwhelming, yet ordinary feelings. Ordinary feelings that show how trauma is lived, how trauma becomes part of who we are. And instead of "curing" our lives, instead of "curing" our beings, trauma ordinariness focuses on teachings behind trauma. The teachings behind making the unlivable livable, the teachings behind making the unordinary ordinary.

To write trauma ordinariness, then, means to open yourself up to feeling it through language, to open yourself up through writing about your overwhelming, yet ordinary experiences of daily life. Feeling, in this manner, becomes a source of knowledge in itself —a knowledge that departs from the belief that in order to know, one must first (factually) define what is going on (Stewart, 4). In staying with trauma ordinariness, a different kind of knowledge surfaces; the modest knowledge behind stories of the bodies that *feel*. And what the body feels —in all its individuality, uncertainty and subjectivity— can, in turn, provide insight into how contemporary daily life is lived —even if it is only the insight into that one, specific subject.

Writing about trauma ordinariness is, in the end, not about telling an unified and undifferentiated story of "Truth". It is about reconstructing what happens within the scenarios of daily life and what it teaches us about living in the contemporary (Berlant, 9). And again, even if it is only specifically lived that way by the writer. Because even when knowledge is the personal, local knowledge of the present, of the here-and-now, it is still knowledge. The stories of trauma ordinariness are about finding a kind of recognition, whether it is finding recognition in the form of self-reflection or recognition in the form of identifying with someone else. It is the recognition based on what is best described as the homecoming to a place where you are not alone in feeling; whether it is feeling overwhelmingly ordinary, or whether it is feeling overwhelmingly lost.

Writing about trauma ordinariness is, more than anything, about willing and wishing to surrender to feeling *whatever* is felt. Uncovering and untangling feelings that (to a certain extent) were formerly kept to oneself. In following this, I too shall start from personal feelings, from personal experience, demonstrating how "the researcher's own experience can be a topic of investigation in its own right" (Ellis and Bochner, 733). I will tell (a few of) my stories. Stories that reveal feelings. Feelings that are subjective; to be interpreted in various way. Regardless of "Truthfulness".

AUTETNHNOGRAPHIC NARRATIVITY

To write about trauma ordinariness in an academic way means to write in an alternatively way. It means writing about feelings —the ambitious endeavor of translating feelings into text (Cvetkovich, 24). We all know how difficult it can be to grasp why we feel a certain way, let alone depict how someone else feels. The stories about trauma ordinariness, then, or at least my stories about trauma ordinariness, will start from my own, ordinary feelings. In writing about feelings; in writing about the self, myself, I follow the feminist methodology and method of autoethnographic research (Allen-Collinson, 3; Ellis and Bochner, 739; Haraway, 578). Autoethnography is the subfield of ethnography that adjusts ethnographic methods in order to incorporate and "portray the researcher's own, personal, lived experiences" of the subject matter (Allen-Collinson, 4). It starts from the auto-, the personal life. In this case my personal life. In order to write autoethnographically, then, I will be paying "attention to my […] feelings, thoughts and emotions" and try to make some kind of understanding of particular "experiences I lived through" (Ellis and Bochner, 737). Try to make my experiences matter.

Autoethnography is centered around capturing the moment-to-moment, tangible details of life (Ellis and Bochner, 737). This, however, does not imply that autoethnography is the equivalent of biography. Merely reading about my relation to the whirlpool of feelings I feel will not (yet) suffice as academic. It has to be theorized as such. Surely, autoethnographic writing *has* to be evocative, first and foremost. But in being truly evocative it has to do more than elicit feeling; these feelings need to transmitted, and, in turn, made own by the reader. In order to transmit feeling, these feelings need to be part of the text itself. In both form and content. Only this way readers will apply the writing according to their own situation, hence starting a(n) (internal) conversation on the personal relation to feelings of trauma ordinariness.

When feelings get transmitted through writing, through text, they rise above the specificity of that text alone, uncovering (part of) the socio-cultural background of particular feelings (Allen-Collinson, 4). We do not just feel, socio-cultural structures *taught* us (how) to feel (Allen-Collinson, 4). Autoethnography finds its academic influence in displaying these connections between the personal and the socio-cultural, using "personal experience to illustrate cultural experience and thus make characteristics of a culture familiar for both insiders and outsiders" (Allen-Collinson, 7). Personal experiences are culturally shared, one way or another. Autoethnography, then, does not tell separate single stories, but tells about the real world. Of course, experiences —especially of the real world— are subject to context and change. But there is always a level of sharedness, of recognition. Autoethnography consequently tells about the real world "insofar as that real world is partially shared by groups" (Haraway, 579). And in this sharedness, in this recognition, I want to embed my stories about trauma ordinariness.

The strength of autoethnography lies in the interplay between the personal and the socio-cultural. Autoethnography finds its origin in the belief that personal feelings are "profoundly structurally shaped by […] socio-cultural (and subcultural) and historical location" (Allen-Collinson, 201). In coming to terms with the personal, then, autoethnography becomes socio-cultural; it becomes collective. Because the personal, is more than anything, the socio-cultural historical membership of living in the present. Even when it deals with feelings and thoughts seemingly remote from the reader, as the reader, througout

the process of reading, gets "exposed to local stories that bring us into worlds of experience" formerly unknown (Ellis and Bochner, 748). Readers are thus "invited to take the story in and use it for themselves" in a way that makes them "co-performers, examining themselves through the evocative power of the narrative text" (Ellis and Bochner, 748). We learn about the self through reading stories of others, other stories; (formerly) alien stories.

Autoethnographic narrativity tells stories about the lived experiences of feelings and issues that might, initially, seem to impact only some of us (Ellis and Bochner, 748). But, as autethnographic stories have proven time and again, that these feelings and issues actually impact *all* of us, as they tell stories about the world we live in (Ellis and Bochner, 748). This opens up the potential to tell stories that previously untold, unknown. Unheard before because they were cast away as being too "insignificant", too "irrelevant" for the greater good. Autoethnography, then, opens up the potential to tell these deviant stories, stories of the un(der)represented. These deviant stories, these stories of the un(der)represented, that, in turn, pave the way for discussing issues of marginalization like "racism, sexism, poverty, homophobia" (Ellis and Bochner, 748). Discussing issues of marginalization as told by those living it.

Through writing about your own feelings, feelings that are socio-culturally subjected to issues of marginalization, your own position within the world becomes clear —if only partially. And it is through this clarification, through this self-reflexivity, that the differences between different subjects can be written down. Differences that uncover privilege; differences that uncover marginalization; differences that leave you confused. Autetnography thus enables researchers to go in-depth into their own situation, as it shifts focus from the unity and similarity of life towards diversity and difference (Ellis and Bochner, 747). These diverse and different stories, in turn, showing the diverse and different logics of privilege and marginalization, generate another kind of unity and similarity; the unity and similarity of reading and thus engaging with the stories of the autoethnographical accounts, sharing and recognizing the lived realities of others (Ellis and Bochner, 747).

In writing the feelings of trauma ordinariness according to autethnographical stories I focus on my experience while considering it to be one out of countless experiences. In telling my stories, I account for the diversity and difference of experiencing trauma, yet attributing it to the unity and similarity of liv-ing socio-cultural contemporary life. Because while my reality might be only my reality, we do live in this world together. Altogether, then, autogethnography can be best summarized as the narrative way to teach both about self and the other (Ellis and Bochner, 741). In researching a particular life, it comes to understand it as a *way of life* (Ellis and Bochner, 737). And that is exactly what trauma ordinariness is to me. It is not a mental disorder, not a disease. It is not something I can get rid of, however hard I try. It shapes my life; it is *my* way of living life.

THE CRITICAL MEMOIR

I argued above why I will use autoethnography for narrativizing my stories about trauma ordinariness. Autoethnography is a methodology driven by the ambitious motive to merge the art of writing about feelings evocatively and transitively with the science of socio-critical analysis (Ellis and Bochner, 761). Contrasting starkly with "more traditional forms of social-scientific writing", autoethnography is essentially a more creative way of doing research. As creative endeavor, autoethnography takes on various forms under various labels (Ellis and Bochner, 742). What needs to be figured out, now, is *how* I will use autoethnography for narrativizing trauma ordinariness.

In wishing to write about my trauma I first and foremost find myself situated at the double bind of searching for a way to represent an intrinsically unrepresentable matter. In order to represent the unrepresentable, in order to write about trauma, I have reconceptualized and theorized trauma as an ordinary lived reality; as trauma ordinariness. In writing about trauma as trauma ordinariness, then, I write about the knowledge behind the ordinary —unpacking (some of) the hidden sites of "ordinary or insignificant activities" (Cvetkovich, 82). I write about ordinary feelings of the historical present, tracing their overwhelming, yet ordinary impacts in situations where such an impact is generally repressed or overlooked (Berlant, 54). I write about my engagement with (the generality of) non-engagement.

In search of the most suitable autoethnographic method to narrativize trauma as trauma ordinariness I got inspired by Cvetkovich. In *Depression: A Public Feeling*, Cvetkovich writes about her depression by staying with her day-to-day feelings (23). More specifically, Cvetkovich writes about her depression by means of what she calls the "Depression Journals", combining evocative embodied narrativity with academic support (76). The Depression Journals consist of memoirs about her (daily) life with depression, memoirs that are subsequently connected to socio-cultural criticism, resulting what Cvetkovich terms the critical memoir (17).

Along the same lines as Cvetkovich I will make use of the critical memoir in order to write my stories about trauma ordinariness. I make use of the critical memoir because it allows me to tell personal, short stories about my feelings of trauma ordinariness in an evocative way while simultaneously allowing to let socio-cultural critique arise from these very stories. The critical memoir is where my heartfelt feelings, feelings of trauma ordinariness, come together with an academically supported analysis.

However, unlike Cvetkovich, I will not focus on moments where feelings take over my being, on moments where I am left at an "impasse" (20). I will not focus on moments where I am stuck, where everything has become too much. On the contrary, in writing my memoirs I will focus on moments where everything is seemingly "normal", where nothing particularly memorable or noteworthy is happening. I believe that in these moments, moments of the ordinary, something *extra*ordinary is happening.

Something that is imprinted on the body, imprinted on the mind —yet in such a way that it (sooner or later) drifts away to the subconsciousness. But what is subconscious is not what is forgotten. It floats somewhere, perhaps hoping to be restored, hoping to be traced back. And it is in this space, the subconscious, that feelings are not forgotten, but fail to be present (Ahmed, 46). The feelings hiding within our subconsciousness are not forgotten. They are traceable, through the memories of moments, through the memories of encounters.

Before moving on I want to quickly touch upon the fascinating relation between memory and feeling (Ahmed, 7). Moments are *always* moments of feeling; even when you feel "nothing", then nothingness is what you feel. Memories recall these moments, therewith retrieving the feelings residing within these moments —retrieving the feelings that linger. These retrieved feelings, in the process of recalling the moments of the past, might be adapted, might be altered. But they are real, lived feelings nevertheless (Ahmed, 7). These retrieved feelings, whether true to the past moment or not, are the moments where I stay with in writing my memoirs. Because that is how I remember these (past) moments; that is how these (past) moments made and make me feel.

These moments made me feel a particular way in great part because they were moments of interactions, moments of encounters. And moments of interactions of, encounters, are the moments where my feelings of trauma, as I have learned, metabolize and manifest themselves (most clearly). Those are the moments where my feelings of worthlessness, of not doing enough, of being a failure, show themselves. Because I always compare myself to others, constantly. More than anything, I look for my failure in the success of others. And this fixation on the success of others has made my feelings of failure ordinary. It has made failure part of my being. My feelings of failure, that, (as good as always) remain unnoticed to others, as I succeeded perfectly at one thing; not showing, not sharing, my feelings of failure. As I live my ordinary life I live with my ordinary feelings of failure, because that is what I consider myself to be. And exactly in this self-proclaimed being, in these unshared feelings, I will trace my trauma ordinariness.

More specifically, I will trace my trauma ordinariness according to interactions and encounters I have had with a dear friend of mine. I specifically focus on my interactions and encounters with her, because for a long time I believed that her trauma overshadows mine, making me fail at being a "proper "traumatized subject. For a long time I felt like she was more than I am because she is displaced. She can no longer return to her homeland. She is trying to make this her homeland —unsure whether that will ever, truly, happen. She has to learn so many things over again, from scratch; language, culture, customs. This, to me, has been more than enough reason to diminish my own trauma. My trauma is, after all, a childhood trauma. A trauma I have lived with for most of my life. Her trauma made me wonder why I am not over my trau-ma altogether; why I am failing to "get over it", why I am failing to "move on". Without ever asking her about her trauma.

Unlike Cvetkovich, then, my memoirs will not only be the product of moments where everything is seemingly "normal", but furthermore will be the product of moments of interactions, of encounters, with someone that confronts me with my failure to be "properly" traumatized. Accordingly, I will handle the writing of the memoirs exactly as I handle the interactions and encounters; largely leaning on intuition. I will focus on both the said and the unsaid; on both the explicit and imxplicit. Furthermore, I will focus not only *what* I feel but also *where* these feelings come from. I will focus on what she shares with me, on what I think she leaves unshared. And with this, translated to memoirs, I will focus on how I feel. With this, translated to memoirs, I will focus on my trauma ordinariness.

Socio-cultural critique will arise from these memoirs. It will arise because the memoirs allow me to "think about the sociality" of my feelings, which, in turn, allows me to think about the structures that lie beneath this sociality (Ahmed, 8). It allows me to think about the self-imposed and the socio-cultural-

ly imposed expectations, standards, and norms. Because we share feelings, but we only share what we think we *should* share (Allen-Collinson, 4). We are are taught to prioritize certain feelings over others (Allen-Collinson, 4). We are taught to share our feelings *only* when the situation allows us to (Allen-Collinson, 4). And the everyday, the ordinary, that is no situation for sharing trauma. Not even when trauma is ordinary.

The memoirs, hereafter referred to as "the Tales of Trauma Ordinariness", will form the basis of my socio-cultural critique. A critique that will challenge some of the socio-cultural "structural operations of power" (Górska, 109). Operations of power that manifest themselves in the shared solitariness of the overwhelming ordinary, in feelings —however small these feelings might seem. Feelings of trauma ordinariness hence function as the evidence for the pressures of living in the socio-cultural present (Berlant, 42). The same socio-cultural pressures that determine who is heard and who is not. Because in our collective endurance of socio-cultural pressures not everyone is treated equally. Countless voices are being silenced, knowledge being dismissed as having less —or *no* value. The following theory behind intersectionality will offer insight into the power dynamics behind these oppressive forces of silencing, literally and metaphorically.

(FEMINIST) INTERSECTIONAL THEORY AND THINKING

The Tales of Trauma Ordinariness and the analysis that follows uncover the (generally) unconsidered feelings behind the overwhelming ordinary. The overwhelming ordinary feelings of trauma. More specifically, these feelings will be revealed through writing about my own interactions, through writing about my own encounters. Through writing about the overwhelming, yet ordinary feelings that hide within these encounters. Through writing about my trauma as trauma ordinariness; on the basis of several memoirs. It is through these memoirs, then, that my personal feelings will appear. Whether said or unsaid, whether explicit or imxplicit. This is where my feelings of trauma ordinariness are hiding, ready to be interpreted, ready to be revealed.

The memoirs, the traces of my personal feelings of trauma ordinariness, will, in turn, be connected to a larger framework. The larger framework of the collectively endured socio-cultural pressures of living life in the contemporary (Cvetkovich, 11). But these are no singular, static pressures. The pressures we endure, the pressures that determine our experience of the contemporary, differs and differentiates between subjects. Cultural life of the contemporary is inevitably, unavoidably, marked by social inequality (Crenshaw, 1242). It is therefore, then, that the pressures of contemporary life are (in great part) the effect of social inequality.

And social inequality —that is real life. A real life of embodying both the equalities and inequalities between subjects on the basis of identity categorizations (Crenshaw, 1242). It is a simple process, when you come to think of it, the process of social categorization; this characteristic is better than that characteristic, this feeling is better than that feeling, and so forth. But while the process in itself might be simple, its consequences are anything but. The lived consequences of social categorization can make life tremendously hard, it can make life tremendously complex. Because social categorization determines the social status. It is where social power does its job, it is where social power gains its power (Crenshaw, 1297). Categorization determine the social status. It privileges. It marginalizes.

The privileging and marginalization of social categorization is, first and foremost, premised on the power of delineating social difference, a social difference that results in the domination of designated identities (Crenshaw, 1242). Difference, then, becomes the measure of marginalization, as this practice of social categorization has real social and material consequences (Crenshaw, 1297). Those that are located at the social categories that make difference "different", those who are deemed "different", are silenced. I will not contribute to this sense of difference. I will not deem myself, nor others "different". Whether that is truly possible, that is another story. But I will surely try my best.

Nevertheless, if being different requires (some form of) social exclusion, then this difference of domination *must* be taken into account in writing about trauma ordinariness (Crenshaw, 1242). Overlooking the consequences of ruling categories of social difference would mean overlooking the consequences of the systemic inequalities resulting from it (Crenshaw, 1241-1242). It does not mean, however, that I must comply with these norms in my writings about trauma ordinariness. First the intersecting patterns of identities must be located (Crenshaw, 1245). It is only thereafter, that privileging and marginalizing mechanisms can be traced; that social domination can be criticized.

Thinking about the social domination of certain identities on the basis of social categorization furthermore means that the multiple grounds of identities must be taken into account "when considering how the social world is constructed" (Crenshaw, 1245). Feminist lawyer Kimberlé Crenshaw was (amongst the) first to officially coin the term "intersectionality" when pleading how her own social difference, how her own intersectional identity, one of being a black feminist, was at the heart of her marginalization (1241-1299). Being black *and* a woman, Crenshaw argues, leaves her at the predicament of having to choose between aligning with anti-racist *or* feminist activists (1252). But, as Crenshaw states, racism and patriarchy intersect, and through the tensions of these categorical identities she is made "different"; she is made alien (1252). Systems of subordination overlap, Crenshaw explains, silencing those who refuse to simplify their identities and hence, themselves (1242).

Intersectional thinking uncovers the powerful consequences of categorization. More specifically, intersectional thinking uncovers how certain categories "intersect and produce social and cultural forms of discrimination, oppression, privilege and violence" (Górska, 116). Intersectionality, then, is most often deployed as an analytical tool for researching the operations of "gender, race, sexuality and class", but can also be used more widely, researching "diverse dynamics of living with structural operations of power such as dis/ability, queerness, migration, aging, beauty, mental and physical norms and more" (Górska, 116). In following intersectional theory and thinking it would appear that the Tales of Trauma Ordinariness are, first and foremost, concerned with criticizing and questioning mental health norms. But it is not as simple as that.

In writing trauma, especially as the ordinary, the broad scope of intersectional theory and thinking *must* be taken into account. Trauma ordinariness differs. It differs because of *all* the identity categorizations. Intersecting identity categorizations determine the experience of trauma, whether personally or socially. Our social position shapes our relation to the individual and institutional, as both are subjected to mechanisms of exclusion, to mechanisms of marginalization. What we do, how we feel, is thus shaped by our social identity; which, in turn, is shaped by the way we are treated; which, in turn, "is shaped by the contact we have with others" (Ahmed, 4). Different identities call for different stories of trauma ordinariness. Differentiated stories.

The Tales of Trauma Ordinariness are a few stories about *my* approach to *my* trauma. My trauma as traced from moments of the overwhelming ordinary. My trauma, *me* being a white, Western, middle-class, heterosexual, cis-gendered, woman who has been struggling with mental issues for several years, resulting in (occasional) feelings of worthlessness, failure, inability, and ugliness —amongst other feelings. Feelings that (from time to time) have become a lived reality. Feelings that shape my life, feelings that shape my social identity.

My social identity is, however, subject to change (Górska, 125). Over the years I have grown to accept that I struggle with mental issues unlike a lot of other people do. I have grown to accept that, sometimes, things are not as they "should" be. And I have grown to accept that this growth is the result of my shared sociality, the result of encounters. So even while the memoirs might be about my approach

to my trauma, these memoirs, these stories, are not just mine. I argued before how my feelings of trauma ordinariness predominantly take shape through encounters with others. Others that have *their* approach to *their* trauma. Others that have their difference, their sense of being "different".

That does not imply, however, that my approach to my trauma is *only* relevant to me. Different identities create different, differentiated stories of trauma ordinariness. And we might not come to complete agreement, to complete uniformity, in our stories of trauma ordinariness. But there are similarities. Similarities in how we tell stories about how we live. Similarities in how we tell stories about how we feel. Similarities in telling stories —altogether. In the similarity of sharing, of sharing whatever and however it is shared, we can share our difference. We can share how we live "differently"; how we feel "differently". We can share our privileges. We can share our marginalizations. And from here, we can start to question our position. We can start to question social inequality.

CHAPTER 3

THE MEMOIRS

THE TALES OF TRAUMA ORDINARINESS

INTRODUCING THE TALES OF TRAUMA ORDINARINESS

The following four memoirs, the Tales of Trauma Ordinariness, are based on my relationship with a (now close) friend. She is key to my memoirs because despite all barriers, one might even say against all odds, we were able to establish a meaningful connection. We got to know each other because we did the same internship. During that internship we closely worked together on a project. (Partly) displaced by war, she was commonly characterized as refugee while interning. As refugee, then, one would generally consider her to be the prototype traumatized subject, whether in micro- (personal) or meta (social) narrativity. As I did too. I saw her as a victim of war —first and foremost.

I never asked her about her trauma. I was too scared about her reaction. I never noticed anything about her trauma. She *did* notice my trauma, or at least how miserable I felt at the time. While working together I was at a particular low point. My insomnia had grown to an unprecedented intensity and the most basic obligations provoked an incredible anxiety. At times when I did not feel like myself, times where anxiety took hostage of my being, she was there. Her capability of supporting me while I considered her to be in a severer state than me simultaneously intrigued and humbled me. It compelled me to write about her, wondering what lies beneath the surface of our interactions. Instinctively, I knew there was more to unravel, more to learn about both her and my trauma.

As a whole, the memoirs express the development of a friendship. They are shaped by the remainders of two encounters, about three months apart from each other. The first is a get together of a small group and the other of a personal (semi-)steered conversation (on trauma). A snapshot wherein trust is built. Our encounters and interactions are furthermore specific to time, and over time changes occur. At the time of this writing already much has changed, both in our relationship to each other and in our relationship to our selves. This indicates that when it comes theorizing trauma ordinariness, there is no coherent story to tell. No beginning, no middle, no end.

Altogether, then, the memoirs above consist of the literal expression of the remains of both interactions, both scraped together intuitively; short pieces that can be pulled apart and put together differently. Stories that do not "inevitably lead to the same ending" (Ahmed, 7). Another author, another relationship, and another story will appear (Ahmed, 7). It is one out of countless stories. For this reason she will further remain anonymous. Not by her wish, but by mine. She gave rise to these feelings, and with this a story arose that transcends the both of us. Trauma ordinariness is not just a story about personalities; its feelings reach further. And I want to uncover (part of) its reach.

The memoirs uncover the traces of trauma ordinariness by dwelling on moments of the overwhelming, yet ordinary. Moments that are written down intuitively; attending to feeling when writing down these memories. Memoirs of memories that will, in turn, be interpreted through close reading, locating the feelings that dwell within (Ahmed, 12). Feelings that, in turn, expose (some of) the pressures of living life in the socio-cultural contemporary. Feelings uncovering things that would otherwise be passed. And instead of bypassing it, I will *pass it on*.

HIS NEW PLACE

On a late summer afternoon I was invited to see his new house. *He* is thoroughly connected to her; they moved here together. And have moved elsewhere together. I got to know them around the same time, their faint outlines...

… that after living with his boyfriend out of necessity for over half a year, he finally got placed in an apartment in the North-East of town. Right near the water.
Together they, she and him, invited me over for dinner.

His apartment is where we are situated; the five of us. All friends who I am familiar with through her. He guides me through the house. It is quite spacious. As he guides me through the rooms I increasingly become agitated with myself. I am trying to suppress it but I know I cannot avoid the thoughts rattling in my mind.

I am envious. Of his place.

Over the course of the evening shame keeps throbbing inside of me.
I tell myself this envy is completely misplaced, obscene even.
I am fantasizing about redecorating the space according to my standards nevertheless.
I feel cruel and disrespectful for doing so.

On my way back my head is overflowing with thoughts. I punish myself for not being genuine; for not being able to be *unconditionally* happy for him, even while he feels so close to me. I wish for a sincerity that might not have ever been there. That might not ever have been within me.

That night, I longed for sharing this with her. I knew I would not.
I go to the midnight screening at the cinema, convulsively forcing distraction onto my mind. As I most often do.

THE BED

We meet each other at the bar where I work. Strange as it sounds, I feel strongly connected to this place. Even when fleeting (as I will not work here for long anymore), *it is for now home.*

We sit down and discuss the general whereabouts of our lives. After some time she brings up my thesis. She appears to be highly intrigued, and, knowing that she will be part of it, starts to talk freely. She has always been very open. This time is no different.

She lights a cigarette and begins to talk the untalkable, casually. I am amazed by her airiness. She sums up all she has acquired while being here and takes it as evidence to separate herself from trauma. House, job, fellowship; the Holy Trinity of a young adult life.

Then, as if our shared language (as if, perhaps, *any* language) hinders her from full self-disclosure, she comes up with a story about her bed. She talks about her past, about growing up. How there was always the reassurance her bed would be there. No matter what, she could come home to it.

Moving abroad for studies irrevocably changed this. From now on she was always uncertain whether there will ever be a bed she can call hers. And now, now it is too late to ever go back to her bed in her homeland. It was sudden, she tells. Something she perhaps did not think of until it occurred.

Regardless, there was a shift. Irrevocable and irreversible. In both her story and her presence. Her airiness, the whole air, was getting thin. She continues. With the disappearance of her bed her sense of stability as she knew disappeared too.

The disappearance of her bed provoked anxiety, she reveals. It made her realize everything is temporary and unstable. "I had a lot of things going for me in the summer and all of a sudden it all went away." She looks slightly uncomfortable. Far removed from the comfort of her bed.

Her words seem to move beyond my capacity to register. This metaphor, this bed that is not hers —*unlikely will ever truly be hers*, is the unthinkable.

I wonder now, in writing this, if a bed is needed to make a home.

“SARDEH”

That particular evening, when I was (enviously) visiting his new place. After dinner, the five of us made ourselves comfortable on a big gray couch. The couch was rejoicing its second life in this apartment. The many people that had sat on it before made us sag into it.

One friend was selecting some ambient music while searching for visuals to screen alongside. The five of us spent the whole evening chatting, with silent intervals when watching the graphics. At several occasions they fall back on speaking their mother tongue.

All of a sudden the girl next to me stands up and lies down on the carpet next to the couch. She raises both her hands and starts to swirl them rhythmically through the air. Then she remains still. After a moment of stillness she falls asleep.

From now on I am only capable of focussing on the girl, wondering why she distanced herself from us. Typically, I search for things that I could have said or done wrong as to make her leave.

My mind spins around this shifting dynamic for some time.

Then someone else starts to emphasize how comfortable this situation is. He says something in their shared language and everybody immediately seems to agree. I wonder out loud what they are discussing. After several attempts on translating it they get no further than the word “Sardeh”.

They each take their turn in attempting to explain it.

It is about being located in a somewhere devoid of any spatio-temporal understanding. Forgetting your surroundings, letting time pass by without noticing. Being taken by a situation in a way that resembles *something* close to a meditative state.

Not having a translation that suits the Western languages we master shows that which is powerful.

It shows the beauty of language; it shows the art of being comfortable.

THE ARMOR

That afternoon we met up at the bar was strangely compelling. Through metaphor, through figuration, through dialogue; she transcended time. For however brief a time. Her words brought together the past, present, future.

All boundaries blurred.

Meandering through time, she reads herself with great ease, forcing me to surrender to her words. She alternates between happiness and despair. First distinctively, then interchangeably.

She starts to talk about a shield. About the times before, during, after, running from her bed. About how somewhere over this course she was forced to be armored. She leaves me ever more confused.

She continues. About how she feels like she is able to get by happily. For now. If something, someone, would reach beyond her shield she would fall. Fall harder than most people.

The shield would come off.

She goes home as I am left disorientated by this journey.

“Do not worry, be happy”, she told me before leaving.

AFTERTHOUGHTS

(OR: PERSONAL IMPLICATIONS OF WRITING TRAUMA ORDINARINESS)

The process of writing the memoirs has been confronting, to put it mildly. As expected, it forced me to stay and interact with formerly overlooked, perhaps purposely neglected, yet always ambivalent feelings. After being used to run past these feelings for so long I had to stop; I had to stand still. It is not a matter of coincidence, then, that the memoirs were written during a turbulent, tumultuous period. A period in which days filled with anxiety seamlessly overflowed with days of relief.

There were (and actually are) days in which I rejected the limits of both my mind and body. Days in which I pushed myself until I was paralyzed and empty. A constant fear of not doing enough, of not being enough drove me —at times straight to bed. I stumbled, multiple times. But never without knowing I would be able to get up and write again.

It might be the price I had to pay for attending to both my feelings and thoughts. Sure enough, I learned a tremendous lot by holding up that painful mirror. That in order to be vulnerable great strength is demanded. That the self-proclaimed quality of my own writing shifts accord-ingly to my own state of mind; good - bad - excellent - good - ridiculous. But mostly and regardless of value; that writing feeling is possible, as long as you attend to your intuition.

The memoirs that shape the Tales of Trauma Ordinariness are the result of intuitive self-scrutinization; at once the product of creative expression and well-considered wording. In the processed-based writing of feeling, feelings have shaped these stories (Ahmed, 13). In following feeling I went with the unfamiliar, I wrote in a way I had never written before. The memoirs might have rough edges, and, according to its reader, might be too insignificant or, on the contrary, be too telling. But, as Cvetkovich argues, these rough edges could prove to be of great analytical importance, as they are "exactly what enables fresh thinking to emerge" (12). The rough edges is where I stay, the roughness that normally remains at the margins. The roughness, the margins, that bring up (formerly) unconsidered thoughts.

Surely, there was no other option for describing how I felt. It was the direction I was pulled towards (or pushed myself into) in the search of "my own style of being present to the struggles of my time", of writing up responsive thoughts and bodily enactments informed by feeling (Gregg and Seigworth, 8). Of course, the stories could have been written up in many ways. But there was some direction to it, even when I leaned on intuition. My intuition was my guidance. Even before writing anything, the stories were already partly established, as the memoirs —in dealing with trauma as the ordinary— intuitively favor minor feelings that are generally considered to be unprestigious over feelings that are grander and considered to be more passionate (such as trauma in its conventional form) (Ngai, 6).

Writing is unavoidably a process of pick and choose. Even though I went with feeling, with intuition, I also discarded and altered a great deal. Some stories, some parts, were discarded or altered because there simply was no space to engage with them here. Other stories, other parts, were discarded or altered because they remained too unclear; too ungraspable to interpret. I had to prioritize, I had to reason. Reason about my intuition. Reason about my feelings.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYZING THE OVERWELMING ORDINAIRY

TRANSLATING THE TALES OF TRAUMA ORDINARINESS

UNCOVERING THE FEELINGS OF TRAUMA ORDINAIRNESS

The memoirs above are intuitive writings about the ordinary, yet overwhelming forces of daily life. These ordinary, yet overwhelming forces make up a particular cluster of feelings, which all share the quality of being experienced as inherent to the everyday and ordinary. Taken together, but definitely not considered to be an exhaustive (re-)conceptualization, this cluster forms a depiction of experiencing the particularity of trauma as a thing that structures daily life —albeit a trauma that is ever shifting and refuses to shape itself.

The depictions of trauma ordinariness are shared both implicitly and explicitly through the memoirs; within the personal encounters as well as by its accompanied descriptions. These depictions, in the stratifications of both the inexplicit and explicit, are subsequently interpreted according to the feelings hiding within. I use the word "interpreted" purposely here, because theorizing feeling is, as argued before, always a matter of partiality and situatedness (Haraway, 578).

When I look at the memoirs specific feelings stand out (to me). In His New Place and the Bed the sentiments of envy and anxiety are obvious. But overwhelming sensations are also implicitly present, as "Sardeh" shows a particular spectrum of comfortableness and uncomfortableness, and the Armor deals with a certain fear (a fear of falling apart). These exemplified feelings were most evident to me, and will be the foundation for the rest of the analysis. Although by no means wishing to compromise other feelings dwelling within and across the memoirs.

Forming the foundation for the rest of the analysis, the uncovered feelings of the Tales of Trauma Ordinariness furthermore uncover (some of her and my) struggles to comply with being a "proper" subject; a subject complying with social norms (Górska, 232). Norms that determine what feelings are "good" and what feelings are "bad"; what subjects are "happy" and what subjects are "unhappy" (Ahmed, 3, 11). Norms that make differences "different". Norms that, as I will continue to argue, make us strive for the same feelings, at the sacrifice of our differences.

I. ENVY

His New Place expresses the internal struggle of envy. More specifically, it expresses the internal struggle of envying that which belongs to someone else. In this case of envying that which belongs to someone held dear. In real life this enviousness is kept in secrecy, as my mind tells me that nothing good could possibly come from revealing it. This memoir, however, reveals (some of) the reasons *why* I believe this enviousness should remain hidden. Envy is here straightforwardly and unproblematically connected to cruelty and disrespect, resulting in a felt shame about being envious in the first place. In working with this sense of shame, I expose it here, delving deeper into the connections between envy, cruelty, and disrespect. Uncovering other, potential reasons of this (minor) internal, personal struggle.

Before moving towards these optional, other reasons of being envious, it is first of crucial importance to clarify the distinction between envy and jealousy, as the two are commonly used interchangeably (Ngai, 11). Jealousy is the worry that someone is trying to take something "belonging" to you (Ngai, 20). Envy, on the other hand, is the desire to have something "belonging" to someone else (Ngai, 20). This something and someone can be both material and immaterial, real or fictional. So the self-centered desire to possess the apartment described in His New Place is not the utterance of jealousy, as one might initially think, but the utterance of envy.

Moving forward with envy, in this case my wish to possess an apartment designated to a friend taking refuge in the same city, its evaluative character becomes apparent. The sense of shame seems to create a feeling of insincerity, of ingenuity ("I punish myself for not being genuine") about being envious. Envy does often go hand in hand with the accumulation of other (unfavorable) feelings, which are visible through the negotiation between these different feelings (Ngai, 10). In His New Place the shame about being envious result in the evaluation of my envy as a personal "lack" or "deficiency", hence its secrecy ("I longed for sharing this with her. I knew I would not") and evasion ("I go to the midnight screening at the cinema, convulsively forcing distraction onto my mind") (Ngai, 10, 20).

In processes of suppression (in both secrecy and evasion), then, envy becomes the self-reflexive, self-measuring process of evaluating the legitimacy of a felt desire. The projection of the feeling moves from the object of desire towards the personal sensibility, ultimately leading to the self-punishment of feeling an illegitimate, "ingenuine" feeling. Envy can thus generally be considered as "a reflection of the ego's inner workings", with the inner workings being at default (Ngai, 128). But what happens if we look beyond the object of desire as relation to the ego into the underlying subject for which the object substitutes. Whether justifiable or not, envy always "addresses forms of inequality" (Ngai, 126). And that inequality does not have to be the object of desire per se. The object of desire can indicate another, related desire. A desire formerly unconsidered.

Following this train of thought, this particular envy, *my* envy, can be understood as not just being directed towards that particular apartment, but to being at home in general. Behind envisioning the redecoration, and thus the construction of a personalized domesticated space, lies the

desire of making a house a home, which in turn could denote the absence of feeling like being at home altogether. In both past and present, then, the realization of a lack might not be the lack of justified feeling, but the lack of feeling justified in terms of something way bigger. Of not being granted or not being capable (—who knows?) to feel at home.

Wishing to be placed in that apartment indicates the longing for a new start, an imaginative new try to finally be at home. It is a longing to let go of the past, a longing for recovery; for reparation of the present. But one can impossibly literally move away from the past. The longing for recovery, therefore, is a longing of naiveté. This naiveté nevertheless provides hope that the emotional homecoming *is* possible. This hope, unveiled here, is wrapped up in enviousness and displaced onto his lived experience. His experience, in turn, gets devoid from himself, and filled in as I desire to live it *my*self. A desire to make that house *my* home.

My relation to the very idea of being at home thus becomes clear in conceptually moving the object of envy from the some*thing* to the some*where*; from that tangible house to the concept of home. Certainly, this argument gets its backing when my troubled childhood, filled with domestic problems, is taken into consideration. When the place that should have been your home has, at crucial times, failed to function as a home, has not functioned as a shelter for sorrows, then the feeling of being at home becomes disturbed. From a young age onwards. And even without such a childhood, without such a (personal) history, one is expected to make their house their home. Regardless of the age, regardless of the place. And is there really something like a second start in this?

II. ANXIETY

The Bed tells about the sudden shift towards a frank conversation between her and me. Unexpectedly she opens up; about her perception of trauma, about her personal relation to trauma. Metaphors take over during this conversation and one of the most compelling is the metaphor of the bed. The loss of the bed (her bed, not *a* bed) triggers anxiety, she reveals. Her use of metaphor is noteworthy to me. I notice her use of metaphor because I recognize it. I recognize her use because I, myself, use metaphors just like her.

I often use metaphors when I explain my feelings. Mostly, I use metaphor when I explain my feelings of anxiety. Because anxiety is known for its inexplicability, its indeterminacy. When feelings get so abstract, so intangible, language often does not seem to be able to capture it. So the both of us seem to get creative in order to express ourselves, in order to find a way to deceive anxieties equivocality. Because anxiety knows no univocality; its authoritative capacity to seize control over the mind (often without awareness) arises from anxieties very character (Górska, 207).

Anxiety metabolizes itself in "multiplicity and uncontainability" with its ambiguity functioning as perhaps its only unquestionable quality (Górska, 217). How anxiety is experienced, then, varies according to its shape and intensity. It can remain unnoticed, be disruptive, or even destructive. We are all familiar with our own perception of anxiety, whether its vague outlines are endured from time to time or whether it is (self- or medically) diagnosed as disorder. Feeling anxious is, and in Western discourse particularly, more or less experienced by everyone (Ngai, 213). It is no surprise, then, that countless of approaches are taken on to try and understand —and subsequently "overcome" anxiety.

In attempting to epitomize anxiety, therewith attempting to clarify the abstract, anxiety often gets related, or even equated, to fear (Cvetkovich, 38; Ngai, 210). Unlike anxiety, fear often has a real, existing object; we know when we fear, what we fear, and therefore how to evade fear, however illogical the object of fear may seem. But I believe this telling of anxiety as *just* the intrinsically fearsome constitutes a conceptual layer on top of that which is still undecided, resulting in the conceptual pitfall of anxiety as the cluster term of *all that is feared*. It grows into something graspable, yet so big, that it implodes into nothingness.

That is not to say, however, that anxiety cannot be associated to other feelings. My experience taught me that my anxiety declares itself through feelings of (indeed) fear (of impending doom), paranoia (mostly about my fear being (ir)rational), restlessness (and the inability to fall asleep), worry (questioning practically everything), and nervousness (in both agitation and excitement) (Ngai, 214). But as learned from first-hand experience, these feelings are the declarations of anxiety; not its core. They form the branches of the tree; not its roots. I have attempted to "overcome" the feelings above time and time again. Just to find out that they always resurface. Always soon. Always slightly differently. Something is triggering these feelings —yet *what* is triggering these feelings remains unknown.

As an unctontainable phenomenon that resists "conventional deliminations", anxiety refuses to let itself be explained (Górska, 207). There are symptoms related, as above, but there is no clear origin unproblematically awaiting to be identified. Still, regardless of all its ambiguity, there are stories that attempt to explain the experience of anxiety. Precisely these stories are worth telling, these "situated stories,

that in their individual linearity and transversality, their uniqueness and comparativity, tell of worlding" (Górska, 208). Because anxiety shapes worlds; in both symptoms and origin. The anxiety of the Bed is therefore told as a story about a story. Anxiety is explained through sheer interpretation; *my* interpretation (emerging from my experiences) of *her* told experiences. In her telling she wishes to express something and I, in turn, try to make sense of the remainders of the story. These remainders construe a new story, one where both our experiences come together.

In returning to the Bed the causal connection between anxiety and losing property —the bed— is most apparent ("the disappearance of her bed provoked anxiety, she reveals"). Anxiety thus gets directed towards something tangible, as the memoir itself states too ("this metaphor, this bed that is not hers — *unlikely will every truly be hers*, is the unthinkable"). This metaphor, this bed, seems to address pressing issues that would otherwise remain hidden; issues of displacement and belonging. The bed, then, signifies rest (a bed awaiting for you to rest in) and the foundation of stability and security (something to come home to). This security and stability are seized when the bed is no longer a personal belonging, just *a* bed. It was, after all, the disappearance of the bed that made her "realize that everything is temporary and unstable".

Her story, guided by metaphors, address of some of the most pressing issues of subjecthood. And the use of analogy in order to clarify anxieties abstraction is common. Take the metaphor I use above of the tree, which in turn refutes the causality between the bed and felt anxiety. When following this metaphor, the loss of the bed form not anxieties roots, but form yet another branch. The metaphor of the bed seems to serve the cognitive understanding of the felt anxiety, projecting its cause onto something tangible and therewith comprehensible (Ngai, 209). It becomes a coping mechanism, as the bed now gets loaded with her feelings of anxiety —the bed becomes the Bed.

Metaphor is a powerful means for projection. Projection, in turn, is a powerful means for coping with anxiety (Ngai, 209). Through metaphor, the felt ambiguity becomes projected onto the understandable. The loss for words get projected onto the imagery, and here words are found again. This is how, citing the memoir, it becomes possible to "talk the untalkable, casually" and share some of the branches with those we trust. These branches, however, are viewed from the outside, as I am not the tree, she is. In order for me to reach theoretical comprehensibility, I project my understanding of my felt anxiety onto her story. I project my history onto her. Because my anxiety, my history, are the only anxiety and history I live with. Nevertheless, it is an anxiety, it is a history, that can be expressed. And in expressing we share our experiences, we share our beliefs. And as I put my buds on her branches, her anxiety becomes both our worlding.

III. UNCOMFORTABLENESS

Simply put, "Sardeh" depicts how different people experience a setting differently. In this case the setting is his apartment, the evening I was (enviously) visiting. A small group, including me, had dinner and hung around. But over the course of the evening I noticed that something lingered, something uncomfortable. This uncomfortableness arose when the girl next to me stood up and laid down on the carpet, which left me insecure ("typically, I search for things that I could have said or done wrong as to make her leave"). However in the meantime, while I was still contemplating this occurrence, everyone else expressed their comfort ("then someone else starts to emphasize how comfortable the situation is […] everybody immediately seems to agree"). This perceived contradiction left me confused.

My uncomfortableness, as quickly discovered, was not shared. It therefore remained unspoken. The voice of the majority, of the comfortable, overruled it. Expressing myself would not only mean to be vulnerable; it would also mean that their comfortableness could potentially vanish, that their comfortableness could potentially be reshaped into the uncomfortableness that goes accompanied with confrontation. In this spectrum of two extremes (comfortable/uncomfortable), the uncomfortable, as the undesirable, was left in the dark. But the dark side of the spectrum, the undesirable, also decides what is memorable. We tend to forget, or even notice, the times we are comfortable; even when we verbalize it (Ngai, 147). Uncomfortableness, on the other hand, is oftentimes rememberable, generating the discomfort of reliving the uncomfortable experience anew (Ngai, 148). Uncomfortableness persists.

Uncomfortableness persists because it disorientates (Ngai, 148). In being uncomfortable the body identifies its incapability to follow established normative scripts (in behavior and/or appearance), which leads to feeling awkward and unsettled about being present somewhere altogether (Ngai, 148, 152). It is a sense of estrangement, of out-of-place-ness that invokes an acute awareness of the surface of the body, as being *a* surface positioned in a —and thus *out of*— context (Ngai, 148). The body, now the self-identified stranger in a room full of acquaintances, has little choice but to address or ignore its felt uncomfortableness. And since we are dealing with normative scripts here, the latter proves to be the norm (Ngai, 148).

But my argument is not that my uncomfortableness just arose from being outnumbered. Not in my incapability of speaking their shared language, nor in my incapability to understand certain behaviors. My uncomfortableness, in this case, is result of a confrontation of a whole different sort. It confronted me with *my own* comforts, comforts unquestioned up to that point, and in all likelihood to be unquestioned in the future. Let me briefly elaborate on this somewhat antagonistic statement.

In their interactions my friends share a different background, a different culture. And yet it still overwhelmed me when I was unable to flawlessly interact with them, to share in that moment what they (had) shared together. It confirmed differences between us, differences unseen before. In being surprised about these differences, to others perhaps self-evident, my ignorance shows. My assumption, however, was not that such differences would simply cease to exist, but that that their behaviors would intrinsically correspond to mine. We are alike, and therefore we behave alike, was my belief.

My behavior, taught by (my own) upbringing and substantially according to socio-cultural structures, made me internalize my behavior as normative. Comfortability is thus my norm, the principle

of how *everyone* should feel. My uncomfortableness, then, shows how deeply rooted the conviction of my behavior as rightful is. So yes, while living in a multicultural society *could* be designated to be the primal cause for my uncomfortableness, it does not imply that the majority rules and that uncomfortableness can only be washed away through the assimilation of the "unrightfully" comfortable (Ahmed, 121). Uncomfortableness is first and foremost a confrontation with normative ideals, which are not just self-imposed but pursuing a national ideal, which itself is premised upon mechanisms of social exclusion (Ahmed, 1).

As the inability of translation of the word "Sardeh" shows, there is no unitary understanding of something even as mundane as comfortableness. Thus, insofar as this memoir show the "art of being comfortable", it does not as much as I initially thought. It actually has more to do with art of embracing difference (Ahmed, 16). However cliché it sounds, there is much to learn from it. Only then we can start let go of tensions —in the broadest sense of the word.

IV. FEAR

Out of all four feelings, fear stands out the most. It is the only feeling I, personally, did not experience explicitly during the encounters. Yet it is also the one feeling I felt most compelled to write about. The feeling that was left so implicit, yet was so obvious for me, that it immediately brought me back to my own, past felt fears. Thus, fear is nowhere stated in the Armor. Instead, it is more like an overall sentiment.

In the Armor she metaphorically suggests how she was forced to protect herself ("[…] somewhere over this course she was forced to be armored"), an ostensibly required measure for the survival of the here and now. But, and as she appears to be aware of herself, one cannot hide behind a shield forever. In transcending time ("her words brought together the past, present, future") she becomes aware of the inevitable logics of temporality ("the shield would come off"). The Armor anticipates the loss of its very armor ("if something, someone, would reach beyond her shield […]"), a loss with potentially excruciating consequences ("[…] she would fall. Fall harder than most people"). Consequences that are fearsome.

The use of metaphor in order to elicit feeling is again of no coincidence. Whether purposefully or not, the imagery of the loss of armor corresponds with the temporal logic of fear. Fear involves the anticipation of hurt and injury; the point where the armor fails to protect (Ahmed, 65). In fearing that which will harm the self she thus prepares herself for a bad scenario. This bad scenario is, however, already reality, as fear metabolizes itself as the unpleasant intensity of the here and now (Ahmed, 66). Fear is of the future; the "could-be", but that "could-be" envelops the body in the present (Ahmed, 63).

Fear envelops the body because it reminds of the vulnerability of that very body (Ahmed, 63). In negating its bodily vulnerability, the self is again inclined to be protective. Some take flight, others paralyze (Ahmed, 65). Both reactions are alike, as both function to await the passing of threat as to evade fear. As though when fear passes, the self is restored. Keeping the fear of the Armor implicit, then, could be considered as form of flight. If she would explicitly state that she fears, her fear would be echoed into the world, and her body would turn unquestionably vulnerable. In this moment of remaining still, of keeping fear quiet, the self is —if only for that moment— is at stake.

But what does it mean to (publicly) acknowledge our fear, our vulnerability, in that moment where the self at stake? Earlier on I made the argument that fear distinguishes itself because we can know what we fear. In acknowledging *what we fear*, the object of fear turns real; the fearsome object (Ahmed, 64). And the object of fear is unambiguous, however ambiguous the felt fear may appear. The Armor again functions to illustrate this —now spatial— dimension of fear. She describes how she was forced to protect herself, suited with armor, after she had lost a bed to call her own. Her fear therefore hints at a fear of transition, of what her changing world (after losing the bed) leads her to become. So while the changes themselves are tangible (living in a new environment), the perceived fear (worrying about the impact of these changes) is not.

Not every body, however, would fear these tangible changes. Surely, fear differentiates, and is "felt differently by different bodies" (Ahmed, 69). Nonetheless, there are dominant narratives that determine what is fearsome, what are "legit" objects of fear (Ahmed, 69). Again the Armor complies with this — now narrative— quality. She had to provide herself with armor because she had left her bed, and with her bed her homeland. Her homeland is not safe, torn by war. She got her asylum, and is now settling. From a bureaucratic viewpoint, at any rate, this makes her a refugee. A figure (literally) moved by fear.

In the West, however, the figure of the refugee is infamously feared *in itself*, as it is mobilized in close proximity to the figure of the (international) terrorist (Ahmed, 79). The slide between the two figures is premised on the assumption that those who flee from terror, from war, may "themselves be bogus insofar as they could be the agents of terror" (Ahmed, 80). She, following the dominant narrative of fear, is the potential instigator of the very thing she leaves everything behind for. In fleeing from the fearsome, from terror and war, she herself becomes the embodiment of fear to others, if only on documentation and not in real life. Because frankly, in real life, I doubt that anyone would truly regard her as threatening.

The Armor teaches about fear. About how its temporal, spatial, and follows scripted narratives. ""Don't worry, be happy", she told me before leaving". As if to remind me, and perhaps herself, not to fear as she does. And that there is no reason to fear her(self).

ASPIRING TO FEEL THE SAME...

The feelings above —envy, anxiety, uncomfortableness, fear— offer insight into how trauma is lived in all its ordinariness. But even though they were felt in all their ordinariness, the feelings remained (partially) obscured. The analysis of the four feelings show how, during the encounters, the feelings were treated as confining and noncathartic, leaving little room for contemplation (Ngai, 6). Only afterwards, through writing memoirs and accompanied interpretations, it becomes clear that these feelings, ostensibly minor, are capable of drawing out struggles that are actually major (Ngai, 11).

Precisely this makes trauma ordinariness so enigmatic. Trauma ordinariness is that which at first sight, during the actual interactions, remains seemingly light. It is only after scrutinization, interpreting both the said and the unsaid, that the seemingly light turns weighty. Trauma ordinariness bares latent pressing issues, issues about the personal relation to the self as well as to the outside world. It shows that nothing disruptive is required to be confronted with traumatic feelings; not the disruptive traumatic event nor the disruptive re-experience. Traumatic feelings are already, and essentially, *always there*. Hiding somewhere.

Feelings of trauma are thus not intrinsically connected to the traumatic moment but omnipresent. Envy, anxiety, uncomfortableness, fear; feelings we all feel, all have felt, and all in our own way (Ahmed, 4). These four feelings, however, do not define trauma. In contrast, they are solely suggestive, showing a small part of a totality that will not let itself be theorized as such. Yet this indication, even if it does not define trauma, unveils feelings identifiable to everyone. Feelings everyone struggles with —at one point or another, whether admittedly or not. In returning to trauma ordinariness, then, it turns out that it concerns *everyone*, insofar that everyone experiences feelings arising from the overwhelming ordinary. It is noteworthy, then, that uncovered feelings —in all their identifiability— are repressed during the interactions. The interactions above are, so it appears, based on an (unspoken) agreement about the unworthiness of profoundly sharing certain feelings in everyday encounters (Ngai, 4). This collective neglect is not innocent (Ngai, 3). It shapes who we are (Ahmed, 10).

Feelings shape who we are because feelings are not self-contained (Ahmed 194). All feelings carry certain connotations, certain meanings (Ahmed, 13). Meanings that are constructed in order to make claims about an individual or collective, claims based on value judgements (Ahmed, 14). Earlier I argued how feelings are generally divided in terms of the "good"/"bad" dichotomy. Feelings that are "bad" are considered to be bad, hence most likely to remain hidden out of fear for being judged. But what remains hidden is not lost. Both individually and collectively evading the publicness of feelings of trauma ordinariness, then, might hide its own meaning; a meaning informed by mechanisms of social inclusion and exclusion (Ahmed, 14).

In analyzing this meaning, the meaning behind individually and collectively repressing trauma ordinariness, my personal theorization, my own writing, will assert its contemporaneity (Ngai, 304). We feel the same feelings, yet we feel them differently. These differences, in turn, are (in great part) result

of our (aforementioned) social identity, our (aforementioned) intersectional location. Following this, we do not just feel feelings of trauma ordinariness, arbitrarily. Trauma ordinariness teaches about social mechanisms. Social mechanisms of power.

Trauma ordinariness follows social mechanisms of power that maintain a hierarchy of feelings; an overall belief in the distinction between "good" feelings —feelings that are cultivated and "are worked on and towards", and "uncultivated" feelings —feelings that are unruly and "frustrate the formation of the competent self" (Ahmed, 3). Nowadays feelings are generally understood according to this dualistic model (Ahmed, 3). When a subject or collective gets identified with a particular feeling, the subject too gets identified with a particular social status. To feel good is to be "good", and to feel bad is to be "uncultivated" —thus to be "bad" (Ahmed, 3). Trauma ordinariness, then, in all its evasion and repression, seems to be gathered under the latter. So, at least in daily life, the idea prevails that it is better to suppress feelings of trauma ordinariness than to share them. This prevailing idea, the idea of what should and should not be felt, becomes its own reality. The reality of trauma ordinariness.

It goes without saying that the feelings above are not pleasurable. And the unpleasurable, we are brought up to believe, is undesirable, standing in our way of becoming the (earlier discussed) "proper", subject; the subject complying with the norm, the subject that does not need to be "fixed" in any way, shape, or form (Górska, 232). The subject that is the embodiment of the social ideal; the subject of happiness (Ahmed, 4; Cvetkovich, 116). In following this, the social experience of the pleasurable turns indicative for the social experience of the unpleasurable (and undesirable). Because if feeling pleasurable is feeling good, and feeling good makes the "proper", happy being, then feeling unpleasurable is feeling bad, whereby feeling bad makes the unproper, unhappy being. This counterbalance between unhappiness and happiness is significant. Altogether we wish to be happy, *even* when we do not know what we wish for in wishing happiness (Ahmed, 1). And in attempting to grasp it happiness invariably operates in opposition to unhappiness (Ahmed, 4). So to be happy, is more than anything, not to be unhappy (Ahmed, 4).

The feelings of trauma ordinariness *are* unpleasurable, unhappy feelings. Unhappy feelings that stand in the way of happiness. Unhappy feelings, as the above analysis uncovers, confront us with struggles of being an (designated) unhappy subject. Defined as unhappy feelings, feelings of trauma ordinariness are repressed because they are identified with being bad, with being an outsider who does not pursuit happiness. But it does not stop here. Happiness is premised on a social ideal reaching well beyond the self-identification of dualistic feeling (Ahmed, 7). Happiness is ascribed to particular bodies and particular bodies only (Ahmed, 7). Happiness has a body. Happiness has a face.

The next paragraph will concentrate on the social ideal that converts feeling happy into *being* happy. Because happiness is not just a feeling, it is a being (Ahmed, 2). More than feeling happy, we want to be happy. And while feeling happy is possible for everyone, being happy is not. The next paragraph will illustrate how happy feelings, how happiness, generates social exclusion.
Happiness marginalizes. Happiness rules out.

... AT THE SACRIFICE OF DIFFERENCE

I argued above how feelings of trauma ordinariness are generally considered to be unhappy feelings. Unhappy feelings, in turn, signify unhappy beings. Following this, I will continue to argue how the power of unhappiness goes beyond converting feelings into beings. It works the other way around too; identity categorizations, social differences; they determine the socially ascribed unhappiness of a subject (Crenshaw, 1242). Being a certain being, having a certain body, thus determines whether you comply with the social ideal, a social ideal of happiness.

Not complying with the social ideal, in turn, leads to (a degree of) unhappiness. Unhappiness rules out, excluding certain forms of personhood (Ahmed, 11). Various aspects of personhood, or the (aforementioned) axes of difference, thus determine the social status. This social status, in turn, determines whether a subject is socially "allowed" to be happy or not, whether a subject fits the profile of unhappiness (Ahmed, 11). This paragraph will illustrate how unhappy subjects are already formed beforehand —well before our formation.

In order to support this argument I will again return to the memoirs. In all the memoirs feelings of trauma ordinariness remain (partially) repressed in order to evade self-identification as an unhappy subject. But there is more to it, at least in this case there is. Giving voice to unhappy feelings would not just make us unhappy. It would also make us unruly women (Ahmed, 3). The public profile of a woman is associated with experiencing and expressing feelings of every sort, as women are traditionally represented as guided by feelings and less able of "rational" reasoning (Ahmed, 3; Berlant, 3). Facing the weightiness behind our feelings would then paradoxically enough indicate our over-sensitiveness, our irrationality. It would make us weak, whiney women.

Weak, whiney, those are certainly not the characteristics of the young, heterosexual, modern women we are ought to be according to the general norm. Young, heterosexual, modern women like us nowadays have two identities to choose from, both identities in line with being a happy woman. Either to enter the public world ruled by men or be the private caretaker of the household (Berlant, 33; Cvetkovich, 156). And is it not entirely coincidental that both identities, both in their own way, regulate feelings. To be in a "men's world" is to be hard and tough. To be the caretaker of the household is to be soft and caring. Both identities are, both in their own way, at odds with the unhappy feelings of trauma ordinariness. Staying with trauma ordinariness thus inevitably implies failing to fit the profile of the happy woman. It implies failure.

Repression seems a reasonable reaction, considering how staying with feelings of trauma ordinariness implies the failure of being a happy woman. Consequently, not to fail is, one way or the other, to repress; to keep it together. But to repress does not mean to erase. In the memoirs the feelings of trauma ordinariness were never *entirely* hidden. On the basis of interpretation the feelings were traced. In being vulnerable, even if it remains unspoken, we shared our struggle to be happy women, we shared our struggle to keep it together. A struggle where we find each other. A common ground.

But she is not the woman I am. She faces struggles I will never face. She lives differently, according to the specific intersection of *her* axes of difference. She is innumerable things, clear and unclear. For one thing…

…I will never understand what it must be like, being the (designated) refugee
and I will never understand what it must be like, leaving loved one's behind
and I will never understand what it must be like, coming from the Middle-East
and I will never understand what it must be like, expected to assimilate
and I will never understand what it must be like, engulfed by (unattainable) Western standards
and I will never understand what it must be like, having to learn Dutch
and I will never understand what it must be like, being perfectly able but denied full participation
and I will never understand what it must be like, starting anew

and all I cannot think of, all I will never understand.

Outlined above are her specific axes of difference, which are all interwoven in order to construct her intersectional identity. The background she comes from, the journey she made; it all determines her subject being. A subject being that is, in turn, subjected to oppressive forces. Because and as mentioned before, axes of differences are not neutral. Axes of difference determine who fits the profile of the happy woman. The happy woman is settled (Ahmed, 2). She is (fully) white (Ahmed, 2). She is (fully) Western (Ahmed, 2). And in this occasion, she is (fully) Dutch. She is the social ideal (Ahmed, 17). She is the norm.

Her axes of difference do not comply with all these things. Her axes of difference are different, deviant from the norm (Ahmed, 14). Not just in terms of gender and sexuality, but also in terms of ethnicity, race, culture, language, education, and all I cannot think of here. She fails to live up to the social ideal, she fails to identify as the "proper" happy woman. But this difference, this failure, is not hers. It is imposed *upon* her, publicly enforced.

Her differences do not *have* to be converted into failure (Ahmed, 154). Different ways of living, different ways of being, can challenge the norm (Ahmed, 154). Having a different relation to difference, in terms of potential worth instead of assigned failure; herein lies the true challenge, in both academic and activistic potential (Ahmed, 196). It is okay not to be okay. It is okay to be unhappy, in both feeling and being. Happiness is an unachievable norm anyways (Ahmed, 1).

This thesis, then, is a first step to resign to unhappiness. Because when taken together, the face of happiness looks rather like the face of privilege (Ahmed, 11). To protest against it is to open yourself up, is to be vulnerable. Towards ourselves and others. It is staying with our unhappy feelings and discover what they teach us. Both about ourselves and the world we inhabit. I stayed with feelings of trauma. Trauma as the ordinary; trauma ordinariness. But there is so much more to stay with, so much more to learn. It might be difficult to find but the feelings always linger. In conversation; somewhere between the lines. In metaphor; in silence (Ahmed, 12). *Somewhere it screams.*

CONCLUSION

I began this thesis with describing my feelings of trauma. Feelings of worthlessness, of not doing enough, of being a failure. And I believe that these feelings of trauma will not, will never, be "cured". They will always be there. They will always be part of my being. Yet, these feelings do not take over my being all the time. On the contrary, the shape and intensity of my feelings of trauma fluctuate significantly. Every now and then my feelings of trauma *do* take over my being, making me feel like life is not worth living; making me feel like living is surviving. It is much more often, however, that I barely notice my feelings of trauma. They are probably there, yet so difficult to identify, that I do not know where to start searching. Or perhaps I do not want to search for them, relieved as I am that they remain hidden.

More often than not, then, I felt like I was not traumatized "enough" because my trauma was not taking over my being. As if my trauma does whatever it wants, showing itself only occasionally. And this is where I started to feel lost. I felt lost because I felt alone in experiencing trauma this way. Wherever I searched for thoughts or theories on trauma, they always brought me back to the understanding of trauma as the disruptive, as the catastrophic; as the moments after which trauma takes over your whole being. As result, I thought of trauma as a "mental illness", as a "disease". But this understanding of trauma, an understanding of pathologization; of diagnoses and treatments, remains far removed from my trauma, remains far removed from my experience.

My experience of trauma is not of disruption, nor of catastrophe. My experience of trauma does not rupture my daily life —at least not on a daily basis. It takes place *within* my daily life. My trauma is everyday. My trauma is so present, yet so difficult to notice, that it has become ordinary. And I knew that, if I ever wanted to find some understanding of my trauma, if I ever wanted to feel less alone in this, I had to stay with my own feelings. Feelings not of disruption, nor of catastrophe; but ordinary feelings. If I wanted to write my story about trauma, about trauma as I live it, then I had to approach my trauma differently. It was time to talk differently about trauma.

In talking about trauma differently I wanted to come up with some form of vocabulary that expressed this alternative approach. I wanted to stick with trauma, with the sticky stigmatization that makes people that they are different, that they are deviant from the norm. Yet, simultaneously, I wanted to come up with a way to emphasize the everydayness of my trauma, the ordinariness of my, what most would call, "disorder". In doing so, I had to approach feelings differently altogether —especially feelings that are considered to be "bad". Because if I stayed my with feelings of trauma as a "bad" thing, I furthermore stayed with my feelings of trauma as a thing that had to be "cured"; as a thing that had to be overcome.

In approaching trauma alternatively, in letting go of the"good"/"bad"dichotomy I contribute to the (feminist) field of Affect theory (Cvetkovich, 4). Affect theory centralizes the social-cultural relevance of feelings, arguing how power relations and feelings are intrinsically related. Instead of categorizing feelings in terms of "good" and "bad", Affect theorists approach feelings as social constructs that uphold these very categorizations (Cvetkovich, 2). The categorizations that make you feel

bad about feeling "bad". But these feelings could, actually, teach me something about the world we are living in. My ordinary feelings of trauma, then, might want to teach me something about the world we are living in as well.

In writing about my ordinary feelings of trauma I was inspired by Berlant, who conceptualized trauma as the overwhelming ordinary; as feelings that are overwhelming, yet ordinary (Berlant, 10). Instead of trauma, however, Berlant shifts this focus towards crisis, stating how this, more than trauma, is ordinary (Berlant, 10). But I stayed with my trauma. And I moved away from the catastrophic, from crisis, even if it is conceptualized as ordinary. Following this, I introduced the new term to describe the trauma I live with on a daily basis, the trauma that shapes my world (Berlant, 10). I came up with the term "trauma ordinariness". Trauma ordinariness traces trauma through the ordinary; the *overwhelming* ordinary. Trauma ordinariness traces trauma through feelings that are so common, so familiar, that these feelings often get dismissed as having little to do with trauma. Ordinary feelings that make you stop and think — but not about (your) trauma per se. Ordinary feelings that, over time, most likely will be forgotten.

Trauma ordinariness, at least *my* trauma ordinariness, is the product of my social world. My feelings of worthlessness, of not doing enough, of being a failure might be the result of childhood trauma, but they are relived through my interactions with others. I constantly measure myself, my value, during ordinary conversations; during ordinary encounters. I constantly look for things to marginalize my trauma, for things that confirm that my trauma is not "bad" enough. In tracing trauma through trauma ordinariness, then, I trace it through ordinary encounters between me and someone close who I thought of as being more traumatized than I am. I decided not to interpret how she feels about her trauma, as I find it difficult enough to understand how I feel; let alone how someone else feels. Rather, I decided to interpret how ordinary encounters with her made it possible to rethink my own trauma.

In doing so, in tracing trauma ordinariness through ordinary, everyday encounters between me and her, I have not only theorized trauma differently. I also searched for trauma in a different place, by using a different method. I stayed with my own feelings. Staying with your own feelings in order to elicit socio-cultural critique about the world we live in is not something entirely new. This is at the heart of the feminist method(ology) of autoethnography that I use in this thesis (Allen-Collinson, 4). Traditional autoethnographic research, does, however, (as good as always) focuses on the self; on inner feelings, on inner thoughts, on inner emotions. I, however, stay with everyday encounters, with ordinary feelings, feelings that the are result of ordinary interactions —and that is a new place to stay; to search for feelings of trauma.

I searched for my trauma through ordinary interactions —more precisely, through two interactions. I searched for my trauma through ordinary feelings, which led to a different take on autoethnography. An autoethnography not just of the personal, but of the inter-personal; of relationships to the outside world. This different take on autoethnography, in turn, led to the writing of several memoirs —four to be precise. Memoirs that made me able to translate ordinary feelings to text, however hidden these ordinary feelings might have appeared to be at first. Memoirs that let both individual reflections and socio-cultural critique arise from these writings on ordinary feelings. Memoirs that enable this cri

tique, that altogether compose the critical memoir.

Combining ordinary feelings with cultural criticism (both on a personal and collective level) led to the configuration of "the Tales of Trauma Ordinariness". The Tales of Trauma Ordinariness are where the ordinary feelings of trauma are located; whether implicit or explicit. And these ordinary feelings, the feelings traced from the Tales of Trauma Ordinariness, surprised me. Hiding within ordinary encounters were feelings of envy, of anxiety, of uncomfortableness, of fear. I was surprised because of the heaviness of the feelings; the heaviness that resided behind our encounters. My ordinary feelings were confronting. My ordinary feelings were confronting because they taught me that, under the surface, there is this heaviness that I have made own; there is this heaviness that I have made ordinary.

The four feelings all confronted with pressing issues I (do not) deal with —all in their own way. Envy confronted me with my longing for a new start, with my longing for a new beginning. Anxiety confronted me with how impossible anxiety is, and how we express ourselves through metaphor in order to make anxiety as the impossible somewhat possible. Uncomfortableness confronted me with my status quo; with my unquestioned comfort, with my unquestioned sense of entitlement. Fear confronted me with the intensity and scope of not just my fear, but of how fear is furthermore surrounding her, of how her fear is everywhere.

The four feelings described above are the result of our encounters. Ordinary, yet heavy feelings of trauma ordinariness, that, in turn, formed the basis for socio-cultural critique All the ordinary feelings of trauma ordinariness remained repressed during the encounters —repressed up to a certain extent. These feelings remained repressed for a reason; they are too heavy, they are too dark. These feelings do not comply with socio-cultural structures, structures that lead you to the pursuit of happiness. These feelings make me, make her, make us both unhappy subjects. Even when these feelings are not experienced as negative.

But unhappy subjects are not just constructed out of the experience of particular "bad" feelings. Unhappy subjects are socially constructed. Unhappy subjects carry a certain identity. An identity that is imposed, from outside. Happiness and privilege, then, go hand in hand. Because if happiness has an identity, then happiness has a face as well. Happiness gets constructed through specific identities. Hence, it is not just your (particular) feelings, but furthermore your identity, your face, that determines whether you fit into the picture of happiness. A socio-cultural, constructed picture.

Both she and I are socially deemed unhappy for feeling our heavy feelings. Both she and I are socially deemed unhappy for being unruly women; for being women guided by feeling instead of rationality. But here our paths separate. She is socially deemed unhappy for many things I am not. Because of her identity. She is not "from here", she is not the norm. She is different, she is deviant. And the different, the deviant, is made alien. The different, the deviant, does not belong here. And if she *is* here, then happiness is not granted towards her. Trauma ordinariness, then, does not just teach about the self, about the way *I* feel. Trauma ordinariness also teaches about others, about matters of inclusion and exclusion, of privileging and deprivileging.

I close this thesis by making an appeal. The appeal to stay with your own difference, to stay with your own deviance. There is no magical solution that cures trauma, but there is recognition. The recognition of feeling different. We all feel different, deviant from others, deviant from the norm —sometimes, somehow. And if feeling different implies non-conformity to the social norm; if feeling different implies failure to fit a certain identity, an identity based on mechanisms of marginalization, then it might be time to reclaim difference, to reclaim deviance. Reclaim it as the refusal to take part in the pursuit of "proper" human subjectivity. Reclaim it as the refusal to treat difference as "different".

To reclaim difference, and to be, what Ahmed describes as "affect aliens" (228). And in our difference, in our deviance, we will find recognition. Recognition of the feelings we all feel. Envy, anxiety, uncomfortableness, fear; they might be my feelings of trauma ordinariness, but they are also ordinary feelings; feelings we all feel, all in our own way (Ahmed, 12). Ordinary feelings that might be heavy, feelings that might have delayed the process of writing my thesis.

Eventually I did it. I started my thesis. And I finished it. But I did it in my own time, at my own pace. Instead of what was expected.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Atkinson, Meera, and Michael Richardson, eds. *Traumatic Affect*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013.

Ahmed, Sara. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. Routledge, 2013.

Ahmed, Sara. *The Promise of Happiness*. Duke University Press, 2010

Allen-Collinson, Jacquelyn. "Chapter 9 Autoethnography: Situating Personal Sporting Narratives in Socio-Cultural Contexts." *Qualitative Research on Sport and Physical Culture*. Emerald Group Publishing Limited, 2012. 191-212.

Baumann, Sabina, and Karin Michalski. *Feeling Bad: Queer Pleasures, Art & Politics*. New York: Reena Spaulings Fine Art, 2009.

Berlant, Lauren. *Cruel Optimism*. Duke University Press, 2011.

Berlant, Lauren. "Trauma and Ineloquence." *Journal for Cultural Research* 5.1. 2001. 41-58.

Crenshaw, Kimberle. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color." *Stanford Law Review* 43.6, 1991. 1241-1299.

Cvetkovich, Ann. *Depression: A Public Feeling*. Duke University Press, 2012.

Ellis, Carolyn, and Arthur P. Bochner. "Autoethnography, Personal Narrative, Reflexivity: Researcher as Subject." *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2nd edition), 2000. 733-768.

Górska, Magdalena. *Breathing Matters: Feminist Intersectional Politics of Vulnerability*. Linköping University Electronic Press, 2016.

Gregg, Melissa, and Gregory J. Seigworth, eds. *The Affect Theory Reader*. Duke University Press, 2010

Haraway, Donna. "Situated knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective." *Feminist Studies* 14.3, 1988. 575-599.

Haraway, Donna J. *Staying with the trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Duke University Press, 2016.

Krystal, Henry. *Integration and Self Healing: Affect, Trauma, Alexithymia*. Routledge, 2015.

Sianne, Ngai. *Ugly Feelings*. Harvard University Press, 2009

Shouse, Eric. "Feeling, Emotion, Affect." *M/c Journal* 8.6, 2005. <http://journal.media-culture.org.au/0512/03-shouse.php>.

Stewart, Kathleen. *Ordinary Affects*. Duke University Press, 2007.