

Ivana Milojevic.

*Breathing : Violence In, Peace Out*

(St Lucia, Queensland : University of Queensland Press, 2013, 296pp.)

Ivana Milojevic analyses the long-term impact of trans-generational trauma by looking at the personal experience of her family over three generations caught up in the Stalinist repression in the Soviet Union, the Second World War, especially in Yugoslavia, and the 1990s break up of the Yugoslav federation. The book “looks at the possibilities for the emergence of more peaceful futures, including the individual/social practices necessary to bring them about... I have used the rhythm created by inhaling and exhaling as it symbolically reflects not only how we ‘take in’ life and the world but also what we ‘give out’ to the people around us. This in-out pace models efforts to understand the links between violence-peace, self-other, individual-world history, personal-political, trauma-healing, experience-sense-making, stability-change, safety-threat, oppressing-freeing, perception of reality-reality, and past-future.”

In her personal life Ivana Milojevic had had trouble breathing and found relief in widely-used techniques of relaxation and concentration through a focus on in-out breath. Breathing is an important symbol as well as a healing technique. The use of breath is becoming increasingly used in the West, especially in New Age circles.(1)

As Milojevic has had more experience with trauma than with healing, the emphasis in the book is on factors that lead to violence. The first is the mental and then social-political creation of “the Other”. As the French sociologist Georges Gurvitch has argued, all forms of social interaction relates to the existence of a ‘we/they’ relationship, its degree of intensity and the degree of hostility or perceived danger from the ‘they’, the outside group. The ‘outsider’ can become the enemy, and it is considered legitimate to plan his systematic destruction.

Milojevic outlines the ways in which the image of the ‘outsider’ as enemy leads to narrow nationalism, militarism, and imperialism. “Overall, militarism is understood here as ‘the use of force at the expense of alternative solutions. The use of force and violence requires preparation both in terms of developing certain social or cultural technologies (that is, promoting bellicose narratives and worldviews) and in terms of investing in and developing certain physical technologies (weapons). Militarism has historically been an important building block of both imperialist and expansionist states as well as within those old/new states liberated from the rule of such expansionist states. Despite various efforts

for demilitarisation over the past century, militarization and militarism continue to be significant forces in the Age of Terror.”

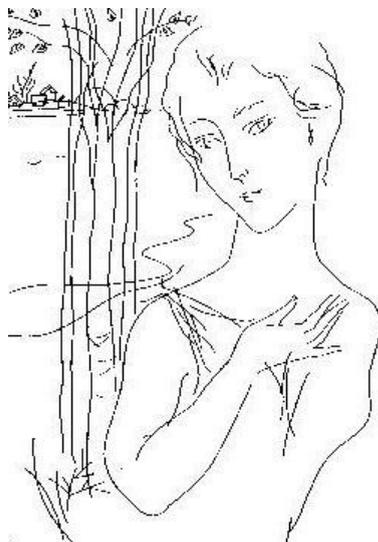
The other significant factor creating a we/they vision of the world is male/female gender images and practices. Pushed to its limits, male/female differences can become the organizing framework of the society, such as patriarchy, a social system of uneven distribution of power and authority to the detriment of women. The exaggeration of sexual differences can lead to masculinised patriarchal societies which often turn into warrior societies, influencing family life and child socialization patterns.

Milojevik underlines that “work towards peace, therefore, requires simultaneous transformation of both violent masculinities and violence-supporting femininities. In other words, alternative, non-violent masculinities need alternative, simultaneously non-violent and empowered femininities. As men do their work on abandoning violent and hegemonic ways of expressing masculinity, they need support from other men as well as from women, in a similar way that generations of women needed support by progressive men to be able to finally express their public/political voice.”

Milojevik concludes her analysis by stating “Wars and international conflicts are neither inevitable nor based on ‘primordial hatreds’ and certainly they are not ‘givens’. Rather, they are results of a sequence of choices and violent actions, which can, at any given time, be replaced by another sequence of alternative, non-violent actions.”

#### Note

1) see Dennis Lewis. *Breathe into Being* (Wheaton, IL: Quest Books, 2009, 115pp)



Drawing: Evgueni Bosyatski