

Politics of Pain: “A Good Subject for Eminent Amateurs”

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Since those days in which Lucien Febvre wrote his now widely quoted paper on the history of emotions, the connection between the past and the present has become increasingly pressing¹. The advantages and uses of history for present life, to use Nietzsche’s expression, happen to be even more telling when one comes to write the history of the emotional experiences. Opposing the “impersonal history”, the history of ethereal ideas or heartless institutions, Febvre defended a new form of historical narrative that would finally refrain from turning our universe into a stinking pit of corpses. While few pages of his paper examined sources and methodological difficulties, the most exciting manifesto came at the very end of the piece. In a notorious final paragraph, the French historian advocated for a new form of history that would, eventually, emerge from this psychological approach: a history understood as a connection between ancient and new; a history viewed as “our own history, a perpetual sentimental history of resurgences and resurrections”². His plea for a massive inquiry for sensibility in history called into question not just the idolatry of the facts, but the conception of a past too distant from the present. When Febvre wrote that the historical study of psychology was “a good subject for eminent amateurs”, he was arguing against the dead ends to which disciplinary and self-absorbed professionalism seemed to lead. What he judged as the revival of primitive forces, the exaltation of cruelty at the expense of love, or the proliferation of animal behaviour at the expense of culture, had to be widely researched and accounted for, not just for the sake of the past, but for the understanding of the present. Outside the servitudes and requirements of professional historians, only *amateurs* were willing to enjoy the freedom required to undertake the task. Given the political situation of the 1940’s, the political nature of this historiographical revolution could not be questioned. The new “sentimental history” would have to explain the resilience of primitive emotional forces that threatened culture.

Febvre, of course, was not alone in this plea. At the very end of their *Dialectik der Aufklärung*, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer followed a similar line of thought. The triumphant history of the Enlightenment had to face the brutal and irrational forces uncovered by the Nazi regime. The diversification and density of the civilization process described by Norbert Elias, or the secularization and disenchantment of the world, in Max Weber’s terms, had come to a dead end, as the massive proliferation of ritual murder came to demonstrate. Underneath the known history of Europe, claimed Adorno and Horkheimer, there was an underground history: the history of the human instincts and passions repressed or defaced by civilization³. As

1. Lucien FEBVRE, “Sensibility and History: How to Write the Emotional Life of the Past”, in Peter BURKE, ed., *A New Kind of History from the Writings of Lucien Febvre*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973, pp. 12-26. The citation is from page 26.

2. *Ibidem*, p. 26

3. Th. W. ADORNO and HORKHEIMER, *Dialectik der Aufklärung*, in *Gesammelte Schriften*, 3, Frankfurt am Main, Surkamp Taschenbuch Wissenschaft, 1997, p. 265.

in the case of Febvre, the past and the present of Western reason - the history of the enlightened subject - collide with the research into purely irrational elements, whose definitive presence could no longer be denied.

This connection between the history of emotions and the political dimension of history has also been underlined, though from a very different perspective, by many contemporary authors. According to the historian Ruth Leys, for example, the so-called “affective turn” was motivated by the desire to undermine the role of reason and rationality in politics, ethics, and aesthetics. In other words, the cultural analysis of emotions and passions arouse from the need to unravel the hidden affects that govern political decisions. Ley specifically cites the philosopher Brian Massumi, for whom our affects had to be viewed independently of, and in an important sense prior to, intentions, meanings, reasons and beliefs.⁴ Since affects were defined as autonomic processes that took place below the threshold of conscious awareness and meaning, the history of the emotions had to deal with the progressive uncovering of those “inhuman” and “pre-subjective” forces and intensities that, though unconscious, lay at the very core of our goals and intentions⁵.

More recently, scholars have given shelter to new theoretical frameworks in which the history of emotions collided with political claims. For the ethno-historian Monique Sheer, for example, emotions are a kind of practice⁶. In a similar line, the historian Joanna Bourke has described pain as “a type of event”⁷. In both cases, this performative view of emotions has consequences not just with regard to the way in which we should envision subjectivity and its history. Their approach comes to suggest that, thinking otherwise, claiming that emotions are somehow only natural and entirely autonomous of the self, would imply to “depoliticize emotions by naturalizing them and endowing them with fundamental autonomy, thus denying their social and historical contingency”⁸. “As a public ‘type of event’, writes Bourke, [pain] is a political practice”⁹. And rightly so, since the differentiation between true and feigned pain implies the mobilization of many social resources and rhetorical tools, as the recent book by Keith Wailoo has come to demonstrate.¹⁰

Unfortunately, the political dimension of “sentimental history” (*à la* Febvre) does not come naturally. On the contrary, the history of emotions, in general, or the history of emotional practices, in particular, must avoid falling into the trap of “performative contradictions”, as noticed by historian William M. Reddy¹¹. This is the

4. Ruth LEYS, “The Turn to Affect: A Critique”, *Critical Inquiry*, 37 (May 2011), pp. 434–472.

5. *Ibidem*, p. 437.

6. Monique SHEER, “Are emotions a kind of practice (and is that what makes them to have a history)? A Bourdieuan approach to understanding emotion”, *History and Theory*, 51, (May 2012), pp. 193-220.

7. Joanna BOURKE, *The Story of Pain. From Prayers to Painkillers*, Oxford, OUP, 2014.

8. SHEER, “Are emotions a kind of practice?”, p. 208.

9. BOURKE, *The Story of Pain*, p. 18.

10. Keith WAILOO, *Pain. A Political History*. Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014.

11. W. M. REDDY, “Humanists and the Experimental Study of Emotion”, in Frank BIESS and Daniel M. GROSS (eds.), *Science and Emotions after 1945*, Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 2014, pp. 41-66; p. 47. See also Martin JAY, “The Debate Over The Performative Contradiction: Habermas Versus the Poststructuralists,” in *Philosophical Interventions in the Unfinished Project of Enlightenment*, ed. Axel HONNETH, Thomas MCCARTHY, Claus OFFE, and Albrecht WELLMER, MIT Press, pp. 261–279.

kind of criticism that Habermas made of Michel Foucault's analysis of the self and his regimen of truth and error; a type of self-referential paradox very common in all those authors whose academic training has granted them the notorious ability to speak *from the point of view of nowhere*. Though widely spread, the most common form of this inconsistency usually appears when the distribution of credit is involved. For many social constructionists, even if all other intellectual merit must be explained by the confluence of social interests, the academic value of their own contributions cannot possibly be assessed that way. On the contrary, their own relationship with the truth-value of their historical or sociological statements seems to be the most remarkable exception to their own golden rule. In this vein, their analytical claims seem to come from an exceptional epistemological place, a Karl Mannheim's *intelligentsia* refuge, which, in a non-defined sense, cannot possibly be socially mediated or constructed.¹² In the case of the history of emotions, performative contradictions usually take the form of an alleged neutral position with regard to the emotions of the past and the politics of the present. In a very recent book, David Carr has shown the relationship between history and experience¹³. Both in the reign of historical representation and in the domain of memory, the issue has always been that they both "begin with a gap between us and the past"¹⁴.

This is not the place to explore the contradictions between linguistic utterances and their truth-contents, or between memories and history. It will suffice to say that it is only from, or through, our contemporary present tensions that we may produce, or uncover, or recover, a story of distant emotional life. Not surprisingly, the proliferation on memory studies, very often triggered by either the obligation to remember or by the right to forget, has come about as a new form of post-Second World War historiographical revolution. The collision between lived experience (*Geschichte*) and the form of that narrative we call history (*Historie*) is felt everywhere in our contemporary world, but it is particularly pressing in the case of the history of emotions, where the use of ego-sources, like diaries, auto-biographies and the like, seems to be a necessary requirement to dig into emotional practices or representations. The connection between past and present, memories and histories, emotions and politics, comes in many different varieties. But my concern here is not with the political emotions studied by the philosopher Martha Nussbaum or with the relationship between emotional practices and political discourse explored by the anthropologists Michelle Z. Rosaldo or Catherine A. Lutz¹⁵. I want to defend a situated history as a precondition to explore the regimes of visibility of emotions and passions. To do so, I will first explore the history of emotional expression and repression in the work of Peter N. Stearns. Secondly, I will attempt to show the need for a politics of emotions and, more in particular, for a politics of pain. To illustrate my point, I will refer to two recent books,



12. Some of the best examples of "performative contradictions" are the, on the other hand, excellent (intellectual) histories of social constructivism. See, for example, Dominique PESTRE, "Pour une histoire sociale et culturelle des sciences, nouvelles définitions, nouveaux objets, nouvelles pratiques", *Annales HSS*, mai-juin, n. 3, (1995), pp. 487-522.

13. David CARR, *Experience and History: Phenomenological Perspectives on the Historical World*, Oxford, 2014

14. *Ibidem*, p. 3

15. Martha C. NUSSBAUM, *Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice*. Cambridge, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013.

the first on the history of cruelty, by Margaret Abbruzzo, and the second on the history of political responsibilities towards sufferers, by Keith Weiloo.

Emotional Expressions and Political Repressions

70 “Choosing to express or repress a feeling, choosing to obey or ignore conventions about feelings, can be an explicit political act”¹⁶. As many anthropologists have already declared, the study of emotions is not so much about private feelings as it is about power relations¹⁷. Johanna Bourke has put it very clearly: “Emotions lead to a negotiation of the boundaries between the self and other or one community and another”¹⁸. As far as I am aware, this political approach within the history of emotions was first proposed by the *emotionology* of Peter N. Stearns and Carol Z. Stearns. Their seminal paper of 1985 came to propose the development of a research programme in the historical changes of “emotional standards”¹⁹. By this expression, they referred to the written or non-written rules that determined the way in which emotions had to be expressed within certain cultural settings. Following the steps of Norbert Elias, *emotionology* attempted to clarify how changes in the rules that regulate emotional expressions could account for other social changes, or conversely, how social changes, such as those related to social and economic diversification, for example, could be held responsible for social conventions of emotional life. According to Stearns, the attempt to produce a social history of emotions suffered from two major historiographical problems. First, it was necessary to clarify to what extent the modern parameters of family life had changed in relation to the pre-modern world. Much of the Stearns’ discussion, including their interest in differentiating between (hidden) experiences and (public) expressions, led to a critical re-evaluation of some of the seminal works on the history of childhood, violence, family or love²⁰. Secondly, it was essential to discern whether social history was anchored in a purely rational explanation of collective action²¹. Thirty years after the connection between emotional standards and political practices were first explicitly made, the role emotions have played in the social shaping of the world can no longer be denied: “While concerned with the most personal of subjects, human feelings, the investigations [of the history of emotions] have demonstrated that emotions have larger social and political implications and can shape public realities”²².

16. Susan J. MATT and Peter N. STEARNS, *Doing Emotions History*, Urbana, Chicago and Springfield, University of Illinois Press, 2014, p. 5.

17. Lila ABU-LUGHOD and Catherine A. LUTZ, “Introduction. Emotion Discourse and the Politics of Everyday Life”, in *Language and the Politics of Emotion*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990.

18. Joanna BOURKE, “Fear and Anxiety: Writing about Emotion in Modern History”, *History Workshop Journal*, 55, 2003, p. 124.

19. Peter STEARNS and Carol Z. STEARNS, “Emotionology: Clarifying the History of Emotions and Emotional Standards”, *American Historical Review*, 90, 4 (1985), pp. 813–836.

20. See for example Peter N. STEARNS, *Childhood in World History*, London and New York, Routledge, 2006.

21. See Ute FREVERT, *Emotions in History: Lost and Found*, Budapest, Central European University Press, 2011, ‘Introduction: The Historical Economy of Emotions’.

22. MATT and STEARNS, *Doing Emotions History*, “Introduction”.

In a recent chapter on modern patterns in emotions history, Peter N. Stearns underlines how scholars have not given a clear answer to the question of emotional change. For one thing, he argues “modernity” is a contested notion. Furthermore, since emotions have biological bases, emotions history entails difficulties regarding the question of stability and change. Finally, in his view, scholarship oscillates between emphasizing continuity and arguing in favour of discontinuity. Perhaps he could have added the new interest in the history of emotional experiences, as something different from the description of social rules and regulations of human passions. The possibility to explore the experiences of the past, and not just the social regimen of their manifestations, adds a renew vantage to the debate.²³ While in 1988, Stearns were willing to recognize “some distinction, though not necessarily a complete distinction, between emotional standards and emotional experiences”²⁴, his new approach leaves plenty of room for inquiries about emotional experiences. It is in this aspect that the work of William M. Reddy, whose work was also inspired by a clear and declared political position, deserves attention in this context.

Reddy’s *The Navigation of Feeling* (2001) was initially intended to explore a middle ground in which emotions could be understood in both a biological and cultural setting, without losing sight of their role in a historiography of historical change²⁵. Following John L. Austin’s speech act theory, Reddy agreed that emotions, and not just their expressions, had an essentially *performative* character. In line with the sociology of René Girard or Erving Goffman on the staging of experiences, Reddy understood that the products and practices of culture not only reflected social experiences: they also *built them*. This discursive performativity, however, had to be counterbalanced so that it could leave space for social change and value judgement. As a type of speech that both describes and changes the world, “emotives” -one of the key terms introduced by Reddy to build a new theoretical framework-, were essential for this re-conception of emotional liberty and, in turn, for the understanding of the cultural variations and explanation of historical change.

Despite this pioneering and highly sophisticated approach, Reddy’s theoretical model for the history of emotions has been subjected to different and severe criticisms. For Jean Plamper, for example, the framework was “logocentric”, in the sense that *emotives*, and emotions for that matter, seem to be restricted to their linguistic dimension. More important for our purposes, Plamper also considers that the relationship between Reddy’s theory and politics was somehow circular, in the sense that he must have chosen only those theories of cognitive psychology that suited his political ideas whereas, at the same time, claiming that the political implications of his emotional framework were just a consequence of the preference for those emotional

23. Peter N. STEARNS, “Modern Patterns in Emotions History”, in MATT and STEARNS, *Doing Emotions History*, chapter 1, pp 17-40. For his previous vision, see for example.

24. See Carol Z. STEARNS and Peter N. STEARNS, *Emotions and Social Change*, London, New York, Holmes & Meier, 1988. “The attempt to handle change accurately involves, finally, an increasing willingness to recognize some distinction, though not necessarily a complete distinction, between emotional standards and emotional experiences”, p. 7.

25. On REDDY, see Jan PLAMPER, *The History of Emotions. An Introduction*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015, chapter IV: “Perspectives in the History of Emotions”, pp. 251-265.



regimes that would produce less emotional suffering²⁶. Despite all these criticisms, there are two elements from Reddy's work that I would like to underline here. Firstly is his awareness of the political dimension to the history of emotions: "researchers on emotions in fields other than anthropology have frequently neglected the political implications of their work"²⁷. Secondly, his understanding that, ultimately, the history of emotions is nothing more than the history of emotional suffering²⁸. It is only his concept of "emotional liberty", defined as the capacity to undergo conversion experiences and changes of emotional goals, what "allows for a political relevant definition of [emotional] suffering"²⁹. In turn, emotional suffering plays an essential role in developing a kind of history that is neither Eurocentric nor progressive. Despite all criticisms, Reddy has attempted to free scholars of the necessity of theorizing culture, power, class, race, gender or ethnicity. "The only questions that need to be asked are, Who suffers? Is the suffering an unavoidable consequence of emotional navigation or does this suffering help to shore up a restrictive emotional regime? That is, is this suffering a tragedy or an injustice?"³⁰

Politics of pain

In the first chapter of her outstanding book on pain and slavery, Margaret Abruzzo claims that causing another to suffer did not, by itself, amount to cruelty: "nor was inflicting bodily pain the defining ingredient in seventeenth-century usage of *cruelty*"³¹. Though she refers in this sentence to the changing Quaker attitudes towards the infliction of physical pain, the same reasoning may apply to many other historical instances in which suffering is simultaneously visible (for the historian) and partially invisible for (at least some of) our historical subjects. Since physical violence may count as either cruelty, judicial justice or well-deserved punishment, pain sometimes remains not just culturally accepted, but also socially and historically hidden. In fact, if bodily pain was not, as Abruzzo argues, the defining ingredient of cruelty, on what grounds will we be allowed to make it visible? How can a history of pain be built on elusive evidences?

Despite the evidential blurriness, Abruzzo's own understanding of the rise of humanitarianism from the seventeenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries seems to be anchored in the relative invisibility of physical pain. Cruelty, she claims, was a key element in the moral philosophy that went along antislavery movements, "but not initially because Anglo-Americans had devoted great energy to the problems of physical pain or the experience of that pain"³²; rather, what was at stake in early antislavery

26. PLAMPER, *The History of Emotions*, pp. 262-263. See also BOURKE: 'Fear and Anxiety', pp. 111-132; and BOURKE, *The Story of Pain*, p. 121. According to BOURKE, to argue that historians can only analyze emotions discursively does not require a denial that emotions have a physiology.

27. William M. REDDY, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2001 p. 112. See also, REDDY, "Against Constructionism: The Historical Ethnography of Emotions", *Current Anthropology*, 38/3 (1997), pp. 327-51.

28. REDDY, *Navigation*, p. 122.

29. *Ibidem*, p. 123.

30. *Ibidem*, p. 130.

31. ABRUZZO, *Polemical Pain*, p. 17.

32. *Ibidem*, p. 52.

movements was the role played by both the perpetrators and the witnesses to it. The link between pain and cruelty was never immediate, in the sense that cruelty was defined in terms of unnecessary painful experiences. To bring these issues to our contemporary debates, it will be enough to argue that, in order to oppose bullfighting, for example, there is no need to assume the sensorial position of the bull. One may condemn the entertainment and celebration of suffering without being concerned about the experience of the animal. According to Abruzzo, that was exactly what provided the bases for early humanitarianism: “Humanitarian concern about cruelty was never a straightforward, simple concern about pain or the experience of victims. It was not pain, but objections to the deliberate and unnecessary *infliction* of pain, that provided the intellectual impulse of humanitarianism”³³. This emphasis on *infliction* comes to suggest that compassion was not “irresistible”, as Norman S. Fiering has suggested³⁴. Neither did the narrative of compassion arise from the myriad detailed narratives of the body in pain, as Thomas Lacqueur claimed³⁵. The humanitarian narrative, far from being naturally connected to the distant pain of others, appeared as a heterogeneous set of moral discourses that were not always inspired by the visibility of pain and the social acknowledgement of physical suffering³⁶. Even the presence and visibility of pain did not necessarily imply any kind of moral commitment or social obligation. On the contrary, the representation of bodily pain, in anti-vivisection or anti-slavery narratives, for example, very often turned the explicit depiction of suffering into an object that appealed to the prurient gaze of the reader. As Mary A. Favret and Karen Halttunen have argued, the pornographic dimension of early humanitarianism, the erotic transport that many viewers seemed to enjoy when facing distant suffering, remains anchored in our historical DNA³⁷.

For many historians, nineteenth-century narratives on the history of anaesthesia, of education or of punitive justice were not truly concerned with pain. In the case of the history of anaesthesia, for example, whereas some authors have emphasized what was achieved with the discovery, others have turned their attention to the efforts made to legitimize the new profession, sometimes even calling into question the significance that physical suffering played in these disputes³⁸. And they may very well be right. Since the priority was not always the alleviation or treatment of pain, it cannot come as a surprise that this suffering become hidden behind disputes related to professionalism or credit. And yet, there remains the question: if pain was invisible, how do we know of



33. *Ibidem*, p. 63. Her *emphasis*.

34. Norman S. FIERING, “Irresistible Compassion: An Aspect of Eighteenth Century Sympathy and Humanitarianism”, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 37 (1976) 2, pp. 195-218.

35. Thomas LAQUEUR, “Bodies, Details and the Humanitarian Narrative”, in Lynn HUNT (ed.), *The New Cultural History*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1989, pp. 176-204.

36. Kathleen KENNEDY, “On Writing the History of the Body in Pain Cultural History”, *Cultural History*, vol. 4, 1 (2015), pp. 87-106.

37. Mary A. FAVRET, “Flogging: The Anti-Slavery Movement Writes Pornography” in Anne JAROWITZ (ed.), *Romanticism and Gender*, Cambridge, D.S. Brewer, 1998. Thomas L. HASKELL, “Capitalism and the Origins of the Humanitarian Sensibility,” *American Historical Review*, 90 (June 1985), pp. 547-566.

38. Alison WINTER, “Ethereal Epidemic: Mesmerism and the Introduction of Inhalation Anaesthesia to Early Victoria London,” in *The Society for the Social History of Science*, (1991), p. 1. See also Stephanie J. SNOW’S, *Operations without Pain, The Practice and Science of Anaesthesia in Victorian Britain*, London, Palgrave MacMillan, 2006.

its existence? How have we, contemporary historians and readers, become aware of subjective emotions that were only indirectly addressed?

These very same questions applied to most recent book written on this problem. *Pain. A Political History*, by Keith Wailoo, is an extraordinary book on the history of liberalism and conservatism around physical suffering. The book traces how the question of other people's pain became a recurring site for political battles. For Wailoo, the reality of pain has never been only a clinical or scientific problem. On the contrary, the understanding of pain, of *real* pain, requires the mobilization of many sources and many different communities. The history of pain involves a political dimension, since what counts as pain depends not just on the testimony of those who complain, but on the negotiations of our standards of trust. Visualizing pain and accepting other's complaints requires a joint effort of agreement between not only medical doctors, but also politicians, pharmaceutical companies, quacks, and different kinds of associations, from veterans' to housewives'. Conversely, however, the public comprehension and understanding of pain also works as a Trojan horse, in the sense that, once it enters the public arena, what counts as pain will also determine or challenge our ideas of compassion and sympathy. This means that the political dimension of pain cannot possibly be avoided. It is not simply a social feature that will have to be added to some other physiological or psychological characteristics. On the contrary, the public dimension of pain implies that pain, *real pain*, and not feigned or exaggerated pain, for example, lies truly embedded within political concerns and social values. In judging chronic pains sufferers, explains Wailoo, doctors confront several political assessments, including the question of converting disability rating into monetary benefits. Since the problem of pain was, to a certain extent, a question of trust, its assessment and treatment was always embedded into the discourse of those who defended the welfare state and those who were convinced of the pathological malingering of many complainers: "culture, not science, defined what pain meant"³⁹.

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In the conclusion of this extraordinary book, Wailoo acknowledges that "the uses of pain have nothing to do with truth, but rather with drama"⁴⁰. From the point of view of its theatricality, pain is experienced and valued under the form of a dramatic structure. This implies that the historical analysis of this unpleasant experience involves the afflicted as well as the observer, including, and this is the key point here, the set of historians and social scientists who, by describing the invisibility of pain and pain experiences, contribute to uncover a new form of social awareness. In this regard, Wailoo, who agrees that pain fraud exists, found that there was no need to add to the scrutiny of sufferers to accuse them of deceitfulness. He reminds us that "pain fraud includes the artful quacks and drug makers through history, promising fast relief while fomenting anguish and dependence"⁴¹. Since the problem of pain and social welfare came to define American political theater, Wailoo remains far from falling into performative contradictions. His book shows a sinuous story in which pain, true pain, emerges through multiple negotiations. The question is not only *whose* pain should matter, but *which* pains should be silently endured, and which may be socially expressed and accepted.

39. WAILOO. *Pain*, p. 83.

40. *Ibidem*, p. 202. The quotation is from J. MOSCOSO, *Pain. A Cultural History*, New York, Palgrave MacMillan, 2012, p. 43.

41. WAILOO, *Pain*, p. 212.

Many of these examples affect a single case that may be somehow representative of wider and deeper tensions. More interestingly, however, are those instances where the invisibility or visibility of pain, its scopic regimen, to use the expression first coined by film theorist Christian Metz and later employed by philosopher Martin Jay, affects whole populations or human groups, for in these instances, emotional invisibility is also very often justified by the historical treatment. *The politics of pain*, as a complement to the study of its theatricality or the rhetoric tools employed to generate conviction, is not just another example of historical scrutiny: the scopic regimen of pain and its history affects the very nature of historical writing.

Conclusions

It is only through the experience of the vanquished, wrote the German philosopher Reinhart Koselleck in a very beautiful and thought-provoking essay about the transformation of history and historicity, that we may turn experiences into knowledge, that we can be willing to accept cultural and historical change⁴². Though these ideas have plenty of examples, pain studies, as they were understood in the 1990's, were just a very good indication of this tendency. Despite their multiple variations, the seminal works of David B. Morris or Rosalyne Rey came to recover and sometimes uncover the experience of the vanquished, of the losers of clinical medicine⁴³. Their approach attempted to take patients' words at face value, while paying attention to their expressions, their ailments and their miseries. What those historians and literary critics were doing almost thirty years ago was the side-effect of what military surgeons, anaesthesiologists and neurologists claimed to be doing in the 1960's: extending the humanitarian gaze. These historians were not just calling into question the bio-mechanical model of pain, but also a mechanical understanding of history. David B. Morris' distinction, for example, between "modern" and "post-modern" pain came to suggest that the two turning points in the history of pain treatment had been related to two different forms of experience that requested different historical narratives⁴⁴. If the discovery of chemical anaesthesia in the mid-nineteenth century was strongly related to the understanding of the modern, acute, peripheral, bio-mechanical conception of pain, the appearance of pain as an object of medical practice, of the pharmaceutical industry, and of the cultural market in the mid twentieth-century was related to the chronic, central, and bio-cultural notion of post-modern pain. In both episodes, however, there was a clear correlation between pain and history, between pain and trauma.

As a job for "eminent amateurs", as Febvre put it, the history of pain, as any other history of experience, demands a "situated historiography", able to discriminate between repressed emotions and false expressions. By "situated historiography", I refer

42. Reinhart KOSELLECK, "Transformation of Experience and Methodological Change. A Historical-Antropological Essay", in *The Practice of Conceptual History*, English Translation, California, Stanford University Press, 2002, pp. 45-83.

43. Rosalyne REY, *Histoire de la douleur*, Paris, Éditions La Découverte, 1993 ; David B. MORRIS, *The Culture of Pain*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1991; David LE BRETON, *Anthropologie de la douleur*, Paris, Métailié, 1995.

44. David B. MORRIS, *Illness and Culture in the Postmodern Age*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, University of California Press, 1998, especially chap. 4: "Reinventing Pain."

here to the same kind of standpoint epistemology of situated knowledge advocated by Helen Longino and other feminist theorists⁴⁵. In a very influential review essay, the historian Sarah Maza considered in 1996 two big theoretical influences in cultural history: the anthropology of Clifford Geertz and Victor Turner, and the feminist approach⁴⁶. As long as the history of pain refers to the history of experiences, and not just to the history of emotional standards, the anthropology of experience seems an unavoidable step. But the same applies to the defence of a historical consciousness that may narrow the gap between the past and the present.

What Sarah Ahmed has named “the contingency of pain” was based on what she thought was the impossibility to explore in detail the subjective experience of the pain of others⁴⁷. We cannot possibly agree. If our historical account does not want to fall into performative contradictions, “sentimental history” must be able to explore and uncover the invisible emotions of the vanquished; the solitary suffering of those whose pain has been forgotten. We know very well that lower back pain is almost a consummate post-modern malady, but we also know that it is a very rare condition in developing countries. This pain, the most frequent cause of limited activity in the West in persons under 45, is however ignored, or unreported, in the rest of the world. We are very much aware that the majority of people who have spent their lives gripped by pain find no place in the history of medicine. To mention just another example: the distinction between acute pain and chronic pain, which served as a basis for the historical explanation for the emergence of pain medicine, or as David B. Morris called it “post-modern pain,” is not a prerogative of the twentieth century, nor does it in itself explain the development of palliative medicine⁴⁸. The limited use of the expression “chronic pain” does not allow us to understand the systematic concealment of groups of people whose living conditions we would today consider terrible. The reasons for which, until recently, histories of pain had left aside the evolving and always complex social attitudes regarding children’s pain, or the reasons why visceral and, more specifically, cancer pain was usually ignored in our twenty-first century historical narratives, are only two indications of the way in which we have built our history upon the foundations of enlightened humanitarian politics. Though phantom limb pain is a much more infrequent condition than cancer pain, we still prefer to address the pain of those who will not be soon forgotten or whose testimonies and maybe even their lives, will not be soon spared.

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45. Helen LONGINO, “Subjects, Power, and Knowledge: Description and Prescription in Feminist Philosophies of Science”, in L. ALCOFF and E. POTTER (eds.), *Feminist Epistemologies*, New York, Routledge, 1993, pp. 101-120.

46. Sarah MAZA, “Stories in History: Cultural Narratives in Recent Works in European History”, *American Historical Review*, 101 (1996), pp. 1,493-1,515.

47. Sara AHMED, “The Contingency of Pain,” *Parallax* 8:1 (2008), p.: 22. Published also in her *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, New York and London, [2004], Routledge, 2015, cap. 2, pp. 20-41.

48. David B. MORRIS, *Illness and Culture in the Postmodern Age*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, University of California Press, 1998, especially chap. 4: “Reinventing Pain.”