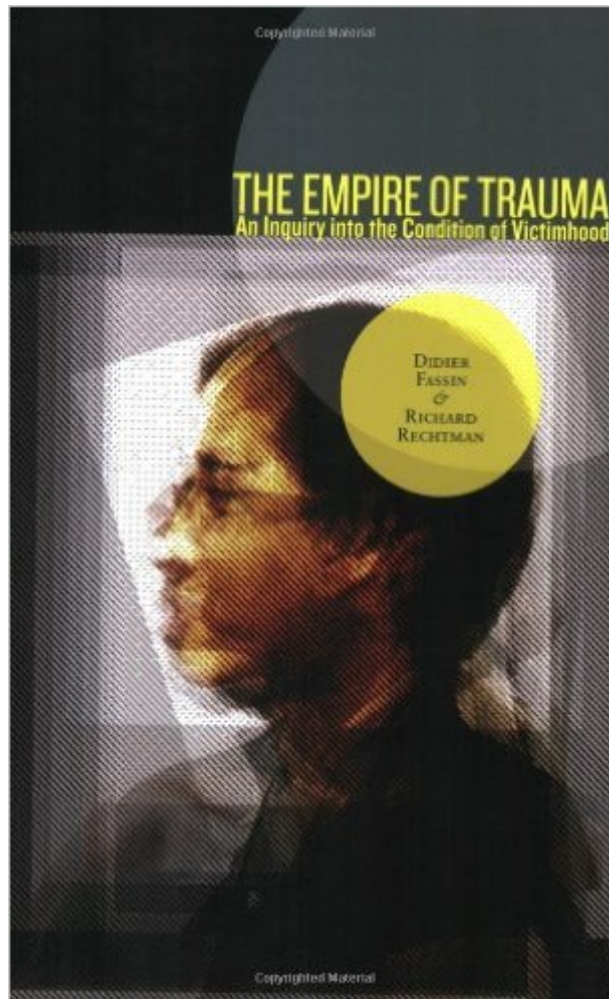


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The Empire Of Trauma: An Inquiry Into The Condition Of Victimhood



Synopsis

Today we are accustomed to psychiatrists being summoned to scenes of terrorist attacks, natural disasters, war, and other tragic events to care for the psychic trauma of victims--yet it has not always been so. The very idea of psychic trauma came into being only at the end of the nineteenth century and for a long time was treated with suspicion. The Empire of Trauma tells the story of how the traumatic victim became culturally and politically respectable, and how trauma itself became an unassailable moral category. Basing their analysis on a wide-ranging ethnography, Didier Fassin and Richard Rechtman examine the politics of reparation, testimony, and proof made possible by the recognition of trauma. They study the application of psychiatric victimology to victims of the 1995 terrorist bombings in Paris and the 2001 industrial disaster in Toulouse; the involvement of humanitarian psychiatry with both Palestinians and Israelis during the second Intifada; and the application of the psychotraumatology of exile to asylum seekers victimized by persecution and torture. Revealing how trauma has come to authenticate the suffering of victims, The Empire of Trauma provides critical perspective on some of the moral and political issues at stake in the contemporary world.

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Customer Reviews

When I studied anthropology at the University of Chicago, there was a lot of distrust among the faculty for the work of Michel Foucault. Jean Comaroff, for one, recommended that I read a certain work because it was an "English reading of Foucault." I had to tell her that an English reading of

Foucault did not, in fact, exist. Why? At that time, a good English translation of Foucault or, in fact, even a good translation of a French scholar who worked in a Foucaultian vein, did not exist. Thus, there was no "English reading of Foucault" to be had. Now there is. Now there is *The Empire of Trauma*. I hope that Jean will take note. At the University of Chicago, even the great historical anthropologist Marshall Sahlins, who historicized Levi-Strauss, had contempt for Foucault. See, for example, Sahlins' "Waiting for Foucault," the title being a take off on Samuel Becket's "Waiting for Godot." Why was Sahlins contemptuous of Foucault? Perhaps because Sahlins, despite his disavowal of historical materialist methodology--see, for example, his reading of Mintz in "The Sadness of Sweetness"--still employs methods that can be likened to dialectics. After all, like Levi-Strauss, Sahlins is a fan of dualisms. Foucault said of Marxism/dialectics that it/they can only breathe in the nineteenth century. Elsewhere, it/they is/are a fish out of water. We need to read Sahlins and his conceptual arsenal in this light. This book, *The Empire of Trauma*, is a good start. What of work in the social sciences in the United States that did not/does not have contempt for Foucault? There is a whole industry of work on "governmentality" based on Foucault's later lectures at the College de France in the United States.

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