



Introduction

Silence after violence and the imperative to ‘speak out’

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During the 1980s, a new dilemma emerged in various democratising nations, mostly in the global south: how should a repressive and violent past be dealt with in the context and as a constitutive part of democratisation? (Borneman 1997). The problem of the uses and abuses of the past in struggles over the public sphere has, of course, been around for centuries. The question arises: what was distinctly ‘new’ in this dilemma?

As this special issue aims to show, historicising the ways in which societies have been grappling with legacies of systematic injustice and mass violence can provide a critical perspective on current certainties regarding how societies are to deal with a violent past. Since the 1980s, these attempts of a transition to ‘normal’ democracy have, to an ever-increasing extent, been informed by a logic of therapy that takes its cue from psychological understandings of trauma. This above all has rendered silence about past atrocities illegitimate, suspicious and, potentially, pathological.

In a lay version of Freud’s triad of remembering – repeating – working through, individuals are encouraged to speak out about what happened, so that society as a whole (significantly being more than the mere sum of its individual members) can come to terms with what happened. George Santayana’s famous dictum that “those who fail to remember the past are condemned to repeat it” has, as Rieff (2011: 47) puts it, “become part of the conventional wisdom of our age”. At the same time, forgetting and, by extension, silence about past

atrocities, are nowadays considered detrimental to individuals' and societies' futures and taken as an indicator of repression, coercion and pathology.

Today, we are almost unaware of how recent a historical phenomenon this imperative to 'speak about it' is. For example, the second article of the Treaty of Westphalia that ended the Thirty Years' War in 1648 and founded the modern international system, includes the formula *perpetua oblivia et amnestia*: "Everything that happened ought to be forgotten and amnestied" (Weinrich 2004: 172). This was, in its time, a dramatic departure from the pre-existing restorative logic, according to which the tranquil and just state was in the past and was hence to be – at least allegedly – restored. The Treaty of Westphalia expressed the budding, new modern logic of starting afresh – of projecting the tranquil and just order of things into a future to be realised.

It is noteworthy that one would be hard-pressed to find an obligation to forget in any document of a similar nature in the present. Renan's (1990) seminal essay *What is a nation* (1882) stresses the virtues not only of shared memory but also, more importantly, of shared forgetting for the construction of national unity: "Forgetting, I would even go so far as to say historical error, is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation, which is why progress in historical studies often constitutes a danger for [the principle of] nationality." (Bhabha 1990: 11). The "imagined community" (Anderson 1991) of the nation state is dependant not only on the myth of a shared past, but also on shared acts of forgetting.

Yet these acts of forgetting are in themselves divided into what may be termed forgotten acts of forgetting – all that we no longer remember we once remembered – such as the fact that most of the French peasants were coerced into renouncing their regional identity in favour of a homogenised national French one (Weber 1976) – and remembered acts of forgetting – all that we remember to have chosen to forget, such as the genocidal pacification of the Vendée after the French revolution (Secher 2003).

In other words, the simple break of 1648 from a medieval, backward-looking, restorative logic to a modern, forward-looking, corrective logic, has gradually since the nineteenth century proliferated and internally diversified into a far more complex and ambivalent approach to the past in the aftermath of mass violence and in the context of establishing a just polity. Forgetting has become internally differentiated, as the act of forgetting itself became hesitant, tentative and an object of disputed commemoration in itself. While a careful and detailed history of this development is still very much needed, by way of introduction to this special issue, our survey focuses on what is only the very last chapter of this story, namely the decades since the Second World War.

That letting bygones be bygones can be a worthwhile strategy for dealing with a violent past is a notion to be found well into the twentieth century. In

1946, just one year after the end of the Second World War, Winston Churchill (1948: 200) stated in a speech he gave in Zurich:

We must all turn our backs upon the horrors of the past. We must look to the future. [...] If Europe is to be saved from infinite misery, and indeed from final doom, there must be an act of faith in the European family and an act of oblivion against all the crimes and follies of the past.

Clearly, the understanding of how to deal with a violent past has changed considerably in the decades that followed Churchill's speech. From a present-day perspective, the notion that the Second World War and the events that, since the 1960s, came to be known as the Holocaust ought to be forgotten for the sake of a peaceful future seems abhorrent, not only lacking in good taste, but also in moral fibre and, above all, politically dangerous. An unprecedented kind of preoccupation with memory and a ritualised approach to bearing witness hesitantly started to emerge in the 1960s, only truly gaining prominence in the 1980s.

It has ever since informed considerations on how to deal with legacies of gross human rights violations, erasing in its ascent prior approaches. Risking oversimplification, we may suggest that a rather simple opposition between a restorative privileging of the past and a corrective eagerness to let bygones be bygones has, by the second half of the twentieth century, been completely transformed into the desire to heal the wounds that stem from an unbearable past by means of a specific – disinfecting – technique of never forgetting or a perpetual ritualistic remembrance.

In the following, we sketch how the Holocaust became a paradigmatic case and which elements of the discourse on how to come to terms with it, continue to serve as a template for dealing with violent pasts. In particular, we argue, this is the case with the therapeutic paradigm that views speaking out and working through as essential steps in order to cultivate a healthy democratic culture. The show trials (in the wider, non-derogatory sense of the term) model of the 1940s-1960s has matured into, rather than replaced the testimonial transitory justice model.

The question of reckoning with past oppression and violence was already part of the first wave of democratisation, to use Huntington's (1991) famous schema of the first (late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries), second (1945), and third (since the 1970s) waves of democratisation. However, the Nuremberg and Tokyo war crimes tribunals in the aftermath of the Second World War, in the context of the second wave of democratisation, are usually suggested as the

first example informing transitional justice (Neier 1999, Teitel 2003). The various ways in which life under the previous regime was condemned as mutilating and in a sense criminal or what we would now term traumatising, and as such in need of some kind of redress and 'coming to term with', is currently still a relatively unexplored prehistory of transitional justice.

As Bloxham (2002) argued, the Nuremberg trials should be understood first as a means for establishing and canonising a coherent narrative about the war. Given the unprecedented prices paid for the victory over the Axis, a systematic and undebatable answer to the question "Why did we fight?" had to be provided. The fact that an international tribunal was deemed the best medium for doing so indicates the influence of international law enthusiasts in the US, but was also appropriate, given Nazi ideological opposition to the very principle of international law and universalism (Koskeniemi 2001).

Framing the past as criminal and putting on trial several key figures accountable for its perpetration, not only with regard to Nazi Germany in Nuremberg, but also with regard to Japan in Tokyo, indicates the emergence of the inescapable necessity of somehow dealing with the violent and oppressive past. At the time, many questioned that necessity. Churchill and Stalin preferred summarily executing the former heads of the Nazi regime, while the uprooted and displaced multitudes, many of which still engulfed in an ongoing process of expulsion and resettlement, preferred to rebuild the life shattered. Inhabiting a world paved with remnants of the war, this often required silence about the war. Dealing with the past was understood by most as ensuring that the past will remain in the past, blocked from contaminating the present. To the extent that this silence was indeed blocking the haunting spectres, it was thick and robust.

Locally, however, violent – sometimes horrendously violent – accounts-settling took place. The ensuing chaotic reconstruction in the years after the war generated a temporary space of relative micro-scale impunity, also benefitting from people understandingly looking the other way. Such vigilante 'dealing with the past', while not being in themselves silent about the past, was nevertheless something people preferred to keep silent about.

In the first decades after the Second World War, the Holocaust was understood to be simply one of the many horrors caused by Nazism and war (Alexander 2012: 31-4). While remembering the heroes who had died fighting for their country was a national duty and families would remember their dead, the notion that the destruction of European Jewry constituted a unique and unprecedented radical evil did not yet exist. Only after the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem in 1961 and the Frankfurt Auschwitz trials in 1963, did the international public become more aware of the enormity of the genocide. It took another two

to three decades for a Holocaust memory culture – or, in the term of its most uncharitable critic 'Holocaust industry' (Finkelstein 2001) – with museums, memorials and educational programmes to evolve.

The trial of Adolf Eichmann in Israel in 1961, while in keeping with the legalistic form, departed from the Nuremberg model by replacing the dispassionate temperament of the proceeding with an emotionally flooded, literally pathetic (i.e., intentionally saturated with pathos) giving of testimony (Arendt 2010, Yablunka 2004, Lipstadt 2011). The decision to put on the stand more than a hundred witnesses, carefully chosen to voice different aspects of the genocide, was mostly guided by the will to educate the public about the Holocaust. The trial was said to break the pre-existing silence, allegedly imposed on the survivors by the general population, who in their ignorance regarded their survival as dirty and their stories as better left untold. The testimonies were hence framed as transformative, enlightening the public both with regard to what had happened and the obligation to solicit further testimonies.

The Eichmann trial was, in this regard, an important mediating development concerning mechanisms for a collective dealing with a troubling past. By overburdening the trial with excessive testimonies, the Eichmann trial pushed the act of giving testimony beyond its legal function, which limits testimonies to the minimum required so as to ascertain certainty about the past. Since the Eichmann trial, each further testimony given by a Holocaust survivor only increased the demand to hear more, to solicit and archive more testimonies, indeed all possible testimonies. This culminated with the University of Southern California Shoah Foundation Archive, founded by Steven Spielberg's initiative to establish a fully, minute-by-minute, indexed audiovisual archive of Holocaust testimonies. Consisting of 52.000 Holocaust testimonies, the archive has recently started filming and archiving testimonies from the Rwandan Genocide, the massacre of Nanjing and the Armenian Genocide. Efforts are also made to integrate into the archive testimonies of human rights abuses perpetrated in the context of the South African apartheid regime.

The undebatable merits of this commendable enterprise should not, however, hinder a symptomatic reading thereof. Though academic and research-oriented, the archive showcases the current privileging of the personal oral testimony over the documentary evidence. Though these testimonies were given several decades after the event, by people greatly influenced by the narratives and conventions disseminated in the context of the commemoration of the Holocaust, they are nevertheless seen as an indispensable bulwark against Holocaust denialism. Holocaust museums and educational modules increasingly use the potency of these testimonies as a means for emotional identification

rather than intellectual sense-making. This is noteworthy, given that the Holocaust, as all examples of widespread systematic mass violence, could not be experienced as such by the individual victim, but only from the impersonal bird's eye or systemic perspective. The strong experiential sense of incomparable authenticity and insight into the Holocaust is, in this regard, thoroughly false.

In contrast to the "explosion of testimony" (Wieviorka 2006: 140) we have seen since the 1990s, speaking about what happened was not encouraged in the first decades after the war. This applied to all national contexts with some involvement in the Holocaust. The "communicative silence" (Lübbe 1983) within Germany found its complement in a coalition of silence among the victorious allies (Laqueur 1980), while in the immediate post-war years there was a "great silence" (Segev 1993: 11) concerning the destruction of European Jewry in Israel. As Wieviorka (2006: 126) points out in her periodisation of Holocaust testimonial internationally, "[t]estimony given spontaneously, and testimony solicited by the needs of justice, have given way to the social imperative of memory". The latter is, as we will see below, largely due to a changed status of what the Holocaust means, but also driven by an acute awareness that the last first-hand witnesses will perish soon.

Even though the framing of the Holocaust as the defining catastrophe of the twentieth century was the result of a very specific political constellation in the US and Israel (Novick 1999: 146-9), two strands of reasoning have emerged in its aftermath that motivate not only the global culture of Holocaust remembrance, but also the contemporary universal imperative to remember past atrocities. These are twofold and underpinned by ethical, therapeutic and pedagogical considerations.

On the one hand, the Nazis made an effort to keep their programme of extermination a secret. Threats that no one would believe what happened in the death camps and that, along with the victims, the memory of their fate would be obliterated, are well-documented. The awareness that a genocide unremembered is as if it had never happened and will leave its perpetrators unscathed comes to the fore, for instance, in Hitler's Obersalzberg speech in August 1939, in which he announced the forthcoming annihilation of the Poles in order to create *Lebensraum* for the German people: "Who, after all, speaks today of the annihilation of the Armenians?"¹ Remembering is thus seen as an act of granting retroactive justice to the dead that denies the perpetrators the second victory of having their victims being committed to oblivion. At the same time,

1 This quote is contested, however, with some historians such as Browning (2004), for instance, claiming that the so-called L3 document of the speech was distorted and then leaked to Britain to gain support for Poland.

it ties in with an imperative to remember that is rooted in Jewish eschatology (Yerushalmi 1982: 5-9).

In this vein, at the 1987 trial against Klaus Barbie, a prominent Nazi collaborator in France, Eli Wiesel (1987: 187) stated: "Justice without memory is incomplete justice, false and unjust. To forget would be an absolute injustice in the same way that Auschwitz was the absolute crime. To forget would be the enemy's final triumph". It is no coincidence that Wiesel originally dis-embedded the Holocaust from history by declaring it incomparable, unprecedented and unique in the 1960s. His at first glance perplexing (even when taken as hyperbolic) suggestion that forgetting Auschwitz is as absolute an evil as Auschwitz itself makes more sense when understood as part of what is a theologisation of the Holocaust as a negative revelation.

While remembrance, conceived as retroactive justice that honours the dead and provides the survivors with a sense of recognition, largely concerns the past, there is a second strand of reasoning underpinning commemorative efforts that is clearly future oriented. It is aimed at future generations and seeks to prevent future violence. Under the auspices of 'Holocaust education', the annihilation of European Jewry has, since the 1990s, been turned from a historical event into a cautionary tale about the slippery slope from bigotry to genocide. This double character of Holocaust commemoration – morality tale about the past with future orientation – comes to the fore in the Stockholm Declaration (2000) that led to 27 January (the date of the liberation of Auschwitz) becoming Holocaust Remembrance Day in several countries.

This was the result of the work of a Swedish-led task force, including representatives of 16 mostly European nations, that sought to preserve the memory of the Holocaust into the twenty-first century and to carry the memory beyond the European borders by fostering a network of institutions.

The Holocaust (Shoah) fundamentally challenged the foundations of civilization. The unprecedented character of the Holocaust will always hold universal meaning. [...] With humanity still scarred by genocide, ethnic cleansing, racism, anti-Semitism and xenophobia, the international community shares a solemn responsibility to fight those evils. Together we must uphold the terrible truth of the Holocaust against those who deny it. We must strengthen the moral commitment of our peoples, and the political commitment of our governments, to ensure that future generations can understand the causes of the Holocaust and reflect upon its consequences (Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust 2000).

But how did the set of events that has come to be known under the name 'Holocaust' become a universal point of reference, the normative moral touchstone in the discourse on human rights violations and genocide? Different approaches to this question can agree upon the fact that this process began in the US. Sznajder traces the universalisation of the Holocaust back to its particularistic roots in the 1960s, when the rise of identity politics "shifted the focus of political rhetoric from universal concerns to the particularistic claims of groups and subcultures" (Sznajder 2003: 179). It brought about a change in perceptions of victimhood, "its transformation from something to be ashamed of to a sign of grace and moral righteousness" (Sznajder 2003: 179). In this context, American Jewish establishment successfully asserted "that it represented an ethnic group that had a special moral claim based on having suffered the ultimate victimization" (Sznajder 2003: 180). According to Sznajder, this led, in turn, to an identification on the part of non-Jewish Americans and made the US the centre of a particular culture of remembrance that spread globally as mediated memories, such as Anne Frank's Diary, the TV-series Holocaust or Steven Spielberg's feature film Schindler's List.

Linking globalisation and the increasing cultural permeability of the borders of the nation state in "second modernity", Sznajder and Daniel Levy argue elsewhere, that "memories of the Holocaust shape the articulation of a new rights culture", because they transcend the boundaries of the container of the nation state in which collective memories used to be embedded (Levy and Sznajder 2004: 155). They maintain that the Nuremberg trials, with their construction of 'crimes against humanity', had implied a transnational universalism that had been superseded by the effects of the Cold War (Levy and Sznajder 2004: 147-9). Only in the 1990s, when Holocaust memories were mapped onto the Balkan wars, a re-awakened universal set of values underpinned the international reaction against ethnic cleansing and human rights violations.

Yet the supposedly global memory of the Holocaust is mainly of relevance in Western Europe and North America which makes Levy's and Sznajder's diagnosis Euro-centric to the extreme. Beyond the centres of the global north, the memories of colonialism or, in the case of Eastern Europe, communism compete with the Holocaust as historical events that provide a moral yardstick or serve as markers of identity. Recently, more attention has been paid to the multi-directionality of collective memory. As Micheal Rothberg (2009) shows, memory is no finite resource. This is why memories of the Holocaust and of colonialism need not be pitched against each other, but rather mutually enhance each other as interpretive paradigms in the works of theorists such as W E B du Bois or Hannah Arendt.

Jeffrey Alexander, who argues within a framework of social constructivism, takes a different perspective on the universalisation of the Holocaust. He (2012: 169) maintains that in order for the Holocaust to become a “traumatic event for all humankind”, it had to be turned into the radical evil it is now perceived as. A number of social processes contributed to this development: The decades after the Second World War were dominated by a mainly progressive narrative, in which the Holocaust was seen as just one particular figuration of the wider evil that was Nazism. Consequently, the military victory over Nazism was considered the dawn of a new democratic age without bigotry. Since the 1970s, the Western Allies, in particular the US, lost their moral status when news of their own grave human rights violations as well as stories of collaboration emerged. As Alexander (2012: 36) puts it, the Western allies “lost the control of the symbolic means of production”. As a result, the progressive narrative was gradually replaced with a tragic one, in which the Holocaust became the centre of the Second World War and gained the character of a “sacred-evil [...] inexplicable in ordinary rational terms”, thus gaining an archetypal, universal quality (Alexander 2012: 56).

This tragic narrative that conceived of the Holocaust as a “break of civilization” (Diner 1988) found its complement in a theoretical rupture in the humanities. It fostered scepticism towards narratives of human perfectibility in the tradition of the Enlightenment and resulted in epistemological scepticism. The evolution of trauma studies since the 1990s can, to some extent, be understood as a response to this, because it appears to provide a king’s way “beyond the crises in knowledge posed by post-structuralism and deconstruction” (Radstone 2001: 68). Trauma, as understood by theorists like Caruth (1996), who draw on neurobiological concepts as a reality imprint onto the brain, is supposed to provide insight into the literality of a traumatic event that is, like the Holocaust, supposedly beyond representation.

Yet the notion of a cultural trauma that, according to Alexander, the Holocaust has come to be understood as, already presupposes another development that allowed the individual clinical category of trauma to be applied to collectives of people. This brings us to the aforementioned rise of new social movements and identity politics, in the course of which the notion of speaking out came to be valued not only as testimony, but also for its therapeutic merit.

While scholars such as Peter Novick or Levy and Sznajder stress the institutional side of Holocaust consciousness in America – the foundations, museums and educational programmes that were largely fostered by elites – the mass distribution of survivor stories by the ‘second generation’ (i.e., the children of survivors of the Holocaust) is rooted in the counter-culture of the 1960s and 1970s where psychological categories were mobilised for political

purposes. The feminist movement against rape and sexual abuse, for instance, encouraged individuals to 'break the silence' in order to not only give visibility to a widespread social phenomenon, but also re-gain agency and be transformed from victims into survivors (Stein 2011: 190).

A similar movement of Vietnam veterans fought for the recognition of their suffering, which resulted in post-traumatic stress disorder entering the diagnostic manuals in 1980 (Illouz 2008: 169-72). Children of Holocaust survivors, often psychologists themselves, took the cue from these movements. They stressed to what extent their parents' experiences had been subject to a taboo within the families, so that speaking out about the Holocaust became a political act as well as an important marker of identity as 'second generation' (Stein 2014). In this regard, they fall into the domain of a politics of identity that demands recognition of difference by virtue of past, oftentimes even vicarious, suffering and codifies its demands within the language of psychology (Illouz 2008: 185). If the notion of generational past-Holocaust cohorts with distinct identities emerged in the context of the identity politics of the 1960s and 1970s, other groups nowadays, against the background of a fully developed Holocaust memory culture, draw on the historical analogy of the Holocaust in order to voice their own grievances. As Assmann (2010: 111) remarks, the Holocaust

is increasingly evoked as a model to articulate, analyse and legitimate other traumatic memories around the globe. The reference to the Holocaust need not necessarily be invoked in a spirit of competitive victimhood, but rather with the aim to establish a claim for moral authority, recognition and restitution for historical traumas that have as yet received no or little attention.

This preoccupation with memory as a currency in the field of quasi-therapeutic claims-making has been discussed in the context of a demise of future-oriented political projects. In the course of this "retreat from transformative politics [in the] age of failing expectations", future-oriented values have come to be replaced by ethnic memories of past suffering and claims for recognition based thereon (Maier 1993: 145, 150). Similarly, Rieff makes a case against memory, drawing on his experience as a journalist in the Balkan Wars. He (Rieff 2011: 47) names "the conviction that memory is a species of morality [one of the] unassailable pieties of the age", arguing instead that, in the aftermath of conflict, remembrance is an obstacle to, rather than a bringer of peace, because the workings of collective memory differ from those of individual memory (Rieff 2011: 31). In contrast to history, he argues, memory is always about past hurt and narcissist injuries. Ultimately, lasting collective memories will always be those of hurt and violation, because "remembrance is always about self-love, and self-recognition, or it is about nothing [which is

why] in its paradigmatic form [it] is permanently adolescent, and proceeds as if gravitationally drawn to suffering, conflict and sacrifice”, hence providing the worst conceivable basis for lasting peace (Rieff 2011: 97, 101).

We can arrive at a similar conclusion by means of a political-historical argument. The third wave of democratisation, since the mid-1970s, has had several features influencing the task of dealing with a troubled past. In many cases, the transition to democracy was achieved by means of promising varying degrees of amnesty to at least some of those responsible for the violence and oppression. Negotiating a relatively peaceful and prompt transition to democracy – as opposed to a protracted and bloody civil war – in exchange for amnesty was surely prudent (Villa-Vicencio 2009). It did, however, require the development of a certain mechanism that would, at least to some extent, satisfy the popular demand for justice. Some actors from the radical left, whether in Latin America or in South Africa, enraged by their marginalisation in the process of negotiating the terms of the regime change, condemned the amnesty agreements. They saw the amnesty as indicative of the true nature of the regime change: a mutually beneficial pact between elites, rather than a genuine democratic revolution. The frustrated rage of the masses was, in this regard, a political resource for radical critics of the transition to liberal democracy and as such had to be somehow defused.

Next to the frustrated internal popular rage, as of the mid-1970s in the context of the human rights revolution (Moyn 2010), abusive dictatorial regimes were systematically delegitimised and condemned for violating international human rights law. The third wave of democratisation followed a decade of unprecedented global civil society attention and mobilisation against the internationally criminal human rights abuses perpetrated by various dictatorial regimes throughout the world.

This international awareness of the wrongdoing perpetrated around the world, both symptomised and further produced by the NGOs such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, encouraged oppressed and abused populations to express their grievances in terms of human rights abuses and international criminality. This said, it would be wrong to oversimplify the effect of the international human rights movement on the way oppressed and victimised populations in various countries came to express and experience the wrongs done to them. The adoption of the terminology does not indicate an actual integration of the entire conceptual framework of international human rights law. Local meanings and frameworks were never replaced, but merely covered by human rights language. Gaps and profound differences were, in this regard, concealed beneath the easy-and-attractive-to-adopt rhetoric.

It was in this context that Latin American states, struggling to transition from dictatorial military regimes such as Argentina, Bolivia, El Salvador and Uruguay, experimented with truth commissions (Hayner 2002, Kritz 1995, O'Donnell & Schmitter 1986). The first truth commission in 1983 in Argentina – National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons (Comision Nacional sobre la Desaparicion de Personas [CONADEP]) – was created in order to investigate the forced disappearances perpetrated by the military regime between 1976 and 1983, as well as other human rights abuses (Robben 2010). The Argentinian commission and all truth commissions after it, though varying in many important ways in terms of objectives and procedure, placed the excavation of the truth about human rights abuses as the cardinal goal.

It is remarkable that, since the 1980s, the unimposing right to merely know the truth about what happened to those who disappeared emerged as the minimal substitute to the mostly unattainable justice. While the crimes perpetrated by the dictatorship could not be undone and all too often could not be prosecuted, the silence surrounding those crimes could at least be broken. Truth commissions produce reports, sometimes also staging public hearings. Their effect consists of proving the new regime not to be an accomplice in the former regime's conspiracy of silence. Exposing the crimes of the former regime to the sanitising sunlight is meant to bring closure as well as to socialise the newly democratised society to human rights discourse.

In a way similar to the testimonies in the Eichmann trial, truth commissions are meant to educate the public, flooding the public space with the truth about what happened, even when no real doubt still exists. The minute details of the crimes, often spilling over into what, in other circumstances, would be denounced as pornographic, as well as uninhibited displays of emotion, entrench a narrative about what has happened, in which the horrific quality is constituted as the first and foremost fact about the past (schematically: "What happened? – It was something horrible").

The truth commissions aim to end a prevailing controversy over what has happened. Society is depicted as threatened by this controversy, which arguably prevents the fault lines inherited from the former regime (between its supporters largely defined and its victims largely defined) from closing. The bridging of those fault lines already begins by the very suggestion that the cleavage results from ignorance that, once the truth is made public – the divisive silence is broken, the original unity of the nation would be restored.

It is important to see the similarity with the Eichmann trial. At first glance, the almost complete separation of the perpetrators and the surviving victims in the aftermath of the Holocaust – the Germans in the two post-war Germanys and the

Jews either in America or in Israel – appears to radically differ from the situation in Latin America in the 1980s. Truth commissions were meant to enable the healing of radically divided societies, exactly the opposite of the situation in Israel in the early 1960s. However, once we dig deeper, we see that ignorance and silence divided the Jewish Israeli society in the early 1960s – Holocaust survivors were excluded from the Zionist nation as survivors. Their inclusion into the Zionist nation was conditioned upon remaining silent with regard to the war. The testimonies in the Eichmann trial demarcate a threshold within Israeli society as they made it possible to embrace the survivors into the Zionist nation as survivors, gradually transforming the Holocaust into the nation's constitutive trauma.

In the same way, truth commissions aim at enlightening the public and enable it to understand all that was previously – allegedly – unknown. To be sure, encouraging the part of the population that supported the former regime to excuse its past loyalties by pretending to have been ignorant, is rather prudent. They are, in this regard, also encouraged to silence any claims that might suggest that they were not exactly ignorant.

It might be suggested that the overflowing nature of the truth testified in the context of truth commissions, the framing of the traumatic past as a saturated phenomenon, as Catholic philosopher Jean-Luc Marion called it – something that is experienced as given in excess (Marion 2001), camouflages all that is omitted and silenced. In this regard, there is a feverish quality to the way in which truth commissions over-pack the public space with testimonies in which the unspeakable nature of the experience is repeatedly confessed.

This may also explain, at least to some extent, Wiesel's aforementioned theologisation of the Holocaust. Feverish appears to indeed be the proper adjective for the reactions of those who genuinely (as opposed to cynically and strategically) experience any comparative narration of the Holocaust (such as Bloxham 2009) as blasphemous (for example, Yakira 2009). In other words, the imperative to break the silence and stabilise a perpetual giving of testimony is not only delegitimising the option to simply remain silent about the past, but is at the same time also silencing heterodox narrations and perspectives. And indeed, a productive ongoing and open public discussion about all that has happened will inevitably desecrate any memory of the past.²

It is the clash of iconoclastic and sanctifying currents that hinders any real hope for an open rational public discussion, held in the spirit of liberal civility. However, uncritically invoking medicalising notions such as trauma in order not only to explain manifestations of rage in such public discussions of the past,

2 Dlamini (2014) seems to forcefully exemplify this in the South African context.

but in fact also delegitimising, depoliticising and suffocating rage does not bring about the aspired liberal civility. If a proper political space, in which a genuine meaningful discussion of the past with all its political implications may take place, is to open and remain open, we need to remind ourselves of our resilience to survive the uncivilities of rage. It is ironic that the mode in which we tell of the way we survived untold horrors is underpinned by such profound disbelief in our capacity to survive raging controversies about these horrors.

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