

## About Truth Finding and the Importance of Memory

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Occupying armies and dictators often destroy public archives and sites of memory. Destroying memory is a kind of demolition of the man or even people. So did the dictatorship in Argentine. They declared war and destroyed our books, our music, our public space; they were aiming for a non-memory. They killed, tortured, occupied land, kicked people out of their houses. And implemented Silence. Many of these things happen with no media in the neighbourhood to tell. Only the personal and private memories of those directly involved remain.

Not telling, not remembering, and not seeing the past as a school for tomorrow is a kind of non-memory too, it is a way of making the goals of the dictator successful.

First of all I seek to agree on something with you about 'memories'.

We ourselves exercise 'non-memory' when we 'forget' to speak about men and women in our memories. The past, our memory, should be gender specific also, we forget too often about that. Forgetting about gender issues happens so often; it so easily. But I can not forget about My Mothers, my grandmothers, about my own mother and grandmother, about my aunt who gave her child in safety before she was killed. So if we agree that we have the right on memory and if we agree about the importance of memory, let us start with not forgetting about the specific male and female roles in memories; let's do better.

I have in my memory some 'lacunas', things that happened to me or my family that I forgot. I know I was there, I know something happened, but I forgot what it was but still I know something terrible happened. And I have taken it out of my memory, till today I choose not to remember.

We have the right not to remember. The right on memory includes the right not to remember. Sometimes the facts are too inhuman, too hard to live with on personal but also on community level. Sometimes a person or a people just can't remember or talk or work on what happened because it is too hard to deal with. People do have that right; the right not to remember, not to work on the past.

But.. I know something happened, and I know what it was about and I live with it and it influences me since it happened, in each relation that I have, in my being a mother, in my being a sister, in my role in society. Actually, I carry that feeling in me of what happened, and that invisible fact has more influence on my life than perhaps any other occurrence that I do know.

The same is in a society, which is nothing more than lot's of 'I's together.

So, there is a dilemma memorising or forgetting?

Forgetting could help to become 'liberated', to go on, to accept and reconcile with the past and all people involved. Injustice or silence may however go on when everyone accepts not to remember with loud voices. Think about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa.

A bloodbath was prevented, the society could move on. But same say: too many crimes on humanity where 'accepted as a fact, forgive even' without taking care of the victims and the people involved. A climate of acceptance on serious and massive crimes against humanity was born. "If you kill one man or two or ten, you get in prison but if you kill 100 or more you get forgiveness" .

Impunity was established and now South Africa is dealing with a sky-high criminality on all levels of society. A theologian in Argentine told me one day: "If you don't let Justice win over impunity of crimes, impunity will get systematized in society and you will find it back in the homes. Impunity gets normal if justice doesn't take care of inhuman crimes" he said.. I think he is right.

In Argentine, it took more than twenty years before the personal memory got public recognition. It was hard labour of specially women, mothers and families who choose never to forget, keeping their beloved alive in their memories. After twenty years society started to open its mind, to see there was a common memory and a common school to learn at. There then was political will to do so.

I think Argentine is an exceptional case on how memories are of central importance in a process towards justice and peace. Each personal memory of each family was brought to the collective memory and became part of the general memory. By doing so one Recovered the truth and happenings, even if the criminals didn't admit anything and kept saying 'I didn't know, it was my duty, it was war, it was a reorganisation of the nation'.

The Mothers, women bringing a message of love for their children, were and still are at the head of this movement , looking for justice, never wanting revenge. They never got violent and never asked others to take revenge. They preach, they work and they inspire all Human Right Movements in Argentine to follow them, in their peaceful resistance, led by feminine love.

In other countries, other places, people use their memories to take revenge or to impose their views to others in a violent, political or social way. People also use their 'forgetting' just to escape justice, to quiet the victims, to keep their power. Mostly, these people are men.

Memory and Forgetting are a very important, central part of the process to Justice and Peace.

But only if they are in good hands. In my case, they were in good hands, in my Mothers hands.

There are at least four 'monuments' in Argentina for my father. One at the town hall in the village where we lived. Because my father was a community doctor. The new officials didn't want to forget their former college. His name is also on the Wall of the Medicine Faculty, because he was a doctor, his fellow doctors didn't want to forget him too.

His name is also on the big Muro de la Memoria, together with the other thousand missing people, because, collective; we don't want to forget any of them.

, But the monument I most like is a small clinic in the Fabela-village where he was a free doctor for the poorest, that got his name. At the front of the clinic is a bronze plate with his name, between the people he choose for.

People remember him; they want to remember him at a personal level but also as group.

Remembering him is more than that, it is recognizing him and the other victims, as victims and as human beings with fundamental rights. Remembering them and searching for justice in their name is recovering their rights posthumous, it is recovering their dignity and at the same time, ours.

All this monuments for my father are a kind of 'museum of memories or forgettings'. In front of them men and women stand still and tell the youngest what happened then, they get conscious of the cruelty that was and still can be, they talk about 'Nunca Mas', they talk about Justice. People talk with each other about their memories and forgettings.

Memorizing in an honest way, not only on the winners side but also on the losers site, not only on the victims site but also on the perpetrators site. It is learning, is breaking silence, is saying 'Nunca Mas' to tremendous injustice and cruel human beings, is protecting us and our children of becoming barbarians like some have become in history. Is trying the stop atrocities and trying to be more human with each other.

'Memory' is always choosing what to preserve and what to suppress'

But choosing not to remember injustice is choosing to deny justice, to preserve impunity. Preserved impunity gets incorporated in a society, I have learnt in Argentina. It is like a seed for collective terror. Only Justice could dry this seed out.

I hope the example in Argentine, where peaceful persistence on memorizing, dignity and love lead to a political will to be better than before, to Justice and to end impunity, could be of some inspiration for many others.

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