MemoSur/MemoSouth

Memory, Commemoration and Trauma in Post-Dictatorship Argentina and Chile

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Live to Tell

Norma Fatala

> The problem for them, for the real killers, is that I never was a policeman. And I lived to tell the tale.
> Carlos R. Moore (Robles 2010)

This essay attempts a sociosemiotic approach to the narratives of survivors of the clandestine centres of detention, torture, and extermination (CCD) that existed in Argentina between 1975 and 1983.[1] The focus of research has been on statements published in "actuality books" (*libros de actualidad*), within the framework of interviews or conversations.[2]

I have referred to the books that make up the corpus as "actuality books" because they are so in many senses; in the first place, because of their very subject. As François Hartog (2007: 234; my translation) says:

> The imprescriptibility "by nature" of crimes against humanity founds a "juridical atemporality" that can be perceived as a form of the past in the present, of a present past, or, still better, as an extension of the present, considering the present proper to the process.

[1] Dating the beginning of state terrorism is quite a controversial matter, since it affects political interests (cf. Tcach 2014). The fact is that there are almost 700 forced disappearances reported before the 1976 military coup, involving not only the Armed Forces (the CDD Escuelita de Famaillá, in Tucumán, begins operations in February 1975, in the context of the Operativo Independencia); but also "task groups" formed by policemen and civilians, promoted, protected or tolerated by the state apparatus, which exercised illicit violence in order to terrorize the opposition and the population at large (cf. Robles 2010; Bufano & Teixidó 2015).

[2] Such is the case of *Ese infierno* (That Hell), in which five women (survivors of the ESMA—The Higher Naval School of Mechanics) talk among themselves about their experience in the clandestine camp.

In the second place, every construction of a selective past, as Williams (1997: 137-139) noted many years ago, involves present interests and projects itself into the future.

Last but not least, their actuality is confirmed by the *discursive field* (Angenot 1989: 91-93) in which they are produced. In fact, testimonies contained in the books have already been presented before the courts and human rights organizations; but their (re)production in published materials prefigures a broader public and transforms them into a *production of truth* with polemical implications, designed to affect public opinion about the recent past and, therefore, collective memory.

Nevertheless, these attempts at documenting barbarism are founded on experience and thus become inseparable from the subjective construction of enunciators. The enunciation dispositif (Verón 2004: 173) appears, then, as a document within the document, which offers an entrance into the effects of terror on singular and collective identities.

In order to give a brief report on research involving a very dense corpus and much heartbreaking reading, I shall concentrate on the ethical, subjective and identitarian constructions deployed in/by the narratives.

Telling

According to Mariana Tello (2013), it is common to find in the testimonies of Argentine survivors explicit references to the "unspeakable", "unimaginable" character of concentrationary experience, similar to those present in some classical writings on Nazi camps, such as Primo Levi's or Jorge Semprum's.

Nevertheless, the proliferation of testimonies driven by the reopening of trials for crimes against humanity, as well as the proliferation of statements in published material are indicative of an extended *drive to tell*, usually presented as the fulfillment of an ethical command: survivors must make known the truth about state terrorism, for the sake of those who died. However, the straightforward logic of this obligation is but a starting point in a complex tissue of discourse.

Let us return for a moment to the epigraph, which throws light on the *pathos* that runs through the discourse of many survivors. "The problem for them, for the real killers, is that I never was a policeman. And I lived to tell the tale",

says Carlos Raymundo Moore (Robles 2010: 232, my translation), nicknamed Charlie, a prisoner in the much feared Intelligence Department of the Córdoba Police (D2) for six years, from November 1974 until November 1980, when he fled to Brazil, where he wrote, in a few days, a very full declaration which he presented to Amnesty International. His statement was based not just on sheer memory but also on the bits of information, written on small pieces of cigarette paper, which he had been able to get out of prison over the years.

It could be said, then, that the artisanal and risky collection of information gives credibility to the three propositions included in my short quotation, involving the construction of the adversary ("the real killers"), the description of his own position ("I never was a policeman") and the ethical command ("I lived to tell the tale"). Let me add that, after his first months in prison, Moore was considered a traitor by his former comrades, but in his story (in his *autofiction*, as Robin would say)[3] he appears as the freelance operator of a huge counterintelligence scheme that may have saved 60 or 70 lives.[4]

I have chosen this very extreme case because it shows how state terrorism transformed the clichés of political prison in Argentina and triggered new forms of resistance, which rendered fuzzy the clear-cut opposition between the hero and the traitor. It also shows that, after state terrorism, survival required an explanation.

Survival and Suspicion

In terms of the effects of state terrorism on political or social militancy, survival could well apply to a vast number of individuals: those who withdrew into their private lives (internal exiles); those who left the country (external exiles); those who survived prison or clandestine camps. But the dramatic differences, even between the two last cases,

[3] In the terms of Régine Robin (1996: 61-2), *autofiction* does not designate a false or invented story, it rather signals the impossibility of (objective) self-narrative.

[4] The operation consisted of implicating as many prisoners as he could in the take-over of the Military Factory at Villa María by the ERP (10 August 1974), in order to have them legalized, since the military planned to stage an "exemplary" trial of that case (cf. Robles 2010; Carreras 2010).

impose particular conditions upon the narrative of the experience.

Although there were many deaths in legal prisons (most of them as the result of shootings disguised as attempted escapes or armed confrontations), their numbers (approximately 130 people, according to Garaño & Pertot (2007)) constitute a reduced proportion of the more than 6,000 political prisoners who occupied the jails from 1974 to 1983.

In the case of forced disappearance, the *returning subjects*, as Calveiro (1998) calls survivors from the clandestine centres, are a small percentage—between five and ten per cent—of those kidnapped.[5]

There are, nevertheless, some differences in situations that should be taken into account. In the first place, the date of *the fall*—that is to say, the date of capture: death was an almost certain fate from the middle of 1975 to the first half of 1977, by which time the political-military organizations—Montoneros and the PRT-ERP—could be said to have been decimated. Afterwards, death became more selective.[6] Casual or unimportant victims of kidnapping could find their way to legal prisons or even to freedom.[7] "Only half of the fifty prisoners that were in La Perla arrived at San Martin [Penitentiary]; the rest were shot", remembers a survivor captured in September 1977 (Mariani & Gómez 2012: 328).[8] Although the figures are shocking, they show the proportional variation in the probabilities of survival.

Nevertheless, the differences underline the status of the long-term survivors, those who were caught in the first

[5] Although the official number of forced disappearances—that is to say, of those that were reported—totals about 13,000 victims; real numbers could easily double the figure, considering the fact that many claims were never filed because of material impossibility (some families were decimated), ideological differences, fear or ignorance.
[6] ERP (Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo [People's Revolutionary Army]) was the armed branch of the PRT (Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores [Workers' Revolutionary Party]).
[7] Calveiro (1998: 44-45) includes in this category persons kidnapped because they had witnessed illegal proceedings or were relatives or visitors of military targets.
[8] La Perla (12km from Córdoba city) was the largest CCD outside Buenos Aires. It belonged to the III Army Corps.

stages of state terrorism and outlived their stay in the extermination camps. They were generally put to work on diverse tasks by their captors and thus regained at least the relative possibility of *moving, seeing and hearing*, activities from which the rest of the prisoners were banned. Their living conditions were also better and they were allowed to contact their families and even visit them. Although they were kept under surveillance, they were generally freed long before legal prisoners.

The stigma of collaboration that falls on this group of prisoners depends, then, not only on survival but on this differential treatment. A survivor of the last phase of the dictatorship describes her experience in this way:

> I was questioned by a "broken prisoner" [*un quebrado*]. I know he was a prisoner because I was without the blindfold and I saw him [...]. I understand that the contribution of collaborators to Justice is superior to ours, because they worked with the military files and went about the barracks without a blindfold. However, I consider that terror is one thing—saving your life or the lives of your son and husband—and collaborating with the military another. (Mariani & Gómez 2012: 328)

We can see how many questions are interwoven in such a short paragraph: the proof of a particular collaboration; the general traits that would define a collaborator (moving and seeing) and the subtle line that divides giving information under torture from collaborating.

On the other hand, Moore divides the long-term survivors in La Perla into three groups: those who gave information under torture, those who collaborated doing tasks, and those who changed sides (Robles 2010: 208). Here, the line of treachery isolates those who changed sides, that is to say, those who chose to become one of them, while the rest are considered victims, forced to collaborate by extreme violence, but retaining their status as prisoners.

Now, if we put together the second group—those who collaborated doing tasks—with the superior contribution to justice mentioned in the first quotation, we arrive at the central paradox of the *returning subjects*: survival makes them suspects, but it also transforms them into the only agents who share with the agents of genocide a firsthand

knowledge of the clandestine devices of extermination. Their statements, therefore, are the cornerstone of any attempt to achieve “truth and justice”, as human rights lawyers understood quite early on. They had to labour, nevertheless, to convince the human rights organizations, mainly composed of relatives of the disappeared, that any expectation of bringing the agents of genocide to justice implied necessarily a symbolic transformation: the *becoming victim* of those up to that point considered traitors.

Knowing

Knowledge seems to be the key to the social reintegration of survivors. But we must look deeper into this harshly acquired competence. If we do, we find that information (collecting, systematizing, communicating data) is at the core of these survivors’ trauma, but, at the same time, their only way out of it. In the clandestine camps, they were not only tortured to produce information, but were given the task of analyzing information (for instance, in newspapers) for the military.

On those terms, collecting information against their captors was, as Canetti (1973) would say, the only possible means of *reversal* for human beings subjected to an almost total power. This form of individual resistance gave purpose to survival and helped them regain the human status their torturers had endeavoured to crush: if they had been forced to tell in order to live; they would now, of their own free will, live to tell. Thus, subjection becomes *simulation* and information becomes the gift, the *object of value* which survivors would bring from their descent into hell. However, on the other hand, I must register here some differences that show the multiple nuances of survival. *Simulating* or *acting as if* are recurrent notions in the discourse of survivors, but they frequently refer purely to survival (*Ese infierno* is paradigmatic in this sense). In such cases, the value of information is an afterthought that appears with the return of democracy.

On the other hand, the confluence of simulation and purposeful collection of information anticipates reversal and describes an enunciator that, still in prison, had managed to regain some of his previous competences. In some cases, it is even possible to detect in the statements an undercurrent of self-satisfaction, even superiority, at having outwitted the captors:

> The military made a mistake in letting us live. We are the product of their mistakes. They should have killed us all; but they did not do it and now we are stating what really happened.[9]

Los compañeros (The Comrades), a non-fiction novel written by Rolo Diez, a former militant of the PRT, gives yet another twist to the relation information-survival. Towards the end of the book, an exiled survivor receives the visit of a Party intelligence official who even stays the night at their flat. The survivor and his wife are extremely moved by this gesture of confidence and conciliation. The visitor, who is also the narrator, listens to the survivor's story, including his own collaboration, with remarkable equanimity; but the real object of the visit is to learn if the survivor has any information about the existence of a "filter" (a spy) among the members of the Party leadership in Córdoba in the seventies—a real and unsolved question that still provokes arguments (see *Sudestada* 2015).

Narrative Identities

Information, no matter how important, is but a part of the tale. The telling accomplishes other functions, enacting subjects caught in a space-time, producing identities, introducing pathos... In Deleuzean terms, all the properties and qualities of a particular *assemblage* (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 503-504).

In an article on the incidence of penitentiary treatment upon identitarian constructions of political prisoners and, more precisely, on a classification dreamt up by the last dictatorship which divided "subversive delinquents" into three groups, where "recoverability" was measured in inverse proportion to resistance,[10] Santiago Garaño (2010:

[9] Fragment of Piero Di Monti's statement in the trial of Brandalisi *et al.,* quoted in Mariani & Gómez *(*2012: 98*;* my translation).

[10] "a) Group 1: (Resistant prisoners)

Negative attitude: they present traits of irrecoverability. Unruly. They have no symptoms of demoralization. They form groups and exercise leadership. They exhibit a strong ideological foundation and a sense of belonging to the SDB [Subversive Delinquents' Bands].

b) Group 2: (Undefined prisoners)

Their attitudes are not clear or cannot be specified. They exhibit

129) concludes that, in legal prisons, differential grouping contributed, basically among the "irrecoverable" prisoners (G1), to the consolidation of group identities, loyalties and comradeship which, after liberation, allowed the construction of a group narrative that, in large measure, determines "what is memorable and how the experience of political prison is to be remembered" (my translation).

I cannot agree with the almost exclusionary productivity which Garaño assigns to penitentiary power, but I share his view about the importance of collective identification in the feedback on resistance and also about the risk implied in considering the narrative of the prison experience of the strongest, "as if it were the same for all political prisoners". Furthermore, I believe it would be even riskier to take the survivors' narrative as the camp experience of all the sequestered, for most of whom self-narration has become impossible.

Both legal and illegal prisoners shared the experience of capture and torture, but the place of detention determined irreparable divergences. According to legal prisoners, death was an ever-present possibility: they could die in torture, they could be "transferred"[11] in order to manufacture an escape shooting, they could be killed as a reprisal for actions carried out by their organizations, or they may simply attract the most brutal punishment from a prison officer.[12] But in

doubt. They require more observation and to be subjected to PA [Psychological Action] in order to be defined.
c) Group 3: (Ductile prisoners)
They do not form groups with the resistant prisoners. They tend to collaborate with the PS [Penitentiary Service] staff. They show symptoms of demoralization. Some of them may make public their rejection or disown ideological positions related to the SDB. They are willing to enter into a process of recovery [*recuperación*]*"* (Special Order N° 13-77 ("Recovery of boarders [*pensionistas*]"). Copy N° 2, Command Zone 1; Buenos Aires, dated July 1977, [p.3]. Personal archive of a former political prisoner, Córdoba, Argentina, in Garaño (2010: 122-3; my translation)).

[11] Taking out prisoners to shoot them or dump them in the sea was euphemistically called "transfer" by the military.

[12] Such is the case of the physician José René Moukarzel, killed on 15 July 1976, in Córdoba's Penitentiary (UP1) (Cf. Garaño & Pertot 2007: 208). Moukarzel's wife, Alicia De Cicco, had been killed in December 1975 in the CDD Campo de La Rivera (Córdoba). According to one of La Perla's survivors, interrogation officer

clandestine centres, devoid of legal restrictions of any kind, death became almost a certainty.

Even the rudimentary legality allowed by a dictatorial regime made a difference in the conditions of captivity. Although there was a perpetual changing of rules, a moving of prisoners from one penitentiary to another, and all manner of difficulties created for them and their families; the legal status meant having a lawyer and, when conditions allowed it, receiving visits, news and packages from relatives, being able to talk to other prisoners, and even maintain collective partisan practices. In their everyday life, legal prisoners were neither blindfolded nor restricted in their mobility by handcuffs, shackles or fetters, as happened in the camps. More important still, even a terrorist state had to account for legal prisoners, but *desaparecidos* had no "entity", as the dictator Jorge Videla said.[13]

In the concentrationary regime, besides information, the prime objective of unlimited torture, for an indefinite time, was the destruction of collective identifications, the breaking up of solidarities and loyalties, the reduction of totally helpless individuals to their own resources, which explains the recurrence of the phrase "each one did what he/she could" in different stories. Survival appears, then, as a rather solitary enterprise, a personal experience ruled by the principle of affection, where no abstraction is possible (see Calveiro 1998: 131)

I have thought very much about the statement of a survivor from La Perla. She says: "The dead have no past, they have memory; I have a past, because I am alive" (Mariani & Gómez 2012: 260; my translation). Inadvertently,

Héctor Vergez told them that he had strangled her himself, incensed by the fact that such a beautiful woman would not speak and looked at him with hatred (Liliana Callizo's testimony, *El Diario del Juicio*, 28 May 2012).

[13] "As long as he remains so, the missing person [*desaparecido*] is a mystery. If the man were to appear alive, he would be treated as 'x', if appearance confirmed he was dead, he would count as 'z'; but as long as he is missing, he cannot have a special treatment: a disappeared person has no entity [*entidad*], is neither alive nor dead, is missing. In which case, we cannot do anything." Jorge R. Videla [1979], in *El Día*, 17 May 2013 (my translation).

perhaps, she has distinguished two problematic fields: the production of collective memory and the coming to terms with one's own past, almost along the lines of the opposition social/individual. But dichotomies, we know, are only heuristic tools. Social and individual fields overlap in real life and, in this case, overlap in the figure of the un-returned subjects, the truly disappeared.

From this point of view, it seems necessary to consider survivors' stories on at least two levels of analysis: one dealing with the *expository* sequences of their narrative, basically consisting of *information* about state terrorist methodology and hard data about the victims and victimizers (names, dates, places…) and another dealing with strictly *narrative* components, basically, the configuration of the first-person narrator, his/her pragmatic and cognitive transformations, his/her relation with the other subjects.

The first level, as we have seen, concerns the production of truth, the transmission of an object of value (first-hand knowledge) that, at the same time, reinstates the survivor in the *socius* as a victim of state terrorism.

The second has to do with the basic form of getting to grips with one's own past: the construction of what Ricoeur (1996: 147) calls a *narrative identity*, a dynamic identity that exerts a mediating function between the poles of sameness and ipseity, incorporating discontinuities or variations into permanence in time.

In the discourse of survivors, this operation heals the identitarian breach produced by their concentrationary experience and especially by torture, which frequently evokes a metaphor of death: "There is no coming back from torture", says a survivor; "I died in La Perla", says another (cf. Mariani & Gómez 2012: 248 and 54; my translation). But the implosion of individual identities also implied a loosening of collective identifications and loyalties, overshadowed by guilt. Self-justification, therefore, plays an important role in the discourse of the returning subjects and filters their recollection of their less fortunate comrades. The dead are, in that sense, delivered into the hands of the living.

Causes and Hazards

Among the long-term survivors there is an almost unanimous assertion of the hazardous character of survival. Collaboration, they argue and even exemplify, did not ensure

life. Although they admit to a desire to live, the recognition of survival as an option (in the Sartrean sense) appears as a substantial node of the personal trauma that must remain unsaid. It is possible, nevertheless, to assert that there were prisoners who *chose to die* (Actis *et al*. 2001: 157-158).

The discourse of hazardous survival relies for its reality effect on the description of the irrationality and perversion of the agents of genocide, their internal struggles, their paranoia, and their ravings about their power over life and death... But the reasoning has a sophistic angle since, according to the same stories, there is nothing hazardous in the non-survival of those who refused information or collaboration. These cases, nevertheless, are promptly passed over, in order to reinforce the thesis that everybody said something; in which case, resistance consisted in giving false or useless information or retaining as much information as one could.

Since their enunciative stance requires the dismantling of the opposition hero/ traitor, "old" prisoners—including those who write scholarly works—find it hard to recount unbreakable resistance and death.[14] Calveiro arrives at an aporetic solution by shifting suspicion onto the dead:

> Among survivors, there are many who resisted torture and surely that first victory helped them to tolerate the hood, the isolation, the pressures and all they suffered until their liberation. (Calveiro 1998: 74; my translation)

> There are no heroes in a concentration camp.
>
> The irreducible subject who dies during torture without giving any sort of collaboration is the one who comes closest to that notion, but there are no proofs of that, there is no exhibition of the heroic deed that could be testified to without the shadow of a doubt. Resistance to torture is a solitary representation of the tortured before his/her torturers. (Calveiro 1998: 129; my translation)

[14] There are, of course, exceptions to this rule. Some survivors, like Liliana Callizo, include in their testimonies many instances of death brought about by unbroken resistance.

It is easier to find stories of enduring resistance in the testimony of casual victims or even in the statements of repentant military personnel. For instance, former sergeant Víctor Ibáñez recalls the torture and death of a member of the political Buro of the PRT in these words:

> Menna was tortured for months and he never said a thing. I don't know how that man could stand it. They would leave him with the automatic electric prod on, while the interrogators went to have lunch; and not once, but day after day. In the end, he won the respect of the task group [interrogators, torturers]. Anyhow, they "transferred" him like everyone else. (Almirón 1999: Part II, Chap. XVI; my translation)

It can be noted, though, that the sergeant admires the resistance, but does not think it very useful, since it did not lead to survival: an un-paradoxical coincidence with the discourse of some survivors who subtly undervalue stubborn resistance or open confrontation with the military as a lack of the ability to survive.

Them and Us

If torture was designed to alienate the victim from his/her collective political identification, being chosen to collaborate or to do tasks introduced another problematic node: the relationship with the victimizers. The forced coexistence of kidnappers and kidnapped may have brought about a mutual process of "humanization" in the perception of the adversary, as Calveiro (1998: 96-98) puts it; but, according to survivors' stories, it was a process attended by confusion, fear, distrust and simulation. Furthermore, this ambiguous closeness drew a line between the old prisoners and the transitory inhabitants of the extermination centres, which explains why the relationship of long-term survivors to the rest of the prisoners is a disturbing aspect of the narratives.

Separation between chosen and not-chosen prisoners becomes quite evident where there were different living quarters, as in the ESMA. In La Perla, where all prisoners shared the same physical space,[15] there is less talk of the

[15] Only in 1978, when there were just five "old" prisoners left, were they taken out of the barracks and allowed to sleep in an

human side of victimizers and more emphasis on the human tragedy. Self-narrative encompasses, then, multiple stories that rescue the absent from anonymity: assassinated teenagers, young mothers separated from their just-born children and "transferred" to death, people who agonized in the camp as the result of torture, people each one knew and loved… Stories that construct a *community of suffering,* an aggregate of individuals not devoid of human solidarity, but deprived of a political horizon by sheer terror. Since militancy and partisan discipline seem to have receded to a past prior to capture and torture, the ethical limit is fixed by the command: if someone gets off, he/she must tell what is happening.

Telling the passion of thousands, after having outlived it, is not, however, an easy task. A legitimizing gesture common to most stories consists of the reference to the survivor's conversations with renowned figures who shared captivity in the camp before being assassinated. Besides the obvious importance of attesting to the presence and fate of political and union leaders in the camp, it could be said that as subjects of the enunciated-enunciation (Greimas), quoted as sources of good-will, support and advice, those leaders become the model or ideal reader (Eco) of the survivors' stories: someone who understands the awful exceptionality of forced disappearance and the extreme conditions it imposes on its victims.

Nevertheless, there are inconsistencies that are difficult to surmount. Principally, as regards the timing of the telling and the (lack of) identification with the non-returned. For instance, some survivors of the ESMA state that they did not attempt to escape or to communicate with the relatives of other prisoners during their outings or even to report the situation to international organizations after being liberated, in order not to harm their *compañeros* (comrades). There is a sort of virtuous reaction against statements presented in Europe as early as 1979 and 1980, oriented, we may presume, *to stopping the practice of forced disappearance* (cf. Actis *et al*. 2001: 183).[16]

office (Mariani & Gómez 2012: 182-184).

[16] According to Calveiro (1998: 125), *s*taff prisoners agreed to keep silent about their experience "until the last of them was set free" (my translation).

Compañeros, therefore, cannot refer to the blindfolded, immobilized, anonymous numbers that inhabited Capucha and Capuchita, the quarters of the non-chosen prisoners in the ESMA. They can only refer to other members of staff, the group of recoverable prisoners chosen by navy officers. By semantic displacement, the old word has come to describe an entirely new situation: a collective identification built not around ideological principles but around a new value, unthinkable for the militants they used to be: survival.

Survival takes the place of ideals in the configuration of an unstable community of long-term prisoners. In the first testimonies, it was usual to find criticisms or even accusations regarding other prisoners' behaviour;[17] but the reopening of the trials has brought about an almost corporate defence of the victim status for everyone:

> I do not agree with some survivors' attitudes in La Perla; but I must acknowledge that all of us were victims of the same destructive system. All of us, without exception, entered as victims and left as victims. (Mariani & Gómez 2012: 186; my translation)

> We have to finish once and for all with the arguments among survivors and concentrate on the real victimizers who were the military. (Mariani & Gómez 2012: 257; my translation)

The last quotation, I believe, shows clearly the reasoning that underlies these changes: the possibility of achieving justice (i.e., the conviction of the military) merits forgetting some prisoners' weaknesses. Trials appear, then, as the final confrontation (on a pure symbolic level) of survivors and their injurers on an equal footing, that of citizens. In Verón's (1987) terms, it means the discursive construction of the other as an adversary (a *negative other, a counter-receiver*) and the demonstration of his discourse as absolutely false, but, at the same time, it requires anticipating the *destructive reading* of the opponent:

> Of course the military speak ill of us! They do it to defend themselves. They know we are their main

[17] Calveiro (1998: 73-76) attempts a classification of prisoners.

> enemies and it's easy to understand that they will do everything to discredit us. (Mariani & Gómez 2012: 126; my translation)

Giving testimony on the perverse workings of state terrorism, it seems, not only accomplishes the ethical command so frequently invoked, but it performs *reversal* as well. Contrary to the pious tendency to circumvent the victim's personal feelings on behalf of abstract justice,[18] I would propose that in crimes against humanity, the intensity of personal feelings gives us the measure of the irreconcilable nature of the crimes.

In the discourse of survivors, especially those who collected evidence against their captors, the wish for reversal (for the opportunity of *telling)* justifies and reinforces the drive for survival.

In Sum

From a juridical and social point of view, survivors' testimonies are invaluable; they belong to the kind of documents that *change history,* even if they are open (as every discourse is) to different and antagonistic (that is to say, political) readings. As regards collective *memory*, I believe their effects are multiple and heterogeneous and will be better assessed in the long term.

As survivors say, they are the memory of genocide and their efforts to bring the military to justice for crimes against humanity—a belated answer to the forty years of struggle of the affected families—may impress on the common doxa the virtues of democracy, but it is difficult to predict the scope of reception since half the population never lived under a military dictatorship and military power is but a shadow of what it used to be.

On the other hand, their fixation on the military was amenable to the administration of memory (and forgetting) operated by Kirchnerist governments, which dated the start of state terrorism to the military coup (24 March 1976),

[18] A witness felt moved to explain that in recognizing the agents of genocide he had deliberately disrespected military rank, not as "revenge" but as "vindication" of himself and his dead comrades (Mariani & Gómez 2012: 181).

eliding the responsibility of politicians, union leaders, regular police and para-police organizations for illegal repression long before that time. Collective memory, it seems, does not require a working definition of state terrorism.

Nevertheless, given the present state of discourse, I believe the deeper impact of the survivors' narratives on collective memory may be political, of a negative kind. Survivors proclaim themselves not only the memory of genocide, but also, with scant analysis, the memory of defeat. In order to demonstrate the perversion of the military personnel brought to trial, and to explain their own survival, they produce and reproduce the effects of terror. But in our hedonistic, egotistical times, ruled by self-interest, their survival does not cause moral ripples; while their stories may affect the relatives of disappeared people and a progressive minority, for the general public, torn between clientelism and political disaffection, harassed by economic and labour demands, they just go to prove the unfeasibility of any alternative notion of politics.

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