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## Trauma Construction and Moral Restriction:

### The Ambiguity of the Holocaust for Israel

Jeffrey C. Alexander and Shai Dromi

## Yad Vashem Fires Employee Who Compared Holocaust to Nakba

*Haaretz*, April 23, 2009: Yad Vashem has fired an instructor who compared the trauma of Jewish Holocaust survivors with the trauma experienced by the Palestinian people in Israel's War of Independence. Itamar Shapiro, 29, of Jerusalem, was fired before Passover from his job as a docent at the Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority, after a teacher with a group of yeshiva students from Efrat made a complaint. Shapiro had worked at Yad Vashem for three and a half year....

Shapira confirmed, in a telephone conversation with *Haaretz*, that he had spoken to visitors about the 1948 massacre at Deir Yassin. He said he did so because the ruins of the Arab village, today a part of Jerusalem's Givat Shaul neighborhood, can be seen as one leaves Yad Vashem. "Yad Vashem talks about the Holocaust survivors' arrival in Israel and about creating a refuge here for the world's Jews. I said there are people who lived on this land and mentioned that there are other traumas that provide other nations with motivation," Shapira said. "The Holocaust moved us to establish a Jewish state and the Palestinian nation's trauma is moving it to seek self-determination, identity, land and dignity, just as Zionism sought these things," he said.

The institution's position is that the Holocaust cannot be compared to any other event and that every visitor can draw his own political conclusions ... "Yad Vashem would have acted unprofessionally had Itamar Shapira continued his educational work for the institute," [Yad Vashem spokeswoman Iris] Rosenberg said. Yad Vashem employs workers and volunteers from the entire political and social spectrum, who know how to separate their personal position from their work, she said.

Shapira said Vad Yashem chooses to examine only some of the events that took place in the War of independence. "It is being hypocritical. I only tried to expose the visitors to the facts, not to political conclusions. If Yad Vashem chooses to ignore the facts, for example the massacre at Deir Yassin, or the Nakba ["The Catastrophe," the Palestinians' term for what happened to them after 1948], it means that it's afraid of something and that its historical approach is flawed," Shapiro said.

This disheartening report from Israel's most influential newspaper illustrates the idea that is at the core of this collective research project. References to trauma, and representations about it, are not

just individual but social and collective. Who was responsible for a collective trauma, who were its victims, and what the trauma's moral lessons for our own time – these are not simply theoretical or empirical issues for professional social scientists. They are fundamental concerns of everyday life, matters for reporting in daily newspapers and websites, and they powerfully affect contemporary conflicts at the individual, institutional, national, and global levels.

As this *Haaretz* report also demonstrates, however, the manner in which collective traumas are presented in everyday life is naturalistic, to the point of being dangerously naïve. Traumas are spoken about as if they are simply historical facts, as things that happened, clearly understand events, empirical things that can either be recognized or ignored. How we choose to react to the facts of trauma is presented as if it were simply a matter of personal, individual reflection.

According to the cultural-sociological approach, however, neither of these latter suppositions is correct. Collective traumas are not found, they are made. Something awful usually did occur, but how it is represented remains an open question, subject to whirling spirals of signification, fierce power contests, simplifying binaries, subtle stories, fickle audiences, and counter-narrations. Individuals do not respond to traumas but to trauma constructions. How they come to reflect upon them is certainly a matter for individual conscience, but it is also a massively collective thing. Individuals experience the pain and suffering of defeat, and the hopes for future emancipation, in terms of collective stories that engulf and instruct them, sometimes in positive, sometimes in frightening ways.

Earlier work on the Nazi murder of six million Jews<sup>1</sup> explored how the representation of this horrendous event shifted, in the half-century after it transpired, from “war crime” to “Holocaust.” As a heinous event associated with Nazism, the mass murder was initially contextualized inside the culture

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<sup>1</sup> Alexander, “The Social Construction of Moral Universals: The ‘Holocaust from War Crime to Trauma Drama,’” in Alexander, Eyerman, Giesen, Smelzer, and Sztompka, *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* (2004). See also Alexander, *Understanding the Holocaust: A Debate* (Oxford University Press, 2009), where that earlier piece is

structures that had framed the second World War, a civilization-versus-barbarism binary, on the one hand, and a progressive narrative of modern amelioration, on the other. For two decades afterward, this binary and narrative frame allowed Western nations to keep the mass murder of the Jews, even as it remained ferociously stigmatized, as an event very much relegated to the past. In the postwar period, people looked to the future and engaged in reconstruction. They saw themselves as building a new, modern, and civilized society, one in which Nazi genocide would never be allowed to happen again. These efforts at civil repair were not illusory. Democracies were reconstructed from dictatorships, and millennia long anti-Semitic barriers were overcome. Nevertheless, in the course of the 1960's this grand narrative of postwar progressive, which had sequestered racial, religious, and ethnic mass murder in a distant past began, began to be vulnerable and to change.

Collective traumas are complex symbolic-cum-emotional constructions that have significant autonomy from, and power over, social structure and interests in the more material sense. At the same time, however, trauma constructions are affected by the kinds of social groups that promote them, by the distribution of resources to broadcast them, and by the institutional structure of the social arenas in which their construction takes place. With the rise of anti-Western, anti-colonial movements abroad, and the emergence of anti-war movements racial and ethnic movements of liberation at home, the postwar protagonists of the progressive narrative were profoundly challenged. Their purity became polluted by association with their own ethnic, racial, and religious massacres, and their ability to maintain the civilization-barbarism binary destroyed. Rather than being seen as carriers of universalism, they were accused of being primordial and particularistic themselves. It was as these new understandings developed that the shift from “war crime” to “Holocaust” emerged. Rather than being relegated to the past, the dangers of massive racial, ethnic, and religious domination, and even mass murder, moved

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subjected to intense debate. The present chapter draws from, revises, and substantially extends the Alexander's postscript to that volume.

forward into the present. They became part of modernity. For contemporaries, the Holocaust shifted from a progressive to a tragic narrative. It became a story about hubris and punishment. A trauma drama that evoked sorrow and pity, its victims became objects of universal identification and its perpetrators were now constructed as representing humanity rather than any particular national group. Its bathetic denouement provided a drama of eternal return to which contemporaries felt compelled to return over and over again. The Holocaust came to be seen as the singular representation of the darkness of the twentieth century, the humbling lesson upon which was erected post-modern doubt. Yet, this humbling and tragic lesson created a new, more universal standard of moral judgment for present and future humankind.

This research on Holocaust and trauma construction was conducted in the late 1990s. It was a time of cautious optimism. The American and European intervention in Kosovo seemed to provide singular evidence for the universalizing power of the Holocaust effect. Dictatorships were still being turned into democracies, and there was a bubbling effervescence about the emergence of global civil society. It was a time to focus on the emergence of global narratives about the possibility of justice, among which there was no more surprising and inspiring story than the transvaluation of the Jewish mass murder from an historically situated war crime into tragic trauma drama whose moral lessons had become central to all modernity. In the words of Bernhard Giesen, a principal collaborator in that earlier project, this transvaluation process provided “a new transnational paradigm of collective identity,” according to which the Holocaust became the “global icon of evil.” In Alexander put it, “a specific and situated historical event” had become “transformed into a generalized symbol of human suffering,” a “universal symbol whose very existence has created historically unprecedented opportunities for ethnic,

racial, and religious justice, for mutual recognition, and for global conflicts becoming regulated in a more civil way.”<sup>2</sup>

We live now in a darker time, more divided, more violent, more tense. We have become much more cautious about the possibilities for a global civil society, more sensitive to the continuing festering of local wounds and their often explosive and debilitating world-wide effects. This is the time to explore the relationship between cultural trauma and collective identity in a different way, elaborating the theory so that it can explain not only more universalizing but more particularistic and deleterious results. In this chapter, we return to the historical genealogy of the Holocaust, but connect it with the emergence of a radically different carrier group, a drastically divergent social setting, and spirals of signification that depart sharply in their symbolic meanings and moral implications. We connect Holocaust symbolization not to pluralist Western democracies but to a democracy bent on securing the foundations of a single religion, not to a post-war national context but to a nation that founded in war, facing challenges to its very existence for decades after, right up until today. For this Jewish nation, despite its progressive aspirations, the memory of the Jewish mass murder connoted tragedy from the outset, and the catharsis produced by iterations of the trauma-drama sustained moral strictures of more particularistic and primordial than universal and civil kinds.

### **Tragic Dramas, Divergent Effects**

Going beyond the progressive narrative to a tragic vision compels members of a collectivity to narrate and symbolically re-experience the suffering of a trauma’s victims. If, however, these victims are represented narrowly – as simply the story tellers themselves -- the tragic trauma-drama may not, in fact, have a sympathy-generating effect. It creates not identification with extended others but with ancestors, who share the same primordial identity as the story tellers themselves. The tragic trauma drama produces catharsis, but it is not the enlightening pity that Aristotle once described. It is more self-pity, a

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<sup>2</sup> Giesen 2009, Alexander 2004.

sentiment that blocks identification and undermines the expansion of moral feeling that such contemporary neo-Aristotelians as Martha Nussbaum have prescribed. It is not a universalizing love for the other but a more restrictive self-love, a feeling that cuts experience short, encouraging emotional splitting and moral scapegoating.

In this emplotment, the moral implications of the drama of eternal return are inverted. Not being able to get beyond the originating trauma, feeling compelled again and again to return to it, actually reinforces the particularistic hatreds that inspired the aggression and murder of that earlier time. Narrowing rather than universalizing in morality and affect, earlier hatreds are reproduced, not overcome. Rather than expanded human sympathy for the other, we have Hitler revenging the defeated German people, Serbia's ethnic cleansing, and Hindu nationalism's bloody minded struggle against Islamic "intruders" today.<sup>3</sup> We also have the *Nakba*, the catastrophe that Israeli's founding created for the Palestinian people, a trauma that inspired the violently anti-Jewish and anti-Israeli struggles by Palestinian people and Arab states against the Zionism and the Israeli state. These polarizing, trauma-inspired struggles have fuelled the tragic-cum-primordial narratives that prevent peace between Arabs and Jews in the Middle East today.

### **An Israeli Patriot's Lament**

In the middle of 2007, David Remnick, the editor of the *New Yorker* magazine, published a controversial "Letter from Jerusalem." It was a conversation with Avraham Burg, once Speaker of the Israel Knesset and former director both of the World Zionist Organization and the Israeli Jewish

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<sup>3</sup> In a series of influential studies, the psychiatrist Vamik Volkan has explored such narrowing and particularistic responses to trauma and the manner in which they fuel violence and revenge, e.g., "Transgenerational Transmissions and Chosen Traumas: An Aspect of Large-Group Identity," *Group Analysis* 32 (1) 2001: 79-97. From an historical and cultural sociological perspective, however, Volkan's work is limited by the individualistic and naturalizing assumptions that seem endemic to the psychoanalytic perspective on collective life. These problems also affect, but in a less restrictive manner, the wide-ranging, politically engaged studies by Dan Bar-On and his colleagues, e.g., Sharon Shamir, Tali Yitzhaki-Verner, and Dan Bar-On, "'The Recruited Identity': The Influence of the Intifada on the Perception of the Peace Process from the Standpoint of the Individual" *Journal of Narrative and Life History* 6

Agency. Remnick's conversation with the now embittered Israeli leader points directly to the social processes **we** wish to illuminate here. "As of this moment," Burg observes, "Israel is a state of trauma in nearly every one of its dimensions." Insisting that this is "not just a theoretical question," he asks, "would our ability to cope with Iran not be much better if we renewed in Israel the ability to trust the world?" It is because Israelis identify the Holocaust with their betrayal by Christian Europe, Burg reasons, that they do not possess the necessary reserve of trust that could propel a process of peace. "We say we do not trust the world, they will abandon us," Burg explains. Seeing "Chamberlain returning from Munich with the black umbrella," Israelis draw the conclusion "we will bomb them alone."<sup>4</sup> It is because of this trauma construction, Burg believes, that so many Israelis feel they must go it alone. He finds this path deeply self-defeating. "Would it not be more right," he asks, "if we didn't deal with the problem on our own but, rather, as part of a world alignment beginning with the Christian churches, going on to the governments and finally the armies?"

In its early "optimistic years," Burg tells Remnick, Israel was different. Paradoxically, "the farther we got from the camps and the gas chambers, the more pessimistic we became and the more untrusting we became toward the world." As Burg sees it, this narrative shift has produced chauvinism and selfishness. Today, the Holocaust trauma fragments and divides, allowing conservative Israelis to justify oppressing Palestinians. It is because of their Holocaust consciousness, Burg insists, that his contemporaries are not "sensitive enough to what happens to others and in many ways are too indifferent to the suffering of others. We confiscated, we monopolized, world suffering. We did not allow anybody else to call whatever suffering they have 'holocaust' or 'genocide,' be it Armenians, be it Kosovo, be it Darfur." The Holocaust trauma is remembered in a manner that makes a significant swath of Israeli

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(3) 1996: 193-233 and Bar-On, "Israeli Society between the Culture of Death and the Culture of Life," *Israeli Studies* 2 (2) 1997: 88-112.

<sup>4</sup> David Remnick, "The Apostate: A Zionist Politician Loses Faith in the Future," *The New Yorker*, July 30, 2007, pp. 32-37.



society impervious to criticism: “‘Occupation? You call this occupation? This is nothing compared to the absolute evil of the Holocaust!’ And if it is nothing compared to the Holocaust then you can continue. And since nothing, thank God, is comparable to the ultimate trauma it legitimizes many things.”

### **Jewish Dreams of Post-Tragedy**

It might have seemed, from a more naturalistic perspective, that the Holocaust would be written directly on the body of Israel and its Jews, whether via first-hand experience or by primordial identification. From a cultural-sociological perspective, however, meaning-work is contingent. For Israel and its Jewish people, the meaning and message of the Holocaust has been up for grabs, crystallized in strikingly divergent ways. “The memory of the Holocaust and its victims,” Yechiam Weitz observes, “was accompanied by unending political strife;” these debates “were always bitter, full of tension and emotional,” and occasionally “violent and even deadly.”<sup>5</sup>

The millennia long sufferings of the Jewish people created an historical memory of persecution. These tragic iterations were ritualized in Jewish religious ceremonies, constituting a cultural legacy that seemed to demand not progress but eternal return. While the post-enlightenment European emancipation of ghettoized Jews triggered a more progressive narrative, the backlash against Jewish incorporation that exploded in the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and accelerated during the early 20<sup>th</sup>, pushed European Jewry to look backward again. Zionism emerged in response to this stinging disappointment. It fought against not only anti-Semitism but the fatalism and pessimism that so often had marked the Jewish tradition itself. It promised that, if a homeland were regained, the Jewish people would be landed and

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<sup>5</sup> Yechiam Weitz, “Political Dimensions of Holocaust memory in Israel,” pp. 129-145 in Robert Wistrich and David Ohana, eds., *The Shaping of Israeli Identity: Myth, Memory and Trauma*, London: Frank Cass, 1995, p. 130. It is paradoxical that in her searching and original investigation *Israel’s Holocaust and the Politics of Nationhood* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), Idith Zertal insists on contrasting what she views as the truly “historical dimension of the events” with their “out-of-context use” in the new nation’s collective memory, which she condemns for having “transmuted” the facts (pp. 4-5). The position that informs our own approach is that history

cited, and their history rewound. The story of the Jewish people could start over again in a healthy and “normal” way.<sup>6</sup>

### **Zionist Struggles, Holocaust Memories**

This historic dream came to earth in a land peopled mostly by others. Israel’s founding did instantiate the progressive narrative of Zionism, but in a decidedly triumphalist and militarized manner. Throughout the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, growing Zionist settlement faced increasingly embittered antagonists, not only indigenous Palestinians but other, better organized Arab Muslim populations.<sup>7</sup> Could the Zionists have understood their potential opponents in anything other than an antagonistic way? In fact, different sorts of relations were possible, and some were tried. Of course, the options narrowed substantially after the murder of six million. The heinous event gave an extraordinary urgency to the Jewish exodus from Europe, both inside and outside the Jewish community itself. The British folded up their Mandate and the UN declared a fragile, and almost universally unpopular, two-state solution. Even then, however, there was more than one path to take. Despite their territorial ambitions, the more left-wing, socialist, and democratic Israeli fighters conducted their struggles in less violent and pugnacious, more civilly-regulated ways. Right-wing Zionists, epitomized by the notorious Stern Gang, were more aggressively violent, demonstrating much less concern for non-Jewish life, whether British, Arab, Palestinian, Muslim or Christian.<sup>8</sup>

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is never accessible as such. To make it seem so is to provide resources for the kind of ideology critique in which Zertal is so powerfully engaged.

<sup>6</sup> For an account of this emancipation, its fateful disappointments, and the rise of Zionism as one among several Jewish responses, see Jeffrey C. Alexander, *The Civil Sphere*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2006, chapter 18. The idea of returning to Jerusalem had, of course, long been an essential idiom of diasporic Judaism.

<sup>7</sup> For an account of this situation, see Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern Consciousness*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.

<sup>8</sup> For a synthetic account of the significant contrast between the mentalities and fighting strategies of the left and right-wing Jewish forces fighting for the creation of the Jewish state, see Ian J. Bickerton and Carl L. Klausner, *A Concise History of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2002 (4<sup>th</sup> edition), especially pp. 100-115.

Amidst the chaotic conditions and competing ambitions of this postwar struggle, Israel declared its independence, the Arab states and Palestinians declared and acted upon their opposition, and the historical options narrowed further still. Zionist forces engaged in pitched battles against local Palestinian fighters and invading Arab armies. Jewish soldiers individually, and the emerging Jewish nation collectively, experienced this birth struggle as a matter of life or death. “We, the Jewish Israelis,” the psychiatrist Dan Bar-on recalled, “saw ourselves as surrounded by enemies and having to struggle, physically and mentally, for our lives and survival.”<sup>9</sup> Making an analogy with the Holocaust, the only recently terminated and extraordinarily searing experience of racially-motivated mass murder, Israeli individuals and their nation identified themselves as victims. Feelings of compassion for displaced Palestinians -- who were equally endangered, and most directly by Israeli’s own army -- were cast aside.

### **Trauma and Primordiality**

The Israeli state, established upon the blood sacrifice of its courageous but also ethnically cleansing army, honored its soldier-martyrs and inscribed in historical memory the trauma-inspired lesson that only military strength could prevent Jewish defilement and murder from ever happening again.<sup>10</sup> For the new nation’s first two decades, the historical record shows, the school textbooks of

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<sup>9</sup> Bar-On 1997, p. 90.

<sup>10</sup> For many contemporary friends of Israel – and **we** count ourselves among them -- such a characterization may appear harsh. It seems to us, however, the ineluctable conclusion from two decades of Israel’s own deeply revisionist, self-critical historiography. As such writers as Benny Morris (*The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947-1949*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) and Ilan Pappé (*The Making of the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1947-51*, London: I.B. Tauris, 1992) have documented in painstaking and painful empirical detail, the Independence conflict involved not just Palestinian residents’ voluntary flight but massive, Israeli-instigated population transfers, pushing hundreds of thousands of Palestinians off their land and wiping out the Palestinian identities of hundreds of once-Arab villages. None of this is to say that the historical events triggered by the UN’s two-state resolution were inevitable, nor is it to absolve the Palestinian and Arab parties of their own fateful responsibilities. For a collection of archival-based essays by Arab and Jewish scholars exploring this complex and deeply contradictory period, see Eugene L. Rogan and Avi Shlaim, eds., *The War for Palestine: Rewriting the History of 1948*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. The collection is also notable for Edward Said’s “Afterward: The Consequences of 1948” (pp. 206-219). In one of the radical Palestinian critic’s last published essays, he lashes out at the repressive, anti-Semitic, and militaristic conditions that, in his view, had marked so much of Arab and Palestinian political and cultural life during the post-Independence period. For an insightful overview of the polarizing, if delayed, effects of Israeli’s “history wars” over its collective identity – and an argument that it is psychologically overdetermined – see Jose Brunner, “Contentious Origins: Psychoanalytic Comments on the Debate

Israeli children were filled with deeply polluting descriptions of Arabs as savage, sly, cheat, thief, robber, provocateur, and terrorist. As one Israeli historian has suggested, during these early decades the national narrative hewed closely to the “tradition of depicting Jewish history as an uninterrupted record of anti-Semitism and persecution.”<sup>11</sup> The continuing Arab military campaign against Israel was represented inside this frame. Palestinian violence was analogized with pre-Independence ‘pogroms’ against Jews, and Palestinian and Arab leaders were depicted as only the most recent in “a long line of ‘oppressors’ of Jews during the course of their history.”<sup>12</sup>

Insofar as this trauma-construction conceived Israeli’s origin as an iteration of the Jewish Holocaust experience, an aggressive and military response to the “Palestinian problem” became the only conceivable “solution” to the subjective fears of Israelis and the objective dangers that a series of Arab attacks posed to their nation. And, indeed, so long as military power seemed a viable method of wiping the historical slate clean, even the progressive narrative of democratic Zionism was deeply compromised, linking “bereavement and triumph” in an inward turning, particularistic way.<sup>13</sup> When Holocaust Day was officially declared in 1951, it was not considered a major event, its tragic narration sitting uncomfortably alongside Zionism’s future-oriented founding myth. One effort at metonymic

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over Israeli’s Creation,” in John Bunzl and Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi, eds., *Psychoanalysis, Identity, and Ideology: Critical Essays on the Israel/Palestine Case*, Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002, pp. 107-135.

<sup>11</sup> Elie Podeh, “History and Memory in the Israeli Educational System: The Portrayal of the Arab-Israeli Conflict in History Textbooks (1948-2000),” *History and Memory* 12 (1) 2000: 65-100, quoting pp. 75-6.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. This specifically Israeli-Jewish frame complemented the more broadly polluting binary of Western orientalism. Though sweeping and polemical, Said was not wrong when he suggested, thirty years ago in *The Palestinian Question*, that “between Zionism and the West there was and still is a community of language and of ideology [that] depends heavily on a remarkable tradition in the West of enmity toward Islam in particular and the Orient in general.” Asserting that Arabs were “practically the *only* ethnic about whom in the West racial slurs are tolerated, even encouraged,” Said suggested that “the Arabs and Islam represent viciousness, veniality, degenerate vice, lechery, and stupidity in popular and scholarly discourse” (*The Question of Palestine*, New York: Times Books, 1979, p. 26, original italics).

<sup>13</sup> Avner Ben-Amos and Illana Bet-El, “Holocaust Day and Memorial Day in Israeli Schools: Ceremonies, Education and History,” *Israeli Studies* 4 (1) 1999: 258-284, quoting p. 267. See also Yoram Bilu and Eliezer Witztum, “War-Related Loss and Suffering in Israeli Society: An Historical Perspective,” *Israeli Studies* 5 (2) 2000: 1-31; Doron Bar, “Holocaust Commemoration in Israel during the 1950s: The Holocaust Cellar on Mount Zion,” *Jewish Social Studies: History, Culture, Society*, n.s. 12 (1) 2005: 16-38; and Dalia Ofer, “The Strength of

resolution placed Holocaust Day one week before the Memorial and Independence Day sequence, in the period that followed upon the Passover celebration of Jewish enslavement and emancipation.<sup>14</sup> The Holocaust holiday, in other words, pointed backward and forward at the same time, and in both directions remained resolutely particularistic. In its tragic mode, it mourned “the modern attempt to annihilate the Jewish people;” in its progressive mode, it celebrated the Warsaw Ghetto uprising as “the heroic spark” that had reignited Israel’s birth.<sup>15</sup>

In fact, constructing parallels between the Holocaust and Israeli wars was more than a metonymic matter. Strong metaphorical resemblances were established between the holidays marking them as well. On the eve of both holidays, businesses, coffee shops and cinemas close early. Radio stations replace their regular broadcasting schedules with melancholic Israeli songs, and television channels feature documentaries about the Holocaust and the Israeli wars. Schools devote these holy days to commemoration and hold compulsory memorial ceremonies. Although these ceremonies are planned and conducted by representatives of the student body, they closely resemble one another, for drawing upon from the same limited, iconic cultural corpus. Many of the same poems are recited, many of the same songs are sung, similar imagery is projected, and parallel dress codes are required. A state ceremony is broadcasted live through most public TV and radio stations on both days<sup>16</sup>. Another feature the holidays share is the sirens that provide temporal and moral demarcation. "On the appointed minute, and for one minute's duration, siren blasts shriek in every village, town and city in the land.

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Remembrance: Commemorating the Holocaust During the First Decade of Israel,” *Jewish Social Studies* 6 (2) 2000: 29-38.

<sup>14</sup> Cf., Zertal, op. cit., p. 39 and Don Handelman and Elihu Katz, "State Ceremonies of Israel-Remembrance Day and Independence Day" in D. Handelman, *Models and Mirrors: Towards Anthropology of Public Events*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, pp. 191-233. Handelman and Katz interpret this juxtaposition as having suggested that, for the Israelis, Holocaust Day signified an exit from the suffering of diasporic Jewry, framing the tragedy, in a progressive manner, as adumbrating the emergence of the Jewish state.

<sup>15</sup> Ben-Amos and Bet-El, p. 272.

<sup>16</sup> Handelman and Katz, pp. 192-195.

Human life stands still, people stop in their tracks, vehicles stop in mid-intersection... All is silent."<sup>17</sup>

This siren, which in other contexts and with different modulation serves as an air-raid warning, not only enforces the short period of shared commemoration; it also emphasizes the incorporation of the victims of the Holocaust into the Jewish-Israeli collectivity.<sup>18</sup>

At the heart of the Independence Day ritual is a binary that contrasts the “passive Diaspora Jewry” of the pre-Holocaust period – “sheep to the slaughter” – with the “active Zionism” of post-Holocaust Israel, “which had fought successfully for statehood.” For its part, the Holocaust memorial day ceremonies are often accompanied by a similar pairing. Such phrases as “from Holocaust to Heroism” and “from Holocaust to Revival/Establishment”<sup>19</sup> signify a Zionist chronology that leads from Holocaust in the Diaspora to Jewish revival via the establishment of modern Israel. These binaries inspire a progressive narrative according to which “resistance fighters ... and soldiers in the War of Independence became the protagonists of the ceremony.” It was via such a political-cum-cultural process that youthful Israel, in Bar-On’s words, “crossed the fragile distinction from being morally right as a persecuted people” – for whom “persecution became imbedded in our internal representations throughout the ages of the Diaspora” -- to being a dominant and aggressive military power, one which did not “attempt to include the relevant 'other' but rather to ignore or disgorge him.”<sup>20</sup>

This construction of a causal relationship between the Holocaust and Israeli wars was dramatized in a closely watched and influential television series. “Pillar of Fire” first aired in 1981 on what was then the nation’s only television channel, the government run Channel 1. This series narrates the history of the Jewish people in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century from a distinctively Zionist perspective,

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<sup>17</sup> *ibid*, p. 193.

<sup>18</sup> As Zertal notes, it has been proposed that all six million Jewish casualties be granted Israeli citizenships, see Idit Zertal, *Death and the Nation: History, Memory, Politics* [Hebrew]. Or Yehuda: Dvir Publishing House, 2002: p. 16.

<sup>19</sup> The Hebrew phrase “M’shoah L’tkuma” is polysemic. The word “Tkuma” can be translated both as *revival* and as *establishment* (specifically regarding the establishment of the state of Israel).

<sup>20</sup> Amir et al, “Recruited Identity,” p. 195.

encapsulating what later come to be criticized as the hegemonic Israeli narrative.<sup>21</sup> “Pillars of Fire” led the viewer from the tragedy of the Final Solution to the heroic Warsaw Ghetto Uprising; from there to the Jewish Brigades, which volunteered to serve in the British army and assist the Allied forces in their war against Germany; onward towards the struggle of the Zionist leadership against the British forces who prevented Jews from immigrating to Palestine; concluding with Israel’s the declaration of independence and the ensuing war with the Arab nations.

This historical account rests upon a self-justifying, narrowly particularistic, and deeply primordial reconstruction of the Holocaust trauma, one that has continued to exert great influence today. The Jewish fighters are the protagonists of this drama. Arrayed against them is the long list of their historical antagonists: the Germans and their accomplices; the British, who stood between Jewish refugees and the soon-to-be Israelis; the Allied Forces, who intervened too late and failed to save European Jews from the Final Solution; Arab-Palestinians and the surrounding nations, who opposed the establishment of the Jewish State; and Europeans, who resented the Jewish survivors and greeted their return to their original residences with several post-war Pogroms. The binary of Jew and Gentile, a defining characteristic of most Jewish communities since biblical times, is thus reformulated inside the Zionist narrative. Instead of leading, as it did in earlier times, to social seclusion, on the one hand, and moral calls for a more just and universal order, on the other, the new Jewish-Israeli narrative reinforces the militaristic and exclusionary aspects of Zionism. Foreign nations have proven to be untrustworthy. Israel can rely only on the resources of the Jewish people and its own military strength to defend itself.

### **Shifting Constructions, New Sympathies**

Only later, as Israel became more embattled and militarized Zionism stymied and wounded, did this ambiguous and narrow reconstruction of the Jewish nation’s founding began to falter. It is revealing

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<sup>21</sup> Amit M. Shejter, "The Pillar of Fire by Night, to Shew them Light." *Media, Culture & Society*, n.s. 29(6) 2007: 916-933.

that Holocaust Day became more culturally significant as the trauma-drama framing it became more insistently pessimistic, and there were a series of symbolic developments that contributed to darkening before the social arena for the performance of militarized Zionism actually change. For example, the trial of Adolf Eichmann, a Nazi official publicly tried for war crimes in 1961, exposed the Israeli public to a multitude of testimonies which brought to light the horrendous war experiences of Holocaust survivors. After more than a decade in which the personal stories were belittled in favor of the collective progressive narrative, these relived testimonies set in motion a new, more privatizing Holocaust memory. Not only a national disaster brought on by the passiveness of Diasporic Jewry, the Holocaust now became a collection of personal tragedies, to be sympathized with, commemorated, and also avenged.<sup>22</sup>

This turn toward tragedy deepened after the Yom Kippur war in 1973, when Israel barely escaped a catastrophic military defeat. With this event, the social arena for the performance of collective trauma was changed. The war experience allowed the particularistic approach to the identities at stake to be challenged in a subtle but powerful way. A newly experienced “feeling of dread,” according to a contemporary Israeli observer, meant “diminished importance of the fighter as a Zionist role model” and the corresponding reconstruction of the Holocaust drama in a manner – complementary to the post-Eichman privatization -- that “placed a bolder emphasis on the suffering of the victims and focused greater attention on daily life in the ghettos and camps.” As a consequence, “a different type of bravery was now given prominence – one that was non-military, but involved survival under oppressive conditions.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> For an elaborate discussion of the privatization of the Holocaust memory in Israeli society, see Anita Shapira, “The Holocaust: Private Memories, Public Memories.” *Jewish Social Studies* 4(2), 1998, pp. 40-58.

<sup>23</sup> Ben-Amos and Bet-El, p. 270. Bilu and Witztum note, for example, that the psychiatric diagnosis of Post-Traumatic-Stress-Disorder could only emerge in the wake of the Yom Kippur war, for it implied a weakening of the indomitable Israeli protagonist’s military strength: “The myth of heroism, and with it the layers of disregard and denial that had hidden combat stress reactions from the public eye in the preceding wars, were extensively eroded in the 1973 War. Following the utter surprise and confusion at the onset of the war, the military defeats in the first days



It is from this point onward that the enduring conflict between more particularizing and more universalizing constructions of the Jewish trauma-drama became crystallized inside Israeli society. Of course, a sense of victimhood continued to permeate political discourse in Israel's third decade. The Six-Day War of 1967, the 1967-1970 War of Attrition, the Munich Massacre of 1972, the Entebbe Operation of 1976, and the punctuating acts of terrorism undertaken by the Palestine Liberation Organization left deep marks on Israeli society, becoming frequent trauma-recalling and trauma-inducing features of public discourse. Conservative Prime Minister Menachem Begin made prominent use of Holocaust imagery in his political speeches, warning time and again against the "return of Auschwitz" in reference to threats from the Palestinians and Arab nations. The leading Labor politician Abba Eban famously compared the option of a return to the pre-1967 borders of Israel to a return to the borders of Auschwitz.<sup>24</sup> When speaking of the Arab-Israeli conflict, soldiers and politicians frequently expressed concerns about a Holocaust-like disaster looming over their heads<sup>25</sup>. Such narrative inscriptions of Holocaust tragedy inside the long-suffering history of Jewish suffering provided further justification for violent resistance against those were perceived as purely external threats.

The new post-1973 context, however, also allowed the tragic trauma construction to provide a different kind of script, one that could connect Jewish Israelis with Palestinian suffering. An Israeli peace movement emerged that put land for peace on the table, and a new generation of critical historians righteously exposed Israeli complicity in Palestinian expulsion. Leftist intellectuals introduced such

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of fighting, and the heavy toll of casualties – more than 2500 soldiers killed and about 7000 wounded – the war was inscribed in the national consciousness as a massive trauma” (loc. cit., p. 20).

<sup>24</sup> For a detailed account of this change in the Israeli attitude towards the memory of the Holocaust, see Hanna Yablonka, "The Holocaust Consciousness in the Third Decade: From 'There' to 'Here and Now'," in Z. Zameret and H. Yablonka, eds., *The Third Decade* [Hebrew], Jerusalem: Yad Ben Zvi, 2008, pp. 364-378.

<sup>25</sup> A collection of testimonies and experiences from the Six-Day War provides numerous examples: A. Shapira, ed., *Warriors' Discourse: Chapters in Listening and Meditation [Siyach Lochamim: Pirkey Hakshava Vehitbonenut]* [Hebrew], Tel Aviv: Kvutzat Chaverim Tzeirim Mehatnua Hakibutzit, 1968, pp. 160-170.

new critical concepts as “cognitive militarism.”<sup>26</sup> More moderate observers spoke about the decline of “collective commemoration” and the growth of a more individual centered, rights-based political culture.<sup>27</sup>

The “devaluation of the myth of heroism”<sup>28</sup> intensified after the 1982 Lebanon War, whose military frustrations produced feelings of futility and whose massacres at Sabra and Shatila ignited feelings of humiliation. In its initial response to the massacres, conservative Likud government officials lashed out against accusations of Israeli complicity. They described them as “a blood libel against the Jewish state and its Government,” framing them in terms of historical anti-Semitism against the Jewish people. In response to this defensive and narrowly primordial construction, some 300,000 Israelis organized a massive protest in Tel Aviv. This unprecedented expression of criticisms and anti-war feeling triggered the creation of a Commission of Inquiry. Chaired by former Supreme Court Justice Yitzhak Kahan, the investigation produced sharply critical findings and made significant recommendations for reform. While it was Lebanese Phalangists who had carried out the massacre against Palestinians, the Kahan Commission found that the Jewish government had “indirect personal responsibility” and accused Ariel Sharon, then Minister of Defense, of “direct personal responsibility.”<sup>29</sup> The events surrounding the Lebanon invasion and the self-critical reaction to it not only created more universalizing trauma constructions inside Israel. They triggered also a global reaction that, according to one French observer, allowed the normative symbolization of Holocaust “to be turned against those to whom it hitherto protected.” For the first time, “large swathes of international public opinion distanced

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<sup>26</sup> Victor Azarya and Baruch Kimmerling “Cognitive Permeability of Civil-Military Boundaries: Expectations from Military Service in Israel,” *Studies in Comparative International Development* 20 (4) 1985-86: 42-63; Kimmerling, “Patterns of Militarism in Israel,” *European Journal of Sociology* 2 (1993): 1-28 and “Political Subcultures and Civilian Militarism in A Settler-Immigrant Society,” in D. Bar-Tal, D. Jacobson and A. Kliemann, eds., *Concerned with Security: Learning from Israel's Experience*, Greenwich, Connecticut: JAI Press, 1998, pp. 395-416.

<sup>27</sup> Bilu and Witztum, p. 25.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>29</sup> Kahan Commission, *Israeli's Lebanon War*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984, pp. 283-84.

themselves from the policy of Israel.”<sup>30</sup> Two decades later, the Israeli feminist critic Ronit Lentin asserted that this new spiral of signification had made an expanded solidarity possible.

After Lebanon, for the first time, the suffering of others, particularly of Palestinian children, not Jewish suffering, was the principal subject of Israeli literary and poetic discourses. The death of Palestinians was described using Shoah images; their fate was equated with the fate of the Jews as Israeli poets and playwrights reflected and compelled Jewish understanding of the suffering of the Palestinians<sup>31</sup>.

### **Palestinian Counter-Narrative of Trauma**

Throughout this period of symbolic reconstruction, the emergent Palestinian national movement played a significant role, creating new “realities on the ground” that provided a new dramatic field of performative possibilities. Its energetic and aggressive ideology, and often murderous tactics, presented undeniable evidence of a previously “invisible” nation and people, making it more difficult, though not of course impossible, to narrate a progressive story of emancipation on the Israeli side. Yet, the PLO’s terrorism severely restricted its dramatic appeal. In the late 1970s, the world’s best known Palestinian intellectual, Edward Said, declared that, while “we have gained the support of all the peoples of the Third World,” the “remarkable national resurgence” of the “Palestinian *idea*” had not yet succeeded, for “we have been unable to interest the West very much in the justice of our cause.”<sup>32</sup> While acknowledging how much he resented “the ways in which the whole grisly matter is stripped of all its resonances and its often morally confusing detail, and compressed simply, comfortably, inevitably under the rubric of ‘Palestinian terror’,” Said declared himself “horrificed at the hijacking of planes, the suicidal

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<sup>30</sup> Michel Wieviorka, *The Lure of Anti-Semitism: Hatred of Jews in Present-Day France*, Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2007, p. 59.

<sup>31</sup> Ronit Lentin, *Israel and the Daughters of the Shoah: Reoccupying the Territories of Silence*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2000, p. 145. The empathy-creating possibilities of Holocaust memory is ignored by Zertal’s reconstruction, whose cultural history has no place for the peace movement.

<sup>32</sup> Said, *The Palestinian Question*, pp. xi-x, original italics.

missions, the assassinations, the bombing of schools and hotels.” Said believed that this performative failure would have to be redressed. In order to attract a Western audience, the trauma-drama of Palestinian suffering would have to be told in a different way. For there to be “some sense of the larger Palestinian story from which all these things came,” Said explained, there must be a new and more compelling focus on “the reality of a collective national trauma [that is] contained for every Palestinian in the question of Palestine.”<sup>33</sup> A new progressive counter-trauma narrative was projected, describing Palestinian suffering, Western/Israeli domination, and a heroic anti-colonial movement for liberation. It provided a new symbolic protagonist with whom a widening circle of Western citizens, and the developing group of self-critical Israelis, could identify, or at least ambivalently support. This possibility deepened among many Israelis in the wake of the first Intifada, the relatively non-violent Palestinian uprising that began in 1987. The expanding structure of solidary feeling became powerfully institutionalized in the treaties and ceremonies marking the Oslo peace process in 1993.

### **Right-Wing Backlash**

What has been described as the emergence of “post-Zionism” was constrained, though not entirely cut short, by the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in 1995.<sup>34</sup> Rabin’s cruelly calculated murder managed to short-circuit processes of civil repair that had, in no small part, been fuelled by the manner which the Holocaust trauma specifically, and Jewish suffering more generally, was being symbolically and morally recast. This murderous short-circuiting demonstrated the ambiguous and contradictory trauma construction that responded to Israeli’s post-1967 history. While the earlier, more particularistic trauma drama had been challenged, its narrowly primordial power had certainly remained. There is no inherent correlation between narrative form and moral aspiration. Indeed, even as the Yom Kippur war and the difficulties that unfolded in its aftermath allowed the

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. xii.

<sup>34</sup> See, e.g., Erik Cohen, “Israel as a Post-Zionist Society,” pp. 203-213 in Wistrich and Ohana, loc. cit.

creation of a more universalizing tragic narrative, they also energized a much more particularistic kind of tragic story, one that was distinctively more anti-civil than the Israeli nation's ambiguously progressive founding myth. And even as the emerging Palestinian movement provided opportunities for cross-national solidarity, it also had an equal and opposite effect. Alongside and competing with the Palestinian protagonist with whom the left could identify, Palestinian actions offered the growing backlash movement a more sharply defined, polluted antagonist against whom to carry on Israel's long-standing primordial fight.

In 1977, the right-wing Likud party took power on a platform demanding continued occupation and usurpation of the "holy lands," its leaders and supporters fervently opposed to any Palestinian accord. During this of backlash movement there also emerged Gush Emunim – literally "Block of the Faithful" -- whose supporters began a decades long, highly successful campaign to take Jewish possession of occupied Palestinian lands. The religious Zionist ideology initially inspiring Gush Emunim was not militarist. Emerging in response to the seemingly "miraculous" 1967 war, it narrated the acquisition of Judea, Samaria and Sinai – which had taken just six days -- as a millennial sign of the Jewish people's imminent salvation. In opposition to the traditional views of Orthodox Judaism, for Gush Emunim building, settling and developing – whether in pre-war Israel or in the Occupied Territories – became a positively sanctioned commandment. The movement's activity's soon generated intense opposition nonetheless. Illegal settlements were forcibly removed time and again, only to be reinstated by Gush Emunim. Public opinion remained largely unsupportive, the expected salvation did not arrive, and Egyptian-Israeli peace accord forced withdrawal from Sinai and the first massive settlement removal in 1982. Its messianic aspirations thwarted, Gush Emunim turned from messianic to militaristic narrations of expanded settlement as a result.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> For an elaborate account of the first years of Gush Emunim and of the religious and political context out of which it had emerged see Gideon Aran, *From Religious Zionism to a Zionist Religion: The Roots of Gush Emunim and its*

In the years that followed, “settler” became as ubiquitous a trope in conservative Israeli society as “survivor.” Indeed, the former collective representation drew its symbolic strength from the latter. For the Israeli right, Jews needed desperately to annex every inch of Palestinian land that surrounded them, for every non-Jewish person was a potential enemy. They had learned this deeply anti-civil lesson from their tragic, and primordial, reconstruction of the Holocaust trauma. Because they experienced the Jewish victimhood of those terrible days as never having gone away, they could glean no bridging metaphors from their re-experience of trauma. Instead, they felt compelled to frame every conflict with outsiders in a boundary-making way.

When the Likud Minister of Education delivered her Holocaust Day speech on 2001, she proclaimed complete identification with the protagonists in the original trauma. “We shouldn’t suppose,” she insisted, “that we differ from our grandfathers and grandparents who went to the gas chambers.” Rejecting a progressive narrative that would dramatize the distance between the situation of Jews then and now, she insisted “what separates us from them is not that we are some sort of new Jew.” What has changed is not the opposition between Jew and Gentile, but its asymmetry. The Jewish side can now be armed. The Minister explained: “The main difference is external: we have a state, a flag and army.” During the historical Holocaust, by contrast, the Jews had been “caught in their tragedy, [for]

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*Culture* [Hebrew]. Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. Jerusalem: Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1987. The turn from a messianic religious discourse to a militaristic discourse in the political culture of Gush Emunim was pointed out in Gadi Taub, *The Settlers and the Battle for the Meaning of Zionism* [Hebrew], Tel Aviv: Miskal, 2007. If the polarizing effects of the Israeli trauma drama’s shifting retellings were deepened by more “fundamentalist,” and often more eschatological, versions of Jewish religion, the same can be said for the Palestinian trauma. More radical and rejectionist elements, publicly dedicated to the annihilation of Israel, increasingly experienced the sources of their trauma, and its possible resolution, through Islamicist faith. For this intertwining of the religious extremes, see Roger Friedland and Richard Hecht, *To Rule Jerusalem*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996, e.g., pp. 168-170 and 355ff.

they lacked all three.”<sup>36</sup> The trauma drama points toward an ineluctable solution: It is only power and violence that can save contemporary Jews from suffering their ancestors’ fate.

Caught up inside this narrowly constructed trauma drama, the Israeli right has identified the peace process with Jewish annihilation. In the months before Yitzhak Rabin’s assassination, ultra-orthodox and right-wing magazines attacked the general-turned-peacemaker as a “traitor” and “madman,” suggesting he was “anti-religious” and even “non-Jewish.” He and his Foreign Minister, Shimon Peres, were depicted as members of the *Judenrat* and *Kapos*, the infamous Nazi-appointed Jewish leaders who had collaborated in the administration of the death camps. At the anti-government demonstrations that grew increasingly aggressive in the months and weeks before his murder, Rabin was portrayed in posters wearing an SS uniform and cap.<sup>37</sup>

These disturbing images point to the construction of a trauma drama that is increasingly radical and particularist. Mainstream Zionism casts Israeli Jews as protagonists and Arabs as antagonists. The new conception marks Israeli settlers as victims, and any political or military party which attempts to evict them as Nazis. This trauma rhetoric framed resistance to the first large-scale eviction of Israeli settlers, from the Sinai as part of the peace agreement with Egypt in 1982. In the final clash between the settlers and Israeli military forces who forcibly removed them, the settlers placed yellow stars on their chests, echoing the emblems that European Jews had been forced to wear under Nazi occupation.

Since 1982, the settlement movement has grown considerably not only in size but influence. In the 2005 “Disengagement,” Israeli forces withdrew unilaterally from the Gaza Strip and Northern Samaria, and 25 settlements were dismantled. These powerful challenges to the anti-Palestinian land movement triggered more intense invocations of the Holocaust trauma in response. Soldiers sent to

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<sup>36</sup> Limor Livnat, “Of Holocaust and Heroism,” *Ha’aretz*, April 19, 2001, quoted in Jackie Feldman, “Marking the Boundaries of the Enclave: Defining the Israeli Collective through the Poland Experience,” *Israeli Studies* 7 (2) 2002: 1-31, p. 1.

<sup>37</sup> Lentin, loc. cit., p. 148.

forcibly evict settlements were met with sobbing children wearing yellow stars, asking with raised hands "Have you come to take us to the gas chamber?" Settlers prepared Auschwitz-like uniforms to be worn on eviction day. Right-wing activists broadly referred to soldiers and Israeli leaders as Judenrat, which drew censure from Holocaust survivors and left-wing political activists alike.<sup>38</sup> The mainstream Zionist invocation of the Holocaust trauma drama justified anti-Arab and anti-Palestinian violence in the name of creating and defending Israel. The right-wing pro-settlement variation on this theme understands such violence differently, as an act of defiance. As the Nazis obliterated Jewish communities in Europe, so are Israeli leaders planning to destroy the Jewish communities in the Occupied Territories.

### **Left-Wing Inhibition**

Faced with such powerfully reactionary trauma constructions, the response of the left would seem clear. Drawing upon the relatively autonomous cultural power of Holocaust symbolism, it could challenge the social instantiations upon which right-wing deployments of the narrative rest. Building upon the earlier peace movement, it could broaden solidarity by identifying the Palestinians as the victims of a Holocaust-like disaster themselves. That such counter-narratives only rarely appear in the highly polarized political conflicts that mark contemporary Israel, even among fierce opponents of the settlement movement, is not only a politically debilitating but an empirically perplexing fact.

Western critics of Israel's occupation policy, whether Jewish or not, do not share this difficulty. In the 2008 animated pseudo-documentary "Waltz with Bashir," Israeli journalist Ron Ben-Yshay recounts his arrival at Sabra and Shatilla at the massacre's end. "Do you remember the photo from the Warsaw Ghetto? The one with the kid raising his hands?" he asks his interviewer. The next shot shows a group of Palestinian women and children raising their hands while being led by gun-bearing Phalangists to their certain deaths. The following shot is a close up of one of this group of victims, a solemn child of

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<sup>38</sup> "The Difficult Scenes which will never Relent" [Hebrew], *Maariv*, August 8, 2005; "Moving to a New Home is not Similar to Crematoriums and Gas Chambers" [Hebrew], *Maariv*, December 21, 2004; "Settlers: We'll Greet the



approximately the same age as the Jewish child from the Warsaw Ghetto. This potently inverted analogy strongly appeals to critical audiences outside of Israel. "Waltz with Bashir" was nominated for an Academy Award. Such inversion, however, rarely surfaces inside Jewish-Israeli discourse itself.

Post-Zionist scholars have certainly deconstructed the once widely accepted causal relationship between the Holocaust and the establishment of Israel. They have challenged the Zionist founder's claim that the establishment of Israel was the only possible response to the Holocaust and the only feasible solution to the anti-Semitism of the Diaspora.<sup>39</sup> While these radical arguments have not been universally accepted among critical Israelis, they reveal the widespread identification of the Israeli left with the suffering of the Palestinians.

Yet, when speaking out publicly against the occupation, critical Israelis rarely evoke rhetorical solidarity with Palestinians. When Holocaust imagery is employed, it is directed inwards, towards Jewish-Israeli leaders and institutions, identifying them as anti-Palestinian "perpetrators." Philosopher Yeshayahu Leibowitz publicly called Israeli military units "Judeo-Nazis."<sup>40</sup> Historian Moshe Zimmerman asserted that his ability to study extremist settlers was limited because the Jewish children of occupied Hebron resemble Hitler Youth. The Leibowitz interview became notorious. Zimmerman was sued for libel.<sup>41</sup> In a similar incident, scandal erupted and legal proceedings ensued over a letter addressed to a settler in "KZ Kiryat Arba," widely understood as "Concentration Camp Kiryat Arba," an identification that clearly equated Jewish settlement with Nazi Holocaust crimes. While acknowledging that "doubtlessly, the defendant intended to claim that the plaintiff is an evil man," the presiding judge in the case adamantly maintained that, no matter how evil the settler seemed, the defendant could not have

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Soldiers in Auschwitz Uniforms" [Hebrew], *Yediot Aharonot*, July 28, 2005.

<sup>39</sup> Moshe Zimmerman, "'Post-Zionism' and Post-Zionism" [Hebrew], *Theory and Criticism* 12-13: 487-496.

<sup>40</sup> "Yeshayahu Leibowitz, 91, Iconoclastic Israeli Thinker." *New York Times*, August 19, 1994.

<sup>41</sup> The statement was originally published in Moshe Zimmerman, "The Children of Hebron Resemble Hitler Youth." [Hebrew] *Jerusalem* April 28, 1995. Court proceedings in this matter are in Civil Complaint (Tel Aviv) 2313/00 Zimmermann vs. Yedioth Communication Inc., 2005 [Hebrew].

intended to link him with Nazism -- “He did not mean to say that the plaintiff is, God forbid, a Nazi.” The judge’s reasoning underscores the difficulty of universalizing the Holocaust trauma in Israel today. “As a Jew,” he explained, “the plaintiff cannot be anything but a victim of the Nazis.”<sup>42</sup>

There are several reasons for this discursive inhibition. One undoubtedly is that Israel’s inability to come to terms with the Palestinian question has produced increasing radicalism, violence, and anti-Israeli, and often anti-Semitic stereotypes among a significant part of the Palestinian resistance. Another, less noted reason has to do with the centrality of the army in Israeli society. Most Israeli Jews, both men and women, have compulsory military duty of two to three years starting at the age of 18. Many voluntarily extend their service to gain benefits and professional development, and most remain in reserve duty until the age of 40. To severely criticize the military by comparing it to the bitterest antagonist in modern Jewish history is to pollute not only the military *per se* but, indirectly, the whole of Israeli society. Institutional setting plays a vital role in trauma construction, filtering and tilting the spiral of signification.

Whatever the causes, the result of this constraint on the signification process has been to deprive Israeli critics of a potent political weapon. Criticizing the intertwining of Holocaust and national founding narrative as a forced marriage, post-Zionists generally avoid evoking the trauma drama in any political context. This has allowed the meaning of the Holocaust to be monopolized by nationalist and conservative forces.

According to the Israeli right, to recognize the rights of Palestinians is to become an enemy of the Jewish people. Solidarity cannot extend beyond the boundaries of one’s own group. It must be primordial, not civil. So reconstructed, the trauma drama of the Holocaust is a recipe for conflict without end. If this view should prevail, it would not only be severely destabilizing in

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<sup>42</sup> Civil Complaint (Jerusalem) 552/84 Haetzni vs. Tomarkin, 1986 [Hebrew].

geo-political terms. It would assault the universalizing moral principles that the memory of the Holocaust calls upon us to sustain.

## The Cultural Trauma of Katyn Massacre

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*“The worst was the silence, the prohibition against speaking openly of their death, of a dignified burial, for half a century. It was forbidden even to visit the places of execution. My younger sister, Zosia, always envied those friends of hers whose parents had died in Auschwitz. They at least could go to the grave sites, and didn’t have to hide the truth...”*

Stanislawa Dec quoted in *Children of the Katyn Massacre* Teresa Kaczorowska Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Company 2006:150.

*“The Katyn massacre is the only international crime in world history where two nations disputed the guilt”*

U.S. Congressman Ray Madden 1952, cited in *Katyn and the Soviet Massacre of 1940* George Sanford London: Routledge 2005:124.

## ABSTRACT

The case we analyze is that which has come to be called the Katyn Massacre, the murder of approximately 14,500 prominent Poles apparently by the Soviet secret police (NKVD) in the early spring of 1940. While these men were actually held in three different prisoner of war camps, the first mass graves were uncovered by the advancing German army in 1943 in the Katyn forest in the Ukraine and the incident is now commonly associated with this place. A memorial cemetery has been constructed there and it has become the site of pilgrimages and other forms of commemoration. Who the actual perpetrators of the massacre are continues to be a matter of dispute. While most accept that the killings were carried out by the NKVD, and official documents released by the Soviet government in the 1990s appear to confirm this, there still exist those who claim that the Nazis were the responsible party, a claim originally made by the Soviet government in 1943 when the bodies were uncovered.

The massacre of these Polish citizens was from the very beginning encased in political conflict and controversy. The individuals killed were representative figures and their murder could never be treated simply as a crime against individual persons. The story of Katyn is one of silencing as much as it is of suppressed memory, thus one central issue of our paper concerns how traumatic memory, a category we will define and elaborate, is maintained under conditions of extreme political domination and public denial; another is the construction of a trauma narrative on this basis. In this latter process, we will highlight the witnessing and representative role of intellectuals, in the broad sense to include creative individuals such as artists, writers and filmmakers.

## Introduction

In what came to be called the Katyn Massacre, the precipitating occurrence was the mass murder of over 14,500 Polish elite officers and over 7,000 other Polish citizens captured by the NKVD in April 1940 following the Soviet invasion of eastern Poland on September 17, 1939. The directly affected collectivities were the Polish military, at that time under attack not only from the west by the German army but also from the east by the Soviets, and the families and friends of those killed. However, neither the army nor the relatives of the murdered soldiers knew the precise circumstances of what happened. It took years to establish historical facts and to narrate them in a coherent and meaningful way. One reason why this took as long as it did was the

concerted attempts made by the wartime governments in the United States and Great Britain to silence any public discussion in the fear of alienating their Soviet ally, as well as the systematic attempts by the latter to cover up the facts. Any attempt on the part of Polish citizens in occupied Poland to raise the issue of possible Soviet guilt was treated as pro-German treason. As time progressed, the affected collectivities expanded from the military and relatives and friends to include the Polish nation, as the event, once constructed, became an important symbol in the struggle for independence from Soviet domination. It was also its potential anti-Soviet propaganda value which in large part motivated a renewed interest in the United States and Great Britain during the Cold War.

According to a cultural sociological understanding of social tragedy, this particular war crime could emerge as a cultural trauma capable of deeply affecting whole collectivities only insofar as the claims to truth could be firmly established and the symbolic attribution of suffering and guilt effectively enacted in the form of a story couched in universalistic moral terms. The present project aims at exploring the social conditions under which these claims were made in the name of these victims as well as the cultural trajectory of the trauma narrative that followed the event. We will investigate *how* the war crime of Katyn massacre entered the core of Polish collective identity, *when* it unfolded, and *what* were the results of transformation of that crime into a major cultural crisis that to this day overshadows Polish-Russian political relations.

While looking at the historical facts, we realize that there are several important social processes at stake. *First*, from the very beginning the construction of the trauma narrative of the victims was accompanied by the construction of what we may call a counter-trauma narrative by the perpetrators who sought to set forth an incorrect attribution of responsibility for the crime and to actively conceal the circumstances of the massacre. *Second*, we recognize that the unequal distribution of political and military power during World War II, not only between Poles, Germans and Russians, but also between Poles and their Western Allies, played an important role in conditioning the context of the whole story. In fact, we claim that a distinctive characteristic of traumatic narratives is an asymmetrical relation between perpetrator and victim and that this, in part, is what makes cultural trauma. In the present case, we deal with a situation that might be described as emergence of dialectic between the trauma narrative of the relatively weak victims based on strong premises and the counter trauma discourse of the relatively strong suspects based on weak premises. *Third*, while the power distribution mattered and continues to

matter, it is necessary to explore the conditions under which the correct attribution of responsibility for the massacre was prevented, the controversy sustained, and an eventual resolution made possible.

In other words, we recognize that it was not only the sheer power of political and military control, but also the intellectual attachments and emotional dispositions of various social groups on all sides that played a significant role in framing and handling the issue. These attachments, beliefs and perceptions, i.e. a set of time- and place-specific cultural codes and attitudes shaped the ways in which the incident was approached during the war and subsequently thereafter. One result is that these cultural codes initially obscured and suppressed the trauma drama of Katyn. From the perspective of cultural sociological theory, this very fact of the memory of painful experience being suppressed, not only the ruthless carnage itself, contributed to the emergence of collective anxiety and enabled victims to construct yet another dimension of their collective injury.

This collective memory of terrible injury had to be first retained, however, throughout the time of foreign occupation (German and Soviet), passed on to others and then discussed as well as visualized/iconized in various ways, if it was to enter Polish society and other societies as a major cultural force. For many Poles (as well as the German and Soviet leaders), the Katyn massacre, the calculated murder of a national elite, symbolized the death of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Republic (1918-1939) (Paul 1991: 113). In order to analyze this process, we have decided to employ an analytic binary of the private and the public spheres. At least in Poland, the memory of the Katyn massacre has been passed on from generation to generation within the restricted channels of the private sphere, but we recognize that as such it could not directly constitute a fully-fledged cultural trauma that – in turn – would establish the status of the massacre as cultural crisis and more universal moral tragedy.<sup>43</sup>

This memory was repressed by the Soviet political control over Poland efficiently exerted between 1945 and 1989, and as a result it could not be introduced to the Polish domestic public

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<sup>43</sup> Is it a specific factor in the Katyn case that there were no competing ‘emblematic memories’ (Stern 2004) within Poland itself, as in many other cases? In narrating the memory of the Chilean military coup of 1973 and the many ‘disappeared’ one finds several (Stern locates 4 ideal-typical emblematic memory frames) competing frames within the affected national population. While there may have been contemporary Poles who endorsed suppressing public discussion of Soviet responsibility, everyone, except for “the small minority-mostly communists-who chose to believe the Soviet claims’ (Cienciala et al 2007:219) appears to have accepted it was they who were responsible.

sphere, the locus of crucial engagements with the event. However, it was possible, at least to a certain extent, among the Polish diaspora in the West, especially in France, England and the United States to publically address it. The publicized trauma narrative of Polish emigrants and exiles was fueled by their own private memories and the existential anxiety and pain of the relatives of those killed who remained in Poland. However, as long as the Cold War status quo maintained the political and cultural structures that initially sought to repress the discourse of Katyn tragedy, the construction of cultural trauma remained latent and stalled. The potential of symbolic power associated with private sufferings can be fully actualized only in broad public sphere and only when the directly affected communities themselves are able to express it verbally and visually in a sustained way that eventually transcends individual tragedies and projects them onto the moral screen of the whole nation and later international community.

At the sociological level, we distinguish three crucial carrier groups (survivors, relatives and intellectuals/politicians interested in exploring the case) who sustained the trauma narrative within the two dimensions of social reality we have specified, some of them in both spheres simultaneously. They had their own social organizations and attempted to use the public institutions of their host countries as well. Some of them delivered extraordinary testimonies replete with what one could call thick descriptions that almost single handedly established Katyn as cultural tragedy because it endowed it with a tremendous sense of moral sensitivity and historical authenticity, for example Jozef Czapski's *Inhuman Land*, J.K. Zawodny's *Death in the Forest*, and Salomon Slowes *The Road to Katyn*.

However, it was only under the changing political and cultural conditions following the Autumn of Nations of 1989 and the rise of Mikhail Gorbachev in the Soviet Union that their trauma narrative could truly become a powerful public phenomenon, a grand trauma drama. For the first time in the post-War period it became possible for the public representations of it to surface widely and for a truly international discourse to emerge. In short, the Katyn story has undergone a metamorphosis from a political conflict and tragedy known by few to a genocidal event discussed by many. Only then was the Katyn massacre completely transformed from war crime to collective cultural crisis.

The most recent visualization of this traumatic event by the famous film director Andrzej Wajda and the whole gamut (and lack) of responses to the movie which have themselves created

a cultural story whose complexity refracts, as it were, the complexity of the actual trauma construction. There are at once compelling personal, national, international, moral and intellectual aspects to it that can possibly illuminate the Katyn trauma. Since they are brought to public life by a single event of artistic production we can contribute to the understanding of trauma construction by adding a performative analysis of it to a standard historical presentation of the story at hand. Such extraordinary individuals like Czapski and Wajda, both at once visual artists and intellectuals, were very much aware of the fact that events need representations if collective memory is to be firmly entrenched in the cultural fabric of society and to effectively support a formative sense of collective injury, not only among those who directly identify themselves with those murdered and their families because of national and civil ties but also among those who empathize with the victims because of more universal moral ties. Andrzej Wajda emphasized the role of “showing Katyn to the world” and the intensity of moral and cultural shock of audiences in the West that ensued, for example after the screening of the movie at UCLA before the Oscars ceremony of 2008 (Wajda 2008). Thus we have to recognize an iconic aspect of trauma construction as well, not only the salient discursive regimes. In the introduction to “Inhuman Land” written in 1984, Jozef Czapski mentioned that the greatest reward for him was that after many years there were still people who wanted to read his Katyn story. His mission, therefore, was proven to be complete. However, from the very beginning he was convinced that there’s certain kind of profound paradox involved in the whole story. In the book he notices that “it would be impossible to live, impossible to smile, if one always remembered things and never erased any memories” (Czapski 2001: 96).

Thus beyond the dialectics of victims’ trauma narrative and perpetrators’ counter trauma discourse there is an important dialectics of memory and forgetting. This dialectics actualizes itself within the temporal logic of generational change and continued cultural renewal. This was clearly understood by Czapski who while talking about the continued interest in his work as the greatest reward modestly admitted that he “had not dreamt about it.” The responses to the representations like his and his own attitude towards it should be culturally unpacked, for they contain the key to understanding what it really means that social actions become cultural events through the process of symbolic construction, not simply by themselves. This is one of the key things that this Katyn case study can contribute to sociological theory.



## A Time Line of the Occurrences

In August 23, 1939, the governments of Germany and the Soviet Union signed a non-aggression agreement, popularly known as the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, which essentially eliminated Poland from the map by dividing its territory between the two countries. The document also contained a secret agreement which legitimated the elimination of its intelligentsia. The following year in the early spring, approximately 15,000 Polish citizens, (the issue of whether or not they were prisoners of war is a legal issue, as no formal declaration of war against the Soviet Union was made), primarily reserve and regular officers in the military, but also including members of the police corps were murdered in the rural area of western Russia.<sup>44</sup> These individuals were generally recognized as the cream of Polish society.<sup>45</sup> The killings were carried out with German-made revolvers by the Soviet secret police (NKVD), individually with a single shot to the back of the head and the victims buried in stacked layers of tightly-packed mass graves.<sup>46</sup> The prisoners, mostly men but including at least one prominent female officer (Lt. Janina Musnicka Lewandowska, daughter of General Dowbor Musnicki), were held in three separate camps in the Soviet Union and killed within the space of a few weeks. Many prominent Polish Jews were included amongst the victims, about 5% of the inmates of one of the three camps (Kozelsk) were Jews, according to one account, among them the chief rabbi of the Polish army (Paul 1991: 70) and Slowes who survived. There were also Muslims killed and the monument now but in the memory of the Katyn Massacre contains four different religious symbols.<sup>47</sup> After the betrayal of the non-aggression pact agreement with German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, the Soviets gather captured pro-Soviet officers in the Polish military to form a Polish division in the Red Army. These officers present a list of those who would be

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<sup>44</sup> There were also about 7,000 civilians killed at other unknown locations. According to Paul (1991:105), "for unknown reasons, the NKVD decided to spare 448 men from a total of 15,400...of those spared, 245 came from Kozelsk, 79 from Starobelsk, and 124 from Ostashkov".

<sup>45</sup> According to Allen Paul (1991:65) "the German and Soviet governments collaborated closely in their efforts to eliminate the Polish intelligentsia". He and others suggest that the two governments may also have colluded in the Katyn massacre, making later claims and counter-claims of guilt and responsibility even more complicated.

<sup>46</sup> Only one eyewitness lived to describe the moment and method of execution, Stanislaw Swianiewicz now a professor of economics and author of *In the Shadow of Katyn* (W cieniu Katynia) 1976.

<sup>47</sup> One survivor, Father Zdzislaw Peszkowski, recounts, "At Kozelsk, I discovered Poland". Allen Paul, who interviewed Peszkowski in 1989, explains: "What he meant was that at Kozelsk he met the best that Poland could offer. At twenty-one he had been thrown together with men from all parts of the country, a cross-section of the nation's professional elite" (Paul 1991:70-71). Peszkowski was not a priest at the time but after receiving a Phd in Polish literature from Oxford after the war was ordained in the United States in 1954.

suitable to the head of the NKVD. This list contains many of those who had just months before been executed. The Russians tell these Polish officers that these men had been handed over to the Germans (Cienciala et al eds 2007:208). Later, in August 1941, the Soviets release General Wladyslaw Anders from a prisoner of war camp and persuade him to head a relatively independent Polish army to aid in the fight against the Germans. One of Anders first official acts in this new role is to obtain the release of Captain Jozef Czapski, a Russian-speaking Pole and an internationally recognized artist, with the intention of finding out what happened to the missing officers. In February 1943, the Soviets organize a Russian-based Polish government-in-exile to counter the one already established in London, which was the one legally recognized at the time. This is two months before the Germans announce the discovery of the bodies in the Katyn forest, as the advancing German army forces the Soviets to abandon the region in late summer 1941.

Early in the spring of 1943, a German military unit occupying a NKVD guest house in Katyn reports finding bodies of Polish soldiers. In part because of the severe weather conditions, but also because of the historic events occurring with the battle of Stalingrad (October 1942-February 1943) the Germans wait until late March to investigate and exhume the bodies. On 13 April 1943 in a broadcast carried by all German controlled radio stations, including those in occupied Poland, Radio Berlin announces that “the local population indicated a Soviet execution site at Kosogory...about 3000 bodies...had already been uncovered in a huge pit...” (128) and that these were the bodies of “thousands of officers of the former Polish army, interned in the U.S.S.R. in 1939 and bestially murdered by the Bolsheviks” (Paul 1991:210). On 17 April, the Polish government asks the International Red Cross (IRC) to investigate. Coming as it did in the wake of the defeat at Stalingrad, the discovery of the bodies at Katyn, which the German command mistakenly thought represented all the murdered Polish officers, presented a significant opportunity in the propaganda war and “Goebbels now saw an opportunity to divide the Allies. He wrote in his diary that as soon as he heard of this statement, he secured Hitler’s sanction for the German Red Cross to ask the IRC for an investigation of the Katyn graves” (Cienciala et al 2007:218). <sup>48</sup> This insures that the murder at Katyn will become intimately couched within the wider political conflicts and intrigues of the war.

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<sup>48</sup> Paul (1991:207) puts it this way: “The Germans recognized from the outset that their discovery presented a golden opportunity to split the Western Allies. They were keenly aware of the serious rift between the Soviets and the Polish government-in-exile over disputed territory in the western Ukraine and western Byelorussia. The Germans

Following a German request, an international commission worked in the Katyn forest carefully and systematically exhuming the bodies between 28-30 April 1943. The commission produced a 350 page report identifying the bodies and establishing the cause and approximate time of death (check on this). The Polish Red Cross, which at first refused to participate for fear of supporting German propaganda (and indeed the Germans thought Polish representation necessary to making their case believable), was represented at the site by a group of forensic specialists and other technicians, including some who were active in the Polish underground. The advancing Russian army and the lack of further discoveries cause the Germans to suspend operations and by June the Polish representatives are back in occupied Poland.<sup>49</sup> They strongly suggest Soviet guilt, but the use of German pistols and the difficulty in establishing the exact date of the executions, along with the clear propaganda motivations of the Germans, raise doubts. In addition to the continuous radio announcements (in Krakow and other major occupied cities the names of the dead were solemnly and repeatedly pronounced over loud speakers in the central square), lists of the names of the dead are published in German language newspapers throughout occupied Poland. However, the question of who carried out the killings is publicly disputed, the Germans accusing the Soviets and vice versa. Two days after the Berlin announcement (April 15, 1943), Moscow fires back with this statement: "In launching this monstrous invention the German-Fascist scoundrels did not hesitate at the most unscrupulous and base lies, in their attempts to cover up crimes which, as has now become evident, were perpetrated by themselves" (cited by Paul 1991:211). Stalin takes the opportunity to use the cooperation between the Polish Red Cross and German authorities as a pretext to break off relations with the Polish government in Exile, calling them "Hitler's Polish Collaborators". This

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knew also that more than ten thousand Polish officers captured by the Soviets in 1939 were still missing when General Anders and his army-in-exile left the U.S.S.R. in 1942".

<sup>49</sup> The advancing Red Army also was the precipitating cause of a very dramatic attempt to preserve some of the incriminating documents which would help establish Soviet guilt. The documents found on the bodies of the victims at Katyn, such as newspaper clippings and other dated material which would have importance in establishing the date of the executions were hurriedly collected by the Germans and shipped to occupied Poland for safe-keeping for fear of falling in the hands of the NKVD which was keenly aware of both their existence and importance. These documents were later packed into fourteen shipping crates as the Russian army approached Krakow where they were kept and sent to Germany. Further advances by the Soviet army and the pursuit of the NKVD pushed the documents further and further Westward, until they ended up in the private home of the elderly father of Dr. Werner Beck, one of the forensic experts enlisted by the Germans to carry out the exhumations at Katyn. Beck had himself seen to it that the documents arrived there, all the while with the Soviets in hot pursuit. The crates were finally burned on at his request, before they could fall into Soviet hands. All this came to light during the American House hearings in 1952, before which Beck testified (see Paul 1991:269ff. for the full account).

became one of the interpretative frames that would define any attempts by Poles to dispute the Soviet claims of German guilt.

Late in 1943, the Soviets establish their own Special Commission (The Burdenko Commission) to investigate ‘the Circumstances of the Shooting of Polish Officer Prisoners by the German-Fascist Invaders in the Katyn Forest’ (Sanford 137). Their report issued in 1944 supported this claim, repeating the false German figure of 11,000 bodies at Katyn.<sup>50</sup> A few days after publication, a ceremony was held at the gravesite in the Katyn forest where Polish soldiers of the Kosciuszko Division in the Soviet army paraded listened to a speech by their commanding officer, Colonel Berling in which the following words were uttered: “Our inexorable foe, the German, wishes to destroy our whole nation because he desires to seize our land.... That is why they murdered here in Katyn Forest the Polish officers and men. The blood of our brothers which was spilled in this forest cries for revenge” (reported by an eyewitness at the House Hearings and cited by Paul 1991:260). Katyn and the cry for vengeance became a strong motivating agent in both forces of the Polish military fighting in the war, those led by Berling and those more closely linked to the West, originally led by Anders.<sup>51</sup> The Soviets would name a tank the Avenger with this in mind. It was also a strong motivating force in the Polish resistance and in what was called the Home Army, the force behind the tragic Warsaw Uprising in 1944 where Polish forces were hopeless outnumbered by the Germans and where the Red Army, camped on the outskirts of Warsaw, watched passively. The Soviets viewed the Home Army with the same lens as it viewed the London government-in exile, as Polish nationalists who were a threat to Soviet aims in the

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<sup>50</sup> The Russian report gained support from two significant Americans present when the Soviet report was made public. They were John Melby of the American embassy in Moscow and Kathleen Harriman, the daughter of Averell Hariman, the American ambassador. In her report, Harriman wrote “...it is my opinion that the Poles were murdered by the Germans. The most convincing evidence to uphold this was the methodical manner in which the job (the murders, R.E.) was done, something the Commission thought not sufficiently important to stress”. Melby wrote: “It is apparent that the evidence in the Russian case is incomplete in several aspects, that it is badly put together, and that the show was put on for the benefit of the correspondents without opportunity for independent investigation or verification. On balance, however, and despite the loopholes, the Russian case is convincing” (both cited in Paul 1991:259). This is the message that Ambassador Harriman then sent to the U.S. State Department. Both Melby and Kathleen Harriman would later reverse their opinion when testifying before the House Select Committee in 1952.

The issue of the ‘methodical manner’ of the killings is an important one in that for both sides, it symbolized the ruthless inhumanity of the other. For those third parties, the manner of killing also was important in confirming already established images. For example, for many who supported the Allies, such as the two individuals above, the Germans were easily associated with such evil and the Russians less so. The Poles however had long experience of the ruthlessness on both sides in this struggle and could as easily see this act carried out by either.

<sup>51</sup> Just weeks before Normandy, the Polish Second Corps, led by Anders, were decisive in the battle of Monte Cassino on the road to Rome and the defeat of the German army on the Italian front. Other Polish troops were among those who landed on the Normandy beachhead in June 1944.

region and they did all they could to discredit and destroy both. Polish hopes and their sense of betrayal by both the Soviets and the British in this event are powerfully represented in Wajda's well-known trilogy.

At the Nuremberg tribunals in 1946 the prosecution of the perpetrators of the Katyn massacre fell under Soviet jurisdiction as it occurred in their allotted zone. The indictment read: "In September 1941 11, 000 Polish officers, prisoners of war, were killed in the Katyn woods near Smolensk". While it did not name the Germans as perpetrators, it was clear from the dating of the event who was to blame, as the region was at that point under German occupation. The case presented was based on the findings of the earlier Soviet report (Paul 1991:335). The German lawyers put up a strong defense and there was much suspicion of Soviet guilt, but in the end the Soviets formally withdrew their claims the case was omitted from the final verdicts announced in late September, 1946. Besides the general ambiguity amongst the Allies, another reason given was that the Tribunal was concerned only with German war crimes. GB and the US are reluctant to confront their Soviet allies on this matter and seek to bury it as an issue, the Polish government-in exile had expected this and sought to have the issue of Katyn excluded from consideration at Nuremberg.

With the continued Soviet presence, any discussion of Katyn was strictly forbidden in post-war Poland. One incident, recounted by one of the families of Katyn victims followed by Allen Paul, will suffice. "Shortly after the war, Magda Czarnek, then a medical student at the Jagiellonian University, met on a crowded Krakow streetcar an acquaintance she had not seen for several years. After exchanging a few pleasantries, the woman asked, "And how is your father?" Didn't you know?" Magda replied. "We lost him at Katyn." These words brought a shaken look to the woman's face as she glanced quickly at the passengers nearby, worried that some of them might have heard Magda's answer. Turning back to Magda she whispered, "Don't you know?" That is not something to say in public!" (quoted in Paul 1991:334). With much of their recent history deemed forbidden as topics of public discussion, Poles were directed to the official account of the war given in the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*. As something publicly forbidden, reference of Katyn was kept within the bounds of the private sphere, while in the public memory it became a symbol for Soviet oppression. If public discussion was forbidden in Poland, this was not the case

for the émigré Polish communities in the West. In the Cold war and under pressure from Polish-Americans, most notably the Polish American Congress (PAC, established in 1944, Sanford 141) leads to the creation of a congressional committee called the American Committee for the Investigation of the Katyn Massacre, the Lane Committee. In 1951 the House establishes a Select Committee to investigate ‘the facts, evidence and circumstances of the Katyn forest massacre’ (142). Some of the witnesses called wear hoods while testifying to avoid identification for fear of their families living in Poland. Hearings held throughout 1952, in the highly politicized time of the Korean War and McCarthyism. In its final report, December 1952 named the Soviets as the responsible agent and recommended a case be made at the UN and the International Court of Justice against the Soviet Union and called for the establishment of an International Commission to investigate crimes against humanity. The USSR was denounced for ‘one of the most barbarous crimes against humanity’ (144). In 1965 a US postage stamp is issued commemorating the event and implying Soviet guilt, this was pushed through by Congressman Edward Derwinski of Illinois, Chicago having the largest concentration of Polish Americans. There is a campaign to establish a Katyn monument in Great Britain, which is strongly supported by the American based Polonia, an association of Polish Americans. In 1972 the Daily Telegraph prints a headline “Russian guilt for Katyn Reaffirmed” (Sanford 180). Books appear in GB and a BBC tv program 1971. A memorial is built in London in 1976 (185), yet it does not mention the perpetrators. Rise of dissident organizations and the emergence of Solidarity bring Katyn forcefully into the Polish public sphere. Intellectuals involved in KOR, the Worker’s Defense Committee established in 1976 makes Katyn a central issue, calls for an April Anniversary commemoration and for “Polish citizens and émigrés to commemorate the anniversary of Katyn not in a spirit of revenge, but in a spirit of truth and fraternity among all people of good will of all nations” (Lipinski 351), so as not to confront the USSR in a direct way. Although CPSU chairman Nikita Khrushchev apparently ordered the files destroyed, the folder containing the original execution orders remained in the Soviet archives. In 1988, Polish PM Jaruzelski and Russian leader Gorbachev agree to the construction of a Katyn Memorial. In July 1988 at a meeting with Polish intellectuals, Gorbachev promises “he would accept the truth”.

On April 13, 1990 the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Massacre, Gorbachev reveals Soviet responsibility for Katyn. However, it is not until later that June that the KGB makes public the burial place of the thousands of others killed at the other two camps. It is clear now that in Katyn

itself 4421 officers were killed, and that 6311 of those kept in the camp in Ostaszkow and 3820 of those kept in the camp in Starobielsk were liquidated in Mednoe and Kharkov respectively. To this day there is no precise information concerning the tragic lot of remaining 7000 other prisoners.<sup>52</sup> In 1992, key documents were given to former Solidarity leader and current PM Walesa. 2007 Wajda's film is released. 2008 several Russian newspapers continue to blame the Germans for the Katyn massacre, something which might have to do with the case brought before Russian courts by Polish Katyn families seeking economic compensation for their loss. Their claims were denied there. For Poles Katyn remains an open wound.

### The Maintenance of Memory

There are three prime sources in the maintenance of the memory of Katyn, the Polish military, the families and friends of the victims and the émigré Polish communities scattered around the globe. The Polish military was the first to bear collective responsibility for the loss of its men and along with the government-in-exile and the underground resistance the first organization to search for them. This was carried out under traumatic circumstances: the Polish army was decimated by having to fight a war on two fronts. While they valiantly resisted the German and Soviet enemy, they were ill-prepared and suffered devastating losses while trying desperately to hold out in anticipation of engagement from their British and French allies. The Poles had formal agreement with both countries, that in case of German invasion they would come to Poland's aid. Needless to say this did not happen. While their relations with Moscow were never friendly since they defeated the Soviet Army in 1920, an occurrence which led to the seizure of territory, border disputes and to hostile relations with their Eastern neighbor.<sup>53</sup> Still the Soviet invasion came as a shock, especially as it was justified by Moscow as merely a protective measure after the German invasion to aid Ukrainian and Lithuanian minorities on Polish soil. The members of

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<sup>52</sup> It is surmised by historians that at least some of them may be buried in Bykownia, near Kiev (contemporary Ukraine), and in Kuropaty near Minsk (contemporary Belarus).

<sup>53</sup> The Soviet army was defeated in August, 1920 after pushing westward to spread the Bolshevik revolution and extend Soviet control over the region. The Communist forces were quite successful and were stopped only near Warsaw at the Vistula River and then pushed out of the newly reconstituted country. The Soviet army was only able to escape as it did with German help. The territory seized was ethnically mixed, but predominantly Polish, Lithuanian, Ukrainian and Belarusian, with numerous Polish Jews as well. Prior to the 1920 war, the Polish army pushed eastward and briefly controlled Kiev. The entire period between 1918-21 was an extremely complicated one with regards to the newly formed Poland and its neighbors.

the Polish army seized by the Soviets on the Eastern front were fooled into thinking they were merely being re-deployed by their Soviet allies. Many of the officers among them died at Katyn. The confusing circumstances contributed to the devastating affect on the Polish Army of the loss of so many of its officers.

The families of the victims at first reacted to the disappearance of a member individually. This would develop into a collective force as the search led by the authorities in the military and government progressed. Later, especially during the closing days of the Soviet occupation more formal organizations of Katyn families would form with in Poland. These organizations began much earlier amongst Polish émigrés, especially in the United States and Great Britain.

## Knowledge, Remembrance and Meanings of Katyn Massacre in Poland, 1943 – 2008

*“To not have your suffering recognized is an almost unbearable form of violence”*

Andrei Nikolaevich Lankov, a Russian orientalist

*“In the vacuum of complete dehumanization the bottom point is the point where meaning is attached to the sign anew and the silence overcomes itself”*

Tomas Venclova, a Lithuanian writer

The sixty-five years of the Katyn trauma drama in Poland have constituted a narrative of protracted civil struggle for historical transparency and moral repair. Specifically, it has been a struggle for public acknowledgment of actual, Soviet responsibility for the extermination of Poland’s elite citizens, for unveiling the missing links of history, and for symbolic closure of the issue as a cultural tragedy.

In order to state briefly the difference between the post-war situation of Polish Diaspora in Western Europe and the United States and in-country citizens, one could say that whereas the story of Katyn Massacre was an inconvenient truth in public discourse in the West, it remained a rather cumbersome official lie and eventually a top-secret issue in the public sphere of Eastern Europe until 1989. As a matter of fact, it continues to be a political taboo in the official discourse



of contemporary Russia, a circumstance that sheds additional light to the conditions of Soviet occupation in the region and its cultural legacy.

The time between the first public information about the existence of mass graves in the Katyn Forest in April 1943 and the first official celebration of the Katyn Remembrance Day on April 13<sup>th</sup>, 2008 was a period during which this specific issue became a key signifier of Polish victimhood as inflicted by communist Russia. Much of this time was consumed by civil perseverance and moral dedication to an issue that was silenced and consigned to oblivion by the highest echelons of authority. To many the issue seemed almost lost, to others it remained vague or virtually unknown.

For those Poles who knew the facts as established in 1943, and remembered thereafter, this was a dramatic period not only because of the traumatizing potential of the knowledge they initially had to face and keep, but also due to the fact that before 1989, (1) this knowledge and remembrance have been strictly suppressed for decades, (2) the directly involved carriers of this knowledge systematically persecuted, threatened or socially marginalized, (3) a false account of events was disseminated from the outset of People's Republic of Poland, and (4) the issue was ignored altogether from the 1960s on by official media.

Beyond this there was an even greater number of individuals for whom the drama consisted in an anguish of uncertainty intertwined with the premonition that the Katyn massacre was not an isolated case. As time elapsed, the worst case scenario was finally confirmed. But before that confirmation could arrive in Poland, the Katyn drama symbolized in an ever increasing number of Polish circles the vast array of physical and psychological damage inflicted on the Polish people. It signified at once the extermination of Polish prisoners of war in the Soviet Union, the long lasting uncertainty and confusion concerning the facts, the brutally enforced silence, the gaping lack of information about "loss in the east," and last but not least the communist hypocrisy, obfuscation and deception with regard to this issue.

The specificity of the Katyn trauma consists then not simply in the systematic nature of the atrocities committed by the Soviet state apparatus and of the groups targeted, but also in the fact that the mass killings were cynically appropriated and used by two totalitarian regimes for their own political purposes, initially effectively silenced by democratic states, and that what was uncovered in 1943 had been shut down or falsely represented to a Polish society under Soviet domination.

Knowledge of the massacre had been scattered, incomplete and overshadowed by the perpetrators counter-narrative and their symbolic frames. Since memory is indispensable for the experience of trauma and since memory does not exist without its cognitive object, i.e., the actual knowledge of the incidents, the conditions of the Katyn cultural trauma construction might seem very unfavorable. Indeed, the Soviet political realism of the time determined an overwhelming corruption of reality, a paradigmatically Orwellian situation in which the control of the present strictly depended on control of the past. The latter meant the destruction and falsification of hard evidence, the psychological and physical torture of inconvenient witnesses, and above all the blurring of key social meanings and degrading the value of individual life. In this process, language itself was permeated by sayings such as an ambiguous Russian phrase “to lie like an eye-witness” (Nim 2008: 22). This Orwellian reality filled with newspeak was also a Kafkaian reality that created a social “labyrinth” as another Russian dissident emphasized (Abarinow 2007: 9, 13).

All this ensured the typical totalitarian condition of perennial fear, disorientation, suppression of knowledge and lack of critical public debate. However, these particular circumstances appear to have added to the sense of trauma felt in thousands of Polish households. Crucially, the Katyn tragedy was emerging not just as a trauma of tragic memory but as a trauma of scant, robbed and persecuted memory. It was not only about what was coded as extraordinary injury but also about a necessity of dealing with silence, uncertainty and falsehood in ordinary daily life.

Actual memory of the occurrence as such was relatively scarce for the simple reason that only approximately 394 out of more than 20,000 captured left the detention camps alive, spared by NKVD and initially grouped in a separate camp. Because, as one of the survivors Jozef Czapski noted (2001: 71), the prisoners had not even considered the possibility of mass extermination; the very few who survived and could be regarded witnesses did not quite realize then what exactly was going on in fall of 1939 and spring of 1940. For many Polish citizens the first weeks of terror and havoc caused by the Soviet occupation of Poland meant a brutal confrontation with the informational chaos and political arbitrariness of invading power. For this reason it seems more adequate to talk here about tedious processes of ascertaining and verifying knowledge, about channels and frameworks of communicating and disseminating it, and finally about acts of commemoration, artistic representation and responses to them.

This is also a reason why cultural trauma scholars tend to employ such notions as ‘post-memory’ (Hirsch). Working in a similar vein, the German scholars Aleida and Jan Assmann (reference) introduced the distinction between communicative and cultural memory. From this vantage point a key sociological question becomes how exactly is witness-based remembering conveyed and translated to the collective level and subsequently transformed into sustained social remembrance? The way we approach it here is influenced by an understanding of the micro-macro link in sociological explanation (Alexander 1987). We recognize that just as individuals need the horizon of cultural meanings to make sense of their experiences, so society needs individual testimonies and specific narratives laden with personal emotions, some of which can incrementally be turned into symbols, typifications and archetypes which then are formative in any given society’s collective identity.

How exactly are these narratives turned into symbols and collective meanings? The present study emphasizes in this respect the role of discursive frames and visual representations predicated upon a specific set of cultural binaries that in turn are intertwined with emotional attachments. First of all, there is the dichotomy of truth and lie employed in all narratives surrounding the case. This fundamental binary is often accompanied by other oppositions such as the innocence and guilt, decency and perfidy, openness and secrecy. Secondly, in addition to the fundamental division of the public and the private we can speak of the dichotomy of the official and the underground, the state and the society. These binaries are not, of course, identical, but it is important to recognize that under the Communist regime they often overlapped to a considerable extent. The transmission of private narratives into public discourse was severely restricted, and in case of Katyn mostly downright impossible, in the last years of World War II and immediately after the War until so-called ‘political thaw’ of 1956. It continued to be seriously hampered by the state apparatus and its ideological orthodoxy almost until the very collapse of Communism in 1989. However, private discourses and the familial transmission of memory could never be completely muffled, and they eventually carved out a significant social niche whose meanings and cultural relevance began to be felt in public, at least to a certain degree. Interestingly, as we shall demonstrate later, this particular tension between state order and social order can easily be re-inscribed within the mythical tragedy of Sophocles’ play “Antigone”.

On top of this, we deal with yet another binary, namely that between what can and cannot be spoken, a dichotomy of what can (and should) be told and discussed, and what seemed to constitute the unspeakable. On the one hand, there is speech and text as forms of anthropological imperative to express oneself and testify. As Lithuanian writer and Professor of Slavic Literature at Yale University Tomas Venclova writes in his book titled *Forms of Hope*, “speaking and writing means overcoming and transcending” (1999: 129). Certainly, speaking and writing about the forbidden truth of Katyn, whether in private or in public, was a form of overcoming and transcending the Communist regime that suppressed it in Poland. On the other hand, the construction of each cultural trauma involves a specific distribution of the sacred and profane, and an understanding of the symbolic borders of its representation and reception. According to Izabella Sariusz-Skapska who devoted her Ph.D. dissertation to the Polish literary memory of the Gulag experience, “to not cross the border between testimony and silence of things that are ineffable is a condition of reliability of representation” (Sariusz-Skapska 2002: 22). The ineffable is understood as something that cannot be fully communicated, not only because of the limitations of language employed by story-tellers, but also because of impossibility of finding a full entrance into communicated narrative on the part of recipients. Moreover, there are also borders to what should be communicated, in that the risks associated with crossing the aforementioned borders can mean either the banalization of victims’ suffering or the fascination with the profane and evil. Therefore while researching forms of knowledge, remembrance and post-memory one faces a double problem of, (1) the politically molded possibility and (2) the culturally molded ability to speak out and hear in a particular social context.

If we take into account the first criterion of the politically shaped possibility of public expression, we can distinguish at least three general periods within the temporal brackets established here during which the processes of trauma construction occurred. The knowledge of Katyn Massacre was being obtained and transmitted, remembrance enacted, and the event itself intellectually and artistically represented under various social conditions in the following, heuristically delimited political eras: (1) 1943 – 1956, (2) 1956 – 1989, (3) 1989 – 2008. If we refer to the second criterion of culturally shaped ability to communicate a specific periodization is much harder to establish. It is affected by political conditions but is also responsive to various other circumstances that have their own, often non-linear logic of temporal change. However, one can distinguish one such particular circumstance that has crucially affected the emergence

and maintenance of cultural trauma of Katyn in Poland and its broader significance. It is the lack of symbolic closure in trauma drama and determined pursuit of making it happen despite all adversities.

There is direct psychological evidence that possessing a life story in the form of a biographical narrative is a crucial part of the mental well-being of an individual, at least as far as Western culture is concerned (Tilmann, Habermas 2008). A meaningful and coherent narrative of this sort is one of the key conditions of making sense of one's life and thus creating and maintaining a relatively consistent self-identity, i.e., a sense of selfsameness and continuity, without which functioning in modern society is hardly possible. This complex narrativization of the life-course connects facts and endows them with meaning by reference to other meanings, emerges and develops significantly only in adolescence (Habermas 2008: 719). The key terms 'consistency' and 'coherence' should not be mistaken for 'stability', but what they do imply is that the ruptures, shocks and breaks that have occurred are meaningfully incorporated into and symbolically represented through personal narration. In practice this often means that particular events are narratively "closed as chapters."

The developmental logic of cultural trauma appears to resemble this pattern, providing once more an interpretive link between the macro and micro characteristics of human life. Meaningful events are rarely, if at all, constructed as such immediately upon their arrival in an individual's biography, and one makes full sense of them with time and often rediscovers them in the process of ongoing biographical interpretation. Tragic occurrences themselves usually come as shock, often accompanied by initial disbelief and/or confusion. It takes time to fully comprehend and represent them meaningfully, i.e. in relation to broader symbolic structures, with reference to other occurrences and in dialogue with those who are not directly affected but nevertheless remain potentially connected to them through emotional, ethical and symbolic means of social life.

A recurrent string of metaphors that is intuitively crucial in this respect is that of injury, wound and scar. A full-fledged cultural trauma emerges as a full recognition, symbolic elaboration and meaningful representation of social wounds that remains open. It continues to exist as a cultural process that tends, as it were, to turn wound into scar, something healed but still present. The symbolic closure is indispensable at this point. Lack thereof keeps the wound

open and fosters anxiety derived from deprivation of coherence in a narrative marked by tragic occurrence.

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Robert Nozick concluded an essay on Holocaust by stating, “perhaps every evil of whatever magnitude constitutes some distortion of human space. It has taken a cataclysm to get us to notice” (2006: 242). One role of a cultural sociologist is to show that “noticing” is more complex a process than meets the eye and that beyond it lie even more complicated social processes of representation that render “human cataclysms” cultural traumas. The following is meant to show how the mass killings of Katyn first affected the community of victims in their own country, how and why that community was denied a symbolic closure of the tragedy, and the specificity of the closure that was eventually realized.

The anonymous mass graves containing thousands of murdered Polish citizens were never meant to be found. The sites of the Soviet genocidal actions were dissembled by newly planted trees and well hidden, for example at NKVD spa centers like in the case of Katyn (Oseka 2007: 5).<sup>54</sup> There were systematic attempts at purposefully destroying these “death pits,” such was, for example, the case of the massacre site near Kharkov in today’s eastern Ukraine (Materski 2008: 132). The local population was often arrested, just in case, and then some were deported and subsequently replaced by people from other distant locations of the Soviet Union.<sup>55</sup> Deportation to the far eastern parts of Soviet Union awaited also many of the family members of those killed.<sup>56</sup> The NKVD sought to destroy any and all material traces of the massacre. For example, in June 1940 in the Starobielsk camp 3655 unsent letters of the imprisoned Polish citizens were burned (Adamska 2007: 12). Prior to the actual massacres a wave of letters had reached the

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<sup>54</sup> The presence of young trees on the site of the massacre became actually yet another among numerous detailed evidence against Soviets. The international forensic commission employed a forester named von Herff who established that the pine trees growing there were 5 years old and planted 3 years prior to the arrival of the commission (Kwiatkowska-Viatteau 1988: 26).

<sup>55</sup> Jozef Czapski mentions in his book “Inhuman Land” that even the inhabitants of places like Buzuluk where the Anders’ Army had stationed before it left Soviet Union were later deported by NKVD to distant parts of the country (2001: 104).

<sup>56</sup> It was a part of much larger deportation action organized by the Soviet invaders during their occupation of eastern Poland. According to the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact between Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia signed in August 1939 the eastern voivodeships of Poland were left at the discretion of the latter. Until the Nazi breach of that agreement in June 1941 NKVD had probably managed to deport over one million people from those territories, i.e. around 8% of their total population. It is estimated that over 50% of them were Poles, nearly 30% Jews, and around 18% Ukrainians and Belarussian (Gross 2008: 7).

families in Poland, but these ceased abruptly in March 1940, a fact which later constituted yet another symbolic indication of when the massacres occurred, and hence who was to be blamed. Some of the letters to and from families, diaries, family pictures and other personal belongings retrieved in 1943 at the Katyn site, reached relatives in Poland. The sheer abundance of such things in the mass graves strongly suggested that the victims were kept unaware of their impending fate until the last moment.<sup>57</sup> For families in the country who managed to get access, these objects meant being “connected” to their lost relatives. Those who despite the fear of communist persecution did not destroy the recovered diaries and other personal items tellingly discontinued in 1940 or the last letters sent to them that year, all such things constituted a scarce body of sacred relics and priceless traces. Such documents are currently preserved in private and national archives as carriers of crucial material connection to the past that for half a century was consigned to dematerialization.

Just as the Soviet aggression against Poland in September 1939 came as a shock to Poles, so was the German aggression against Soviet Union received in June 1941. It was a highly unexpected breach of the non-aggression pact that Soviet government signed two years earlier with Nazi Germany. The eventual seizure of the western parts of Soviet Union by German troops meant also the sudden loss of control over the sites of massacres and *ipso facto* the critical loss of monopoly of the detailed knowledge about them. The Soviet Union and later also the communist government of Poland were therefore put in a highly precarious position that required an intense propaganda actions designed to cover up correct attribution of responsibility. As Andrzej Wajda’s film emphasizes, a sovereign post war Poland was impossible without the elite that had been systematically decimated both by Nazi Germany and Soviet Union during WWII.<sup>58</sup> By the same token, a failure to cover up the Soviet act of liquidation of the Polish elite would have made an unobstructed inauguration of a communist Poland hardly possible in the years following the war. As a result, the knowledge and remembrance of Katyn massacre became coded as extremely dangerous to the externally enforced and thus potentially vulnerable Communist status quo in Poland. Remembering the truth about Katyn was understood as an utmost threat to

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<sup>57</sup> A striking fact discovered by the exhumation specialists in 1943 was that the bodies were buried in the order that matched precisely the system of transportation of the prisoners from the camps to the execution sites. It was established thanks to the pertinent record kept by the officers in their private diaries and later found next to them in the death pits (Kwiatkowska-Viatteau 1988: 26).

Communism's political credibility and the Soviet Union's proclaimed moral status as Poland's liberator in WWII. Hence it became an object of strict suppression, and mass symbolic violence systematically followed the mass physical violence that occurred in 1940. The symbolic violence of Communist propaganda at the time of installing new Soviet-dependent Polish communist regime was interpreted by those directly affected as adding an unbearable insult to already existing injury. After all, the new Communist authorities "protested too much." For some this meant the high moral obligation to persist and make sure that the knowledge was passed on and thus less dissipated throughout society. Others, however, were effectively silenced or chose to silence themselves because of the risks involved in the early post war and only began to communicate their trauma many years later, if at all. The memory of the mass murder of the Polish elite was at first, relatively, an elite social fact.

In this context, it comes as no surprise that the specific carrier groups with first hand knowledge and those who harbored the most emotionally charged memory of the massacre, such as the families of the murdered, were either chased after or closely watched by the NKVD and its collaborators in Poland. Polish forensic specialists and other experts from Poland who visited Katyn in 1943 were defined as one of the most significant among these carrier groups. Among them were: Ferdynand Goetel, Jan Skiwski, Dr. Edmund Seyfried, Konrad Orzechowski and Dr Edward Grodzki. Goetel was one of the people who prepared written accounts of what the group found as the results of the work of international specialists on the site, all of whom arrived at similar conclusions, namely, placing blame on the Soviets. In 1945, Goetel and Skiwski were officially considered criminals in communist-controlled Poland but they managed to flee the country illegally. Others were arrested and interrogated in NKVD prisons in Poland. Orzechowski was subsequently deported to east Russia. The fate of Dr Grodzki remains unknown to this day.

Another person of similarly crucial importance was Kazimierz Skarzynski. He organized the on-site proceedings of the Polish Red Cross in the Katyn Forest between April and June in 1943 and contributed significantly to the creation of the lists of the murdered, i.e., the Katyn records independent of the German ones. As one of very few Poles who actually saw the mass graves and examined them, Skarzynski prepared a report that was promptly delivered to London.

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<sup>58</sup> At the time when Soviets imprisoned Polish officers and intellectuals in the east, Germans conducted their own actions against Polish non-military intelligentsia. For example, Sonderaktion Krakau and AB actions whereby



The documents and material evidence were sent to Krakow's Institute of Forensic Research. He continued his work in Poland aimed at uncovering full truth in subsequent years. Skarzynski's knowledge, however, quickly became dangerous to himself and his family. Threatened by an imminent NKVD capture, he spent last years of war under changed surname in the countryside. He managed to leave Poland illegally with his family in May 1946. Skarzynski's report was evaluated as very valuable by the British Foreign Office, yet this certainly contributed to treating it as a top-secret item (Przewoznik 2007: 15). The findings included there were later published, but only in 1955 and in a Polish journal "Kultura" edited in Paris by Jerzy Giedroyc, the venue that until the end of communism in Poland remained one of the key sources of "underground" knowledge and memory for Polish society.

Finally, there was an interview with Jozef Mackiewicz published on June 3, 1943 after he had visited Katyn as an observer in spring that year. Mackiewicz was a known literary figure in pre-war Poland and during the war a journalist in *Goniec Codzienny* ("Daily Messenger"), a Polish newspaper that was being issued in Vilnius controlled after 1941 by Germans. The interview titled "I saw it with my own eyes" reported quite extensively on the Katyn massacre. Mackiewicz stated that he had "absolutely no doubts that the massacre had been conducted by Bolsheviks" (1988: 55). He referred to the works of the international commission and provided information about the established facts, witnesses and specialists involved in the issue. But what is most significant from a cultural sociological point of view in that testimony is the language in which Mackiewicz couched his recollections. Asked if he remains "under impression" of what he had seen he replied:

„I don't know if one can call it being 'impressed.' Impression is a result of some, usually singular event or fact, limited in itself. Smolensk which I saw, Katyn, crimes, corpses, ruins, bolshevism that I went through myself, and the letters, letters of children to their fathers, beginning with the words: "Dear Dad" or "Dear Daddy," being dug out now from the piles of squashed, putrid bodies, from this swamp of death or the semi dried Polish uniforms... Yes, all of this creates a sort of long chain of associations, thoughts, reflections sinking deep in the heart. I would not call it an impression. An experience rather" (1988: 51).

This, one of the first statements from the interview, was aimed at establishing Mackiewicz's authority as a witness and introduces a significant distinction between 'impression' and

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thousands of academic and other professionals were imprisoned and liquidated between 1939 and 1941.

‘experience’ that can be mapped in the more general cultural understanding of the difference between the shock of a violent occurrence and the cultural trauma of violence later inflicted. It refers to the building of an experience through associations and connecting its facts to the horizon of culture and affect. Moreover, Mackiewicz stated that “the Katyn tragedy is not anymore a tragedy of particular persons or their families but of the whole nation” (1988: 54). While developing this thought, he emphasized that “he was deeply convinced that the widest possible groups of the Polish nation as well as all other nations should understand a deeper sense and danger of Bolshevism” (1988: 54). This can be interpreted as one of the first public acts of trying to connect the tragedy of Katyn to more universal moral codes and thus to represent the massacre as a cultural trauma. Because of the factual and symbolic weight of the interview, as well as a string of anti-Soviet publications authored by him in 1944 in Warsaw and Krakow, Mackiewicz was sentenced to death by Polish Communists.<sup>59</sup> He escaped Poland in January 1945 and continued to publish on the Katyn massacre first in Rome, then in the Parisian *Kultura* and later in London where he authored the first work in English about it. His testimonies constituted one the key sources of knowledge about Katyn.

It became clear that those few eye-witnesses had to either flee the country or be imprisoned shortly after WWII. They managed to pass on their knowledge to specialists and lay people in the country and through their work aided a more general framing of the massacre. But it was the personal trauma of the families, especially of the wives, mothers and children of those killed that supplied the critical mass of highly emotionally charged tragic narratives (see for example those collected in Kaczorowska (2003 in Polish and 2006 in English)). Their situation became particularly dramatic as any inquiries concerning the fate of “the lost in the east” and the public sharing of knowledge and opinion about Katyn began to be strictly prohibited and persecuted. Yet thousands of women waiting in vain for their husbands, brothers and sons were one of the key elements of society that imperceptibly were undermining the official discourses. Their forced silence in the first decade following the war compounded the traumatizing sense of helplessness and initially confined their suffering to strictly private sphere. The dissemination of “false information about Katyn crime” was punished by the Communist government of Poland

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<sup>59</sup> Earlier during the war, he had gained a controversial reputation as a journalist in German-controlled Vilnius, was accused of collaboration with Nazi Germany by Polish Home Army, and subsequently sentenced to death by it. However, he was not executed and later absolved due to lack of hard evidence and a growing suspicion that the whole issue came about as a result of provocation of Soviet intelligence that was infiltrating Home Army.

with the two-year sentence in labor camp. Acts of invigilation targeting the families took place and those caught spreading “the false knowledge” could even be accused of espionage (Oseka 2007: 7). If one was identified as a child of those “lost in the east” the entrance to education and other institutions could have been seriously hampered if not impossible. Once drafted to the Polish army, the sons of those murdered could have been actually directed to work in mines and other industrial locations controlled by Communists (Skapski 2009 – my interview).

Under such strenuous political and social conditions the wives, sisters and mothers of the exterminated officers were important carriers of remembrance of the victims not only due to the knowledge some possessed but most importantly because of their emotional attachment to the case. The atmosphere of fear and the strict official control of the Katyn narrative fostered suspicion towards the government and its official propaganda. As members of elite families, the women came to feel responsible for saving the traces of what was for them a true Polish heritage, the vestiges of their life-world that now was to be systematically erased. That feeling was buttressed by the fact that many of them belonged to the first generation raised and educated in independent Poland created in 1918 after 123 years of political non-existence caused by partitions (Ksiazek-Czerminska 1999: 7). For some the imposition of Communist regime could have appeared as a continuation of previous Russian domination under a different banner. The disappearance of their husbands in the Soviet occupied Poland was linked to it and the binary of truth and lie was mapped onto the division of society and state; though not quite underground heroes, the wives, sisters and mothers of the murdered launched one of the key mechanisms of transmission of remembrance into the public sphere. In the first period this was completely “privatized” and restricted to the occasional distribution of leaflets and individual acts of sabotaging official propaganda. As their official and personal abandonment persisted, their fate eventually became emblematic.

In short, the first period of the emergence of Katyn as trauma drama was marked by shock, confusion and extreme forms of symbolic struggle surrounding the massacre and its circumstances. The key narratives were created and the clash of victims’ discourse, related counter-discourses and acts of covering the story up shaped the reception of the crime. Still, in the 1940s in Poland the name of Katyn was being mentioned openly along Auschwitz as a symbol of German genocidal actions (Oseka 2007: 7). The official discourse blaming the Germans subsided in the wake of Stalin’s death in 1953 but continued to be one of the key

elements of legitimation of Poland's communist government. It was only in 1956 when the political climate was changed unequivocally by the unfavorable light shed on Soviet Communism. Many of Stalin's crimes were revealed by the Soviet government itself. Although this provided a powerful context for an unambiguous evaluation of the Katyn massacre, Communist propaganda in Poland did not cease to employ the standard Soviet version for its own purposes of political and cultural control. Until the end of the 1950s the name of "Katyn" had its own entry in encyclopedias, defining it as a geographical location in Russia and falsely identifying it as the site of massacre of Polish citizens committed by Germans after they had seized that territory in 1941 (e.g. Suchodolski 1959: 407).

The next 25 years saw the official silence on the issue on the part of Poland Communist authorities. The great encyclopedia published by Polish Scientific Publishers (PWN) in 1965 has no mention of Katyn (1965, Vol. V). This situation has not changed in subsequent decades. It is hard to judge today what the exact motivation was behind the change of strategy in approaching the tragedy of Katyn. Yet for a sociologist not the shift itself or its political intricacies are of the greatest significance but rather the cultural consequences. In the eyes of the vast majority of those who remembered the massacres symbolized by Katyn or found out about it in the wake of the thaw of 1956, this act of introducing a total censorship on the Katyn issue had one fundamental meaning among others, namely that it could be viewed as an indirect, and probably unwitting, acknowledgment of the Soviet responsibility (Oseka 2007: 7).

From that moment on, a series of persistent iconic and discursive actions were taking place. The official silence was countered by repeated unauthorized civil undertakings. The symbolic opening of this period of publicly enacted resistance was marked by the inception of so called "Katyn Valley" on the main cemetery of Warsaw. On All Saints' Day in 1959. A commemoration site for the Katyn victims was created there, a place where a cross and plaque were put by unidentified people. It was openly named "the symbolic grave of the Polish officers murdered in Katyn". Perpetrators were not explicitly named, but the plaque stated that the officers "perished on foreign soil at hands of a cruel enemy" and that "they deserve memory and honor." The traditional candles were laid there in acts of spontaneous response. The site was liquidated after only one day by state militia officials, who noted that they had managed to "reintroduce order to the cemetery" (Sawicki 2007: 18). Though "state order" was promptly reintroduced, the public manifestation revealed the existence of a "societal underground order",

which destabilized it symbolically. It was a brief but visible cry for recognition which triggered a sense of moral empowerment, first in Warsaw but later also in other cities whose inhabitants connected to the murdered kept visiting the “Katyn Valley” in the following years. This cry for recognition was a signifier of a secretly lived trauma that expressed a deep sense of suppressed “we” and the responses of authorities made it clear they cared about the incident. The Communist government indeed treated the situation seriously, initiating an official investigation and launching a secret police operation that consisted in systematic intelligence efforts to find out who stood behind the cemetery event. The results, however, were poor and what might be called resistance performances continued to be enacted there until the collapse of Communism in 1989. These occurred not only on the 1<sup>st</sup> of November but also on other days like April the 13<sup>th</sup> and September the 17<sup>th</sup>. The apogee of this string of iconic actions was reached in the heyday of Solidarity struggle in 1981 when a real 4-meter high monument weighing 8 tons was put on the focal spot of the “Katyn Valley.” Like all previous material symbols of resistance erected in that place, it was promptly removed by the authorities, but became much discussed in many private circles in Warsaw and other places and interpreted as yet another demonstration of civil disobedience and political disbelief. In effect, the actual fame of the “Katyn Valley” has been discursively and iconically cemented, at least in the capital city and those connected to it (Sawicki 2007: 19). In the end, the story of the cemetery performances only indicated that the dedication with which the Communist authorities sought to erase the remembrance of Katyn was directly proportional to the actual cultural potential of this memory as a general signifier of the Soviet-related Polish sufferings and, ultimately, to the extent of the moral debacle of Communist regime in Poland.

A quarter of a century after the “Katyn Valley” was created as a symbolic space of anti-communist contestation, there appeared in Poland the first school textbook that described the Katyn massacre vaguely enough to create precedence in the official discourse about it. The civil success of Solidarity was preceded by the election of a Pole, Karol Wojtyla, as the Pope John Paul II in 1978, effecting a wave of unauthorized discourse about Katyn. No one seemed to be afraid of talking about Soviet responsibility in the Solidarity inspired time of unprecedented “festival of freedom” (Materski 2008: 122). Underground materials were circulated around the country and meetings organized by the church played an important role in the life of city intelligentsia, the group most directly attached to the story of Katyn crime. By then the Iron

Curtain was already rusty and porous enough to let information from the outside in and create a “strange situation” in which the official censorship itself began to be unsure about what exactly was allowed to be published (Abarinow 2007: 11). As a result, there was a plethora of illegal publications created inside or smuggled into the country from Western Europe and the probability of encountering information about Katyn increased dramatically. The grand international myth of Solidarity was emerging, even if the movement itself was temporarily muffled by the Martial Law introduced by the Communist government in 1981.

Though still relatively arcane, the truth about Katyn became an undeniable fact of life among many representatives of the Polish intelligentsia, a commonly recognizable cachet of increasingly self-confident societal “us” against the discredited governmental “them.” Incrementally growing social pressure effected further alteration of the ruling party’s stance and in closing years of the 1980s the Katyn massacre was sporadically thematized in official media and political institutions like the Parliament. It was also the time when the first large-scale sociological research on Polish collective memory was conducted. Two things about these studies strike the reader: (1) 23% declared that they talked about history “often” and 54% - “sometimes;” (2) nearly 3% declared that they talked with others about such things as Katyn or the Ribbentrop-Molotow Pact, and more than 5% discussed the Stalinist period in Poland or the Martial Law (Szacka 2007: 3). The overall cultural impact of Solidarity and anticipatory climate of 1980s became obvious but the research showed the scale of damage caused to the Polish collective memory by Communist propaganda. A clear discrepancy between a heightened general historical interest and specific discursive commitments indicated the cultural legacy of four decades of autocratic regime. Even if, as a later study showed, 40% found out about Katyn during the Communist period, that awareness seemed to be one among many other tragic memories and as a key trauma still apparently confined only to those directly connected to its occurrence. The excitement and then euphoria associated with leaving Communism behind appeared to be the euphoria of the exhausted as far as collective identity was concerned. However, in view of those who cultivated still circumscribed but now stronger commitment to the issue, the end of the 1980s meant a renewed hope. The demand for proper recognition of Katyn, however slim, seemed hardly quenchable.

In the newly forged climate of broader political change in Eastern Europe a series of new discourses about Katyn made an ineradicable impact on Polish intelligentsia. So it came as a

profound disappointment and ultimate disillusionment when on July 14, 1988 Mikhail Gorbachev announced at the official meeting with the representatives of Polish intellectuals at Warsaw's Royal Castle that "there exists no secret documentation which would shed a new light on the Katyn crime" (Materski 2008: 124). For the truly radical change in the official presentation of events Polish citizens had to wait until the revolution of 1989, and specifically till April 13, 1990 when the official news agency of Russia (TASS) finally acknowledged, even if under somewhat inadvertent circumstances, the Soviet responsibility for the massacres in Katyn and the existence of further extermination sites of Mednoe and Kharkov.<sup>60</sup> It took place exactly half a century after the moment when the world first heard the terrible news of Katyn.

As Andrzej Wajda admits himself, this was the time when his cinematographic intervention into the Katyn trauma drama should have taken place (Wajda 2007: 5). Changes in Moscow at the outset of the 1990s seemed to create sufficient symbolic space for a relatively open, long-term dialogue with by then a completely politically altered Warsaw. They promised a potential for eventual exposure of relevant Soviet archives and reconciliation. An ensuing full disclosure of knowledge and responsibility would mean a clear symbolic closure of the trauma. This potential, however, was hardly ever fulfilled in a manner suggested by the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe. In Polish society itself, however, a qualitatively unprecedented era of the Katyn trauma drama began.

The Round Table Talks in spring 1989 gave Poland the first democratic elections in Eastern Europe and 1990 was the year when Lech Walesa became the President of Poland and the Polish Communist Party was officially dissolved. The opening of last decade of the twentieth century meant the point of no return in terms of the developing Katyn trauma drama. Even if painful, new concrete prospects of unfettered inquiry and commemorative catharsis were opened. Still, it took another decade to realize a partial symbolic closure of the trauma and then nearly another 10 years to launch the official full-fledged process of ritualization inside the country. Despite what might be interpreted as a significant delay of the official commemoration of Katyn, the crime did emerge as a key signifier of WWII tragedy and Polish trauma of Soviet occupation. This metamorphosis of formerly subterranean and private tragedy of Polish soldiers into a central

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<sup>60</sup> As a matter of fact, Soviet government led by Gorbachev had appeared to be forced to admit its guilt officially after a few Russian historians, such as Natalia Lebedeva, obtained a rather unwittingly issued permission to examine NKVD archives that indirectly proved Soviet responsibility (Materski 2008: 125 – 126). The text of the TASS

traumatic narrative of country's history is remarkable. The finally liberated country caused many tragic but previously stifled Polish memories to surface. As Michael Kimmelman wrote in *The New York Times*, "Poles have especially good reason to see themselves as long oppressed, having been fought over and occupied for much of the last century by vicious regimes" (2009: 6). How then has it been possible that this particular crime and its ordeal became a distinguished trauma narrative?

After 1989 the most apparent change was a sudden public visibility of Katyn. Books, articles, documentaries, discussions, and monuments of various kinds filled media and public sphere in general. The classic accounts of the crime and its circumstances finally found their way to bookstores and libraries. Among them were tellingly titled diaries such as "Inhuman land" by Jozef Czapski or "Without last chapter" by Wladyslaw Anders, and novels such as "The silent, the invincible" by Wlodzimierz Odojewski or "Katyn. Post mortem" by Andrzej Mularczyk. The latter became the narrative base for Andrzej Wajda's film. But perhaps the most significant was the emergence of a new civil movement, The Katyn Families Association, with affiliation abroad, as well as in Poland itself. The few relatives of the victims who remained alive could finally speak up and express their anguish. It was this non-governmental and explicitly apolitical organization that created a symbolic forum for them, and established itself as a key carrier of remembrance and an indelible sign of unhealed Polish war wound. It has become a logical cultural continuation of half a century long persecuted memory.

Interestingly enough, the absolute priority of the Association's public mission was to establish official symbolic cemeteries at the three massacre sites revealed by Gorbachev. Finding out where exactly the other sites are that continue to hide over seven thousand of the murdered was also defined as crucial. The first goal, understood as the unprecedented real symbolic act of the dignified commemoration of the victims and of "emphasizing of the drama," has been realized. The second still remains a task for the future. For this reason, the symbolic closure was felt as partial. However, the official opening of the Katyn cemetery on July 28, 2000 functioned as a key event for the trauma drama and played an invaluable role as catharsis, not only for the families but also for Polish society as a whole. This was the case because over the

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announcement itself was cautious but powerful enough and launched an avalanche of irreversible changes to the issue.



years Katyn has become the effective synonym of the Soviet massacres committed on Polish citizens during World War II (Skapski 2009 – my interview).<sup>61</sup>

The Association refers to various cultural binaries to frame the specificity of the Katyn trauma drama and to present its pursuits to the public. The crucial ones are dichotomies between civilized and barbarian actions and dignified and degrading conduct. Reference is also made to legal obligations that were breached by the Soviet perpetrators and the ethics of full acknowledgement, transparency, repentance and compensation. As its leaders unanimously recognize the “shamefulness of Russian position” connected to “the crime unknown in civilized world,” they are acutely aware that what they have achieved in terms of symbolically closing the Katyn trauma deepens its actual potential as such also for Russian society. As a matter of fact, the actual place, Katyn, happens to be an old NKVD execution site where thousands of anonymous Russian citizens were also buried. The solemn and well-organized commemoration of Poles murdered there raises broader questions about internal Soviet crimes and inspires the remembrance of those thousands of Russian citizens who also fell victim to the regime.

As a full-fledged cultural trauma Katyn potentially assumes another meaning, namely that of a key condition of Polish-Russian political relations and thus of being a part of common European identity as well; more specifically, Europe’s attitude towards history of Communism. While in 2008, 52% of Poles believed that contemporary Russia must openly settle its historical issues, especially the Katyn Massacre, in order to count on Poland’s partnership, 69% of them declared that it is necessary to “forgive Russians” (Koscinski, Serwetnyk 2008). This narrative is embraced also by the leaders of the Katyn Families Association (Skapski 2009 – my interview). However, the establishing of Polish symbolic cemeteries in Katyn, Kharkov and Mednoe, as well as ongoing efforts to uncover further extermination sites meet understanding and strong support in relatively small circles and only in such Russian organizations like “Memorial.” The contemporary Russian responses still have among them publications such as Jurij Muchin’s “Anti-Russian Meanness” that continue to maintain untenable Soviet-like explanations. The very possibility of such public discourse undermines the prospects of political reconciliation from Polish point of view. Moreover, recent legal efforts for compensation made by some of the Katyn families encountered rejection at every level of the Russian court system. This form of recognition has been clearly denied to the victims. What seems to emerge out of this

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<sup>61</sup> Two other official cemeteries were opened in the same year in Kharkov in Ukraine and Mednoe in Russia.

international circumstance is the realization not only the harm done to Katyn families and to the legacy of Soviet Communism but also that certain meanings of “Russianness” are at stake. This obviously emotionally and culturally compounds the already existing problems.

Finally, the Association recognizes also that any closure in the form of official commemoration may mean the potential of the actual ossification of memory and hence its partial trivialization (Sariusz-Skapska 2002: 11). Paradoxically, the acts of symbolic closure may make the tragic story dull, as historically catalogued and resolved. The symbolic closure is necessary, for it crucially alleviates the private anguish of those directly involved and raises public awareness of country’s actual history, but at the same time it may distance those whose expectations towards such things are shaped not by abstract attachments but concrete emotions. As temporal distantiation slowly adds its own dimension, potentially turning traumatic events into mere historical facts, these may become disconnected from the moral and affective fabric of society that originally gave birth to them. Public disinterest becomes probable when there emerge attempts at political instrumentalization. This nearly happened to Katyn in the time shortly before the establishment of Katyn commemoration day in Poland. The members of the Association and other public figures involved remain concerned with the danger of a right wing instrumentalization of this event and have opposed it explicitly (Szumer 2007: 3). As the Polish Parliament finally and unanimously declared the 13<sup>th</sup> of April the National Remembrance Day of Katyn Victims in 2007 and first official commemoration followed in 2008, the Katyn trauma drama was at once re-launched and closed. On the one hand, that is what contributes to the emergence and maintenance of cultural trauma in the first place. On the other hand, there is recognition, especially among the Association leaders, that in order for even the most tragic events to become and be maintained as cultural trauma, they need self-reflective representation and specific narratives that connect to more global human aspects of life. And finally, there is a more general understanding in Polish society that even such deeply tragic events need to be at least partially left behind in a sense conferred to this recognition by Czapski.

Since the official registration of the Katyn Families Association in 1992 around four thousand individuals have joined it. They have had opportunities to openly tell and share their private stories, and project them into the public discourse. Association members contributed to the emergence of clear public articulation of the Katyn trauma as a special cultural event. Beside their struggle for official commemoration, they engaged in the projects of publishing personal

stories of silenced and abandoned women that were previously thwarted. This effort stems from the conviction that in absence of authentic documents, only literature and private diaries can fill the lacuna of recognition, acknowledgment and empathy.<sup>62</sup> Those killed have been unambiguously represented as a patriotic elite, their history disclosed in details and their tragic fate narrated in a way that connects the tragedy not only to an injured Polish identity, but also to a more general human sensibility.

It has been shown that the murdered were the prisoners of war without war being declared, their death sentence saw no trial, their death was accompanied by no funeral, their names were consigned to anonymity, the crime of which they were victims was left, and still remains, without punishment, and the damage of execution was followed by lie and indifference instead of recognition and compensation. Because the victims were carefully chosen by the perpetrators according to specific military and civil criteria, and because they were denied all that constitutes human symbolic conduct in boundary situations, their families became the Antigones of national fate. Through the publication of memoirs and diaries, the murdered Polish elite were finally publicly and unequivocally represented in their own country as normal family members who became inadvertent martyrs. They were rescued from anonymity by connecting them clearly to their daily life-world. At the same time they appear as martyrs because their main “guilt” was their specific citizenship combined with particular social origin and occupation and who therefore were viewed by the victimized and the perpetrators alike as one of the key carriers of Poland’s cultural continuity and professional values, regardless of specific religious background.

All these symbolic components and anthropological imperatives of trauma drama have been recently artistically condensed in Andrzej Wajda’s movie titled simply “Katyn”, to date the most internationally visible statement about the incident. The film, short listed for an Oscar for the best international movie in 2007, explicitly thematizes an “Antigonic” element of the story. It realistically depicts the incident itself and links it to the contemporaneous crimes of Nazi Germany committed on Polish society, but focuses primarily on what the massacre meant to families, particularly to wives and sisters of the victims. In the opening text of the first set of memoirs written mostly by wives and daughters of the victims and published by the Katyn

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<sup>62</sup> To this day the Russian government has not delivered to the Polish side 21857 personal NKVD folders of the killed. It claims that they had been destroyed. However, there is no confirmation that they were indeed burnt

Families Association under the title “Written with Love,” one of the first sentences refers to the “terrible silence” that shrouded longing and despair (Bakowska 2000: 9). Wajda, whose father was among those murdered in Kharkov, visualized this aspect and reveals through it the brutal and cold-blooded destruction of a particular life-world. By shifting the attention from soldiers themselves to those who loved them and whose loss was publicly unrecognized, *Wadja* made the extension of sentiments and identification possible.

The movie was noticed internationally and was received as a shocking story, from Berlin to Los Angeles. However, the difficulties with global distribution caused largely by the indolence of Polish National TV, responsible for the movie as a commercial product, contributed to “murdering of the film” (Wajda 2009: 16). In addition, the reluctance of certain audiences to be confronted with it,<sup>63</sup> and what some viewed as a problem of an occasionally “too arcane” contextualization of the movie (Applebaum) has significantly decreased its anticipated international impact. The director was apparently aware of the predicament created by “Katyn”’s obscure historical references, something which may make parts of the film politically illegible (Wajda 2009: 16), but as a part of the legacy of great silence concerning various aspects of Soviet history this very predicament renders the movie a kind of invitation to unpack East European mysteries. This problem has been reversed with Polish audiences. The Katyn trauma drama appeared so symbolically and politically charged in that country that the movie has been susceptible to political manipulation, not unlike the official remembrance of the massacre described above. Referring to this danger, Wajda has stated that he is more afraid of the allies of the movie than its enemies (Wajda 2007: 5).

But regardless of the specific problems of immediate reception, the widespread visibility of a movie by the country’s most noble director, honored in 2000 with an Oscar for his whole oeuvre, created a significant intervention that may serve as a pattern to follow and made lack of knowledge of the crime much more shameful than before. Certainly in Poland itself few could fail to notice it upon its release in fall of 2007. Already before the screening of the movie 95% of Poles had declared that they knew the name “Katyn,” yet as much as 40% had not known who

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(Materski 2008: 131).

<sup>63</sup> “Katyn” has so far been largely ignored as an “inconvenient” picture for example in Italy, the fact linked to the influence of Italian leftist circles (GW 23 April 2009). However, even one of the biggest cinema networks in the country that belongs to the family of Silvio Berlusconi launched only a DVD distribution of the movie. Whereas this may have come as an unexpected disappointment for some observers, it has not been surprising that the Russian distribution of the movie is almost non-existent.

exactly is to be blamed for the massacre and 10% had still believed that the perpetrators were Germans (GW 23 April 2007).<sup>64</sup>

The movie released to the market in 190 copies half a year later, on September 21, 2007, was watched in the cinemas across the country by 1,021,881 persons only during the first two weeks, 265,000 of which viewed it in the first weekend of its screening.<sup>65</sup> By the 20<sup>th</sup> of October 2007 the number had already reached two million<sup>66</sup>. By the end of 2008 the number of viewers reached 2,7 million.<sup>67</sup> Such an attendance could not fail to change the sociological figures mentioned before. Above all, as an artistic intervention it represented and recalled Katyn as a grand symbol of the individual's helplessness vis-à-vis the totalitarian state and re-inscribed this recollection within a personally and concretely grounded narrative. Due to this connection the film has vividly depicted a group experience that thanks to this portrayal made decisive strides towards confirming itself as a truly collective experience of Poland as a cultural community. It was one of the more important representations that attached anew the meaning of human suffering to the sign of Katyn and aided the victims' silence overcoming itself.

### Some Notes Toward a General Conclusion

Lack of symbolic closure deepens cultural traumas. It is conceived of as necessary for controlling the trauma and sufficient for launching of the processes of reconciliation.

We can distinguish specific parts of it:

1. overcoming anonymity
2. overcoming silence by the victimized

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<sup>64</sup> There is here, of course, a methodological problem at stake, namely how can researchers be sure that the statement „Yes, I have heard about Katyn” is not distorted by a more general framework that stigmatizes ignorance. It would perhaps be better to possess in this respect studies that elicit pertinent knowledge or lack thereof indirectly. Still, even if the figure of 95% regarding those who declared they knew of Katyn were exaggerated, it is not unrealistic to assume that the vast majority of society indeed have heard about it by 2007 and thus could identified and respond to the issue.

<sup>65</sup> <http://www.wprost.pl/ar/115088/Katyn-obejrzało-milion-widzów/> (May 12, 2009)

<sup>66</sup> <http://film.wp.pl/id,81557,wiadomosc.html?ticaid=1803e> (May 12, 2009)

<sup>67</sup> <http://www.money.pl/gospodarka/wiadomosci/artykul/rekord:frekwencji;-:32;mln:polakow;odwiedzilo;kina,20,0,311828.html> (May 12, 2009)

3. acknowledging the guilt openly by the perpetrators
4. establishing ritualized commemoration
5. establishing the reconciliation dialogue between representatives of the victimized and representatives of community to which the perpetrators belonged

As we have seen, the case of cultural trauma of Katyn starts with the fundamental problem of sheer knowledge of facts, something usually taken for granted in trauma discourses. The very awareness of occurrences was for a long time partial and what was known was either suppressed or framed in a way that made the story controversial. The specificity of the case forces us to ask new general questions about the relation between such categories as knowledge, awareness, memory, commemoration, remembrance, media. The sociological definitions of these terms are often taken for granted and their epistemological status hardly explored. One of the values of this study is that it may contribute to a better understanding of what we really mean when we employ these concepts in sociological practice.

Beyond power/knowledge category there seems to exist a complex notion of memory/knowledge (perhaps this should also include ‘memorialization’). Both definitional elements of the latter are mutually constitutive and fundamental. Yet, they are also largely passive phenomena. Memorizing something constitutes a necessary but not a sufficient condition of using it, i.e. making it consequential for one’s biography and the environment. There is, of course, no memory without knowledge; memory needs its objects (thus memorialization as sites of memory as well as commemoration and the practices which go along with that). At the same time, we cannot really know anything if we do not have memory. In actual practice, these categories largely overlap.

Therefore the issue of cultural trauma is less a matter of sheer memory and more a matter of what structures memory and how, and then what and how “activates” it so that it may become a social fact with Durkheimian ramifications. Memory/knowledge compound requires to be symbolically unpacked through social performances and artistically elaborated in order to be turned into active remembrance. Memory/knowledge appears often as something essentially “dormant.” To become “active” and thus culturally consequential, it requires emotional

commitments of various groups, ritualization of its core messages and recurrent presence in different media. Above all it, needs to be experienced affectively and represented artistically within channels of broadly conceived popular culture if it is to matter for modern collective sense of belonging and continuity.

## **Claiming Trauma through Social Performance: The Case of *Waiting for Godot***

**Elizabeth Butler Breese**

In November 2007, Samuel Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot: A Tragicomedy in Two Acts* was performed in two neighborhoods in New Orleans: Gentilly and the Lower Ninth Ward. In Gentilly, a house destroyed by Hurricane Katrina served as the set; in the Lower Ninth Ward, the play was performed at an intersection of formerly busy streets. On face value, the production of a classic French Surrealist play on the streets of two neighborhoods largely destroyed by Hurricane Katrina is curious. Why did producers stage, actors perform, or audiences attend this play in such unlikely locations? What did the play mean to the audience and actors in New Orleans? Further, what meanings did the production convey to audiences other than the one physically present at the performances?

Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* debuted as experimental, avant-garde drama. Today, it is widely acclaimed as one of the premier dramatic works of the twentieth century. Throughout the play's arc from experimental to canonical drama, critics, academics and journalists have recognized that *Waiting for Godot* has a "special relevance" and resonance when it is staged in contexts of political oppression, violence, and disaster (Bradby 2001: 162). Instead of the numerous explanations for resonance in these contexts, I offer one: productions of *Waiting for Godot* have achieved "re-fusion" in contexts of trauma. I closely examine *Waiting for Godot*—the circumstances of its creation, its aesthetics and available meanings—in order to analyze productions of the play and its unique resonance in contexts of trauma (Eyerman and McCormick 2006).



Concentrating on Susan Sontag's production of *Waiting for Godot* in Sarajevo in 1993 and Paul Chan's production in New Orleans in 2007, I argue that the productions in these locations are social performances as well as theatrical performances which express, communicate, and narrate trauma. The play, written after and out of Beckett's experience of war, expresses the mood of collective trauma. However, even in contexts of collective trauma, the metaphor of waiting does not speak for itself. Directors, producers, actors, journalists, and critics insert references to the meanings of the trauma into the play. The central proposal of cultural trauma theory is that trauma does not simply *happen* but must be created through meaning work of construction and narration. Social actors make claims about their trauma—the nature of suffering, who are victims, and who the perpetrators—through these productions of *Waiting for Godot*. The productions communicate the claims to trauma to the audience that is physically present at the performances as well as to a wider audience who read and hear journalists' accounts of them. As social performance, rather than political speech, the claims which are made about the trauma are not posed as claims to truth in a Habermasian sense but as claims to expressive aptness (Rauer 2006: 259). This case study of productions of *Waiting for Godot* illuminates that carrier groups and social actors make different kinds of claims in the trauma process: some claims to trauma appeal to factual truth while others appeal to expressive aptness. Quite simply, this study illustrates that there are different ways to construct and narrate trauma. We must understand the different types of claims to trauma and their different measures of success in order to evaluate how and why trauma processes begin or fail, continue or stall.

**Personal, Historic, and Artistic Context of *Waiting for Godot***

*"War is latent in much of Beckett's work" (Gontarski cited in Bradby 2001: 13).*

Samuel Beckett wrote *Waiting for Godot: A Tragicomedy in Two Acts* in a flourish of literary productivity in 1948/9. Beckett spent most of the 1930s traveling and living in Britain, Ireland, Germany, and France. By the time World War II reached France he was living in Paris where he established himself within Surrealist and avant-garde literary and artistic circles and started writing in French. Distraught by the German occupation of France, Beckett and many of his friends joined The Resistance (Bair 1978: 309&319). After participating in The Resistance for a year, his network was betrayed to the Nazis, and Beckett and his partner Suzanne Deschevaux-Dumesnil went underground for their safety (Bradby 2001: 12). In October 1942, after two months of hiding in Paris, Beckett and Suzanne procured false papers to move to the unoccupied zone. The couple proceeded by foot from Paris to Roussillon in Provence, where they stayed for two and a half years (Bair 1978: 318&319).

The unique aesthetics of the Provence countryside and Beckett's experiences in Roussillon figure significantly, though rather subtly, in *Waiting for Godot*. In Roussillon, war was omnipresent; it was the reason Beckett was compelled to stay in the Provencal village, and it shaped nearly all the conditions of life. Beckett and his neighbors and friends in Roussillon listened to radio reports of the war, and he participated in late-night resistance missions (Bair 1978). Several literary scholars argue that Beckett's post-war writings reflect his real, rather than purely intellectual, experience of war and "all the anguish of waiting for contacts in dangerous circumstances, of seeing friends betrayed, hearing of their torture and death..." (Bradby 2001: 13). Beckett habitually took long walks while biding his time in Roussillon (Bair 1978: 325). The opening stage directions of Beckett's play announce the setting: "A country road. A tree. Evening" (Beckett [1954] 1982: 1). Beckett's travelers wait, uncertain of their fate, along a road like the ones between Paris to Roussillon or like the country roads where

Beckett passed the time waiting for the war to end. In addition, Beckett made several direct references to Roussillon in *Godot*, including the unique red color of the dirt, and he named a character, “Bonnelly,” after a local farmer (Bradby 2001: 12&13). As I will discuss later, *Godot* does not explicitly refer to war. However, the fear, anxiety, uncertainty and waiting the play conveys are unmistakably born of his experiences during the war in Roussillon. Before I examine productions of *Godot* which make claims to trauma, let us look closely at Beckett’s play in order to understand the literary script employed in the social performance of trauma.

### ***Waiting for Godot: A Tragicomedy in Two Acts***

Simply stated, *Waiting for Godot* revolutionized theater. Several decades after directing the Actors Workshop production of *Waiting for Godot* in San Francisco, Herbert Blau stated, “I think the hardest thing to reconstruct, now that Beckett has been deified among American theater people, particularly academics, is just how startling those plays were” (Blau cited in Bradby 2001: 97). Perhaps the most novel element of *Waiting for Godot* is that it lacks a true plot. As the title indicates, *Godot* is a play in two acts, yet the structure of the second repeats the first. Instead of development, the structure of *Waiting for Godot* is “cyclical and static” (Bradby 2001: 36). In the first act, Estragon and Vladimir meet on a road and commence waiting for Godot to arrive. The setting is simple; as mentioned previously, the stage directions indicate only “A country road. A tree. Evening.” Like clowns and music-hall performers, Vladimir and Estragon banter in the form of a “cross-talk act” which features interruptions, unfinished stories, double meanings, and misunderstandings (Bradby 2001: 43). Eventually Lucky, burdened by packages and with a rope around his neck, and Pozzo, holding a whip, enter the stage. Pozzo bosses Lucky with commands such as “Up pig!” (Beckett [1954] 1982: 20). These two couples are the main figures in the play, but they are not typical dramatic characters. They lack reliable personal

histories and evidence of internal life. Bradby argues that “it is best to approach each of the pairs of characters as two halves of a single theatrical dynamic” (2001: 29). Pozzo and Lucky depict an interdependent master-slave relationship while Vladimir and Estragon are cross-talk performers whose symbiotic relationship takes on many shades depending on the performance, including friends, an old married couple, or two comedians (Bradby 2001: 30). Toward the end of Act I, a boy comes to announce that Mr. Godot will not “come this evening but surely tomorrow” (Beckett [1954] 1982: 55). In Act II, the set and the actors appear physically diminished; Pozzo is now blind. As the play ends, Vladimir and Estragon discuss committing suicide but decide to wait to see if Godot will come tomorrow. In their last exchange, they decide to go, yet the stage direction reads, “They do not move” (Beckett [1954] 1982: 109).

Typically in drama and literature, meaning is delivered via standard elements such as the progression of the plot, the topic of the play, and character development. Actions happen in sequence, building toward an end and a resolution from which meaning or a lesson may be gleaned. Static instead of progressing, *Godot* does not allow for meaning to be “read off” the plot (Bradby 2001: 24). *Godot* also evades a structure of being directly “about” something; the play lacks a referent. It has no inherent setting, time period, or message. Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House* is about marriage in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. *Waiting for Godot* resists that sort of telling. Characters wait on a road, but the object of their desire never arrives. Further, it is not clear who or what “Godot” is. Throughout his life, Beckett insisted that “Godot” was not a stand-in for God and if he “knew who Godot was” he would have said so in the play (Bair 1978: 382; Schneider 1967: 55). Although the figure of Godot is the focus of many audience members and critics, Martin Esslin argues that waiting, rather than Godot, is the subject of the play ([1961] 1980: 50). However, it is not only *about* waiting in a standard sense. Beckett’s *Godot* depicts on stage the

existential experience of waiting. One place to find a meaning offered by *Godot* is its presentation of the human—painfully, comically human—experience of time.

The last pairing of utterance and stage direction in the play, when the travelers decide to go yet do not move, is an example of Beckett's treatment of the themes of movement and stasis in such a way as to unsettle meaning. Dialogue and action work at cross-purposes, creating an effect nearly impossible to produce with prose. This double gesture—at once toward movement and toward stasis—is one last destabilizing move in *Godot*; the end of the play, and thus the “meaning” in a standard sense, is left open. Or, perhaps, it indicates that the meaning cannot be fixed or resolved. Beckett himself inveterately declined to illuminate the “meanings” and symbolism of his plays. The director of the first American production who developed a personal relationship with the playwright explains that Beckett preferred to “let the supposed ‘meanings’ fall where they may....” (Schneider 1967: 55). As I will discuss in detail, the meanings of *Waiting for Godot* do not only passively “fall” where they may; social actors and the audience actively write meanings of their trauma into Beckett's play.

**“The play struck such different chords in its various audiences...” (Bradby 2001: 2)**

Roger Blin directed the first performance of *Waiting for Godot* at the Théâtre de Babylone in Paris in 1953. Beginning with that inaugural performance, critics, journalists and academics have expressed considerable interest and anxiety over whether performances of the *Godot* would be “understood” and received favorably by audiences and critics. In fact, before Blin agreed to stage *Waiting for Godot* at the Babylone, the play was rejected by several producers in Paris who cited concern that it was “incomprehensible, boring, too highbrow, or too deep” (Bair 1978: 397). Despite the concerns, the first production in Paris proved extremely

successful, running for four hundred performances at the Babylone before transferring to another theater in Paris (Esslin [1961] 1980: 39).

Over the course of several decades, concerns that the avant-garde qualities of the play would prevent positive audience reception of the play largely fell off. Despite fears—which proved to be well-founded in some cases—that early audiences would not understand or connect with the play, *Waiting for Godot* has been staged extensively throughout the world.<sup>68</sup> Its success helped propel Beckett to his position as one of the most prominent literary figures of the twentieth century, and, in turn, his literary fame conferred legitimacy on the play. The revolutionary, avant-garde play is now a classic drama. Although the initial anxieties that audiences would not understand or respond positively to the play subsided as it achieved the status of classic, those concerns were replaced by others. Critics and academics now express concern that *Waiting for Godot* has lost its “provocative quality” and has become a “safe bet” to stage (Bradby 2001: 162). However, critics, journalists, and academics have long identified performances where their anxieties about reception are much less—or even ceased to be—of concern for reasons external to the logic of the theater. When *Godot* was feared to be too dark or too high-brow, audiences understood it. And when critics and academics feared *Godot* is merely a mundane classic emptied of its theatrical surprises, audiences felt a vibrant connection to the

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<sup>68</sup> The first production in the United States was, in the words of the director, a “spectacular flop” (Schneider 1967: 56). Staged in Miami, the producers advertised *Waiting for Godot* as the “the laugh sensation of two continents” starring the well-known comic actors Bert Lehr and Tom Ewell (Bradby 2001: 93). Bradby assesses that Lehr and Ewell and the director doomed the production by playing up the comedic aspects of the play and making the tragic elements palatable. Schneider, the director, attributes the production’s failure to the audience’s expectation of attending a light comedy (Schneider 1967: 56). Due to the “disastrous” run in Miami, *Godot*’s first opening New York City was canceled (Bradby 2001: 93). After reorganizing the production and replacing the director and some of the actors, *Godot* opened on Broadway in April 1956 (Bradby 2001: 93). The production in Miami is the first of several examples of *Waiting for Godot* failing to some degree when it was used primarily as a star vehicle or to earn large profits for the theater and production company. A critic for *The New York Times* reports that the Broadway production featuring Robin Williams and Steve Martin as Vladimir and Estragon in 1988 “rode into town on tidal waves of hype” (Rich 1988). However, the show proved “utterly impersonal” and turned *Godot* into “the stage equivalent of a buddy film” (Rich 1988). Instances of failed or less successful *Godot* productions underscore the interest of productions that succeed.

play. In the beginning of *Beckett: Waiting for Godot*, Bradby attributes the varied receptions of the play to variations in the logic of the theater: “It was understood (and misunderstood) differently in the different theatrical cultures (2001: 2).” Yet, later in the book, he joins other critics and academics in acknowledging that the unique history of performances and audience reception of *Waiting for Godot* goes beyond the logic of the theater. In “situations of political oppression” the canonical drama has “special relevance” and becomes provocative once again (2001: 162).

Susan Sontag’s production of *Waiting for Godot* in Sarajevo during the siege in the summer of 1993 is one of the productions in “situations of political oppression” cited by Bradby. In “Waiting for Godot in Sarajevo,” Sontag articulates that the relevance and resonance of *Waiting for Godot* in Sarajevo was obvious. During her first visit to Sarajevo the preceding spring, Sontag spoke with a director and producer about coming back to the city to direct a play. When he asked which play she would direct, Sontag recalls:

And bravado, following the impulsiveness of my proposal, suggested to me in an instant what I might not have seen had I taken longer to reflect: there was one obvious play for me to direct. Beckett’s play, written over forty years ago, seems written for, and about Sarajevo. (1994: 88)

Why did Sontag, a social critic and literary figure with countless dramas to choose from, realize “in an instant” that *Waiting for Godot* was written for and about the situation in Sarajevo? How is it that *Godot*, a play which cannot properly be said to be “about” anything, could be about the violence and suffering in that city?

In *Waiting for Godot in Sarajevo: Theological Reflections on Nihilism, Tragedy, and Apocalypse*, David Toole (1998) weaves together philosophy, theology, sociology, and

contemporary politics to explain that Sontag and her audience in Sarajevo turned to *Waiting for Godot* as a way to reflect on the atrocities of the twentieth century. Violence in Sarajevo book-ended the century: the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand began World War I and the citizens of Sarajevo suffered a violent siege, during which thousands died and many more suffered from malnutrition and gripping fear, at the dusk of the bloody century (Toole 1998: xiii). Toole reflects:

I can imagine that to witness a performance of *Godot* in Sarajevo in 1993 would have been to meet head-on the question of what such a century might mean—or rather, the question of whether *meaning* itself could possibly survive a century such as this.  
(Author's emphasis 1998: 19)

In Sarajevo in 1993, *Waiting for Godot* was not merely a classic of the theater; here the play seemed ultimately relevant to the situation. Bradby identified the resonance and labeled it “political oppression.” Recognizing the same resonance, Toole attributed the “remarkable convergence of text and world” to understanding atrocity in the twentieth century (Toole 1998: 4).

In certain contexts—variously labeled political oppression or atrocity—concerns that critics, academics and journalists normally have about *Godot* lose their importance. Instead of worrying whether *Godot* will be understood, critics and journalists reports it has “struck an instant chord” with the audience (Bradby 2001: 102). Instead of worrying about whether it has been performed too much, it seems instantly obvious to stage it and no other play (Sontag 1994: 88). These critics identify what, in the theory of social performance and cultural pragmatics, is conceptualized as “re-fusion” (Alexander, Giesen and Mast 2006). In complex, mass mediated society, social life has been “de-fused” (Alexander 2006: 29). Rituals, which rely on shared



meanings and cultural understandings, are rare. However, social actors in our complex social world continue to communicate the meanings of their social experiences through social performance. Cultural pragmatics takes as its goal to demonstrate “how social performance, whether individual or collective, can be analogized systemically to theatrical ones” (Alexander 2006: 29). I argue that the theatrical performance of *Waiting for Godot* is a social performance in contexts of trauma. In contexts of trauma, audiences seem to understand *Godot* and its deeply provocative qualities. This “re-fusion” transcends the logic of the theater; audiences not only “enjoy” or “appreciate” the play, but it “speaks to” and “speaks for” their social situations. In these contexts, *Godot* is not only a theatrical performance; it is a social performance.

Instead of the numerous explanations for fusion in these contexts, I offer one: productions of *Waiting for Godot* have achieved fusion in contexts of trauma. To label these circumstances of “trauma” is more than a parsimonious solution for understanding the circumstances in which *Waiting for Godot* is something other—something more—than an avant-garde play or a classic drama. A close study of the productions of *Waiting for Godot* in Sarajevo and New Orleans will contribute to our understandings of social trauma theories. First examining these productions will help to clarify the relationship between collective trauma, a concept describing communities affected by disasters, and cultural trauma which argues that trauma is not born but made. On the theoretical level, I will argue that collective trauma theorizes important elements of mood and emotion, but we must remain theoretically vigilant that it is not events which are traumatic but it is our construction of occurrences as traumatic to cultural structures and expectations that make them so. Further, looking at productions of *Waiting for Godot* in Sarajevo and New Orleans will illustrate the ways in which claims to trauma through construction and narration may be made performatively rather than factually. By staging *Waiting for Godot*, social actors define the

trauma—what the trauma means to the community, who are the victims, and who are the perpetrators—using aesthetics and performative acts rather than evidence such as testimony, dates of events, numbers of the dead, and cost of destruction.

### **Trauma Theory: Mood and Meaning**

*Waiting for Godot* has been staged in many contexts of trauma or potential trauma (Smelser 2004: 35&36); indeed, there have been too many to adequately address here. *Godot* has been performed in prisons in the United States and Sweden, in Haifa with references to the plight of Palestinians in Israel, and South Africa during Apartheid by a mixed-race cast (Bradby 2001). The very first performance of *Godot* at the Théâtre de Babylone followed shortly after World War II and the Nazi occupation of France. I will discuss at length two other performances in trauma contexts: in Sarajevo during the siege and in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina.

Academic and clinical work on trauma began in the realm of psychiatry; Freud was the most famous early theorists of trauma (Smelser 2004: 32). Sociologists have specified two more main types of trauma: collective (or social) trauma and cultural trauma. Kai Erikson's seminal study of Buffalo Creek, an Appalachian mining community almost entirely physically destroyed by a flood of mining sludge, defines and illustrates the central elements of collective trauma (1976). Collective trauma holds as its main tenet that "one can speak of traumatized communities as something distinct from assemblies of traumatized persons" (Erikson 1995: 185). In his précis on cultural trauma, Jeffrey Alexander acknowledges Erikson's important contribution of conceptualizing trauma as a collective as well as individual phenomenon, but he criticizes Erikson for holding a "naturalistic perspective" in which trauma is treated as a quality inherent in certain events due to their sudden, devastating, violent, or shocking nature (2004: 2-4). Later in his career, Erikson seems to argue for a less-naturalistic position for collective

trauma. In “Notes on Trauma and Community,” an essay reflecting on his decades of fieldwork and study of disasters and collective trauma, Erikson points out that his dictionary defines “trauma” as a “a stress or blow that may produce disordered feelings or behavior” and “the state or condition produced by such a stress or blow” (1995: 184). Erikson encourages his readers to shift their emphasis to the latter definition “because it is *how people react to them* rather than *what they are* that give events whatever traumatic quality they can be said to have” (Author’s emphasis 1995: 184). Cultural trauma goes further, arguing that trauma is produced when members of collectivities successfully construct and narrate an event or a series of events as significantly and indelibly undermining part or all of their culture and system of meanings (Alexander et al 2004: especially 10 & 38). Groups make claims to injury and trauma in the “trauma process” of constructing and narrating trauma between the event and its representation (Alexander 2004: 11). It is in this process of claims-making that the production of *Waiting for Godot* represents, speaks for, and specifies the trauma in Sarajevo and New Orleans.

In addition to denying that traumas are born fully-formed and specified, we must also unsettle the idea of the “collective” in collective trauma. Collective trauma signals that a group imagined to constitute a “collective” suffers a trauma together. However, this “collective” may or may not have been experienced as a community or a collective before the traumatic occurrence. The collective trauma, therefore, can form or refigure the collective—its membership, bonds, mutual responsibilities, and stance toward outsiders. We should think of Erikson’s “traumatized communities” as a collective that has, in a Durkheimian sense, a reality and a set of logics external to individuals. It is this Durkheimian collective which experiences social trauma. Erikson argues that “trauma damages the texture of community” (1995:187) in

two ways: by damaging social bonds and by creating a social climate of trauma. Specifying the latter sense of damage to the community, Erikson (1995) writes:

...traumatic experiences work their way so thoroughly into the grain of the affected community that they come to supply its *prevailing mood and temper*, dominate its imagery and its sense of self, govern the way its members relate to one another. (Emphasis added, p.190)

Collective trauma is primarily a concept of emotion rather than, like cultural trauma, a concept of cognition and meaning construction. Erikson argues against a common and rather sentimentalized vision that communities experiencing trauma enjoy a “wave of good feeling” when they realize that they and their community have survived the initial disaster (1995: 189). Erikson flatly states that he has never witnessed this sort of euphoria in any of his fieldwork nor read about it in the recent literature. Instead, collective trauma is characterized by a loss of community bonds, lack of trust in the future and in ones neighbors, and a collective mood of fear and depression (Erikson 1976). Although we must be clear in our understanding of the concept of collective trauma and the language we use to describe it, I contend that collective trauma remains an important sociological concept for understanding when and how communities and collectives experience events as traumatic. Collective trauma may or may not become a cultural trauma at a national or international level in a “trauma process” of articulation, narration, construction, and counter-construction (Alexander et al 2004).

Erikson’s study in Buffalo Creek also indicates that collective trauma is characterized by perseveration on the traumatic occurrence. In Buffalo Creek, residents lived in constant, illogical fear of another flood. Many residents reported difficulty sleeping and feeling agitated and apprehensive when it rained (Erikson 1976: 179). The occurrence is over, but the emotions stay

with the individuals and shape the collective mood. In other words, collective trauma involves a particular experience of time. Days and weeks go by, but the mood of collective trauma lingers. When performed in these situations, *Waiting for Godot* expresses waiting, uncertainty, anguish and fear that the people experiencing collective trauma feel acutely in their daily lives. Like Vladimir and Estragon, individuals and collectives experiencing collective trauma do not know when their situation will end. Nor, like Beckett's hobos, do they know what that end will look like in terms of the bonds of community that have been forged, challenged, and upset during the occurrence and the collective trauma.

Productions of *Waiting for Godot* become social performance through which the collective can represent and communicate its present state to itself. In addition, the collective may realize itself as such through a social performance of a shared emotional state and mood. However, productions of *Waiting for Godot* do not become social performances expressing trauma on their own. Claims to trauma do not speak for themselves. There is a “need for walking and talking—and seeing and listening to the walking and talking” which theater and social performance, and theater as social performance, can provide (Alexander 2006: 33). Social performances, like theater performances, require actors, audiences, scripts and settings. Social actors perform and multiple audiences—the in-person audience, journalists, and media consumers—observe and interpret the social performance of trauma via *Waiting for Godot*. It is to these performances that I now turn.

### **Performing Trauma to Multiple Audiences**

Beckett intended *Waiting for Godot* to “avoid definition” (Bradby 2001: 17). Productions of *Godot* honoring Beckett's intentions could express the “mood and temper” of collective trauma. However, as we will see, productions of *Waiting for Godot* in contexts of

collective trauma have gone beyond mood to articulate the meaning of the situation and the identity of “the players.” In these performances, directors, actors, journalists, and attendees inject the famously “meaningless” avant-garde play with meanings relevant to their situation. The productions specify the victims, the perpetrators, and the meanings of the trauma itself. The first production of *Waiting for Godot* provides a good example. David Bradby (2001) reports that audiences in Paris were particularly horrified by the Pozzo-Lucky couple which was read as a Nazi-victim pair:

No doubt a sense of horror was provoked as much by the attitude of Pozzo as by the appearance and behavior of Lucky. Memories of the Nazi occupation were still fresh in people’s minds. Indeed the full horror of the death camps had emerged only gradually in the postwar years. The image of a poor, broken-down slave, suffering from a terminal medical condition but obliged to continue to perform whatever tasks he could still manage by an arrogant master, was not very far removed from realities which were only too vivid in the memories of many in the audience. (p. 62)

Bradby indicates that the director, Blin, encouraged the audience to read Pozzo as a Nazi by emphasizing the class differences between the two (Bradby 2001: 62). Of course, the “full horror” of the death camps continued to be given meaning long after the performance of *Godot* in Paris. An interesting question to pose—one which we probably cannot answer now—is how members of the Parisian audience understood the figure of Lucky in 1953. If Pozzo represented a cruel and demanding Nazi, who did Lucky represent? Was he a Jew, a prisoner of a Concentration Camp, or was he a Parisian during the Occupation? We do know that Beckett’s potentially generic master-slave pair was rendered and read in Paris as a reference to the collective trauma of Parisians at the time. And, further, the performance of Pozzo as a Nazi indicated the perpetrator of the trauma.

Beckett was part of this “collective” in Paris after the war. When he returned to Paris after years of interminable waiting, Beckett found his beloved city and his relationships with friends and colleagues irrevocably changed by the war (Bair 1978: 373). As a text, *Waiting for Godot* was born out of Beckett’s personal trauma and the mood of collective trauma in Paris following the war. However, as discussed previously, Beckett explicitly includes neither the war nor any other referent in his play. In addition to lacking a referent, literary scholars have argued that Beckett revolutionized the narrative logic of drama. As I discussed previously, *Godot* resists standard plot progression; the play presents an experience of waiting and time rather than being “about” anything. Godot’s arrival, what is expected to “happen” in a standard sense, is denied to the characters and the audience. However, from the first performance, audiences and directors undermined Beckett’s intentions to stage a “meaningless” play defying definitions and interpretation. Against the grain of Beckett’s narrative logic, audiences and producers insert meanings into the play by specifying victims, perpetrators, and the nature of their trauma.

The central contribution of cultural trauma is the insistence that occurrences are not automatically traumatic; events must become traumatic. Groups must construct and narrate events and their aftermath as threatening or damaging to the meaning structures which underpin, and indeed constitute, the collective. Individuals and groups construct and contest the meaning of events in institutions such as courts, parliaments and the media (Alexander 2004: 15-20). The media play a crucial role as journalists and intellectuals report and interpret the construction and contestation of trauma narratives in other institutional realms. In addition to reporting strict “facts” such as numbers of the dead, the cost of destruction, and the transcripts of judicial and legislative hearings, journalists and writers may “expressively dramatize” traumas in the mass media (Alexander 2004: 18).

The capacity of the media to convey, interpret, and judge constructions and narrations of trauma is critical in the social performance of *Waiting for Godot* in Sarajevo and New Orleans. The media constitutes an audience to the social performance along with the audience which was physically present at the performances of the play in those cities. Valentin Rauer argues that the presence of multiple layers of audience is an essential feature of social performance (2006: 260). Social performances require actors to creatively perform and audiences to interpret the performance. Further, the audience does not consist only in Goffman's dichotomous front stage and back stage (2006: 259). In societies with mass media, there are layers of audiences who witness, describe, interpret, and judge social performances: there is an in-person audience, the media audience that encodes the performance, and the media consumers who hear or read about their reports (Rauer 2006: 260).

Rauer identifies these three layers of audience in his case study of the performative act of German Chancellor Willy Brandt's *kniefall* at the monument to those who suffered and died in the Warsaw Ghetto (2006). Rauer disaggregates the audience of social performance analytically to understand the different ways audiences contribute to the social performance or diffuse it through their actions and interpretations. In other words, social performance requires fusion with all layers of audience to become a salient performance. However, Rauer does not discuss the ability of social actors to shape how the audience, including the journalistic audience, receives and perceives the social performance. Using Rauer's three layers of audience is useful for analyzing the interpretations of meaning by the various audiences for the productions of *Waiting for Godot*. Further, I will show that analytically disaggregating the layers of audience illuminates different performative strategies of the social actors who produced and directed *Waiting for Godot* in Sarajevo and New Orleans.



The first-order audience consists of the spectators who are present for the performance (Rauer 260). Social performances always entail action rather than description, and an audience, usually one that is physically present, must witness the act (Rauer 2006: 259). The in-person audience reacts in real time to an action happening in their physical space. Journalists and critics, the second-order audience, must report and interpret an occurrence for it to achieve social and cultural importance, for an *occurrence* to become a salient social *event* (Mast 2006: 118). There is often overlap in the layers of audience (Rauer 2006: 260); indeed, some of the journalists who reported on the productions of *Waiting for Godot* in New Orleans and in Sarajevo physically attended a performance. Journalists report on the performative act, recounting what happened and by whom. Journalists and critics also encode the meaning of the event, interpreting the actions and declaring their consequence. Journalists and critics pronounce a performance a “success” or a “failure.” A social performance is a “success” on a theoretical level when the audience, the *mise-en-scene*, script, and the actors achieve “re-fusion” (Alexander 2006). To achieve re-fusion, a social performance must be perceived as spontaneous rather than calculated, authentic not manufactured (Rauer 2006: 275). Journalists and critics indicate the success or failure of a performance using these criteria, and by citing and interpreting the reactions of the in-person audience. When the reactions—laughter, gasps, comments, silence, and tears—of the first-order audience are encoded and conveyed by journalists, those who are present are simultaneously audience and actors in the social performance (Rauer 2006: 260).

Journalists and critics encode the meanings of the performance for the third-order audience, media consumers. The third-order audience reads reports in newspapers and blogs, hears about the performance on the radio, and sees visual representations of it on television and the internet. An occurrence becomes an event, and action becomes social performance, in part

through the sheer dissemination to a wide third-order audience. The third-order audience “more or less depend” upon the interpretations of the journalists and critics and their assessment of performative success or failure (Rauer 2006: 260). However, the third-order audience is not populated by passive consumers; they will also interpret the meaning of the performance and form their own opinions of its authenticity and consequence. Nevertheless, their reactions are notoriously difficult for social analysts to capture. It is the meanings as they are actively received by the third-order audience that they will mobilize in future decisions and actions such as in opinion polls and political action.

In Sarajevo during the siege and in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina social actors—directors, producers, and stage actors—appealed to all three layers of audience in their social performance of trauma through the theatrical production of Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*. In these locations, the play expresses the mood of collective trauma in Erickson’s sense. However, the metaphor of waiting does not speak for itself. The social actors make claims to trauma by inserting references to the nature of the trauma, the victims, and the perpetrators into Beckett’s referent-free avant-garde play. These references specify and construct the trauma for the individuals who are living through the traumatic occurrence as well for the wider public from whom those claiming trauma seek recognition and solidarity.

## **Sarajevo**

Susan Sontag, the American writer and public intellectual, traveled to Sarajevo in 1993 to direct *Waiting for Godot* as the city’s residents were being ravaged by indiscriminate violence, power outages, and widespread hunger. Sontag’s production featured a local producer, Haris Pasovic, and local theater actors. Sontag appealed to three layers of audience through her performative project: those who attended the performances in the Youth Theater in Sarajevo in

August 1993, the journalists who wrote about the production, and the individuals who heard and read those accounts. The production made claims to trauma through the production of the play that resonated and appealed to each level. I will discuss how Sontag and the other social actors involved in the production appealed to each layer of audience and the ways in which the play achieved, or was said to achieve, re-fusion. Of course there was overlap in strategies of appealing to and interpretation by the layers of audience: what the production of *Waiting for Godot* meant, or was said to mean, to the people of Sarajevo affects what it means, or what it is said to mean, to the audiences beyond the city.

How was the production of *Godot* experienced and interpreted by the people in Sarajevo during the summer of 1993? To analyze the first-order audience almost two decades after the performance without having been present at the performance, I must rely on the accounts of the social actor's involved: principally what Sontag wrote about her production and on comments by residents of Sarajevo as they are quoted by journalists. Artistic culture, European identity, and feeling abandoned by their fellow Europeans were very much related for residents of Sarajevo in the summer of 1993. Sarajevo's residents who had sustained a vibrant intellectual and cultural life based in European artistic traditions were now living without electricity or proper food and were in constant fear for their lives. Many of them felt that their European neighbors allowed them to suffer by their reticence to intervene in the violence. Under ongoing attack, residents bitterly recognized that cultural solidarity with Europe did not extend to political solidarity. The intellectuals and artists with whom many residents of the city felt an affiliation largely abandoned the cause of the Sarajevans. Boujan Zec, a Sarajevan journalist, was quoted in *The Guardian*: "Writers like Hemingway risked their lives for liberty in Spain. Now all that Europe

can do is send us a few packets of aid.”<sup>69</sup> By participating in the production of *Godot*, the actors, theater support staff, and first-order audience members reinforced for themselves their collective identity as civil, cultured Europeans worthy of being saved from “savage” violence. The actor Velibor Topic, who played one of the Estragons, was also quoted in *The Guardian*: “There is not only fighting on the front line. We must tell the world that we are not animals. We are cultured, we have ideas and dreams.”<sup>70</sup> The production of *Waiting for Godot* and the media attention it generated was a way to showcase that culture and civility persevered in Sarajevo. As Velibor indicates, the production of *Waiting for Godot*, a well-known and respected play, articulated their collective identity as civilized Europeans to the residents of Sarajevo. The production was intended to articulate the same collective identity to audiences outside the city.

The residents of Sarajevo were also widely quoted by journalists and by Sontag saying that *Waiting for Godot* made sense to perform in their historical moment because they, too, were waiting. They were waiting for intervention by the United States, President Clinton, the United Nations, and their European neighbors. John Pomfret includes one of the actor’s reflections on the figure of Godot in his article for the *Washington Post*: “You never know when something is going to come crashing down and blow your head apart... That’s my own personal Godot.”<sup>71</sup> Using the same sort of language as the academic David Bradby when he identified *Godot*’s “special relevance,” a British reporter writes, “The play’s message has touched a chord among Sarajevans beyond the tiny theatre-going public. ‘I hear Ms Sontag is waiting for Godot - we are waiting for the Europeans and the Americans,’ commented Jovan Divjak, a Bosnian

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<sup>69</sup> Narayan, Natasha. 1993. “A Candle in the Dark.” *The Guardian*, August 20, p. 2.

<sup>70</sup> Narayan. 1993. *The Guardian*, August 20.

<sup>71</sup> Pomfret, John. 1993. “‘Godot’ Amid the Gunfire; In Bosnia, Sontag’s Take on Beckett.” *The Washington Post*, August 19, C1.

army chief. ‘Did Godot ever show up?’”<sup>72</sup> The residents waited for an uncertain end to the violence, and the production of *Godot* is a way to express their status to those for whom they wait.

The journalists and critics, including Sontag herself, who wrote about the production of *Godot* in Sarajevo largely focused on the desperation in Sarajevo and how apt the metaphor of waiting was for the residents’ situation. Soon after returning to the United States in the early fall of 1993, Sontag wrote two similar essays about her experience directing the play in the beleaguered city. Published in the *New York Review of Books* and the *Performing Arts Journal*, Sontag targeted her reflections and interpretations of the performance to an elite, intellectual, and largely American audience. In “Waiting for Godot in Sarajevo,” Sontag wrote that she traveled to Sarajevo to direct a production of *Waiting for Godot* in order to “pitch in and do something” (1994: 87). Although Sontag insisted that she could not go to Sarajevo merely to act as a witness to the violence, she is that too. In her essay, she provides details about life in the city that read like an ethnographic account. Sontag describes the emotional tableau of collective trauma, stringing together observations that echo Erikson’s fieldwork in Buffalo Creek:

...many Sarajevans are reluctant to leave their apartments except when it is absolutely necessary...though no one is safe anywhere, they have more fear when they are in the street. And beyond fear, there is depression—most Sarajevans are very depressed—which produces lethargy, exhaustion, apathy. (1994:90)

Further, Sontag reports that the residents are “waiting, hoping, not wanting to hope,” and they are “humiliated” (1994: 91). The forces promoting what Erikson called the “prevailing mood and temper” of collective trauma were constant; the real danger had not subsided in Sarajevo. Snipers threatened to kill people on the street and in their homes. Residents lacked electricity,

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<sup>72</sup> Tanner, Marcus. 1993. “A Long Wait for Godot.” *The Independent*, August 2, p. 1.

and waited in lines to receive daily rations of food and water from the United Nations. Sontag notes that her actors suffered from fatigue and malnutrition; a formerly overweight actress lost more than sixty pounds during the war. The newspaper accounts of the situation in Sarajevo and of the plight of the individuals in the social and professional circle of the theater mention many of the same details that Sontag includes in her essays.

The second-order audience, the journalists, established that *Godot* was, in fact, an apt metaphor in large part by describing the reactions of the actors and the audience in the theater. Many journalists describe what happened and interpret the mood in Youth Theater during the performances by mentioning particular details such as what materials appeared on stage, what the actors wore, and how the house was lit. I quote John Burns of the *New York Times*:

A charged silence settled over the theater as actors and audience took a long, painful pause, digesting a message of hope deceived that is a defining passage of a new dramatic production performed here for the first time on Tuesday. To hear the silence of the packed house in the small theater in the city center was to feel the grief and disappointment that weigh on Sarajevo as it nears the end of its second summer under siege.<sup>73</sup>

By declaring a match between the situation “on the ground” and the play using the stunned, silent, pensive, and emotional reaction of the in-person audience as evidence, the journalists declared *Waiting for Godot* a performative “success.” The journalists indicated to their reading and listening audience that *Godot* re-fused the setting, script, audience, and actors into a shared experience of meaning. They conveyed that everyone in Sarajevo understand exactly what *Godot* meant and why it was important to perform in Sarajevo at that moment. And, importantly, during the performance of the play, performed around the world so many times before, the Sarajevan audience saw not only a classic dramatic work; they saw themselves.

The journalists and critics who described and interpreted the production of *Waiting for Godot* conveyed to their listening and reading audience how apt the metaphor was for waiting, uncertainty, and anxiety in Sarajevo. Many journalists repeated variations on the statement “The metaphor of waiting for intervention was well understood.”<sup>74</sup> Often, they established the resonance of *Godot* by describing that the in-person audience was riveted by the performance, collectively understanding its significance in their place and time. However, Beckett’s script and the metaphor of waiting did not speak unaided for the trauma of the Sarajevans. Sontag and the actors changed significant elements of Beckett’s play including the set, the characters, and the length of the play to signify their circumstance and to narrate their trauma for the audience beyond the besieged city. Such changes would be notable in almost any dramatic performance, but insertions into the play to establish the meaning of the situation is additionally surprising in *Godot*. Beckett and his estate are (in)famously inflexible, rarely allowing productions to deviate from Beckett’s authorial intentions for the staging of his plays.<sup>75</sup> More importantly for this study, by specifying the nature and players in a trauma the social actors insert a referent into a play that does not carry one of its own.

Instead of one pair of protagonists, Sontag staged three pairs of Vladimirs and Estragons as “three variations on the theme of the couple” with one mixed gender, one male, and one female couple. She reports she made the decision, at least in part, to “employ”—a symbolic rather than monetary concept—more actors (1994: 92). However, a journalist quotes her explaining to her actors: “Beckett was still thinking in that old way of thinking; that if these

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<sup>73</sup> Burns, John F. 1993. “To Sarajevo, Writer Brings Good Will and ‘Godot.’” *The New York Times*, August 19.

<sup>74</sup> Narayan. 1993. *The Guardian*, August 20.

<sup>75</sup> See, for example, 1993. “Waiting for Godette.” *The Times*, September 1, Features. This news piece states that Sontag’s “real accomplishment” is staging *Godot* with female actresses while the Beckett estate sues other productions for the same substitution.

characters are to be representative then they should be men.”<sup>76</sup> In addition to lightening the burden on her exhausted and malnourished actors, Sontag explains that the extra pairs of travelers have the symbolic value of representing both men and women, male and female Sarajevans who wait for Godot alike and together. Pomfret, writing for *The Washington Post*, declares: “This troika succeeds on the stage as each pair -- two women, two men, and a man and a woman -- explore different parts of the waiting game as they inhabit a world garnished with ammo boxes, sandbags and a hospital bed -- part of the spiritual architecture of life in Sarajevo.”<sup>77</sup> Here, in addition to declaring the representation of all Sarajevans a success, Pomfret also indicates that the production introduced meanings of trauma into the set of *Godot* which is usually exceedingly sparse. David Bradby argues that the most important aspect of the setting of *Godot* is its “neutrality: it provides an empty space, neither historically conditioned nor socially appropriated” (2001: 34). However, Sontag’s actors presented *Waiting for Godot* “on a stage lit by candles, and with Red Cross boxes and UN sandbags as props...”<sup>78</sup> In one of her nods to Beckett in her essay, Sontag comments that her staging was “as minimally furnished, I thought, as Beckett himself could have desired” (1994: 96). She fails to mention the war paraphernalia invoking the Red Cross and The United Nations, material representations of trauma, decorating the stage.

Sontag only staged the first act of the play. In her essay on the production, she points out that the first act is “itself a complete play” without the repetition and the stasis of the second act (1994: 97). She reports that she decided to stage only the first half of the play because her actors and audience could not sustain energy for a longer performance. However, Sontag undermined

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<sup>76</sup> Eagar, Charlotte. 1993. “Radical-Chic Sontag Waits for Godot as Shells Shake Theatre of the Absurd.” *The Observer*, July 25, p. 13.

<sup>77</sup> Pomfret. 1993. *The Washington Post*, August 19.



her explanation of this as a logistical, value-free decision in comments to the first- and second-order audiences. Pomfret attended a performance in Sarajevo where Sontag announced: “Its correct title, then, is ‘Waiting for Godot: Act 1.’ We are all waiting for Act 2.”<sup>79</sup> Of course, Beckett’s *Godot* never arrives. Sontag’s *Godot* may still arrive in the Act 2 that is yet to unfold. Until he arrives—and perhaps even if he does—he is a guilty party in their trauma.

So far, it sounds very much like all the journalists agree that *Waiting for Godot* was the right play at the right time in Sarajevo and that the residents of Sarajevo responded to this resonance and relevance. This is, actually, largely true. But that is not to say that there were no criticisms of staging *Godot* in Sarajevo. The criticisms, however, did not pertain to whether or not the claims made implicitly and explicitly through the play—that the Sarajevans suffer from deep existential uncertainty and physical decline as they wait for the United States, the United Nations, and their European neighbors to intervene in the violence. Rather, whether or not the play will be taken as a legitimate, successful social performance of trauma hinges on whether the performance was spontaneous and authentic. Specifically, the motivations and actions of Susan Sontag coming to the beleaguered city to direct the play was at issue for the layers of audiences. Simply stated, the critical question is not whether the meanings encoded by the performance are correct; the critical question is whether Sontag should have directed the play.

The most direct and vehement critic, Richard Grenier, wrote that Sontag has resumed her “her position as the artist-moralist of the Western world” in the “limelight” of Sarajevo.<sup>80</sup> Grenier’s was the most ardent formulation of what occurred in whispers in other news pieces: did Sontag seek out this high-profile cause to boost her own career or did she seek to bring the

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<sup>78</sup> William, David. 1993. “The Great Provider: Alemko Has it all at a Price Despite the Siege.” *The Daily Mail*, August 18, p. 12.

<sup>79</sup> Pomfret. 1993. *The Washington Post*, August 19. .

<sup>80</sup> Grenier, Richard. 1993. “Sarajevo and Susan’s Sweet Sensibilities.” *The Washington Times*, August 30, p. E3.

world's attention to the situation in Sarajevo? Is it legitimate for an intellectual from the U.S. to travel to a war zone to direct a play? Although these questions were certainly not uniformly answered or resolved, many reporters' accounts assure the third-order audience that Sontag's presence and her work in the embattled Sarajevo theater scene were welcome by the Sarajevans. An editor of a Sarajevo newspaper that continued to publish during the shelling, Kemal Kurspahic, commented on the status of Sontag: "She is not a war tourist...She has really tried to come here and talk to us and understand the situation."<sup>81</sup> The same news story states, as do several other reports, that Sontag declines, out of a sense of equality and solidarity, to wear her flak jacket. Some reporters write that a flak jacket lies nearby the famous intellectual, but, like her actors, she goes without. Weighing in on her authenticity as an artist in Sarajevo, Sontag tells a reporter, "You have to have some reason to be here. I'm not just a voyeur. I was invited to take part in a theatre festival..."<sup>82</sup> Journalists and critics declared Sontag's production of *Waiting for Godot* a performative success. The meanings resonated with the situation and the people. Sontag's changes to Beckett's stage directions were not over-done and those embellishments did not take away from the power of the play's simplicity. Sontag's position and job as director were (largely) authentic and the show's connection with the audience seemed spontaneous and strong. In short, most journalists declared *Waiting for Godot* a successful social performance in Sarajevo.

## **New Orleans**

Graphic and performance artist Paul Chan knew about Sontag's production of *Waiting for Godot* in Sarajevo when he brought a production of Beckett's play to New Orleans in November 2007. Chan considers his production of *Godot* "within the lineage of imagining what it means to

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<sup>81</sup> Narayan. 1993 *The Guardian*, August 20.

create art in places where we ought not to have any” which includes Sontag’s production.<sup>83</sup> Supported by the public art nonprofit Creative Time, Chan mounted a multifaceted expressive project featuring a whispering campaign and local art practices including Second line brass bands. Like Sontag’s production in Sarajevo, Chan dramatizes and communicates the situation of the people living in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina to the city’s residents and to the wider world. And like Sontag’s production, Chan and the director Christopher McElroen and the stage actors added specific references to their city and their situation to Beckett’s austere drama. In a sense, Chan had at his disposal Beckett’s script for the play as well as a script written by Sontag’s production, the production at San Quentin, in South Africa and elsewhere for how to stage *Waiting for Godot* as a metaphor for trauma. In these instances, though the play is touted as a “perfect” and “apt” metaphor, the nature of the trauma, the perpetrators, and the victims are explicitly referenced via the characters, set, costumes, and other theatrical elements. The second “script” of *Godot* as a social performance of trauma indicates what can be altered in Beckett’s play to make it speak for and construct the trauma at hand. Journalists comment on this “lineage” and how Chan uses the script passed down to him from Sontag, the prison productions, and others.<sup>84</sup> Also like the production in Sarajevo, in addition to expressive aptness which is required for the play to express and narrate trauma, the legitimacy of artists who direct and produce the play are at issue for residents and journalists.

Chan’s production went beyond Beckett’s script and the previous productions from his “lineage” to mount a social performance of community and trauma. To advertise the performances, Chan and his theater group posted signs including only Beckett’s first stage

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<sup>82</sup> Narayan. 1993 *The Guardian*, August 20.

<sup>83</sup> Simon, Scott. 2007. “Still Waiting on Repairs, New Orleans Hosts ‘Godot.’” Weekend Edition Saturday, National Public Radio, November 3.

directions: “A country road. A tree. Evening.” This whispering campaign knew no boundaries of class, race, or hurricane destruction; “good” and “bad” neighborhoods alike were garnished with the signs.<sup>85</sup> A journalist for the *New York Times* describes that they “added up to a visual network, art as a connective tissue for a torn-apart town.”<sup>86</sup> He interprets for his readers that the social bonds that were broken through the storm will be restored through art’s catharsis. Before the show went up, the producer and others involved with the production hosted theater workshops and attended pot-luck dinners with a variety of New Orleans residents. The *Times-Picayune*’s coverage of this multifaceted art project helped to send out a casting call for local actors to audition for the play.<sup>87</sup> Chan cast three actors from the Classical Theater of Harlem production of *Waiting for Godot*, including Wendell Pierce who plays Detective Moreland on the popular television show *The Wire* and is a native son of New Orleans. Chan cast a local actor, Mark McLaughlin, as Lucky, and two young local actors shared the role of the Boy.<sup>88</sup> The local paper also listed phone numbers to call for reservations for the show and issued a call for volunteers to help with various aspects of the production.<sup>89</sup> The *Times-Picayune* advertised that at each of the free performances the audience would share a gumbo dinner before being led into the seating area by Second line bands.<sup>90</sup> The play was performed at a street corner in the Lower Ninth Ward and in front of a destroyed house in Gentilly. In his artist statement, Chan explains that staging the play outside with the brass band “connects with the city’s storied tradition of street performance, from Mardi Gras to the Second lines that leisurely snake through streets and

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<sup>84</sup> Simon. 2007. Weekend Edition Saturday, National Public Radio, November 3; Cotter, Holland. 2007. “A Broken City. A Tree. Evening.” *The New York Times*, December 2, Section 2, p. 1.

<sup>85</sup> Cotter. 2007. *The New York Times*, December 2.

<sup>86</sup> Cotter. 2007. *The New York Times*, December 2.

<sup>87</sup> Cuthbert, David. 2007. “Katrina ‘Godot’ a Go: Wendell Pierce Set to Star in Hurricane-Themed Adaptation of Classic Play in New Orleans.” *The Times-Picayune*, September 15.

<sup>88</sup> Cuthbert, David. 2007. *The Times-Picayune*. October 26.

<sup>89</sup> Cuthbert. 2007. *The Times-Picayune*. October 26.

neighborhoods.”<sup>91</sup> Cotter reported in the *New York Times* that thousands of people attended the shows, and an extra performance was added to accommodate audience demand.<sup>92</sup> The first-order audience did not merely occupy seats in a theater. Local residents, food, and music, were part of the performance in New Orleans. On the day of the first performance, the *Times-Picayune* quoted Pierce exclaiming with a laugh, “We’re gonna have a lot of New Orleans in this!”<sup>93</sup> The local flavor surrounding the stage performance expresses to residents and to those outside the city that New Orleans has a unique and vibrant culture that should not languish or disappear.

Much of the journalistic coverage, the comments by the second-order audience, focused on the parallels between the characters, setting, and plot of *Godot* and the residents and their lives in New Orleans. Holland Cotter, writing for *The New York Times*, comments on the apt pairing of the text and the situation in Gentilly and the Lower Ninth Ward: “Under the circumstances, Beckett’s words sounded less like an existentialist cri de coeur than like a terse topographic description.”<sup>94</sup> Cotter conveys to his reader that the set of *Godot* which seems peculiarly sparse to many audiences is simple description of reality in New Orleans. The text and the landscape merge, but a journalist for the *Times-Picayune* writes that the resonance between the play and the situation is fully expressed only through the performance: “Many lines in the ‘Godot’ text take on new meaning post-Katrina, but it is not until the actors speak them at the barren intersection in the Lower 9th Ward—both blighted and beautiful—that their full

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<sup>90</sup> Cuthbert, David. 2007. “A Play in the Street: For New Orleanians, ‘Waiting for Godot’ Hits the Spot.” *The Times-Picayune*, November 2.

<sup>91</sup> Chan, Paul. June 2007. “Waiting for Godot in New Orleans: An Artist Statement.” Available [http://www.creativetime.org/programs/archive/2007/chan/artist\\_statement.pdf](http://www.creativetime.org/programs/archive/2007/chan/artist_statement.pdf), last accessed 04/29/08.

<sup>92</sup> Cotter. 2007. *The New York Times*, December 2.

<sup>93</sup> Cuthbert. 2007. *The Times-Picayune*, November 2.

<sup>94</sup> Cotter. 2007. *The New York Times*, December 2.

immediacy and import is felt.”<sup>95</sup> Another journalist for the *Times-Picayune* illustrates this “immediacy and import” by quoting the woman he sat next to at the performance in the Ninth Ward who lives in the neighborhood. When Estragon sat on a curb on the stage, the woman remarked, “He’s sitting there like me sitting on my stoop.”<sup>96</sup> Beckett’s characters and the characters in the drama of Katrina wait just the same, sitting on the stoop and watching up the road for Godot to arrive.

Like the woman in the Ninth Ward who sits on her stoop, several articles about the production of *Godot* convey that the characters in this social performance have their own experiences of waiting like Beckett’s hobos, the stage characters. McLaughlin, who plays Lucky, told a reporter for the *Times-Picayune*, “I see this 'Godot' every single day on my block, where a Baptist church is a clearinghouse for all kinds of people in need.”<sup>97</sup> An article in the *Times-Picayune* divulges that Pierce, the famous television and movie actor, is angry about his parents’ experiences tangling with government bureaucracy and “politics” to get recovery money after losing their home during Katrina. The reporter writes, “They [Pierce’s parents] went down to the office and found themselves playing an absurdist scene right out of “Godot.”<sup>98</sup> The characters of the social performance of trauma go beyond the stage actors. Radio and newspaper journalists introduce their third-order audience to Lower Ninth Ward resident Robert Green who lost both his mother and his granddaughter in the storm. Chan gave Green a copy of *Waiting for Godot*. At first he was skeptical of an outsider producing a play on the streets in his neighborhood, but after Green read the play, he left a screaming message on Chan’s answer

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<sup>95</sup> Cuthbert. 2007. *The Times-Picayune*, November 2.

<sup>96</sup> MacCash, Doug. 2007. “Worth the Wait: Standing-Room Crowds Create Havoc, but 'Godot'-Goers go with the Flow.” *The Times-Picayune*, November 6.

<sup>97</sup> Cuthbert. 2007. *The Times-Picayune*, November 2.

<sup>98</sup> Cuthbert. 2007. *The Times-Picayune*, November 2.

machine: he had to be part of the project.<sup>99</sup> A writer for the *Times-Picayune* places Green in his scene on show night. Green welcomed the play's audience, but the journalist hesitates to say "to his neighborhood" for Green's neighbors are gone, and he waits for them to come back.<sup>100</sup> Green is Vladimir and Estragon. The stage actors bring Beckett's characters to life on stage, and they are bringing Green's story to life as well.

In Sarajevo, *Godot* was performed concurrently with the violent siege; in New Orleans, more than two years elapsed between the storm and the production of *Godot*. Through the multifaceted social performance, the *Waiting for Godot* production and project in New Orleans articulated that the people in New Orleans continue to wait for the disaster, and the trauma, to end. One way that the production articulated the residents of New Orleans as "victims" was by casting a mix of African-American and local actors. The Lower Ninth Ward and Gentilly are predominantly black neighborhoods. Flooding in the city and the miserably slow response from the local, state, and federal governments disproportionately affected black neighborhoods and black residents. By casting Beckett's travelers to "look like" the people in New Orleans, the production represented the identity of those who are the victims of an ongoing trauma.

We can also think about the production of *Waiting for Godot* and the other aspects of the art project as a counter-performance to the rhetoric and placations that politicians have offered the residents of New Orleans. New Orleans was the backdrop for John Edwards's entrance into and exit from the 2008 presidential campaign, at the end of 2006 and the beginning of 2008 respectively. Countless other politicians and agency representatives travel to New Orleans to give press conferences assuring the residents and people throughout the United States that New Orleans is on the top of the political agenda. There have been many improvements in the city,

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<sup>99</sup> Simon. 2007. Weekend Edition Saturday, National Public Radio, November 3.

<sup>100</sup> DeBerry, Jarvis. 2007. "Waiting, Wondering? We Can Relate." *The Times-Picayune*, November 6.

but years after the hurricane, neighborhoods like the Lower Ninth Ward and Gentilly remain largely in tatters. The counter-performance of the *Waiting for Godot* artistic project expresses and articulates their continuing trauma: the residents of the Lower Ninth Ward and Gentilly are still waiting, uncertain of their fate and abandoned by Godot.

The second-order audience, the journalists, and the residents they interview claim that the play represents the situation of the people of the Crescent City. Like Beckett's hobos, they wait for an object of desire which they only know in a hazy form. Who is Godot? When is relief coming? When will the city return to "normal"? There is no dispute in any of the newspaper or television reports, local or national, which I surveyed that Beckett's play uniquely represents life in New Orleans. Like in Sarajevo, questions about the legitimacy of the play, and the legitimacy of the social performance carried on through and around it, focus on the producers and directors who came to New Orleans from outside the city. Can artists legitimately create a claim to someone else's trauma? We learn from the productions of *Godot* in Sarajevo and in New Orleans that they may if they properly engage the local population by hiring them as actors, costumers, and stage hands. Chan goes beyond this to partner with various community groups; two separate articles in the *Times-Picayune* and an article in *The New York Times* list a long roster of local partners in the *Godot* project including high schools, universities, and community organizations.<sup>101</sup> Writing for the *Times-Picayune*, MacCash and Cuthbert write that Chan made New Orleans his "temporary home" for the duration of the *Godot* project.<sup>102</sup> He's not an insider, of course, but they convey that he is not merely a tourist-artist cashing in on New Orleans's misfortunes either. In fact, they go on to quote an art-world insider who suggests that

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<sup>101</sup> Cuthbert. 2007. *The Times-Picayune*, September 15, Cuthbert, David. 2007. "'Godot' Makes the Bean Scene." *The Times-Picayune*, October 27, and Cotter. 2007. *The New York Times*, December 2.

<sup>102</sup> MacCash, Doug and Cuthbert, David. 2007. "Artist Paul Chan Brings his 'Godot' to a Waiting City." *The Times-Picayune*, November 2.



having big-name artists and actors can be a good thing because the “power elites” of the art world will be at New Orleans’s “doorstep” thanks to Chan’s project. And, indeed, national and international newspaper and radio journalists covered Chan’s project and, through this coverage, conveyed the meaning of the play and the meaning of the trauma to a wide third-order audience. David Cuthbert, who covered the production over a span of two months for the *Times-Picayune* summed up the project’s success in unifying and representing the broken city and its people for his readers: “The haves and have-nots in New Orleans right now are those who have seen ‘Godot’ and those who haven’t.”<sup>103</sup>

## Conclusion

Claims to trauma are not always made directly in the trauma process. Of course, they may be. Political leaders deliver speeches to assign guilt and to argue for the veracity of their claims to trauma. Textbooks teach children the “truth” of past conflicts, specifying the aggressor and the victim, the trauma and the triumph. The basic questions which must be answered through the trauma process—“the nature of the pain, the nature of the victim, the relation of the trauma victim and the wider audience, and the attribution of responsibility” (Alexander 2004: 13-15)—are, by virtue of the status of guilt and innocence at stake, usually quite contentious. Who is to blame? What is to be blamed for? What should the responsible party do about it? Often, these questions are not posed and the answers are not given directly through straightforward political speech. Claims made during the trauma process have two forms: factual truth and expressivity. The productions of *Waiting for Godot* in Sarajevo and New Orleans are social performances whose “success” is not achieved in the register of factual truth. Their success is achieved in the register of expressive aptness.

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<sup>103</sup> Cuthbert, David. 2007. “Audience Completes ‘Godot’: The Play is Not the Thing if No One is There to Hear it.”

Some claims to trauma accuse. Through fact-oriented speech and action, social actors indict a party as guilty or refuse blame. Other claims to trauma reveal. Through expressive performance, social actors represent the elements of trauma. Truth and Reconciliation Commissions, though surely performative in some senses (cite Tanya Goodman?), appeal to factual and experiential truth. Participants formally state where they were, what happened to them, and by whom. Victims name perpetrators and their crimes. In contrast, through the case study of *Waiting for Godot*, I argue that social performance of trauma appeals to expressive truth. Individuals in Sarajevo and New Orleans do not literally wait on a road, but the metaphor of waiting for help whose arrival is dubious and whose identity is unknown speaks for and narrates their trauma.

Journalists, critics, and academics declare that *Waiting for Godot* is a metaphor for these situations. The set is a metaphor for the bleakness of landscape following a disaster; waiting for Godot is a metaphor for waiting these situations to end. However, even the most apt metaphors do not speak for themselves. I challenge the notion that the play simply stands for the situation of trauma. Instead, I show that social actors inject the play with meanings in order to express their situation as a trauma. Yet, to speak too explicitly of blame and the status of victims turns metaphor into bald politics. If made explicit, claims to guilt and innocence may be accepted or rejected on the grounds of truth claims. Like so many paintings (Picasso's *Guernica* is perhaps the most famous example) and films (*Roots* is an American example), and other art forms, *Waiting for Godot* narrates the trauma and expresses charges of guilt without making accusations in the political realm or a court of justice.

Productions of *Waiting for Godot*, as I discovered, were not judged according to factually accuracy. Such a rubric simply would not make sense. Instead, the audiences to these

productions of *Waiting for Godot* pronounced the performances a success or failure based on the aptness of the expression for capturing the experiences of the residents in each city. This is not only a separate rubric from other claims to trauma, but of course a different rubric of success than most theatrical performances. The acting, directing, costuming, and stage design were not based exclusively on the logic of the theater, but also on the logic of social performance. Audiences expected the actors to embody Vladimir and Estragon, sure, but there was a simultaneous expectation that they personify the residents of the cities as well. Audiences did not only appreciate *Godot* as a literary masterpiece but as the representation of their plight. Like Austin's speech performatives, social performance cannot be true or false; they are "felicitous or infelicitous." Rauer writes, "The only epistemological doubt that can be raised concerns the pragmatic question of whether the act is infelicitous, inadequate, or fabricated..." (2006: 259). Since performatives and social performance do not merely describe social reality but have the ability to create a new social reality, they can create social reality that other forms of action (e.g. political speeches, court trials, and awareness campaigns relying on facts as evidence) cannot. Questions, therefore, abound on the "*adequacy* of the symbol, not its *truth*" and regarding whether the correct person took the correct action (2006: 259). The success of the social performance is judged in part on the aptness of the play. Is it too intellectual? Is it too dark? Is the play overdone? Two writers for the *Times-Picayune* write that if they were exposed to *Waiting for Godot* in another circumstance they might have thought the text too high-brow, but in New Orleans it is perfectly apt.<sup>104</sup> The writers are not intimidated or bored by the play because it represents life in their city. The success of the social performance also depends on the authenticity and legitimacy of the artists. In both Sarajevo and New Orleans, *Waiting for Godot*

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<sup>104</sup> DeBerry. 2007. *The Times-Picayune*, November 6 and Maloney, Ann. 2007. "Wait with Me: N.O. May be the Richest Ravaged City in the World." *The Times-Picayune*, November 9.

was put on only because a famous (more so in the first case) and well-funded (more so in the second) intellectual and artist came to the city to produce the play. Accordingly, the audience asks, what is the status of the imported intellectuals? Are they grabbing attention for themselves? Are they investing in the community or just putting up a production and leaving? Sontag and Chan walk a performative tight-rope. They must be able to create art that fuses with the local audience. Yet to create a social performance making claims to trauma they must be able to reach beyond the city, the site of the collective trauma, to journalists who will convey the social performance to a national and international audience. They must be local and global, speaking to and speaking for both.

In his essay “Notes on Beauty,” Peter Schjeldahl writes, “Insensibility to beauty may be an index of misery” (1994: 59). In contradiction to this assertion, actors, directors, producers and audiences seek out and shape Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* to claim and specify trauma. Accounts of these productions indicate an astute sensitivity to and connection with this great work of theater. Social actors have shaped their aesthetic experience to specify and communicate the circumstances, perpetrators and victims of their trauma to themselves and to a wider audience; they have turned theater performance into social performance of trauma. Indeed, I argue that it may be through beauty, through aesthetics and art works, that social actors make a claims to trauma which will not be not be judged based on factual accuracy but on the aptness of the expression of meaning.

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## **The drama of the Greek civil war trauma**

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semi-final draft

## Preface

Child of a working class family, I was born in late 1950s. Less than a year before my birth, my family had to move to Athens, the capital of Greece, where ever since 1950 dozens of thousands of inner immigrants have been moving in. Abandoning their home villages for a better life, all these people had to sort out the new urban setting with limited material resources and social capital. So did my family; they had to adjust themselves into an unfamiliar social environment whose promise for upward mobility required much emotional energy and human cost. During my childhood I was occasionally witnessing quarrels between my parents and my ten years eldest brother over family issues mainly related to the coping with the harsh conditions of our everyday life. What was striking me, or what I currently think it was striking me, in those quarrels, particularly whenever career and life chances were involved, was my brother addressing fervently my father using the biblical saying *the sins of the fathers visit upon their children*. Upon this utterance I remember my father remaining speechless, with his facial expression revealing embarrassment and a hidden desperation and then suddenly every discussion was over. For many years I was at odds with these repeated episodes because I couldn't understand or imagine what the sins of my beloved father might be, and how was it ever possible for that hard working and honest man to commit any sin at all. Insinuations and silence on this didn't help much until my adolescence where I started to realize the meaning of the words 'occupation', 'resistance', 'resistance fighter', and 'exile' which were mentioned by both my parents rarely in the house. As soon as I realized that the meaning of those words was somehow about my father, I came to feel that there was actually no puzzle of a wrongdoing, no sin committed. On the contrary, although he was a resistance fighter he was sent to a detention camp shortly after the liberation from the Axis. While I was growing up, through my parental identifications and despite the fact that my father was hardly speaking about his past political doings and about politics in general, I found it unjust; in time, around this sense of injustice I discovered myself to almost naturally belonging to the community of the Greek Left, whatever the vagueness of the word might be. Nonetheless, the embarrassment at his face and the silence related to that biblical saying, which sounded like a verdict, were a bit of an unsettled reminder in my mind, a bit of a mystery.

At his 60s, when I was already a young man, he was ready to become somewhat more talkative about his experiences during the 1940s. Among others, I recall two things: first, he was emphatically saying that he 'did no harm to anyone' while in the resistance; second, he was describing the civil war as a big mistake and a drama. Then it didn't escape my notice that although he did not take part in the civil war in any conceivable way he was sharing the responsibility for this 'big mistake'. He was feeling guilty and humiliated and therefore he kept silent most of the time. Though he committed no wrongdoing he was feeling guilty because he identified himself with the defeated Left as a whole, as a declined imaginary community. The mystery was almost solved.

My father's state of mind reflected the mentality of an entire generation; the generation of the civil war whose experiences and memories were so much complicated, emotionally charged, and negatively marked that were condemned into silence, embarrassment and fear. Those experiences and memories spill over the next generation precisely because the Greek civil war was not just a personal drama for all those who took active part in it but a cultural trauma which was meant to affect the entire social body and the body polity for several decades. In this paper I



attempt to substantiate this claim by placing the war in its socio-historical and cultural setting. This is done by using and interpreting evidence from past historical, sociological and ethnographic research, on the one hand, and original qualitative interviews conducted for the purpose of this paper, on the other<sup>105</sup>.

## Historical context

The Greek civil war was Europe's bloodiest military conflict between 1945 and the collapse of Yugoslavia in 1992-5; besides, as a defining moment of the Cold War<sup>106</sup>, it has been the most prolonged and traumatic experience of Greece since its establishment as a nation-state in 1830's. As every other civil war, it sprang out of a host of socio-historical and political cultural roots. Most of them are located in the confrontations of the interwar period, the most important of which are (1) the national schism between republicans and royalists, (2) the newcomers who fled the lands of Asia Minor vs autochthones, and (3) the Metaxas' dictatorship (1936) and the anticommunist legislation. To be sure, these divisions were much less intense than the intersecting cleavages which fueled the Spanish civil war (regional/ethnic differences, Catholics versus anticlerical groups, class conflicts). What is more, the Finnish civil war had a much more solid class basis thanks to the strong organizational unity of the workers' movement in Finland so that it can be seen as perhaps Europe's most clear-cut class war in the twentieth century (Alapuro 2002).

The national schism (*Ethnicos Dichasmos*), started with the different attitude of the King Constantine and the Prime minister Eleftherios Venizelos towards the powers of the Entente (Britain, France and Russia). The King insisted on neutrality whereas Venizelos opted for alliance with the Entente at the outbreak of the First World War. The real cause, however, lied in the unbridgeable differences of the two men with regards to political preferences. The politics of the King and of his supporters were deeply conservative whereas the politics of Venizelos were liberal and reformist. After internal political turmoil between royalists and republicans and pressure from Entente, the King without abdicating went into exile (1917) but returned to the throne in 1920 after the defeat of Venizelos in the national elections of a country exhausted after eight years of wars.

As a result of the 1919 peace treaty, in 1921 the Greek Army, under the command of Constantine himself, undertook a major expedition in Asia Minor which, however, was ill-fated. In August 1922 the Turkish Army under Mustafa Kemal in a counter-offensive forced the Greek troops out of Asia Minor altogether and demolished Smyrna which was virtually a city of Greek diaspora. About 1,500,000 refugees fled to Greece from Asia Minor. This "catastrophe" resulted into the abdication of the King, put an end to Greek irredentism and gave rise to the strain between refugee newcomers and autochthones. The frail economy of the country burdened by foreign indebtedness and the huge cost of waging wars for a whole decade was at pains to sustain the refugees most of which faced social hardship, discrimination and humiliations of all kinds.

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<sup>105</sup> Thanks to my MA student Katerina Koronaki for her valuable contribution in this. We contacted eleven informants; eight of them are left minded, and three right minded. All of them took part in the civil war.

<sup>106</sup> Even more bloody, the Spanish civil war (1936- 1939) was the terrain of the confrontation between Fascism and anti-fascist forces. The defeat of the Left in that war heralded the domination of the Axis for almost a decade. The defeat of the Greek Left announced the sheer political and diplomatic domination of the USA in the country for three decades or so.

In the census of 1928 the Greek population had risen to 6,204,674 out of 5,016,589 in 1920. The large influx of the refugees set in motion a significant left-wing labor movement in the urban centers and an acute problem of agrarian reform in the countryside. Along with this there was a widespread anti-royalist feeling which resulted in the establishment of the First Greek Republic (1924-1936). Yet, due to the interwar economic depression and the persisting confrontation between royalists and republicans parliamentary democracy was suspended in 1936 by the dictatorship of the dedicated royalist General Ioannis Metaxas. The new regime, supported if not directed by the King himself, was successful enough in destroying the Left by implementing anticommunist legislation and taking such harsh measures as exile, imprisonment and repressive surveillance.

To the triple (German-Italian-Bulgarian) Axis occupation of the country, 1941-1944, a noticeable grass roots resistance was enacted; quite soon though it provided an opportunity for the leftist – mainly communist- political forces to organize themselves in a massive scale for the first time, inspired by the anti-imperialistic strategy of the Third International. This was in tandem with a spirit of resistance and the general leftward shift spread throughout the occupied Europe. In Greece and Yugoslavia the resistance developed into a massive emancipatory movement with internal discrepancies as well as impressive results against the occupation forces. It has to be noted, though, that one should not overdo with the resistance by any sort of idealization while analyzing the Greek or any other European country in the 1940s. In many countries a legend of an all-embracing ‘national’ resistance was constructed and forwarded immediately after the end of the war as a point of collective admiration which suppressed either the toleration to the occupation forces by many social strata or the dealings and deeds of collaborators during and after the war.

The Axis occupation in Greece led to a breakdown of state and society. It has been well documented that during the occupation the victims of the famine in winter 1941-2, caused by the blockade of the Greek ports by the British navy, the plunder of the natural resources by the occupation forces due to the lack of any serious system of their supplying, and the felonious mistakes of the public administration agencies responsible for the distribution of food, were in total more than the victims of the bombings, the guerilla war and the retaliation of the Axis troops<sup>107</sup>. Though exact numbers cannot be defined, it is estimated that the victims of the famine are almost 100.000 (Fleischer 1986).

Under these circumstances, the prewar ruling elites were almost totally discredited in view of their reluctance to undertake any serious resistance initiatives and their massive retreat to the Middle East. In this political vacuum, ordinary people took first efforts to keep themselves

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<sup>107</sup> Even nowadays the expression “occupation syndrome” refers to precautions and proactive consuming behavior based on the assumption that there might be no food in the near future. No doubt, the famine marked collective memory in a decisive way. It can be argued that up to a certain point the roots and causes of the civil war stem not so much from the above mentioned cleavages but from the dissolution of the Greek society during the Occupation period and the antagonisms, animosities and hostilities it gave rise to: collaborators, black marketeers and so on. To be sure however, one should not exaggerate with the long last destructive consequences of the occupation as these were used in the construction of the post war victimization of the nations involved. After the war, almost each country constructed a powerful myth about the unprecedented destructions it suffered by the enemy, suppressing thus from the public memory the thorns of collaboration, the toleration of the Jewish genocide and ethnic cleansings executed either by the Axis forces or the resistance, as well as alignment with the occupation forces. On top of this, one should not fail to underscore the incredible corruption with which the Marshal plan was implemented in Greece so that huge amounts of money to end up in private pockets, frequently in those of collaborators, fanatic anticommunists and the power elite. For these groups the blaming of the Axis for the post war misery of the country was an easy bypassing to get away with their own responsibilities (Fleischer 2008: 135 etc).

alive and to secure access to food; at a later stage a more organized pro-Allied resistance began mainly by communists. Acts of resistance and sabotage became frequent from the winter of 1941 by the *Ethniko Apeleftherotiko Metopo* (EAM: National Liberation Front), the major organization of the left and the communists (Tsoukalas 1969: chapter 4; Clogg 1979). EAM was by far the largest and more powerful organization which in 1942 formed its own military branch, the *Ethnikos Laikos Apeleftherotikos Stratos* (ELAS: Greek People's Liberation Army) pronounced as "Ellas", the name of the country itself. To be sure, the great majority of the people were not communists but very sympathetic to EAM and very many, including lots of women, joined it not only out of defiance against the German, Italian and Bulgarian occupation but also as an act of participation in social life from which have always felt excluded. According to Clogg (1979:150), «by the end of the occupation the membership of EAM has been variously estimated at between a million and two million».

Other resistance organizations such as the *Ethnikos Dimokratikos Ellinikos Syndesmos* (EDES: National Republican Greek League), initially of liberal democratic tendencies, soon developed an anticommunist orientation. Consequently, the resistance did not manage from the beginning to act in unison, apart from one or two major acts of sabotage in collaboration with British intelligence. Already in 1943 deadly battles and bloody skirmishes were taking place in the countryside and the Athens area between EAM/ELAS and various non-leftist organizations heralding thus the civil war which was to follow.

In March 5, 1946 Churchill announced his notorious "iron curtain" statement and in March 1947 the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan were launched. These dates tally with two crucial incidents of the Greek civil war: March 30, 1946 is regarded to be the conventional date for the launching of the conflict; in September 1947, after consulting USSR, the Greek Communist Party decided to lead the war to its climax [the *limnes* (lakes) plan]. These correlations indicate the inexorable engagement of the Greek civil war with the setting out of the Cold war. As a matter of fact, the civil war in Greece was the first paradigmatic case where the USA, on the one hand, invoked the domino theory, and tested their credibility as the world leader against communism, on the other. From their part, Stalin and Tito handled the Greek case according to their mutual relations and the cross pressures exerted on them in the UN. For the USA, the confrontation with the Greek Communists (no political compromise and smash of the enemy) served as a model in their later entanglement in Guatemala, Lebanon, Cuba, Saint Dominican and Vietnam (Kolko 1994: 373-395, Coufoudakis 1981, Iatrides 2002).

It has to be stated emphatically that, seen in a historical perspective and from the vantage point of the present, the Greek civil war was a multifaceted phenomenon. First of all, it was a total war which involved armed and civilians, orthodox and unorthodox styles of military conflict. Second, with some sound exemptions, it was carried out almost exclusively in the countryside<sup>108</sup>. Third, it was marked by great local particularities and exigencies. These have been recognized quite recently when certain scholars used alternative methodological tools in the study of the civil war: oral history, local memories and personal archives, discourse analysis and

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<sup>108</sup> The Left in the cities survived the civil war with much less damage compared with the rural areas, and that explains why it scored quite high in the 1950s' general elections. In the 1958 election, particularly, the *Eniea Demokratiki Aristera* (United Democratic Left) received 24,4% of the vote and became the major opposition party. Unlike the Spanish case, while the civil war was waged in Greece the regime remained democratic. Paradoxically or not, even when executions were performed in late '40s and early '50s, the country was run by a center-right government. That government and those to come over the next two decades until the 1967 *coup de etat* were patronized by the USA embassy and acted according to double legal standards: an emergency legislation against the Left and a 'normal' rule of law for the rest, alleged to be nationally minded.

so on (Marantzides 2002; Kalyvas 2000, 2002, 2003; Sakkas 2000). Often, events in local context diverted from the great politics of the decision-taking headquarters and as a consequence the cleavages of the central political scene had little or even no impact on the local politics where personal and kinship relations and hostilities were of primary importance. It has been documented that, as the micro-foundation of the macro-structure of the civil war is more crucial than it was thought one or two decades ago, mediating mechanisms and procedures such as ethnic origins, religious attachments, local networking, family ties, local traditions, local violence, interpersonal relations etc play an important role for the recruitment to this or the other side of the conflict, the persistence of the commitment, and the selective incentives in participating or abstaining from the war (Margarites 1989: 507-9; Mylonas 2003).

### **The Greek civil war as a research topic. A rich but tormented bibliography**

It has not been always easy to do research and make publications on the Greek civil war; for several decades it was a taboo of public life and scholars were reluctant to deal with it due to non accessible archives until early 1980s and suspicious or even hostile political climate. Systematic scholarly work started after the political changeover of 1974 (the collapse of the seven years military dictatorship), but took off in early 1990s by historians, social anthropologists, political scientists, sociologists and social psychologists. Gradually, the number of local and international conferences on the civil war has been growing up indicating thus that it is not a taboo any more (Dordanas & Michaelidis 2007). Ever since 1984, seventeen conferences have been organized mainly in Greece as well as abroad with the Network for the Study of the Civil Wars ([http://www.elia.org.gr/civil\\_war\\_greek/index.htm](http://www.elia.org.gr/civil_war_greek/index.htm)), founded in 2000, to be one of the major actors in this sort of academic activity. Roughly speaking, the rationale of all this academic and scholarly activity has been the redirection of attention from the question “Whose fault was it?” towards the question “How did the civil war take place?” (Marantzidis & Antoniou 2004; Mazower 2000: 8).

Yet, the situation is somewhat more complicated; scholars not only dispute over definite aspects of the civil war but over the ways it should be studied. To my opinion, these disputes are indexical of the pertinently discordant effects of the civil war in many social *milieus*, the academics and the intelligentsia included. But let me be more explicit.

a) Respecting the duration of the civil war, for many years and as indicated above, the mainstream position was March 30, 1946 to August 29, 1949. Yet, this has been disputed lately and a ‘When it started vs When it ended’ controversy is taking place among political sociologists and historians in Greece. Among others, the criterion is what makes an armed conflict within a state into a civil war. This is a controversy that draws on from both the literature of the comparative studies of civil wars (Fearon & Laitin 2003, Sambanis 2002) and the retroactive stakes of the Greek political scene. For some, it is more appropriate to speak of civil military conflicts during the occupation period when one refers to the armed confrontations between ELAS and EDES in 1943, rather than of civil *war*. For them, a civil war presupposes a durable and large scale of military mobilization which actually occurred in the 1946-1949 period. In their point of view, the 1944 December events (*Dekemviana*) where a short but dreadful struggle between ELAS, the British troops and the newly formed Greek gendarmerie, staffed mainly by collaborators, sparked three months after the liberation, cannot be seen either as a civil war (Margarites 1989).

On the other hand, there are scholars<sup>109</sup>, whose positions I tend to endorse, arguing that conflicts between Greeks during the resistance period can be regarded as civil war irrespective of their sporadic or intermittent nature, provided that contradictory and mutually exclusive socio-political projects lay behind them. A similar situation one can observe nowadays in Iraq where civil and inter-ethnic conflicts coexist with resistance to the American and British troops.

Another similar issue raised in the debate is whether the 1945-1946 right-wing violence which sprung after the Varkiza Agreement against the defeated followers of EAM/ELAS signals the beginning of the civil war (Mazower 2000: 6-7, 31-2). Among others, according to that agreement, signed in February 1945 as a result of the end of *Dekemvriana*, the guerilla units had to withdraw and surrender their arms. Subsequently, the offenses committed during the *Dekemvriana* were pardoned except 'common-law crimes against life and property which were not absolutely necessary to the achievement of the political crime concerned'. This clause provided the excuse to ultra-right and royalist bands for launching a mass-scale violence and terror against members, followers or even sympathizers of EAM/ELAS (Voglis 2000: 74-5). Nowadays, a considerable part of the right-wing historiography accepts the description of these events as "white terrorism", and a minimum of consensus seems to be formed around this. Yet, a crucial issue is raised, mainly by left-leaning scholars, as to whether that was a "unilateral civil war" – which was to be followed soon by the "bilateral civil war" –, or it can be seen as the real beginning of the civil war, pulling thus its opening date one calendar year backwards, i.e. 1945 (Koulouris 2000: 52-4).

b) By and large and for many years, the Greek scholars seemed to stay aloof or ignore the results of the international research on civil wars, remaining therefore highly Hellenocentric and ethnocentric rather than comparative and non-parochial (Mylonas 2003; Marantzidis & Antoniou 2004). Most interpretations were swept by the left-right cleavage and the imperatives of the Cold War. As a result, the ethnic dimensions of the war were overlooked as well; for instance, until recently, the vicissitudes of the Slavophonic population and the strategies of the Turkish-speaking groups during the war were particularly under-researched. Also, the extermination of about 100,000 Greek Jews has been hardly researched and analyzed systematically in most of scholarly works on the civil war.

c) Currently, a heated controversy between traditional historians who base their work chiefly if not exclusively on the study of archives and a respectable group of younger and post-revisionist scholars who bring in oral history, memory and local studies, and clinical approaches is taking place. The thrust of the dispute is about the appropriateness of the oral and local history methods and the possible disintegration of the field through topical approaches and piece meal studies. Most clearly, the traditionalist argument holds that scrutinizing written sources as opposed to oral testimonies is the right method to study the civil war to the extent that these sources are objective and not self-selected. Yet, the proponents of this argument tend to overlook that, very often, written documents are produced and distributed in an equally selective manner. In addition, they claim that by focusing on local histories and personal memories, revisionists conclude to a fragmentation of the subject matter, lose the macro-analytical perspective and contribute to the relativisation of historical reality. It should be noted that in this controversy both left and right-leaning scholars are involved in an intersecting way.

A clear-cut, though, distinction between left and right-leaning approaches can be found in the non academic bibliography on the Greek civil war. On the whole, it consists of propaganda

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<sup>109</sup> As early as 1969, Andreas Papandreou (1969) explicitly stated that the Greek civil war started at October 1943 when ELAS troops attacked EDES.

material, veterans' memoirs, auto-biographies, biographies, diaries, illustrated texts, congresses and conventions minutes and the like (Koulouris 2000). Since the non-academic writings are closely related to the waving of political climate, researchers have distinguished two periods in the production of this sort of writings: (a) 1945 - 1974 where two out of three books published were anti-left; (b) 1974 – 2000s where four out of five books were left-minded (Marantzidis & Antoniou 2003, 2004). It is note worthy that almost half of the right-wing production was published within the first decade after the end of WWII, whereas most of the left-wing production appeared in the 1980s. On the one hand, this reflects the urge of the victorious right-wing hegemonic bloc to forward its own narration as soon as the war was over; on the other hand, the massive publication of memoirs and auto-biographies after the 1974 political changeover (the so-called *Metapolitefsi*) and especially after 1982, when the Socialist government recognized the national resistance, can be seen as a after-effect of the much more broader 'explosion of collective memory' and the rise of 'public history' which has been taking place since 1989 all around the globe (Voglis 2008; Panagiotopoulos 1997). In effect, there are two different perceptions of the Greek Civil War image, the post-war Civil War and the post-dictatorship Civil War perception.

To sum up, the bibliography for the Greek civil war is quite rich as it consists of a large number of books and writings<sup>110</sup>. Naturally, though, it is divided and tormented by controversial issues, overt and covert political antagonisms, and unsettled dilemmas.

### **Conceptual setting: The civil war as cultural-social trauma**

The notion of “cultural- social trauma” has been forwarded systematically as a distinct cultural sociological concept referring to institutional changes, to the constitution of collective memory and to forms of collective action. Formulated alongside the tenets of a weak social constructionism, cultural-social trauma is meant to be “a memory accepted and publicly given credence by a relevant membership group and evoking an event or situation, which is (a) laden with negative affect, (b) represented as indelible, and (c) regarded as threatening a society's existence or violating one or more of its fundamental cultural presuppositions” (Smelser, 2004: 44). According to Alexander (2004: 1) cultural trauma occurs when members of a collectivity feel that they have suffered a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories for ever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways. From an intergenerational point of view, a cultural trauma is a “chosen trauma” in the way Vamik Volkan (2005) puts it; i.e. a large group's unconscious “choice” to add to its own identity a past generation's mental representation of a shared event that has caused a large group to face drastic losses, feel helpless and victimized by another group, and share a humiliating injury. Apparently, the fundamental elements of the cultural trauma theory are: memory, emotion, and identity. In this respect, cultural sociology joins hands with the sub-fields of memory, trauma and disaster studies. It is a complex area of theory and research which

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<sup>110</sup> It is indicative that between 1945 and 1999 a sum total of 576 books were published in Greek (Koulouris 2000).

straddles the micro and the macro<sup>111</sup>, on the one hand, and the long and short duration of the historical time, on the other.

The Greek civil war is an exemplary case of cultural-social trauma of considerable duration and significance. As already mentioned, it is the bloodiest conflict Europe ever faced between 1945 and 1990. To be sure however, since there is no agreement as to when the civil war starts, and given the collapse of the official agencies of public administration responsible for social statistics during the occupation period and shortly after the liberation, there is no precise measurement of casualties. According to official estimations, the number of dead were 40.000 whereas according to unofficial estimations their number gets as high as 158.000 (Tsoukalas 1969: 89). Up to 100.000 members of DSE (*Dimokratikos Stratos Ellados*: Democratic Army of Greece), the successor of ELAS, crossed the northern borders and migrated in communist countries for several decades. Those of Slavic ethnic origin are not allowed to return and settle back even today. Needless to say that material disaster of all kinds was much larger. On top of these one has to add the unprecedented hardship the country faced from the moment it entered the World War II until the eve of the liberation. From 1940 to 1944 almost 8 per cent of the entire population was killed and 34 per cent of the national treasure was devastated (Tsoukalas 1969: 69). According to McVeagh, the Ambassador of the USA in Athens, in early 1946 the two thirds of Greece's population were fed with only 1.700 calories per day (in comparison to the 2.850 calories of the British); almost 30% of the population suffered by malaria while the percentage of tuberculosis was fifteen times higher than in Britain (Richter 1997: 434). Just after the end of the civil war in 1949 almost 10 per cent of the population (i.e. 700.000 people) were homeless refugees waiting to re-inhabit their wrecked villages. In effect, the WWII and the civil war devastated almost entirely the Greek economy and really ravaged Greek society.

All these had a profound impact on the way people got accustomed with all sorts of violence (Voglis 2002); we could argue that, on the one hand, the civil war rested on a culture of violence inherited from the occupation period (collective retaliations, mass executions, deportation of local population -especially in the region of Eastern Macedonia occupied by the Bulgarians-, burning of villages, public exposure of the corps), which was amplified by black as well as by red terror, on the other (Kalyvas 2002). Cruelties and atrocities from both sides and thousands of victims marked collective memories, hammered personal political identities and life projects, and changed the social fabric in a far reaching way.

As a total social event, therefore, the Greek civil war has been experienced as a cultural-social trauma because it affected collective memories, group consciousness, and the organizational principles of the Greek society, re-directing its orientation for more than three decades. It was not only caused by two almost mutually exclusive worlds; it created two opposed worlds as well. For 25 years the most overwhelming consequence of the civil war was the cleavage between the so called national mindful (*ethnikofrones*) and the defeated Left. This cleavage permeated not only the political realm but every single social, economic and cultural arena. It intersected with the above mentioned mid-war cleavage between royalists and republicans; thus the mid-war animosities were reinterpreted as much as the refugees from Asia Minor joined EAM massively. In late 1960s, at a time where parliamentary democracy seemed to get consolidated and the post-civil war regime to loose ties, the traumatic cleavage of the civil war was enhanced and over-determined by the trauma of the seven years military dictatorship

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<sup>111</sup> As I have claimed elsewhere (Demertzis 2009), the affiliations between the psychoanalytic account of trauma and the notion of cultural-social trauma are more than it is usually admitted (Alexander 2004; 2003: 85-107).

(1967-74). The *coup d'état* blocked every outlet for the democratic incorporation of the 'non-nationally minded' in the political system; this would have normally occurred if the general elections scheduled for May 1967 took place. As I have written elsewhere (Demertzis 2006), fear and insecurity returned to the left-leaning strata of the population who had staffed and socially supported EAM, EDA (*Eniaia Dimokratiki Aristera*: United Democratic Left) and EK (*Enosi Kentrou*: Union of the Center), the parties which challenged the dominance of ERE (*Ethniki Rizospastiki Enosis*: National Radical Union), the governing right-wing party. On top of the cultural trauma of the civil war, there now came the trauma of the imposition of dictatorship and the humiliation of the defeated was not lifted but, on the contrary, accentuated.

For all its horrendous impact, it is my conviction that the Greek civil war was not an inevitable historical event; things could have happened otherwise and follow another direction. It is indicative that during the war the KKE (*Kommounistiko Komma Ellados*: Communist Party of Greece) forwarded twenty one different plans for peace, whereas the British and the Greek government offered more than six peace initiatives. Although those proposals were part and parcel of the pull and push power game at the military, political and international arenas, one can retroactively say that the actors themselves had some freedom and the discretion to choose another course (Sfikas 2002). Had all parties involved opted for a compromise as early as 1947 or even 1948, the likelihood is that the conflict would not produce deep going consequences in the Greek political culture.

Though its consequences came formally at an end in 1974, when democracy was restored, the communist party- clashed in the meantime-, was legalized, and all civil rights and liberties were reinstated, the social psychological effects of the civil war are still pertinent, albeit not to the same extent as ten or twenty years ago. It may be true that nowadays scholars and students approach the civil war in a more distanced way, but it is equally true that it hibernates in collective moods, political and national stereotypes, and social memory(ies). This can be discerned in the current elite and mass attitude towards the (Former Yugoslavian) Republic of Macedonia a considerable part of whose inhabitants consists of DSE fighters of Macedonian ethnic origin.

### **The discursive-symbolic construction and reconstruction of the civil war.**

We know that an event, as destructive as it may be, will become or produce cultural-social trauma when connected to the structure and logic of social action. A cultural-social trauma involves the realization (with both meanings of the word, that is as becoming conscious of something and as something becoming real) of a common plight. It has to be defined collectively as such in order to influence the systems of reference of an entire society or, at least, of a significant part of it and change established roles, rules, *habitués*, and narratives. In other words, it has to function as a total social event and not just be the aggregate of numerous individual experiences. A dislocating traumatogenic event, for example, a civil war, does not in itself constitute a "trauma". In order to become "trauma", it has to undergo a process of social signification; namely, it has to be signified and become socially accepted and constructed as "trauma". In what follows I shall attempt to outline the regime of signification of the Greek civil war so as to mark out some distinguishing characteristics as well as commonalities with other civil wars.



### *The semantic designation of the war*

If one wants to compare the Greek case with other civil wars in an effort to demonstrate its own particularities, one should point out the semantic designation of this war in its proper political cultural setting. Hitherto I have been referring to the Greek civil war making use of the English words ‘civil war’. Yet; one should bear in mind that in Greek there is no semantic equivalent to *civil war*; in fact, the Greek word which goes for *civil war* is *emphylios polemos* (internecine war, war within the same race). Civil war is premised on the notion of civil society and civil sphere; it presupposes individualized citizens who are organized along clashing collective goals and/or interests and contest over the definition of a society’s historicity, to use Touraine’s terminology. On the contrary, the Greek universe of political discourse cannot sustain linguistically the idea of inner-state war *qua* civil war precisely because it has been endowed with a variety of pre and anti-modern social significations. This is due to the traditionally weak civil society; i.e., the making of the Greek state and polity in the nineteenth century, including the parliamentary sub-system, took place principally in a non or, to be more accurate, an quasi-capitalist socio-economic environment (Mouzelis 1986, Charalambis & Demertzis 1993). As a consequence, Greek economic capital at large has been commercial rather than productive, and the socio-economic development has been thoroughly carried out by the state and not by a robust capitalist market. This model has made for the prominence of loose party structures, it has been conducive to clientelistic electoral politics and it contributed to an atrophic civil society (Demertzis 1997). More generally, in the absence of a deep rooted bourgeois culture, for more than a century, Greek society developed alongside the tenets of cultural nationalism and traditionalism rather than on political and socio-economic modernity, resembling thus what Riggs (1964) defines as “prismatic society”, i.e. a society with minimal differentiation and highly mixed structural functions. In other words, despite the modernization processes put forward since the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the emergence of a still born class politics and interest intermediation in the inter-war period, the hegemonic political cultural setting within which the civil war took place was of a *Gemeinschaft* rather than of a *Gessellschaft* nature.

As a strong civil sphere was missing and the communal *habitus* prevailed it follows naturally that the armed conflict between Greeks in mid 1940s was designated as internecine rather than as civil war proper. It was meant as a conflict within the same national family, between men and women of the same blood, namely between brothers rather than between opposing life projects and mutually exclusive societal interests within civil society. For this very same reason in the Greek language “public opinion” is translated as “common opinion” (*koini gnome*), as an opinion shared by everyone and not as an opinion formed publicly.

As in other Balkan as well as eastern European countries, the nation-state in Greece, as a post-traditional mode of domination, is supported by what has been called cultural nationalism, i.e. an ideological discourse according to which the nation is far from being a human association premised on modernity’s civic liberties, but a particularistic ethno-cultural community of language, religion, tradition, race, habits, romanticized historical memories and so on (Kohn 1961: 329-30, 457; Sugar 1969: 19-20, 34-5; Mann 1992: 137-8; Demertzis 1996: 227-44). At a macro-level, this ethno-nationalist discourse provided an ultimate legitimacy of the societal order as long as it fosters a collective self-representation of Greek society as a horizontal and communal brotherhood.

No wonder, therefore, that although in 1943-44 and 1945-46 EAM as well as the anti-EAM bloc were warning about the large scale imminent civil war (*emphylios*), during the period of the actual fighting (1946-1949), both sides were cautious enough not to use the word *emphylios polemos* for the description of what they were taking part in. Had they employed such a semantic designation, they would discredit themselves as violators of the transcendental racial/national unity. To put it in another way: the constitutive civiclessness of the Greek civil war is explained by the moral, if not sacred, character of national community which imperatively precluded the actors from defining their doings in current time, as bloody and devastating as they might be, in line with the only available codification the universe of the Greek political discourse could offer them: as 'internecine war'. Instead, both sides demonized each other and thus they were creating symbolically the proper enemy to kill. As long as it was morally unbearable to take responsibility for the waging of an internecine war, each rival struggled symbolically for the de-humanization of the other drawing legitimacy from the consensual myth of national-communitarian unity.

Unable to follow a binary discourse of civil society, the contenders adopted a moral and nationalistic binary discourse evading thus to identify their conflict as internecine war. For the Right, on the one hand, the 1944 December events were assigned as rebellion and their opponents were just rebels against the legal national government. Besides, the 1946-49 conflict was a war against bandits and outlaws (*symmoritopolemos*), a war against communist bandits who betrayed their country by pursuing to cut off a part of it and annex it to the Soviet bloc or offer it to the Slavs. The latter was premised by the anticipation that the DSE and its government (*Proisorini Demokratiki Kivernisi*: Interim Democratic Government) would serve Bulgaria's geo-strategic ambitions, after the Soviet Union's proposal at the Peace Conference of 1946 that western Thrace, actually a Greek territory, should be conceded to the then socialist Bulgaria. To be sure, a couple of years before, as an occupation force, Bulgaria projected the annexation of the north east Greek Macedonia and put into practice a systematic plan of de-hellenization of the region. On top of that, three years later, at January 1949, the Greek Communist Party decided for the autonomy of Macedonia and the self-government of the Macedonian People. Although that decision was canceled five months later and proclaimed as an 'error', it gave to its opponents a perfect opportunity for propaganda and blame attribution.

For the Left, on the other hand, the 1946-49 inner-state conflict as well as the December events was described principally as "people's liberation war", "people's democratic struggle", "people's self-defense", "armed struggle of DSE", "armed struggle", or plainly "struggle". The opponents of the Left were monarchists-fascists and reactionaries who gave up the country to British and American troops, whose presence was interpreted no less than a "second occupation". Only after the December events the left-minded press referred sporadically to the possibility of an "internecine tearing" caused and led, as it were, by the British.

Apparently, these semantic designations on both sides were the necessary symbolic arms which prepared the actors to hate and kill the enemy and to be ready to get killed themselves. Via an adversarial meaning-giving process, both sides were defending the nation, albeit in a different fashion; namely, the Right was defending the restoration of the national unity whereas the Left was concerned for the liberation and the reconstitution of the nation. For their advocates, both projects were of outmost significance that awarded legitimacy to violent and brutal actions, and moral superiority to each side's own self-contained political outlook. At the end of the day, the paradox is that although everybody knew perfectly that the war they were waging was among Greeks no one dared to call it internecine war (Elephantis 2003: 96-7,143).

Actually the above mentioned semantic designation of the Greek civil war should come as no surprise; in many other cases of civil wars one can observe the same terminological civiclessness premised on the different dependency path of each country with respect to political modernity. To use a few examples, the word in Serbian/Croatian *bratocibilački rat* which means internecine war or war between brothers (armed conflict between Yugoslav peoples during the WWII and conflict within national communities later on). The Polish equivalent of the civil war is *Wojna Domowa* which means ‘domestic war’; in the feudal era, civil war in Japanese was 内乱 = Nairan (internal unrest) whereas in the present era was 内戦 = Naisen (internal fight, internal war). As ‘internal fight’ civil war is understood in the Chinese as well (内战 = 内战). In Czech there are two terminological versions of the concept: the colloquial version is *občanská válka*; when it comes to the struggle with the collaborators in the WWII, *Građanski rat* is the literary translation of ‘civil war’. Similar but not identical is the terminological designation of the Finnish civil war; until 1970s, where the consensus politics had prevailed and the sharp memories of the war were alleviated, civil war (*kansalaissota*) was very much in use by the defeated Social Democrats, and class war (*luokkasota*) was in currency by left-wing socialists and Communists. The victors of the war named it ‘war for Freedom’ (*vapaussota*), or ‘war for liberation’ (as against the Russian imperialism). Contrary to the Greek case, the Reds in Finland were using ‘civil’ or ‘class war’ during the actual fighting in 1918 (Alapuro 2002).

### *The memorization of the civil war*

After the war was over and for the decades to come, the semantics and the political vocabulary changed. Here one should distinguish two periods where a symbolic battle for the hegemony of the public memory has been taking place:

(a) During the period 1949-1974, the official account of the Right as well as the account of the right-minded man of the street had been still that of *symmoritopolemos* (war against bandits) or rebellion. On the contrary, as early as 1957 the KKE used for the first time the word *emphylios polemos* with regards to the 1946-49 inner-state violent clashes. Until then, the party’s elites were speaking of ‘liberating war’ or even ‘revolutionary’ war; especially in the countryside, people of the Left were speaking of the “second guerilla war” (*deftero andartiko*). In fact, that was a devastating period for the Left which was not only defeated in the war but it has been politically excluded and marginalized until 1974. The KKE was banned and the ideology of *ethnikofrosini* (national-mindedness) was dominant in every single sector of the public sphere. Against this, and probably as part of a defense mechanism and as part of a symbolic struggle, the official Left and its ordinary supporters as well the anti-monarchist camp gradually adopted wholeheartedly the term *emphylios polemos* as a tragic phase of contemporary Greek history whose victim is the Greek people *in toto*.

(b) From 1974 onwards a spectacular change took place in the memorization of the civil war. With the restoration of democracy and especially after the 1981 general elections, when Socialists, led by Andreas Papandreou, took office for the first time in the country’s history, and after the legal recognition of the resistance (Law 1285/1982), *symmoritopolemos* was virtually banned from the public and official political language of the Right. This was the aftermath of the unprecedented long lived hegemony of a leftward political culture, endowed with plenty nationalist-populists overtones and anti-americanism. Since then *emphylios polemos* has been univocally used in public speeches, in political documents, even in legislation and jurisprudence. Consequently, according the 1863/1989 Law , *symmoritopolemos* was officially replaced by

*emphylios polemos* whose duration was defined from 1944 to 1949. Besides the word ‘bandits’ (*symmotites*) was replaced by ‘Democratic Army’ (*Dimokratikos Stratos*). That law was enacted by the three-month coalition government of the Right-wing party of *Nea Demokratia* (New Democracy) and the Left-wing party of *Synaspismos* (Left Coalition) and apparently had great symbolic impact with respect to the abrogation of the civil war consequences.

Seemingly, along these symbolic battles a politics of oblivion was gradually put into effect. In the remainder of this section I shall refer to some crucial constituents of this politics:

(i) With respect to the historical/official memory, the date of the end of the civil war (1949, August 29<sup>th</sup>) has never been celebrated as a National Day. Of course, there were a number of minor and local celebrations and political rituals with reference to the communists’ victims, but the end of the civil war as such was not commemorated in any substantial way, as it was the case in Franco’s Spain. Likewise, for all the devastation incurred by the WWII, in Greece May the 8<sup>th</sup> is not celebrated as the end of the Big War. Instead it is the 28<sup>th</sup> of October, the day of the beginning of the victorious Greek-Italian war, which is celebrated as a National Day<sup>112</sup>. Since the end of the WWII almost coalesces with the beginning of the civil war, the winning national elite didn’t wish to connect the two events (Voglis 2008).

(ii) More so than it already was in the fifties and sixties - with the exception of the seven years dictatorship (1967-1974) whereas references and allegations to the civil war were made more often-, an effective by-passing of the civil war from the official memory was accomplished in 1982, shortly after Papandreou’s government took office (see above). The official recognition of the resistance of various groups and of course EAM was characterized as ‘National Resistance’ which is ever since officially commemorated in November 25, with not much enthusiasm though; that day in 1942 a major sabotage against the Axis was accomplished in common by ELAS and EDES. Typically the recognition was conferred to the individual resistance fighters who were awarded an appropriate title and pension. Apparently, a mythologization had been taking place since the period of resistance (1941-4) was cleaned up from any disturbing stains of internecine conflict and radical -if not virtually revolutionary-, projects, subjugated entirely to the nationalist discourse. Sometimes, the retroactive recall of the resistance period is accomplished through metaphysical and almost religious metaphors; one of our informants said: [ ... *whoever lived that era, whether today is in the right of left side, is like receiving the Holy Communion, as if one drinks fresh water from a source, it is something you get power from...*](woman, aged 84). By this token, the old names of hundreds of streets and squares all over the country were changed overnight into ‘National Resistance’. In a prominent and historic square in the center of Athens a great statue was erected dedicated to ‘national reconciliation’. In contradistinction, the public commemoration of the civil war is rare and sporadic, inflicting sometimes embarrassment and bitterness. A ritual of great significance for the ‘nationalization’ of the resistance and the promotion of ‘national reconciliation’ was the ceremonial and widely mediatized burning of hundred of thousands, if not millions, of police files of the so-called ‘non-nationally minded’ citizens which took place in 29.08.89 in spite the objections of Greek historians.

(iii) If officially the national resistance was forwarded as a ‘chosen glory’ (Volkan 2005), and even if the official, not to say hegemonic, attitude was that of silence and forgetting, at the level of collective/popular memory and living political culture the situation has been quite more complicated. As Halbwachs (1992: 172, 182) Connerton (1989: 38-99) and Aguilar (1996)

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<sup>112</sup> For quite different reasons, the Baltic countries do not celebrate the 8<sup>th</sup> of May either; for them the real liberation came on 1991 when the Soviet empire collapsed.

rightly argue, collective memory is by definition multifaceted and divided alongside the lived experiences and local memories of different groups and individuals who witness and shape historical events, notwithstanding their traumatic potential. At the level of unofficial collective memory, therefore, the civil war has been recollected antagonistically until the early 1980s. Even if until then the political discourse implied silence on the matter, the undercurrent interpretations were sharply incommensurate (Voglis 2008)<sup>113</sup>. A divided collective memory emerged not only alongside the binary opposition between Left and Right but in accordance to a variety of local animosities and struggles amidst which frequently the roles of victims and perpetrators were mixed and interchanged.

(iv) It is misleading to draw too sharp a line between the official/public and the collective/popular memory; in the on-going hegemony process bridges are built and various kinds of overlapping are formed. By and large, on both sides silence about the civil war is the dominant attitude. With some exceptions, even nowadays the mnemonic community of the defeated Left is built around the resistance rather than the civil war. This is repeatedly observed in numerous testimonies and narratives, and is documented in the qualitative interviews conducted on the occasion of this paper. Half of the left minded informants were more than reluctant to use the word *emphylios polemos* (civil war); as one of them mentioned: [... *well the civil, I do not want to say the word, war between the Democratic Army and Governmental Army from '46 to '49 is the continuation of the national resistance ...*] (man). According to another one, [... *gradually, after 1946 the resistance against the British in the beginning and against the American afterwards has been named civil war*] (man).

The mnemonic community of the victorious Right is equally embarrassed with the civil war; I already mentioned that its victory was never celebrated as a national fest. A taboo issue is the Greek Security Battalions, which were collaborators of the German troops; during the December 1944 events they were the backbone of the anti-EAM forces and soon after most of their members joined the National Army against DSE in order to escape legal prosecution for war crimes. Actually, unlike other European countries<sup>114</sup>, in Greece the punishment of collaborators was extremely poor and they survived precisely because they served the anti-communist cause (Haidia 2000). In addition, large parts of the newly formed post-war ruling class were has roots in collaborators and black market dealers during the occupation or usurpers of Jewish property. As a consequence, these things are preferable to suppress than to recall, let alone to be pride of. All in all then, in both Left and Right community of memory and political discourse the fatal 'national tragedy' of the civil war has been systematically juxtaposed to the 'epic of national resistance'.

This politics of oblivion bears witness two defense mechanisms Smelser (2004) underscores as to cultural-social trauma: 'displacement' and 'projection' with regards to the attribution of responsibility and the rationalization of trauma. The 1946-49 civil war is ultimately interpreted as the outcome of British and US intervention in Greek political life; the December 1944 events, let alone the 1943-44 conflicts between ELAS, EDES and the Greek Security Battalions are scarcely mentioned openly. Scapegoats, expiatory victims, and conspiratorial explanations of history have been more than frequently employed to identify causes and consequences of the civil war. For instance, in 1945, the secretary-general of the KKE

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<sup>113</sup> Among others, this is evidenced in the proliferation of the left-oriented publication of memoirs, auto-biographies, and diaries referred to above.

<sup>114</sup> In France, for instance, until 1945 almost 10.000 'traitors' were killed with no trial. Later on, 1.600 were executed according to death verdicts (Fleischer 2008: 235).

(*Kommounistiko Komma Ellados*: Communist Party of Greece) Nikos Zachariadis denounced the previous secretary-general and the majority of the party's central committee for the December events, and in turn Zachariadis himself was officially denounced by his own party later on (1957) for the waging of the civil war. Hundreds of executive members who disagreed with the official decisions were physically exterminated by the party's death squads OPLA (*Organosi Perifrourosis Laikou Agona*: Organization for the Protection of the People's Struggle); the accusation was spying and petty bourgeois mentality. To mention bypassing that the acronym OPLA sounds the same with the Greek word arms; it is more than obvious that this was a living metaphor designating death.

Apart from that, and in the years to come after the war, the self-representation of the Left was that of the expiatory victim. The public memory of the leftward side selected the innumerable atrocities it suffered by the so called "white terrorism" of the Right between 1945-1946 as well as the unbearable prosecutions they endured during and after the war (executions, exile, imprisonments, rapes, tortures, social marginalization etc); at the same time however, they repressed or even disavowed their own malpractices, atrocities, and responsibilities<sup>115</sup>. Likewise, the Right has been more than reluctant to memorize about 5000 of its opponents executed by the extraordinary courts-martial and nearly 70000 prisoners and exiles who were convicted from 1947 to early 1950s. Yet, the public memory of the Right selectively detains the 'red terror' and the communists' crimes.

Besides, the attribution of responsibility for the civil war to the British and the Americans is a classic example of the conspiratorial explanation of history, quite common in the Greek populist political discourse, either Left or Right<sup>116</sup>. Under these terms, Greeks *in toto* are the expiatory victims of the foreigners. Another similar defense mechanism is the double tendency of remembering and forgetting. For one and the same traumatic event as the Greek civil war, precisely because it constitutes a field of competing interpretations and significations, there is, on the one hand, the demand to "leave everything behind us" on the name of 'national reconciliation'; on the other hand, however, there is the injunction to "preserve our historical memory" forwarded principally by the Right. Both options are cases of unsuccessful mourning and, paradoxically, in spite of been profound political options, they depoliticize the civil war itself by subsuming it into the nationalistic universe of discourse. The adversarial political identities of the opponents of the 1940s are symbolically transfigured to extend that (a) any revolutionary or counter-revolutionary potential of the civil war has been systematically suppressed from the public discourse and the popular memory; (b) the opponents were discursively endowed with non-political, nearly metaphysical, traits: noble defenders of the race and the nation, on the one side, and selfless and benign patriots who chase the reactionary servants of imperialism, on the other side. Even the bridging of the opposition described as 'reconciliation' instead of 'compromise' has its own significance; actually, 'reconciliation' is the counterpart of internecine war as it presupposes two formerly homogenous parts which only temporarily have been put apart. On the contrary, devoid of any value or moral echo,

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<sup>115</sup> There is ample evidence that even among the women political prisoners, the fighters who "held gun" were set apart and seen cautiously since the line of the party was that its members in prison were detained because of their opinions and not because of their doings.

<sup>116</sup> Likewise, the dominant account of the civil war in today's Finland resides in the seemingly inconceivable revolt of a part of the people "against itself" by projecting the cause of the war outside the nation. Reds were "infected" or "misled" by the Russians to betray their own fatherland (Alapuro 2002).

‘compromise’ is a political concept premised on power relations and convergence of strategic projects in a public sphere (Kotarides – Sideris 2002: 117-8).

As a matter of fact, the above described politics of oblivion did not contribute to a sort of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, i.e. a systematic reappraisal and collective process of coming to terms with the past. Yet, this is not a Greek peculiarity; in all countries that took part in the WWII there are some dark aspects in the way they treat their past. For instance, for many decades in France a sort of national amnesia surrounded the Vichy issue and it was suppressed or unacknowledged that the great majority of the French gave credence to, or were aligned with, Petain and his regime. In equal measure, in Latvia it is denied that the biggest and perhaps the most competent non-German military force embedded in the Nazi troops during the WWII consisted by Letts and that among the most fanatic defenders of Hitler’s shelter in the combat of Berlin were Letts fighters. One of the most successful management of public memory ever in the post war European history is Italy’s self-characterization as victim and enemy of the Germans based on the national myth of the good Italian (*Italiani brava gente*) and a veil of silence obscuring that only at the very end of the war Italy declared the war to Germany, purging thus all war crimes and atrocities its troops committed in hands with the Nazis (Ricoeur 2004: 449-52; Fleischer 2008: 196, 209, 234, 246-7). To press the point further, the encomium of the resistance as opposed to the civil war in Greece is part and parcel of a collective myth and a hegemonic strategy for the definition of the public and collective memory. During the first post war years and later on, in many if not all Western and Eastern countries, the legend of an instant, popular and mass resistance to the axis served as a symbolic means for: (1) national (re)union, (2) purging of plenty anti-Semitic atrocities hidden behind the Holocaust, (3) forging a common European identity (Fleischer 2008: 228, 236; Antoniou and Marantzidis 2008: 14-5). Greece, torn apart by Occupation and a civil war, could not be an exception.

### **The affect dimension during and after the war was over**

It was mentioned above that a host of left leaning non academic literature about the civil war and the resistance was produced after 1974, when the democratic regime was restored, the communist party(ies) was recognized, and the ‘national resistance’ was legally acknowledged. Most of this literature was written by prominent actors of the 1940s. One of the central concerns of these writings was the reconstitution of the official memory of the Left and therefore the re-articulation of the left identity within the new political cultural setting. This was accomplished by the overstatement of the communists’ contribution to the resistance and the understatement of their accountability for the civil war. In the new political cultural setting and the new structure of political opportunities and constraints, the mnemonic discursive strategy of the communist left was entangled into a symbolic antinomy: by claiming the glory of the resistance they were no longer morally defeated, while at the same time they were still the victims of the post civil war state of political affairs. This antinomy has been/is grounded on two mutually exclusive mnemonic vectors: on the one hand, the silencing of the old sharp opposition to the class society, i.e. the ultimate stake of the communists’ civil war, and the affirmation of the national society they wanted to be part of, on the other. Effectively, this antinomy was premised on a particular sort of emotional reflexivity. By ‘emotional reflexivity’ I mean a sort of emotional dynamics, a capacity, to negotiate relationships by changing the structure of feeling and, therefore, how others feel within these relationships. It is a process in which social actors have feelings about and try to understand and alter their lives in relation to others (Holmes 2008). Accordingly, the

defense of the resistance was/is meant to de-stigmatize the Greek communists as traitors and national outcasts, while at the same time it was a symbolic means for transforming the trauma of humiliation they experienced after the defeat in the civil war into a full blown pride that deserves to full fledged citizens. The de-stigmatizing emotional reflexivity has been carried through a justifying discourse guided by a militant testimonial zeal (Panagiotopoulos 1994) which, as a rule, framed the Greek communists as martyrs of the homeland during the occupation and innocent victims of a revengeful state. It is not accidental that some of our reviewed subjects used the word 'Golgotha' in order to describe their experience as victims of the war, i.e. a religious metaphor via which their activities acquire a non-political trait. Just only recently very few intellectuals of the Left deviate from this justifying discourse by discretely referring to the civil war as a strategic political option carried out by the Greek Communist Party in the 1940s and not as a fatal tragedy of the Greek people as a whole.

The mnemonic discursive strategies of the Left and its emotional reflexivity cannot be properly interpreted unless taking into account the emotional consequences of the defeat in the civil war as well as the left emotional *habitus* during the decades before the war. To start from the latter, one should take into consideration that almost from the beginning the political socialization of the Greek communists was carried out in an emotional climate of self-asserted marginalization. As an aftermath of the Bolsheviks' revolution, the Greek Communist Party was founded in 1918. From early on, the party as an institution and its individual members were at pains to comply with the official policies of the state as they departed from the directions of the Third International which were followed faithfully by the party in line with the Marxist-Leninist creed. In 1920 it strongly opposed the irredentist war in Minor Asia denouncing it as imperialist and adventurous. In 1924 it supported the 'unified and independent Macedonia and Thrace' propagating the idea of a working class revolution in Greece and the Balkans (see above). During 1929, the year of the great recession, in tandem with popular sentiment it organized plenty militant rallies and strikes which resulted in severe casualties and deaths. In 1930 it unsuccessfully declared general political strike and advocated the establishment of the soviet regime in Greece.

The repressive apparatuses of the state responded harshly to these political projects by prosecuting hundreds of party members. What is more, the 1936 Metaxas dictatorship denounced the communist party as illegal; almost 2000 of its members and cadres were arrested or exiled and approximately the entire network of its organization was demolished by the secret police. Those who remained free had to follow strict conspiracy rules in their contact to each other and in their private everyday life.

Given the quasi religious adherence to the communist utopia, these experiences and practices had contributed to the shaping of an emotional climate and *habitus* of strong group mindness, suspiciousness against real or alleged police agents, traitors and revisionists within the party ranks, disciplinary solidarity, as well as a mentality of the righteous or even expiatory victim. By and large, this emotional *habitus* was reactivated during the resistance and after the defeat in the battle of Athens in December 1944 and the 1946-49 civil war. In effect, it was a defense mechanism for coping with disappointment and humiliation. Yet, it could not shield the defeated all the way through the process of humiliating self-negation imposed by the post-war regime (Voglis 2000).

It was mentioned above that thousands of people were arrested, exiled, imprisoned, murdered or executed from the December events and thereafter. In addition to the battleground, a moral and emotional war was taking place as well. All detainees in prisons or places of exile



were pressed to sign declarations of repentance in which they recanted their political ideas and the Communist party itself. This method of demoralization was applied for the first time during the Metaxas dictatorship but during the civil war it developed into an industry of recantation. In thousands of cases, with my father's being one of them, these declarations were signed after long and painful processes of physical and psychological torture. What is more, these declarations were widely publicized in the local and national press as well as in the small village communities the repentants were coming from; those who signed were forced to prove their true repentance by informing against comrades, sending public letters repudiating communism, and by joining the military police confining and torturing their former comrades and friends. As one of our informants said [ ... *violence was immense, psychological mainly but physical as well ... the moment I was forced to sign they commanded us to take an oath and to write three letters ... one to the priest of our parish, one to the gendarmery of our region ... and another one addressed to the newspapers ...*] (man, aged 83).

Through this mechanism these people were 'reformed' into nationally minded citizens and willy-nilly negated their past identity as moral and political subjects (Voglis 2000: 76-7). Not a few could not stand a humiliation of this kind and committed suicide; a very tough emotional cross-pressure was exerted on all those who signed but did not alter their belief in the communist cause as they were stigmatized by both the authorities and the party itself. Activating the reflex syndrome of suspicion, the party organization treated these people not as politically defeated and physically exhausted subjects but as sinful and compromised individuals who could not manage to defend the moral superiority of the party.

After the civil war was over thousands of left-wingers who were morally cancelled, politically marginalized, socially stigmatized and personally exhausted, forced to find refuge in the big cities. For them, as well as for their immediate descendants, defeat functioned as a 'cultural trauma', as a painful event whose retroactive processing in memory and discourse caused disruptions and reconstructions in their collective identity. Essentially, there was no place for left-wingers in the public sphere, who were treated as second-class citizens. Their political marginalization caused them fear, anger, embarrassment and angst.

Essentially, until the end of the 50s, the space for any strongly worded discourse challenging the post-civil war establishment was extremely narrow. But since the beginning of the crucial decade of the 60s that space widened as, on the one hand, the 'Union of the Center' party (*Ενωση Κέντρου*) challenged the dominance of ERE (the right-wing dominant party) and, on the other, the economic development in the tertiary and manufacturing sector allowed for the massive and very fast accession of the domestic migrants to the labor market. There existed, however, an unbridgeable contradiction: while economic incorporation continues and creates the conditions for social consensus and the gradual de-EAMification of the petit bourgeois masses (Charalambis, 1989: 196), the structure of the post-civil war state (palace, army, national-mindedness, etc.) did not allow for the lifting of their political exclusion. The petit bourgeoisified civil war defeated, already incorporated in the market and the consumerist way of life, demanded moral recognition and political representation. In the new socio-economic environment their fear gradually gave way to resentful indignation. It was precisely because their social opportunity structure had changed and therefore they were able to express the accumulated emotional energy and transform the feeling of indignation to a material-political force: where else could the massive social rallies of the period be based and in what other way could they be expressed, if not in a mixture of indignation and hope?

Yet, under the prospect of losing control in the parliamentary elections scheduled for May 1967, April's *coup d'état* in effect blocked every outlet for the democratic incorporation of

the not nationally minded in the political system and cancelled the mood for further massive protests. On top of the cultural trauma of the civil war, there now came the trauma of the imposition of dictatorship. So there was formed a belief in the fatality of political inequality and marginalization and the impossibility of its overcoming. The humiliation of the defeated in the civil war was not lifted but, on the contrary, accentuated. As I have argued elsewhere (Demertzis 2006), the main consequence of the dictatorship in terms of cultural trauma analysis is that the contradiction between the desire for political and moral recognition and the powerlessness to impose it, combined with the chronic and traumatic reliving of endless vindictiveness, hostility and indignation, produced a deep-rooted *ressentiment*. Based on Max Scheler (1961) I regard *ressentiment* as an unpleasant moral feeling without specific addressees, which operates as a chronic reliving of repressed and endless vindictiveness, hostility, envy and indignation due to the impotence of the subject in expressing them in social practice. To the extent that dictatorship overturned the democratizing potential of the mid 1960s, it can be argued that a significant portion of pre-dictatorial resentment qua moral indignation, during the dictatorship dematerializes and is transformed into *ressentiment*. The injustice of political marginalization and the post-civil war establishment were perceived to be an inescapable fate leading to an experience of impotence and inferiority. However, as soon as PASOK took office in 1981 and the lower middle strata stemming from the defeated in the civil war (the ‘non privileged’ in Andreas Papandreou’s populist rhetoric) found themselves integrated into the political system, *ressentiment* gave place to vengeance precisely because it could be released and acted out publicly. Party mass clientelism (Lyrintzis, 1984) and the ‘green-guards’ (PASOK’s cadres who dominated in trade unions, the public sector and state mechanisms) were the compensation for the ‘stony years’ of the political marginalization. But apparently vengeance cannot be the only emotion stemmed from Papandreou’s policies favorable to the former political and social outcasts; many must have experienced disappointment combined with bitterness, a kind of half hearted satisfaction, when the National Resistance was recognized and they received, by law, a pension for their contribution to the country. What two of our interviewed said about it might reflect a more widespread mood: [...they got me in trial for high treason ... us who fought the Germans ... they give me a 320 euros pension ... this is the way they compensate us ... can you imagine? ... here we had the greatest resistance throughout Europe...] (man, aged 85). [... we risked our lives and this makes us proud ... those memories are great but painful, it is the most patriotic and heroic I’ve ever lived. Well, nowadays I am looking at my self, my house etc, I’ve become a petty bourgeois like others] (man, aged 83).

Overall, sixty years after the end of the war, our left minded informants experience retroactively a fusion of negative and positive feelings: rage, resentment, anger, disgust or even hatred together with pride, moral satisfaction and responsibility spring out from their narrations.

Contrary to what currently passes as left leaning common sense with regards to the civil war trauma, I want to argue that this war was traumatogenic to the right side of the Greek political spectrum as well.

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## Conclusion

Stemming from a personal interest and in pace with the fundamental tenets of cultural trauma theory, i.e. identity, memory, emotion, a (re)interpretation of the Greek civil war was attempted throughout this paper. This interpretation was based primarily on the already existing impressive research literature, partly on findings from original qualitative research, and to some extent on comparisons between the Greek and other civil wars. After sixty years, that war still ignites Greeks' political psyche, maybe not so fervently as the former decades. The main reason why this cultural trauma has repercussions after so many years is the partial failure of the politics of oblivion pursued by both sides (silence, 'nationalization' of the resistance, forgetting/manipulated public memory). Alike other countries, in Greece, a systematic reappraisal and a coming to terms with the past has not been generated. As a result, despite the claims of national reconciliation, the issue of forgiving has not been raised seriously as yet.

Forgiveness is crucial to the cultural trauma theory because a consistent concept of trauma, as a living metaphor, refers to a dynamic process which includes both the traumatic element itself *and* the process of its healing. Forgiveness is part of the healing process, an integral element of mourning. Certainly, to forgive is not to forget, nor is it denial or disavowal. Forgiveness entails transformation of negative emotions based on strong will, a will to start anew, a gesture quite opposite to vengeance. Forgiveness is never predicted, as it comes out of free will and frees both doer and sufferer from the relentless automatism of a vicious cycle (Arendt 1958: 236-241). What is more, forgiveness can be offered unconditionally only by those (previous victims) who are able to punish perpetrators (Ricouer 2004: 470). But who exactly is the victim and who is the perpetrator in the Greek civil war? Who is supposed to forgive whom?

This question was unthinkable ten years ago due to the unshaken hegemony of the left minded accounts of the civil war. Today, whoever utters this question has: (a) to steer clear from negationism and historical revisionism (which is not identical with revisionist historiography); (b) to deconstruct the commanded forgetting of the civil war and the mythology that surrounds the so called 'national resistance'; (c) to promote a spirit of 'difficult forgiveness'. Certainly, it will be a long process which ultimately concerns the next generation, my generation, as the real participants in the civil war are passing away. Yet, it might be less painful and it may leave room for a mutual request for and offering of forgiveness.

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### **Revolutionary Trauma and Representation of the War: the Case of China in Mao's Era**

For millions of Chinese who had the misfortune to live during the span of the War of Resistance Against Japan (1937-1945), their personal experience must have been unbearably traumatic and painful. During the 8 years of the war, China lost three million lives in combat, and the civilian casualties is estimated to be about twenty million<sup>117</sup>. And the heinous nature of the war atrocity committed by the invading army must have left indelible marks on memories and consciousness of millions of war victims, of which the Nanking Massacre and the crimes of No. 731 Special Forces are but two particularly atrocious cases. Such massively shared suffering and injustice, however, as vivid as it must have been in each war victims' minds, remained ultimately private and individual: for many years after the building of the new state, it seldom if ever, found its way into the public sphere of expression.

Why is this the case? One of the goals of this chapter is to delve into this curious phenomenon and to seek explanations from a cultural sociological point of view. As scholars of cultural trauma powerfully demonstrated, even widely shared suffering and injustice of enormous scale are not collectively traumatic in themselves, I argue that the horrendous misery and mass destruction brought by the war was never able to be translated into a cultural trauma for the collectivity; not only has there not been a successful trauma process occurring, the significance of the war was largely diminished by the triumph of other cultural traumas that had been powerfully constructed.

My tasks in this chapter are therefore twofold. First, I attempt to reconstruct a grand narrative constructed in Mao's era that tells the people about the modern history of China which eventually leads to the building of the new state. I argue that the new national collectivity was built through the successful construction of a cultural trauma, a trauma of the old society when all the evil forces joined together to inflict injury and unbearable pain upon Chinese people. At the core of this 'grand' collective trauma, there was the more intensified and heightened trauma-drama of class struggle, where the evil perpetrators in the old society were 'condensed' and 'epitomized' into an absolute evil of class enemy and the unspeakable pain and suffering of the proletarian victims were recreated and relived by a broad sphere of people, who were solidly united into a new class collectivity via a strong symbolic and emotional identification with the victims.

My second task is to examine how the experience of the War of Resistance Against Japan fits into this grand narrative. Tracing the representation of the war in the public sphere of Mao's China and analyzing its relation with the grand narrative, I argue that the depiction and interpretation of the war is to certain extent determined by the intrinsic logic and strength of the

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<sup>117</sup> There perhaps has never been an accurate statistic of the loss of lives and numbers of casualties caused by the War of Resistance against Japan in Chinese society since the end of the War. There seems to be several official versions of estimation on both sides of the Taiwan strait, by the Nationalist government and the PRC government respectively; but none could claim to be THE most precise estimation. In general, the most widely spread version in PRC is that the cost of lives amounted at least up to twenty millions. The number I quoted came from estimation from the Nationalist government in Taiwan, as made clear in an article written by Chiang Kai-shek's son in memorization of the ex-president who led the war of resistance.

compelling grand narrative. It seems that in the hugely successful reconstruction of the grand narrative of revolution, representation of the war is a prosaic and much less relevant chapter, whose significance is severely mitigated because of an innate conflict it poses to the universal communist trauma of class struggle and the collective identity the latter so powerfully fostered.

### *The Grand Narrative and the 'Old Society'*

As “community of memories” (Weber 1978:903), modern nations, from the moment of their birth, are defined and constructed by the collective memories upon which they build their collective identities and national grouping. And collective memories, as a social construction contingent upon specific social configuration and historical conjuncture, is given form by mnemonic representations that are “circulated and stored in particular forms, such as narratives, pictorial images, textbooks, pamphlets, legal charters, wills, diaries, and statues” (Wagner-Pacifici 1996:302, quoted in Saito 2006:354). In light with this, to trace the collective memories of revolutions and wars in the first two decades after the founding of the People’s Republic of China, one helpful approach is to reconstruct the grand narrative of history through which the nation defines and legitimizes itself and through which it shapes its next generation into proper social and national beings.

A casual visit to the Tian’anmen Square could offer some helpful hint for the discovery of such a grand national narrative. At the very center of the Square, there erects the national monument of China, known as the ‘Monument to the People’s Heroes’. Unveiled in 1958 to commemorate the “Eternal Glory” of the martyrs who devoted their lives to the revolutionary struggle of Chinese people in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Monument plays a most important role in the self-definition of the new state as it is supposed to testify and crystallize the traumatic historical trajectory along which the new nation was brought into being. On the back of the monument, there is an inscription drafted by Mao Zedong and written by Zhou Enlai. It reads:

"Eternal glory to the heroes of the people who laid down their lives in the people's war of liberation and the people's revolution in the past three years! Eternal glory to the heroes of the people who laid down their lives in the people's war of liberation and the people's revolution in the past thirty years! Eternal glory to the heroes of the people who from 1840 laid down their lives in the many struggles against domestic and foreign enemies and for national independence and the freedom and well-being of the people!

While the words here sound mundane and redundant, they carry with them important message that helps to decode the founding myth of the new nation. First, it is indicated in these words that the new state stands as the finale to an old era, but the ‘old era’ is not too old, but traced back to 1840, the beginning of the Opium War designated as the symbolic start of the modern history of China, or what is to be known as the one-century of humiliation and insult. Second, note that the order by which different eras are mentioned is reverse to the temporal order. I would argue later that such an arrangement is made along a line of descending symbolic significance and what is indicated by this sense of hierarchy is that the class origin of different historical agents plays a decisive role in determining the symbolic significance of different conflicts and historical events. Third, as closely related to the first point, it is also implied in these words, that the nation was born as a salvation, a redemption of what had gone wrong. Indeed, it takes no less than the ultimately sacred mission as “the people’s liberation” and “the

national independence and the freedom and well-being of the people” to justify the tremendous human sacrifice that had to be paid for such a salvation.

If the founding myth of the new nation is only partially implied in this inscription, it is put straightforward in the opening speech given by Chairman Mao Zedong at the First Plenary Session of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference held on Sept. 21, 1949. The speech was selected as the text of the first lesson in the Chinese textbook for Third Grade Junior High student, which serves to testify, though in a trivial way, the ultimate importance of the document. Indeed, given at a historic moment immediately preceding the inauguration ceremony of the new state, or the symbolic birth of the People's Republic of China, the speech not only composes part of the grand narrative of the nation, it actually performs the function of actively calling the new nation into being.

In this speech, Mao drafted an authoritative narrative that tells where the new nation came from and where it is destined to go. In one of the most pithy paragraphs, Mao locates the symbolic birth of the new nation into a world-historical framework and thereby invokes a sense of sacred mission and millennial salvation. He starts with “we share among us a common understanding that what we have achieved will go down in the history of mankind<sup>118</sup>”, and continues with perhaps one of the most symbolically empowering sentence that still resonate in today's China: “the Chinese people, comprising one quarter of humanity, have now stood up!” In the following sentences, Mao elaborates on the fundamental transformation that the nation had gone through and the historical trajectory that leads up to such a redemptive moment. It goes:

The Chinese have always been a great, courageous and industrious nation; it is only in modern times that they have fallen behind. And that was due entirely to oppression and exploitation by foreign imperialism and domestic reactionary governments. For over a century our forefathers never stopped waging unyielding struggles against domestic and foreign oppressors, including the Revolution of 1911 led by Dr. Sun Yat-sen, our great forerunner in the Chinese revolution. Our forefathers enjoined us to carry out their unfulfilled will. And we have acted accordingly. We have closed our ranks and defeated both domestic and foreign oppressors through the People's War of Liberation and the great people's revolution, and now we are proclaiming the founding of the People's Republic of China...Ours will no longer be a nation subject to insult and humiliation. We have stood up!<sup>119</sup>

According to this narrative, the new state is first and foremost a millennial salvation for Chinese people, a radical rectification of what had gone horribly wrong. What is presented is an archetypical progressive narrative based upon a teleological perspective, where good and innocent people, no matter how badly they had been hurt and exploited, and how hard and prolonged they had to fight for their emancipation, would eventually triumph over the anguish and redeem the wrongs and injuries they had to suffer for long. Here, the founding of the new nation, which represents the redemptive moment, is personified into a human action, a physical

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<sup>118</sup> Editorial Division for Chinese Course, People's Education Publishing House. 1960. *Chinese* (Textbook for Junior High School). Book No.5. Hangzhou: People's Education Publishing House in Zhejiang. P.4. Translated by the author.

<sup>119</sup> The original text could be found in the Chinese text book for Junior High School students in 1960. Editorial Division for Chinese Course, People's Education Publishing House. 1960. *Chinese* (Textbook for Junior High School). Book No.5. Hangzhou: People's Education Publishing House in Zhejiang. P.4. And the English translation is quoted from the following website: [http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-5/mswv5\\_01.htm](http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-5/mswv5_01.htm)

posture that conveys the transcendental leap from a state of subjugation and humiliation towards an empowering stance that indicates a sense of dignity and equity. It is exactly through such a transcendental leap that the darkness of the 'old and bad' world can be obliterated by the bright light of a new world which promises a different and consequently much better future.

Obviously, all progressive narrative entails a traumatic representation of the past, the negative point from which the transcendental leap to the positive can be made. It is therefore not hard to notice that necessary elements of a traumatic narrative could be found in both the aforementioned documents, and particularly in Mao's opening speech, where he explicitly identified the horrendous predicament that the nation had been suffering and the perpetrators who had inflicted such wounds were explicitly identified. In the preceding paragraphs to the one I just quoted, he traces the historical trajectory of the Political Consultative Conference, and by pointing out how the results of the first attempt of such a conference, held three years ago, were "sabotaged by Chiang Kai-shek's Kuomintang and its accomplices"<sup>120</sup>, unambiguously designates the camp of chief enemies that the Chinese people must fight against, "imperialism, feudalism, bureaucrat-capitalism and their general representative, the reactionary Kuomintang government"<sup>121</sup>. The profound lesson that people must learn from that first attempt, Mao concludes, is that "there is absolutely no room for compromise with Chiang Kai-shek's Kuomintang, the running dog of imperialism, and its accomplices -- overthrow these enemies or be oppressed and slaughtered by them, either one or the other, there is no other choice."<sup>122</sup> In this brief statement, Mao firmly built the fact that the fight against the three huge camps of enemies and their general agent KMT is a battle of life and death for Chinese people, a battle that is not only profoundly and thoroughly justified but a battle that must be won. By coding the war against the evil-doers as a battle for survival, Mao not only made a powerful argument for legitimizing the victory of the people and the building of the new state, but established a traumatic representation of the past, where people were oppressed and slaughtered and which consequently must be vanquished and transcended.

The fundamental outline that is sketched out in Mao's speech, and especially the traumatic representation of the past, reverberates in all the discourses and language that contribute to the construction of the national collectivity of China in the 1950s and 1960s. Because the founding myth of the nation emphasized a fundamental transformation from what is old and bad towards what is new and good, the binary code 'old' and 'new' is made one of the most powerful and prevalent codes in Mao's era and the stark contrast between the sacred 'new society' and the profane 'old society' becomes the perpetual motif in literary works and other cultural products. Take articles selected into the Chinese textbooks for junior high school in the 50s for examples<sup>123</sup>. While the texts, altogether 110 pieces of them, were sampled from a wide variety of literary works, including news story, memoirs, poems, dramas, novels, classic works, etc, **with the exception of a few**<sup>124</sup>, the majority could be easily put into five categories, each,

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<sup>120</sup> The original text could be found in the Chinese text book for Junior High School students in 1960. Editorial Division for Chinese Course, People's Education Publishing House. 1960. *Chinese* (Textbook for Junior High School). Book No.5. Hangzhou: People's Education Publishing House in Zhejiang. P.2-3. And the English translation is quoted from the following website: [http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-5/mswv5\\_01.htm](http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-5/mswv5_01.htm)

<sup>121</sup> Ibid

<sup>122</sup> ibid

<sup>123</sup> These include Chinese Textbook for Junior High School, book no. 1 to no. 6, published by People's Education Publishing House in 1954.

<sup>124</sup>

though slightly different in their way of relevance, is equally entrenched in the binary code of the 'old' and the 'new'.

Some texts, represented mostly by pieces selected from contemporaneous news reports such as 'I Love New Beijing', and 'New Masters of the Grassland', are straightforward odes to the new society. Almost invariably, at least parts of these pieces would be dedicated to depicting and condemning how miserable life used to be in the old time, in addition to extolling how excellent and wonderful the new life is nowadays. Some texts, mainly comprised of memoirs, biographies of famous social figures from the old society and novels written before 1949, were selected primarily for the strength and depth they revealed in exposing the darkness and inhumanity of the old social system. Representative pieces in this category include Lu Xun's most famous piece 'Hometown', 'the Diary of a Mad Man' and 'Stories of My Mother' written by Zhu De, all vividly and poignantly depicting how poor ordinary people had suffered before 1949. Some texts, usually selected widely from contemporaneous news coverage and novels written by writers under the leadership of CCP and published after 1949, deal directly with the transcendental leap from the past to the present. Many of articles of this category, such as 'The Land', 'Our First Harvest', 'Peasant Sanhei and his Land', were selected from novels that write about the land reform campaigns carried out under the leadership of CCP during various times. Tracing the tortuous way along which poor peasants eventually won the ownership of their land, the theme of these works is to highlight the stark contrast between life of the peasants before and after their ultimate emancipation, and thereby demonstrate how happy life is today in comparison with the pain of yesterday. The fourth category, comprised of articles that tell stories and biographies of revolutionary role models including heroes on the battlefield, communist martyrs, and socialist model workers and peasants, may appear less explicit in their relevance to the construction of the binary code between the old and the new. But it is not a coincidence that all the heroes in these stories, as represented by those in 'Heroin Grown up in the Battle' and 'A Soldier Like This-Memorizing People's Hero He Daqing', were depicted as coming originally from poor peasants families and having an extremely harsh and deprived life. In fact, their agonies and grievances under the oppression and exploitation of the old ruling class were usually given quite long descriptions so that the evilness of the old society becomes the very motive upon which they participate in the revolution and grow up to be staunch communist fighters. The fifth category, which may appear rather exotic, is composed of texts selected from novels and stories from other socialist countries like the former Soviet Union and Hungary. These texts, represented by 'A Conversation between Charcoals', 'Driving Away Poverty', demonstrate how superior the socialist system is to the old feudal or capitalist system, how the 'new' society has brought liberation and happiness for the people there, and thereby showcase the universality of the sacredness of the 'new' and serve to bulwark the construction of the binary code from a totally different yet powerful perspective.

This brief survey over the Chinese textbooks not only demonstrates how universally the narrative construction of the national collectivity is carried out via two opposite means, the positive construction that eulogizes the 'new society', and the negative construction that condemns the old one, it also reveals that the remembrance of the 'old' is ubiquitous and made the very base upon which the legitimacy of the 'new' is being built. In fact, the negative construction of the profane, almost always predominates over the establishment of the sacred, and the 'old society' as a signifier always assumes a much greater symbolic significance than the new one.

Indeed, there can not be any other signifier than old china, or more frequently the old society, that is more prevalently and firmly established as the profane signifier that denotes everything that had gone horribly wrong before 1949. In an article selected as part of the Chinese textbook for Junior High students, for instance, the author, to justify people's struggle for liberation and eulogize the noble sacrifice of countless martyrs, defines the 'old society' as a place where the only possible option left for human beings is to "exploit and subjugate each other" and it must therefore be characterized by "tens of thousands of evils"<sup>125</sup>. In the same vein, the horrible old society is so unfailingly portrayed in a series of speech genres, as demonstrated in Alexander and Gao's article on the failed trauma of Nanking Massacre, that it becomes difficult to imagine the old society without evoking the iconic images that these phrases crystallize. For instance, Sang quan ru guo, one of such phrases which literally means "losing the sovereignty and mortifying the nation," communicates the collective trauma induced by the series of unequal treaties that China was forced to sign under the threat of more violent aggression. Shui shen huo re and min buy liao sheng – respectively "in deep water and burning fire" and "there was no way for people to make a living" – figuratively evoked the inexpressible pain suffered by ordinary people under the stifling oppression of the "Three Big Mountains," imperialism, feudalism, and bureaucratic capitalism, suggesting that they were "constantly drowned in the depth of the water, and burned in heat of fire."

In case the horrendous nature of the old society has not been fully illustrated, in another text selected in the senior high school textbook, a short story written by Lu Xun, the most famous left-wing writer in early 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was indicated that the entire history of the 'old society' was being written with the language of cannibalism. The paranoid protagonist of the short story, who kept a diary daily, recorded faithfully how he gradually decodes one secret message from the behavior of people around him, that they "were one band, all eaters of human flesh" and eventually realized that because "I too am a man, they want to eat me!" Being extremely frightened and bewildered, the protagonist attempted to find why this is the case from a book, which serves a metonymy for the history of the old society, but only found "the whole book being filled with the two words—"Eat people.""" It becomes quite obvious here that the use of the figurative language that indicates cannibalism deepened the weighting of the evil.

To certain extent, the old society starts to assume an all-encompassing and absolute status of a sacred-evil and one telling testimony to this point is that the signifier seems to possess the ability to pollute by means of mere association. A good example could be found in the teacher's guide book for music course in junior high school. When talking about how to teach a folksong that has been popular among the people since the old era, the guidance book lists several pedagogical advices, among which point no. 4 reads:

Tell the students that folksongs composed in the old society reflect the painful suffering of the working people, their hatred towards and their struggle against the feudal ruling class; at the same time, these songs also demonstrate the invincible optimism of the people who, despite their unspeakable plight, are still filled with hope for happiness and a brighter future (p.28).

What is particularly interesting is that the editors appear to be apologetic for including folksongs into the music textbook in the first place. In pedagogical advices, no. 1,3 and 5, the editors are

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<sup>125</sup> Editorial Division for Chinese Course, People's Education Publishing House. 1960. *Chinese* (Textbook for Junior High School). Book No.5. Hangzhou: People's Education Publishing House in Zhejiang. P. 9.

again eager to justify why folksongs that are composed “in the old era” should be known and learnt by the students at all. For instance, in bullet point no. 1 the editors kept saying that folksongs, because of their “profound ideas, their rich expressiveness and their authentic emotionality”, are “extremely beneficial teaching materials” (p. 28); in no. 3, it is emphasized that folksongs are created collectively by the proletarian people and therefore are the crystallization of the wisdom and talents of the mass people over time (p. 28). It is not hard to notice here that folksongs are deemed as something not sacred enough to be included into textbooks, mainly because of its origin which is rooted in “the old society”, therefore, to purify folksongs and to diminish its profanity derived from “the past”, a universal and transcendent symbol of sacredness in communist culture, “the mass people”, must be employed: the folksongs can not be bad even if they came into being in the old society, for they were after all created by the sacred proletarian people.

*The Genre of ‘Remembering the Bitterness’ and the Cultural Trauma of ‘Old Society’*

The predicament and suffering brought by the old society would remain impersonal and abstract, and the evilness of the enemies, no matter how the coding has been weighted, intangible, if there is no symbolic identification to bridge the temporal and psychological gap between the new era and the old one. Such a symbolic extension and emotional identification was successfully achieved among the public in Mao’s China because the traumatic representation of the past was extensively and consistently dramatized in various types of cultural products. In fact, a new literary genre was created for such purpose, which is known as ‘Yi Ku Si Tian’, or literally, ‘appreciating the sweetness of today by remembering the bitterness of the past’.

A prototype of such genre could be found in the lyric of a song titled “The Past Story of Mum”. Selected in the music textbook for elementary school students, the melodious song is still popular among young kids of today. It begins with the usual building of a romantic ambience which also serves to depict a general picture that implies the better quality of life made possible in the new society:

The moon is moving through the white clouds that take the shape of beautiful lotus,  
Joyful songs flow with the gentle evening breeze.  
We sat next to the hill of millets that piles high,  
Listening to the story told by mum about the past.

Then, the traumatic past that mum had experienced was reconstructed, recounting how mum, a landless and impoverished peasant, had suffered unspeakable misery at the hand of the avaricious landlords. The song goes on like:

At that time, Mum was landless and all she has was her hands and labor,  
Toiling in the field of the landlord, the only food she could get was wild herbs and husks  
The blizzard of the harsh winter was howling like wolves, yet mum had barely anything  
on except for her pieces of rug.  
She fainted at the side of the road out of hunger and coldness, being on her way to sew a  
fur robe for the landlord’s wife.  
Only through such a tortuous ordeal did mum eventually hail the happiness of today.

Two salient features stand out from this lyric that are also characteristic of other works of this genre. First, the painful experience that one suffers in the old society is successfully

personalized because the victim takes the image of one's most intimate family member, which undoubtedly makes a psychological identification much easier. Usually, works of this genre adopt the form of memoirs, biography or autobiography, in which the protagonist recounts the story with first person perspective and recalls the unbearable torment and grief that she had experienced personally in the old society. The poignant and detailed recreation of the life story of a specific victim not only lends much authenticity and truthfulness to the story, but also facilitates a symbolic identification with the protagonist.

Second, it can not be missed that the major conflict as narrated in the lyric is explicitly developed along a class line where the victim, the mum, represents the impoverished proletarian class, and the perpetrator, the landlord, obviously serves as a metonymy for all the exploitative class that by definition also include the capitalists. This highlights the fact that the profanity of the 'old society' is principally constructed via the dramatic struggle and opposition between class enemies and it is thereby inseparably coupled with the trauma of class struggle. In fact, the following discussion would testify in a most compelling way that the genre of 'appreciating the sweetness of today by remembering the bitterness of the past' plays a crucial role in building the trauma drama of class struggle, which in turn becomes an essential component in the overall traumatic representation of the old society.

Another illuminating example of the genre (hereafter referred to as 'remembering the bitterness') could be found in the Chinese textbooks for school kids in 1960s, where many such articles or literary works were selected. In fact, in the Chinese textbook published in 1964, at least three pieces of such works can be found in each of the two books to be taught to second year students in junior high school. Among these texts, one article titled 'A New Watch' is again very informative of the basic format and structure commonly used in this genre. As with the lyric, the story also starts with a depiction of the happiness that the entire family enjoyed today, when the protagonist bought a new watch for his daughter. Then, predictably, the protagonist started to testify how such an apparently easy purchase was completely unimaginable for his family 20 years ago. The painful memories are long and replete with iconic images that evoke similar visualization resonated with that narrated in the lyric. In one of the most salient images, for instance, the protagonist recalls the scene he witnessed at the entrance of a watch store from a distance. He was enraged to find that "only those who had a private rickshaw or who came in cars, only those capitalists and the wives of bureaucrats who wear silks ever went into the shop, and never ever have I seen any single worker or peasant went in there."<sup>126</sup> Most revealing of the genre, this image powerfully visualizes the binary opposition across the deep trench of class between the allied perpetrators and the joined victims, both of whom are essential to the narrative construction of not only the trauma of class struggle, but also the profanity of the old society.

However, what differentiates the story from the lyric and makes it somehow more enlightening, is the last paragraph where the protagonist, after recounting the past torment, exclaimed to his daughter with passion: "What a society that was! What a miserable life! We must inscribe them line by line upon our heart! Even when we are one-hundred years old, when we are enjoying a happiness that is equivalent to paradise, we must not let these marks erode!"<sup>127</sup>

What is being conveyed in this paragraph adds another significant symbolic dimension to the genre of 'remembering the bitterness'. It shows that though the past, or the 'old society', as an evil has already been triumphantly conquered, its symbolic significance is not only not

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<sup>126</sup> Editorial Division for Chinese Course, People's Education Publishing House. 1964. *Chinese* (Textbook for Junior High School, newly edited in 1964). Book No.4. Beijing: People's Education Publishing House. P. 83.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid



diminished but strengthened, because the sacredness of the new society can not be firmly established or fully appreciated but through a perpetual symbolic recreation of the ‘bitterness of the past’. In fact, it is only through a constant cycle of reconstruction and remembering that the darkness of the old evils who feed on the victimization and suffering of the proletarian people, could be successfully built, without which, the positive image of socialist beings that become the true master of the ‘new society’ can not possibly come into being.

#### *Four Genealogies and the Collective Trauma of Class Struggle*

By the beginning of 1960s, the genre of ‘remembering the bitterness’ had surged with such momentum that from the year 1960 on, in the General Catalogue of Publication compiled by the central government, under the category of *Feature Stories, Profiles and Revolutionary memoirs*, there appeared a new column named ‘Four Genealogies’, namely, genealogy of factories, of PLA, of people’s communes, of village, and etc (usually with the additional one of family), which are exclusively composed of the ‘bitterness’ works published nationwide over any one specific year. In the prologue of one of the representative book series under this column in 1964<sup>128</sup>, the editors explain why they chose the new terminology ‘Genealogy’, which could also be taken as part of the justification of the formation and surge of this literary type from the 1960s throughout to the Cultural Revolution:

Since ancient time, having a ‘genealogy’ has been the privilege of the reactionary ruling class, who made use of it to strengthen its own rule and deceive the mass people. However, when our New China was established like the breaking of a spring thunder, history turned a new page from that moment on, and off with the old page was the ugly genealogy of the ruling class. From now on, under the leadership of CCP, we, the revolutionary people also have the privilege to record our own struggling experience, to write the genealogy of proletarians and to paint the most beautiful layout of our future (V1, 2; V2, 2).

The choice of the new term here conveys a significant message, that genealogy cannot be the records of just anyone’s history, it must be the collective memories of the ‘proletarian’ people<sup>129</sup>. And by such a shift in terminology, the class boundary that characterizes all the ‘bitterness’ works seems to be more intensified, and the focus upon class struggle fiercely stressed.

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128 This refers to an article collection titled “Red Genealogies”, which was published by the Xin Hua Daily Press in 1964 and composed of 12 booklets and two volumes of selected articles. The series was chosen first and foremost because the publisher was very prestigious which guarantees a wide circulation among readers; secondly, and equally important, the series cover all the four (though most of the time it refers to five) types of genealogies and therefore in itself forms an independent system that could offer us a more complete view of the genre. Owing to lack of source, I could only make access to three of the 12 booklets published in this series, but fortunately, the two big volumes of selected articles actually covered many of the articles in other booklets and thus makes the data more complete.

129 Such a definition bears extremely consequential repercussions upon the construction of grand narrative of the nation as well as on the representation and remembrance of any specific period of history, including, the War of Resistance against Japan that I would discuss later, because it stringently excludes from the agencies of history members of classes other than the proletarian.

Reading through stories with the label of ‘Genealogy’, it is not hard to notice that while they share all the features that characterize other ‘bitterness’ works, they also systematically reveal certain special patterns that are subtly yet significantly distinct from the other works, besides their heightened fixation upon class and class struggle. Taking the previously mentioned book series ‘The Red Genealogy’ for instance, like other works in the ‘remembering the bitterness’ genre, this series is composed of a collection of memoirs written by ordinary working people, recalling how miserable their life used to be under the rule of the reactionary forces before the liberation. What makes this series of ‘genealogy’ distinguished from other ‘bitterness’ works though, is that it seems more explicit and eager in creating a symbolic identification and emotional extension among the readers. And it attempted to achieve this goal through two means. One is that the protagonists in the stories seem to be intentionally chosen so that they could represent poor people from all walks of life, including peasants, factory workers, technicians, craftsmen, elementary school teachers, nurses, chefs etc, and of all ages and genders. Such an arrangement of course serves to better illustrate how proletarian people, no matter what they did and who they were, can not escape the tragic fate of being oppressed and exploited in the old society, but it would also facilitate the symbolic identification of current people, each of whom could find in these victims, in a concrete and personalized way, either their own painful memories, or the gloomy fate they were likely to suffer if they had the misfortune to be born into the old society.

Second, following each memoir, there is an editor’s words section, summarizing the ‘morals’ that the readers are supposed to learn. As articulated in the prologue of the volume, the editors encouraged the readers to identify with ‘those who had gone through the great transformation of our nation, because for these people, the anguish of being exploited, oppressed, insulted and discriminated against in old China, the excruciating memories of being undulated in pain and torment, are like a scar of whip on their back and a mark of burn on their chest; they will never be able to forget about it.’(4) And so must we, those who had the fortune to live in the happy new China, the editors continued, ‘never forget the agony of class oppression, the sacrifice made during the revolution and the history of class struggle’ (2), because ‘to forget is the equivalent of betrayal’ (2).

The endeavor to reach out for breadth of audience and for creating a symbolic collectivity is accompanied on the other hand by earnest attempts to ‘deepen the evilness’ of the perpetrators, to make the ‘wound’ upon the collectivity more painful and the ‘scar’ on the memory indelible. Indeed, another feature that distinguishes the ‘genealogy’ stories from other ‘bitterness’ works seems to be that they were much more articulate and focused upon constructing a trauma-drama for the proletarian collectivity, the process of which entails two building blocks.

One is to showcase the incredibly broad extent and the tremendous volume of the sufferings of the people, and this was successfully achieved with the sheer huge number of stories and memoirs published under the column of genealogy in the 1960s<sup>130</sup>, all basically adopting the same framework of plot and narrative development. In the prologues, epilogues or editor’s words of the genealogy publications, the editors all seem to be focused upon building the ‘universality’ or the ‘ubiquity’ of the distresses and afflictions experienced by the proletarian class in its entirety. They would not only justify the production of their own collections by emphasizing how ‘class grievances are just endless to speak’, as an editor acknowledged in the epilogue in one booklet that (V6, 40), but also apologize for being able to present only such a tiny parts of all the ‘representative cases’. Indeed, the most frequently quoted Chinese idioms in

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these texts is perhaps the term, “Qing Zhu Nan Shu”, which literally means that ‘(the horrendous agonies inflicted on us) are so tremendous and so profound, that even if all the bamboos (bamboo is the material the ancient Chinese used to write stuff on, like paper of today) in the world are used out, we still could not finish writing them.’ The overwhelming amount of publicity given to the tragic experiences of poor people in the old society not only magnified the sufferings of individuals and increases the enormity of the evil doings of the perpetrators, but elevated traumas that would have remained in the privacy of personal memories onto a public sphere, so that the pain and agony of a worker or a peasant became the sufferings of an entire collectivity. In fact, the universality of the agony of proletarian people seemed so well established that it became inseparably interwoven with the definition of the collective identity of the class; in other words, to have gone through unspeakable agony and suffered at the hands of demonic enemies is almost a necessary precondition upon which one claims his membership into the proletarian class and a common denominator he shares with his class brothers and sisters.

The second building block involves both the unequivocal identification of the victims, the perpetrators and the nature of the trauma, and heightening the weighting of all the symbolic codes and deepening the emotional involvements of the audience. Browsing over the titles of the publication under the column of ‘Four Genealogies’ from 1960 to 1965, one would be stricken by how dramatically gory and sentimental language is used to present a general images that is tinted with a touch of violence and blood. Take the afore-mentioned collection of ‘Red Genealogy’ again as a revealing example. The titles, or subtitles, of the memoirs in this collection, echoing the general trend, are full of words and expressions that are capable of reenacting violent visual images that would heighten the level of people’s alertness and emotional response. In one article titled “the Surge of Indignation Avenged the Feud of the Fishers’ Family”, for instance, the first section was subtitled “the Yangtse River was a River of Blood and Tears”; in another article titled “the Killing Ground of the Imperialists” (V3 □ 21), the title of a section reads “A Drop of Milk Was Produced with a Drop of Blood of the Workers Before the Liberation”. The extensive use of words like ‘feud’, ‘hatred’, ‘enmity’, ‘blood’, ‘tears’, ‘killing’ here alert the readers that what await them in these stories are not simply some ‘ordinary’ offense or ‘usual’ incidents of oppression or exploitations, but tragedies of bigger enormity, situations where people’s blood was spilled. In other words, the class trauma depicted here is an issue of life and death and definitely nothing less.

In fact, just as these titles indicate, what was being shown in all the genealogy stories is ‘a debt of blood that goes as deep as the ocean’ (a title of one of the genealogy publication in 1963), a collective trauma of the proletarian people who, according to these stories, had not only been oppressed, starved, tortured, persecuted, maltreated, insulted, humiliated, trampled upon, and relentlessly exploited, but also murdered, massacred, and carnally destroyed. That there must be at least one victim whose life was deprived by various evil perpetrators seem to be rule for every genealogy story. One very representative piece comes from the memoir of a nurse, titled ‘From a Slave to a Fighter in White Dress’, in which she recalled the tragic fate that her young female colleagues fell to before 1949: one of them being raped by a patient who was a high-rank government official, one being forced to marry a rich businessman as his concubine, and another committed suicide soon after being sold to a brothel by her rogue husband. ’And in case this is not adequate to make things traumatic, she continues to expose more horrendous details she witnessed in the practice of the hospital, that while hospitals in old time refused to treat poor patients because the latter can not afford the prohibitive expenses, some of them were taken in on purpose because the hypocritical medical ‘experts’ wanted to use these patients for experimental

purposes and many of them were thus killed during the process of being treated (V2, 93). To conclude this traumatic portrayal of the suffering of poor people in the old society, the author exasperated “how many young and vigorous lives have been ruined by this savage social system!” (V2, 93) and asked with indignation “Could this be a human world at all?” (92).

In another memoir written by a peasant, he recalled the destitute and agonizing life his family suffered when he was a child and then told a heart-breaking story of how his family was ruined after a fatal accident stroke. It was said that he was burned severely while serving as a tenant in the landlord’s household, whom he gave the nickname of ‘the Living Yanluo’ (or yama, the god in Chinese legend who was in charge of hell and who is famous for being extremely merciless, cruel and brutal and taking pleasure in inflicting pain upon people), and the landlord refused to lend him any money for medical treatment, leaving him to die. Deprived of any means of living, yet anxious to save their kid, his parents, who were already in their 60s, went out begging and his father was killed in a snowstorm out of hunger and coldness and his mum soon died because of sorrow and physical weakness. For the author, this tragedy not only left an indelible scar on his life but remained a debt of blood that must be avenged, as he claimed with a clenched teeth that “Two of my most beloved family members died at his hands and the bloodstain would be forever fresh.” (V1 113).

‘Death’ and ‘blood’ obviously functions as the transcendental mechanisms through which common sad stories about how good people suffer are elevated to a more dramatic and traumatic level where innocent and sacred people are being slaughtered. Through this transcendental mechanism the nature of the trauma and the perpetration was endowed with a much graver symbolic weight. For instance, it is very common for the authors in these memoirs to deny the humanness of the old society, as they frequently used terms like ‘hell in human world’ (V3 21), ‘killing ground’ □ V3,21), ‘slaughterhouse’ to describe the world they used to live in. Words and expressions associated with ‘killing’, ‘murdering’, ‘slaughtering’, were also frequently employed figuratively in various contexts to indicate how bad the exploitation and oppression had been. For instance, a prohibitive expense that denies the poor people of their basic substances would be described as ‘a price that is capable of killing’ (v1 20), a usury is called ‘a murderous debt that can not be cleared even if one sells one’s entire family’ (v4, 3), and a particularly exploitative business owner would be portrayed as “the one who slaughters without even having to use a knife!” (v4, 24). And not unusually, like in Luxun’s novel that I mentioned previously, ‘cannibal’ or ‘human-eating’ is used as the qualifying words that defines the ultimate evil nature of the perpetration inflicted upon the proletarian people. In a story, when the author told how the imperialist troops were sent to crack down a strike held by factory workers and many workers were shot to death as a result, he cried out indignantly: “the imperialists once again exhibited their true color of being cannibals!” (v3, 31) In an epilogue, the editor claimed that “capitalist class eat human flesh without even spitting out the bones!” (v6, 40)

The grim, hellish image of the perpetration is perfectly matched by the portrayal of perpetrators who take different yet equally dreadful forms in various contexts. Many times the perpetrators were compared to marauding predators in animals. For instance, one of the frequently quoted Chinese idioms in genealogy stories is ‘all the crows in the world are as dark as each other’, meaning that evil forces around the world are as bad as each other and they join together to bully poor people around (v1 67, 100, 104; v2, 24). But while this idiom could convey the ubiquity of the evil forces, crows are obviously too gentle and feeble to embody the real brutality and rapacity of the class enemies, and thus huge-size and cannibal beasts were more often employed. To expose the equally savage nature of all oppressors, for example, it was

rhetorically asked in one article that ‘can you find a tiger in the world that does not eat human beings?’ (v1, 67). In another memoir, the author compared the reactionary Nationalist government to “beasts that eat human flesh without even spitting out the bones” (v2, 24) and his own painful sufferings at the hands of different enemies as ‘once out of the mouth of the tigers, right into the dens of the wolves’ (v2, 3). In addition to cannibal beasts, venomous animals were also used to depict the virulence and malice of the evil forces in the old society. For instance, an actress grieved in her memoir that ‘in the old society, the thugs, rogues and gangs were harassing me as venomous bees’ (v2, 72); another author, recalling how the factory owners cracked down on workers’ strike with violence, claimed with anger that “venomous snakes will bite in desperation before taking in their last breath” (v3, 41).

Yet, it seems that even the most deadly and predatory beasts can not hold up to the comparison with the evilness of the landlords and capitalists class and therefore more widely adopted than the figuration of animals is the comparison of class enemies to the ultimate embodiment of cruelty and profanity in traditional Chinese culture. One most frequently employed symbol is “Yao Mo”, the Chinese words for devils and fiends, as shown by a subtitle in one article in volume 3, “the reactionary forces are a group of devils and fiends who were stinking with the odor of blood” (v3, 38). Another group of popular symbols could be found in the nicknames that local peasants attributed to particularly rapacious landlords. One particularly devilish landlord in a village, as the aforementioned genealogy stories showed, was called by the local peasants “Yan Luo in human world” (v1, 67) meaning the god of Yama, or the god in Chinese legend who was in charge of hell and who is famous for being extremely merciless, cruel and brutal and taking pleasure in inflicting pain upon people. ‘Ba Pi’, which literally means the ‘person who strips people’s skin’, is another most frequently employed metonymy typically reserved for ‘bad’ landlords who are notoriously rapacious and exploitative.

‘Remembering the bitterness’ genre, with the surge of Genealogy stories and publication as its climax, offers a very efficient mechanism through which the trauma-drama of class struggle was successfully built in Mao’s China. The huge-scale distribution and the wide popularity of the genre elevated individual tragedies onto the platform of a collectivity and brought the issues into the center of public discourse. Through the witness-perspective memoir genre, perpetrators and victims were concretely personalized, facilitating the symbolic identification of the audience. The dramatic plot setting, which unfailingly involves the sacrifice of lives and spill of blood, and the heightened weighting of the symbolic codes attributed to the nature of the sufferings and the enemies, both contributed powerfully to the recreation of the traumatic experiences of suffering and agony of the victims and the production of a wide emotional extension among the readers. Through the trauma drama thus constructed, through a process of recreation and identification, the audience either ‘relived’ the past, ‘redefined’ it as traumatic, or they would, especially for the younger generations, have the chance to be ‘traumatized’ by ‘experiencing’ and ‘sharing’ the hellish life of victims of the past. The diary of the a young PLA soldier, Lei Feng, a role model for all the youngsters in the 1960s and throughout to early 1990s, as selected in the Chinese textbook in the 1960s, demonstrates how powerful the trauma drama was in its impact among the public. In one piece of his diary, Lei was talking about the emotion he experienced after reading some ‘bitterness’ works: “How profoundly I could understand their sufferings and how indignant and aggrieved I felt when I read their stories! (quote?) I too was born in a poor peasant family and had been suffering unspeakably in the old society, just like them!” And it is very clear that such a close emotional and symbolic identification plays an essential role in building a collective identity based on class,

as Lei continues to express how he was determined to dedicate himself to the proletarian class: “I am always ready to sacrifice everything of mine, including my life for the interests of the party and our class.” (p.73)

### *The Trauma-Drama of Class Struggle*

What is extraordinary about the trauma-drama of the old society and class struggle constructed in Mao’s China is that the drama was not only written and read, but also performed and participated by real people on a daily basis. Since early 1950s, various nation-wide campaigns were carried out consecutively, that not only necessitates but also facilitates struggle meetings and other types of rituals being enacted at all levels up from the local communities (notes?). Among all the rituals, ‘speaking the bitterness’ is perhaps the most universally adopted and also exerts the most profound and broad impact on people. Emerging first in the first Land Reform Campaign as a form of struggle for CCP to mobilize the populace and to create a solidarity that is defined and strengthened by class boundary, ‘speaking the bitterness’ offers an efficient way where the ‘drama’ could be literally put on a show and the ‘bitterness’ got reenacted on a ‘stage’. In other words, ‘speaking the bitterness’ is to certain extent the performative embodiment of the literary genre, ‘remembering the bitterness’; only that it is much more powerful and compelling than the latter, as it rises beyond the cognitive argument and demands the acute physical presence, emotional involvement and performative action.

To observe how the ritual works and to understand its powerful impact on participants, we now turn to works that actually record the proceedings of such a ritual and a text titled ‘Struggling Han Lao Liu’, found in the Chinese textbook for junior high students in the 1960s proves very illuminating. The chapter was selected from a novel very well received in the 1950s and depicts a ‘speaking the bitterness’ meeting that occurred in a small village in the North-east region during the land reform movement led by the communist party in late 1940s. As a typical work of ‘remembering the bitterness’ genre, this chapter contains an extremely interesting co-presence of double ‘bitterness’ that is particularly enlightening to my research here. On the one hand, belonging to the genre of ‘remembering the bitterness’ makes the chapter a part of the general narrative building process of the trauma drama; on the other hand, with its substances relating the ritual process of ‘speaking bitterness’, it opens a live window to the historical moment where a trauma drama was being built on the local level.

What becomes salient from the very beginning of the article is the absolute coding and weighting of the chief antagonist, the target of the struggle, landlord Han. It was described that even before the ritual starts, women and kids had started to sing a folk Yang Ge song that they improvised on the spot. The lyric goes: “Thousands of years of hatred, and Tens of thousands of years of grievance (scores), can only be solved when the communist party comes! Han Laoliu, Han Laoliu, the people today will cut you to pieces!” The rancorous sense of animosity illustrated in the lyric made it lucid that the landlord had not only been coded as someone evil, but his evilness has been weighted to such a level that he deserves to be killed in a most relentless way.

When the meeting begins, the landlord was brought to the center of the courtyard where a certain kind of stage was set for the ‘struggle’, and one by one, people who felt that they had been wronged, oppressed or persecuted by the landlord came up to the stage to give a public testimony to the unforgivable sins of the evil doer. The ritual starts, with the first figure, a young man stepping onto the central stage. He claimed that Han had attempted to force him to be a

slave worker for the Japanese colonizers and when he refused and ran away, Han retaliated by sending his mum into prison who eventually died there. Then the chapter goes: “I want to take revenge for my mum today!”, as Yang San, (the name of the figure) bellowed with anger, people around all cried out, “Let’s beat him to death!” and started to push forwards with sticks to the center of the courtyard.” “Their chorus”, it goes on, was like “the thunder of spring roaring in the sky” (p.61)

What can not be missed from the scene is that the ritual of speaking bitterness is also a production of a trauma drama, where the tragedy that the victims had to suffer individually and privately was dramatized on the stage and publicized to an audience who share with victims their pain and distress and their hatred towards the common foe. If the bitter story told by each victim comprises one independent act of the drama, the momentum of each act would accumulate and eventually reach the climax of the drama when a collective effervescence is achieved and a stronger solidarity created among the whole community. Such a dramatic process could be found in the final act of the struggle described in the chapter.

When the last bitterness speaker Widow Zhang finished her story by yelling “Give me back my son!”, it was described that “men and women all pushed forwards, crying that they want their sons, husbands, fathers, brothers back. And the sounds of weeping, crying, beating and cursing all mixed together.” Indeed, the scene was so intense and moving that Xiao Wang, a young member of the land reform team who came from outside the village, “kept wiping his tears with the back of his hand”.

It is interesting to note that at this moment, when Xiao Wang emotionally identified with the victims of the village, the readers of the chapter would also have relived the trauma drama that occurred in the all-evil old society that they may or may not have experienced personally. So what we observe here is a dual process that parallel two mechanisms working at two different levels, one on the micro level of the local communities, where rituals, physical presence and intensified emotions produce a concrete and tangible collective effervescence that bonds individuals together into a corporeal entity, the other on the macro level of the wider ‘imagined community’, where the powerful textual recreation of a ‘common’ trauma produces widely spread symbolic identification and emotional extension among readers who are tightly united by both the past anguish that they believed they have shared, and the new proletarian class identity that emerges from the collective trauma and made the new China possible.

By examining the grand narrative which tells the founding myth of the nation, I argue that a collective trauma of the old society and class struggle was successfully constructed which plays a critical role in the narrative construction of the new national collectivity. Several elements contribute to the solidification of the trauma. First, the profanity of the old society, encoded with all the sense of evilness, darkness and profanity, endowed with an absolute symbolic polluting power that deepens the coding of everything that is associated with it, is very successfully established. Second, the trauma of the past was inseparably interweaved with a trauma of class struggle. And via literary genres of ‘remembering the bitterness’, and particularly the broad distribution and popularity of ‘genealogy stories’, the trauma was personalized and dramatized extensively and consistently in various cultural products. Third, the textual recreation of a shared trauma was ‘performed’ and ‘embodied’ by various struggle meetings and rituals that exponentially add to the force of impact. Through the construction of a grand national narrative, through a constant reproduction of the trauma drama in texts and in rituals, the bitterness and

darkness that characterizes the old society was being consciously revisited and relived. This perpetual recreation not only forms the solid foundation upon which the legitimacy of the new nation is built, but also facilitates the construction of a national collectivity through a symbolic identification and spiritual catharsis that can only be experienced via a narrow yet sacred salvation from an otherwise extremely traumatic fate.

*Remembrance of the War: Absent-minded Commemoration of the War in Public Sphere and Vice Chairman Lin's Commemoration Article*

In this powerfully built collective trauma of dark old society and ruthless class struggle, what kind of roles did the War of Resistance Against Japan play? How was it represented and memorized in the grand narrative of modern China? How did it contribute to the collective identity building in the new republic? It is my argument in the following sections that the grand narrative of revolution, with the compelling cultural trauma of class struggle at its core, preempted and blocked the emergence of the War as a collective trauma in Mao's China and I demonstrate that the process of 'preemption' has been worked through two cultural and symbolic mechanisms that converged to shape how the War would eventually be narrated and represented in the public sphere around the time. First, as I demonstrate in previous sections, the successful construction of the collective trauma of class struggle has been achieved with such sweeping scales and engrossing depth, that it basically left little symbolic space for the emergence of any other powerful cultural trauma which would inevitably compete with the former for symbolic resources and media venues; and this is particularly true for cases like the War, that, as I would immediately show by the second mechanism, claims an entirely different set of perpetrators, victims and nature of sufferings that is not necessarily compatible with the innate logic of the former. Second, and perhaps more importantly, the intrinsic logic and force of a collective trauma of class struggle rules that the world be defined and structured along a horizontal boundary of class and the collective identity be fostered along a line of fraternity that transcend any other border posed by gender, races, ethnicities, or nations<sup>131</sup>. This means that the fundamental conflict of the War, basically defined along a vertical boundary of national difference, runs contradictory to the predominant horizontal demarcation of the world, and to underscore the significance of the War would be at best irrelevant and at worst doing an inconvenient disservice to the legitimacy and truthfulness of the trauma of class struggle. The compelling force of the trauma of class struggle, therefore, entails that the symbolic significance of the War be toned down and that the identification of the enemies be put in an ambiguous light so that it would not be blatantly at jar with class lines. To substantiate my arguments, it perhaps makes sense to start with observing what happened in the public sphere in 1965, the 20th anniversary of the victory in the War.

Full 20 years after the end of the war, with the benefit of hindsight, one would assume that this could be an ideal time for the nation to come to terms with what happened during the

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<sup>131</sup> Evidences for such entrenched internationalism are ubiquitous. For instance, of the two huge emblazed slogans that hung on each side of Chairman Mao's portrait on Tian'an Men gate, one reads "Long Live the Solidarity of People of the World!", noted that "people" here, like anywhere else in Mao's China, had a strong connotation of proletariat people, or working people. Also noted that the other slogan of the two reads "Long Live the People's Republic of China". The juxtaposition here unmistakably demonstrates the ultra significance of internationalism and the horizontal way of interpreting the world that was so deep-rooted in Chinese society in the 1950s and 1960s. My summary and analysis of Chinese textbooks' contents on page 5 and 6 could also demonstrate how internationalism predominates in texts and media.



war, who were to blame, how horrendously people had suffered, how to rebuild the life of millions whose families and lives had been devastated, and what should be done to prevent something so disastrous to happen ever again. In other words, it was good timing to transform the profound sense of trauma and loss that still seared on the minds and bodies of millions of individuals into an indelible mark upon the entire collectivity, should there be any attempt or intention to inscribed a particularly devastating and traumatic war upon the collective memories of the nation.

Yet, such assumption proves to be ultimately counter-factual. A general survey over the media coverage and publications in 1965 reveals that none of the necessary elements that might contribute to the emergence and construction of a collective trauma based upon the War ever appeared in the public sphere. Indeed, not only was there not any attempt to build a traumatic collective memory, the institutional commemoration activities convened by the central government appeared to be rather limited in quantity and absent-minded in its intention. Browsing briefly through the General Catalogue of Publication of 1965<sup>132</sup>, one would be surprised to find that besides two monographs that were listed respectively in the Politics and Social Life and Military Columns, and a collection entitled ‘In Commemoration of the 20th Anniversary of the Victory in the Great War of Resistance against Japan’ that comprises four books<sup>133</sup> listed in the News Features and Profile Stories Section in Literature, there was hardly any special works published explicitly dedicated to the commemoration of the War<sup>134</sup>. The lack of commemoration works was even more underscored if it is taken into account that right after the News Features and Profile Stories Section where the collection was listed, starts the Section of Four Genealogies, and to pose a sharp contrast to the four books that were dedicated to the commemoration of the War, this section include 109 books whose titles cover six and half pages (Catalogue 1965, 127-133). And this is not to take into consideration the several book series published under Children’s Literature column, two of which were named ‘Class Struggle Must not be Forgotten Series’ and ‘Stories that Can not be Forgotten Series’ ([check the other publication?](#)) (Catalogue 1965, 510-511).

Another telling piece of testimony that demonstrates the lack of attention attached to the commemoration of the War could be found in ‘Editorials of the People’s Daily 1965’ compiled and published by the People’s Daily Press. Among all the 6 volumes of the collection, there was not a single piece dedicated to the commemoration of the War. While this does not mean that there was not any commemoration articles or publications at all (indeed, a most important commemoration article was first released on the People’s Daily as seen from the following discussion), it does very powerfully reveal what little historical significance the commemoration and the War had been attributed in the public sphere around that time. The very fact that People’s

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<sup>132</sup> The columns I observed include History, Politics and Social Life, Military, and the [News Features and Profile Stories](#) Section in Literature, and Literature for Children.

<sup>133</sup> The titles of the four books are respectively: *the Tunnel War*, *the Landmine War*, *the Yanling Team*, and *the Heroic Panjia Valley*. Showcasing the mightiness and bravery of the mass people in fighting against the invaders, it is quite obvious that these books were compiled first and foremost because they could exemplify the People’s War, the type of war that represents the best of the military and political thoughts of Chairman Mao, as will be shown in the following discussion of Lin Piao’s article.

<sup>134</sup> Quite a few novels were published in 1965 which writes about the War. However, the fact could hardly stand out as something noteworthy because these books compose only a tiny part of all the novels published that year, as is the case in all the other years, and they were not explicitly dedicated to the commemoration of the War. In the later part of this section, when I discuss the texts in the Chinese textbooks, some chapters of these works would be referred to because part of them were revised and selected into these textbooks.

Daily is the mouthpiece of CCP and editorials on it are usually meant to serve as the guiding book for all the provincial governments and local people to comprehend and implement policies and lines adopted by the central government, makes such absence more salient and the meaning more illuminating.

While the absence is striking, the contents of what had been published prove more rewarding to explore and one of the most significant documents is undoubtedly a commemoration article written by Lin Piao, the Vice-Chairman of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, Vice-Premier of the State Council and concurrently Minister of National Defense, namely, the military and political guru whose rank and prestige was only second to that of chairman Mao. The title of the article was 'Long Live the Victory of People's War! In Commemoration of the 20th Anniversary of Victory in the Chinese People's War of Resistance Against Japan.' It was first released on People's Daily on September 3rd, 1965 and was then quickly compiled and published as a monograph and translated into several foreign languages. Because of the author and the venue where it was first published, the symbolic significance of the article was beyond doubt. It would be the authoritative version that not only sets the overall tone for the commemoration activities but also shapes and tailors the interpretation and collective memories of the War among the public.

The article was composed of 9 sections that could be divided into two parts. The first 6 sections, 'The Principal Contradiction in the period of the War of Resistance Against Japan and the Line of the CCP', 'Correctly Apply the Line and Policy of the United Front', 'Rely on the Peasants and Establish Rural Base Areas', 'Build a People's Army of a New Type', 'Carry out the Strategy and Tactics of People's War', 'Adhere to the Policy of Self-reliance' are mainly dedicated to an almost technical discussion on how and why the CCP, leading its revolutionary army and the masses of Chinese people, could eventually defeat an enemy that enjoyed extreme superiority 'in both arms and equipment' (Lin 1965, 2) and win the 'great war of resistance'. The last three sections, 'The International Significance of Comrade Mao Tse-tung's Theory of People's War in the International Community', 'Defeat the U.S. Imperialists and Its Lackeys by People's War' and 'The Khrushchev Revisionists Are Betrayers of People's War' immediately connects the significance of the War to the current political struggle in international community, and mobilizes the Chinese people for the possible regional conflicts and strives that were seen as imminent around that time.

Meant as a grand narrative of the War perhaps more than any other genre, the document explicitly defines the historical significance of the War in the modern history of China. In one of the first several paragraphs, Lin claims

Of the innumerable anti-imperialists wars waged by the Chinese people in the past hundred years, the War of Resistance Against Japan was the first to end in complete victory. It occupies an extremely important place in the annals of war, in the annals of both the revolutionary wars of the Chinese people and the wars of the oppressed nations of the world against imperialist aggression. (Lin 1965, 1)

What can not be missed from such a historical definition is the triumphant tone that singled out the War as the victorious starting point for an ascending grand narrative where the nation was led from one victory to another. And what is more, according to the Marxist-Leninist tenets, the War was interpreted as a necessary, ineluctable and thus almost 'essential' stage in a teleological history where the social progress must be brought up step by step:

The War of Resistance Against Japan constituted a historical stage in China's new-democratic revolution. The line of our Party during the War of Resistance aimed not only at winning victory in the war, but also at laying the foundations for the nation-wide victory of the new-democratic revolution. Only the accomplishment of the new-democratic revolution makes it possible to carry out a socialist revolution (10).

Not only was the War deemed a necessary and vital stage in history, it was also interpreted as contributing tremendously to the eventual victory of the Communist Party and its army over the Kuomintang regime, because, as Lin acknowledged in the following paragraph, it allowed the party and people's army to husband their power, hone their military skills and struggle experiences, and more importantly, establish revolutionary base areas that were to become 'the springboards for the People's War of Liberation' (25):

The Chinese people's victory in the War of Resistance paved the way for their seizure of state power throughout the country. When the Kuomintang reactionaries, backed by the U.S. imperialists, launched a nation-wide civil war in 1946, the Communist party of China and Comrade Mao Tse-tung further developed the theory of people's war, led the Chinese people in waging a people's war on a still larger scale, and in the space of a little over three years the great victory of the People's Liberation War was won, the rule of imperialism, feudalism and bureaucrat-capitalism in our country ended and the People's Republic of China founded (3).

Such a historical definition, which interprets the War as playing a critical and almost 'positive' role in bringing up the eventual triumph and liberation of Chinese people, entails the construction of an immaculate hero whose virtues must be perfect and victory complete, and a defeated foe whose 'badness' must be definite but prowess understated. In other words, the binary code in this heroic, ascending narrative must be that of the 'David vs. Goliath' genre, instead of a helpless 'victim' vs. ruthless 'perpetrator' type, lest the latter would convey too much a sense of agony, suffering and distress that contradicts the heroic images of the victors and dampens the revolutionary optimism and heroism that was deemed as the soul of the revolution.

Predictably, eternal glory goes to the CCP and Comrade Mao Tsu-tung. Main part of the monograph composes an ode to the 'mission impossible' achieved by CCP during the War, who had, according to Lin, managed to build a national united front "that embraced all the anti-Japanese classes and strata" (Lin 1965 11), "compel the Kuomintang ruling clique to stop the civil war and co-operate for joint resistance" (8), "hold aloft the banner of national liberation"(7) against all odds, take upon their shoulders "the heavy responsibility of combating Japanese imperialism" (2), and fought courageously and tenaciously against the aggressors until the final victory came to their side. And of course, none of such heroic feats were possible if it were not for the sagacity of Chairman Mao who scientifically analyzed the contrasting features between the Chinese nation and the Japanese imperialism (8), wisely concluded that this would be a 'protracted war' (8), put into effect the correct Marxist-Leninist political and military lines (2), and formulated the most efficient strategy and tactics of people's war.

And loyal to the logic of a heroic narrative, the sacred protagonist must be endowed with such undaunted fearlessness and buoyant heroism that not a trace of tragic sense of loss or

suffering is allowed in the depiction even when it is confronted with ‘extremely difficult circumstances’ (Lin 25). A telling piece of evidence could be found in the following paragraph where Lin attempted to demonstrate how the development of the revolutionary base areas is not “plain sailing all the time” (Lin 24):

Between 1937 and 1940 the population in the anti-Japanese base areas grew to 100,000,000. But in 1941-42, the Japanese imperialists used the major part of their invading forces to launch frantic attacks on our base areas and wrought havoc. Meanwhile, the Kuomintang, too, encircled these base areas, blockaded them and went so far as to attack them. So by 1942, the anti-Japanese base areas had contracted and their population was down to less than 50,000,000. Placing complete reliance on the masses, our Party resolutely adopted a series of correct policies and measures, with the result that the base areas were able to hold out under extremely difficult circumstances. After this setback, the army and the people in the base areas were tempered and grew stronger. (24-25)

Notice here how the tragic loss of more than 50,000,000 lives were being dismissed lightly with a brush of ‘the population was down’, and how a series of most brutal and murderous massacre committed by the Japanese forces during the War, which later became notoriously known for its guiding line of ‘**Three Extinction Policy**’, literally meaning “**burning all, killing all and looting all**”, was presented as just another ordinary ‘setback’ through which the army and the people could be tempered.

While the eulogy to heroes was ardent and the construction of the sacred solid, the identification and portrayal of the profane side was not without ambiguity. Browsing through the monograph, one cannot but get a curious impression that the major antagonist in this document, which was intended as a piece of commemoration work for the War of Resistance Against Japan, is not Japanese imperialism at all. In fact, throughout the entire 68 pages, not a single war crime or brutality committed by the Japanese forces was mentioned, and except for a negative adjective ‘barbarous’(Lin 8) , used only once when the nature of the war was being discussed, not any characterizing profane code heavier than this was attributed to the Japanese forces. To make the camp of the enemy more equivocal, the former foe were depicted as harboring the potential to become the loyal alliance of the sacred camp, as Lin proudly claimed that

During the anti-Japanese war we... succeeded in converting not a few Japanese prisoners, who had been badly poisoned by fascist ideology. After they were politically awakened, they organized themselves into anti-war organizations such as the League for the Liberation of the Japanese People, the Anti-War League of the Japanese in China and the League of Awakened Japanese, helped us to disintegrate the Japanese army and co-operated with us in opposing Japanese militarism. Comrade Sanzo Nosaka, the leader of the Japanese Communist Party, who was then in Yenan, gave us great help in this work (30).

In comparison to the Japanese camp, which seems to verge on the border of ‘sacred’ and ‘profane’ and harbor the potential of being ‘sacredized’ from time to time, the profanity of the leading devil of the antagonist in this narrative, Chiang Kai-shek and his Kuomintang reactionaries, seems hard to redeem. One might have already noticed how in narrating Japanese forces’ attack on the base areas in 1941-42, the Kuomintang forces were identified as their

accomplices. Indeed, it seems the rule that the Japanese were seldom constructed as the sole offender without the accompanying profanization of Kuomintang forces; and more often than not, Kuomintang reactionaries were not only singled out as the main devil, the profane code assigned to them carries much heavier symbolic weight. The following words and expressions sampled from the monograph, all of which are quite explicit in their demonizing message, help to illuminate the point.

According to these depictions, it was the Kuomintang reactionaries who “had betrayed the revolution, massacred large numbers of Communists and destroyed all the revolutionary mass organizations” (26) after the First Revolutionary Civil War; it was their forces that “crumbled and fled into one defeat after another”, when the Japanese forces surged into China’s hinterland; when the CCP called for a national united front, it was them again who were engaged in ‘passive resistance to Japan and active opposition to the Communist Party’, suppressed ‘people’s resistance movement’ and carried “treacherous activities for compromise and capitulation” (15); and what’s more, it was Chiang Kai-shek, “our teacher by negative example”, who “repeatedly lectured us with cannons and machine-guns”, that launched ‘surprise attack’ on the part of the New Fourth Army located in Anhwei in 1941, “slaughtered” many of our “heroic revolutionary fighters” and brought “disastrous losses” to our units (17). Obviously, in comparison to the verbs or adjectives used to depict the Japanese forces which tend to be neutral in its undertone, the Kuomintang, as the antagonist, were portrayed explicitly as ‘treacherous’, ‘brutal’, ‘ruthless’, ‘cowardly’, and its crime of ‘massacre’ and ‘slaughter’ more unforgivable. Such a comparison indicates that there exists in the identification and coding of the enemies a sense of hierarchy, with the Kuomintang ranking as the top, irredeemable devils, and the Japanese imperialism much lower in the ranking and prone to be converted or salvaged.

Because of its particular literary genre and the current political needs it has to serve, Lin’s commemoration piece as a whole may not be able to stand for all the works that commemorate the War, however, two narrative and semiotic features that become salient in this piece, as discussed above, are to be found recurring repeatedly in most of the materials and texts that represent and depict the War in Mao’s era, including those that preceded the document in time. First, it is manifest that the War was emphatically narrated in a rosily romanticized and fiercely heroic pattern, or what Frye would have referred to as Romance<sup>135</sup>, which, by putting ultimate symbolic significance upon the eventual outcome of victory, localized and temporarized the War into a self-contented and transitional historical stage that had been gratifyingly sealed with a happy-ending and thereby prompted the continuous triumphant march of history along an ascending spiral.

Second, the article shows an intriguing sense of semiotic hierarchy and ambiguity that exists in the identification and coding of the profane camp of enemies which not only tends to rank the Japanese forces as a much lesser evil than Kuomintang reactionaries, crucified as the ultimate representative of all class enemies, but from time to time, renders the former precious symbolic possibilities for redemption and transcending opportunities to be allies and friends that has been absolutely denied for the latter.

Combined with the absent-minded and scanty commemoration of the War in public sphere, these features as shown in Lin’s article help to highlight the salient absence of a collective trauma making process centered on the War experience. They demonstrate that there

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135 As this is a term that was coined by Frye (????) in the context of Western literature, the denotation and connotation of the concept may not be able to convey the meaning of the situation in the most relevant and accurate way. However, it does perhaps help to showcase a general pattern with which the War was narrated in China.

has neither been a carrier group making trauma claims nor any conscious endeavors to build the trauma on a collective level. At the same time, two other essential elements to a trauma building process were also evidently missing. On the one hand, unlike the oppressed, exploited, massacred and trampled proletariat class as constructed in the trauma of class struggle, the identification of victims of the War were curiously yet thoroughly shunned, turned into a non-identity or non-existence; in its place, as Lin's eulogy to the People's war so vividly illustrates, any potential victims would have been constructed as heroic soldier of resistance, intrinsically rejecting and denying enactment of victimhood. On the other hand, unlike the unequivocal and absolute evil of class enemies, the brutality of the potential perpetrators in the case of the War, the Japanese invading army, was always posed in such a way as it appears not worthy of consideration in comparison with the ultimate vile of Kuomintang regime and all the class enemies it represented; the identification of a perpetrator group for the War was thus eluded, eclipsed and shifted back to the identical target of the trauma of class struggle.

While different texts might differ in their degree of convergence to the general pattern, and in some local and concrete derivative works, deviant representations might occur from time to time, in the following analysis, it could be forcefully demonstrated that these features as well as the absence of a traumatic construction are overwhelmingly representative and prevalent of the cultural framework in the representation and memorization of the War in Mao's era.

### *Representation of the War in Cultural Products*

Take *The East is Red* for instance, a song and dance epic of the Chinese revolution that debuted at the Great Hall of the People, Beijing, in October 1964. Made in celebration of the 15th anniversary of the founding of the new republic, the epic performance presents a vivid depiction of Chinese revolution in forms of songs, dance, opera and ballet and thus offers an ideal text for interpreting how the nation represents its own past and defines its collective identity to the public, including the construction of the War in public arena<sup>136</sup>. Among the five major episodes that compose the epic performance, each referring to a historical stage understood as critical to the revolutionary cause, the fourth one was dedicated to the War of Resistance against Japan, with the title of 'the Anti-Japanese Beacon-Fire'. Following the general pattern of the entire performance, paragraphs of 'explicatory words' were inserted in-between performances, which were usually recited by anchormen and women with passion and artistic presentation. These paragraphs serve to inaugurate the episode, connect between sections of performance as intermissions and also to contextualize the episode within the larger picture of

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<sup>136</sup> The significance of this epic performance is unquestionable. Not only was it one of the most spectacular extravaganzas in the cultural horizon of Mao's era, it has ever since been remembered as "one of the grandest art performances since the founding of the P.R.C.". Indeed, its influence among the Chinese audience has been so profound and enduring that even today, when its ideological messages cease to function effectively, its aesthetic and artistic values still play an important role in shaping the public imaginaries and compose an inseparable part of the collective representation. This point could be powerfully demonstrated by the broad popularity and wide acclaim it enjoys among the Chinese public over generations. There has been numerous publication of the music score or song books based on the original soundtrack since the debut of the performance and countless local reproduction of the performances among the mass people throughout China. The zest perhaps faded for a while since the end of Mao's era, but from early 1990s on until today, with the resurgence of the 'red', or 'revolutionary', cultural trend, there has been another long-lasting growth of the popularity of this epic performance, accompanied with the release of innumerable copies of CDs and DVDs that recorded the original performances, the countless remix of the original recordings, and innumerable renditions and concerts that reproduce the symphonic and choral version ever since the debut of the performance.

historical background. But functioning more than just links, they also seem to indicate a 'preferred reading' of the performance to the audience and thus play an important role in shaping their interpretation of not only the performance but also the memory of the War that it represents.

A browse over the 'explicatory words' of the fourth episode does illuminate the specific understanding of the War that the epic performance attempts to convey. At the beginning, it was introduced that the scene now had shifted to the period when the Red Army of Workers and Peasants had already finished the 'unprecedented' heroic feat of the Long March and the CCP called on for a united front against the invading Japanese forces. The tone of the words was then sharply turned into indignation as it claimed that

the Chiang Kai-shek reactionaries, however, disregarding the danger of extinction faced by the nation, insisted on turning the guns towards their own people, and persisted in their opposition to the Communist party. They **bowed and scraped** to the Japanese imperialism, conceded our territory and land to the enemy without even resisting. How many people have lost their beloved family ones and how many have been displaced as a result! The fire of fury was burning in the hearts of the mass people!"

After the performance of several songs and dances that showcased the indignation of the people towards the 'passive resistance' strategy adopted by the Kuomintang reactionaries and the heroic endeavors made by CCP to build base areas in the enemy occupied territory, another paragraph of 'explicatory words' were presented which goes like

Our Eighth Route and New Fourth Army fought with tenacity and bravery, bathing in blood on the battlefield, and holding back the barbarous attack of the Japanese imperialists. Yet what Kuomintang reactionaries were doing then was to besiege our base areas with their major troops, attempting to starve us to death! But all were in vain! Because the revolutionary people would not be daunted by hardships nor would they be defeated by embargo! Responding to the call of the Party and Chairman Mao, the mass people and our armies in the base areas were mobilized and started a momentous campaign of 'Great Production'! Adopting the policy of 'self-reliance', they would overcome any sort of difficulty and persevere in the War of Resistance!"

The message that these words are meant to convey is explicit, that the CCP and its armies are the staunch pillar of strength in the War of resistance and have been fighting tenaciously and bravely with the invading Japanese forces throughout. In stark contrast, the only deed that Chiang Kai-shek and his Kuomintang forces have been engaged is to undermine the nation's chance of survival by not only not resisting the aggressors at all, but sabotaging CCP's endeavor by assaulting the base areas and suppressing and killing revolutionary people. In this message, the significance of the War in itself was no longer the prior issue to be handled, rather, it was reduced to a piece of meaningful and particularly revealing backdrop picture against which the dialectically oppositional construction of the ultimate sacred and the ultimate profane, that is, the CCP and its antagonist devil Kuomintang, can be highlighted.

While 'explicatory words' convey explicit messages, the performance in themselves are also telling platform where the representation of the War was being showcased. Among all the performance in the fourth episode, one calls for special attention because it is the only piece in the entire epic performance that directly recreates CCP's fight during the War of Resistance, instead of its conducting a 'Great Production' Campaign or mobilizing students' movements (?). The performance is a dance performed by a dozens of dancers, accompanied by '*the Song of Guerillas*', sung by a chorus at the backstage. Though a small section of the dance attempts to reproduce the scene of a battle, the enemy never materialized and the major theme seems to be



focusing on the demonstration of the superior tactics of the guerilla soldiers and the merit of the particular type of War that had been advocated by Lin Piao in his article, namely, the People's War. Such a choice of the theme and of the way that it was choreographed was not without meaning, though it must also be determined by the needs and requirements of an artistic stage presentation at the same time. The absence of the enemy on stage downplays the significance of the identification of THE enemy, and thereby makes the scene consistent with the main message of the episode. At the same time, concentrating upon eulogizing the extraordinary fighting tactics of the guerilla forces also contributes positively to the heroic ascending narrative pattern of the entire epic performance. Just as the lyrics of the Song of Guerillas demonstrates, these guerilla soldiers were portrayed as being capable of conquering any possible adversities and finding ways to triumph throughout regardless the dangers and insurmountable difficulties they have to face:

We are sharpshooters, wipe out one enemy by only one bullet; we are pilots, no matter how high the mountain and how deep the water is; in the tight forest, comrade's camp is all over; on the high mountains, there's unlimited numbers of our brothers. If we haven't food and clothes, enemy will give us; if we haven't weapon, enemy will supply us. We are born in here, every inch of the land is ourselves'; no matter who want to occupy it forcefully, we will struggle with him till the end<sup>137</sup>.

Obviously, the heroic construction of the protagonist here is thoroughly optimistic and cheerful. They were empowered with agency and autonomy, and a mighty capacity to surmount any obstacle and prevail. Notice that in this heroic construction, there was even little symbolic space for a tragic hero, because no signs of suffering, pain or sense of loss, signs that would betray a sense of helplessness or vulnerability was involved. This is perhaps to comply with and exemplify the guidelines that advise the production of artistic and literary works representing Chinese revolution as stipulated by the Central Committee of the Party (?note), namely, the 'revolutionary romanticism' and 'revolutionary heroism'<sup>138</sup>, both of which entail not only an ascending narrative pattern that must end in triumphant note, but the portrait of immaculate heroes that remain undaunted and buoyant no matter how much pain they have to suffer and how much danger they have to face. Such a portrait could of course boost up morale and strengthen revolutionary spirit, but it would also preempt the possibility of the emergence of a tragic or traumatic reading, because the denial of human defects or signs of human weaknesses in these hero characters intrinsically rejects the construction of victimhood. Indeed, with an assertion as hyper-romantic and light-hearted as that being made in the lyrics "If we haven't food and clothes, enemy will give us; if we haven't weapon, enemy will supply us", who would even feel a slight trace of sadness or sympathy for these guys, but not want desperately to be one of them and enjoy the romantic experience of fighting as a guerilla soldier?

What had been shown from the analysis of the fourth episode of *The East is Red* is that the general patterns that were summarized from Lin's commemoration article in the previous section are also prevalent in the artistic representation of the War, i.e., the heroic ascending narrative that are characterized with revolutionary romanticism and revolutionary heroism, and the emphasis upon the construction of a primary enemy that hinges upon class struggle which

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137 The English translation was revised by the author, based on a version that comes from the following website: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guerillas'\\_Song](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guerillas'_Song).

<sup>138</sup> The two 'isms' are the soul of the revolutionary discourse in China and permeate throughout not only the grand narrative that tells the modern history but also creative works that contribute to the propaganda campaign for the revolutionary causes both before and after the founding of the People's Republic.



diminishes the War as being meaningful only as a stage background where the fight against Kuomintang was put on a show.

### *Construction of the War in Literary Works*

Such patterns were being reproduced extensively also in literary works published in 1950s and 1960s, part of which were being revised and selected into school Chinese textbooks<sup>139</sup>. Among all the texts taken into Chinese textbooks for senior elementary and junior high schools in the 1950s and 1960s, there were eight that tell about stories of the War, all selected from novels or other literary works written by writers under the leadership of CCP and published during the 1940s to late 1950s. And with the exception of one<sup>140</sup>, almost all the works focus upon stories of the guerilla forces or civilian soldiers in the CCP-led base areas, and particularly their fight and experience in the face of the ‘Annihilation Campaign’ launched by the Japanese forces, mainly during 1941-1942 (?).

Reading through these chapters, one could not but get a curious mixture of feelings that combines excitement, envy, sense of empowerment, and joy; indeed, one could hardly refrain from exclaiming loudly, ‘what an extraordinary and romantic life these guys had!’ and feeling an irresistible urge to go and become one of them. Such a response, which implies a strong sense of symbolic identification, of course, comes as a result of the picture of the War that emerges from the portrayal of these chapters. And the picture of the War, as depicted from these pages, is not only predictably victorious and heroic, but incurably romantic and rosy.

In fact, one theme that all these chapters share in common is that any conflict between the CCP-led forces and the Japanese invading armies must inevitably end with a thorough triumph of the former party. What is even more amazing is to find that in none of these chapters was there a single loss of life or casualty being mentioned or depicted on the side of the Chinese people; it seems almost a rule that ‘our’ victory must come at no cost of lives or blood, lest it will ruin the immaculate image of the revolutionary people. This was even true for texts that depict battle scenes that are admittedly bloody and gory. For instance, in the text titled ‘Triumph in the Pingxing Valley’, it was depicted that the battle lasted from afternoon to late evening, that the entire battle field was bombarded by the enemy bombs and the soldiers had to fight with their bayonets; still, the victory comes clean of any single word on the death or sacrifice made by ‘our’ side. In a more dramatic chapter, titled ‘At the Baiyang Lake’, the ‘zero casualty’ rule was

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139 My original data come from Chinese textbooks for senior elementary and junior high school published during 1950s and 1960s. There were altogether two versions published by the central People’s Education Publishing House, one around mid 1950s, published consecutively through 1954-1956, the other around early 1960s, through 1963-1964. Focusing on school textbooks proves to be more yielding than sampling directly from the pool of novels and other literary works being published because of two reasons: first, because textbooks must fulfill the most significant function of inculcating values and morals into the younger generation, and shape them into collective beings, the literary works and novels selected into them would have already been scrutinized and are considered as being most representative and consistent with the ideological and political message that the central authority endorsed. This makes the novels and literary works selected into texts most revealing of the way that the society wants the War to be represented and memorized by the next generation. Second, while it is hard to estimate the amount of readers of novels and literary works, the extent of circularity of textbooks was perhaps the widest, given the 9 year obligatory education system in China. This means the picture of the War as represented and depicted in the texts is perhaps one the most widely accepted versions among Chinese people.

140 The exceptional one is titled ‘the Triumph in Pingxing Valley’, selected into Book no. 3 of the Chinese textbook for elementary school published in 1955. The text will be discussed in detail later because it is almost the only one that depicts a headlong confront between the CCP-led Eighth-route army and the Japanese forces.

even extended to animals; a big cock that became the target of Japanese soldiers' chase, the latter of whom obviously wanted to grab it for a long-awaited treat of meat, escaped its doom unscathed. On the contrary, every single casualty of the War as mentioned in these chapters came from the side of the Japanese forces and the Chinese puppet troops, and their loss was usually quite severe, as demonstrated by the previously mentioned text about the battle in Pingxing Valley, where the narration was concluded with the following sentence "the bodies of the enemy covered the roads and the hillsides...the battle was won and victory belongs to us.<sup>141</sup>"

Not only must 'our' victories be tremendous and come at no cost, in these chapters, they also come with such convenience and ease; usually, the right thing happens about the right time in the right place so that all the conducive elements coincide to contribute to the eventual triumph of the people. In a text titled 'Yanling Troop', for instance, that tells about how a small guerilla dispatch team thwarted a round of attack made by the Japanese water forces, the defeat of the enemy was portrayed as just a piece of cake; as soon as the enemy characters made their appearance into the scene, they fell into the trap prepared by the guerilla soldiers and their fate already doomed. And predictably, the battle scene barely started when all the dozens of Japanese soldiers were erased with a light brush, and their much more advanced weapons and the impressive modern steamboat became the booty of a boisterous crowd of guerilla soldiers. In the previously mentioned text 'At the Baiyang Lake', to give another example, at the critical moment when three young women who hid themselves into piles of reeds were exposed and faced with the fate of being captured, handily, one of them came up with a grenade and efficiently killed all the three soldiers that chased them. And afterwards, even when 'Guizi' took revenge by setting fire to all the piles of grasses, they somehow miraculously escaped to safety without a scratch.

The incredible prowess and good fortune of the Chinese people as depicted in these chapters is juxtaposed sharply with the portrait of their antagonists, always constructed as being ridiculously weak, absurdly stupid and incredibly unfortunate. As a matter of fact, though they were most frequently referred to as 'Guizi', Chinese words for 'the devils', their images as portrayed in these chapters were far from being devilish at all<sup>142</sup>; on certain occasions, the image of 'Guizi' was so deprived of evil characters that the word starts to pick on it a certain comic connotation. To demonstrate this point, it is again worthwhile to turn to the text titled 'At the Baiyang Lake', where the 'guizi' were more vividly portrayed than the other pieces.

At the beginning of the story, several 'guizi' soldiers, who came to attack the Baiyang village, were depicted as being exclusively absorbed with catching a cock so that they could give themselves a treat; then as their very awkward and absurdly frantic chase was successfully

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141 Page 12, Book no.3, Chinese (Textbook for Senior Elementary School). Beijing: People's Education Publishing House. Texts translated into English by the author.

142 This does not mean, of course, that they were not unequivocally coded as 'evil' or 'bad. In the text titled 'the Tunnel War in the Jizhong Plain', after claiming that "unable to vanquish the people, Guizi started to use other attacking techniques, including fire, poisonous gas, and water" (124), it was commented that 'the means adopted by the Guizi were heinous indeed'(122). In the story of 'Er Huzi', 'guizi' were portrayed as so debased and conniving as to attempt to cajole the kids in the village to give out the name of the hidden CCP cadres. And in the worst case, in the story titled 'Yulai is still alive!', 'guizi' was even portrayed as torturing the little boy who they believed knew about the whereabouts of an injured CCP cadre, and attempting to execute him when he ran loose miraculously. Indeed, the encoding of 'guizi' as profane is made very clear and punctuated. However, at the same time, the deepening of such an evil never occurred, as I would demonstrate in the following paragraphs.

thwarted by the cock, which was personified as brave and tactful as its Chinese master, they came across three young Chinese women who hid themselves in the piles of grass. As “guizi” happily cried to each other that they found some ‘young pretty women’, they quickly met with their premature death by a grenade thrown to them by one of the Chinese girls. One could even share a bit of pity to these pathetic ‘guizi’, as they seem not capable of doing any serious harm, even less of posing any daunting threat to the invincible and brave Chinese people. Their cardinal sin exposed in this piece, the desire for delicious food and beautiful young women, makes them even empathizable as human beings.

If they were allowed to have feelings, these ‘guizi’ soldiers as portrayed in the above chapter would perhaps feel satisfied because at least they could appear as some comic figures with individual characters, unlike their fellows in other cases, who were not even given a recognizable figure, but reduced to an abstract number of casualty or blurred backdrop image of the stage where the bravery of the CCP-led forces, as well as the impotency and cowardice of the Kuomintang troops could be showcased. The following text ‘Triumph in the Pingxing Valley’ was a great example to the point. It is discussed here at length also because it embodies all the characterizing features analyzed above and thus represents an archetype of the narrative telling about the War.

This article is really a rare piece among the texts as well as other literary works because it deals with a battle scene between the Eighth Route Army with the Japanese on the frontline, which, historically speaking, is one of the few battles where CCP-led forces confronted directly with the Japanese armies other than in guerrilla warfare often conducted in enemy-occupied areas. The text starts with an introduction of the context of the battle, which, significantly informative, took up almost 2/3 of the entire text. While the Eighth Route Army soldiers were depicted as brave, fearless and eager to join the battle, the nationalist army was predictably portrayed as the dialectical opposition of the CCP soldiers, and the portrayal of their cowardliness and panic, and their acquisitiveness and detestable mug towards the civilian people almost occupied the entirety of this part of the text.

To illustrate how the Kuomintang troop had been corrupted and impotent from top to the rank and file, it was said that the commander of the troop, “even before he could see the Japanese army through his telescope, had already escaped with his troops... and he ran in a run for hundreds of miles before he dared to stop to take a breath.” (8) And to pose a sharp contrast, the eighth route army was depicted as heading straightforward to the direction where the enemies came and thus confronted the nationalist escaping soldiers face to face, when they were portrayed as “some of them lost their caps, some even their military badges... yet they carried with them the properties and chickens that they grabbed from the civilian’s household on their way of running away.” (8) To make their thug-like images fuller, in the next paragraph, the civilian people were depicted as complaining to the eighth route army their predicament at the hand of the Kuomintang troops, some with tears. In their words, Kuomintang were ‘worse than the bandits’ (9) and people ‘hated them with such a profound resentment that their teeth start to itch whenever the nationalists were being mentioned’ (9).

The text then turns to write about the strategic maneuver made by CCP commander Lin Biao, which predictably is composed of a long eulogy to the wisdom and talent of the leader and the sense of dedication and strength of the CCP soldiers. It was not until the last several paragraphs of the text that the battle was briefly narrated, and the real enemy of the battle eventually stepped onto the stage. But as we have observed repeatedly, their doom was prearranged and came along almost too quickly; and within a few sentences, the story already

ended with a triumphant tone “the bodies of the enemy covered the roads and the hillsides...the battle was won and victory belongs to us.” (12) It will be hard not to notice that in this ‘recreation’ of one of the most famous battles fought by the CCP with the Japanese forces, the ‘legitimate’ enemy were not even an active human player; rather they were presented like stagnant puppet figures without recognizable individual faces and function only as a necessary yet passive part of the ‘stage’ setting in the scene. And except for the label of ‘enemy’ assigned to them, no enthusiastic attempts were made to ‘construct’ the ‘evilness’ of the figure or to make the images more concrete or tangible.

With the discussion of ‘Triumph in Pingxing Valley’, we will be able to conclude our analysis of the narrative of the War in Mao’s era because the former is almost an epitome of the latter with all the characterizing features present. With unfailing and thorough triumphs that always come with as little cost as possible, and with rosy binary construction that reminds one of childhood tales where bad rascals will always be defeated by good people, the narration of the War is a perfect embodiment of the ‘revolutionary heroism’ and ‘revolutionary romanticism’ and serves loyally as a masterpiece chapter in the grand ascending narrative about the founding of the new nation. Defined as a hard yet necessary transitional stage through which revolution shall be won, representation of the War always appeared a bit absent-minded and off-the-target, because the literal enemy in the War are not necessarily the ‘legitimate’ and ‘true’ enemy of the people and the perpetrators ‘correctly’ defined in other more successfully ‘told’ stories must be given more symbolic significance. With the heroic construction of the protagonist that inherently denies victimhood, and with the hierarchy in the ranking of the ‘evilness’ where the Japanese forces were always toppled by the more ‘proper’ camps ‘class-wise’, such a narrative intrinsically preempts the emergence of a traumatic representation of War.

In the larger picture, the emergence of a traumatic construction of the War was hindered in the first place by the powerfully built collective trauma of the old society and class struggle which, as I have tried to show in the previous sections, serve as the very basis upon which the new nation and collectivity came into being. The absolute evil of class enemies and the unspeakable nature of the sufferings as built in the collective trauma leave little space for the portrayal of another evil of a similar symbolic weight. And the class abyss that divides the victims and the perpetrators made other conflicts that do not come along the line seem erasable. After all, in comparison with a landlord who would not hesitate to strip your skin and who therefore must be eliminated without mercy, a Japanese soldier, not capable of doing any serious harm and possibly also a victim of class oppression himself, is a much more amicable figure and demonstrates more potential of redemption.

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## **A Fire That Doesn't Burn? The Allied Bombing of Germany and the Cultural Politics of Trauma<sup>143</sup>**

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A lot of seriously bad things happened to Germans during and immediately after World War II. More than five million soldiers were killed, most of them on the eastern front. Those who survived the war in the east were often wounded, half-crazed or frostbitten, and were further decimated by the harsh conditions in Soviet POW camps. British and American bombers attacked more than one hundred German cities and towns, reducing many of them to a sea of rubble, killing around six-hundred thousand civilians, and making many more homeless. Millions of ethnic Germans who had settled in Poland or Czechoslovakia fled the onslaught of the Red Army, or were later expelled by the newly established communist governments. On their way to Berlin and in the fallen capital itself, Soviet soldiers raped altogether perhaps one and a half million women, often “in the presence of their menfolk, to underline the humiliation” (Evans 2009: 710).

This list of horrors is, of course, deliberately one-sided in that it ignores not only the endless suffering inflicted by Germans on their non-German victims including their own Jewish fellow-citizens, but also questions of causal and moral responsibility. Historians like Richard Evans have shown that such questions are not only been asked in hindsight, but were already on the minds of many ordinary people during the war itself. To some degree at least, Germans saw their own misery filtered through a sense of what had been done to others in their name. Given the context that has shaped the experience of suffering especially of German civilians, we believe it is interesting to explore how they have represented their own suffering, how these representations have been transmitted into the collective and national memory, and to what extent the political culture has been shaped by war-related memory projects.

In his influential lectures *On the Natural History of Destruction*, the German-born writer W.G. Sebald notes that some of the occurrences of the war, in particular the mighty air raids against German cities “left scarcely any trace of pain behind in the collective consciousness” (Sebald 2004: 4). We suggest to rephrase this statement by saying that the memory of the bombing war has not been turned into a national or “cultural trauma.” In other words, Germans do not remember the situation of their cities being firebombed and often completely flattened by identifiable actors as a psychologically searing event that has forever transformed and still defines their identity. The destruction of much of Germany is not remembered and commemorated to mark off this nation against others in fundamentally new ways. The question we try to answer is why this particular collective experience of suffering has not, in spite of its horrifying proportions, given rise to a cultural trauma. The answer given by Sebald (2004: 11) is that there has been a “taboo” on speaking about the devastation and suffering caused by the Allied air war. What is implied is that Germans felt no longer entitled to speak of themselves as victims as they increasingly accepted their image of being perpetrators of war crimes and the Holocaust. We believe that this answer is flawed. For one, the term “taboo” insinuates that

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<sup>143</sup> Acknowledgments: Till van Rahden, Sulamith Gräfenstein, the Press and Public Relations Office of the city of Dresden.

Germans should finally break the silence and lay claim to their own suffering, something they have done all along. In modern societies, calling something a taboo does not end a conversation but on the contrary introduces issues into the public debate in a sensationalist way. Sebald's claim also implies that there is something fundamentally wrong with German war memories. Yet, we argue that there is considerable controversy, incoherence and awkwardness, but nothing pathological or repressed about the way in which most Germans remember and commemorate the devastation of their cities and the death of civilians during the war.

In developing our argument, we not only agree with but wish to bolster Jeffrey Alexander's and Ron Eyerman's point that a cultural trauma does not directly flow from historical occurrences, however horrible they may have been. Rather, cultural traumas are socially constructed through narratives and other forms of representation. For Sebald, the absence of almost any trace of pain in the memory of the bombing war is something "paradoxical" (Sebald 2004: 4), because he assumes that there is a positive correlation between the magnitude of suffering experienced by a collectivity and the intensity of memories transmitted from one generation to the next. For us, such a correlation exists only to the extent in which a social and political consensus on the meaning of the relevant historical instance of suffering can be constructed and effectively communicated. Yet it is also true that a recognizable instance of massive suffering is always the raw material of cultural trauma. In fact, the most prominent examples of sociological trauma theory have so far been American slavery (Eyerman 2002) and the Holocaust (Alexander 2003: chap. 2). Slavery in the antebellum South was an instance of collective suffering that has been turned into a cultural trauma of successor generations of the same victim group of Afro-Americans. The Holocaust was an instance of collective suffering that has been turned into a cultural trauma of successor generations of the victim group, Jews, as well as for successor generations of (non-Jewish) Germans and other national membership groups who were the perpetrators and bystanders of the Holocaust. Our case study breaks new ground by focusing on an instance of collective suffering—the Allied bombing of German cities during World War II—that has not become a cultural trauma, *not even for the successor generations of the victim group*.<sup>144</sup>

In what follows, we give a short overview of the ways in which the air war has been remembered, memorialized and commemorated in postwar Germany. We begin by rejecting the widespread claim that the memories of German victims, in general, and of civilian bombing victims, in particular, were actively silenced in postwar Germany. Instead, we sketch out the memory matrix that in our view has underpinned and constrained practices of remembrance of the *Bombenkrieg*. We then turn to three case vignettes to shed light on the reasons why the bombings have not given rise to a cultural trauma. First, we highlight the case of Hamburg, which among German cities was hit the hardest by British bombers in 1943. More specifically, we are interested in how the rise of the Holocaust trauma has rendered the remembrance of the firebombing of Hamburg more complex, inconsistent and ultimately non-traumatic. Second, we look at attempts to draw analogies between the high-altitude bombing of German cities and the bombing of other places, in particular Baghdad in the second Gulf War (1990-91). This analogy allowed sections of the German public to mourn the victims of American bombs without explicitly reactivating nationalist or revisionist notions of German victimhood. Third, we briefly explore the memory and commemoration of the 1945 bombings of Dresden, in which neo-Nazi

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<sup>144</sup> This is true at least in terms of the cultural trauma theory as proposed by Alexander and Eyerman. In the psychoanalytic sense of the term, traumas might well be transmitted through certain communicative strains and failings from one generation of both victims and perpetrators to the next (see Bergmann and Jucovy 1990).



extremists, who would like to redefine the memory of the bombings as the new cultural trauma of post-reunification Germany, play a major role. The final section summarizes the reasons why we believe that memory projects aiming at the establishment of a cultural bombing trauma in Germany are unlikely to succeed anytime soon.

### **The German Bombing War Memory Matrix**

Since the reunification of Germany in 1990, every major broadcast or publication on the bombing of the country during World War II has been pitched as taboo-breaking. However, there has never really been a taboo on representing the suffering of Germans. In fact, this is a rumor or legend so ubiquitous that it requires explanation. However, like all rumors and legends, the idea of a taboo on representing Germans as victims is based on a small kernel of truth.

Our main point is that what has been forgotten is not the bombing war itself but its many traces in the memories of those who survived and documented it. Artists, in particular, began to draw, paint, wood carve, write about and take photos of the destruction often literally as soon as the dust had settled after the air raids. Ignoring an official ban imposed by the Nazi government, which was later renewed by the Soviet military authorities, more than thirty “rubble photographers” emerged in Dresden alone, some of whom like Kurt Schaarschuch and Richard Peter quickly rose to fame (Kil 1989). As early as 1949, Peter published a much-reprinted collection of photographs under the title *Dresden, eine Kamera klagt an* (Dresden: A Camera Accuses). Around the same time, German “rubble films” depicting the destruction of cities in flashbacks became a genre of its own (Shandley 2001). In 1952, Axel Rodenberger’s bestselling memoir *Der Tod von Dresden* (The Death of Dresden) was published. German studies scholars such as Jörg Bernig (2005), Thomas Fox (2006) and Ursula Heukenkamp (2001) have offered overviews of the range of artistic representations of the bombing war experience, listing novels, memoirs, anthologies, films, poems, plays, song texts and audio recordings that have escaped the attention of those who claim that the air war has fallen into oblivion. Especially some of the novels are quite well-known and have also been translated into English, for example Horst Bienek’s *Earth and Fire*, Bruno Werner’s *The Slave Ship* or Hans Erich Nossack’s *The End*—a ruthless account of the 1943 bombing assault on Hamburg that has been praised even by Sebald. More influential have been the diaries and stories of Victor Klemperer and Elisabeth Langgässer, who were both German-Jewish writers. Other works are noteworthy not for the literary quality but for their semi-official status. An example is Erwin Strittmatter’s children’s story *Tinko*, which was first published in 1954 and became mandatory reading for school children in the German Democratic Republic. Interestingly, one of the most acclaimed contributions has come from abroad: Kurt Vonnegut’s semi-autobiographical *Slaughterhouse-Five*, an anti-war satire written by an American soldier who was held as a prisoner of war in Dresden at the time of the air raids. In Germany, this novel has, among other things, been adapted as an opera that premiered in Munich in 1996.

Thus, what we have seen after the war was not a taboo on the remembrance of suffering but rather an irrepressible zeal to give meaning to the harrowing experiences of the recent past. Ulrike Heukenkamp has observed that writers often did not use a vivid, authentic language to describe the experience of being bombed, not because they forgot what had happened, but because part of that experience was a sense of panic, of emptiness, of loss of self that led authors to use clichéd metaphors such as “hell,” “inferno” or “Judgment Day” to fix the meaning of the bombings (Heukenkamp 2001: 470-72). She also points out that talking was less easy for the civilian survivors of the bombing war than for the exhausted, defeated and disillusioned soldiers

who returned from the front lines of what they saw as the “real” war. The soldiers were often compulsively loquacious and have left detailed descriptions of their war experiences in the memories of families as well as in literary texts. To the extent it was real, the silencing of civilian bombing victims, a majority of them being women, was the result of the restoration of the patriarchal family order in which men decided about what counts as an experience worth telling and transmitting (Heukenkamp 2001: 470).

Apart from the perceived lack of authenticity in literary representations and the dominance of the memory of front soldiers over the memory of women there is a third factor that has contributed to the notion of silence surrounding the human consequences of the bombing war. West Germans, in particular, were eager to rebuild their cities and their economy and felt that they had no time to look back. Sebald mentions “the unquestioning heroism with which people immediately set about the task of clearance and reorganization” (Sebald 2004: 5). This is something very different from a taboo although it may as well have had a silencing effect on memories. In this context, it is interesting to note that the German will to reconstruction, which in West Germany came close to an industrial ethic of high-performance fanaticism, bore a striking resemblance to the pioneer ethos of Israel. As José Brunner writes, “Hundreds of thousands of Jewish Holocaust survivors found, when they reached Israel after the war, that the pioneer-warrior ethos of the Jewish state left them no room to voice their suffering in the public sphere” (Brunner 2007: 105). Nobody would claim that there was a taboo on remembering the Holocaust in Israel. Yet, as this example illustrates, material and ethical imperatives can have the same consequence of restricting the ways in which collectivities remember their own painful past.

That the immense suffering caused by incendiaries and high-explosive bombs dropped from the sky was not forgotten does not imply that this particular memory fit easily into a larger, agreed-upon frame of public remembrance of World War II. In fact, all the controversies and struggles in recent decades have been about this problem: how to insert the memory of the air war into the larger process of meaning-making in a way that is in harmony with the self-description of Germany as a liberal Western democracy. Before we delve into some of the political struggles over the memory of the bombings, we want to outline the memory matrix that has guided activists and audiences in their attempts to represent those occurrences as broadly meaningful and significant.

We suggest distinguishing four basic positions in recent German memory struggles. Three of these positions share the implicit assumption that there was no alternative to the defeat of Germany and the Axis Powers by the combined military forces of the Allies. Obviously, neo-Nazis beg to differ on this point. But we are not aware of a position saying that the German people was able or willing to overthrow the government of Hitler on its own. There is thus a widely shared conviction that Germany had to be defeated militarily. Let us call this the “Carthage must be destroyed” consensus. A classical early statement of this consensus can be found in the preface to the first edition of Franz Neumann’s *Behemoth*: “A military defeat is necessary ... More and better planes, tanks, and guns and a complete military defeat will uproot National Socialism from the mind of the German people” (Neumann 1942: ix). Note that Neumann wrote before the emergence of a transnational Holocaust trauma which in retrospect has made the imperative to destroy Nazi Germany by military means even more compelling. Today, German historians and democratic politicians across the board basically agree on the connection that existed between defeating Germany and ending the mass extermination of Jews and others groups (see, e.g., Nolte 2008; see also White 2002). Differences among the following

first three discursive positions emerge only against the backdrop of this taken-for-granted consensus. The fourth position is an outlier, at least for now.

A *just-war position* has been articulated by military historians in Britain and the United States, and continues to influence in particular left-wing memory activists in Germany to this day. This position states that the air bombing of German cities contributed to the defeat of National Socialism and was therefore by definition legitimate.<sup>145</sup>

The *moderate anti-Machiavellian position* says that in pursuing highly legitimate war aims the Allies employed illegitimate means such as the indiscriminate bombing of entire cities. Moderate anti-Machiavellians usually refrain from using the term “crime” to describe the bombings. They are often members of the liberal academic and political elites in Germany, and have called for reconciliation and for strengthening international humanitarian law.<sup>146</sup>

A *radicalization of the anti-Machiavellian position* can be observed among those groups who claim that the air bombing of cities did not serve its alleged military purpose. There has been, it is argued, a growing disjuncture between ends and means in the final stages of the war. Radical anti-Machiavellians use the term “crime” to describe the bombings. Yet these groups, too, call for reconciliation and for a moralization of international affairs that goes beyond legal reforms.<sup>147</sup>

A *revisionist right-wing position* has been adopted by those who claim that the bombings were not meant to serve a limited military purpose but were launched to commit genocidal crimes against the Germans. These groups, some of which should be called neo-Nazis, are against reconciliation with the former victors, and in favor of bringing them to what they call “justice.”

The foundational moment and organizing principle of this memory matrix is the Holocaust. Although the notion that the bombing of cities might appear legitimate, given the unrelenting aggressiveness of Nazi Germany, had been formulated earlier, as the example of Neumann shows, knowledge about the unprecedented crimes committed in Auschwitz or Treblinka dramatically propelled this argument. In fact, the split that divides the memory matrix between those who acknowledge the military necessity of pain inflicted upon civilians (if to different degrees) and those who indiscriminately reject the air bombings as crimes is congruous with the cleavage between those who in principle acknowledge German responsibility for the consequences of the Holocaust and those who deny it. Our argument in the following sections is

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<sup>145</sup> See, e.g., US Air Force Historical Division, “Historical Analysis of the 14-15 February 1945 Bombings of Dresden.” Available at: <http://www.airforcehistory.hq.af.mil/PopTopics/dresden.htm>. The case for the effectiveness of the Allied bombing campaign has been made, for example, by Gregor (2000). Rolf-Dieter Müller (2004: 229) of the German Military History Research Institute reckons that the air attacks have shortened the war by at least one or two years.

<sup>146</sup> The origins of the anti-Machiavellian position can be found in the moral scruples that surfaced in internal debates in Britain itself during the war, as Sebald (2004: 14-15) has indicated. For details, see Taylor (2004: 360-66, 376-79).

<sup>147</sup> German military historians seem to waver between moderate and radical anti-Machiavellian positions. In a landmark publication, Müller (2004: 231) speaks of “transgressions” during the Allied bombing campaigns, but rejects the term “crime.” Yet the multi-volume history of World War II edited by his research institute concludes that the area bombings “massively violated traditional notions of morality” and were a “crime against humaneness [*Verbrechen gegen die Menschlichkeit*],” although not unambiguously illegal in terms of international customary law; in light of the ultimate goal, they were much less effective than the destruction of “key industries and militarily relevant target groups” (Boog 2008: 874-76).

therefore that the memory of the air war on German cities is closely intertwined with struggles over the representation of the Nazi past, and in particular of the Holocaust.

### **The Bombing of Hamburg and the Rise of the Holocaust Trauma**

There can be no doubt that individual experiences of being injured, raped or bombed-out as well as the overwhelming collective experience of the military defeat of Germany led, like all military defeats in history, to “a complete crushing of self-confidence” (Clausewitz 1976: 255) of the vanquished population. As a result, many people, not only Nazi leaders who acted out of a warped sense of honor, committed suicide (Evans 2009: 731-32). This was, of course, an option only for a small minority. Another small minority was mentally prepared to absorb the news of the “ignominy of the concentration camps,” as it was called in October 1945 in the headlines of a widely circulating illustrated magazine in Berlin (Kil 1989: 13). The vast majority of Germans, however, was occupied with the tasks of surviving and did not care about the past. At this juncture in history, it was by no means clear how future generations of Germans (and others) would later remember, narrate, and make sense of the war and the unprecedented destruction and suffering it brought upon the world. In spite of the vacuum of meaning Germans found themselves in there was not a situation in which the Allies could have simply impressed lessons and memories on the mind of the German public. Much depended on how Germans themselves would begin to represent and remember their past, including their own experiences during the war.

Let us look first at the example of the port city of Hamburg and the evolving collective memory of its bombing. Hamburg suffered one of the most devastating air raids in the entire war on Nazi Germany when the British Bomber Command under General Sir Arthur Harris launched “Operation Gomorrah” on July 24, 1943. This attack consisted of a coordinated series of “city-busting” night raids, which were supplemented by a smaller number of US Air Force daylight raids against shipyards and submarine pens. Altogether, more than thirty-four thousand people were killed within a couple of days (Thiessen 2007: 12).

Explicitly taking issue with Sebald, the young German historian Malte Thiessen has demonstrated that the postwar memory of the bombing raids, far from being suppressed, served in fact as an important symbolic resource for recreating a new sense of togetherness and local pride among the citizens of Hamburg. While immediately after the war even democratically elected officials continued to use Nazi propaganda terms such as “air terror [*Luftterror*]” (Thiessen 2007: 98) to characterize the bombings, the perpetrator-centered frame was quickly replaced by an almost exclusive focus on victims. From early on, political representatives from all parties, including the Communist Party, called for mourning a generously defined group of victims which included all the civilians killed by bombs, but also German soldiers and the inmates of Hamburg’s concentration camp in Neuengamme, where many more people were killed than in Operation Gomorrah (about fifty thousand). Significantly, this emotional and semantic shift from the accusation of perpetrators to the mourning of victims was in no way driven by the British occupying forces in Hamburg, although the German desire to regain a minimum of recognition and good will from their former enemies played a role (Thiessen 2007: 176-77).<sup>148</sup> What is also important is that most Hamburgers did not harbor any resentment toward Britons, a fact that was already noted by Nossack, who was an eyewitness to the air raids

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<sup>148</sup> On this subject of “memory diplomacy” see Etheridge (2008), who focuses on private and public actors in both West Germany and the United States in the 1950s, and their converging interests in constructing favorable “prosthetic” memories of Germany.

(Nossack 2004: 34; see also Evans 2009: 466). A perpetrator-centered framing of the bombings would therefore not have resonated with the public.

At the local level at least, a vibrant culture of remembrance emerged that garnered significant public attention. Unsurprisingly, the early memory of the air war was constructed in such a way as to suppress simmering collective feelings of guilt. Germans defined themselves as victims not just of the bombing assault and other horrors, but also as victims of the “hypnotic influence” of Hitler, as a former mayor of Hamburg has put it (quoted in Thiessen 2007: 109). What is indeed surprising and unsettling is that apparently there has not been a one-directional movement toward enlarging the circle of victims to be mourned. Thiessen (2007: 173-74) shows that until 1950 the inmates of Neuengamme, many of whom were shot, starved to death or sent to extermination camps in the east, were included in various commemorative performances and discourses, whereas later only German city dwellers were considered worth the tears and thoughts of Germans. This narrowing of the collective memory can be described as a consequence of the early cold war, which led to the marginalization of communist groups, who after the war had played a crucial role in keeping the memory of the concentration camps alive, although without any reference to what was later called the Holocaust.

The cold war pattern of remembering with its heavy emphasis on local bombing victims combined with an inhibition to discuss the motives and strategies of those who were in charge of the air war changed with the rise of a new generation that no longer had any direct experience of the bombings. The new “generational memory” (Eyerman 2002: 11) began to crystallize in the early 1970s. For the first time, officials interpreted the bombing of their city not in the context of the “collapse” of the Third Reich, but as a harbinger of the “liberation” of Germany (Thiessen 2007: 203, 388). This new moral term immediately brought back the memory of Neuengamme, a memory which at that time was already embedded in a much broader narrative about the Holocaust. The Holocaust as a defining memory icon and signifier for what Theodor Adorno (1998: 89) characterized as “a horror that one hesitates to call ... by name” emerged in West Germany only in the course of the 1970s.<sup>149</sup> Once established, the Holocaust narrative and the narrative of the liberation of Germany by the Allies reinforced each other, forming a new web of meaning.

In Hamburg, this shift in the mode of remembrance was to a large extent spearheaded by the regional Evangelical Lutheran Church whose leading representatives tried to marry two different narratives. The first insisted on the innocence of the German bombing victims who were described as having been sacrificed and even “crucified,” as the Austrian artist Oskar Kokoschka said, who contributed a mosaic (“*Ecce Homines*”) to the St Nikolai Church memorial in Hamburg (Thiessen 2007: 230). The second narrative represents German civilians not merely as victims, but also as (knowing or unknowing) accomplices to the evil that ruled Germany. In a speech given on the occasion of the inauguration of the memorial in 1977, the bishop of Hamburg reminded the audience of a plaque hanging at some distance from Kokoschka mosaic. The plaque reads: “Open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all the unfortunate” (Proverbs 31, 8). Germans, the bishop continued, did not heed the call and ignored the plight of “those people for which we did not open our mouth” (quoted in Thiessen 2007: 232). This way of

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<sup>149</sup> The Auschwitz trials in Frankfurt in 1963-65 focused the attention of the public more on the perpetrators than the victims. Michal Bodemann (2002) has argued that a major turning point in the perception of the Jews was the Six Day War in 1967 during which many Germans, including the media, sided with Israel. The Jewish state was compared to Prussia, and citizens in Hamburg, for example, donated blood for Israeli soldiers (see Bodemann 2002: 48-49).

interpreting the past gave a new twist to the perception of the bombings as some kind of divine “punishment,” – a perception that was already prevalent among some eyewitnesses (Nossack 2004: 12-14).

Occasionally, this dual innovation of representing the perpetrators of the air war as also being liberators, and the victims as also being accomplices of the same forces Germany had to be liberated from, took the form of what we have called the just-war position. For instance, in 1993 the editor of the influential liberal weekly *Die Zeit*, Gerd Bucerius, described his jubilant mood at the sight and sound of the bomber squadrons. “‘Finally,’ I kept shouting, ‘finally.’ In my view, the Allied had waited much too long before battling the world’s enemy Hitler” (quoted in Thiessen 2007: 327). To be true, this was quite an exceptional statement that did not resonate with many in Bucerius’ generation. To the contrary, the new mode of remembering the war tended to alienate sections of the older generations of Hamburgers, some of which voiced their anger and bitterness in the local media (Thiessen 2007: 334). While these voices were losing influence in the ongoing memory struggles, other voices made sure that the bombing-as-liberation narrative began to slowly disintegrate. At no point, however, did this disintegration affect the memory of the Holocaust which was rather increasingly consolidated as iconic and indisputable. Until the late 1980s we still find the vocabulary of liberation in the official language, usually attenuated by what we have identified as the moderate anti-Machiavellian position. Yet throughout these years the liberation motif had to compete with a radicalization of anti-Machiavellian positions whose advocates claimed that the air war was not an immoral means to a moral end, but did not contribute at all to the moral end of defeating Nazi Germany (see Thiessen 2007: 272-73, 400, 406).

As a result of these trends, the post-reunification period after 1990 offers a mixed picture. Partly in response to the contextualization of the air war and the enlargement of the circle of victims who have been included in the collective memory, public intellectuals and the media rediscovered the “taboo” on remembering German bombing victims. Since then, the term “taboo” has been used in different ways. Some usages are benign. Sebald, for example, only wanted writers to express themselves in an adequate language, and the public to be aware of the horrible things that happened on the ground as a result of the bombings (people getting stuck in the melting tar while trying to run away from the firestorm, etc.). More often, however, the interjection of “taboo” into controversies over collective memory is an expression of resentment against the inclusion of non-German victims in the collective memory, and a response to the growing difficulties of constructing an imagined homogeneous community of victims out of the ruins left behind by the Royal Air Force.

Furthermore, the “taboo” vocabulary is paralleled by a return of the “terror” vocabulary. This is a direct consequence of the radicalization of the anti-Machiavellian position toward the bombing war. Once it is believed that the bombings did not serve any intelligible military purpose, the term “terror” is bound to seep back into public discourse. The terror vocabulary is also a response to the consolidation of the Holocaust trauma which has made it even less legitimate to criticize the ultimate goal of Allied war effort than in the first decades after the war. Once the Holocaust was memorialized as “sacred-evil” (Alexander 2003: 50), victory over its perpetrators became sacred too. Thus, if Germans wish to avoid being symbolically polluted by the evil of the Holocaust, they have to phrase their opposition to the war by rejecting the means chosen by the Allies, or by questioning the relations of means and ends. This is precisely what happened in the 1980s in Hamburg’s tabloid papers and later in national mainstream media such as the news magazine *Der Spiegel* which in January 2003 published a series of articles on the

“terror attacks against Germany,” calling the assaults on Hamburg and Dresden “climaxes of *Luftterror*” (Thiessen 2007: 400-1).

Although these terms are taken straight out of the dictionary of the Nazi Ministry of Propaganda, we wish to emphasize that the recent critique of the Allied “air terror” has undergone a largely successful process of semantic de-Nazification in the sense that it is no longer part of a strategy to create a harmonious community of heroic sufferers based on the radical exclusion of the Other. The indictment of the Western Allies as perpetrators of terror attacks has not weakened the desire of the city of Hamburg, the vast majority of Germans and mainstream media to be on most friendly terms with the alleged perpetrator nations, and to be recognized as a member in good standing of the Western Alliance and the European Union. The return of a perpetrator-centered frame focusing on the “terror” spread by the Allies did not, for example, affect the planning for the fiftieth anniversary of Operation Gomorrah in 1994, which was organized in close coordination with the British Ambassador to Germany in a “spirit of peace, reconciliation and friendship,” as the mayor of Hamburg was eager to emphasize. When Prince Charles of Wales gave an appropriately fair-minded and conciliatory speech at the commemoration, about thirty thousand enthusiastic Hamburgers gathered to celebrate him, waving small Union Jack flags and wearing “Prince Charles” buttons (Thiessen 2007: 372-74).

### **The Air War as Bridging Metaphor**

Over the last decades, the Allied bombing war on German cities became included in the national and collective memory as a horrific and evil event whose relation to the morally worthy ends of the war remains controversial. The moral content of the bombing symbol is thus still contested. Scholars and citizens continue to debate whether the bombings were a necessary evil or a crime, and whether it happened to innocents or to bystanders and accomplices to another horrific and evil event, which is the Holocaust. There is a much controversy about the ranking of evils: for most Germans the air war, unlike the Holocaust, is far from achieving the status of a sacred evil. Still, even as a comparatively weak symbol of evil the bombings serve a moral function. Whenever the media report about the air bombing of other places in other wars, Germans tend to respond to such cues by remembering the bombing of their own cities. The German perception of the 1991 Second Persian Gulf War, code-named “Operation Desert Storm,” is a case in point.

When the US-led coalition launched a massive air campaign against Iraq on January 17, 1991, many Germans drew an analogy between Germany’s past and Iraq’s present. For instance, visitors to the town of Giessen near Frankfurt (where one of the authors of this paper happened to study at that time) could see messages sprayed on official city signs that read “Giessen = Baghdad.” During World War II, Giessen offered many industrial targets and was an important link in the German transport system, which is the reason why the city was bombed and almost completely destroyed on the night of December 6, 1944, by American B-17 bombers.

The sprayed message in Giessen was symptomatic for a much broader phenomenon that was new at least in the Western part of the country. Several voices from the peace movement against the Gulf War employed allusions to the German experience of being bombed by the Western Allies as a “bridging metaphor” (Alexander 2003: 67-76) to make sense of and mobilize against the Iraq war. There had of course been other American air wars before, most notably the Vietnam War, which was also opposed on a global scale. However the public controversy over the Vietnam War unfolded without any appropriation of specifically German war memories. Indeed, the perception of this particular war was still (or already) shaped by the fundamental

perpetrator/liberator ambiguity that was about to dominate the public discourse on the World War II bombings of German cities. Artworks such as Wolf Vostell's Pop-art collage "Lipstick bomber" gave expression to this ambiguity which was later completely erased by the German peace movement.

[insert "Lipstick bomber"]

Voices from the peace movement of the early 1990s varied considerably with regard to their level of reflexivity and elaborateness, and did by no means amount to a coherent ideological position. Still, in hindsight the peace movement turned out to be a political actor whose contribution to the ongoing process of German memory-making has been much more salient than its effects on global politics, although spokespersons of the movement attempted to combine precisely these two areas. The popular psychoanalyst Horst-Eberhard Richter, for example, argued that Germany had a special right and duty to push for strictly pacifist policies in the international arena because this country had been the source as well as the site of mass atrocities during World War II. Although the bombing of German cities did not figure explicitly in his argument, Richter gave a telling list of impressions about what he perceived to be the immediate results of the Gulf War: "The enormity of the sacrifice in blood of soldiers and civilians, the misery of those who have been bombed out as well of hundreds of thousands of refugees, the destruction of cities and the landscape, the poisoning of the sea and the toxic oil well plumes engulfing hundreds of kilometers" (Richter 1991: 15). Reading such descriptions it is hard to miss the vague similarity with accounts of what happened to Germany during World War II. This vagueness and ambiguity of Richter's lament was symptomatic for many other texts published in the context of the peace movement at that time.

What is most striking in Richter's account is the blurring of the distinction between victims and perpetrators in the context of the Holocaust and World War II. On the one hand, he clearly distances himself from any attempt to questioning the historical guilt and the political responsibility of Germans for the Holocaust; on the other hand he uses German war memories to seize the moral high ground for Germany as an international actor. Because Germans have suffered so much, so the argument goes, they are uniquely well-positioned to speak up against any war, whereas those who have suffered less are still caught up in nationalist and militaristic mindsets. From the memories of German suffering and victimhood Richter distills a spirit of moral superiority that distinguishes Germany from other, allegedly more traditional nations. The implication of this rhetorical move is that the blurring of the line between victims and perpetrators is matched by an equally problematic blurring of "temporal and spatial boundaries," as Andreas Huyssen (2003: 163) has pointed out. Like many other Germans, members of the peace movement continued to define their identity largely in *temporal* terms, based on the difference between the democratic present and an ominous, highly charged, anti-democratic past. At the same time, however, this repudiation of the past was *spatialized* and turned into a rejection of contemporary nations such as, in particular, the United States of America.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> The arbitrariness of these rhetorical stances became obvious when in 1999 the German government successfully enacted a reversal of the analogical framework introduced by the peace movement by deciding to join the Kosovo intervention on the ground that Serbia was planning a "second Auschwitz" against Kosovo Albanians. Here again we saw the spatial localization of an evil retrieved from the collective memory and projected onto a real place which then was bombed by the German Air Force and others (see Heins 2007).



Our reading of the ambiguities of the German peace movement was already reflected by some of the protagonists themselves who felt that the movement was maneuvering in murky waters. Thus, Jörn Böhme, who had been an activist of the peace movement in the 1980s, argued that the attitudes of the German left, and in particular the peace movement, during the Gulf War were fraught with “dilemmas” (Böhme 1991: 215) of the kind discussed above. Every attempt to define an unambiguous pacifist position in Germany, Böhme argued, was marred by an unconscious desire to escape those dilemmas. While mapping out a complex field of mutually contradictory loyalties and self-canceling positions, he also mentioned the memory of the air war, wondering “to what extent the bombing of Dresden and other cities has been tabooed among young Germans, on the ground that the older generation used Dresden to repress Auschwitz, with the consequence that now perhaps the lack of mourning is projected collectively on the people of Iraq as an innocent victim of ‘the Allies’” (Böhme 1991: 223). Similarly, Gert Schäfer interpreted the discourse of the peace movement in terms of a “return of the repressed.” In a much-quoted essay he noted that “after a long time I heard once again every single air plane, a noise that is normally submerged in the sounds of everyday life. Memories of bombers and attacks by low-flying aircraft returned, memories of nights spent in bomb shelters, of fires, debris, dead people and my child gas mask” (Schäfer 1992: 9). It is important to stress that both Böhme and Schäfer talk about the memories of the bombings in strictly psychological, non-constructivist terms of a “return of the repressed.” This is significant because the intrusion of bombing memories into the public discourse is not described as the result of a lifting of a communicative taboo, but as the result of an allegedly natural psychic dynamic.

We reject this interpretation as much as we have rejected the taboo thesis. As far as the public sphere is concerned, memories of the bombing of German cities did not “return” like a jack-in-the-box jumping at us. Rather, these memories were consciously revived by activists, although under inherited symbolic circumstances shaped by previous memory projects. In the early 1980s, for example, activists and the media began to circulate the slogan of the “nuclear holocaust” (Thiessen 2007: 256) to associate the memory of the destruction of Hamburg and other cities with two other evils at once: the cold war threat of nuclear war, and the systematic extermination of the European Jews captured by the rising Holocaust symbol. In this case the resurrection of the memory of the air war was short-lived: it vanished together with the Soviet Union and the cold war constellation, which again makes clear that it is misleading to speak of a past forcing itself onto the present.

We conclude that Dan Diner (1991) was probably right when he interpreted the protests against the Gulf War as an expression of both continuity and change in the parameters of political protest in post-reunification Germany. On the one hand, he commended the peace movement, not the least for the ability of some of its representatives to reflect upon the movement’s inherent anti-American ideological grounding. On the other hand, he was concerned about what began to take shape as an effort to mobilize memories of German victimhood in the protest against the US campaign in Iraq, a campaign that should have been judged and criticized on its own terms. In 1990 and 1991 this mobilization was still very much dominated by the ideological debates within the West German left and the peace movement that grew out of it (Böhme 1991; Kloeke 2007). Twelve years later, on the occasion of the protests against yet another US-led war in Iraq, however, the memory symbol of “Dresden” could no longer be found occupying a particular position at one end of the ideological left-right spectrum. In hindsight, the German peace movement has indeed earned the dubious credit of having turned the bombing war on Germany into a free-floating symbol that allowed the public to understand

and rally against the successors of the same Allies which had devastated, but also liberated Germany in World War II.

At the same time, though, this symbol, precisely because it is free-floating, should not be regarded as pointing toward an underlying cultural trauma, because it is not really connected to issues of collective identity. Memories can be mobilized in conflicts over the self-definition of the collectivity as well as referred to in struggles over resources that have no inner connection to the issues resurrected from memory (Langenohl 2001). Although most conflicts over memory have both a strategic and an identity dimension, from the point of view of cultural trauma theory the crucial question is whether memory offers a narrative that is directed toward the in-group in such a way as to shape its collective identity (Eyerman 2002: 70). If that is not the case, a memory may still serve as a symbolic capital of sorts that is used to win over an audience for a particular cause. The “achievement” of the peace movement has been the creation of a token of symbolic capital out of the memory of the bombings which now can be used for the public dramatization of issues and for adding moral weight to political arguments and positions, but which cannot be regarded as having any identity-constitutive meaning of its own.

### **Dresden and the Clash of Memories**

More consequential for German memory struggles than any American-led war in recent decades has been the reunification of Germany itself. To be sure, this event did not fundamentally reconfigure what we have called the bombing war memory matrix. In fact, the institutionalization of the Holocaust trauma continued. More memorials to Nazi crimes were unveiled, the most spectacular of them being the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in central Berlin which was inaugurated and opened to the public in 2005. Also, empirical research shows that contemporary Germans of all age groups continue to identify Nazism with evil and recognize the Holocaust as “the superlative historical genocide” (Langenbacher 2008: 65). At the same time, however, the inclusion of the former German Democratic Republic strengthened certain forces and trends that were already visible in West Germany. In the communist East, the memory of the bombing war was omnipresent and consciously evoked by the state. Many cities bore the scars of the war into the 1980s, with wastelands of rubble and facades of buildings pockmarked by bullet holes that served as constant reminders of the past. While the relative slowness of reconstruction made sure that popular war memories would linger on, the official public discourse politicized those memories in accordance with the binary cold war logic.

From the mid-1950s onward the East German discourse on the bombing of Germany focused on the eastern city of Dresden which was destroyed on February 13 and 14, 1945, by a highly controversial air campaign called “Operation Thunderclap.” The bombing of Dresden was the most catastrophic attack on a German city since Hamburg. Twenty-five thousand people were killed, most of them in the first two out of three night raids carried out by British bombers. Dresden had been a city that prided itself for her rich culture, but also a Nazi stronghold and an important hub for moving military personnel and supplies to the east. Because of its strategic position, the campaign was planned in London as a way to ease the Red Army’s advance in Germany (Taylor 2004: 190-92). However, from our perspective, the most interesting aspect of this unforgotten campaign does not lie in such empirical details. The intriguing phenomenon is rather that the bombing almost instantly morphed from a military fact into a powerful moral signifier of evil. As the British historian Frederick Taylor (2004: 372) writes, the destruction of Dresden began “to exercise an independent power of its own, one that could not but affect the Allies’ claims to absolute moral superiority.” According to Taylor, this transformation must

partly be credited to the efforts of Joseph Goebbels and his Ministry of Propaganda that lost no time manipulating the figure of dead (by adding a zero) and denouncing the raids as a “barbarian” terror attack on an innocent city that represented the epitome of European “culture” without having any military value.

Much of this straightforward coding of the events survived the end of Nazism with only minor permutations. Intellectuals and the government of East Germany offered a narrative of the bombing of Dresden that was based on a small set of symbolic equivalences between the National Socialism and the Western Allies. The perpetrators of the bombings were analogically associated with the Nazis, and victims were represented in analogy to the victims of Nazism (although the Jews were not named). East Germans also perpetuated the myth of the innocence of Dresden as a place of no military or industrial importance where people loved the arts and kept themselves aloof from the demands of politics. Hence the trope of the “senselessness” of the air raids (see, e.g., Kil 1989: 19). For cold war propaganda purposes the attackers were also called “Anglo-Americans,” although in this particular case the US Air Force had only been a junior partner in a largely British and Commonwealth operation. However, the role of the United States was seen as particularly frightening in light of the even worse fate that could have befallen Dresden: becoming the target of the first atomic bomb. According to a widely believed story line offered by communist party intellectuals, this possibility was thwarted only by the fast advancing Red Army, which saved the people of Dresden. Although empirically unsubstantiated, this doomsday scenario became a center piece of the East German collective memory of the air war (Taylor 2004: 454-56; Widera 2005).

In short, the East German discourse lifted the assault on Dresden out of the overall context of the war, invested it with immense moral significance and created a salvatory narrative that idolized the Red Army while polluting the British and American air forces as apocalyptically evil.

<u>Dresden</u>	<u>Anglo-American air forces</u>
Victim	Perpetrators
Culture	Barbarism
Communism	Capitalism
peace loving	war mongering
saved by Red Army	threatening annihilation

After reunification, this narrative entered the mainstream of German public culture, where some of its aspects such as the savior role attributed to the Soviet Union have been submerged, while other aspects have affected the collective memory. It is worth noting, though, that the East German discourse did not contradict the core assumption of the West German memory matrix that Germany had to be liberated by foreign armies. On the other hand, the Holocaust did not figure prominently, if at all, in East German memory. The place of the sacred-evil remained empty in East Germany, even if the communist propaganda tried for some time to assign this place to the imperialist West. Yet this assignment was predicated on the changing geopolitical situation and was thus inherently unstable.<sup>151</sup> The atomic bomb also might have been a candidate, but since the Soviet Union also maintained a considerable nuclear arsenal, only

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<sup>151</sup> As the cold war was winding down in the 1980s, East German historians like Olaf Groehler softened their critique of the Allied bombing considerably (see Fox 2006).

the actual dropping of two bombs by the US Air Force over Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945 could be referred to as epitomizing modern evil. This, however, was a much weaker symbol than the Holocaust, and did not lead to consequential institutional changes in society and state. The survivors of the nuclear attack were not supported in any concrete way nor did Japan as a victim nation play a particular role in communist foreign policy. East Germany is also not known for ever having opposed nuclear weapons as such.

If East German public discourses after reunification did not radically disrupt the matrix underlying the remembrance of the bombing war, how did they affect collective memory and practices of commemoration as well as the chances for constructing a cultural trauma? To find a preliminary answer, we now turn briefly to the ways in which the destruction of Dresden has been commemorated in recent times in Dresden itself.

After reunification, both Dresden and the province of Saxony, of which Dresden is the regional capital city, were governed by the liberal-conservative Christian Democratic Party (CDU). The new ruling political elite was, of course, determined to promote reconciliation with the West, and made sure that the annual commemoration was organized and scripted accordingly. One of the early steps taken by the city of Dresden was the decision of reconstruct the eighteenth-century Lutheran Frauenkirche (Church of Our Lady). This decision was controversial because the heap of ruins to which the cathedral had been reduced by the 1945 air raids was conserved under communist rule as a war memorial, similar to the ruins of Coventry Cathedral in England which was destroyed by German bombers. Supporters of the reconstruction, who were aware that the removal of the ruins would be interpreted by some as a “sacrilege” (Blaschke 1990), nevertheless argued that it was more important to allow people to forget and to leave behind the horrors of the past of which the dark stones of the ruins were a vivid reminder.

Today, the reopened cathedral is being touted by German as well as British representatives as a transnational symbol of “reconciliation” between former enemies. “Reconciliation” is indeed one of the key words of a commemorative discourse that no longer differs significantly from the discourse on the bombing of Hamburg. In both cities we have seen two different narratives of the air war in recent years, one that describes the air raids as a symbol of the madness of war in general, or even as a symbol of the destructiveness of modernity as such. A former mayor of Dresden, for example, used the rhetorical device of metonymy to contextualize the memory of the bombing. The attack on Dresden was said to be “senseless” and “barbarian,” but no more senseless and barbarian than “the entire war,” which was started by Germany before taking on a life of its own.<sup>152</sup> This narrative amalgamates the different tactics and strategies used by the Allied and the Axis Powers, as well as their human consequences, into one single emblem of absurdity. In 2005, the city held an event where messages written by victims of war from Dresden, Baghdad, Guernica, New York, Hiroshima, Grozny and other places were read out in public to evoke the idea of a global “community of victims.” Around the same time, the mayor of Hamburg gave a commemorative speech in which he interpreted the firebombing of his city not as a consequence of decisions taken by countries which had been attacked before, but as the result of a breach of “the dams of our civilization” that led Europe to abandon herself to the destructive potentials of technology and modernity (quoted in Thiessen 2007: 421-22; for the “dams of civilization” metaphor see Freud 1905: 178). To the extent that it

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<sup>152</sup> Address by Ingolf Rossberg, Dresden, February 13, 2006 (on file with authors).

radically downplays the role of agency and responsibility in modern society, this narrative could be called postmodern.

At the same time, there is a second narrative centered on the conviction that historical occurrences such as the bombing of cities should be explained not as expressions of a self-propelling modernity that got out of control, but as consequences of motivated human action. Since the 1980s much of the memory work done in Hamburg, for example, has been inspired by a causal story which regarded Nazi Germany as the source of a violence that finally **boomeranged**. Hosea 8, 7—“For they have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind”—was therefore a much quoted reference. This way of distributing causal and moral responsibilities across different actors is by no means alien to the public discourse in Dresden. In February 2009, Helma Orosz, who had been elected mayor only a few months ago, addressed a crowd at the city center emphasizing that “Like Dresden, thousands of other human places had to sink to ashes before the criminal Nazi racket that started the war could be stopped.”<sup>153</sup> The day before, she gave a speech at the Heidefriedhof (Heath Cemetery) in Dresden where many of the remains of the bombing victims are buried, insisting that “It was Germany who forced the nations attacked by her to fight back in a life and death struggle.”<sup>154</sup> Other representatives of the city have called upon the citizens to remember their former Jewish fellow-citizens who were persecuted and deported from Dresden like everywhere else in German-ruled territories. Recalling specifically the fate of Victor Klemperer, a Jewish citizen and professor of literature who survived the Nazi period in hiding, former mayor Lutz Vogel mentioned that Klemperer had barely escaped Hitler’s henchmen: “The air raid on February 13, 1945, had saved his life!”<sup>155</sup> Civic groups including a survivors’ association have also invoked the double image of German civilians as victims/accomplices, which corresponds to the perpetrator/liberator ambiguity in the perception of the Allies including their bomber pilots.<sup>156</sup>

The crucial difference between East and West, Dresden and Hamburg, can be gleaned from the fact that there is virtually no commemorative speech by a democratic politician in Dresden that does not address the pervasive counter-discourse produced by extreme right-wing groups in society and their political parties. At the heart of this memory discourse is no longer what Adorno (1998: 90) ridiculed as the “quite common move of drawing up a balance sheet of guilt ..., as though Dresden compensated for Auschwitz.” Instead of only minimizing the Holocaust by pointing to alleged crimes of the Allies, the new revisionist discourse directly analogizes “Dresden” to the Holocaust by calling the Allied bombing of German cities a “bombing holocaust.” This new trope has the advantage of not denying the Holocaust (which is a criminal offense in Germany) but rather treating it as a floating signifier that becomes truly meaningful only when attached to the memories of the air war. The career of the “bombing holocaust” trope can partly be traced back to Jörg Friedrich’s bestselling book *The Fire: The Bombing of Germany, 1940-1945*, in which the author establishes two equivalences: he calls the British Bomber Command and the aircrews dropping bombs over Germany “*Einsatzgruppen*”—the official name of the German death squads who rounded up and killed Jews and other groups

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<sup>153</sup> Speech by Helma Orosz, Altmarkt Dresden, February 14, 2009 (on file with authors).

<sup>154</sup> Speech by Helma Orosz, Heidefriedhof Dresden, February 13, 2009 (on file with authors).

<sup>155</sup> Speech by Lutz Vogel, First Mayor, Neumarkt Dresden, February 13, 2008 (on file with authors).

<sup>156</sup> “At the same time the history of the city shows the co-responsibility also of the citizens of Dresden for the inhumane, criminal policies of the National Socialist power holders,” says the mission statement of a group of local history activists called “13 February 1945.”

throughout Europe; and he equates the basements where people died during the air attacks “crematoria” (Friedrich 2006). Still, Friedrich does not see himself as a right-wing author. He believes that the Allied air war was a unique crime and should not be compared to more recent American wars. Thus, while drawing an analogy between the Holocaust—the systematic extermination of a people which was stigmatized as biologically defective and born evil—and military actions that were (rightly or wrongly) believed to contribute to the defeat of the regime responsible for the Holocaust, Friedrich dissociates other, more recent bombing campaigns from the one launched against Germany. Unlike both the peace movement and right-wing extremists who use the bombing memory as a tool to mobilize people against other wars fought by Germany’s former enemies, Friedrich mentions that he even supported the 2003 war in Iraq (see the “Afterword for American and British Readers” in Friedrich 2006: 483).

[insert photos “bombing holocaust” etc]

The right-wing manner of remembrance is passionately rejected by the democratic political parties as polluting the founding ideals of reunified Germany, but also of its newly democratized eastern provinces. It is seen as “disgracing” Dresden and “sully[ing] the memory of its dead.”<sup>157</sup> At the same time, local activists admit that the right-wing memory project resonates with sections of the people in Dresden. Whereas in Hamburg we have seen a notable decline of public controversies over the meaning of the air raids on the city as well as over the appropriate mode of remembering them (Thiessen 2007: 457), Dresden has become a veritable cauldron of memory wars. In 2009, the annual “commemorative march” organized by local right-wing extremists attracted more than 6,000 like-minded people from all over Germany and some neighboring countries. Even official events held by the city of Dresden are dominated by these groups. Their countless wreaths, for example, completely drown out the wreaths laid by ordinary citizens or German and British dignitaries at the Heath Cemetery. In the past, some invited British guests like the historian Frederick Taylor had to be protected by security guards while others, for example the Holocaust survivor Ruth Kluger, who is a former professor at the University of California, declined an invitation explaining that she could handle a bunch of right-wing hecklers but not the sight of thousands of neo-Nazis marching on German streets. Unsurprisingly, this disturbing situation has triggered a cycle of counter-mobilizations by left-wing radicals who have begun to stage their own performances on the occasion of the anniversary of the bombings. Some of these groups adopt a provocative, almost carnivalesque version of the just-war position that is perhaps best illustrated by the slogan “Bomber Harris Superstar—Thanks to You from the Red Antifa [Antifascist Action].”

[insert photo]

It is easy to understand why none of the actors involved in the annual Dresden bombing remembrance spectacle achieves what Alexander (2004) calls a “fused performance,” which would be characterized by the presence an audience identifying with the actors and by cultural scripts appearing to be true. Understandably, many citizens simply stay physically away from a scene dominated by radical memory activists from the opposite ends of the political spectrum, monitored by helicopters hovering over the city and kept in check by thousands of police officers

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<sup>157</sup> Speech by Helma Orosz, Heidefriedhof Dresden, February 13, 2009 (on file with authors).

in riot gear. The mayor of the city of Dresden has meanwhile organized a dialogue with citizens about how future commemorations of the past should look like in a situation where there is little consensus neither about the symbolic text of the commemoration nor about the ways of transforming this text into a convincing and effective performance. Nothing could be more different from this situation of utter cluelessness than the state of affairs in Hamburg where the memory of Operation Gomorrah has been “normalized” (Thiessen 2007: 457) and drained of explosive emotions.

### **Toward a New Cultural Trauma?**

We wish to summarize the findings of our case study with a view to some of the more general issues in the debate on cultural trauma. The Allied bombing of Germany offers an interesting test case for cultural trauma theory. The bombings clearly represent a historical instance of massive collective suffering that was deliberately inflicted on civilians by identifiable actors. There is no question that these occurrences have been traumatic in the clinical and psychological sense of the term. Still, memory projects attempting to translate this original experience into a cultural trauma have failed. The remembrance of the destruction of Hamburg, Dresden and many other German cities and towns does not point to an underlying cultural trauma that fundamentally shapes the collective identity of modern-day Germans. Rather, the memory of the bombing war is a function of another memory: the memory of Germany’s wartime atrocities including the Holocaust.

This does not mean that the Holocaust memory has “repressed” that of the air war or put a “taboo” on it. Not only have images of the bombings and their human consequences “crossed the threshold of the national consciousness” (Sebald 2004: 11); today they are now in fact deeply ingrained in the political culture. Our point, however, is that the meaning of the bombing war for the nation cannot be established independently from memory discourses on the crimes of Nazi Germany. The public discourse on the bombings is not about the obvious fact that Germans, too, have been victims of the war; it is rather about whether they deserve a place in the sun of virtuous victimhood which would rule out that they have been perpetrators or accomplices to evil as well. Whenever Germans during World War II are *obliquely* represented as virtuous victims, we do not witness a return of repressed memories, but a strategy to exonerate Germans from their responsibility for the Third Reich.

Not the memory of the air war, but the memory of the Holocaust is a cultural trauma for Germans (like for others). This social fact in turn constrains and conditions present and future memory projects. The memory matrix of the bombings is thus organized around a reference point external to the debate over the bombings. Political struggles over the public commemoration of the bombing victims, including all the historically incomprehensible analogies between “Dresden” and “Baghdad,” always take place in the shadow of the Holocaust as the negative foundational myth of contemporary Germany.

A cultural trauma serves as filter and organizing center of political perceptions and value-statements which in turn fuel processes of collective mobilization and identity construction. Far from being such a symbolic resource, the memory of the air war in Germany has been more of a ghost light in an ideological swamp. Of course, there is nothing about this memory that makes it impossible to reconstruct the facts of German suffering in such a way as to initiate a cultural trauma process. Alexander overrates the importance of the fact that by winning the war the Allies gained control over the “means of symbolic production” (Alexander 2003: 32-33) so that they could portray the existence of German-controlled extermination camps in a certain fashion. For

the Allied victory did in no way guarantee that one day West Germans would accept the Holocaust as a defining national memory icon. Nor is there any transcendental guarantee—given that the means of symbolic production are quite evenly distributed today—that Germans (or others) will one day abandon this particular memory. However, the obstacles are formidable.

Let us look at the example of the “bombing holocaust.” Apart from being obscene, this fairly successful trope highlights the fact that the same groups who deny or minimize the Holocaust have to refer to and affirm the Holocaust as sacred-evil in order to denounce the bombing of German cities. The much less extreme example of Friedrich’s *The Fire* also shows that even a drastic and simplified account of Germans as innocent victims of evil perpetrators draws its persuasive power from the Holocaust narrative. Far from making a first step toward replacing or eroding this foundational narrative, Friedrich has actually strengthened what will remain for a long time the central symbol of evil in the Western world.

Obstacles to constructing a new cultural trauma abound as we move from the margins to the center of the public debate. A cultural trauma “demands reparation” (Eyerman 2008: 163). Thus, if the memory of the air war ever crystallized into a cultural trauma, Britain and, to a lesser extent, the United States would have to repair the damage, starting perhaps with a formal apology. But there is evidence that the refusal of British officials including Queen Elizabeth II to apologize for any bombing raid has not caused more than a minor and passing public outcry, not even in Dresden (Taylor 2004: 422). The situation is further complicated by the fact that leading German military historians such as Rolf-Dieter Müller have publicly argued that an “admission of guilt” on the part of Great Britain would be inappropriate; according to him, we should rather be “grateful” for the Allied war effort (Müller 2004: 230). The public debate about whether the area bombing was a “necessary” evil (given the imperative of defeating Nazi Germany) or a “lesser” evil (compared to a nuclear attack) is likely to continue for some more time. But there are no indications of a memory project that is going to replace the double image of German civilians as victims/accomplices, which corresponds to the perpetrator/liberator perception of the Allies, with the kind of polarizing discourse that is required to establish a cultural trauma.

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“Dresden – Hiroshima – Bagdad. Outlaw the Anglo-American Bombing Terror!”  
Dresden 2008



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“Bomber Harris Superstar—Thanks to You from the Red Antifa.” Berlin 2004



# ***Traumatic Memory in Generational Perspective***

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## **Abstract**

The article attempts to contribute to the recent debate on cultural trauma by 1) adding the historically recent example of post-communist memorizing of communism to the cases of the Holocaust, the American slavery and the German Nazism, around which the debate has particularly evolved, and 2) focusing systematically on the generational aspect of the issue. It defends the analytical value of the concept of cultural trauma, both theoretically (in the first part of the article) and with the help of the empirical example of memory of communism in Czechoslovakia and the Czech Republic (in the second part of the article). It shows how memories and past experience acquire a traumatic nature within the context of a generationally divided discourse of guilt. It especially accentuates two related features of traumatic memory/experience: ambivalence and silencing effect. And it illustrates these two aspects of trauma on the example of postcommunist memorizing of the communist experience. It also attempts to trace sociologically, rather than psychologically, the relevant intervening variables that limit the scope of historical imagination, hindering transferability of the past experience onto the younger generations – and thus contributing to the traumatic character of the contested memories and the heightened sense of generational divide at the same time.

***Keywords:*** collective memory, communication of experience, communist past, cultural trauma, generations, post-communism

***Draft – not edited***

## ***Introduction***

Ever since Mannheim's seminal study on generations, sociologists have generally agreed that, for an individual, the core of a generational habitus takes shape in the time of entering adulthood. It is the moment in one's life-course when a period of personal maturation intersects with formative historical events or forces – the moment at which a youth makes „fresh contact“<sup>158</sup> with history and the adult world. Such a statement indeed calls for a wide range of qualifications. Some of them are dealt with by Mannheim, such as why it is in the state of youth that people absorb the kind of experience that will be constitutive of their specific generational identity. Others remain outside his attention. Among the latter, there is the question of the nature of the formative historical events and forces. Why do just some events or periods in history play the generation-constitutive role, while others do not? What exactly does their formative function consist of? In these points, Mannheim remains largely silent. He takes for granted an independent rhythm of history, which sometimes gets more dynamic, sometimes more static, fostering the formation of generational awareness in the former case, while hindering it in the latter.

In the following, I will take the analytical advantage of the culturalist stream in current sociology in order to shed more light on this issue – in a particular context of a recent theoretical debate and with a particular empirical aim. It is the triple task of this chapter, first, to contribute to the general sociological theory of generations, second, to highlight the generational perspective in the sociological debate on cultural trauma and collective memory, and third, to present communism as one of the past historical events or rather periods which have left an intense generational chasm in its wake.

The sequence of the aims should perhaps be reversed, since the major contribution is attempted at the empirical level of getting the topic of communism – more concretely the post-communist articulation of generational cleavages in the process of collective, and traumatic remembering of communism – on the sociological table. It is less my ambition to correct anything substantial in the theory of cultural trauma as it has recently been developed especially by and around the Yale

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<sup>158</sup> Karl Mannheim, „The Problem of Generations“ in Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964), 293.

Center for Cultural Sociology.<sup>159</sup> Rather, I am making an extensive use of it, further strengthening the culturalist stance, and highlighting – both empirically and theoretically – the generational aspect involved in the debate, especially in the contributions by Bernhard Giesen and Ron Eyerman.<sup>160</sup> Neither is it my primary task to exercise a critique of Mannheim’s theory of generations. A culturalist departure from his position, in accounting history as a producer of generational divisions, will be apparent throughout the text. After all, there is not much more to add here to Mannheim’s conception on a general level. Even from the viewpoint of recent cultural sociology, though not only from this one, Mannheim’s piece on generations remains remarkably inspirational, analytically rich, and theoretically sound. As such, it still calls for being amended, corrected, and developed via empirical investigations of the subject matter, rather than replaced by another theoretical paradigm.

### ***From psychoanalytical to cultural concept of trauma (via the generational perspective)***

One important amendment to Mannheim’s theory of generations is provided by Bernhard Giesen<sup>161</sup>, and it pursues the path taken in this text as well. It employs the concept of traumatic experience as a historical trigger of generational consciousness. Referring to the concept of historical time by Reinhart Koselleck, Giesen explores the way in which traumatic events leave a strong imprint in the shared experience of a young age cohort, providing a dramatic experiential ground for its definition as a distinct generation. “Thus the collective trauma of a generation

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<sup>159</sup> Jeffrey C. Alexander, ed., Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

<sup>160</sup> Bernhard Giesen, „Noncontemporaneity, Asynchronicity and Divided Memories“ in *Time & Society* 13:1 2004a, 27-40. Bernhard Giesen, “The Trauma of Perpetrators: The Holocaust as the Traumatic Reference of German national Identity” in Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity. Jeffrey C. Alexander, ed., (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004). Ron Eyerman, “Intellectuals and the Construction of an African American Identity: Outline of a Generational Approach” in Generational Consciousness, Narrative, and Politics. June Edmunds and Bryan S Turner, eds., (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002). Ron Eyerman, “Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity” in Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity. Jeffrey C. Alexander, ed., (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004). Ron Eyerman, “The Past in the Present: Culture and the Transmission of Memory“ in *Acta Sociologica* 47:2 2004, 159-169.

<sup>161</sup> Bernhard Giesen, „Noncontemporaneity, Asynchronicity and Divided Memories“



constitutes a distinctive historical horizon (...), a founding event of history that for the life span of this generation is shared neither by the preceding nor the succeeding generation.”<sup>162</sup> Here there is one important aspect of a life of a generation. A generation is recognized by social actors – among other properties – as a carrier of a specific historical memory, and that specificity stems from the unique intensity of a cohort’s encounter with history at the time of youth. Wars won and lost, occupations and liberations, cultural upheavals, economic crises or booms, revolutions and contra-revolutions, assassinations or emergences of charismatic leaders, any such historical turning point is jointly experienced by all concerned, regardless of age. Yet it is always just a circumscribed age cohort that encounters a particular historical experience of this kind in their formative years of entering (mentally at least) the adult world. This uniquely intense historical experience constitutes a distinctive generational bond, the basis of a mutual understanding that cannot be easily shared by those who have not gone through the same traumatic ordeal (or triumphant glory) at the time of making a “fresh contact” with both history and adult life at the same time.

The shared dramatic life-historical experience, however, does not only constitute an abstract sense, however strong, of an inalienable generational bond. It also becomes reflected, contextualized and sometimes rationalized by representatives of the generation it has brought to social and cultural existence, especially in their making sense of an experience of other generations. This is what Mannheim takes into account when he speaks of the “interpretive formative principles” of a generation.<sup>163</sup> A formative generational experience tends to wield a perspective for interpreting history in a wider scope. It provides a ground for understanding past historical events and experiences of earlier generations, but it also absorbs later impulses, and it makes a distinct sense of both within its own sensibility. Therefore a collective past, shared across all age cohorts, tends to present itself from different angles to different generations of one and the same collectivity. It is when such differences become articulate and clash with each other in conflicting interpretations that age cohorts become generations, that is, they are recognized as such by involved social actors and thus made socially real and mattering.

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<sup>162</sup> *ibid.*, 36.

<sup>163</sup> Mannheim, *op.cit.*, 306.

To account for such cases, the concept of cultural trauma comes particularly apposite, although it should not be hastily applied to all instances of generational conflict over history. It departs from the psychoanalytically restricted understanding of traumatic experience, but for good analytical reason. Psychoanalysis stresses deep inhibitions in one's psyche to recall disturbing past experiences, that is, something in one's past which is difficult to digest morally and existentially. Trauma or traumatic situation, in this perspective, is located in one's past, and the mechanisms of repressing it from memory are largely unconscious. Yet once the traumatizing experience is identified in one's past, for example by a psychoanalyst, the traumatic effect does not automatically disappear by this virtue. To the contrary, the disturbing past experience is just made subject to reflection and self-reflection.

The concept of cultural trauma takes the step, and it understands the painful process of reflexive memorizing as a *constitutive* part of the traumatic experience. Should a discomforting past experience become traumatic, it still must remain in the memory reservoir of the concerned actors. They may strive to forget it, repress it in their self-understanding, disregard it while solving practical problems of today, and make it meaningless. At the end of the day, however, one can always be reminded of it, accidentally or intentionally, either as an individual, or by a challenge to an entire collectivity to which s/he belongs. If such a remainder brings about the feelings of discomfort, insecurity, anxiety, a doubt about one's Self, the experience in its traumatic effect has never been completely forgotten or repressed. It still surfaces as a distinct moment of reference in one's biography, as it does in common history.

In other words, an event or an experience is not traumatic in itself. It is the uneasy memory of it that makes it traumatic. An event and its experience assume the meaning of trauma in so far as recalling them shatters one's personal or collective self-understanding.

"Trauma is not the result of a group experiencing pain. It is the result of this acute discomfort entering into the core of the collectivity's sense of its own identity."<sup>164</sup> After all, Sigmund Freud himself comes close to the point when he says, e.g.: "It is as if these patients had not finished

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<sup>164</sup> Jeffrey C. Alexander, "Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma" in Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity. Jeffrey C. Alexander, ed., (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 10.

with the traumatic situation, as though they were still faced by it as an immediate task which has not been dealt with; (...).”<sup>165</sup> But the psychoanalytical position switches the cause and the symptom. It still locates trauma in the past, and stretches its impact mysteriously to the present. The cultural sociological approach, to the contrary, shows that traumatic are the barriers – cultural and social, communicative and psychological – that actors face when trying to make sense of their past experience, to get the latter in line with how they want to see themselves today. Then repression of a past deeply disturbing experience is not only a psychological phenomenon, it also stems from limited communicability of such experience. It is the impossibility to square such experience with our present self-understanding and self-esteem that makes it truly traumatic.

The cultural sociological approach does not completely disregard and devalue the psychoanalytical inspiration. It just re-formulates one of its central concepts in order to endow it with a wider empirical reach and a richer explanatory power, at least from the sociological point of view. In fact, the cultural approach employs the concept of trauma for the same analytical reason as psychoanalysis did – that is, in order to account for an aspect in our experience that otherwise may have gone unnoticed. This is the ultimate reason for replanting the concept of trauma from the psychoanalytical soil into the cultural sociological one.

We adopt the concept of cultural trauma precisely because it makes it possible to relate past experience and its present memorizing to the empirical process of articulation of generational cleavages. It makes it possible to account empirically for the case of ‘divided memories’<sup>166</sup> as one, though not the sole, aspect of articulation of generational distinctions. And the generational analytical perspective, in turn, makes empirical sense of the generational transferability of trauma through communicative non-transferability of the traumatizing experience onto those who have not lived through that experience. Just as individual trauma comes with a biographically shattered self-esteem and self-understanding, collective trauma relates to the historically wounded identity of a collectivity. Trauma comes with a transposition of a present

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<sup>165</sup> Sigmund Freud, “Fixation to Traumas – The Unconscious” in Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Co., 1966), 340.

<sup>166</sup> Giesen, „Noncontemporaneity, Asynchronicity and Divided Memories“

conflict onto the chronological dimension. It is a powerful reminder that integrity and identity finds its sources in the body's past. And the nature of generational conflicts makes it clear that this applies as well to collective bodies, that is, to collectively shared identity and integrity.

For generations are not only historically emerging and disappearing collectivities. They also are relational phenomena. As there would be no generation without a shared historical lot of a specific age cohort, there also would be no generation without other generations sharing the same collective identity (national, ethnic, religious, regional, etc.). One's own generational feeling is only acknowledged in encounters, physical or ideational, with what is identified as representations or representatives of a different generation inhabiting the same historical region. It is not just a particular historical experience that makes a generation out of an age cohort. It is this experience being absorbed, understood, and represented differently than how representatives of other generations understand and represent *this same* collective experience. Generational conflict – and generations alone, for that matter – can only emerge if individuals identify with others not only along the same-age line, but also with those who are generationally different, with *their* predecessors, and *their* ancestors. Generations make experiential sense only within a collective body with a shared history, but divided memory of it. It is only then that a difference in memorizing the past matters in the present. An articulated generational cleavage or conflict, in turn, reminds us of a shared (historical) identity of *all* involved. The life of generations is an experience of *the non-contemporaneity of the contemporaneous*.<sup>167</sup>

### ***Uneasy memories of communism***

#### *The making of history that matters*

Although the concept of cultural trauma has mainly been discussed and developed in reference to the Holocaust, slavery and Nazism<sup>168</sup>, the East-Central European communism seems to be an equally inviting historical case to be accounted for in this analytical perspective. And this is the

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<sup>167</sup> Mannheim, op.cit., 283.

<sup>168</sup> Alexander, Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity

case despite the latter poses some specific difficulties for such analysis at the same time. The reason for both, analytical usefulness of the concept of cultural trauma and analytical difficulties of using the concept, is basically the same: communism is, compared to the other cases, a *more recent* historical “event” – but one which has *already* been subject to conflicting public interpretations and discursive struggles in the post-communist countries. It is the vivid and publicly contested memory of the communist past, shattering common national identities and peculiarly dividing national communities in the post-communist countries, which signifies presence of the trauma process. It is therefore somehow surprising that the question of communist trauma has so far largely remained outside of sociologists’ attention.<sup>169</sup>

The lack of attention to the trauma aspect in collective memorizing of the communist past relates to a certain uniqueness of this case as compared to the other historical examples of the trauma process. Firstly, the Czechoslovak “Lustration Law”,<sup>170</sup> contemplated in public and political forums since the very regime change and implemented in 1991, was of a different kind than the post-war Nuremberg Trials in Germany, in two respects at least. It was not imposed by a foreign power, and (as such) it is a powerful symbol of an *internal* division within the national community between victims and culprits of the communist injustices. While in the cases of Nazism and the Holocaust the whole collectivities, Germans or Jews, have naturally been seen as

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<sup>169</sup> Piotr Sztompka has come relatively close to this topic in his article “The Trauma of Social Change: A case of Postcommunist Societies”. (Piotr Sztompka, “The Trauma of Social Change: A Case of Postcommunist Societies” in *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*. Jeffrey C. Alexander, ed., (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004)) But, as the subtitle says, his primary concern is with *postcommunism*. In such a case, however, serious problems arise with the analytical use and explanatory power of the concept of trauma. Hans Joas rightly points out that “as a whole his chapter is characterized by an extremely wide notion of trauma so that almost every social change would have to be seen as traumatic.” (Hans Joas, “Cultural Trauma? On the Most Recent Turn in Jeffrey Alexander’s Cultural Sociology” in: *European Journal of Social Theory*. 8:3 2005, 372) Moreover, in Sztompka’s use of the concept, the question of traumatic memory, the difficult recalling of a traumatic experience – which is central to the cultural (and also psychoanalytical) understanding of trauma – disappears altogether.

<sup>170</sup> The “Lustration Law” was implemented in order to legally prevent former high positioned functionaries of the Communist Party, contracted collaborators of the communist secret police, and members of the communist “People’s Militia” to hold higher offices in the post-communist state bureaucracy and other institutions (like, e.g., state sponsored or non-private universities and media). In the following part of the article, I will be exclusively focusing on the Czech and

perpetrators or victims respectively, this does not apply to the post-communist national communities. Secondly, the level, nature and acts of historical guilt have been vibrantly present issues within post-communist societies from the very moment of regime changes, and they have constituted sharp symbolic divisions with concrete consequences for the involved actors. Not only did the question of historical guilt come from inside, it also came *immediately* after the historical break – and formation of generational divisions, as we will see shortly, has ever since been an important part of this historical self-reflection.<sup>171</sup> And thirdly, while the process of cultural constitution a trauma of slavery among American Blacks was a rather gradual process, triggered by later developments like the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, the intensified interest in ethnic (African) roots of black Americans, and the establishment of widely recognized public representations of American Blacks (black literature, black history accounts, intellectuals and writers, political representatives, etc.)<sup>172</sup>, all of this – political and social mobilization, strong sense of national identity, and public representations – has been at work since the actual collapse of communist regimes.

It therefore seems that we cannot refer to a certain delay in the trauma effect of the collective memory of communism, a delay that has been noted in the other three instances (even though in each for different reasons, partly suggested above), and which is another constitutive part of the trauma process. Still silence has been a part of this process as the latter developed in the post-communist environment. It has been the silence of those who have been persistently and impassionedly asked for explanation of the nature and motives of their assumed collaboration with the communist regime. Their personal testament should provide an answer to how it had been possible at all that majority of the adult population so willingly exchanged trivial or just

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Czechoslovak case. But much of the argument, on the general level, can easily be applied to other post-communist countries and contexts as well.

<sup>171</sup> In the post-war Germany, according to Giesen's account, the public salience of the question of historical guilt as well as the strong sense of a generational difference constituted around this question did not appear before "the 1960s, when a new generation entered the political stage. This generation was born after the war and did not have personal memories of the Nazi past. Children of this generation broke the coalition of silence and faced their parents with inconvenient questions that until then had been the mark of outsiders (...)." (Giesen, "The Trauma of Perpetrators: The Holocaust as the Traumatic Reference of German national Identity", 127)

<sup>172</sup> See Eyerman 2002, 2004a, 2004b

fallacious certainties for significant concessions, and thus made the long continuation of the unjust regime possible. What has been sought is a remedy for the wounded national identity, a clue to a national understanding and self-understanding. The silence of the communist trauma is the unwillingness of the assumed culprits to explain what in the eyes of many of them is inexplicable, since their language does not fit the newly created framework of historical imagination. The criteria of sincerity have changed with the historical turn. The addressed feel that the query for an explanation is in fact a demand for their apology, a demand that is psychologically uncomfortable, since such “coming out” can never lead to a full understanding and reconciliation. The stakes are too high, and the discursive means at hand severely restricted.

It is an important feature of post-communist environment – and this particularly applies to the Czechoslovak and Czech case – that it has provided a largely uncontested agent of critical historical self-reflection: the youth. Young people (especially university students, young professionals, but to some extent also high school students) took an important part in triggering the processes that eventually led to the old regime’s collapse. True, the picture of the youth’s revolutionary involvement soon reached an almost mythical dimension in the post-revolutionary culture. Yet all the more it has endowed the youth with a strong legitimization to ask the uncomfortable questions. It elevated them to the symbolic status of those who: first, could not have been straightforwardly responsible for the past injustices; second, have therefore been the most sincere in their revolutionary involvement; and third, whose lives has already been and still will be affected by the troubled past nevertheless. This symbolic position dissociated them from majority of the adult part of the population, and it did so prospectively and retrospectively as well. They are presented and self-presented as those with a unique historical merit and imagination, as wittingly captured in Adam Michnik’s famous quip: the young people made the revolution happen, since they did not know it was impossible.

It is also the historical immediacy of the trauma discourse which has made the emerging generational cleavage a more salient aspect of the historical self-reflection in post-communist societies. It is the urgent public and political concern with the relatively recent past that represents one of the most dramatic discursive fields through which the generational cleavage has been articulated.

The immediate and continuing political sensitivity and public salience of the question of the communist past in post-communist societies brings about two sorts of problems for a sociological analysis. Let me briefly address them both. On the one hand, any attempt at a sociological account of the current trauma process runs the risk of becoming part of the process itself, instead of reclaiming the status of an ideologically disinterested (if not impartial) analysis designed to provide a deeper understanding of the stakes involved. It can easily be read through the partisan lenses of “which side are you on”. This may not be a problem for a more radical sort of ‘public sociology’, yet it is a problem for any truly critical theory. For the latter’s task is not to provide an intellectual ammunition to a party in ideological or political conflict, but to cultivate a critical understanding and self-understanding of the involved actors.

The other side of the problem is analytical in kind, and it takes us back to the subject matter. As students of generations well know, their topic is largely elusive when the task is to analyze generations that are still in the making. It is a comfortable theoretical enterprise to account for the generation of the 1960s, for example, since this generation has already secured its symbolic status in western history, it has established itself through a distinct identity and various cultural representations. We have already been able to observe how representatives of this generation and its identity have later left a distinctive impact on culture, politics, family patterns, and also work ethic. And knowing the outcomes, it also is easier for us to trace back the relevant aspects of the formative experience of this generation.

None of this is readily on hand when we look at the post-communist age cohort, the post-communist youth. And yet we still can see how intensely young people in post-communist countries are haunted by the past of their parents, teachers, bosses, older politicians and journalists, neighbors and colleagues at work. Certainly this is not their only or primary concern. It only comes to mind in certain situations and contexts. But it has already found its place in their historical sensitivity, even though it is troubling for some more than others, and it has been articulated in specific forums (the media, universities, social movements, judiciary, institutions of political representation, etc.), to which not all of them have equal access.



The personal past of their older mates matters to young people, too, since it seems to affect their current lives and their future as well. The strong sense of a historical break, which makes the past of parents and grandparents seem so unique and their past world so different from that of today, is the basic experiential ground for an equally strong feeling of generational difference. At this point, it even does not need an explicit or articulate content. It is irresistibly suspected and taken for granted. Substantial articulation of the generational difference, after all, will be almost naturally delivered by the urgent examination and re-examination of the mysterious past, i.e., in a process instantaneously triggered by the sense of a dramatic historical break.

The question of the elders' past can only be seen as a generational problem because this past becomes a part of *common* history, that is, a history that bounds the younger and the older together. It is not easy to ignore history's challenge in an environment which persistently brings the communist past up as a problem for mundane social and political processes, not only for the shared national identity. The interest in the past is unswervingly imposed by the sense of the latter's practical importance. Here history offers itself as a source of understanding of those affected by it, as a ground for explaining their present behavior, making sense of their present motives, and inferring what may be expected from them. And all this is easier achieved to the extent to which the past gets anchored in a frictionless framework of collective memory, while the will to a critical 'historical understanding' has weakened.<sup>173</sup> Historical understanding, with its ambiguities and uncertainties, always seems less practical in providing a clear point of orientation in the present and for the future. And an appeal to such 'historical understanding' of past experience in its ambiguity will readily be recognized as a cunning trick, as an attempt to

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<sup>173</sup> Here I use the distinction made by Peter Novick with reference to Maurice Halbwachs: "Indeed, collective memory is in crucial senses ahistorical. To understand something historically is to be aware of its complexity, to have sufficient detachment to see it from multiple perspectives, to accept the ambiguities, including moral ambiguities, of protagonists' motives and behavior. Collective memory simplifies; sees events from a single, committed perspective; is impatient with ambiguities of any kind; reduces events to mythic archetypes." (Peter Novick, The Holocaust in American Life (Boston: A Mariner Book, 2000), 3-4) This way of contrasting 'collective memory' with 'historical understanding', strongly evokes a positivist preference for the latter as the rational, indeed scientific attitude to the past. It will be clear from my further text that I see it analytically more useful and empirically proper to read this distinction as one between two ideal-typical strategies of dealing with the past in concrete struggles among concerned parties over the interpretation of a shared past.

obscure the past and blur the clear line between good and evil, as just another way of retouching the historical and personal guilt. The promise of an easier orientation in the *contemporary* world incites morally categorical questions, which are as discomfiting for the human products of communism as were those confronting members of the German war generation some decades ago.<sup>174</sup>

### *Posing the question of guilt*

The trauma of the communist past finds its public expressions and hovers in the collective memorizing process as a trauma of perpetrators, not as a trauma of victims (as is the case of the Holocaust and slavery in Jewish and black American historical memory). In this general sense, the post-communist ordeal of collective remembrance resembles the trauma process in the post-Nazi Germany, described by Giesen<sup>175</sup>. Being labeled as a perpetrator, as one who took part in the atrocities or injustices of the past regime and therefore is held responsible for current problems and contamination of national identity, itself is a stigmatizing position. But the core of the trauma process resides in the limited communicability of the perpetrators' past experience. It is the actual impossibility to rationalize the past experience which only converts stigma into trauma. In their self-defense, the accused have often inclined to present themselves as victims of the unfavorable historical circumstances – which is the case of (post-)communists as it was the case of the members of the German war generation.<sup>176</sup> The kind of 'historical understanding' which muddles up victims and perpetrators, however, is not easily acceptable, especially from the moral point of view, and particularly by those who did not live in the troubled past.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> See note no. 6.

<sup>175</sup> Giesen, "The Trauma of Perpetrators: The Holocaust as the Traumatic Reference of German national Identity".

<sup>176</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>177</sup> The status of outsiders vis-à-vis the communist society has not only pertained to the post-communist youth, but also, e.g., to Czech or Czechoslovak emigrants, to clear dissidents or those who had been in a sense exempt from facing the moral-political dilemmas of life in communism (like some segments of the working class, which still had nothing to lose but their chains, even during the communist times). Again, not all of the representatives of these categories have been equally eager in posing the question of historical guilt – but they have certainly been better psychologically predisposed to do so.

Moreover, even if the analogy between communism and Nazism would seem inadequate in terms of historical understanding, it has nevertheless become a part of the struggle over interpretation of responsibility for communist injustices. ‘Look, we were no Nazis’, goes one of the self-defensive patterns of easing the past compromises with the communist regime. Yet also this statement is readily recognized as an instrumental strategy of avoiding personal responsibility, rather than being taken as a satisfactory historical explanation, and much less as an apology. It is little convincing because it looks utterly inappropriate. It only confirms the traumatizing nature of a remembering which is marked by helplessness in rationalizing one’s past behavior, and eventually by unwillingness to even try to do so. The point is that the concrete extent and character of the past atrocities plays just a little role in the cultural production of trauma. Trauma is constituted retrospectively, and what matters is the *dramatization* of challenges which history brings to the present.

The question of guilt has been central to the reflection of the communist past, in three respects. Firstly, there has been the question of who was guilty for the widespread injustice of the communist regime, from imprisoning people for publicly stating their political views opposing the policies of the Communist Party and the regime in general, to withholding passports or making it impossible to pursue a career for which one was qualified or to study at a university or even a high school (for reasons like having a family member emigrated to the West). Who was responsible for creating the atmosphere of fear, docility, and opportunism for a large part of the population? Secondly, there has been the more immediate concern with people’s past, when new elites and leaders were looked for after the regime change, not only in politics, but also in the media, at schools and universities, in the state bureaucracy and other institutions. How is someone reliable to be found when those who were qualified for these positions had often been part of the old communist “nomenclature” or too close to it? How are true proponents of the old regime to be recognized in contrast to those who just played the game and did not harm anyone directly, at least? And thirdly, the question of guilt arises as many problems of the democratic transition are attributed to the communist heritage. Who is to be held accountable for the current problems in political life, the economy, and social relations – problems which could have been avoided if only we had not started with the burdens the corrupt communist regime?

*Disclosing a generational gap: the revolutionary generation vs. the normalization generation*

Young people have not been exempt from facing these dilemmas. They have been involved in all of the three versions of the post-communist discourse of guilt, although perhaps most immediately in the second one. This especially concerns the age cohort that, at a young age, took part in the regime changes at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s. As noted above, in Czechoslovakia students and young people in general played a crucial role in what has become known as the Velvet Revolution of 1989. Violent suppression of a student demonstration in Prague, on 17 November that year, unleashed a series of events and activities, which eventually led to the regime change. Students and young people were particularly active in the first weeks and months of the changes – at universities or in the work place.

It was these events and the implicated conflicts what started to draw the dividing line between what has later been labeled as the *revolutionary* and *normalization* generations. The former took its label from spectacular involvement of many of its representatives in the process of the regime change. The latter received its brand name from the Communist Party vocabulary of the 1970s. Then the official term ‘normalization’ served as a legitimization of the massive crackdown of Czechoslovak authorities (especially the Communist Party, judiciary, and police) on any sign of ideological dissent, in a widespread and perpetual campaign that followed the military and political termination of the democratizing reform process known as Prague Spring of 1968. By and large, the term ‘normalization’ had soon become a symbol of the repressive policy of the Communist Party under the renewed Soviet control. Long before the regime change in 1989, it had been widely (but always privately or just implicitly) understood as an ideological nickname for creating the atmosphere of fear, distrust, intrigues, opportunism, docility, and submissiveness. Apparently, with such a history of the term and its meaning, the label itself imposes a great deal of stigmatization on those who happen to get generationally identified with and by it.

However, it should be noted that this culturally defined and discursively reproduced generational division has effectively run through the young cohort itself. That is, it has also divided those who were in their twenties and sometimes even late teens at the time of the regime change. The cultural definition of the generational divide exerted its social power from the very start. What was at stake among the young people themselves, too, was the level and nature of their involvement or non-involvement in concrete processes of the regime change at universities or in work places, their short institutional past (especially in the Socialist Union of Youth, but sometimes also already in the Communist Party), their reputations among peers. All this sorted people within this age cohort itself, making ‘revolutionaries’ of some and ‘normalizers’ of others, regardless of age. True, in concrete individual cases, this seldom happened definitively, once and for all, in every respect. Such clear-cut divisions are rare in history, and they are even rarer at times of an inflamed generational partition. Formative generational classification struggles initially often occur under the disguise of other sorts of social and political struggles, and almost always in persistent negotiations and endeavor to join the side one wants to represent and seeks to belong to. In these struggles, generational divisions find their dramatic articulation, so that they can serve as a cultural label of belonging to the people of today (or the future) or to the people of yesterday. It gradually becomes a commonly understood scheme of interpretation and as such it is at hand to be employed in concrete social interactions. The actual generational categorization of actors and their generational self-identification comes to word situationally, that is, in proper moments and in relevant contexts. However episodically such (self-)categorization may occur, it often works with a powerful social effectiveness, in so far it is tied with positive or negative social sanctions, expectations and self-esteem.

Of course, the cultural definition of the generational gap has not been completely arbitrary in historical terms. The ultimate generational division between ‘revolutionaries’ and ‘normalizers’ has also reflected the shift in formative historical experience of both age cohorts. The representatives of the young revolutionary generation were about to enter the world of adults in the second half of the 1980s. This was a world whose effective working principles they saw in moral corruption, hypocrisy, and cynical submission to the communist regime. By itself, however, this would not have been a different experience than that of the normalization generation of the 1970s. Then, in the aftermath of the Warsaw Pact occupation of the country in

1968, the installment of the pro-Soviet puppet regime and the political purges that followed (especially in the work place and also in the Communist Party itself), another historical round of the morally corrupting struggle for positions took place. This was the experience which largely shaped the world of the normalization generation, including the nature of its basic inner practical and moral conflicts running along the axis “cowardly collaboration vs. heroic resistance”. These were the extreme points which in many social contexts and relations (at work and in schools, in wider families, among friends, in church and other associations, etc.) provided working criteria for a moral categorization and self-understanding of social actors.

The problem for the young in the late 1980s was that now, while cynicism, hypocrisy and submissiveness were still expected as a norm of adult behavior, they no longer at least safeguarded a chance for a relatively good career. It seemed that good positions had already been taken and the circulation of cadres principally reserved for an already re-consolidated, narrow and enclosed nomenclature elite. Even young members of this elite started to perceive that they can hardly convert their privileged family background into the capital they sought, that is, especially the economic one.<sup>178</sup> The experience of growing up in the late 1980s was thus a variation of the proletarian socialization: amoral submissive assiduousness no longer promised noteworthy gains, and civic indifference did no longer resulted in serious losses. Compared to the young people of the late 1960s and early 1970s, the young of the late 1980s had less to gain by being obedient, and less to lose by being disobedient.

Also this brought many active young people into the revolutionary project and post-revolutionary politics at all levels.<sup>179</sup> And one of the tasks they embraced was how to get rid of the corrupt proponents of the old regime. Of course, not all of them were active in this direction, not all of them to the same degree and in the same style, and young people were not the only ones involved. Older people took part in the various ‘councils’ and campaigns as well. Yet while the

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<sup>178</sup> Ivo Možný, Ivo, Proč tak snadno. Některé rodinné důvody sametové revoluce (Why So Smoothly. Some family reasons for the velvet revolution) (Praha: SLON, 1991).

<sup>179</sup> We could call these young people active in the so called “civic forums” at universities and places of work, but also in the media and newly emerging political parties and movements, a *generational unit* (Mannheim 1964), since they were representative of the whole generation, or at least acted like they were.

latter tended to stress professional competence, and disregard small concessions to the old regime on the part of those who were being profiled, the question of moral purity acquired a more prominent place among the young.<sup>180</sup> Sure there may have been a pragmatic element at work in stressing moral competence by the young people. As they were at times reminded, they had not had that much time and opportunities in their lives to get involved in the corrupting practices of the old regime, to join the Communist Party, to sign a petition against the dissidents, to accept a position in the political apparatus. Neither had they had the time and opportunities to gain sufficient professional reputation and skills required after the regime change.<sup>181</sup> And if some of them had managed to advance in taking some part in the old regime practices, this qualified them to being more easily attached to the generation of the normalizers and normalized.

However, it would be misleading to see the moralizing posture among young revolutionaries solely in the perspective of a purely pragmatic calculus of personal gains and losses. What is at work here, rather, is the ‘practical sense’ as Pierre Bourdieu<sup>182</sup> coins the term. The moral attitude mirrors some basic dispositions, schemes of orientation in the social world, which reflect the specific experience of historical socialization described above. It is this experience which endows the attitude with subjective cogency for the concerned social actors, and which gives Bourdieu’s concept its explanatory power. The accent on moral competence of new leaders at all levels of different sorts of institutions (not just the political ones) can be understood, in the case of the young revolutionaries, as an expression of a mental disposition which no longer took the corrupt world of normalization for granted. For them, immunity against the lures of opportunism

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<sup>180</sup> Milan Otáhal and Miroslav Vaněk, Sto studentských revolucí (A Hundred of Student Revolutions) (Praha: Lidové noviny, 1999).

<sup>181</sup> In fact, it has become a prominent maker of this generation to complain about the lack of competences: weak at foreign languages, no experience abroad, no proper orientation in the world of politics and business, no knowledge of newest developments in the fields of their interest, etc. They felt to be deprived of all of this by the regime they dismantled. Ironically, the change they had sought made losers of them again – a truly tragic situation. They soon began to distinguish themselves generationally from those even younger people who, in their eyes, were able to consummate all the new opportunities opened up by the regime change. No wonder the young revolutionaries have leaned so much to the value of moral credit. For many, it seems to be the only asset remaining to them. (See Radim Marada, „Social Construction of Youth and Formation of Generational Awareness after Socialism“ in Petr Mareš et al. Society, Reproduction and Contemporary Challenges (Brno: Barrister & Principal, 2004)

<sup>182</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, Practical Reason (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988).

was still less a matter of personal heroism and still more a matter of common sense – while the readiness to give in was not only morally dubious but also less and less intelligible. In the late 1980s, it was still more difficult to get a reasonable explanation from their peers who were too active in expressing their loyalty to the communist regime, especially by joining the Communist Party.

### *Imposition of silence*

The young people of the late 1980s could perhaps still understand their parents, who entered the Party during the 1970s or earlier. But they were sorry for them, rather, since the parents had made this concession in order to keep life chances of their children open, without the offspring seeing any noteworthy point in such a sacrifice.<sup>183</sup> In both instances – in contact with their peers and their parents – this resulted in a communicative barrier: irritating, depressing, and embarrassing at occasional attempts to break it. As demonstrated also by Alan's study, membership in the Communist Party has been carefully avoided as a conversational topic in many families, before as well as after 1989. In the 1970s and the early 1980s, this was still an understanding silence. The reasons for political and moral concessions were clear without saying, and the shared silence protected those who made them against the feeling and label of cowardice or weakness, if not unscrupulousness. No family wants to have such a person in home. By the end of the 1980s, the silence started to be driven by futility, rather than understanding.

When the question of guilt and past misdeeds was publicly raised later on, in the time of post-revolutionary institutional and moral purification, those who had in some way compromised with the communist regime did not have any convincing language at hand to explain their moral-political concessions and retain a sense of self-esteem at the same time. And this especially has been a problem for the representatives of the normalization generation. What has remained to them, in the context of a public discourse of historical guilt, were arguments pointing to their

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<sup>183</sup> Josef Alan, Josef, “Rodinné vztahy a členství v KSČ” (“Relations in Families and Membership in the Communist Party”) in Otevřená minulost: autobiografická sociologie státního



professional ambitions and care for their families – both in danger had they not been loyal to the communist regime. But these arguments came little satisfactory to the audience, partly in relation to the historical significance of the past misdemeanors (legitimization and in effect support of the unjust regime), partly for the futility of such collaboration which after all often did not bring the fruits that were to justify it (“look at those who resisted the lures of opportunism, and still achieved something and provided for their families”). The outcome has been the picture of amoral cowardice combined with historical incompetence. And this is difficult to face by way of a rational communication.

There is still another intervening variable that makes it difficult for members of the ‘normalization generation’ to attempt a public reconstruction of their communist experience. Since about the later 1990s, there has been a growing tendency among younger film directors, writers, journalists, and sometimes historians and social scientists to account for and come to terms with the communist past of their nation.<sup>184</sup> From these endeavors, there have emerged two representative types of the ‘normalization character’: cynical opportunists on the one hand, and devoted communists on the other. The former participate in the regime game only to the point of securing their job and family, and perhaps gaining some private profit (like the permission to travel abroad), the latter actively foster the regime, although still less by conviction, and still more because they know that their privileges depend on it. Without overestimating the impact of the culture and media industry, these pictures have certainly contributed to limiting the space of imagination in dealing with the communist past, especially for those who do not have direct (adult) experience with it. The extent to which these are the only imaginable prototypes of the life in communism, biographical stories of the older generation are but variations of the two prototypical characters. There is no place in this interpretative framework for those who did not belong to nomenclature, nor to the dissent, who made some concessions to the communist regime to avoid troubles, but who *did* feel this as a moral problem, and whose identity was

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socialismu (*An Open Past: Autobiographical Sociology of State Socialism*), Zdeněk Konopásek, ed., (Praha: Karolinum, 1999).

<sup>184</sup> It is quite symptomatic, in this respect, that also the director of the German Oscar awarded movie *The Lives of Others*, dealing with the communist past in East Germany before 1989, has come as if from another world than he is depicting, in double sense: Florian Henckel von

shattered for that reason. There is no place in such a framework for the ambiguous experiences and the complexity of pressures of life during communism, in which keeping moral credit in one respect sometimes required giving it up in another. The other option during the communist times, in the eyes of many, was to resist and become a pointless hero – perhaps admired by some for a time, but abandoned by others for good, keeping some moral credit within their families, but confronted with a label of practical irresponsibility therein.

The categorical nature of the question of guilt, along with the variety of contexts in which it has been posed, has brought about peculiar discursive dynamics. At the abstract level, the dividing line between guilt, that is, responsibility for the past injustices, and exemption from such responsibility has been clear. However abstract – that is, de-contextualized – this question is, it has been posed dramatically and urgently in various public forums. But the criteria of guilt (responsibility) have, at the same time, varied according to the context and the stake, and most often they have been lumped together and used arbitrarily or instrumentally. What did it mean to be a proponent of the old regime? Was an active and intentional participation in Communist Party campaigns against real or potential threats to the regime necessary to qualify one for historical guilt? Or did just utterly formal membership in the Union of the Czechoslovak-Soviet Friendship, which many chose for their CV's as a less compromising alternative to joining the Communist Party, amount to a support to the regime? What constituted effective collaboration with the oppressive communist regime? Did it concern just those in higher positions within the Communist Party nomenclature and those found in communist secret police files as its collaborators? Or did every member of the Communist Party (about a 1,5 million people from the population of 15 million in Czechoslovakia) contribute to past injustices, and thus cannot be exempt from their guilt and responsibility? Must every journalist, every teacher, every state bureaucrat, every artist appearing on TV, every store manager, etc. – regardless of their membership in the Communist Party – have been somehow allied with the regime? Did not all 99% of the adult population who took part in the staged elections (with results known in advance) effectively support the regime?

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Donnersmarck was born in the western part of Germany (in Cologne) in 1973. He was only 16 years old when the Berlin Wall came down, and he was 33 when making the movie.

Confronted with the lack of clarity in its own criteria, the imperative question of guilt has resulted in the kind of ambivalence that is constitutive of cultural trauma.<sup>185</sup> It is largely due to such ambivalence that the question of historical guilt has become so urgent for some (especially the younger), and so discomfiting for others (especially the older). “Like psychological ambivalence, its manifestation at the sociocultural level sets the stage for the frequently observed tendency for generation after generation to engage in compulsive examining and reexamining, bringing up new aspects of the trauma, reinterpreting, reevaluating, and battling over symbolic significance.”<sup>186</sup> Smelser’s account is generally right. But it should be added that the compulsion to examine and reexamine the past is not only incited by the very absence of the clear criteria of good and evil, by the ambivalence of the past experience when confronted with present challenges and attempted self-understandings. The urgency alone stimulates the sense of ambivalence which is difficult to overcome communicatively.

On the part of the normalization generation in particular, such ambivalence has brought about a silencing effect. For this was the generation which, unlike still older generations, did not have any sound excuse for taking part in the corrupt communist project. Members of the older generations can at least refer to the attractiveness of the communist idea after experience of the 1930s’ economic depression and the Second World War. And those who took an active part in the reform process of the Prague Spring of 1968 (especially if they were later expelled from the Communist Party) can refer to the democratic potential of their vision of ‘socialism with human face’. They can be, and often are (even by themselves), seen and labeled as foolish, historically disoriented, but not as morally corrupt. The possibility to refer to these historical circumstances of *their* guilt – if they have accepted it at all – makes them generationally different from those who already lack any such historical explanation of their collaboration life strategies.

The memorized history is by no means on the side of the normalization generation, it works mercilessly against this generation. However its representatives may try, their explanations are perceived as either incomplete or deceiving. Whatever they say in their defense – how they made

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<sup>185</sup> Neil Smelser, “Psychological Trauma and Cultural Trauma” in Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity. Jeffrey C. Alexander, ed., (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

<sup>186</sup> *ibid.*, 54

fun of the communists in private or avoided participating in May Day parades by making themselves ill – this may at most be a folkloric part of their conversations with coevals. But it finds little resonance among the young, *if meant as an evidence for personal courage and dignity*. The young lack the right imagination to value such ‘heroism without risk’, they have already adopted different criteria of sincerity.

The above discussion should not suggest that young people have been the only ones to raise the question of the communist past and the historical guilt. These problems have by no means been an issue for the youth only – ever since the regime change, they have been generally present in the public discourse. Instead, my account should have brought to the fore some of the specific reasons that have made young people vitally interested in the communist past at all. The point is not only that their formative generational experience or their youth predisposes them mentally to pose these questions. Their age alone is a symbol which makes this psychologically easier for them, since they can hardly be fought back by the same discursive ammunition. And it is the communicative barrier – aggravating full mutual understanding with the older about the moral dimension of their common past – that in turn makes them feel generationally alienated and eventually curious.

Confronted with the question of historical guilt, eventually even the culprits come to see inadequacy of such arguments. It therefore comes as no surprise that publicized biographical interviews concerning life in the communist past have so far almost exclusively been reserved for either clear dissidents (expelled from work and sometimes imprisoned by the communist regime) or the undoubted representatives of the communist regime, the top functionaries amounting to about the same small number as the dissidents.<sup>187</sup> This is no longer due to a lack of interest on the side of the interviewers (sociologists, journalists, etc.), political celebrities of the communist regime on both sides have already given their accounts, repeatedly. Josef Alan, the Czech sociologist, tried to break this silence by the end of the 1990s, and he still encountered a persistent reluctance to speak: “Many of those confronted with the question of what the Communist Party meant in their lives refused, politely yet categorically, to respond. Others

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<sup>187</sup> Miroslav Vaněk and Pavel Urbášek, eds., 2005. Poražení?-Vítězové? Životopisná interview. (Losers?-Winners? Biographical Interviews.) (Praha: Prostor, 2005).

reacted as if they were subject to torture – and this was not only the case of the former Communist party Members. In this sense, an auto/biographical research all too much reminds of vivisection.”<sup>188</sup> Alan’s study astutely captures the phrase of non-contemporaneity of the contemporaneous: “Those who lived through a different time than in which they talk about their past lives, in fact anticipate this ‘incomprehensibility’. They suspect how difficult it is to explain, clarify and rationalize anything – especially before their own children. In effect, it means to accept that by part of their lives they do not belong to the present, that they even can represent relicts of the regime despised by all, including by themselves.”<sup>189</sup>

Here we come to the generational core of the cultural concept of trauma. A direct historical experience acquires traumatic nature when it becomes difficult to communicate this experience across generations because of its enormous complexity, at least in the eyes of those concerned. The bearers of such experience easily convince themselves that those who did not live in their past, can never fully understand it – a paradigmatic generational statement. They do not want to explain, since their contemporaries do not need any explanation, and the younger generation would not take it anyway. If there is any reason to apologize at all for their past misdeeds, there is nobody around to apologize to. The guilt is too general, and the young would have been the same had they lived in the same time – just another excuse.

The post-communist memorizing of the communist experience once again reveals the paradoxical nature of collective trauma: *trauma* is transferred from one generation to another because of the difficult communicative transferability of the *experience* to which it refers. What is traumatizing is not the past experience itself but the situation, in which this experience gets dramatized in acts of collective memorizing. Yet it is the dramatized and compulsive process of collective memory that, at the same time, poses insurmountable barriers to this experience being communicatively shared among generations.

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<sup>188</sup> Alan, op. cit., 168

<sup>189</sup> *ibid.*, 169

## **“1974” as Cultural Trauma**

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No one could have ever conceived that the treacherous coup and the Turkish invasion that followed it in 1974 would overturn the smooth course of time; these age-old habits and folkloric traditions. Along a line of other tragic consequences in our lives and the development of our land and its people, the blow to our mores, customs and the traditions of our land was devastating.

Demetris Christofias

President of the Republic of Cyprus, February 9, 2009 <sup>190</sup>

This paper outlines the major manifestations of 1974 as a cultural trauma for Greek Cypriots and elaborates on the implications of this trauma in the context of the “Cyprus issue.” <sup>191</sup> Greek Cypriots remember “1974” as the Turkish invasion that displaced around 180,000 people, caused the death of hundreds and resulted in 1,619 missing persons <sup>192</sup> and the island’s semi-occupation. As a message repeated in almost every official talk, the president’s words are not exceptional even as they assert the exceptionality of a profoundly traumatic event: “1974” is a cultural trauma for Greek Cypriots not only because it left “indelible marks upon their group consciousness” but also because it is experienced, until today, as an event that changed “their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways” (Alexander, 2004a: 1). In this paper, we explain how “1974” became a cultural trauma for all Greek Cypriots through its commemoration, institutionalization and routinization.

In particular, we use cultural trauma theory to analyze the processes through which Greek Cypriots have interpreted the 1974 events as a painful trauma that shapes their current identity. In the first section, we establish scope restrictions, unpack some theoretical issues and sketch the social processes that fuelled the construction of 1974 as a cultural trauma. Next, we expand our analysis into trauma routinization. In this section, our objective is to show how everyday rituals are evocative of the trauma and how they echo and reproduce the trauma in Greek Cypriot culture. Finally, we examine the problematic nature of the trauma’s transmission and

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<sup>190</sup> Talk given by the president of Cyprus in commemoration of the occupied community of Kondea, at the church of Ayios Charalambos in the Geri refugee housing project. Translation by authors. Full text in Greek at <http://www.cyprus.gov.cy/moi/pio/pio.nsf/All/8D2BEC4C716A7A46C2257558005C485C?Opendocument> (Retrieved March 4, 2009).

<sup>191</sup> The “Cyprus Issue” is a term used to describe the unresolved situation of conflict on the island since 1974. The United Nations have used the term in various resolutions adopted by the General Assembly. It could be argued that from the perspective of the unilaterally declared Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC, since 1983) there is no “Cyprus Issue” but a problem of TRNC’s international recognition.

<sup>192</sup> This number was the official estimated figure for the Greek Cypriots who went missing in July and August of 1974. This estimate has been continuously revised, especially since the beginning of excavations by the Investigative Committee for Missing Persons (established in 1981) in August 2006. For more on the politics of the recovery of missing persons in Cyprus and the controversy on determining their actual number see Cassia (2005; 2006).

reproduction in the post-1974 generations, who depend upon collective memory alone for reconstructing the trauma. We argue that the “1974” cultural trauma commemorated in the suffering caused by the island’s forced division has left indelible marks on the Greek Cypriot identity but at the same time, it has become the only lens through which Greek Cypriots refract their current concerns and future aspirations.

### Constructing “1974” as Cultural Drama

As a *carrier group*, the collectivity of Greek Cypriots identifies “1974” as the affliction that permanently stigmatized their identity. Beyond the violence and deaths, the trauma of 1974 is interpreted as the drama of being a Greek Cypriot in the various permutations of an unstable national identity—Greek Cypriot, Cypriot, Turkish Cypriot—and the categorical uncertainty they ensue. On the one hand, 1974 emphasized the Greekness of the Greek Cypriot label through the perennial and largely mythologized Greek/Turkish opposition. On the other hand, it implicitly forced Greek Cypriots to focus on the Cypriotness of their identity by permanently giving up on the idea of union with Greece (*enosis*) and emphasizing instead the integrity and unity of the Republic of Cyprus which includes both Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots. The *nature of the pain* is routinely expressed as the pain of loss of ancestral homes (villages and family properties) and the uprooting caused by the forceful population movement of some 180,000 Greek Cypriots. Greek Cypriots *relate the victims of the trauma to a wider audience* by appealing to the violation of rights such as the right to property and the right of return. Given that refugees and relatives of missing or ‘disappeared’ persons are international categories, the cultural trauma of 1974 is constructed to be relatable at the human, not simply the ethnic level. The *attribution of responsibility* begins with locating Turkey as the state responsible for a military intervention that went beyond its constitutional right to protect Turkish Cypriots and instead occupied the northern part of the Republic of Cyprus.

This paper does not detail the historical and political developments that led to the construction of “1974” as a cultural trauma for Greek Cypriots, nor is our discussion is going to address the successful employment of the trauma narrative in various international institutional arenas—such as the UN, world press, the EU—in order to have this narrative gain wide international acceptance and nearly global legitimacy. Our aim is to examine its construction *within* the Greek Cypriot community itself, focusing in particular on everyday practices as well as institutional rituals and ceremonies that sustain its emotional impact for the past 35 years. Therefore, perhaps the first issue that needs to be tackled with regarding the applicability of cultural trauma theory in a case of inter-communal ethnic conflict such as Cyprus is to address the moral relativism implicit in the multitude of accounts that stress the extent to which each side’s national narrative is implicated in the reproduction of memories (for example, Papadakis, 2003, 1998, 1993; Anastasiou, 2002; Cockburn, 2004; Cassia, 2006). That is, Greek Cypriots’ suffering in the context of the 1974 invasion is traditionally contrasted to the inter-communal fights of 1963-64 and the suffering of Turkish Cypriots who were isolated into ethnic enclaves until the 1974 invasion when they resettled in the territory that was self-declared as the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) in 1983.

In fact, to the extent that cultural trauma is a key element in a group’s master narrative its articulation is intertwined with the master narrative itself (Alexander, 2004). Narrativization itself then carries important repercussions for constructing a view of history, of group conflict and of the Other that can lead to the politics of mutual suspicion and to an increase in the possibility of future conflict (Rydgren, 2007). In essence such interpretations adopt an

instrumentalist view of culture, whereby symbolic struggles are merely an extension of real world power conflicts (Bourdieu, 1989; 1990).

From our viewpoint, however culture is constitutive and not simply instrumental to social life – and as such, there is simply no strict counterpart of “1974” in the experience of the Turkish Cypriot community. That should not be misleadingly interpreted as a negation of their suffering. It is a mere extension of the *gradual* nature of inter-communal separation for the Turkish Cypriots (versus its *abrupt* and *sudden* nature for the Greek Cypriots). It is also an extension of the fact that the establishment and commemorative rituals of the post-1983 TRNC cannot be viewed in strict correspondence to the post-1974 Republic of Cyprus. This is because of the different demographic developments in the post-1974 Greek and Turkish parts of the island: While in the Greek-Cypriot controlled Republic of Cyprus nativism has played a major role in determining citizenship, in the Turkish-Cypriot controlled TRNC more than 160,000 Turks from mainland Turkey were resettled, altering the demographic composition of its citizens<sup>193</sup>. To understand the specificity of cultural trauma, it is necessary to point out that, just like numerous other post-colonial societies, Cyprus is characterized by strong *nativism* (Anderson, 1991). Colonially constructed categories of “native Cypriots” operated as a means of re-inscribing the peasants’ connections with their kinship groups – which to this date remain the main reference group among the island’s natives – as well as with their original village (Loizos, 1975, 1981; Loizos and Papataxiarchis, 1991; Attalides, 1976).

Finally, the major reason for applying cultural trauma theory in the case of “1974” is that Greek Cypriots did not have to interpret this event as cultural trauma – but as the inevitable consequence of the application of Greek and Turkish nationalist claims over the island. Dual partition was a possible outcome of the Cyprus issue even before the establishment of the Republic of Cyprus in 1960, and therefore in theory it would have been possible to interpret “1974” as the natural conclusion of this process. Therefore, our approach seeks to problematize “1974” and to view its construction as a process – and not as the result of a single event. Needless to say, the constructed nature of cultural trauma does not imply its fictionality—in the sense of the fantastic or imagined—neither does it foreclose the notion of an event that predictably results in pain and suffering. It emphasizes, however, the importance of attending to the socially mediated processes that translate suffering into a collective cultural trauma, the proportions of which extend beyond individual experience.

This means that suffering which is not personally experienced can be deeply traumatizing for the next generation or that violence and death can be interpreted as heroic and triumphant instead of traumatic. In the case of Cyprus, 1974 is not a cultural trauma for Turkish Cypriots who were also displaced from their towns and villages in the southern part of the island and relocated in the northern part of the island. Instead, the sense of displacement and relocation has given birth to a cultural trauma felt not only by those Greek Cypriots who personally experienced the events, but, as we shall show, even for Greek Cypriots born into families of internally displaced persons<sup>194</sup> (referred to in Greek as “refugee” families [*prosfyges*]). From

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<sup>193</sup> According to the Republic of Cyprus Press and Information Office (PIO) the Turkish Cypriot population is estimated at 88,100 and settlers from Turkey at 162,000 (more information at [http://www.moi.gov.cy/moi/pio/pio.nsf/a\\_problem\\_en/a\\_problem\\_en?OpenDocument](http://www.moi.gov.cy/moi/pio/pio.nsf/a_problem_en/a_problem_en?OpenDocument)). The official position of the TRNC does not differentiate between native Turkish Cypriots and settlers from Turkey (more information at <http://www.trncinfo.com/eng/index.htm>).

<sup>194</sup> According to the 1951 Geneva Convention and the 1967 Protocol those not forced to leave their country are described as ‘internally displaced’ people and not refugees. Given that the UNHCR describes their condition as a



a Greek Cypriot perspective, Turkish Cypriots could have identified with the trauma of 1974 because they were also displaced and suffered losses. Turkish Cypriot narratives, however, follow a different timeline that emphasizes the suffering caused in the 1963-64 inter-communal conflict that confined them in enclaves under constant fear of persecution (Papadakis, 2003; Bryant, 2008).

To understand this development, “1974” must be analyzed as a “horrendous event” (Alexander, 2004a) that stands as a rupture in time or, in the president’s opening quote, as an event that overturned the “smooth course of time”. Cultural traumas treat the painful historical event as a happening ‘out-of-time’ (Alexander, 2004b: 226). That suggests the trauma’s unpredictable character as well as the inability to view the event as part of the ordinary course of time. For Greek Cypriots, the break from ordinary time and the rootlessness of their experience are two of the main factors that contributed to looking upon the events of 1974 as a cultural trauma. Both of these are directly attributed to forced relocation and a perceived break with tradition. We begin, therefore, by detailing the two major characteristics of the “1974” cultural trauma: the experience of *uprootedness* and the vision of a mythical *day of return*.

The metaphor of *uprootedness* is pervasive in the refugees’ narratives of loss, denoting both the literal supplantation of a largely rural and agrarian population, as well as the centrality of the land in configuring identity (Loizos, 1981). As Bryant (2002) has argued, kinship with the land partakes of religious imagery in Cyprus and it represents another element of the metaphorical familial connections of nationalism that naturalize the relationship between the people and the nation. However, 1974 did not simply deprive refugees from homes, fields and orange groves; it also unsettled deep-seated cultural constructions of time and continuity that are uniquely exemplified in the agrarian rhythms of the land. This rupture in time, therefore, was both historical and cultural, with the use of chronology advancing the traumatic event into a symbol while signifying its magnitude in relation to the post-1974 epoch. Although we realize that 1974 does not carry the same international cultural capital as 9/11, our purposeful use of it in the title echoes its cultural significance in constructing a horrendous event that was beyond comparison with any other disastrous event in the island’s history. In turn, Greek Cypriot narratives foster a nostalgic view toward the pre-modern pre-1974 status quo that leads to a nearly messianic expectation of restoring the lost grace of that era as part of the future. As Bryant (2008) notes, this is a point of divergence between Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot readings of the past: while for Turkish Cypriot readings history reached a turning point in 1974, for Greek Cypriot readings, history remains to achieve its closure in the future – as part of a final settlement of the Cyprus issue.

The question of the unpredictability of 1974 as a horrendous event is also important in constructing it as cultural trauma. On the one hand, Greek Cypriot narratives of history often present 1974 as the epitome of the island’s inescapable destiny in being successively occupied by different peoples (Christou, 2007). On the other hand, the question of responsibility or the issue of ‘who started it’ (see Smelser, 2004) can expose deep ideological rifts in the Greek Cypriot

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‘refugee-like situation’ (see Zetter, 1994) the term refugee—along with its connotations of social status and identity—has prevailed in Greek discourse. The Greek Cypriot refugees’ plight has been aptly documented – including the documentary “Attilas 1974” by internationally renowned director Mihalīs Kakogiannis, a native of Cyprus.

political landscape (Mavratsas, 1997; Papadakis, 1993; 1998). But in dominant commemorations of 1974, events are presented as a shock, as something that could not have been predicted or contained. Thus, the brutality of the *uprootedness* is established in its departure from the normal course of history, regardless of the political events that could have served as a warning. The president's reference to the 'treacherous coup' that preceded the Turkish invasion alludes to a controversial causality in which the military coup that overthrew the Greek government was linked to Greek Cypriot extremists' attempt against the Cyprus president's life which then precipitated the invasion events.

Furthermore, the longing for the *day of return* functions as a response to the suffering caused by the sudden uprooting and maintains a positive vision for the future. Despite tangible signs of adaptation in their new social and economic structures of exile, aided not only by various social provisions such as housing and health care but also by a largely supportive population of co-ethnics in the south, Greek Cypriot refugees have always maintained the hope that one day they will be allowed to return just as they were unexpectedly forced to leave (Loizos and Constantinou, 2007). Even after decades of 'protracted exile' this deep belief in the 'myth of return' (Zetter, 1999) is guided by a sense of inconceivable injustice perpetrated upon them and a metaphysical faith in divine justice.

For example, the Rotary Club of Nicosia – Salamis, one of the Rotary clubs of the island founded by internally displaced professionals from the city of Famagusta (currently in the occupied part) has enshrined the longing for a day of return in the prayer that precedes each club meeting:

*Oh God, our Lord,  
We pray you bless this meeting and strengthen us in our deeds of love and benevolence. Also, our Lord, we ask you to deliver speedily our beloved country Cyprus from the sufferings of foreign aggression and grant that its indigenous population live in peace and security, praising thy holy name.*<sup>195</sup>

This yearning for the *day of return* is also evident in the discursive shifts in the post-1974 Greek Cypriot political rhetoric. Since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century Greek Cypriots had expressed a desire for *enosis* (union with Greece) which later prompted the corresponding Turkish Cypriot demand for *taksim* (partition) of the island. After 1974, however, the *enosis* demand was abandoned and any lingering sentiments for *enosis* that had been officially or unofficially expressed by Greek Cypriots were effectively silenced (Mavratsas, 1996, 1997; Attalides, 1979; Markides, 1977; Stamatakis, 1991). This was followed by the vision of a unified island where Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots would live in harmony. However, this supposedly harmonic pre-1974 reality clearly differs from the Turkish Cypriot experience which was punctuated by isolation. Regardless, Greek Cypriots abandoned the *enosis* vision in order to construct this mythical *day of return* that will heal the "1974" cultural trauma.

Furthermore, this myth of return is galvanized by the idealization of the pre-1974 period as the paradise of simple and blissful life (Zetter, 1994, 1999; Dikomitis 2004; Loizos, 1981). Greek Cypriot refugees—and, to a certain extent, all Greek Cypriots—describe the occupied

<sup>195</sup> <http://www.rotary-cyprus.org/~nic-salamis/>, retrieved March 25, 2009. The city of Famagusta (Ammochostos in Greek) used to be the largest city in pre-1974 Cyprus. Since the invasion, its Greek Cypriot inhabitants were displaced mainly to Nicosia, Larnaca and Limassol. The old part of the city was sealed off by the Turkish forces, and the city has become a ghost town.

areas as the most beautiful, scenic and picturesque part of the island. Just like it is not appropriate to speak ill of the dead, Greek Cypriots refrain from saying anything negative about the areas under occupation or even remembering negative occasions in those areas; except, of course, from the events of 1974. Nothing compares to a refugee's occupied home: everything before 1974 was good, everything after, is bad (Loizos and Constantinou, 2007). This has burdened the idea of return with unrealistic expectations. As Zetter (1999: 6) has pointed out: "What is mythologized, is what has been left behind and what, it is hoped, return will accomplish—the belief that 'home', both as a material and symbolic entity, can be restored as it was before exile".

The mythological status of a 'day of return' that would uplift the rootlessness of modernity has also contributed to the elevation of those "left behind" (that is, those who did not leave their houses in order to move to the southern part of the island) into a special symbolic status. These are referred to as "enclaved" [*englovismenoi*] Greek Cypriots who have become emblems of the resistance against uprooting. Their everyday struggle is commended and commemorated officially by the state and unofficially in the media and other sites of cultural production. Appealing to the European Court of Human Rights, the Republic of Cyprus government achieved a vote which condemned Turkey for 14 violations of the European Convention of Human rights, 7 of which refer to the living conditions of the "enclaved" Greek Cypriots (*Cyprus Versus Turkey*, application no.25781/94, May 10 2001).

### ***Into the Mundane: Everyday Rituals of "1974"***

Cultural traumas are established with the identification of a horrendous event and solidified through commemorative practices that transform the event into personal and collective memory. In this section we aim to show how this trauma is experienced through the discursive, representational and institutional practices that established the commemoration of those events not simply as an *annual ritual* but as an *everyday routine* that ritualizes the very act of remembering the trauma. In a multitude of sites that range from official ones – such the Republic of Cyprus' educational system or state legislation– to unofficial ones – such as the refugee associations and kinship groups – the trauma of 1974 has been constructed not as a historical event but as a present day trauma that derives its urgency from an unresolved political problem.

The Greek Cypriot educational system has significantly contributed to the ritualization and routinization of "1974" through the cross-curricular goal of the "I don't forget" (*Den Ksechno*) objective. The slogan "I don't forget" was originally created by writer and advertising director Nikos Dimou, on the very day of the Turkish military intervention in 1974. Succinct and solemn, and accompanied by a visual image of a bleeding island (see image below), it became the symbol of the invasion trauma (see [http://www.ndimou.gr/kypros\\_gr.asp](http://www.ndimou.gr/kypros_gr.asp)). It has been since duplicated in numerous official and unofficial sites both in Greece and the Republic of Cyprus as a visual representation of commemoration and resistance and it is by far the most successful visual image that has enshrined the notion of "1974" as a trauma at the level of popular culture.



The presence of the ‘I don’t forget’ logo in schools complements a cross-course educational goal of transferring the traumatic memory of “1974” to the new generation. Whereas there is no particular course devoted to the 1974 events, the whole curriculum, from kindergarten to the last year of Lyceum (ages 4-17) is infused with references to the problem of occupation. A familiar ritual in Greek Cypriot schools every September is the decoration of classrooms with landscape pictures of the northern occupied areas of the island and the distribution of student workbooks that feature these locations on the cover. The phrase “I don’t forget and I struggle” is inscribed prominently on classroom boards as teachers hang the pictures on the walls and identify on the Cyprus map the location of northern occupied villages and cities. The principals’ welcoming remarks and the Minister’s address to all students that is read on the first school assembly invariably include references to the problem of occupation in Cyprus and the desire to return to these areas and reunify the island. For example, in 2006 the Minister wrote: “In these difficult conditions of the 21<sup>st</sup> century world, our homeland is waging its own struggle to achieve, through peaceful means, the liberation of our occupied areas that have been under the foot of the Turkish Attila [Turkish army] for the past 32 years.”<sup>196</sup> In 2008 the Minister’s address included similar remarks: “Unfortunately, this new school year finds Cyprus divided by occupation. I hope that this will be the last year.”<sup>197</sup>

Educators seize every opportunity to bring up references to the problem of occupation, whether talking about Arbor Week—references to the natural resources of the occupied part—or Easter Week—the occupation of Cyprus compared to Christ’s persecution and crucifixion. The “I don’t forget” objective is registered as the primary goal ‘under emphasis’ every new school year and it saturates all aspects of the curriculum by functioning not as a distant historical event but as a current cultural issue that has touched the lives of all Greek Cypriots. Essay competitions and art exhibits regularly call students to narrate and illustrate the suffering of 1974: students write about the beauty of the occupied villages and the pain and longing of refugees; they draw picturesque landscapes of the areas they have not visited and portray the suffering of the mothers of the missing persons.

The focus of this curricular goal is decidedly emotional rather than anything related to the specific events preceding or following the 1974 Turkish invasion. In fact, teachers avoid any references to episodes around the Turkish invasion that may taint this monochromatic view of history and they steer clear of any references to ‘dangerous memories’ that may challenge the view that Greek Cypriots were the absolute victims of the island’s recent history (Christou, 2007). School fieldwork studies have documented the nature of the “I don’t forget” curriculum that narrates suffering only from a Greek Cypriot perspective and serves to maintain stark contrasts between ‘Us’ and ‘Others’ (Spyrou, 2001; 2002; Philippou, 2005; Christou, 2006). This construction of the absolute evil and the absolute victim is a necessary step in the assembly of a tragic narrative that becomes an iconic event of suffering for a social group (Alexander, 2004b).

Thus, “1974” is educationally re-enacted as a cultural trauma through narrative, aesthetic and religious performances that routinize an exceptional event into an everyday recurrent experience for all Greek Cypriots. It could be argued that the “I don’t forget” objective is a paradoxical, if not an impossible goal: It demands that new generations identify with the memory and the suffering of events not personally experienced. But it is precisely this paradox that makes “1974” an exemplary cultural trauma – for it has to a large extent succeeded in imparting its

<sup>196</sup> From <http://www.schools.ac.cy/dde/circular/data/Doc5039.pdf>, retrieved April 10, 2009

<sup>197</sup> From <http://www.schools.ac.cy/dde/circular/data/Doc7390.pdf>, retrieved April 10, 2009

emotional impact to younger generations. Even though students' reactions to the "I don't forget" curriculum can range from a sense of obligation to the concern that the larger society is not identified with the trauma anymore, the younger generation reflects on "1974" with a sense of sacred responsibility (Christou, 2006). As Alexander (2004a) argues, cultural traumas allow members of the wider public to participate in other people's pain and thus, create new avenues of social incorporation. This can also be seen in the transformation of the phrase from "I don't forget" in the 1970s and 1980s, to the most recent (1990s) "I don't forget and I struggle" or even in some cases "I know, I don't forget and I struggle"; clearly aimed at creating a clearer sense of identification with the cultural trauma.

The trauma of 1974 is evoked not only in the commemoration of the day of the 1974 invasion; a day that is commemorated by Greek Cypriot authorities as a sad anniversary and by Turkish Cypriot authorities as a day of deliverance, complete with a military parade and with the participation of state dignitaries from mainland Turkey. Rather, the presence of the 1974 trauma is strong and colors *all anniversaries* as such. A case in point is the celebration of March 25 – the anniversary of Greek independence that is promptly celebrated by Greek Cypriots as a celebration that marks their symbolic inclusion into the Greek nation. March 25 is both a religious and a secular national holiday for the day is also Annunciation Day in the Greek Orthodox calendar. It was originally selected to coincide with the anniversary of the 1821 Greek revolution for its potent symbolic character: the birth of Christ is but a metaphor for the birth of modern Greece (see Roudometof, 2005). What is of particular significance in the Cypriot context though and what marks off this celebration in Cyprus – as opposed to mainland Greece – is its strong connection to a *day of return* to the lost homelands. In March 25 2009, for example, in one of the speeches delivered in one of the churches of the Nicosia metropolitan area, the priest made explicit and clear-cut references to "1974". "We must endure" he said, "and keep our faith to God in order to go through these difficult times." Hope of return to "our ancestral homelands" should not be abandoned, and the faithful should hold fast to their belief that, with the help of God, this will be accomplished.<sup>198</sup> What is important here is evocation of such a *day of return* in the context of a completely unrelated national holiday – a striking connection gone unnoticed by Greek Cypriots but immediately visible to non-natives.

The same belief is manifested in the University of Cyprus' commemorations of March 25. Typical commemorative celebrations conclude with the signing of the Cretan folk song "Pote tha Kanei xasteria" (Πότε θα κάμει ξαστεριά). The folk song has gone through a native adaptation whereby its original place names have been replaced by references to the refugees' regions – Kerynia, the mountain of Pentadaktulos, Mofru and so on. In its reinterpretation the song goes as this:

«Πότε θα κάνει ξαστεριά,  
 πότε θα φλεβαρίσει,  
 να κατεβώ στον Όλυμπο,  
 στην έμορφη Κερύνεια  
 στη Μόρφου και στη Μεσαριά,  
 σ' όλη την Καρπασία  
 να δω τον Πενταδάκτυλο  
 να μου χαμογελάει..  
 Πότε θα κάνει ξαστεριά...»

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<sup>198</sup> The quotes are based on participant observation by one of the authors.

How long till clear sky  
How long until February comes around  
To walk down from (Mt.) Olympus  
To the beautiful Kerynia  
To Morfu and Mesaria  
To all of Karpasia  
To see Pentadaktylus  
Smile to me  
How long till clear sky. . .<sup>199</sup>

Hence, in the context of a celebration unrelated to “1974” as such the event resurfaces in all its potency: Not only is the event forcefully altering the nature of the occasion in the Cypriot context (versus the March 25 celebrations within the Greek state) but it becomes the dominant point of reference in local discourse.

The cultural trauma of 1974 can further be identified in everyday rituals that attempt to symbolically reconstruct the lost home in the context of temporary refugee housing. When Greek Cypriot refugees fled from their homes in July and August of 1974 many believed that the military intervention would be temporary given that Turkey had attempted to intervene in Cyprus already since the 1960s. So, most refugees did not pack any belongings as they believed that they would return home in a matter of days. But when they narrate their experiences many years and decades after the event, Greek Cypriot refugees begin their stories by emphasizing the sudden and unforeseen displacement that forced them to leave without taking anything with them: “We left with nothing, just what we were wearing” is a common opening line. The meaning of ‘nothing’ in this phrase implies that the body is left exposed because of its dislocation from its context. According to Connerton (1989) the body is the main vehicle of habitual memory because through ritual bodily performances the collective shared history is transformed into a deeply personal experience. In this way, commemorative rituals exercise a bodily discipline that re-inscribes the event through the “mnemonics of the body” (Connerton, 1989: 9).

The refugees’ rituals, therefore, often attempt to re-contextualize the body in the foreign environment: they build an identical fireplace as the one they had “back home” or plant an orange tree in their small backyard to take care of it as they used to do before becoming refugees. The refugees reclaim their lost past through everyday routines that maintain the traditional social bonds of the pre-1974 life (Zetter, 1999). These punctuate everyday conversations of Greek Cypriots and their stories are inevitably always connected to the cultural trauma of 1974. The reminders can be as mundane as the aroma of oranges—which, refugees are quick to say that they do not taste the same as the ones they grew back home—or as generalized as the bitterness of being the world’s forgotten victims of human rights violations. Through these discursive and bodily performances of recollecting & symbolically reconstituting the occupied home and land, refugees and their families routinely evoke the horrendous event of 1974 and make it part of the routine of everyday life on the island.

Following the immediate events of the summer of 1974, and when it became apparent that return would not be easily achieved, a large number of refugee associations were established in the south—generally one association for every village or city. Not only do these associations

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<sup>199</sup> Translation by the authors. There are numerous variants of this folk song. Within Greece, it is often related to hardcore Greek nationalist circles.

draw attention to the centrality of kinship structure and place of origin as cultural markers of membership, but they also serve the purpose of creating a geographical reference point to the lost land. All such communities have established refugee associations in the Greek-controlled post-1974 Republic of Cyprus. Their function is to keep the dispersed population in touch through religious and national celebrations, thereby maintaining a sense of origin and preventing dissolution of the original village unit. Refugees regularly attend the weddings and funerals of co-villagers wherever they may be taking place in the southern part of the island. Death notices in the newspaper, tombstones and wedding invitations always identify the family's origin in the occupied part followed by their current, 'temporary' residence (Zetter, 1994).

Furthermore, the post-1974 designation and institutionalization of the refugee label has created the conditions for the universalization of the refugees' loss and the possibility that all Greek Cypriots could identify with the pain of uprootedness. That is, official legislation enacted on September 19, 1974 (Ministry Council decision 13.503)<sup>200</sup> specifies that a "refugee" is a person who before and up to July 1974 permanently resided in an area that is currently under Turkish occupation. The decision was amended in 1995 to include those who owned land and property in the occupied part even if their permanent residence at the time of the invasion was in the areas that remained under the control of the Republic of Cyprus. The legislation—accompanied by the bureaucracy of refugee identification cards and related documentation—has offered to refugees specific advantages such as, access to low cost government housing estates, financial aid for building a house or purchasing an apartment and renting allowances. Their status is inherited patrimonially—but not matrimonially—thereby reassuring the continued construction of generations of refugees for several decades after the event. Intermarriage further reassures that the refugee status is diffused throughout the Greek Cypriot community, and therefore its existence becomes part of the fabric of all Greek Cypriots—even for those who were not personally affected.

The *nature of the victim* is therefore not limited to the individuals directly affected by the invasion but is relayed as the generalized Greek Cypriot victim of Turkish military aggression. The president's opening quote comes from a speech given on Saint Charalambos' celebration—the patron saint of the occupied village of Kontea—that the Kontea refugees organized to commemorate the religious day. The president addressed the refugees by connecting the religious commemoration to the commemoration of 1974 and the struggle for solution to the Cyprus issue: "Today," he said, "Kontea celebrates its patron Saint Charalambos. But, the President went on, "Kontea also honors her children who were killed during the tragedy of 1974. [...] Kontea does not forget and, in the endless bitterness of refugeehood and uprooting, it resists, it hopes and it anticipates."

It is plain that even after decades of "protracted exile" there is a strong sense of inconceivable injustice perpetrated upon the natives. This sense of injustice is coupled with a metaphysical faith in the possibility of divine justice to foster a deep-seeded belief in the 'myth of return' (Zetter, 1999). To understand *why* 1974 has been encoded as such a pervasive cultural trauma it is necessary to refer to the radical social, political and economic transformations of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Following transition from British colonial status to the 1960 founding of the Republic of Cyprus, the island's economy functioned, for the first time, under the status of an independent state and slowly began to expand its agricultural and tourism sectors.

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<sup>200</sup> More at <http://www.mfa.gov.cy/mfa/mfa2006.nsf/All/5C42EAB55AEA9A5EC22571B0003E0AF5?OpenDocument>, retrieved April 16, 2009.



The 1963-1974 interethnic conflicts and the Turkish Cypriots' withdrawal from the government fostered uncertainty but also increased the socio-economic gap between the two groups, with Greek Cypriots advancing more than Turkish Cypriots (Kedourie, 2005). The major and abrupt setback was the 1974 events that brought all major functions of the economy to a halt. Nicosia's airport, the only airport on the island at the time, was caught in the buffer zone between the two sides while a third of the population lost its entire livelihood means and the tourist industry's major hubs came under Turkish military occupation. For Greek Cypriots, this bode a future of dark economic times but with a steady stream of foreign aid the economy in the South recovered at an unprecedented rate during the 1980s—a development that has been dubbed as 'The Cyprus Miracle' (Christodoulou 1992). It is important to emphasize, however, that this was not the fate of the northern part of the island inhabited by Turkish Cypriots. The lack of an internationally recognized status caused the economy to suffer and development has been at a much slower rate. As a result, for Greek Cypriots who experienced these wild swings of personal and social misfortune, the pre-1974 reality has been the subject of romanticized post-1974 reconstructions and of the nostalgia expressed for a tradition unfettered by the problems and complications of the post-1974 modernization

### ***Trauma Transmission: Facing the Challenges of Time***

The intergenerational dynamics that weave narratives of loss and suffering in the context of the family are important sites in the construction of the 1974 cultural trauma. Cultural trauma theory examines the practices of collective memory production and transference to the next generation. Influenced by Durkheim's argument on the centrality of social and group realities that provide resonance and authority to collective representations (Fowler, 2005), Halbwachs' (1941/1992) groundbreaking work on collective memory posed that we recall, recognize and localize our memories in a societal context. An essential aspect of social solidarity, collective memory is located in the interrelations of groups such as the family or the social class.<sup>201</sup>

For Halbwachs the interests, concerns and problems of the present also shape collective memory. Greek Cypriot refugees' stories about the occupied part have been a perpetual connection between the past and the present. Second generation refugees, that is, those born to refugee families after 1974, grew up exposed to vivid accounts of the lost land and have adopted, to a large extent, a refugee identity (Hadjiyanni, 2002). First generation refugees have always expressed their collective anxiety for the erosion of the memory of the occupied land and they see their stories as a way to maintain alive the desire for return. These family narratives mediate symbolically between the past and the present and create meanings that connect parents and children (Hinchman and Hinchman, 1997). The telling of traumatic stories is a way of structuring

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<sup>201</sup> The interdisciplinary surge of interest in memory studies is fueled both by events that have generated a 'commemorative fever' in the 1980s and 1990s but also by the booming of cultural artifacts (film, photography, internet media, artificial memory storage) that facilitate the collective processes of bringing the past into the present (Misztal, 2003). Huyssen (2003) argues that whereas 20<sup>th</sup> century nation states sought to monumentalize national history, today we witness a fascination with the processes of remembering and forgetting. Utopian visions of the future, the staple of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, have given way to the appeal of the past and what he calls a 'hypertrophy of memory'. This is evident in the rise of visual cultures of documenting and commemorating the past as well as architectural creations that monumentalize cultural traumas. For an overview of recent perspectives, see Roudometof (2007).



experience and producing meaning out of disparate or incomprehensible events (Ricoeur, 1988). Children of refugee families ‘remember’ the occupied part and identify with their parents’ pain:

*I saw a dream that Cyprus was, I saw the shape of Cyprus in the form of trees. [...] And my mother told me that maybe when I was younger and I was listening about it all the time, I created a picture of it in my mind, so it wasn’t a dream. But I believed that I saw it. I feel very strongly that I saw it. And my mother told me that this place was on route to Apostolos Andreas.* Nasia, 15 years old

*During the summer when I see the orange trees, I remember the oranges of Ammochostos. Ore when we have the flower festival in Larnaca, I remember that we used to have the same in Ammochostos.* Maria, 16 years old

*In our family gatherings, we talk about the invasion. And I hear how [my father] talks about the people who are lost and the people who were killed and I see him cry. And that’s when you think, ‘Why did they do this to us?’ And no one cares about it. [...] He talks about Kerynia where they sent all the soldiers and lined them up. It’s difficult to know that you may lose your husband or your father or your child, your son.* Eleni, 16 years old<sup>202</sup>

Nasia, Maria and Eleni have never been to Apostolos Andreas or Famagusta (Ammochostos) or Kerynia but their ‘memories’ of the occupied areas sound as vivid as any personal account can be. In the first narrative, the dream is a surreal account of an experience that has not taken place and it symbolizes the metaphorical dream of return even if the return will only be a first experience for Nasia. The younger generation of refugees has internalized these memories to the extent that the word ‘remember’ is used in a way that collapses the limits between personal and collective memory. As these narratives saturate everyday family encounters, the younger generation is left with a heavy legacy of memory and the burden to realize the mythical return. Nevertheless, the second generation’s emotional connection with their occupied homes is less identified with the idealization of the past and more with the idealization of a future where the restoration of the human rights of property and freedom of movement can finally materialize (Zetter, 1999).

On the other hand, the post-1974 economic realities on the island have conditioned different kinds of expectations for the new generation of Greek Cypriots. Cyprus became a member of the European Union in 2004, in an awkward agreement that recognizes suspension of EU law in the northern part of the island currently not under the control of the Republic of Cyprus. The 35-year-old shift from refugee tents to a booming economy is met with a collective Greek Cypriot pride for the hard-working ethic that paid off. Nevertheless, the new comforts became an uncomfortable reality that contradicts the need to maintain the ‘fighting spirit’ for a solution to the Cyprus problem (Christou, 2006). The younger generation exemplifies a materialist turn that, for the older generation, is at odds with the existential need to preserve this ‘fighting spirit’:

*The new generation... grew up with more luxuries. They didn’t go through the experience of being a refugee. They didn’t have the experience of living in a tent and have the tent leak during the winter and you don’t know where to sleep. We spent two months in a bus and we were sleeping on the seats—from my grandfather to the*

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<sup>202</sup> Excerpts from interviews with children of refugee families, Christou (2002).

*youngest child—two months! We are another generation. We went through this hardship. But... these kids are used to luxury and so they get used to easy money. And the parents give money too easily because they were deprived of it growing up.*<sup>203</sup>

The younger generation, therefore, is constructed as the promise of the nation and as a potential obstacle in maintaining the fight for return. In this sense, the cultural trauma depends on the strength of the intergenerational dynamic that sustains it. As already discussed in the previous section, the refugee family has been an important site for the commemoration and generational transference of the refugee trauma.

And yet, when compared to the generation that actually experienced coexistence with Turkish Cypriots, the younger Greek Cypriot generation is more inclined to show a preference for separation (for statistics, see Webster, 2005; Georgiades, 2007). The same generational pattern was also observed in the 2004 Annan Plan referendum with higher rates of negative Greek Cypriot votes by those born after 1974 compared to the previous generation (Webster, 2005). This was a paradox to many observers, as the evidence overturned simplistic accounts of collective conflict predicated upon personal animosity. From within the lenses of cultural trauma theory, though, the result simply registers the successful routinization and reproduction of “1974” as a cultural trauma. For the reader of the preceding pages, it should *not* come as a surprise that those who lack personal remembrance of the pre-1974 reality will be the least inclined toward inter-communal coexistence. How and under what circumstances can the “1974” trauma be left behind?

The normative implications generated by the routinization of the “1974” cultural trauma can also be seen in the events that challenge its educational primacy. For example, an August 2008 circular by the Ministry of Education identified the first goal of the new school year as follows: “The cultivation of a culture of peaceful coexistence, mutual respect and collaboration between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots with the goal of removing occupation and reuniting our homeland and our people.”<sup>204</sup> For the first time since 1974, the Ministry’s leadership outlined the vision of an educational system that nurtures a culture of reconciliation between the two main communities on the island; a goal that should be expected, especially given the fact that re-unification has been the explicit and expressed political goal of the Greek Cypriot community as well as the official position of the Republic of Cyprus. The circular however, caused heated reactions by teachers’ unions which claimed that the already burdened curriculum cannot support an additional goal that may be difficult to implement. The elementary school teachers’ union POED said that schools should not be forced to visit Turkish Cypriot institutions in the north and argued—as the head of POED claimed in an interview for a Greek television channel<sup>205</sup>—that such actions can ‘confuse’ 8-year-old children and hurt teachers’ and parents’ ‘sensitivities’.

In an open letter to teachers the union pointed out that given the ‘realities’ in Cyprus, “the goal of ‘I know, I don’t forget and I struggle’ remains a permanent objective under emphasis, to underscore the struggle of our educational system to liberate and reunite our homeland.” Irony and blatant contradictions aside, it is important to note the language of emotional appeal—confusion, sensibilities—that registers a resistance to desecrate the cultural trauma by diluting its

<sup>203</sup> Excerpt from interview with a refugee mother (Christou, 2002).

<sup>204</sup> From <http://www.schools.ac.cy/dde/circular/data/Doc7387.pdf> retrieved April 17, 2009.

<sup>205</sup> The full 15 minute report on “Cyprus History Lessons” by Sky News can be found at [http://www.skai.gr/master\\_avod.php?id=115439&cid=61569&bc=61569&lsc=1](http://www.skai.gr/master_avod.php?id=115439&cid=61569&bc=61569&lsc=1), retrieved March 29, 2009.

emotional strength. It also illustrates the compulsory return to the trauma drama (Alexander, 2004b) which emphasizes the possibility that “1974” or any cultural trauma could happen again.

In April 2003, the Turkish Cypriot leadership, under mounting popular pressure from the declining economic situation in the north, decided to lift the ban on movement across the Green Line. This meant that, for the first time in 29 years, Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots would be able to visit the areas that were largely inaccessible to them. This almost surprising turn of events challenged not only existing understandings of the political will of the other side but also the supposedly shared comprehension of terms such as ‘state’ and ‘authority’ (Demetriou, 2007). Some cynical comments by Greek Cypriots in the early days contended that the Turkish Cypriot leadership’s shrewd move served to politically elevate the appearance of ‘good will’ for a solution to the Cyprus problem while creating the conditions for Greek Cypriots to swallow the reality of division and thus eliminate the problem itself. The idea was that Greek Cypriots facing their dilapidated houses or entering them as visitors of new (Turkish) owners will give up on the hope of return and reunification of the island.

Crossing the Green line to visit the hitherto inaccessible northern part of the island was subject to a variety of interpretations. For some, outright refusal was the only dignified response because Turkish Cypriot authorities forced all those who wish to cross to display their ID papers. This turned natives into “tourists” to their own land (Dikomititis, 2005). Others, though, were moved more by material considerations, opting to cross the Green line in search of cheaper goods and services. To these two diametrically opposed interpretations, it is necessary to add a third and perhaps more widespread interpretation of crossing. For many Greek Cypriot refugees, crossing the buffer zone became an act of pilgrimage (Dikomititis, 2004. 2005). As Dikomititis (2004) points out, the refugees literally *moved* the earth by collecting water and soil to take back with them. Their visits to the occupied areas became a ritual of visiting their house, the church and the cemetery. They collected soil from the graves and anointed themselves with the water running at the center of the village. Parents came with children who have never seen their ancestral lands and who were told repeatedly of these lost territories.

Crossing the Green line entailed elements of sacralization of these territories which in turn maintained the mythologization of the island’s occupied part. These visits were also short lived experiments that did not confirm expectations for a widening inter-communal relationship. Over time, the number of visits dropped significantly: Once visited, the promised lands of the north returned to their mythological status as an imaginary *topos* for Greek Cypriots.

This imaginary *topos* is not located solely in a different *space* but also in a different *time*. For example, in a newspaper article<sup>206</sup> titled ‘Mores and Customs of Christmas and New Year: Nostalgia for Tradition’ (December 27, 2009), a Greek Cypriot woman details the making of traditional sweets and the Christmas family rituals of the past. The woman and her husband reminisce the days when these customs were authentically practiced, when people were pure enough to appreciate their significance and poor enough to be grateful for a pair of pants and a piece of warm pastry. The opening lines set the narrative in the context of ‘traditional grandmothers’ of Paralimni who ‘reminisce their childhood years and the festive days in Rizokarpaso, Varosi and Kerynia’. Without naming them as such, the article is situated in the nostalgia of older refugee women for the past—a pre-1974 past, rife with tradition and the virtues of simple life. The article ends with the following words:

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<sup>206</sup> *Politis* newspaper, 27 December, 2009 at <http://www.politis-news.com/cgi-bin/hweb?-A=843521&-V=archive&-w=H0H@KAI@E0IMA@&-P>

*Ms Androula, on the other hand, feels that as faithfully as she tries to preserve these customs she can never be as happy as she used to be in Karpasi [occupied area]. 'I believe that refugeehood has left a bitterness inside us and it is difficult for us to be joyful and carefree like the old days', says Ms Androula expressing her grievance and wishing that warmth and peace can return to people's hearts, in a Cyprus that is free and reunited.*

Just like the president's talk professed a break from 'age-old habits and folkloric traditions' caused by the invasion, the article assembles a narrative of double-coded loss where the refugees' memories of the occupied part are the memories of tradition. Thus, the 1974 events are recounted as a break from tradition, the loss of innocence and the pain of losing both a home and a heaven of pure, authentic life. In this way, the occupied areas become a time capsule that holds not only the answer to happiness but also the solution to the crisis of identity, signified by the endangered traditions. Ms Androula laments the inability of the new generation to appreciate the laboring process of home-baked goods or the significance of a simple gift made with love. Even though she follows these customs with 'religious piety' in order to transfer tradition to her children and grandchildren, she also feels that in the current context of consumerism and material abundance it is difficult for anyone to experience the spirit of the good old days.

## **Conclusions**

This paper begins with the assumption that the events of 1974 possess the potential but not the proof that their experience would be traumatizing. In other words, the cultural trauma of 1974 cannot be objectively deduced from an equation of suffering but it has to be understood through the social processes that construct an event as traumatic not only for the present but also for future generations. As we explain, there is no escape from "1974" in Cyprus even though the manifestations of its commemoration differ depending on which side of the buffer zone one is located. For Greek Cypriots who live in the southern part of the island, "1974" is a haunting cultural trauma that is impossible to ignore whereas for Turkish Cypriots the events of 1974 have concluded the process of inter-communal separation (see Bryant, 2008). In this paper, our objective has been confined to discussing the specificity of the Greek Cypriot cultural trauma.

We argued that for Greek Cypriots "1974" is a horrendous event that stands outside the scope of normal time. The articulation of the 1974 cultural trauma through the experience of *uprootedness* and the vision of a *day of return* is embodied in specific groups that have become emblematic of the trauma – these include the refugees, the missing persons and the "enclaved" in the north. As ultimate symbols of the trauma drama, these groups have become collective agents of the trauma process (Alexander, 2004a) by bearing the burden of narrating the pain and thus by inviting members of the wider Greek Cypriot community to identify with them. By functioning as metaphors for return (Cassia, 2005) they register the emotional trauma through their liminal states of uprootedness, homelessness and dis-embodiment. Thus, they reiterate the exceptionality of the 1974 event even as they become the everyday, mundane symbols of it.

In the paper's second part, we further sought to illustrate how "1974" is reproduced, evoked, represented in everyday rituals, in practices unrelated and seemingly far removed from politics. In so doing we aimed to offer examples where trauma is experienced at the very level of the mundane – where cultural trauma theory's applicability has been questioned (Spillman,

2005). In this level, we see the routinization of trauma or its falling back into the background of social life. Its manifestations however continue to punctuate everyday conversations, practices and thoughts: Everything, from a presidential address to the watering of orange trees or the discursive and bodily practices and institutional routines (such as IDs and financial aid) that enshrine and reproduce the “refugee” label operate as constant reminders of the cultural trauma of “1974” on a daily basis. As such, these reminders become part of everyday routine, ritual and the taken – for – granted cultural *milieu* of the Republic of Cyprus. The identification of the post-1974 military occupation of part of the island with the loss of folkways and tradition in general universalizes the trauma beyond the loss of property and mirrors the two processes as one. As the occupied areas become emblematic of tradition, the invasion of 1974 is narrated as the invasion of modernity that unsettled people, mores and fundamental identity values. The pain of loss and the desire for return are, therefore, a cultural urgency for return to tradition.

But the trauma’s hold is not restricted to the generation of those who have personally experienced the events of the summer of 1974. It extends to the totality of Greek Cypriots and most importantly to those who have been born after 1974 or who were too young to have personal memories of the events. Notwithstanding the religious undertones of a ‘fall from Eden’ the “return of the trauma narrative” is located in intergenerational dynamics that can only be understood as an all-consuming cultural framework, which refracts all societal changes in the prism of 1974. If life before the invasion is mythologized, the post-1974 context is vilified as national degeneration. For the older generation of Greek Cypriots “modern” is what came after 1974 and is what threatens the memory of tradition and fuels the desire of return.

While seemingly routine, the cultural trauma’s intergenerational transmission remains contested and consequential. In fact, in the second and third sections of this paper, we argued that the focus of official remembrance – under the “I don’t forget” slogan – has contributed to an extensive absorption into the collectivity’s own suffering, even to the detriment of endorsing the goal of coexistence with the Turkish Cypriots in a future re-unified Cyprus. For the younger generations experience the trauma unconnected to personal memory and simply as a cultural construct, whereby its resolution can be sought only in a future settlement that would fulfill the Greek Cypriot national objectives. The emotional burden of the cultural trauma for Greek Cypriots, therefore, is so extensive that it raises the community’s expectations of what would constitute an acceptable solution to island’s political troubles. We dare say that any successful solution of the Cyprus issue would need to offer not only practical solutions for dealing with the island’s problems of political governance but it would also need to heal the Greek Cypriots’ cultural trauma by restoring that community’s “fall from grace”.

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## THE TRAUMA OF KOSOVO IN SERBIAN NATIONAL NARRATIVES

### A story about stories

On the face of it, this is a perfect case of cultural trauma. If asked what distinguishes them as a nation, most Serbs would tell you it is the memory of the Battle of Kosovo, fought between the Serbian army and the forces of Ottoman Turks in 1389. Serbs lost the battle, and their prince was killed. The event marked the collapse of the medieval Serbian state and beginning of the long Ottoman domination. The Kosovo *sore*, *wound* or *pain*, as it is usually called in the “stories Serbs tell themselves about themselves” (Živković 2001a), that is, the aggrieved but proud feeling of tragedy, death and loss engendered by remembrance of the Kosovo catastrophe 600 years ago is generally held to be the foundation of Serbian identity, part of the very essence of being a Serb. Yet I will not start from the assertion that Kosovo as trauma is central to Serbianness, because this is precisely what needs to be examined. I will primarily be interested in how this claim has come to look so self-evident.

“Kosovo” in Serbian national narratives is not a story of a thing, a place, or an event but, more than anything else, a story about stories. It is then appropriate to begin with two sets of statements, illustrating two broad types of accounts that purport to explain the link between Serbs and the symbolism of Kosovo.<sup>207</sup>

### I

“The Battle of Kosovo is the symbol and mark of Serbian history. ... For the Serbian people, Kosovo is the imprint of its identity, the key through which to understand the message of its entire history, the banner of national freedom.” (Bogdanović 2006: 410)

“That one event has imprinted itself indelibly on the Serbian soul forever. ... It is a simple matter of fact that, whenever Serbs are faced with events of great historical importance, they invariably turn to the one source of strength and inspiration – the Kosovo mystique.” (Mihailovich 1991: 141)

„It is on the tragic myth of a heroic sacrifice and the choice of the eternal life in the heavenly kingdom that the moral philosophy of the Serbian people has rested all the way to modern times. The ethic and spiritual principles of the Kosovo commitment were the foundation of the spiritual life of the entire Serbian people.“ (Palavestra 1991: 23)

“Kosovo is many diverse things to different living Serbs, but they all have it in their blood. They are born with it. ... The question of why it is in Serbian blood is never meant to be answered – it is a transcendental phenomenon.” (Dragnich and Todorovich 1984: 4)

“For centuries it has been as essential ingredient in the historical consciousness of the Serbian people. ... On the six hundredth anniversary of their nation’s Golgotha, Serbian people around the world pause to reflect once again on the meaning and impact of a medieval battle which shaped their destiny” (Emmert 1990: 142)

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<sup>207</sup> The following quotations are all taken from the broadly scholarly genre of writings which, whether academic or more popular, claim a basic factual accuracy and adherence to a methodology. This for the moment excludes journalistic, poetic, and overtly propagandistic texts, which will be taken up later on.

## II

“The Kosovo mythology operates as an alternative field of logic, history, and reality. In this alternate reality, the configurations of hate stereotypes ... make sense. ... At some point ... Kosovo mythology became so strong that those who tried to manipulate it ... found themselves slaves to the expectations and interior logic of this ideology of eternal conflict unto extermination.” (Sells 2002: 67)

“The crux of the grand narrative ... is the way in which present-day Albanians, or alternatively Bosnian Muslims, are looked upon as ‘Turk-surrogates’, that is, as symbolic stand-ins for the real Turks (Ottomans) who defeated (Serb) Prince Lazar 600 years ago in 1389 at the Battle of Kosovo.” (Vetlesen 2005: 179)

“The loss of power was particularly traumatic for the Serbs. ... The myths dealing with the loss of the medieval empire served to create a nationalist frenzy at the moment when ... a unique opportunity [seemed to be provided] for the realization of the central promise of Serbian national mythology, the creation of the Second Serbian Empire.” (Anzulović 1999: 2)

“Serbs began to feel the defeat in Kosovo as if it had occurred only yesterday. ... Based on the past trauma and time collapse, Serbs perceived a threat when one did not actually exist and felt compelled to act against it. Thus the collective idea that Muslims had to be exterminated slowly began to develop.” (Volkan 2002: 93, 96)

The first group of statements view Serbs as a nation decisively defined by the traumatic but ennobling memory of the Battle of Kosovo. It is believed that the “Kosovo pledge” – the choice of the “heavenly kingdom” and the self-effacing heroism of Serbian fighters – which Serbs have adhered to throughout the centuries, makes them a better kind of people, brave and virtuous, unassuming but tenacious, profoundly spiritual. This account will be called *celebratory discourse*.

The second group represents a view that is in many respects the polar opposite of the first. It is highly critical of Serbs and denies them any and all of such beautiful qualities. They are depicted as a power-hungry nation prone to aggression against others, especially their weaker neighbors. In these destructive actions Serbs are propelled by a pernicious myth in whose grips they are hopelessly caught, losing any rational sense of reality. This is *denouncing discourse*.

The former discourse tends to be an insider one, set forth by Serbs, especially those who readily self-identify as such, while the latter is generally an outsider discourse, put forward from without by non-Serb observers and commentators. This preferential association between the content and the speaker’s location is of course not absolute,<sup>208</sup> but it is both quantitatively and symbolically preponderant.

Opposed as they are, the two discourses share more than would be expected. Their common ground is marked by three basic assumptions.

*Ontologization of Trauma.* First, they both believe that the mythicized collective remembrance of the Battle of Kosovo is indelibly imprinted on the Serbian mind. On both sides the Kosovo Myth is construed as trauma, as *the* Serbian Trauma. Whether this is extolled or

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<sup>208</sup> There are also denouncing insiders and an occasional celebrating outsider. Critically minded insiders (e.g. Popov 2000; Čolović 2001, 2002), while concurring in many respects with the denouncing outsiders, are free from gross oversimplifications and factual errors that abound in the latter’s works. As for the sympathetic outsiders, it is worth noting that a rare example of this kind (Emmert 1990) was written well before the outbreak of Yugoslav wars.

denigrated, it is taken as a fact that Serbs have mourned the Kosovo defeat for centuries.<sup>209</sup> Furthermore, this thing, the Kosovo Trauma, not just passively exists but is an active factor in shaping Serbs' actions. As a result, it produces consequences in reality and affects also the lives of others – whether they are seen as targets of Serbian aggression (version II) or beneficiaries of Serbian chivalrous idealism (version I).

*Exoticization of Serbs.* In both discourses, Serbs are essentialized into a special kind of people, a race apart. The incorporation of the Kosovo Trauma makes them different from anybody else, producing their radical alterity. Unlike other nations, Serbs glorify death and celebrate defeat. The pain of the Trauma and the thirst for revenge turns them into savage aggressors(II)/ self-sacrificing heroes(I) in their constant conflicts with various enemies. Due to the Trauma, they have remained immune to the ills(I)/ benefits(II) of Western modernity. Serbs are irrational, inscrutable and unpredictable, controlled by mysterious emotional forces working from within them. They are the Savage – whether Noble or Ignoble.

*Homogenization of Serbs.* The third assumption stems logically from the preceding two, and perceives the nation as a homogeneous body. It is “Serbs” who feel, remember, believe, think, sing, or imagine. There is no mention of disagreement or multiplicity of voices. Denouncers almost never speak of internal differences in opinion among “Serbs” concerning the Kosovo legacy, its interpretation or use. For the celebrators, the invocations of “every Serb” and “all Serbs” is a central element of their very discursive stance, which importantly depends on magically obliterating dissent and heterogeneity within.

Beside such internal similarities, the two arguments share one more feature: they are both currently hegemonic in their respective areas of influence. The interest in the Kosovo Myth received a strong impetus with the outbreak of wars in former Yugoslavia in the early 1990s. The widespread perception of Serbs as the main culprits for Yugoslavia's bloody collapse and chief perpetrators of atrocities prompted many too look for causes of such behavior in the Serbian cultural past, and to find a pivotal point in the Kosovo Myth. An unbroken line was established extending from late 14<sup>th</sup> century through 19<sup>th</sup>-century Serbian nationalism to the present day. It was postulated that the traumatic memory of the Kosovo failure which Serbs were never able to overcome, this unhealed wound, spurred them to aggression, expansionism, trampling on others' rights and, finally, genocide.

Over the past fifteen or so years in the international public opinion, including the scholarly one, Serbs have become rather firmly entrenched as *the* example of a nation going amok. They have been likened to the Holocaust perpetrators, an association which is not just an ordinary political slander but a ritual pollution, and thus cannot be shed by rational demonstrations of innocence (Alexander 2004b: 244).<sup>210</sup> This is the background that determines current international receptions of the Kosovo symbolism. The latter is used, almost self-evidently by now, as an explanatory tool. In a recent book about the notion of genocide (Vetlesen 2005), Serbs are the central example, and the Kosovo Myth is matter-of-factly referred to as a major trigger of their genocidal actions. For the psychiatrist Vamik Volkan (1996, 2001, 2002) Serbs and their Kosovo legacy proved particularly instrumental in building the theory of “chosen

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<sup>209</sup> True, quite a few denouncers dispute the historical record of the Battle, or otherwise point at the spuriousness of the Trauma, as something that Serbs have made up rather than experienced. Yet this is still ontologization insofar as Serbs are held to believe in this fabrication and act upon it.

<sup>210</sup> See also Alexander 2004b: 246-249 for a discussion of the analogy between the Holocaust and Serbs' conduct in the 1990s wars.

trauma”.<sup>211</sup> Šuber (2006) flatly declares Serbia is an “imperative subject” for studying interrelatedness of myth and politics, and singles out the Kosovo myth as *the* factor conditioning Serbian behavior lately. Michael Billig, in his otherwise thoroughly original book (Billig 1995), looks for the sharpest possible contrast with the bland, “banal” nationalism of the Western democracies and finds it in, whom else, Serbs.<sup>212</sup> Countless more examples could be cited, but the point is that the Kosovo Myth is presented in a misleadingly univocal manner, as conveying invariably a single message over many centuries: a message of unyielding collectivism, adoration of war and death, aggressive militarism, and particularistic anti-humanism.

Yet it has been curiously overlooked how much this account, minus the negative moral judgment, agrees with the most uncritical and self-congratulatory internal Serbian view of the Kosovo tradition. Western disparaging accounts portray Serbs in precisely the way the staunchest Serbian nationalists prefer to see their nation. Seen from this angle, the two sides cooperate closely. They work together in a formidable joint effort to constrain the Serbian identity to a single symbolic structure – *the* “Kosovo Myth” – and a particular version of it at that. Although they are usually articulated as a hostile response to, and in order to undercut the claims of, one another, even this apparent opposition contributes to their objective cooperation. I will return to this.

In the analysis that follows, the twin accounts presented above will be used as a foil against which to test new openings. I will take a closer look at how they were constructed and how they are still being constructed. All three shared assumptions will be challenged. To begin with, I will seek to *de-ontologize* the Kosovo Trauma, or to de-traumatize Kosovo symbolism. The traumaticness of Kosovo for Serbs is not a fact but a social process, an “ongoing practical accomplishment” as Garfinkel would put it, which can be traced and described. Secondly, as for *essentialization*, I am convinced that Serbs are not so much different from other nations as they would sometimes like to think of themselves or as they are frequently portrayed by outsiders; and that for analyzing things Serbian the usual instruments of the social sciences will perfectly do.<sup>213</sup> Thirdly, it will be shown how *homogenization* is harnessed to the political usability of Kosovo symbolism in the internal political arena for purposes of exclusion, undermining the development of genuine pluralism.

It is my intention to explore the strategically important ambiguities, gaps, loops, nesting implications, loose ends, double-entendres, misunderstandings better left unclarified etc. It is such discursive plays which, I believe, are mainly responsible for the Myth’s enduring power, especially a continuous shifting along the axis of *universality vs. particularity*.

I hope to show this to be an excellent example of how cultural structures operate within the dynamically unfolding historical contexts, in constant tension between the autonomous strength or “semiotic resistance” of sedimented and patterned cultural meanings, on one hand, and the contingencies of political, economic, and military circumstances, on the other. Cultural structures, though flexible and open-ended enough to remain meaningful over for so long and

<sup>211</sup> Neither Volkan nor Vetlesen are Balkans specialists, but this does not seem to be a hindrance.

<sup>212</sup> “[S]urely, there is a distinction between the flag waved by Serbian ethnic cleansers and that hanging unobtrusively outside the US post office” (1995: 6). It will be a concern of this chapter to show that the Kosovo Myth can serve, and has served, not only the purposes of “hot nationalism” but of the “banal” one as well – underpinning, one might say, “the flag hanging unobtrusively outside the Serbian post office”.

<sup>213</sup> The assumption that Serbs are profoundly different may lead to the kind of intellectual abdication van de Port (1999) openly advocates in proclaiming that “it takes a Serb to know a Serb”, an idea which he claims to have arrived at by “taking seriously what Serbs tell about themselves”. Here the Serbian radical-alterity- posturing happily coincides with an outsider’s postmodernist destruction of social science.

through so diverse situations, have also been resistant enough not to allow for just any use that someone might wish to put them to. These structures have displayed an ability to channel interpretations into some directions at the expense of others, restricting the range of the possible. On the other hand, cultural structures cannot operate in a vacuum producing, like a machine, always the same pre-packed hermeneutic output. Finally, they do not operate by themselves but require living, thinking, acting and, especially, speaking agents.<sup>214</sup> Kosovo has become the main Serbian “entrenched story” (Živković 2001a: xii) – the community’s most powerful communication resource because, having been told and retold in thousands of times and ways, has acquired a unique intertextual thickness.<sup>215</sup>

My theoretical terrain can be delineated by juxtaposing the Dragnich-Todorovich sentence quoted above – “Kosovo is many diverse things to different living Serbs, but they all have it *in their blood*” – and a seemingly similar one used by Eyerman (2002: 18) to characterize the role of slavery in the forging of African American identity: “Slavery has meant different things for different generations of black Americans, but it was always there *as a referent*” (italics added). It is in the space between *blood* and *referent* that I wish to move, from the former to the latter. A *referent* is something you can follow and describe how, where, when and by whom it has been referred to; and in this way, you may hope to re-trace in the reverse direction the passage it covered in turning into the alleged *blood*.<sup>216</sup>

Two reservations are in order here. First, I will only deal with Kosovo as a *Serbian* symbolic referent. Albanians, who make up the overwhelming majority of inhabitants of Kosovo as a real territory and newly independent Balkan country seeking full international recognition, also feel Kosovo to be “more than” just a piece of land. For them too, Kosovo has sacred attributes and this sacralization is similarly based on suffering and heroism. Though it would be fascinating to examine the parallels between Albanian and Serbian constructions of Kosovo as traumatic, this must remain beyond the scope of this chapter.<sup>217</sup> Second, when referring to “Kosovo”, I will mean the symbolic, abstract meaning, not Kosovo as a real place, unless I specifically indicate so. I will not deal with the more directly political, legal or security issues involved in the Kosovo crisis since the late 1980s. The abstract and the concrete cannot of course be completely disentangled, all the more so because Kosovo as territory has been the bone of contention over which Serbs and Albanians have vied for the last one hundred and fifty years. For Serbs, Kosovo is a sacred symbol not only because of the Battle but also for the presence on the soil of real Kosovo of precious cultural monuments, most notably medieval churches and monasteries. Thus when Serbs claim Kosovo is the “cradle of Serbhood”, they ambiguously refer

<sup>214</sup> While bewareing the mythification of the Myth itself, its purely instrumentalist alternative is no better. Thus Malcolm (1998: 80) writes that “[t]here is simply no evidence to suggest that any Serb ever drew the idea of a special ‘Kosovo covenant’ ... before the nineteenth century” and, in response to a Serbian author who called Kosovo tradition the “permanent connective tissue among Serbs”, continues: “‘Permanent’ is perhaps not the most obvious choice of word for such a very recent product of nationalist ideological history”. A cultural sociology cannot afford to deal so dismissively with meaning-structures.

<sup>215</sup> “Entrenched story” is a narrative a community comes to be stuck with, which “becomes ever more entrenched even as it is bitterly contested, for any new reference only serves to make it associatively richer”. Its elasticity in interpretative and pragmatic terms is due to the fact that its elements “trail behind them a long history of previous uses” (Živković 2001a: xii-xiii)

<sup>216</sup> Dragnich and Todorovich’s *blood* is not the only one, cf.: “Deeply rooted in the mind of the people, the Kosovo tradition is still torturing Serbian blood” (Djordjević 1991: 324 – interestingly, another Serbian American academic).

<sup>217</sup> For hints, see Vickers 1998; Luci and Marković 2008; Zdravković 2005; Duijzings 2000. On recent symbolizations of Kosovo Albanian victimhood see Di Lellio and Schwandner-Sievers 2006.

to both the embodied place and the sacred idea, and the dynamic between an abstracting, de-territorializing symbolization and recurrent re-territorialization of “Kosovo” has been quite important in the cultural history of the notion.<sup>218</sup> However, Kosovo as a contemporary political issue is far too complex to be dealt with summarily.

My argument will proceed in four steps. To begin, I will trace how the apparently unitary Myth, its form finalized in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, operated within a number of vastly different ideological-political programs in modern Serbian and Yugoslav history. Next, I will try to tease out the Myth’s strategic ambivalences and the ways in which it is continuously discursively reproduced in specific instances. A discussion of the official and vernacular interpretations in the most recent period will follow, to conclude with some general implications.

## **Cultural structures and their contexts: the shaping of the Myth**

### *1. The beginnings: 14-18<sup>th</sup> centuries*

The Kosovo legend was spun over several centuries from elements originating in three kinds of sources, one oral and two written. The epic folk poetry about the Battle of Kosovo had been preserved and transmitted until 19<sup>th</sup> c. as a living oral tradition, at first chivalric and feudal in literary form and social location, to become more rural, popular and patriarchal with the disappearance of the native Serbian elite.<sup>219</sup> The two kinds of written sources involve religious writings (sermons, eulogies, hagiographies), and secular works (travelogues, biographies, chronicles). In a fine example of what nowadays would be called intertextuality, the various sources intermingled and borrowed from each other, motifs and elements flowing from one to the other in different directions. To try to set apart the “factual” and the “imaginary” within the Kosovo symbolism is difficult and, moreover, unproductive, because it is only in their conjunction that the two levels represent an active cultural structure.

What would become known as the Battle of Kosovo<sup>220</sup> took place on a field near present-day Pristina, on June 15, 1389, between the army led by the Serbian prince Lazar Hrebeljanović and the Ottoman forces led by the Sultan Murad. At that time, Lazar was just beginning to meet some success in his attempts to stabilize the fragmented and mutually quarrelling Serbian lands and to bid the position of the sovereign. Previously, the Serbian medieval state had gone through almost two centuries of progress and expansion under the Nemanjić dynasty, reaching its apogee under Stefan Dušan, crowned emperor in 1346. The decline was soon to follow however, and the last Nemanjić, Dušan’s son Uroš, died in 1371. In the same year, the advancing Ottomans marked their first important victory against the Serbs.

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<sup>218</sup> In terms of O’Brien’s (1987: 9-13) theory of “holy nations”, distinguishing the Old Testament version (concrete and localized) from the New Testament version (spiritual and other-worldly), the Serbian case oscillates between the two. It began as the latter and slid into the former in 19<sup>th</sup> -turn of 20<sup>th</sup> century, yet occasionally reverting to the “New Testament” variety in calmer periods, while the last three decades have seen a powerful revival of the “Old Testament” kind.

<sup>219</sup> The oldest and first recorded folk epics were 14- or 16-syllabic *bugarštice*, but what would become canonical is the decasyllabic type (*deseterac*), usually sung with the accompaniment of *gusle* (a simple string instrument played with a bow). In spite of their aura of the only genuine representative of the folk tradition about Kosovo, poems of the latter kind were composed no earlier than mid-18<sup>th</sup> century (Emmert 1990: 122; Loma 2002: 130). Other, less consequential genres of folklore on Kosovo themes – tales, proverbs, toponyms and popular genealogies – also exist.

<sup>220</sup> See Emmert (1990) for a detailed account of the historical event and the legend.

Like all medieval battles, Kosovo was, strictly speaking, not fought by “Serbs” and “Turks” in national or ethnic terms, although it was redefined as such in retrospect. Its religious component was important though: it was felt on both sides to be a clash between Christians and Muslims. The Battle’s immediate outcome is not clear,<sup>221</sup> but with the passage of time it was increasingly presented as Serbian and Christian defeat, on which basis the Kosovo Myth would be built. This was a retrospective interpretation of a military event which, however undecided initially, represented an important step in the loss of Serbia’s statehood and independence to the Ottomans.<sup>222</sup> Although Serbian lands retained a degree of autonomy until 1459, and actually experienced some cultural flourishing, Lazar’s widow was forced to accept vassalage to Turks and other feudal lords were under mounting Ottoman pressure.<sup>223</sup>

Whether Kosovo was “really” Serbian military defeat or not is actually not crucial. The cultural construction of Trauma congealed around the factual core of a battle and death of the ruler. The social context was favorable for a traumatic definition of the event. Under Ottoman rule, the previously initiated economic, political and cultural development was cut short. Social structure changed: native nobility disappeared, previous political institutions were dissolved, Serbian Church lost its privileged role, a new ruling group of a different faith was introduced. Serbs’ ties to Western Europe were severed. The population homogenized into peasantry underwent what ethnologists have called “secondary patriarchalization” - reverting to ancient, often pre-Christian forms of social organization, economy and morality. Although one would do well not to perpetuate Serbian textbook stereotypes on the “five hundreds of Turkish yoke”, a frozen time of utter darkness and misfortune, there are enough grounds to argue that for Serbs the Ottoman conquest meant a rupture, a sudden redirection of historical course. The Kosovo legend emerged as part of the collective effort to make sense of this rupture and a retrospective explanation of its roots and causes.

The legend would take its final shape only in 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>224</sup> In this long first period, several types of carrier groups may be identified that were articulating, recording, interpreting and spreading what would become the Serbian Trauma of Kosovo. At the very beginning of the process stood the mutually overlapping circles of Serbian aristocracy and the Orthodox Church, who first established the cult of Prince Lazar. Later carriers of the tale were innumerable anonymous folk singers who were telling and retelling the story of Kosovo heroes in their creations/performances.<sup>225</sup> They did not necessarily intend to transmit Trauma: their main concern was to tell a good story well, to entertain their audiences and at once provide them with a morally uplifting lesson of warrior virtues, in accordance with the patriarchal ethos. Further, there were Catholic travelers, monks, educators and emissaries, from the Balkans or Western Europe, who often found it in their own interest to spread the Myth. And finally, often left out of

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<sup>221</sup> The earliest sources, both Serbian and Turkish, either just describe a bloody battle in which both commanders died, or call it a Christian victory.

<sup>222</sup> The possibility of a Serbian victory is actually irrelevant because the idea of Kosovo as defeat, tragedy, and drama “is so deeply engraved in the consciousness of both ordinary people and professional historians that it has become ... part of our thinking and values we have adopted” (Blagojević 1990: 14-5).

<sup>223</sup> Ottoman rule in central Serbia would last until early 19<sup>th</sup> century, and in Kosovo until 1912.

<sup>224</sup> This final shape, which we know today, appeared for the first time in two compilations originating at two remote points in the Serb-populated territories, both of them outside of Serbia proper: epic drama *The Battle of Kosovo* was created in the Bay of Kotor (present-day Montenegro); and the prose work *The Tale about the Battle of Kosovo* in the Austrian province of Srem (present-day Vojvodina, across the river Sava from central Serbia) (Emmert 1990: 123; Popović 1998: 60-68). The authorship and mutual influences of the two works remain moot.

<sup>225</sup> On the specific logic of epic singing, and the notions of formulae, creativity and originality in this context, see the superb study of Albert Lord (1964).

conventional accounts in spite of their importance, were the Serbian educated middle classes in the border regions of the Habsburg Empire, arising since the late 17<sup>th</sup> century after successive waves of Serb migration from Ottoman-held territories. As to the specification of the “nature of the victim”, it was not quite clear who they were, and hence should feel “interpellated” by the traumatic narrative – Serbs, Orthodox Serbs, Christians?, nor did it have to be made clear, given the cultural assumptions of the times. This initial ambivalence would prove useful in later stages.

*Elements of the legend.* The legend is organized around two foci, personified in two towering figures: Prince Lazar and Miloš Obilić. One focus is religious, Christian, and martyrial, and the other epic and heroic.<sup>226</sup> They are complemented by the “traitor” Vuk Branković. There is a host of accompanying characters – the knight Jug Bogdan and his nine sons, the Jugović brothers, all killed in the battle; their mother, who died of sorrow; the Maiden of Kosovo, a girl who lost her fiancé; as well as an array of lesser knights and nobles. Almost all of them are fictitious, but very much alive in the conventional reception of the myth.<sup>227</sup>

**Prince Lazar.** The cult of Prince Lazar was the embryo of the emerging Kosovo myth. Proclaimed a saint shortly after the Battle, from 1390 on Lazar was celebrated every June 15 along with the Prophet Amos (the saint to whom the day is dedicated in the liturgical calendar), with a special *Office to the Saint Prince Lazar* composed to that purpose. While several members of the Nemanjić dynasty had been proclaimed saints, these earlier saintly rulers were celebrated for having lived in deep devotion to the Christian faith, and not for dying for it (Popović 1998: 23-4). Lazar was the first to be commemorated both as a believer and a martyr, who through deliberately embracing death earned the entrance to eternal life.

Lazar’s martyrdom is based on the fact that he gave his life “in defense of the holy cross”. The early religious writings are responsible for presenting Lazar’s death as the result of a *choice* on his part: he consciously opted to die in order to redeem himself, his people and his faith. By modeling Lazar’s character closely on the figure of Jesus Christ, the church writings also introduced the theme of *reversal* of the Battle’s outcome. What was a defeat in this-worldly terms becomes a triumph on a higher, spiritual level; what looked like a terrible loss is recoded as willing self-sacrifice in order to attain eternal, spiritual and therefore, in devout Christian eyes, the only true victory. In a medieval eulogy, Lazar is described as addressing his knights on the eve of the battle, calling them into an honorable death as the price for salvation.<sup>228</sup> The phrases employed belong to the rhetoric of the period, and the worldview they express is also recognizably medieval. We do not know if Lazar really said this to his soldiers; but even if he did, it would not make him very different from countless Christian warriors of the period.<sup>229</sup>

The folk tradition elaborated this symbolic baseline laid out by the Church, placing Lazar’s martyrdom in a compelling narrative which it fleshed out with many details. On the eve

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<sup>226</sup> Some commentators add also: pagan (Loma, 2002; Popović, 1998).

<sup>227</sup> It can hardly be said that they live on just in the “popular” understanding, since in every Serbian city and town there are streets bearing the names of these characters, which makes them quite “official”.

<sup>228</sup> “If the sword, if wounds, or if the darkness of death comes to us, we accept it sweetly for Christ and for the godliness of our homeland. It is better to die in battle than to live in shame. Better it is for us to accept death from the sword in battle than to offer our shoulders to the enemy. We have lived a long time for the world; in the end we seek to accept the martyr’s struggle and to live forever in the heaven.” And his soldiers respond: “We die so that we may live forever” (Patriarch Danilo, “Narrative about Prince Lazar”, quoted in Emmert 1990: 63, 64).

<sup>229</sup> And not just Christian, for that matter: Ottoman sources glorify the Sultan in almost identical terms, Islamic version, as a martyr for the faith. How the Battle of Kosovo was portrayed at *both* sides of the battlefield as a “cosmic” battle and a pledge for eternal glory and salvation, is discussed in Bakić-Hayden 2004: 35-38; Emmert 1990: 88-98; Popović 1998: 24-30.



of the battle, the poem says, Lazar received a message from the Holy Virgin, transmitted by St. Elijah in the guise of a falcon, to choose between an earthly kingdom, that would bring him victory and the battle, and a heavenly one, for which he would have to die together with all of his men. Lazar chooses the latter, erects, as ordered, a church on the Kosovo Field, takes holy communion with his soldiers, and marches to death. This – Lazar's choice of death as redemption – would become known as the "Kosovo covenant" or "Kosovo pledge". The parallel between Lazar and Christ is particularly accentuated in the tale of the "Prince's Supper", which is only found in the folk tradition and is modeled as a replica of the Last Supper.

When the early Christian sources talk of Lazar's victory rather than defeat, it is always described in terms of "light", which indicates the notion's otherworldly, spiritual meaning. Besides, popular lore includes legends about his miraculous body. Lazar is here identified as the embodied symbol of the community, of Serbs' "corporate identity" (Bakić-Hayden 2004: 39) which, in the centuries after the battle, was under pressure to survive both in a physical sense and in the sense of preserving their religiously based communal identity.<sup>230</sup> The influence of medieval notions of the "king's two bodies" (Kantorowicz 1957) is obvious, where the spiritual body of the leader is joined with the corpus of his knights, or "the whole people", in a sacralized sacrifice for the eternal life of the community and the Christian faith (Bojović 1991).<sup>231</sup>

**Miloš Obilić** is a brave soldier and Lazar's son-in-law who at the supper before the Battle was unjustly accused of imminent treason. Faced with Lazar's mistrust, he decided to prove his loyalty by killing Murad. The next day during the fighting he went on his own to the Turkish camp, entered by pretending to be a deserter, and killed the Sultan, only to be killed himself.

Miloš Obilić is not a historical personality. How, where and when he appeared as a fictional character is still debated. Some scholars (Popović 1998: 29-42) suggest that Miloš originated in the Turkish sources, invented by Ottoman writers in order to cover and justify the embarrassing fact of Sultan's death; Serbs then took over this character of villain-assassin and turned him into a hero. Yet others (e.g. Loma 2002) argue that Serbian sources too knew of a knight who killed Murad,<sup>232</sup> but that everything else, including his name, was legendary. Whenever Serbs' relations with the Turkish authorities worsened, as in rebellions and wars, Miloš's figure became salient, and finally topped all others on the eve of the First Serbian Uprising of 1804.

Furthermore, Catholic Slavs of the Western Balkans played a role in the shaping and spreading of the cult of Miloš. The neighboring Catholic states, exposed to the threat of Turkish invasion, were promoting anti-Ottoman and anti-Muslim sentiments, to which purpose the figure of Miloš was ideally suited (Popović 1998: 43-70). In addition, after 15<sup>th</sup> century considerable numbers of Serbs fleeing from Serbia settled in the border regions, employed as frontier soldiers of Austria and Venice. They lived in a highly patriarchal and militarized cultural milieu, where the epic tradition was thriving. Miloš, the most epic of all Kosovo heroes, was thus prominent

<sup>230</sup> "[Lazar's] body incorporates the nation itself, his head the spirit of the people. Miraculously... neither rotted for forty years, just as the Serbian people have not 'decayed' into the customs and faith of their Islamic rulers" (Bakić-Hayden 2004: 39).

<sup>231</sup> Although in the Middle Ages, writes Kantorowicz (1957: 261) every soldier giving his life for the community becomes a martyr in the image of Christ, the king's death holds a special significance: "The sacrifice of the Prince for his *corpus mysticum* – the secular state – compared with the sacrifice of Christ more directly ...: both offered their lives not only as members but also as the heads of their mystical bodies."

<sup>232</sup> Military historians argue that the feat was more probably accomplished by an armored unit. Capturing or killing the enemy chief commander was a major element of medieval war tactics (Blagojević 1989: 20).

among both Catholics and the Orthodox in the Western Balkans. Finally, a major source of the narrative substance of the Kosovo myth, from which oral tradition subsequently borrowed, was the semi-legendary history of Slavic peoples (*Il Regno degli Slavi*, 1601) by Mavro Orbin, a monk from the Republic of Dubrovnik. It is in Orbin's work that the complete story of Miloš and his exploit was rendered for the first time.

Nowadays, Miloš is undoubtedly the central character of the Kosovo Myth. Although he never existed, most Serbs are convinced he did. His name is metaphorical shorthand for selfless heroism and fearlessness; the saying, "to have the heart of Obilić" means honorable courage and ability to withstand the greatest challenge. His figure is in present times the epitome of Serbhood, especially of its militant, warrior variant. It is a curious paradox then that this very personification of Serbianness should be a literary figure which among all the Kosovo characters was most directly derived from Serbs' political and cultural exchange with others – and those others most often seen as Serbs' enemies, that is, Muslim Turks and Catholic Croats and Slovenes.

**Vuk Branković** illustrates yet third possibility of the relation between "fact" and "fiction": he really existed, but was not at all what the legend tells of him. In the story, he is the traitor who, having first slandered Miloš to Lazar to divert the latter's attention from his own evil designs, betrayed Lazar, gave up fighting in Kosovo and went over to the Turks. Historically, Vuk Branković was the second greatest Serbian feudal lord, Lazar's son in law and master of the very land where the Battle was fought. He was not a traitor at all but, on the contrary, continued resisting the Ottomans even after Lazar's family agreed to surrender. He died in Turkish prison.

None of this helped him to escape his literary fate. It is as if the narrative of heroic martyrdom of Lazar and his knights could not do without a traitor: such a figure was demanded, one might say, by the constraints of the genre. How Vuk Branković got into the role in the first place is not entirely clear,<sup>233</sup> but probably has to do with the fact that he refused to obey the Lazarević family and follow their political line. The enmity between the two families continued for some time after the Battle and it was at the Lazarević court that the first allusions to Vuk's disloyalty were produced (Ljubinković 1989: 150-152; Mihaljčić 1990, Emmert 1990: 105-120). And once the motif of treason got into the legend, it could not leave it, because it was nurtured both by instrumental factors of political interests and by cultural factors of narrative coherence and familiarity. If Lazar was Jesus Christ, someone had to be Judas. The Biblical cliché of the "Judas motif" was found in many Christian legends, especially in the Middle Ages (Mihaljčić 1990: 29). And for the more heroic, epic reading of the legend, if two characters were positive, the story would lack sufficient dramatic intensity and thus would be implausible without a negative one. Both virtue and vice must have a face in order to be sufficiently alive for the vernacular cultural consumer.

As could be seen, all the early formative drives that helped shape the Kosovo Myth were not specifically Serbian but rather partook of the cultural dynamics of the times. Christian hagiography, which served as the first discursive form to establish the cult of Prince Lazar, was a major genre of medieval literature; and the practice of canonizing and religiously celebrating political leaders, preserving and displaying their holy relics were all common in European Christendom (see also Ćirković 1990: 112). Further, the Kosovo folk poems belong to the genre of heroic epic widespread in Europe of the early Middle Ages – the only difference being that Serbs, due to "secondary patriarchalization", continued singing them long after the Western

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<sup>233</sup> The first attested source that names him as the traitor is Orbin's *History*. We do not know, and never will, if the unrecorded oral tradition preceding Orbin cast Vuk Branković in that role or not.

counterparts sank into oblivion. Even specific motifs are shared: the slandered knight, accused by his master of betrayal, who decides to prove his allegiance by a great deed, is found also in the legends of Roland or Tristan and Isolde (Ljubinković 1989: 154; Loma, 2002). Hence from the very beginning the Kosovo legend was a way of Serbs' participation in the cultural traffic with the rest of the world rather than a path leading to isolation and exclusivity.

## 2. *Serbian modernity: 19<sup>th</sup> century*

The dominant twin accounts presented at the beginning of this chapter cast the Kosovo Myth as the prime sign of Serbs' irreparable pre-modernity and anti-modernity. Nevertheless, the Myth as we know it was formed only in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, at the time when Serbia was struggling to get (back) into the history of European nations. And this was necessarily a modern struggle, which made use of modern ideas and modern ways of pursuing them.

The Kosovo legacy lived into the late 18<sup>th</sup> century as a collection of interrelated and symbolically relatively coherent bits and pieces. In Bakić-Hayden's (2004: 31) apt phrase, it was the First Serbian Uprising that "tied into the knot of collective awareness many loose strands of a long epic memory". In the decades immediately preceding the 1804 Uprising the cult of Kosovo was more widely spread and alive than ever before. As previously noted, its main centers were not in Serbia proper (which of course is not to say it was unknown there) but in the Montenegrin highlands, and among Serbs in the Habsburg Empire, whose entrepreneurial middle classes were the only modern, educated stratum of Serbs at the time. They were crucial inspirers of the Myth's first direct political use. And in spite of their modernity, they preserved the epic singing tradition they had brought with them on their migrations, so it was in Srem that some of the key folk poems about Kosovo were written down at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (1998: 147-150).<sup>234</sup>

The beginning of 19<sup>th</sup> century was decisive for both the Serbian nation and the Kosovo Myth. Politically, modern Serbia took its first steps, through the First (1804-1813) and Second (1815) uprisings against Ottoman rule, in a long process of acquiring independence that would be finished only in 1878. Culturally – which in this case means also politically – the crucial move in articulating and fixing the oral folk tradition was made by the ethnographer and language reformer Vuk Karadžić. He wrote down, compiled and published Serbian folk poems, dividing them into several "cycles", the central one being "the Kosovo cycle".<sup>235</sup> And, intentionally or not, "Vuk's work posited the Kosovo tradition as being the heart of his people's life, perceiving it, in the light of the current Western and Central European *Zeitgeist*, as a living expression of their 'national spirit'" (Bakić-Hayden 2004: 31). From the very beginning, the nation-builders felt that the Kosovo legacy can be used for political mobilization for the purposes at hand. "By the late 18<sup>th</sup> century as the spirit of revolution found an echo in the Balkans, Serbs were ready to utilize the powerful psychological factor of Kosovo in the struggle for liberation and unification" (Emmert 1990: 123). The Kosovo story had all the features Smith (1997: 56-59) lists as criteria for a "usable past", i.e. one that can help form nations: "authenticity", inspiration, and capacity for reinterpretation. The Kosovo theme was used already in the preparations for the rebellion.<sup>236</sup> At the outbreak of the Uprising, the leader himself, Karadjordje – who would be

<sup>234</sup> It is sociologically extremely interesting that a few of these key poems were at least to a degree the authorial creations of specific individuals, the well-known singers of the time who told them to Karadžić. It was only after being published that they were canonized as the stereotypical "expression of the anonymous folk genius".

<sup>235</sup> Himself a participant in the First Uprising, after its defeat he was forced to flee to Austria. His first collection of Serbian folk poems was published in Vienna in 1814, and several more followed.

<sup>236</sup> At a secret meeting an insurgent priest reportedly said: „Brothers! It has been so many hundreds of years since all our glory was buried in the dark and for all of us sad tomb at Kosovo...” (quoted in Antonijević 2007a: 135).

remembered as the „avenger of Kosovo“ – is said to have called „every Serb to arms, so that we may take revenge on the Turks, and in the name of God cast off the yoke that the Serb has carried since Kosovo to this day“ (quoted in Antonijević 2007a: 142). The epic tradition could be used to perceive and understand new situations and new tasks through the familiar images and concepts, and thus to collectively appropriate them more easily (Bakić-Hayden 2004: 36)

While Obilić's heroism and Lazar's sacrifice could incite peasant masses to join the struggle that was at once a war of independence and a social revolution, the folklore collected by Vuk Karadžić was an invaluable political asset in winning outside support for the national cause.<sup>237</sup> This was the time of the romanticist craze for “authentic” folk culture, and Serbian poems were warmly received and praised by some of the great intellectual figures of the day. Karadžić understood it very well that his undertaking is not just cultural but rather a national-political one, since the admiration for Serbian culture in the powerful Western Europe would help secure a more favorable stance towards Serbian political aspirations, and on the other hand, the proof of “antiquity” of national traditions would support Serbian claims to nationhood. Serbian leaders felt what the spirit of the times was, and spoke its language. It is one of the many paradoxes around the Kosovo Myth, nowadays used to mark the radical alterity of Serbs, that its final form was fruit of the Serbian desire to construct a modern national culture that will be part of the Western world (cf. Bakić-Hayden 2004: 32).

Around the middle of the century, as Serbia was gradually winning more sovereignty and building a new nation-state, some other important events took place. The adoption of Vuk Karadžić's reformed orthography and grammar supplied Serbs with a standard language they had never had. The Montenegrin poet-ruler Petar Petrović Njegoš published his epic poem *Mountain Wreath* which, though written by an individual, in its poetics and its ethics followed closely the world of the patriarchal folk poetry, and did for the popularization of the Kosovo themes more than any other work. In Serbia, new, bourgeois strata were slowly emerging. The state encouraged and supported education abroad, and at home as well public education was established in order to raise the abysmally low literacy rate. The Karadžić collections of folk songs immediately became part of the curriculum, and the importance of the educational system in inculcating the Kosovo legacy in subsequent generations can hardly be overestimated.

The ideas of European liberal and national revolutions of 1848 resonated strongly among Serbian youth, especially students, both in Serbia proper and in the Habsburg lands. One of the offshoots was literary romanticism of the 1850s and 1860s. This cultural-political movement was particularly passionate in reviving the Kosovo Myth, centered, in their understanding, on heroism and self-sacrifice for the nation. Student societies, clubs and associations idolized the Kosovo heroes and emulated the folk singer in the poetry they themselves wrote.<sup>238</sup>

In light of the current easy identifications of the Kosovo Myth with conservatism, Serbian chauvinism, and Orthodox clericalism it is important to situate this first outburst of Kosovo idolatry back into its cultural and political context. This reminds us of the broader spate of interpretational possibilities inherent in the Myth's contents. The radical Serbian youth were the children of their times: they were nationalist, but also democrats and modernists, as well as, in their own way, cosmopolitans. They maintained close contacts, both ideological and personal,

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<sup>237</sup> As Skerlić writes, with a touch of sarcasm: “Folk poetry ... was, after all, the only thing the Serbian people could present to the world” (Skerlić 1925: 256).

<sup>238</sup> The Battle of Kosovo was the *Leit-motiv* of Serbian poetry of the 1860s, with literary magazines swarmed by poems entitled *Kosovo*, *At Kosovo*, *Oh Kosovo*, full of wailings such as “Kosovo – my bloody wound!”, “Woe Kosovo!” etc. (Skerlić 1925: 155).

with democratic revolutionaries in other parts of Europe – Italy, France, and Hungary. They wanted their people to join the family of free European peoples, and the Kosovo legacy was seen not as an obstacle but a support on that road. Each free and sovereign people had to have something peculiar, something purely its own, and Kosovo was felt to be this Serbian specificity and Serbian gift to the colorfulness of the world – just the way Herder understood national cultures and their respectful coexistence.

Although the Kosovo symbolism was certainly most strongly bound with Serbian nationalism, this did not preclude pan-Slavic and proto-Yugoslav connections. Interestingly, pan-Slavism, the ideology of cultural and possibly political unity of all Slavic peoples, did not arrive in Serbia, as might be expected, from Russia but from the Slavic circles in Central and Western Europe (Skerlić 1925: 140).<sup>239</sup> While in contemporary Serbia attachment to Kosovo is automatically associated with attachment to Russia as Serbs’ “older brother” and natural ally, in the period we are talking about this was not at all so straightforward. Playing the pan-Slavic card was rather connected with political cooperation with the Slavic peoples of the Habsburg Empire. Among the Southern Slavs, many young Croatian nationalists, wishing to see the liberation of their people from Austrian and Hungarian dominance, found the Kosovo legend to be speaking to them, too. For many of them, Kosovo could be read as a symbol of South Slavic (“Illyrian” as it was called), not just Serbian, national pride and promise of future liberation.<sup>240</sup>

Finally, Serbian nationalist youth was also liberal in questions of internal policy and for this reason was often in conflict with authoritarian Serbian governments. Contrary to the impression conveyed in many present-day accounts, it is not true that all Serbian elites – from princes and their ministers, to writers and poets, to Orthodox priests – maintained a single and unified front of expansionist Serbian nationalism, whose watchword was “Kosovo”. In reality, nationalist authorities often harassed and imprisoned nationalist youthful activists who, along with “avenging Kosovo”, asked for freedom of the press and constitutional checks on the power of the prince. In the mind of these young people, “external freedom” (national independence) did not make much sense if it was not coupled with “internal freedom” (democracy and rule of law).<sup>241</sup> Those who wrote most enthusiastic poems about the “bleeding sore” of Kosovo were also the ones who wrote the first liberal political programs, and suffered for that.

It is equally misleading to forget about the specific position and interests of the Serbian Orthodox Church as a social agent. Without any doubt, the Church was in this period very patriotic and very much politically involved. But this does not mean it did not have its own views of what Kosovo legacy was and how it should properly be used. For one, it did not readily assent to the thorough secularization and nationalization of the Myth. A good example is the history of *Vidovdan*, the name given in the folk poetry to the day of the Battle. Although this term is

<sup>239</sup> The most important figures are the Slovaks Ljudevit Štur and Jan Kolar, teachers at Austro-Hungarian colleges, as well as the famous Pole Adam Mickiewicz, whose course on Slavic folk traditions held at *Collège de France* in Paris the 1840s did much to popularize Serbian folk poetry in the West.

<sup>240</sup> Patriotic Croatian authors of today, anxious to expose the chauvinistic import of the Kosovo Myth, wisely omit such historical details as that students of the Zagreb Catholic seminary commemorated the Battle in 1840 (Skerlić 1925: 164); that in 1889 in Vienna celebrations of the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary were jointly organized by Serb and Croat academic societies, and that the most famous Croatian actor of the day traveled to Belgrade to play Prince Lazar in the premiere of a play commissioned for the anniversary (Emmert 1990: 130, 208). The Croatian Romanticist painter Franjo Kikerez used to depict mythologized scenes from the history (or “history”) of both peoples with the same enthusiasm: his ‘Croatia’ embodied as the tragic defender of Western Christendom against Islam (Žanić 1998) is equally pathetic as his “Maiden of Kosovo” (Popovich 1991).

<sup>241</sup> The formula was coined by Jevrem Grujić, member of the fervently nationalist Association of Serbian Youth and writer of the first liberal manifesto in Serbia, persecuted and imprisoned for his liberal beliefs.

nowadays virtually synonymous with “Kosovo”, it was resisted by the Church for a quite long time. The term is the Serbianized form for “St. Vitus day”, but refers basically to the secular commemoration of the Battle’s anniversaries. As has been said, the Serbian Church dedicated June 15 (28)<sup>242</sup> to Amos and Lazar; Vitus is not a saint recognized by the Orthodox. For the more secularized nationalist audience, *Vidovdan* did not have much to do with St. Vitus either – it was just a welcome coincidence that June 15 was his day in the Catholic calendar<sup>243</sup> – but rather with celebrating the nation itself, through celebrating the Kosovo heroes. To make the celebration more solemn, they wanted Vidovdan to be the national *and* church holiday, but the Church refused to include it in its official calendar until as late as 1892. The Church also opposed the fervor with which young poets venerated and all but sacralized secular national figures such as Vuk Karadžić and Dositej Obradović. For the Church, this was blasphemy. When the young Romanticists openly identified the “Golgotha” of Kosovo with Jesus’ Golgotha, this provoked severe criticism from the religious circles. In the bitter polemics taking place in the 1860s, Church writers expressed their abhorrence of what they saw was pervasive heathenism of folk poetry and the literature inspired by it (Skerlić 1925: 256).<sup>244</sup>

The 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo was the first to be commemorated in an independent (“resurrected”) Serbian state, and provided the occasion for several important events. First, around this date the first professional historical studies of the Kosovo battle were made public, by the two founders of Serbian critical historiography, Ilarion Ruvarac and Ljubomir Kovačević. Ruvarac sifted what had been accepted as the historical record of the Battle of Kosovo and rejected most of it as product of poetic imagination or political fabrication; Kovačević demonstrated that Vuk Branković was not a traitor. Yet from our present-day viewpoint, what is equally if not more intriguing as their uncompromising critical and rationalist attitude is the fact that it stood side by side with their nationalism. Their motive in exposing myths *as* myths, which caused them much trouble amongst their myth-loving contemporaries, was in no way to spoil the collective image. Quite the opposite: they believed that by rectifying obvious untruths they were helping Serbian glory shine even brighter. Nowadays this ideological combination would look curious indeed.

An extremely important circumstance in the second half of 19<sup>th</sup> century was that the territory of real Kosovo was still in Ottoman hands. Thus in this period the appeals to the symbolic Kosovo as an abstract Trauma and spiritual pledge was easily, and deliberately, conflated with a simple call to arms, a battle cry to “avenge” and “liberate” Kosovo, and finally “settle the accounts” with the Turks. But just at this same time, and in Kosovo, Albanians were creating their own national movement.<sup>245</sup> Like never before, Serbian and Albanian collective aspirations began to diverge and conflict. It is from this period that the Albanian-Serbian rivalry over Kosovo dates. Open conflicts and mutual victimization of Serbs and Albanians began to feed back into the already existing traumatizing framework of the Serbian Kosovo narrative. Kosovo symbolism was significantly re-territorialized. And increasingly, the enemies to be

<sup>242</sup> The Serbian Church uses the Julian calendar which is 13 days apart from the Gregorian, so that anniversaries of the Battle are nowadays celebrated on June 28.

<sup>243</sup> Given the possibly significant role Dubrovnik played in molding and spreading the Kosovo Myth, it may also be relevant that St. Vitus is the city’s patron saint. Popović however explains Vidovdan as a barely Christianized pagan holiday, based on the cult of Vid, the ancient Slavic god of light (1998: 71-87).

<sup>244</sup> It is helpful to remember such details today, when the Serbian Church seems to be, to say the least, much more tolerant to sacralization of the nation.

<sup>245</sup> For Albanian political development in this period see Vickers 1998, Malcolm 1998; a Serbian view is presented in Bogdanović 2006.

fought “in the manner of Lazar and Miloš” were identified as Albanians rather than Turks. Yet the use of Kosovo as a political slogan was not uniform: the state, by definition, had to be much more cautious and take into account foreign policy and other concerns that the cultural elites could afford to ignore.<sup>246</sup>

So Kosovo symbolism served somewhat different purposes for different actors: the government sought to turn a standardized, regularized version of the tradition into the institutionalized founding myth of the nation-state and dynastic rule; the cultural elites often used Kosovo to confront the government and attack its policies as inappropriate, both in internal and international arenas; moreover, within the elites themselves, the first criticisms arose of what was perceived as political abuse and unhealthy exaggeration of the Kosovo myth,<sup>247</sup> and finally, the Church, by defending the more traditional receptions of Kosovo, tried to reassert its position in the rapidly changing environment.

Thus while the first stage leading up to the late 18<sup>th</sup> century provided elements of the myth, this second stage rounded it off, completed its construction as a cultural structure: the narrative was there, the main characters were presented in relief, and the presumed centrality of the Myth for Serbs as a nation was slowly being impressed, through the educational system, upon everybody. This is what the 19<sup>th</sup> century bequeathed to the forthcoming generations. But what it also bequeathed was Kosovo’s fundamental ambiguity: what was its “true” message; what was the proper way of preserving it; what should Serbs do about the trauma inflicted in 1389 – is there, in fact, any trauma at all? The 19<sup>th</sup> century was the first time when different social actors, pursuing various and often conflicting goals, reached for Kosovo as an inspiration, a call to arms, a spiritual reminder, an emotional bond with their fellows, or a scourge to chastise them. This multi-dimensionality and pragmatic versatility of Kosovo would remain its basic, though largely unacknowledged feature.

### *3. An “integralist” Kosovo: the interwar period*

Real Kosovo was finally liberated - or occupied, depending on the perspective one takes - in the Balkan wars of 1912-13. After World War I, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (from 1929 Kingdom of Yugoslavia) was created, bringing together the formerly independent states of Serbia and Montenegro and territories previously held by Austria-Hungary (Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia, Herzegovina). The country was ruled by the Serbian dynasty Karadjordjević. King Aleksandar “the Unifier” felt it necessary to develop an ideological underpinning to his rule over the newly united South Slavs. He launched the ambitious cultural-policy project of “integral Yugoslavism”, based on the idea that Serbs, Croats and Slovenes are one and a single people, divided in three “tribes”. He took over from the former Serbian state the Kosovo legend in the function of founding myth but sought to “Yugoslavize” it. Thus the Kosovo theme figured prominently in many of the manifestation of this political-cultural outlook, which was officially dominant in the 1920s and much of the 1930s, and was often forcefully imposed along with other King’s policies (in 1929 the regime turned into a dictatorship). Upon Aleksandar’s assassination

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<sup>246</sup> The 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations, for instance, were carefully planned so as not to offend the Turks and spoil the relatively good diplomatic relations with the Ottoman state.

<sup>247</sup> The prominent playwright Jovan Sterija Popović, at first an ardent Kosovo promoter himself, in later years became disappointed by political instrumentalizations of the Myth and, in the foreword to his bitterly satirical play *The Patriots* (1848), warned Serbs that they would not make progress until they learned how to acknowledge their failings, not just their virtues (quoted in Antonijević 2007a: 89).

in 1934, he was likened to Prince Lazar, for sacrificing himself to the unity of Yugoslavs (Emmert 1990: 138).

Probably the most interesting form in which Kosovo served the ideology of dynastic Yugoslavism was through the then fashionable disciplines of ethnopsychology and national characterology. The importance of Kosovo for the “national soul” had already been stressed by the geographer Jovan Cvijić. In his typology of Serbian characters, Cvijić described as clearly superior the so-called Dinaric Highlander, whose warrior and state-building capacities he praised. The Highlander’s soul is centered on the memory of Kosovo and upholding of the Kosovo covenant.<sup>248</sup> While for Cvijić Kosovo concerned Serbs alone, in the works of a major exponent of the integral Yugoslavism, Vladimir Dvorniković, it became Yugoslav. An ethnic Croat, Dvorniković deeply believed in the idea of the fundamental unity of South Slavs. For him, folk epics, especially the central Kosovo Cycle, is the true expression of the “people’s psyche”, the essence of the Yugoslav soul. In these poems, we hear “the voice of a people which *is becoming a nation* and which feels its state-building and Christian-cultural mission in the Balkans” (Dvorniković 1939: 537). “Our epics” is “ethically higher” than that of other peoples since it represents a stance of “struggle, resistance and ultimate sacrifice”. Our people has a “powerful historical organ” and is endowed with “collective popular mnesis which hardly has an analog in any other European people” (ibid.). The exaggeration and collective conceit are remarkable indeed.

Yugoslavism found expression in the visual arts as well. The best known Croatian and Yugoslav sculptor, and for a time the dynasty’s favorite artist, Ivan Meštrović, sought to embody the Kosovo Myth in marble and granite, so that its important messages, as he understood them, might permanently foster the unity of South Slavs. Meštrović produced the design for a spectacular memorial to be erected at Kosovo Field. The project was never realized however, only reliefs representing individual characters (Popovich 1991: 252).

I certainly do not wish to claim that, in the interwar period, Kosovo suddenly stopped being Serbian and became a common heritage binding the South Slavs. After all, that King Aleksandar’s projects were not very successful was more than convincingly demonstrated first by his assassination by Croatian nationalists, and then in 1941 when, attacked by the Axis Powers, Yugoslavia fell apart in less than a week. But even if one concedes that it was all just plain Serbian dominance cloaked in a false Yugoslavism, it does make a difference whether the framing was more exclusive or more inclusive. It is culturally significant that an attempt was made in this direction, and that for at least some non-Serbs it made sense to see Kosovo as part of their own legacy and inspiration.<sup>249</sup>

#### *4. The communist twist: after 1945*

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<sup>248</sup> “The Dinaric man burns from a desire to avenge Kosovo... where he lost his independence... From there stems the almost unlimited spirit of sacrifice... for social and national ideal” (Cvijić 1992: 34). [Every Highlander peasant] “considers the national heroes as his own ancestors: with profound national and human sensibility he participates in his thoughts in their great deeds. ... There are even regions in which the people feel the wounds of the Kosovo heroes” (p. 39-40).

<sup>249</sup> The non-Serb Yugoslav peoples could do more with Kosovo than accept, or reject, wholesale its dynastic version. In an article with the telling title “In defense of the real Vidovdan”, the newspaper of a Croatian political party comments on the occasion of the 550 anniversary in 1939, that to conceal Serbian hegemonic policies behind the ideology of Kosovo is to betray its very ideals, which consist of “ethics and love of justice”, and only when they start treating Croats in a fair and just way will Serbs become worthy of Vidovdan (quoted in Emmert 1990: 208).



It is often argued today that in communist times, between 1945 and the late 1980s, the Kosovo legacy was suppressed and forcefully forgotten. But this is not quite true: though public celebrations of Vidovdan were banned, the communists knew how to incorporate Kosovo into their ideology and make good use of it. But before they came to power, the turbulent years of World War II intervened, extremely interesting for our topic. On March 27, 1941, the government which two days before had signed the Tripartite Pact with Nazi Germany was toppled in a coup backed, to put it mildly, by the British secret service. The putschists, the public figures<sup>250</sup> and the public opinion in favor of the coup all explicitly referred to the Kosovo covenant as their guide, and interpreted the rejection of the agreement with the vastly more powerful Germany as a reenactment of Lazar's choice of the heavenly kingdom. Street protesters carried placards with slogans "Better war than the Pact" and "Better grave than slave". The graves were not long in waiting, as Belgrade was bombed on April 6.

During the war, the Kosovo theme became one of the stakes in the intra-Serb strife between the communist-led Partisans, the forces loyal to the King and government in exile (the Chetniks), and the quisling government installed by the Germans. All sides used Kosovo as symbolic capital in fighting cultural battles that accompanied armed ones; all of them claimed monopoly over the message and values of Kosovo and strove to sully the opponents by identifying them with the treacherous Vuk Branković. The collaborationist government used Kosovo rhetoric to denigrate the Partisans, throwing Lazar's curse against them (see e.g. Emmert 1990: 140). On the other hand, the Communist Party also liberally exploited Kosovo symbolism. In the flyer they distributed in July 1941, calling Serbs to join the resistance they were leading, the communists also used Lazar's curse (Ćosić 2004: 157). In mobilizing people in villages they often employed folk rhetoric and lines from the epic poems. They sought to establish a direct link between the Kosovo heroes and themselves, as the new resisters to foreign occupation. But the Chetniks used the same language and imagery, and which side would win a village over often did not depend on whose speaker was more convincing (Žanić 1998: 63).<sup>251</sup>

After the establishment of the communist regime, the Kosovo legacy was not wiped out. In a somewhat modified form, it remained an obligatory part of the school curricula. It was purged as much as possible of its religious content, and its Serbian character was played down. In spite of the profound hate of the communists for the Karadjordjević dynasty and all it stood for, their treatment of Kosovo was not totally dissimilar, at least in the intention to defuse its Serbianness and stress the (potential) Yugoslav commonality. Communists presented the Kosovo legend as part of the tradition of "our peoples", which they took as the basis of their cultural legitimacy.<sup>252</sup> Their cultural policy was basically populist: while officially claiming to have

<sup>250</sup> Speaking on the Belgrade radio, the Patriarch of the Serbian Church said that the pact was a betrayal of the Kosovo ethic, reminded Serbs that Lazar had accepted his fate for the sake of Serbia, and that the current situation demanded the same sacrifice. "This morning at dawn the question [of the nation's fate] received its answer. We chose the heavenly kingdom – the kingdom of truth, justice, national strength, and freedom" (quoted in Emmert 1990: 140).

<sup>251</sup> It is worth noting here how selective the "denouncing" and "celebratory" discourses are in citing historical instances when Kosovo was invoked for political purposes. Both are glad to mention Gavrilo Princip's assassination of the Habsburg heir to the throne Franz Ferdinand in 1914, since this may be seen as either terrorism or freedom fighting. But the denouncers never mention the 1941 coup or the Partisans, because this was antifascist struggle and hence does not fit in the portrayal of the Myth as conducive to Serbs' *fascist* behavior; Yugoslavia's 1948 split with the Soviet Union is similarly unsuitable. Celebrators, on the other hand, tend to forget the Kosovo rhetoric of the quisling government.

<sup>252</sup> Being myself a pupil in Serbian schools in Titoist times, I remember we spent many hours studying the Kosovo poems and duly learned by heart large chunks of them. (*That is how - by having learned the poems for homework -*

broken with all things past, they actually retained many features of the traditional folk ethos. Within this ethos they foregrounded its agonistic strand, pitting “us” (any of the Yugoslav peoples, or all of them together) against “them” (various foreign invaders, actual or possible). Analyses of textbooks from former Yugoslavia (e.g. Rosandić and Pešić eds. 1994; Žanić 1998: 308-311) invariably point out that priority was granted to militaristic values, at the expense of the more peacetime, “soft” values of creativity, diligence, tolerance or intimacy.

### 5. Milošević’s ‘Back to the future’

The decade of the 1980s was decisive for Kosovo both as a real place and as a symbol. The ethnic Albanian majority in the province increasingly demanded more autonomy, i.e. the status of a full-fledged republic within the Yugoslav federation.<sup>253</sup> Political unrest was suppressed by force and no dialogue was opened. On the other hand, in this same period Kosovo Serbs began to complain they were being harassed by the Albanians and forced to move out. Hostility between the two peoples was growing rapidly and their political projects were becoming totally incompatible. The Serbian republic authorities however were not particularly receptive to Kosovo Serbs’ grievances, so these were taken up first by the Church<sup>254</sup> and then by such institutions as the Association of Writers and the Academy of Sciences.<sup>255</sup> This “unofficial nationalism”, increasingly at odds with the official line, made ample use of the discourse of trauma in depicting Serbian distant and recent history. It established a continuity of Serb suffering since 1389. It used the elements of the existing Kosovo legacy, in its most traumatic version possible, to make sense of contemporary developments; and vice versa, a traumatic interpretation of present-day events was used to reinforce a traumatic reading of the traditional Myth. It is in this atmosphere, and thanks to it, that Slobodan Milošević took power in 1987.<sup>256</sup> He aligned himself with the unofficial nationalism, but always retaining some rhetorical distance from it, as will be seen.

Milošević was lucky enough to have the opportunity to celebrate the 600<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo just at the moment he was at the height of his charisma. In his memorable speech delivered at the huge rally held at Gazimestan, the site of the Battle, on June 28, 1989 he was seemingly referring back to tradition, but in fact what he was saying was all about the plans he had for the future. He referred to the heroes of 1389 and their virtues, drawing direct parallels with the present. Earlier that year, Milošević had curtailed the autonomy of the Province of Kosovo by constitutional redesign, provoking Albanian protests whose violent suppression resulted in dozens of casualties. In the Gazimestan speech he presented this as a fulfillment of the Kosovo Covenant – not of course by explicitly boasting the dead the policy had produced, but by arguing that Serbia had reclaimed its dignity.

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most Serbs become familiar with the characteristic topoi of the Kosovo legend, and not because they “have it in their blood”.) The Serbian character of the story and its heroes was made evident, but was not insisted upon. With the advent of Milošević, the substance of teaching Kosovo remained the same, but it was thoroughly Serbianized.

<sup>253</sup> After 1945, Kosovo was established as an autonomous province within the republic of Serbia.

<sup>254</sup> An “Appeal for the protection of Serb inhabitants and their holy places in Kosovo” signed by twenty one priests was issued in 1982.

<sup>255</sup> The actions of these three institutions during the 1980s and their political effects are analyzed in the appropriate chapters in Popov (ed.) 2000. For a more general overview of the Serbian intellectual opposition and its “nationalization” in the 1980s see Dragović-Soso 2002.

<sup>256</sup> A weird example of explicit traumatization for political purposes took place in 1988, when the remains of Prince Lazar were taken on a long journey through Serbian lands, being displayed, hailed and mourned in many towns and villages before arriving at the Gračanica monastery in Kosovo on the eve of the Battle’s 600th anniversary. The organizer was the Church, while the Milošević authorities benevolently condoned.

Interestingly, Milošević's recasting of the Kosovo narrative was much less traumatic than that of the cultural, unofficial nationalists. Actually, his 1989 speech comes closest we get to a "progressive narrative" of the Kosovo Trauma. It is full of optimism, problems solved, difficulties left behind, and new challenges bravely taken. But the irony is, while Milošević's version of Kosovo Trauma was progressive on the surface, in reality it led to new traumas. His limitless arrogance, taken over and amplified by his followers, definitively antagonized Albanians and destroyed the last chances for a peaceful settlement. In the following years, the same happened with Serbs' relations with other Yugoslav peoples. We may only speculate today, is it possible that Milošević really believed he had "resolved" the Kosovo problem and laid grounds for a Bright Future of Serbia "and all its citizens", as he was fond of saying?

But what was really Milošević's central concern in this speech was to threaten the political opponents by invoking the treason of Vuk Branković and the "disunity" among Serbs as the "evil fate throughout their history".<sup>257</sup> Those who disagreed with his policies were identified with the legendary traitor. In this way the old epic tradition was used to legitimate the wholly communist practice of "differentiation", i.e. purge of dissenters, and to underwrite a forced unity of mind and action.

The political impact of the Kosovo Myth as used by Milošević in the late 1980s is usually judged simply as aggressive chauvinist mobilization. While of course this is basically correct, it is also important to remember that in that early period Milošević deliberately and skillfully mixed nationalism with socialism, or at least some kind of "welfare" rhetoric.<sup>258</sup> And more generally, Milošević's nationalism always came out packaged in somewhat civic and internationalist language. He never addressed his audiences as "Serbs" but always "citizens"; he never openly called for persecuting, let alone killing people of other nations; he was fond of praising "multiethnic coexistence" in Serbia. Although these rhetorical devices could be exposed as mere shams when compared to reality, they were not used in vain. Such ambiguities clearly enabled Milošević to enlist the support of many more and more diverse people than would otherwise be possible, because different constituencies could "read" differently his person, his political position, and his moves. And the masses gathering to hear Milošević at the staged-"spontaneous" public rallies that marked the period were not just Serbs inebriated with nationalist frenzy and hate: they were also people deeply disappointed with the imploding real-socialist system, desperately wishing for a change, and enjoying the feeling of new openings that Milošević had managed to create, deceptively but effectively, in the early years of his rule. He did not promise his followers the opportunity to slaughter Albanians, or anybody else – the aggression was unmistakably there, but usually implicit, and had to be read off from clues. What was promised explicitly was national rebirth, dignity, peace and prosperity. True, Milošević also promised to reclaim "our" Kosovo, but who exactly "we" were was not fully specified, nor were

<sup>257</sup> Naumović (2008: 70-2, 173-4, 219-227) offers an excellent analysis. Antonijević (2007b: 127-8) shows the same ploy operating in other political speeches of the period.

<sup>258</sup> The editorial published on the very June 28, 1989 in the leading Belgrade daily *Politika*, Milošević's chief media outlet, is revealing: "It is in Kosovo and around Kosovo that the destiny of Yugoslavia and the destiny of *socialism* are being determined. They want to take away from us the *Serbian* and the *Yugoslav* Kosovo, yes, they want to, but they will not be allowed to" (quoted in Zirojević 2000: 207, emphasis added). Mention of *socialism* in the same breath with Kosovo, and Yugoslavia with Serbia, is of course not accidental; nor is the strategic vagueness of "they", which may be filled with many different names, as need dictates.

the means to achieve it. When mentioning “battles” in his 1989 speech, he did so in such a way that an ordinary listener could easily choose to ignore the violent undertone.<sup>259</sup>

### *The welcome ambiguities*

The foregoing has hopefully demonstrated how a continuous exchange between a cultural structure and the varying contexts in which it is enacted has produced changing but not unboundedly diverse performative effects. Contexts are analytically indispensable for two reasons. One is the necessity for actual agents to enliven the cultural structures through their practices, which is not to claim it is their instrumental action that determines the character of cultural products, or that cultural elements can be taken out of their *Gestalts*. The second reason is that cultural structures themselves have a history, which places one atop another the many layers of meaning inherited from the past usages. In every time- and space-located context this sedimented past is slightly different and therefore “the meaning” of the structure at hand cannot be known in the abstract. The Kosovo Myth was too often ascribed such a timeless, transparent and unequivocal meaning.<sup>260</sup>

The contextual variations however profoundly depend on the multivocality inherent in the cultural structures themselves. Several such points of tension within the Kosovo Myth can now be made explicit. As Billig has long argued, ideologies, including nationalism, become powerful precisely thanks to their contradictory and dilemmatic character (1995: 87). The tensions within the Kosovo tradition may be seen as variations on the one basic theme of universalism and particularism, as sliding back and forth between the more narrow and constricted, and the more expansive and inclusive; a dialectic between the own and the shared. As became clear, the Myth could not have emerged at all without the sustained cultural exchange between Serbs and their environment.

Some more specific ambivalences now. Take first the figure of Prince Lazar and his sacrifice. His identification with Christ makes it possible for believers to concentrate on this aspect and give the narrative a strongly religious and Christian bent (offering oneself in sacrifice in order to realize God’s design and His power on earth). The more atheistically minded, at the same time, may take Lazar as an able secular leader and commander. The sacrifice of Lazar and his army can and has often been, at least since 19<sup>th</sup> century, interpreted as aimed at the future salvation of the Serbian nation and state; but a more religious interpretation is also possible and not uncommon, where the subject of redemption is a broader category - of Christians, or even the whole of humanity. Although in recent times, the message of Kosovo has often been taken to be primarily one of establishing absolute, blood-drawn boundaries between “us” and “them”, this is not necessary. Lazar’s sacrifice can be taken as fighting a generalized evil, or even evil within.

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<sup>259</sup> Though the word for “battle” Milošević used, *bitka*, is primarily related to war, it may – like its English equivalent – also denote something neutral, a struggle, an effort to achieve something. How Milošević exploits the double meaning is notable, in what is probably the most often quoted passage from this speech: “Nowadays, six centuries later, we are again in battles and facing battles. They are not armed ones, although such cannot be ruled out either. But whatever they are, battles cannot be won without resolve, courage and sacrifice, the virtues that were present at the Kosovo Field on that long-past day.” This is the militaristic side, but the very next sentence reads: “Our main battle today refers to the achievement of economic, political, cultural and generally social prosperity. For approaching more rapidly and successfully the civilization humans will live in in 21<sup>st</sup> century.” Quoted from: [www.uio.no/studier/emner/hf/ilos/BKS4110/Eksamensoppgaver/BKS4110%20V07.doc](http://www.uio.no/studier/emner/hf/ilos/BKS4110/Eksamensoppgaver/BKS4110%20V07.doc)

<sup>260</sup> Works which acknowledge the changing meanings of the Myth but without dismissing its relevance are the least frequent. Good examples are the brief analyses by Bieber (2002) focusing on the political aspects, and Bakić-Hayden (2004) with a more cultural-hermeneutical approach. Zirojević (2000) provides a condensed account of the historical background.

Further, Lazar's and Miloš's sacrifice can be understood as purely collectivist, patriarchal and pre-modern message, as the imperative for individuals to give up all that is theirs, including their bare lives, for the benefit of the collective. Yet it can also be interpreted in a much more universal manner, as an instance of a very basic ethical principle of overcoming selfishness and egoism for a noble goal. Similarly, by their self-chosen personal sacrifice both Lazar and Miloš stand out powerfully as figures, so that they can be seen as strong individual personalities who have the courage to make difficult decisions and take all the consequences – and not just as slaves to a rigidly collectivist ethos.

Against the background of ex-Yugoslav wars of the 1990s, much has been made of the presumed psychological displacement by Serbs from the original "Turks" of the epic poetry onto today's Bosnian Muslims or Kosovo Albanians. But to the extent that the Kosovo Myth teaches a lesson in unconditional resistance to the enemy Other, the enemy does not have to be Muslim at all but can be anyone perceived as stronger and unjustly oppressing. The agonistic ethos of Kosovo may be mapped onto many different situations; it is not so much the clash between "us" and specific "them" as the courage of absolute withstanding against the powerful, the heroism of fighting against all odds, for honor and justice.<sup>261</sup> The more unequal the battle, the greater the imperative to act this way, and the more "Kosovo-like" it becomes. So the "Turks" of today may well be Western nations and politicians, and particularly the US, because they are the most powerful and at the same time are perceived to be imposing things on Serbs.<sup>262</sup> We may go back to the two opposed discourses and better understand how they reinforce each other through confrontation, at least from the Serbian side: the logic is "the more the powerful Other defames us, the more we shall embrace precisely what they defame, *so as to show* how proud, courageous, impossible to buy, Lazar- and Miloš-like we are, still".

While discourses using Kosovo are almost always performative rather than descriptive, what exactly their action-implications – their illocutionary and perlocutionary effects – will be is not foreclosed. Kosovo has often been used to prompt people to go to war, but it can also inspire other kinds of action. One can plausibly fight one's own "Kosovo" in many realms of life, and without any blood spilled. As was said before, the wide diversity of historical moments and political causes in which the Kosovo covenant was invoked testify to its flexibility. A remarkable recent instance happened in 2001, when on June 28 the Serbian government, headed by the super-modernist and pragmatic Prime Minister Zoran Djindjić, extradited Slobodan Milošević to the International Criminal Tribunal in the Hague. Djindjić apparently took no notice of the date but advised that it was Vidovdan and that many people would take that to heart, he felt compelled to address the public. In his speech broadcast that evening, Djindjić attempted to turn the whole Kosovo symbolism upside down: for the sake of our own and our children's future, he said, we must give up the commitment to the "heavenly kingdom" and finally opt for the "earthly" one: for life, prosperity and happiness. His attempt seems to have failed. He did not win over any of his opponents, and even some of his supporters might have been made a bit uneasy by this radical recoding of the axial Serbian story. Appeals to the "earthly kingdom" did not become any more frequent in the public sphere in the following years – on the contrary. But the irony is, it would be quite imaginable to construct a Kosovo-based argument *in favor* of Milošević's extradition: a state handing voluntarily a former president over to an international

<sup>261</sup> But Emmert (1990: 142) obviously overstates the matter when he claims that the Kosovo ethic is "democratic, anti-feudal, with a love for justice and social equality".

<sup>262</sup> Kosovo covenant was also evoked on the occasion of Yugoslavia's break with Stalin in 1948. A completely different context, enemy, even the "we": but a similar cultural-psychological logic.

court could, for example, be construed as an expression of Serbs' unconditional belief in the ideal of justice and therefore readiness to sacrifice their more immediate interests to upholding higher values. We cannot know if this alternative rendition of the argument would have been more successful, and even less if it would have helped Djindjić avoid the assassination two years later.<sup>263</sup>

### **Trauma as a speech act**

Rather than attempting to give a clear-cut answer to whether Kosovo *is* or *is not* Serbian Trauma, we are now in a position to approach the question in a more fruitful way. In the language pragmatic perspective, both can be true at the same time. Trauma may be seen as a speech act, a continually discursively produced condition which stands in mutually constitutive relations with the contextual circumstances. In this sense, it is “there” as a cultural meaning-structure, Eyerman's “referent”, or Živković's “entrenched story”. But this does not imply that Trauma is actively *felt* by people, that it is located somehow within them, that it affects them uniformly and unavoidably, or that there is some mysterious connection between being Serbian and the Trauma.

Over the centuries, the thematic cluster of Kosovo has become a traumatizing, or at least potentially so, interpretive framework readily available to Serbs for making sense of their collective experiences. Though to call it a “master narrative” would be stretching it too far, the Kosovo legend has certainly been the most widespread, familiar, habitual and easily usable story Serbs have had to explain things to themselves. This framework, although not absolutely conditioning, still did facilitate or funnel a traumatic rendering of a series of collective events, especially during the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and then again in the last three decades, that is, whenever Albanian-Serbian rivalry over real-life Kosovo re-territorialized the Myth. These events in turn provided empirical fodder which reinforced the traumatic strand in the Myth. And in periods when the traumatic interpretations were especially powerful, they would spill out into ways of narrating the situations quite unrelated to (real or symbolic) Kosovo. At such moments, the Kosovo Trauma would become metaphoric shorthand for timeless and metaphysical “Serbian suffering”.

### *The bards of Trauma*

In her interesting typology of nationalisms, Ramet (1995) uses Serbs as the example of “traumatic” nationalism, one that draws its energy “from a reinterpretation of Serbia's history in terms of suffering, exploitation, pain, and injustice” (1995: 103) and laments that “Serbia is the wronged party, the universal victim, the martyr, the Jew, the new Job” (1995: 119). Yet Ramet's claim that this dates back only to the late 1980s is unacceptable. The Trauma was not, and could not have been, invented from scratch. At that moment it already had a lengthy history.<sup>264</sup> Those youngsters of the 1860s did not wait for nothing.

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<sup>263</sup> The nationalists would never forgive Djindjić for extraditing Milošević, and in particular for doing that on Vidovdan. Djindjić's assassins, an organized crime group, said they had killed him because he was a “traitor”. But criminals can hardly be expected to speak the truth, so the importance of Djindjić's radically anti-mythical attitude in all this should not be overestimated.

<sup>264</sup> Ramet's argument is in fact quite contradictory. She relies heavily on psychoanalysis and the concepts such as repression, projection and compulsive repetition, while at the same time arguing that Serbian traumatic nationalism arose only in 1986, as a “new phenomenon” manufactured by “elite manipulation” (1995: 103, 105). One is tempted to say that Ramet's essay is an illustration of how much one loses by not employing the theory of cultural trauma, with its injunction to clearly identify the elements of the trauma process.

But in one thing Ramet is right, and that is the major role of the Serbian Orthodox Church, and other agents of unofficial, cultural nationalism in the 1980s, in constructing an especially insistent, and occasionally quite morbid, traumatic version of Kosovo symbolism. It has already been mentioned that in that crucial period the cultural nationalists and Milošević in power had many things in common, but the division of labor was retained: Trauma for the priests and the writers, and victories and Bright Future for the government.

In those years Trauma was being produced at a rather feverish pace. It was then that some of the major publications in this regard appeared. These are worth examining in some detail. Their authors were “cultural”, seemingly non-political actors – priests, theologians, poets. All of them were immediately recognized as the main exponents of the contemporary, traumatic Serbian nationalism by both their adherents and their critics. But what is more interesting is to what extent they, too made use of the ambiguous doubletalk we already encountered in various other performances, like in Milošević’s Gazimestan speech.

Let us begin with the simplest, because most overt, case of Matija Bećković, the foremost poetic bard of the new nationalism. His collection of poetic essays entitled *The Service* (1990) is a veritable compendium of traumatic themes.

Here is what he says: “Kosovo is the most expensive [or: most precious, dearest] Serbian word. It was paid for by the blood of the whole people. With that price in blood it became enthroned on the throne of the Serbian language. ... As times goes by, it is more and more uncertain whether the Kosovo wound will make us heavenly or swallow us” (Bećković 1990: 47).<sup>265</sup> For Bećković, the Battle of Kosovo mythically and mystically instituted Serbs as a collectivity, and once this happened, nothing can ever change: “Folk poetry proves [!] that the fate of the Serbian people was resolved by just one word: *the prince preferred the heavenly kingdom*. The word was given once and for all and it can not ever be recalled” (p. 49). Furthermore, Serbs are and have nothing but the legacy of Kosovo: “Kosovo is the equator of the Serbian planet. The roof of its upper world and the foundation of the lower one. ... Kosovo is the most important thought, the greatest project of the Serbian culture” (p.49). In vain would one look for any other substance of Serbhood: “We have no firmer footing, nor more powerful spiritual focus. Kosovo is the fireplace around which the Serbian people is gathered, the mainstay around which it is weaved together, the cradle in which it was raised” (p. 68). At the same time, Kosovo is Serbs’ contribution to the world – the only one, it seems, and their sole accomplishment: “[It is] the name for what is the most precious that we have given to the Christian civilization. ... Heritage and bequest of Serbian art and spirit to the humankind” (p. 49). And back to the Trauma: “Kosovo is the deepest sore, the longest memory, the most vivid recollection, the most beloved ashes of the Serbian people” (p. 68).

It could be objected that, this being poetic discourse, exaggeration and other genre-specific figures may be excused. But the problem is that this book, like others by Bećković, regularly sold in thousands of copies, is taken as a political statement. It is not meant as just an expression of the freely creative impulse of an individual, but both its writing and its reading are located deliberately within the grey zone between poetic license and political responsibility.

The next major Trauma-producing publication from the 1980s, although written decades before, belongs to the contemporary landscape since it was only with its modern edition that it became known to the general public. Its author was Nikolaj Velimirović, an anti-communist bishop of the Serbian Orthodox Church active before WWII who died in emigration. Velimirović is a controversial figure in Serbia – much revered in the Church for his theological writings and

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<sup>265</sup> Živković (2001b) offers a detailed analysis of Bećković’s sinister metaphors.

for his presumed suffering in the hands of the Nazi and the communists, and at the same time heavily criticized by the liberals for his anti-Semitism and antidemocratic conservatism (Byford 2008).

In Velimirović we see much more clearly than in Bećković the operation of the universalism/particularism dialectic. The first thing to be noted about Velimirović's essays on Kosovo, entitled by the editors *Kosovo and Vidovdan* (Velimirović 1988), is how much Christian humbleness and martyrdom, and how little overt aggressiveness, one finds there. A theological-philosophical novella presents a conversation between the dying Prince Lazar, anguished by the dilemma whether his choice was right, and an angel reassuring him that the choice was not of death but of life and ultimate salvation. The martyrdom at Kosovo was necessary, because self-deserved by Serbs' alienation from God. This-worldly, bodily and material death and forthcoming suffering under the Turks is a necessary price to pay for spiritual redemption and thus the only true survival and advancement in the future. In another essay, Kosovo is again described not as a defeat but a victory: "Wrong are those who argue that Kosovo stopped the wheel of our history... On the contrary, it was Kosovo that made us a great people. It is our people's Golgotha, but at the same time our people's resurrection" (p.69). Serbs are here presented in the universalistic Christian key of redemption through suffering.

The more exclusivistic effects are accomplished by a detour: suffering "earns" a sort of moral absolution in advance: "From now on", says the angel to Prince Lazar, "*whatever happens* with your people will pull it away from the deceitful, fleeting and vacuous love of this world and elevate it increasingly towards the eternal heavenly love" (p. 34, emphasis added). Then, real life politics is reintroduced, but also by detour: "When our entire social and stately, cultural and political life is penetrated by the idea of the superiority of the heavenly over the earthly, we will have fulfilled the Prince's bequest" (p. 103). Yet – how shall we know this "penetration" is complete, how do we measure it? Further on: "Vidovdan demands purification from hate, selfishness and vanity. Vidovdan commands reconciliation with God and with the brothers." (And they are who exactly?) "Vidovdan thunders with damnation against the traitors of the people's faith and people's mission." (How do we recognize them?) Yet, it should not be overlooked that in the entire book there is hardly an objectionable line - no battle cries, no calls to spilling blood, no explicit hate or contempt of others. And this surface feature makes its messages – however they are decoded – more acceptable.

Velimirović's texts are an early example of a discursive move that would become common from the 1980s on: a rhetorical depoliticization of Kosovo, in order to wage quite political battles by ostensibly metaphysical means. In the preceding phrases we see how a rhetorical sacralization of politics opens up a dangerous space of arbitrariness. The precise content of the "Kosovo covenant", and therefore of its possible political operationalizations, are kept utterly vague. Elimination of shared and testable criteria of political performance invites the intrusion of self-appointed interpreters of what actually is the fulfillment of the Covenant. This is what prompted the ethnologist Ivan Čolović to coin his superb formula of Kosovo as "the golden bough of Serbian politics".<sup>266</sup>

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<sup>266</sup> "Who manages to seize it, even if in words alone, who becomes the priest in the temple of sacred Kosovo, his is the power, too". Kosovo is the "sacred name of power", the word the authorities use to appoint and legitimate themselves, as wielding a "privilege and duty of the guardians of the national sanctity". Since power is understood as not a political institution but a "mystical union", no one really wants to inquire into the origins, history and meaning "sacred Kosovo" (Čolović 2001: 195-197).



But the arguably most powerful Trauma-engendering product of this period was the book *From Kosovo to Jadovno* by an active Orthodox bishop, Atanasije Jevtić (2007 [1987]). The book, in addition to a couple of author's essays on Kosovo themes, consists basically of documenting instances of victimization of Serbs at the hands of others, the first part being devoted to (real) Kosovo in the 1980s, and the second to the Croatian quisling state during WWII.<sup>267</sup> The vacillation between the universalizing (Orthodox, Christian, human) thrust and the particularization of Serbs as a special people provides the basic dynamic of the text, and is propelled by sustained doubletalk taking place between the textual surface and the implied, half-buried messages. Thus the programmatic text "The Kosovo Covenant" opens with the universalistic assertion that "all" writers on Kosovo agree that "the whole topic of Kosovo, particularly its rendition in folk poetry, is in fact a distinctly Serbian experience of Christianity" (p.375). The vacillation is sometimes felt in one and the same sentence: "This speaks to us about Lazar's, and all our people's, commitment to the Heavenly Kingdom as the enduring and imperishable, eternally meaningful substance of human life and history" (p. 389). Like in Velimirović, political implications are treated with strategic open-endedness: "We Orthodox Serbs... are fighting simultaneously for the earthly and the heavenly kingdom and in both cases it is one and the same spiritual battle that we are waging" (p.387) Or: "The liturgical moment of victoriousness, this supra-temporal time of the Heavenly Kingdom, made its appearance in our history as spiritual victory whenever Serbs manifested their Kosovo covenant and commitment, whenever they sought primarily the Kingdom of God and Eternal Justice" (p. 394). (How do we know it happened?)

At the explicit level, aggression as a response to victimization is rejected.<sup>268</sup> But it is at least potentially present, in the relentless production of Trauma by the sheer quantity of gory detail, by insistence on crimes against Serbs (without ever remotely mentioning crimes committed by them), and by the simple placing side by side the accounts of two very different settings, as if they were intimately connected by the metaphysical logic of Serbian suffering.<sup>269</sup>

#### *Serbhood as victimhood*

Although multivocal, the Kosovo tradition does tend to funnel Serbian collective self-construction along certain paths. Kosovo does not produce them by itself, since other factors also contribute, but it does a lot to sustain them. Two of such paths are especially prominent. One, which has an elective affinity with the traumatic weave in the Kosovo Myth especially in the versions reviewed above, is self-identification as victims, and the other is verbal grandiosity.

That "we" have always been victims of evil others is, of course, not an exclusively Serbian idea. But Serbs seemed to have developed it rather elaborately and to stick to it with much enthusiasm (Jansen 2000). The most troubling consequence is the tendency to think of

<sup>267</sup> Jadovno, the name of a pit where the Ustasha were throwing bodies of slain Serbs, is meant as the metonymical designation for all Ustasha crimes against Serbs.

<sup>268</sup> "God is our witness that we do not wish any evil to the Albanians" (p.120). In the Preface, another publicly visible nationalist bishop, Amfilohije Radović, writes that testimonies presented in the book are not meant as an appeal to revenge and hate, but as a "sound of alarm to come back to ourselves and our historical self-awareness, and an evangelical appeal to repentance and sober rationality".

<sup>269</sup> The three bards were of course not the only producers of Trauma in the late 1980s: "The Kosovo wounds were carried and are still carried today as their own by each and every Serb. They are incurable" (Tasić and Djuretić eds. 1991: 117). "Serbs pledged themselves to the holiness of Kosovo and they have been making it sacrifices in blood for six centuries already. They do not know why they are doing it, but they have to" (the poet Gojko Djogoin 1990, quoted in Čolović 2001: 196)

“us” in morally righteous terms, to routinely assume own moral superiority presumably wrought by suffering.<sup>270</sup> A corollary is a difficulty to engage in collective soul-searching, self-criticism and self-censure.<sup>271</sup>

The basic ambiguity of the Kosovo story, deriving from the reversal of defeat into victory effected very early on in the religious writings, has made it possible to use it for “having it both ways”, as it were: to be at once a *victim* and a *winner*, and to claim moral capital on both counts – by virtue of suffering, and by virtue of coming out on top. The ruse is that, as Milosevich (2000: 74) puts it, “the martyr always triumphs”. Or, in Giesen’s (2004) terms, Kosovo seems to be available as *both* “triumph” and “trauma”, even though Giesen presents the two as mutually exclusive.<sup>272</sup>

Furthermore, claim on victimhood often turns into a monopolization of it. Especially in strained, Trauma-favorable periods, the circle of legitimate victims tends to be restricted to “us”. Instead of broadening the category of victims and expanding the circle of the “we” that Alexander (2004a: 1) sees as an important part of the trauma process, here we have a contrary trend of *shrinking* of the “we”. The solidarity of others is not sought, perhaps it is even discouraged. This seems to be going on right now, with a perceived “lack of understanding” for Serbs on the part of the West fuelling further alienation and sinking deeper into an exclusive-victimhood language of identity. It is also manifested in the spiteful opposition of the Serbs’ “celebratory” discourse to the observers’ “denouncing” one.

Claiming moral superiority on the basis of the supposed purifying effects of suffering may be read as an assertion of particularism through reference to some kind of universal standards. Another paradoxical move of this kind is asserting Serbian specialness by insisting on the megalomaniac exceptionalism of Kosovo. The statements such as: “No Christian nation has in its history what the Serbian people has – none has *Kosovo*. ... Kosovo is one of its kind in the twenty centuries of the Christian world” (Velimirović 1988: 68- 69), or “How to present this spiritual meaning of Kosovo for Serbs to the public opinion, when there is no analogous example in the world heritage?” (a newspaper article from 1998, quoted in Čolović 2001: 208), or “Six centuries ago, nothing on the globe happened more important than the battle at the Kosovo Field” (Bečković 1990: 47) – are not at all uncommon, in spite of their extravagance, and could easily be heard even from ordinary people.

This is connected with the second path along which the Kosovo legacy tends to channel Serbian narratives: the tendency of grandiloquence when the nation is concerned. Somehow, Serbs have developed the belief, or at least the habit, that when talking about matters of nation and state only lofty and pompous terms are in order. A down-to-earth language of Serbian patriotism is mostly lacking. The “great”, read national, has been decoupled from the “small” – the petty things of daily life, economy, work, ordinary human effort, patient building of an ordered collective life. Of course, Serbs have been doing all these things over the centuries, just as any other people, but this sort of endeavor has been kept at the side of the profane, at a distance from the sacrality of the nation. It is not easy to verbally perform as a good Serb talking about daily, this-worldly matters; there is no “sacralization of the everyday” in a Weberian sense.

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<sup>270</sup> How both Serbs and Albanians in (real) Kosovo ground their political claims in the morality of victimhood is analyzed in Zdravković 2005.

<sup>271</sup> Čolović (2002: 7-9) provides an ironic summary of what, following Malkki (1995), might be called Serbian mythico-history, revolving around victimhood and moral purity.

<sup>272</sup> Referring to Giesen’s terms does not mean I also subscribe to his view that “there is no way to imagine a land beyond the liminal horizon of triumph and trauma” (Giesen 2004: 112). Quite the contrary. I am convinced there is a way, if not “beyond”, then at least *below* such high-flying notions.

The problem is that this contributes to a devaluation of Serbia's civilian accomplishments during the two centuries of its modern history and hinders the recognition of the nation's good in the democratically defined common good.

### *The Myth as a speech act*

Not just the Trauma is continuously produced through discourse, but also the Myth itself – its existence, solidity, rootedness, Serbianness, utmost significance etc. are routinely re-created by deploying claims to that effect. Compared to the production of Trauma, the tone of this process is less emotional, and its social location is mostly academia. But perhaps this only makes its effects smoother. By being repeated so many times, and having come from the authorized mouth of the expert, the claims slide into everyone's routine way of expressing whatever they have to say.

For example: the book that purports to offer a conclusive historian's view of the Battle of Kosovo, published bilingually in Serbian and German on the occasion of 600<sup>th</sup> anniversary (Tasić and Djuretić eds. 1991), opens with these words: “*Undoubtedly* the most important event in the entire history of the Serbian people, the Battle of Kosovo...” (p.7, emphasis added). A contribution to the same volume claims: “The Kosovo commitment has become not just the national idea but that inner trait that makes a Serb a Serb” (p. 14). Another one: “The theme of the Battle of Kosovo is part of our destiny, we know it was built into the foundations of our consciousness and our culture... The Battle of Kosovo, this is *us*” (p. 49).

Not even the very sober scholars are exempt. For all her critical detachment, Zirojević (2000: 195-196) lists all the historical moments when Serbs' behavior was “determined by the Kosovo myth” without making at all clear whether she is reporting others' arguments or arguing the same herself. Or, here is how the prominent ethnologist Dušan Bandić attempts to salvage the idea of Kosovo as a continuous living tradition, against contrary evidence. In the early 1990s, his team undertook field research in rural Serbia about the actual presence of the Kosovo tradition, talking to hundreds of typical peasants, farmers with little education (Bandić 2001). The general conclusion was that the Kosovo Myth had been forgotten: knowledge of it was poor, confused and erroneous (Bandić 2001: 462).<sup>273</sup> But Bandić does not give up: the Myth has survived in a covert form, he argues, through its “hidden message” that lives “a secret life in rural people's consciousness” (Bandić 2001: 463, 465), and that is the belief that Serbs are God's chosen people, better (more honest, pious, generous etc.) than the others.<sup>274</sup> Bandić then goes on to “recognize” this hidden message of Kosovo in a wide variety of popular lore concerning Serbian identity and world politics. The connection that Bandić presents as self-evident between these manifestations and the supposedly still living Kosovo Myth is tenuous however, and counts on the complicity of the reader. Like many others, Bandić is here accomplishing a performative task: by producing statements on the vitality of Kosovo symbolism and its centrality for Serbs he hopes to produce these states of affairs as “social facts”.<sup>275</sup>

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<sup>273</sup> Informants, for example, mostly knew nothing of Prince Lazar, except that he had died at Kosovo; a majority did not know what the “Covenant” was – what kingdom Lazar had chosen.

<sup>274</sup> But since the belief in one's chosenness, which in practice usually boils down to belief in one's superiority, is found in very many nations (Smith 2003), what is then so specifically Serbian about Kosovo? Bandić prefers to sidestep this difficulty.

<sup>275</sup> This is how it works: “Lazar's fate is a metaphor by which Serbs represented their historical fate. They – and *this is the message of the myth* – are a chosen, heavenly people which had to pay a high price for its heavenly status. ... Such a self-characterization became deeply engraved in the consciousness of the Serbian people. .... Whenever a new ‘Kosovo’ would appear on the horizon, Serbs would choose a solution similar to Lazar's. ... [and] *without any*

*The year 1999: the Trauma, a trauma, and the importance of registers*

In 1998-99, the symbolism of Kosovo was rather brutally terrestrialized again, with the outbreak of armed conflicts between the Albanian Kosovo Liberation Army and the Serbian state forces. In March 1999, NATO intervened, to prevent humanitarian catastrophe as was said, and bombed Serbia for two and a half months. The Trauma as a cultural script was now confronted with a real-life, palpable trauma of being victimized by the high-technology weaponry of the world's most powerful military machinery, in the first attack on the territory Serbia after WWII. What is more, the immediate trauma was directly connected with Kosovo as the site of the original Trauma, and the victimization was widely perceived as thoroughly unjust, because "we are just trying to keep what is ours". All the reasons were there to expect that the trauma of NATO bombardment would be experienced and narrated in a framework heavily determined by Trauma.

Indeed, we find in the official statements, from Milošević's speeches to the posters displayed in regime-organized protests (Jansen 2000) all the staple motifs of the Kosovo Myth. In his analysis of *Vojska*, the official magazine of the Serbian Army, during the months of bombing, Nedeljković (2007: 46-51) documented abundant use of mythical images.<sup>276</sup> Yet one must not overestimate the significance of such official constructions. Nedeljković himself (2007: 50) adds a precious footnote, based on his personal experience as a Serbian Army reservist: according to what he saw amongst his fellows, the influence of *Vojska* on ordinary soldiers was virtually nil. Protracted exposure to traumatic circumstances produced nothing but disaffection, skepticism and, finally, complete alienation from the official rhetoric.

A similar duality arises between two other sets of data collected at roughly the same time (end of 1990s-early 2000s) which reveal vastly different, even contrary ways of talking about Kosovo. For the first set we are again indebted to Nedeljković (2007: 52-66) who wished to complement his analysis of symbolic production of the nation in official discourse with individual elaborations of such mythical matrices. Between 1998 and 2000, Nedeljković collected 200 written compositions by Belgrade university students, mostly in the Ethnology department, on the topic of "Serbhood" (*Srpsstvo*). Although "Kosovo" was not a required theme, most respondents wrote about it. It was discussed in emotional rather than intellectual terms, and a lot of mythical rhetoric was used: Kosovo is "the only true core of truth", "the heart of Serbia", when one goes there "one is stunned into silence, and time comes to a halt", "Kosovo is the insistent strong pain in the soul", "Serbia's cancer" (Nedeljković 2007: 60-61). What may first be noted is the contrast in which these constructions stand with the previous ethnographic data, collected only several years before by Bandić. What provides at least a part of the explanation is the differential educational levels of the two samples, but not in the direction the social scientist would assume: the almost illiterate peasants were *less* colonized by the mythical discourse than the urban college students. This again strongly supports the idea of the importance of the educational system in inculcating the allegedly inborn Serbian Trauma.

The other set of data comes as close as any to providing insight into the vernacular receptions of the symbolic Kosovo. It was collected in 2001/2002, one year after the fall of the Milošević regime in 2000 and two years after the war of 1999. In 300 interviews with ordinary

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doubt, have behaved as a 'heavenly' people is expected to do" (Bandić 2001: 461, italics added). These sentences, needless to say, are not in any way derived from the field data.

<sup>276</sup> Such as: Kosovo as Serbian "sacred land" that must be defended at all costs; Kosovo as Serbia's "heart" and "core"; reminders of Lazar's covenant and the heavenly kingdom; the Golgotha metaphor; assimilation of Milošević to Prince Lazar; etc.

citizens of Serbia about the recent political past and prospects for the future, one question concerned the issue of (real) Kosovo and the 1999 NATO bombing. It was in this conjunction that many respondents went back to Kosovo as symbolic legacy.<sup>277</sup> While for many (by no means all) of them the events of 1999 were in various ways traumatic, it is striking how much this was *not* couched in the language of the Trauma. People were familiar with the symbolic tradition and generally ready to respect it, but not to let it determine their political stands. They seemed to be caught between demands of rational positioning in the real world and moral sentiments of pride and justice that are so strongly associated with the Kosovo theme. The result was a perplexed and contradictory, but open attitude, an honest attempt to think through a difficult topic.<sup>278</sup> Well-known tropes, like *Serbian cradle*, were often employed in casual, even ironic manner. As one interviewee said: “Kosovo is the sacred Serbian land – I’m joking”.

As a general trend, the most frequent frame to discuss the topic was a simple and assured assertion that “Kosovo is ours”, however it was *not* expressed in metaphysical but rather in more political and legal – though doubtfully more commendable – terms that saw Kosovo as part of Serbia, and Serbs as the state’s entitled nation. Another general trend was for interviewees to acknowledge, with a sort of aggrieved resignation, that Kosovo was “lost”.<sup>279</sup> And if this was a trauma for them, it was of a rather mild kind and one that they had already begun to overcome.

So how do we account for the difference between extensively mythicized discourse in the first data, and uneasy realism in the second? The main reason lies, I believe, in the different framings of the discussion, resulting in two different registers people were employing in response to these framings. Nedeljković’s assigned title-appeal, “Serbhood”, framed the issue in a way inviting the mythologizing approaches: *srpstvo* is a very loaded word, abstract and general, with a flavor of artificiality; it is not a word one would use in daily speech (not even when talking “grand” of the nation). The other data were obtained within a questionnaire that provided a frame doubly different from the former: it was a) rational, and b) concrete, personal and experiential. Interviewees were called on to express their own personal experience, and reflections on that experience, to refer to the concrete events, dates, facts from their life and the collective life insofar as it affected them. The whole research design did not encourage generalized and empirically unfounded proclamations. Thus different discursive registers produced divergent ways of talking about the same things. Maybe even if the very same people participated in both studies, they would have talked just as differently.

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<sup>277</sup> The project’s title was “Politics and everyday life” and its findings are presented in Golubović et al. (eds.) 2003, an English summary in Spasić 2008.

<sup>278</sup> Examples from some interviews: “I don’t feel Kosovo to be part of my country, because in effect it is not, but essentially it is. I mean, if you take history, religion... Now many people say history is no longer important, because it all happened ten centuries ago, but it is... It has always been part of Serbia – all that we were told, the cradle of the Serbian people, this and that, but it is true. Now, what it is really... but actually it no longer is, so...” Or, another person: “And the battle of Kosovo, we pledge to Nemanja, Lazar, this and that, well, they are long gone, this is nonsense. They were fighting with maces, and now is the time of the atomic bomb”, but immediately goes on to say: “Now we must try to save Kosovo, the Serbian cradle, with all those cultural monuments that are now being burned down.” A clear tension between pragmatism and loyalty to tradition: “This Kosovo Myth, it has maintained Serbs for centuries... It is the heart of Serbia... Miloš Obilić, and other known and unknown heroes... But true, definitely, we cannot live of such myths”.

<sup>279</sup> Such as: “We saw Kosovo was gone”, “We were deceiving ourselves concerning Kosovo, it had been sold out long ago”, “It hurts so much, but I think Kosovo will be taken away from us”, “I’m very much emotionally attached to Kosovo, but I think it is lost and we’d better invest this energy into something else.”

### A common language in which to disagree

The long history of the Trauma as a cultural structure has produced the layered character of its meanings. Yes, Kosovo “means” something to most Serbs, probably even “matters” to them. But the contents of this are of highly diverse origin.<sup>280</sup> Furthermore, the layered meanings are only partly expressible in words. They may also involve a whole range of vague feelings of uneasiness, discontent and shame, provoked by the recent collective experiences. For example, remembrances of the Myth’s association with Milošević’s aggressive and failed policies – that is, with wars, national humiliation and international isolation – might also have become part of the Kosovo Trauma as it is experienced today, but will hardly be made explicit. So within the seemingly singular Trauma some meaning layers may be closer to the surface and more readily articulable, and others buried, tacit and possibly activated only in the mode of Herzfeldian “cultural intimacy”. This would amount to more than just different “meanings”, to profoundly different emotional and moral import – including outright irrelevance of the Trauma to an individual Serb.<sup>281</sup> What remains, and what really acts as the much-extolled “connective tissue” among Serbs, is the identical language they are all familiar with, the “entrenched” symbolism of Kosovo which rhetorically brings all of these differences together, without admitting it. The name remains the same, providing the impression of stability, and making it possible to ostensibly “revive” the myth, while in fact it is turned in nothing but “a useful cliché or linguistic stereotype, a ‘reference’ and argument in ideological use” (Djerić 2005: 30)

It has been pointed out repeatedly that the tropes of the Kosovo legend, especially in its epic guise, have often been used as political devices for censuring, condemning and morally polluting political opponents. We have seen how the labels of Vuk Branković or, conversely, of Lazar and Miloš, were exchanged by all kinds of political forces since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>282</sup> This practice has been so widespread in Serbian political life that the function of *internal exclusion* may qualify as an even more prominent pragmatic function of the Trauma than aggression towards others.

Nevertheless, mechanisms of exclusion may be more subtle than the explicit pollution of the opponent by calling him/her traitor. An excellent instance of this more oblique deployment was provided in 2006 by the then-Prime Minister Vojislav Koštunica, a democratic but conservative nationalist. Speaking at the symbolically highly charged site of the ancient Serbian monastery of Hilandar in Greece, Koštunica said: “Everybody knows what Kosovo means to us.” Let us have a closer look at this phrase. If “everybody” knows it, then those who feel they do *not* know exactly what Kosovo means to them, or to others, cannot help feeling excluded or better, completely obliterated (since they do not even belong to the “everybody”). If everybody “knows” something, then there is no need at all to articulate, discuss and argue this something. Finally, who the “us” are is similarly unclear (Serbs? all of them, or only some? and if some, are

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<sup>280</sup> As Brubaker (2004: 56) reminds, the materials that collective identities are made of include, in addition to the more famous *mythomoteurs* and other long-term factors, “also the moderately durable ways of thinking and feeling that represent ‘middle-range’ legacies of historical experience and political action”.

<sup>281</sup> When Dragich and Todorovich begin their “blood” phrase with: “Kosovo is many diverse things to different living Serbs...”, this is not acknowledgment of fundamental disagreement. What they have in mind is variation within the range of the beautiful, sublime and awesome. In celebratory discourses in general, apparent diversity of meanings is often used to enhance the effect of all-Serbian pervasiveness of the Myth, but it never includes the idea that Kosovo to an individual Serb may mean something unpleasant, irritating, silly, boring, embarrassing, old-fashioned, awkward, worn-out etc.

<sup>282</sup> These practices, extremely detrimental to the development of a democratic political culture, were dubbed by Naumović (2005) „quasi-ethnic identity splits“.

these the patriots, the religious, the members of Koštunica's party, or his voters, or...? ) Hence, by a short and seemingly innocuous phrase, all those who do not recognize themselves in it are excluded from the community. But this is done implicitly, which makes the move less conspicuous and harder to challenge: one would not really know how to protest it.<sup>283</sup> The main paradox involved in both "simple" and "complex" strategies of exclusion is that the Trauma, presented as what binds Serbs together, is used to produce *internal and self-inflicted traumatization* of the national polity, by deepening cleavages within and preventing their pacification.

The period after 2000 has been characterized by a series of new twists and turns on the Kosovo theme. After the war of 1999 and installment of international administration in (real) Kosovo, its status has remained unresolved, which has been conducive to a mood in Serbia in which it is quite easy to score political points by rising the rhetorical stakes in discussing Kosovo. While the unofficial, more personalized and private discourse, as the quoted interviews show, was characterized by a general rationalism and open-mindedness, the discourse produced by political elites has sought a *re-traumatization* of Serbian attitude to Kosovo. Instead of being gradually replaced by more rational and realistic, policy-oriented suggestions, the tropes of the Kosovo myth in its most traumatic cast have been liberally employed by elite actors, who were trying to outdo one another in upholding the sanctity of Kosovo. As the verbal stakes were continuously risen, it has become all but impossible to talk about Kosovo, real as well as symbolic, in anything but the most elevated tone. A whole range of positions on the issue have become discursively unavailable or excessively costly.<sup>284</sup> On the other hand, uttering or supporting empty phrases like "Kosovo is Serbia!", "We shall never give up Kosovo!", "Kosovo is our sacred land!" and so on, costs nothing and can bring some profit – if anything, the profit of showing that one is not sticking out. So everybody choose to repeat these phrases, without much thinking. At the same time people harbor all kinds of doubts and grudges against the symbolic prevalence of Kosovo and its mythical impingements on current Serbian policies, but are extremely uncomfortable to express them in public, or even to themselves, because the sacredness of the topic has been so extremely enhanced. This private and subdued attitude of weary irritation is almost impossible to pin down: one may feel it in muttered remarks, half-voiced comments, and grumbles overheard, on people's faces and in tone of their voices.

This came out in elections. The year 2008 was hot with passions, with (real) Kosovo's proclamation of independence in February, ensuing protests turned riots in Belgrade, including the raiding and burning of US embassy, sudden icing of Serbia's relations with the Western countries etc. The public sphere reverberated with innumerable invocations of Lazar's oath and the bequest of the Kosovo heroes, particularly in the campaign of the ultranationalists. Nevertheless, in February 2008 the incumbent democratic president Boris Tadić was reelected, and in parliamentary elections held in May a democratic coalition marked a convincing

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<sup>283</sup> Some more examples of the same device: "A Serb is the one *whom* Kosovo concerns" (Bečković 1991: 68). Or, in Velimirović (1988: 71) "Those who scowl at Kosovo; those who belittle, condemn, or hate it... such *are not real Serbs*... And real Serbs ... ought to thank the Lord for having given them Kosovo, their pride and comfort." And here is Jevtić (2007): "It is impossible for the word Kosovo to be mentioned without causing profound agitation in each of us Serbs. ... *There is no Serb* who has not thought, spoken, written about Kosovo, grieved over it and resurrected through it" (pp.374, 116). Italics added.

<sup>284</sup> When in 2007 prominent journalist Boško Jakšić argued in his column in *Politika* for Serbia's acknowledgment of an independent Kosovo, this provoked public uproar that lasted for weeks.

victory.<sup>285</sup> True, Tadić and his democrats, just like almost everybody on the Serbian political scene, consider Kosovo's independence illegal and fight it as they can; but whatever one may think of their Kosovo policy, it is not extremist, and, even more to the point, it contains virtually no mythologizing rhetoric. Pointing in the same direction, polling data show that, when asked to list the most important problems Serbia is currently facing, people place (the status of real) Kosovo below "unemployment", "low living standard" and "corruption" (SMMRI 2008).<sup>286</sup>

If we then go back to the question – is there a Kosovo Trauma for Serbs?, the answer may be "yes", provided that we understand its proper location: it does not dwell *in* Serbs, but in the discursive space *between* them. And the Trauma itself involves a whole knot of entangled traumas, not necessarily those that bards of the Trauma strove to inculcate. The deceptive simplicity of the noun, *Kosovo*, might also hide traumas of the Yugoslav wars, including the "trauma of perpetrators"; the trauma of being caught in an irresolvable conflict with a neighboring people, Albanians; the trauma of Serbia's exclusion from European integration; the trauma of living in a faulty democracy and continuing economic stagnation. And also, perhaps, the trauma of being forced into a traumatic identity and lacking the language in which to express one's dissent without being called a traitor.

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<sup>285</sup> The coalition "For European Serbia" (Democratic Party/G17) won 38.40% of the vote and 102 seats in Parliament, while the ultranationalist Serbian Radical Party came second with 29.45% (78). Source: CeSID, [http://www.cesid.org/rezultati/sr\\_maj\\_2008/index.jsp](http://www.cesid.org/rezultati/sr_maj_2008/index.jsp)

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**Solidarizing with the kidnap victims:  
On the generalization of trauma across a fragmented civil sphere**

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## **Introduction**

Colombia has been plagued by one of the longest civil conflicts in the world. The two guerrilla movements that are still fighting – the FARC and the ELN - have been around for almost half a century and therefore constitute two of the oldest guerrilla movements that are currently known worldwide. Over the past decades different governments in Colombia have initiated peace talks with different groups of illegal combatants. Some of them have been remarkably successful as they have led to the total demobilization of the groups involved, and have managed to reincorporate their members into civilian life and democratic politics. In the case of the FARC and the ELN, however, all contacts have been unfruitful. In the course of the 1990s the conflict between these two groups and the state became increasingly gruesome and in the aftermath of 9/11 the two guerrilla groups were reclassified by the European Union and the US State Department as terrorist organizations.

One of the weapons such groups have used over the years in part to pressure the Colombian government and in part to finance their illegal operations has been the kidnapping of thousands of people. Their victims have been subjected to inhuman conditions while in captivity, often stacked behind barbed-wire fences in the thickest corners of the Colombian jungle, in some instances tied for years to trees with chains at their necks, undernourished, with little medical assistance, and under the constant threat of execution. At the end of 2007 their suffering reached and moved international audiences as some of the kidnap victims made a ghostly appearance in a video the FARC circulated to prove their ‘survival’. Traditionally, Colombian society has not regarded kidnapping as a national trauma. Instead, different segments of society have read it differently depending on their political sympathies. Since 2007, however, kidnapping has slowly appeared to be on its way to be coded as a generalized trauma.

In his theory of cultural trauma, and more generally in his theory of the civil sphere, Alexander suggests that, to generalize trauma, and therefore to establish far-reaching solidarity ties between the victims and the rest of society, advocates must tap into the discourse of civil society and articulate a grand narrative that can translate the pain of the victims into the pain of all. There are societies, however, that do not exclusively rely upon such discourse for the purpose

of establishing generalized solidarities. Parts of them may well do so but others may resort to alternative discourses of political legitimation. Alexander's theory of the civil sphere does not take stock with such situations that, as Reed (2006) would put it, entail "conflict without complicity". As a result, his theory does not address the actual mechanics by which a fragmented civil sphere can still yield generalized forms of solidarity. Baiocchi (2006), on the other hand, takes stock with the possibility of fragmentation but in the end falls short of accounting for the actual mechanisms by which the civil sphere overcomes it. This leaves us with a theory of cultural trauma that lacks of an underlying theory of the civil sphere to account for the way trauma gets generalized in culturally divided societies.

The ongoing process of generalization of the trauma of the victims of kidnapping in Colombia shows that multivocal performances along the fault line that breaks the Colombian civil sphere into two distinct discursive zones constitute the elusive mechanism by which generalized solidarities can still emerge across a plurality of social groups that appeal to two alternative discourses of political legitimation to sustain solidarity among their own members. This, in turn, bears an important implication upon Alexander's theory of cultural trauma. The generalization of trauma in deeply divided societies does not necessarily call for one single grand narrative of pain, as Alexander would otherwise predict, and definitely cannot call for one at its early stage. Rather, it is sufficient for society to count upon a set of different narratives of pain – one for each discursive zone that makes up the civil sphere - and upon a battery of multivocal performances to zip all narratives of pain together. For the purpose of my analysis in this paper I will focus on the latter.

Bringing multivocal performances into the analysis has two unexpected theoretical implications. Effective multivocal performances display an enigmatic Mona Lisa-type of authenticity that exceeds the analytical correspondence Alexander establishes in his cultural pragmatics between the notions of authenticity/inauthenticity and those of fusion/defusion. Also, they yield a distinct type of cultural reenchantment that has curiously escaped the analytical lenses of neo-Durkheimian sociology. The former point entails that an extension of Alexander's theory of the civil sphere inherently calls for a theoretical extension of his cultural pragmatics while the latter suggests that the horizon of enquiry of the neo-Durkheimian tradition within contemporary sociological theory might be even broader than imagined in the past three decades.

## **Theorizing the generalization of trauma across a fragmented civil sphere**

The generalization of trauma is nothing but a process by which a society redesigns and expands the horizon of solidarity among its citizens so as to include the victims of trauma, give them due recognition, and embrace their suffering as if it were directly experienced by society at large. For this reason any theory about the socialization of trauma must rely upon some theory that accounts for the way societies go about articulating solidarity ties among their members. And this is why Alexander's theory of cultural trauma implicitly relies, and must rely, upon his theory of the civil sphere.

According to Alexander democracy is not just a set of technical rules. Rather, it is "a world of great and idealizing expectations" and "overwhelming feelings of disgust and condemnation." This world – he insists - is articulated through "a transcendental language of sacred values of the good and profane symbols of evil"<sup>287</sup>, "a historically contingent final vocabulary" – to put it with Rorty (1989, pp. 190-192) – by means of which people express what brings them together and what sets them apart.<sup>288</sup> Citizens will consequently tap into this specific language – the discourse of civil society - to define the horizon of solidarity among their members, and therefore to generalize the traumas of particular sets of victims to the rest of society.<sup>289</sup>

Not all societies, though, exclusively rely upon the discourse of civil society for such a purpose. As Baiocchi (2006) has recently shown, parts of them may well do so but others resort to alternative discourses of political legitimation. Alexander's theory of the civil sphere does not take stock with such situations that, as Reed (2006) would put it, entail "conflict without complicity". As a result, his theory cannot cover those instances in which generalized solidarities might still emerge despite the fact that the civil sphere is fragmented and only few social groups in society can, want or accept to resort to the discourse of civil society to sustain them.

To understand how traumas get generalized in such societies, it is therefore necessary to get an analytical grip upon the mechanisms by which they still manage to build generalized solidarities despite their fragmentation. As Baiocchi (2006) explicitly takes stock with the phenomenon of a fragmented civil sphere, it makes sense to start from him to look for insights. Baiocchi shows that two different discourses of political legitimation contended the control over

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<sup>287</sup> Alexander (2006: 4).

<sup>288</sup> Alexander (2006: 56).

<sup>289</sup> Alexander and Smith (1993).

the Brazilian civil sphere in two major public debates. In the 1979 debate over crime – he suggests – the liberal discourse of civil society played just an emergent role whereas in the 1992 debate over the impeachment of the President it achieved dominance, and progressively did so in the course of the crisis.<sup>290</sup> According to Baiocchi such debates did not only show a symbolic contest about the application of the two discourses but also about the validity of one over the other.<sup>291</sup> His analysis, however, does not dwell upon the concrete mechanics by which one discourse disputes the cultural terrain of the other. It does not account for the way members of society switch from one to the other, nor does it theorize upon the switch. It does not say if, for example, switching is like jumping or like crossing a bridge. Nor does it clarify whether the switch ultimately reflects the population ecology of the socio-demographic bases that underpin each discourse or whether it is a matter of cultural work. In short, Baiocchi suggests that a civil sphere can overcome its fragmentation as a result of a process of symbolic competition among different discourses of political legitimation but does not explain how exactly one discourse will achieve cultural dominance over the others.

Most importantly, though, Baiocchi's argument seems to imply that generalized solidarities can emerge out of a fragmented civil sphere only when such fragmentation is on its way to get resolved. And the closer the civil sphere comes to it, the more general the solidarity ties society will be able to establish among its members. This, in turn, implicitly rules out the possibility that a fragmented civil sphere could sustain the emergence of generalized solidarities and that, for example, the victims of trauma in culturally divided societies could still achieve society-wide recognition of their suffering. The ongoing process of generalization of the trauma of the kidnap victims in Colombia, however, shows that generalized solidarities may still emerge despite a fragmented civil sphere that keeps being fragmented. To extend Alexander's theory of the civil sphere in an effort to make his theory of cultural trauma more encompassing, it is therefore necessary to take a step beyond Baiocchi's argument.

A closer look to the concrete operation of the communicative institutions of the Colombian civil sphere may provide useful insights as how to move forward. If one extrapolates the predictions of Alexander's theory of the civil sphere to such a context, one would expect that such communicative institutions would carry out one unique function. That is, they would

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<sup>290</sup> Baiocchi (2006: 306).

<sup>291</sup> Baiocchi (2006: 305, 306).



merely translate the particularistic interests of specific social groups into the more general interests of larger segments of society by resorting to the two discourses of political legitimation such segments respectively employ to establish solidarity ties among their members. Quite interestingly, though, with reference to the trauma of the kidnap victims such institutions have been lately carrying out one additional function Alexander's analytical framework does not account for. That is, they have been introducing specific cultural mechanisms that work as revolving doors between the two discourses of political legitimation and make it possible to recast the moral justifications of one cultural camp into the other. It is through such revolving doors, in other words, that the narratives of generalization within one camp have progressively got zipped to those within the other. This would seem to indicate that the generalization of solidarity ties across a fragmented civil sphere is possible as a result of the combination of the two functions the communicative institutions of the civil sphere carry out under such circumstances.

The 'revolving-doors' that make it possible to sew a fragmented civil sphere back together are nothing but multivocal performances along the fault lines that fracture the civil sphere. A multivocal performance along the fault line between two cultural systems collapses two simultaneous cultural performances in one, and produces the same reactions among the audiences on both sides by projecting different meanings within the two cultural camps to which such audiences respectively belong. As a result of its dual nature, a multivocal performance brings together two different sets of background representations, two scripts, one set of actors, one *mis-en-scene*, one set of means of symbolic production, two different sets of audiences, and two different systems of social power. Multivocal performances are theoretically intriguing for at least two reasons. First, their enigmatic Mona Lisa-type of authenticity exceeds the analytical correspondence Alexander establishes in his cultural pragmatics between the notions of authenticity/inauthenticity and those of fusion/defusion. And second, they yield a distinct brand of cultural reenchantment that has so far eluded neo-Durkheimian analysts.

Alexander argues that a cultural performance is effective when it is perceived by its audiences as authentic and this has to do with the fusion of the elements that make up the performance: the background cultural representations, the scripts, the actors, the audiences, the *mis-en-scene*, the means of symbolic production, and social power. According to Alexander the better such elements fuse together into a coherent whole, the more authentic the performance

will come across, and the more effectively will it project meaning upon its audiences. Multivocal performances, however, display a type of authenticity that does not fully square with the idea of fusion Alexander introduces in his cultural pragmatics. Quite curiously, for them to be effective, they cannot get to the point of resolving their inherent enigma. They must preserve an element of ineffability. They cannot stop being equivocal. They must leave a permanent doubt in their audiences as whether they are actually about one performance or whether they might be about something else, as well. In other words, the elements that constitute each of the simultaneous performances that respectively make up a multivocal performance cannot afford to perfectly fuse together and separately become fully convincing for the multivocal performance to appear authentic. The slight defusion one perceives on one side of the cultural fault line along which a multivocal performance unfolds therefore contributes to the fusion of the elements on the other side and vice-versa. The two simultaneous performances that make up an effective multivocal performance, in other words, would seem to be tied together like in mobia strip. If one could paint them, they would probably look like one of Escher's works. Multivocal performances, as a result, paradoxically lose authenticity in case of excessive fusion. And the more they do so, the less effectively will they work as revolving-doors that can zip together the narratives of generalization of solidarity that may emerge at different points of a fragmented civil sphere.

The peculiar kind of authenticity that characterizes multivocal performances also entails a curiously distinct type of cultural reenchancement that seems to have escaped the analytical lenses of the neo-Durkheimian tradition within contemporary sociological theory. Neo-Durkheimians have suggested that modern complex societies can still attain cultural reenchancement. Only, unlike in traditional societies, this is no longer automatic but rather quite contingent since authenticity in performance is much more difficult to achieve in complex societies than in simpler ones. This notion of cultural reenchancement tacitly relies upon an idea of plenitude of meaning which is in turn implicitly linked to Alexander's idea of authenticity through fusion. As effective multivocal performances paradoxically entail some peculiar element of defusion in order to be authentic, then one would have to conclude that they either do not yield cultural reenchancement despite their authenticity, if reenchancement is necessarily only about plenitude of meaning, or they do so but in that case cultural reenchancement must be possible even when the attainment of full meaning is beyond reach. Since the former is a self-contradiction, given that authenticity is a definitional dimension of cultural reenchancement, then the latter must apply.

This implies that in modern complex societies that are fragmented into different cultural spaces effective multivocal performances along the fault lines between them can still deliver cultural reenchantment. Only, this time this will curiously exhibit a strange dialectic between plenitude and deficiency of meaning that will very much resemble the way fusion and defusion are tied together in authentic multivocal performances.

After explaining why the generalization of the trauma of the kidnap victims in Colombia is relevant for the purpose of theory development on at least four fronts – that is, the extension of Alexander’s theory of cultural trauma as well as of his theory of the civil sphere, of his cultural pragmatics and finally of the idea of cultural reenchantment within neo-Durkheimian cultural sociology – I will devote the next three sections to address the specifics of the Colombian case in question.

### **The Colombian fragmented civil sphere**

One of the most apparent features of the Colombian civil sphere is its deep fragmentation. As Daniel Pecaute once observed, “if in Colombia people talk so much about memory, it is because it is impossible to write history. ... There is no common vision that can help people define what occurred.”<sup>292</sup> One might add that Colombians even lack of a common political vocabulary to articulate such a vision. Against such a background Colombian intellectuals have wondered whether it makes sense at all to talk about civil society. Some of their leading figures have concluded that such a category is inapplicable to their societal context. I will start this section by explaining why, instead, it still makes sense to talk about a Colombian civil sphere despite its fragmentation, and will address in the rest of this section the two discourses of political legitimization that currently contend the control over such a space.

According to the anthropologist María Teresa Uribe the Colombian civil sphere is a “juxtaposition of different worlds”. It brings together “micro- and macro-logics that move at different speed” and knows nothing else but social groups with exclusively particularistic pretensions. Under such circumstances - she concludes - it is hardly meaningful to talk about civil society and it is risky to keep on acting as if it existed. The political scientist Leopoldo Munera agrees with this point. The idea of civil society “presupposes a highly coherent society with a relatively homogeneous public opinion”. It is predicated upon the existence of a diffuse

general interest and tends to downplay conflict. As the sociologist Francisco Leal would put it, “civil society is the dream of a harmonic society”. For this reason – they suggest – its application to Colombian political reality is highly problematic.<sup>293</sup> Their recommendation to ditch the notion of civil society, however, is predicated upon an equivocation. Recognizing or denying difference and conflict within society, after all, cannot dictate whether the notion of civil society must be rejected or retained as a pertinent theoretical category. The crucial question one needs to ask, instead, is whether the fragmentation of the civil sphere prevents civil society from carrying out its function within a democracy, which has to do with the articulation of generalized solidarities among its members. Since neither of the afore-mentioned Colombian social scientists addresses this point, it is legitimate to overlook their recommendation and discuss instead the cultural makeup of the Colombian civil sphere. I will suggest that two discourses of political legitimation currently contend the control over such a space. One is the discourse of civil society Alexander (2006) refers to in his theory of the civil sphere and the other is a non-individualistic discourse that resembles Baiocchi’s corporate code and that Tognato and Cuellar (2009) have recently labelled as the discourse of the *hacienda*.

In Colombia true liberals as well as most of the Left use the discourse of civil society as their cultural metric of legitimacy in public life. Such a discourse is more widely used in urban areas and less popular within rural settings. The Marxist-Leninist discourse that for a long time permeated the Left during the XXth century seems to have retreated from the civil sphere and today the internal debates within the major leftist party – the Polo Democrático Alternativo – follow the cultural logic of the discourse of civil society, though not all politicians within it always manage to perform it with sufficient authenticity. The President of the Polo, Carlos Gaviria, for example, whom many identify with the more Leftist strand within his Party, is a constitutionalist scholar, former President of the Colombian Constitutional Court, a radical liberal, a vehement defender of the principle of personal autonomy of the individual, and a true believer of the virtue of rational discussion among citizen.<sup>294</sup>

In 1991 Colombia passed a new liberal constitution and the discourse of civil society consequently gained a more central position within the national civil sphere. Despite the new emphasis on the sacredness of the individual, on human dignity, personal autonomy, rationality

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<sup>292</sup> Posada Carbó, Eduardo. “Unidos contra el secuestro,” *El Tiempo*, July 6, 2007.

<sup>293</sup> “La sociedad invisible”, *Alternativa*, December 1996, No.5: 24-26.

and freedom, however, the new system of secular collective representations fell short of providing a common political vocabulary for all Colombian society.<sup>295</sup> As Tognato and Cuellar (2009) have recently shown, this resulted into the continual presence in the everyday practice of most of average Colombians of the axiomatic system that till then had oriented the conception of agency, social relations and political institutions within the Colombian civil sphere - the discourse of the *hacienda* (i.e. large farm).

Such a discourse builds upon an organic understanding of society and therefore deems desirable whatever feeds into collective harmony and condemns whatever breaches it. It consists of a system of binary oppositions that define what is legitimate in social life and what instead must be resisted. The attributes on the positive side make up the *patron/peón* code whereas those on the negative side identify the *bandit* code. The notion of patron collapses into one figure elements that are political, religious, familiar, moral, and economic. The patron is the protector, the shelter, the moral authority, the saint, the person in charge of the workers, the lord that rules over his feud, and the owner of the house where everyone else is guest. The *peón*, on the other hand, is the subordinate that submits to the superior wisdom of the patron, the docile follower, the listener, the modest that knows his own place in society and accepts his humble part in it. If the patron is the head of the social body, then the *peón* is its hand and can claim dignity till he fulfils his own function. On the other hand, the bandit is the *peon* who decided to rebel against social, and therefore natural, harmony.

As far as agency is concerned, the *patron/peón* code establishes that the patron be civilized, cultivated, compassionate, orderly, respectful, and considerate while the *peón* must match those attributes with complementary ones - modesty, docility, humbleness, good-willingness, reverence, and generosity. On the other hand, the bandit code defines those who reject the organic order of social life as barbarian, ignorant, ungrateful, disorderly, irreverent, disruptive and calculative. As far as social relations are concerned, the *patron/peón* code grounds them upon paternalism, loyalty, and charity whereas the bandit code structures them upon individualism, treason, and selfishness. Finally, political institutions according to the *patron/peón* code will be based on tradition, authority, personalism and order while bandits will build up institutions that are based on anarchy, rebellion, impersonality, and chaos. The fact that the

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<sup>294</sup> Rincón, Héctor. "El oso polar," *Cambio*, March 18, 2002.

<sup>295</sup> See Palacio (1999), Estrada, 2004, Gutiérrez (1999), Morales (1998).

discourse of the *hacienda* comes quite close to the corporate code Baiocchi (2006) talks about with reference to Brazil reflects the partial commonalities Latin American countries share in terms of their political development as well as their social and cultural history.

The discourse of the *hacienda* spans across broad segments of Colombian society. As Cuellar (2009) shows, since the end of the nineteenth century, both conservatives and moderate liberals have tapped into it as their metric of legitimacy in public life. Today, many see Colombia President, Álvaro Uribe, as the quintessential embodiment of the patron. As such, his popularity rates do not suffer at all whenever he openly acknowledges in a press conference that he is having opposition congressmen followed by the Presidential Secret Police because they oppose the Free Trade Agreement with the US and lobby in Washington DC against it.<sup>296</sup> The patron, after all, is culturally entitled to protect collective harmony and to intervene against those who spoil it. In a different occasion the conservative historian Eduardo Posada Carbó stressed that the Colombian government cannot keep saying before international audiences that in Colombia there is no conflict. He recommends that the government appeal to “a different discourse, more elaborate, more pondered, and with fewer passionate rhetorical improvisations”. In a way Posada’s wakeup call politely signals that the patron can surely claim epistemic authority within his *hacienda*, but anywhere else, where the principle of personal autonomy applies, observers will immediately object to it.<sup>297</sup>

It would be mistaken, however, to attribute the use of the discourse of the *hacienda* just to those segments of the population that identify with the political right. The organic understandings of society based upon patriarchy and Catholicism that underpin the discourse of the *hacienda* are widespread in Colombia and even creep into the discourse of the leftist guerrillas. In occasion of the Conference the FARC summoned to celebrate its 43<sup>rd</sup> Anniversary, for example, the guerrilla group issued a communiqué that called Colombians “to struggle for a new government capable of reconciling the Colombian family.”<sup>298</sup>

After suggesting that the Colombian civil sphere is indeed fragmented and constitutes a space where two discourses of political legitimation compete for control, I will address in the

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<sup>296</sup> “Grabando, grabando...”, *Semana*, May 7, 2007.

<sup>297</sup> Posada Carbó, Eduardo. “El estado y la opinión mundial,” *El Tiempo*, January 11, 2008.

<sup>298</sup> “Comunicado: 43 Aniversario de las FARC-EP,” Secretariat of the Central Command of the FARC-EP, May 25, 2007, <http://www.redresistencia.org> from [www.farcep.org](http://www.farcep.org).

next section some of the most salient features about the treatment of kidnapping in the Colombian civil sphere.

### **The trauma of the kidnap victims in the Colombian civil sphere**

The history of kidnapping in Colombia starts on January 31, 1933, when three-year old Elisa Eder, daughter of an industrialist, was kidnapped. Thirty years later her father would be killed during an attempt of kidnapping. In the following decades “in Colombia freedom would become a merchandize to be exchanged for money, political rent and even rubber boots or cell-phones.”<sup>299</sup> Only between January 1996 and June 2008 approximately twenty four thousand people have been kidnapped. By June 2008 almost three thousand were still in the hands of their captors and almost fourteen hundred had died in captivity. Over that period the FARC kidnapped 6,902 people, the ELN 5,422 and paramilitaries 1,187.<sup>300</sup> Prisoners are subjected to inhuman conditions while in captivity. Their life is under constant threat. In case of military rescue operations their kidnappers are instructed to execute them. While in the jungle they are completely cut off from their families and the rest of the world. They cannot receive adequate medical assistance. They are constantly exposed to the dangers of the jungle and to tropical diseases. Tying them for long periods of time or even permanently to trees with chains at their necks has become a rather widespread practice<sup>301</sup>. Some of them have been in captivity for more than ten years. Colombia President Álvaro Uribe has compared the FARC’s detention camps to the Nazis’ concentration camps and Human Rights Watch has explicitly referred to their practice of kidnapping as a patent crime against humanity.<sup>302</sup> Over the past two years the Colombian government has been subjected to increasing pressure both at home and abroad to negotiate a humanitarian exchange with the FARC and the ELN. The proofs of survival of some of the kidnap victims the FARC delivered at the end of 2007 have laid further pressure upon the

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<sup>299</sup> “24.000 colombianos han sido secuestrados en la última década; 1.269 han muerto en cautiverio”, *El Tiempo*, June 30, 2007.

<sup>300</sup> “Estadísticas generales de secuestro: Enero de 1996 - junio del 2008” and “Comportamiento de secuestro 1996 - junio 2008” Fundación País Libre, [http://www.paislibre.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=blogcategory&id=28&Itemid=84](http://www.paislibre.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=blogcategory&id=28&Itemid=84).

<sup>301</sup> Espinosa Valderrama, Abdón. “Estigma del secuestro y al fondo cejas de Luz,” *El Tiempo*, December 27, 2007; Pombo, Roberto, “Carta de un secuestrado,” *Cambio*, November 25, 2002; “Estadounidenses narran momentos del Cautiverio. ‘Las FARC son animales y bárbaros sin humanidad’,” *El Tiempo*, July 12, 2008.

Colombian government to reach a solution to the problem. Foreign governments have increasingly intervened on the matter, particularly Venezuela and France. On the one hand, Venezuela has sought to launder the international image of the FARC with the purpose of transforming it into the vanguard of a prospective Bolivarian Revolution in Colombia and beyond. And France has vowed to rescue Ingrid Betancourt, former candidate during the 2002 Colombian presidential election and a Franco-Colombian citizen, who was kidnapped in 2002 during her campaign. In 2007 Venezuela President Hugo Chavez was asked by his Colombian counterpart to mediate with the FARC to obtain the liberation of the kidnap victims. Chavez pushed further the internationalization of the issue by involving different foreign actors, such as former Argentina President Nestor Kirchner and film director Oliver Stone. By the end of 2007, however, Colombia President Uribe revoked the authorization he had given Hugo Chavez to mediate with the FARC after it became manifest that Chavez was pursuing the change of FARC's terrorist status into one of belligerency. On February 4, 2008 more than ten million Colombians took the streets to protest and call for the immediate release of the kidnap victims. This constituted a historical turning point in Colombian political culture, given that public protests had traditionally been regarded by most of Colombians with utter suspicion. On July 2, 2008 the Colombian army launched Operation Checkmate. After infiltrating the FARC's lines of communication, two helicopters were dispatched to a camp where the FARC held Ingrid Betancourt, three American citizens and eleven policemen and army soldiers. The Army managed to convince the FARC that a friendly NGO had put the helicopters at disposal of the guerrilla for the purpose of transporting the 'prisoners' to another camp. The guards were tricked into delivering them to unarmed intelligence officers that posed as NGO cooperators. The fifteen kidnap victims were then retrieved from the camp and freed without shooting one single bullet. The leading national newspaper – El Tiempo - celebrated the success as a greater national triumph than the historic 5:0 Colombia scored in soccer against Argentina.<sup>303</sup>

Colombians have been traditionally quite indifferent to the suffering of the kidnap victims. In a letter to his family one of the kidnapped, Coronel Mendieta, writes: "It is not physical pain that paralyzes me, or the chains around my neck that torment me, but mental agony, the evil of the evil and the indifference of the good, as if we were not worth anything, as if we did not

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<sup>302</sup> Vivanco, José Miguel. "Colombia: Setter to Rebel Leader Demands Release of Kidnapped Political Figures." *Human Rights Watch*, April 15, 2002.



exist.”<sup>304</sup> A journalist has once compared the indifference of Colombians to that of the Germans before the Holocaust. War – she argues - has transformed Colombians into petty monsters that can no longer draw the line between good and evil. It has converted them into confused beings that can hardly distinguish truth from lie. War has bent their capability to react and their right to feel outraged.<sup>305</sup>

In 2007, however, the situation started to change. When the FARC executed 11 regional congressmen whom it had kidnapped five years earlier and attributed instead their deaths to an attack on the part of the Colombian army, more than one million Colombians took the streets in protest. Still, while the front of indifference to the kidnap victims started to crack, it became soon apparent that the quest for a generalized recognition of their pain throughout Colombian society would soon stumble into one major obstacle: the deep division of the Colombian civil sphere. The protest in response to the assassination of the 11 congressmen, for example, soon turned into a Babel of discordant messages: some in favor of negotiations with the FARC to obtain the liberation of the kidnap victims and others harshly opposed to any concession on the part of the government.<sup>306</sup>

What is most striking about the evolution of kidnapping as a public issue, is that Colombians have progressively managed to overcome their traditional indifference to such a phenomenon, but the two axiomatic systems that have been confronting each other in the civil sphere all along the public debate over the issue have hardly managed to erode each other’s cultural terrain, as one would instead expect in the light of Baiocchi’s argument. In other words, the fragmentation of the Colombian civil sphere has not shown any sign of resolution in the course of such a debate as a result of the symbolic competition between the discourse of civil society and the discourse of the *hacienda*. What instead such a competition triggered, was a process of consolidation of the two discursive blocs that made up the Colombian civil sphere. For the sake of clarity, I will here explain how that happened in one of the two camps by addressing the debate over the participation of the major opposition party – the Polo Democrático Alternativo – to the February 4 march.

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<sup>303</sup> “El rescate de los 15 mejor que el 5 a 0 a Argentina” *El Tiempo*, July 8, 2008.

<sup>304</sup> “Carta del Coronel Luis Mendieta se convirtió en símbolo de la crueldad del cautiverio en la selva,” *El Tiempo*, January 16, 2008.

<sup>305</sup> Duzán, María Jimena. “Y los Secuestrados, ¿Qué se pudran?” *El Tiempo*, March 24, 2008.

At the end of December 2007 a Colombian 33-year old computer science engineer, Oscar Morales, created a group on Facebook named “One million voices against the FARC”. He tells that the ghostly image of Ingrid Betancourt the FARC circulated that early December to prove her survival, the photos of the kidnap victims in chains, and the failed liberation of little Emmanuel, the 3-year old boy who was born in captivity in a detention camp of the FARC moved him to do something about it. Soon enough, the group on Facebook brought together thousands of people and Oscar Morales decided to use it to call for a march against the FARC. Through Facebook the march was scheduled for February 4, 2008 and was organized in 115 cities around the world. Many Colombian mass media, the private sector and the government joined the initiative and supported it both in Colombia and abroad. In the end, more than ten million people marched. The FARC reacted to the initiative by stigmatizing it as a “military weapon of espionage and destabilization” and as a plot orchestrated by the Colombian government and the CIA.<sup>307</sup> The official newspaper of the Colombian Communist Party, on its part, sentenced that the march constituted a typical example of manipulation of the masses on the part of the capitalist mass media and of the Colombian political oligarchy.<sup>308</sup> An observer of the February 4 march sentenced that Colombia got to it more divided than Israel and Palestine: “Even on the most delicate, most useful and most human matters, it is impossible to agree. We are incapable of discussing with respect. There is intolerance, anger and intense pain.”<sup>309</sup>

Reaching a decision on whether to participate to the march became a thorny issue for the major opposition party – the Polo Democrático Alternativo – that constituted an umbrella organization for many political groups on the left of the Colombian political spectrum. The Mayor of Bogota, a member of that party, declared he would march as a mayor and as a citizen because he believed in the mobilization. One of the leading senators of the party, Gustavo Petro, called his party to join the march but his petition was turned down by the directorate of the Polo. As political pressure mounted upon it, its leaders decided that they would not march but would rather turn up in the central square of Bogota, protest against kidnapping, and leave the square before the marchers reached it as planned. This way – they explained – public opinion would be

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<sup>306</sup> “Colombia contra el secuestro”, BBCMundo.com, July 06, 2007 [http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/hi/spanish/latin\\_america/newsid\\_6275000/6275734.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/hi/spanish/latin_america/newsid_6275000/6275734.stm).

<sup>307</sup> “La Marcha de la Rabia,” *Semana*, February 4, 2008.

<sup>308</sup> Editorial, *Voz*, February 6, 2008.

<sup>309</sup> Ochoa, Luís Noé. “No nos tiremos la marcha,” *El Tiempo*, January 26, 2008.

clear that they would not support a pro-government initiative.<sup>310</sup> In an interview former Minister of Interior, Humberto de la Calle, joked that the decision of the Polo not to march but to concentrate instead in Bolivar Square sounded like Clinton's famous statement that he smoked marijuana but never inhaled it.<sup>311</sup>

The debate that immediately broke out within the camp that had been declaredly tapping into the discourse of civil society as its metric of legitimacy in public life was not whether they should rather shift to the discourse of the hacienda but instead whether the Polo was performing the discourse of civil society in an authentic manner. Liberal opinion-makers criticized the decision on the part of the Polo to condition its participation to the march. Some stressed that one cannot politicize barbarism and must reject it straightforwardly, irrespective of whether those who condemn it stand on the opposite side of the political spectrum.<sup>312</sup> Others warned that one cannot condition one's own adhesion to a march depending on whether its organizers include the condemnation of other forms of violence one is more sensitive to.<sup>313</sup> Others more pointed their finger to the equivocal posture certain members of the Polo had been keeping towards the FARC and questioned whether the Polo's commitment to the values that underpinned the discourse of civil society was actually genuine. This issue, in particular, had been a recurrent theme for public debate especially since the assassination by the FARC of the eleven regional congressmen. Some had criticized the fact that the Polo kept neutrality towards the insurgency and enmity against the constitutional government.<sup>314</sup> Others remarked that the Polo never straightforwardly condemned the FARC in the same way it did with paramilitaries.<sup>315</sup> One of the leaders of the Polo, after all, once declared that the Polo is "neither friend nor enemy of the FARC".<sup>316</sup> In a different occasion the President of the Party, Carlos Gaviria, said that the FARC carries out crimes but its members are not criminals. And finally, a regional leader of the Polo went as far as suggesting that "conflict" justifies the existence of the FARC.<sup>317</sup> In conclusion, the debate that went on within

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<sup>310</sup> "Los organizadores de la marcha del 4 de febrero ratificaron que es contra las FARC," *El Tiempo*, January 30, 2008.

<sup>311</sup> Amat, Yamid. "El País está cayendo en un peligroso ambiente de polarización," *El Tiempo*, February 3, 2008.

<sup>312</sup> Abad Faciolince, Héctor. "Sobre la marcha," *Semana*, February 4, 2008.

<sup>313</sup> García Villegas, Mauricio. "Marchar sin advertencias," *El Tiempo*, February 5, 2008.

<sup>314</sup> "La crisis del Polo," *El Tiempo*, September 16, 2007.

<sup>315</sup> Abad Faciolince, Héctor. "Izquierda y guerrilla," *Semana*, December 12, 2005.

<sup>316</sup> "Los partidos y sus vínculos con grupos armados," *El Tiempo*, September 14, 2007.

<sup>317</sup> "¿Ganó la línea Navarro-Petro sobre la Gaviria-Robledo-Dussán?," *Semana*, September 24, 2007.

the Colombian liberal camp systematically tested whether its members were coherently and therefore authentically committed to the principle of personal autonomy of the individual which demands that the individual be recognized irrespective of his or her proximity to some specific group that expresses a particularistic set of interests. This, in turn, enabled the members of the civil camp to undergo an important learning process as how the discourse of civil society should be adequately performed in public, which ended up serving the purpose of consolidation of that camp.

The fact that the Colombian civil sphere maintained its deep fragmentation all along the debate over kidnapping does not imply that the Colombian civil sphere did not display any mechanism that would yield the generalization of the trauma of the kidnap victims across society. In principle, one might be tempted to believe that one way to restore complicity in a situation of “conflict without complicity” – to put it with Reed (2006) – is by recovering the profoundly human dimension of the suffering of the victims. In other words, - one might think - the experience of being human should be a universal anyone can relate to. And to support this point, one might invoke the narrative strategy CNN Correspondent Steve Nettleton or one major opinion-maker in Colombia, Salud Hernández, displayed with reference to kidnapping. In one of his pieces Nettleton, for example, describes the long lines wives, mothers, brothers and children of kidnap victims make outside the radio studio as they wait to address the microphone and send out to their beloved in captivity their messages of love and support. He observes that “twice a week, families of the kidnapped repeat this somber ritual at the Radio Nacional. The growing crowds of people who line the corridors rehearsing their comments are a testament to how in Colombia kidnapping has become an institution.”<sup>318</sup> Hernández, on the other hand, remarks in one of her op-ed pieces that Colombia is so plagued by so many different horrors that there will be no possible way to overcome them if people do not fix their gaze upon the face of the victims, on their tears, and on the tortures they underwent without acknowledging that both in mass graves and in the jungle there are and have been innocent victims who suffered. It is necessary – she says - to break the indifference and stop measuring pain quantitatively.<sup>319</sup>

The problem with using the appeal to human experience as a strategy to bridge deep cultural difference is that it tends to naturalize it and therefore its sets it beyond culture. Surely,

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<sup>318</sup> Nettleton, Steve. “Kidnapped: pinned by the sword and the wall.” CNN, <http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/2000/colombia/story/reports/kidnapped/index.html>.

the visceral dimension of human experience that is not mediated by language is probably close to a universal. Victims of torture around the world, after all, share a terrible secret irrespective of their cultural backgrounds. Most of human experience, however, is mediated by language and therefore by culture. Depending on the horizon of interpretation within which it unfolds, it will take different meanings. And sadly enough, the Colombian case is a clear witness to that. Salud Hernández herself admits that in Colombia different measures of pain get attached to different set of victims. FARC Chief Spokesman Raul Reyes, for example, refuses to talk about kidnapping. Rather he prefers to say that the FARC “retains” the rich and charges them with a “tax”: “When a person takes away something from another for a lucrative personal interest, this is kidnapping. But when taxes are levied for a political or a social goal or do the transformation of society, this is taxing. Those are simple taxes.”<sup>320</sup>

If human experience does not constitute a resource that can be automatically tapped into for the purpose of building cultural complicity across difference, then a fragmented civil sphere must resort to some alternative mechanism to generalize solidarity across the abysses that fracture it. The fact that in Colombia solidarity with the kidnap victims is on its way to get generalized means that such mechanisms have been eluding the theoretical lenses we have so far employed. In the next section I will address such a mechanism and show how in concrete it has operated within the Colombian context.

### **Multivocal performances and the generalization of the trauma of the kidnap victims across the Colombian civil sphere**

Since the assassination of the eleven regional congressmen that shook Colombian public opinion and cracked the traditional wall of indifference towards the kidnap victims, three events seem to have been pivotal to awake – as an observer puts it - “a generalized feeling of indignation and rejection”,<sup>321</sup> thereby contributing to generalize solidarity with the victims across Colombian society: Professor Moncayo’s 600 miles march to Bogota to demand the liberation of his son; the image of Ingrid Betancourt in a video the FARC circulated to prove her survival; and the story of

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<sup>319</sup> Hernández Mora, Salud, “Con licencia de juzgar,” *El Tiempo*, January 20, 2008.

<sup>320</sup> Nettleton, Steve. “Kidnapped: pinned by the sword and the wall.” CNN, <http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/2000/colombia/story/reports/kidnapped/index.html>.

<sup>321</sup> Pombo, Mauricio. “Dolor de carne y hueso,” *El Tiempo*, December 6, 2007.

Emmanuel, a three-year old boy that was born in captivity from a kidnap victim and a FARC combatant.

These three cases engage into a rather complex and possibly paradoxical exercise of cultural juggling. They are both about the celebration of civil heroism and human dignity and about the vindication of traditional values. Gustavo Moncayo turns into a national symbol of civil protest but at the same time he manages to walk that fine line within the Christian tradition that enables the humble – the peon - to rise and partake into the glory of Jesus. Ingrid, on her part, becomes a living indictment against political repression and civil indifference but simultaneously her iconic appearance in the video transfigures her into a Virgin Mary, a sign of the possibility of social unity through the common experience of pain. A journalist remarks that her image in the video bears “something of the Piety of Michelangelo, aesthetically beautiful, and humanly violent and tragic.”<sup>322</sup> Finally, Emmanuel rises as a symbol of the shamelessness of anti-democratic forces which are capable of denying the most basic rights of the weakest in society but at the same time he also comes to play the role of Baby Jesus who will descend at Christmas on a divided Colombia and contribute to bring it back together.

All three cases are multivocal performances that unfold along the fault line between the two discursive camps that make up the Colombian civil sphere: the discourse of civil society and the discourse of the *hacienda*. As such, they function as revolving doors that make it possible to zip together the calls for solidarity with the kidnap victims that each side manages to articulate on its own terms. Giving a closer look to such peculiar cultural phenomena may provide useful insights into the mechanism by which a civil sphere can still build generalized solidarity ties across society despite its fragmentation. For the purpose of this exercise, I will here focus upon the march of Professor Moncayo.

Gustavo Moncayo is a 55-year old high school teacher from a southern region of Colombia. His son – Pablo Emilio, a corporal of the National Police - was kidnapped in December 1997 by the FARC after an attack against the police station where he was serving. In October 2006 the FARC exploded a car bomb within the parking lot of the Military University in Bogota and President Uribe decided to close the door to any humanitarian exchange with the guerrilla group. At that point Gustavo started to publicly wear chains at his wrists and neck, like the kidnap

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<sup>322</sup> Pombo, Mauricio. “Dolor de carne y hueso.” *El Tiempo*, December 6, 2007.

victims of the FARC, and never stopped ever since.<sup>323</sup> In July 2007 in the aftermath of the assassination by the FARC of the eleven regional congressmen, out of despair and fearing he might no longer see his son alive, he decided to leave his home together with one of his daughters and head on foot to Bogota to protest for the release of his son. He started his march in the middle of a generalized neglect and without support of any institution – social, political, religious or economic.<sup>324</sup> But then he managed to catch public attention. The media would accompany him along the track. People impatiently awaited his arrival. They applauded him, hugged him, touched him, took photos with him, asked for autographs, dedicated local folk songs to him, donated money, and offered food. In a society that is marked by severe socioeconomic segregation, his march moved people from all strata. In one occasion – Moncayo remembers - an armored BMW stopped, a man came out, took a photo with him and left. Moncayo tells that the man did not dare give him a lift. He knew that Gustavo was walking for his son.<sup>325</sup> Towards the end of his march, his arrival was announced on the radio and schools would stop their classes.<sup>326</sup> The march lasted forty-six days. Even the FARC acknowledged that his gesture was “valiant”.<sup>327</sup> When he got to Bogotá, Moncayo met with the President and the Mayor of the city. At the end of 2007 he was awarded the National Piece Prize.<sup>328</sup> Though his painful march did not manage to obtain the liberation of his son, he managed most of times to command the attention and the solidarity of broad and diverse segments of the Colombian society.

CNN correspondent, Steve Nettleton, described Moncayo as a national Forrest Gump. I would argue, however, that the parallel hides more than it actually reveals. Surely, what immediately comes to mind when one observes Moncayo’s action is its civil vocation. It is a statement about the civil value of peaceful protest. It is a declaration of belief in the capability of the individual to make a difference. It is a reminder about the duty citizens have to take a stance on public issues and act. It is a promise that in a divided society civil rituals can bring together people from all regions, all ethnicities, and all socio-economic strata. And it is the vindication that civil society can play a role in public life, as an activist who marched along with Moncayo

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<sup>323</sup> “La procesión de un padre,” *Semana*, June 25, 2007.

<sup>324</sup> “El episodio de Uribe y Moncayo: Pueblo vs. Pueblo,” *El Tiempo*, August 13, 2007.

<sup>325</sup> Navia, José. “Moncayo paralizó todo a su paso,” *El Tiempo*, August 2, 2007.

<sup>326</sup> Miño Rueda, Luis Alberto. “Moncayo, de maestro de geografía a ídolo nacional,” *El Tiempo*, July 22, 2007.

<sup>327</sup> “FARC elogian a Moncayo. No responden sobre su hijo,” *El Tiempo*, August 14, 2007.

pointed out.<sup>329</sup> Moncayo's march, in a way, performs a similar function to being on a campaign track for a political candidate. It transforms a private individual into a public figure by exposing the individual to public problems and by committing him or her before multiple publics to take them into account. An observer remarks that "Citizen Moncayo" turned into the symbolic transfiguration of the people.<sup>330</sup> He interpreted the people and rose because of the people. And he did all this by showing dignity.<sup>331</sup>

Still, looking at Moncayo in purely civil terms will not capture all that he really meant to Colombian society. Moncayo was not only the citizen. He was also the peón who managed to walk along that fine line within the Christian tradition that allows the humble to rise and partake into the glory of Jesus. Turner (1973) would say that the life of Jesus served as the archetypal metaphor for the performance Moncayo carried out.

Moncayo showed from the start to be a man of faith. When he left home, his daughter warned him they had no money. He reassured her. Along the way they would encounter good people.<sup>332</sup> Like Jesus, he started to have followers who would march with him.<sup>333</sup> Public opinion would soon refer to them as "the legion" or "the disciples".<sup>334</sup> Ingrid Betancour once said in a letter to her mother: "We live like dead".<sup>335</sup> To resurrect his son and all kidnap victims from their death in the jungle, he needed to carry out a ritual of collective purification by walking the same *via crucis* Jesus did in his Passion. The media actually recognized his march as such.<sup>336</sup> Like Christ, he would suffer along the way. And the media dwelt on his bleeding feet<sup>337</sup> As Moncayo entered innumerable villages along the way, people came to the street to see him. Some knelt. Other blessed him and raised their arms to the sky: "The entire world is moved."<sup>338</sup>

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<sup>328</sup> "Gustavo Moncayo, ganador del premio Nacional de Paz, dice que prefiere la libertad de su hijo," *El Tiempo*, December 5, 2007.

<sup>329</sup> "Día 8: El profesor Gustavo Moncayo llegó a Popayán en su recorrido por el acuerdo humanitario," *El Tiempo*, June 25, 2007.

<sup>330</sup> "El episodio de Uribe y Moncayo: Pueblo vs. Pueblo," *El Tiempo*, August 13, 2007.

<sup>331</sup> "El episodio de Uribe y Moncayo: Pueblo vs. Pueblo," *El Tiempo*, August 13, 2007.

<sup>332</sup> "Día 8: El profesor Gustavo Moncayo llegó a Popayán en su recorrido por el acuerdo humanitario," *El Tiempo*, June 25, 2007.

<sup>333</sup> Miño Rueda, Luis Alberto. "Moncayo, de maestro de geografía a ídolo nacional," *El Tiempo*, July 22, 2007.

<sup>334</sup> Arbaláez, Jotamario. "Viaje a pie," *El Tiempo*, August 1, 2007.

<sup>335</sup> Ochoa, Luis Noé. "Carta a Ingrid," *El Tiempo*, April 5, 2008.

<sup>336</sup> "La procesión de un padre," *Semana*, June 25, 2007.

<sup>337</sup> Gonzáles Posso, Camilo. "El caminante por la libertad," *El Tiempo*, August 2, 2007.

<sup>338</sup> Arbaláez, Jotamario. "Viaje a pie," *El Tiempo*, August 1, 2007.



Children approached him and gave him flowers.<sup>339</sup> Orphans and elderly alike came to him and greeted him.<sup>340</sup> A woman once implored him to enter her home. Her husband had been ill for a month. She asked him to touch him and see if he could do a miracle. “Moncayo stopped and the husband was already walking towards him.” He told the man to put some water on his knees and to have faith because God helps everyone. Then, he went back to the road and marched along the multitude.<sup>341</sup> The encounter with President Uribe under a tent in Bolivar Square where he finally settled at the end of his march once again evokes parts of the script of the Passion of Christ. To the President who resisted a humanitarian exchange with the FARC, Moncayo says: “You’re not the owner of life”.<sup>342</sup> As a journalist puts it, “the President insults, and the people do not give in. The President humiliates, and the people will look down. The President invites a fight, and the people will hide.”<sup>343</sup> Moncayo lends his chick before a President who loses his patience and raises his voice and before the President’s advisors who arrogantly accuse him of simple-mindedness. Before a President who is insensitive to human dignity – says an observer – Moncayo vindicates the reason of humanity and, by doing so, through his pain, his impotence, his own dignity, Moncayo vindicates the outraged dignity of the public.<sup>344</sup> The media would conclude that the ritual of humiliation against Moncayo ended up showing a President that cannot accept a horizontal encounter with the people.<sup>345</sup>

One may ask at this point who is really Gustavo Moncayo? A civil hero or a traditional saint? What is interesting about his performance, is that we have no way of resolving the enigma. He is both and yet does not completely fulfil our expectations about either of them. From a civil perspective there are elements about his performance that clearly do not fit in. How could a civil hero, after all, enter the home of that woman and address her sick husband that way? The same conclusion could also reach by approaching Moncayo’s performance through the lenses of the discourse of the *hacienda*. In one occasion the “peace walker” says: “I am neither a hero nor a saint, just a man who got tired of so many humiliations and hit the road to seek the liberation of

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<sup>339</sup> Navia, José. “Moncayo paralizó todo a su paso,” *El Tiempo*, August 2, 2007.

<sup>340</sup> Miño, Luis Alberto. “Noooooooooo,” *El Tiempo*, July 16, 2007.

<sup>341</sup> Miño Rueda, Luis Alberto. “Moncayo, de maestro de geografía a ídolo nacional,” *El Tiempo*, July 22, 2007.

<sup>342</sup> Forero, Juan. “After a long trek across Colombia, hostage advocate not ready to rest,” *Washington Post Foreign Service*, August 24, 2007, Page A01.

<sup>343</sup> “El episodio de Uribe y Moncayo: Pueblo vs. Pueblo,” *El Tiempo*, August 13, 2007.

<sup>344</sup> Benedetti Jimeno, Armando. “Rincón Caribe al fin apareció un Moncayo,” *El Tiempo*, August 6, 2007.

<sup>345</sup> “El episodio de Uribe y Moncayo: Pueblo vs. Pueblo,” *El Tiempo*, August 13, 2007.

his son and all other kidnap victims.<sup>346</sup> Now, each mismatch – and therefore each slight defusion - on each side of Moncayo's enigmatic performance feeds into the authenticity of the other side.

If authenticity in a multivocal performance involves some defusion of the elements that make up each side of it, it is therefore legitimate to wonder how one can then distinguish an authentic performance from an inauthentic one. Will the latter involve more defusion or rather a different form of defusion? In other words, is it a quantitative matter of degree or a qualitative difference in form? Although the development of a cultural pragmatics to deal with multivocal performances is not possible given the limited objectives of this paper, still it is worth referring back to Moncayo's march to refer some of the factors that seem to have contributed to undermine the authenticity of his performance.

Towards the end Moncayo's action started to lose part of its initial effectiveness. Two issues, in particular, seem to have been influential in this respect. First, to start talks over a humanitarian exchange conducive to the liberation of the kidnap victims, the FARC had demanded that the government demilitarized the territory of two municipalities in a southern region of Colombia. As his march progressed, Moncayo increasingly insisted that the government should go along with such a demand. The FARC publicly saluted his insistence and observed that "as his march was continuing, the need and urgency of a humanitarian exchange advanced in the conscience of Colombians."<sup>347</sup> In an open letter to Moncayo an opinion-maker warned him that, by invoking the humanitarian exchange under the conditions dictated by the guerrilla, he was turning into a tactical asset of the FARC, which would throw a bleak shadow onto his march. After all, that would undermine the meaning his march had acquired, which crucially depended on its being "pristine and pure, foreign to any kind of ideological taint that would profane" it.<sup>348</sup> Now, from a civil standpoint it would be unacceptable that the march turned into something that could help the FARC. And from a more traditional point of view, it would be unacceptable that the sacred ritual of the *via crucis* be turned into a tactical weapon in the hands of 'the bandits'.

One second element also latently threatened the effectiveness of Moncayo's multivocal performance. It had more or less directly to do with his arrival at Bogota and his decision to set

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<sup>346</sup> Miño Rueda, Luis Alberto. "Moncayo, de maestro de geografía a ídolo nacional," *El Tiempo*, July 22, 2007.

<sup>347</sup> "FARC elogian a Moncayo. No responden sobre su hijo," *El Tiempo*, August 14, 2007.

<sup>348</sup> Hernández Bolívar, Saul. "En el lugar equivocado. Al profesor Moncayo," *El Tiempo*, August 7, 2007.

his tent in Bolivar Square where the Colombian Congress, the Town-hall, the Cathedral, the Constitutional Court and, not too far, the Presidential Palace converge. Quite curiously, such a mis-en-scene exposed Moncayo to a space that – symbolically speaking – had an inherent potential for contamination and this is a risk neither a saint nor a civil hero can afford to run. Their aura, after all, crucially depends upon a perception of disinterestedness that will be badly spoiled by the lures of political power.<sup>349</sup>

In the light of these two factors that seemed to influence the authenticity of Moncayo's performance, one may at least formulate the following conjecture. Both authenticity and inauthenticity in a multivocal performance involve some defusion of the elements that make up each side of it. However, there is a qualitative difference between the two. In the former case, as I earlier suggested, each side experiences some level of defusion due to the percolation into one side of elements that fit instead into the other side. On the other hand, in an inauthentic multivocal performance defusion is caused by the presence of elements that do not fit into either side. It will be up to future research on the cultural pragmatics of social interactions under “conflict without complicity” to pin down the grammar of authenticity under such circumstances.

Addressing the question of authenticity in multivocal performances is also crucial for another reason. It makes us aware of the fact that their contribution to the articulation of generalized solidarities across a fragmented civil sphere is a much more contingent and fragile cultural accomplishment than it would otherwise happen with a regular type of performance. For this reason the consolidation of generalized solidarities under such circumstances must call for an effective, sustained, and systematic presence of these performances in social life.

## Conclusion

For a long time Colombian society has not regarded kidnapping as a national trauma. Lately, however, things have been changing. In this paper I have suggested that addressing the generalization of trauma across a fragmented civil, like the Colombian one, can be particularly fruitful in terms of theory-building.

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<sup>349</sup> Castillo Cardona, Carlos. “Golpe de estado,” *El Tiempo*, August 8, 2007; Ochoa, Luis Noé, “La plaza de Moncayo,” *El Tiempo*, August 4, 2007.

In his theory of cultural trauma, and more generally in his theory of the civil sphere, Alexander suggests that, to generalize trauma, and therefore to establish far-reaching solidarities between the victims and the rest of society, advocates must tap into the discourse of civil society and articulate a grand narrative that can translate the pain of the victims into the pain of all. There are societies, however, that do not exclusively rely upon such discourse for the purpose of establishing generalized solidarities. Alexander's theory of the civil sphere does not take stock with such situations that, as Reed (2006) would put it, entail "conflict without complicity". As a result, his theory does not address the actual mechanics by which a fragmented civil sphere can still yield generalized forms of solidarity. In this paper I have suggested that the ongoing process of generalization of the trauma of the kidnap victims in Colombia shows that multivocal performances along the fault line that breaks the Colombian civil sphere into two distinct discursive zones constitute the elusive mechanism by which generalized solidarities can still emerge across a plurality of social groups that appeal to different discourses to sustain solidarity among their own members. This finding – I have argued – may contribute to extend Alexander's theory of the civil sphere and, by implication, his theory of cultural trauma.

I have also suggested that bringing multivocal performances into the analysis has two unexpected theoretical implications. Effective multivocal performances display an enigmatic Mona Lisa-type of authenticity that exceeds the analytical correspondence Alexander establishes in his cultural pragmatics between the notions of authenticity/inauthenticity and those of fusion/defusion. Also, they yield a distinct type of cultural reenchantment that has curiously escaped the analytical lenses of neo-Durkheimian sociology. The former point entails that an extension of Alexander's theory of the civil sphere inherently calls for a theoretical extension of his cultural pragmatics while the latter suggests that the horizon of enquiry of the neo-Durkheimian tradition within contemporary sociological theory might be even broader than imagined in the past three decades. As Smith and Alexander (2005) have recently remarked, in the 1980s a neo-Durkheimian tradition emerged within sociology. It gained momentum in the 1990s and in the course of the past three decades it has generated a broad range of fresh insights into multiple spheres of social life such as war and violence, national symbols, criminal law and punishment, race and ethnicity, technology and environmentalism, money and economic life, democratic transitions, democratic legitimacy, cultural trauma and collective memory. In 2006 Reed published an essay titled "Social Dramas, Shipwrecks and Cockfights: Three Types of

Social Performance” whose far-reaching theoretical implications upon the horizon of enquiry of neo-Durkheimian cultural sociology have not been systematically worked out, yet. My paper attempts to take one first step in that direction by opening up a narrow window upon the new terrain of enquiry that may face scholars as they take stock with the phenomenon of “conflict without complicity” in social life. In short, as neo-Durkheimian cultural sociology did in the past, it can once again enhance our understanding of war and violence, national symbols, criminal law and punishment, race and ethnicity, technology and environmentalism, money and economic life, democratic transitions, democratic legitimacy, cultural trauma and collective memory. Only this time, it may do so by exploring “conflict without complicity” within each of the above-mentioned areas.

To conclude, I would like to acknowledge my intellectual debt to Padget and Ansell’s 1993 award-winning article for their notion of multivocal action which inspired my analysis of multivocal performances. In their paper the authors lay out a theory about the structural and cultural factors that underlie the centralization of power in processes of state formation. In particular, they suggest that Cosimo de Medici managed to become the political pivot of Renaissance Florence thanks to two factors – one structural and the other cultural. More precisely, his structural position within Florentine society enabled him to engage into separate exchanges with the aristocrats, the merchants and the populace. And his enigmatic sphinx-like posture allowed him to obtain their support because he did not come across as exclusively committed to the particularistic interests of any of them. His action – Padget and Ansell point out – was inherently multivocal and this crucially contributed to the transfiguration of Cosimo de Medici within the Florentine political scene into a quintessentially public figure. In their article Padget and Ansell do not elaborate any further on the specifics of multivocal action or on its broader theoretical implications. Nor does McClean (1998) dwell on it, despite his more direct focus on the cultural side of their analysis. By building upon Padget and Ansell’s intuition about the relation between multivocal action and the construction of publicity, I have tried to suggest that an encounter between their research tradition and neo-Durkheimian cultural sociology may result into handsome gains from trade for both. On the one hand, neo-Durkheimians can build upon such intuition for the purpose of extending their theory of the civil sphere. And on the other, complexity theorists may draw from neo-Durkheimian cultural sociology a clearer picture of the cultural specifics of multivocal action and of its broader theoretical implications.

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DRAFT:  
**Narrating Cultural Trauma of Defeat in Postwar Japan**

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Over the past decades, the trauma of war and defeat in Japan has been recounted in many voices from a broad spectrum of perspectives. From personal accounts to commemorative speeches, and from media dramatizations to public controversies, the official and unofficial narratives of war and defeat have been inescapably present in national collective life. During this time, social groups of different persuasions have contended over the master narratives of the Asia-Pacific War. These groups – consisting of politicians, intellectuals, teachers, bureaucrats, business leaders, media entrepreneurs, labor activists, and students, who were themselves veterans, returnees, bereaved families, orphans, atomic bomb survivors, ethnic minorities, and so on – forged different narratives to interpret what the war meant and what went wrong. Their narratives used different moral frames: some universalized the war and the atrocities (“All wars are bad”), while others relativized them (“We were bad, but they were bad too”), or condemned it (“We started an atrocious, reckless war”), and still others sought to triumph over the defeat (“Defeat was the harbinger of peace.”) Within these frames, individuals staked out different positions: victims of a brutal war (“We all suffered and paid heavily”); victimizers in an imperial war (“We wrought so much suffering in Asia”); the repentant who vowed never to make the same mistakes again (“No more war! No more Hiroshima!”). At the same time, many also remained silent, preferring to bury their own memory, or conceal their post-traumatic stress disorder.

Over the course of the decades, the narratives of the national trauma coalesced into two broad directions that cultural trauma theory would propose (Alexander et al 2004). The progressive narrative of amelioration is recognizable in the “bedrock of peace” discourse (*heiwa no ishizue*) that represents the vision that defeat is the reason why Japan enjoys peace and material prosperity today. This “fortunate fall” argument is used often in official speeches and commemorations, justifying and legitimating the sacrifices of the war dead, while at the same time, diverting attention away from the culpability of the state in starting and losing the war. The focus on assigning positive value to the personal sacrifices of the dead invokes an inescapable sense of indebtedness to them, while bracketing out the question of whether the war was fought for a legitimate cause. Thus, as long as those soldiers’ and civilians’ sacrifices are emphasized, the narrative frame is elastic enough to allow the war itself to be either condemned or ennobled. The rationale that the destruction was somehow a necessary condition to attain fruitful ends is a strained logic to be sure, but it nevertheless satisfies the strong desire for elevating and dignifying a colossal failure.

By contrast, the tragic narrative represents identification with suffering victims. In this narrative frame, the war wrought unimaginable tragedy to the people who had to “bear the unbearable and suffer the insufferable.” The scale of violence and destruction in the total war is undisputable, and the only appropriate response as a nation is to make sure it will not happen again. Thus, those who were affected by this tragedy are duty bound to recount, warn, and prevent repeating the mistake. The war was wrong, but there is also sufficient elasticity here in assigning the blame to different agents and causes, from the Emperor and colonial aggression, to incompetent military strategists and self-serving Western powers. This narrative is often recognized as the “ravages of war” discourse (*sensô no sankā*) that sets a



premium on Japan's victimization in Hiroshima, Nagasaki, and indiscriminate air raids, and tends to cast war as an absolute evil.

In broad strokes, these narratives have helped to normalize the national trauma in the national consciousness, and over time, they have infused the Japanese collective identity with strong anti-war sentiments. These narratives have helped legitimate the sentiments of the "peaceful nation" discourse (*heiwa kokka*) that is based on Article 9 (the constitutional clause on the renunciation of war), and have served as a common platform for the nation – for the political left and right, from official discourse to kitchen talk, and across generations. This discourse of the peaceful nation strategically directs the search for new identity toward the future, not the past. A future-oriented identity discourse, then, effectively blurs moral categories and blunts moral judgments about the past events.

Past studies of Japan's war memory have often described the phenomenon in terms of its political conditions such as the left/right divide, or in essentialist terms such as shame/guilt cultures. Cultural trauma theory, however, by articulating the structure of discursive systems that emerge to normalize the cultural trauma in collective life, helps capture the complexity inherent in Japan's national experience that is not explained by the reductionistic, one-dimensional analyses. One such phenomenon that I explore in this paper is the response to the problem of public trust and national belonging after the total defeat. How could state power be trusted when it had let its people down badly, leading them to a disastrous war in a totalitarian society that repressed, censored, and destroyed individual lives? How could fellow citizens be trusted when they had supported enthusiastically or acquiesced meekly to the reckless Imperial ambitions? How could the

new democratic order be trusted when it was forced upon a people by their former enemies?

I argue that responses to this problem in Japan have bifurcated into progressive and tragic narratives of the war over time, and have influenced the formation of collective identity in postwar society. I also explore the social impact of this long-standing bifurcation which still yields no consensus today, and consider its role in blocking empathy for Asian victims beyond national borders.

#### THE NATIONAL TRAUMA OF WAR IN THE JAPANESE CASE

A cultural trauma occurs “when members of a collective feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways” (Alexander 2004, 1). To fathom the scale of this “horrendous event” a brief outline of the scope of deaths inflicted in this case is in order. The total death toll of World War II is estimated at 60 million, of which one-third occurred in Asia (Weinberg 2005). During the Japanese invasions, from China to Indonesia, the Philippines and New Guinea, it is estimated that 20 million Asians died, not only from warfare but from civilian raids, plunder, rape, starvation, and torture (Fujiwara 2001). In Japan, civilian death – from the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, Nagasaki to air raids in numerous cities – totaled approximately 1 million. In China, the civilian death toll is said to be around 16 million. In the United States, total civilian dead was less than 2,000. In the Japanese military, one in every three soldiers died out of 6 million who were mobilized. The death rate (38%, 2.3 million dead) was higher than that of German soldiers (33%), and 19 times that of

American soldiers (2%)(Yui 2005, 261). Because Japanese soldiers fought across the vast expanse of the Asia-Pacific region from North China to the South Pacific where supply lines were broken off especially toward the end of the war, approximately 60-70% of them died not from warfare but from starvation, disease, and abandonment. To date, only half of their remains have been repatriated, while the rest remain scattered throughout the far reaches of the region. Given the prohibition on surrender, a relatively small percentage was taken prisoner, and the last of them returned in 1956. The repatriation of several million civilians and ex-soldiers took decades.

After unconditional surrender the U.S. Occupation (1945-52) followed, during which time the war crimes trials (The Tokyo Trial 1946-48; Class B and C war crimes trials 1946-51) punished mostly military men for the most egregious violation of war conventions. Nearly 6,000 men were prosecuted for war crimes, and almost 4,500 of them were convicted; twelve were executed as Class A war criminals, and 920 were executed as Class B and C war criminals. The Occupation also implemented blanket social, economic, and political reforms that amounted to a total inversion of the moral order, scrapping the social institutions of the totalitarian militarist state and its Shinto ideology, and replacing them with Imperial democracy and liberal social reforms (Dower 1999).

## THE CULTURAL TRAUMA OF DEFEAT AND ITS NARRATIVES OF COLLECTIVE IDENTITY

For Japan, defining a national identity over the past decades has been a difficult and challenging undertaking following the trauma of war, defeat, and foreign occupation. The country's attempts to re-establish a collective identity after such radical shifts in the social and moral order provoked urgent questions of trust and suspicion toward the discredited

state authority and the political culture that wrought those traumatic failures. Trust, suspicion and betrayal became important political moral emotions that underpinned the question of solidarity to build new social institutions and define a new collective identity after the disintegration of prewar society. Dirk Moses (2007b, 56) has argued in the case of Germany that only two options exist in such a case: people could either rally to *defend* the national culture or seek to *renovate* it. Japan faced a similar choice to facilitate its collective regeneration. Whether or not people were willing to invest their hope and fate again in the Japanese power elite to face the unpredictable changes proved to be the core ingredient that would shape the contours of political identity in subsequent years and decades.

Out of this process, there emerged two broad approaches for individuals to re-establish their relationship with state power. On the one hand there were those who emerged from the experience of social collapse with their sense of trust and belief in the nation more or less intact, who could still trust state leadership to guide the nation toward recovery with some sense of confidence. Others emerged embittered by the failures of Japan's wartime political authority with a sense of profound misgivings for the nation and sought to distance themselves from it. For them, defeat was an experience of liberation from the oppressive totalitarian state and authoritarian culture, and hence it made sense that they sought to rebuild a collective identity that was, in a sense, less absorbed in the "we" of the nation state.<sup>350</sup>

People thus responded differently according to their confidence in the nation's ability to move in the right direction, with some level of stability and predictability. This difference has come to characterize a great deal of postwar political culture, and it is today

evident in the opposing viewpoints on revising the peace constitution to allow greater options for the state to deploy the military, or on mandating patriotic education in public schools. In terms of cultural trauma theory, those two narratives differ in the symbolic weighting of pollution assigned to state power (Alexander 2004). One sees state authority as reliably promoting better life, and building stable social bonds and institutions. The other sees it as pursuing self-serving interests at the people's expense. While assuming different forms over the past decades, the opposition between trust and distrust continues to mark a deep social divide today. It ultimately represents alternate ways of giving meaning to citizenship and to maintaining group identity (Eyerman 2004).

These two broad orientations are associated with different levels of ontological security, and over time, they fashioned general narratives of trauma that I call "Bedrock of Peace" and "Ravages of War" narratives, which I outline below. Although they characterize general trends in right/left divides, they nevertheless do not classify neatly into those conventional categories. As Moses (2007b) showed in the case of Germany, the political emotions of trust in the state and political culture do not fit or coincide exactly with the conservative-progressive divide. For example, leading LDP statesmen of the wartime generation like Miyazawa Kiichi and Gotôda Masaharu staunchly defended the peace constitution throughout their long political careers. Likewise in the media, the national newspaper Yomiuri shinbun, usually a reliable supporter of the conservative LDP government, spearheaded the discourse on the culpability of wartime state leadership in a high profile project in the 2000s (Yomiuri Shinbun 2006a, 2006b). Thus the landscape of war memory is not always shaped according to political party lines.

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<sup>350</sup> My discussion here draws on Dirk Moses' analysis of the German case in his *German Intellectuals and the*

## THE PROGRESSIVE NARRATIVES ON THE 'BEDROCK OF PEACE'

As scholars have pointed out, the desire to search for positive meaning after defeat in war through in a progressive narrative is often very powerful (Schivelbusch 2003; MacLeod 2008; Smith 2005). There are many examples of the urge to generate positive meaning in the aftermath of defeat in modern history, from the myth of the Lost Cause for the American Confederacy after the Civil War to the myth of the Fallen Soldier for German soldiers who died in World War I. The need to find redeeming worth in mass death is exceedingly powerful also among victors, as the well-known British rationalization of World War I as 'the war to end all wars' attests. Win or lose, with the benefit of hindsight, people have often strained contradictory logic to find 'meaning' in tragic slaughters, attempting to reconcile the violence with virtue: 'the soldiers killed to free people,' 'the bomb was dropped to save lives,' 'the war dead have brought peace,' 'the soldiers died to protect the future' and so on.

Japan's attempts to turn national failure into motivation for building a better future started immediately after the war in the 1940s as part of the efforts to come to terms with the enormity of its war dead. For example, public intellectuals like Nanbara Shigeru vowed in his tribute to the fallen that they had not died in vain as they would serve as the foundation upon which peace would be built in the future (Dower 1999, 489). Anxieties about the futility of sacrifice for the state are often subsumed in a narrative of hope called "the bedrock of peace" which has played a key role in reconstructing the meaning for the deaths and devastation in the collective imagination. By blending together narratives of

tragedy and messages for peace, defeat can be made a palatable experience, like the fortunate fall where destruction is supposedly instrumental to bringing about something good. The deaths of those men were worthwhile because they prevented a situation that could have been worse. They did not die in vain, because their death enabled the defeat which ended the atrocious violence. Regardless of where and how they died, this narrative allows their deaths to be redefined as an act of courage, while relieving the guilt of the living. Japan's enormous attachment to the valor of the fallen has to be understood in this light (Takahashi 2005).

A discourse explicitly linking acts of sacrifice to achieving peace in a formula of national "progress" started to gain traction in national commemorations and national newspaper editorials in the 1960s, at a time that the ruling party LDP consolidated power and claimed to guide Japan toward "prosperity and affluence" that would ultimately make it the second largest economy in the world (Akazawa 2005; Nakano 2005). The understanding of "progress" here referred to a range of ideas: peace, prosperity, democracy, justice, and security that seemed to be preconditions for a society aspiring to a high standard of living without a state of war (Gluck 1993, 93; Igarashi 2000, 130-9). With such a broad and elastic definition of progress, the ameliorative narratives helped to unite, energize and integrate the populace in a time of rapid uncertain social change; they also suggested reassuringly that loyal sacrifice for the "greater good" – such as the national-state or a business corporation – would be amply rewarded.

*Discourse of 'Meaningful Sacrifice': The Case of Battleship Yamato*

Modernity has been characterized by the emergence of nation-states that can mobilize the passion of young men to die for the country on a massive scale (Anderson 1991). By mobilizing nationalist passion, a conscripted soldier in a modern war can believe “he is dying for something greater than himself, for something that will outlast his individual, perishable life in place of a greater, eternal vitality” (Rahimi 2006). If the tension between recognizing the violent destruction of war and seeking constructive meaning in mass death has remained virtually irreconcilable – especially in total wars that called up ordinary conscripts by the millions for the first time in modern history – it is especially acute for the vanquished who are haunted by military failure (Mosse 1990).

One of the best-known examples of discourse on sacrifice for the “greater good” in Japan is the story of battleship Yamato and its 3,000 crew who died in the sea southwest of Japan. This patriotic tale recounts the last moments of those navy men in the largest battleship ever built, used for a tactically meaningless suicide sortie only months before the defeat. One of its survivors Yoshida Mitsuru documented the tormented discussion among the young officers aboard who questioned the meaning of their impending death for a war that was certain to end in defeat. Yoshida recounts the now infamous phrase of Captain Usubuchi desperately seeking meaning in dying for the nation, moments before the ship sank under relentless bombardment by 700 American jet fighters. His tormented words reveal how he thought his impending death may be a sacrifice that would serve as an awakening, a rallying cry for a better national future.

“Japan has paid too little attention to progress. We have been too finicky, too wedded to selfish ethics; we have forgotten true progress. How else can Japan be saved except by losing and coming to its senses? If Japan does not come to its senses now, when will it be saved?

“We will lead the way. We will die as harbingers of Japan's new life. That's where our real satisfaction lies, isn't it?”(Yoshida 1985, 40)



What this twenty-one year old officer meant by “progress” here is vague enough so that it is possible to draw different meanings like peace, justice, and prosperity. It is also easy to fault the logical contradiction of a young man claiming to contribute to a future that he will not experience. Yet this contradictory logic is at the heart of the fluid idea of linking progress to sacrifice which enables the collective belief that Japan would rebound and recover. In Yoshida’s rendering, the courage and discipline of the men facing certain death are emphasized, without blame or resentment directed toward the state leadership that ordered the tactically dubious “special attack” mission with no fuel to return home. Instead, Yoshida’s account is a requiem for the dead, a tribute that facilitates and legitimates the idea that defeat was somehow a catalyst for progress. This story works as a popular tale because the protagonists hail from the Imperial Navy, the arm of the Japanese military on record for opposing the war against the United States. Far from being guilty war mongers, then, the protagonists are more readily cast as seekers of peace in war, and their stories are more easily framed in terms of opposition to militarism. This allows the narratives to align neatly with the search for innocence in these men who have committed no evil and died worthy deaths, preserved as part of national memory by subsequent generations. The protagonists are not killing machines but tragic heroes of a country going through a national catastrophe. The narrative conspicuously and studiously avoids blame, and refuses to assign responsibility for killing. Thus, critics have charged that the Yamato story all too eagerly seeks to banish evil and safeguard innocence, to mitigate accusations that the protagonists were perpetrators of war (Fukuma 2007, 56).

The nationalist appeal of this tale of “meaningful sacrifice” is obvious. The story of Yamato has been made into four films from 1953 to 2005, and has inspired numerous

fictive accounts (e.g. popular manga series *Spaceship Yamato*, *Zipang*, etc). Usubuchi's statement has been cited in language arts textbooks, and recounted in a variety of political speeches. As a patriotic symbol as popular as Paul Revere, 20,000 viewers of NHK television voted Usubuchi's statement among the top five favorites in a popular program called *That's When History Changed* (Sonotoki Rekishiga Ugoita) in 2007. Nevertheless, this wrenching tale of courage and hope never quite fulfills even those who survived the Yamato catastrophe like Yoshida, much less the veterans embittered by other cases of military ineffectiveness (Yoshida 1986, 2003a; Iida 2008). The patriotic narrative therefore does not easily convert into a new militaristic identity as critics fear, because Yoshida never leaves the confines of this immediate experience (Fukuma 2007).

For today's young audience watching the recent feature film on the Yamato tragedy of 60 years ago, the value of sacrificing one's life for the nation is not plainly obvious. Thus, after the 2005 premiere, a high school student posed a question about the meaning in dying for the nation to the young actors who played the officers:

Student: "It's difficult for me to understand what it means to defend the country. What does it feel like? Is it scary?"

Actor A: "Perhaps it's normal that we can't understand it."

Actor B: "It's becoming more and more difficult to imagine the relationship between the individual and the state. We've grown up at a time when we don't know what that feels like. And it's scary to die. I wondered how people could love the country so much" (Tôei Production 2005.)<sup>351</sup>

With such new sensibilities, the "bedrock of peace" narrative has thus had to shift its meaning away from military valor. In the 2005 version, the officers do not emphasize that they are dying for the nation or the Emperor, but they do so more "to protect their family and loved ones."

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<sup>351</sup> My translation

## THE TRAGIC NARRATIVES ON THE RAVAGES OF WAR

If progress is to be understood as the state of postwar prosperity without war in the ameliorative narrative, then the atonement has been completed and the war dead have already been rewarded for their sacrifice. But if progress is to be understood in the sense of world peace, such an ideal has not been achieved, so the dead have not been rewarded and mourning continues (Akazawa 2005, 160). In the latter tragic narrative, the war was an act of intentional aggression, carried out by a handful of ignorant and incompetent military leaders. In contrast to the ameliorative narratives, the tragic “ravages of war” narratives were born out of a profound skepticism about state-defined “justice,” and the notion that people ultimately died in vain for an unnecessary war. Recognizing the state’s capacity for violence and immoral acts, this perspective profoundly questions the positive meaning of sacrifices (Akazawa 2005, 7-8.) The following two cases represent examples of those narratives.

### *Discourse on Perpetrator History: The Case of Ienaga Saburo*

One of the most influential figures to shape the postwar discourse is historian Ienaga Saburo, a prolific scholar of war history and war responsibility, and a well-known plaintiff who waged the longest legal battle against the state over how to teach the national past. Motivated by a sense of remorse at having been a passive bystander during the war, Ienaga devoted himself to asserting the right to publish perpetrator history in school textbooks, staking the claim that the state had specific culpability and responsibility for the mistaken judgments and decisions regarding the entry into and conduct during the war

(Nozaki 2008, 154). His three lawsuits over the course of 32 years claimed the right to freedom of speech, and challenged the constitutionality of the textbook certification system by the Ministry of Education which demanded extensive revisions for Ienaga's textbooks. Importantly, the "speech" that he sought to protect in those lawsuits is the critical narrative of national history, especially the dark chapters of World War II, including the invasion of China, the rapes in China, the biological experiment Unit 731, the Nanjing Massacre, the civilian victimization in the Battle of Okinawa, and the forced labor of colonial subjects and POWs (Nozaki and Inokuchi 2000, 116).

Ienaga's narrative of war is unmistakably that of perpetrator history. He represented the viewpoint that the war was an illegal war of aggression in violation of international treaties, driven by Japan's economic and political ambitions to control north China, and it culminated in a 15 year conflict, starting from the Manchurian incident in 1931, the Marco Polo Incident in 1937, Pearl Harbor in 1941, the invasion of southeast and south Asia and the south Pacific, and ultimately ending in 1945. He does not spare the state:

"... the fifteen-year war as an unrighteous, reckless war begun with unjust and improper goals and means by the Japanese state, and because starting the war and refusing to end the war in a timely fashion were both illegal and improper acts of the state..." (Ienaga 2001, 148)<sup>352</sup>

In turn, the Ministry certification officials sought changes in his draft texts countering that "Japan was not unilaterally bad," "Do not write bad things about Japan," "Eliminate the description that Japan caused suffering in China and Asia" (Nozaki 2008, 22).

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<sup>352</sup> Original in "Jûgonen sensô ni yoru shi o dô kangaeru ka," *Rekishi tokuhon* (expanded issue, March 1979); in Ienaga Saburô shû, vol 12, p.260); translated by Richard Minear in *Japan's Past, Japan's Future: One Historian's Odyssey*. London: Rowman and Littlefield. p.148

As these disputes were publicized over time, Ienaga's lawsuits raised public awareness, and spurred citizens' movements to support his ongoing efforts. A favorable verdict for his second lawsuit emboldened other history textbook writers to increase their coverage of perpetrator history in the 1970s and 1980s. Following a dispute with South Korea and China in 1982, the Cabinet Secretary of the Japanese government announced that it will promote a more diplomatically sensitive framework to depict war in history textbooks. By 1993, another court challenge was underway by Takashima Nobuyoshi to continue the pressure on the state certification system that sought to reduce perpetrator narratives in textbooks (Aramaki 2003, 233; Takashima 2003). Beyond the education field, Ienaga's public defiance inspired peace movements, NGOs and citizens forum that sought a new collective identity based on ideas of freedom, democracy, peace, and rights of citizens (Nohira 2003; Yoshioka 2008).

#### *Discourse on Obliterated Hiroshima: the Case of Barefoot Gen*

Around the time when the second of Ienaga's suits was underway at the height of the Vietnam War, another anti-war citizen of the wartime generation began penning mortifying stories that would become one of the most iconic anti-war literature in postwar Japan. Nakazawa Keiji's semi-autobiographical comic *Barefoot Gen* (1973-87) offers a tragic narrative of the obliteration of Hiroshima, depicted as an intimate family portrayal of day-to-day survival after the atomic bomb. Interweaving personal history and world history, it tells the horrific effects of the nuclear blast and radiation with unmistakable rage, agony, grief, and despair. The graphic details of the atomic blast are depicted to maximum effect: charred bodies, people with torn skin hanging from their faces and limbs, eyeballs dangling

from their sockets and maggots hatching on corpses, heaps of burned dead bodies in the river and elsewhere all over the scorched flattened city. The tragic plot and logic are straightforward. Gen's father and sister died in the nuclear blast under the collapsed house, but Gen, his mother and brothers narrowly escaped. His mother was pregnant and gave birth to Gen's sister on the day of the blast amid the wreckage. Thereafter, for ten volumes, Gen survives hunger and poverty, loss of his mother and sister, humiliation and fear, illness and discrimination, and exploitation (Morris-Suzuki 2005, 160; Nakazawa 1994; Spiegelman 1994).

In *Gen*, the indictment of war's evil is unequivocal: the war was brought on recklessly and unnecessarily by the Japanese military and the Imperial state that heartlessly misled civilians to deathly destruction and suffering. All the suffering emanating from this disaster could have been prevented if only the war had been stopped earlier, if only the state had the sense to accept the Potsdam Declaration. *Gen's* message is clear: authorities like the state, the military, the Emperor, the American military and American doctors are evil, and cannot be trusted (Dower 1999, 243-4, 248-9). Thus, even as the story progresses from obliteration to rebuilding life, it carries a bitter undertone, since nothing can really undo the permanent damage to people's lives and their bodies, and the culprits are not brought to justice. Although the story ends when Gen is a preteen, readers may sense that the radiation disease that claimed his mother and sister, the last of his surviving biological family, may also eventually catch up with Gen himself.

Widely used in schools and easily accessible, *Gen* is arguably the most influential and iconic war literature to reach successive postwar generations and shape popular consciousness in the past four decades. It is a vehicle for intergenerational transmission of

anti-war sentiments, and many attest to learning about Hiroshima first from *Gen* (Ito 2006, 152). It is available in all school libraries, shown in peace education class, broadcast in commercial television, and released in cinemas, It has been reprinted several times (1975, 1988, 1998, 2000, and 2001) and has sold 5 million copies, and has been translated in 11 languages (Fukuma 2006, 29). It has been made into an animation film, live action features, musical, and television broadcasts, the most recent of which shown as a two-part live action story in Fuji television in summer 2007 and earned a high rating of 19.3% (Fuji TV 2007). As a social equivalent of Anne Frank's story that mobilizes empathy and anger, its reinforcement effect works over the generational cycle: people read *Gen* in manga, then re-encounter it later in anime, then again as an adult on TV, and then watch it with their own children. The generational transmission has now reached the point that grandparents report watching *Gen* with their grandchildren (Fuji TV 2007). The message is emphatic: We must take control of our own lives, have the strength to say no to war and nuclear weapons, so as to never become such victims again (Dower 1999; Nakazawa 1994).

One of the most important ingredients for *Gen's* enduring success is its ability to offer a clear alternative political identity in the father figure who serves as a spiritual backbone of the story, even though he dies at the beginning by the impact of the atomic bomb, crushed excruciatingly under the roof of his house. Gen's principled father, the source of Gen's strength, was a down-to-earth, clear thinking artist who saw the deception of the military and imperialist government for what it was, and was tortured for expressing his opposition to the war that brought nothing but suffering. Nakazawa was five when his own father was tortured for being critical of the war, and this greatly influenced his political views. This father is the antithesis of the common postwar excuse of the wartime

generation that “we were all deceived”. Gen’s father represents the possibilities of courage to fight, resist authority, and oppose the war (Napier 2001, 168).

Although *Barefoot Gen* is influential in encouraging people to learn about the destructive power of nuclear weapons, it rarely takes a look at the victimization for the whole war in larger perspective. No connection is made between the bomb and the 15 year war that preceded the blast even though Hiroshima was a military city (Yoshida 2006). Because of the overwhelming demand on empathy, the young audience who watched the 2007 television broadcast seem prevented from asking how the war came about, why the Americans did it, or why the Japanese military did not prevent it. Although they vow “never again,” they don’t say why or how (Fuji TV 2007). They gain no insight that much of invaded Asia welcomed the atomic bombs dropped on Japan at the time (Ônuma, 223), and that it is a tale that Korean audiences rejected (Yamanaka 2006).

Hence, *Gen* can unite people through their suffering but cannot inspire hope and progress to attain a nuclear free world. There is no universal agreement about the evil of US decision to obliterate Hiroshima and Nagasaki to win the war. The perpetrators of this tragedy were never brought to justice, and never will be. There is no promise that the obliteration will never happen again in a world where nuclear arms have multiplied throughout the Cold War. *Gen* remains an indictment of the Japanese government in the guise of victim narrative (Ueno & Narita 1999), and thus sets a constraint on the universalization of the Hiroshima story. There is no enduring hope in the messages that can bring closure to the resolve to “never again” wage war. Absolute pacifism finds no redemption because no justice is forthcoming to punish the perpetrators, and without such justice the claim for peace and antimilitarism rings hollow.



## IDENTITY FORMATION AND PATHWAYS OF EMPATHY FOR THE “OTHER”

In defeat cultures where perpetrators and victims can be often made up of the same people, questioning the legitimacy of what is right and wrong has led to some contemplation of the shades of gray. Recognizing the need to conceptualize the perpetrators and victims not as oppositions but as embodied in the same side, some scholars of war memory have sought to clarify the messy amorphous middle zone. Aleida Assmann (2006) for example has attempted to connect the mutually contradictory frames of suffering and guilt in German memory by conceptualizing a structure of hierarchy in the discourse. In explaining the current shift in German memory that posits the polarity between a memory of German guilt and a memory of German suffering, she posits that various levels of heterogeneous memory can exist side by side if they are contained within a normative frame of generally accepted validity.

A search for a possible “empathetic” approach that still allows the postwar generations to condemn individual acts of perpetration for what they are, has been gaining some ground in World War II memory since the 2000s (LaCapra 2001). It attempts to identify intersecting dimensions of perpetrator and victim in soldiers by integrating the understanding of individual biographies with the structural conditions that transform individuals into savage killers. This complex approach to remembering the past represents a trend toward identifying and embracing a ‘good-and-also-evil’ narrative. In these narratives, authors locate and work through the experience of atrocious violence as itself a monumental trauma and in doing so, succeed in making accessible the mindset of the soldier-as-killing-machine. They attempt to move beyond the good versus evil split by

identifying the perpetrators as victims of military abuse, while, at the same time, condemning their actions as perpetrators. Looking for such connections and bridging contradictions requires disentangling distortions and finding ways of understanding complicated human action without being encumbered by the taboos that stifled dialogue in the past. These attempts can be seen as efforts to move beyond the impasse that is inherent in the defeat culture (Inoue 2005; Kurahashi 2002).

Many more transnational wars have now been fought since World War II: the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the Afghan War, the Gulf War, the War in Kosovo, and now the Iraq War. With wars that caused escalating civilian casualties, and used technologies that were ever more potent and destructive, the narrative of war and peace is in need of rethinking and reformulation for the post-Cold War 21<sup>st</sup> century. The distinction between the good war and the bad war is no longer clear-cut; the heroes and villains are no longer simply apparent; the moral codes begin to blur from black and white to shades of gray. There are many instances that call for the understanding of the gray zone (Levi 2004): the Jewish kapos who cooperated with the Nazis in concentration camps during the Holocaust, the Soviet liberators who raped scores of German women in the Third Reich's capital, American soldiers who destroyed whole villages with Vietnamese civilians, and today Iraqi prisoners detained and tortured in Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo. In these proliferating gray zones, the construction of moral frameworks of war is becoming more and more tenuous. If the social construction of a moral framework is based fundamentally on our ability to code the distinction between good and bad legitimately, it is the very legitimacy of those codes that is then called in question (Alexander 2003).

Given the proclivity of most people in the gray zone to see themselves as victims rather than perpetrators, and the tendency for most people to favor the interests of close relations with family and friends rather than empathize with abstract, distant victims, perhaps it is not surprising that the Japanese approaches— using both ameliorative and tragic narratives – did not shift the cognitive map from particularistic understandings of the war to a more universalistic picture at least until the 1980s. One approach to make such a shift might be to redefine the meaning of “progress” as Giesen (2004, 145) suggests, so that a new pattern of identity making that is not based on the horror of the past will become more attractive. In contemplating broader pathways of empathy for the new century, some psychologists’ insights that those with higher national identification have lower sense of collective guilt for immoral historical events are useful (Doosje et al. 2004, 108). Constructing post-national collective understandings of the self that is identified with a supra-national community would call for a certain level of de-japanization of the Japanese, just as the construction of European identity required a certain level of de-germanization of Germans. In other words, a cosmopolitan national identity is the only way to unblock the pathway of empathy for the suffering of Asian victims.

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