

STATE REPRESSION AND
THE LABORS OF MEMORY

ELIZABETH JELIN

One

Memory in the Contemporary World

We live in an era of collectors. We record and save everything: pictures from childhood and souvenirs from grandmothers in private and family life, newspaper and magazine clippings referring to issues or events of interest, making up official and private archives of all kinds. The past is an object of cult in the West, and this displays itself in the marketing and consumption of various “retro” styles, in the boom of antiques and of historical novels. In the public sphere, archives are growing in numbers, commemorative dates proliferate, and there is a never-ending demand for memorial plaques and monuments.¹ The mass media structure and organize this presence of the past in all areas of contemporary life.

This “explosion” of memory in contemporary Western society has engendered a “culture of memory” (Huyssen 2000) that coexists with and reinforces itself in the context of the high value placed on ephemera, on high speed, and on the fragile and transitory nature of life events. Individuals, family groups, communities, and nations narrate their pasts, for themselves and for others who are willing to visit those pasts, to listen to and look at their icons and remnants, to inquire about and investigate them. This contemporary culture of memory is in part a response or reaction to rapid change and to a life without anchors or roots. In such a cultural climate, memory has a highly significant role

as a symbolic mechanism that helps strengthen the sense of belonging to groups and communities. Furthermore, especially for oppressed, silenced, or discriminated groups, the reference to a shared past often facilitates building feelings of self-respect and greater reliance in oneself and in the group.

The cultural debate moves among different interpretations and positions. Those analysts who stress the role of memory as a reaction to the acceleration of contemporary life and as a source of protection against the fear or even the horror of forgetting (as expressed with a touch of nostalgia by Pierre Nora, who laments the disappearance of the "milieux de memoire" and their replacement with the "lieux") seem to place themselves in opposition to those who deplore the pasts that last forever and do not want to move—the apparent "fixations" and returns, the persistence of painful or conflictive pasts, that seem to endure and reappear without allowing one to forget or to broaden the perspective and thus overcome them (Todorov 1998).

Both processes, the fear of oblivion and the presence of the past, take place simultaneously, although they exist in clear tension with each other. In the Western world, this memorialist movement and the concern with memory of painful past events were stimulated by the debates on World War II and the Nazi extermination, which have intensified since the early 1980s.² Cultural critics such as Andreas Huyssen theorize about the "totalizing dimension of Holocaust discourse," which "loses its quality as index of a specific historical event and begins to function as a metaphor for other traumatic histories and memories" (Huyssen 2000, 24).

Thus, beyond the cultural climate of the times and the expansion of a "culture of memory" at more general, community, or family levels, memory and forgetting, commemoration and recollections become crucial when linked to traumatic political events or to situations of repression and annihilation, or when profound social catastrophes and collective suffering are involved.³

For the individual subject, the imprints of trauma play a central role in determining what the person can or cannot remember, silence, forget, or work through. At the political level, the processes of settling accounts with the past in terms of responsibilities, accountability, and institutional justice are overlaid with ethical imperatives and moral demands. These imperatives, however, may be hard to settle given the

political hostilities prevailing in settings where conflict is unfolding and where social catastrophes unleash the destruction of social bonds.

Debates over memories of periods of repression and political violence frequently surface in specific historical contexts and times, namely, when societies undergo political change and there are widespread feelings of urgency to construct democratic regimes in which human rights are guaranteed for the entire population, regardless of class, race, gender, ideological orientation, religion, or ethnicity. The actors participating in these debates link their democratizing projects and their orientations toward the future with the memories of their violent and conflictive past.

Over and over again, actors who struggle to define and name what took place during periods of war, political violence, or state terrorism, as well as those who seek to honor the victims and identify the perpetrators, interpret their actions as necessary steps to make certain that the horrors of the past do not recur—*Nunca Más* ("Never Again"). The Southern Cone of Latin America is an area where this association between past violations and the will of a different future is very strongly established.⁴ Likewise, some actors associate the memories of the Shoah and of the Stalinist purges in the Soviet Union with the determination and will to avoid such atrocities in the future. Elsewhere in the world, from Japan and Cambodia to South Africa and Guatemala, the processes of remembrance and the links between a painful past and the expectations for the future may be different, insofar as they are set in different cultural frames and thus may have alternative ethical and political meanings.

The Complexities of Time

The framework presented above locates the meanings of the past unequivocally in the present and in relation to a desired future. If we add the existence of multiple subjectivities and time horizons, it is clear that we are facing an inherently or essentially complex issue. What then are the temporal dimensions at stake here?

A first way to conceptualize time is in a linear or chronological manner. Past, present, and future are ordered in a clear way—one could even say "naturally"—in a physical or astronomical time frame. The units of time are equivalent and divisible: a century, a decade, a year, or a minute. However, as soon as historical processes and human

subjectivities are introduced into the picture, the complexities involved come to light. As expressed by Reinhart Koselleck (1985), "historical time, if the concept has a specific meaning, is bound up with social and political actions, with concretely acting and suffering human beings and their institutions and organizations" (xxii). And when studying these concrete human beings, the sense of time and temporality are established in a different way: the present contains and constructs past experience and future expectations. "Experience is present past, whose events have been incorporated and can be remembered" (272).

Experiences are also shaped by the "horizon of expectations," thus introducing a reference to a future temporality. Expectation is "the future made present, it points to the not-yet, to that which has not been experienced, to that which can only be discovered" (Koselleck 1985, 272). It is at that point of complex intersection and convergence, in that present where the past is the space of experience and the future is the horizon of expectations, where human action is produced.

Locating memory in time implies making reference to the "space of experience" in the present. Remembrances of the past are incorporated there, although in a dynamic manner, since experiences incorporated in a given moment can be modified in subsequent periods. "The events of 1933 have occurred once and for all, but the experiences which are based upon them can change over time. Experiences overlap and mutually impregnate one another" (Koselleck 1985, 274-75).

There is an additional element in this complexity. Human understanding embodies personally lived experiences; it also incorporates secondhand experiences—those that are conveyed by others. The past, therefore, can be condensed or expanded, according to how these diverse past experiences are integrated.

In sum, we are referring to subjective processes of assigning and changing meaning, whereby the actors move and orient themselves (or disorient and lose themselves) among "past futures" (Koselleck 1985), "lost futures" (Huysen 2000), and "everlasting pasts" (Conan and Rouso 1994). All this takes place in the present, which must simultaneously come close to and distance itself both from the pasts accumulated in the spaces of experience and from the futures included as horizons of expectations. Furthermore, these temporal meanings are constructed and change in relationship to and in dialogue with others who, individually and collectively, can share and/or confront the experiences and expectations. In turn, new historical processes, as well

as changing social and political conjunctures and scenarios, inevitably produce alterations in the interpretive frameworks for understanding past experience and for constructing future expectations. The complexity, then, refers to the multiplicity of temporalities at play, the multiplicity of meanings, and the ongoing transformation and change in actors and historical processes.

The Labors of Memory

The title of this book alludes to memory as labor. Why refer to the *labors* of memory? As a distinctive feature of the human condition, work is what puts the individual and society in an active and productive position. The person is an agent of transformation, and in the process transforms him or herself and the world. Activity adds value. Thus, to assert that memory involves "labor" is to incorporate it into the activity that generates and transforms the social world.

To talk about the *labors* of memory demands establishing some important analytical distinctions. Undoubtedly, some events lived in the past have effects on subsequent periods, independently of the will, consciousness, agency, or strategy of the actors involved. Such effects show up in "objective" social and collective facts, such as losing a war and therefore being under the domination of foreign powers. They also are inherent in more personal and unconscious processes associated with traumas and voids. The presence of the past can disrupt, penetrate, or invade the present as something that makes no sense, as mnemonic traces (Ricoeur 2000), as silences, compulsions, or repetitions. In such situations, the memory of the past intrudes, but it is not the object of labor. It is a presence without agency. The flipside of these involuntary intrusions takes place when human beings are actively involved in the processes of symbolic transformation and elaboration of meanings of the past. Human beings who "labor" on and with memories of the past.

The events of the past, and the attachment of the person to that past, especially in cases of trauma, can involve a fixation or a constant return: the compulsion to repeat or to act out, the inability to detach oneself from the lost object. Repetition involves, in this case, acting out again and again the same pattern. There is no sense of distance from the past, which reappears and makes its way, like an intruder, into the present. Even observers and secondary witnesses can become participants in acting out or repetition, through processes of identification

with the victims. There is a dual danger in such situations: the menace of an "excessive" presence of the past in ritualized repetition and in the compulsion to act out, and the menace of a selective forgetting, a void that can be subject to manipulation by the self or by others.

To overcome such situations requires considerable labor, working through the painful memories and recollections instead of reliving them and acting them out. Psychoanalytic theory refers to this as the labors of mourning. Mourning involves an "intrapsychic process, following the loss of an object of fixation, through which the subject achieves progressive detachment from the object" (Laplanche and Pontalis 1981, 435). In this process, the psychic energy of the person is released from being "occupied by pain and recollections," and the subject is able to recover his or her freedom. This labor requires time, "it is carried out piece by piece, with an expenditure of time and energy . . ." (Freud 1976, 243). It involves being able to let go and forget, and to transform attachments and feelings, breaking the fixation on the other and on the pain, accepting "the satisfaction brought about by the very fact of being alive" (243).⁵ It involves a period of mourning, and "the labor of mourning reveals itself, not without difficulties, as a liberating exercise to the extent that it consists of memory work" (Ricoeur 1999, 36).

Acting out and repetition can be contrasted to the idea of working through. The Freudian notion of working through, conceived in a therapeutic context, consists of the "process through which the patient under analysis accepts and incorporates an interpretation, overcoming the resistances that it evokes. . . . [It is a] type of psychic labor that allows the subject to accept certain repressed elements inside himself, thus liberating himself from the spell of repetitive mechanisms" (Laplanche and Pontalis 1981, 436). Working through is no doubt a form of repetition, yet modified by interpretation. Thus, it predisposes or encourages the subject to work on his or her repetitive mechanisms (437).

These notions of working through and acting out can be applied and extended outside the therapeutic context. In working through, according to LaCapra (2001), "the person tries to gain critical distance on a problem and to distinguish between past, present and future. . . . There may be other possibilities, but it is via the working through that one acquires the possibility of being an ethical and political agent" (143-44).

At the level of the individual, acting out and working through turn out to be coexisting forces. Involved with the tension among these two

forces, the person has to face the threat that the process of working through may awaken a sense of betrayal and a feeling of weakening the loyalty to the lost object. Taken to the ethical and political level, this tension implies the active incidence of social forces that push for maintaining and reinforcing the repetitive acting out of the past. It is as if repetition (even compulsive repetition) would make possible avoiding the closure and forgetting presumably implied in the process of working through. To quote LaCapra (2001):

The result is a paralyzing kind of all-or-nothing logic in which one is in a double bind: either totalization and the closure you resist, or acting out the repetition compulsion, with almost no other possibilities. Within this constricted frame of reference, politics often becomes a question of blank hope in the future, an openness toward a vacuous utopia about which you can say nothing. And this view very often links up with an apocalyptic politics or perhaps a politics of utopian hope in the form of indefinite deferral of institutional change. . . . (145)

At the collective level, the big challenge is to overcome repetitions, to surmount silences and political abuses, to simultaneously be able to distance from and promote an active debate and reflexivity about the past and its meaning for the present/future. Concerned with the "abuses of memory" (stemming from moral mandates to remember, which generally involve repetitions rather than a process of working through), Todorov (1998) seeks a way out by trying to abandon the emphasis on the past in order to place it on the future. This involves a difficult journey for subjective processes: distancing oneself from the past, and "learning to remember." For the public and political sphere, it involves rethinking the relationship between memory and politics and between memory and justice.

Two

What Memories Are We Talking About?

The draft title for this chapter was "What is memory?" Such a title invites a single and univocal definition of the term. Though not involving a logical contradiction, asking what memory *is* (in singular) may seem at odds with offering to study processes of memory construction, of memories in the plural, and of social disputes over memories, their social legitimacy, and claims to "truth." This chapter attempts to advance some conceptual issues in order to offer some tools for further analytical and empirical steps. It does not pretend to be an exhaustive discussion of issues that, by their very complexity, are inherently multi-dimensional and open-ended. Dealing with memories entails paying attention to remembrance and forgetting, to narratives and acts, to silences and gestures. Knowledge and information are at play, but so too are emotions, lapses, voids, and fractures.

A first issue to consider is the subject who remembers and forgets. Is the subject always an individual, or is it possible to talk about collective memories? The social sciences have devoted countless pages to answering this question, which is yet another manifestation of the eternal tension and dilemma of the relationship between individual and society.

A second issue refers to the content of what is remembered and of what is forgotten. No doubt, the core of what is remembered and

forgotten relates to direct personal life experiences. Yet even the most intimate incidents are always mediated by mechanisms of social interaction, involving links between the manifest and the latent or invisible, the conscious and the unconscious. Memory also incorporates knowledge, beliefs, behavior patterns, feelings, and emotions conveyed and received in social interaction, in processes of socialization, and in the cultural practices of a group.

Additionally, there is the issue of how and when remembrance and forgetting occur. The past that is remembered and forgotten is activated in a present and in relation to future expectations. Be it within the dynamics of the individual, in interpersonal social interactions, or in more general or macrosocial processes, certain memories are activated in special moments or conjunctures; in other moments, silences and even forgetting prevail. There are also other ciphers for the activation of memories, expressive or performative in nature, in which rituals and myth occupy privileged places.

Intellectual and Disciplinary Traditions

Memory as "the mental capacity or faculty of retaining and reviving facts, events, impressions, etc., or of recalling or recognizing previous experiences" (*Random House Webster's Dictionary* 1998, 1199) has always intrigued humanity. Indeed, what most concerns people is *not* remembering, not being able to retain events of the past in memory. At the individual level and in daily interaction, our lives go on accompanied by the unremitting and perpetual enigma of not understanding why we do not remember a familiar name or a date, why we store and have available so many and varied "useless" recollections, and why surprising associations and memories crop up at unexpected times or places. And the fear of memory loss when aging haunts us permanently.

At the group or community level, or even socially or nationally, the enigmas are just as compelling. The question of how remembering or forgetting occurs arises from the anxiety and even the anguish generated by the possibility of forgetting. The fear of oblivion and forgetting, or that of being forgotten by others in the future, has come to be interpreted in the contemporary Western world in terms of the threat to personal and cultural identity.

In the first place, the issue revolves around the psychological ability to remember and forget, in mental processes that are the domain of psychology and psychiatry. Developments in neurobiology locating

memory centers in the brain and studying the chemical processes involved in memory are complemented by significant research on the “paths” and circuits of memory and memory loss and errors (Schacter 1996, 2001).

In a different direction, psychoanalysis is concerned with another quality of the mystery, paying attention to the role of the unconscious in the search for an explanation of the blocks, lapses, voids, and repetitions that the conscious ego cannot control. The influence of psychological processes involved in the development of the ego and the notion of trauma (a topic we will return to later) are central to this field. This line of inquiry goes beyond examining memory and forgetting from a cognitive perspective interested in how much and what is remembered or forgotten. It introduces unconscious emotional and affective factors when considering “how” and “when” memory works.

The exercise of the abilities for remembering and forgetting is unique. Each individual has his or her “own memories,” and they cannot be transferred to others. It is this singularity of memories and the possibility of activating the past in the present—memory as the present of the past, in the words of Paul Ricoeur (1999, 16)—that defines personal identity and the continuity of the self over time.

These processes, we know, do not take place in isolated individuals, but in human beings embedded in networks of social relations, groups, institutions, and cultures. At this juncture, the passage from the individual to the social and interactive level is unavoidable; the move follows its own seamless course. It is human beings who have the capacity to remember, and they are always located in specific group or social contexts. It is impossible to remember or re-create the past without alluding to those contexts. The question debated at length in the literature is the relative weight of the social context and the individual in the memory process. Thus, to borrow the apt expression from a recent study, the question is how to combine *homo psychologicus* and *homo sociologicus* (Winter and Sivan 1999).

Two stylized models for thinking about the social dimension in memory processes can be advanced. These models reproduce the debates within the classical traditions of sociology. Maurice Halbwachs is the central figure in these debates, anchored in his writings about the social frameworks (*cadres*) of memory (published in 1925) and about collective memory (published posthumously) (Halbwachs 1994, 1997). His ideas have generated numerous readings and interpreta-

tions, including annotated critical analyses (Coser 1992; Namer 1994; Olick 1998a; Ricoeur 2000). There are several points for debate and controversial understandings: whether Halbwachs allows space for individualities in the field of collective memory; if it is possible to have such a thing as a “collective memory”; or whether these are purely collective myths and beliefs, where memory does not have a place (Hynes 1999).

It is not my intention to enter into that debate or provide a new interpretation of Halbwachs’s ideas here. There is a key insight in his work, and this is what should be stressed, namely the concept of social *cadres* or frameworks. Individual memories are always socially framed. These frameworks bear the general representations of society, its needs and values. They also include the worldview and language of a society or group. For Halbwachs (1992), this means that “we can remember only on condition of retrieving the position of past events that interest us from the frameworks of collective memory. . . . Forgetting is explained by the disappearance of these frameworks, or of part of them” (172). This entails that the social is always present, even in the most “individual” moments. “We are never alone”—one does not remember alone but with the help of the memories of others and of shared cultural codes, even when personal memories are unique and distinct. These personal recollections are immersed in collective narratives, which are frequently reinforced in group rituals and commemorations (Ricoeur 1999). Insofar as the frameworks of memory are historical and subject to change, all memories are more reconstructions than recollections. Anything that does not find a place or a meaning in that framework is material that can be lost and forgotten (Namer 1994).

Can the existence of collective memory be asserted? And if so, what is collective memory? Some readers of Halbwachs interpret his emphasis on a collective memory as an affirmation of its “real” existence as a “thing” independent of individuals. However, if emphasis is placed on the notion of “social framework”—a view that, in my understanding, is more productive for our objectives—the interpretation shifts toward a focus on the group matrix within which individual recollections and silences are set. These frameworks—Halbwachs looks at the family, religion, and social class—provide meaning to individual recollections.¹

In fact, the very notion of “collective memory” presents serious

difficulties if it is understood as a reified entity, a thing that has an existence that is separate and above that of individuals. Such a conception originates from an extreme Durkheimian interpretation that takes social phenomena as “things.” Alternatively, the “collective” can also be construed in the sense of shared memories, layered on each other—as the outcome of multiple interactions structured by social frameworks and power relations. In this vein, the collective aspect of memory is the interweaving of traditions and individual memories in dialogue with others and in a state of constant flux. The outcome is not a chaotic disorder, because there is some structure shaped by shared cultural codes and some social organization—where some voices are stronger than others because they have greater access to resources and to public stages. As Ricoeur (1999) says,

collective memory simply consists of the set of traces left by events that have shaped the course of history of those social groups that, in later times, have the capacity to stage these shared recollections through holidays, rituals, and public celebrations. (19)

This perspective allows one to conceive of collective memories not only as facts that are out there, “given” and preexistent. It calls for placing primary attention on the processes of development and social construction of these memories. This implies incorporating the agency of different social actors (including marginalized and excluded groups), and the disputes and negotiations over meanings of the past in different settings (Pollak 1989). It also leads to leaving open to empirical research the question as to the conditions that foster the existence (or lack) of dominant, hegemonic, unique, or “official” memories.

A further significant distinction in memory processes is between active and passive memories. Remains and vestiges of the past, even recognizable knowledge and information, can be kept passively archived in people’s minds, in registers, in public and private archives, in electronic formats, and in libraries. The accumulation of such traces of the past have led some analysts (Nora especially) to talk about a “surplus of memory.” However, these are passive reservoirs that have to be set apart from their use, the labor and human activity connected with memory work. At the individual level, cognitive psychologists distinguish between *recognition* (a cognitive association or connection, the identification of an item with reference to the past) and *recall* (which implies a personal evaluation of what is recognized, entailing

a more active effort on the part of the subject). The mnemonic traces of recognition seem to last longer than those of recall. At the societal level, there may be an abundance of archives and documentation centers, even of accumulated knowledge and information about the past, with traces in various types of recognized vehicles and material supports. Yet all these supports and props do not guarantee that the past will be recalled, or the specific meanings that groups will attach to its traces. To the extent that recall is activated by social subjects and is mobilized in actions intended to give meaning to the past, by interpreting it and bringing it onto the stage of the current drama, the process of recalling becomes central in the process of social interaction.

A note of caution is required here to avoid the pitfalls of extreme ethnocentrism or essentialism. It should be clear by now that memories are constructed and acquire meanings within specific social frameworks embedded with values and social needs shaped by particular worldviews. This conception could imply, in a first naive understanding, that the content of memories being constructed is contained and shaped by a clearly set and unchanging conception of past, present, and future. In such a view, there is no room for diversity in the conception of time itself. Notions of time would thus appear to stay outside the social frameworks and the actual processes of “framing” memories. A second reading is therefore needed, one that avoids essentializing time conceptions and taking the Western conception of time as universal. As Halbwachs indicated, the concepts of time and space are themselves objects of construction and social representation. Although all processes of memory construction are inscribed in a given representation of time and space, these representations—and consequently, the very idea of what is past and what is present—are culturally variable and historically constructed. Of course, this includes the analytical categories used by researchers and scholars.

At this point, anthropological and historical research has to come into the picture, to enrich the analysis with the diversity of ways of conceiving time and, consequently, of conceptualizing memory. Classical anthropology did, in fact, develop itself in contradistinction to history. It was the study of “peoples without history.” And if there is no history, then there cannot be historical memory, since the present is seen as an unending repetition and reproduction of the past. In many past and present societies, that which is experienced as “real” is not historical temporality but a mythical time that returns permanently, in

rituals and repetitions, to an original foundational moment. However, the ritualized performance of myth is not static. In such cases, the issue is not about ahistorical societies. Rather, the issue becomes to show how the “new” events are incorporated into preexisting structures of meaning, which at times can be anchored in myths. Thus, “every reproduction of culture is an alteration” (Sahlins 1987, 144), and the re-presentation of myth implies change.² In such cases, what is “remembered” is the cultural framework of interpretation, a tool that facilitates the understanding of circumstances that viewed from the outside seem “new,” although they may not be seen as such by the actors involved.

Alternatively, there are traditions and customs incorporated as nonreflective daily practices that have lost their original meaning in the evolution and historical changes of the times. The Inquisition, for example, forced many Jews to convert to Catholicism, and many maintained private clandestine traditional Jewish practices (the so-called *Marranos*). After several generations, some practices may have been maintained, although devoid of their original meanings. Examples include deep housecleaning on Fridays in a rural Brazilian village, and Stars of David on Catholic tombs in some Portuguese towns.

Memory and Identity

There is a sphere in which the relationship between memory and identity is almost banal, but nevertheless important as a point of departure for reflection: the heart of any individual or group identity is linked to a sense of permanence (of being oneself, of selfhood) through time and space. The ability to recall or remember something from one’s own past is what sustains identity (Gillis 1994). The relationship is one of mutual constitution in subjectivity, since neither memories nor identity are “things” or material objects that are found or lost. “Identities and memories are not things we think *about*, but things we think *with*. As such, they have no existence beyond our politics, our social relations, and our histories” (5).

This relationship of mutual constitution entails a give and take: to establish some parameters of identity (national, gender, political, or any other type), the subject selectively takes certain signposts, certain memories that place him or her in relation to “others.” The boundaries of identity are established by these parameters, which simultaneously stress some features of identification (and belonging) with some groups and of differentiation with others. In this process, they become

social frames that structure memories. Some of these signposts develop into “unvarying” or fixed elements around which memories are organized. Pollak (1992) refers to three types of elements that can fulfill this signpost function: events, persons or characters, and places. They may be linked to experiences lived by the person or conveyed by others. They can be empirically based on concrete facts or be projections or idealizations stemming from other events. What matters is that they allow the maintenance of the minimum of coherence and continuity needed to preserve the sense of identity.³

The constitution, institutionalization, recognition, and strength of memories and identities fuel each other. Both for individuals and for groups or entire societies, the processes are not linear over time. There are periods of tranquility and calmness, when life goes on without disturbances, and times of crises. During periods when memories and identities are firmly constituted, strongly attached, or even institutionally established, the challenges that might emerge do not generate urgencies, they do not lead to major restructuring processes. Memory and identity can work by themselves and on themselves in an effort to maintain coherence and unity. Periods of internal crises or external threats are usually preceded, accompanied, or succeeded by crises in the sense of collective identity and in memories (Pollak 1992). In such moments, the unsettling of taken-for-granted interpretations of the past leads to self-reflexivity and revisions of the prevalent meaning attached to the past. At the same time and in the same movement, they involve questioning and redefining group identity itself.

Memories and Forgetting

Everyday life is primarily made up of routines: patterns of behavior that are habitual, nonreflective, learned, and repeated. The past of the learning process and the present of its memory turn into habit and tradition (understood as “the handing down of statements, beliefs, legends, customs, information, etc., from generation to generation, especially by word of mouth or by practice” [*Random House Webster’s Dictionary* 1998, 2006]). Habitual and traditional beliefs and practices are part of “normal” life. There is nothing “memorable” in the daily exercise of these memories. Exceptions—not very frequent in any case—occur when the person associates some routine practice with the recollection of some incident of failure of the learned routine, or with some childhood episode in the process of personal learning.

These patterns of behavior, clearly “framed” (in Halbwachs’s sense)

socially in the family, the classroom, and the traditions of other institutions, are both individual and social. They are incorporated in a unique way by each person. At the same time, they are shared and recurring in all members of a social group. Clothing and table habits, manners of greeting men and women, strangers, and close friends, body language employed in public and in private, forms of expressing feelings—all these are simple examples of shared learned practices. The list of learned patterns of behavior where a “habitual memory” functions in a routine manner is interminable.

Fractures in these learned routines involve the subject in a different way. Emotions and feelings come into play, occupying center stage. As Mieke Bal (1999, viii) argues, it is that emotional commitment that transforms these moments and turns them “memorable.” This memory is a different one, transforming itself. The event or moment being remembered is then associated with emotions and feelings, and this association sets in motion a process of search for meaning. In turn, the “memorable” event will be expressed in narrative form, becoming the *way in which the subject bestows meaning to the past*. In this way, memory expresses itself in a narrative story, which can be conveyed to others.

This narrative construction has two central features. First, the past acquires meaning in its intersection with the present, in the act of remembering/forgetting. Second, the interrogation of the past is a subjective process. It is always active and socially constructed in dialogue and interaction with others. The act of remembering implies having lived through a given event in the past that is activated in the present, as a result of some current desire or distress. Often, this active recollection is accompanied by the intent of communicating it to others. It does not necessarily entail that the events being recalled were important or significant in themselves, but rather that they gain an emotional charge and a special meaning in the actual process of remembering or recalling.

This narrative memory entails, in the words of Micheline Enriquez, constructing a “new arrangement” between the past and the present.⁴ A number of social and psychic mechanisms come into play. The process of constructing and conveying narrative memories involves complex negotiations about what is acceptable and what is to be silenced, what can and cannot be said, in the disjunctions between private narratives and public discourses. Socially accepted narratives, publicly

accepted commemorations, social frameworks, and societal mechanisms of censorship—along with the more personal and intrapsychical drives—leave their imprints in such negotiations, as shown in the large body of research on Eastern Europe and the testimonies of concentration camp survivors (Passerini 1992b; also Pollak 1989, 1990).

In turn, although they may reappear in different ways in future instances, some past events resist the possibility of being integrated in a narrative and remain without a clear meaning. Traumatic events involve breaks in the ability to narrate and memory voids and gaps. As will be further developed later, the presence of trauma is indicated by the coexistence of an impossibility of assigning meaning to past occurrences, by the inability to incorporate it in a narrative, and by its recurrent and persistent presence and manifestation in symptoms. At this level, oblivion is not an expression of absence or emptiness. Rather, it is the presence of that absence, the representation of something that is no longer there, that has been erased, silenced, or denied. Like Milan Kundera’s photo, it is a manifestation of a social vacuum.⁵ The clinical equivalent of these traumatic gaps takes the form of voids, symptoms, and repetitions.

Up to this point we have distinguished two types of memories, habitual and narrative. The narrative memories are the ones that are of interest here. Among them, there are those memories that find or construct meanings of the past. And there are—a situation especially important to our analysis—the “wounds of memory,” an expression that is more precise than “wounded memories” (the latter expression is used by Ricoeur 1999). These wounds imply great difficulties for constituting meaning and building its narrative. They refer to situations where repression and dissociation act as the psychic mechanisms that lead to interruptions, breaks, and traumatic gaps in narrative. Traumatic repetitions and dramatizations are “tragically solitary,” while narrative memories are social constructions communicable to others (Bal 1999).

Forgetting and silence play a central role in narrative memory. All narratives of the past involve silences. Memory is selective; full memory is impossible. Thus, there is a first type of forgetting, “necessary” to the functioning of the individual subject, of groups, and of communities. But there is more to silence and forgetting, since there is a multiplicity of situations in which many different forms of forgetting and silences are expressed, with different purposes.

One type of forgetting, which can be called deep or "definitive," involves the erasure of recollections of facts and processes of the past and is produced within historical development itself.⁶ The paradox is that if total erasure is successful, its very success impedes its verification. Nevertheless, there are cases when pasts that seemed "definitively" forgotten reappear as a result of changes in cultural and social frameworks and acquire a new symbolic or political presence. Those changes prompt a reexamination and the assignment of new meanings to traces and residues that had not been significant for decades or even centuries.

Erasures and voids can also be the results of explicit policies furthering forgetting and silence, promoted by actors who seek to hide and destroy evidence and traces of the past in order to impede their retrieval in the future. Recall Heinrich Himmler's famous statement at Nuremberg, declaring that the "final solution" was a "glorious page in our history that has never been written and that never will be."⁷ In these cases, there is a willful political act of destruction of evidence and traces, with the goal of promoting selective memory loss through the elimination of documentary evidence. In a broader sense, all policies for conservation and memory, by selecting which artifacts and traces to preserve, conserve, or commemorate, have an implicit will to forget. This is true of course for the historians and researchers who choose what to tell, what to represent, what to write, and how to do it.

The past leaves *traces*, in material ruins and evidence, in mnemonic traces in the human neurological system, in individual psychological dynamics, and in the symbolic world. In themselves, these traces do not constitute "memory" unless they are evoked and placed in a context that gives them meaning. A further question thus arises: how to overcome the difficulties involved in accessing these traces, to preclude oblivion. The task involved implies uncovering and revealing, bringing to light the hidden, "crossing the wall that separates us from these traces" (Ricoeur 1999, 105). The difficulty is not that few traces remain, or that the past has been destroyed. Rather, what count are the impediments to accessing those traces caused by the mechanisms of repression and by displacement,⁸ which cause distortions and transformations in different directions and of diverse types. Psychoanalysis has worked extensively on the issue of the recovery of personal memories. As well, recent developments in historiography and social sciences

attempt to deal with the social and collective processes of unearthing hidden pasts.

One societal response to the fear of destruction of traces of the past is reflected in the contemporary expression of urgency to preserve remnants of the past, accumulating them in personal, historical, and public archives. This is an expression of the "obsession with memory" and the memorializing spirit that are discussed by Nora, Gillis, and Huyssen.

There is also the type of forgetting that Ricoeur labels as "evasive," which involves an attempt not to recall potentially upsetting memories. This mood tends to prevail in historical periods following large social catastrophes, massacres, and genocides, which may engender among those who suffered them directly and survived them the desire to not know, to avoid painful remembrances as a means to continue living.

At this point, silence comes in, as the counterpart of oblivion. There are silences imposed by fear of repression in dictatorships of every stripe. Silences kept during Franco's Spain, the Stalinist Soviet Union, and the Latin American dictatorships burst open with the change of regime. During these repressive periods, painful memories survive that "await the propitious moment to be expressed" (Pollak 1989, 5). Yet the silencing of dissident memories does not have as a point of reference only a dominant dictatorial state. They also arise in the context of more horizontal relationships among social groups. Pollak (1989) analyzes several types of silences among Holocaust survivors, from those who returned to their places of origin and needed to find a *modus vivendi* with their neighbors who "in the form of tacit consent witnessed their deportation," to the silences about extreme situations in the camps, maintained to avoid the well-known mechanism of blaming the victims (6). There is also the will to silence, of not telling or transmitting, of keeping the traces enclosed in inaccessible spaces, in order to care for the others as an expression of the desire to not hurt them nor to convey a message of suffering.

Other silences follow a different logic. To communicate suffering and painful events, one has to find a willingness to listen and understand on the other side (Laub 1992b; Pollak 1990). At the level of individual memories, the fear of not being understood creates silences, and thus the importance of an attentive ear, of finding others with

the capacity to listen. We will return to this issue in the context of personal testimonies. At the societal level, there are conjunctures of political transition—such as Chile at the end of the 1980s, or postwar France—in which the desire for reconstruction is experienced as contradictory to messages linked to the horrors of the past.⁹

Finally, there is the liberating type of forgetting, one through which the person or group feels itself free from the burden of the past, allowing a shift of focus toward the future. This is the “necessary” forgetting in the life of the individual. For communities and groups, the modern origin of these thoughts can be traced to Nietzsche, who condemns the historical fever and demands a forgetting that encourages living and makes it possible to see the world without being burdened by the heavy baggage of history. This historical fever, as Huyssen (2000) states,

[s]erved to invent national traditions in Europe, to legitimize the imperial nation-states, and to give cultural coherence to conflictive societies in the throes of the Industrial Revolution and colonial expansion. (37)

As Ernest Renan (2000) suggested,

Forgetting, and I would even say historical error, is an essential factor in the creation of a nation, which means that progress in historical studies is frequently a threat to nationality. (56)

The current fever for memorialization has other characteristics, and other dangers, as raised in the debate about the “abuses of memory,” the title of the small and provocative book by Tzvetan Todorov (1998). Todorov is not campaigning against the recovery of memory; rather, he is concerned with its use by different groups who may appropriate memory to foster their own interests. The memory abuse that the author condemns is that of preserving a “literal” memory in which the crimes are viewed as unique and unrepeatable. In that case, the experience is not transferable; it does not lead anywhere beyond itself. Todorov defends an “exemplary” use of memory, in which the memory of a past event is conceived as one instance of a more general category, or as a model for understanding new situations with different agents. In terms of forgetting, this proposal entails the (political) forgetting of what is singular and unique about an experience in order to make memory more productive. We will take up this issue again in the next chapter.

Discourse and Experience

Let's return to the central issue that animates this inquiry, namely that of memory as the process of giving meaning to the past. Several questions can be raised here. Who is to create and convey meanings? Which is the past that is being referred to? They are active agents who remember, individuals and groups who assign meanings to the past and who often try to convey their message to others (and even impose it). This characterization must be accompanied by the recognition of the plurality of “others” and the complex dynamic of the relationship between the subject and alterity.

Which past is the one that the subject is to make significant? There are autobiographical pasts, experiences lived “in one's own skin.” For those who lived through an event or experience, having done so may turn out to be a key marker in their lives and memory. If the event was a traumatic one, rather than remembrances and meaningful memories, the subject will be faced with voids, vacuum, silences, and the traces of trauma, expressed in his or her current behavior, including pathological symptoms (and, in the least frequent cases, plain “forgetting”).

There are also those who did not have the “past experience” themselves. This lack of experience puts them in another category: they are “others.” For this group, memory is a *representation of the past constructed as cultural knowledge shared by successive generations and by different “others.”* In fact, the presence of this otherness involves thinking about experience or memory in its intersubjective and social dimensions. As Luisa Passerini argues, memories are connected one to the other.¹⁰ Subjects can develop narrative memories because others had done it before, others who had been able to transmit and engage a dialogue about them.

Similarly, social forgetting is also intersubjective:

What we call “forgetting” in a collective sense occurs when human groups fail—whether purposely or passively, out of rebellion, indifference, or indolence, or as the result of some disruptive historical catastrophe—to transmit what they know out of the past to their posterity. (Yerushalmi 1996, 109)

As already mentioned, these catastrophes can involve a rupture between individual memory and public and collective practices. This happens when, due to political conditions, collective practices are dominated by ritualization, repetition, deformation or distortion, silence or lies.

They can also involve silences and fault lines in the processes of inter-generational transmission.

Let me return for a moment to the difference between social memory and personal recollection and forgetting of events lived through personally. What is firsthand "experience"? In the language of common sense, experience refers to events and occurrences that are lived directly, firsthand, captured subjectively in their immediacy. Analysis of the concept of "experience" indicates, however, that it is not so directly and linearly dependent on the event or occurrence. Rather, to have an experience implies the mediation of language and the cultural interpretive framework that allow it to be expressed, to be thought about and conceptualized (Joan Scott 1992; van Alphen 1999). In fact, the central place of language for memories had already been recognized by Halbwachs. In a seldom quoted paragraph, Halbwachs (1992) points out that "[t]here are no recollections to which words cannot be made to correspond. We speak of our recollections before calling them to mind. It is language, and the whole system of social conventions attached to it, that allows us at every moment to reconstruct our past" (173). In turn, the unavoidable and ever present linguistic and narrative mediation implies that under all conditions and whatever their content, all memories—even the most individual and private ones—are socially and symbolically constituted (Ricoeur 1999).

In broader terms, this perspective suggests that the availability of symbolic tools (culture, language) is a precondition for the process of structuring subjectivity. However, the process is not simple or linear. To the contrary, as Joan Scott (1992) points out, subjects and subjectivity are constituted discursively in scenarios that imply multiple and contradictory discursive systems. In addition, subjects are not passive receivers but rather social agents with the ability to respond and transform what is conveyed to them. It could be argued, in fact, that subjectivity emerges and reveals itself in full force in the cracks, in the confusion, in the disruptions in the functioning of habitual memory, in the unrest that stimulates the person to engage in interpretive work in order to find meaning and the words with which to express it. In situations of extreme disruption and bewilderment, words to express and represent the events cannot be found, and we are faced then with the signs of trauma.

If the preceding discussion is not qualified, the reader could come to the conclusion that the perspective adopted here centers attention exclusively on discourse, on narration, and on the "power of words." This is not the perspective that we want to advance here. The power of words is not located in the words themselves but in the authority they represent and in the power-related processes connected to the institutions that legitimate them (Bourdieu 1985).

Memory as a narrative social construction involves studying the narrator and the institutions that grant or deny power to the voice of the narrator and authorize him or her to speak, since as Pierre Bourdieu notes, the effectiveness of performative speech is proportional to the authority of the speaker. Additionally, it involves paying attention to the processes of construction of legitimate recognition, socially granted by the group to which it is directed. The reception of words and acts is not a passive process. Quite to the contrary, it is an act of recognition bestowed on whoever is undertaking the transmission (Hassoun 1996).

Thus, taking language as the point of departure, the road takes us to encounter conflicts over the representations of the past, centered on and reflecting struggles for power, legitimacy, and recognition. Such struggles involve different social actors developing strategies to "officialize" or "institutionalize" a (their own) narrative of the past. Achieving positions of authority, or assuring that the occupants of those positions adopt the desired narrative, is part of these struggles. The struggle also involves a strategy for "winning supporters," widening the circle or group that accepts and legitimizes a given narrative, incorporating it as its own or identifying with it. This issue will be taken up again when discussing institutional questions related to memories.

What has all this to do with thinking about memory?

First, it matters to have or not have words to express what has been lived through, to construct experience and subjectivity stemming from events that "bump" into us. One of the characteristics of traumatic events is the massive character of their impact, creating a gap in the capacity "to be spoken" or told about. This provokes a hole in the ability to represent symbolically the event. There are no words, and therefore there cannot be memories. Memory remains disarticulated, and only painful traces, pathologies, and silences come to the surface.

Trauma alters the temporality of other psychic processes, and memory cannot handle them. It is unable to recover, convey, or communicate that which has been lived through.

Second, if "experience" is always mediated and is never "pure" or direct, it becomes necessary to rethink the apparent distance and difference between the processes of autobiographical memory and forgetting on the one hand, and the sociocultural processes shared through the mediation of mechanisms of transmission and symbolic appropriation on the other. To transform an occurrence into "experience," even those who lived through it must find the words to convey it, locating themselves in a cultural framework that makes communication and transmission possible. Analytically, this paves the way to a reconceptualization of what in common sense is understood as "transmission," namely, the process through which a shared cultural understanding linked to a given vision of the past is constructed. Thinking about mechanisms of transmission, about inheritances and legacies, about learning and the creation of traditions becomes then a significant analytical task. (These issues will be taken up in chapter 7.)

Third, the approach taken here makes it possible to articulate individual and collective or social levels of memory and experience. Memories are simultaneously individual and social. Insofar as words and the community of discourse are collective, experience is as well. Individual lived-through occurrences are not transformed into experiences with meaning without the presence of cultural discourses, and these are always collective. At the same time, individual experience and memory do not exist in themselves; they reveal themselves, and become collective, in the act of sharing. Thus, individual experience constructs community in the shared narrative act, in narrating and listening.

Nevertheless, no linear or direct relationship between the individual and the collective is to be posed or expected. Subjective inscriptions of experience are never mirrorlike reflections of public occurrences. Thus, no "integration" or "fit" between individual and public memories, or the presence of a single memory, is to be expected. There are contradictions, tensions, silences, conflicts, gaps, and disjunctions, as well as converging points and even "integration." Social reality is complex, contradictory, and full of tensions and conflicts. Memory is no exception.

In sum, "experience" is subjectively lived, culturally shared, and "shareable." It is in human agency that the past, embodied in cultural

contents (discourses in the broad sense), is activated. Memory, then, is produced whenever and wherever there are subjects who share a culture, social agents who try to "materialize" the meanings of the past in different cultural products that are conceived as, or can be converted into, "vehicles for memory," such as books, museums, monuments, films, and history books. Memory shows up also in actions and expressions that, rather than re-presenting the past, incorporate it performatively (van Alphen 1997).

Three

Political Struggles for Memory

The past is gone, it is already de-termin(at)ed; it cannot be changed. The future, by contrast, is open, uncertain, and indeterminate. What can change about the past is its *meaning*, which is subject to re-interpretations, anchored in intentions and expectations toward the future.¹ That meaning of the past is dynamic and is conveyed by social agents engaged in confrontations with opposite interpretations, other meanings, or against oblivion and silence. Actors and activists “use” the past, bringing their understandings and interpretations about it into the public sphere of debate. Their intention is to establish/convince/transmit their narrative, so that others will accept it.

Thus, research about this issue does not consist of “dealing with social facts as things, but of analyzing how social facts become things, how and why they are solidified and endowed with durability and stability” (Pollak 1989, 4). What is involved is the study of the processes and actors that intervene in the tasks of constructing and consecrating memories. Who are these actors? Whom do they confront and with whom do they engage in dialogue in the process? Different social actors, with diverse connections to past experience—those who lived through specific periods or events and those who inherited them, those who studied them, and those who expressed them in different ways—strive to affirm the legitimacy of “their” truth. They engage in

struggles for power, searching often to legitimate their current positions through claiming privileged links to the past, asserting continuities or ruptures. In these processes, agents of the state have a central role and special weight because of their power in relation to establishing and developing an “official history/memory.” Thus, attention has to be placed on the conflicts and disputes over interpretations and meanings of the past, and on the process through which some narratives displace others and become hegemonic.

The Production of a National History and an Official Memory

One of the central symbolic operations in the processes of state formation—in Latin America throughout the nineteenth century, for example—was the elaboration of the “master narrative” of the nation. This involved advancing one version of history that, together with patriotic symbols, monuments, and pantheons to national heroes, could serve as a central node for identification and for anchoring national identity.

What purpose do these official memories serve? They are more or less conscious efforts to define and reinforce feelings of belonging that aim to maintain social cohesion and defend symbolic borders (Pollak 1989, 9). At the same time, they provide the reference points for framing the memories of groups and sectors within each national context.

Like all narratives, these national stories are selective. Establishing a group of heroes requires obscuring the actions of others. Emphasizing certain characteristics as indicators of heroism involves silencing others, especially the errors and missteps by those who are defined as heroes and must appear “immaculate” in that history. Once these official canonical narratives, historically linked to the process of political centralization in the process of nation-state building, are established, they come to be expressed and crystallized in the history textbooks passed on in formal education. At the same time, they become the targets of diverse efforts at reform, revisionism, and construction of alternative historical narratives. Because the master national narrative tends to be the story of the victors, there will be others who—whether in the form of private oral stories or as practices of resistance to power—will offer alternative narratives and meanings of the past, threatening the national consensus that is being imposed.²

If the state is strong and its policing includes control over ideas

and freedom of expression in public space, alternative narratives take refuge in the world of “private memories.” At times, these narratives are silenced even in the sphere of intimacy, out of shame or weakness, or they are integrated into practices of more open or clandestine resistance (James Scott 1992).

In this process of construction of the master narratives of modern nation-states, professional historians have had a central role. Official master narratives are written by professional historians whose link to power is crucial to their task. Over time, antagonistic interpretations and revisions of that memory of the nation or official historical narrative will be produced, be it as a result of open antagonisms and political struggles, of changes in social sensibilities, or of advancement in historical research itself.

The construction of official histories turns to be particularly problematic when dealing with contemporary or recent events, especially when they are marked by deep social and political conflicts. During the dictatorial periods of the twentieth century—Stalinism, Nazism, military dictatorships in Brazil, Chile, Argentina, and Uruguay, Stronism in Paraguay—public space was monopolized by a dominant political story, where the “good guys” and the “bad guys” were clearly identified. Censorship was explicit, and alternative memories could arise only underground, prohibited and clandestine, thus exacerbating the ravages of terror, fear, and traumatic lapses that generate paralysis and silence. Under such circumstances, the official stories conveyed by the representatives of the regime encountered few challenges in the public sphere.

Generally, the dictatorships’ narratives present the military in the role of “saviors” of the nation from a mortal threat (in the Southern Cone in the 1970s, the threat was that of “Communism”) and from the chaos created by those who try to subvert the nation. In this context, subsequent military stories may emphasize the achievements of peace (especially prominent in Argentina), of economic progress (in Brazil), or of both (Chile) (Jelin 2002b). For example, in 1974, the tenth anniversary of the coup d’état in Brazil was used as an occasion to put into circulation one exclusive story in the public sphere and the school system: the account of the economic success of the military regime—the story of the Brazilian “economic miracle.” There was no mentioning of the political system or of restrictions of public liberties (Carvalho and da Silva Catela 2002). Undoubtedly, the ethical and

political role and public responsibility of historians and critical intellectuals are of extraordinary significance in such periods.³

Political openings, thaws, liberalizations, and transitions give a boost to activities in the public sphere, so that previously censored narratives and stories can be incorporated and new ones can be generated. Such openings create a setting for new struggles over the meaning of the past, with a plurality of actors and agents who express a multiplicity of demands and claims.

The new political scenario is one of institutional change in the state and in state-society relationships. At such times, the struggle plays out between a variety of actors who claim recognition and legitimacy of their voices and demands. The memories of the oppressed and marginalized and the memories about oppression and repression—at the edge, of those who were directly affected in their physical integrity by death, forced disappearance, torture, exile, and imprisonment—emerge, usually with a double intent, that of asserting the “true” version of history based on their memories, and that of demanding justice. In such moments, memory, truth, and justice blend into each other, because the meaning of the past that is being fought about is, in fact, part and parcel of the demand for justice in the present.

These are moments in which stories and narratives that were hidden or silenced for a long time emerge into the public eye. There may be considerable public surprise at the survival (at times for decades) of memories that were silenced in the public world but were kept and transmitted in the private sphere (within family or clandestine social groups), maintained in personal intimacy, even “forgotten” in an “evasive” memory loss (because they might be forbidden, unspeakable, or shameful memories, according to Pollak 1989, 8), or buried in traumatic lapses and symptoms. These conjunctures of political and expressive aperture and “uncovering” provide clear evidence that the processes of forgetting and remembering do not respond in a simple, linear, or direct manner to the passing of chronological time.⁴

Moments of political opening involve a complex political scenario. They do not necessarily or primarily entail a binary opposition between an official history or a dominant memory articulated by the state on the one hand, and a counternarrative expressed by society on the other. Quite to the contrary, multiple social and political actors come to the scene, and they craft narratives of the past that confront each other’s, and in so doing, they also convey their projects

and political expectations for the future. In these conjunctures, neither is there a single voice on the part of the state. Political transition involves a transformation of the state, a new foundational moment, with new readings and meanings given to the past. At times of political opening, the state itself is crisscrossed by multiple and competing readings, reflecting the variety of meanings of the past that circulate in the societal scenario.

The Conflictive History of Memories

Controversies over the meanings of the past surface at the very moment when events are taking place. At the time of a military coup or of the invasion of a foreign country, the victors interpret their actions and resulting events in terms of their insertion in a long-term historical process. Already in the initial proclamations and in the way in which the event is presented to the general population they offer an interpretation of what is going on—generally, an image that portrays the victors as saviors. As Henry Rousso argues, “[i]f we wish to understand the configuration of a discourse about the past, it must be remembered that the discourse is being constructed ever since the initial stages of the event where it is rooted” (Rousso, in Feld 2000, 32). This discourse will be revised and resignified in subsequent periods, according to the configuration of political forces and disputes that unfold in different economic and political conjunctures.

Rousso studied the memory of Vichy in France. In 1940, De Gaulle’s first speeches already declared that France (the “true” one) was not defeated, and that the Vichy regime was only a “parenthesis.” Starting in 1944, a mystified memory of the war was being constructed: the French are presented as heroes of the resistance, and this vision is accompanied by trials of collaborators and by the “deputation” after the war. The first wave of trials in the postwar period centered on the crime of collaboration understood as “treason against the nation.” Only in the early 1970s could the French be indicted for crimes “against humanity.” The definition of the norm that had been transgressed and the interpretive framework have changed by then: crimes committed by Frenchmen who were members of French fascist organizations could then be recognized. Such crimes were then disengaged from the notion of “treason against the nation.”

Rather than stress treason towards France in relationship to Germany, i.e., a nationalistic vision of the crime . . . the issue becomes understanding the degree to which the perpetrators were “fascists” and “anti-semites,” incorporating thus the idea, for the most part correct, that fascism and anti-Semitism belonged to the French tradition independently of the German occupation. In the extreme, in these recent representations, the German or Nazi occupier is falling to the background, especially within the framework of the criminal trials. (Rousso, in Feld 2000, 34)

Another point stressed by Rousso is that although at the beginning the charges were pressed by the state, which at that time needed to send strong signals of its rupture with the Vichy regime, decades later the instigators of judicial action and of demands of official symbolic recognition were social actors. Former deportees and resisters acted as “militants for memory,” “in the name of a ‘*duty to remember*,’ with the objective of keeping alive memory against all forms of oblivion, which in their perspective is considered as a new crime” (Rousso, in Feld 2000, 36). The public management of memory must undoubtedly be understood in the French political context, including the emergence and popularity of right-wing (and anti-Semitic) discourses and practices, as well as in the broader European context, issues that obviously go beyond the scope of this volume.

Periods of transition of political regimes take place in scenarios of confrontation between actors with opposing political experiences and expectations. Each position involves a vision of the past and an (often implicit) agenda regarding how to deal with it in the new era, always defined as a break and as a moment of change vis-à-vis the previous regime. In the Spanish transition, the painful memories of different actors facilitated convergence and negotiation, rather than a rehashing of differences and confrontations. Paloma Aguilar Fernández (1996) argues that “the existence of a traumatic memory of the Spanish Civil War played a crucial role in the institutional design of the transition, in favoring negotiations and inspiring a conciliatory and tolerant attitude towards each other on the part of the principal actors” (56). The central hypothesis of her argument is that the memories of conflict and war played a pacifying role in the transition.

What memory? How was it constructed? “First, the existence of a collective traumatic memory of the Civil War prompted most of the actors to avoid its repetition at any price . . .” (Aguilar Fernández

1996, 57–58). During the transition, most Spaniards interpreted the brutality of the Civil War that took place forty years earlier as “collective insanity,” and the principal lesson they extracted from that understanding was “never again.” “Such a drama must never be repeated in Spain, and all political, social, and economic forces must contribute to this aim” (Aguilar Fernández 1996, 359). At the time of Franco’s death and of political transition, the memory of the Civil War was intensely activated. The connection made between that moment and the prewar period (the Second Republic) was paramount in deterring the possibility of committing the same mistakes.⁵ At the same time, the effort was to forget the animosities of the past in an intentional forgetting that would help in “retaining the lessons of history, but avoiding scrutinizing it.” It was a political act of forgetting, a strategic silence that could happen while the Civil War was becoming the focus of cultural expression for filmmakers, musicians, writers, and academics.⁶

The transitions in the Southern Cone were different and distinctive. In the first place, with the exception of Paraguay and to a lesser extent Brazil, the dictatorial regimes did not last for decades. Thus, there was no generational renewal and the conflicts of the past were still part of the “lived experience” of most actors. Argentina was the case where the new regime took as its banner the redress of human rights violations during dictatorship. The brutality and immediacy of the human rights abuses led to open denunciations and the possibility of political, societal, and judicial redress. In Chile and Uruguay, amnesty laws and decrees obstructed the possibilities of judicial prosecution, while the political opening allowed for the previously censored and suppressed voices of victims and their supporters to be heard. Yet in all cases, the authoritarian voices of dictatorship and its supporters did not necessarily disappear from the public sphere of debate (Acuña and Smulovitz 1996).

Unlike France in 1945, there was no occupying army in retreat, leaving behind a political community liberated from foreign yokes. Both the dictators and the democrats were national political actors and forces, and now they faced the need to coexist within the framework of the new democratic rules. The issue of how to settle accounts with the recent past thus became the focus of disputes about political strategy. Whether to promote amnesty laws, truth commissions, trials, or reparations became political issues to be tackled in each country

according to the strength of different political actors.⁷ In connection with memory issues, what is peculiar to the Southern Cone countries is the strong and visible presence of the human rights movement as a political actor and as an “administrator” of memory.⁸ What is also notable in the region is the continuing presence of authoritarian actors—the military and the Right (especially strong in Chile)—during the political transitions, and a highly ambiguous role of the traditional political parties (notably in Uruguay).

Memory Entrepreneurs and Their Projects

In a now classic book in North American sociology, Howard Becker offers a perspective that in its time revolutionized the thinking about social deviation. In my view, this perspective provides some clues for thinking analogically about the fields of dispute over memories and the actors who participate in them (Becker 1963). Becker argues that in the process of generating and labeling certain patterns of behavior as deviant, “[s]omeone must call the public’s attention to these matters, supply the necessary push to get things done, and direct such energies as are aroused in the proper direction to get the rule created” (162). He calls this group “moral entrepreneurs,” enterprising moral leaders or social agents who, often out of humanitarian motivation, mobilize their energies for the sake of a cause they strongly believe in.

I borrow here this notion of *moral entrepreneur* to use it in the field of struggles over memories, insofar as those who express themselves and seek to define the field can be portrayed as “memory entrepreneurs.”⁹

The problem of how and why a certain theme becomes a public issue at a given time and place has attracted the attention of analysts in diverse fields, from those working on public policies to those searching to explain the success of a film or the failure of some initiative that was expected to attract attention and provoke debate. What is clear is that the conception and development of a public issue are processes that evolve over time and require energy and perseverance. There has to be someone who initiates, who promotes and devotes her or his energies to the desired end. These are Becker’s moral entrepreneurs, broadening his concept to a variety of issues in the public sphere.

In the field we are concerned with here, that of memories of recent political violence and state terrorism in conflict-ridden political scenarios, what we should find is a struggle among “memory entrepreneurs,” who seek social recognition and political legitimacy of *one* (their own)

interpretation or narrative of the past. We will also find them engaged and concerned with maintaining and promoting active and visible social and political attention on their enterprise.

Who are they? What do they seek? What motivates them? At different conjunctures and times, the actors on the scene are diverse, as are their interests and strategies. With respect to the dictatorships of the Southern Cone, the human rights movement has been and continues to be a privileged actor in the political enterprise of memory. Its visibility and capacity to mobilize social support have varied across the countries in the region. In Argentina, its presence and actions have been systematic and permanent, while it has been less continuous and somewhat less significant in Chile and Uruguay. Even in these countries—and also in Brazil—there have been moments and conjunctures when societal mobilization has been very high, such as the Brazilian mobilization asking for amnesty for political prisoners and exiles in 1979, and the mobilization for the plebiscite to repeal the amnesty law in Uruguay in 1986. In all cases, the human rights movement is a heterogeneous actor that encompasses (not without tensions and conflicts) diverse experiences and multiple horizons of expectation.

The human rights movements are not alone in the public sphere. There are also entrepreneurial interests that are motivated by a mix of criteria, combining the lucrative and the moral in different ways.¹⁰ The political Right (the Pinochet Foundation in Chile is probably the emblematic case), as well as other political groups of diverse ideological stands, also play their role and push for their interpretation of the past. Academic debates and the art world offer additional channels for expression of the “memory enterprises,” making available innovative interpretive frameworks and performance opportunities.

There is one group that, without question, has a privileged role in this respect: the victims who were directly affected. In France that group could include the deportees or former resistance fighters; it could be war veterans groups (from Vietnam or the Malvinas/Falkland war) or survivors of massacres. In the countries of the Southern Cone, the most visible among the directly affected persons are the relatives of the kidnapped and disappeared (those who were clandestinely abducted, their fate never disclosed nor their bodies recovered). Their relatives—the emblematic symbol being the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo in Argentina—met with each other, organized themselves to express their grievances and their pain, and formed the backbone of the human

rights movement.¹¹ Their demands and struggles varied from case to case and over time. During dictatorship, besides the constant search for the missing and the international denunciations, their role was to offer comfort and care to themselves and other victims. After the transition to democratic rule, they tried to influence and change the meaning and the content of the “official story” of the dictatorial period, with the explicit goal of eliminating historical distortions and to bring to light and legitimate the stories that had been in the “catacombs,” hidden, censored, and silenced. They also pursued material claims and reparations, anchored in their status as victims that the state must recognize and for whom it must assume responsibility. Over time, they have developed rituals; they have promoted and participated in commemorations and have demanded symbolic signs of recognition in memorials, monuments, and museums. Other voices—that of exiles, of activists in opposition to dictatorship, of religious leaders condemning repression on humanitarian grounds, of international human rights activists, and so on—have also been heard, although center stage was occupied by those defined as “directly affected.”

As a matter of fact, public and political uses of memory are embedded in the concept of “memory entrepreneurs.” Following Todorov, it is useful to differentiate between “good” and “bad” uses of memory. A human group can remember an event in a *literal* or in an *exemplary* way. In the first case, what is preserved is unique; it is not transferable, it does not lead anywhere beyond itself. Otherwise, and without denying the singularity of the experience, it can be translated or turned into more generalized demands. In this case, working through analogy and generalization, the recollection turns into an example that leads to the possibility of learning something from it, and the past develops into a guide for action in the present and in the future (Todorov 1998).

In the movement from literal to exemplary memory, there is also a shift from the personal to the social and the political, leading in turn to the incorporation of institutional realms. In that vein, on the basis of the analysis of the remembrance of war situations in the twentieth century (principally in Europe), Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan (1999) suggest that remembering is a multifaceted negotiation that includes the presence of the state—although it is not necessarily the only actor, nor is it all-powerful. Various social groups can participate in the memory negotiations, following strategies that may be convergent or contrary to the policies of the state. These are diverse voices, and

some are louder than others—silence or weakness may involve being farther away from the microphones of power, self-censorship, or a lack of moral legitimacy before others. Winter and Sivan also demonstrate that the manifest intentions of a group that remembers do not necessarily coincide with their actions. There may be actors following personal and private drives (such as remembering the death in action of a son), whose personal actions end up having unexpected and unwanted consequences for the social and political memory process. There can be times, I would add, in which there is a “saturation of memory” in the public sphere, triggering a sense of rejection or a freezing of memory, opposite to what was hoped.¹²

Some Markers of Memory: Commemorations and Sites

The role of memory entrepreneurs is central to the dynamics of the conflicts that surround public memory. An initial path to probe into conflicts about memory entails analyzing the social dynamics involved in dates, anniversaries, and commemorations. Some dates have very broad and generalized meaning in a society, like September 11 in Chile, or March 24 in Argentina, dates when the military coups took place (in 1973 and 1976). Other dates might be significant at the regional or local level, based on events that happened in specific locations and affected local populations. Finally, there are dates that gain their meaning on a more personal or private level, such as the anniversary of a disappearance, the birthday of someone who is not there anymore.

Insofar as there are different social interpretations of the past, public commemoration dates are issues around which social debate and even political conflict emerge. What date should be commemorated? Or, more to the point, who wants to commemorate what? Rarely is there social consensus on these issues. September 11 is clearly a conflictive date in Chile.¹³ The same event—the military coup—is recalled and commemorated differently on the left and on the right, by the military and by the human rights groups. Furthermore, the meaning of the dates changes over time, as different visions crystallize and become institutionalized, and as new generations and new actors confer them with new meanings (Jelin 2002a).

Dates and anniversaries are conjunctures when memories are activated. The public sphere is occupied by commemoration, with shared expressions of remembrance, and with confrontations about their meanings. In personal and subjective terms, these are moments in which there is an arduous labor of memory for everybody involved, for the

different factions, for the old and the young—who have lived through diverse events and experiences. Facts fall into place and gain a new (dis)order, preexisting models and blueprints break down, the voices of new and old generations are heard, asking, narrating, creating new intersubjective spaces of dialogue, sharing their understandings and codes of what has been lived through, what has been heard or overheard, what has been silenced or omitted. Such dates are landmarks or signs, junctures when the clues as to what is taking place subjectively and at the symbolic level become more visible, when the memories of different social actors are brought up to date and become part of the “present.”

Even—and perhaps particularly—in such moments and periods, not everyone shares the same memories. There are conflicting narratives based on ideological clashes. Furthermore, there are intercohort differences among those who experienced the repression or war at different stages of their lives, and between them and the very young, who have no personal memories of repression. This multiplicity of memories and narratives of the past generates a peculiar dynamics in the social circulation of memories. For example, over time, March 24 has been commemorated in different ways in Argentina (Lorenz 2002). During the dictatorship (1976–83), the only public expression on that day was the “Message to the Argentine People,” in which the armed forces gave their version of what they had done, emphasizing their role as saviors of a nation threatened by an enemy, “subversion.” Given the repressive state and the looming fear, there were no alternative stories or activities in the public sphere in Argentina. Expressions of condemnation of the military coup could only be aired outside the country, among exiles and the international solidarity movement. A few years later, following the defeat in the Malvinas war in 1982, official commemorations lost their authority. The “Message” was not delivered at all in 1983, the last year before the transition.

On the other side, human rights groups developed their own conflicting version of what took place on March 24, 1976, stressing state terrorism and repression of popular demands. It was the human rights movement that occupied the public stage of commemoration beginning with the political transition in late 1983. The human rights movement could practically monopolize public spaces on that date. In fact, up until the mid-1990s, the state was absent from the scene of commemoration.

Over the years, the commemorative marches and activities evolved

in their configuration and order, in the slogans and demands brought forth to the government as well as in who participated and which actors decided at a given moment *not* to show up. During the first half of the 1990s (after the setback of the presidential pardons of the convicted military officers), the human rights community was weak, and there was little commemorative activity. Beginning in 1995, however, the mood changed, and the date became a significant moment of expression of a multiplicity of actors and banners, demanding action and redress on the part of the government while at the same time linking memories of dictatorship with ongoing societal demands of various sorts (social justice, police violence, rights of minorities, demands of social policies, and so on). New participants, particularly youth, employing new forms of expression and participation (such as the emergence and growth of the association of H.I.J.O.S.—Hijos por la Identidad y la Justicia, contra el Olvido y el Silencio [Children in Search of Identity and Justice, against Oblivion and Silence]—and the participation of groups of young street musicians and dancers), reflect the process of transformation of the date and its meanings (Lorenz 2002).

This short summary shows that in Argentina, the public commemorations of March 24 have not involved open confrontations and conflict between radically different versions of the past. Those who could speak during the dictatorial period kept silent afterwards, while those who were silent occupied the public scene afterwards, when the political conditions had changed.¹⁴ The political conflicts on how to settle accounts with the past are handled in other public scenarios, particularly in the judiciary, through the cases that are brought forth in court.

The contrast between the Argentine commemoration and the display of social and political conflict every September 11 in Chile is striking. There, the hostility between actors with opposing visions of the past and projects for the future has involved considerable violence in the streets each 11th, since the time of the dictatorship up to the present (Candina Palomer 2002; on Uruguay, see Marchesi 2002a, and on Brazil, see Carvalho and da Silva Catela 2002).

Just as there are significant dates, there are also significant sites or physical markers. What are the material objects or the sites connected with past events that are chosen by different actors to territorially inscribe memories? Usually, monuments, commemorative plaques, and other markers are the ways in which official and nonofficial actors try

to convey and materialize their memories. Initiatives of this sort can at times be countered by contesting actors' attempts to erase the remnants of the past, as if by changing the form and function of a place the memory of what took place will also be erased.

Struggles over monuments and commemorations unfold openly all over the world. Each and every decision to build a monument, to set up spaces for memory in places where serious affronts to human dignity were committed (concentration and detention camps, especially), to construct museums and install commemorations is the result of the initiative and the commitment of social advocacy groups that act as memory entrepreneurs. These groups usually demand public and official recognition of these physical markers, and this societal demand may generate opposition and conflicts with those who want to erase and deny, or do not give them the priority that the promoters demand. There is also the struggle over the narrative that is going to be conveyed, over the content of the story that comes to be attached to the site.¹⁵

Detention camps and jails of the dictatorships are sites where repression occurred. There are cases in which the physical space has been "recovered for memory," like the Peace Park in Santiago, Chile, on the premises of what was the detention camp of Villa Grimaldi during the dictatorship (Lazzara 2003). The opposite may happen as well: projects can erase signs and destroy buildings, obliterating the materialization of the remembrances in physical markers. Such was the case with the Punta Carretas jail in Montevideo, which was turned into a modern shopping mall. Other efforts to transform sites of repression into sites of memory encounter opposition and destruction, such as the plaques and commemorative structures that were installed and then vandalized in one of the sites of repression in downtown Buenos Aires, the site of the El Atlético detention camp.¹⁶

These places are the actual physical spaces where dictatorial repression occurred. They are undeniable witnesses. One can try to erase them and destroy the buildings where torture and murder took place, but people's personalized memories retain the marks with their multiple meanings. What happens when an effort to physically mark the memory of the past offence in a monument fails? When memory cannot be materialized in a specific site? Administrative fiat and power cannot erase personalized memories or the public projects of active entrepreneurs. Subjects must then look for alternative channels of

expression. When blocked by others, the subjectivity, desire, and will of the people fighting to materialize their memories are energized, their will to act is mobilized publicly, strength is renewed. There is no pause, no rest, because the memories have not been "deposited" in any place; they have to remain active in the hearts and minds of people.¹⁷ The issue of transforming personal feelings, which are unique and intransferable, into collective and public meanings, remains open and active. The question here is whether it is possible to destroy what people intend to remember or perpetuate. Indeed, could it be that the silence and oblivion that are sought for by repressing commemorations have the paradoxical effect of multiplying memories, of maintaining alive the questions and the public debate around the recent past? We are faced again with the issue of the disjunctions between different social groups and their subjective feelings and timings of their memory work. This paradoxical effect of repression activating rather than covering up memories may actually take place in a "personal time" or specific biographical experience of a specific human group that lived through a given period and certain events, and cannot be transferred or transmitted in an unmediated or direct way to others who did not experience it and may not be able to understand the urgency of the claim.

Controversy and conflicts over interpretations do not necessarily calm down once the memorial, museum, or monument is constructed. The initial or official understanding of the past to be conveyed by a given site may be the one presented by the group that promoted it, or it may be a "negotiated" script. With time, and with historical, political, and cultural processes developing, there will necessarily be new processes of giving meaning to the past, with new interpretations. Thus, revisions, changes in narratives, and new conflicts over interpretations will have to arise.

An extreme case of this ongoing conflict and of changes in interpretations of the past linked to political developments is provided by Germany in the wake of reunification, especially in the former German Democratic Republic. According to Claudia Koonz (1994), the stories told to visitors at the concentration camps in East Germany when it was within the Soviet orbit emphasized three basic points: first, the responsibility of fascism and monopoly capitalism for the war crimes; second, that the German working class, led by the Communist Party and assisted by Soviet troops, bravely resisted Nazi domination; and

third, that this heroic legacy is the basis for future struggles against international capitalism. There was no reference to Jews, gypsies, or other non-Marxist victims in the camps. On the Western side, the narrative was very different and even opposite.

Reunification under the control of the West German regime precipitated reactions of rejection among groups of citizens in the former German Democratic Republic, who opposed remaking their histories according to the Western mold. The "official" consensus on both sides broke down, resulting in localized conflicts (for example, about attempts to commemorate the victims of the postwar Soviet camps that had been functioning in the same sites of the Nazi camps, or efforts toward obtaining vindication or reparations for Jewish victims). There were also protests of nearby communities that did not wish to see their area damaged by horror images, and of economic interests that sought to capitalize on horror in potentially lucrative tourist attractions. As Koonz (1994) concludes,

The concentration camps continue to haunt the German landscape, but the categories of victimhood have expanded beyond the anti-Fascist memorialized in the East and the victims of the Holocaust mourned in the West. . . .

The landscapes of Nazi brutality retain their power to horrify. Nazi atrocities must remain at the core of a shared public memory, even as we confront the complex heritage that shapes our postwar world. To accomplish this, the camp memorials must both commemorate the Soviet role in the Allied liberation of the camps and recognize that some Germans died unjustly in the "special camps." The enduring legacy of the camps, however, must be to serve as warnings (*Mahnmaehler*) against all forms of political terror and racial hatred. (275)

Uses and Abuses of Memory: Ownership and the Meanings of "Us"

We return now to Todorov's distinction between "recovering" a past or its traces in the face of efforts to erase it, and the use that is made of that recovered past, that is, the role the past has and should have in the present. In the sphere of public life not all memories of the past are equally admirable. There can be gestures of vengeance; alternatively, there may be learning experiences. The question that naturally follows is whether there are ways to distinguish a priori the "good" and "bad" uses of the past (Todorov 1998, 30).

Todorov proposes the distinction between "literal" and "exemplary" memory as his point of departure. The final sentence of Koonz's work is a good example of this distinction. When she asks that the legacy of the camps serve "as warnings (*Mahnmaehler*) against all forms of political terror and racial hatred," she is calling for a universalizing use of the memory of the multiple horrors of the camps, and places herself against those who wish to appropriate only one of those horrors—the Nazi horrors against Jews or against gypsies versus the Soviet horrors against Germans—which would lead to a politics of glorification of some and the infamy of others and would simultaneously create "privileged victims."

Koonz's conclusion calls for an "exemplary" memory. This position involves a dual task. First, it is necessary to overcome the pain caused by remembrance and successfully contain it so that it does not invade life completely. Second, and here we move from the private and personal level to the public realm, it is necessary to learn from it, drawing from it the lessons that would make the past the guide for action in the present and the future.

Literal memory, on the other hand, stays closed within itself. All the labors of memory are situated in direct contiguity to the past. The searches and efforts to recall will serve to identify all the people who were involved in the initial suffering, to reveal each detail of what happened, to try to understand the causes and consequences of the events, and to deepen and immerse oneself in them. But they cannot serve to guide future behavior in other areas of life, because literal memories are incommensurable, and the transmission to other experiences is impossible. Literal use, according to Todorov (1998), "makes the past event something insuperable, and ultimately makes the present subject to the past" (31).

The uses made of memory correspond to these two types. In the literal case, memory is an end in itself, in opposition to what Koonz seeks. Action is explained and justified as a "duty to remember," and there is a moral mandate to perpetuate constant recollection against all forms of forgetting. In this vein, Rousso complains of the "militants of memory," whose impact will vary according to whether the broader context will receive them more or less openly, or even refuse to listen.¹⁸ The notion of "memory entrepreneur" developed earlier implies elaborating memories in terms of, or in view of, a project or endeavor, and this may open the possibility of moving toward an "exemplary" memory.

The public and social issues raised by these two positions directly refer to the way a political community is constituted and the rules that govern it. Allow me to introduce Guaraní at this point, since it may be helpful. In Guaraní (an indigenous language spoken on a daily basis by the Paraguayan population) there are two words to express the idea of "us." One, *ore*, marks the boundary separating the speaker and his or her community from the "other," the one who listens and observes, who clearly is excluded from the "us." The other word, *ñande*, is an inclusive "us" that invites the interlocutor to be part of the community. I want to suggest that the two types of memory, and their uses, correspond to these two notions of "us" or of community, one inclusive and the other exclusive and excluding.¹⁹

Practices of commemoration and the attempts to establish memory sites always involve political struggles. The principal adversaries in these conflicts are, on the one hand, the social forces that demand markers of memory and, on the other, those who seek to erase these markers on the basis of rendering a narrative of the past that minimizes or eliminates the meaning of what the others wish to remember. There are also confrontations over the "appropriate" forms or means of remembering, as well as over which actors have legitimacy to act, that is, who has the (symbolic) "truth" or the power to decide the contents of the memory to be conveyed. These conflicts can be discussed under the label of the issue of the "ownership" of memory.

At one level, there is a confrontation about the appropriate and inappropriate forms of expression. Are there standards for judging remembrances and memorials? Further, and most importantly, who is the authority that is going to decide which are the "appropriate" forms of remembering? Who embodies *true* memory? Is being a direct victim of repression a necessary condition? Can those who have not themselves lived through repression participate in the historical process of building social memory? The very definition of what constitutes "personal experience" or being a "direct victim" is also part of the historic process of social construction of meaning.

No one doubts the pain of the victim nor the victim's right to recover the truths of what took place under repressive regimes. Nor is there any question of the protagonist role (in concrete historical situations) that "direct victims" and their families took as the initial voices in the entrepreneurship of memories. The issue is a different one and, in fact, is a dual one. First, who is the "us" with legitimacy for remembering? Is it an exclusive us, in which only those who "lived through"

the events can participate? Or is there room to broaden that “us,” in practices through which legitimate mechanisms of incorporation begin to function for (us) others? Is it an *ore* or a *ñande*?

On the other hand, the theme posed by Todorov becomes significant. To what extent does memory serve to broaden the horizon of experiences and expectations? Or is it restricted to the event being remembered? At this point, memory comes into play in another context, that of justice and institutions. When generalization and universalization are introduced, memory and justice converge, in opposition to intentional oblivion (Yerushalmi 1996).

A preliminary hypothesis, which will have to be the focus of future research, relates the scenarios of struggles over memory to state action. When the state does not develop official and legitimate institutionalized channels that openly recognize past state violence and repression, the conflict over truth and over “proper” memories develops in the societal arena. In that scenario, there are strong voices that claim their own “truths”: the discourse of direct victims and their closest relatives, and the discourse of perpetrators who “saved” the nation. In the absence of parameters for sociopolitical legitimation based on general ethical criteria (the legitimacy of the rule of law) and of the translation or transfer of memory to institutional justice, there will be ongoing disputes about who can promote or demand what, about who can speak and in whose name.

The question of the authority of memory and the *Truth* can take on an even more disquieting dimension. There is a danger of anchoring the legitimacy of those who express the *Truth* in an essentialized vision of biology and the body (a mirror image of biological racism). For many, personal suffering (especially when it was experienced directly in “your own body” or by blood-connected relatives) can turn to be the basic determinant of legitimacy and truth. Paradoxically, if legitimacy for expressing memory of a painful past is socially assigned to those who suffered repression on their own bodies or that of their kin, this symbolic authority can easily (consciously or unconsciously) slip into a monopolistic claim on the meaning and content of the memory and the truth.²⁰ The recognized “us” is thus exclusive and nontransferable. Furthermore, under social conditions that foster the prevalence of silence and the absence of social spaces for memory circulation (mechanisms that are needed for enabling processes of working through traumatic symptoms), victims can find themselves

isolated and trapped in a ritualized repetition of their pain, without any access to the possibility of dialogue and to a friendly environment for working through their suffering. Taken to the extreme, this situation can lead to obstructing the mechanisms for broadening the social compromise with memory by not leaving room for the reinterpretation and resignification—on their own terms—of the meaning of the experiences transmitted.

The discussion of these themes presents us with a double historical danger. One danger is institutional oblivion and void, which turns memories into literal memories of nontransferable property, which cannot be shared. Under such circumstances, the possibility for incorporating new subjects is blocked. Another danger is the fixation of the “militants of memory” on the specific events of the past, which obstructs the possibility of creating new meanings. Choosing to speak of memory “entrepreneurs” injects an element of optimism here: Entrepreneurs know very well that their success depends not on mechanical reproduction but on widening scales and scopes, on their capacity to create new projects and open new spaces. It is here where the possibility of a *ñande* and of the action of exemplary memory rests.