

## REMEMBERING OR FORGETTING? THE ROLE OF MEMORY IN SOCIAL RECONCILIATION PROCESSES IN THE CONTEMPORANEITY

## RELEMBRANDO OU ESQUECENDO? O PAPEL DA MEMÓRIA EM PROCESSOS DE RECONCILIAÇÃO SOCIAL NA CONTEMPORANEIDADE

**Renata Barbosa Ferreira<sup>1</sup>**

Programa de Pós-Graduação em Relações Internacionais  
Faculdade Mackenzie Rio  
Rio de Janeiro – Rio de Janeiro - Brasil

**Abstract:** This article analyses the role of memory in social reconciliation processes developed by the international community in intra-State post-conflict scenarios since the end of the 1990's. Different mechanisms of social reconciliation have been put into practice without any previous discussion about which memories are being preserved, how this has been done, or why. The author claims that naturalised assumptions of memory, promoted by intervening agents, are elaborated according to an ethic discourse of memory that limits the chances of success in promoting social reconciliation among those who survived the conflicts. This is why it disregards perspectives, values, and culture of survivors and their impact on how these individuals perceive memory, its modes of preservation, and the role of forgetting.

**Key-words:** Intra-State conflicts. Social reconciliation. Memory.

**Resumo:** Este artigo analisa o papel da memória em processos de reconciliação social desenvolvidos pela comunidade internacional em cenários de pós conflito intraestatais desde o final dos anos 1990. Diferentes mecanismos de reconciliação social têm sido colocados em prática sem que se questione que memórias estão sendo preservadas, como isso tem ocorrido ou por quê. O argumento central é o de que pressuposições naturalizadas sobre a memória, promovidas pelos agentes interventores, são elaboradas segundo um discurso de ética da memória que com frequência limita as chances de sucesso da reconciliação social entre os que sobreviveram aos conflitos por desconsiderarem as perspectivas, valores e cultura dos sobreviventes e seus impactos sobre como eles percebem a memória, seus modos de preservação e o papel do esquecimento.

**Palavras-chave:** Conflitos intraestatais. Reconciliação social. Memória .

**DOI:** 10.29327/2293200.15.2-1

**Recebido:** 12/01/2024

**Aprovado:** 08/02/2024

### Introduction

Those who are interested in studies of war and peace have long known the issue of reconciliation. Over the last decades, however, because of the emergence of several civil

---

<sup>1</sup>re\_ferreira@hotmail.com  
Orcid: 0009-0005-7256-1354

wars around the world, the discussion on peace processes has increasingly focused on this theme. The main concern of contemporary scholars and policy-makers is that a peaceful resolution of a conflict *per se* has not been able to guarantee lasting peaceful relations among the parties previously involved in the conflicts. Hence, many scholars suggest that the solution would be in the investment in processes of reconciliation, which would build stable peace.

However, few scholars are able to define reconciliation, namely, a complex concept and an over-arching process that may include different types of instruments, such as the search for truth, forgiveness, justice, healing, etc. As Bar-Tal and Bennink (2004, p. 12) points out, reconciliation “goes beyond the agenda of formal conflict resolution to changing the motivations, goals, beliefs, attitudes, and emotions of the great majority of the society members regarding the conflict, [or changing] the nature of the relationship between the parties, and the parties themselves”.

All of these elements, nonetheless, are intimately linked to the subject of memory as they necessarily involve dealing with issues that have divided societies in the past. The past and the consequences of what was done at that time is a significant part of the present of all societies affected by widespread violent conflict and may define what their future will be.

Those who dedicate themselves to the study of memory noticed that it has emerged as a cultural obsession of monumental proportions across the globe (Huysen, 2000) in the last decades and stimulated debates in many disciplines. But, according to Duncan Bell (2006), it has not yet played a substantial role in international relations studies.

For this reason, this article aims to contribute to the debates of memory and reconciliation, investigating their roles in post-conflicts to argue that many reconciliation processes - whether social or political - developed nowadays are put into practice without questioning, more carefully, what, how, and why memories are being preserved and the motivations of those who develop the predominant memory discourses.

This author claims that some assumptions about what memory is supposed to represent in the reconciliation processes became naturalised by a prevalent discourse of

ethics of memory, which frequently undermines the chances of achieving some sort of reconciliation among those who survived widespread violence. Finally, the author also considers the importance given to forgetting in some reconciliation processes and debate its role to the aim of producing sustainable and lasting peace.

### **1. Reconciliation: Conceptualisation and mechanisms**

The end of the twentieth Century compelled the international community to adopt a new perspective on the methods of managing conflict and of making and maintaining peace. The many civil conflicts, which emerged in the last three decades, led scholars and policy-makers to dedicate their attention to understand the dynamics of intra-national rather than international conflicts and to develop tools and techniques that may be more appropriate to promote reconciliation between domestic parties who need to rebuild their states and nation. According to Nicole Ball (2001, p. 722),

[i]n the early 1990s, when the international community first became involved in a significant way in helping countries recover from civil war, the primary emphasis in post-conflict rebuilding was economic and social reconstruction. (The reason for that was that) [...] people require tangible proof that investing in peace or in democratic transitions will change their material situation for the better.

The establishment of structural mechanisms was envisaged as a first step, which could progressively reduce the perception of threat and feelings of fear, which may represent the possibility of new eruptions of violence. Hence, in the transition phase of peacebuilding, the main aim has been to create political institutions, consolidate the internal and external security, and revitalise the economy. Nevertheless, to reassure the development of a “democratic culture” within societies affected by violent conflicts, the international community began to consider the need of cooperative relationships among the members of these societies to implement the structures of democracy. That is where reconciliation came in.

In order to establish a new distribution of power, restore civil and human rights, develop new democratic political institutions and organisations, and create a new legal system and a more participatory governance, one would first need to address the relationships between those who are directly involved in the implementation of these actions. This relates not only to politicians, but also to the entire population. As Bloomfield (2003, p. 11) points out,

(i)t is the entire communities who have to begin to reorient themselves from the adversarial, antagonistic relations of war to more respect-based relations of cooperation. The very best democratic system in the world produced by the most able democrats will not survive if the general populations to which it applies are not minimally prepared to trust the system and each other and at least try it out. A key element of that process of developing a democratic culture is to engender the relationships necessary for good democracy between communities, neighbours, constituencies, individuals, and so on.

Although it is possible to recognise that the insistence in the implementation of democracy in many post-conflict scenarios is something quite controversial, this author is not debating this issue here. For the moment, it will be pointed out the reasons that led the international community to develop a wide range of mechanisms to promote the reconciliation and investigate this process.

The first challenge, as far as reconciliation is concerned, is its definition. Many studies suggest different conditions that the parties involved need to fulfill to facilitate the reconciliation process. As Luc Huyse (2003, p. 19) observes, “reconciliation means different things to different people and its significance varies from culture to culture, and changes with the passage of time.”

Hence, for Marrow (1999, p. 132), reconciliation is the “reestablishment of friendship that can inspire sufficient trust across the traditional split”, and, for Asmal et al. (1998, p. 46), it is “the facing of unwelcome truths in order to harmonise incommensurable world views so that inevitable and continuing conflicts and differences stand at least within a single universe of comprehensibility”.

Some authors, like Lederach (1997, p. 18), focus on intra-societal reconciliation; others emphasise national or political reconciliation and privilege an up-bottom approach; and, some others, like Bar Tal and Bennink, argue that “reconciliation is a process that begins when psychological changes begin to take place”.

For the above authors, reconciliation begins when the parties in conflict start to change their beliefs, attitudes, goals, motivations, and emotions about the conflict or about each other and their future relations – all in the direction of reconciliation. [...] The reconciliation process is by its nature an informal one that lasts for a very long time and [...] (it) is not a linear process of continuous change in the direction of peaceful relations, but one of regressions and advances (Idem, p.20, 2004).

Finally, authors, like Bloomfield (2003, p.14), conceptualise reconciliation as “a process through which a society moves from a divided past to a shared future”, arguing that it is a long term, deep, and broad process intimately related to the solving of past issues.

The second challenge posed by the issue of reconciliation is its multifaceted structure. An overall reading of the literature on the theme shows that it can comprise different actions, for instance, truth telling, forgiveness, apology, justice, reparation, and healing. Nonetheless, all these actions or mechanisms valued as forms to promote reconciliation present an interest point in common: A strong connection with past and memory.

Hence, given their importance, this author will study some mechanisms that compound the contemporary reconciliation processes and observe their connection with the idea of memory while they seek to reach their purposes of producing stable and durable peace in contemporary post-conflict scenarios.

## **2. Mechanisms of reconciliation and Memory**

Truth telling has emerged over the last three decades on the need for states and societies to address past crimes in the aftermath of war and violent conflicts. Many scholars and policy-makers consider it as one of the cornerstones of successful peacebuilding.

According to Mendeloff (2004), truth-telling advocates make several claims about its peace-promoting effects, for instance: 1. it assures justice, 2. It promotes social and psychological healing 3. It fosters reconciliation, and 4. It deters future crimes. It is intimately linked, then, to other central purposes of reconciliation, i.e., justice and healing.

Truth advocates, like Herman (*apud* Mendeloff, 2004, p. 359), believe that “remembering and telling the truth about terrible events are prerequisites both for the restoration of the social order and for the healing of individual victims”. Therefore, Truth Commissions and Trials have been put into practice as an important means to preserve historical memory once it is valued as a safeguard against forgetting. As Mendeloff (2004, p. 360) observes, truth advocates claim that

[...] it provides an objective accounting of the past that can be used as the basis for developing a common shared history, which in turn helps

serve as the basis for reconciliation. [...] (It) “closes the book” on a painful history. By providing the definitive word on the past, it removes history as a point of contention among former adversaries, allowing them to work together constructively in new power-sharing arrangements. [...] Demagogues and ethnic entrepreneurs will have less success inciting violence by appealing to historical distortions and myths if the truth is actually known. [...] (Finally), (it has the role of) educating the nation about the events of the past, learning from history, and thereby preventing a resumption of violence.

The underlying assumption in all these claims is that remembering is an important form of accountability that should be imposed on perpetrators of violence, and something owed to the victims of mass crimes and the survivors of violent conflicts.

In this sense, remembering is taken as something positive and capable of preventing history from repeating itself. However, what remains unnoticed is that a strong rhetoric against forgetting is developed as part of this process and Truth Commissions are structured under the assumption that there is one kind of memory to be reassured.

An ethics of memory is, hence, naturalised – not questioned - and forgetting is understood as something to be avoided at all costs since it is taken as a synonym of disregard towards the suffering of those who lost their relatives and friends or survived the conflicts.

Something similar can be noticed in all mechanisms that reinforce practices of forgiveness and apology. Levy and Sznajder (2006) point out that forgiveness has constituted an implied background to the debates of the politics of memory, restitution, and historical injustices. Since the aftermath of Holocaust, different perceptions of forgiveness have been debated and underlying all of them is the assumption that forgiveness has the power to undo what has been done. As the authors (2006, p. 84) remarked,

[...] (i)t implies freedom for political action, to liberate oneself from the prison of time, to be born anew in politics. As (Hanna Arendt) puts it, the opposite of forgiveness is vengeance, and vengeance can be predicted; it runs its due course, people acting as they were supposed to act, the past determining the present and the future. Forgiveness, on the other hand, is unpredictable; it is undetermined action, therefore, in Arendtian terms, true political action and an expression of political liberty.

Hanna Arendt, however, reinterpreted the notion of forgiveness- which was originally impregnated with Christian morality - and transported the concept to the public sphere.

She has advocated that if the idea of forgiveness was understood as gesture of respect (and not love) and as an act that can be performed by people (and not only God), it could be accepted as a new fashion to construe politics. (Levy & Sznajder, 2006)

Nonetheless, her interpretation of forgiveness was conditioned by the fulfillment of certain elements. The most important of them was that there should be a moral equality between the forgiver and the recipient of forgiveness. They should share a common world that would allow them to agree to break the prison of the past. Yet, she observed that deeds that are not punishable cannot be forgiven, excluding from politics what she called 'radical evil'. Radical evil, according to Arendt, is a condition in which victim and perpetrator have stopped sharing the same world for it destroys plurality and therefore politics. She was making a clear reference to Holocaust. (Levy & Sznajder, 2006)

As one can see, the concept of forgiveness is also naturalised, but in a different way, once it is assumed to be applied so it can be conducive to forgetting and not to the imperative of remembering mentioned above. Although the assumption "forgiveness = forgetting" has a minor impact on reconciliation and memory debates, it serves to present the paradox that outlines the memory debates. What is important, after all? Remembering or forgetting? Which of them should be pursued in order to promote reconciliation? One can be considered without the other? What, how, and why memories should be preserved? Why is forgetting generally viewed as something bad?

Before any attempt to answer these questions, it is important to observe two other relevant issues. The first one is that there are authors who advocate remembering through its association with resentment and retribution, by fiercely contesting the idea of forgiveness. Levy and Sznajder (2006, p. 87) mention the writings of Améry and Jankélévitch, two authors who refuse the idea of forgiveness and insist "on the moral worth and virtue of resentment". They believe that the passage of time should be resisted, and they deny the power of moral and legal absolution to the passage of time.

For them (2006), forgiveness is a personal/individual perspective and has nothing to do with politics, because no punishment could be enough. The weight of the atrocities is so heavy in their view that reconciliation is meaningless. What remains is the memory of the violence and the resentment that keeps it warm.

In the example above mentioned, despite the interesting defense against an unquestioned acceptance of the association of forgiveness to forgetting, the claim for resentment is problematic, once it leaves no room for political action or some sort of positive assimilation of the past. The reinforcement of resentment seems to lock individuals and societies in a time prison that freezes them in a traumatic momentum that turns the present an eternal representation of the past.

The second issue to be considered is that not all those who urge for forgiveness envisage it as a synonym of forgetting. In fact, authors like Auerbach (2004), observe that forgiveness does not inevitably lead to reconciliation. In his (2004, p. 157) evaluation, forgiveness is

[...] a necessary – though not always possible – and not sufficient condition for full and perfect reconciliation between former adversaries. Forgiveness is only possible if and when the two sides that engage in the process of reconciliation agree about the crime committed by one of them and about the identity of the perpetrator.

Here, one can notice more clearly how the meaning of reconciliation significantly varies from culture to culture. In this sense, Auerbach (2004) observes that incompatibility between the parties' convictions regarding forgiveness will make it hard for the sides to get into a genuine process of forgiveness.

Auerbach (2004) exemplifies that by mentioning that while for Christian's theology forgiveness "should be given unconditionally to friends and enemies alike", independently of the size of the crime or the behaviour of the perpetrator, for Judaism there are stricter rules regarding forgiveness. Judaism argues that forgiveness can be asked only from the victims himself, and only the victim can forgive.

According to Rambam (apud Auerbach, 2004, p. 158), [...], 'there are three essential stages in the process of *Teshuvah*, that is, repentance. Firstly, sinners have to confess their sin; thereafter, they are requested to repent their wrongdoing: and, finally, they must undertake not to repeat their sins'.

It is noteworthy that there are conditionalities to the offering of forgiveness in the Judaic conceptualisation and that they grant the forgiving power to the victim and not only to God. Differences in the religious approaches to forgiveness can significantly interfere in a reconciliation process between two parties that choose this mechanism as a form of rebuilding their relationships, mainly if forgiveness is perceived as a harm to



fundamental beliefs and myths related to the identity and legitimacy of one of the parties. Problems like these turn reconciliation through forgiveness something very difficult to achieve.

Finally, before addressing the questions proposed in the first part of this section, it is equally worth mentioning two other mechanisms of reconciliation, which are deeply intertwined with memory debates: Apology and Healing. Public apology has emerged in societies coming to terms with past injustices and it is in itself a multifaceted mechanism of reconciliation, strongly connected to forgiveness. Its purpose is to provide some resolution for the shame, humiliation, or negation of worth that an act of injustice promoted and perpetuated by different means.

Hence, a public apology is the use of language by those who are responsible for the production of injustices (or those who represent them) to express guilt and empathy for those who were deprived of respect. It entails a reversal of conduct, from the one that humiliates to one that gives respect.

Fette (2006) observes that scholars have suggested several reasons for the emergence of apology on a global scale at the end of the twentieth century. Some point out a new international focus on morality, others emphasise a revised understanding of universal human rights, state sovereignty, and law, a willingness of state actors to show feelings of caring and regret, and to view apology not as a weakness, but as a manifestation of strength. Some others emphasise the globalisation of memory in the post-cold war era, as well as an increased demand for recognition by past victims.

Nevertheless, as Raymond Cohen remarks, there are different types of apologies and different understandings of its role. For the purpose of this article, consider those apologies whose focus are on historical injustices. According to Cohen (2004, p. 187),

[a]pology for historical injustice at the international level is rare and invariably contentious. Considerations of public opinion and national honor make it extraordinarily difficult for governments to admit guilt for past crimes. Apology in such highly sensitive matters is resisted as placing the nation in a humiliating posture of supplication or subordination, whatever the rights or wrongs of the case. Leaders are deeply reluctant to acknowledge national error and thereby undermine patriotic myths of national virtue and infallibility. There is great unease at the policy implications of acknowledging historical injustice since apology may imply recognition of contested rights. Apologies for past atrocities also risk opening up cans of worms. If you begin investigating sordid episodes from a nation's past, it is argued, where will it all end? [...].

Despite all these controversial consequences, apology – in a general sense - is perceived by most of its advocates as an important strategy in reconciliation processes for it represents the acknowledgement that the apologising party has denigrated and excluded the other party and, in a simultaneous move, it enacts respect and recognition. But, this interpretation of apology as an instrument capable of reconstructing social meanings in the present and in the future is not a consensus among its defenders.

According to Celermajer (2006, p. 176), there is a distinction between behaviorist and commissive apologies. On one hand, the one mentioned above is commissive, because it “commits the speaker (or the collective of which the speech act is made) to a certain course of action or way of being. It is closer to a promise than to a penalty.” On the other hand, behaviorist apologies are those that express a response, or an attitude to, or feeling about the events of the past. It has a compensatory character and apparently is the prevailing meaning attributed to it.

It is noteworthy that apology practices related to historic injustices are symbolic acts that also have contradictory effects as far as memory is concerned. It clearly reflects the paradox that permeates the debate of memory for one remembers in search of recognition and respect with the aim of forgetting. Here to forget demands remembering in the first place.

In addition, if the apology is not followed by a reversal of conduct of those responsible for past humiliations, remembering will not change the relationship among the parties, will open up old wounds, and reinforce the suffering. In this case, remembering perpetuates itself and locks individuals and societies in a past momentum that poisons relationships of the present. For this reason, many scholars question the validity of public apologies and its contribution to reconciliation processes.

Interestingly enough, all these mechanisms that may compose a reconciliation process search a final element: Healing. However, healing is not only a final aim, but it is also a process that counts with another group of practices that are meant to address trauma. Like the other mechanisms, healing presents different definitions. Hamber (2003, p. 77) conceptualises it as

[...] any strategy, process or activity that improves the psychological health of individuals following extensive violent conflict. Strategies, processes, or activities aimed at rehabilitating and reconstructing

local and national communities more broadly are also integrally linked to this process. As such, healing is not only about assisting individuals to address their psychological health needs in an isolated way but is dependent upon and integrally linked to repairing and rebuilding communities and the social context. This implies restoring a normalized everyday life that can recreate and confirm people's sense of being and belonging.

Hamber (2003) also mentions that World Health Organisation has defined health as not only merely the absence of disease, but also as a positive state of physical, emotional, and social well-being. He (2003, p. 77) observes that the WHO understands psychological health as

encapsulating, among other factors, subjective well-being, perceived self-efficacy, autonomy, competence, inter-generational dependence, and self-actualisation of one's intellectual and emotional potential. Psychological, emotional, physical, and social health are not only interlinked but also interdependent.

Nonetheless, as the author points out, healing is a lengthy and culturally bound process, and it is rare for the psychological impact of the past ever to be completely dealt with.

Despite these problems, the international community has endorsed the broad concept of health in its peacebuilding actions and translated into several practices, for instance: 1. Psychosocial programmes 2. Individual counselling and support interventions, 3. Training of local communities with psychosocial support skills, 4. Self-help support groups, and 5. Symbolic forms of healing. Much of these practices are developed because of a deeper comprehension of what trauma means and because of its implications for the reconciliation processes and international politics.

The study of social and political implications of trauma are also present in International Relations (IR) and peacebuilding debates. Some authors, like Fierke (2007), note that trauma is an issue that goes beyond the psychological suffering of individuals, because the environment of the victims is more socially and politically entangled as the source of shock. Hence, as he asserts, the traumatic experience is a human encounter characterised by hatred, betrayal, and humiliation, which emerges out of particular kinds of interaction.

In violent conflicts, the experience of violence and trauma is intimately attached to a social, cultural, and political context, which attributes different roles to the individuals, as perpetrators, victims, or bystanders. Moreover, the role of memory in all this process is quite central. (Fierke, 2007).

Twentieth Century is deeply marked by the occurrence of many wars and atrocities. For this reason, the relationship between trauma and memory became a feature of political discourse. On one hand, in much of the literature on these issues, there is a predominant acceptance of Freud's conceptualisations, mainly guided by his idea of the unconscious of the individual.

On the other hand, another part of the literature heads in opposite direction, focusing instead on political expediency and trauma discourse. In this line of thought, these authors, through a concept of collective memory, investigates how present concerns determine what past one remembers and how wto remember it. Halbwach (*apud* Fierke, 2006, p. 116), in his theory, asserts that

collective memory is ahistorical in so far as it simplifies and is impatient with any kind of ambiguity, reducing events to mythic archetypes. Memory in this conception denies the 'pastness' of its objects and insists on their continuing presence. A memory once established defines an eternal truth and identity for members of a group.

Following Halbwach's steps, Fierke develops the debate on trauma by searching its social meaning to support the debate that past trauma can manifest in the habitual memory of a culture.

Hence, an action within a culture may continue to be limited by the linguistic boundaries of a past world, thereby reproducing patterns of speech and behaviour from the past trauma in the present. She grounds her claim on Wittgenstein's critique of Freud's idea of unconscious, which asserts that there is nothing hidden on one's memory.

For Wittgenstein (*apud* Fierke, 2006), the issue was not the existence of an unconscious/conscious dichotomy, but the existence of degrees of "perspicuity" or clarity regarding the reasons for one's action. According to this author (*apud* Fierke, 2006, p. 119),

[...] Memories are not like computers files, retrieved from the unconscious, but are always constructed by combining bits of information selected and arranged in terms of prior narratives and current expectations, needs and beliefs. [...] (He) shifts the emphasis away from something hidden and repressed to the reasons for an action, which may be more or less transparent to the actor.

Nonetheless, Wittgenstein and Freud agreed on the emphasis on the meaning of what was being said in the therapeutic environment, as well as on the tendency to be “bewitched by our own assumptions”.

This debate is quite important for the discussion this author seeks to advance in this article. As Fierke (2006, p. 120) observes, Freud recognised that the meanings presented by a patient are in a sense more important than the actual experience of trauma. Wittgenstein, for his part, asserted that one needs greater perspicuity about the use of words in order to see what they assume. “Because this language is overly familiar, because it is constitutive of ourselves and our social world, we often cannot see it clearly. We are often ‘bewitched by our own assumptions’”.

### **3. Memory revisited: An Attempt to Break the Spell.**

As mentioned in the previously, there are contradicting views about the role of memory in reconciliation processes and some serious debate about which course of action should be taken to address the remembering/forgetting dichotomy raised by reconciliation processes.

This author defends that contemporary reconciliation processes are being conducted by the international community according to an imperative of remembering that reassures its benefits without questioning this assumption and its complexity, mainly because they are, as Fierke (2006) puts it, bewitched by it. Moreover, in all the mechanisms mentioned above, the voices of local people and their narratives are frequently repressed or silenced.

Unfortunately, many of the recipients of the peacebuilding efforts often submit to the authorities’ narratives of memory and trauma in order to consolidate peace quickly and return to a normal life – or something closer to it - as soon as possible due to their material needs. Although there is local resistance to the prevailing narratives of memory and trauma in many of these post conflict scenarios, it still does not have the strength to promote their counter-narratives and reinforce their own meanings of memory and trauma to define their future according to their values, not according to the narratives of the international community and its interveners.

In addition, when considering the remembering/forgetting dichotomy, one of the lessons learned from all considerations exposed above is that the debate about memory offers only one certainty: the uncertainty. As Zehfuss (2007) points out, although memories or references to the past are usually called upon with conviction to underline the certainty of what it is claimed, recourse to memory involves uncertainty. Memories of war are problematic and ambiguous. Invocations of memory by politicians are made with the purpose of finding support for their interests and positions.

Therefore, by claiming any memory or by referring to the past, an invitation to unspoken assumptions is made, causing political implications. In this sense, this author agrees with Zehfuss that more important than trying to understand what memories to preserve and which ones to forget, one should validate the effort to understand how they are preserved and why they are preserved. These questions help to unveil the assumptions that pervades the memory debate and sustain the imperative of remembering.

One should also investigate what it means to remember for those who survived violent conflicts and try to understand how their meanings of memory of war interfere (or not) in the processes of reconciliation implemented by the international community and its interveners. Moreover, at the same time, it is fundamental to understand how and why the international community sustain the imperative of remembering. As Zehfuss (2007, p. 22) observes,

[...] (w)hat is at issue is not discovering what is being remembered and how that might affect political choices but interrogating the logic within which articulations of memory operate. [...] (and) is to show how (a discourse) undermines the philosophy it asserts, or the hierarchical oppositions on which it relies, by identifying [...] the rhetorical operations that produce the supposed ground of argument, the key concept or premise.

Frequently after events involving violent conflicts and atrocities, the following predominant rhetoric is the one against forgetting and, therefore, in favour of remembering. The reasons for that, ranges from the idea of a duty towards the victims and the search or hope for reconciliation, if there is an acknowledgment of the past and the belief that one may learn from the past.

Consequently, exploring memories – mainly those which have been suppressed – and preserving them are often seen as a positive move. Nevertheless, as Zehfuss (2007)

remarks, such opinions are problematic for they assume that there is a particular memory one must work towards, that what must be remembered may be clearly identified, or is self-evident.

In addition, campaigns against forgetting imply that remembering is good or even fundamental to prevent history from repeating itself. This underlying assumption has become so familiar and widely accepted that often what is seen in different political scenarios is a dispute over which lesson to draw from a certain painful event or past and not what it means to remember or – what is more important - if remembering, in the cases considered, really brings prospects of recognition and reconciliation.

However, what cannot remain unquestioned is the fact that memory inspires revenge as much as it inspires reconciliation. In addition, many of the violent conflicts in the last three decades are a soundproof of that. The conflicts that devastated the former Yugoslavia or Rwanda, for instance, not only showed how memories can instigate violence, but also pointed out to the risks of their manipulation, instrumentalisation, and distortion. Underlying these risks, nonetheless, is the assumption that there is a correct memory that must prevail over the manipulated versions.

This assumption needs to be addressed with caution. Despite being important for societies, they should preserve the truth against political manipulative narratives. One should not forget that a “correct memory” could be just one narrative sustained by power, frequently for long a period. Therefore, the value of this narrative will very much depend on the integrity of those who elaborated it and on their intentions in sustaining it over time.

Nevertheless, in the face of the memory boom, not everyone feels excited. Some authors emphasise forgetting as a critical act towards the past. Nietzsche (1874) is one of the greatest advocates of forgetting. He envisages it as act that allows a break with the past and something necessary from time to time when knowledge of the past threatens to rule over life.

Nietzsche (1980 p. 38) asserts that forgetting belongs to all actions: as to the life of everything organic belongs not just light, but also darkness. Indeed, according to Nietzsche, it is possible to live with hardly any memory but ‘it is entirely impossible to

live without forgetting altogether'. He (1980, p. 38) dismisses here [...] the necessarily positive connotation of remembering. In fact, (he asserts) remembering may wear us down, may stop us from action and may be pernicious. [...].

## **Conclusion**

In light of all the observations above and considering the context of reconciliation processes in post-conflict scenarios, the dichotomy of remembering x forgetting appears to be unavoidable but also unsolvable.

In this sense, for the purpose of improving the results of reconciliation processes and their relationship with memory, the alternative one might contemplate in order to “break the spell” of predominant assumptions about memory may be an attempt to achieve a balance between the two, i.e., a more equalised application of practices of remembering and forgetting as a means to open room for new realities, without leaving unaddressed the consequences of the past on the people that survived painful conflicts and are still struggling to participate in the rebuilding of their societies in the present.

Their voices, culture, and values should be the point of departure of any effort and these factors should certainly define how their memories should be narrated and preserved or determine if forgetting should be respected if that is the way envisioned by them as the best path to their future.

## **References**

- ASMAL, K. et al. (1998). **Reconciliation through Truth: A Reckoning of Apartheid's Criminal Governance**. Oxford: Thrift Books-Phoenix.
- AUERBACH, Yehudith. (2004). The Role of Forgiveness in Reconciliation. *In* BAR SIMAN, Yaacov (ed.). **From Conflict Resolution to Reconciliation**. London: Oxford University Press, 149-175.
- BALL, Nicole. (2001). The Challenge of Rebuilding War-Torn Societies. *In* CROCKER, Chester (ed.). **Turbulent Peace – The Challenges of Managing International Conflicts**. Washington: United States Institute of Peace Press, 719-736.
- BAR TAL, Daniel; BENNINK, Gemma H. (2004). The Nature of Reconciliation as an Outcome and as a Process. *In* BAR SIMAN, Yaacov (ed.). **From Conflict Resolution to Reconciliation**. London: Oxford University Press, 1-289.
- BELL, Duncan. (2006). Introduction. *In* BELL, Duncan (ed.). **Memory, Trauma and World Politics: Reflections on the Relationship Between Past and Present**. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1-29.



- BLOOMFIELD, David. (2003). Reconciliation: An Introduction. *In* BLOOMFIELD, David; BARNES, Terri; HUYSE, Lucien (eds.). **Reconciliation after Violent Conflict: A Handbook**. Stockholm: IDEA, 10-18.
- CELERMAJER, Danielle. (2006). The Apology in Australia: Re-covenanting the National Imaginary. *In* BARKAN, Elazar; KARN, Alexander (eds.). **Taking Wrongs Seriously, Apologies and Reconciliation**. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 153-184.
- COHEN, Raymond. (2004). Apology and Reconciliation in International Relations. *In* BAR SIMAN, Yaacov (ed.). **From Conflict Resolution to Reconciliation**. London: Oxford University Press, 177-195.
- FETTE, Julie. (2006). The Apology Moment: Vichy Memories in 1990s France. *In* BARKAN, Elazar; KARN, Alexander (eds.). **Taking Wrongs Seriously, Apologies and Reconciliation**. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 259-285.
- FIERKE, Karin. (2006). Bewitched by the Past: Social Memory, Trauma, and International Relations. *In* BELL, Duncan (ed.). **Memory, Trauma and World Politics**. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 116-134.
- FIERKE, Karin. (2007). **Critical Approaches to International Security**. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- HAMBER, Brandon. (2003). Healing. *In* BLOOMFIELD, David; BARNES, Terri; HUYSE, Lucien (eds.). **Reconciliation after Violent Conflict: A Handbook**. Stockholm: IDEA, 77-96.
- HUYSE, Luc. (2003). The Process of Reconciliation. *In* BLOOMFIELD, David; BARNES, Terri; HUYSE, Lucien (eds.). **Reconciliation after Violent Conflict: A Handbook**. Stockholm: IDEA, 19-39.
- HUYSEN, Andreas. (2000). Present pasts: media, politics, amnesia, **Public Culture**, 12 (1): 21-38.
- LEDERACH, John Paul (1997). **Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies**. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace.
- LEVY, Daniel; SZNAIDER, Natan. (2006). Forgive and not Forget: Reconciliation between Forgiveness and Resentment. *In* BARKAN, Elazar; KARN, Alexander (eds.). **Taking Wrongs Seriously, Apologies and Reconciliation**. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 83-100.
- MARROW, D. (1999). Seeking peace amid memories of war: learning from the Peace Process in Northern Ireland. *In* Rothstein, Robert L. (ed.), **After the Peace: Resistance and Reconciliation**. London: Lynner Rienner, 111-139.
- MENDELOFF, David. (2004). Truth-seeking, truth-telling, and post conflict peacebuilding: curb the enthusiasm? **International Studies Review**, 6 (3): 355-380.
- NIETZSCHE, Friedrich. (1980). **On the Advantage and disadvantage of history for life**. Indianapolis (USA): Hackett Publishing Co.

ZEHFUSS, Maja. (2007). **Wounds of Memory: The Politics of War in Germany.** Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.