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MEMORY OF VIOLENCE: INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE

I. VIOLENCE

Violence is an ambivalent phenomenon. It is both rejected and desired at the same time. It has accompanied mankind since time immemorial. Violence, and the memory of it, can form social bonds, but it can just as well destroy them. Violence, especially ritualised, is also a language of social communication, constantly changing in space and time. Indeed, there is no single, univocal, and universally applicable definition of violence, which would refer to all human communities at all times. Intuitively, drawing from often unacknowledged categories of culture we live in, we are able to identify, name and describe violence. However, we are also conscious that violence is by no means limited to merely a violent physical action taken against someone's will. Indeed, there exists violence which does not resort to the use of physical power: for example, psychological violence. Some scholars believe that the experience of violence, both as an aggressor and as a victim, came to shape religious and social imagination. The position of violence in human world can be compared to the relationship between Order and Chaos in the cosmic dimension. Despite constraints imposed by religious commands, law and, broadly understood, culture, violence is nevertheless constantly present in human world. Indeed, it has always been its permanent part, also due to its absence. At this point, it might be relevant to recall the definition of evil

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proposed by St. Augustine, which describes evil as a lack of good (Evans 1982, Mann 2001). By analogy, we might conclude that a lack of violence is always a situation, whose sense and context will be interpreted in connection with the existence of violence.

II. MEMORY

Just as the concept of violence, that of memory is equally ambiguous. We may speak of personal and collective memory, depending on who is the depositary of it. In communities characteristic of complex organisation, where knowledge is transmitted not merely through stories, but with the help of numerous other, often very diverse, methods, memory can become institutionalised, or it can remain at the level of oral transmission. Thus, the existence of the past in time can adopt various forms. The access to the recollection, or reconstruction, of the past can be equally diverse, various for different people or social groups. Memory, and the recollection of the past, have always performed a crucial role in the shaping of human identity. However, this process is different for every culture, because in each of them, different facts are believed to deserve remembering. Possibly, there may exist situations, where the official memory of the past would disagree with the version remembered at the level of individuals and groups. There exists the memory of the winners, and the memory of the losers [victors and victims] [victorious and defeated]. Moreover, there can also exist a discrepancy between an academic reconstruction of the past and its social picture, and the difference does not necessarily have to result from any intentional manipulation. Finally, one more difficulty is connected with memory, namely this, that the picture of the past which we store, and which helps us to interpret the world we live in, is never created in a simple, uncomplicated way. It is always composed of knowledge derived from various sources, which we actively transform and shape according to the needs of our psyche. Thus, memory is not a mere reflection of what we have heard or seen. It is our own creation, changed and altered, and thus, it can sometimes tell more about us, rather than about the past which it stores (Schacter 2003).

The reflection sketched above suggests caution and modesty. Sceptical about the possibility of a theory, which would thoroughly systematise the complex liaisons [relationships] of violence and memory, I suggest, instead, that we should wander through texts, the analysis of which will help us to

point to some of the functions performed by memory of violence. In short, I will just tell you some stories.

III. MEMORY OF VIOLENCE FORMING SOCIAL BONDS

War

In *Iliad*, Homer tells the story of the war between the Greeks (Achaians) with the Trojans. His narrative is a generalisation of the war experience common to many people. Behind the artistic layer, the epic stores the memory of actual events. Today, we are not able to determine, not do we need to, whether all the protagonists of the epic really existed, or whether all the episodes are told exactly as they happened. It is enough to conclude that the events described are real in a typological sense, and, thus, the realism of presentation refers not solely to the events that happened, but also to those that might have happened. Homer's songs handed down to the following generations of Hellenes the description of Achilles' anger, the code of the heroic ethos, the taste and smell of warlike glory. For many Greeks, the story of the victorious siege of Troy has become a source of knowledge that has shaped their identity. It has also transmitted the chivalric ethos and handed down the rules governing the relationships between people, and between gods and people. It is obvious, that war is inseparable from violence. It is equally obvious, that an efficient use of violence and warlike skills have always been highly praised in some cultures. For hundreds of years, Homer's epic has been stored in memory only. The following generations of *aoides* sang it at the fires, strengthening the bonds between the Hellenes. Thus, it has acted as a *lieu de memoire*, both for the individuals, and for the whole community. Based on the sum of warriors' personal recollections, which had been praised probably already during the war, Homer's epic has been transformed into a story and become a common property of all the Greeks. It has become their collective memory, artistically transformed.

Iliad is an uplifting epic. The heroes' deeds, that is, the pain afflicted upon the enemy, death, destruction and violence, were all to strengthen the bonds between the otherwise conflicting Greek states and cities. The epic was written from the perspective of the winners. We do not know of any recollections of the inhabitants of Troy. The winners spoke with respect about the defeated enemies; yet, even the bravest of the latter, Hector, was not spared humiliation after his lost fight with Achilles: his dead body was dragged by the winner's chariot.

The tenth book of *Iliad* describes the errand of Odysseus and Diomedes to the Trojan camp. The mission is carried out at night. It is preceded by a night council of Greek warriors discussing the course of the war in the light of Achilles' wrath and his refusal to fight. According to Homer's narrative strategy, a parallel council, at the very same night, takes place in the Trojan camp. There, it is Dolon who volunteers for the spying mission, a rich, vain, greedy and cowardly man. In contrast, Odysseus, upon hearing Diomedes praising him during the council, answers him modestly:

> Son of Tydeus, – replied Ulysses – say neither good nor ill about me, for you are among Argives who know me well. Let us be going, for the night wanes and dawn is at hand. The stars have gone forward, two-thirds of the night are already spent, and the third is alone left us. (Iliad X, 246-250)

At the same time, during the council of Trojans, Dolon, son of Eumedes, thus speaks to Hector:

> I, Hector – said he – Will to the ships and will exploit them. But first hold up your sceptre and swear that you will give me that chariot, bedight with bronze, and the horses that now carry the noble son of Peleus. (Iliad X, 317-321)

In this parallel, two types of ethos are being juxtaposed: the noble ethos of Odysseus and the greedy one of Dolon who, not trusting Hector, makes him swear that he will receive his reward. However, the book does not treat about that, but about the slaughter carried out by Diomedes and Odysseus among the Tratians. There is no question of fight. First, the two Achaian scouts catch the cowardly Dolon. Questioned by Odysseus, he tells them far more than asked. The scene of his death is shocking. When he is begging Diomedes for mercy, the latter splits his head with a sword:

> On this Dolon would have caught him by the beard to beseech him further, but Diomed struck him in the middle of his neck with his sword and cut through both sinews so that his head fell rocking in the dust while he was yet speaking. (Iliad X, 453-456)

The two Greeks take Dolon's clothes and weapon, and Odysseus puts them on a tree in order to come for them later. Next, they go in the direction shown by Dolon: to the Tratian camp. Diomedes flies into a fury and kills the sleeping Tratians:

> [...] and the earth was red with their blood. As a lion springs furiously upon a flock of sheep or goats when he finds without their shepherd, so did the son of Tydeus set upon the Tratian soldiers till he had killed twelve. (Iliad X, 486-490)

While Diomedes is murdering the Tratians, Odysseus is dragging the corpses away in order to take the horses:

> [...] that the horses might go forward freely without being frightened as they passed over dead bodies, for they were not yet used to them (Iliad X, 492-494)

Diomedes kills also the king of the Tratians. Together with Odysseus, they take the horses, and on their way back to the camp, they recollect the booty plundered of the dead Dolon. They are received as heroes. Odysseus ties the booty plundered of Dolon to the back of his ship in order to offer it later to Athena. Both of them wash the blood and dust away in the sea, take a bath and make a sacrificial offer to Athena during the feast.

Iliad's tenth book does not focus on fight: it describes slaughter. The protagonists kill a captive (Dolon) and slay the sleeping Tratian warriors. War violence appears in its purest form here. The fruitful mission, the success made, the booty taken: all of them confirm the ethos of a warrior. They are something to be remembered by in the eyes of posterity; thus, the memory of violence strengthens the sense of community.

Persecution

There remains the perspective of the persecuted. Sometimes the memory of the experienced violence can strengthen the sense of social bonds and identity. For a group consciousness, it can be of a decisive importance. Elias Canetti believes that one of the elements making the Jewish community survive for centuries, is precisely the experience of persecution:

> The most important element comes from their oldest days and it was repeated over the years with striking regularity: it was the exodus from Egypt. [...] The image of the mass of people, wandering for years through the desert, became the Jewish symbol of the mass. [...] The aim often disappears out of their sight, the mass threatens to collapse; strong blows of various nature wake it up, sustain it and keep it together. (Canetti 1996, 203-204)

Religion

In ancient Greece, the experience of holiness in a form of a ritual dance was known as chorus. The dancing accompanying rituals was an expression

of memory, and it was a repetition and reliving of the time of the beginning. Despite various theoretical standpoints, most of the historians and anthropologists agree that the ritual reminded of and made visible the deity and the myths connected with it. Some ritual dances were accompanied by violence. Sacrificial dancers hurt themselves, chased and killed, literally tore apart, the victim. The collective experience of the killing of the victim had the bond-forming power and provided the experience of catharsis. During the ritual, a human group laid a sacrifice of reconciliation. For Rene Girard, the source of sacrum in human culture, and the foundation of the birth of religion, is always the experience of violence. It comes back as a ritual, whose functions are essential both for the religious cult, and for social bonds. The sacrificial rite restores the peace of a group and prolongs its existence; thus, a sacrifice has a redeeming function. Violence and death make the existence of a community possible (Girard 1978; 1987, 1994). In ancient Greece, violence was connected with the cult of Dionysus. In Attica, his cult was particularly extensive. God was coming to his worshipers to be killed. As Edward Zwolski writes:

> Dionysia were born out of the experience of holiness in a degree unparalleled by other rituals, out of the feeling of total unity with god, no longer external, with a god-feaster, but internal, with a god-victim (Zwolski 1978, 155)

Through the murder and tearing apart of the half-god, half-man, the participants of a ritual reached unity with god and restored order to cosmos and to people. A cruel sacrifice was a source of the renewal of the world. The participants believed that this sacrifice was voluntary:

> Though he easily tore chains apart and crumbled prison walls [...] yet, he allowed himself to be led to the sacrificial field, was willingly hanged on the top of a pine changed into a gigantic axe, only to tumble into the earth and to sow it with the bloody shreds of his body. (Zwolski 1978, 155-156)

This image is extremely expressive. However, an objection may be raised, whether the voluntary character of a sacrifice does not question the treatment of the ritual as a manifestation of violence. Are we really dealing with violence, if no action against someone's will is taken? It is by no means easy to answer this question. Indeed, the very hesitation reveals once again the ambivalent nature of the concept of violence, and the difficulty in establishing of what it is and what it is not. The answer depends on the perspective

of the observer, either that of a member of a group taking part in a ritual, or that of an external spectator. René Girard writes:

> A spectator who does not take part in it [sacrifice – H. L.], observes from a distance the collective violence, and only sees a helpless victim thrown to the cruelty of a hysterical crowd. Yet, if he asked any one of the crowd about what happened, he could hardly recognise the eye-witnessed situation. He would learn about the unbelievable power of the victim, and of its mysterious present, and possibly also future, influence over the community, because the victim must have surely escaped death [...] (Girard 1987, 84)

The spectator's misunderstanding of the ritual results from the fact that the ritual repeats the gestures and actions of the beginning, using violence which laid a foundation for the experience of sacrum. The participants of the ritual, in turn, reenact the myth which focuses on a deeper meaning of the events. The myth is a story which makes sense of the gestures that repeat the ritual of violence, and it explains their redemptive meaning for individuals and for the whole community. It focuses on the symbolic power of a sacrifice, while the ritual reenacts the events which gave rise to the experience of sacrum. However, the course of the ritual does not always relate clearly to the myth, which is to explain it.

The experience of violence, the participation in inflicting pain and causing death, leaves the participants unaffected. We may observe that the slaughter, carried out by Odysseus and Diomedes, is not a traumatic event for them, either. Homer's epic suggests that their actions are correct and that each of them deserves praise for his deeds. The situation is identical in the case with taking part in a bloody religious ritual. The participants experience no feeling of guilt; the death of the victim and its blood do not fall on them, do not haunt them in their dreams. Do they act outside of the human time, then? Do they act in the cosmic time, whose gates are open at the moment of the appearance of god? It seems to be the case. While the ritual lasts, the human time is temporarily discarded, and it is the divine time that takes over. The participants of a sacrifice do not act as themselves only; their dancing, singing and gestures recall and embody the history of the deity described by the myth. Thus, they are no longer merely people, and their larger-than-life status is frequently emphasised by their disguise. A man is transformed into a non-man: into an animal, into a god's companion.

There is a deep affinity between religion and war. Chorus – the dance does not only accompany religious rituals, but it also precedes and follows the fight. Before the battle, it stirs up aggression and evokes the gestures,

which are to be acted out in the battlefield. It is supposed to drive the participants of the ritual into a warlike-madness (Zwolski 1978, 58-59). After the fight, it is a sign of victory and a way to suppress fear of the defeated enemy:

> Dancing over the dead body of an enemy is a natural reaction of a winner. It is both a tribute paid to his own power, and a cure for fear: the fear of the killed, and the fear of the god, who envies man his victory. (Zwolski 1978, 66)

Pyrricha, the war dance which combines religion and war, is a plea for gods' help, for victory, health, warlike-madness and for a warrior's liberation from his human shape. Is the latter vital for the avoidance of the conscious experience of the pain that one inflicts? Quite probably. *Pyrricha* is both a recollection of the violence done, and its premonition. It concerns individual experience, yet this experience is acted out in relation to the group.

Peace

War and religious experience are special times. War suspends the norms governing human relationships in the time of peace. Religious experience and the ritual happen in the time which is not human, and they relate to the cosmic time. However, violence is also present in the time of peace. It accompanies everyday life, and, also in this case, it can perform the function of forming social bonds and confirming individual and collective identity. Violence can be a part of procedures which aim at building social order and at reinforcing the hierarchy between people. To perform this function, violence must be controlled, 'tamed' and curbed by strict forms of a ritual. This role is played by rituals connected with the defence of honour, which are found in the cultures that recognise this concept. In European culture, the defence of honour is conducted in a duel. Throughout the centuries, the European chivalric ethos has undergone various transformations that, for the lack of space, are hard to present here. However, let us recall only one of its versions, namely the rituals governing the conduct of members of German students' associations in the second part of the 19th century. They were described by Norbert Elias. The rules observed in these associations resembled the code of honour functioning in officers' circles:

> The central element of both of these systems of rules was the obligation to fight, the requirement to fight in a duel (Elias 1996, 85)

Members of the associations were subject to severe discipline. Through initiation rites, they became members of a group characterised by strict hierarchy. The rules adopted by a group determined the behaviour of its members in an extremely precise manner, and every breach resulted in rejection, and, consequently, in civil death. In such cases, the infamy surrounding the rejected person made him a pariah of his own social circle. Thus, the stability of a group was not only determined by acts physical violence performed within it (that is, duels), but also by psychological pressure, which consolidated a group and made its members subordinate to the rules considered proper. Violence, in its various forms, was to shape members' characters and to prepare them for future work and service. The rules of fighting a duel, which was the most conspicuous ritual of violence in students' associations, were similarly precisely regulated. Gradually, starting with the 1860s, duels lost their character of a real fight, and they were turned into a strictly determined ritual. Thus, they performed a function of the rite of passage (rite de passage), and, consequently, of initiation. Norbert Elias observes:

> Members of a corporation were required to learn how to injure to the point of bleeding, with the blows delivered exclusively in the face, skull and ears, and yet, without hurting the opponent more than merely leaving some ugly scars on his head. This type of duel, which at the same time performed disciplinary functions, was called a designated *menzura*" (Elias 1996, 155)

The students did not fight with each other because of some real offence of honour, they fought on principle. Each member of a corporation was obliged to fight a given number of duels prescribed for an academic year. Thus, violence became a compulsory exercise. Each confrontation was, in a way, 'written down' by the wounds, as all of them were inflicted upon an enemy in the facial region. Thus, on the faces, ears and noses of students, there remained the traces documenting their group affinity. They were the signs, which performed an important communicative function both within the associations, and outside them. They demonstrated the ability to use violence and manifested indifference to pain, both of others and one's own. They were the premonition and fulfilment of all the features which were expected from the leading class of the II Reich.

The rules of conduct presented above once again demonstrate the ambivalent nature of violence. On the one hand, legal systems of modern states reserve the use of violence for state structures; yet, on the other hand, the people, who, in future, were supposed to enforce the law passed by the state,

were the very ones who broke it. At the same time, the ritualised forms of violence sketched above could only be applied to members of upper classes who shared the same social status. The Germany of that time was divided into two groups: one included the people, who were entitled to fight in a duel, and the other those, who had no such right. Thus, the opportunity to take part in ritualised violence was a distinctive feature of the classes which were believed to enjoy a higher social status.

IV. DESTRUCTIVE MEMORY OF VIOLENCE

So far we have focused on the ways in which violence and its memory form social bonds and shape identity of individuals and groups. However, it is the destructive function of violence which is most commonly recognised. In order to illustrate this function, I have chosen two examples. First, Elias Canetti's reflections on power, entitled *Crowds and Power* (Canetti, 1996). And then the history of the possession of Loudun nuns (France 1632).

Individuals and masses

The feeling of belonging to a community, shared by some people, for others may become the experience of being excluded. People acting in a mass (a pack) can easily turn against others. Their anger and aggression can lead to the destruction both of others, and of themselves. Canetti's reflections concern primarily politics, understood, after Aristotle, as the art of seizing, keeping and exercising power. Wandering though continents and centuries, Canetti traces destructive effects of numerous forms of exerting power. Each form of power uses enforcement, and hence, violence; it creates institutions and a symbolic language which remind people of necessary obedience. However, violence used by those, who have power, does not destroy only the victims: it can just as well destroy the oppressors. While the collective memory of experienced violence can sometimes perform a bond-firming function, the very same experience can turn out to be a source of ceaseless suffering for individuals. I will recall two events here: the annihilation of the Jews in Europe during World War II, and the massive resettlements of people which have entirely changed the face of Central Europe.

The annihilation of the Jews keeps coming back as [a theme of memory]. It is extremely hard to imagine how it was be possible at all. The whole world vanished, or, indeed, millions of worlds, millions of people. The survivors struggled with their own memory, desperately trying to explain, both to

others and to themselves, what had happened. This struggle was often lost. It is only with the utmost difficulty that a man can carry the burden of his experience by himself. The annihilation of the Jews, on the example of the individual fate of the survivors, reveals the destructive power of memory. Their salvation seemed to lie in the act of telling about their experience, but the hope raised by the expected catharsis was often dashed. Not everybody understood the story, and the lack of understanding led to despair and deprived life of its meaning (Borowski 1948, Buczkowski 1954, Krall 1977).

The massive resettlements of people, which took place after World War II, affected several millions of Germans, Poles, Ukrainians, Belorussians, Hungarians and other Central European nations. The deportations were accompanied by violence and death. The change of a place of living meant the change of the whole world, it brought separation from the familiar space and transfer to places once inhabited by „the others" [strangers]. Till the rest of their lives, many of the deported people were unable to accustom themselves to their new place of living. These were only the next generations which managed to do it.

Possession and denigration

Is the possession by the devil possible without the co-operation of the person possessed? Whether we believe in the existence of the devil or not, possession is a peculiar example of one person exerting an influence on another. In 1632 several nuns from St. Ursula's convent in Loudun were pronounced to be possessed by the devil. Repeatedly questioned by judges and exorcists, they finally revealed that the devil had possessed them with the help of a local priest, Urban Grandier. The exorcists knew that the devil could not have acted alone. Thus, an investigation was launched, which soon included the whole local community. Urban Grandier was pronounced guilty and burned at the stake, and his ashes were scattered over the four corners of the world. Once the sorcer was done with, the devil left the nuns' bodies. Nothing is clear about the possession of the nuns in Loudun. (de Certeau 1980, 7-18) However, according to some possible interpretations (which by no means exclude others), Urban Grandier fell prey to his own violence. The investigation revealed that, in Loudun and its vicinity, the priest was a famous womaniser. Still, despite repeated accusations and trials, he managed to get away with it. It was only a delicate web of violence, a web of words, which the exorcists used to elucidate the nuns' possession, which made the latter to confess the name of the magician – the devil's helper. Similarly, Grandier's power was not physical, either: it was the power of the word:

> To Urban Grandier, for example, the Good Fairy had brought, along with solid talents, the most dazzling of all gifts, and the most dangerous – eloquence. Spoken by a good actor – and every great preacher, every successful advocate and politician is, among other things, a consummate actor – words can exercise an almost magical power over their hearers (Huxley 2001, 20)

The power of the word perceived as violence, the fear of the person who possesses this power – could these be the reasons for the rise and fall of Urban Grandier? It is hard to tell. However, we may observe that the magic power of the word does not last forever. The thus enchanted people wake up of their dream-enchantment, and observe themselves with pain. They feel hurt and angry. The memory of being abused by the violence of the word does not leave them any peace of mind. The only possible atonement is the destruction of the person who was the source of their disturbance.

V. CONCLUSION

Violence escapes univocal judgement. Indeed, such a judgement depends on a perspective: that of a spectator, or a participant of the events involving it. This perspective, in turn, can change with the passage of time. Mechanisms of memory change the experience, events and emotions, into a story, whose meaning is enriched and transformed by new narrators and listeners. However, this observation does not lead to relativism. Instead, it means that every story can be told in a variety of ways. We remember the things, which we have experienced, in the way we tell about them. We remember the experience of others in the way it has been told to us. Thus, the vision of the past depends on the comprehending subject who tries to understand it. And the subject is free in his cognition. It is the subject who chooses methodology and criteria of judgement. It is also the subject who chooses the areas of the past, and the problems, which are the most interesting for him. Does the understanding of the past help us to understand ourselves better? It definitely does. Does an entirely objective reconstruction of the past exist, a kind of total and unambiguous memory of what has happened? I do not think so.

Thus, memory of violence, experienced by communities and individuals, has two dimensions: destructive and creative. Thanks to memory, we build the image of ourselves and others. Thanks to memory, we introduce order to our experience, we make sense of it. However, memory cal also destroy us. Persistent recollection of past experience may lead to disintegration of perso-

nality. Thus, in order to exist, man has to master memory. The ambivalent nature of violence is a paradox; indeed, not the only one in human world. Equally paradoxically, we can say that, living, from the very first moment of our existence, we are approaching death. Life, therefore, is at the same time a process of decline and development.

Not always do we recognise violence. Does man, every man, realise that the industrial civilisation is an act of violence done to the Earth? Does he feel empathy with the picture of the world, and the position of a human being in it, which has been shown in Godfrey Reggio's film *Koyaanisquatsi*? [*Life out of Balance*] (directed by Godfrey Reggio, 1983; http://us.imdb.com/-title/tt0085809) I leave this question as an inspiration for further reflection.

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PAMIĘĆ O PRZEMOCY: INDYWIDUALNA I ZBIOROWA

S t r e s z c z e n i e

Przemoc jest zjawiskiem ambiwalentnym. Może być siłą niszczącą i twórczą zarazem. Jest to szczególnie prawdziwe, kiedy mówimy o pamięci przemocy w wypadku osób i wspólnot. Z jednej strony pamięć o przeżytej i doświadczonej przemocy może niszczyć osoby czy też wspólnoty, z drugiej zaś trauma związana z doświadczeniem przemocy umacnia więź wspólnotową i współtworzy tożsamość grup i indywiduów. Rolę przemocy w umacnianiu tożsamości grup i osób przedstawiono na przykładach zaczerpniętych z historii antycznej Grecji (*Iliada*), ruchów studenckich w Niemczech w XIX i XX wieku oraz z traumatycznych przeżyć wspólnoty żydowskiej w czasie II wojny światowej. Wnioski wynikające z dokonanego przeglądu wpisują się w koncepcję Réné Girarda, w której przemoc (ofiara) jest zjawiskiem konstytutywnym w tworzeniu kultury, a tym samym w tworzeniu więzi w społeczności ludzkiej.

Key words: social memory, violence, individual and collective identity.

Słowa kluczowe: pamięć społeczna, przemoc, tożsamość indywidualna i zbiorowa.