

Memories and reconciliation in Former Yugoslavia¹

Memórias e reconciliação na ex-Iugoslávia

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Abstract

This bulletin discusses the dynamic context of memory, conflict and reconciliation using the the former Yugoslavia case in the 1990s. The relevance of this subject belongs to the recovery of the concept of memory from the perspective of international relations, being a contemporary challenge along the processes of conflict and political reconciliation.

Keywords: Memories; Reconciliation; Former-Yugoslavia.

Resumo

O presente boletim de conjuntura discute a dinâmica entre memória, conflito e reconciliação à luz do caso da ex-Iugoslávia nos anos 1990. A relevância do mesmo dá-se pela apresentação do conceito de memória sob a ótica das Relações Internacionais, de forma a desafiar o entendimento contemporâneo no que tange os processos de conflito e reconciliação na política.

Palavras-chave: Memórias; Reconciliação; Ex-Iugoslávia.

Introduction

Talking about memories is not simply referring to the past. More than this, talking about memories is also to understand the present, about how identities and representations are played in a social community and how a political community deals with its past. Whenever it is possible to deal with memories it is also possible to bring some light to how each actor of a political community plays its own role. In the international relations field, talks about memories could also bring some light into understanding how a political community can create a background for war

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and feelings of revenge, on the one hand, or for peace and reconciliation, on the other.

Duncan Bell (2006, p.1-4) identifies three “boom” moments in the memory studies³ and Edkins (2003, p. xiii) points that after the XX century it is possible to visualize the rise of interest about how and with which consequences communities remember violent pasts as the Vietnam War, Auschwitz or Hiroshima. In an effort to shed some light into those processes this article tries to answer how memories can fuel a conflict or, in another way, how memories can bring peace and reconciliation, regarding the dynamics played at Former Yugoslavia. Over the years the ideas about how to deal with painful memories and bring reconciliation have been sophisticated with a lot of studies about memorials, the role of literature in world politics, truth commissions and the International Court.

In another direction not so much was revealed about how memories were instrumented in a way as to evoke a rowdy past leading to the conflicts and instigate ethnic disruptions between people who lived together for years, as happened at Former Yugoslavia and Rwanda. Prior inter-ethnic marriages demonstrate that at some point, relationships between those different ethnicities were stable and intimate. The first part of this article is going to address the question of how memories can be used for political purposes. The second part is going to deal with the Former-Yugoslavia case and will be subdivided into two sections. The first one is going to address the issue of how collective memories can be instrumented in a way to fuel conflict, and the second one, the one of how memories can constitute an effort and challenge to bring some kind of peace and reconciliation.

Are memories truth?

When we talk about memory, we automatically relate it with the idea of remembrance and a common claim is that there is a Truth about the past and the

³ After the Cold War new archives were opened showing the patterns of some events unknown until that moment. This new information was very important to the new States “created” after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in a way that these new States did not have the full information about their own past. Because of events like the dissolution of URSS, at the end of XX century there was a “boom” in na interesting about which is the best way to deal with a traumatic past that includes, but are not limited to wars and genocides.

belief that this Truth will bring justice or accountability. The consequences of remembering or forgetting were painfully placed at Truth Commissions around the world over the last fifty years. Väyrynen (2007 p. 6) affirms that the idea that the truth about violent pasts can bring the reconciliation is based on two claims: the first comes from the western psychological (and spiritual) approach, and way to deal with painful experiences, with its belief on the healing practice, and the second one based on the belief that when the individual narratives can be part of the main narrative – which is the State's narrative, the foundational myth, for example – the collective narrative about the past becomes more truthful and fair with different actors. There is also a gap between the micro narratives, coming from those who directly participated in an event – like war and genocides – and the macro narratives produced by the sovereign State (Väyrynen, 2007 p. 9). In this sense, it is possible to conclude that these different narratives emerge from different perspectives, in different ways and with different aims.

Departing from this idea of opposition between different narratives it is important to consider the relation between memory and Truth. This relation is, sometimes, poorly emphasized. Memories are about perceptions and collective memories are about sharing those perceptions. Assuming that perceptions are expressed through narratives, there is not a Truth with capital letter, but a lot of perceptions and narratives about the facts occurred in some period of time. There are a lot of particular truths and a lot of versions about the same fact.

So, it is important to have the dimension that talks about memories are not talks about truth/knowledge. The claim about what is important to remember and in which way, is not about truth or knowledge. Although there is the idea that remembrance is related with what is intrinsically true, because someone knows that which s/he remembers and such a memory reflects the truth about the past that connects everybody who lived that same past together, recollections are nonetheless Always influenced by the point of view of who is talking (Zehfuss, 2007, p. 222) and circumscribed by structures of power (Edkins, 2003 p.40).

In contemporary politics there are some mechanisms through which individual narratives, as testimonies, are posed in a way that allows them to build a new ground for peace and reconciliation: in the practice of forgiveness, in

international courts and in truth commissions. At Foucault's (1973, p. 11) work about truth and juridical mechanisms, the author affirms that western society developed two patterns to know the truth. The first is the relationship between the history of truth related with the history of science. The second one comes from the analysis of various places where the truth would be produced from rules which define distinct patterns of subjectivities and types of knowledge. The author identifies at the judiciary practices, where are assigned damage and accountability, the source and reproduction of the belief in a relationship between man and truth as a way of freedom through the Truth.

Without the assumption about the disruption between memory, knowledge and Truth it is not possible to consider that memories are used as a way to build narratives that aim either fueling conflicts or bringing reconciliation and assuming a Truth status. In doing so, a new perspective and possibility to political analyses is possible. A new political analyses that assumes not only that the reality is social constructed but also that our feelings about the past are continuing (re)constructed also, and have consequences.

Memories' Places

Much of the new literature about Memories and World Politics is dealing with the sites where trauma and memories are been articulated. Those sites are represented by some processes as Truth Commissions (TC) or The International Penal Court; or they can be placed in a more static way such as the building of memorials; or also through literature.

Truth Commissions are official organisms with a determinate time frame that are created to investigate strong actions against the human rights mainly in the periods after dictatorships or civil wars. After taking the testimony of victims and witnesses, the TC makes a brochure that can include some recommendations. Such proposals might or might not come to public knowledge. Until now a few TC have had those recommendations become public politics.

As a place where victims and also perpetrators tell their own versions about what happened during the conflict, some investigations are pursued with the aim to find the whole truth or a "truth truthful" about a violent past. In a certain way, it is possible to affirm that those mechanisms are also a way to put all those different

narratives together and normalize them as a final official truth about what happened. Edkins (2003, p. 57) deals with the dilemma between remembrance and forgetfulness in an interesting way. According to her, these dilemmas do not exist because the decision about what to remember and what to forget are taken by the structures of powers, as the State instead of allowing that individual narratives take place. In this way, the memorial does not address the glorious mythic foundation of a society in an objective way; in the opposite, the message on the case of memorials are always as a grey zone that can be rebuilt every moment by a dialogue between social agents and state agents in an attempt to rebuild the meaning after dark times.

Zehfuss (2007, p.14-20) believes that another way to address the memories is through literature. With that, it is possible to create and recreate subjectivities after times of crisis and to articulate collective memory either as a form of resistance or as a way to legitimize hegemonic narratives. All those kind of media are ways to represent and create narratives about the past. Those narratives begin with the expression "I remember..." and are imbued of a claim of authority. Through those narratives some idea and emotions about the past are constructed and naturalized as Truth.

Bet-El, (2002 p. 206) remarks that there is a power to the words "I remember". "The power of an event long past, exerting itself upon the present, the power of an individual over a collective, the power of an opinion over fact" (Ilana R. Bet-El, 2002 p. 206). To the author, the claim that "I remember" is not an exchange - "it is an authoritative statement, based on the stark power of personal convictions, seemingly resistant to contestation by others" (Ilana R. Bet-El, 2002 p. 206). As a consequence when these claims are followed by words begin a flow of warmth or love, it is positive, binding power. But, when those claims are followed by flow of revenge feelings to events of death and destruction, they allocate blame and define justice in terms of personal and national memories. "For as the dark recollections swirl around, enforced by the personal pain of the speaker, the statements join together into a weapon of hate and fear." (Ilana R. Bet-El, 2002 p. 206).

The Conflict at Former-Yugoslavia

In an attempt to present the fundamentals of the argumentation there will be presented firstly some features of the Former-Yugoslavia conflicts at 90s years. In that way, there is a hope to show how the memory of a social group can contribute to fuel a conflict or in another way bring some reconciliation. But, when the question is about memories and performative realities, more important than knowing what happened is to realize that there are different versions for what happened, different points of view and different feelings about the facts. That is the case with Former-Yugoslavia, where instead of producing another authoritative discourse, it is also important not to forget that it is difficult to decide who is guilty and who is not in a war where the violence was spread between all groups.

At the present work it is put the effort to illuminate how each of those groups made the war that have had as result the end of Yugoslavia, have articulated their own truth. In that way, in a first place will be presented a political context of some years until the beginning of the hostilities. In a second move will be presented some political choices posed that have had as a consequence the worst of the hostilities in a 90s years based on collective memories and as a third move the efforts based at memories as well but that worked in another directions, the direction of reconciliation between the different ethnicities, possibly after the conflict of 90's.

Here that is not the aim to describe historical events in a way to (re) produce another Truth about the Former-Yugoslavia conflict, in another way the intention here is to point some categories created and used during the development of the conflict that have legitimized some actions and allowed behaviors. As Wilmer (2002 p. 30) states, the conflict at Former-Yugoslavia was based on categories that were built by identities that in some moment became source of prejudice. The author reminds us that identities are constructed through narratives, and by understanding that History is also a narrative, that serves to give the community the idea of belonging that supports the State as a presumed and naturalized expression of nationhood.

The "Yugoslavia idea" erupted as a desire to the Serbs but also from Croats to get independence from the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian Empires and between the 1870 and the beginning of I World War these two Empires that have dominated

the political and economic life at the area of Yugoslávia declined (Wilmer, 2002 p. 37-9). The “first” Yugoslávia, as a modern state, was created during the I World War (1918) when the Habsburg’s and Turk’s Empire were desintegrated. After many rearrangements, conflicts and accords between Serbs and Croats – since the Ottoman and Austro-Hungary’s Empires and even the fascist events during the II World War, in 1943 a resolution was voted to support the Yugoslavia reconstruction (1945) (Wilmer, 2002 p. 38).

During the World War, the Former-Yugoslávia was occupied for the Nazi’s Army that impose the facism to this area with the colaboration of some extreme-right groups Croat called Utase. At the same period, some resistance groups get some power, being the two mains groups, the Cetniks that was a paramiliter group pro monarchist, and the Partizans - comunist that have had as a leader Josip Broz Tito (Wilmer, 2002 p. 39). After the II World War the “new” territory of Yugoslavia was composed by six republics and two independent villages, with three official languages: the Croatian-Serbians, Slovene and Macedon.

The ethnic identities were represented by the Narodi - Slovenes, Croatians, Serbs, Macedonians e Montenegros, and, since 1971, the Bosnians-Muslins. These identities would create a constitutive nation and would be distinguished also because those populations did not have any territory outside of Yugoslavia. The second group, the Narodnosti, was composed by people from minoritarian groups living at Yugoslavia, as Albanese, Hungarians, Turks and Slovenes (Wilmer, 2002, p. 42). Those constitutions at Former-Yugoslavia show that it was a multi-ethnic place before the war at 90’s years and that those multi-ethnic features have had a good relationship with their culture and historical particularities. Also, a nation very mixed as was the Former Yugoslavia was seemed to represent a stable bridge between the West and the East. Because of your particular appliance of the socialism and your independence not only from URSS but also from USA during the Cold War seemed to represent a gret respectfull nation (Stiglmayer, 1994, p. 1).

But, at a moment that new narratives were redefined those features were reduced to stereotypes and categories of inferiority mobilized by political discourses. The one to first decide for the separation was Slovenia, and ten days

after the confrontations began, Milosevic gave the National Army an order to leave the Former Yugoslavia (Wilmer, 2002 p. 29):

[...] it was a conflict about identity because political leaders made a conscious...choice to rally support by appealing to grievances which had long been a subject of political discourse, and within were constructed in terms of identity within both political and historical narratives (Wilmer, 2002 p 29).

Kaldor presents the conflict at Former Yugoslavia divided into three different moments: “the ten days war in Slovenia in June 1991, the war in Croatia in the autumn of 1991, and the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1992.” This last one can be also divided into four conflicts: one between Serbs and Croats, one between Serbs and Muslims, one between Serbs and the multiethnic population of Sarajevo, and one between Muslims and Croats (Kaldor, 1993 p.99). Rosoux (2007, p.157) defends that the narratives about past can present two distinct perspectives. Narratives based in a backward-looking means that former rivals use their memories to impel new conflict and revenge feelings at the political community. In the opposite, forward-looking narrative means thinking about how old rivals can build a new relationship for the future based on trust values. The next session will present how those two processes can work in a practical case, vis-a-vis the case of Former Yugoslavia.

Memory in a backward perspective

“To be a Serb was, in the Milosevic era, to be a victim” (Ramet, 2007 p. 43). At the 90's years would be difficult that any Serb knows about the critics of the International Community to our people. But after, and maybe people started to have a better perception about the dimension of the conflicts and the critics came “the anger maybe can became shame and shame can became denial” (Ramet, 2007 p.51). The author (Ramet, 2007 p. 51) defends that there is a denial syndrome nowadays between Serbian people with nationalistic dimensions.

This denial syndrome puts the Serbian people in a place of an anomalous victimized hero. The framing of this imaginary in favor of an original myth started to be constructed after the rise of Milosevic in 1987, but it is still present nowadays. But, because of discursive practices applied by the Serbian government

today, it is building at Serbian culture a widely xenophobic nationalism (Ramet, 2007, p. 42). The author affirms that during the war years (1991-95 and 1998-99) which had as a consequence the disintegration of Yugoslavia, the Serbians were exposed to propaganda barrage which fostered and reinforced ruminations processes (the tendency to reinterpret events from the past in a negative way). These kinds of propaganda were aimed to “awaken exaggerated perceptions of conspiracy, sinister attribution error (attributing sinister intentions to others), and hypervigilant social information processing in a way that the societal group developed some posture as responding to a neurotic afraid and psychotic patterns” (Ramet, 2007, p. 43).

Those victimizing discourses have aimed to create some support and justifications to the conflict for the Serbian minority in Croatia, Bosnia and Kosovo. As a consequence, Serbian people started to react with feelings of anger that justified military operations in this area as a self-defense act. In this sense, even when someone did not take part in a conflict personally, the feeling of anger and revenges could be shared with the politicians and army. Through a psychological approach it is interesting to regard some aspects that have implications in political and international realms. In the case of Serbian society, although the Serbs tried to create a guilt-free past through narratives, with a deeper look it is easier to see how the political actions were focused to build those ideas of victimization and guilt-free.

Ramet (2007, p. 45) explains that after Tito's death, there was a movement of historiography revision that favored the idea of Chetniks as heroes and completely pro-Allied during the World War Two and put the Serbians as a victory group in a war but as victims of a great violence. As a part of these new narratives about the past of Chetniks and the Serbians as well, there was a publication of Tito's biography; two historiography works about the WWII paint the Chetniks as anti-fascist resistance; and also a work about history and religion from a Serbian author, where the Serbians are represented as victims to almost all non-Serb groups in Yugoslavia. After Milosevic rose to power in Yugoslavia, the revisionism became an official policy of the new government – a new historiography of Serbia. At this time, the history textbooks used in Serbian schools

accepted the narrative that the Partisans and the Chetniks were equally anti-fascist (Ramet, 2007, p. 46).

The revisionism became the strategy of Milosevic to create an atmosphere of victimization of Serbs and, as consequence, create a support to his violent actions, fueling a conflict. These strategies included a new narrative in which have had a significant rise on the number of Serbians deaths at Jasenovac camp during the World War Two, and a narrative that supposes the Croats would attacked themselves during the first attacked at 90's years. This kind of narrative put the Serbians in a position of victims of their neighborhood. In such a way as to try to create or insufflate the nationalism and give the impression that the Serbian needed a messiah to save them from their neighborhood. And this messiah was Milosevic.

Memory in a forward-looking perspective

There are some features in common between countries with a conflictive past and a history of violence and political destabilization. What happened during this period of violence - as torture and rape, the trauma as a consequence of these past abuses, and how each one will deal with their own past – is going to be determinant to articulate the new features of the regime. How the new regime will deal with the relationship between remembrance and forgetfulness to bring some peace and reconciliation between old enemies is the ground to think about a new future.

Those ways to deal with the past will be represented in various patterns. Some of those mechanisms, described in this article, are the Truth Commissions as a way to promote accountability about the past; memorials as a way to represent the suffering but also the glory and braveness and the sacrifice of the soldiers, and also some politics of education that will bring some results, maybe not too fast, but perhaps more efficiently in a way that when we talks about education we are talking about continuities and long processes.

At Bosnia Herzegovina some interesting efforts are done to solve some challenges about how to narrate the history of a recent conflict but in a way not to create new grounds for a conflict. For that, a very important public target to build a future of peace but constantly forgotten are children and young people. The

University of Ulster made a research about the point of view from children and Young people at Bosnia and Herzegovina and Northern Ireland, about war and reconciliation, called “The role of education in reconciliation”, in 2010. At Bosnia and Herzegovina there is a Common Core Curriculum which consists of the same basic elements to all schools “but lacks ethnic-specific material” (2010, p.20). But each school adopts different curriculums that depend on the major ethnic group (i.e., Bosnian, Croat or Serb). The same research says that when there is a school in which the majority of the population is from one ethnicity, there is a possibility of choosing the curriculum leading to a process of assimilation.

In three cantons with a more mixed population there are two curricula in force, used according to the ethnic majority in the school. This situation has given rise to the phenomenon of ‘two schools under one roof’, where a single pre-war school now houses two new schools, whose children study different curricula and are largely or entirely kept separate (2010, p.20).

Because of the increasing return of families to those regions, in March 2003, an Interim ‘Agreement on Accommodation of Specific Needs and Rights of Returnee Children’ was assigned, which gives families the power to choose which curriculum will be addressed to their kids. But in fact, if their ethnic representations do not have sufficient number in their community, it is not possible to have an option, “thus, outside Brcko District”, a more mixed area, “ it remains extremely rare” (2010, p. 20).

Conclusion

Many are the ethical challenges faced when trying to find some answers for some political dilemmas. Ethics, politics, strategies, militarism: many are also the dimensions for each dilemma, to think about. But as important as it is to think about the consequences of the answers in an attempt to give one, it is also important to think about our point of departure, and also to think about our own ethical choice in doing so. By bringing the subject of memories and World Politics to the center of our analysis, it is possible to notice that as the knowledge from authorities in an academic field is dressed as truth, the narratives about past events, for example, the narratives produced by authorities’ politics can get the

same status. When used for unethical purposes and by States narratives, things can be worse.

As showed in section 3.1 at this article, the State apparel can act in many different fronts. At Former-Yugoslavia, aiming to bring the past to fuel a conflict, a lot of fronts were targeted. Those actions departed from historical revisionism that concerns many sectors in a society, but mostly the intellectuals, to the media, which as mass communication, have the potential to target all the sector of a society. All of these techniques demand from every single person a delicate position, a position so critical that it is not possible to believe in their own eyes. Sometimes, what we are seen is only a consequence of someone's mistake. And some histories that we heard of our families for years as part of their heritage don't should be take as Truth, but can be reinterpreted and contested.

In an opposite way, we saw that memories can be used in an attempt to bring some peace, justice or reconciliation, as with the Truth Commissions, the International Penal Court and also, as showed at 3.2 section, with educational processes. But, at this point it is important to remain aware: not because of this methodologies per se, but because as everything in a world of good intentions can bring some evil consequences. About how the Former-Yugoslavs are trying to deal with the educational program, these efforts are too new to give some answers. But it is already possible to think about some dilemmas.

How to narrate a past of violence to "former-enemies"? It is obvious that those children and Young people are not former-enemies in a sense that they were not at the battle-field (if this exists yet), but they share a heavy past and background that, if in the one hand needs to be carefully touched, in another hand, it carries the potential to bring some peace exactly because of this past – if they decide to face it as a heavy weight on everybody. Human beings make choices at every single moment of their lives. But what will be the consequences of those choices are never fully known. By knowing that even the apparently best choices can bring some evil consequences, maybe we can sharpen our sense of responsibility.

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