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FIGURATIONS OF PAIN: MEMORY THROUGH LIFE

In this text I describe my encounters with the ideas of Veena Das while conducting research on suffering and violence. In the process, I revisit the trajectory that led to my investigation of these themes through memories of Brazil's military dictatorship (1964-1985), highlighting the points where her work made itself present. The catalyst for this reflection was the invitation to participate in this dossier on the author who pioneered new ways for contemporary anthropology to think about violence, becoming an essential reference on the theme, particularly when the focus is on pain.

Here my reflection on Veena Das's work will not take the form of an exegesis or an analysis of its fundamental aspects and lines of continuity.[1] Instead, I describe the points of encounter in order to show how reading her work opens up possibilities for research on the Brazilian dictatorship, specifically in the terms in which I have formulated this on-going inquiry. To this end, I revisit the questions that led me to investigate the suffering associated with violence, such as I had in mind when I began the research, and describe how the reflection on testimonies of these experiences developed over time, set in words (books, testimonies, texts, reports, interviews), emphasizing the moments when the reading of Veena Das (2007: 1, especially *Life and words*, was particularly inspiring due to the singular way in which she proposes to think about the kind of work that anthropology does "in shaping the object we have come to call violence." The impact of her work discussed here, therefore, concerns

not a conceptual framework but the inspiration provided by the perspective adopted by the author to reflect on the pain of violence.

In a way, my intention follows the same path, *mutatis mutandis*, that Das has pursued in her own interlocution with philosophy. In the interview contained in this dossier, she states that it is not a theory for anthropology she seeks from philosophy but rather a kind of partnership, a companionship in her words, her interest being not in philosophy in general but in some philosophers in particular. The question at stake is how we come to think about an object of study in one way rather than another, considering the place of the other – our interlocutors – within this configuration.

I perceive that, from a certain moment in my own trajectory, Veena Das's work was there, echoing and accompanying me. This text is an exercise in understanding this entry, which was not a chance event. Beyond the broader impact of her work on Brazilian anthropology, my aim is to localize how and when her *ideas* helped me think, allowing me to *take forward* certain research problems. I highlight these words in italics since this is how the author herself expresses how she wishes her work to be continued: "But all I think I've done is to make some ideas available which I had limited ways of being able to take forward."[2]

WRITING AND ARGUMENTATION[3]

One of the features to highlight in the way Veena Das goes about doing anthropology is the destabilization of any *a priori* conceptual framework, whether to think about the pain associated with violence, or to access this experience as the experience of the other, beginning with her refusal to seek out a definition of violence.[4] In her texts, knowledge of the pain of violence has the characteristic of an open work, inconclusive, always to be questioned, not only because of the unclear, non-transparent and imprecise contours of violence, but also because of the instability of the very language of pain, recognizing that any enunciation of pain involves the unpredictable nature of one's relation with the other, in the sense that pain necessarily elicits an appeal to the other's presence.

The author's formulations involve singular expressions indissociable from the way she thinks about violence: the subject who *inhabits the world*, the violence that *destroys the world as it was previously inhabited* and the life that *reconstructs the world* through *subjective negotiations between the subject and the possibilities of the surrounding world*. Inhabit, world, subject, experience are terms that accompany her work, interwoven in order to speak simultaneously of pain and violence, words and life, in such a way that, even when used as concepts, these words are not reduced to cognitive instruments but become mingled by conserving something of the sensoriality constitutive of them.[5] Words are the world, making up the ordinary experience of life. Life and words interconnect.

The ethnography of this object we call violence moves among the instabilities, uncertainties and unpredictabilites that surround the phenomenon and knowledge of it, just as the words that express it, not only conserve but are also "guided" by these forms.[6] I emphasize, in this sense, her relation to concepts not as something that one pre-selects from a series of possibilities but as something that winds its way into the work of research by diverse routes, none of which are necessarily foreseen. Here the "imponderables" are not limited to a "real life" problem to be confronted in fieldwork, as Malinowski (1976) forewarned. They are not an "empirical problem," a nuisance that disrupts field research, rather they constitute the epistemological problem par excellence that pervades the entire process of knowledge – in the relations in which we become involved, in the variety of interlocutions that make up fieldwork research, in our reflections, in writing. Veena Das opened up an epistemological field in which we can move around in the meanders of the instability and indeterminacy making up the object on which knowledge is being produced – an approach that proves particularly fecund when violence is the topic under study. Hence the coordinates are established in terms of localized fields of conversation (Das, 2015a). *Life and words* can be read as a varied set of such fields within which the author converses.

Literature as well comprises a mode of reflection in which the argument is inseparable from the writing. In this case, in contrast to philosophy, which was not part of her formal education, her training did include studies of Sanskrit, a literature to which the author frequently refers. This helps us understand how her way of doing anthropology is manifested in her writing, not only through the words that distinguish her text, but through its form. Throughout *Life and words*, the writing connects the various levels on which the author mobilizes the distinct voices of the people with whom she converses, her "interlocutors" as we conventionally call them in contemporary anthropology, and through which she reflects and writes – whether the voice of Asha, Shanti, Manjit, Cavell or Wittgenstein. Here, the anthropological text subtly morphs into interlocution, involving all the voices as though they were conversing among themselves.

In this way, without fuss, the problem of an "ethnographic authority" or a "symmetrical anthropology" that so noisily tormented the anthropology of Western scholars, especially at the end of the previous century, quietly dissipates. The connections between the voices of her interlocutors gradually develop and become perceptible to the reader over the course of the text, nurtured by the author's careful work of reflection, until the final explicit recognition of what both Manjit and Cavell allowed her to understand. If she learned from both, undoing conventional asymmetries of knowledge, this relates to the perspective she adopts in order to embody the other in her way of making anthropology, defined by herself expressly as a form of "devotion to the world." This

perspective, in turn, appears to be related to an aspect that permeates her entire approach to the other: her apprehension of the other's pain. This, it seems to me, is the register that opens her dialogue outwards, whether to other fields of knowledge, especially philosophy and literature, or to the people with whom she lives and connects in her research undertaken outside the socially instituted fields of knowledge. At all these levels, irrespective of the social position occupied by her interlocutors, what is in play are forms of life. For her, if we conduct research with people in anthropology, then the anthropological text will reflect the forms taken by the relations that implicate us with these people. As the author says, "if you are writing within a form of life, your writing is not something outside a form of life."[7]

Her approach to human experience via the pain of violence is among the entry points through which Veena Das's work has had an impact on Brazilian anthropology. Exploring this path, I discuss below what led me to encounter the author in my own research on suffering, looking to situate on a line of continuity the emergence of questions for which the reading of her writings proved decisively inspiring. I start at the beginning of my studies on violence in order to talk about the question that led me to the suffering associated with it, before arriving at the experiences of pain associated with Brazil's military dictatorship.

THE CIRCUMSCRIBED VICTIM

My entry into the field of studies on violence took place through my insertion in the field of health,[8] meaning that body, pain and language would be articulated in the experience of violence from this initial immersion onward. We were researching healthcare responses to violent acts in an emergency hospital in which a specialized service had been created for "cases of violence." The project sought to analyse, based on an ethnography undertaken along classical lines including observation and interviews, how health professionals understood the specificities of the care provided for a body injured by violence.[9]

The violence that arrived at the emergency services, as a phenomenon that affects the body, was translated and treated in the same terms as a disease. As a health problem, violence was construed in a way that rendered it intelligible within the logic of biomedicine and the care associated with the latter. As far as the medics of the emergency unit were concerned, their responsibility was to cure the injury and recuperate the person's vital functions, their physiological condition, irrespective of the reason for the patient arriving at the hospital: a violent act, an accident or a disease. However, the explanation justifying a specific care response to violence, like the care provided at this hospital, centred on their conception of the "victim," defined by attributes associated with the person prior to the violent act. In this conception, violence was delimited through the identification of a fragility in the victim, which made

the person "susceptible to the violent act by corresponding to a place defined in advance as a place of vulnerability" (Sarti, 2005: 114). Women, children and elderly people were those in whom this susceptibility was identified, therefore, occupying the place of *victims of violence* to be provided with care.

Hence, it was not the act in itself that configured the violence, nor the injuries on the body that made the aggression evident, but the prior definition of who the victim was. Young and adult men were thus excluded from this category, based on an ontological rather than situational notion of vulnerability, determined by gender and age. It was at this care service that we witnessed the case of a man who sought help after being sexually assaulted. He had decided to come to this hospital because its care service for sexual violence was a benchmark in the city of São Paulo. However, he was sent away under the allegation that the service was designed exclusively for women and so only had gynaecologists and obstetricians on duty![10]

I remember the striking figure of the hospital's social worker, outraged when she learnt that the assaulted young man had been sent away and her firm resolve to locate him, undertaking an "active search" through his hospital admission record, seeking to ensure he would be provided with the care meant to be universally available in Brazil, as she remarked, through its public health system (Sistema Único de Saúde/SUS). The dissonant reaction of the social worker coexisted with the perplexity of the other professionals over the care that was eventually provided to this out-of-place young man. This research led to the beginning of a reflection on the production of the victim through the form in which the problem of violence entered the field of healthcare. This entry took place through an articulation between the epidemiological logic that operates in the health field, privileging the incidence of the phenomenon, and the active role played by identity-based social movements since the end of the dictatorship in 1985, which named and made visible previously invisible forms of violence, as in the case of the feminist and gay rights movements and the movement for children's rights, which helped shape health policies based on the demand for rights of specific groups (Sarti, 2009).

I recall the case of the sexually assaulted young man here because I consider it a turning point in my research trajectory, opening a new field of investigation through the analysis of the production of the victim as a figure. This change led me to adopt a more phenomenological approach to the study of pain and suffering by focusing attention on experience, in its singularity, as a fundamental strategy in the analysis of violence.[11]

Echoing in this shift was the dissonant voice of the social worker, alien to the biomedical discourse that impregnated the sounds of the corridors strolled over the course of the research, but also distanced to some extent from the initiative – of which she was one of the main agents and advocates – of creating a specific care response to sexual violence exclusively for women in

the hospital. In the practical implementation of her work, she had been confronted with the ambiguities of a provision of care in response to violence that was circumscribed by a predefined notion of the victim. While this care named violence against women, it also made other forms of violence invisible due to its essentialization. At the same time, I imagined the suffering of the assaulted young man, with whom I had never had any contact save through the discourse of the healthcare professionals, in the successive forms of humiliation to which he had been subjected, in the assault, in the initial refusal of care, and in the subsequent treatment that had caused such bewilderment among the hospital staff. Beyond the treatment of his health, I thought about how the event must have impacted his life, about the absence of a place of expression and recognition for what had happened to him. Lives and forms of language had been revealed there as a problem. It was along this path, in face of the questions that were opened by this research, in particular through the analysis of the production of the victim, that the problem of the suffering associated with violence crept into my work, becoming the central question that I have investigated, in distinct forms, ever since.[12]

Simultaneously, the analysis of this "case" allowed me to make explicit the problematization of the place of the other when gender is thought of as an identity issue (Sarti, 2009). In this sense, I recognize myself in the perspective in which Das brings gender to her analysis. For her, gender is profoundly implicated in the production of knowledge – all her work is evidence of this. However, it is not something one seeks out deliberately, rather it is found, because it is there.[13] Focusing attention on the singularity of experiences thus precedes any predefined approach to gender, which, however, always transects the analysis, "because it finds us," not because we pursue it.[14] In my view, it is a question of being attentive to seeing and discerning gender in the forms in which life is decisively traversed by one's inscription in the social place of woman or man.[15] The deliberate search predisposes the gaze, while this subtle but significant change in perspective enables the emergence, beyond the places of subordination socially attributed to women, of the possible modes of female agency unforeseen in our referential frameworks of meaning.

Although there was a line of continuity in my work, the inquiry into violence from the viewpoint of suffering required other forms of ethnographic exploration. Moreover, the locus of investigation shifted. My fieldwork sites were no longer hospitals. By this time I had already joined the Department of Social Sciences following the opening of UNIFESP to the human sciences in 2007,[16] an institutional affiliation that had an impact on the research, which ceased to be linked to the health field alone. This was the moment when I turned my attention to violence during Brazil's military dictatorship in the quest to analyse experiences of imprisonment, torture, disappearance and death of family members, based on the testimony of those who lived through such events.

Looking back, I believe that was the moment when my attention was caught by Veena Das's work. She had recently published *Life and words*. The book *Critical events*, but above all the trilogy on the notion of social suffering and the research agenda proposed there, a collective project in which the author was involved (Kleinman et al., 1997; Das et al., 2000; Das et al., 2001), were already key references for anyone studying suffering and violence, notably in the field of the anthropology of health, as developed in Brazil (Víctora, 2011). Beyond the social dimension of suffering, fundamental to an analysis of individual experience in light of what exceeds it but at the same time constitutes it, such as the political, economic, cultural and environmental processes that directly affect people's lives, the work of Veena Das, in particular, revealed a new approach in the field of the social sciences, made explicit in *Life and words*, through which the author attempts, in her own words, "to remain attentive to the idea of suffering as a concern with life and not with either the given and ready-made ideas of culture or a matter of law or norms alone" (Das, 2007: 212).

Her commentators have highlighted the lines of continuity in the author's work, in particular those running between *Critical events* and *Life and words* (Vianna, 2020; Singh, 2015). The perspective marking her studies on violence, which consists of analysing the phenomenon in the forms in which the event, by establishing some kind of cut, affects life and language, was already outline, I believe, in the very definition of a "critical event." It was not the extraordinary character of the event which stood out; rather, what defined it as "critical" was the establishment of new modalities of action not previously inscribed in the cultural and social repertoire. Referring to the Partition of India in 1947, the thematic event of the book, Das (1995: 6) argued that, through it, "new modes of action came into being that redefined traditional categories." Already present was the analysis of the disruptive event from a perspective in which the death of the world as it had been inhabited before corresponds to the creation of new forms of life – an idea so clearly consolidated in *Life and words*. Associated with the event, the happening or the violent situation is, then, not just destruction but the possibility of reconstruction, which, for the author, operates in ordinary life, raising the question of *how* this happens.[17]

This perspective contributed to shaping questions that became central in my research trajectory on suffering and the memory of the violence of the dictatorship, as I hope to show below.

BETWEEN VICTIM AND COMBATANT

While in the hospital the intelligibility of the idea of a victim presumed the person's identification with a figure predefined by the *condition* of vulnerability, which predisposed them to suffer the aggression, traversed by gender and age, other moral frameworks shaped this figure, as the research would reveal as it unfolded.

According to Wieviorka (2005), the figure of the victim was for a long time absent from the discourse on violence. It appeared in the humanitarian discourse as a "victim of circumstances," such as poverty or sickness, which referred to naturalized social conditions rather than the political sphere. In the discourse on violence, it emerges when this focused on the subject who suffered the aggression, based on an affirmative notion of this subject as a subject of rights, who, as such, demands reparation. Circumscribed in the figure of the victim, the suffering associated with violence becomes socially intelligible, making the construction of the subject as a victim, whether individually or as a group, a mode of legitimizing demands and social actions for justice, reparation and care (Sarti, 2011). Hence, the construction of the figure of the victim and his or her social recognition in terms of rights gave form to the notion of violence itself, while the victim was transfigured into the contemporary mode par excellence of situating oneself subjectively in response to violence (Koltai, 2002; Fassin, 2004; Sarti, 2011; Gatti, 2017).[18]

If the construction of the victim as a subject of rights is connected to what became instituted as the modern rights of citizenship, the focus on the subject who suffers violence interpellates the State in terms of its function of ensuring the basic existential conditions of the citizen.[19] In the paradigm of international human rights law, instituted through war crime trials in the twentieth century, the State responsible for violent crimes is equally held responsible for policies of memory and reparation. This character of being a victim of a State policy is what is in play in the construction of the category of "victim of the dictatorship" claimed in relation to the Latin American dictatorships of the twentieth century.

Either in the fight or the reflection on the crimes of the Brazilian dictatorship, it is commonly asserted that human rights violations (torture, disappearance and death) are not limited to the context of the dictatorship; rather the violence of the State historically pervades Brazilian society, permeated by disrespect for rights, not just political, but the most basic civil and social rights of the socially disadvantaged or dissident population. This is what Pinheiro (1991: 55) called a "socially implanted authoritarianism," embedded in the country's historical formation, whose roots go deeper than the practices determined by regimes of exception. The persistence of State violence in post-dictatorship Brazil is, then, precisely the justification, in the register of human rights, for the social and political demands surrounding the memory of the dictatorship.

In this sense, memory is reconfigured in response to the issues of the present. It was human rights that sedimented the place for reconstructing, during a moment of disenchantment, new horizons and future expectations through which the past could be re-examined (Koselleck, 2006), marking present-day struggles. For Moyn (2012), human rights became, at a global level, the benchmark for political action not after 1948 and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, but after the eclipsing of the socialist and communist utopias

that fed the struggles against dictatorships in the second half of the twentieth century. The memory of these events referred, therefore, not necessarily to the utopia that inspired the struggle against the dictatorship but to the questions that made these struggles contemporary, enabling them to be continued in another time and another register.

In this way, the field of human rights gave the militants, protagonists in the fight against the dictatorship, the framework they needed to reconcile the figure of the victim with their self-image as *combatants* and *resisters*, who chose the armed struggle, *conscious of their choice*. In the face of the refusal to see oneself as a victim, a figure that exempts the subject of responsibility, *State violence* confers moral legitimacy to this place, as a *victim of the dictatorship*, in the political struggle for the right to memory, truth and justice.[20]

THE PAIN OF VIOLENCE AND THE DICTATORSHIP

The Brazilian dictatorship had not yet developed as a field of studies in Brazilian anthropology when I took the event as a reference point for thinking about the pain of violence.[21] In addition to the historical studies that have focused on the theme of the dictatorship since its occurrence, there emerged, at the end of the 2000s, key collective works that covered diverse fields of knowledge in order to think about "what remained of the dictatorship," given the failure to hold anyone accountable for the crimes committed during the period in Brazil following the limitations imposed by the Amnesty Law of 1979 (Law 6,683/1979). The latter also granted amnesty to torturers, making it impossible for the country to pursue a political process of justice, reparation and construction of memory in line with the model of transitional justice established by international human rights law (Teles & Safatle, 2010; Santos, Teles & Teles, 2009). This was the period when the creation of the National Truth Commission was being discussed in the country, which was launched in November 2011 and completed its work in December 2014 (Brazil, 2014), rekindling the problem of the memory of the dictatorship and fuelling its study in diverse fields of the social sciences in the country.[22]

At that moment, then, thinking about the dictatorship was clearly accompanied by a political agenda, endorsed by human rights activism, as Elizabeth Jelin (2003) has highlighted with respect to the emergence of a new field of concerns in Latin American social sciences, which paralleled the memory processes in diverse countries of the region from the 1980s when these countries confronted the transition from military dictatorships to democratic governments.[23] This involved discovering evidence of the violence perpetrated and the demand for recognition of the victims as a condition for advancing the unfinished political process of memory, truth and justice, under the terms of international law.[24] This was the moment when I began my own research.

By focusing on the pain of violence through the event of the dictatorship, my aim was to explore and interrogate these memory processes. The problem

was not the *evidence* of violence per se, as expressed in the political and normative discourse in defence of recognition of the crimes of the dictatorship. Rather the question was how this evidence, informed by the precepts of transitional justice, is constructed and performed in the work of memory. I sought to study the impact of these processes, and continue to do so, on the forms in which the experience of pain became inscribed in the lives of those who suffered the crimes of the dictatorship through the analysis of their testimonies.

How to speak about the pain of the experiences of torture, exile, disappearance and death of family members, as a subjective experience of the other, beyond the social framings that make it socially intelligible, by giving it a place, but without exhausting the meaning of the lived? How to apprehend what was presented as inapprehensible?

From this perspective, literature constituted a fundamental source material for the reflection since in this register we can perceive the "individual's hesitations" spoken of by Simmel (2006), which allow us to glimpse the singularities irreducible to the social and political frameworks. It opens the possibility of putting what has no place into words insofar as it operates outside the socially agreed limits for the subjective expression of pain.

Along these uncertain paths, reading Veena Das (2007) cleared the way ahead by enabling me to realize that it was a field of uncertainties that I had to traverse in order to study the suffering associated with violence from the proposed perspective, allowing myself to be guided precisely by this instability. But how? Reflecting on the pain of violence entailed turning my attention to the singularity of lived experiences, in the interstitial spaces and gaps opened by the testimonies, seeking to locate not only what was lost, but also the inscription of these experiences in life. It is not the event itself that is at stake, but the experience of the event as lived by the person who suffered from violence, transfigured into memory. Not the facts themselves, but what can be accessed of them from the testimony, apprehensible, as Das (2007: 216) suggests, "in terms of the conditions under which it becomes possible to speak of experience." By definition, therefore, experience is articulated with language and language with the world.

FORMS OF SAYING

Amid all the uncertainties, some points seem consolidated in the studies on violence, specifically in relation to the possibilities of speaking about violence. In response to the global impact of the Nazi genocide, a twentieth-century emblem of violence – not just because of the scandal of its scale and characteristics, but also because of the social and symbolic resources of its victims who successfully made themselves globally recognized as such – propositions emerged in the West that affirmed the unthinkable, unsayable and unrepresentable character of the extermination, intensified in the 1980s, according to Cren-

zel (2010), in the postmodern context with its crisis of representation and of the grand narratives. However, the author continues, these propositions have been heavily contested.[25] If it is possible to think, say and represent violence, whose implications, global in dimension, extend beyond national and local borders, then how to do so? The processes of memory instituted by international law after the Second World War would not only give legal form but also morally legitimize the reckoning with the past of violence, transforming it into a "duty to remember."

We have reached here another point, not so uncontested among those who situate themselves in the field of human rights, which relates to the limits of the legal processes in terms of enunciating violence, although its fundamental political relevance for the restoration of the democratic order is recognized. Agamben (2008) referred to the issue when discussing the distinction between ethical and juridical categories. Citing the 1945-1946 Nuremberg Trials and the trial of Eichmann in Jerusalem in 1961, the author argues that, however necessary these processes may have been, they did not exhaust the question, contributing to the idea that the problem had been resolved, given the recognized proofs of guilt. According to the author, the problem of the grey zones alluded to by Primo Levi (2004) remains, blurring the neat separation between the perpetrators of violence and the victims under which legal processes operate.

Das (2007), equally critical of the reading of violence through models based on clear binary oppositions, poses the question in other terms, speaking of these limits in relation to the *practices* that institute forms of saying the "truth," such as the Truth Commissions (TCs), which became globally established as the public spaces par excellence for expressing the truth. Although the policies of memory establish places for listening, making possible the expression and recognition of the discourse of those who have suffered State violence, they also institute the forms through which violence should be said and heard. A predefined script exists, varying in flexibility, established by legal forms or a specific political agenda, on the basis of which victims should speak, although the latter may not necessarily recognize themselves in this framework presented for them to speak within (Sarti, 2014, 2015).[26]

An "exemplary Enlightenment project," which resumes an absolute notion of truth, as Das (2007: 220) defines it, the truth commissions model, in its illusion of establishing clear boundaries between victims and aggressors, ignores at a practical level those forms of testimony and memory that emerge from very diverse situations and contexts as an outcome of equally diverse and localized meanings. Hence, it is a question of seeking, in the interstices of these practices, singular and personal forms of speaking and making visible, through words, silences or mutings, what they say about violence or its concealment. We are talking precisely about "one way to understand the relation between violence and subjectivity," as Das (2007: 78) defines the act of witnessing.

Truth, like the testimony that supposedly enunciates it, therefore, is neither a self-evident or a transparent category, but is linked to the conditions of its enunciation, traversed by the social and political circumstances and the actors involved. Along these lines, Jelin (2003) argues that policies of memory imply not a confrontation properly speaking between memory and oblivion, but distinct actors whose interpretations about what happened collide, presenting us with the political confrontation between distinct memories, something that the author calls struggles of memory against memory. The borders separating victims and perpetrators of violence become hazy in the face of distinct "truths."[27]

The forms of speaking about the pain of violence are, therefore, by definition, permeated by conflict. However, the testimony, beyond its constitution in an incessant struggle for the word, caught in the lacuna between the suffering of lived experience and the absence of a place of recognition where it can be expressed, is also an indefinite place of restless search because, as the literature on violence has demonstrated, experiences of violence are never extinguished and the disquiet surrounding their memory haunts those who lived through them, becoming part of life itself. It is not a question, though, of the moral imperative to remember, in the struggle between remembrance and oblivion, but of unexpected and unpredictable recesses of memory. Again, in question here are not events but the forms that make possible access to lived experiences, the forms of speaking, as expressed by those who lived them or who were affected by them.

In this sense, Das's proposal to read violence not just in its destructive effect but also in its possibilities for reconstructing life cleared a fertile path. It is a question of immersing oneself in life, precisely where what remained needs to be pieced together, reassembling the shards and carrying on, because it has to be done to continue living.

THE WORK OF TIME

In Brazil, where there was no accountability for the crimes committed during the dictatorship, not even following official recognition of the proofs by the NTC, and where the same criminal practices against human rights persist, asking about the memory of the dictatorship in the testimony of those who lived through it inevitably leads to the question: what did the elapsed time do? This calls on us to resituate the past in the elapsing of time, unfreezing it and paying attention to the forms in which life followed its course.

If ongoing political action, transmuted into a struggle for "memory, justice and truth" concerning the events that occurred during the dictatorship, formed the background on which the experiences of pain and violence were inscribed in the existence of those who fought against the dictatorship and their families, becoming part of their form of inhabiting the world, for those

affected by the violence of the dictatorship, the framing of militant action did not exhaust the forms of saying and making life carry on.[28]

To think about this singularity of experience both inside and outside narratives framed in collective references that were, in some form, instituted as counterdiscourses, my reflection became anchored in the notion of the *work of time*, operating in the process of reconstructing life, as formulated by Das (2007: 87): "Time is not purely something represented but is an agent that 'works' on relationships – allowing them to be reinterpreted, rewritten, sometimes overwritten – as different social actors struggle to author stories in which collectivities are created or re-created."

The notion of time as an *agent* that *works* in the reconstruction of life, inhabited by memories and where forgetting and concealments are produced, proved inspirational in terms of comprehending not only the singularity of experiences, but memory as a form of labour that accompanies existence actively, unblocking the past, through the unexpected questions of the present, on an open horizon, a becoming. From this perspective, reparation is not focused solely on an ideal of justice but becomes woven into the concrete fabric of life, in the possible forms of inhabiting the world, amid relations that, through their action, give new meaning to lived experience. The *work of time* has no certain direction, nor predefined obstacles. It thus becomes a guide to the terrain to be explored in thinking about the indeterminacy of the memory of violence, focusing attention on the uncertain paths of memories and the indeterminate movements of forgetting.

Consequently, this perspective is constructed in the opposite direction to the direct and necessary association between violence and trauma, recurrent in studies of violence, through, as Das emphasizes,[29] an imprecise and overhasty appropriation of the psychoanalytic concept.

The relation between violence and trauma entails mediations that intervene decisively for the lack of language in the face of violence. These concern the *relations* that make saying and listening possible or impossible, which must be dealt with carefully, rather than presupposing the blockage of language. Once again, the problem is where one looks. Taking the opposite tack to the focus on trauma, the perspective of Das (2007) leads her to ask, particularly in the final chapter to *Life and words*, whether it is possible to think about a group of victims and survivors of violence in which time is not frozen but is permitted to "perform its work." For the author, it is not that the ghosts have been expelled from the scenes of violence that she describes, "but rather that everyday life is not expelled" (Das, 2007: 215). An everyday life that, for her, is the place of reconstruction, as already emphasized. In this chapter the author re-examines the work of time in order to question the idea that thinking through suffering results in the creation of a "community of resentment." In this sense, it seems to me that looking at the reconstruction of life, in those places where it can happen

through the work of time,[30] and not just at the destruction of violence that freezes the gaze, is what enables a reflection through suffering, but outside the register of resentment.

It is not a question of reducing those who lived through the violence to a community of victims/survivors but of perceiving them as subjects. On this point, Das's ideas coincide, in a profound sense, with the critique of the victim as a contemporary figure mentioned earlier. For her, running counter to the discourse on identity, there is no collective unitary subject (the African, the Indian) but forms of inhabiting the world in which people try to find their own place and their own voice.[31] The recuperation of the memory of violence thus involves the construction of the self as a subject, not a victim. What the women with whom she worked "were able to 'show' was not a standardized narrative of loss and suffering but a project that can be understood only in the singular through the image of reinhabiting the space of devastation *again*" (Das, 2007: 217). It is a question of seeing how life can be redeemed in the face of the violence that attacks life itself, not a particular type of identity.

For the author, the difficulties implicit in naming violence are not related, therefore, solely to the lack of language in response to violence, as a certain theory of trauma might suppose, invoked "too soon" in these cases: "Naming the violence does not reflect semantic struggles alone – it reflects the point at which the body of language becomes indistinguishable from that of the world; the act of naming constitutes a performative utterance" (Das, 2007: 206).

THE APPEAL TO THE OTHER OF PAIN

In *Civilization and its discontents*, Freud (2010) highlights three sources through which suffering threatens us. The first comes from the body itself, which cannot dispense with pain and fear as signals warning of the fatality of its own decay and dissolution; the second comes from the outside world, which assails us with powerful, inexorable and destructive forces beyond our control; and finally the third, which derives from our relations with other humans: "The suffering that arises from this last source perhaps causes us more pain than any other" (Freud, 2010: 31). If, today, the boundaries between "body", "external world" and "humans" are blurred, blended with the relations that constitute human sociality, Freud's formulation shows the inescapable presence of the other in the suffering that constitutes us. Suffering is social by definition. But what is the place of the other in the language of pain?

"Narrating and making oneself heard leads us to the importance of the other in the reconstruction of memory – a fundamental operation for overcoming trauma." With these words, Janaína Teles (2009: 159) – historian, the daughter of parents imprisoned and tortured during the dictatorship, also imprisoned while a child along with her brother – refers to the struggle of the relatives of those political activists killed and disappeared by the military dictatorship. For

her, this is the "political dimension of the work of memory," impossible to be undertaken in private because it needs to be witnessed by a third party, heard by someone from 'outside'."[32]

Confronted by the absence of any stable language to speak about pain and the impossibility of claiming to know the pain of the other, Das queries the *relation* that we can have to pain, beyond what political discourse may express. Here she turns to literature and to Wittgenstein, making a singular use of his formulation of the "pain felt in another's body." For Das (2007: 40) in the philosopher's interpretation, pain "is not that inexpressible something that destroys communication or marks an exit from one's existence in language. Instead, it makes a claim on the other – asking for acknowledgment that may be given or denied."

While recognition of violence in the register of the political is fundamental to "overcoming trauma," as demanded by those who have suffered violence, there remain the recesses of a memory of suffering irreducible to this register, with the muted memories, the concealments and the active silences that the lived violence brings with it and that appeal equally to the other, in the forms in which the unpredictable languages of pain are expressed. For Das, it is a question of resorting to the register of the imaginary where "the pain of the other not only asks for a home in language, but also seeks a home in the body" (Das, 2007: 57); the denial of the other's pain, the author stresses, does not entail a failure of intellect but a failure of spirit.

If the leitmotiv of this text was to locate the points where my research trajectory encountered the ideas of Veena Das, it also resulted, and not accidentally, in a rereading of the work undertaken thus far, recomposed by the memory evoked in the search to understand the paths where the author *accompanied me*, to paraphrase her. Hence, remembering does not mean that memories return in the same form. They are not simply evoked, but transfigured by the ever open and unavoidable questions of the time and the world in which we live. In all cases, it is a question of the constitutive presence of the other that inhabits us.

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NOTES

1 On her work, see the book organised by Chatterji (2015) and the text by Vianna (2020), which comments on its repercussion in Brazilian anthropology.

2 Interview in this dossier.

3 An allusion to Das's remarks (2015b: 246) on the fascination that Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Philosophical investigations* exerted on her: "the tonality of the writing in it had as much to say to me as its form of argumentation."

4 As Vianna (2020: 10) stresses: "Countering the anxiety to define what violence is, Das argues that we should be guided by our engagement in the very instability of what is named as violence."

5 This seems to be the sense explored in the use of the word "textures" in her most recent book, as the author remarks in the interview to this dossier. It seems to me that the sensoriality in the use of words already pervaded *Life and words*, which I highlight here for its importance for an approach to pain.

6 Vianna (2020: 5) calls attention to the significance of the notion of "limit" in Das's work. I refer to her commentary on the notions of experience and limit as indissociable from the very conception of the subject.

7 Interview in this dossier.

8 At the time, I was a professor at UNIFESP's Department of Preventive Medicine (DMP).

9 This research was developed in collaboration with Rosana Machin Barbosa, also a professor at the DMP of UNIFESP, along with undergraduate medical and nursing students under our supervision.

10 We describe and analyse this episode in a co-authored article (Sarti, Barbosa & Suarez 2006).

11 I consider pain and suffering to be equivalent notions in the moral sense in which I approach the question, irrespective of the presence or absence of physical pain. As Le Breton (2013) argues, pain implies suffering since it always involves a "moral blow," a questioning of the individual's relation to the world.

12 Though pain had been a constant theme in the teaching and supervisory activities in the health area, ever since I was urged to explore the topic by professional nursing colleagues when I worked in the nursing field in public health (Sarti, 2001).

13 See Das (2012) and the interview in this dossier.

14 An approach consistent with her relationship to concepts mentioned above.

15 There is no space here to analyse the presence of children in Das's reflection, which, permeated by care, is articulated with gender, as the author emphasizes in the interview in this dossier.

16 Until 2005, when the expansion of federal universities in Brazil began under the Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva government, UNIFESP, identified with its Medical School, had been focused exclusively on the health area.

17 It seems to me that an analogy exists, whose implications lie beyond the scope of this text, but which I hope to be able to explore on another occasion, between Veena Das and Georges Canguilhem, in the form that both think of *life* in terms of its possibilities for recreation, whether in response to violence, in the case of the former, or in the fact of illness, in the case of the latter (Canguilhem, 2006).

18 And, more broadly, in relation to any form of suffering, as Koltai (2002) argued.

19 Although violence appears precisely as evidence of the failure of this model of the State, an important discussion that is beyond the scope of this text.

20 As remarked earlier, the ambiguities in relation to the place of the victim in the testimonies of former combatants during the dictatorship is a theme present in the literature (Sarti, 2014, 2015; Sarti, Baumgarten & Rovai, 2020). In relation to the legal implications of the definition of victims, see the analysis by Tello (2012) on memory of the Argentinean dictatorship, where she highlights the tensions arising from the "theory of the two demons" that marked legal processes in the country. In this judicial context, the *witness-victim* has to demonstrate having been the victim of an attack that was unprovoked and thus undeserved (*innocent-victim*), reflecting the implicit view

of the militant as a "terrorist" in this interpretative framework. On the political resignification of the category "victims of the military dictatorship" in Brazil, see Aydos and Figueiredo (2013).

21 Some pioneering anthropological works on dictatorships, produced in Brazil, did already exist at this time, albeit in isolation: these included Catela (2001) on the struggle of the families affected by the Argentinean military dictatorship (1976-1983), based on her thesis completed in 1999; Vecchioli (2000, 2006) on the struggle for rights in Argentina; and the master's dissertation by Aydos (2002) on the experience of torture during the Brazilian dictatorship.

22 It is worth noting that in 2010, Dilma Rousseff, a former political prisoner tortured during the dictatorship, was elected President of the Republic standing for the Workers' Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores/PT), assuming the post in 2011.

23 In Brazil, the theme of the memory of the dictatorships developed in anthropology in the wake of these events, with the production of dissertations and theses, especially from 2010, focusing on both the Brazilian and the Argentinean military dictatorships. For information on the ethnographic works produced in the context of Brazilian postgraduate programs in anthropology and social sciences, see Ribeiro (2020).

24 The political relevance of naming and recognizing the person as a victim for the realization of the process of memory in post-dictatorship Brazil, within the framework of transitional justice, and the obstacles to this process in the Brazilian case, in comparison with the Chilean and Argentinean cases, are analysed by Mezarobba (2007).

25 Among those contesting these ideas are Agamben (2008), Didi-Huberman (2012) and Pollak (2002), as well as the testimony of those who lived the concentration camp experience, like Primo Levi (1988, 2004).

26 As shown by the analyses of women's testimony undertaken by Ross (2003) on the Truth and Reconciliation Com-

mission in South Africa and by Pollak & Heinich (1986) about memory of the Holocaust.

27 The National Truth Commission (NTC) in Brazil, whose report made public and official the documents that proved the human rights violations, consubstantiated the disputes around the memory of the dictatorship, reigniting the polarizations that reproduce the original conflict, a process that culminated in the reconfiguration of power in the country in the years that followed the release of the report: President Dilma Rousseff suffered impeachment in 2016 and ultra conservative President Bolsonaro was elected in 2018 (Sarti, Baumgarten & Rovai, 2020). See the recent collective book that, ten years on, continues the work of the previous ones in the same register of a "fight for memory," incorporating the impact of the NTC (Teles & Quinalha, 2020).

28 Along these lines, I analysed the book *K*, by Bernardo Kucinski, on his father's tireless search for the disappeared daughter (Sarti, 2016).

29 I analyse the enunciations of torture through literary texts that bear witness, highlighting the meaning of a *combat literature* of the text on torture written during the dictatorship, in contrast to the idea of a *trauma literature* with which the written testimony on torture is hastily associated (Sarti, 2019). The same sense of *combat*, and not of an unassimilated experience, appears in texts written after the dictatorship (Sarti, 2020).

30 In the "descent to the ordinary" found, for the author, in the register of the everyday, in the concrete engagement with the tasks of remaking life. The everyday is not, therefore, the trivial place of repetition, but the place for the creation of new forms of life after devastation.

31 Here I refer to the author's critical comments on Achille Mbembe's "African modes of self-writing" in this final chapter of the book (Das, 2007).

32 The implication of the other intrinsic to testimony forms the central axis of my recent text on the figure of the witness (Sarti, 2020).

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FIGURAÇÕES DA DOR: A MEMÓRIA ATRAVÉS DA VIDA

Resumo

Esse texto trata de encontros com as ideias de Veena Das que aconteceram em meu trabalho de pesquisa sobre o sofrimento e a violência. Para isso, percorre a trajetória que levou à investigação sobre o tema com base na memória da ditadura militar brasileira (1964-1985) nos pontos em que o trabalho da autora ecoou e se fez presente. Em reflexão que interroga não os acontecimentos da ditadura, mas a singularidade das experiências de sofrimento, apreendidas nas formas de dizer, expressas pelo testemunho de quem as viveu ou foi por elas afetado, a leitura da violência não apenas em termos de sua destruição, mas pelas possibilidades de reconstrução da vida depois da devastação, proposta por Das, abriu um caminho fecundo.

Palavras-chave

Sofrimento;
violência;
memória;
vida;
ditadura brasileira.

FIGURATIONS OF PAIN: MEMORY THROUGH LIFE

Abstract

In this text I discuss my encounters with Veena Das's ideas over the course of my own research on suffering and violence. I trace the paths that led to my investigation of the theme through the memories of Brazil's military dictatorship (1964-1985), highlighting the points where the author's work resonated and made itself present. The reading of violence proposed by Das, which sees it not as merely destructive but also as a source of possibilities for reconstructing life after devastation, provided a way forward for my own inquiry that focuses not on the events of the dictatorship per se, but on the singularity of the experiences of suffering, apprehended in the forms of speaking expressed in the testimony of those who lived through these experiences or were affected by them.

Keywords

Suffering;
violence;
memory;
life;
Brazilian dictatorship.