

Il lavoro di riconciliazione: una necessità personale, storica, sociale, politica. Tra rivalsa, perdono, narrazione, riflessività

The Work of Reconciliation: a Personal, Historical, Social and Political Necessity. Between Revenge, Forgiveness, Narration, Reflexivity

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Viene qui presentata una riflessione intorno al lavoro della riconciliazione dopo esperienze di violenza a livello individuale o collettivo. È una cruciale responsabilità storica, sociale e politica comprendere cosa avviene di tutta la rabbia causata dalla violenza, fisica, sociale, psicologica ed educativa. Oggi, è facile ricordare le drammatiche crudeltà dell'IS, lo Stato Islamico. È opportuno mettere a punto un modello di pensiero che colleghi le esistenze individuali e i contesti collettivi, perché ognuno di noi porta nella società il proprio stato di riconciliazione o di vendetta. La ricerca di una via d'uscita, concordata a livello giuridico, morale e politico, è diventata una forte preoccupazione per la politica contemporanea. I terribili eventi odierni chiedono alla Pedagogia di cambiare il proprio modo di pensare e di agire, nella direzione di un'azione più impegnata nell'aiutare persone e società a elaborare le loro parti negative, siano esse emozioni o mentalità.

This paper presents a reflection on the work of reconciliation after trauma or violence, on both a personal and collective level. It is a key historical-social-political responsibility to enquire into what happens to all the anger and aggression caused by the infliction of physical, social, psychological and educational violence. Today, it is easy to think of the acts of cruelty committed by the IS, the Islamic State. The development of a framework, linking individual existences with collective contexts, is necessary, because each of us brings into society his state of reconciliation or of revenge. Looking for a way out, which is juridically, morally and politically bargained and socially agreed, has become one of the most significant concerns of contemporary politics. The current terrible events require Pedagogy to change its way of thinking and acting, in the direction of a more engaged action to help individuals and societies to elaborate their negative emotions and issues.

Parole chiave: riconciliazione, educazione, psicoanalisi, emozioni, significato

Keywords: Reconciliation, Education, Psychoanalysis, Emotions, Meaning

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INTRODUCTION

This paper presents a reflection on the work of reconciliation after trauma or violence, on both a personal and collective level. Indeed, the two of them are closely linked (Mucci, 2014). It is also important to reflect if and in which conditions the narration of life-stories can help elaborate that bitter lump, full of revenge, resentment and hatred. We have all been hurt, physically and psychologically. If we look at history and society, we see a universal outpouring of blood and pain. It is therefore a key historical-social-political responsibility to enquire into what happens to all the anger and aggression caused by the infliction of violence, at both individual and social levels.

Today, it is easy to think of the acts of cruelty committed by the IS, the Islamic State. We can all remember the recent terrible terrorist attacks in Paris,

Brussels and in many other places around the world, at all latitudes. The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism² made a study, commissioned by the Netherlands National Coordinator for Security and Counter-terrorism (NCTV), to establish the profile of the so-called "foreign fighters", the new dangerous phenomenon in Europe and all over the world. "ICCT addresses this gap by analysing not only the numbers and characteristics of foreign fighters across the EU, but also how the Union and Member States assess the threat of foreign fighters as well as their policy responses regarding security, preventive and legislative measures. The Report also outlines a series of policy options aimed both at the EU and its Member States"³. " In analysing the policies of Member States in response to the foreign fighter phenomenon, the authors recommend that strategies be implemented which encompass a suitable, proportional, context-specific and effective mix of policy responses, taken from a toolbox of security, legislative, and preventive measures. Their analysis reveals that, while many Member States have already bolstered security and legislative policy measures, a larger focus needs to be put on preventive measures as well as rehabilitation and reintegration programmes to deal with returning foreign fighters". Very often this appears to be the greatest problem: the great underestimation of the need to listen to the needs and difficulties of people's life stories, thus aiming to set out prevention which is effective. However, in order to implement serious prevention as well as reintegration, there is a need for a wide-ranging, far-sighted and prophetic gaze, understanding the last term as "science of anticipation"(Corsi, 2003). Desmond Tutu - Archbishop Emeritus of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa – wrote⁴: "When our politicians negotiated a peaceful transition from the horrors of the apartheid era to the genuinely free South Africa, that so many of us had, over the long years, argued, prayed, struggles, fought, and laid down our lives for, the joy in our hearts knew no bounds.

² Van Ginkel, B., and E. Entenmann (Eds.), "The Foreign Fighters Phenomenon in the European Union. Profiles, Threats & Policies", *The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague* 7, no. 2 (2016); cf. <http://icct.nl/>

³ <http://icct.nl/publication/report-the-foreign-fighters-phenomenon-in-the-eu-profiles-threats-policies/retr>. 25 February, 2016. Findings include: *Of a total estimated 3,922 – 4,294 foreign fighters from EU Member States, around 30% have returned to their home countries. *A majority of around 2,838 foreign fighters come from just four countries: Belgium, France, Germany, and the United Kingdom, with Belgium having the highest per-capita FF contingent. *There is no clear-cut profile of a European foreign fighter. Data indicates that a majority originate from metropolitan areas, with many coming from the same neighbourhoods, that an average of 17% are female, and that the percentage of converts among foreign fighters ranges from 6% to 23%. *The radicalisation process of foreign fighters is reported to be short and often involves circles of friends radicalising as a group and deciding to leave jointly for Syria and Iraq.

⁴ In the Foreword to Erlich, H.S., Erlich-Ginor, M., Beland, H. (2009) *Fed with Tears – Poisoned with Milk*, Gießen: Psychosozial-Verlag, p. 13.

Our happiness, however, was tempered by one small but nagging worry: what if the atrocities of the apartheid era continued to live on subconsciously in people's minds?" Therefore, the problem to think of is "the atrocities within the mind". "What if these were to fester and breed, and lead in time to demands for revenge and retribution, unleashing once again the dark and destructive forces associated with the apartheid era, turned now on the former apartheid masters, their offspring or their perceived collaborators or beneficiaries?"

The motivation of the foreigner fighters for leaving to fight abroad is very difficult to completely understand. However, Rik Coolsaet, for example, has given some preliminary explanations: "They often mention earlier personal difficulties [...] that left them feeling stifled and ill at ease. Frequently, they express feelings of exclusion and absence of belonging, as if they didn't have a stake in society. For a significant number of them, drugs, petty crime and street violence have been part of their former life. From the sources mentioned, one gets the impression of solitary individuals, sometimes also estranged from family and friends, who at a certain point became angry as a result of their estrangement. Going to Syria is one of a number of possible outlets for their anger"⁵.

Anyone dealing with education and building up education stories has to deal with the fate of the anger in circulation more than ever, especially that of the young generations. "Most young Sunni Muslims became susceptible to fundamentalist interpretations of militant Islam after they found it difficult to integrate into European societies due to cultural, religious and social differences".

The literature in psychology on the FF phenomenon confirms this opinion: "The perception of grievance drives the search for a violence - justifying ideology, not the other way around". The language of jihad then only legitimates "the grievance, offering a designated culprit and a direct justification to fight the wrong, whether that is poor integration, real or perceived marginalisation, relative deprivation, or discrimination. As such, the decision to make hijra "to the land of Islam" may be less of a religious obligation than an emotional response to a feeling of injustice in their home societies"⁶.

The development of a framework, linking individual existences with collective contexts, is necessary. If individuals offer some of their time to work through their personal and social hurts/traumas/injures, the whole society will benefit from it, because each of us brings into society his state of reconciliation or of revenge (Galtung, 2008).

⁵ Coolsaet, R. "What drives Europeans to Syria and to IS? Insights from the Belgium case", Academia Press Egmont – The Royal Institute for International Relations, Update, June 2015, <http://www.egmontinstitute.be/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/ep75.pdf>, retr. 6 February, 2016.

⁶ http://icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/ICCT-Report_Foreign-Fighters-Phenomenon-in-the-EU_1-January-2016_including-AnnexesLinks.pdf, p. 54

1. THE SEARCH FOR A WAY OUT FOR THE "POLICIES OF THE PAST"

The search for a way out, juridically, morally and politically bargained, negotiated and socially agreed, from brutal and oppressive regimes, from civil wars or genocidal situations, has become one of the most significant concerns of the contemporary politics. This has not always been the case (Portinaro, 2011). Usually, throughout history there only seemed two opposing paths that could be taken: the brutal showdown, i.e. systematically pursued revenge, or oblivion and amnesty, i.e. bargained hatred, in the meaning of leniency and indifference. The 20th century innovated, bringing two new ways of settling disputes: judicially, with international trials, which impose sanctions and legitimise different forms of compensation and Truth and Reconciliation Committees, which, by shedding light on «state macro-criminality», created the minimum conditions for a new civil coexistence. There have been different ways of showdowns with the past: revenge, i.e. retaliatory measures and persecutions - in a more or less spontaneous or organised showdown -, amnesty, as a political and legally formalised decision - to bury the past, putting an end to the reciprocal retaliations and accusations -, trials of the most important people responsible for crimes and indiscriminate brutalities. We have observed three paradigms of transition government, i.e. Revenge – which adds new injustices -, Amnesties – which ignore the injustices -, Trials – which punish the injustices with legal and judicial tools. In addition to these solutions, some new methods have emerged: purges, i.e. legalisation of the showdown, the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions - hybrid combinations of trials and amnesty, and compensations for the crime victims -, the aggregate of communicative procedures and pedagogical programmes, that aim at a critical elaboration and stabilization of the memory. In every different transition, these different solutions can intertwine in various ways.

The theory of 'transitional justice' (Kritz, 1995; De Greiff, 2005) includes 'compensation measures', 'rehabilitation of the victims', 'integration policies', 'memory policies', 'identity policies'. As for transitional justice, the most important historical example of resorting to a judicial instrument, in order to deal with the crimes of a political regime, dates back to those responsible for the Holocaust and its victims. Therefore, the most studied case of transitional justice is post-World War II Germany. It is based on four elements: knowledge of what happened, moral and judicial parameters for its evaluation, solidarity with the victims, the will not to repeat the errors of the past. Therefore, to supersede the past, a long-term process is necessary: i.e. civil society must work through it, in order to reaffirm its own collective identity of a subject morally, as well as judicially, recognized by the community of Nations. We are witnessing the emergence of new forms of 'policies of the past'. Previously, the principle of State

sovereignty excluded every form of external intervention in the internal affairs of a State, and did not take into consideration an international conflict ending with a trial before a Court of Justice. After the degeneration in the 20th century of the principle of sovereignty, the States created a series of international tribunals. They recognized the independence of these courts, acknowledged their jurisdiction and have been increasingly having resort to them, filing complaints. We are now in a phase of bargained and reciprocally guaranteed reduction of the sovereignty functions of individual States and in a phase of construction of mutually agreed sovereignty regimes (Portinaro, 2011). The international system has evolved through a number of steps. The first, in Versailles, accused Germany of being responsible for the First World War and the Society of Nations and the first International Tribunals were established. The second step was the trial of war criminals before the military tribunals of Nuremberg and Tokyo, which marked the beginning of a new conception of international law known as «legalism». The third period occurred simultaneously with the end of the Cold War: the expansion at a global level of the judicial showdown with the past and the emergence of international criminal justice. The consequences of this phase was the institution, through the UN Security Council, of the ad hoc Tribunals for former Yugoslavia and Ruanda.

A new moral frame emerged, based on the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions. They go beyond the mere criminalization of war acts, once again raising the question of compensation in favour of the victims for wrongdoings that have been perpetrated, e.g. the USA for the slavery of African Americans and the decimation of American Indians, Japan for sexual slavery in Korea, Indonesia and China, Australia for the extermination of Native Australians. The responsibility for protection is the trend of the fourth period, after September 11, with the marked identification of anti-terrorism activities of USA under the aegis of the UN. The ideology of humanitarian interventionism has appeared, i.e. of military intervention with the cover of the international community, not to stop a genocide but to prevent the violation of human rights and to promote, with coercive instruments, the development of democracy. Thus, the globalization of policies of the past acts in accordance with international criminal law, whose action consists "of breaking the cycle of impunity". Such a process of global justicialization has strong points but also many shadows. We can say that the Reconciliation policies have followed these steps: from criminal law, which focuses on the executors with little sensibility for the victims – "retributive justice" –, the third way was asserted, of "repairing historical injustices", with the Truth Commissions, which gave special attention to the victims – "restorative justice" (UNODC, 2006) –, related to the ethics of dialogue and recognition. It adopts the point of view of the victims and pursues reconciliation between the contend-

ing parties. This is how "victimology" came into being, with the shift of attention from the executors to the victims. In this way, we have seen a change of the object of the social memory in Western countries, because from a memory of «inflicted harm» it becomes a memory of the "pain suffered" (Portinaro, 2011). The practices of transitional justice include 'symbolic and material compensation'. The transition can be successful if the reconstruction and the economic development go along with the efforts of reconciliation and democratic integration. Such efforts depend on many factors: for example, we see the phenomenon of isolation, of "voluntary apartheid" of victims' groups. The consequences of the recognition of liability and the duty of reparation, are seen as consisting of recognition of a right, reparation/compensation, the 'industry of compensation' - great opportunities for law firms -, monetarization of rights, an increase in vengeful escalation, the moral rights of the victims becoming economic-oriented rights (Portinaro, 2011). Other less onerous variations in respect of reparation could be, in Western societies where it has become widespread, the habit of apologizing. We can observe the move from a moral based on the encouraging presumption of truth, typical of ideologies, to a more cogent and demanding moral of repentance and recognition of historical realities. This trend led to the 'culture of apology'. It fulfils an important compensatory function, with relevant financial efforts, important for the debtor-donor and for the creditors-heirs of the victims. A branch of research has developed known as "transitional justice", as told before, which studies the transitional elaboration of the Past, i.e. the political, judicial and moral problems that emerge during the transitional processes from authoritarian and totalitarian regimes to democracy. This is sometimes referred to as "imperfect justice". The theories of transitional justice look for a balance between four devices, in order to recompose a society torn apart by violent conflict: judicial procedures, commissions for the verification of the truth over the past, material and symbolic reparations/compensations, and institutional reforms. None of these ways of overcoming past setbacks, taken individually, gives significant results. Transitional justice is not an answer to radicalism or the ethic of principles but to prudence. Indeed, amnesty is taken into consideration as a fifth instrument of pacification (Portinaro, 2011; De Greiff, Duthie, 2009).

Desmond Tutu chaired the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa after the end of the apartheid, always remembering that the rational tools of pacification are not enough. It was based on the hope that if the truth were faced openly and honestly, this might have the power to heal the wounds of the past and, thus, help to bring closure to past atrocities. He said: "In the sessions of the Commission, we witnessed again and again what a powerful instrument facing the truth is. It brought to life most powerfully the pain and anguish of the victims of atrocities carried out by the apartheid regime, and also sometimes by

members of the liberation movement" and, by being there "we, the commissioners and committee members, could experience something of the cruel and unbearable burden our fellow citizens had been carrying...And we were encouraged by the fact that, in many cases, even when the atrocities concerned were so horrific that a wish for revenge might be entirely understandable, the experience of having their stories heard and fully acknowledged seemed to open up a process by which anger and hatred could be mitigated and stilled, helping many victims to find closure, which often involved forgiving the perpetrators and moving on. On the side of the perpetrators, too, one could sometimes see that facing the truth of what they had done brought forth the terrible pain of guilt and remorse". "I felt privileged and humbled to be in the presence of such profoundly moving and transformative emotional experiences" (Desmond Tutu, 2009, p. 15). This first-person account by Desmond Tutu is of great importance, as it highlights how reparative justice requires, as its essential instrument, listening to the emotions circulating in the social and institutional field (Ronchi, Ghilardi, 2003; Correale, 2007).

2. THE PCCA PROJECT – PARTNERS IN CONFRONTING COLLECTIVE ATROCITIES

The PCCA project began when a group of German and Israeli psychoanalysts and psychotherapists recognised that, "lurking beneath a polite and courteous exterior, was a deep sense of unease and suspicion in the way they related to each other. This was based not on their own qualities as individuals but was a general stereotype connected to the Holocaust." This was perceived as an accusation against the present generation of Germans and Israelis. "This was completely irrational. It was a true legacy of the past"⁷. The project aims to systematically attempt to analyse and discuss this legacy of the Holocaust. They created a psychoanalytic method that relies not on rational issues, but on trying to engage the irrational feelings that underpin prejudice. To do so, they organize a special "conference" setting, far from the pressure of everyday life, in which each working group can go deeply into its own most deeply held prejudices, beliefs, emotions "in the presence of the other group". When victims and perpetrators meet face to face, the memories of past atrocities, stored in the mind, are powerfully brought to surface. It is one's willingness to be fully involved that carries the potential for healing. For example, a German woman said: "I have an ordinary Nazi mother." "How poignant to be able to acknowledge that the tender loving care – the very care that allowed a child to grow into a beautiful human being – coexist-

⁷ <http://p-cca.org/articles/foreword-to-fed-with-tears-poisoned-with-milk/>, retr. 3 February, 2016.

ed with something more sinister, that involved the extermination of others. What unspeakable pain, shame and humiliation must have been faced in recognising the truth that this was indeed part of her inner legacy?" She must have felt safe enough in the conference setting for this important work to take place, for - in the words of another participant - "tears are better than blood and words are better than tears." The process of confronting "the truth of how the atrocities of the past live on in the mind helps to bring closure, laying the atrocity to rest. Left unattended, these very ghosts of the past can be exploited by unscrupulous politicians for their own cynical gain or for a continuous transgenerational chain of revenge"⁸. It is very important to work on the meaning and underpinnings of personal and national identity and identifications, because it lays bare the pain involved in changing one's personal and group identity and spotlights the depth and power of prejudice and the tremendous difficulty of unlearning it. The PCCA Conferences offer a model and methodology for working with extreme conflict groups and an interesting proposal for pedagogical work with traumatized people. In certain circumstances, the concept of conflict takes on life-and-death dimensions. Today, the terrible and cruel events that are taking place every day require Pedagogy to change its way of thinking and acting, in the direction of a more engaged action to help individuals and societies work through their negative emotions and issues.

3. NARRATION, ART AND EMOTIONAL MEANING: TOOLS FOR WORKING THROUGH THE ATROCITIES

As we said before, each of us brings into society his state of reconciliation or of revenge (Galtung, 2008). It is absolutely fundamental to start from this fact, which has to be taken as a starting point for pedagogical and psycho-pedagogical work, to be conceived as responsibly taking on the stories of people's formation, helping them to go through them again. Going back through suspended emotions, hidden traumas that can generate devastating consequences for oneself and for the whole of society - often in a spiral of violence against others or the self -, layers of mistaken convictions and fixations with distorted patterns in the conception of the world, can lead to reclaiming in the first person the meaning of past experiences. Many authors, such as Viktor E. Frankl - a psychiatrist who survived the concentration camps -, maintained in their works the outcome of a constant search aimed at finding the ways and methods to work through the un-

⁸ Desmond Tutu, Foreword to Erlich, H.S , Erlich-Ginor, M., Beland, H. (2009) *Fed with Tears – Poisoned with Milk*, Gieben: Psychosozial-Verlag, p. 13.

thinkable violence experienced. "Searching the meaning of life is the truest expression of the state of being human"⁹.

Narration is one of the fundamental tool for implementing this aim. In addition, many films and autobiographies have dealt with these issues and recently many films have been made on how to cope with revenge, forgiveness and reconciliation. The film *The Railway Man*¹⁰ is a very good example of this. Based on his best-selling memoir, *The Railway Man* tells the extraordinary true story of Eric Lomax, a British Army officer who was tormented as a prisoner of war in a Japanese labour camp during World War II. Eric Lomax was, like thousands of other Allied soldiers and prisoners of war, forced to work on building the Thai/Burma railway during World War II. His experiences of torture left him traumatised and shut off from the world. Many years later, Lomax discovered that the Japanese interpreter he held responsible for much of his treatment was still alive.

He decided to confront him and his haunting past, at first seeking revenge but, during their confrontation, the two of them went over their common tragic experience together and, at the end of their search for meaning, were able to overcome the past. Enormous areas of qualified work can open up in the face of a pedagogy that decides to make a concrete commitments, 'getting to grips' with the dramas and traumas of people and social groups, instead of taking up defensive attitudes of refusing to approach the difficult and also painful aspects of existence. This kind of pedagogy can really make its contribution to facing up to the rampant spread of violence, incomprehension and hatred that we can observe today at a global level. In order to be able to do this work and take up this task, there are many instruments available, from art to story-telling, from playing to images but, above all, in-depth listening to the emotions and their working out, the search for meaning and reflectivity remain fundamental.

⁹ We can remember, for example Viktor E. Frankl, who was Professor of Neurology and Psychiatry at the University of Vienna Medical School. He spent three years during World War II in concentration camps, including Theresienstadt, Auschwitz, and Dachau. In those contexts, he formulated many of his key-theories. "Logotherapy, his psychotherapeutic school, is founded on the belief that striving to find meaning in life is the most powerful motivation for human beings". In his best-known book, *Man's Search for Meaning* (1959), he gives a firsthand description of his experiences during the Holocaust, and presents the psychotherapeutic method he created. http://www.ted.com/speakers/viktor_e_frankl;<http://blog.ted.com/holocaust-remembrance-day-remembering-those-lost-and-those-who-survived/>, retr. 3 February, 2016.

¹⁰ *The Railway Man* is a 2013 British–Australian war film, directed by Jonathan Teplitzky. See:https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bbS_dYEwf2M, retr. 3 February, 2016.

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