

Balancing Memories:
**The ethics of memory and the problem of the different narratives about
the past**

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Abstract

In the field of memory studies, a common trait of collective memory has been the confrontation of the different interpretation of the past. Such confrontation has been described as struggles between different groups whose identity is strongly related to such interpretation of the past. Such circumstances generate strong debates, especially in societies going through political transitions. In such cases, the different versions of the past can have strong consequences in the definition of the truth, the victims and justice during this post-conflict periods. In the field of the ethics of memory, the main research questions have been strongly related to asking what should be remembered. At its core, the ethics of memory have used the figure of the victim as the main source of their normative claims. But in many occasions, the figure of the victims has been used for political goals, sometimes even excluding the victims of the construction of collective memory. For this reason, is important to explore the possibility of an ethics of memory that is capable to give an answer to the problem that different versions of the past can generate. In order to accomplish this, this thesis will compare different perspectives in the field of the ethics of memory and the idea of the balance of stories proposed by the Nigeria novelist Chinua Achebe in order to give a possible answer to the problem of the that the struggles of memory give to the ethics of memory

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Introduction

As I was doing my bachelor in Anthropology at the Andes University in Bogotá, a TV show starring 3 brothers and leaders of paramilitary groups in Colombia was generating a big debate. The TV show was presented as a historical account of the violence that generated many victims during the 80's. After some months of being broadcasted, victims of paramilitary violence, students of humanities programs and relatives of members of the demobilized guerrilla group M-19 organized a debate with the director and producers of the show. Each group was concerned with the way they were portrayed in the show by the main characters. The victims were strongly offended by the way how the characters in the show blame the victims of provoking the circumstances that generated the violence against them. We, the students, were worried of the consequences of how they portrait us as members of guerrilla groups, especially because being called that has been the reason of the violent deaths of many social leaders and human rights watchers. And the relatives of the former M-19 group were offended because the show portrayed the group's actions as the orders of leaders of drug cartels, for example, Pablo Escobar, classifying them as mercenaries and not as a political movement. After a big discussion about the dangers of such a show being broadcasted, the director and the producers promised that the show was going to show the reality of the relation of local and national politicians to different episodes of violence, contributing this way to the clarification of the truth of the violent past.

This never happened.

This is an example of how complicated it is to deal with the past, especially if there is violence involved in it. Different perspectives will give a particular meaning to past events and the repercussion they have in our present. One of the oldest guerrilla groups in Colombia's history, the ELN, had a lot of university students as their members during the 70's and 80's. But it is quite different to recognize that this groups had members with university studies to claim that everyone studying is a guerrilla fighter. A similar issue happens with the victims. In many occasions, different armed actors attacked civilians and claimed that they were collaborating with their enemies. By blaming the victims of their situation, the use of violence against them is justified in the eyes of the public. The relatives of the members of the M-19 were offended by the way the TV show depicted their actions, mainly motivated by the

monetary and legal gain of the big narco leaders. This would delegitimize their political agenda and the constitution of 1991, where the group participated in the construction of the institutional core of the country. The claims of those who were in that debate are important because a TV show that claimed to be historical and neutral was telling an untruthful story about the past to millions of Colombians. What was happening in the auditorium of Bogota's planetarium was what Elizabeth Jelin describes as a political struggle for memory, a confrontation between different actors trying to give the past a particular meaning for the present..

In many occasions when we talk about the past, especially the painful past, we can hear people invoking a duty to remember those who passed away. Other may say that there is a necessity to remember in order to learn a lesson and prevent the repetition of the terrible events of the past. Some have reflected on how “the duty to remember” that is evoked in many occasions, for example commemorations or public demonstrations, cannot really give us a solid answer to problems that may arise after a period of political violence (Meral, 2012, p. 46). The problem is that the same events that may be used to call for reconciliation or forgiveness can at the same time be enough to make a call for hate, resentment and war. Considering this, many narratives about past events and their meaning for those in the present are themselves part of political struggles that shape our lives and relations with others. Thus, our relationship with the past falls under the discussion of both ethics and politics, making this a difficult topic to deal with. As the discussion about how to deal with the past develops, problems arise with topics like justice, truth and reconciliation, as well as identity, forgiveness and forgetting. The way how the duty to remember the past has been discussed so far has emphasizes either the relation to the past in deontological ways, by giving the act of remembering a moral status by itself, making it a straightforward duty, or it has used the argument of reconciliation, social heal and prevention of future conflicts to justify the necessity of remembering the past. Instead of giving arguments to why we should or should not remember, the interest of this thesis is to explore if there could be an ethics about the political struggles for memory. The structure of this thesis will start by addressing the general debate on the ethics of memory and how this explains the purpose of this research. Following this, collective memory and the struggles for memory will be defined using different authors that acknowledge the relation of identity with memory, as well as the dynamics that make

possible to talk about collective memory. Afterward, the normative claims on memory of Tzvetan Todorov, Paul Ricoeur and Avishai Margalit will be described in order to evaluate how they could lead or not to an ethics of memory that can include the problem generated by the struggles for the past. Finally, I will propose that the concepts of balance of stories and the danger of the single story by the Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe and Chimamanda Adichie can be a different foundational point for many of the concepts worked in the ethics of memory. Especially, they allow changing the relationship that most of the ethics of memory have with the concept of the other, thus allowing to make a plea for balancing memories as a way to reduce the distance between the self and the other.

1. The debate on the ethics of memory

Thinkers like Paul Ricoeur or Tzvetan Todorov have emphasized the necessity to remember or to forget in order to avoid either repetition or to cure the wounds of the past. The necessity to remember is for them a way to avoid abusing narratives about the past, that may create incomplete stories about victorious heroes and defeated, big narrations of fights between good and evil that may ignore the atrocities and suffering that third parties suffered. Both Ricoeur and Todorov recognize that this relation is a present one, it happens and is affected by the current affairs of our time. For this reason, the memories of a community are never neutral and naïve, neither are a perfect reference to the true facts of the events described. Some, like Elizabeth Jelin, have studied precisely in depth the power struggles that are inherent to the construction of the collective memories, describing memory as a field where different political and ethical ideals are confronting each other in order to give a particular meaning to an event, or group of events, in the past. There is a dynamic of rival memories, “memories against memories” that try to impose a vision with certain truths and certain shadows about the past (Jelin, 2002, p. 6). Such struggles are important in the establishment of a collective identity but are never absolute. There are always possibilities to find people or communities defending a different approach to the past. Neither the collective memories and the collective identities are isolated and absolute systems, they are constantly in change because of new factors that may emerge in time.

Considering this, to ask for an ethics of memory will always be limited by the reality of political struggles and the challenges to the established ideas about the past. What and why

to remember finally are discussions that will be affected by the different interests and perceptions of the past in the present. Most of the philosophical approaches to the topic try to establish a certain type of relationship with the past as moral, either by establishing the necessity to remember those who suffered or by attacking the big narratives of victory. Instead of looking for arguments to establish reasons for remembering the past, I want to approach the problem of memory from the perspective of the struggles that exist around it. Instead of asking if there is something we ought to remember, I want to know if there is a way how we should behave according to divergent memories of the past. Is there any normative limit on how we relate with the different memories of the past? By talking about the different memories, the problem is extended towards those who identify themselves with them. In this sense, the question implies to think about the narrations about the past and those who narrate them, either because this past is part of their identity or because they were witness to the events. I consider that the duty to care for the existence of a division of mnemonic labour that Avishai Margalit proposes is not capable of giving an answer to the problem of digressing memories, but it gives an important starting point by establishing that there is a duty to maintain the construction of the memories of the past. In order to avoid a situation where the discussion of the past is reduced to an absolute story about it, I will argue that Chinua Achebe reflection on the balance of stories can give an interesting answer to the question of the struggles for memory. He argues that the stories that have been told about Africa have dehumanized the people living in the continent, thus reducing them to be the object of barely human relations or in the best scenario as the receivers of pity. The balance of stories is then an answer to the absolute stories about Africa and its people. I consider that the idea of balancing the memories can be a possible answer to the difficulties that the politics of memory can generate to an ethics of memory.

2. Collective memory identity and struggles for memory

Different authors have highlighted on the difficulties that emerge at the moment of defining memory (Huysen, 2009, p. 3), mostly so because when referring to memory there is a strong tendency to group many things happening in societies under the same category (Jelin, 2002, p. 17). One of the first author to work on the concept of collective memory was Maurice Halbwachs in his book *Collective Memory*. For Halbwachs, memory requires a social component to function. We are capable to remember based on our ability to bring back

information about the past, but through the relations we have with different social groups our memories can become more detailed or even change. He uses the example of the memories of a student and a teacher meeting after many years (Halbwachs, 1980, p. 26). The student may remember with more detail the things that happened in the class, the particularities of each of its classmates and the lessons from the teacher. But for the teacher it is more difficult to remember, even if he was aware of each of the students and cared about their problems at that time. He may have so many students during his working years that after a while it is difficult to remember all the faces and names. The differences between both are not provoked by the number of people they know, for Halbwach the difference is in how the student and the teacher move through social groups. For the first, assuming that the students continued seeing each other after graduating, the information about the past could be constantly be confirmed in conversations. The classmates could tell anecdotes of the classroom, or even give new meanings to the attitudes of the teacher. On the other end, the teacher may not have this network of people giving him information about the particular students and as a consequence it becomes more difficult to retain information through time. In this sense, the memories are affected by the groups the people interact with.

If we think about the example of Halbwachs gives, the use of the word memory could be a little misleading. Usually, this word is used to describe a particular psychological process of bringing back the past to the present. In this sense, to remember is the individual action of recovering past experiences. This way, memory has no use of the social context in the process of recovering the past. Instead, Halbwachs proposes that the capacity of individuals to remember is affected by its social environment to the point that it could even change the contents of the memories because of this. Thus, the collective memory is the product of the relations between individuals and groups. The interpretation developed by Halbwachs has been criticised on many occasions and is not in line with the recent studies of psychology about the topic. But even in this field, the importance of the social context in the capacity to remember is not something new. It has even generated a whole debate about the consequences of the malleability of our memory, especially in the cases of recovered childhood memories (Campbell, 2010, p. 1). Is important to clarify that the concept of collective memory has been misunderstood in many occasions as an entity with its own existence in relation to individuals, following the Durkheimian definition of a social fact

(Jelin, 2002, p. 22). But memory is not a set of informational items of which the existence is independent of the relations that produce it, instead, it comes into existence only through the social activity of a group. Here I will follow Halbwachs in this trait of collective memory.

Another author working on the topic of collective memory is Paul Connerton. Based on Halbwachs work, he considers that the collective memory is not only the result of the contiguity of individual memories. The capacity to evoke memories collectively is not the product of individuals having the same references due to having witnessed the same past. Instead, the capacity to evoke these memories is the product of the interest of the group in those events for establishing (Connerton, 2014, p. 37). This interest is quite important because it is related with the idea of the identity and an origin of a community. As Connerton explains, usually in order to describe who we are we make use of a narration of ourselves where in many occasions events from the past that are relevant for us are used. When we apply this idea to a community, we could find a similar principle of giving the group a particular narration about its origin. Maybe the best example of this kind of stories about a common origin of is the official history of a nation. In the case of many South American countries, such stories highlight certain events of the colonial period and how the independence was achieved. For example, in the Colombian case, the story told to kids in school usually starts by referring to the period of time before the Spanish conquest, this period is barely described and only gives a simple description of the native populations of the country. After that the colonial era is introduced, with its unjust institutions and tyrannical rulers. This is done as a background to explain the independence movement in the region, the injustices that were done by the representatives of the Spanish crown became intolerable and triggered a military campaign for freedom. Myths are created around certain events and heroes are praised for their actions. Such events are constantly reminded through commemorations, through formal education and practices that establish a starting point for the identity of Colombia. Similar processes can be seen in other regions, for example, Connerton makes an analysis of the French Revolution in the beginning of his book *How do societies remember?* as a central event in the memory of the French people of following generations.

Thus, memory is strongly related to the construction of an identity, both collective and individual. This relation between identity and memory has also been part of the reflections of Paul Ricoeur, especially because he considers that it is through the acts of narrating and remembering that we can experience a sense of continuity of our self. For him, the way how we try to answer the question “who am I?” is especially difficult because we have to deal with preserving our identity through time (Ricoeur, 2002, p. 8). Identity has to deal with the tension between our sameness in spite of changes and the flexibility that allows us to change through time. Therefore, our identity is both stable and dynamic. By using narrations where moments of stability are bound to moments of change we are capable to deal with the dual nature of identity. Another issue that he recognizes from identity is the relation with the formation of otherness. By establishing limits, we create the boundaries that define who is part or not of the group. The problem is that this other is usually defined as something different, something that defies our way of living and our ideas about right and wrong. The common response towards the other is fear and violence (Ricoeur, 2002, p. 9). This idea about identity is strongly influenced by the distinction between friend and foe proposed by Carl Schmitt and has been used by many authors in the past (Ricoeur, 2004) (Margalit, 2002) (Rieff, 2011). Following this, memory is related to a certain conception of the political. One that is concerned with the way how people establishes the limits of the groups they are part, as well as the relations with those outside. Considering this, memory and identity have a strong political implication and can be decisive in the construction of a society.

This brings us to the main impression about memory I want to address and will explain how my approach to the topic of an ethics of the struggles of memory will be. Memory is a disputed field, where different actors are clashing for establishing a particular meaning to the past. This has been widely studied in the field of social science, especially in South America by anthropologists and sociologists. In this continent, memory became a common topic for social movements and even for governmental institutions. Due to the wide phenomena of dictatorships on the continent during the cold war, as well the high levels of political violence following that period. Many events and people worth to be remembered can be found in the region. One of the most famous works on the topic is *Los trabajos de la memoria* (translated into English as *State Repression and the Labours of Memory*) by Elizabeth Jelin. Her intention in the book is to give some reflections on the way we give meaning to the past. In

order to accomplish this, she starts by understanding memory as subjective processes, bound to symbolic and material experiences and marks. The memories are the object of struggles between different actors, which implies for her to understand those involved as active members of the relations generated. Finally, memory is historical too, thus the meaning we give to the past is related with the historical contingencies of our present (Jelin, 2002, p. 2). Two topics are important for her when defining memory: identity and forgetting. She approaches the topic of identity using Paul Ricoeur's reflection, the necessity to deal with the variability of our self as time pass by. To be able to remember is an important aspect of how identity is established. But it is important to understand that this relationship between identity and memory is mutually constituted. Memories are not something we think about, instead, they are part of the tools we use for thinking (Jelin, 2002, p. 25). As a result, memory is not the product of identity, nor the other way around, instead, they are both constituted as we are defining important events in our past and narratives about who we are.

Forgetting is another crucial theme of her work and in general for the whole discussion around memory. If identity defines boundaries for who we are and who is outside of the group, memory defines what will be remembered and what will be forgotten. As narrations about the past are formed, a process of selection is made in order to give content to memories. A collective memory that contains everything that happened is impossible (Jelin, 2002, p. 29). This way, forgetting and silence are parts of the construction of memory. Forgetting can be the product of different processes, for example, the loss of meaning for a generation of a particular event or by a deliberate destruction of the traces of a certain past. A contemporary case of this is the current situation with the new generations in Europe. The generation of victims and witness of the Second World War are dying and those that are still alive will understand that event through the memories they have received. As a consequence, there will be no direct access to the memories lost with the death of a generation. Other process is the silence about a past event. Silence usually emerges after the deliberate forgetting, it refers to the knowledge about the past that is known but is not openly spoken about. Examples of this can be found in societies going through undemocratic regimes that will repress any alternative narration about the past. The traces of the past may be destroyed by deleting registers, repressing the press or eliminating eyewitnesses of certain events, but the private memories of those who survive these processes are not easy to erase. This generates the

silence around a certain event. There are always parts that will be forgotten, either because they lost their meaning or because they put in danger the meaning of a particular view of the past. The political struggles for the memory emerge from the conflicts that may exist between different meanings about the past, due to what some may have forgotten or the silence of those who are not allowed to speak.

The struggles for the past are usually stronger in cases where political transitions were going on without the creation of absolute narrative about the violent past. Under these circumstances to have control over the meaning of the past has strong consequences on how justice is accomplished or reconciliation is promoted. Examples of this kind of struggles can be found in many places, but South America has quite a long list of people and groups trying to expose cases of violence and human rights violations. It is not strange that the idea of the struggles for memory proposed by Elizabeth Jelin was created after the extensive fieldwork she has done with members victims movements in Argentina. Amnesties were given and silence were imposed in many countries. Under these circumstances, many victims and families have fought in order to denounce the violence that occurred. In the example of the TV series about the paramilitary violence in Colombia, victims were concerned with how narratives about the past justify violence by blaming victims of the deaths of their families. This is a common issue in the whole region, those applying violence are capable of justifying their actions in the framework of the cold war and the war against terror (Barbosa, 2009, p. 181). The struggles for memory are the confrontations between different meanings of the past that groups of people try to defend for different reasons. Some could be just because of tradition or may be looking for justice in order to break an imposed silence. Others may use these narratives about the past as a way to consolidate their power or justify their actions.

Consider what has been described until now, to talk about memory requires to understand different aspect of the relations that we have in our present regarding the past. Collective memory is a social process, where the meaning of the past is established through the importance we give to a certain set of events. This value that we give is strongly related to our identity, both individual and collective. Through the construction of a narration about our past, a certain idea of the self is constructed where we can connect the present situation with what has happened before and will happen in the future. But as addressed by many authors,

identity is a process of creating boundaries of the self. As a consequence, it is not possible to think about identity without considering what is different to us. A similar situation is found in the relationship between memory and forgetting. By establishing certain narratives and meanings about the past, some information will be left out of what we remember. Thus, forgetting will always be related to the act of remembering. This relation between identity and otherness, as well as memory and forgetting is at the core of the struggles for memory. The confrontation among different views of the past is at the same time a confrontation of identities that are trying to define a shared past. To talk about the ethics of memory requires to start thinking about how we judge our relationship with the past. But first, is it even possible to judge morally our capacity to remember?

3. What are we judging in memory?

This has been the initial question for many of the thinkers that have worked on the ethics of memory. Is not surprising that to establish a normative framework of something, we need to establish if this can be the object of a moral judgment. This is not an easy task in the case of memory, mostly because is difficult to consider the act of remembering an action that we have control over and it has been traditionally conceived such involuntary actions are more difficult to judge than voluntary ones (Reiheld, 2006, p. 25). We remember what we can, if we forget something there is no way to consider that we could do it otherwise. Memory does not seem to fall into the realm of actions that may be under our control. In the following section, I will address how to remember can be judged, by introducing the fact that the type of memory we are interested in is a collective one. Following this, I will explain how different authors have approached the judgment of memory, by evaluating it in function of concepts such as humanity, use and abuse, and justice.

3.1 The problem of having control over our memories

To remember is an ambiguous spot in the discussion about evaluating actions. The difficulty of judging our memory emerges from our incapacity to control the contents of what we remember or forget, as well when and why we remember. Both Paul Ricoeur and Avishai Margalit have considered it important to explain how we can judge memory to propose an ethics of memory. For Ricoeur, the main topic that must be addressed is how to consider the act of remembering as an action that can be the object of uses and abuses. For Margalit,

remembering is a type of actions that we cannot control directly, but as a group we are capable of controlling it indirectly. For him, this will establish the capacity to judge the act of remembering. Both will give answers that establish limits to what can be the object of a normative claim about memory. In other words, the nature of both memory and remembering forces us to put some limits in any normative claim.

3.1.1 A phenomenological approach to memory as an action.

Paul Ricoeur is a French philosopher who has worked on different topics, mostly from a phenomenological perspective. In his book *Memory, History, Forgetting* he explores different aspects of memory in relation to historiography and forgetting, as well the ethical implications of memory in relation to identity and narratives about the self. His work is vast and complex, a reason for approaching to him carefully. At the beginning of the book, he establishes the objective of this research as a phenomenology of memory that is structured around two main questions: “Of what are there memories? And whose memories are these?” (Ricoeur, 2004, p. 3) Truthful to the phenomenological approach, the questions address the content and intentionality of the act of remembering. For this reason, the topic of the identity and the content of memory become important in the book. He starts defining memory through the Greek distinction between *mneme* and *anamnesis*. The first one designates memory as a passive appearance, as content popping into our mind; and the second will describe it as a search, a process of recollection (Ricoeur, 2004, p. 4). Such process of recollection will create a set of tools to remember, what he will call the *ars memoria*. Based on this Greek heritage, he will eventually conclude that to remember is a type of action done with our mind that leads to different uses of the memories we have. The possibility to talk about an ethics of memory then derives from the different uses and abuses of it (Ricoeur, 2002, p. 5).

3.1.2 Indirect control of memory and the use of mnemonic devices

Another perspective on the conditions that allow us to judge memory is -by way of reference to the voluntary and involuntary muscles of Avishai Margalit. For him, individual memory suffers from a problem to be evaluated. We don't have an absolute control over the way we remember and forget. Such circumstances are problematic according to him because “the philosophical cliché has it that *ought* implies *can*, and there is no point in obligating us to do what we cannot do at will” (Margalit, 2002, p. 56). He considers that such threshold for

establishing what can be evaluated is unreasonably high, but he concedes this argument to be right in the case of individual memories but *not* in the case of shared memories. He compares our capacity to remember to the capacity we have to use the muscles in our body: we are capable of voluntarily moving our legs and arms, but the muscles of our heart are not under our command. To have control over our heartbeat, we can use indirect methods like running to make it beat stronger and faster. Similarly, we have a set of mnemonic devices (for example monuments, commemorations, archives, etc.) to stimulate our memory and allow us to have an indirect control over it. This way is possible to talk of an ethics of memory by understanding that there is no way to evaluate if we forget or remember something individually. Instead of this, there is a responsibility towards our shared memory (Margalit, 2002, p. 58).

Both authors emphasize on the necessity to understand the act of remembering as an action that has at the same a passive or involuntary part, and an active or voluntary component. Is important to understand that this is important because usually memory would fall under the category of cognitive functions that are not the object of moral evaluation. The “cliché” mentioned by Margalit is not a minor issue for giving memory the possibility of being evaluated. At the core of two of the more important positions in applied ethics, consequentialism and deontology, we will always find a subject that is concerned to take the best decision. He or she is supposed to have control over actions and this is important to establish the possibility of an ethics. To remember can be an action under our control under certain circumstances, thus limiting what and how we evaluate it. Paul Ricoeur will consider that the moment when we are free to choose about our past is the moment when the *ars memoria* is giving a use to our memories. Margalit will find the same moment when we are using the devices that our community has created for remembering. Thus, it is important to notice that in general, it is difficult to establish a set of rules to evaluate individual memory because we cannot have a consistent control over what we remember. But the same cannot be said of the collective memory, the different strategies we have in terms of education, ceremonies, memorials, etc., allow us to discuss the moral responsibility we may have towards the past.

3.2 Tzvetan Todorov: *The use and the abuse of memories*

In order to understand how the different proposals on the topic of the ethics of memory emerged, it is important to take into account what provoked such a strong interest in the topic. After the Second World war, many intellectuals in Europe had to deal with understanding how in one of the centres of civilization, Germany, such actions of violence could even happen. Some will claim that we are now dealing with the problem of a logical crime, that many crimes are committed in name of freedom or philanthropy (Camus, 1956, p. 4). One of many intellectuals dealing with this violent past from Europe was Tzvetan Todorov. In 1995 he published a book that would influence many of the future proposals of an ethics of memory: *Les abus de la mémoire* (The abuses of memory). The concept of the use and abuse of memory is in the core of many of the reflections on the normative claims about memory, especially in the work of Paul Ricoeur. But Todorov's proposal had such an influence that requires to be presented on its own terms. His book starts by claiming that the totalitarian regimes of the XX's century have made evident an issue never considered before: the suppression of memory (Todorov, 1995, p. 11). The elimination of archives, books and traditions have been a recurrent strategy of those in power to consolidate their positions, examples can be found in the case of the Nazi regime, the URSS or communist China (Todorov, 1995, p. 12). As these regimes try to erase a past, those who survive usually find in the act of remembering what is suppressed as a way of resistance.

As mentioned above, it is difficult to talk about memory without considering forgetting. Todorov recognizes that to reveal the truth about the past is not equal to talk about a proper use of memory. The first distinction he makes is precisely between the process of recovering the past and the use we give to it afterward. The action of recovering the past is for him something that should not be restricted, neither by the State or others agents. On the other hand, the use of it is much more complicated to control because in this case, the problem is to define what constitute a good use and what an abuse. In order to create a normative framework for this, he will compare the good use of the past with the psychoanalytical approach to overcoming a traumatic past. To recover the past is important in this process, but this does not mean that the past should be in control of the present. Instead, it is the present that should make use of the past according to its present necessities (Todorov, 1995, p. 25). Thus, a first important aspect of a good use of the memories of the past is the relation it

establishes with the present. In a case of abuse, the past will reign over the present. An example is a hatred between groups due to old disputes (Todorov, 1995, p. 26). In this type of cases, the memories from the past and the emotions that come with them are the ones under the control of the present, driving groups to reproduce cycles of violence.

The relation between the past and the present is just the initial aspect of his work, the core to distinguish between good and bad uses of memories will be the *literal* and *exemplary* use of the past. The literal use will be the cases when a certain event is used to constantly reproduce the emotions of that past. To seek for every perpetrator, for every detail about a violent event, to register it and expose it constantly. The literal use of the memory will never let go of the emotions bound to the past. This clearly generates a control of the present by the use of the past. The exemplary use of the past is more complex. Without negating the particularities of the events, in this case, we are capable of using the memories in a more general way to use it in our present world (Todorov, 1995, p. 31). The process of transforming an exemplary case requires two things: the first, similar to the process of grief in psychoanalysis, is to reduce the emotional load of the past event; secondly, to open our memories to the public sphere (Todorov, 1995, p. 31). The result of this is that the exemplary memory allows to compare and find similarities instead of continuity, which for Todorov is important because that can be a tool for liberation by comparing today atrocities to past ones. Finally, this use of memory will be compared to the legal procedure of justice. By looking for the generalities that allow judging someone or something, the exemplary memory is similar to the process of seeking justice. It looks over the particularities and searches for an impartial judgment, similar to what a judge should do (Todorov, 1995, p. 32).

3.2.1 Limits to the idea of the exemplary use of memory in relation to the struggles for memory

Todorov recognizes that the exemplary memory is not a request for denying the particularities of an event. But it is a way to establish the possibility of comparing different cases of the past, especially those about the violent one in order to be on the look for preventing similar situations to ever happen again. The possibility of comparing generates a strong debate, mostly because it has been used in order to justify or reduce the importance of events like the Holocaust or the Soviet camps (Todorov, 1995, p. 36). The problem as he notices is that

claiming to use the past as a lesson to avoid future mistakes requires being able to compare the past with the present (Todorov, 1995, p. 37). Thus, the only way to have a use for the past that does not condemn the present is through the use of exemplary memories. But such idea is not free of dangerous consequences. As Andreas Huyssen proposes, a whole obsession with memory has emerged in the Western world (Huyssen, 2009, p. 11). At the centre of it, the Holocaust and trauma are the main points of comparison to understand other violent events in the world. Todorov was not unaware of this problem, but he never put into consideration the possible lesson that violent events outside of Europe could have for understanding our present.

If compared to the proposal of understanding the struggles for memory in South American countries, the idea of the use of exemplary memory seems to be quite useful. The violence in many countries where done in the middle of the Cold War. Thus, the cases have the potential to be generalized in order to understand the political violence in the region and prevent similar cases in the future. However, the potential of the discussion of the use of memory has been limited by the function of the Holocaust as the main example. The problem of this exemplary use of memory is that it has assimilated as part of a national discourse against totalitarianism. The Nazi regime, as well Stalinism, where the main evil figures in the construction of a narration on the past. Such example could be useful for the South American cases, but such a “trope of traumatic history “could either enhance or hinder the local efforts and struggles for memory too (Huyssen, 2009, p. 16). What is important here is to notice that many of the philosophical debate on the ethics of memory have at its core the example of the Holocaust. As a consequence, the normative claims derived from here are strongly influenced by the national discourses about community, the fight against totalitarianism and the defence of human rights. These are actually important aspects to consider for the case of the political violence in South America too but is not enough. The national discourses are not useful because there is no clear external aggressor, the fight against the communist totalitarianism became a way to justify the dirty war against citizens and the defence of human rights was stigmatized as an insurgent activity. This context makes the struggles for memory tougher because a national identity against political violence is much more difficult to create. The exemplary memories of Todorov have a strong potential for the discussion on the ethics of

memory and it is present in other authors reflections, but many have used the Holocaust as the main, if not only, example for normative claims on memory.

3.3 Paul Ricoeur: the duty of memory and the notion of justice

One of the authors who took over the language of the uses and abuses of memory is Paul Ricoeur. As we saw, his books have explored the possibilities of a phenomenological approach to memory and ethics. By referring to the Greek heritage on the philosophical thinking he proposes that memory can be defined as an act of the mind. But besides this influence, another work that has been strongly important to him is Freud's work on memory. The psychoanalytical approach has been quite important in many of the reflections on memory, mostly because trauma is an important aspect of the act of remembering when the past has been violent. From here, he ~~will~~ refers to three pathological or abusive types of memory: blocked, manipulated and abusively controlled memory. Each one happens on a different level of discussion. The blocked memory is a problem of the individual, the manipulated memory is a pragmatism issue and the controlled memory is an ethical-political matter. In the case of the controlled memory, he will propose a duty of memory that emphasizes the relation of memory with the notion of justice.

The blocked memory is a concept that is strongly influenced by Freud's work, especially in his two essays on remembering and melancholia. Freud's initially is interested in the process of recovering traumatic memories and its relation with a compulsion to repeat the experience constantly. The patient is not conscious of the compulsion of repeating, which hides to him the weight of the trauma. The work of memory is the healing process in psychoanalysis where the individual will overcome this situation. The psychoanalyst should be persistent with the patient and has to encourage him to understand that the event is a core part of their identity which requires to be confronted (Ricoeur, 2004, p. 70). The relation between the psychoanalyst and the patient of recovering the memories and confronting them is what constitutes the work of memory. The second essay will explore how the mourning for the loss of someone, or something with a strong value for our identity such as the homeland, can be transformed in melancholia (Ricoeur, 2002, p. 7). In this case, the problem is that the loss is not transformed in part of the identity, but the object of love becomes constantly present in the patient's life. The work of memory and the work of mourning are two different

processes that aim to either a confrontation to the past and overcoming a loss, manifesting in the denial of the past or in the excessive remembrance of the loss. For him, this reflection is important because is based on the idea that the collective memory will work based on collective wounds that need to be healed in order to avoid the abuse of forgetting or the excess of memories (Ricoeur, 2002, p. 7).

On the pragmatical level, Ricoeur finds the most recurring cases of abuse of the memory. Here the memory is instrumentalized instead of wounded by trauma. The abuse of memory and forgetting, in this case, is done by those who hold the power and at the core of this problem we find "...the mobilization of memory in the service of a quest, the appeal, the demand for identity" (Ricoeur, 2002, p. 7). As established before, memory has an important relationship with the identity due to the capacity of narrations about ourselves in the past to establish a continuity between our previous, current and future self. The fragility of memory on the pragmatical level, its potential to be abused, is the product of the fragility of identity. The first reason for the fragility of the identity is the conflict produced by time. As mentioned before, identity requires to deal with the conflict of sameness and otherness in the self as time pass by. Narrations and memory allow us to have a relation between both aspects of our identity. This makes the manipulated memory a powerful tool of power, by controlling the narrations of the past is possible to affect the identity of individuals and groups.

The second reason for the fragility of the identity is the fact that we have a difficult relationship with the other. The outsider is usually perceived as a threat and its traditions as incomprehensible, thus we perceive it as putting our identity in danger. Finally, the third argument for the fragility of our identity is how violent events have a tendency to be our foundational moments. Many national identities fall under this category, a particular moment of peace after a war can be an important cornerstone in the national identity of a country. The same happens with victims of political violence that create a whole political identity around a violent event in the past. The problem here is that violent events usually involve winners and losers, and what we perceive as a victory could be an unjust event for others. Thus, we find the same uneasy feeling as in the second argument on the fragility of identity, when someone doesn't celebrate the same victories as us (Ricoeur, 2004, p. 82). The manipulated memory is then defined by its use of the different fragile parts of identity in order accomplish

certain goals, usually related with the justification of political order and a collective identity (Ricoeur, 2002, p. 85). The function of narratives in this is to become tools for an education of memory and the construction of an identity. In this field, the uses and abuses of Todorov become important. The potential of this education of memory becomes a problem of uses and abuses that can lead us to an extreme of an excess of commemorations or the problem of forgetting. In order to evaluate the use of the manipulated memory and the possibility of an ethics of memory, it is necessary to speak of the ethical-political dimension of memory.

In the case of the obligated memory or the ethical-political dimension of memory, Ricoeur reflects on finally on what constitutes a “duty to remember”. This duty is mainly characterized by justice. According to Ricoeur, the duty to remember can be the epitome of both the use and abuse of the exercise of memory (Ricoeur, 2004, p. 87). The imposition of a duty to remember is at the same time a plea to not forget, and this can be the starting point for any case of excess of memory in the sense of Todorov’s notion. The extraction of the exemplary value of traumatic experiences which characterizes the justice seeks by the good use of memory to transform it in a project for the future (Ricoeur, 2004, p. 88). In other words, the sense of justice for Ricoeur in the cases of a good use of memory is the capacity of memory to be a tool for the present in the construction of the future. He gives a set of reasons for explaining how justice then relates to the construction of future and its relation with truth and the use of memory, but the most important aspect of the duty to justice and memory is the relationship established with the victims. For him, justice is a virtue that is turned towards other and the moral priority from victimhood is then towards the other victim and not ourselves (Ricoeur, 2004, p. 89).

3.4 Avishai Margalit: the duty to remember the cases of absolute evil

A recent account of the proposal of an ethics of memory is Avishai Margalit’s book *The Ethics of memory*. He develops many aspects of the possible implication of memory in ethics, but for the purpose of this thesis, I will focus on the obligation to remember the cases of radical evil and the responsibility towards our shared memory. In order to understand these concepts, is important to have clear that for him ethics and morality regulate two different types of human relationships. According to him, human relations can be thick or thin. The thick relations are those that are generated by an established relationship between people, for

example, family members, lovers or fellow-countryman (Margalit, 2002, p. 7). Such relationships are anchored in a common past of shared experiences. On the other hand, the thin relations are those who are mediated by the bare humanity of the other, clear examples of this are the relations we have with people in distress: the poor, the sick, the orphans, etc. that we encounter (Margalit, 2002, p. 37). Based on this distinction, Margalit will propose that ethics will regulate our thick relations and morality our thin relations. Following this idea, memory is strongly related to ethical claims, due to the fact that our thick relations are anchored in a common past.

The common past that is part of our thick relations is defined in two ways by Margalit: the common memories and the shared memories. A common memory is an aggregate notion, it is all the memories that individuals have about a particular event in the past (Margalit, 2002, p. 51). The shared memories are the product of communication, instead of being the aggregation of different experiences is the coordination of these memories in a single version that is transmitted through a group of people. In order for this to happen, it is necessary that some individuals or institutions recollect and transmit this version of the past, which leads to the concept of a mnemonic division of labor (Margalit, 2002, p. 52). This division of labor is easily observed in the work of individuals and institutions that are concerned with the preservation and transmission of the past, like archives, museums and memory centres. But besides this, there are mnemonic devices that allow us to remember by creating landmarks in space and time, like monuments or commemorations dates. This kind of devices are susceptible to lose their meaning as generations pass by, but they are powerful tools to maintain a dialogue between generations because they require for young people to seek in their community the meaning of the past, in order to have a minimal understanding of the device (Margalit, 2002, p. 55). From here, the responsibility towards our shared memory appears as a responsibility towards maintaining the division of mnemonic labor. Remembering the discussion on the indirect control over our memory, we are not asked to remember every detail about the past but to make possible the access to the network of shared memories generated by the division of mnemonic labor. In this sense, our duty is not towards the content of the memory itself but to the institutions and mnemonic devices that produces our shared memory (Margalit, 2002, p. 58).

The responsibility towards our shared memory is an ethical claim about our relation with the past. But the obligation to remember the cases of radical evil is instead a moral claim about the past. For Margalit, the question for a moral claim on memory is quite difficult. As mentioned before, memory is strongly related to thick relations and shared memories, thus they will be regulated by ethical norms. These relations will generate what Margalit calls the communities of memory. These communities are defined relations of caring, which are by definition relations that require a contrast (Margalit, 2002, p. 75). This means that they can only work if they can set limits to who is part of the community and determine who is an outsider. For this reason, humankind is not a principle under which a community of memory can be constructed. Such community would be incapable of creating a contrast for defining themselves and as a consequence caring would become just a pale notion (Margalit, 2002, p. 76). As the idea of a universal ethical community fades away, Margalit proposes that a moral community could be our second best option. Here he will propose that promoting morality is highly desirable, but protecting it is a must (Margalit, 2002, p. 83). This will define the type of events a moral community should construct its shared memory upon as the acts of radical evil. These acts are defined by how they undermine the foundations of morality itself, in other words, these are the acts that negates the notion of the shared humanity we have with others (Margalit, 2002, p. 79). Following this, the moral duty to remember is not a duty to remember the victories and failures of humanity, but a constant observation of the events where the humanity of people has been violated. For him, the source of this obligation to remember is not only the product of the events in itself but how the radical evil is capable of undermining morality using the collective memory too (Margalit, 2002, p. 83).

3.4 Struggles for memory and the conditions of victimhood

As noticed in the different proposals on an ethics of memory, some questions are common to the whole discussion about the possibility of an ethics of memory. The most important trends in the construction of normative claims on memory are to define what should be remembered and how should memory be used. But due to the nature of memory, the notions of identity and otherness are shaping the different reflections on normative claims about memory. But even with this consideration, the problem of the conflict of agents claiming for the meaning of the past is not a central aspect of the normative proposals of any of the author viewed until now. The problem of identity has shaped the discussion of memory strongly towards the area

of the self and not to the relation with the other, it is more about what we should remember and not how do we deal with difference. Todorov does not establish an ethical or moral theory regarding memory but established a quite important starting point in the use of memory. The main danger is how the memory could be misused to start new conflicts or legitimize certain authorities. In this sense, the only way how a different version of the past can be seen is through suspicion, the examples of the past are seen as the possibility of reducing the past to a literal sense. It is not in the intention of Todorov to do this, but the exemplary use of the past could be a powerful tool to delegitimize the different narrations of the past in the name of a generalization.

Margalit and Ricoeur put the problem of the other in the centre of their account of the ethical claims of memory, but in both cases, the other is not asking of us to confront to the possibility of a different way of telling the past. For both of them, the other is only shaped as the opposition of the identity and as the victim. This is quite a curious situation, mostly because for both of them the idea of the outsider is strongly related with the opposition to our way of living, but at the moment of creating a normative claim, its transformed to the figure of the victim. For Margalit this is the product of the shared humanity that is being violated in the cases of radical evil, for Ricoeur it is the moral priority of the victim as justice becomes part of the duty of memory. The strange situation here is that the other, which is described as the object of fear and incomprehensibility can only become harmless when we are telling their story as a victim. Both the moral duty to remember cases of radical evil and the duty to memory will have at its core the necessity of shaping the other in order to make peace with it, instead of creating a common ground for a relationship. In no moment the other is there as a figure that can challenge or reshaped in a positive way our relationship with the past. For this reason, the normative claims of the authors discussed so far are not capable of giving a concrete answer to the problem established by the struggles for memory. Because is not possible to perceive the other as an active figure that challenges us with own ideas and narrations about the past, unless it is the enemy that defeat us and imposes its version of the past.

The normative frameworks of the authors presented so far, then, are not by itself useless for the question this thesis is trying to answer. Some of the concepts used by Margalit and

Ricoeur are really useful for establishing a ground for dialogue between different versions of the past. The argument of remembering the cases of radical evil is a powerful tool for establishing a limit in who can or not participate on the struggles of memory without putting in danger the whole relation between agents, as we have to be aware that such confrontation for the meaning of the past is the perfect scenario for promoting abusive versions of the past or reduce the humanity of others. The normative claims about what should be remembered are then important to not fall into a situation of relativizing the discussion about the past. Additionally, for Paul Ricoeur, the memory is an opportunity for telling the past in different ways. This idea has for him an important implication on how we may reconcile ourselves with the other. In the following pages, I will develop further the idea that under the notion of the balance of stories, some of the claims in the ethics of memory can be used to promote a better understanding of the other, as something more complete than a victim and less dangerous than an enemy.

4. A Balance of memories

The condition of victimhood is not gratuitous in the reflections of most of the writers working in the field of memory. In general, the violent past has a tendency to leave stronger traces on people's lives. But a problem that emerges from this idea is that the excess of memory is the seed for new expressions of violence (Nimac, 2014, p. 26). In this sense, Todorov warning about the abuse of memory should not be taken lightly. But this fear of new violence can be dangerous because it can reduce any debate about the past to a case of abuse memory. If the victim becomes the paradigm of the past, the control over the definition of victimhood can exclude many that experienced violence too. In the more extreme cases, it can turn the victims in their own perpetrators. That was the risk of the TV series that depicted the victims as guilty of their own condition. The struggles for memory are then not a simple difference of opinion, they can be in many occasions be the scenario of serious accusations, as well the opportunity to seek justice. For this reason, to ask about how we should act toward the diversity of narratives about the past is an important question. If the ethics of memory is just an ethics towards the victims, we are not giving an answer to many scenarios where the past is still disputed. In order to propose an ethics of memory that can consider the alternative narratives about the past, thus having a more complex relationship with the other, I propose the use the

concept of the balance of stories and the single story proposed by the Nigerian novelists Chinua Achebe and Chimamanda Adichie.

In the book *Home and Exile*, Achebe makes a reflection about the way that the literature about Africa, usually written from outside the continent, created and reinforced a certain image of its inhabitants. The type of image created had a political function, as it was a tool for justifying the colonial power in the region. If the colonial authorities had argued that their actions were the product of greed and power, they would have been called scoundrels. In terms of Achebe, they only had to hire a storyteller that would make up a more acceptable story about colonization, where the land in dispute could not be possessed by the natives because they were incapable of using it efficiently (Achebe, 2001, p. 60). This way, a story of dispossession was transformed into a story of civilizing a chaotic region. The storyteller could be different types of agents. They could be members of the colonial authorities or even members of the academy, the storyteller is a position of power that has the potential of transforming a particular story into the only story that matters. Here, another concept coming from Nigeria becomes useful. In a conference called “The danger of the single story”, the novelist Chimamanda Adichie, uses the reflections of Achebe to talk about how a single version about Africa is dangerous for the dignity of those living in the continent. The single story is created by showing people as only one thing and repeat this enough until they become this in the eyes of others. Power once again is a central aspect of this, “power is the ability not just tell the story of another person, but to make it the definitive story of that person” (Adichie, 2009).

The single story then is the capacity to dispossess the other of a complex identity by defining their existence to a single narration. A countermeasure to this is what Chinua Achebe called a balance of stories. The concept is better explained by using a few examples. When he was asked once if he was planning to write about the United States, he didn't find any reason for doing it. This country has already enough novelist writing about it, Nigeria too few. The balance is not a matter of balancing one thing, but a diversity of them (Achebe, 2001, p. 97). Another example could be how Chimamanda Adichie explains why she has not a single story about the United States of America as the consequence of its cultural and economic power. She had read many authors describing the life in this country, thus not being able to have a

single version of it (Adichie, 2009). Following this, the balance of stories is not a plea for having many narrations, but a claim for diversity in their contents and avoiding absolute stories of others. This way the experiences of many people cannot be reduced to only their tragedies, failures or differences with others.

Is important to make two observations. First, the difference between the balance of stories and the freedom of speech. The balance of stories is not aiming to defend the right of individuals to express themselves, even if this is a requirement to achieve this balance. It is claiming that people should not be reduced to a single narrative or version. Censorship can be a tool for telling a single story about others, but the freedom of speech can be a tool for a simplifying interpretation of others too. Secondly, is important to clarify that the concept of balance is not necessarily connected with the philosophy of Ubuntu. Even if both share some ideas, like the recognition of humanity in others, there is no clear connection between them.

4.1 Semantic exclusion in the construction of the past

The problem that concept of the single story highlights is the exclusion of groups of people by flattening their experiences. In the field of memory studies, the inclusion of groups that usually didn't participate in the construction of the collective past has become each time a more compelling proposal (Cole, 2007, p. 9). Traditionally, the history has been told by winners, not by the losers. In this sense, many have been excluded from the process of telling the past. But this explanation may be oversimplifying a wider concept. The knowledge of the past is not impartial and, in many occasions, can exclude certain populations and events from the narrations it exposes. A common example of this derives of an excessive use of the concept of trauma, mostly because it carries the risk of pathologizing the experiences of violence, by first reducing people into "victims" and then into "patients". The problem then is that reduces the agency of individuals and the complexity of social processes that generated the violence, limiting the participation of many in the construction of the collective memory (Argenti & Schram, 2010, p. 16). Some, like Ariel Sánchez, have proposed that armed conflicts have a tendency to create exclusions of different sorts, but one that is usually not studied and is always present is what he calls the semantic exclusion. This exclusion consist is the omission of certain populations of the national construction of the shared history, mostly due to political differences (Sánchez Meertens, 2017, p. 33). According to him, to

give new meanings to the past and opening the debate to new agents is an important feature for societies facing political transition towards a more peaceful future. An important question then emerges: how the different memories in a society should be represented, articulated and confronted with each other? (Sánchez Meertens, 2017, p. 34). This is an important question that finally aims to the problems that the struggles for memory generates to the ethics of memory. How can this field of ethics include the narratives that are excluded? The narratives of others?

If seen through the principles of a balance of stories, a first point to start reconceptualizing the ethics of memory could be to think Todorov literal and exemplary uses of memory in relation to the risk of reducing the other to a single story. The literal use reduces the past to a single interpretation, bound to many emotions that chains the present to it. The literal use is not critical of its content and assumes that it contains the totality of what happened. In this sense, the literal use seems to have some shared aspects with the single story proposed by Adichie. Both are uses of narratives that assume they are absolute, that there is no space for a different version of what they are claiming. For this, both are used in usually as political tools because both can manipulate the perception people have of others. But in the case of the exemplar use of memory, the single story and the balance of stories may give some new criteria to the proper use of the past. As mentioned before, the problem of the exemplary use of memory is how it has used the case of the Holocaust as the main source for any other event. But Todorov does not ignore this problem, he recognizes that each event that becomes an example is still a particular case, and in this sense is not reduced to its generalization. Instead, it is through the exercise of comparing it that its particularity is founded (Todorov, 1995, p. 36). But the danger here is that the exemplary use becomes the literal use for any other case in the future. For example, that the concept of victim derived from the reflections of the Second World War becomes the generalized version of all victims. The problem is that the exemplary use of memory has the potential of becoming a single story of a wider concept, a stereotype may not be untrue but it is incomplete (Adichie, 2009). In this sense, to include the criteria of the balance of stories to the theory of the use and abuse of memories can be a way make the concept of exemplary use of memory more robust by highlighting the fact that the exemplar use is not absolute, but precisely is founded in the possibility of comparison which will require the possibility of different narrations about the past.

4.2 Towards an ethics founded in balancing memories

Balancing the stories of the past could have many implications for the ethics of memory. By taking some of the reflections of Paul Ricoeur and Avishai Margalit, I will argue that the balance of stories may be a way to establish an ethics of memory that takes into consideration multiple narratives about the past. The first concept that requires to change is the relation with the other as a figure that can only be considered in terms of being a threat or a victim. Is possible to accept the idea that those who don't share our identity and origins may be seen as a treat to our way of living, sometimes even compare it to an enemy. But conceptualizing the other to a single category does not reduce the fear towards the outsider. Chimamanda Adichie observes that the consequence of the single story is that "...It makes our recognition of our equal humanity difficult. It emphasizes how we are different rather than how we are similar" (Adichie, 2009). Such a claim implies changing the relation of the self and with the other, by establishing a new definition of otherness. Instead of using the condition of threat as the foundational attribute of the other, it should be principle of difference but not necessarily of antagonism. This is not an impossible idea to conceive, some societies have different definitions of the other that may include someone outside of the community as an equal, creating this way an inclusive concept of otherness (Jelin, 2002, p. 59). The most important thing to consider here may not be the idea of creating this inclusive definition of the other, but to understand that by defining the other in a single way, we are just increasing the distance between ourselves and the other.

This has consequences for the figure of the victim in the ethics of memory. Paul Ricoeur explanation for the duty of memory is based on the idea that justice is addressed to the other as long it is a victim. But as considered before, this is problematic because the definition of victim is part of what in many occasions is being contested in the struggles that exist around memory. Victimhood could be an abusive and reducing way to define the other, as we don't recognize the whole historical experience of the other. Following this, the victim may become a token figure, used to establish new exclusions and not surpassing the problem of the abuse of memories. But Ricoeur's account on the narratives about the past is not limited to the idea of the victimhood. Unfortunately, this seems to be a reflection that he does not develop much more as he works on the ethical-political use of memory. He recognizes that narratives are helpful in the development of an ethics of memory because they are a way of *telling*

otherwise, for the others to tell their own history (Ricoeur, 2002, p. 9). Then, instead of using as a principle the idea of victimhood, balancing stories of the past could be a different path to create an ethics of memory. Balancing memories could be then a request for recognizing the different narratives about the past, not by the condition of victimhood of the other, but for the sake of not reducing the other to a single story and consequently increasing the distance with them.

The next step is defining the limits of such a balance of memories. The obligation to remember the cases of radical evil of Margalit can be a threshold that functions with the concept of balancing memories. The relation here will be established by the concept of the shared humanity undermined in the cases of radical evil and the balance of stories as a countermeasure to reducing the other by the single story. Using this, we achieve two normative claims about the narratives about the past that differ from ours. First, the narrations about the past need to be respectful of the principle of not reducing the other to a single story, thus it has to avoid undermining the humanity of the other. Second, the narratives of the past of the other have to possess the same weight as ours. If we are not open to listening other versions of the past, we would reduce the other to our version of it. In other words, balancing memories would not be reduced to remembering the cases when people's humanity was in danger, but at the same time is aiming to be open to the dialogue and seeking to reduce any kind of semantic exclusion in the construction of memories. The consequence of this is that the struggles for memory should be a space for contesting the past, where we are capable of recognizing in others their humanity and aim to create the most inclusive memory possible.

4.3 Possible developments of the balance of memories

This idea of a balance of memories has its starting point in recognizing that the other should not be reduced to a single story. This could be an interesting way to make a normative call for reducing the absolute narrations about the violent past, where there are good and bad guys, which are common in cases of the dirty wars in Latin America (Comisión Nacional de Reparación y Reconciliación (Colombia), 2013, p. 16). One of the worst consequences of the dirty wars is that has created such an environment of polarization, that the possibility of recognizing the other is already difficult. Any effort towards an ethics of memory with the victim at its core can be used with the intention of excluding groups from the construction of

the past. But even if such a proposal could be interesting for a process of reconciliation in a society, it leaves outside of the discussion the concept of justice. The struggles of memory are in many occasion fights for the recognition of the wrongdoing and the demand of justice. The idea of a balance of memories as described here is not capable of giving a particular conception of justice, including the worst cases of the violence. This idea can only give a reason for accepting the different possible version of the past and give the others the opportunity of participate of such construction of the past. In this sense is not the same as claiming that reconciliation or participation is morally superior to justice or punishment. Is important to be clear in this topic because it has been the object of many discussion around forgiveness and justice, especially in relation with cases like the Truth Commission in South Africa (Crocker, 2002, p. 511). Instead, the idea of balancing memories could have certain similarities with the concept of the wide reflective equilibrium. Both are attempts to include all possible arguments, or memories, in the reflection of a problem or the past, but such task is in practical matters not possible, leaving this to an ideal that we should try to achieve (Knight, 2017, pág. 49). Following this, the concept of balancing memories could be useful for the encouraging the defence of social movements that try to open the debate about the past.

A possible starting point to include the concept of justice in the conceptual framework of balancing memories could be the use of dignity that is implied in Adichie's reflection. To a certain extent, the idea that the single story treats the dignity of people by reducing them to a single narrative has certain similarities to the idea of respecting the humanity as an end in itself of Kant. The single story reduces people existence as a way to justify the use of power over them, in this sense the humanity is negated through the narratives as a mean to achieve a certain goal or end. The Kantian discussion around dignity, humanity and autonomy has a similar structure, as the problem is that we should never treat humanity simply as a mean and we should always act in such a way we treat humanity as an end (Hill, 1980, p. 87). Similarly, we should never treat a story about the others as simply the only story about it and we should tell the stories about other as one of many always. From here, is possible to search in the field of applied ethics an answer to the problem of justice in the case of confronting memories by considering how the humanity of the others could be in danger by the stories we have from them.

5. Conclusion

As argued through this document the use of the concept of the balance of stories and the single story can be a valid way to reconsider the relation of the ethics of memory with the difficult reality of the struggles for the past. Considering that collective memory is the product of social relations, which are not necessarily harmonious, the ethical claims on memory have used until at its core the figure of the victim as if such condition could not be disputed. The problem is that on many occasion, the struggles for memory are precisely seeking for the recognition of such state by many groups. In others cases, the use of the category can be an abusive way to exclude certain groups of the collective construction of the past, even if they had experienced the violence too and by all means can be called victims. Instead of having the condition of victimhood as the central normative claim, the idea of balancing memories would use as the core of its argument the recognition of how the narratives of the past can either reduce the humanity of the other or respect it as an equal. Following this, an ethics of memory should not only care of what we should remember but how as we remember the meaning of the past is in a dialogue with others that may have a different position and that deserves the opportunity to be heard.

The balancing of memories is a concept derived from the dynamic relations between different groups trying to define the past. Considering this, the important thing to go any further in the use of the idea is that is a process or an attitude towards our actions. As Adichie mentioned, we are always susceptible to the single story. Is our duty to try to be aware of the moments when we are reducing the other to a single version, especially one that highlights the difference. In this sense, the balance of memories can be a way to understand memory as a tool for taming evil. As Todorov wrote once, the importance of remembering the past is not on the possibility of building a wall against evil, against other versions of the past, but to be aware of how inhuman actions are always part humanity (Todorov, 2009, p. 461). Our most important duty then is to be careful of not becoming the evil we try to defeat, to be always careful of not reducing the other to a single story.

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