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The forgotten dimensions of 'justice' programs: Cultural meanings and imperatives for survivors of violent conflicts

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Overall, this contribution stems from my experience as a practitioner or as a researcher, in various post-conflict situations. In the past, I have been often appalled by the lack of concern many outsiders were showing to indigenous peoples' thoughts concerning justice issues. Although this has changed in some cases, most attempts to assess public opinions of one particular judicial mechanism seem to limit debate about the whole range of options available and, above all, forget the various subjective dimensions in which these questions are raised. For that reason, when asked about what people thought of a truth commission, I doubted my capacity to furnish a non superficial answer unless I were to entertain deeper considerations of the systems of reference in which these people were functioning, the various parameters fashioning their potential answers and broader cultural concerns such as the different meanings behind the concepts we generally use to deal with these issues and the language used.

Indeed, what people believe—about themselves, the other, the nature of justice, the requirements of community, and the proper structure of rights and responsibilities—determine, at least in part, post-conflict politics, social action, and communal life. Behind justice programs often lay a host of unremarked and unanalyzed cultural meanings. These offer conflicting and often contradictory answers to the following questions: who is to blame, what vengeance is due and whether there is any point in rebuilding at all, thus setting the stage for action or inaction. Now, in a post-conflict phase, these questions are raised in a context where the representations of the collective "self" and the belief systems are deeply

effected. In the first part of my presentation, I would like to briefly explain how this directly relates to the conditions in which "justice" of any kind can be envisioned in post-conflict societies.

The various judicial mechanisms generally proposed also proceed from a certain interpretation of reality, and therefore belongs to the vast domain of the practice of producing narratives and creating meaning. In this process, we often tend to forget that several registers of truth coexist but do not necessarily coincide. In the second part, I will explain how this interferes with any judicial process and why these disjunctions and the subsequent problems must be taken into consideration.

Apart from the very real advances in international law in recent years, these subjective dimensions remain the most neglected in peace processes. Even today, individual traumas and their collective implications continue to be insufficiently acknowledged in the long process often wrongly described as "justice vs. reconciliation". That explains to a great extent the snags encountered until now by politico-judicial responses to wartime crimes. In the last part, I will suggest some avenues for research and assistance to integrate them, and to better aid the imperatives faced by survivors trying to reconcile their past.

Contextualizing justice issues

Most of the key issues raised by people concerned by the promotion of justice (including the delicate balance between forgetting and remembering) are affected by a number of factors largely beyond the usual judicial and political categories: cultural strategies, moral questions, ways in which memories are constructed and narrative landscapes, and how communities define their relationship to the past. In other words, the way people relate to justice issues will be closely linked to their beliefs about "ultimate things"—life and death, right and wrong, good and evil, and innocence and culpability—all concepts deeply affected by social disasters in which many were killed. The concepts of right and wrong often become blurred, "evil" becomes a tangible presence, and those who are culpable call themselves innocent.

Two specific dimensions may explain why such questioning is crucial. First, at the collective level, the society was not only a victim of violence that profoundly effected it, but

an author of the violence, albeit in a partial and involuntary way; it allowed what happened or at the very least did not prevent it.

Second, the killers and torturers now share a common living space with those they murdered or mutilated, they may have lived in or may still live in the same districts. They are rarely from "elsewhere", even when they have given themselves an identity as "Other" (especially an ethnic "Other"). The proportion of violence committed in a neighbourhood, even within the same family, is often higher than we imagine. So, family relationships can be the cause of suffering as well as the basis of support. In Cambodia, family relations were sometimes the reason for killing and at other times, for protecting: numerous testimonies describe cases of children charged for spying on their parents or even for killing them. In Liberia, Sierra Leone and the Democratic Republic of Congo, child-soldiers have played an active part in the extortions that took place in their own villages, including among their own families. In such circumstances, masks (such as in the massacres perpetrated in Ayacucho communities during the war in Peru; "If they had taken off those masks, we would have recognized them"…), rituals and fancy dresses (such as those worn by some militias in East Congo) may serve to construct an artificial identity of 'other' when the ones killing are in fact relatives or community members. Often, such masks fail to hide the facts, and instead suffuse the community with a sense of unreality and fantasy, a sense of the world being upside down.

Such 'intimate' crimes, and the efforts to hide them with lies and masks, individually and collectively, leave particularly deep marks. In its most immediate and visible consequences, such a reality partly explains why in Bosnia-Herzegovina in the spring of 2003 a number of Bosnians, while expressing satisfaction at the trial of Milosevic, recalled, like one young woman of Mostar: "The one who raped me is not Milosevic, he is the man I see passing every morning under my window. As long as nothing is done about that, there can be no peace." More deeply, 'intimate' crimes pit families and family members against one another, and make common, mutually supportive patterns of relationship problematic and painful. When social categories of protection such as family and friends are used instead to organize violence and destruction, basic, even unspoken and assumed regulatory foundations of a society are weakened and undermined. Culturally, assumptions, symbols, and rituals that support family and community, once subverted to promote violent acts, may be weakened as well, confused, and even transformed. After violence, once comfortable notions of family become suspect, making it difficult to establish a new life in peace because simple patterns of

work and trust seem impossible to re-establish. Of course, a tribunal or a truth and reconciliation commission is not supposed to enter into the understanding of how war and violence has transformed the basic structures of the society. But it cannot, in spite of its handicap, totally ignore this dimension as it will largely determine its capacity to play a positive role during the transition.

Both representations and expectations of society and state change as a result of mass violence, particularly when the latter has legitimated, supported or even armed the perpetrators of mass crimes. This begs the question whether the state should hold a monopoly on the legitimate use of violence, which in turn undermines the basis of law and order. Representations of the collective 'self' may also be deeply affected. Questions such as 'Who are the people?' 'What is the state?' or 'What will happen to us as a people?' need to be answered in new ways. The criteria used by people to assess aid programs, particularly in the transitional justice area, express their own demands and hopes, support their own plans, and work to shape society and state in this image. These perceptions are directly connected to the values they ascribe to society, the state, and to justice itself, and more importantly represent their new definitions of self at the individual and collective level.

In many countries, war and mass violence have become the norm rather than the exception. Sadly, the use of violence becomes necessary for survival. These practices could also be considered as strategies of formation and assertion of individual and collective identity, as well as diffused and profoundly internalized relational models. In such a context, the breakdown of social order, mass atrocities and the ghastly violence no longer constitute an "anomaly", or an exception. This cannot be approached as a circumscribed time of chaos which can be ended by the installation of State structures, including judicial institutions. Speaking about "a state of war", as some anthropological studies have suggested, may be necessary in order to describe the profound impact of this peculiar social logic of vendetta and counter-vendetta, suspicion and hate. It illuminates one of the most complex aspects: the state of war as an institutionalized reality, and thereby a general cultural experience that fashions identities and *imaginaires* along the same lines as the family, school, and other social systems. In such contexts, the devastating fragmentation of social ties and individual conscience contributes to the paralysis of any socio-political rehabilitation and fair justice process. It obstructs the reconstruction of everyday life in communities that have lived through a long siege of violence and poverty, due to events that extended beyond state's actions to

inconceivable primal actions executed during altered states of consciousness difficult to comprehend in the aftermath. In wars of ethnic cleansing, paramilitary groups and even entire populations are used as pawns and fodder, making war a mass enterprise rather than a matter of battles between armies. Yet the combatants in these cases are neither trained for combat nor treated as soldiers. Their own cultural categories must suffice for explanation, and the result as we mentioned above, is a descent into cultural confusion. The bloody reassertion of identity and meaning in the midst of altered states of consciousness rooted in fear and incomprehension must rely on cultural images that recede and disintegrate in the face of such intense and impossible realities.

When looking at concrete strategies for so-called "transitional justice", the dilemma is clear: how should we respond to the needs of the survivors and the society as a whole if we do not know the local logic behind social ties, their transformations, and above all the culturally appropriate coping mechanisms? In that respect, the fact that the field of transitional justice has developed in almost total disconnect from other fields of expertise – more particularly anthropology and mental health studies – partly explains this reality. While everybody understands why mass violence is traumatic to the individuals involved, the collective consequences of such trauma remain largely unconsidered. Work in war torn societies requires understanding and taking into account a variety of factors that affect the meanings and significance that individuals and groups ascribe to these events. These factors are tied to the local culture, and require attention to the symbolic and social worlds within which people operate. If 'evil' has been a concrete presence, for example, simply seeking to forget or recast it as injustice may not address issues that will emerge later in the form of distrust and retribution, and concretely impact the way individuals depict themselves as human being *and* citizens.

Engaging in a "narrative-building" process

If they want to have a positive impact on the rebuilding process, the various judicial mechanisms generally proposed in post-conflicts need to be better situated in this complex setting. It is even more important when considering the role they play in the production of narratives concerning the violent events. Indeed, as such, they proceed from a certain interpretation of reality. The process of constructing a narrative must be examined using the

following dualities: collective history and psychic history; individual histories and group relations; and group linkages and the workings of culture.[1] These memories are reconstructed by the interweaving of individual memories and collective memories, which then rewrite distant memories that include long-term history, as in the case of the Balkans or the Great Lakes region of Central Africa. Such an activity is doubly complicated by the historical course of events in which war crimes and the paradoxical functioning of memory are most often situated. Different systems of "truth" co-exist, without necessarily coinciding. For the purpose of this analysis, I suggest distinguishing between three notions of truth. First, there is the establishment (or historical "clarification") of facts that could serve as a basis for a public recognition of the gravity of what has happened. The second system is the subjective, and theological or philosophical, elaboration at both the individual and collective levels of a method for organizing memories and lending sense to them. The final system is composed in the realm of fantasy and art, which prevent what has occurred from passing into oblivion, and, to an even greater extent address the key question: "How and why could such a thing have happened?"

Although these different registers (or viewpoints) do not generally coincide, they coexist, intermingle, and sometimes enrich each other. This association can generate contradictions, which must be recognized as such, as they can transcend well-constructed discourse sanctifying a "consensual" vision that is often nothing more than the imposition of one version of history upon the others. The history of the African Great Lakes region offers successive tragic illustrations of such a process. On the contrary, symbolization must allow for the opening and forging of a pathway between the different systems of truth so that they may share in mutual recognition, move closer together, and finally meet, in an albeit difficult and painful process. To the extent that 'justice' proceeds from a certain interpretation of reality, it belongs to the vast domain of the practice of "creating meaning."

Establishing the facts

The act of establishing the facts must allow for the identification of those responsible for crimes committed as well as the beginning of rehabilitation for the surviving victims so that they liberate themselves from guilt. In fact, besides the various psychological

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[1]. René Kaës, *Violence d'Etat et psychanalyse*, Paris: Dunod, 1989.

mechanisms explaining that feelings of guilt are an important aspect of the relationship between a torturer or executioner and his victims,[2] guilt often forms part of repressive strategy.

In Guatemala, part of the army and those backing it still assert that the majority of the 200,000 killed in the civil war were guerrillas, individuals supporting them, or even Maya *indígenos* who massacred each other. Learning the facts (which involves, in that case, the long and painful work of exhuming mass graves) and acknowledging them publicly should restore the dignity of the deceased, and allows survivors and families to commence the mourning process. If such a process, which official discourse tends to suppress, does not occur the story fails to find a permanent space in society, thus remaining absent from the individual stories as well as from the collective history.[3] In Haiti after the September 1991 *coup d'etat*, when no trace of those who were killed could be found – neither the bodies nor a list of names were produced (while those concerned generally had no civil status at all) – those who denied suffrage to the poor carried out their intentions in the most hideous of manners. They distributed leaflets claiming that the poor, some of whom had wished to procure the right to vote, were worth nothing more than cockroaches with which they shared their miserable quarters. This kind of official discourse intends to completely eradicate events in individual stories as well as the collective memory, and thus hampering future reflection.[4]

The process of transmission to the next generation is then handicapped. Children, including those who were only babies at the time, have a need to be able to make sense of the scars they carry even though they do not possess any clear memories of what happened. A particularly striking example can be found in Cameroon among those who survived a massacre of some 400,000 Bamilékés in 1961.[5] Several emigrants from Cameroon, who were undergoing psychotherapy for different reasons, separately came to the realization that aspects of their neuroses, or simply their difficulties in life, were linked to the events of the massacre. They were far from their homeland at the time, however, and knew nothing of those events.[6] The official history in Cameroon and France alike had imposed a leaden silence upon that period.

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[2]. Françoise Sironi, *Bourreaux et victimes. Psychologie de la torture*, Paris: Odile Jacob, 1999.
[3]. Renée Kaës, *op.cit.*, pp. xv.
[4]. *Ibid*.
[5]. This figure represents 10 percent of the total population of Cameroon at the time and more than 70 percent of the Bamiléké population.
[6]. Private interviews.

It is quite common that members of the generation immediately succeeding the one that endured periods of extreme violence have trouble making sense of entire segments of their lives, not to mention their identity, as a result of the silence maintained by their parents, and, more generally, by the adults of the community. In Cambodia, particularly among those younger than thirty years of age, who compose the majority of the Cambodian population, the memory of genocide seems to be completely erased, as if swallowed up in a collective amnesia that has caused a number of analysts to remark that Cambodians "want to forget." Yet, if a visitor takes time to listen to the individuals he meets, to meet them several times over a sufficiently long period such that a relationship of mutual trust is built up, and if he takes an interest in the writings and the various forms of expression that the young use to relate to each other, he will discover the extent to which this history is inescapable. It happens precisely this way because the young cannot retell a story which has been passed on to them by things left unsaid as parents try to survive with such a past through silence and other strategies. Public narrations of the past, official or authorised accounts (celebrations, commemorations, places of remembrance, etc.) can in that way either give meaning to individual memories or, on the contrary, destroy them.[7]

This articulation between individual and collective narrative does not come in and of itself, especially because it entails real efforts to guarantee that each individual can be heard, not only as a "victim," but also as a person capable of reflecting on his situation and commenting on it.[8] The requirements of an investigative process or legal proceedings do not always encounter the tortuous path and the unconquerable suffering of the individual narrative. The testimony of a young woman before the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda in Arusha tragically highlighted this rift between the individual's story and bureaucratic procedures. During the genocide she was raped several times by Hutu militiamen. At the court hearing, counsel for the defence asked her, "There was no water during the genocide, so you must have smelt quite unpleasant; explain to me how, in spite of that, these men could desire to rape you several times?" The young woman's reply was crushing: "Sir, I understand that you are not very different from the Hutus." Here we have a very current example of the discrepancy between two different registers of truth. When I was

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[7]. See Maurice Halbwachs, *La mémoire collective*, Paris: Albin Michel, 1997; Marie-Claire Lavabre, "Usages et mésusages de la notion de mémoire," *Critique Internationale*, N° 7, April 2000, pp. 48-57.

[8]. See "An ethic of responsibility in practice", *International Social Science Journal,* 174, December 2002, pp. 529-538.

working for human rights defence organisations, I often heard investigators complaining of divergent and changing testimony reaching them: "Why do we never have the same version of what happened?" or – to stay with the example of Rwanda – Why did that woman who first said her mother had been killed in the church state later that that murder had been committed in the swamps? Had she 'lied'? Or rather was it less painful for her first to think of her mother murdered in a respectable place and not in the middle of no where, hunted down like an animal?

All of these considerations are particularly important to keep in mind for both practitioners and researchers who work in such contexts. Indeed, those who are used to conflict and post-conflict situations know that in such circumstances, most critical information concerning the conflict is difficult to obtain or has been manipulated. Statistics on refugee flows, for example, are subject to negotiations and adjustments between local authorities, warring parties, humanitarian organisations, Western governments, and so on. The way in which a conflict is defined and portrayed at the international level has more to do with diplomatic struggles (for example, the debates in the United Nations Security Council) than with the conflict itself. In the field, there are generally as many explanations and views of a conflict as there are people involved. Many scholars working on post-genocide situations have emphasized to me the difficulty of identifying what counts as an "evidence" of a mass crime. This is a particularly tricky issue in such circumstances. As a consequence, outsiders have to be mindful of their potential reactions. Because they do not know what they are "witnessing," even after the event, they might tend to (re-) present an undifferentiated round of suffering or a carnival of horror that ignores the political and social dimensions of the drama. Prosecutors, investigators, judges may also be tempted – as in the case of scholars, humanitarian workers or journalists – to "rework" the account in order to overlay their own "authentic" version of the facts, or, quite simply, impose their own narrative. Since trauma is overwhelming, there is a risk that this narrative could take the place of the unbearable silence and replace the impossible words of survivors. For having worked with historians who have specialized on the history of massacres, I know how much their contribution in the scientific establishment of the circumstances of a massacre can become a component of a work of 'justice'. But I know also that, by definition, the conclusions of all historical studies are likely to be questioned by subsequent work. The debate surrounding the exact numbers of the Nazi genocide of the Jews is a well-known example of this. Therefore, according to the expression

of Bettelheim, the historian must content himself with 'vulnerability' in the formulation of his conclusions, as they are not unassailable vis-à-vis the perspective of the witnesses and their descendents. Faced with these social realities, it seems to me that judges are in a position as delicate as the historian's: they must not only account for the initial facts and place them in context, but also acknowledge the confrontation between conflicting memories. Furthermore, it must assess the processes of instrumentalisation and mythification.

The other dimension of establishing the facts is returning the narrative to the people concerned. My field experience has shown me the importance of it: listening and recording the words of the other is not sufficient, as the example of Guatemala shows. In that country, exceptional work was done by the REHMI (a report published by the archbishop of Guatemala City) and the *Comisión de aclarecimiento histórica* (Historical Clarification Commission). A large space was reserved for the testimony of witnesses and survivors. Nonetheless, during my field missions there, I have noticed a high level of frustration among survivors because nothing was done to return their narrative to them. Some even told me that they felt that their history had been stolen. A multilingual version of the testimony for a general audience is in the process of being prepared, although it is coming quite late in the eyes of the victims. More broadly, one must question the role played by reconstructed narratives in a national or international legal framework, as in the case of the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions, and, to an even greater extent, in the International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, insofar as they attempt to offer a certain representation of what has occurred. The work of Mark Osiel shows how these judicial mechanisms shape collective memory; it also reveals the many contradictions in that process.[9] For example, the recollection of events, reduced to a few "symbolic" cases and to a narrative that is disconnected from the victims and their families, can work against a genuine effort of memory and mourning. For these people, their point of view has not been understood – the deaths or disappearances of their children and loved ones are qualified as negligible importance, and there is an attempt to make them believe that all of it never really happened. One woman met in a poor district of San Salvador expressed what many others repeated to me in that country: "Not only did the war serve no purpose, because we cannot see what it has changed in the functioning of society; people also want to make us believe it never took place, that nothing happened during all those years, that our people are not dead, that our children

[9]. Mark Osiel, *Mass Atrocity, Collective Memory and the Law*, New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1997.

were not kidnapped..."[10] Reproaches of this kind are often heard in countries where not only truth and reconciliation commissions have been established, but the process is deliberately presented to the outside world as an undeniable success, as was the case in South Africa.

In the spring of 2003, in Bosnia-Herzegovina, officers of the Prosecutor's office of the International Criminal Tribunal for former Yugoslavia stated that most of the complaints and testimony gathered over the years was not passed on to The Hague because the massacres they referred to were not "important" enough (according to criteria based on statistics or the identity of the people responsible – standards that do not interest the survivors). Even among the voluminous files passed on to The Hague, only some led to prosecutions. As for the lists of witnesses proposed, for material reasons and reasons of time, the judges often had to reduce them considerably. Although these considerations can be understood rationally, they ignore the pain of the victims and their families. The words of suffering, frustration, anger, and also bitterness that are evoked serve to remind us that the work of memory cannot neglect this subjective dimension.

Several registers of truth coexist but do not always find a meeting point. Accounts reproduced in a national or international judicial setting, or by 'truth and reconciliation' commissions suggest themselves a certain representation of what happened; in that sense, they shape collective memories but may also create contradictions that have to be considered as such. It is essential that we go beyond right-thinking discourse sanctifying consensual visions, which cannot be more than the imposition of a version of history by one group over others. One should be able to maintain the difference between individual and collective experiences and memories of violence.

Participating in a process of organizing memories and making sense to them

Several reasons explain the importance of including these subjective dimensions in the work of justice at both the individual and collective levels.

First of all, experiences of traumatic events may have been very different from one region to another, from one person or group of people to another; the dates and places that are

[10]. Words uttered in San Salvador in September 1995; translation from Spanish. During the Salvadorian conflict, the army kidnapped a still unknown number of children.

to be considered especially important or even representative of the violence, can vary greatly. Reconstruction of the violence in local histories is therefore essential.

Secondly, the religious, cultural and symbolic dimensions of the trauma can be as important as the more physical and immediate ones: the disappearance or death of someone close, being tortured, etc. In Guatemala, as in Cambodia and Rwanda alike, the genocide project also worked to destroy a culture, and a history. In fact Culture itself is generally weakened by the gravity of symbolic attacks committed at the same time as the massacres (ex: the loss of media for transmitting traditions or the repetitive transgression of taboos). In the narratives of victims and survivors, these dimensions form an integral part of the violation of their rights and their emotional experience. In a decision dated November 19, 2004, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights has, in the case "Massacre Plan de Sanchez vs. Guatemala" not only considered but valued the importance of these collective symbolic losses. Although more time will be needed to assess the impact of such a precedent, this is something that should be considered more carefully in post-conflict situations.

Thirdly, in post-conflict situations the 'retrospective' and 'prospective' dimensions of the demand for justice are closely tied together. Initiatives that make it possible to ensure that certain acts and crimes cannot be covered up by society are as important as work on memories of violence. Among other aspects, this process has to allow the society to prevent individual and collective life from becoming caught in the cycle of vengeance and, more broadly, to actually allow for the production of a present and a future which will not be the mere repetition of the past. Now, such work relates to varied, partial, contradictory and intrinsically subjective processes, in which the symbolic world and the imaginary play a decisive role in the transformation of meanings of history and belonging. Indeed, they are long afterwards burdened by the scars of violence, leaving them even more vulnerable to manipulation on the part of the perpetrators of violence. The representations and the imaginary realities that are built around the experience of violence allude to myths that provide varying interpretations of the events. Experiences, memories, nightmares, and rumours of violence (which, to a large extent, like the legends, constitute people's dreams and tell the community what goes on below the collective consciousness) converge to shape and re-shape moral categories—particularly those of good and evil—during and after violence. The frontiers between what one knows and what one is unaware of, and between what one has seen and has imagined are often considerably blurred, particularly in times when rumours are legion and feeding the fires

of fear. All parties to the violence and to reconstruction, including displaced persons and refugees, new and resurgent elites, and actors external to the community (journalists, international organizations, humanitarian actors, research missions and international tribunals) have a role in redefining the world after violence. Everyone after and during violence rewrites history, and all rewrites are meant for the purpose of action. Many narratives are written, and many identities are taken on and discarded in the process; numerous narratives then become entangled with one another. New histories emerge, spawning new identities and collective attitudes. Therefore the roots and assumptions of such rewritings are critical to any rebuilding effort, and must be understood as such.

Fourthly, emphasising the "narrative" element within any transitional justice process raises the dual question: Who is making history? And for whom? This question clearly implicates the work of historians, who can help to render memory dispassionate, but also lawyers, judges, experts, and scholars studying these issues as their analysis contribute to sustaining this narrative process within a given society. It is particularly complex when it comes from an individual outside the group (which is almost always the case), since it seems as if it represented the view of a world from which one was "expelled" at the time of the tragedy. The accuracy of the "narrative" proposed will depend largely on the attention paid to the complexity of the situation, the historical knowledge of the groups concerned, and the judge/expert/researcher's capacity for listening to the interviewees and for seeing beyond the words and the silence. Any outsider needs to understand that, when confronted with differing organized narratives, his personal response will be to propose his own alternative interpretation. He cannot pretend to work in total isolation of the subjective dimensions above mentioned. He should not aspire either to serve as a substitute for the voices of the witnesses, nor even for the narratives of the descendants of the "victims" or the survivors.

Integrating the subjective dimensions of justice through community rebuilding strategies

Whether justice is done within the national territory or outside, it must always be accompanied by the reactivation of communication channels within and among communities, thereby overcoming suspicions aroused by years of war or oppression. Notably, this work needs to involve efforts that allow each person or group in society to start comprehending the

experience of others and relating it to their own.[11] This implies understanding of what has been irrevocably destroyed or transformed, which excludes a simple return to pre-war conditions (traditional modes have always been transformed by events, and are likely to be romanticized by different parties in the aftermath), but requires consideration of the methods used by the societies in question to survive the horror and try to make sense of what has no sense.

The preoccupation with cultural perspectives raised by this contribution is also directly linked to the necessity to identify and recognize local resources. In all cases, even the most devastating, some local resources are already in place, and are more deeply rooted in the complex cultural interpretations of the effects of trauma on that particular place than are outside resources. They are most naturally accessed by survivors immediately seeking out ways to repair their world in a variety of subtle and small ways. The actions undertaken with traditional healers for children traumatized by war and former child soldiers demonstrate the success of strategies deeply rooted in the social and cultural context. In Mozambique, mediums and healers (*kimbanda*) particularly helped peaceful reintegration of child soldiers into communities, through purification rituals involving the whole community. Referring to concepts of pollution and purification made it possible to designate and describe the period of violence as "abnormal", "unacceptable", but also to redefine the indispensable rules for the group's coexistence and survival.[12] In Cambodia, mediums and healers (*kruu* and *ruup*) played a decisive role in the reintegration of displaced people and refugees. In particular, they made it possible to rebuild symbolic links among members of a reference community and reinterpret the various violent ruptures suffered by the society.[13] Here, it is not a matter of wanting at any cost to recover "traditions" which sometimes no longer exist, but rather of listening to the resources that ordinary people may mobilise so as to pick up the threads of disrupted history. In Guatemala, Maya rituals expressed in ceremonies commemorating the dead are no longer a bygone tradition; they reflect a will

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[11]. This approach is suggested by the Greek origin of the word (*sumballein*=bridge).

[12]. See Alcinda Honwana, "Children of War: Understandings of War and War Cleansing in Mozambique and Angola"' in Simon Chesterman (ed.), *Civilians in War*, New York: Lynne Rienner, 2001, pp. 123-42; Harry G. West, "Creative Destruction and Sorcery of Construction: Power, Hope and Suspicion in Post-war Mozambique"', *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines* (37) 147, 1997, pp. 657-98; Sara Gibbs, "Postwar Social Reconstruction in Mozambique: Reframing Children Experiences of Trauma and Healing", pp. 227-38 in Krishna Kumar (ed.), *Rebuilding Societies after Civil War*, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1997.

[13]. See Maurice Eisenbruch, "Mental Health and the Cambodian Traditional Healer for Refugees who Resettled, were Repatriated or Internally Displaced, and for those who Stayed at Home", *Collegium Anthropologicum* 18/2, December 1994, pp; 219-30. See also Joop de Jong (ed.), *Trauma, War and Violence: Public Mental Health in Socio-Cultural Context*, New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, 2002.

both to recover one's roots and to re-interpret them in a world that has gone through a profound upheaval.

Mediums and healers thus appear as complementing transformations taking place in transitional societies, especially endowing them with meaning. It is important to take them into account in order to understand how, in a concrete situation, alternative modes of participation and inclusion of the majority can be ensured. Indeed, the will to "build peace" assumes returning the *imaginary* and the representations to their proper places. From this point of view the transition from a world of war to a world of peace also needs to be marked by rituals. People sign peace treaties (often outside the country concerned) but do not accompany the sharp break felt in the mind, although these wars are nearly always "lost" wars, at least for the majority of the people. Popular rejoicing has been rather rare in the "peace processes" of the past decade. Monuments, commemorations and other rituals should be considered in that sense. They should signify, above all, a change in the nature of the state, a breach with the past that only trials carried out at least partly by national institutions can ritualise.[14]

Of course, not all traditional practices lead to peace; for example, traditions of vengeance may support continuing feelings of rage and a conviction that evil abides in others, laying the ground for future conflict. Local practices and beliefs can result in negative as well as positive outcomes. Nevertheless, local and traditional resources will naturally be used in the aftermath of conflict, and must be understood for that reason. Those that are in support of peace will prove more beneficial than outside interventions with no connection to local perspectives.

Community healing is first and foremost a matter of mobilizing cultural resources aimed at restoring collective memory, encouraging personal narratives and accounts, re-integrating child soldiers into their community, or re-establishing links to the dead whose bodies were not treated with the dignity and the rituals worthy of a human being (as occurred in Guatemala, Rwanda or Bosnia-Herzegovina). All of these efforts contribute significantly to rebuilding human relationships after the experience of mass crime. Likewise, a holistic approach would help us remember that suffering, memory of dramatic experiences, the negotiation or ritual ways of dealing with death, do not concern only "symptoms" or

[14]. See Michael Humphrey, "From Victim to Victimhood: Truth Commissions and Trials as Rituals of Political Transition and Individual Healing"', *The Australian Journal of Anthropology*, vol. 14 no. 2, 2003, pp. 171-87.

"disturbances caused by stress", but rather a political and moral register. This is illustrated in strategies which articulate deletions and reformulation of collective traumatic experiences in particularly efficient ways (through rituals, religious ceremonies, etc.). The mobilization of cultural endeavours then participates in the re-symbolization process – for the opening and forging of a pathway between the different systems of truth and different narratives proposed of a same event, so that they may share in mutual recognition. The recourse to different forms of cultural and creative expression (such as story tellers, theatre techniques for the oppressed, drawings, paintings and sculpture) may be particularly useful in such contexts. These expressions may help further understand and articulate the delicate balance between forgetting and remembering. This is affected by a number of factors largely beyond the usual judicial and political categories: cultural strategies, moral questions, ways in which memories are constructed and narrative landscapes, by which communities define their relationship to the past. In this sense too "reconciliation" may mean to be "no longer opposed", to have the possibility of sharing a present which is not a repetition of the past

Understanding the conditions in which justice and peace can be built in a given society means trying to make the numerous changes in its structures and its rules, intelligible, so as to assess the bases from which reconstruction is possible. In fact, far from being the intangible foundation to which the "international community" readily refers, justice and the "rule of law" is the product of concrete histories, the expression of world views and of social relations.[15] It is a project built through successive compromises and processes. As the anthropologist Georges Balandier reminds us, this enterprise involves renunciation: to a way of thinking that rejects the irrational and the imaginary in the aim of achieving, at all costs, a society of reason – ours, of course.[16]

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[15]. Norbert Rouland, *Aux confins du droit. Anthropologie de la modernité*, Paris: Odile Jacob, 1991, and *Anthropologie juridique*, Paris: PUF, 1998

[16]. See Georges Balandier, *Le désordre. Eloge du mouvement*, Paris: Fayard, 1988, p. 247.