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Oral History: The "Unspoken" and the Importance of Hearing those who have been Silenced

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Abstract

This article intends to understand the meanings and representations of silences. A demonstration of the importance of giving voice to those who have been silenced by state imposition, fear or shame will be discussed. Listening to those who have always been silenced enables them to build a new story or a story with otherness. Words are not always extracted from those who do not (or cannot) speak. In this case, being silenced brings, as well as says clear messages. Consequently, the interpretation of these silences is fundamental.

Index terms— words. silences. give voice.

1 Introduction

First, the role of silence will be demonstrated, as a language, its meanings and attributions. Among them, silence as a watcher of anguish, a cause of collective anxieties and suffering.

These reflections create the following question: what is the relevance or importance of "breaking" or interpreting the silences of those who have been silenced by fear, state imposition or shame? This is the object of the research and to be discussed throughout this article. The question cannot be developed without a precise analysis of what it represents and what "the unspoken" symbolizes (an expression used in the work *le non-dit des émotions* by Claude Olivenstein).

Specifically, these reflections attribute to the anguish of silence. Reflections found in the chapter *"le non-dit de angoisse"* and related to the thoughts of Jelena Markovic, who speaks a lot about the collective anxiety caused by silence.

The hypothesis of this questioning would be directly associated with a need to guarantee, from the hearing of those who were silenced, a "complacency for otherness". In other words, the construction of a new non-majority history built from listening (sometimes silent) to those who have never said it or those who prefer not to say it (for many reasons). This is a new story that is not based exclusively on official texts (such as books and newspapers that tell the official version). It is a search for reversing an imposed silence or for understanding or interpreting what "has not been said".

The new story would not be concerned with the majority-official conception, but with those individual minority memories. It is up to the interviewer of that silenced memory to acquire an ethical interpretation of a certain silence. This will be analyzed in its own topic.

A well-known article by Michael Pollak is used as the theoretical basis (or reference) for this question "History, forgetfulness, silence", published by Revista Estudos Históricos of Fundação Getúlio Vargas in 1989. This article asks why some reports never existed, as will be verified in a specific topic.

1. Silence as a (fluid) language, as a cultural construction and as a "watchman of anguish": the importance of listening to (and understanding) silence Silence is considered a kind of sound. According to Piccard: "language and silence belong together. Language has knowledge of silence as silence has knowledge of language 1 According to Jelena, "silence and speech do not stand in total opposition to each other, but form a continuum of forms ranging from the most prototypical instances of silence to the most prototypical instances of speech ". In this sense, silence (as a language) is totally (and inextricably) connected with words.

Silence is a form of communication, without a doubt, and it is also a cultural construction. Recent studies insist that silence is not just an acoustic phenomenon but also a cultural construct.³ Dès lors, le langage n'est que le veilleur de l'angoisse. Il peut apaiser comme l'aspirine apaise la fièvre, voire organiser, la mettre en œuvre – pensons à Nietzsche ou à . An important reflection is that the use of words can, according to Claude Olivierstein, calm the anguish of those who have been silenced, even if only to a limited extent. The author interprets silence as "a watchman of anxieties." According to Olivierstein: Bataille – la réifie, la chosifie, la moque, la transformer en fragmente du discours amoureux. Mais le langage se condamne à être impuissant parce qu'il organise la mise à distance de ce qui ne peut pas se mettre à distance. Silence is sometimes permeated by the anguish of those many who have never found a place to speak. Anguish of groups that can be punished, if they choose to break the silence. Finally, anguish for not having the right to resolve "misunderstandings".

Language, according to Olivierstein, reassures silence, just as aspirin calms a fever. The role of spoken language would be to organize silence, albeit to a limited extent.⁵ According to Jelena Markovic, there would also be a relationship between silence and anxiety caused by this "not saying". In other words, groups marked by imposed silences would have a kind of collective anxiety.

⁶ According to the author, silence in such cases is more like a reflection of one's inability or one's need to avoid "status anxiety."⁷ It seems that mankind prefers to suffer in silence, prefers to live in the world of silence, even if it be by suffering, than to take its suffering into the loud places of history.⁸ To use that particular silence (usually imposed) can be a way of relieving anguish, anxiety and suffering. This is the understanding of Max Picard:⁸ Les non-dits ne sont pas insonore, même si le silence de l'autre et pour l'autre. Si l'angoisse est sacrifice de la raison, folie cachée dans l'apparent raisonnable, son non-dit l'enlève un peu du monde des monstres pour le ramener à un ordre plus humain. Au contraire du dit qui s'efforce de ne plus.

The author adds the importance of breaking the silence and shows how fundamental it is to externalize the suffering experienced in the form of silence.

Another characteristic to be developed here refers to another type of characteristic of silence. Silence, like memory, is fluid, malleable and under constant zigzag. This is what Olivierstein says:⁴ OLIVERSTEIN, Claude. *Le non-dits des émotions*. Éditions Odile Jacob. p. 57. ⁵ POLLAK, Michael. *Memória, Esquecimento e silêncio*. *Revistas Estudos Históricos da Fundação Getúlio Vargas*. v. 2 n. 3 (1989), p. 3-15, p. 9. ⁶ The author uses as an example the living memories of survivors who prefer silence, when asked about the ethnic massacre they suffered in the villages of Lika. During the independence of Croatia (in the last decade of the last century), the Góspic region was marked by an excess of stories of conflict and violence, according to Jelena. According to the author: "is the fact that Lika, due to an "excess" of history marked by conflict and violence, represents a space of collective anxiety." ⁷ laisser de place au hasard, le non-dit s'autorise à se cafoûiller, aux allers et retours, aux zigzags, à l'affectif, à la non-parole dans l'imaginaire. ⁹ Based on the question of the malleability of not saying (as an inseparable part of memory) other authors also reflect on this issue, although they use the expression memory. According to Marieta de Moraes Ferreira, memories or silence is something that is constantly changing. It would not be fixed, immutable, as Paul Thompson would defend. "It is a construction of the past based on emotions and experiences. It is flexible and events are remembered in the light of the subsequent experience and the needs of the present".

¹⁰ "Memory is malleable, spiraling, not always directive, full of ups and downs, the memory of oral expression escapes from conventional notions (...) not being static or finished, the expression of oralized memory tends to escape from the frameworks of purity of the language (cultured norm) (...) memory of oral expression is not the object of standing water or simple containers for storage

" An understanding corroborated by José Carlos Sebe: ¹¹ "The verbal (and not verbal) dimension of memory is even more accelerated, it challenges the sequence of organization in the post-industrial world, and at the same time, tangency arising from economic, social or cultural relations: instabilities, repairs, daydreams, dreams, advances, setbacks and others speech measures because there would be no single meaning in speech." João Carlos Sebe, as well as Marieta de Moraes Ferreira, emphasizes how fluid the memory and silence happen to be and how much the memory is under constant transformation, using the expression: "oral memory is not an object of standing water". It is always surrounded by "instabilities, advances and setbacks."¹² 2. To understand the silence and the construction of a non-hegemonic discourse. Therefore, silence is an inseparable language of spoken speech. As part of memory, it is malleable, fluid and functions as "anguish watchman" or often a cause of collective anxieties. Thanks to the malleability and individuality of words, silences and memory as a whole, spaces are opened for the construction of a new non-hegemonic-official history. This construction occurs when you hear those who could never be heard.

According to Etienne François, the rise of the oral history movement is associated with a need to break from the old bases of institutionalized academic history linked to official newspapers and books. The oral history would, therefore, be "another story", a way of guaranteeing, without a doubt, alterity. Oral history must also hear and interpret silences, since oral history is made up of words and silences.

One of the foundations of oral history, according to Michael Frisch, is "criticizing conventional history". According to this line of knowledge, the use of documentary techniques would be based on "extremely restricted notions of what (and whose) matters in history, and how (and by whom) historical change is generated, neglecting other types of memory (like linguistic interjections, a stammer, or even a tear).

Jean Chesneaux argues that "there is no neutrality in any form of approach to the past". To put it another way, "each one chooses his past and that choice is never innocent" 13 "This criticism frequently highlighted the links between these limited conceptions and the equally restricted notions of historical evidence -for example, formal documents, newspapers and written memories -on which we commonly base historical narratives and analyzes, and the very notions of what can be known. and say with certainty and evidence about the past ". The conventional model of historiography would have very clear objectives, that of building a majority, official and closed memory for the subjectivities, transients and individualities of memory. According to Michael Frisch 14 The author stresses the limitation of a traditional source such as a formal document or a newspaper. Oral history appears, thus, as an attempt to become a certain historical fact that is less restricted, limited, homogeneous and little diversified. The defenders of this "other story" came to create an expression, known as Alltagsgeschichte " 15

The meaning of the word Alltagsgeschichte is associated with an "alternative, free and emancipatory history, a break with professional academic history" 16 ". Oral history is innovative because of its special attention to the silent and excluded from official history, which makes it innovative in relation to its objects.

An understanding relatively close to that developed by Raphael Herberich-Marx: "Al privilegiar el análisis de los excluidos, de los marginados y de las minorías, la historia oral resaltó la importancia de memorias subterráneas que, como parte integrante de las culturas minoritarias y dominadas, se oponen a la "memoria oficial", en este caso a la memoria nacional. En un primer momento, ese abordaje hace de la empatía con los grupos dominados estudiados una regla metodológica y rehabilita la periferia y la marginalidad. Al contrario de Maurice Halbwachs, ese abordaje acentúa el carácter destructor, uniformizante y opresor de la memoria colectiva nacional. Por otro lado, esas memorias subterráneas prosiguen su trabajo de subversión en el silencio y de manera casi imperceptible afloran en momentos de crisis a través de sobresaltos bruscos y exacerbados ??? Philip Joudart, even speaks of a need for greater visibility to "populations without history, the illiterate, the vanquished, the outcasts and other minorities like the workers, the blacks, the women " At first, the author reinforces the importance of listening and listening to those who have been excluded or marginalized. In general, these "underground" memories are part of a dominated or oppressed culture, a type of memory in opposition to official or national memory and that can reconstruct those peripheral speeches.

Second, the author tries to reject the idea that it is possible to have a negotiation or conciliation between collective memories (majority) and individual memories (sometimes oppressed by an imposition).

Simply put, memory is under constant conflict. The existing silence regarding those memories as opposed to the majority version is that it needs to be (more than ever) studied, understood and interpreted, since the "unspoken" always means something.

Observing interjections, stutter and the silences of an oral memory does not mean the absence of meanings, quite the opposite. "Not saying" is also saying and it is a form of language or communication that must be taken into account in the construction of this new story.

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Give a voice to minorities who have always had a distant view of majority history is also to interrupt silences, and to understand "what has not been said" " An approach that grants a preference for the history seen from low, prioritizing subjective views and individual paths. out of shame, by the imposition of the majority or by State prohibition ??? "Language is just the lookout for anguish ... But language condemns itself to be impotent because it organizes the distancing of that which cannot be put at a distance. It is there that intervenes, with all the power, the inner discourse, the commitment of the unsaid, between what the subject confesses to himself and what he can transmit abroad . The premise that memory it is something under constant transformation and surrounded by "unspoken" and silences and, thus, guaranteeing the fundamental role of Oral History: giving voice to those who have never been heard, to what has never been said and, consequently, building a new story. Or, why not, understand and interpret what cannot be said? After all, not saying is also saying. According to Olievenstein: 20 This was the line of knowledge advocated by Boaventura dos Santos. According to the aforementioned intellectual, there must be an attentive look at the fact that "the subjects who build history are many, they are plural, they are of different social origins". In this sense, oral history is a way of guaranteeing otherness and multiculturalism " The importance of the silence (and to interpret the silence) is, therefore, fundamental to build another story. It is through words or metaphorical resources that images in a particular collective memory are broken. From a majority collective memory, usually imposed by the State, or by certain official "common senses".

It must be stressed that those who have been silenced are not always able to express themselves through words. Oral History, therefore, must also be aware of the silences and what these silences represent in the context. These silences, sometimes, stand out in the form of stutter or tears, which also is a very clear way of saying something. When a silenced voice is extracted, it is necessary to interpret what that cry or silences represented. . Alexander Freund (in its chapter in the book "Oral History Off the Record") guarantees that the greatest attention or concern attributed to that silence must be limited to "off-the-record". According to the author, silence can "harbor secrets that might reveal otherwise unknowable truths".

Silence, as a revealed secret, would therefore be connected to the idea of a new story. A counterpoint to the majority and official history. ??? "Silence in the political sphere can be in the service of conflict management by preventing the escalation of verbal (but also physical) conflict, along with potentially increasing the inequality of

opposing discourses and the existing social and symbolic inequalities. Silence and silencing discourses, therefore, also function as mechanisms for the production of hegemonic social relations. Based on Stuart Sim, silence avoids conflict, but it can highlight those old hegemonic-official speeches. According to the author mentioned above:

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In other words, silencing the discourse of a minority group ends up working as an instrument "for the production of hegemonic social relations". Somehow, there would be a tension between the dominant narrative and other, "small" stories as well as that which remains unsaid in such accounts. The author emphasizes the act of silence as a political choice, avoiding verbal and even physical conflicts. On the other hand, silence would catalyze the inequality of opposition speeches, highlighting the existing inequalities. This title draws attention and coincides with the one of the objectives of this reflection: to demonstrate the role of oral history, guaranteeing space for those who remained silent out of shame, prohibition and or even state imposition, for those who were and still remain marginalized and that finally speak or express themselves through not saying.

a) The importance of the "words and the silences" in the Oral History and the individual memory. One of the roles and greatest challenges in oral history is precisely to oppose "the most legitimate of collective memories" (usually official). Oral history has the fundamental role of giving voice to individual memories. Specifically, individual groups that are most excluded in society, generally oppressed and who have been left out of this official version of traditional history those who were left out of the majority memory. "These forbidden memories (the case of Stalinist crimes), unspeakable (the case of deportees) or shameful (that of forcibly recruited), are jealously guarded in informal communication structures and go unnoticed by society in general. Consequently, there are in the memories of both shadow areas, silences, "not-said." Obviously, the boundaries between these silences and "unsaid" and the definitive forgetting and the repressed unconscious are not watertight; are in perpetual dislocation. According to Henri Rousso, the official story tries to frame the collective memory through different organizations of them that are members, clubs, reflection cells. Pollak explains that the memories reside under the shadowy areas. It is in these areas that lies the silence and the unsaid. Silence says a lot and is usually associated with that unofficial memory.

"La frontera entre lo decible y lo indecible, lo confesable y lo inconfesable, separa, en nuestros ejemplos, una memoria colectiva subterránea de la sociedad civil dominada o de grupos específicos, de una memoria colectiva organizada que resume la imagen que una sociedad mayoritaria o el estado desean transmitir e imponer. Distinguir entre coyunturas favorables o desfavorables a las memorias marginadas es de entrada reconocer hasta qué punto el presente tiñe el pasado".

A forgotten or ashamed memory and often individualized and excluded from non-majority groups somehow recognizes how much is present in that past that was imposed. Pollak uses three examples of "silent memories". The first of these is the official Stalinist memory that prohibited, throughout the 20th century, the existence of reports that detracted the image of the political leader Stalin in the Soviet Union. Official, state and hegemonic memory has always prevented the existence of divergent and contrary reports to the magnanimous and heroic vision of this controversial "leader". In other words, it has always prohibited the dissemination of underground memories that invade public space and that show another type of truth.

The second example of "forbidden reporting", are those of memories of concentration camp survivors who returned to Germany and Austria after the end of the WWII. The author emphasizes the fear of the Jewish community to report what happened and the persecution suffered before completely changing the 26 C. Olievenstein, *Les non-dits de l'émotion*, París, Odile Jacob, 1988 apud POLLAK, Michael. *Memória, Esquecimento e silêncio. Revistas Estudos Históricos da Fundação Getúlio Vargas*. v. 2 n. 3 (1989), p 3-15, p 9 27 HOUSSO, H, "Vichy, le grand fossé", *Vingtième siècle*, 5, 1985, p. 73 apud POLLAK, Michel. *Memoria, Olvido, Silencio*, p 12 available in: https://www.comisionporlamemoria.org/archivos/jovenesymemoria/bibliografia_web/memorias/Pollak.pdf official German policy of deporting Jews in Germanic territories. This silence was therefore associated with fear of possible or future deportations. The third and last example of memoirs in silence is associated with those citizens of the region of Alsace, a French region annexed to Germany, during WWII. Part of the 130,000 enlisted inhabitants (who did not desert the area) happened to be incorporated into the German army by decree. Later, they became prisoners of war on the western front, specifically by the Red Army. In the 1950s, when they returned to the region of Alsace and Lorraine, they were ashamed to say what had happened. Ashamed to say that they served the German army by state imposition. Ashamed to say as well as to be misunderstood by the world for what they were forced to do or see.

5 The need for an ethical interpretation of silence

Many authors discuss, through examples, the reason for one or certain silences (repressors or oppressors). Alexander Freund, analyze two studies: The first one, are the encounters and memories of Germans (men and women) immigrated to North America (to be exact Canada) during World War II. Specifically, their memories and relationships with the Jews. The second study is about the identity of young single women who emigrated from Germany to Canada in the postwar period.

Alexander Freund discusses many interesting reflections, among them the need to "discuss the ways that oral historian's negotiations of off-the-record incidents are shaped by diffuse fears of silence and how our approaches

to silence are entangled in negotiations of four professional and personal identities ??8 But the central problem in question, according to Freund, would be: "in our emotionally charged quest for a complete and perfect interview, we are insufficiently prepared to accept our interviewees silence as a form agency in the interview situation ".

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In some way, "we need to develop an ethical response to interviewee silence, an ethics of silence, which I attempt to address in my conclusion ". 30 II.

7 Conclusion

" In other words, the interpretation of a silence must follow ethical criteria so that there is no personal interpretation (too much) of a given silence.

The article was divided into four parts. In the first one, we tried to characterize silence as a type of language or, as Claude Olivierstein would say, an anguish watchman. Silences can cause collective anxiety, as noted by Jelena Markovic. Silence would be an interdisciplinary field, involving other branches of knowledge, in addition to linguistics. In this first part of the article, the character of silence as fluid and malleable was also confirmed (as well as memory as a whole).

The second topic of this article was the record of the choice by the line of oral history that privileges those who have been silenced. This guarantees a voice to those who are silenced and to those who did not speak out of fear, by imposition, by state imposition. This was the main objective of this reflection.

It is also possible to conclude that the challenge of guaranteeing a voice for the silenced is one of the skillful instruments of making a new story. Michael Pollak's article on Memories and Silences was used as a theoretical framework. The article also added some characteristics of silenced memory, in addition to other characteristics verified by other authors, such as the fact that memory is always in movement or transformation.

In this sense, it was recorded how much silence is also a way of saying something. In other words, how not to say anything is also a way of saying it. Even though there were no words, often stutters, interjections, tears happen to say a lot.

Finally, it was possible to conclude the importance of Alexander Freund's studies. The same emphasized the ethical limits when interpreting silences, considering the identities and personal meanings of the interviewer with that research object. It is a kind of restriction on the freedom and fluidity of a certain not to say.

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Figure 1: 1

Figure 2:

According to Pollak:

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Figure 3:

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