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Theater and right to memory: Yuyachkani (Peru) and Ói Nóis Aqui Traveiz (Brazil)[1]

Teatro e direito à memória: Yuyachkani (Peru) e Ói Nóis Aqui Traveiz (Brazil)

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Abstract
The present work seeks to reflect on the artistic practice of two Latin American theater groups, the Grupo Cultural Yuyachkani (Peru) and the Tribo de Atuadores Ói Nóis Aqui Traveiz (Brazil). It seeks to analyze the ethical and political commitment assumed by the collectives with the defense of human rights, in dealing with the memory and traumas of the past, such as the internal armed conflict in Peru or the civil-military dictatorship in Brazil.
Keywords: Latin American Theater. Memory. Human rights.

Resumo
O presente trabalho procura refletir sobre a prática artística de dois grupos teatrais latino-americanos, o Grupo Cultural Yuyachkani (Peru) e a Tribo de Atuadores Ói Nóis Aqui Traveiz (Brasil). Busca analisar o compromisso ético e político assumido pelos coletivos com a defesa dos direitos humanos, ao lidar a memória e traumas do passado, como o conflito armado interno no Peru ou a ditadura civil-militar no Brasil.
Palavras-chave: *Teatro latino-americano. Memória. Direitos humanos.*

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This article discusses some artistic choices of the *Grupo Cultural Yuyachkani* and the *Tribo de Atuadores Ói Nóis Aqui Traveiz* which signal the ethical and political commitment made by the groups to deal with past and memory. In contrast to the hegemonic interpretations of our past, which reproduce a dominant and universal discourse, these groups have sought to recognize the historical protagonism of marginalized people, emphasizing other ways of narrating and transmitting memory. By crisscrossing records of national history with that of a memory of the margins or the defeated, which often remains a corporate memory and is passed down through generations, they propose to deal with past trauma, such as the internal armed struggle in Peru or the civil-military dictatorship in Brazil. Therefore, in a struggle between memories, the actions of these theatrical groups symbolize ruptures and resist the memories instituted by hegemonic discourse. These actions aim to transform the trauma of those affected by political violence into something transmissible that is part of our present and not ignored when we think of building a future. When defending a culture of memory and reporting serious violations, groups *Yuyachkani* and *Ói Nóis Aqui Traveiz* are part of democratizing processes and fighting for human rights.

Memory as a human and fundamental right

In the second half of the twentieth century, several countries in South America suffered coups that implemented authoritarian regimes. Although the state was under the command of the military, a good portion of civil society supported and encouraged dictatorship. During this period, serious violations of human and fundamental rights occurred, such as kidnappings, torture, deaths and disappearances. With the end of the state of exception, these countries went through a period of re-democratization, each with its own peculiarities. Thus, a transitional justice became necessary, consisting of a set of speeches and actions that aim to reconcile society after the end of an authoritarian government in favor of a democratic society.

At this moment, in the Latin American context, the idea of memory as a fundamental human right arises from the return of power to civilians, in which there is a demand for truth,

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accountability and reparation for crimes against humanity. It is also in this context that truth commissions, instruments in which civil society and the State collaborate to ensure the right of victims and their families to truth and memory, became so important. The assumption is that the recognition of serious violations committed by the State is a fundamental step in preventing violence from being perpetuated. Giving voice to victims is important not only to the individuals who are finally able to speak, but also to society as a whole, as it can acknowledge their mistakes and take responsibility for not committing them again. That is why the slogan *Nunca más! [Never again!]*, wielded by various human rights movements, is so symbolic and fundamental.

Societies that have gone through processes of serious human rights violations and remain unaware of what has happened to their citizens – for lack of public policies aimed at truth and memory about what happened, how it happened and who was responsible – are fractured societies, which have not acknowledged their mistakes, have not transformed their institutions and does not take responsibility for the repetition of these violations. As Rogério Gesta Leal (2012, p. 12) states, "the fracture here is civic and of Rights, it does not matter if it directly affects a few hundred people, since millions are not even interested in the topic".

Persistence of memory

Persistência da Memória [Persistence of Memory] is the name of an audiovisual documentary made in 1996, when the *Grupo Cultural Yuyachkani* was 25 years old. This name also gave title, years later, to a text written by Miguel Rubio Zapata about the experience of being part - with presentations of the shows *Adiós Ayacucho (1990)*, *Antigone (2000)* and *Rosa Cuchillo (2002)* - of the Public Audiences and follow the release of the Final Report of Peru's *Commission for Truth and Reconciliation (CVR)*[3]. This commission was established in 2001, following a major mobilization of civil society, aiming to consider the consequences of the internal conflict (1980 and 2000) and to investigate crimes and violations of human rights. The

[3] The CVR final report can be accessed at: http://cverdad.org.pe/ifinal/.

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testimony of those affected by the violence before the commission marked the moment when the country began to become aware of all the horror perpetrated in the country during the conflict. For the theater director,

> That was a first step towards dignifying those affected, a necessary act of cleansing, whose greater sense is to reestablish their right to say, to seek justice, and to commit the country to "never again" barbarism. According to CVR, the Public Hearings helped to collect hitherto hidden truths, but they were only the first and necessary step of a broad task. The voice of those affected not only faces the official story inherited from the authoritarian regime presided over by Alberto Fujimori, but a huge indifference (ZAPATA, 2008, p. 57-58).

Being a witness of abuse, repression, violence and annihilation led the *Yuyas* to question how theater can contribute to dealing with the traumatic legacy left by periods of political violence. Regarding the *Yuyachkani* group, it is evident that the theater has become a space for confrontation with collective trauma. This contributed to the understanding of what happened in the years of violence, the construction of a common narrative about this past and the taking of collective responsibilities regarding what happened.

The performances presented during *CVR*'s work period allowed the Peruvian public to rethink the issue of survivors' ethical and political responsibilities. During the period of democratic transition, it allowed us to question what collective identity one wanted to build when dealing with the past of violence and indifference by a large part of the population. Thus, the exercise of building traumatic memory became an exercise in citizenship, which everyone should do actively and in solidarity.

To understand this process, Gino Luque Bedregal (2010), in his research on the *Yuyachkani*, emphasizes the intersubjective and social character of memory. He resumes Maurice Halbwachs, whose theory holds that individual memory is always socially marked. The sociologist argues that there is no possibility of memory outside the milestones shared by men living in the same society to fix and retrieve their memories. An event is only remembered when we also remember its position within certain milestones, formed by the world perspective and the interpretation of the reality that a given society shares, as well as the set of values, principles and common needs. Therefore, memory is a representation of the past constructed as

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cultural knowledge shared by successive generations and various "others": "an individual can elaborate narratives from their memories because there were others before them who did it, managed to transmit them and establish a dialog based on this material" (BEDREGAL, 2010, p. 14).

It should be noted that, although performed through milestones shared by a collectivity, the act of remembering takes place and happens in one's subjectivity. Each individual uses shared resources to give coherence and meaning to their own existential story. Retaining information about the past does not guarantee that it will be evoked and recalled. To purchase life, knowledge about the past "enquires to be updated and activated by individuals through targeted actions to make sense of the past, interpreting, bringing and placing it in the present scenario" (BEDREGAL, 2010, p. 14). It is therefore necessary to build your own knowledge about the past, so that this memory is also yours. The *Yuyachkani*, through various actions, has brought information about the traumatic past of its broad and diverse public, often far from the epicenter of events, so that they also recognize this past as their own.

In Brazil, reflecting on the impossibility of forgetting and the duty to remember, from the paradigm of the tortured body, Paulo César Endo (2010, p. 15) asks: "Why has memory become a field of political struggle and place where the highest ethical and moral values achieved within human struggles and decisions about their own destiny are preserved?". Unlike other countries in South America, such as Argentina and Chile, in Brazil there was no process of breaking with its dictatorial past. On the contrary, with the introduction of the Amnesty Law in 1979, military and civilians were able to secure their self-amnesty, anchored in the idea that forgetfulness and reconciliation would be the best transition to democracy. But a real democracy cannot be built through instituted silence and forgetfulness.

In 2012, the *National Truth Commission (CNV)* was set up in Brazil to investigate the serious violations of human rights committed by public officials, people in their service, with support or in interest of the Brazilian State. The commission concentrated its efforts on elucidating the crimes committed during the military dictatorship (1964-1985). *CNV* Final

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Report[4] was announced on December 10, 2014. As expected, it concluded that the practice of illegal and arbitrary detention, torture, sexual violence, executions, enforced disappearances and concealment of human corpse resulted from a widespread state policy against the civilian population, characterized as crimes against humanity. Even after the *CNV*'s final report was announced, the defense for memory of the dictatorial period – as well as other periods that shame our past, such as indigenous genocide and slavery – remains a field of political struggle.

It was twenty-one years of dictatorship and state terrorism (1964-1985) with cassations, arrests, bans, tortures, murders and disappearances. The *CNV* listed 434 deaths and disappearances of politicians. If we consider the indigenous, farmers, and young people living in the urban periphery equally murdered by the regime, the numbers reach the thousands. Many had their bodies hidden and about 150 people remain missing to this day. Homicides were committed by law enforcement officials with arbitrary use of force in illegal circumstances using extremely cruel methods. At least 1,800 people were victims of torture. Regarding the authorship of the serious violations, 377 public agents involved in different participation plans were listed. Until now, none of these agents has been properly sent to trial or punished for their brutal crimes.

Do not family members of the dead and missing, as well as tortured persons and their families deserve justice and reparation? By not sending to trial some of the most serious crimes committed in the country's history, does Brazil encourage the continuation of criminality? If government officials who committed some of the worst crimes in our history have never been sent to trial, let alone punished, is Brazil teaching that State violence is normal? Does yesterday's impunity stimulate today's violence? Based on these considerations, the group *Tribo de Atuadores Ói Nóis Aqui Traveiz* has sought to update the debate on the implications and consequences of this episode for national history. Since its foundation in the symbolic date of March 31, 1978, the day when the military celebrated the anniversary of the coup, *Ói Nóis Aqui Traveiz* seeks a theater ethically committed to the political moment lived in the country. The members seek a political and ethical position that goes beyond the space of the scene. Not

[4] *CNV* final report can be accessed at: http://cnv.memoriasreveladas.gov.br.

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only the impact mounts become an outstanding characteristic of the group, but also the active participation in political demonstrations such as the Amnesty movement and environmental movement, strikes and protests.

Still during the military regime, during a period of resumption of the major social demonstrations, the group decided to talk about armed resistance to the dictatorship. In 1980, the script entitled *O Amargo Santo da Purificação*, which was already being rehearsed by the group, is censored. The plot was based on Renato Tapajós' novel *Em câmera lenta*, which was published in 1977 and became the first Brazilian work – produced by a writer who worked in a group of the armed left-wing – to bring a critical reflection on the guerrilla's strategies and denounce the brutal use of torture for repression. The book took the author to prison on grounds of being an "instrument of revolutionary war". A few years later, the censorship of the play destabilized *Ói Nóis Aqui Traveiz* not only in its attempt to deal with a very recent "wound", but as a collective in itself.

Paulo Cesar Endo reflects on the memory culture as an infinite struggle. If we recognize ourselves as heirs of a culture of resistance from the past, we must also recognize that we are

> [...] heirs of those who fought in the Brazilian dictatorial period, so that we can respect them, admire them, criticize them, differ from them but, above all, have them in us as an influence and historical inscription. We will hardly do so if we cannot comprehend in the slightest the abyss into which they were placed and from which many returned, and many perished there. The fight to rescue them is none other than the refunding of our historical duty. A culture of memory will therefore be endless, infinite. As such, it will know itself active and alive only from its incisive productions in memorials, artistic interventions, intellectual debates, testimonies and judgments around which many militants move in the production of a living culture, far from burial and silence. What it will allow us to understand and say will gradually redo the web of meanings that will allow our own political deepening and that of the fragile and defective democracy we still live in (ENDO, 2010, p. 22-23).

Conscious of its historical development and the need to talk again about resistance to dictatorship, twenty-eight years after a failed attempt, *Ói Nóis* takes up the theme of armed struggle. This time, it has as its driving axis the trajectory of Carlos Marighella, narrated epically so that it is also a portrait of what Brazil was in the twentieth century. Telling the story of a Brazilian person that the ruling sectors tried to banish from the national scene was a way

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of "touch a sore spot again". To recall its own past of political persecution, the group takes up the title *O Amargo Santo da Purificação* (2008). The long subtitle (*An allegorical and baroque version of the life, passion and death of the Brazilian revolutionary Carlos Marighella*) also says a lot about the poetic choices the group took to the streets. Marighella lived critical periods in the contemporary history of our country and was a protagonist in the struggle against the dictatorships of the Vargas Era and the military regime. He was considered a terrorist and was also considered as a "number one enemy".

The street show's dramaturgy was practically all elaborated from Marighella's poems, which, transformed into songs, are the guiding thread of the narrative. Another reference to the creation process was the cinema and the thought of Glauber Rocha, present not only in aesthetic choices. Also, some text fragments of his films are part of the script of the play[5]. Using the plasticity of masks, elements of Afro-Brazilian culture and costumes with strong signs, the staging creates a fusion of the ritual with the dance theater. Following the scenes, the audience watches important moments in the protagonist's trajectory: his origins in Bahia, youth, poetry, passions, dictatorship of the Vargas Era, resistance, imprisonment, disillusionment, democracy, constituent, clandestineness, military dictatorship, armed struggle and death in ambush.

Occupying the streets, from south to north of Brazil, reaffirming Marighella's legacy of resistance, was the way that *Ói Nóis* found to bring to debate the theme of the civil-military dictatorship and its remnants that are still present. At the end of the play, a huge file was revealed and from it came a girl dressed in white, who had several colored balloons. This girl was the same one who was present at other moments from the plot, as a poetic figure who identified the desire for freedom. At the same time there was a shower of little papers. In them there was a faceless profile of a woman or a man under the caption "Missing by the Military Dictatorship" on the back of each paper was the name of one of the missing Brazilian politicians, as well as a short biography. The actors crossed a scenic cobbled street, now

[5] The group quotes Glauber Rocha when recreating the death of Corisco in *Deus e o Diabo na Terra do Sol* (1964) to narrate Carlos Marighella's resistance to imprisonment in the early days after the military coup; and also by giving voice to the character Clara Charf, Marighella's life and fight companion, through the reflections of the character Sara of *Terra em Transe* (1967).

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renamed *Alameda Carlos Marighella*, and sang their poetry, *Rondó da Liberdade*. At the same time as the girl released the balloons to let them fly freely across the sky, the other actors sang the last lines of the poem: "there's no need to be afraid, you have to have the courage to say". In these gestures, charged with emotion, the will and the need to recall the past again is expressed.

Staging traumatic memory

Diana Taylor (2013) analyzes, from the perspective of Performance Studies, cultural and social practices in which the body becomes the main mean of transmitting knowledge and memory, besides bringing sense of identity. Unlike some theories that emphasize the ephemeral character of performance, Taylor emphasizes the body and its expressions as a preservation and transmission system. This system, called by the researcher as a repertoire – which differs from the hegemonic system of preservation of cultural productions, the archive – puts the performance as a mean of transmitting memory and culture through generations. Taylor points out that the practice of performance as an expression that puts the body on the central axis can be traced back to cultures that precede us if we are able to recognize their performances as acts of transmitting memory and identity.

Even if the archive and the repertoire are very different instances and the memory through the archive is more socially valued, as it can be easily recovered, we should consider both as non-excluding but complementary forms of memory. For Taylor, since the conquest of the Americas, there has been a long tradition of seeing as embodied knowledge all that disappears because it cannot be contained in the archive. The intention to devalue corporeal means of preservation and communication has political consequences, since valuing more or less of a certain type of memory is a way of manipulating knowledge. Since we want to forget the centuries of social trauma experienced in the Americas, the written record tells hegemonic versions of history and ignores other types of memory that often contain records of what is unpleasant and veiled. Body memory thus often becomes a form of clandestine memory,

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devalued or intentionally marginalized in society. Nevertheless, multiple forms of "embodied acts that are always present, reconstituting themselves – conveying memories, stories, and common values from one group or generation to the next" (TAYLOR, 2013, p. 268).

From these considerations, in her article *Encenando a memória traumática: Yuyachkani*, Diana Taylor analyzes how the group dealt with the traumatic memory of their country. According to the author, the collective name already indicates embedded knowledge and memory, blurring the line between thinking subjects and thinking subjects. The Quechua word *Yuyachkani* can be translated as "I am thinking, I am remembering", or "I am your thinking". Thus,

> The reciprocity and character mutually built between joining the "I" and "you" does not mean a shared or negotiated identity politics – "I" am not you, not you claim to be or act for you. "I" and "you" are a product of each other's experiences and memories, of the historical trauma, of the staged space, of the sociopolitical crisis (TAYLOR, 2013, p. 264).

The notion of memory evoked by the name of the group implies, according to Taylor, a transitive notion of embodied, relational, non-individual memory of subjectivity. This group of artists, mostly white and mestizo, urban, Spanish-speaking, adopting the Quechua name, affirms a commitment to indigenous and mestizo populations, with diverse and multiple ways of knowing, thinking and remembering. Rather than silencing voices, it is the affirmation of the possibility of an ethnic coexistence, which interconnects and interweaves diverse communities and cultures through social memory, which is at the same time shaping subjectivities.

One of the first theatrical responses of the *Yuyachkani* to the violence that plagued Peru was the play *Contraelviento* (1989). According to Miguel Rubio, it aimed to look at the country from a theatrical view that would bring them closer to the problem of violence from a mythical record, "in which we confront a nonexistent debate between forces interested in transforming our reality, the absence of dialog and the increasingly antagonistic polarization of the proposals" (ZAPATA, 2001, p. 82). The two opposite poles to which Rubio refers are inscribed in the female protagonists of the show, two indigenous sisters who have a dialog that cannot be

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elaborated in the public sphere now. *Contraelviento* tells a mythical story of an indigenous father and his two daughters, Huaco and Coya. They were displaced from his home because of a violent massacre. The father reminds them that the seeds of life must be sought. This task seems both terrifying and ridiculous, but both set out on this mission. The different paths taken by the sisters represent two possible answers: Huaco joins the guerrillas and responds violently; Coya goes to the coast in search of legal justice.

The work is very symbolic and full of Andean cultural references. The story is narrated by an Ekeko, a spirit of Andean good luck, and includes characters from the *Feast of the Virgin of Candelaria*[6] such as *Arcángel*, *China Diabla* and *Caporal*. These characters, used by the natives at the feast to mock the Spanish, represent the forces that encourages rural violence and the massacres of entire villages.

In her search for justice, Coya encounters many deceptions and dishonest acts. At the court in Lima, two masked judges, who speak incomprehensible Spanish, pretend not to understand. Coya's story is told through flute, which symbolizes the great gulf of understanding between the metropolis and the indigenous cultures of the mountains. A lawyer translates, first in Quechua and then in Spanish: "This woman says she comes from afar to tell us that her ancestors told her that the foreman is killing them. [...] She also says that everyone's life is in great danger and that the seeds of life are being destroyed", as quoted by Taylor (2013, p. 282). The judges then state that if Coya cannot speak it is because she is hiding something. The scene dramatizes an apparent impossibility of communication: it is as if Coya, as an indigenous woman, could not speak or had no recognizable language. The court, as an instrument that serves the elites and only uses files, does not "understand" the appeal of the poor people. As Taylor (2013, p. 282) states, "institutionalized circuits of memory and transmission keep the dominant sectors of the population protected from the rural, mestizo and indigenous populations. It is as if the expressions of trauma were transmitted in a foreign language". The

[6] The Feast of the Virgin of Candelaria is celebrated in February of each year in the city of Puno. Its roots come from Catholic traditions and symbolic elements of the Andean worldview. For more information: http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/es/RL/la-fiesta-de-la-virgen-de-la-candelaria-en-puno-00956.

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translator, a kind of modern *Felipillo*[7], betrays its indigenous roots (marked by bare and dirty feet) and stands by the judges. Coya, however, "recovers" her voice and, in addition to reporting the gimmicks and fake nature of the court, she passes on the incommunicable.

Towards the end, there is a dialog between the two sisters that takes place in Coya's dream. Huaco appears wearing a guerrilla mask and a weapon. Initially, Coya refuses to recognize her. The sisters tell what has happened to them since their separation and each unsuccessfully tries to convince the other to join their cause. When Huaco defends the use of fire (violence), Coya replies that fire only weakens for a while and that in the end it ends everything and everyone. Huaco complains that she can't sleep, and Coya says she needs to close her eyes to get a better look inside. When they recognize that their positions are irreconcilable, Huaco leaves.

Reflecting on the work, Zapata (2001, p. 83) comments that the inward look is lacking, especially when making theater based on social assumptions, so that characters are not created as a mass, but with particularities of their individuality. Therefore, the oppositions between Coya (the one who closes her eyes to look inside) and Huaco (the one who does not sleep) complement each other. Looking at different angles, both need their opposite. *Contraelviento* was presented at the height of the armed conflict and reflects an unbalanced and chaotic Peru, with extremely antagonistic facets. The confrontation with the harsh reality "makes the fundamental meaning of the title of the work to go against the current of pessimism and hopelessness, the need to affirm a contrary utopia, [...] learn to fly in the opposite direction" (ZAPATA, 2001, p. 82). Against the forces of domination, suffering and forgetfulness, life must be reaffirmed.

Southern Antigones: sisters, wives, mothers, grandparents, daughters

[7] *Felipillo* is the Spanish name given to an indigenous man who served as a translator to the Spanish when the conquest of the country was still underway. In Peru, he personifies the figure of the traitor.

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Yuyachkami's Antigone (2000) is a solo version of the classic tragedy of Sophocles, written by the poet José Watanabe, in collaboration with the group. The work is starred by Teresa Ralli, who plays all roles: the narrator, Creon, Antigone, Hemon, a messenger, and the blind prophet Tiresias. The change between characters comes from a clap that transforms the actress' voice and gestures. Also, the costume, a large cloak over pants and a bodice, is manipulated in various ways. The only accessories on the empty stage are a wooden chair and a box containing the funerary mask of Polynices, the dead and unseen brother.

At first glance, the work seems to be quite distinct from the group's previous work, which has always directly addressed Peruvian historical themes such as farmers revolts, rural-urban migration, political violence, urban poverty or cultural heterogeneity. In fact, this work does not explicitly evoke the Peruvian experience, since the plot, the characters, and the place where the action takes place are the same as that of Sophocles' tragedy. However, like other collective creations of the group, it addresses issues such as arbitrariness of power, loss of social, cultural and historical memory, responsibility as a citizen and the role of women in maintaining memory. The fact that the action takes place after the confrontation with Creon after the death of Antigone and Hemon changes the dramatic axis of the original version. What is at stake, above all, is not the confrontation between the figure of the tyrant and the rebel, but the later recollection of this fact from the point of view of a character who assumed the role of a passive audience.

At the end of the play, the narrator reveals herself to be Ismene, "the sister whose hands were bound by fear". According to Gino Luque Bedregal, the emphasis on the confrontation between state law, which is imposed in a violent and authoritarian manner, and laws that concern the dignity of every human being gives way to the conflict that "resides in the remorse that Ismene experiences for not having helped Antigone bury her brother" (BEDREGAL, 2010, p. 77). Ismene carries the blame on her conscience for failing not only her unseen brother, but also her sister Antigone and, ultimately, all her family lineage by failing to honor her blood duties. Bedregal (2010, p. 78) points out that "the physical impossibility of changing the past and being able to explain to the dead brothers the reasons that could somehow justify their behavior end it in a spiral of remorse".

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Ismene, the witness who had her hands bound by fear, eventually assumes her role in history. As a survivor and witness, you must deal with the conflict of surviving the tragedy. Having to confront her painful memories is a self-imposed punishment. The characters from her past possesses her body and come alive again, incessantly repeating her torment. The drama can be summarized in the final lines of the play, when she symbolically buries her brother:

> [Antigone] In your lofty kingdom ask Polynices to forgive me the task I did not fulfill in time, because the countenance of power cowered me, and tell him that I already have a big punishment: to remember each day his gesture that tortures me and shame me (WATANABE, 2000, p. 64-65, cited in BEDREGAL, 2010, p. 78).

For Diana Taylor, through the performance, Ismene completes the actions that failed to perform at the right time. The work *Antigone* "gives hope to the participants who were unable to respond heroically to face some outrage. Ismene promises to remember every day by repeatedly reenacting her story" (TAYLOR, 2013, p. 286). *Yuyachkani's* reading of *Antigone* thus reflects on a specific problem linked to the armed conflict in Peru: the survivors' ethical and political responsibility for their traumatic past.

Miguel Rubio and Teresa Ralli say the work is about women and the suffering that national violence has imposed on them. In order to be ready for their version, they interviewed many mothers, wives, sisters and daughters of the missing people. The actress says that the best way to honor these women was to feel the memories inscribed on her body and pass them on to the character. This way, her version of *Antigone* has gestures associated with the women interviewed. According to Diana Taylor, this is a way of assimilating the continuity of cultural gestures and behaviors, although women may not identify with Sophocles' Antigone, they "will recognize this story as their own" (TAYLOR, 2013, p. 288).

Viúvas – Performance Sobre a Ausência (2011) also addresses the story of women who survived trauma. It consists of a research by *Ói Nóis Aqui Traveiz* that starts from the text Widows (1996) by Ariel Dorfman (together with Tony Kushner) without, however, representing him. From the theatrical text remain some moments in the history of Sophia, the oldest of the women of a small village on the banks of a river. They do not know where their

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men are, who disappeared or were killed by the civil-military dictatorship that settled in their country. Sophia breaks away from this anguish and indetermination, sitting like a rock by the river to wait. Her connection with his ancestors and the forces of nature no longer allows her to endure the unbearable. It is also Sophia's character who reveals the history and memory of the place where the scenic action takes place. Led by her, the public travels through the ruins of the prison where several political prisoners were imprisoned in the period of the Brazilian dictatorship. There is a constant tension between what is depicted, the story of this woman who had her father, husband, and two children missing, and what is evoked, the memory of a place abandoned by her sinister history, where several prisoners went through terrible sufferings.

The play begins on the boat that transports the public to Ilha do Presídio [Prision Island], the small island with gigantic stones, trees, shrubs, cacti and flowers, where the ruins of the prison remain. The boat crossing, through the murky waters of the Guaíba River, is a kind of rite of passage that the public must do to reach this place and become a witness to this history, which is also their own. Docking on Ilha do Presídio, which lies between the cities of Porto Alegre and Guaíba, causes ambiguous sensations. For one thing, the lush nature of the place is overwhelming. On the other hand, the remnants of a prison building evoke pain and suffering. In addition, the ruins seem to open wide abandonment and oblivion. To intervene in this space through theatricality and performativity means to evoke their memories - which are embedded everywhere, on the floor, on the walls, on the few remaining grids, on the bullet holes in the wall.

Dorfman's work allows scenic action to go beyond the bounds of this particular place. So close, yet so far away. The story of these women who seek to know the whereabouts of their men is an allegory of what happened throughout Latin America. There were many losses of an entire generation that did not submit to the abuse of power of the dictatorial government. These are decades of anguish without knowing what happened and how it happened. Forgetfulness has triumphed – especially in Brazil – and we remain unanswered. Telling the story of these women who rebel against arbitrariness is a cry of hope. The last image the public has the moment they leave the island is of women setting fire to their chairs, those which always reminded them of the absence of someone sitting there. These women would be able to set fire

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to everything so that justice could be made, and the dead could sleep in peace. According to Caballero,

> To think of the allegory figure is to recognize the fragmentary character of what one sought to evoke. [...] To inhabit memory is to perform it, to give shape to another time. To inhabit a specific space is to expose ourselves to contamination, to be affected [...] so the performance can happen in us. One must even imagine sniffing out the stories that have never been told or which, under the force of discredit and memoryless, seem to belong to the realm of fiction rather than history. Memory is also to put in space reports that should be imagined in order to be remembered (CABALLERO, 2013, p. 211).

The subtitle of this scenic action, *Performance sobre a ausência [Performance on Absence]*, makes a kind of provocation. The ironic thing is that what is being "performed" is precisely absence, the things that it is not. To perform the absence, we start from the writing of the space itself, from the physical and concrete memory that Ilha da Presídio holds, to evoke the dead and give them a voice.

Onde? Ação nª 2 (2011) came after the experience of presenting the show *Viúvas – Performance sobre a ausência* – Performance on the absence in the ruins of Ilha da Presídio. This overlap between fragments of a text that can situate history in various Latin American villages (where women had the role of perpetuating the memory of a terrible past) and a real place (where various atrocities took place in the period of the civil-military dictatorship and which is now abandoned) led *Ói Nóis* to come up with this action. There was a need to take to the streets of the city, sharing with more people and interfering in their daily lives, the experience of pain and oblivion that the island brought, so the title *Onde? Ação nº 2*. As in the show, the relationship between women and the empty chairs, chairs of missing people, who disappeared is worked on.

At the end of the scenic action, for a few minutes, women recall the names of Brazil's missing politicians. Being able to name one by one the names of the missing, and to scatter small papers with their biographies in the wind, was the poetic form found to provoke disruptions in the city's daily life and ask: where? Where are they? Where is Heleny Telles Ferreira Guariba? Where is João Carlos Haas Sobrinho? Where is Dinalva Oliveira Teixeira?

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Where is Osvaldão? Where are the missing people from the dictatorship? And where are the missing people from today? Where is Amarildo de Souza? The wounds are still open. Some women, like Elizabete da Silva, Amarildo's widow, remain without an answer.

The works *Antigone* of *Yuyachkani* and *Widows* of *Ói Nóis Aqui Traveiz* show women who were invisible and silenced of political discourse who were forced to play new political roles that they had not played before. Although these women perform tasks that are traditionally associated with the feminine, such as taking care of their children and family, their actions are rewritten in a new context and in a new space: the public space of male domination. This converts the action of Antigone, Ismene, Sophia, and other widows into an even more transgressive act. The execution of care tasks outside the private and domestic sphere, feminine spheres according to the hegemonic discourse, gain political strength and become a true gesture of resistance. It is the same logic used by the movement of the *Madres de la Plaza de Mayo*, Argentina, described by Taylor:

> The Madres movement was brilliant because it accepted the logic of the patriarchal State body and at the same time reversed it to show all its contradictions. Women claimed to be doing only what they were responsible to do - care and look out for their children. But what happens when these "good" mothers, by virtue of that same responsibility to their children, are forced to fetch them out of their place and confront their powers? Stop being moms? Or no longer being apolitical? This show [Madres] marks fissures in the logic of the State (TAYLOR, 2000, n.p.).

In the face of these women who "simply" want to play their traditional roles, the State forces find no arguments to justify repression. Within the very limits set by hegemonic power, mothers, sisters, wives, grandparents, and daughters can subvert it. What originally had the effect of subjection and control is used in favor of resistance. This way they achieve their goal: to report violence, to make crimes against humanity visible and to seek social justice.

Fighting for memory: to tell in order to teach

Viúvas – Performance sobre a ausência at Ilha do Presídio inaugurated a new strand of action to which Ói Nóis intends to continue working with places of memory. In the field of

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human rights, the term "places of memory" refers to different spaces and media that promote the memory of victims subjected to serious violence or whose rights have been suppressed. These violations of fundamental rights can be armed conflicts, wars, totalitarian political regimes, or even acts of force committed during a democratic regime. The concept was originally conceived by French historian Pierre Nora (1993), for whom memory places are "first and foremost, remains. The extreme form in which a commemorative conscience subsists in a story that calls it, because it ignores it" (NORA, 1993, p. 12-13). It assumes that there is no spontaneous memory, but that there is a need to create them through archives, birthdays, minutes, celebrations, since "without commemorative vigilance, history would soon sweep them away" (NORA, 1993, p. 13). The historian also states that the places of memory are, effectively, places in the three senses of the word: material, symbolic and functional. The three aspects always coexist, but to varying degrees.

Places of memory always aim at valuing collective memory. When associated with human rights violations, the creation of a place of memory starts with the need to deal with the legacy of violence so that it will never happen again. Indeed, it is an important resource for the effectiveness of human rights, as it situates historical memory and is part of the process of symbolic reparation of victims and affected communities. These places often harbor unofficial stories and unacknowledged truths. Therefore, the creation and management of spaces of memory intends to break with the logic of silencing – which is normally imposed after moments of serious human rights violations – and to value the voices of victims by opening the public space for the construction of memories and actions that do not accept at all the assumption that the serious violations that happened in the past will be repeated again.

Onde? Ação nº 2 was also held in some places of memory in Porto Alegre. In December 2013, it was part of the public opening act of the former *Dopinha*, which in the 1960s housed a clandestine center for torture and disappearance, the first in South America. The activity, proposed by the *Comitê Carlos de Ré da Verdade e da Justiça [Carlos de Ré Comitee for Truth and Justice]*, aimed to guarantee the expropriation and compensation to the owners of the big house, which had been closed for years in order to be transformed *Centro de Memória Ico Lisboa*. In April 2015, the scenic action was also part of an act at the Police Palace called to

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mark the 51st anniversary of the civil-military coup. This ceremony inaugurated a plaque indicating that place as a space for torture. On the second floor of this building, in the rooms where the Department of Political and Social Order (DOPS/RS) functioned, there was torture and homicide. This action was part of the *Marks of Memory* project of the *Justice and Human Rights Movement*, which provides the identification of places that hosted torture during the military regime.

During a circuit in Argentina in September 2014, the Tribe held *Onde? Ação nº 2* in fourteen cities from north to south of the country, including some memory sites related to the period of the Argentine military regime (1976-1983). In Resistencia town, Chaco province, the action was completed at the Memory Museum, where Chaco's police investigation department, the clandestine center of detention, torture and extermination, used to operate. In the city of Neuquén, it was held in front of the Federal Police station, which also operated as a clandestine center for torture and detention of political prisoners. The action began as a procession through several streets, with the participation of artists and human rights groups from the city, such as *H.I.J.O.S (Hijos y hijas por la identidad y la justicia contra el olvido y lo silencio [Sons and daughters for identity and justice against oblivion and silence]) Alto Valle* and *Neuquén Human Rights Assembly.*

In this circulation, the group can see how the relationship of Argentines with their recent past of civil-military dictatorship is distinct. Even though the names cited at the end of the lawsuit were of missing Brazilians, most of the Argentine public understood what it was about, and many expressed how important it is to continue to claim memory, truth and justice. Unfortunately, in Brazil, when presenting in places of intense pedestrian circulation, such as Esquina Democrática, in the center of Porto Alegre, the group often came across people who expressed their annoyance to see this past being remembered and who were indignant with the evocation of names associated with organizations that defended armed struggle as a form of resistance to the regime.

Certainly, there are many more and less obvious reasons for the differences of behavior between Brazilians and Argentines. Perhaps the most significant differences are the memory and forgetfulness policies that both countries undertook, as well as the way they dealt with their

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missing politicians. For researcher Caroline Silveira Bauer (2012), the elements of comparison between the two dictatorships must also be in the strategies of repression. Clearly there is a disproportion between the numbers of dead and missing people: while in Brazil we have about 400 cases, the Argentine regime was responsible, according to human rights organizations, for about 30,000 murders. However, if we consider only the so-called "numerical argument", we run the risk of denying or relativizing the existence of the terror implementation strategy in Brazil.

We must understand dictatorships in both countries as State regimes of terrorism that used kidnapping, torture, interrogation, censorship, information production and the practice of disappearance as a strategy. It should be noted that not only those directly affected by repressive action are victims, but "the whole society subjected to state terrorism regimes" (BAUER, 2012, p. 33) are also victims. The practice of disappearance specifically brings what the author characterized as the multiplier effect of terror, which destabilizes the victim's family and social environment, perpetuating a culture of fear: "fear was used as a way to destroy the individual in a citizen and person level and as a form of political domination at the collective level for the implementation of terror strategies" (BAUER, 2012, p. 108). The researcher recalls the character of the play *El Señor Galindez* (1973) – by Argentine psychologist and playwright Eduardo Pavlovsky (1933-2015) – a torturer who warns the prisoner: "For each one we touch, a thousand are paralyzed with fear. We act by irradiation. [...] Irradiation is a practice of social control", as quoted by Bauer (2012, p. 108).

To understand how societies similar in terror deployment strategies have dealt with this traumatic past in such a distinctive way, as Bauer (2012), we need to look at how transitions have been made to their respective democracies, with their pacts, silences, consensus, and demoralizations. Despite the similarities in addressing the issue at the time of transitions to democracy, from the elaboration of policies of memoryless and forgetfulness, later governments in Brazil and Argentina were marked by significant differences. In Argentina, from the 1990s, concrete steps were taken even with advances and setbacks to address the issue of human rights violations. As the author points out, from the 2000s, there was a break with the dictatorial past and the demoralization of the regime. Many Argentine military personnel were

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sent to trial and sentenced based on the understanding that justice and law would serve to solve problems arising from crimes against humanity committed by State agents. In Brazil, in the name of national reconciliation, the logic of consensus and the agreed transition has been established, without taking into account the social effects of state terrorism on society as a whole.

For *Tribo*, in its process of reflection on violence, torture, disappearance and impunity, which is still a common practice in Brazil, it was essential to fulfill these memory sites related to the civil-military dictatorship. Inhabiting a space like the ruins of Ilha do Presídio was a great challenge, as it meant confronting the abandonment of our past, as well as confronting the presence of various absences. Absences evoked in fiction by widows who need to know the whereabouts of their dead husbands, children and brothers, as well as the actual absences evoked by artist-citizens who wish to contribute to the construction of other memories, which are not part of the hegemonic history.

The act of occupying the Prison Island in an artistic and poetic way had many reverberations. Once again people started to talk about its history and the prisoners' who were there. Abandonment was also questioned and what would be the best way to restore and revitalize that space. In December 2014, *Tribo* participated in the historical listing ceremony of Ilha do Presídio, in which it was recognized as a State Historical Heritage by *IPHAE (State Historical and Artistic Heritage Institute)*. The listing process was composed of environmental and archaeological data, but was mainly based on historical issues, highlighting the use of the island as a political prison during the military regime. The invitation to participate in this ceremony demonstrates the recognition that the work on Ilha do Presídio contributed to the public debate about the need to preserve this memory space.

In one of the last scenes of Ariel Dorfman's *Viudas*, the character Fidelia, Sophia's granddaughter and one of the few survivors of the massacre by State agents, tells her little nephew, who never spoke, but is old enough to say, that there are stories that need to be told.

> **Fidelia** (To the baby): You have to learn to talk. You will need to talk. There are things you'll have to tell. But if you decide never to speak, these stories will end up being told in other ways. There are stories that call for screams to be told, and if there

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> are no words yet for them, skin is created to wait for the moment. They are taken by the wind, and the smoke, and the river, the words of each story will find their way to the most lonely and remote place, whenever there is someone who wants to hear... I can wait. I can wait for you to talk. I have plenty of patience. I can wait all the time in the world (DORFMAN; KUSHNER, 1996, p.190).

Fidelia's speech in *Viudas*, as well as Ismene's testimony in *Antigone*, suggest that atrocities, even if not recorded in archives and recognized by courts, will be remembered, evoked, and rethought. As Diana Taylor recalls, even when there is no photograph, document, or mortal remains, the repertoire retains the story of the survivors.

> These performing practices, inspired by age-old repertoires or marginalized traditions, make room for immediate reactions to current political problems. Every reaction to a story of political violence brings with it a history of reactions, evoked from a wide range of embedded and archival memories (TAYLOR, 2013, p. 288).

To understand how evoking a history of reactions can open space for a reaction to the present moment, Bedregal (2010) reminds Paul Ricoeur, who observes the following: if the past is something that is finished and cannot be changed (unlike the future, it is open, uncertain and undetermined), what can change over time is the meaning we give to this past, subject to reinterpretations elaborated in the present in the light of future expectations. Therefore, the sense of past is an active process, given by social agents who find themselves in spaces of confrontation and struggle against other interpretations and other meanings of the same events. Thus, different people use the past in different ways, placing in the public sphere of debate different interpretations and meanings in order to establish, convince and transmit a narrative that is accepted by the rest of society.

Also, according to Bedregal (2010), the sense of past is due to the present political struggle and future projects. When the struggle for memory is collective, that is, it intends to build a historical memory or tradition and to be representative of an identity, the space of memory becomes a space of political struggle. Collective recollections then become instruments for legitimizing discourses, tools for establishing communities of belonging and collective identities. Collective memories also trigger social movements that promote and defend different models of the future. Therefore, it is impossible to find a memory, a vision

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and a unique interpretation of the past, let alone shared by an entire society. There are times when the consensus on some versions of the past is greater, or better, when a certain interpretation is more accepted than others, or when a certain version of the past acquires a hegemonic character. This hegemonic version is usually defended by the winners of political conflicts (and even warlike conflicts), which establish which narrative corresponds to the official history. However, stresses Bedregal (2010), there will always be other stories, other memories and alternative interpretations. What exists, therefore, is an active political struggle over the meaning of the facts and the function of memory itself.

This struggle is often conceived as a "struggle against forgetting" or has as its motto expressions such as "remember not to repeat". Especially when, in certain circumstances, certain social sectors consider it necessary to deepen their knowledge of experiences marked by suffering, violence and injustice, such as the armed conflict in Peru (1980-2000) and the civil-military dictatorship in Brazil (1964-1985). The author warns, however, that these formulations may give the impression that there is only one correct interpretation of the past (which we could reach if the obstacles to this could be overcome). Under an appearance of unity and cohesion, this can hide what is actually an opposition between rival memories that embody their own memories and their own forgetfulness. For him, it is not a struggle of memory against forgetting, but of memory against memory. This way, it is necessary to question how the processes take place and who are responsible for the institutionalization of collective memories. The analysis of the processes of memory construction shows that different social actors, with different ties to past experience (who lived it, inherited, studied, etc.) vie for the legitimacy of their truth. For Bedregal, they are

> actors who fight for power and who legitimize their position in privileged ties with the past, affirming its continuity or its rupture. Therefore, it is essential to focus on conflicts and disputes in the interpretation and meaning of the past, and in the processes by which some of these reports can impose themselves on others and thus become hegemonic (BEDREGAL, 2010, p. 25).

The groups *Ói Nóis Aqui Traveiz* and *Yuyachkani*, in this struggle between memories, always resisted the hegemonic versions of the past. The prevailing interpretations of our past

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have traditionally been a hegemonic construction that privileges canonical documents and texts from the point of view of a nation or homeland, reproducing a dominant and universal discourse. This scripture does not allow us to recognize the memories and speech of the marginalized and defeated, precluding any possibility of a non-hegemonic version of history. In contrast to this historiographical tradition, these collectives have sought to recognize the historical role of the marginalized, emphasizing other ways of narrating history, interweaving the records of national history with that of a memory of the margins or the defeated that often remains. as embedded memory and is transmitted over generations.

But there is still the question of what the memory we want to build and transmit can teach. More than ten years after the release of the *CVR* Final Report in Peru in 2003, thousands of women and men who suffered the terrible violations of human rights during the armed internal conflict still await justice, truth and reparation. The commission made several recommendations, including structural reform of the armed forces, police and the judiciary; individual and collective reparations for victims; as well as a national forensic investigations plan to locate and identify victims, establish cause of death and identify the authors.

According to Amnesty International (2013), in ten years, some progress has been made in Peru in the fight against impunity, such as the attendance of several of the main authors of these crimes to justice. However, less than twenty percent of the cases that were reviewed resulted in a sentence. From the updated list of over 15,000 missing persons and 6,400 identified graves, fewer than 2,500 human remains were exhumed and only half of them were identified and handed over to family members. For Cristián Correa (*cited in* ICTJ, 2013, n.p.), the government's inability to comply with reparations "shows a lack of willingness to overcome historical discrimination and to regard indigenous and peasant communities as citizens on equal terms". For those working on human rights and fight for the maintenance of memory in relation to the armed conflict, it's scary that the candidate of the party *Fuerza*, Keiko Fujimori – daughter of former President Alberto Fujimori, sentenced to prison in 2009 for crimes of corruption and against humanity committed during his rule – has won enough votes to run for the second round in the 2011 and 2016 presidential elections.

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In Brazil, the picture is even scarier. More than four years have passed since the *CNV* Final Report was delivered in December 2014. Among its recommendations is: cancellation of the self-amnesty of agents of the Military Dictatorship, as determined by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights; punishment of torturers; demilitarization of the military police; opening of all archives of the repressive organs; creation or designation of a state body to investigate, with ample right of defense, all crimes of torturers, principals, sponsoring companies; discovery of the circumstances of the kidnappings and murders, as well as the location and delivery of the remains of the missing politicians to their families for a dignified grave. In addition to the *CNV*'s recommendations being completely ignored by the state, Brazil's fragile democracy is now dying for good.

Violence that happened in the past has not disappeared, it reappears every day in countries like Brazil and Peru. To evoke the past of trauma and violence is to keep local and marginal memories alive, to resist the memories instituted by hegemonic thinking. However, it is up to each one to make this past their own and act on it. The work committed to memory groups *Yuyachkani* and *Ói Nóis Aqui Traveiz* only complete their direction when its speech about rupture and resistance is assumed for their receptors and put in place in the public realm. Zapata speaks in shared memory of "the author, the actor, the director, and all those in the creative process, in which there is an individual, collective, citizen, historical, and communal enunciation. It is one memory that needs the other" (GODOY, 2016, p. 21). When it reiterates that past pain is a key part of the present and we cannot build the future ignoring this premise, the trauma of those affected by violence turns into something communicable, bearable and politically effective. The invitation of these groups to their public is to replicate the gesture of memory, resistance and defense of human rights.

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