

Contemplating mnemonics - an inquiry on the *Eselsbrücke*

Probably, one of the reasons why the *Homo sapiens* species has not become extinct, i.e. has survived all cruelty and conflicts of the world is the human being's sound ability and skill to forget, developed in the course of evolution. The ability to forget the pain of birth and the countless sleepless nights after birth; the ability to forget the pain and loss incurred in the fights for greener pastures; the ability to forget the blood shed in revolutions; and in general, the ability to forget psychological and physical pain, disappointment and traumata.

Memory research has classified the concept of forgetting in 4 sub-groups, namely 1) retrieval failure, which is the inability to retrieve a memory, 2) interference, whereby memories compete and interfere with one another because of similar information that was previously stored in memory, 3) failure to store information due to the fact that the information never made it into long-term memory and 4) motivated forgetting, which is an active process aimed at forgetting memories, especially those of traumatic or disturbing experiences. Motivated forgetting can be a conscious process (suppression) or an unconscious process (repression).

Be it suppression or repression, motivated forgetting is a common factor in post-conflict situations, intended as a mechanism to overcome the post-conflict trauma. Conflict is as old as humanity itself... From a religious point of view all three monotheistic religions recount the conflict between Eve (Hawa) and Adam, which is a kind of an Ur-conflict, the origin of sin and the moment in which humanity's lost its innocence. Another religious narrative, which is important in the understanding the concept of conflicts is the story of the Tower of Babel, where humanity, which lived in one place and spoke one language was punished, dispersed all over the earth and a confusion of languages instigated in them by God. This supposedly led to a diversity of humanity. This diversity brought with it a need to protect habitats, languages and traditions. This brings with it a sense of pride, patriotism and belonging and a need for identification, as well as of course the inverse function, i.e. xenophobia, racism, lust for more living space, craving for more economic power and ultimately a series of conflicts with not only the "other" but also with the self. These are all well known roots of conflicts, whose interdependence in economic, social, symbolic and cultural interests was well situated by the French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu.

From Algeria to South Africa, from Palestine to Tibet, from Russia to Finland and from Brazil to Canada different political, economic and social conflicts have left scars on national histories, geographies and social structures. But the question is how do these nations deal with the wounds of conflicts? Are there civic structures in place to treat the traumas resulting from these conflicts? Or are the consequences and filth of the conflicts simple swept under the carpet? Are the wounds of the conflicts cleaned and treated to heal or are they left open to microbic decay?

What is the role of intellectuals and artists in the treating or forgetting of the traumas of conflict?

The Algerian artist, Dalila Bouzar Dalleas, has taken upon herself to go beneath the surface, and investigate humanity's ability to forget, using Algeria as a case study. With the help of the mediums of painting, drawing and video installation, Bouzar Dalleas researches on the traumas that led to the suppression and repression of memory, which has been part and parcel of this society. Her works are on the one hand portrays of found images on the Algerian independence war and the war of the 1990s in Algeria and on the other hand, her works are abstractions of the meanings of signs and symbols, as well as decontextualisation of the myths around such symbols.

While humanity has been conditioned to forget so as to survive, a motivated forgetting is more like an active volcano, which might erupt at any time. Dalila Bouzar Dalleas' work is an effort to make a

controlled outlet for this volcano, by gradually using art to treat suppressed and repressed issues in history.

The obvious question is... can arts and culture deal with such issues as controversial as conflicts? But because conflict has mostly to do with spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional aspects of humanity, society and social groups; because conflicts sometimes arise from traditions and beliefs; because conflicts characterize fundamental rights and value systems of the human race, art and culture can not to be afraid to confront these issues head-on.

The aim of this exhibition project, in the French cultural centre Algiers, is not to point fingers at others, not to trivialize problems, nor offer infallible solutions to problems but to use art as a utensil to reveal this survival instinct of forgetting but also reveal the consequences of this loss of memory. Here, art takes the role of a mnemonic aid.

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