

Responses

Seven Strands of Silencing

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Research on memory and memorialization constitutes a rich and complex interdisciplinary space that tackles important questions, such as those presented by the articles on the “ethnographies of silence” in this special issue of *Cultural Analysis*. In the last few decades, there has been a boom in memory studies, exemplified, for instance, by the foundation of *Memory Studies*, a journal started in 2008 to give “recognition, form, and direction to work in this nascent field” (Hoskins et al. 2008, 5), or by the creation of the Memory Studies Association in 2016. This association brought together more than 1,500 scholars, artists, and memorial practitioners in their last—pre-COVID—congress in Madrid in 2019. One of the main strands of the memory studies field of research focuses on violence, with a recent paradigm change from focusing on victims’ perspectives to analyzing perpetrators’ narratives. This shift has also been acknowledged in the creation of a specialized publication, the *Journal of Perpetrator Research* in 2017, and an international network.

The perspective proposed in these ethnographies of silence adds to the state of the art in memory studies because it focuses on silencing strategies. My title is based on a combination of Paul Connerton’s “The Seven Types of Forgetting” (2008) and Dan Ben-Amos’s “The Seven Strands of Tradition” (1984). Both of these

are seminal contributions to memory and folklore studies. Connerton suggests that at least seven types of forgetting can be distinguished, “repressive erasure; prescriptive forgetting; forgetting that is constitutive in the formation of a new identity; structural amnesia; forgetting as annulment; forgetting as planned obsolescence; forgetting as humiliated silence” (2008, 59).

The repertoire of these ethnographies of silence follows different silencing strands and adds to Connerton’s seven from the silenced—and contested—heritage of the multicultural area of the Alps-Adriatic border (Italian, Slovenian, Austrian) explored by Marion Hamm and Janine Schemmer to the silences in memories on massive migrations of Istrians analyzed by Katja Hrobat Virloget. Marijana Belaj explores dissonant heritagization processes and the silencing of a religious route in different discourses and power relations, while Amy Skillman concentrates on silences in refugee and immigrant women’s narratives.

In addition, the articles offer innovative explorations of silencing strategies. The strand of denial, for instance, is explored in depth by Michele Bianchi. His contributor suggested that “nothing much has happened” expresses the terms on which local identity is built and has gained *social acceptance*. It allows people to present themselves as something outside from the dichotomy of victim/perpetrator. Silencing can also be due to illness, such as dementia. What happens when dementia provokes the forgetting of a second language, and your mother tongue is not understood? Thomas McKean addresses this question in an inspiring way, looking at adult speakers of Gaelic and

Scots forced by their illness to be monoglot. Silencing, in this case, means the absence of communication because of the use of a language that is not understood in the speaker's current environment.

Methodologically, the focus on silences or the unsaid is an ethnographic goose that lays golden eggs. Ethnography is a powerful methodological tool to enter into the unsaid. During fieldwork, discourses are a particular form of communicative practice, but the unsaid is a gem for the ethnographer. Several authors in this volume (Hrobat Virloget, Bianchi) explore these silences that the ethnographers encounter during their fieldwork.

These types of silencing, I want to add two more: (1) silencing mechanisms linked to pre-traumatic stress—or anticipated mourning—which I consider particularly relevant in the current COVID-19 pandemic; and (2) the silencing of specific research topics, such as non-violent situations. Regarding the first one, the memory of what might be called “anticipatory imagined events” is its main component. In a sense, it is related to expectations about what the future will be like in the face of specific traumatic events, such as pandemics or climate change. There are different vocabularies employed for the memories and the grieving of future situations and places. For instance, the term pre-traumatic stress, for example “was allegedly coined by Lise Van Susteren, a psychiatrist who specializes in the psychological effects of climate change” (Craps 2020, 277), while the term “solastalgia,” a combination of solace and nostalgia which refers to the feeling of being homesick at home, “is the distress produced by negative environmental change impacting on individuals while they are

directly connected to their home environment” (Craps 2020, 276). The silences created by the anticipated future are a fruitful field of research. Its fundament is nostalgia, not only of a past, but also of a present that faces an uncertain future.

Finally, I want to focus on the realm of not-so-violent daily life situations to stress the importance of moving beyond the link between memory studies and conflict. Silencing is also happening in memory processes dealing with “small happiness,” everyday moments. For instance, research on utopias and dystopias related to silencing mechanisms is an area that could be developed. Humanities and social sciences are essential to creating alternative scenarios and options for the future.

In the end, experts on imagination are much needed, and anthropologists, ethnographers, ethnologists, folklorists, and culture specialists all have in common their ability to understand, propose and imagine in potential futures, which is a much-needed ability in exploring the strands of silencing.

Works Cited

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To Not Forget and to Not Remember: The Blurred Faces of Silence

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The texts collected in this volume address the unequal access of groups and individuals to the production paths of history. They highlight how the production of traces that render some narratives possible and valorize certain artifacts of the past and not others is always accompanied by the production of silences. They tackle both the question of who imposes this silence and on whom, including studies on women refugees in Pennsylvania (Skillman), post-war Bosnian youth (Bianchi), actors and narrators of the Istrian exile (Hrobat Virgolet), or individuals and institutions involved in the patrimonialization of a religious tourist route in Croatia, the Stepinac path (Belaj).

In his contribution, Thomas McKean reminds us that silence is a verb that reveals the asymmetry of power relations, forms of violence, repression, exclusion, even eradication: "To 'silence' something is to end its communicative activity, neuter its power." However, the author also demonstrates that, as a noun, this term encompasses very different matters, which we often fail to explain in our work. Therefore, the characterization of a lacuna as "silence" might also result from a misunderstanding and thus refer to a (false) shared meaning. Thomas McKean poses the central question of the "what":