

Special Issue: The Ontology of Memory and the Horizon of History, Part III

Through a Glass Darkly: Recollecting, Representing, and Interpreting the Past

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1. Introduction

As a filmmaker as well as a psychologist, I have a deep fondness for visual metaphors. The title of my talk today—“through a glass darkly”—makes use of one such metaphor in foregrounding the complex dynamics that shape recollections of disturbing events. In seeing through a glass darkly, we recognize that our field of vision is obscured in ways that must be taken into account.

For marginalized groups, the project of recollecting requires new ways of searching and seeing. And for those who have been barred from official records, the project is as much one of creating as it is of discovering the past. The lesbian poet Adrienne Rich, for example, insists that “whatever is...buried in the memory by the collapse of meaning under an inadequate or lying language—this will become, not merely unspoken, but unspeakable” (1977: 3). Rich’s poetry holds some affinity with psychoanalysis—the idea that meaning resides in that which has been banished from consciousness and that banished truths have a way of reasserting themselves.

These narrative approaches to memory confronted a battalion of critics in the “memory wars” of the 1990s—a decade when I carried out field studies on trauma discourse and child sexual abuse testimonials (Haaken, 1996; 1998). This was an era of legal and scientific scrutiny of recollections of abuse. Therapists were among the leading protagonists in national dramas where they spoke out publicly on an epidemic of mental health conditions associated with “recovered memory” of childhood sexual abuse. Claims circulated in mainstream media that a range of clinical symptoms presented by women seeking therapy, for example, eating disorders, depression and sexual complaints, were disguised

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signs of childhood sexual abuse. As news reports proclaimed the shocking sources of this mental health crisis, father-daughter incest dominated the cultural stage. Incest survivors broke the code of silence around violations suffered at the hands of fathers, step-fathers, uncles and brothers with a narrative that spoke in a powerful way to female grievances of the era.

For many years, my research has focused on narratives, particularly trauma narratives, and how to interpret them in ways that preserve the integrity of the account while going beyond simply validating them (Haaken, 1996; 1998; 2010; 2021). Theodore Sarbin (1986) and Jerome Bruner (1990) introduced the narrative turn in psychology in the 1980s and 90s, arguing that all mental life is structured around the production of stories—around creating units of associations that organize and make sense of the world. The truth-value of stories depends on the context of reception and who is listening—as scholars in the fields of cultural criticism routinely point out (Hooks, 1992; Radway, 1984).

As a clinician, I am listening for the beginnings and endings of stories, places where the stage is set for other protagonists in the person's life situation and where potential resolutions to life's conflicts are staged. Stories, which may be a mix of fact and fantasy, often portray the dominant scripts that constitute personal identity. My work as a clinician involves attending to these dominant scripts while also attending to images and memories on the periphery of consciousness. I draw on the concept of over-determination introduced by Freud—that multiple factors contribute to the psychological meaning of events. Further, one memory may operate as a “screen memory” in protecting against more disturbing recollections.

Particularly problematic in the sexual survivor movement, including the recent #metoo movement, has been the position that recollections are transparent in meaning or that they are mere imprints of events. This stance strips accounts of complexity, denying the role of imagination, symbolization, displacements, narrative elaboration, and social support in speaking about disturbing experiences. Indeed, the claim that female victims naturally “speak the truth” positions women as child-like in their simplicity.

Beyond these psychological dynamics, my work focuses on collective aspects of storytelling and remembering. Finding that memories are not discrete products of individual minds but, rather, are sometimes “borrowed” from others through group identifications does not undermine their truth value. Attentiveness to how memory is socially constituted is essential to any project of truth-seeking—recognition of places where factual and narrative truths converge in complicated ways.

This presentation draws on psychoanalytic-feminist theory to take up dilemmas that emerge in representing the past, and particularly dilemmas that emerge in accounts of collective grievances. One dilemma centers on how to bring into focus the social settings where memories are produced, whether it is a speak-out, political rally, poetry reading,

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tribunal, the courts or research laboratories. These settings involve their own protocols for evaluating truth claims and each has value in the production of social memory. Much like the scenes in *Rashomon*, the classic film by Akira Kurosawa, where observers to a crime produce different recollections of events, the standpoint of observers can both illuminate and distort images in the field of vision. I extend this analysis of the dynamics of remembering into the politics of forgiveness and social distribution of responsibility for mental suffering.

2. The Memory Wars

Those who have been denied their histories inevitably struggle to emancipate themselves from what Rich calls the lying languages of the oppressor. Second Wave feminism in the 1970s created social space for a broad range of demands, from changes in discriminatory laws and calls for women's studies programs in universities to confronting sexist barriers in the legal system (Haaken, 2010). Many of the critiques of this era focus on the pathologies of the domestic sphere. The prototypical perpetrator had always been associated in the popular imagination with the dark terrors of the city, and folk tales of rape often operated as a cautionary tale against female ventures into public life (Brownmiller, 1975). The idea that female protection within the family was often an illusory one took hold as a unifying motif early on in feminism, fortified by findings that more women are harmed or killed in their homes than on the streets. Shifting the ideological ground from stranger rape to date rape, marital rape, and other violations within the context of intimate relationships was part of a broader struggle for emancipation from the patriarchal family. In the many sites of consciousness-raising and speak-outs in that era, incest survivors gave public voice to what they had previously only privately remembered. Sisterhood provided the receptive space for speaking about what had been unspeakable (Herman, 1992).

My research in the 1990s attempted to understand how child sexual abuse, and particularly father-daughter incest, emerged as what I term the master narrative in campaigns for women's rights (Haaken, 1998). The incest story gathered social symbolic power as a drama that centered on patriarchal power, hypocrisy and betrayal (Freyd, 1996). And it foregrounded the daughter's refusal to be silenced. Since sexual violation of the body of a child evokes public revulsion and signifies the failures of protective institutions, allegations of paternal incest represented a profound challenge to the traditional family (Herman, 1992). Statistics circulated widely in the late 1970s and 80s estimated that one in three women was the victim of child sexual abuse and one in four the victim of incest from male relatives. Even though these numbers were challenged on the basis that definitions were either too broad or vague, almost no one returned to the pre-feminist claim that incest was rare.

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The 1990s witnessed a new genre of incest accounts, however, as women who had not previously recalled childhood abuse began to identify as survivors (Alpert, 1995; Freyd, 1996). A burgeoning clinical literature emerged on *recovered* memories of early sexual abuse, many through hypnosis and other exploratory therapeutic techniques. These recovered memories, recovered in the sense that they were not continuous memory, were increasingly challenged by memory researchers (Loftus, 1993; Loftus & Ketchum, 1994). Many scientific critics drew on findings that autobiographical recall tends to produce heightened memory for disturbing events rather than loss of memory, and that memory is highly malleable, reconstructive and vulnerable to suggestion. But most controversial was the claim of critics that therapists were the source of many of these disturbing accounts of childhood violations. The charge of therapeutically “implanted memories” garnered support as some researchers joined the False Memory Syndrome (FMS) Foundation, an organization formed by parents who fought to discredit cases brought against them in court by their adult daughters. Many of these memory researchers squared off against recovered memory therapists. Elizabeth Loftus took the stage as a leading critic and an outspoken board member of the FMS Foundation. Summarizing twenty years of her research on memory, Loftus (2005) concludes that “misinformation has the potential for invading our memories when we talk to other people . . .” Loftus overlooks, however, how talking to other people can be vital for getting to the truth as well.

Research on autobiographical memory emphasizes how factual events are inevitably intertwined with imaginary processes (Schacter, 1996). Alongside this reconstructive model of memory, however, are investigators who stress the general reliability of autobiographical recall. Ulric Neisser (1988) introduces the concept of “episodic” remembering, or the “gist” of memory, in arguing that people are better at recalling the underlying ideas or themes of conversations than they are at verbatim recall. In the context of contested abuse recollections, however, both sides could claim that their gist of memory was closer to the reality than that of the other side.

Feminists point out how scientists are active agents in the stories they produce and how scientific authority inevitably gives greater weight to more powerful voices (Bleier, 1984; Ussher, 1992). Feminist researchers identified a range of masculine biases in research, from the dominance of male subjects to built-in biases in research methods. Further, if the behavior in question is not open to public scrutiny—if it happens behind closed doors—the procedures of science may not assist in getting closer to the truth. Science, including social science, is best conducted in a context open to scrutiny. Carefully trained observers agree upon a set of rules for testing claims and subjecting them to procedural review. But much of the behavior of concern to trauma therapists and survivors operates in private, outside the bounds of public observation and behind the

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backs, as it were, of scientists. The various effects of oppression women know so intimately in private life may feel utterly unsuited to the procedures of science and therefore as requiring alternative investigatory methods.

In the decade that followed, increasingly horrific sexual allegations captured the public stage. The rise of neoliberalism in the late 20th century brought a wave of campaigns to dismantle government and defund public services. At the same time, there was an expansion in human rights initiatives. In 1989, world leaders adopted the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, many articles enumerating political rights of children and child refugees. The Convention established the duties of States to “protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.” Yet in much of the English-speaking world, gripping tales of sexual abuse overtook reports of mundane, everyday forms of child suffering. In the United States, campaigns to expose and litigate cases of child sexual abuse advanced under the banner of child protection mandates. The monstrous sexual predator emerged as a kind of collective fetish—an image of fascination and horror that served to discount less palpable threats. As social welfare programs were cut, it took a dramatic story to stir moral outrage.

On the legal front, abuse survivors had won ground in the 1990s with laws in many states that set the clock back for statutes of limitations on cases involving sexual allegations. Courts moved to establish the start date based on when the individual *recalled* abuse or was able to understand its significance rather than set in the period following the alleged abuse. For adult survivors, the therapeutic techniques of recovering memory produced the evidence that allowed civil and criminal cases to be prosecuted. As cases based on recovered memories came with increasing frequency before the courts, allegations were more intensively scrutinized by legal experts as were the methods for producing them. Clinical experts were called to explain how disturbing memories buried in the unconscious could surface decades later and retain their essential fidelity to the original events. Trauma therapists began to describe their own work through the idioms of eye-witness testimonial, as “bearing witness” to abuse.

3. Psychoanalysis and Memory

How people integrate a terrible experience into their sense of self is a complex process and one mediated by historical dynamics and cultural beliefs. My own mother taught me as a young girl that it is better to be killed than to survive a rape. In her conservative Christian worldview, it was better to die in purity than to live in sexual defilement. The women’s movement of the 1970s organized to resist both rape and the stigma of rape—

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and the idea that survivors were morally contaminated or “damaged goods.” Feminism helped me to rewrite this tragic script that my mother inherited from her own mother.

One of the ongoing dilemmas centers on how to foreground the destructiveness of what has been endured, whether war, sexual assault, or child abuse, without undermining survivors’ capacities to testify to such effects. Persons with psychiatric histories are often cast as unreliable witnesses to their own suffering. For close to a century, psychiatrists, whether behavioral, psychoanalytic, or biomedical in their orientations, held that victims of sexual assault or domestic abuse either masochistically sought out the abuse or were too weak psychologically to defend themselves. Their testimony was scrutinized for signs of madness—indicators of an unreliable narrator.

As a psychology of secrets—a theory of hidden knowledge revealed through narratives—psychoanalysis creates a more hospitable audience for female storytelling than does the highly operationalized world of scientific psychology or the prosecutorial atmosphere of the courts. In contra-distinction to approaches that focus on the factual accuracy of memory, psychoanalysis attends to the dynamic flux of mental life and the narrative structure of recollections. From a psychoanalytic perspective, repression is not simply understood as interference in the retrieval of memory but, rather, signifies human conflict over self-knowledge.

Psychoanalysis brings into focus the role of infantile anxieties and defenses in adult life. Sex is complex because it evokes early experiences of bodily merger with another and the ambivalent currents of desire in even the deepest attachments. More than the accuracy of childhood memories, psychoanalytic approaches emphasize the psychological meaning of personal recollections. Clinical inquiry unfolds around the narrative staging of life events, perceived motives and desires, and various helpers and hinderers in life’s dramas. This relational foundation of the self provides an internal holding ground for stressful and potentially traumatic events, whether conflicts in relationships or in weathering the inevitable frustrations, losses, and tragedies of life. In my own work as a therapist, psychological conflicts often center on memories of how others intervened or failed to intervene in the formative experiences of childhood.

In an interview with psychiatrist Robert Jay Lifton, literary theorist Cathy Caruth (2014) notes their mutual attentiveness to the role of symbolization in trauma reactions. Psychic trauma results from situations that exceed available mental resources for representing events and for integrating them into consciousness. The posttraumatic experience of emotional numbing signals the gap between the event and mental representational resources, an “impairment in the symbolization process itself” (p. 9). From this perspective, empathic listening is a creative act. The therapist assists the traumatized person in constructing meaning from what is initially experienced as a deathly void. “And as one forms imagery, one is forming a narrative about their story,” Caruth explains. “It’s all

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forming itself or being reconstructed.”

This dynamic approach to recollections of painful events, where symbolic and inter-subjective processes prevail, was pushed to the margins of the memory wars of the 1980s and 1990s. Ironically, as psychoanalysis achieved greater legitimacy in the fields of literary and film criticism and cultural studies as well as areas of the social sciences, an older school of psychoanalytic thought, *dissociationism*, captured the clinical field of trauma treatment and court battles over abuse claims (Putnam, 1993).

Dissociationists argued that memories of trauma are often encapsulated in a fragmented form in the psyche much like an encapsulated cyst. Bessel Van der Kolk (2015) cites Freud in explaining the relationship between dissociated memory and acting out: “If a person does not remember, he is likely to act out: he reproduces it not as a memory but as an action; he repeats it, without knowing, of course, that he is repeating, and in the end, we understand that this is his way of remembering” (p. 183). While Freud emphasized the dynamic and reconstructive aspects of memory, Van der Kolk sought to show how traumatic memory retained a fidelity to the original events.

The dissociation model suggests that the memory of a traumatic event is compartmentalized in mind and separated from consciousness, only to emerge and overtake the psyche when a current situation triggers memory of the abuse. Therapists who enlisted this model tended to view trauma memory as a kind of psychic fossil, remaining intact and holding fidelity to the original event. The model allowed therapists to deploy hypnosis in the retrieval of memory—a therapeutic technique subsequently ruled by courts as inadmissible as evidence. The discrediting of testimony based on hypnosis heightened public awareness of how memory could be manipulated by experts. But this controversy over hypnotic retrieval of memory was as much about the proclaimed powers of therapists as it was the shadowy recollections of patients.

4. The Satanic Ritual Abuse Scare

In the late 20th century trauma field, clinicians took the stance that the more horrible the memory, the more likely that memory corresponded to factual events. False memories were thought to lie principally in the denial or minimizing of traumatic sex abuse rather than in their dramatic elaborations. Campaigns to raise awareness of the pervasive frequency and destructive impacts of childhood sexual abuse cascaded into increasingly gothic tales of horror. If you can imagine it having happened, therapists reasoned, it most certainly must have happened.

Patients diagnosed as suffering from multiple personality disorder were a primary source of accounts that expanded from conventional memories of abuse in childhood to a new genre of Satanic Ritual Abuse (SRA) memories—horrific tales of torture at the hands

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of organized devil-worshippers. In the therapeutic uncovering of deeper layers of trauma memory, often under hypnosis, the “alter personalities” that surfaced in case histories recounted shockingly lurid scenes of children forced to participate, often by their parents, teachers, and trusted clergy, in orgiastic sexual rites (Haaken, 1998; Nathan and Snedeker, 2001). As these stories became more elaborate, they often extended beyond the ritualized torture of children to include the “programming” of cult members that leaves them like walking time bombs.

Many therapists voiced moral urgency around accepting the literal truth content of SRA accounts. The burgeoning treatment protocols on trauma codified “believing the survivor” as an essential element of healing. The patient’s memory of trauma, too horrific to reveal to conventional listeners, could only emerge in an environment of absolute receptivity to the “unthinkable.” This stance was brought into training manuals at women’s crisis centers across the country as well, including protocols for detecting the code language of SRA survivors on crisis calls. In interviews with staff at women’s crisis lines, I sometimes offered a feminist challenge to these horror stories: “we have enough known threats to worry about as women without imagining new ones.”

For me, as a psychologist and social theorist, questions remained after many were closing the books on the SRA scare. Why did so many people—including quite sensible and thoughtful people—endorse what seems in hindsight a fantastical set of beliefs? Surveys in the 1990s indicated majorities of trained clinicians, many with PhD degrees and advanced training, believed that networks of Satan-worshippers were sadistically torturing and killing young children in secret, in spite of the lack of material evidence to support such claims.

The moral urgency and drama of these “save the children” campaigns swept aside broader social justice demands. Women could speak up about violations from the perspective of the innocent child in a way that was far more difficult to voice in the thicket of more morally suspect, mature sexual encounters. Demonstrating the absolute innocence and non-culpability of women in cases of date rape, sexual harassment or domestic violence was—and remains—an onerous challenge. Winning sympathy for child victims, particularly victims of sexual abuse, was far less daunting.

5. Collective Remembering

Social psychological research tends to focus on *distortions* produced by group influences. From group think, group conformity to bystander effects, where people fail to intervene as observers of crimes, American social psychology has throughout much of its history seen groups through a glass darkly. There is a streak of paranoia in this psychological gaze. Sociologists, with whom I often hold greater affinity than my psychologist

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colleagues, are more oriented to the progressive side of groups. Solomon Asch, an important researcher in post-World War II social psychology, carried some of this same sociological ethos into his work on group phenomena. One influential set of studies involved a series of experiments where a research subject in a group setting was presented with a set of stimuli—two lines clearly unequal in length—along with other group members who were confederate subjects. Asch found that when other group members endorsed the statement that the lines were equal, the research subject agreed in conformity to this false perception. When there was at least one other group member voicing disagreement, however, the research subject was able to resist conformity. For Asch, this line of research held important implications for resistance to authoritarianism and fascism. Speaking the truth requires forms of social solidarity.

As claims gather complexity and social symbolic freight, the registers for assessing their truth value do exceed experimental controls. The simplicity of Asch's conformity experiments offered few insights in working through the murky complexity of courtroom dramas. Yet many experimental psychologists such as Elizabeth Loftus (1995) did indeed leave the laboratory to testify in courtrooms, extending laboratory findings to complicated and troubling human situations. Loftus has provided expert testimony in support of defendants in sex abuse allegations—a role that stirred the ire and outrage of many feminists (Aviv, 2021). Yet her research on eye-witness testimony in crime scenes contributed to the larger movement for racial justice in the courts. Black people, and particularly black men, suffered long histories as victims of false allegations, including allegations of rape. Given this history, few Black feminists reflexively endorsed the “believe women” stance (Collins, 1998). Loftus's work found more friendly reception in these quarters.

6. The Gender Politics of Forgiveness

The feminist project of remembering began with making visible the formerly invisible, taking the public stage as active subjects. One of the problematic aspects of the recovered memory movement, however, was in the limited range of scripts available to women in narrating distress in patriarchal society. A feminist practice of memory requires that we attend to the contexts that shape available representations of the past and insist on space for complexity and uncertainty.

In interviewing refugees that fled the Sierra Leonean civil war in the late 1990s, I spoke with a number of women who described the horrors they had endured when rebels overtook their villages (Haaken, Ladum, Tarr, Zundel, & Heymann, 2005). One account strained my personal believability filters, even as it pressed me to think further about what makes a story feel true. Several women told of teenage soldiers with the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) who would routinely cut open pregnant women

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and rip out their fetuses and then proceed to cook and eat them. The stories included reports of these soldiers raping their own mothers. Yet no one had actually seen these events. They were stories passed on as rumors, although there was evidence that killing, amputating villagers' limbs, and rapes were part of the terrorist arsenal of the rebels. Over time I came to understand these elaborations as attempts to break through a wall of colonial indifference to their suffering. While some psychiatric readings might view the accounts as expressions of group hysteria, I came to view them as symbolic registers of extreme distress.

As symbolic narratives, the stories captured the agonizing poetics of the tragedy. The rebel war ripped open the very heart and soul of the country. As I became known by Sierra Leonean youth as Mama Jan, I also became attuned to how older women are commonly addressed as "mama," and to the flexibility of maternal categories in the matrilineal kinship structures of this region of Africa. The *rebel war*—as it was often called—was different from so many civil wars in that the rebels attacked their own villages rather than a cultural group marked as outsiders or the "Other." Some of the grievances of these alienated youth centered on a patriarchal system where young men were cut off from the resources of their village, with heavy fines levied for infractions, such as having sex with young women who were in arranged marriages to older men. While the rebels may not have raped their biological mothers, many had returned to their home villages to destroy them—even firebombing the houses of elders. Just as rape may be used as a metaphor for environmental destruction, for example, in decrying the fossil fuel industry's rape of Mother Earth, the invoking of this incest taboo and the violence of rape conveyed this same moral condemnation of the young rebels.

As I talked with women about their experiences of the war, discussion turned to the meaning of forgiveness. Some women stressed the importance of forgetting the past and looking to the future. "We have to put it at our backs," one woman insisted. "If you dwell on the past, the trauma will never leave you. The way we do this is by engaging in activity together, by working together." Other women stressed remembering as vital to the project of recovery. As one of the Catholic Sisters at a center for child soldiers explained, "we have to understand why this happened to us. If you do not deal with the past, it will never leave you." While these prescriptive statements seem contradictory, I came to see them as a necessary contradiction. In the refugee camps, children and adults came together to create theater reenacting and reworking memories of the war. But they also taught each other skills and found creative ways of remembering the positive side of their cultural past. Remembering meant recovering the good as well as the bad within their histories and of finding collective means of representing their trauma.

Talk of forgiveness also led to the issue of how responsibility for suffering should be socially distributed (Haaken, Ladum, Tarr, Zundel, & Heymann, 2005). For Sierra

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Leonean women, identifying the enemy—the perpetrators of the war—defied the one-dimensional portraits of evil that prevail in much of Western culture. Women struggled with the question of who to hold responsible as the primary perpetrators of this conflict. Is it the young men and boys who joined a violent rebel movement and turned brutally on their own communities? Is it the corrupt government officials who made deals with foreign governments and investors while turning their backs on their own people? Is it the International Monetary Fund, the institution that forced the government to lay off a third of its public sector workforce prior to the outbreak of the war? Is it the continuing impact of colonialism? Is it the international diamond trade and its commerce in dirty diamonds—systems that extract raw materials from Africa without building the productive capacities of its people? While women differed in where they placed most blame, there was considerable agreement that the villainy behind the war involved many players. Some of the perpetrators of the war, most certainly the young rebels, were more easily identified than others. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) provided settings for a range of testimonials and for holding the complexity of post-war grievances, even as this process inevitably failed to fulfill its hopes and promises. It became the task of the next generation to remember the lessons of the war while also learning how to forget.

7. Conclusions

One way of entering into the politics of testimonials is to begin with the experience of victims—with those who have been most injured and whose complaints are more likely to be silenced by the more powerful. Truth and Reconciliation Commissions around the world have recognized this principle of beginning with victims. Yet in many cases, the positions of victims and perpetrators are not so easily untangled. The victims may engage in strategies of survival that are not so ennobling. If recognition of victim claims depends on stories of absolute virtue, the complex moral lessons of history are lost. Casting perpetrators as “evil” carries similar costs. The rhetoric of evil places the perpetrator beyond normal ways of understanding destructive deeds, placing them outside of the everyday institutions that may be very much implicated in harms suffered.

The settings available for adjudicating grievances do shape in critical ways the forms of social remembering that emerge and scripts available for making claims. The rules in courts and in research laboratories often exclude sources of evidence that matter in everyday situations of harmful encounters. Uncertainty or confusion in recollecting events exposes the complainant to harsh scrutiny, and particularly for those most vulnerable to the prejudices of the courts and the biases of research institutions. Groups that share histories are better able to hold the vagaries and partial truths of recollections, even

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as they confront societal conditions that make it harder for their suffering to be seen and grievances heard.

With the rise of neoliberal economics in the late 20th century and the dismantling in the U.S. of the welfare state, stories of everyday misery were displaced by increasingly dramatic tales of devil-worshippers and rituals of blood sacrifice carried out in clandestine places. While similar tales circulate currently among far-right social media outlets in the US, this genre of conspiratorial thinking captured feminist and liberal organizations several decades ago. In both political contexts, Satanic abuse stories express a state of rage and terror and a crisis in the state's ability to respond.

The horror stories that unfolded in the Sierra Leonean civil war were palpably real. The war was declared officially over by the United Nations in 2002 after most of the combatants, including children as young as six years of age, were disarmed and demobilized. Understanding why this youth rebellion moved from legitimate grievances to terrorist acts, such as chopping off the limbs of villagers, emerged as one of the most disturbing questions taken up in the aftermath of the war. Women's peace groups in Sierra Leone played leading roles in bringing context to this brutality and in creating projects of remembering that targeted destructive forces on the periphery of the horrific violence. These forces included some of the same neoliberal economic policies advanced by the US and other Western powers—policies that contributed to the moral panic of the SRA scare in the English-speaking world in the late 20th century.

Social movements give rise to forms of collective remembering that establish unity around common struggles. They create valorized accounts of what victims have endured and the rich knowledge that has survived hardships. As important as the factual accuracy of accounts, however, are the scripts available for representing shared suffering. Idealized representations of group experiences become repressive if they disallow the full range of humanity—both destructive and noble—that constitute these same legacies. For if only virtuous representations of the past are integrated into group consciousness, the less noble elements may find their way into group life through a fantastical story.

Movements for social change inevitably oscillate between two moral poles in struggling for justice—a kind of collective bipolar condition. One pole—the depressive condition—focuses on damages and the range of trauma, impairments, and limitations endured. Without evidence of harms suffered, it would be difficult to advance grievances and demands for justice. This depressive pole, much like clinical depression, risks reproducing group identity as a bundle of deficits or lacks. The grievances may then take the form of an appeal to the dominant group for protection, as lacking the requisite capacities for autonomy. The second pole centers on establishing the capabilities and resiliencies of victimized groups—capacities that survive in spite of histories of suffering and trauma. On a psychological level, the group must be able to re-project the bad back onto the oppressor

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and to assert its own insurgent subjectivities. Each pole brings the potential to displace or repress the other, however, whether in a manic focus on resilience or in a depressive fixation on damages. Campaigns that become forces for progress find ways of holding these dynamics over time, both the rational and the irrational, the nightmares and the dream work that are the twin legacies of the dispossessed.

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