

Memory for catharsis

By: Daliborka Uljarević

Facing with the past is a difficult, long-term, uncertain, but a necessary process – both on the personal and social levels. It takes a lot of courage, commitment and patience, all the things that we often miss also on the personal level, which is then inevitably reflected on the broader planes.

How do we remember and how much? What do we learn from it, if we learn at all? Are we capable of objectively comprehending our past, present and ourselves in these contexts? Or are we more prone to hypermnesia, remembering selectively certain events, information, some powerful feelings, and forgetting others?

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There are different approaches. During and immediately after the fall of the Nazi regime, some 200 000 Germans who were in one way or another part of the regime – from **Heinrich Muller**, the head of Gestapo, to his colleague ideologists or direct executors, various businessmen, academics, journalists etc. killed themselves. Others, without a trace of remorse, continued to live ordinary lives, like Hitler's secretary and party secretary **Gerhard Klopfer**, who became a lawyer after the war. Yet others had to face the court, like **Adolf Eichmann**, the mastermind of the holocaust, who was found in Argentina where he hid under a false name and was convicted to death by hanging. Another thing these people have in common is that they were present at the Wannsee Conference on 20 January 1941, which brought together 15 of the highest officials of the regime. The Conference is the best illustration of the "banality of evil", as defined by **Hannah Arendt**, taking place in an atmosphere perfectly free of dilemmas, breakdowns or excitement as portrayed in the screen version of the event, directed by **Kenneth Branagh**. In reality, the plan on the so-called "final solution of the Jewish question" was adopted in some 85 minutes of the meeting. It was presented by **Reinhardt Heydrich**, as a de facto guideline for the holocaust of 11 000 000 Jews. The 15-page paper, marked as the top secret, was only made in 30 copies. Every copy was marked, so that in case of further dissemination the authorities would know who leaked it. The preparation and the meeting itself went smoothly, just like the execution of most aspects of this monstrous protocol by the already well tuned machinery.

In his analysis of the example of Nazi Germany, **Karl Jaspers**, offers a typology of guilt or responsibility of citizens for the actions of their regime. According to him, there are: criminal responsibility, political guilt, moral guilt and metaphysical guilt. Jaspers takes up the challenge of measuring the guilt of his countrymates, as well as of the external forces (those which, for various reasons, ignored the rising power of Nazism), but he does not accept for a moment that individuals should be forgotten and escape justice. Everybody can be judged according to different types of guilt or responsibility, although beyond the relatively straightforward assessment of the criminal responsibility thing necessarily become more sensitive.

In addition to these types of responsibilities, Jaspers notes another type, which can be relevant also for the Montenegrin context. This is civic responsibility, and part of the civic responsibility is to face one's past, to reject the systematically imposed but false central narrative of Montenegro's non-participation in the wars and of an equal (lack of) responsibility for all. It is equally important that we stop seeing ourselves as victims, in any regard, because this limits our ability to face the future.

German society has an established culture of memory and commemoration of crimes which happened on their territory or in their name. These crimes are incomparably more horrible and of a larger scale than those committed on our territory and in our name. This made it all the more difficult to find a balance in preserving the memory of the evil that has been committed, to stand as a warning against anything similar ever happening again. Part of our current civil responsibility is also to

establish this culture of memory in order to chart our further social catharsis, as a precondition for achieving those so often and so eagerly recalled European values and standards.

Naturally, none of this takes away the personal responsibility – we are talking about parallel processes. Memorialisation of the crime, which is one form of rendering justice to the victims, is a way of strongly supporting the efforts to deliver the perpetrators to justice. Which is why it is also part of our civic responsibility to erect a memorial at the spot from which busloads of deported refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina left Montenegro. It is our duty to avoid desecrating the memory and feelings of the victims with daily political banalities aimed at forging a new master narrative, whose only similarity to the old one would be alienation of the victims.

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