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NEVER AGAIN! AGAIN AND AGAIN WHEN MEMORY SERVES POLITICAL VIOLENCE

To avoid any misunderstanding, let me first establish what the French call 'un champ sémantique' or a 'semantic field'.

The dictionary definition of Memory is: "The set of psychic functions which allows us to perceive the past as the past. (and) Preservation in the brain of impressions which continue to influence our behavior in the form of habits".

The word "memory" is used in the western world mostly to point out collective or individual memory. In recent years it has quite often been used in reference to WWII crimes or even more specifically the Jewish genocide during the war. "Memory" became an undefined interdisciplinary field. In the context of this lecture, I will consider memory, as remembrance. The act of remembering by an individual and mostly by a national collective.

By trauma, I mean the consequences of an event that make an individual unable to use his usual psychological defenses. For example, the traumatized individual is unable to forget or to re-narcissize. I will refer to collective trauma as learnt suffering on a mass basis. A taught trauma transmitted by national or political institutions.

Memory - or as I said 'to remember' - is not the opposite of 'to forget'. The terms that are opposed are 'to erase' or 'wipe-out' and 'to conserve'.

Remembrance is an interaction between memory and forgetting, which is always a selection. Or, in Goethe's words, "When I hear memory, *I ask myself what was forgotten*".

You will not hear me use the words "Shoah" or "Holocaust". Both are religious notions that uproot the political event of genocide, from its political and realistic dimension. I will address later the roots of these metaphysical notions.

Through these works I will try to illustrate the approach of someone born and educated in Israel, who decided to exile himself and to dedicate his artistic work, through documentary cinema, to the relationship between remembrance and political violence.

On an individual psychological level, the triangle trauma-remembrance-violence is quite well known - and by that I mean the fact that a traumatized individual potentially can become an oppressor. It is the case of sexually abused children, abused women or even concentration camp survivors etc. this is what we usually call the effect of repetition. On a collective level, despite its clear existence, this triangle or repetition is difficult to examine. Collective trauma is difficult to study or to highlight.

It is hard to recognize the link between, collective trauma, collective memory and collective violence. It is well known that memory is used for building national identity. The recent experience of the Serbs' violent attitude in Bosnia and in Kosovo has shown us once again the extent to which memory is one of the favorite tools of nationalism and totalitarianism. With memory easily becoming an instrument that stimulates, encourages and justifies different forms of collective violence. What a terrible circle: Remembrance of inflicted crimes, a trauma, as an instrument of crime against others.

On a collective, as on an individual level, we remember what happened to us, how we were oppressed, the suffering that we endured. Eventually, we remember our heroic and positive creative deeds, and eventually these heroic acts which we hold close. This is how nations remember. We, of course, do not remember the sufferings of others, neither our cowardice. Tzvetan Todorov writes:

, "Collective memory divides the world in two: 'us' and 'them'. Us, the victims and heroes, and them, the criminals, oppressors, cowards, followers. This 'us' does not depend on the extent of the crime or suffering. It is the way it is used which determines truth and reality. As a result, being victim or heroes becomes as an inheritance. "

But I will concentrate on what we are used to see as victims.

On a collective level, it suffices to be a self-declared victim, and to be recognized as such, and then any violent or criminal act done by this collective of victims will be judged with indulgence. With even the suffering endured by others becoming a subject of suspicion. If a scale of suffering is established, then violence caused by a victim is not real suffering. This is the case in Israeli-Palestinian relations, and it is also what Edward Said, the Palestinian scholar from Columbia University, means when he says, " we (Palestinians) are the victims of the victims".

Kurds remember Salah-el-Din as their hero, they remember dozens of years Turkish of oppression and persecution, but they of course do not remember that they were the executors of the criminal order of genocide pronounced by the Ottoman authorities against Armenians in 1915. French collective memory concerning Second World War is mainly based on the fact that France was occupied by Nazi Germany and on French resistance. The Vichy collaboration regime is a new element in French collective memory. The French army crimes in Algeria are still absent. This is somehow the case here in Austria. We can continue with the Serbs' remembering better the battle of Kosovo, the Turks and Muslim oppression of Orthodox and WWII suffering. Rwanda's Tutsis remembering 1963 massacres and the 1993 genocide, which justified the massacre of Hutu refugees during the 1999 war in Zaire. This is the case in Northern Ireland, and in the ex-Soviet Union etc. But I will concentrate on Israel's Policy of Remembrance.

No other nation in the second half of 20th Century has transformed the remembrance of suffering into an instrument of justified oppression as Israel has. No other nation has of course quite the same moral credit as Israel does. In a speech he made in Kansas City, on 14th November 1970, (three years after the occupation of the West-Bank and Gaza strip) Elie Wiesel said, "There is a State and it is different to all the others. It is Jewish and, for that reason, it is more human than any other state is".

I was born and grew up in Israel. Already at kindergarten, we learnt that *our* ancestors were slaves in Egypt. As a matter of fact, "ancestors" was not a word that was used; it went something like "We were slaves in Egypt". We learnt that we were persecuted for more than 2,000 years. By Pharaoh, by the Greek invaders of Palestine, and by the Romans. That we were chased and exiled. We learnt that *WE* suffered among Gentiles. And the central issue was, of course remembering the Jewish genocide. Our existence as Jews born in Israel, is revenge over history. Chief-Commander of the Israeli armed forces, Mordechai Gur, said in 1976 at the Yad Vashem memorial, (which was built on the site of a destroyed Palestinian village in 1948): "The Shoah constitutes the legitimate basis of our enterprise... Our army takes its force and power from the secret martyrs of the holocaust and the heroes of the resistance".

We were brought up to become proud Jewish warriors. With our soul and body we were supposed to defend our State and our nation from future suffering. "Izkor", which means "remember" in Hebrew, was the order.

"Never again" was our mission. But I will come back to that later, when I will develop my work around the film "Izkor, Slaves of Memory" which I directed in 1989.

At the banal secular Israeli school I attended in Jerusalem, as in most Israeli schools, a sentence from the Talmud (one of the Jewish religious books) hung above the blackboard in our classroom: "Do not do to your friend what you would hate him to do to you". In fact, this friend according to our education was just another Jew, it was 'us', this collective 'we' that I mentioned before. It might be that I misunderstood this sentence. My understanding, and that on which I later conducted my artistic work, was that 'my friend' is simply any other human being with whom, as Hannah Arendt says, I am condemned to try and build a common world. This is, in fact, was what the French scholar Tzvetan Todorov meant by 'exemplary memory', which he opposes to 'literal memory'. Literal memory is centered on ourselves. Exemplary memory, says Todorov in his book "The abuses of memory", is: "the memory which allows to use the past in view of the present, to use endured injustice to fight injustice today. Memory which allows you to leave yourselves and to go towards the others".

In 1986, one year after I left Israel and settled in Paris, I directed my first film "Aqabat-Jaber, passing through", a feature length documentary about a Palestinian refugees camp in the occupied territories. My work on these refugees was the first time that I work on the representation of victims. I was wondering what is a refugee, who is receives, after almost 40 years, the memory of the 1948 catastrophe. What is the link between these displaced Palestinians, chased from their land and houses by the Jewish army in 1948, and their lost land? And why they are so attached to the notion of refugee? "Refugee", said a man who I interviewed, "means that one day I will go back to my village". The village he was chased from with his family when he was just a few months old. For an Israeli Jew, making a film like that, and in Arabic wasn't an everyday event, but there was of course an analogy... I was struck to discover that this event, the expulsion of more than 720,000 Palestinians, in Arabic is referred to as "Nakba", which means catastrophe, exactly the same meaning as "Shoah" in Hebrew, which means also catastrophe. The second thing was the Palestinian memory, linked to a concrete space, geography, trees and plants, houses and villages. A place which does not exist anymore, and one that we never learnt about. A place

that could only be represented through memory. We - Israeli Jews - we grow up on Israel Zegwils' sentence (a major Zionist thinker) who said "WE, people without land, we came to a land without people".

Can we suppose that our education, that the memory we were taught of our own suffering, became through the years, a credit note for crime? If we quote Elie Wiesel, it seems unfortunately possible. In his book "Against silence", Wiesel wrote about the June 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon - which costs the lives of some 20,000 people: "I believe one cannot judge an ancient people on the basis of episodes. We are a 4,000-year-old people and what we do today reflects a history of 4,000 years. Episodes are episodes." Concerning Jews who condemn Israel's behavior, Wiesel suggests "Would it not have been better to have offered Israel unreserved support regardless of the suffering endured by the population of Beirut". (Against Silence, vol. II pages 213-216).

It is the same Wiesel that said in Oslo, on 10th December 1986, in his speech on receiving the Nobel peace prize: "I fought oblivion and lies: to forget is to choose to be an accomplice. I swore never to shut up when human beings are persecuted or humiliated".

In 1990, during the Palestinian Intifada, I directed a film called ***"Izkor, Slaves of Memory"***. In the film, the Israeli religious philosopher Y. Leibovitz, who was the spiritual leader of the movement of Israeli Soldiers who disobeyed the Israeli army by refusing to serve in the occupied territory, said: *"We allowed ourselves to kill refugees in refugee camps, because all this happened to us."*

"Izkor, Slaves of Memory" is a film that follows one month in the life of the Israeli State through the schools. It starts in kindergarten at the beginning of April and follows through to Independence Day right at the end of April, in a High school. In Israel, the month of April is the month of memory. It starts with Passover, the remembrance of slaves being freed from Pharaoh. A few days later, is the day of Commemoration of the Shoah and Heroism. Then comes the Day of Commemoration for Israeli soldiers killed in wars, and finally, Independence Day. This is the temporal frame of the film.

I shot this film based on my own memory of school. I shot it from the point of view of a child. The camera gets higher with the age of the children. I chose to follow a family and I looked for a family with children in a range of classes

from kindergarten up to high school. And I chose an oriental Jewish family, which has no direct link with Europe in the broad sense (a family of Moroccan origin) and which had no soldiers fallen or wounded in any of the Israeli wars. The film starts with a scene in a secular kindergarten, where we see three-four year-old children on the floor singing "*We were slaves... now, we are free men!*" This was accompanied with gestures. After that, they enact the exodus from Egypt with a song. They are putting clothes and other things in bags. The teachers asked the kids "*Why are we drinking salty water?*". After a few answers from the kids, they scream the right answer: the tears, to remember the tears of the slaves in Egypt.

Then the following scenes are about the Day of Memory of the Shoah, when the children are older. There are girls, 9 or 10 years old, sitting in the hall of their school making decorations. Together they are cutting yellow stars from a big sheet of yellow cardboard. The camera approaches and I ask one of the girls, "*What does this mean to you?*" she says, "*It means that they suffered, it is very sad*". I continue, "*What do you feel about it?*", and she answers "*It is as if it happened to me when they tell us about it*". Then there is another scene with a class of 12 year-olds. The kids are learning to read a text for a ceremony, which will take place in the courtyard of the school. They are reading and learning the following text: "*Remember, O Israel, the souls of six million Jews. Men, women, boys and girls, the old, the new-born, school children disappeared, assassinated, burned alive, taken to the slaughter house in the train of death, sacrificed in the holocaust...*" and they end all together "*...Jewish blood cries for revenge*".

This education splits the world in two. This memory *par excellence*, this representative approach leads to permissiveness, in a way. I will quote an example. This is a scene, taking place in the courtyard of the high school, with teenage girls and boys, just between the Day of Remembrance of the fallen Soldiers and the Day of Independence. There, we are talking about what is happening in the occupied territories at that time, in 1990, during the Intifada. They define themselves as humanists and leftists. One of the boys says: "*I will tell you what's going on there, in the territories. You do your military service. The army is obligatory. In the army, in a country that has this law, the only thing you can do is to obey the law. You mustn't give your opinion, especially in the army. Your superiors give you orders, and you respond to this order. If he tells you to shoot, you shoot.*" Later I found this

group of kids in the entrance of their school, hanging up a huge poster design by them, on which is written - of course - "*Izkor*" (remember, in Hebrew) and "*never again*". I just note that in the Israel army, the national service is obligatory for everybody, three years for boys and two years for girls.

The film "*Izkor, Slaves of Memory*" ends with the scene of the oath of the Israeli soldiers, 18 year-old boys, to the Israeli army. Most of the oaths for the Special Unit are conducted on Mount Masada, which is the symbol of a major revolt ending in collective suicide during a siege by the Romans in the 1st Century. I will read you the oath: "*You are going to swear your allegiance to the Israeli Defense Forces. The oath is: "On my honor, I swear and I commit myself to remain faithful to the State of Israel, to its laws, its legitimate authorities. To respect without condition or reserve the discipline of the Israeli Defense Forces. To obey the orders and instructions of my superiors, to give even my life in defense of my country and the independence of the State of Israel'."*

I didn't pursue in this film the system of the Israeli military education. But, around the same time, there was a group of Israeli film makers, composed from two film makers, two cinematographers, and two psychologists who opened a basement in Tel-Aviv and invited soldiers, in service in the occupied territories, to come to speak to the camera. You don't see the psychologists, you just hear them. This kind of experiment was done in America with a film about the massacre of Mi-Lay in Vietnam. I want to quote just two scenes of this film. So the guys are in a medium shot and they speak in front of a black wall, the first explains: "*We were in a small unit, we took a house in a refugee camp under siege and we received the order to move into the house. Then, everybody ran into the house, broke everything, even the crystals..."* And suddenly he said: "*of course I didn't participate. They were beating all the family, and suddenly I imagine in front of me something which was hard to our generation because of own history... , our soldiers with different uniform in front of me."*

Another scene from this film shows a psychologist who was an officer in his reserve military service. He explains that he was outside a house in a small village, not far from Bethlehem. The unit he was directing encircled the house in a night routine control and asked the Palestinian people to come out. The Palestinian family didn't come out of their house. He shouted to them: "*If you*

don't come out, we will use tires gas". But they still didn't come out. He shouted once again: "If you don't come out, we will use gas" and the unit throw teargas into the house. Few minutes after, there was a Palestinian Red Crescent ambulance that came. A man came out of the house with a one month-old baby in his arms, and the baby was dead. The psychologist explains: I came to this man and I started to shout at him and when I went back to the military base I called my family in Tel-Aviv and I wrote to my sister to tell her what happened. Then the psychologist, who interviews him, asks: "Was this a sort of process of confession? Were you wanting to be forgiven for what you did?" and he said, "Yes, I wanted to be forgiven". - "And you never thought of asking to be forgiven by the Palestinian family?" He looks at the camera and says: "I never thought about it", which is followed by a very long silence and then he says: "No, they have to ask me to forgive them for what they obliged me to do to them."

Around the same time, which was during the Intifada in the occupied territories, a very harsh debate started in Israel about the question of obedience. This debate was not new. The first time it appeared was in 1982. It started because of two things. First, one of the official organizers of military and government events, Dan Almagor, a poet and a writer, decided one day to appear in the central square of Tel-Aviv during a demonstration by the Peace Now movement. He asked them if he could read a very short poem, which ended with the following words: *"Generals, stop beating the kids, prepare yourselves. One day, you will find yourselves in the glass booth."*

The second element was Professor Leibovitz (once again) who called for the disobedience of Israeli soldiers, in the name of the memory of the Eichmann trial. (Of course, when Dan Almagor, the official poet, spoke of the 'glass booth', every Israeli knew that he was referring to the Eichmann trial.) Leibovitz, in the name of the Eichmann trial memory, calls for disobedience, saying: *"Remember that Eichmann obeyed legal orders"*

In fact, the Eichmann trial in 1961 is the beginning of what I will allow myself to call the ideology of holocaust or Shoaism. The Eichmann trial opened up the possibility for the very first appearance of witnesses who had survived and who spoke openly. The Eichmann trial took place in the biggest auditorium in Jerusalem. It was not in a court, a court was set-up on a stage and the trial was held in public.

It was in 1961. Video had been invented in 1959. It was decided to fully record the entire trial of Eichmann with four cameras. The idea of course was to do it for memory, to remember. But the event of the Eichmann trial, the capture of Eichmann by the Israeli Secret Service in Argentina, the Ben Gurion announcement that Eichmann, one of the biggest murderers of Jewish people is in Israel and will be soon in court, was like a new birth for Israeli society. The avowed aim of Ben Gurion, Prime Minister of the State of Israel (and I won't get into lengthy quotations, but you can read about it in a book I have written with Rony Brauman on the subject), was to make Israel the sole representative of six million martyrs, and to give a lesson to the world and to the youth of Israel. Why was there a need for the Eichmann trial in Israel in 1961?.

In the 1950's, there was large-scale immigration of oriental Jews, I mean the Jews who didn't know and for the most part didn't experience at close hand, the genocide and persecution of Jews in Europe, with the exception of the Tunisian Jews. They were settled in transit camps or in new towns built in the desert. And there were big demonstrations at the end of the 1950's against Ben Gurion. We could have seen in the demonstrations that took place for example in Haifa, in the North of Israel, North African Jews, mainly Moroccan, "*King Mohamed take us back home*". They suffered major discrimination from those who were, at that time, the Ashkenazy, or Western majority. But this was also the time when Israelis did change ethnically. The oriental Jews - the ones who didn't know the persecution of Jews in Europe - then became the majority. Ben Gurion said, in one of his speech about the Eichmann trial and about the oriental Jews, "*We have to show them what real suffering means*". But it was also the time when holocaust survivors from the camps didn't dare to speak. We remember the story of Primo Levi, and maybe you are familiar with it, who was not in Israel and who didn't manage to find a publisher. They didn't speak until the Eichmann trial. We know hundreds of stories of people removing their tattooed Auschwitz numbers, in Israel. Their story is told in a book by an Israeli member of the school of New Historians, Tom Segev, which is called the "***Seventh Million***" on the relation between Israel and the Shoah. We had a name in Israel for those people who came from Europe; we called them "soaps". I wasn't born at the time, but in my school we called them "sabon", (soap) those kids who had big glasses, the good children who were white (who never saw the sun light). There was real discrimination, but Israeli society changed in 1961, when we heard the voices

of the survivors for the first time. This was important in the Eichmann trial, in which Eichmann himself played a very secondary part. Most of the journalists who were there, most of the visitors and the broadcasts on Israeli radio were particularly interested in the first three months of the trial, during which time the survivors spoke. This is totally understandable in the context of the 1960's.

I already said that the Eichmann trial was fully recorded on video. In the year following the trial there was some footage, which travelled around the world. During the trial itself, there were broadcasts. The German TV (and I'm not sure about Austria), broadcast some sort of a regular journal, a kind of a regular resume of the trial. It was the same in United States and in France. But when Eichmann came to speak, journalists left, people left, and there was no further interest in the recorded footage. Nor, at the end of the trial, in the full length (i.e. 500 hours, as we can suppose today) of some unique archive material. Unique, because it was the only trial of a Nazi criminal which was filmed in its entirety. The Nuremberg collection represents 12 hours. The Hamburg trials were not filmed. Neither was the Rudolf Hess trial in Poland. The Tokyo trials were not recorded. The Eichmann trial is indeed the only trial that was filmed. But the images of the silent man in the glass booth pleading "not guilty" became an icon that replaced, in a way, all other words. This footage just disappeared, vanished for 35 years. We can say that memory replaced history. There was some archive material available, something like 60 hours, which was kind of a very poor quality rough summary, held in the Israeli Archive Institute. But this is the reason why when we see extracts of the Eichmann trial in many of what are called the holocaust representation films; they are always the same extracts. And there is always a voice-over over the sound track; it is just an illustration.

During the making of film, which is entitled "***Itgaber, He will overcome***", which is a portrait of Y. Leibovitz. This film is about disobedience. I discovered this 60-hour selection of the Eichmann trial video material. It was just sitting in a room, in the Archive Institute in Jerusalem. I then came back to Jerusalem and talked to Dr. Rony Brauman, who was at that time President of Medecins Sans Frontières (Doctors with no Border). And I told him "*I've seen some archive video material of the Eichmann trial and when I was working with Prof. Leibovitz about disobedience, he frequently used the*

example of Eichmann..." And he said, "You must read "Eichmann in Jerusalem" by Hannah Arendt". So I answered, "**What is "*Eichmann in Jerusalem*"**" and who is Hannah Arendt?" Because, until today, none of Hannah Arendt's books have been translated into Hebrew and "Eichmann in Jerusalem" was not yet published in Israel. Rony Brauman and myself decided to try to make what can be called a cinematographically adaptation of Hannah Arendt's "***Eichmann in Jerusalem***". This film is mainly centered on the figure of the perpetrator, we show really very few survivors in the film. We followed the trial. We do not follow the idea of the trial in Jerusalem, as the Attorney General Gideon Hausner presented it. We didn't build a geographical trial, it is not a history of Jewish suffering from Pharaoh to Nazism, as he put it. We just tried to build the imaginary trial of a specialist, a title which is of course taken from Hannah Arendt's title in French "*un spécialiste de la question juive*" (an expert of the Jewish question). **You might understand that I prefer the analogical approach and then to move the center from the figure of the victim to the representation of the perpetrator as a way of universalizing the approach to political crime.** But unfortunately, I don't have time to speak about the Rwanda film, which is also centered on the figure of the perpetrator through the radio Thousand Hills, the Rwandan Hutu power radio which called for genocide.

I'm **bound** to conclude. I do not believe in self-representation of trauma as any collective, social or political sense. It is important for the traumatized individuals themselves. It is true that the monstrous war crimes committed by an ordinary man, such as Eichmann, should not imply that by all being potential criminals, we are all guilty. Confusing this potential guilt with a real one is to disqualify the possibility of justice. "*If everybody is a criminal, nobody is a criminal*", says Arendt. And this is exactly what Eichmann tried to argue in his trial, that everybody is criminal, and that everybody is responsible. This is why the work done by Arendt invites us to judge every event as a new one, and as a singular event, to think about facing the consequences of our own deeds. "*Morally speaking,*" said Arendt, "*it is as bad to feel guilty when we did nothing precise as it is to feel innocent when we are guilty.*"

Please just allow me to make mine the following words of Professor Alfred Grosser, quoted from his book "**Crime and Memory**": *"And even if my action led to little else, my life will have a meaning from the sheer fact that it has been lived. Lived according to death. Behind me, the memory of the dead who might have lived if crime had not assassinated them. Mourning only has meaning in the confirmation of values and of life, otherwise why would I be so upset that they went too soon - other than to cry over what I have lost? My memory calls on me to take action to avert further suffering, if only by communicating a little confidence and joy to those who suffer today, to avoid them having no alternative but to resort to violent revolt, which so easily becomes criminal."*

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