

# Knowing Violence: Testimony, Trust and Truth

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This is an inquiry into the epistemology of violence. How do we acquire knowledge of violence? Or in other words, how do we know that an act of violence has taken place? I will argue that in searching for an answer to this question, testimony is the most powerful tool at our disposal. After exploring the role of trust and speech-acts in the epistemology of testimony in general, and testimonies of violence in particular, I'll suggest that apart from allowing us to acquire knowledge of violence, testimony is also indispensable in order to prevent an act of violence from turning into an instrument of epistemic injustice.

Part I will look at both the merits and limits of the most obvious answer to the question of how knowledge of violence is acquired: namely, that we gain knowledge of violence perceptually, through direct personal experience of violence. Part II will explore the pivotal role of testimony in the attainment of knowledge of violence, while in Part III the knowledge of violence we acquire from the testimonies collected from the work of Truth and Reconciliation Commissions worldwide will be highlighted, with a focus on the role of trust within the dynamics of testimony. Finally Part IV will suggest that when it comes to the knowledge of violence, it is imperative to find space for testimonial knowledge; without it, the victims of violence become also victims of epistemic injustice.

## THE EXPERIENCE OF VIOLENCE

In the philosophical literature on violence, the question of how one comes to acquire knowledge of violence has never been asked. Perhaps because it was felt that the answer to this question was trivially obvious; namely, that anyone at the receiving end of violence is sure to know that violence has occurred. The suggestion here is that, quite simply, we acquire knowledge of violence through the experience of it. Let's call this the Argument from Experience.

This explanation has the merit of having common-sense on its side. Anyone who has been at the receiving end of a violent assault will tell you that they *know* what violence is. In fact, some would even go as far as to say that unless you have been through a particular experience, you cannot know what it is like.

A personal experience often cited to make this point is child-birth. Another example, this time specifically relating to the experience of violence, is war: it is said that only those who have fought in a war truly know what war is, a view powerfully reflected in the war poetry of Wilfred Owen.<sup>1</sup>

No one would deny that direct, personal experience of violence is one way of acquiring knowledge of violence. To claim otherwise would be absurd. But perhaps the Argument from Experience is not the *only* way to acquire knowledge, nor necessarily the most significant.

One problem with the Argument from Experience is that one cannot always trust one's perceptions. As I've argued elsewhere,<sup>2</sup> sometimes violence occurs even though the victim may not be aware of it, therefore the victim fails to acquire knowledge of the act of violence. In such cases (marital rape, domestic violence and foot-binding come to mind) we do not always hear the voice of the

<sup>1</sup> DULCE ET DECORUM EST, by Wilfred Owen  
Bent double, like old beggars under sacks,  
Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through sludge,  
Till on the haunting flares we turned our backs  
And towards our distant rest began to trudge.  
Men marched asleep. Many had lost their boots  
But limped on, blood-shod. All went lame; all blind;  
Drunk with fatigue; deaf even to the hoots  
Of tired, outstripped Five-Nines that dropped behind.

Gas! Gas! Quick, boys! — An ecstasy of fumbling,  
Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time;  
But someone still was yelling out and stumbling,  
And flound'ring like a man in fire or lime...  
Dim, through the misty panes and thick green light,  
As under a green sea, I saw him drowning.  
In all my dreams, before my helpless sight,  
He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning.

If in some smothering dreams you too could pace  
Behind the wagon that we flung him in,  
And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,  
His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin;  
If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood  
Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,  
Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud  
Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,  
My friend, you would not tell with such high zest  
To children ardent for some desperate glory,  
The old Lie; Dulce et Decorum est  
Pro patria mori.

<sup>2</sup> 8 October 1917 — March, 1918  
Buftacchi (2007, pp.33-38).

victim. One possible explanation is that the victims do not realize that what is being done to them is violence, perhaps because they have come to accept that what they are being subjected to is widespread, expected, culturally sanctioned, and therefore 'normal'. In such cases, they rationalize that whatever they are being subjected to is not wrong, therefore cannot be violence.<sup>3</sup> In other words, violence can occur in situations where the victim is not aware of the violence, or when the awareness is suppressed. As Simpson (1970) rightly reminds us, in a hostile environment one may become inured to almost anything, including injury, therefore someone raised in the midst of turbulence or social decay may fail to recognize that they are being subjected to violence. The same can be said for cultural environments that condone inegalitarian practices of subjugation and oppression, where the victims may not be aware that they are being violated.

This is not to trivialize or lessen the fact that first-person experience of violence often leads to knowledge of it. Far from it. Instead, it is to emphasize the fact that from an epistemological point of view, what arguably matters even more than the first-person *experience* of violence is the first-person *narrative* of violence.

In her brilliant work *Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of the Self*, Susan Brison (2002) reassesses first-person narratives as a powerful philosophical tool:

In philosophy, first-person narratives, especially ones written by those with perspectives previously excluded from the discipline, are necessary for several reasons. I'll discuss just three. Such narratives are necessary: (1) to expose previously hidden biases in the discipline's subject matter and methodology; (2) to facilitate understanding of (or empathy with) those different from ourselves; and (3) to lay on the table our own biases as scholars. (Brison 2002, 26)

Brison goes on to explain that first-person narratives are particularly useful in feminist theory. Referring to the works of Virginia Held and Annette Baier, Brison (2002, 28) explains how

the above theorists who employ the personal voice all recognize a fundamental characteristic of feminist theory, which is that it takes women's experiences seriously. Likewise, trauma theory takes survivors' experiences seriously. And we cannot know what these are a priori. We need to tell our stories, making sure to listen to those of others, especially when they're at odds with ours.

<sup>3</sup> I'm certainly not suggesting that this is always the case, nor that it is true in the majority of cases. All I'm saying here is that this may be the case sometimes.

Brison is right; when it comes to violence, knowledge comes in part through first-person experience, but also (mostly) through first-person narratives. The direct, personal experience of violence cannot be the *only* way we come to acquire knowledge of violence. After all, it is by reading Primo Levi that post-war generations acquired knowledge of the holocaust, even though we were not there to experience it. Likewise, it is through reading Brison that I acquired an inkling of knowledge of the full impact of traumatic violence on the integrity of the self, although I was never subjected to the ordeal that Brison experienced.

The reason why Brison feels so strongly about first-person narratives is precisely because one can acquire knowledge of violence through the experience of others. Another way of putting it is that apart from direct, personal experience, we can also acquire knowledge of violence through testimony — in fact, one could go as far as to argue that when it comes to violence, we acquire more knowledge of it via testimony than from personal direct experience. To switch our focus from first-person experience of violence to first-person narratives of violence can be likened to the progressive change of emphasis in epistemology from perception to testimony as the primary source of knowledge.

## ON TESTIMONY

So far the merits and limits of the Argument from Experience have been considered. In what follows, another approach to knowledge of violence will come under scrutiny; I will refer to the latter as the Argument from Testimony.

Testimony is, of course, a very exciting topic in contemporary epistemology. The *locus classicus* for this literature is still CAJ Coady's *Testimony: A Philosophical Study* (1992). In this groundbreaking book, Coady makes a convincing argument for the fact that the vast majority of what we claim to know is not acquired through perception or inference, instead testimony is the epistemic source of what passes for knowledge. I'm going to suggest that this is certainly the case when it comes to knowledge of violence.

Testimony can take different forms, from oral hearsay to written documents. How do we know that we have a brain inside our skull, given that very few of us have ever had the direct experience of seeing a brain in a skull (or even outside a skull)? Knowledge of our brain comes of course from the testimony of our science teacher back in our school days, or perhaps from some reading material, be it a book, journal or newspaper. Similarly, virtually all our scientific knowledge, and even more so our knowledge of history, comes from testimony in one form or other.

Coady's seminal work on testimony is best known for his refutation of the reductionist conception of testimonial evidence, according to which testimony is at best only a derivative source of knowledge. That is to say, Coady challenges the standard view, associated with the work of Hume, which claims that we have knowledge through testimony only insofar as we can independently justify the reliability of testimony through some more fundamental source of rational belief.

This is of course the meatiest part of Coady's book, both in terms of pages devoted to it by Coady in his work, and in terms of philosophical content. It also provides the backdrop for the vast majority of commentaries on Coady's work. I will not get involved in this highly technical debate on reductionism, notwithstanding its fascinating nature, since it has been adequately covered elsewhere;<sup>4</sup> instead I want to shed light on a related aspect of Coady's critique of reductionism that perhaps has not received the attention it deserves, namely, the rejection of what he calls 'the egocentric predicament' which forms one natural starting-point for much traditional epistemology.

The Egocentric Predicament says that questions of knowledge inevitably involve asking about *my* knowledge or *my* perception:

When one thinks of investigating knowledge in a systematic philosophical way it can seem somehow inevitable to start from the epistemically isolated self; beginning with the idea of an individual who initially lacks knowledge altogether, we ask what it would be for him to acquire it. It will seem natural from such a starting-point to focus upon the individual's perceptions or, more exiguously still, his sensations. (Coady 1992, 149)

Coady invites us to abandon this egocentric predicament, and therefore shift the focus from the individual to the community. As Coady (1992, 150) explains, "If we shift focus in this way it will be natural to see our starting-point as encompassing *our* knowledge and not exclusively *my* knowledge". The point Coady is making here is that an individual will know some things that are not common knowledge or even widely known, yet at the same time what we know, as a community, will not necessarily be known to every single individual.

This shift from the egocentric premise to a communal premise I will refer to as Coady's Communal Predicament. Surprisingly this is an aspect of Coady's work that has not attracted much attention, perhaps because Coady devotes only a few pages to this aspect of his theory, although the main thrust of Coady's

<sup>4</sup> See for example Lackey and Sosa (2006); Fricker (1995).

message has been taken up by what is widely known in the literature as 'social epistemology'. When it comes to the knowledge of violence, the Communal Predicament plays a determining role.

## TESTIMONIES OF VIOLENCE

There have been more than 20 Truth and Reconciliation Commissions since 1973 worldwide, the best known of all perhaps being the TRC set up in South Africa after the end of the Apartheid regime.<sup>5</sup> In Latin America alone, there have been 13 Truth Commissions.<sup>6</sup> These commissions demonstrate great diversity. As Avruch and Vejarano (2002, 37) point out: "They function in a wide variety of socio-political settings with varying levels of support..., resources and constraints, and with varying degree of success".<sup>7</sup> At the same time, what they seem to have in common is the fundamental belief, or hope, that by reporting the truth it is possible to draw a line between past crimes and the new political order, so that the truth is a substitute for legal justice, trials and punishment. This suggests that Truth and Reconciliation Commissions are first and foremost about 'reconciliation', not justice, and certainly not revenge.

From a strictly philosophical point of view, Truth and Reconciliation Commissions are fascinating creatures. These institutions not only, rather shamelessly, deal with two of the most notoriously troublesome topics in metaphysics and epistemology: namely, the nature of truth and the role of testimony in acquiring knowledge, but, what is even more remarkable, they endeavour to bridge the gap between these two philosophical hotspots, by suggesting that we can establish 'the truth' simply by way of collecting 'testimonies', more precisely the testimony of witnesses.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> See Avruch and Vejarano (2002). The authors provide an extremely valuable annotated bibliography on Truth Commission, including books and chapters in books, and articles in scholarly and nonspecialized journals.

<sup>6</sup> Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay.

<sup>7</sup> The most successful Truth Commission is, arguably, the South African Commission of Truth and Reconciliation established in 1995, while at the other hand of the spectrum we find Zimbabwe (report commissioned in 1985, but never publicly released) and Sierra Leone (called for in 1999, but failed to prevent further atrocities from taking place).

<sup>8</sup> Michael Ignatieff (1996) is one of the few commentators who is aware of the philosophical problems with this picture. Referring to the Truth Commission in South Africa, Ignatieff points out the implausibility of assumption often made by Truth Commissions: "that a nation has one psyche, not many; that the truth is one, not many; that the truth is certain, not contestable; and that when it is known by all, it has the capacity to heal and reconcile. These are not so much assumptions of epistemology as articles of faith about human nature: the truth is one and if we know it, it will make us free".

Given the affinity between what philosophers talk about, and what Truth and Reconciliation Commissions do, it is remarkable that philosophers have shown little interest in the work on truth and testimony being carried out by Truth and Reconciliation Commissions.<sup>9</sup>

Consider for example Bernard Williams. In *Truth and Truthfulness*, Williams (2002, 209) writes:

I shall also leave aside a particularly interesting topic, the role of truthfulness in the transition from authoritarian to democratic rule. Such institutions as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa mark a new and significant development... One question is how these practices relate to justice... There is a question, too, of how far the process is intended to preserve memory of the victims of the past regime... These questions are deeply tied into our conceptions of confronting the truth and living an honest political life, but they would take us too far into territory I cannot claim to understand.

Williams is right; such questions would indeed require, as he says, "complex empirical discussion", but the fact that they are 'complex' or 'empirical' is not a reason for philosophers to ignore these questions.

Truth and Reconciliation Commissions are philosophically interesting for at least two reasons. First, Truth and Reconciliation Commissions are a good example of how testimonial knowledge is not only socially constructed, but also how the knowledge held by the individual testifier flows from social contexts. Secondly, that the value of a testimony does not lie exclusively in the transmission of truth-claims, as often suggested, instead the speech-act of performing a testimony is also intrinsically valuable. That is to say, the act of giving testimony, and the act of taking a testimony, are both valuable because of the mutual recognition of trust being bestowed on the actors involved in this particular speech act.

That testimony performs a fundamental role as a source of knowledge is beyond dispute. Yet testimony only works on the basis of trust. Trust plays a determining role in accepting testimony as the source of our knowledge. In other words, testimony (and therefore the transfer of knowledge) only succeeds if there is trust, or as John Hardwig (1991, 694) puts it: "the trustworthiness of members of epistemic communities is the ultimate foundation for much of our

<sup>9</sup> One area where philosophy has looked at the impact of Truth Commissions is the literature on forgiveness. See for example Govier (2002) and Verdeja (2009).

knowledge".<sup>10</sup> Trust is a difficult entity to quantify, or even explain, and for so much of our knowledge to be based on trust raises some disturbing questions.

This in part explains why a great deal of the philosophical literature on testimony centres on the issue of trust. Is our trust of another person's testimony uncritical and undiscriminating? And if it is discriminating, what conditions have to be in place before we trust their testimony? The point about testimony, as Coady reminds us, is that it is a form of speech-act. Coady (1992, 42) explains the conventions governing the speech-act of testifying as follows:

A speaker *S* testifies by making some statement *p* if and only if:

- (1) His stating that *p* is evidence that *p* and is offered as evidence that *p*.
- (2) *S* has the relevant competence, authority, or credentials to state truly that *p*.
- (3) *S*'s statement that *p* is relevant to some disputed or unresolved question (which may, or may not be *p*) and is directed to those who are in need of evidence on the matter.

Testimony is not just any illocutionary speech-act, but one immersed in trust and trustworthiness. Keith Lehrer (2006) points out that testimonial knowledge requires trustworthiness on the part of both the speaker *and* the hearer involved in a given exchange. The act of giving and listening to a testimony, and taking it as evidence for knowledge, is based on the condition of a mutual recognition of trust, and respect, of the actors involved.

The potentially emancipatory powers of testimony are due to testimony's communal predicament, and its projection of trust. There is some empirical evidence backing this claim, as the experience of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Guatemala in the 1990s indicates. In 1996 Guatemala emerged from a civil war between the military-backed authoritarian government and rebel forces; the armed-conflict had lasted 36 years. This civil war not only claimed the lives of 200,000 people (mostly indigenous Mayas), but it catapulted Guatemala to the top of a very special league: as the country with the worst human rights record in Latin America. The United Nations has since recognized a genocide carried out by the military-backed dictatorship of Presidents Lucas Garcia and Rios Montt against the indigenous population between 1981 and 1983. In December 1996 a peace treaty was signed that officially brought an end to a civil war. One of the conditions for signing the peace treaty was that a Truth Commission would be set up. As it turned out, Guatemala did not have one but

<sup>10</sup> There are those who argue that the role of trustworthiness has been exaggerated; see for example Adler (1994).

two Truth Commissions. Apart from the official report of the Commission for Historical Clarification (CHC), called *Guatemala: Memory of Silence*, there was also *Guatemala: Nunca Mas!* (*Guatemala: Never Again!*) an independent report of the 'Recovery of Historical Memory Project' of the Catholic Church in Guatemala. Both documents agreed on the following findings:

- 200,000 people died in the 36 year civil war, 132,000 of these died under the governments of Lucas Garcia and Rios Montt between 1981 and 1983.
- 83% of those victims belonged to the indigenous Mayan peoples of Guatemala
- 626 massacres were committed against Mayan communities
- 93% of all serious human rights violations were carried out directly by the Guatemalan army or by other state agencies (paramilitary groups)
- The army committed acts of genocide against the Mayan peoples of Guatemala, in particular during the years 1981 and 1983.

In Guatemala, the Historical Clarification Commission took testimony from 9000 war victims, as well as from civil society organizations, 'binational' Guatemalan individuals and communities in the United States. The commission also sought written documentation from all domestic and foreign players in the war, including the US and the Guatemalan army.<sup>11</sup> The 9000 victims of war who came forward to give their testimony were asked to recount their experiences; it is precisely this reliance on memory that accounts for the precarious nature of knowledge based on testimony. The problem here is that memories are notoriously unreliable at the best of times, and even more so when a person is asked to recollect traumatic events. As Beatriz Manz (2003, 313) poignantly asks referring to the epic scale of violence in Guatemala in the 1970s and 1980s: "How does one remember events so traumatic that forgetting them seems an act of redemption?"

There is an extensive literature on the need to reclaim the memory of the Mayans' situation in the war. This project poses a number of difficulties, in part because the army intentionally set out to legitimize its brutality by falsifying the truth. The army relied upon devastating terror as a means of reshaping collective memories, indeed as Zur (1998, 159) points out: "the entire history of *la violencia* can be read as a war against memory, an Orwellian falsification of memory, a falsification of reality". But also in part because, as Primo Levi

<sup>11</sup> See Jonas (2000).

(1988, 27, also quoted in Manz 1988, 316) famously reminds us, the past can be an unbearable burden, which victims of violence reinvent:

more numerous are those who weigh anchor, move off, momentarily or forever, from genuine memories, and fabricate for themselves a convenient reality. The past is a burden to them; they feel repugnance for things done or suffered and tend to replace them with others.

Given the well-known and extensively documented problems with accepting the truth based on testimonies in the context of traumatic experiences, such as genocides, what can we learn from the work of the Truth Commission in Guatemala? First of all, we can learn that knowledge, as Coady suggests, is much less individualistic than we think. The important point to remember about memory is that it is collectively and socially formed. As Manz (2003, 316) reminds us: "collective memory, by definition, is a social product, but individual memory also flows from social context". Although the 9000 witnesses of the Guatemalan civil war who gave their testimonies were asked to give their own personal account of the events, in fact what many of them were doing was to voice their socially formed collective memories. To the specific question 'Tell me know *you* know', they individually answered 'this is what *we* know'.

The argument presented here that the act of giving testimony in Guatemala is not an individual predicament but a community affair is validated, at least in part, by the literary tradition known as testimonial narrative or *testimonio*. Testimonial narrative denominates a broad, flexible category of nonfiction texts which record contemporary events from the perspective of direct participants or witnesses. In fact, testimonial literature not only derives from the notion of giving witness, but also gets its intellectual and emotive force from this source. Testimonial literature almost always has a political purpose, to the extent that it shares an explicit commitment to denounce repression and abuse to authority, raise the consciousness of its readers, and offer an alternative view to official, hegemonic history. This in part explains why traditionally *testimonio* has been associated with the powerless.<sup>12</sup> There are good reasons to think that the 9000 people giving their testimonies in Guatemala to the Truth Commission were in fact giving a personal *testimonio*, not a scientific testimony.<sup>13</sup>

Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, what comes out of this complex picture of social memory is that it reverses the role of trust in the epistemic analysis of testimony. According to the standard account of testimony in episte-

mology, in order for a testimony to count as knowledge one must trust the source of the testimony. But collective memory turns the table on this relationship of trust; it is not simply a question of those working for the Truth Commission to ascertain whether they trust the testimony of a certain individual, but it is also a question of those giving testimony to trust those who claim to want to establish the truth by asking questions about the past.

As Coady says, testimony is first and foremost a speech-act. The act of listening to a testimony, and taking it as evidence for establishing the truth, gives recognition to voices that had for many years, if not centuries in the case of the Mayas, been silenced. A Truth and Reconciliation Commission does not provide us with an ideal speech situation, as defined by Habermas, but it is nevertheless an important exercise in trust building, based on the speech act of testimony. By virtue of the Communal Predicament, we are not simply talking about trusting or not trusting a single individual, but trusting a whole community. This is why the political act of listening to testimonies within the context of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission becomes so important — it is not a question of determining the veracity of certain events, but of building a new political discourse based on trust, where the victims of historical injustice can feel that their voices can, perhaps for the first time, be heard. This recognition is crucial for those who suffered violence to rebuild their identity as other than victims.

## KNOWLEDGE, VIOLENCE AND EPISTEMIC INJUSTICE

We all know that violence can be either a personal tragedy, or a political calamity, or both, yet it is still necessary to ask ourselves what exactly we *know* about violence, and how we know what we know about violence. In her work on the effects of trauma on personal identity, Susan Brison reminds us of the moral and epistemic importance of a first-person narrative. We have seen how the first-person narrative is also at the heart of the depositions collected by Truth and Reconciliation Commissions world-wide. In both cases, it would seem that knowledge of violence comes, first and foremost, from testimonies of violence. This suggests that the epistemology of violence is closely related to the epistemology of testimony.

In his account of the epistemology of testimony, Coady argues (amongst other things) that testimony is a speech-act, and that in our epistemic inquiries we ought to embrace a shift from individual to communal premises, or from the Egocentric Predicament to the Communal Predicament. In this essay I have argued that an epistemology of violence would benefit from acknowledging

<sup>12</sup> I'm grateful to my colleague Nuala Finnegan for this insight.

<sup>13</sup> On *Testimonio*, see Beverley (2004).

first-person narratives of violence as speech-acts, and that these testimonies of violence speak to what *we* know, and not just what *I* know.

Recognizing the value of first-person narratives is significant for different reasons. At the personal level it benefits the narrator, who gains from being listened to, and believed: if violence is a violation of one's integrity,<sup>14</sup> first-person's narratives engenders reintegration. As Brison (2002, 68) explains, for survivors of human-inflicted trauma working through traumatic memories involves a shift from being the object of someone else's speech to being the subject of one's own: "the act of bearing witness to the trauma facilitates this shift, not only by transforming traumatic memory into a narrative than can then be worked into the survivor's sense of self and view of the world, but also by reintegrating the survivor into a community, re-establishing connections essential to selfhood".

Yet there is more. Apart from the direct benefits to the narrator, first-person narratives are also significant at a communal level. In her recent book on *Epistemic Injustice*, Miranda Fricker explains in great detail the epistemic effects of testimonial injustice. Testimonial injustice occurs when someone is wronged specifically in her capacity as a knower. When a speaker or narrator receives less credibility than they otherwise would have, they are being wronged, to the extent that they are being undermined, insulted, and not treated with proper respect *qua* subject of knowledge. In Fricker's (2007, 28) own words: "the central case of testimonial injustice is *identity-prejudicial credibility deficit*".

Fricker explains how the undermining of someone as a knower is a powerful tool often used as a mechanism of silencing; testimonial injustice can silence someone by prejudicially pre-empting their word. The incidence of being silenced is a well-known experience amongst persecuted minorities: it is not a coincidence that the title of the official report by the Guatemalan Truth and Reconciliation Commission (officially the Commission for Historical Clarification) was called 'Memory of Silence', since it sought to recover the truth from memories that had been silenced. The point here is that to deny the knowledge of violence that comes from testimonies of violence is to silence the victims of violence, individually and communally. It is, in other words, to do them an injustice.

For the Guatemalans giving their testimonies to the Commission for Historical Clarification, being listened to, and believed, meant being treated with proper

respect *qua* subject of knowledge; a prerequisite necessary in order to recover their collective memory. Manz (2003, 317-318) rightly points out that on one level memory reflects the struggle of an individual to deal with the past, but on another level memory is collective and socially formed: "in Guatemala the act of remembering, let alone the act of retelling, is a highly charged, politicized event, fraught with danger. Not surprisingly, people tend to give partial information and often misinformation... until trust is established". In the last analysis, the knowledge of violence that comes from testimonies of violence is empowering, and the denial of such knowledge is an act of injustice.

## CONCLUSION

How do we know what violence is? How do we acquire knowledge of violence? I've argued that in an effort to answer these questions, the epistemology of testimony is the most powerful tool at our disposal. Testimonies of violence are first-person narratives of violence, therefore unless first-person narratives are recognized and legitimized as philosophically and epistemologically valuable, our knowledge of violence would be seriously compromised. But the value of these testimonies of violence does not lie merely in the transmission of truth-claims, although that is part of it of course. Instead, the speech-act of giving a testimony is also intrinsically valuable. The act of giving a testimony of violence, being listened to and believed, is essential for the victim of violence in the process of rebuilding her sense of self and personhood that had been destroyed by the act of violence. Furthermore, apart from enduring the violence being afflicted on them, victims of violence often suffer a further injustice; namely, they are marginalized as credible sources of knowledge. This is true of all victims of violence, from victims of gender-based sexual violence to victims of genocide. All victims of violence often find themselves being the victims of two forms of violence: first the direct attack, and subsequently epistemic injustice. Recognizing the validity of testimonies of violence in the form of first-person narratives of violence, as a way of acquiring knowledge of violence as well as a way of acknowledging the credibility of the narrator, is perhaps the strongest antidote to epistemic injustice.

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<sup>14</sup> Integrity is here defined as wholeness or intactness. On this idea of violence as violation of integrity, see V. Bufacchi (2007), Ch. 2 'Violence and Integrity'.

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