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Joshua Davies, Martial Manet, Loanh Mirande, María Paula O'donohoe
Villota

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Dissonant Heritage: Concepts, Critiques, Cases

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5. The Treatment of Dissonant Memories by Truth and Reconciliation Commissions: Four Case Studies

Joshua Davis
KU Leuven, Belgium

Martial Manet
Paris-Saclay University /UVSQ, France

Loanh Mirande
Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne University/ Lille University, France

María Paula O'Donohoe Villota
Complutense University of Madrid, Spain

Abstract

Our paper focuses on how Truth and Reconciliation Commissions (TRCs) deal with dissonant memories in transitional justice processes. Truth and Reconciliation Commissions aim to shed light on a traumatic near past marked by murders, disappearances, torture, suffering, and structural discrimination, by bringing together perpetrators and victims simultaneously. The prominent place given to the words and memories of the victims, combined with the rhetoric of forgiveness used by most of the perpetrators, is supposed to contribute to the construction of pacified memories that will allow society to be rebuilt despite this dissonant heritage. However, while speaking out can certainly be a relief for victims at first, the reopening of the wound it causes can lead to more unrest in the long run. Moreover, one of the flaws of these commissions seems to be the gap between the expectations they raised and the concrete measures taken by governments afterwards.

From a methodological point of view, our article is situated at the intersection of law, anthropology, and history. We examine four different TRCs, followed by a comparative analysis of selected cases and an evaluation of outcomes. Our idea is to explore several geographic areas, so we have chosen the Togolese, the Chilean, the South African, and the German Commissions. These Commissions dealt with different dissonant memories and political regimes, yet they developed crosscutting concepts, processes, and practices. We consider the specificities and differences between the Commissions in order to see how they address these dissonant pasts.

Keywords

Transitional justice, Dissonant memories, Truth and Reconciliation, Victim and Perpetrator narratives, Comparative analysis

1. Introduction

The Truth and Reconciliation Commissions—hereafter TRCs—have proliferated as the main institutional mechanisms for dealing with and representing violent pasts as narratives in the recent decades.¹ As part of the international justice paradigm, in most cases, these TRCs have been implemented in various parts of the world since the 1980s in the context of political transitions following authoritarian regimes (Jara 2020). In memory studies and human rights, TRCs have been analysed as mechanisms for the production of truth in transitional contexts (Bernasconi Ramirez et al. 2019). According to Richard Wilson, when defining a TRC in the South African context, but also universally, a transitional statutory body acting as a “a key mechanism to promote (the) new constitutionalist political order and the reformulation of justice in human rights talk as restorative justice” as well as “using human rights talk to construct a new national identity” (Wilson, 2001, 13). We understand TRCs as emergent objects oriented towards producing effects both in the past and the present, also acknowledging that memory involves “memories and forgettings, narratives and acts, silences and gestures” (Jelin 2002, 17), as well as images, experiences, meanings, and resignifications. Through the dynamics of creation and reiteration that subvert, surpass, and delimit, memory is nourished by meanings, symbols, and values (Augé 1998; Candau 2008), so the role of memory can be associated with the versions of the past that societies are willing to sustain as time goes by. Thus, the battle of memory is the battle between memories and counter-memories over what should be remembered and how (Jelin 2002).

While there has been a consensus on the TRCs importance in recognising victims of state violence, recently, doubts have been raised about their long-term impact and implications (Bakiner 2015). According to authors like Bronwyn Leebaw (2011), TRCs are structured around the positions of victims and perpetrators to depoliticise their investigations, which prevents them from considering the competing projects and interests at stake in these episodes. The memories produced by the TRCs were part of the contestation for a moral post-dictatorship space insofar as they were contested, appropriated, and selected by civil society (Jara 2020).

The Chilean case is paradigmatic for examining TRCs and the battles of memory, as it was the first nation to convene a Commission in order to confront the repressive practices of political imprisonment and torture (Bernasconi Ramirez et al. 2019).

2. The Rettig Report, Chilean Truth and Reconciliation Commission

In March 1990, former president Patricio Aylwin became the first democratic president of Chile since the beginning of the Pinochet Military Dictatorship in 1973 (Aguilar 2002). A month after establishing the democratic government, newly elected president Aylwin called upon a group of experts to prepare a report on human rights abuses based on the testimonies of interested parties, including victims and their relatives (Aguilar 2002). On 25 April 1990, Supreme Decree No. 355 created the National Truth and Reconciliation Commission, whose aim was “to contribute to the overall clarification of the Truth about the most serious human rights violations committed between September 11, 1973, and March 11, 1990.”

¹ According to Amnesty International, from 1974 to 2007, there were over forty Truth and Reconciliation Commissions in over twenty-eight countries.

The Commission was presided by Raúl Rettig and was formed by eight members who were given four main tasks (Aguilar 2002): (1) to prepare a comprehensive picture of the extent of human rights violations, their details, and circumstances. (2) To collect information concerning individual victims, their fate and location. (3) To recommend just reparation and necessary retribution. (4) To recommend legal and administrative measures to prevent future serious violations of human rights in Chile.

Even though the South African Truth Commission focused on hearing the testimonies in an open, communal manner, Chile opted to use reports based on social and political analysis (Aguilar 2002). The reason behind this decision was that the Chilean Commission's main research topic had been the methods used to "annihilate subversion in all its facets," ranging from illegal detention, kidnapping, torture, and the disappearance of corpses, to official executions, missing persons, torture resulting in death and even detainees' suicides (Camacho Padilla 2004). Thus, they decided not to consider the cases of survivors.

After nine months of intense work, on 8 February 1991, the Commission handed over the Rettig Report of the National Truth and Reconciliation Commission. It stated the receipt of 3,550 statements, of which 2,296 were considered qualified cases of human rights violation.

Following the Rettig Report, additional Commissions were established to further clarify the truth. In February 1992, the National Reparation and Reconciliation Corporation was entrusted with resolving the cases that the previous Commission had been unable to address satisfactorily or lacked sufficient background information. Afterward, the National Commission on Political Prison and Torture, created in September 2003, received the testimony of over 35,000 Chileans who had suffered political prison or torture during the Pinochet Regime. At last, in 2009, the Presidential Advisory Commission for the Qualification of Disappeared Detainees, Victims of Extrajudicial Executions, and Victims of Political Imprisonment and Torture was created to open a new period of recognition of victims who did not present themselves or were not recognised by the Rettig Commission, by the National Corporation for Reparation and Reconciliation, or by the Valech Commission. Between February and August 2010, it received 32,453 statements.

The publication and later dissemination of the Rettig Report had great national resonance. For the first time and only a year after the end of the dictatorship, the government officially acknowledged the human rights violations committed under the Pinochet Regime (González Morales and Ibarra Paredes 2015). Once the document was published, two trends emerged within the social movements: on the one hand, human rights organizations and the Catholic Church accepted the work of the Rettig Report by a large majority; on the other—the associations of relatives and victims of the repression maintained a more reticent and dissenting attitude (González Morales and Ibarra Paredes 2015). The latter called for the disclosure of the names of those responsible and for an end to the amnesty law. This follows claims from authors such as Barbara De Cock and Daniel Michaud Maturana, who conclude that 61.3% of the Report's propositions lack information about the agents responsible for the actions considered (quoted in González Morales and Ibarra Paredes 2015).

For authors like Marc Ensalaco (1994), the Report provided an official history of the terror by preventing the perpetrators from writing it, unlike in Germany during the Second World War, for example. In this way, it inaugurated a new politics of memory that, from then on, would gradually publicly acknowledge the state violence committed in the recent past, and that would eventually become institutionalised through a Museum of Memory in 2010. Indeed, the Commission reconstructed the history of repression after the military coup by describing the social polarization that characterised Chilean society during the 1960s (Jara 2020). This narrative echoes what in the Argentinean case was

called the “doctrine of the two devils” (Jara 2002) – the idea that the violence was provoked by the left- and right-wing extremism, and which depicted the general society as a passive bystander of a struggle between extremists and the military. By not acknowledging the agency behind the crimes, the Report conveys an ambiguous message regarding the perpetrators of state violence. As Jara argues, “despite describing in great detail the practices of terror, the forms of organisation and institutions involved, the individual perpetrators were treated with anonymity and caution” (2020, 254).

Authors such as González and Ibarra (2015) argue that even though the Rettig Report was not sufficient to achieve national reconciliation, it contributed to providing Chileans with an official and impartial document based on a shared memory which allowed them to form an opinion on what happened and to discuss how to prevent the occurrence of crimes against fundamental rights. The officialised/institutionalised memory of the Rettig Report had been influenced by the limits imposed on the narrative, which triggered the involvement of new actors in the battle of memory (Bernasconi Ramírez et al. 2019). With them, the human rights violations between 1973 and 1990 are no longer understood solely in terms of the logic of the victim-state dyad. These new actors are questioning the process of dictatorship by appealing to the search for truth and justice and emphasising the importance of the historical knowledge of the events.

3. Truth and Reconciliation Commission – Republic of South Africa

Like the Chilean TRC, the South African TRC, formed in 1996, aimed to establish a democratic government within the nation (Chapman 2006, 66–67) as part of the *Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act, 1995*. However, whilst the terms of reference for the Chilean TRC were aimed at addressing human rights violations committed by the government against the Chilean population, the South African TRC had a broader purpose of investigating both human rights violations committed by the government and intra- and inter-community violence within South Africa (Chapman 2006, 66–67). The *Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act, 1995* explicitly stated that the South African TRC served a role mandated by the 1993 Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, in which “the pursuit of national unity, the well-being of all South African citizens and peace require reconciliation between the people of South Africa and the reconstruction of society”. As multiple perspectives from the different communities were included in terms of reference, along with that of the government of South Africa under Apartheid, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa was required to address dissonant memories in the spirit of forgiveness for national reconstruction.

In his article “The Contributions of Truth to Reconciliation – Lessons from South Africa,” James Gibson assesses that the South African TRC successfully addressed the dissonant memories in South Africa through a “logic of rational hypocrisy,” which he describes as a strict condemnation of the abuses of apartheid without excessive prosecution (2006, 428). In his research, Gibson finds a causal process through which, as a result of the TRC, the people of South Africa began to “reconceptualize the struggle over apartheid as something other than a clash between infinite good against unremitting evil” and “began to accept that at least some of the justifications for the opposing side were legitimate” (2006, 428). Thus, for Gibson, the TRC in South Africa was an effective medium for addressing the dissonant memories of the apartheid period by strictly condemning abuses in moral terms without retributive and compensatory measures, therefore allowing for a “preparing for the future” (2006, 428). The TRC’s approach has been complemented, as Katherine Mack points out, by Desmond Tutu’s foreword to the

TRC report. Tutu articulates that the purpose of the TRC is to provide closure on the apartheid era by exposing human rights abuses and asking for the perpetrators to take moral responsibility without penalty, in order to, as Tutu suggests, “shut the door on the past” (Mack 2011, 146).

In contrast, in her article “Truth Commissions and Intergroup Forgiveness,” Audrey R. Chapman claims that the South African TRC was not successful in developing a model to promote intergroup forgiveness and reconciliation. Her findings provide evidence that the TRC focused too heavily on forgiving the perpetrators of human rights abuses at the expense of the victims (Chapman 2006, 66–67). Moreover, the readily offered forgiveness left the perpetrators with little incentive to accept responsibility for the human rights abuses. From a societal perspective, Chapman cites polling data which suggests that the TRC, in fact, complicated relationships between racial groups in South Africa and increased resentment (2006, 66–67). Therefore, from a perspective of dissonant heritage, it may be concluded that the TRC process in South Africa amplified the issue of dissonant perspectives on apartheid by lessening the pressure on the White population to accept responsibility for the human rights abuses.

Willie Henderson attempts to bridge these opposing evaluations of the TRC as either a success or a failure by stating that the TRC resulted in some individuals and groups justifying their human rights abuses in certain instances (Henderson 2000, 459). The TRC could not sanction these justifications; moreover, the Commission’s activities resulted in a universal realization (Henderson 2000, 460–461). Thus, for Henderson, despite the dissonant memories between communities concerning condemnation or justification of human rights abuses perpetrated during apartheid, the TRC did nevertheless allow South African society to develop the norm of anti-racism as a norm of governance.

It remains a matter of debate whether or not the TRC in South Africa adequately addressed the human rights abuses committed during apartheid, and whether it allowed South Africa to prepare for the post-apartheid period. As racism is increasingly understood to be structural and moral, it may be argued that by not punishing the perpetrators, the TRC perpetuated the conditions of racism. Therefore, the question is, to what extent did the TRC lead to addressing the conditions that caused apartheid to occur, and how can the TRC ensure that such events are prevented in future. For prospective TRCs in other nations, the lesson of the South African TRC is the following: the ways in which the core moral crime of the human rights abuses is framed and addressed are crucial in determining whether or not a TRC may be considered a successful mechanism of achieving transitional justice in the context of dissonant memory.

4. Truth and Reconciliation Commission – Togolese Republic (Togo)

Established in Togo on 25 February 2009, the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission (TJRC) took root four years earlier after the death of General Gnassingbé Eyadema, after a thirty-eight-year authoritarian reign. On the day of Eyadema’s death (5 February 2005), under pressure from the army, the Togolese parliament proceeded to a constitutional amendment, which aimed to install one of the General’s sons – Faure Gnassingbé, who is still president today—as head of state. However, in the face of popular and, above all, international pressure, this constitutional “tampering” was postponed. A presidential election was organised on 24 April 2005, and won by Faure Gnassingbé under conditions contested by the opposition. This was followed by post-election violence and a period of instability that resulted in the death of at least 150 people and the departure into exile of more than forty thousand (Amnesty International 2005).

Following the publication of reports on the electoral violence by a national commission of enquiry (Special National Commission of Independent Inquiry)² and a United Nations mission³, an “inter-Togolese political dialogue” was opened on 21 April 2006 and led to the signing of the *Accord de politique globale* (APC) on 20 August 2006. In addition to “the establishment of a new National Assembly at the end of a transparent, fair and democratic electoral process”, the agreement stipulated the creation of two commissions: “a commission responsible for shedding light on the acts of political violence committed during the period from 1958 to the present day, and for studying ways of pacifying the victims” (APC, 2006, 1); and a commission responsible for “proposing measures to promote forgiveness and national reconciliation” (Décret 2009-147/PR, 2009, 1). For budgetary and functional reasons, only one commission was created and placed under the chairmanship of the bishop of Atakpamé and future archbishop of Lomé, Nicodème Anani Barrigah-Benissan. Composed of eleven members designated by the government (Décret 2009-147/PR, 2009, 2) after consultation with so-called “living forces of the nation (political class, socio-professional organisations, civil society)” (TJRC, *Final Report* 2012, 61), this commission was to proceed, in addition to the elections, with the creation of a new commission. In addition to implementing the recommendations of the APC, the commission was to identify “the perpetrators of violence and human rights violations” and to “propose to the government measures to be taken for reparations and various forms of reparation for the harm suffered by the victims” (Décret 2009-147/PR, 2009, 2).

Like other “truth and reconciliation” commissions, the TJRC’s ambition was to constitute a policy of cathartic memory, allowing the Togolese people to revisit their history in order to “rework the past in order to build the future” (Lefranc and Gensburger 2017, 88). As a demonstration of listening, the hearings should, in the words of Nicodème Anani Barrigah-Benissan, offer an opportunity to “free the victims’ speech to restore their dignity and heal their wounds, which are essential conditions for any in-depth reconciliation. By organising them [the commissions], we secretly hope that the strength of conviction of the victims will succeed in creating a national catharsis and thus lead the entire people to engage in a movement of national reconciliation” (Barrigah-Benissan 2015, 386–388). The challenge here was to manage, by working on dissonant memories, to “resurrect dialogue” (Lefranc and Gensburger 2017, 45) between the different fringes of society in order to create a national memory that was appeased, if not unified; and thus, to “lay the foundations for a new social contract” (Andrieu 2012, 27). As Sandrine Lefranc rightly points out, we find here the fundamental idea of transitional justice according to which

the public expression by individuals of suffering memories . . . must heal not only the victim-witness but the whole society, since so-called ‘transitional justice,’ and more generally the policies of memory, postulate an analogy between the individual and the collective. What happens in a few inner spaces would affect, through the force of emotion and exemplarity, all individuals, and then the entire nation. (Lefranc and Gensburger 2017, 95)

² A *Commission de réflexion pour la réhabilitation de l’histoire du Togo* was also created on 7 September 2005 in order to “identify and raise all the elements, factors of peace, unity and togetherness to promote a permanent and open dialogue” (TJRC, *Final Report* 2012, 58).

³ *Mission d’établissement des faits du Haut-Commissariat des Nations Unies aux droits de l’homme chargée de faire la lumière sur les violences et les allégations de violations des droits de l’homme survenues au Togo, avant, pendant et après, l’élection présidentielle du 24 avril 2005.*

This desire for “pacification through memory” (Lefranc and Gensburger 2017, 143) is clearly reflected in the CVJR’s final report, which insists on “the importance of the Togolese as a whole agreeing on a common vision of their future as a nation,” affirms that “the appeasement of the victims” requires, in particular, “the re-establishment of the historical truth, the rehabilitation of the great figures of national history,” and recommends that the State “works to strengthen the sense of national belonging by making the history of the Togolese better known through cycles of conferences, debates, publications, documentaries, and films” (TJRC, *Final Report* 2012, 248, 259).

It is in order to preserve and perpetuate this work of pacifying dissonant memories by re-constructing a memory that is both pacified and shared. The CVJR believes they have laid the foundations for such a memory during the thirty-four months of their work—a process they have defined as “preserving the memory” (TJRC, *Final Report* 2012, 241), although it would be more accurate to describe it as memory-constructing. According to the CVJR, “the preservation of memory is necessary so that future generations know the history of their country and the difficult situations it has experienced, so that such events can be avoided in the future.” Noting the “institutional weakness of the National Archives of Togo and the non-existence of a regulation on public archives,” the CVJR calls for the creation of an institution responsible for monitoring and guarding its archives, and for promoting research on the themes of citizenship, peace, human rights, and memory (TJRC, *Final Report* 2012, 241).

Ten years after the publication of its final report, it remains difficult to predict the future of the CVJR’s recommendations. Nevertheless, and without necessarily taking up the recurrent criticism of transitional justice commissions as mere “courts of tears” where the orchestration of individual memory catharsis “does not heal, by miraculous translation, all the other individuals forming the nation” (Lefranc 2013), a factual observation seems to contradict the vision of a successful transition from a “conflicting memory” to a “consensual memory” (Ahadzi-Nonou 2014, 98) that has allowed for national reconciliation. Indeed, not unlike those that had triggered the 2005 violence that gave rise to the CVJR, the constitutional manoeuvres aimed at allowing the outgoing president to remain in power until 2030 provoked a new period of socio-political tension during which opponents were arbitrarily arrested, and demonstrations were violently repressed. Despite the resistance, the constitutional revision was adopted on 9 May 2019 (Loi n° 2019-003, 2019), and President Faure Gnassingbé was re-elected for a fourth term in the first round on 22 February 2020 with 70% of the votes.

5. Reconciling East and West: The German Truth Commission

The German Truth Commission was established in the transition from authoritarianism to democracy after the end of the communist regime in 1989. Following the reunification, formally acted on 3 October 1990, the German Federal Parliament established two successive commissions of inquiry from 1992 to 1998. By documenting practices of the SED (Socialist Unity Party of Germany) between 1949 and 1989 to establish a “complete record of dictatorship” (McAdams 2001, 88), both of these commissions sought to “contribute to reconciliation” and the “inner unity” of reunified Germany (Deutscher Bundestag 1995, vol.1, 188). According to the commission expert Ilko Sascha Kowalczuk, the commissions were to contribute to:

1. The promotion of an anti-totalitarian consensus in Germany
2. The memory of the victims and of all individuals that didn’t succumb to the temptation of the dictatorship

3. The development of a historical narrative on East Germany, free from myths and trivialization of its crimes (Das Parlament 1998, 5)

The German post-communist transition is unique in that, unlike other East-European countries confronting their former oppressors, it was lived as “West Germany putting the East on trial” (Kritz 1995, 595–597). Issues of passive and active complicity, consent or collaboration (Horne 2017, 214), blurred the distinction between victims and perpetrators in post-Soviet societies, unlike in Latin America, where victims and victimizers were identified (Ciobanu 2009, 314–315). Hardly anticipated, multiple tensions arose between former eastern and western Germans (Welsh 2006, 148). The qualification of the SED regime as a dictatorship was itself far from consensual (Yoder 1999, 70).

In order to articulate these dissonances, underpinned by issues of forgiveness (Andrews 1999) and *Ostalgie*—the nostalgia of East Germany (Neller 2000, 580; McAdams 2001, 111), the Commission’s proceedings had to address the tension between the need for a unifying collective memory based on democratic values and the danger underlying political uses of history in the public sphere. Act No. 12/2597, creating the 1992 Commission of Inquiry, asserts its goal to contribute “to the solidification of democratic consciousness and the further development of a common political culture.” Seeking to establish a national memory, and thus a national identity (Andrews 2003, 53), the German goes beyond historical writing, involving governmentality dynamics (Foucault 2004, 111–112). Taking a stance opposite to that of authoritarian national master narratives, the final report from the second Commission states that “dialogue, or rather reconciliation between victims and perpetrators, cannot come from state coercion. On the contrary, it lies on individual actions” (Deutscher Bundestag 1999, vol. 1, 249).

Embracing these principles, the TC’s singular approach to victimhood (Beattie 2009) carefully balances what Paul Ricoeur called historiographical and judiciary dynamics. Based on individual guilt, criminal judgments are necessarily binary because trials need definite conclusions; on the contrary, history, as an illimited process of perpetual reassessment, tries to consider a multifaceted reality (Ricoeur 2000, 420-426). As a non-judicial body (United Nations Security Council 2004, 17), the German TC acted as a counterpart to juridical incrimination because other transitional justice mechanisms dealt with criminal aspects. As such, it adopted a more discursive and symbolic undertaking (Beattie 2009, 238). In order to promote healing within East German society, individual guilt was not brought into focus (Deutscher Bundestag 1995, vol.1, 30). In this perspective, the first inquiry only presented a schematic list of “categories of victims” with no attempt at quantification (Deutscher Bundestag 1995, vol.1, 630).

Academic literature largely pointed out the German Commission’s failure to handle these dissonances. According to Jennifer Yoder, it left eastern Germans “on the sidelines as their past was reconciled on their behalf” (1999, 72). It was also pointed out that the existence of the Commission was ignored mainly by German citizens (Kamali 2001, 135), as opposed to the South African case, where victims’ stories were widely publicised; the impact on former East Germans was thus minimal (Sa’adah 1998, 185). In terms of methods, its productions were described as a “stereotypical assessment of the sources of stability and discord under the communist rule” (McAdams 2001, 38). Although the Commission’s proceedings were “not free from ideological baggage” (Beattie 2009, 248), its interpretative and partisan nature was stressed in all investigations, from public hearings to reports’ accounts of the Commission’s processes or dissenting statements from opposition parties (Beattie 2009, 244). This way of dealing with dissonant memories by promoting polyvocal narratives and transparency in the process resonates with European memory policies, such as Markus J. Prutsch’s call to establish a critical “European culture of remembering” grounded in values of humanism, tolerance and democracy, opposed to an imposed singular “remembrance culture” (Prutsch 2015, 6). Acknowledging that

remembering the past necessarily involves value judgements, this process renounces the notion of “historical truth” in order to take subjectivity into account.

6. Conclusions

The research conducted into the effect of TRCs on addressing dissonant heritage is undoubtedly complex. The major purpose of TRCs is to provide for a political process in which the human rights abuses perpetrated by previous regimes are considered to have been “managed” in order to allow for a consensus to develop. This, in turn, is to facilitate the government and the political system that have replaced the previous regime to achieve the establishment of a “post-oppressive regime” country. A consensus on “national memory” is established, condemning the past and allowing for previous conflicts to be considered “solved.”

It is within this idea of how a previous conflict may be considered as “managed” that the differences in the cases discussed in this chapter are most distinct. The South African decision to have the proceedings based on open hearings for testimonies allowed for the tangible consequences of apartheid to be understood and, therefore, reduced the possibility for apartheid’s defenders to rationalise and justify the system. In contrast, the Chilean Rettig Report’s emphasis on social polarization as the major source of the conditions leading to the dictatorship provided an incentive for Chilean society to mitigate the rise of such political and social conditions, and for the subsequent government to commission a report demonstrating its commitment to addressing social polarization. In the case of the Togolese TJRC, the aim for “pacification through memory” underpinned the policy paradigm of the transitional justice hearings and proceedings as ending the conflict that had occurred. On the other hand, in the case of the East German TC, the proceedings of the hearings were grounded in the policy paradigm of the West legitimising its absorption of East Germany and denouncing the previous regime. Consequently, it was the “system” of East Germany rather than individual perpetrators that was placed on trial, treating East Germany as an entity to be condemned, rather than, as in the South African case, placing an emphasis on abuses committed by individual citizens. To conclude, the choice of the manner in which Truth and Reconciliation proceedings are carried out is dependent upon the “narrative” that a government wishes to construct regarding the abuses of the previous regime. This narrative serves as a legitimising force for the post-authoritarian government, contributing greatly to a sense of dissonant heritage regarding a country’s past.

However, in allowing for amnesties so that a country may “move on,” TRCs fail to provide the opportunity for victims to seek justice against perpetrators, which leads individuals to resent and oppose the “consensual national memory.” This can potentially lead to the continual deconstruction of the “narrative” of consensual memory that has been developed, thus increasing dissonant heritage, particularly if it creates an impression that oppressors have never been punished or forced to take responsibility for their actions. In considering the continuous development of national narratives in consensual memory constructed through TRCs, it may, therefore, be concluded that TRCs are, in fact, a vector for the formation of dissonant memory and later, dissonant heritage in how the past is interpreted in the context of the perpetration of human rights abuses by previous regimes.

As time goes by, new global dynamics emerge, which provoke dissensus, new contestations, and memorial disputes, mainly the inclusion of new generations who have not lived through the conflicts (Reyes et al. 2014). There are essential transgenerational differences in how each generation relates to the memories of past conflicts. Those who lived the event bring their testimonies and experiences into

the conversation from their personal and individual life stories. However, when younger generations remember, they do so by specifying that “this is what was told to me;” furthermore, they bring their point of view about the past. Thus, they are actors who generate new discourses and practices where the memories of the past become referents for their actions in the present. In general, these new generations tend to be more critical of the actions of the past and the impunity that sometimes comes from how the democratic transitions were done, like in Chile. Even though a deep analysis of how each generation deals with the past is out of the scope of this paper, we should acknowledge the transgenerational dynamics in memory issues, especially as today’s actors dealing with these topics belong to a second, and even third generation.

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