Writing Against Terror
A different vocabulary for transitional justice.

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2016

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To my mother
Her lessons on the power of love are woven into this text

To Colombia
A dream

To Zoe
Dancer of the words of life
Acknowledgements

My heartfelt words of appreciation to those who opened their homes to me. To the survivors and activists in Colombia, for letting me walk with them. To the neighbours of Kulon Progo in Central Java, for feeding me their food and teaching me their ways. Without their generosity these words would have never come into being.

All my gratitude to my supervisors Katherine Gibson, Stephen Healy and Denis Byrne, who patiently considered my ideas and projects and lovingly nourished them with their wise advice and unshakable support. To my friends and colleagues of the Community Economies Collective and their commitment to a different world. To my fellow PhDs at ICS for their their genius insights and for their companion in rainy and sunny days.

My sincere thanks goes to Greg Noble, who made sure my PhD boat never sank when sailing dangerous waters during my time at ICS. To WSU for hosting me on the other side of the world.

Gracias totales, to my friends and family in Colombia, Australia and other parts of the world. You never doubted of my strength and skill, even when I myself did. You are my inspiration and all the words I write to make the world a better place are meant for you.

I kindly thank the Australian people for financially supporting my work, for providing me with a safe haven to cultivate my ideas and for all the shinny sunny days.
Statement of Authentication

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in full or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.

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Abstract

This thesis is a creative critique of transitional justice. It critically assesses policy oriented legal debates on transitional justice, what I call the *pragmatic transitional justice literature*, as they are structured by the liberal narrative of modern progress in which a democratisation agenda based on human rights prioritises addressing violence against the body of individuals. Contrary to this literature’s assumed claim that democracy plus capitalism equals peace, I argue that the narrative of progress obliterates the violent historical relation between forced displacement and the consolidation of capital extraction and labour exploitation. When transitional justice is framed by the liberal progress agenda it reveals one kind of violence and covers up another. By reflecting on violence and silence in the Caribbean mountains of Colombia, I show how the 2000’s massacres radically changed practices providing community well-being. Not only were the lives of loved ones lost. The massacres were also an attempt to destroy a mode of living in the world. I understand this violence as a silencing: an attempt to dismantle a meaningful experience of the world. I am concerned that processes of transitional justice attend to this kind of silencing—but the problem becomes, how?

Revising more critical, field-based and theoretical debates on transitional justice, what I call *conceptual transitional justice literature*, the notion of haunting emerged as useful for opening up transitional justice to political imagination. This notion helped me to challenge the narrative of progress by conjuring up the “doubtful contemporaneity of the present to itself” (Derrida, 1994, p. 48). The question here is: what can haunting teach us about how to attend to silence, loss and death? How can it teach us to listen to seemingly disappeared non-capitalist worlds? In this thesis I pursued a research agenda interested in using haunting as a strategy to craft a different language capable of envisioning new political possibilities for transitional justice.

I found that in order to work against the silencing terror of the massacres I needed a mode of listening that corresponded to this notion of haunting. To make the conceptual promise of haunting productive for re-imagining transitional justice, I decided to perform *théorie* or travelling with concepts. Théorie is a methodology that draws from the experience of dislocation, of exposure to the unfamiliar, to difference, in search for learning from other ways to give meaning to the world.

I went to Indonesia, a privileged site to learn from haunting. Here, one million suspected communists were massacred in the mid-1960s. General Suharto utilised the massacres to remain in power for thirty years, consolidating a political and military elite that profits from a ruthless extractive capitalism. Drawing on historical accounts and Joseph Oppenheimer’s documentary films *The Act of Killing* and *The Look of Silence*, I analysed the historical origins and contemporary effectiveness of Suharto’s narrative of development. I showed how his silencing strategy consisted in breaking the link between meaning-making and livelihood practices. I then went to Kulon
Progo in Central Java, where Muslims and Catholics share the same living space. I observed how the active agency of the dead articulates diverse religious and economic practices that make up a community economy. By listening actively when attending to these practices, my théôria unlocked a new vocabulary of political possibility, one defined by the cohabitation across lines of cultural and religious difference and between the living and the dead, and communicative protocols required to support a shared form of existing in which wellbeing (economic and cultural) is produced through commoning practices. What emerges from these concepts is a different understanding and practice of transitional justice that breaks with both the form and trajectory of “progress.” The normative core of this new transitional justice can be understood as the end of the silencing processes that “progress” imposes. This would require enacting listening practices that acknowledge cohabitation and can learn from diverse forms of living in the world. These listening practices are active processes of creating the conditions for the kind of communication necessary for this learning. A communication of this kind can craft and nourish an abundance of strategies that can host the commoning of wellbeing.
Introduction

Because it is an international issue, we should be given a gift. We should be rewarded with a trip to America [...]. We deserve it! We did this because America taught us to hate communists

Amir Siahaan, Commander of a death squad that murdered 500-600 communists in Indonesia in the 1960's (min 47:23 in Joshua Oppenheimer’s documentary film The Look of Silence).

How can Siahaan’s perception of his mass murders be in such stark contrast to the world’s view of these atrocities? Or is his attitude chillingly in line with a narrative that has been playing out since colonisation began? In this thesis I am interested in analysing and rethinking the relationship between transitional justice and the liberal narrative of progress. Transitional justice is a process designed to address past injustices and is today considered the most morally and politically developed policy strategy to facilitate political transition.

Consider the experience of the South African post-apartheid transition. The apartheid was a political regime based on racial segregation, forced displacement and exploitation. The transitional government devised a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), the prototypical tool of transitional justice, to overcome the apartheid by voicing publicly the systematic violation of human rights perpetrated by the regime. The core normative and political claim of the TRC was that unless the testimonies are properly articulated into a political project, the apartheid cannot be transcended. In this way, the TRC was itself a performance of this new political project: the survivors' public testimonies symbolised the recognition of their status as democratic citizens entitled to a voice and protected by human rights. The post-apartheid transitional project was based on the understanding that the institution of the voice of black South Africans could overcome human rights violations sponsored by segregation policies. In this way, the language of transitional justice formulated a ready-made horizon of political possibility inspired by a narrative of liberal progress where democracy and human rights inevitably deliver peace and justice.

The South African transitional justice process did indeed deliver change, but it is of radical importance to acknowledge how it was also as a policy tool to facilitate the integration of South-Africa to the liberal post-Cold War new world. In this way, the TRC framed and constrained the universe of political possibilities that could have been derived from considering forced displacement, exploitation and the overarching institutional everyday practices of oppression of the colonial regime as acts of injustice. It used the language of human rights violations and a short-term time frame to articulate its definition of violence and injustice and envisioned the according institutions necessary to protect them. In this way, it consolidated the emergence of the post-Cold War world as the actualisation of the triumph of the liberal narrative of progress, a narrative that,
ironically for a policy based on the idea of accountability of past injustices, was meant to leave the past behind and embrace a ready-made vision of the future.

The irony of this triumph can be better appreciated by listening to Amir Siahaan’s unabashed and public plea for recognition and a reward for mass killing. His claim for justice makes sense in the world of the post-authoritarian transition in Indonesia because there is a narrative that justifies his past crimes. It is the narrative of liberal progress as well—a narrative that positions Indonesia as a place in need of frictionless and inevitable integration into the global capitalist economy. “Democracy” and “capitalism” have operated in post-colonial contexts like South Africa, Indonesia and Colombia, my home country, to facilitate terror in the form of forced displacement, economic exploitation, political repression and ecological devastation. Despite their location in different parts of the world, these countries, each in their own historical particularity, taught me something about the operation of this narrative. I learned from them that narratives of progress can legitimise terror to silence other worlds of political possibility. An uncritical transitional justice presented and analysed as a neutral pragmatic policy is in fact structured by this narrative and it indeed can silence those worlds despite its claim of locating voice at the core of its political strategy.

These different sites showed me the need for questioning the vocabulary of human rights, democracy and capitalism articulating the current pragmatic language of transitional justice. To orient this questioning towards other political destinations, it is necessary to start by using a different vocabulary to define the core normative claim of transitional justice. I propose that the core normative claim of transitional justice should termed as the end of terror. This thesis is about crafting a language that makes possible this redefinition and that can provide the adequate vocabulary to restore transitional justice’s potential outside of the narrative of liberal progress. It is in this way, this work constitutes an exercise to actualise Michael Taussig’s ethical injunction of “writing against terror” (M. Taussig, 1984).

This introduction briefly presents important aspects of the context in which transitional justice has emerged as a global language. Following, it lays out the different strategies and concepts developed to unlock the potential of transitional justice. Finally, I define the reformulation of the understanding of justice that this language proposes and set a agenda for future research.

Historically, the consolidation and popularisation of transitional justice as a pragmatic and politically neutral language of the liberal progress narrative should be framed in the context of the fall of the Berlin Wall “[…] and the euphoria of the presumed triumph of free market ideologies and political liberation around the globe” (M. Mutua, 2015, p. 1). This triumphal outlook was to become a kind of fatalism about the inevitability of democracy and the market economy--
epitomised in Fukayama’s *The End of History* (1989). Bred in triumphalism and teleological reassurance at prestigious American universities (Sharp, 2015), transitional justice, as an academic field as well as a geostrategic policy for consolidating the narrative of liberal progress globally, was to become, from the 1990s, the technocratic language that structured political transitions.

It is in this context that we can speak of a “gospel” of transitional justice: a mystical belief that formal democracy and capitalism are the sole answer to violence, a very narrow global geopolitical “perpetual peace” *a la* Kant. To highlight the formulaic nature of this “gospel” as produced by a rationalistic approach to international law, political science and international relations scholarship, where transitional justice emerged as a field of study, I parse this “gospel” in terms of an equation. As a formula, uncritical and seemingly pragmatic definitions and uses of transitional justice aim to bring about peace by promoting democracy and capitalism as the horizon towards which political transitions should head. Put shortly, what I call the *Transitional Justice equation* (TJe) establishes that:

\[
\text{peace} = \text{democracy} + \text{capitalism}.
\]

The transitional justice equation (TJe) up until today limits our political imagination. Even when important concerns about social justice in processes of accountability are introduced (inequality, dispossession, marginalisation), they are articulated in terms of a kind of “development” conceptualised as successful integration into the capitalist economy (Greiff & Duthie, 2009; Mani, 2008).

The problem with the TJe is then that it is a language of political possibility trapped in the narrative of modern liberal progress. Drawing from critical and postcolonial literature, it becomes evident that this narrative has not only been unable to guarantee peace for the colonial subject, but has actually brought violence to the colonised territories. In this thesis I propose that, in order to start generating a different language to activate other political possibilities for transitional justice, it is necessary to understand *silence* as a particular kind of violence and not to limit it with the language of human rights. Dwelling in my experience of the Colombian transitional justice process during 2009-2010 in the Montes de María as an academic researcher, in Chapter Two I define violence as a silencing process where the subject of liberal progress (the industrial agricultural entrepreneur) is forcefully imposed upon the life-world of the *campesino* (the small farmer). This process is analogous with that of torture: an attempt to break meaningful socio-symbolic bonds through the terror of fear and pain. In the case of forced displacement and the *campesino* world, it

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1 Note, for example, that the founding academic text of what I call the *pragmatic* scholarship on transitional justice was published by the United States Institute of Peace Press (Kritz, 1995).

2 I borrow the term “gospel” from Castillejo-Cuellar, who refers to transitional justice as enacting a “global gospel of forgiveness and reconciliation” (Castillejo-Cuellar, 2009; Castillejo-Cuellar, 2013).
meant destroying the symbolic bond that had historically joined together people and land to produce and distribute well-being. In other words, a community economy vanished into the shadows of fear and the power to openly and explicitly articulate what is worthy of desire and action, of sustaining life and meaning, was significantly diminished.³

This understanding of silencing as violence provides a conceptual bridge that renders visible a similar process that haunts transitional justice. Indeed, the liberal progress narrative that provides the language for pragmatic transitional justice silences other languages of political possibility. Historically, the political appreciation and exploration of other-than-European worlds has been neutralised by linguistic binaries such as civilised/barbarian, developed/underdeveloped, advanced/backward, modern/primitive, future/past or even economy/culture.⁴ As revealed by these binaries, transitional justice’s promise to realise peace through formal democratisation and capitalist development is a language articulated in a classic modern conception of progress. From the colonial experience, this progressive understanding of modernity, the economy and democratic politics has been violently imposed over the world of the non-modern other. The others’ knowledge has been continually silenced when they have been either located in the narrative of progress as backwards and utilised for the purpose of control or simply physically destroyed.⁵ Transitional justice as articulated through this narrative of progress has been performing silencing processes conceptually analogous to the one it is supposed to overcome.

While my experience in Los Montes de María triggered a conceptual reflection on silence, it equally, and for the same reasons, triggered one on listening. Confronted by the experience of silence, I found that a conception of listening that can start doing justice to this kind of silencing process requires a mode of reflection that can nourish an understanding that emerges by letting the world of those who have been silenced affect, challenge and perhaps change the way you see and act in the world.

With this conception of listening in mind, I decided to look for encounters that could help me to find a vocabulary for the TJ(e) that is not trapped in the liberal progress narrative in order to open it up to a different political imagination. First, I had to challenge the linear understanding of

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³ Community economy refers here to a conception of economic relationships that considers the capitalocentric understanding of the economy insufficient to explain and perform the diversity of processes of production and distribution of livelihoods that make possible collective well being. The community economies scholarship works from the conceptual, ethical and political contribution of Gibson-Graham’s oeuvre, specially as proposed in her *The End of Capitalism (as we knew it)* (2006b) and *A Post-capitalist Politics* (2006a).

⁴ The use of these binaries in current and colonial contexts has been material of research for the major figures of post-colonial theory. See, for example, Appadurai (1996, 1996b); Bernal (1987); Blaib (1984); Buck-Morss (2009a); Castro-Gómez (2000); Chakrabarty (2008); Dussel (2000); Escobar (2004a); Guardiola-Rivera (2010); Mbembe (2001); Mignolo (2002); Quijano (2000); Spivak (1988); Wallerstein (1991); Young (2004).

⁵ This postcolonial critique of the politics of epistemology and its function in the colonial project is largely inspired by Chakrabarty (2008); Dussel (2000); Escobar (2004a); Quijano (2000).
time embedded in the modern narrative of liberal progress. In order to do so, I adopted the general critical approach Derrida called *haunting* as my research agenda. In his challenge to the progressive understanding of time and the philosophy of presence implied in the idea of “the end of history”, Derrida formulated the principle of “[…] the doubtful contemporaneity of the present to itself” (1994b, p. 48). Derrida re-articulates the modern conception of time in a way that can illuminate a different understanding of justice where the past is always disrupting our confident ideas of victorious fulfilment. The idea of haunting, consequently, aims at blurring the imaginary boundaries between past, present and future. As used in this thesis, haunting is a different grammar of time that requires a sensitivity to the continuing and ethically demanding relevance of the “past” in order to respectfully engage with the other. Haunting then challenges the violence of silencing because it is an invitation to let the past speak to our present imagination of the future. In this way, haunting highlights continuities, interdependency, becoming, and multiple possibilities. Most importantly, it is also an always open-ended claim for justice, the ongoing obligation to right wrongs in order to create the conditions that allow a world to host community economies capable of producing and distributing well-being.

Haunting is also a challenge to the certainties of total systems, of full presence, of complete actualisation, of victorious fulfilment, that equally underlines the narrative of progress. The narrative of progress in its post-Cold War version claims that capitalism and democracy represent the full achievement of human political and economic potentiality. But before the fall of the Berlin Wall, Lyotard had already announced the ongoing debunking of metanarratives of progress (Lyotard, 1984).

Since then, progressive intellectuals have engaged in the project of deconstructing narratives and denouncing their perverse epistemological politics. To a great extent, the necessary work of policing the potential emergence of metanarratives has meant, though, a political deadlock where alternatives are scrutinised to the point of disavowing constructive political alternatives. This kind of critique is often based on the general assumption that capitalism is ever-expanding and that alternatives are, sooner or later, captured by the capitalist system and turned into its own instruments (Hardt & Negri, 2000; Harvey, 2005). Here I adopt Gibson-Graham’s post-capitalist politics by pointing out that even these critiques, including Derrida’s (Gibson-Graham, 1995), fall into the trap of giving capitalism a “total system” nature that it does not actually own (Gibson-Graham, 2006b). These analyses, Gibson-Graham highlights, overlook the actual multiplicity of economic practices sustained by diverse ethical negotiations that live alongside and despite

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6 See, footnotes 4 and 5 for a list of postcolonial intellectuals who have endeavoured to deconstruct metanarratives. Derrida, Foucault and Lyotard developed their works to show the epistemological power struggles of different discourses and master narratives.
capitalism. A post-capitalist haunting mode of listening is then essential for this thesis since it calls for the observation of the non-capitalist diversity that is nonetheless abundant in post-colonial worlds. My aim is to engage with them as sources of political imagination.

For this reason, I decided to travel to witness the kind of lively experiences of haunting able to nourish a different mode of thinking that could ignite other political imagination for transitional justice. I call this methodology travelling with concepts or théoria. Théoria as a research methodology is indeed a kind of ethnography, only in this case a particular mode of ethnographic inquiry designed specifically for unlocking thought. Surely, ethnography has made the encounter with the other its methodology and raison d’être, finding in this encounter the potential for the necessary “astonishment” that can make normality strange and normalise strangeness (Augé, 1999). In this spirit, théoria as a methodology follows Said’s understanding of difference. For Said, difference does not amount to irreconcilable “cultural” or “ethnic” partialities, cultural ghettos that police their borders to repel contamination. What is necessary to counter this tendency is to enrich our common human experience through genuinely learning from diverse historical trajectories. That requires, then, taking other knowledges, beliefs and social practices as relevant to our own intellectual reflections, as possessing the same value as the works of philosophers, historians, sociologists, etc. (Said, 2003, sec. Preface).

In order to make this principle operative, I follow Castillejo-Cuéllar’s work. Castillejo-Cuéllar suggests that a genuine experience of the other can trigger and structure a particular mode of questioning (Castillejo, 2014). The encounter with the other is an experience where witnessing aspects of other worlds stirs thinking and affect in different directions. In this way, the experience of difference then is not about deciphering the other (as if the other was a total unit transparent to itself), but a process of both physical and figurative dislocation, taking us away from our usual and problematic academic modes of observation.

Castillejo-Cuéllar reminds us of the similarity between this mode of witnessing (as opposed to mere observation) and the practice of théoria in ancient Greece as accounted by Nightingale. Her tracing of the origin of the word “theory” describes the process by which this word was reappropriated by Socratic philosophers from the specific practice of travelling that was popular in the ancient Greek world (Nightingale, 2001, 2004). Théoria was prototypically a practice whereby a state sent an envoy to neighbouring cities to witness their religious festivities. They were expected to figure out from these performances the economic, social and political forms of organisation particular to those other city-states. Once they were back in their city of origin, they shared that knowledge to rethink and reform their own societies. Plato re-signified this practice to mean the travel of the philosopher to the world of pure forms or ideas. For Plato, the achievement
of the philosopher is to wonder into the world of pure ideas. His wondering does not consist of stumbling across the partial reality of the senses to finally achieve a full experience of pure forms. According to Nightingale, Plato saw theôria as a state of openness made possible by a mode of seeing developed during this experience of traveling. This state consists of the ability to appreciate the kinship between humans and gods, of their belonging to a common nature. Extending this analogy, the methodology proposed for this thesis also acknowledges the learnings that can happen from an experience of common kinship between different historical trajectories. In this way, the intention of my theôria is to think through conceptual problems by dislocating my position as thinker as a result of participating in events of social importance for the communities I visited where haunting is staged. In other words, this theôria is about letting myself become affected by witnessing haunting with the purpose of offering alternative avenues of thought and political possibility for transitional justice.

From the Caribbean mountains of Colombia I then directed my theôria, both physically and intellectually, towards Indonesia. Two reasons lead me to travel to the exact opposite side of the planet in search of haunting. First, my interest in Indonesia comes from it also having a violent past that haunts its present national politics and local everyday life. In 1965, the anti-communist military forces led by Suharto took over power. The next years saw Suharto’s forces, paramilitaries and civil sympathisers massacre around one million people suspected to be related to the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI). Suharto then established a façade democracy, the New Order, that would elect him continuously for over thirty years. During that time, any expression of free association - ranging from dance performance groups to union movements - that was not acquiescent with the ruling power structures was labelled communist and persecuted. Today, after two decades of a new democratic political system, Demokrasi, the military and paramilitary structures that facilitated the 1965-66 massacres remain extant and powerful. For this reason, concerns about how to account for the massacres and other emblematic events of brutal state sponsored violence are still a haunting matter that politicians have not been willing or able to put forward effectively for political and legal scrutiny. Despite this relentless repression, there have been many attempts at laying the violent past open for reflection, such as national and local TRCs and numerous citizen-led memory and reconciliation initiatives.

Second, in Indonesia, and specifically Java, spiritual life is intense and dynamic, providing rich experiences and narratives of haunting. Anthropologists have famously written about it. As described by Clifford Geertz, in the rural areas of East Java (Modjokuto, specifically), one among the three main religious practices, abangan, is based on an “extensive and intricate complex of spirits beliefs [...] and a whole set of theories and practices of curing, sorcery, and magic” (Geertz,
In fact, anthropologists have pointed out in different studies that spirits play an important role in mediating different kinds of situations of uncertainty in the context of economic and political transitions (Beatty, 1999; Florida, 1995; Larasati, 2013; Peluso, 1992; Pemberton, 1994; Tsing, 2005).

In this sense, my thesis can be defined as a théoria, a travelling with the concepts of haunting and listening. This théoria is divided in six chapters. Chapter One discusses the location of transitional justice in the American narrative of civilisation, modernity and progress. In the context of pragmatic transitional justice debates, this narrative is actualised by formulating an imaginary and tacit idea of future peace as guaranteed by what I call the transitional justice equation (TJe) where peace/progress is the result of adding democracy to a capitalist economy (peace(TJe) = democracy + capitalism). From its early European origins, narratives of progress have been utilised to legitimise the violent demise of non-European life-worlds by symbolically locating them in the past, while the modern Euro-American world is seen as the desirable/inevitable future. Transitional justice is no exception. In this chapter I acknowledge the potential of more conceptual debates on transitional justice as opening up thinking and practices to haunting. I take this haunting to become a research agenda that can challenge the imaginary boundaries that the modern narrative of progress constructs between past, present and future, and the implied idea of “presence” that it requires. Setting a research agenda interested in haunting is this thesis’s strategy for crafting a different vocabulary to articulate transitional justice.

Chapter Two draws on my ethnographic experience in the context of the Colombian transitional justice process to show how violence is about silencing life-worlds. This understanding of violence is possible by including in the analysis not only crimes against individuals, but their impact on communities and their strategies to make sense of the world for survival and well-being. I ask how does Transitional Justice address violence as the silencing of these worlds and what kind of justice does it make possible? I argue that Transitional Justice, despite being interested in the testimonies of victims as a strategy to counter silencing processes, requires an approach beyond voice that instead focuses on a kind of listening that is able to do justice to their life-worlds.

In Chapter Three I review a range of social and political theorists that have been concerned with the polities of voice and ethical listening. I argue that progressive politics still lacks an adequate form of listening that makes the silenced worlds of victims actually powerful. Drawing from feminist rhetoric studies I conclude that silences are charged with meaning. Following this work, I find that haunting as a mode of active engagement with loss, death, displacement and silence can better articulate listening for crafting a different language for transitional justice.
Chapter Four explains the principles of haunting that can operationalise listening in a research methodology. I call this methodology *théoria* or travelling with concepts. The work of the previous three chapters was to explore the kind of violence transitional justice should be able to account for and to provide a vocabulary capable of grasping it (narrative, life-world, community economy, silencing, voice, listening). This chapter works as a bridge to leave home (Colombia, analytical certainties, traditional methods) to travel to Indonesia in search of a language that can articulate and activate a different set of political possibilities for transitional justice. It then presents Indonesia as a privileged site for learning from processes of haunting.

In Chapter Five I follow the haunting call for justice staged in the documentary films of Joshua Oppenheimer. In his films, it is possible to witness the powerful silencing process possible because of the Cold War narrative that still legitimises the power structures that rule Indonesia from the anti-communist massacres of 1965-66 until today. I ask here what are the conditions under which this narrative becomes so powerful? This question led my théoria to inquire into other silencing processes in Indonesian history and identify a regular trend in them. I argue that since colonial times, modern narratives of progress have split the constitutive link between meaning-making and economic practices (a community economy as life-world) as a strategy to control, neutralise and silence autonomous local peoples.

Chapter Six acknowledges that haunting puts into action the principle that silence is never fully achieved. My théoria then travels to Kulon Progo, Central Java, Indonesia, to listen to this haunting call. I relate how I observed and participated in a number of spiritual practices where the experience of haunting actually articulates the co-constitutive relationship between meaning production and economic practices. By dwelling in my observations on these practices I craft a vocabulary that can let transitional justice assess and act upon the violence of silencing. I re-articulate the meaning production and economic practices of communities by identifying this link with practices of cohabitation, communication and commoning. I call this vocabulary the *CCC language*.

In the concluding chapter I discuss how the CCC language can address violence differently than the narratives of modern liberal progress. I then consider what are the implications for corresponding notions of justice. I sketch out how to understand this notion of violence and justice in contexts of transitional justice processes. Finally, I consider the implications of this notion of justice for future research. My aim is to use this understanding of justice to shed light on the connections between violence as silencing, global politics and climate change.

My théoria has taken me to disclose a new route for exploration, a new horizon of political possibility away from the silencing processes of modern narratives of progress. My direction this time is set by a new understanding of justice opened up in my haunting encounters in Colombia.
and Indonesia and the CCC language that they fostered. This new conception of justice is the result of my learning about what makes a world meaningful. I came up to the conclusion that *justice is commoning well-being*, is the capacity of a community (whatever we might say a community is) to (re)create and nourish the conditions to (re)produce and (re)distribute well-being. My future intellectual journey will be then concerned with further understand and develop this conception of justice and with the kind of institutions, politics, economic practices and ethics that could enact it. This exploration will require théoria too, but this time my listening will be redirected to be attentive to how this justice is or can be possible. Ultimately, disclosing worlds of commoning wellbeing is my response to the injunction of writing against terror.
Chapter One

The time of transitional justice: Progressive narrative in the politics of transitions to democracy

Monuments are like wearing pants. Civilisation.
(Riantiarno, 1992)

1. The transitional justice equation (TJe)

Transitional Justice was rocketed to global policy making stardom in the mid 90’s when South Africa combined the irresistible duet of truth and reconciliation as key concepts to facilitate the transition to a much needed post-apartheid regime. This might have been the zenith of transitional justice as a peace making policy toolbox, and it remains, by default, the most sought after. Indeed, it was at this time when the foundational text of transitional justice studies, Neil J. Kritz’s “Transitional Justice: How Emerging Democracies Reckon with Former Regimes” (1995), was published by the United States Institute of Peace Press, just a year after the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was established. A decade after, United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan stated the relevance and the increasing importance of transitional justice for global peace:

Recent years have seen an increased focus by the United Nations on questions of transitional justice and the rule of law in conflict and post-conflict societies, yielding important lessons for our future activities. [...] The United Nations must therefore support domestic reform constituencies, help build the capacity of national justice sector institutions, facilitate national consultations on justice reform and transitional justice and help fill the rule of law vacuum evident in so many post-conflict societies. (Secretary-General, 2004)

But the history of what later on was conceptually called transitional justice has been traced to times before the South African TRC. Many commentators agree on locating the origin of transitional justice in the Nuremberg and Tokyo trials. When the Nazi military leaders were trialled after being defeated by the Allies, United States-led international discourse and practices of state building broke into a new era of policy making in the context of mass violence and conflict

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7 See (Barahona De Brito, González-Enríquez, & Aguilar, 2001; Elster, 2004; Kritz, 1995; Mendez, 1997; Offe, 1997; Roht-Arriaza & Mariezcurrena, 2006; Teitel, 2000). Elster (2004) argues that, despite the modern version of transitional justice originating in the Nuremberg and Tokyo trials, measures of extraordinary justice that secure regime transitions (including reparations and amnesties) can be traced back to revolutionary France and ancient Greece.
resolution. Aware of the negative consequences of the “victor’s justice”, the Euro-American post-
WWII alliance decided to rely on formal legal mechanisms to address Nazi’s crimes as a way of
making the rule of law holding the transition to political stability. In this way, it was expected that
German and European societies would not just punish Nazi criminals but that accountability and
institutional reform would also create the conditions for the consolidation of the democratic rule
of law and the regional pacification it was expected it would bring about.

As such, the reconstruction of Europe after World War II was guided by the belief that the
democratic rule of law would facilitate the transition to long-lasting peace, prosperity and human
progress. Americans operationalised this narrative in the Marshal Plan, a plan to rebuild Europe
after WWII with the explicit purpose of preventing war. Nils Gilman suggests that the Marshall
Plan and the subsequent American Cold-War politics were inspired by the work of an intellectual
elite who believed that America was now in charge of protecting civilisation and fostering human
progress. He calls it the American conception of modernity. In contrast to the Frankfurt School
tradition, which sees in Nazism the most brutal expression of modernity, the American
intelligentsia saw fascism and Nazism as irrational and hence outside the modern project. Since the
transitional justice trajectory has been to a great extent guided by American political philosophy
and foreign policy, it is not surprising, then, that it has not been critical of the destructive legacies
of modernity and, in consequence, not been attentive to the risk of an irreflexive confidence in
modern narratives of progress (Gilman, 2004).

Since then, the idea that democratic accountability can prevent war or violence has inspired
a significant number of post-conflict transitional justice strategies aimed at consolidating peace all
around the world. Adapted to concrete cases, thus differing in their degree of formality and rigor,
transitional justice has taken various shapes, from intellectual-led clarification panels, to popular
truth and reconciliation commissions, to international criminal trials, along with reparations,
pardons, bureaucratic purges, institutional reform, and of course symbolic gestures of apologies
and recognition of loss and suffering. Emblematic cases are post-dictatorship countries in Latin
America, post-apartheid South Africa, ex-Yugoslavia and Rwanda, among many others. It has
become a tool of political engineering for transition of such importance that it is being applied in
Iraq and Afghanistan after the United States’ intervention, and now is considered as the pertinent

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8 The concept of narrative as used in this chapter refers to the, by now, common use of the term in critiques of modern
metanarratives. I briefly referenced the origin of this critique to Lyotard (1984) on page 13. In Chapter Five this concept
is used in a more colloquial way by naming official history-making as narrative as well. As history-making narrative in
the case of Indonesia’s New Order regime, this concept can also be linked back to the metanarrative of progress.
policy for many of the countries after the Arab Spring (Fisher & Stewart, 2015; Robins, 2015; Teitel, 2006).

The global popularity of transitional justice as a peace-building policy has led to a flood of academic literature on the topic. The overwhelming majority of this literature discusses the pragmatic or policy making implications of transitional justice. In this thesis I distinguish pragmatic transitional justice literature and conceptual literature. The pragmatic literature is one which authors have debated the role and effectiveness of individuals, government agencies and international actors in designing, executing and interacting with peace agreements and disarmament, transitional legislation and accountability (Murphy, 2017), international tribunals, extraordinary courts and truth commissions (Bachmann & Heidrich, 2016), institutional reform, nation-building and constitutional remake (Yusuf, 2013), reparations (Clamp, 2014), and different forms of memorialisation and official apologies (Schwelling, 2012). Scholars define transitional justice rather descriptively. As McAuliffe (2013) argues, transitional justice, like humanitarianism (Kennedy, 2005), is often presented as a “depolitisised” or self-evident political and legal reformation. Debates are centred on the practicalities of this or that policy and do not consider the critical implications of an unquestioned narrative of political progress.

One of the most influential scholars in the field, Ruti Teitel, so defines it: “[Transitional justice implies a] conception of justice associated with periods of political change, characterised by legal responses to confront the wrongdoings of repressive predecessor regimes” (Teitel, 2003, p. 77). Following this same strategy, another influential text defines it as follows: “[F]or our purposes transitional justice includes that set of practices, mechanisms and concerns that arise following a period of conflict, civil strife or repression, and that are aimed directly at confronting and dealing with past violations of human rights and humanitarian law.” (Roht-Arriaza & Mariezcurrena, 2006, p. 2). Kora Andrieu has summarised a long academic tradition on the conceptualisation of transitional justice in this way:

The theories and research programs that explain, justify, compare, and contest specific practices of moral and social repair, and the political and social movements dealing with the [violent] past, including practices such as Truth Commissions, trials,

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9 Policy oriented literature on transitional justice is immensely – a testimony to its widespread academic popularity and global policy demand. Each of the elements of transitional justice mentioned could constitute a field of research in itself. For the purpose of this thesis it is important to point out only the most complete, significant and recent works in each field. For a recent attempt at scanning contemporary literature on the general field of transitional justice, see Fletcher & Weinstein (2015). Teitel (2000) provides a broad commentary of the state of the art by the end of the last century. A rundown of the major themes in transitional justice and a justification of defining it as a field of study in its own right can be found in the inaugural edition of the International Journal of Transitional Justice.
administrative reorganization, nation building, commemoration and reparation, is what we now call ‘transitional justice’” (Andrieu, 2010, p. 2. Emphasis added).

This conception of transitional justice is not just about government takeover in post-conflict situations. It is, in fact, a particular kind of regime change. In Barahona De Brito’s words, “by ‘transition’ is meant the shift from a non-democratic regime type to a democratic one, not merely a change of government or a process of liberalization within an authoritarian regime” (Barahona De Brito, González-Enríquez, & Aguilar, 2001, p. 11).

Although it is not often part of, or even mentioned in, these works, transitional justice has also been thought of as economic reform. Posner and Vermeule have argued that “[m]any transitions also seek economic reform, and can be judged by their success in creating a vibrant market economy” (Posner & Vermeule, 2004). As many authors working on the landslide of political transitions triggered by the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the USSR, transitional justice has not only meant political and institutional reform but also the engineering of an internal free market economy and the opening to international markets. Indeed, the overoptimism about the freedom that capitalist democracy inspired made unimaginable, for the new countries and for the West, transitions to other-than-capitalist economies. Transitional justice has been a legal strategy to facilitate an overall transition into a democratic regime under a capitalist economy (Guilhot, 2005; Orford, 2003, 2006). This kind of pragmatic conceptualisation, purposefully or not, (de)limits the universe of possibilities of transitional justice.

Following McAuliffe (2015), my argument is that capitalism is the default economic structure that pragmatic transitional justice does not question. When capitalism is not brought into question, exploitative and violent economic practices mostly go unaccountable and systemic redistributive economic change is disregarded. In pragmatic transitional justice debates it is assumed, and mostly runs unmentioned, that capitalism, as a doctrine and as a reality, is not part of processes of accountability and truth-telling. I conclude with others that this assumption ignores important injustices that this economic system facilitates and can even legitimise. It is not, then, that pragmatic transitional justice tries to install capitalism, but rather that capitalism functions tacitly, silently, as the assumed natural economic companion of democracy and peace. The aim of my thesis is to name this silence, question this assumption and offer alternatives.

It is also revealing to observe the concerns of those addressing economic injustice through public policy-oriented debates in contexts of political transition. Most commonly, scholars consider processes of democratic accountability and reparations to victims as part of “closing the books”. They debate the relative merits of reparative policies such as financial compensations, property ownership restoration and other policies focused on private property and individual loss.
Other scholars have highlighted how human rights violations during periods of mass violence very often leave the victims and survivors in more precarious economic conditions than before violence broke out. They argue that reparations should aim at lifting up the economic conditions of the victims, which could require, in cases of large amounts of victims, national blanket policies of economic development (Gready, 2011; Greiff & Duthie, 2009; Mani, 2008). The scholarship on transitional justice and economic development is certainly a progressive voice in transitional justice debates, but it rarely analyses the implications of the economic system, itself an actualisation of modern narratives of liberal progress, as a source of violence (Arthur, 2009; McAuliffe, 2015). As we will see in Chapter Two on the Colombian transitional justice process, the narrative of liberal progress, and the economic and political systems that it promotes, often serves to legitimise or invisibilise the very violent processes that transitional justice is meant to address.

Examining these definitions, it becomes apparent that, within the global practice of transitional justice policy design, very influential conceptualisations of the field can be synthesised in what I call the Transitional Justice equation (TJe):

**Transitional justice = Accountability + democracy + rule of law**
**Capitalist economy**

The entirety of the transitional justice project in its most policy-making definition is aimed at promoting (hopefully) long-term peace. Seen from a long-term perspective, transitional justice is revealed not only as a pacification tool, but a teleological narrative of societal progress. As Joanne Quinn points out, transitional justice is “the process by which societies move [...] from war to peace [...] while dealing with resulting questions of justice and what to do with social, political, and economic institutions” (Quinn, 2009, p. 3). Furthermore, as Webber summarises,

Transitional justice is about situations in which a society is moving from a state of injustice to justice, from oppressive government to government that respects the rule of law, from authoritarianism to democracy. (Webber, 2012)

In this way, the transitional justice equation can be modified as follows:

**Future peace = Accountability + democracy + rule of law**
**Capitalist economy**

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10 McAuliffe (2013) calls this description of transitional justice a “narrative of progress”. In this thesis, this notion is analysed in its theoretical dimension
The TJe’s narrative in this sense gains all its discursive power through its temporal orientation. The whole project of transitional justice makes sense only if it is dedicated to move from past human rights violations toward a future of democratic peace. As Theidon sharply observes, “[...] there is a teleological aspect to the concept of transition: ‘before’ was worse, and ‘after’ will lead to something better” (Theidon, 2009, p. 295).

Seen in its teleological conceptual foundation, the TJe reveals its narrative structure when condensed as follows:

**Future = Democratic rule of law**
**Capitalist economy**

The “something better” in the future that this equation suggests is embedded in a very particular way of seeing the world. As Teitel succinctly states it, “transitional justice’s main contribution [...] is to advance the construction of a collective liberal narrative” (Goetschel & Hagmann, 2009; Teitel, 2003, p. 4).

It is possible to argue, then, that the TJe is a pragmatic policy vocabulary that articulates the liberal narrative of modern progress, one that critical theory, post-structural, post-modern, feminist and post-colonial authors find very problematic. In agreement with this scholarship, I am interested in creating a new language to talk about political transitions to re-work and subvert the simplistic liberal narrative in which the TJe is embedded. First, it is necessary to be more precise about the historical contingency in which transitional justice emerged. I locate the emergence of transitional justice simultaneously with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the consolidation of the idea that there is only one way to live in the world that it brought about. Second, in order to open the TJe up to different political possibilities we need to discuss how a more conceptual literature (as opposed to a pragmatic one) opens up the political potential of transitional justice by dwelling in the tension in the grammar of time it performs. I argue that this potential is yet to be conjured up and that it is still necessary to use this potential to create a different language of transitional justice.

2. The end of a history, or the history of the narrative of progress

Making explicit the articulation of concepts in the TJe is the beginning of my critique and theoretical contribution to the transitional justice debate. Once made visible, it is possible to see that its formulation can be tracked back to the consolidation of the American version of liberal modern progress, dubbed the “end of history” in the late 1980’s. The pragmatic scholarship on
transitional justice is trapped in this narrowing of political vision and imagination. This section historicises this process to open transitional justice up to critique and reformulation.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, the growing invisibility of political alternatives has been reinforced by the powerful assertion that there is just one way to see and live in the world, the best we as a species can achieve. From this perspective, it seems only natural that formal democracy and the capitalist economy constitute the achievement of all human potentialities and hence the “end of history”. As Fukuyama synthesises it in an epoch making article:

“[At the time of the fall of the Berlin Wall], ‘peace’ seems to be breaking out in many regions of the world. But what we may in fact be witnessing is not just the passing of a particular period of post-war history, but the endpoint of mankind’s ideological evolution and the emergence of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government [...]. It may be the end of history”. (Fukuyama, 1989, p. c1)1

Very influential and renowned political scientists and historians Neil Ferguson, Paul Kennedy or Samuel Huntington back this narrative. After studying the comings and goings of “waves” of democratisation, Huntington finally concludes: “[...] the movement toward democracy seemed to take on the character of an almost irresistible global tide moving on from one triumph to the next” (1991, p. 37).

Although most of these scholars portray themselves as just witnessing events naturally/necessarily unfolding toward democracy, some authors see it as a semi-deliberate expansion of the liberal progress narrative. This narrowing of political imagination has remarkable historical iterations traceable back to the narratives of civilisation. As developed in France and England, “civilisation” provided a conceptual homage to already commonsensical ideas of superiority and advancement that emerged from the encounter with a new continent and gave grounding to modern political thought especially in the early Western Enlightenment (Bowden, 2009). Since its inception, “civilisation” was attributed to a specific kind of political organisation associated with social cooperation to protect the signatories of the political pact from violence and in so doing allowing them to explore, develop and profit from the high expressions of the human soul (Bell, 2007; Mantena, 2010; Pitts, 2009, 2010; Sartori, 2006). The more stable, efficient and “rational” a form of association was, the more civilised.

In Zigmund Bauman’s words,

Although other sociological images of the civilizing process are available, the most common (and widely shared) is one that entails, as its two centre points, the

11 Critiques of Fukuyama’s claims are abundant. This thesis builds upon Derrida’s reaction to the general argument Fukuyama defends (Derrida, 1994b).
suppression of irrational and essentially antisocial drives, and the gradual yet relentless elimination of violence from social life (more precisely: concentration of violence under control of the state, where it is used to guard the perimeters of national community and conditions of social order). What blends the two centre points into one is the vision of the civilized society - at least in our own, Western and modern, form- as, first and foremost, a moral force; as a system of institutions that co-operate and complement each other in the imposition of a normative order and the rule of law, which in turn safeguard conditions of social peace and individual security poorly defended in pre-civilized settings. (Bauman, 2000, pp. 28–29)

European philosophers and political theorists of the XVII century profited greatly from depicting the divide between barbarians or savages and civilised people. For them, savages childishly enjoy or brutally suffer in the shadows of their ignorant and anarchic world, while the civilised are illuminated by rational thinking and lawmaking, hence living in peace and comfort. This narrative assured that civilisation was not just a property of a singular people, race of nationality, but hosted in all human beings, although, of course, in different degrees of development. European Enlightenment theorists found that this moral hierarchy was universal to the human soul. Despite its very parochial origins (Europe), this moral hierarchy became the “standard of civilisation”, a descriptive-evaluative set of concepts used to measure the world’s social diversity with uniform criteria. As such, then, this narrative procedure turned the description of the world into a way to see that in turn made visible a delimited set of possibilities to live and act.

Such criteria have survived and it remains structurally intact today in a descriptive-evaluative narrative of modernity based on liberal democracy, which in turn informs the normative assumptions of standard transitional justice policies. Indeed, after the East German government declared the end of the German divide in November 1989, the United States of America led, emulating the success of the Marshall Plan after World War II, the establishment of an exclusive universe of possibilities: liberal modern progress. In Bowden’s words,

“The end of the Cold War [...] ushered in an era that was acclaimed as the coming of a “new world order” in which capitalist liberal democracy as a system of government had defeated all comers. International politics entered an environment in which the concepts of individual rights, participation in government via some modicum of

12 If during the last five centuries these criteria reflected emergent European values, in its contemporary post-Cold War version it reflects a more “Americanised” version of democracy and modernity. This point will be explored further in chapter two.
democracy, and unhindered access to the goods and services available via the marketplace are widely thought of as the aspirational norm” (Bowden, 2009, p. 167).

This set of possibilities, or “aspirational norm”, constitutes the contemporary language of civilisation. The popularisation of this language became even more prominent after the attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York on 11 September, 2001. Bowden reminds us that George W. Bush called them “attacks on civilisation” by “barbarians”, “so too, the subsequent war on terrorism is widely cast and prosecuted as a war between the “civilized” world and an “uncivilized” mix of despots, rogue states, terror networks, and assorted sympathizers” (Bowden, 2009, p. 209). As in the past, the language of “civilisation” serves to simultaneously divide the world into those belonging to the morally acceptable humanity and those who are not part of it.

This language does not just legitimise actions to promote, violently if necessary, the integration of outsiders into the civilised community. The very form of this integration comes together with its descriptive-evaluative functions. This standard of civilisation/modernisation in fact does something more than depicting the world’s normative landscape. It also, and very importantly, sets and freezes the universe of possibilities. In Bush’s words “[There is] a single sustainable model for national success: freedom, democracy, and free enterprise” (93); or “we will actively work to bring the hope of democracy, development, free markets, and free trade to every corner of the world.” (201). Thus,

at present for a state to be considered a full member of the international society of civilized states, it must commit itself, at minimum, to the following principles: human rights and the rule of law, representative democracy in governance, economic liberalism and free markets open to international trade and foreign investment, religious and cultural pluralism, and the efficacy of science and technology. If, in the process of becoming globalized and liberalized, a state can claim to promote and adhere to these principles, then it is deemed to have arrived at that exalted condition known as modernity, or more accurately, Western modernity. (Bowden, 2009, p. 186)

Furthermore, the language of civilisation is structured by a future-oriented grammar of time that sets “progress” as a narrative necessity that simultaneously enables and disables possibilities. The progressive temporal orientation of modernity emerged with the origin of civilisation as a concept as well, as Bowden reminds us quoting Starobinski: “[the] word civilization, which denotes a process, entered the history of ideas at the same time as the modern sense of the word progress. The two words were destined to maintain a most intimate relationship” (Bowden, 2009, p. 46; Starobinski, 1993). The narrative of modern progress together with the idea
of civilisation formally emerged with Enlightenment philosophy (Kant, Hegel) and developed properly with early social science (Condorcet, Comte).

This progressive narrative is based on the belief that human history follows a series of laws that pre-set future human behaviour which, in turn, finds its way to constant improvement. Its top achievement is Civilisation, modernity or development. Any society, then, can be measured/judged on its level of civilisation, progress, modernisation or development placed on a linear time line in which some are closer to the future end and others to its past one. For the most recalcitrant ideologues, there are some societies that are innately incapable of reaching the future end. For the most sympathetic, there are some policies that may help the backward peoples to become civilised, modern. These policies are, of course, the ones established by the standard of civilisation, the standard of modernity. As such, then, the universe of possibilities for any society that wants to belong to the international community is constrained: it must design its change or transformation strategy under the interpretative framework of this narrative of progress. Its only option (forcibly or not) is then to locate itself in this self-defined timeline, always striving to get to the future end through following the civilisation/modernity formula.¹³

This progressive narrative has been widely criticised and it is by now common place of several critical schools. As an illustration of their common critical stand towards civilisation and modernity I will only refer to a quote so frequently cited by critical scholarship that it has become its mantra. The quote is from Walter Benjamin’s famous *Thesis on the Philosophy of History.*

A Klee painting named “Angelus Novus” shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly

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¹³It is worth remembering here that this same progressive imaginary inspires the contemporary narrative of “development”, which classifies countries as “developed” and “underdeveloped”. Pertinent critical assessments of this theory can be traced back to “dependency theory”, a research agenda followed by the group surrounding Raúl Prebisch from 1949 in Brazil. Today many scholars are working on a post-developmental theory. This thesis is inspired by the post-developmental research agenda as proposed by Escobar (2012) and (Gibson-Graham, 2006b).
propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress. (1968, p. 257)

Benjamin’s evocative critique of modernity is relevant to my analysis of the TJe and the narrative of progress at its (inexplicit) normative foundation. The wreckage Benjamin’s angel is staring at could be seen as the accumulated debris of European successive wars, especially World War II and the Nazi Holocaust, but also of colonialism. It suggests a disenchantment from the narrative of progress, a force that pushes humanity to the future leaving a legacy of destruction.

To get a clearer idea of what the connotations of this disenchanted vision of progress are, it is worth bringing in another theoretician from the critical Frankfurt School, Theodor Adorno. For him, “To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric” (Adorno, 1981, p. 34). In this passage Adorno points out the moral difficulty, if not impossibility, of appreciating beauty using the same modern framework that facilitated the Holocaust. But this paragraph does not only refer to the moral paradox of modernity claiming a kind of technological, bureaucratic and artistic progress while at the same time, and because of it, creating the most effective murder machine of all times. It is also, perhaps more importantly, about the moral impossibility of any totalising narrative, including any poetry aiming to synthesise the human experience. In this sense, his critique is directed to the totalising breath of modern poetry, an aspiration proper to modern drives of total understanding and total control. In that way, writing poetry with totalising aspirations is barbaric; it is violent to the extreme of aestheticising the normative framework that facilitated totalitarianism and systematic murder in the first place.

When the transitional justice equation is the only language that articulates the political possibilities in transitions to peaceful societies, one must remember Bauman’s precaution:

[T]he rules of instrumental rationality [inspired by discourses of civilisation and modernity] are singularly incapable of preventing such phenomena [the Holocaust]; [...] there is nothing in those rules which disqualifies the Holocaust-style methods of “social-engineering” as improper or, indeed, the actions they served as irrational. I suggest, further, that the bureaucratic culture which prompts us to view society as an object of administration, as a collection of so many “problems” to be solved, as “nature” to be “controlled”, “mastered” and “improved” or “remade”, as a legitimate target for “social engineering”, and in general a garden to be designed and kept in the planned shape by force [...], was the very atmosphere in which the idea of the
Holocaust could be conceived, slowly yet consistently developed, and brought to its conclusion. (2000, p. 18)

A similar twisted process applies when pragmatic transitional justice is uncritically used for policy making. As we will see in Chapter Two, the Colombian transitional justice process occurs under the expectation that the democratic rule of law will bring peace. Simultaneously, the government pursues policies of economic modernisation in rural areas where paramilitary terror displaced millions of people. These policies encourage entrepreneurs to consolidate agribusinesses in land that small farmers owned before being displaced. The government narrative of economic prosperity thus tacitly justifies the paramilitary economic project. This process coincides in a twisted and macabre way with a transitional justice based on the promise of delivering peace. Even by the time of my ethnography in one of these rural regions, many small farmers were still afraid to come back to their lands since the terror and paramilitary control were still latent. When challenged from this critical perspective, the pragmatic scholarship of the modern progress narrative of transitional justice starts to loose its grip over our political imagination for future possibilities.

Although critical theory (e.g. Benjamin, Adorno, Horkheimer), post-structuralism (e.g. Foucault, Derrida), postmodernism (e.g. Bauman, Baudrillard), or even post-colonialism (e.g. Spivak)\textsuperscript{14} may seem dead end roads where our only remaining utopia (modernity) is the source of our very own destruction, my project is to read transitional justice’s core normative framework for new possibilities. When analysed \textit{conceptually}, the ultimately future-oriented modern grammar of time, upon which the narrative of pragmatic transitional justice scholarship rests, can be challenged. My critique will focus on the transit from violence to peace, from barbarism to civilisation and from the past to the future that informs the pragmatic transitional justice scholarship.

3. Haunting the modern understanding of time

As shown above, the TJ performs a particular meta-historical narration of a particular narrative of progress. In order to open the possibility for other world-views to intervene in the transitional justice meaning-creation process, we have to develop a critical examination of the way

\textsuperscript{14} Although Spivak’s critique may suggest an existential dead end, I find inspiration from postcolonial historical accounts of modernity that explore the diverse origin of modernity. I would suggest that this kind of historical approach focused on diversity (which is not the same as relativistic questioning of historical facts) is precisely the kind of backward and long term view transitional justice may need to do justice to the past. As mentioned above, my guides here are of course Bernal (1987), Buck-Morss (2009b), Chakrabarty (2008), Dussel (2008), Rediker (2000), Said (2003), among others.
modern thought structures time. The modern understanding of time locates events sequentially on a flat time-line divided in past, present and future. It seems unquestionable that this is how time works.

Nevertheless, some authors have pointed out that the way modernity describes how time works is the result of a long-term historical process in European thought. In this sense, rather than just how time naturally works, this experience is more a matter of meaning-creation and lively experience conditioned by particular historical circumstances, roughly what Charles Tylor defines as “background understanding” (Taylor, 2004, 2007). I follow Charles Taylor’s *A Secular Age* (Taylor, 2007) to trace the historical unfolding of our contemporary background understanding of time through the description of how it came to be as it is and what possibilities could be found in it for opening it up for different experiences of time. I first define what “background understanding” as a concept is. Then, I describe how it changed from transcendental/multi-layered times to an immanent/one-layer time. In the process of describing this change, it will be evident how our background understanding of time shapes how we design our social practices and institutions, how it enables and disables different sets of possibilities. Third, I define what are the particular characteristics of our modern background understanding of time and how it is so far taken as a future oriented one, an idea that shapes our understanding of what progress means. Finally, I make a case for the need to consider haunting as one of the possibilities for rethinking transitional justice, as it represents the resistance to letting the past be gone, challenging, then, the modern clear-cut of past, present and future.

I have chosen Charles Taylor’s genealogy of modernity in *A Secular Age* as one of its main contributions is his analysis of the change of our background understanding of time from a transcendental one composed by several dimensions to the modern one-layered one that is properly immanent. In order to comprehend the characteristics of this change it is necessary to have a better grasp of what Taylor means by “background understanding” and how it is a historical social meaning-creation that shapes practices and institutions.

Taylor uses this concept “drawing on the work of Heidegger, Wittgenstein, and Polanyi” (2007, p. 794). In his words, “Heidegger has raised this issue of the “meaning of being”, the usually unspoken, background understanding of what entities are, which can change from epoch to epoch” (2007, p. 95). To introduce us to the Heideggerian concept of understanding, Hubert Dreyfus suggests that it is mainly a “fundamental existenciale” anchored not precisely to a cognitive phenomenon (as something that can be conceived and explained), but instead it is constituted as the universe of the doable, of what comes to our mind as possible, even as an imaginary impossibility. In his words, “[...] understanding reveals some actions as doable, as
making sense, and others as not, or, better, it does not reveal these other possibilities as possibilities at all” (Dreyfus, 1991, pp. 184–185).

Following this Heideggerian tradition, Taylor suggests that this universe of possibilities is subject to change over time. This is because it is a meaning-creation process grounded in long-term social interactions. Taylor defines a background understanding, hence, as a “social imaginary”. In a sense, our social practices, the institutions we collectively build and perpetuate, become part of our reality because we share a collective belief in their very possibility. Henceforth, our social imaginary is constituted by, first, the facts that make these practices possible. On a second level, after having a background understanding of the universe of possibilities, there is a normative level, which is composed by those actions that we consider “normal”: “[Conceptually, a background understanding] is both factual and “normative”; that is, we have a sense of how things usually go, but this is interwoven with an idea of how they ought to go, of what mis-steps would invalidate the practice” (2007, p. 172). In this way, a background understanding at the same time enables us to see what is possible (compelling us to take action in its terms) and limits the universe of what comes to our minds as doable and/or even feasible. It is at the same time, then, a process of including and of excluding which gives for itself a sort of singularity that differentiates it from other epochs and even other lifeworlds.

For Taylor, our particular modern social imaginary holds a characteristic background understanding of time that is the result of significant changes over the last five centuries with important consequences for our social practices and institutions. In Taylor’s words:

In earlier ages, the understanding was that this profane time existed in relation to [...] higher times. Pre-modern understandings of time seem to have been always multidimensional. Time was transcended and held in place by eternity [...] eternit was not just endless profane time, but an ascent into the unchanging, or a kind of gathering of time into a unity [...]. Modern “secularization” can be seen from one angle as the rejection of higher times, and the positing of time as purely profane. Events now exist only in this one dimension, in which they stand at greater and lesser temporal distance, and in relations of causality with other events of the same kind. (2007, pp. 194–195)

The modern background understanding of time has particular performative effects whereby time works as a recipient that contains the diversity of human beliefs and actions and shapes them into the form of a one-dimensional sequence of past, present and future. This change accompanied the transformations of our normative ideas about philosophical, social, political and economic order. According to Taylor, up until the Middle Ages the different layers of time were
hierarchically related. In this way it was possible to imagine a King with two bodies, one inhabiting the secular everyday life, and the other a sacred time. The latter, then, functioned as his source of authority and gave a sense of coherence to the administration of human affairs. In contrast, from the 1500s onwards, order is imagined as the achievement of self-contained individuals in the search of intimacy, self-realisation and to be able and willing to participate in government, the market economy and the public sphere (2007, p. 543). This required, then, that actions took place “here and now”, under systematic planning and control by individuals reared to be “citizens”, part of the “civilised” world. According to Taylor, “[...] they have taken us from a world in which higher times made everyday sense, to one in which the monopoly of secular time over public space is unchallenged” (2007, p. 713).

For Taylor, our background understanding of time is linked to the way we design our institutions. In this sense, it is a particular image of how things work and, hence, how they ought be done. In the latter sense, we can find a second level of meaning-creation that is not just related to the form time is shaped, but also to the value we assign to the different stages on this timeline. Following Habermas’ reading of Hegel, our modern imagination is characterised by a valuation of the future, or more precisely, of the new, of novelty. According to Habermas,

The Secular [modern, one-dimensional] concept of modernity expresses the conviction that the future has already begun: It is the epoch that lives for the future that opens itself up to the novelty of the future. In this way the caesura defined by the new beginning has been shifted into the past, precisely to the start of modern times [...]. (1987, p. 5)

This modern understanding of time leaned towards novelty, being a historical process, renders a very specific template of social order. The future that “has already begun” is rooted on the nowadays hegemonic belief in the Euro-American political (state, rule of law), social (democracy, instrumental individualism) and economical (market economy, capitalism) narrative of progress. Transitional justice debates rely on this narrative, where the future of political transitions is imagined as a clear breaking with the past and the realisation of readymade European progress.

Despite all the well-intentioned optimism of transitional justice policy debates, at the root of modernity’s background understanding of time and progress lies a significant silencing. In Habermas’ words:

Modernity’s specific orientation toward the future is shaped precisely to the extent the societal modernization tears apart the old European experimental space of the peasant’s and craftsman’s lifeworlds, mobilizes it, and devalues it into directives
guiding expectations. These traditional experiences of previous generations are then replaced by the kind of experience of progress that lends to our horizon of expectation (till then anchored fixedly in the past) a “historically new quality constantly subject to being overlaid with utopian conceptions”. (1987, p. 12)

This may sound like a historical process specific to Europe that now seems to be far in the past. However, this modern process of breaking with the past and tearing apart “peasant’s and craftsman’s lifeworlds” is also present in modernity’s global expansion. Chapter Two describes a similar process in the case of the Colombian transitional process where the world of the small farmer is silenced under the overwhelming military, political and economic support of the world of the new agribusiness entrepreneur.  

Here it is possible to remain sceptical of a naive optimism towards a transitional justice based on the normative claims of modernity around the narrative of progress. As Arturo Escobar warns us: “[...] modernity and development are spatial-cultural projects that require the continuous conquest of territories and peoples and their ecological and cultural transformation [...]” (Escobar, 2004b, p. 16).

There is a connection, then, between a very concrete violence of silencing the peasant’s and craftsman’s lifeworlds caused by the cultural transformations of economic practices and the modern narrative of progress: violent dispossession, forced displacement and labour exploitation. Pragmatic approaches to transitional justice prioritise a legalistic policy-oriented grasp on social change that silences those other-than-modern worlds under the claim that liberal modern progress alone will guarantee long-term peace and development. What is forgotten, intentionally or not, is that the aggressive modern totalising drives that underlie global economic liberalisation (political, social and spiritual transformations included) are in most cases precisely the source of the violence.

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15 I find important to keep these two conceptual discussions of the ideas of “background understanding”, life-word”, “world”, separate. I use the discussion of these concepts in Chapter One to highlight the linear and progressive background understanding of time characteristic of modernity. The discussion of this concept in Chapter Two does the work of highlighting the constitutive interrelation between practice and moral believes, which is essential to understand the relationship between protocols of social interaction and economic production and the existential meaning these practices give to everyday life. The latter sense is key to understand what was the effect of terror and displacement for the victims and survivor of the Las Brisas massacre.

16 It is important to point out how this process is not unidirectional and incontestable, e.g. urban agriculture and participatory (non-representative) democracy. Although it of course doesn’t mean a “coming back to the past” sort of politics, where individualism, freedom and equality are displaced for values of collectivism, submission and hierarchy, it does mean a reflexive take on the aggressive and destructive dimension of modernity, and hence an attempt to create assemblages of rural-urban, craft-industrial, spiritual-secular, old-new, lifestyles and ethics. See, for example, (Roelvink, St. Martin, & Gibson-Graham, 2015; Santos, 2007)
that transitional justice is trying to overcome.\(^{17}\) It is the narrative of progress serving as the foundation of the transitional justice project that prevents it from creating substantial change.

4. Silence in the law

As a method for strengthening the rule of law, state-building, democratising and modernising institutions, transitional justice strategies are based on policy-making decisions grounded in laws. From a critical law intellectual tradition, laws are more than fixed rules dictated by rational/modern principles, and more than a transparent image of peoples’ values and beliefs or even norms for conflict regulation. Laws are embedded in politically contested struggles to define how legal concepts will fit a certain image of what society, democracy, justice, public good, etc. should look like (Douzinas, 2000; Laclau & Mouffe, 2001).\(^{18}\)

In the context of transitional justice, this political process aims to determine the scope of the past violence it will account for. Legal anthropology enquiries have recently developed a nuanced understanding and description of the close relationship between law, power and knowledge production especially in this kind of context. The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), for example, highlighted very concrete crimes where the oppressive nature of the apartheid regime was evident. However, the TRC was legally structured to read from the past just those crimes perpetrated within a very restrained time-frame (1960-1994) and with a very limited conceptualisation of “violence” as only those acts which were synonymous with human rights violations. As Castillejo-Cuéllar points out, the definition of this relatively short period of time defined the reality against which New South African democracy would be built. The knowledge structured by this short period of time left out forced displacement, dispossession, exploitation and the very experience of an overarching segregation system that justified and maintained colonisation since way before 1960 as irrelevant for political action and left behind to the archive as a passive past (Castillejo-Cuéllar, 2007, p. 32).\(^{19}\)

Furthermore, as Richard Wilson points out in his study on the TRC, “the struggle over defining justice in the first years of post-apartheid [...] presented itself as a struggle over how to deal with the political crimes of the apartheid past, and, in so doing, to reconfigure legal authority in the present” (Wilson, 1997, p. 352). The TRC law-making process is, then, an epistemological

\(^{17}\)This is clearer when transitional justice is read as a process part of a post-Cold War democratisation history. I will explore this further on Chapter Five.

\(^{18}\)I would call this “should” a “normative claim”, although, of course, a normative claim is always partial and politically contested. Neither Douzinas nor Laclau and Mouffe, though, address this political process with this language. I take a “soft” approach to normativity precisely because of its historical and political contingency. I take distance, then, from more rigid conceptions of normativity that aim to define universal and atemporal moral truths.

\(^{19}\)See also (Castillejo-Cuellar, 2009; Grunebaum-Ralph, 2001).
design where very concrete politics determine the lens (1960-1994 human rights violations) to observe the object of the law (the apartheid’s particular mode of violence).

Seen from this perspective, transitional justice laws are composed of two simultaneous processes. These are active processes of voicing, illuminating, and hence narrating past injustice or violence, and, at the same time, of silencing it. First, when these laws define what is going to be understood by “past violence” they include certain kinds of violence such as human rights violations, but at the same time exclude other kinds of violence such as structural dispossession caused by colonial regimes. Hence, they frame the very official historical knowledge about the past. This framing process gives voice to a certain narration that simultaneously silences others depending on the power distribution of the concrete political situation (e.g. 1900’s South Africa). In this sense, transitional laws are active processes of narration, where the legal descriptive concept of “violence” constructs the consistent historical narrative upon which the state operates. As Michelle-Rolph Trouillot briefly puts it: “[...] any historical narrative is a particular bundle of silences” (Trouillot, 1995, p. 27).

As stated above, the normative claims of transitional justice discourse perform a particular meta-narrative of progress that shapes the policy-making designs and practices of transitional justice. In this sense, political transitions are not designed nowadays to promote “new beginnings”. They are designed to promote the beginning of an already known modern future: a future where peace is guaranteed by capitalist prosperity facilitated by democratic rule of law. Post-Cold War modernity is, then, a narrative performed by transitional justice’s laws. While it may open a very compelling set of possibilities, it simultaneously closes crucial opportunities for genuine positive change.

This is not surprising at all. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note how this process happens: what is the precise content of what is silenced and what is spoken? What are the conditions of possibility of this silencing? In this way, the basic assumptions of transitional justice are undermined by a wilful over-positive assumption that the TJe in itself is enough to bring peace and prosperity. This assumption is speaking over many other narratives, especially those related with ways of living together through very concrete economic practices that make sense for people suffering the violence that transitional justice is precisely trying to address.

5. Conjuring up the haunting time of reconciliation

Conceptual debates on transitional justice offer the potential to open up our political imagination to other-than-liberal-technocratic possibilities in the context of political transitions.
In this section I aim to unlock these debates and begin to think and create a different language of transitional justice.

Until now I have assessed the future oriented narrative of progress that informs legalistic and policy oriented transitional justice formulations. There is, though, an interesting temporal tension within the transitional justice equation. Indeed, the general forward outlook of transitional justice that depends on accountability of the past sets up the possibility of challenging the future oriented modern narrative of progress. As one of the most influential conceptual scholars in the field of transitional justice states it, “in the transitional justice discourse, revisiting the past is understood as the way to move forward” (Teitel, 2003, p. 86). Evidence of this can be found in the South African constitution of 1993, set up to facilitate the post-apartheid transition and establish a Truth and Reconciliation Commission:

This Constitution provides a historic bridge between the past of a deeply divided society characterized by strife, conflict, untold suffering and injustice, and a future founded on the recognition of human rights, democracy and peaceful co-existence and development opportunities for all South Africans, irrespective of color, race, class, belief or sex. (The constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1993, p. National Unity and Reconciliation provision)

Teitel reads this tension between past, present and future (the tension in the modern grammar of time), but leaves the potential of structural change towards other-than-formalistic-liberal futures unscrutinised. In her words, “[…] transitional law is both backward- and forward-looking, as it disclaims past illiberal values and reclaims liberal norms” (Teitel, 2014, p. 96). By naming this process a “collective liberalizing narrative” (p. 105) she denies the radical potential of transitional justice. In this way, despite the silencing performance of “future-oriented” modern narratives, it is interesting to note the insertion into its normative landscape of a backward-looking drive which is meant to bring about a new future. As such, in transitional justice’s practices and normative reflections, the boundaries between past, present and future are particularly unstable (Bevernage, 2012).

Let us then explore this tension in its conceptual dimension together with other scholars in the field who have been working straightforwardly on this tension through the concepts of reconciliation and reparation.

After the popularisation of the South African transitional justice model, this process of accountability of past violations of human rights was significantly enlarged by the concepts of
memory, restoration and reconciliation. These concepts added a specific and quite new character to a notion of accountability solidly attached to the simple democratisation narrative performed by the TJe. The idea of truth as a vehicle for not just collecting the facts of past violence but also restoring the voice of the survivors invested memory with an important political role (Verdeja, 2006a, 2006b, 2008). Remembering became an act of dignification of the survivors that simultaneously meant the constitution of a new post-apartheid subjectivity that in turn would open a genuine possibility of reconciliation (Christodoulidis, 2000).

In this way, reconciliation went far further from a “no war” conception of peace. It meant a performative constitutional act. This act recognises that the founding ‘we’ is not the same ‘we’ that the act is directed to: the ‘we’ must be confirmed by itself in the future (Schaap, 2006). In sum, after the South African post-apartheid transition, accountability of the past became a present strategy to reimagine the future. In this sense, the modern linear time-line that solidifies a qualitative break between past, present and future is blurred by the “memory of offence” (Bevernage, 2010).

Furthermore, accountability in transitional justice in this period started to be based on the concept of “restorative justice”, implying that if there is going to be any genuine “transition”, our conception of doing justice to the past had to mean repairing what was broken (Braithwaite, 2002; Kiss, 2000). After the Latin American and South African transitional processes, the idea that punishment was not enough to do justice to victims grew in importance. In order to (re)establish the rule of law, it was also necessary to bring that legal system to those that had suffered the most. As such, restoring victims’ rights is seen nowadays as part of the project of transitional justice and as a guarantor of long-lasting peace and development/progress. Restorative justice, however, seems to be a very difficult task. According to Andrieu, one of the basic assumptions of restorative justice is that “criminal justice should aim at reconciling the parties and repairing the wrong rather than simply punishing the perpetrator” (2010, p. 9). After the South African TRC, the truth and reconciliation commission model has become the paradigm for achieving reconciliation through restorative justice. To do it, TRCs must promote the recognition of the victims’ suffering through a number of strategies. Some of them are, for example, public apologies, memorial sites, victims’ testimonies, truth-finding teams, and, key for this thesis, reparation of victims’ economic loss. Associated with this last claim are all sorts of mechanisms, for example housing, health and

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20 The origin of truth commissions can be traced back to Argentina and Chile, where a group of notable civilians were assigned to investigate the composition, actions and development of dictatorships after the demise of the military regimes. Truth commissions were meant to look at the past to produce a legal-like accountability document. Their function would change with the addition of reconciliation to their normative landscape.

21 Here I interpret Shaap with the concept of “performativity” developed by (Derrida, 2002) in his essays about the American constitution.
education subsidies, compensation in cash, and different strategies to promote productivity and sustainability among the victims. Some most recent debates in transitional justice scholarship surround the challenge of economic reparation. For them, the matter under scrutiny is social justice (Arbour, 2007; Duthie, 2008; Greiff & Duthie, 2009; Mani, 2008; Z. Miller, 2008; Roht-Arriaza & Mariezcurrena, 2006). Most of this research is still in the realm of pragmatic questions about how to promote mainstream ideas of development under the strong belief that development (a contemporary politically correct way to say “progress”) is in itself the condition for long-lasting peace.

There is a potentially productive ground for reflection in the middle of this intersection between reconciliation, reparation and, ultimately, social justice in transitional justice debates. Reconciliation in all its dimensions, including social justice, aims to bring together dissociated parties, to renew a conflicted community. Recent scholarship on reconciliation has shown the complexities of this claim (Bashir, 2011; Christodoulidis, 2000; Hirsch, 2011; Perrin & Veitch, 1998; Schaap, 2004, 2006; Veitch, 2007). For some of its critics, reconciliation is also a meta-narrative that supposes a community must be rebuilt after it was violently broken. However, as in the case of South Africa or Australia, that community cannot be rebuilt since settlers or colonisers established strong boundaries between settlers and natives, boundaries than in most cases meant a narrative justification for extermination: there is no community to rebuild because there was no community in the first place. Instead, community must be constituted (Schaap, 2004). Reconciliation in this way must remain open to the possibilities of any outcome, since a future inspired by the one-sided narrative of liberal modern progress would mean the failure of reconciliation itself (Christodoulidis, 2000; Schaap, 2006).

Reconciliation as the final outcome of transitional justice would require, then, a particular attitude towards justice. This more conceptual literature on reconciliation and reparation suggests that justice must be understood not as the definitive restitution of a previous community, but as an open-ended dialogue. I propose to gain deeper insight into this kind of justice by addressing it through Derridean ideas about the responsibility to “the other”. Inspired by Levinas, Derrida challenges liberal ethics. Respecting someone in the name of the law is not, for Derrida, respecting that person in her radical singularity, a singularity, then, that is out of the law’s jurisdiction precisely because it is incalculable and hence undecidable. This undecidable property makes any definitive decision in terms of responsibility always-ever incomplete. Extrapolating this understanding of justice to larger social/theoretical dimensions, Derrida sees, then, any decision about justice as oriented towards an unknown future. In his words, “[...] the decision, if there is to be one, must advance towards a future which is unknown, which cannot be anticipated” (Derrida, 1994a, p. 38). As
such, then, a transitional justice that is not constrained by a ready-made template of a modern liberal future requires the aporetic ethics of undecidability: radical singularity leaves the question of justice always open, always as a site of questioning where we never cease to return to, and hence of constant reworking of the current by visiting the past. It is in this particular way that it is pertinent, if at all, to use the word “future”: an unknown time.

In this way, Derridean undecidability is also a challenge to an understanding of time based on a linear timeline of causal past, present and future. For Derrida, metaphysics is based on the possibility of an indivisible self. Henceforth, it privileges presence, or that which is. According to Raynolds, in Derrida’s theory the present “[...] is always already compromised by a trace, or a residue of a previous experience, that precludes us ever being in a self-contained “now” moment” (Reynolds, 2010). In this thesis I explore the potentialities of transitional justice from within its own normative demands for reconciliation and reparation. In doing so, it is necessary to reveal its very potential for injustice in silencing the other. I argue that transitional justice must preclude any attempt to set and fix the boundaries between past, present and future. In other words, transitional justice must host what Derrida calls haunting.

As Christiane Wilke (2010) sharply points out in the case of German courts addressing both Nazi and Communist state agents’ crimes, there is a tension between the need for securing the state’s legitimacy and sovereignty in present times and the call for a deep reflection on the presence of those practices and beliefs from the past in the very exercise of the courts’ sovereignty today. Seen from this point of view, the modern progressive timeline boundaries at the foundation of transitional justice normative claims are not settled at all: in the case of German courts, and perhaps many others, the past inhabits the present. Wilke describes this as courts haunted by ghosts from the past.

In this case, ghosts represent “haunting reminders” from past “inaudible experiences” that make the issues for account today not addressable without examining those in the past (Gordon, 1996). From Wilke’s perspective, courts fail in doing justice today precisely because they don’t do justice to the ghosts from the past. Therefore, transitional justice’s explicit insertion of a backward-looking horizon of enquiry poses a particularly productive time tension able to even challenge modern narratives of progress. Researching the haunting property of transitional justice proposes, hence, a significant qualitative shift from a strictly linear understanding of time. Haunting, in this way, puts forward a take on justice where the past is always speaking to present times. As Labanyi states it, “ghosts [are] the traces of those who have not been allowed to leave a trace, [they] are by definition the victims of history who return to demand reparation” (Labanyi, 2001). Repairing, doing justice to the past, speaking with ghosts – all of it requires deeply reflecting
and rethinking time in transitional justice. As Wilke clearly puts it, “if there is any justice to be had through an engagement with ghosts, it requires the departure from the linear temporality that arranges past, present and future in linear progression and clear separation from one another” (2010, p. 78).

A few critical scholars of transitional justice have also found ghosts and haunting useful to illuminate their understanding of what is at stake in transitional justice. Baines (2010), for example, has found that reconciliation of “intimate enemies” after war is possible through cultural practices that deal with spirits conjured by experiences of injustice in northern Uganda. For her, top down policies of transitional justice fail to deliver the transformative power that these practices achieve. Similarly, Igreja and Dias-Lambranca (2008) have shown that transitional justice scholars disregard Mozambique’s peace agreement on 1992 because of its limited scope in terms of bringing perpetrators to trial. His ethnographic research shows how the traumatic past returning in the form of unsettling ghosts or apparitions of Gamba spirits. The local cultural traditions around these spirits create social spaces that provided the conditions not only for individuals to reconcile and heal, but to reinstate and relive community institutions. For him, though, this kind of autonomous and organic community reconciliation practices cannot overshadow processes of accountability of power structures, which in turn can easily legitimate impunity under the veil of cultural relativism.

My interest in these traditional justice practices is not how they might help transitional justice consolidate a democratisation project. On the contrary, the challenge is how we can rethink, reconceptualise and change transitional justice altogether by appreciating what traditional justice has to teach us about justice when it deals with a haunting “past”. How can transitional justice integrate the productive power of haunting experiences into its core structure by learning from traditional justice? This is a classic question of how the particular can be made general. What is necessary, then, is to use experiences of haunting on the ground to build a conceptual apparatus, a language that can deliver a suitable understanding of justice that perform a grammar of time that is different from the one structuring narratives of progress. It is the aim of this thesis to search for such a language.

In this way, it is possible to start by acknowledging that this haunting power is blocked by a transitional justice scholarship loaded with assumptions of how the future should be: a liberal modern narrative where the rule of law, democracy and the capitalist market economy are necessary values and institutions of any future peaceful society. These normative claims perform a particular narrative about how transitions must happen. However, transitional justice inserts in its modern liberal narrative an element of haunting justice: the past made relevant to the present. This haunting challenges the very potential of the modern liberal narrative to become the only way...
to make sense of arbitrary attempts to settle the boundaries between past violence and future peace.

 Transitional justice could be understood as meaning just an extraordinary justice that happens during the extraordinary time of transition. From this perspective, it entails a pragmatic approach where the sole interest of scholarly research is to analyse and suggest best policy practices. This analysis and strategic action, however, is limited to a particular set of possibilities framed by a deeply questionable modern way to see the world. Defined as a set of practices to assist societies in transition, it sidelines the fact that it shapes societies in need of significant change to fit a homogenising liberal narrative. In this sense, the contemporary mainstream pragmatism of transitional justice is designed to promote transitions from an illiberal regime to its default other: free markets and liberal democracy, especially (and perhaps only) when it means electoral democracy.  

6. A haunting research agenda

It is in fact surprising that transitional justice debates have not developed a substantial account of the violent past of its own narrative by engaging with well established critiques of modernity and liberalism. In this sense, what is framed as a pragmatic approach is actually making invisible its very own potential to enable new possibilities.

Underlying this silencing process is the modern narrative of progress, as it is based on a specific understanding of time and a philosophy of presence. Haunting, as devised by Derrida, proposes a systematic critique to this narrative. I take it as my general research agenda: it is by observing haunting, and adopting a haunting mode of observation, that I aim to find a different vocabulary for transitional justice.

This critical perspective has been developed by those interested in venturing out of classificatory oppositions, such as object/subject, as they find in them the simplifications that structure the philosophy of presence and the modern understanding of time that articulates the narrative of progress and legitimises modern narrative binaries such as human/nature, male/female, civilised/savage, modern/traditional, etc. The questioning of binaries can be seen in

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22 Following the work of Nicolas Guilhot (2002), Paige Arthur points out how transitional justice emerged in the 1980s and 90s in the context of a paradigm shift about social change and democratisation. She argues that sociologists, historians and political scientists had claimed that democracy was only possible under appropriate structural conditions developed over long periods of time. From the 1960’s on, sociology had changed its paradigm to show that social change was not the natural result of a set of pre-conditions, but actually the consequence of elite leadership able to push institutional reforms in the short and mid-terms. In this context, transitional justice scholars and activists understood that their job was to lead these institutional reforms and “engineer” social change towards a desired outcome: democracy (Arthur, 2009, pp. 337–339).
early 20th century critical philosophy and post-structuralist analysis of modernity. Heidegger, a pioneer in this journey, provided perhaps the most powerful philosophical tools for this task when he conceptualised the being of humans not as rational neutral individual observers of the world, but beings that have been thrown into the world and that can become themselves only through it. In this sense, human experience is not the one of a subject detached from a world composed by a myriad of objects. Instead, the being of human is one of learning and contextualisation, of intersections and intimacies, thus a being of becoming genuine when human beings disclose themselves by their intimate experience with the world. Heidegger in this way shows how modern philosophy turns the world, that is open and intimate, into a distant and impersonal set of objects (Dreyfus, 1991).

The challenges to modern binaries are indeed very pertinent to my research. In his critique to classic phenomenology, Derrida addresses the long standing question of classic philosophy: what is to be? In his understanding, this question too quickly prioritises presence (or what it is) and underscores, if not entirely ignores, the particular effects of absence (or what is not). Challenging the hierarchically superior location of presence, and its logic of dualisms, Derrida would argue that, for phenomenology, the recourse to the nemonic necessary to recall and relate the actuality of phenomena taints the very idea of presence with the trace of the past. In other words, our interaction with the world relies on our capacity to recall and build on previous experiences of it, specially in the case of social life, where historically constructed languages, symbols and manners are essential for an effective interaction with others. So, in contrast with the binary of what it is and what is not, of ontology, he would propose a philosophy that he calls hauntology. Simply put, its grounding principle is the “doubtful contemporaneity of the present to itself.” (Derrida, 1994b, p. 39). This principle is essential for enabling haunting as a mode of observation with the potential of challenging transitional justice by complicating the arbitrary boundary-making between time tenses.

Furthermore, when talking about death, disappearance and silence, as we will see in Chapter Two, haunting becomes a useful way of letting the interaction between absence and presence become meaningful. Indeed, Avery Gordon, who has explored the idea of haunting and ghosts in the theoretical field of sociology, puts it very clearly: “[H]aunting describes how that which appears to be not there is often a seething presence, acting on and often meddling with taken-for-granted realities [...]” (1996, p. 8). Indeed, haunting as challenge to the modern understanding of time is also Derrida’s response to the philosophy of presence, to Fukuyama’s “End of history” and the narrative of progress it conveys. His critique of Fukuyama takes on the latter’s use of Hegel. Evoking Hegel, Fukuyama defends representative democracy and market
capitalism as actualising (making present) the human spirit to its fullest. Derrida’s project is precisely to dismantle the idea of a totalised expression of being (in this case the “human spirit” actualised in the post-Cold War American narrative of liberal modern progress). In order to articulate his critique, Derrida scrutinises Husserlian phenomenology and find it fails to break with two totalising projects: the closed subjectivity of the idealists and the brute imposing objectivity of the materialist. To bridge subject and object, and hence to overcome the debate between idealism and materialism, Husserlian phenomenology proposes to strip the ‘natural outlook’ from psychological and empirical contingencies. In Howells’ words, phenomenology “[…] abandons the ‘natural attitude’ in an effort to describe, without preconception, what appears to the consciousness […]” (Howells, 1999, p. 7). Consciousness, then, becomes a transparent and unified receiver of phenomena that, if it is to grasp any truth, needs to abstract itself from any concrete cultural/political/economic contingency: to be understood as ahistorical, as fundamentally present. Derrida’s critique of the presence of conscience to itself is, according to Howells, most clearly exemplified by the role of writing and representation in the process of accessing phenomena. Indeed, if perception needs anticipation and memory, and its retention in symbols, as Husserl argues, then the present moment is contaminated with the non-present, and the continuity of present and non-present alters the character of consciousness as purely present, introducing an element of alterity that challenges its unity and transparency. On the contrary,

[…] it is, Derrida maintains, the non-self-identity of so-called originary presence that explains the possibility of reflection and representation which is essential to all lived experience. So the fissuring of the present moment fissures in its turn the self-identity of the inner self of the phenomenological reduction, and opens it up to the very alterity it was intended to exclude. (Howells, 1999, pp. 22–23)

Haunting is in this sense also a social theory concept that opens up the possibility of seeing the social in its complexity. It makes it possible to see and value simultaneity and indetermination, not as incomplete or wrongly analysed phenomena, but as the very character of the material of reflection. In questioning presence, then, haunting enables us also to attend to other kinds of partial agencies. In my theôria to Indonesia this dimension of haunting became extremely helpful to relate to the simultaneous belief systems cohabiting in the places I visited. While searching for haunting I was given different accounts of the various forms of spiritual agencies, human and non-human.

Derrida calls the concrete situation where the haunting happens the spectre. In order to grasp this more-than-human spirituality, I suggest to instead call the ghosts spirits. This signifier is an explicit attempt to reach beyond the anthropocentric imaginary usually related to ghosts as a
theoretical figure (all along Derrida’s dissertation on his hauntology he uses the King of Denmark as a metaphor to exemplify the spectre). The figure of spirits offers a broader comprehension of the haunting happening at the religious practices I witnessed in Central Java. At them, very diverse spiritual beings are called upon, from Allah and the Christian God to Hindu deities, spirits of the landscape or spirits of dead humans and animals. Contemporary debates about animism also contribute to the project of complicating simplistic binaries. As Ingold proposes:

Animacy [...] is the dynamic, transformative potential of the entire field of relations within which beings of all kinds, more or less person-like or thing-like, continually and reciprocally bring one another into existence. (2006, p. 10)

Animism so understood therefore joins the challenge to presence and opens up ontology to alterity, to haunting. Derridian hauntology, then, offers us an introduction to the relevance of animist/animated thinking, a theory for a complex world where absence and presence do not freeze in definitive oppositions but contaminate each other. This move is equally relevant to challenging the certainties of transitional justice articulation into the narrative of progress. Hauntolology renders an understanding of time that is itself open to alterity, where the linear progression from, and boundaries between, past, present and future are unstable and hence analytically unproductive. In equally challenges the possibility of unity, totality, fulfilment and presence that is also embedded in this narrative.

Haunting represents a research agenda dedicated to opening up the possibilities for other ways to see the world, for other voices to enter into the transitional justice language. Haunting challenges the attempt to silence meaningful worlds performed by the narrative of modern progress. Haunting breaks silence by acknowledging the agency of the past in the present. In Gordon’s words, haunting, or ghosts, are “[...] the principal form by which something lost or invisible or seemingly not there makes itself known or apparent to us” (1996, p. 63). The power of haunting, though, does not lie in re-formulating a lost past, if full restoration of what was lost. Instead, haunting resists the absolute consummation of silencing, as it invites to the search for meaning, a meaning which however always allusive.

Finally, haunting as a research agenda also marks a profound distance between a concept of justice as the respect for the law and justice understood as responsibility for the other. When anchored in the law (or in a normative claim of an already-made idea of progress), justice performs a reduction of the other to the same, exercising the violence of silencing the other’s radical alterity. Haunting, on the contrary, facilitates the possibility of embracing justice as an always open-ended dialogue; the justice of haunting means a respectful engagement with the other’s alterity. As a consequence, it always hosts an opportunity for transformation: “it involves being taken beyond
a dull curiosity or a detached know-it-all criticism into the passion of what is at stake [...] change cannot occur without [this] encounter” (Gordon, 1996, p. 203). In this way, it potentially can achieve what so far has been one of the most compelling normative claims of transitional justice: reconciliation as transformation. According to Christiane Wilke, “the encounter with ghosts might be structurally similar to the encounters involved in reconciliation more generally: both require giving up certainties about identities, power and boundaries -if they are successful, they leave everyone changed” (Wilke, 2010, p. 78).

In conclusion, my main concern is the modern liberal narrative of violence, justice and progress that articulates transitional justice’s language. I challenge this narrative by making haunting destabilise the modern narrative of progress. As a research agenda, haunting is a mode of observation and thinking that requires sensitivity to continuing and ethically demanding relevance to the past, which in turn allows a different ethics of alterity, a different mode of engaging with the other.

In the next chapter I explore the implications of haunting as a research agenda in terms of an ethics of research: how to perform the kind of justice I claim is needed for transitional justice in my very own work? This exploration is a post-facto reflection on my ethnographic experience in Colombia. There I interviewed politicians, human rights activists and organisations of survivors to analyse the negotiation process of the Colombian transitional justice legislation. One conversation dramatically marked my thinking and writing. At the commemoration of the 10th anniversary of a massacre perpetrated in Las Brisas, a small town in the mountains of the Colombian Caribbean, the wife of one of the victims kept silence after I put forward the possibility of talking about her loss. Her silence triggered, then, a reflection on how terror and violence operates to silence a meaning of a particular way to experience the world and dislocated my research to direct it to the question of how to make silence meaningful. Haunting in the next chapter helped me to disclose a different language to understand what the violence that transitional justice aims to address is about. This exploration led me to understand the central role of language in delivering a different understanding of transitional justice and, hence, to produce a different political agenda for actualising the normative claim of transitional justice: to end terror.
Chapter Two

World silencing: A lively conceptual exploration

1. Introduction

It was once a house, one among the few standing in the little town of Mampuján in the middle of the Colombian Caribbean Mountains. Half buried under mud and wild vegetation, the ruins of this town seemed to me reminders of a place that meant something to someone a few years ago. It was once a house like any other, a normal house. After the last massacre, the great majority of survivors left the town and, as time passed and nobody was there to care about the place, the town turned into uncanny ghostly ruins.

Nonetheless, the walls were speaking to me. They were like mute shouting, like a speaking silence of a past that in the presence of those ruins becomes contemporary, actual. In front of those walls I realised how violence operates to silence and to give voice. In this chapter, forced displacement in a rural municipality of Colombia is described as a process of silencing. Forced
displacement can be understood in this way when its structural similarities are compared with torture techniques. In forced displacement, as in torture, suffering and pain are forced upon the victims to erase their voice, their self, their world, while at the same time the voice of the torturer and their regime, their world is imposed. This comparison serves as a conceptual bridge rather than an absolute equation of the two, but I argue that what is at stake in forced displacement is a collective capacity to live, perpetuate and re-create a meaningful world. An understanding of forced displacement as an act of world-silencing presents a challenge for legalistic, formal and ‘pragmatic’ ideas of justice. I propose, following a haunting research agenda, that doing justice in the context of forced displacement requires a project of an ethics for listening, a project of acknowledging the agency of silence for our understanding and enactment of justice. Listening implies, then, to remain open to learn from and be changed by silence, by the specific silences that violence carves in order to impose narratives.

2. A lost world

I was standing amid the ruins of Mampuján, a haunted town in a world that refuses to entirely disappear. From there one starts to walk up the hills to get to Las Brisas, a vereda (rural locality) in the Colombian Caribbean inland. In Mampuján you can see a few empty houses without roofs, immersed in thick and tall grass, their lonely walls marked with the scars of bullets. The track from Mampuján to Las Brisas opens with a deep and wet mud. The path itself is talking to us; it is a swamp you have to cross to go to the place of memory.

That day the families of victims were walking to meet in Las Brisas for the commemoration of the tenth anniversary of a massacre. In 2000, a paramilitary army came to Las Brisas and called out twelve farmers, one by one, by their names. The army killed the farmers in front of their relatives and friends, old and young, men and women. Paramilitaries chose an almond tree for the massacre site because it was a landmark for many community activities. Ten years later the survivors decided to commemorate the massacre at that same tree. Between 1999 and 2001 alone, paramilitary forces committed 138 massacres in Los Montes de María, the geographical region where Las Brisas and Mampuján are located. Two thousand people were murdered in those years and 120,000 fled (Verdad Abierta, n.d.). Overall, according to the UNHCR, approximately four million people have been displaced in Colombia in just the last three decades, and the number is increasing (ACNUR, 2012). Many people in Las Brisas and Mampuján have abandoned their crops,
animals and houses. Most now live in the closest cities and towns, working low-paid jobs there or for new industrial plantations.

The most prominent scholarship on Colombian history has been dedicated to analysing the many aspects of recurrent cycles of violence. Tellingly, historians and sociologists dedicated to this field have been dubbed “violentologists”.23 The origins of the cycles of Colombian violence can be traced back in the long-durée to Spanish colonialism, independence and the first republican century (Guillén Martínez, 1979). More recent violentologists focus, however, primarily on the armed conflict initiated in 1945 with the assassination of the populist liberal social democrat leader Jorge Eliezer Gaitán (Braun, 1985) to explain the historical continuity of the current conflict (Palacios, 2003; Sánchez & Peñaranda, 1986; Urrego, 2002). During “La Violencia”, the decade after the assassination of Gaitán, conservative and liberal popular militia entered into a civil war. In this conflict, conservatives defended established powers (landlords, aristocracy, the church) while liberals defended more progressive social agendas (redistribution of land and wealth, secularism, participation and inclusion). The major traditional parties representing these two political ideologies signed a truce known as the “National Pact” where all positions in public administration were rotated from liberal to conservative parties every four years (Chacón Barrero, 2004; Guzmán, Fals Borda, & Umaña Luna, 2010; Hobsbawm, 2014; Palacios, 2003; Roldán, 2002; Sánchez & Meertens, 2001; Sánchez & Peñaranda, 1986; Uribe, 1990).

By the end of the 1950’s, the National Pact was seen as an alliance between political elites that left the large majority of the population out of the loop of power. A new cycle of violence was being brewed. First there was an armed peasant movement claiming land. This was a regrouping of earlier armed liberal militias. During the 1960’s, the guerrilla movements was more clearly articulated through various communist programs (Leninist, Maoist, Guevarist, Trotskyist, etc.). These guerrillas gained significant popularity and ultimately control over large territories. They functioned as de facto local governments, and reached into urban regions to kidnap for ransom or propaganda, for recruitment or to hit strategic targets. By the 1980’s guerrillas were a force the government was not able to ignore. Guerrilla presence was closing down on major urban centres and even the capital (Dudley, 2004; Durán, Loewenherz, & Hormaza, 2008; Ferro & Ramón, 2002; Leongómez & Peñaranda, 1991; Ocampo, Azuela, & Pastor, 1987; Pécaut, 2008; Peñate, 1999; Pizarro, 1996; Ramsey, 1981).

Simultaneously, the drug cartels were reaching peak success. The 1980’s and 90’s were decades during which the infamous Medellin and Cali cartels, led by Pablo Escobar and the Ochoa

23 (Meertens, 2000) points out that the term was first devised colloquially to refer to the scholars of the official commission for the study of the causes of the Colombian conflict (Comision de Estudios sobre la Violencia, 1987). From then on, it has been used to refer to the scholarship dedicated to the study of violence in Colombia.
brothers respectively, terrorised the country with multiple attacks on government buildings, the press and community activists. Anti-drugs political and civil society leaders were targeted and assassinated. Demobilised guerrilla fighters participating in democratic politics were also summarily executed. In general, Colombian institutions crumbled under these attacks and the political elite that had governed the country for centuries was compromised by the new economic and military power of the drug cartels (Holmes, Amin Gutiérrez de Piñeres, & Curtin, 2008; Pécaut, 2000, 2001).

By the end of the 1990’s, however, drug lords, rural land lords, local and international industries and a weakened political elite found common ground in targeting a shared enemy: communist guerrillas. The most powerful expression of this alliance was the paramilitary confederation called “Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia – AUC” (Colombian United Self-defences). Ideologically, they were articulated as a neo-liberal and conservative right wing movement that described the communist guerrilla as an obstacle to national economic development. The government and the army overtly and covertly supported the conformation, growth and operation of semi-legal and illegal paramilitary groups and death squads. This move finalised the process of assassinating left-wing political and community leaders en masse and increased military pressure on guerrilla armies. They furthermore undertook a terrorising campaign all across the country involving collective threats, public killings and massacres. By 2000, fear of paramilitaries had displaced at least four million people mainly from strategic rural regions such as Los Montes de María. In this way, they significantly dismantled most independent community organisations or any civil resistance to the new status quo and, ultimately, facilitated the introduction and consolidation of a properly capitalist economic landscape in these regions (García-Peña, 2005; Hristov, 2009; Rozema, 2007). Paramilitary violence, then, could be said to be the most recent cycle of violence in Colombia and the one that the official Colombian transitional justice process is focused on.

Chronologically speaking, the Colombian transitional justice process started in 2002 when the recently elected president Álvaro Uribe Vélez, himself supporter of right-wing self-defence armies during the 1980s and 90s, started peace talks with paramilitary leaders of the AUC (Centro de Memoria Historica, 2012).

So there I was, at one of the scenarios of the most recent cycle of Colombian violence. I was there involved in the commemoration of a massacre perpetrated by paramilitaries in 2000, conducting research into transitional justice in Colombia. I walked with the families of the victims and several members of national and international social organisations and some institutions from the Colombian state. The friendly mood was accompanied with solemnity and serenity. The walk
was not an easy one, at least not for a city boy like me (and most of the guests). We had to cross several high hills by muddy tracks. As we walked for hours, I noticed teak crops covering the hills: a wood tree that, according to the people there, is grown to sell in international markets. Meanwhile, I talked with some members of the families.

People told me that small farmers had to sell or abandon their lands during the last ten years either under the continuing pressure of threats of violence or because, as they pointed out, it is now too expensive to produce and transport their harvest; industrial crops have raised prices in the region. There is a shortage of land on which to grow food and those who still live in the region have to buy food produced in other parts of the country or even expensive imported products.

After the ceremony of commemoration, we were invited to the house of one of the families that has decided to return despite the persistent threats. Almost one hundred people ate sancocho there. Sancocho is a kind of soup made with yucca, potato, corn, manioca, yam, pork, beef and chicken—all produce from the family farm—cooked slowly on a wood fire in a communal pot. In Los Montes de María small crops like those in a sancocho have become themes for festivals where each of them is celebrated. Campesinos (peasants) in Las Brisas and Mampuján hold the ‘Yam Festival’ following a neighbouring town that celebrated the famous ‘Mango Festival’. These festivals were established to honour the campesino lifestyle where cultural assets and technical skills were shown and tested. People from Las Brisas lobbied regional governments and asked landlords to provide sponsorship. There was not a significant response from the local government, but landlords offered awards and gifts for the different categories in the contest. The categories included best food, best music, biggest yam and so on, with donated prizes such as seeds and animals, and all sorts of farming tools. In the words of a political scientist working with the survivors from Las Brisas and other districts in Los Montes de María, this organisational capacity was (and still is, despite the threats and fear) quite dynamic:

There are places that strike you for some things. When I started to know more about San Cayetano [a rural district in Los Montes de María] that [the intense social organisation dynamics in the region] struck me ... There are many organisations. Frequently you see new organisations. Of course, very few of them achieve their
objectives, all directive boards changes constantly, nothing is formal, they struggle with each other all time ... but for sure there is a sense of sociability.24 (Emphasis added)

In a letter published on a website edited by notable journalists, academics and human rights advocates, one of the survivor campesinas wrote:

With the massacre a whole social fabric was lost. The leadership was lost. One of those leaders lost in the massacre lobbied [the local government] to get the first school in the region, in Aguas Blancas, and then after in Las Brisas ... So he did get the official approval for the local council to build the road to Mampuján; he also got the health mission to come every month and got agriculture technical assistance from the regional government. He got the priest to hold masses, baptisms and even weddings. Likewise, another of these leaders was a youngster who in his spare time tamed horses, donkeys and mules that the neighbours used for transporting heavy loads. And the leadership of cultural exchanges like the ‘King of the Yams’ was also lost. (Anonymous, 2010)

The Yam Festival represented the common life campesinos share, an economic system based on solidarity. The campesino life at Las Brisas was not romantic and heavenly. But, to make a life in this rural region an explicit and implicit set of understandings were necessary. These understandings, although under constant change, helped people make sense of the ‘world’ or, in fact, made up a ‘world’, the world of the campesino in Los Montes de María.

3. Worlds of economic possibilities

In chapter one I showed how a seemingly pragmatic approach to transitional justice as a scholarly object of research is actually loaded with teleological assumptions of human progress. Apart from criticising the articulation of transitional justice in this narrative of progress, I also emphasised my dissatisfaction with what is conceived as “pragmatic” or “practical” in that literature. I see this process of naturalisation and universalisation (via pragmatic conceptualisation) as performing an old fashioned binary between theory and practice. In not making explicit their particular theoretical framework and the politics embedded in it, transitional justice policy-oriented scholars assume that they are neutrally describing reality and acting upon it (practice). This binary, as many others that compose modern thought (human/nature, civilization/barbarism,

24 Interview by the author, 27 September 2010. The interviewee prefers to remain anonymous.
science/belief, etc.), has been largely criticised. It seems, nonetheless, that transitional justice scholarship has not come to terms with this challenge.

In the process of crafting a different language of transitional justice, and hence opening different horizons of political possibilities, I want to develop an approach to what is at stake in violence, to our understanding of it and the way we relate to it that departs from these binaries. I follow, then, the Heideggerian tradition of creating concepts that are not constitutionally built around oppositions, but from frameworks that embrace the complex ways ideas and actions are interwoven or co-constituted (perhaps to a point where this difference is not useful anymore). The concept I use to bring to the fore this complexity is the idea of “world”. From this point of view it is possible to render a more comprehensive understanding of what is at stake in mass violence than from that of the human rights’ abstract and formal framework. An enlarged understanding of violence would also, I propose, open up our political imagination to more comprehensive ideas of justice and a language of/for political possibilities. In this section I introduce this concept.

In Chapter One I introduced the ideas of “background understanding”, “social imaginary” and “life-worlds” in the context of the characteristically modern understanding of time that structures the political imaginary of pragmatic debates about transitional justice. In this section I will further develop the meaning of the concept ‘world’ as used in this thesis. In order to do so, it is useful to look at Charles Taylor’s ideas on ‘moral order’, for him closely related to ‘background understanding’, ‘social imaginary’ and ‘life-world’. For Taylor, a moral order is the image of order societies make up of themselves. It is not necessarily the actual order. Instead, it is either a transcendental model through which to judge events of everyday life, or an immanent order to strive for here and now. In both cases they condition or frame our everyday actions. This is the case because our imagination of what is possible, doable or even convenient and correct is constituted through the image of what we collectively think we are and what we do. Following Heidegger, Taylor calls it “background understanding”. In his words,

Our social imaginary at any given time is complex. It incorporates a sense of the normal expectations that we have of each other; the kind of common understanding which enables us to carry out the collective practices which make up our social life. This incorporates some sense of how we all fit together in carrying out the common practice. This understanding is both factual and ‘accepted’; that is, we have a sense of how things usually go, but this is interwoven with an idea of how they ought to go,

25 A more contemporary use of the concept of “frame” in a philosophical analysis of violence can be found in (Butler, 2009)
of what mis-steps would invalidate the practice [...]. That’s the very nature of what contemporary philosophers have described as the ‘background’. (2004, pp. 24–25)

I am interested in how common understandings “enable us to carry out collective practices”. One of Taylor’s most compelling contributions is his assigning of a cultural location to the conceptualisation of social imaginary and its relation to background understanding. We will get back to the substantial aspect of the cultural location of social imaginaries, but first I want to provide a short rephrasing of Heidegger’s argument about the relationship between “ideas” and “practices” that does not explicitly address the culturally partial aspect of this relationship. I do it in order to show how the understanding of “pragmatism” that the cannon of transitional justice follows falls short in giving an account of what violence is about. Furthermore, this pragmatic and legalistic approach formulates a specific and limited set of actions/policies do justice to the violations under account. The understanding of what violence is about, then, makes visible or available certain political options while invisibilising or dismissing others.

Heidegger’s intellectual project is founded on a critique of Cartesian philosophy and thinking strategy, in particular against the opposition between object and subject that its methodology presupposes. For Descartes, the subject must subtract herself from any deceiving sensory perceptions and previously conceived beliefs in order to capture the true nature of herself (Descartes & Cress, 1993). In contrast, phenomenology, from which Heidegger draws significant elements for his critique, considers that sensorial perception is how reality becomes actual to the observer, including herself. Heidegger, in this vein, would add that humans are “thrown into the world”, by which he means that our existence depends on conditions we find already set for us as a consequence of historical and intellectual formations that we can’t control beforehand. Philosophical abstraction, then, is not how humans normally interact with the world, and as such it substantially misses what is most characteristic of them. He would suggest, then, that the way being is characteristic of humans is being-there. All our interactions with others and with our surroundings are structured by what was already there and as such our very being is co-constituted through our relationships with them. In this way, the observer and what is observed are both co-dependent on the context they are part of.

Heidegger’s most quoted example to illustrate his point is the carpenter’s workshop. In the workshop, the carpenter does not contemplate the nature of her hammer: she does not assess this one hammer’s essential characteristics to judge if it is an actualisation of the universal hammer form. She does not philosophise about it. She bangs nails with it; and if it does it well, it is a

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26 Taylor shares his approach with Benedict Anderson, who, interestingly, developed his analysis of the relationship between culture and politics in his observations of Indonesian history. See Anderson (2006a).
hammer. The nature of the hammer, then, cannot be thought of in and of itself. It can be disclosed only because of its relation to the nails it hammers. But not only to nails, since nails are hammered to join together wood; and not only nails and wood, since the wood needs to be polished with sandpaper; and then there are measuring tapes, squares and levels as well. And all of these objects are related indeed to the carpenter herself, her mentors, and in general to the accumulated knowledge that is shared in a community of carpenters and those who value their craft. Her hammer, then, is only possible in the world of carpentry in the same way that the person who uses it can only disclose herself as a carpenter. More importantly, she can bring herself out through her singular and unique contribution to the world, through her reappropriation of the world. The carpenter finds her most intimate expression of her singularity not despite, but because of the world she is part of.

As such, a radical distinction between what a carpenter is and the objects she uses only obscures the process whereby she genuinely becomes herself. In consequence, the “pragmatics” of such a process cannot be differentiated from the knowledge (the understanding of how things work) that makes up the world of carpentry. This is the case because there are foreseeable actions that are only possible within a set of available objects and knowledge specific to the social configuration of a particular world. In more technical terms, Dreyfus clarifies:

For Heidegger primordial understanding is know-how. ‘When we are talking ontically we sometimes use the expression ‘understanding something’ with the signification of ‘being able to manage something’, ‘being a match for it’, ‘being competent to do something.’ I know how to go about what I am doing, I am able to do what is appropriate in each situation. […] Understanding reveals some actions as doable, as making sense, and others as not, or, better, it does not reveal these other possibilities as possibilities at all (Dreyfus, 1991, pp. 184–185).

In this specific sense, then, a world is a space of possibilities. World joins together practice and meaning to make visible their co-constitution and co-dependency to the extent that the terms “theory” and “practice” become, if anything at all, only technical labels.

It is possible to enlarge the idea of world by mirroring Polanyi’s conceptualisation strategy of what is considered the “economy”. In “The Livelihood of Men”, Polanyi (Polanyi & Pearson, 1977) differentiates “formal economy” from “substantial economy”. The formal economy is the field of market monetary interactions based on the understanding that the agent of the economic interaction is an individual who wants to maximise profit. This field is properly the object of study of economists. Polanyi argues that economists have managed to make this formal understanding of the economy the only way we think about what the economy is. Nevertheless, he argues, the economy must be understood primarily as the “[…] man’s patent dependence for his livelihood upon nature and his fellows. He survives by virtue of an institutionalized interaction between
himself and his natural surroundings” (Polanyi & Pearson, 1977, p. 20). Notice not only how his conceptualisation prioritises interdependency between humans and humans and nature, but furthermore, how his approach highlights that the interdependency that survival requires forms patterns of interaction (intentional and explicit or not), or what he calls institutions. Such institutions can be the family, the tribe, cooperatives, companies, states, multinationals, etc. They are not only formed by the concrete purpose of producing livelihoods, but also by the mutual understandings necessary for interacting towards that very purpose. A substantive economy is formed then by the mutual understandings necessary to produce and distribute livelihoods. This definition of economy can complement the notion of world put forward here in so far as it reveals the co-constitutive character of the understandings that a group of people share and the livelihood it is meant to produce and distribute. Here ideas and practices are again closely tied together in such a way that one cannot work without the other. Moreover, understandings of this kind (ideas plus practices) belong to larger historical processes of meaning-creation or “cultures”, in the vaguest sense of the word. Economic worlds are in this sense embedded, to use Polanyi’s terminology, in a particular culture. The way economic practices (production and distribution of livelihoods) are performed takes shape from long-term consolidated beliefs and habits that grow over time from regularised and internalised patterns of interaction.

Such a concept of the economy is pertinent when considering what is at stake in the context of mass violence. A world, in this way, becomes actual in everyday life through shared historically developed and place-grounded economic practices, like growing yams. The argument followed here, then, steps aside from long-term narratives of social change (from the times of belief to the times when belief is an option) as so masterfully described by Taylor. Instead of describing causalities from distant aggregated analysis, this concept is used here to make sense of the particularities at play in forced displacement from a close perspective, from a look to the everyday. As Arturo Escobar reminds us, it is necessary to call for “[…] greater sensitivity in capturing the intersubjective process of shared experience, the ways in which the world is always in the making, by focusing on the domain of everyday, immediate practical activity and on the embodied and place-based lifeworld of practical and social life” (Escobar, 2001, p. 150).

A way to see how economic worlds take place in everyday life is through tracking the ethical landscape they host. Economic geographer J.K. Gibson-Graham, in her critique of capitalocentric conceptualisations of the economy, precisely points out that “[…] economy [is] a site of decision, of ethical practices [and] all economic practices [are] inherently social and always
connected in their concrete particularities to the ‘commerce of being together’” (Gibson-Graham, 2006a, pp. 87–88).

To make these economic practices possible, to live in an economic world, people need to create, perpetuate and recreate “[an] entire constellation of beliefs, values, techniques and so on shared by the members of a given community” (Dreyfus, 1991, p. 90). As we shall see in the concrete case of Las Brisas, these values are as necessary for the reproduction of livelihoods as techniques are. In this way, economic worlds are existentially significant to the human experience in at least two senses: first, as the necessary social network that facilitates survival and well-being; and, second, because they are constitutional elements of how we collectively make sense of the world. Place-based economic practices carry on in their everyday performance the actual recreation of a familiar world, a world that makes sense.

Summing up, I use the idea of world to signify a place where shared technical, economic, cultural and normative knowledge make possibilities imaginable while at the same time they disclose new aspects of such knowledge that in turn open up the social imagination to different possibilities. I see this self-feeding process as a particular dialogue in multiple modes of communicative exchange located in its own temporality and place.

Furthermore, a world, I argue, can be defined in this sense as a meaningful voice. I take voice here as a conceptual metaphor or figure. I am not referring with it to the actual speech someone can articulate. I see it as a position towards the world. The world, as defined before, provides a normative landscape from which people can judge what is right, desirable, or even possible. It is in this landscape that people find their place in the world at large, and it is from this landscape that they draw the social coordinates to articulate a particular position towards it. This idea of voice can better be grasped when contrasted with that of silence and listening. In the next section I consider silencing while in chapter three I develop listening.

For now, it is important to highlight a determinant aspect of the idea of world and of voice. Despite the dynamic processes of disclosure the idea of world hosts, it still remains confined to its own historical and local particularities. For this reason, there are “worlds”, in plural. In this sense, it is possible to discern the contours of different worlds in order to assess the ways they interact. Here my interest is in the violent dynamics between the world of the capesino and the world of the entrepreneur in the context of mass violence and forced displacement in the mountains of the Colombian Caribbean.

Consider the Yam Festival in Las Brisas, a contest for the biggest yam that became very popular during the last decade of the 2000s in Los Montes de María. The same man won the contest for so many years that his fellow villagers started to call him ‘The King of Yams’. For
people in Las Brisas, he represented the ideal of the proud campesino lifestyle: ‘a worker man, passionate about his crop, good guy, generous’, someone during the commemoration told me. To grow the biggest yams, he used to choose the best place on his piece of land to plant them: the best wind, the best water, the best earth. Yams need a lot of attention and care, and people say his wife used to complain he loved his yams more than he loved her. Notice here the tight links between the practice of growing yams and the moral value given to the practice itself. During the commemoration it was evident that people valued the campesino lifestyle very dearly, and considered it ethical; more desirable to practice, that is.

The King of Yams was murdered in 2000 along with eleven other campesinos in the massacre by paramilitaries we were commemorating. After the massacre, the King of Yams’ son fled to Bogotá, the capital city, leaving his wife and daughters. They in turn had to move to Cartagena, one of the biggest cities in the Caribbean Coast. The King of Yams’ daughter also fled. She decided to demand truth, justice and reparation through the Colombian Transitional Justice process (specifically through the juridical procedures provided by the 975 Act, or ‘Peace and Justice Law’), although she decided—at least until the date of the commemoration—she would never work again on her father’s land. The terror of the massacre, the fear, the suffering and pain it produced, resulted in the silencing of the world of the campesino, of the campesino way of life.27

In order to grasp the way in which the silencing process happens, in the next section I trace the structural similarities between torture and forced displacement. There I show how these processes of silencing are at the same time processes of voicing the world of the torturer’s regime, of the torturer’s world.

4. “Intense pain is world-destroying”

At the site of the abandoned houses of Mampuján, a place that was once someone’s home, I felt uncanny. In Freud’s words, “[...] that class of the terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar” (Freud, 1985). The houses were of a type of basic architecture abundant in the Colombian lowlands: simple high-ceilinged square houses that a hard-working family can afford to build or buy. For the poorest, these houses are signs of wealth and

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27 García and Chaparro define this process in Los Montes de María as ‘descampenización’, by which they mean the active violent forces against the campesino lifestyle, this last one defined as a “subjectivity that has aspired to have an autonomous life through managing the land independently.” (García, & Chaparro, 2012, p. 32). Their account is a very detailed study of the characteristics of the dynamics of violence that led to the contemporary transformation of the human geography of the region. They trace patterns of forced displacement and resettling from colonial times. Rather that offering a strict socio-historical account of the forced displacement in Los Montes de María, in this chapter I’m interested in the affect my personal experience triggered in the presence of the ruins of Mampuján and how I made sense of that experience. This chapter is then about the conceptual tools I put together to establish a dialogue with that world and the possibility of an ethics for listening.
prosperity, perhaps a kind of achievement that any farm worker dreams of. Now those very ruined
and abandoned walls with bullet holes in them seemed to me markers of the negation of the
campesino’s familiar hopes, of their universe of possibilities, of the campesino’s voice, of the

campesino world. Standing there in front of those walls was to witness how their familiar
expectation became a realised threat and how those walls survive paradoxically as a reminder of
both a dream and of a threat. I experienced an uncanny transformation of the familiar into
something threatening that had happened in this context: a dignified way of life represented by the
King of Yams, the familiar dream for the campesinos of the region, was turned into a terrifying
memory. The uncanny as a concept introduces us to the structural similarities between violent
displacement and torture and so is useful for understanding forced displacement as a silencing
process.

Yolanda Gampel has studied the concept of the uncanny in her analysis of child survivors
of Nazi concentration camps. According to her theoretical description of the self in violent social
contexts, individuals live under two polar backgrounds: the “background of safety” and the
“background of the uncanny” (Gampel, 2000). Quoting Joseph Sandler, she defines the
background of safety as “a feeling so much a part of us that we take it for granted as a background
to our everyday experience.” (Sandler, 1987, p. 2). It is precisely this background that here I call a
world. The King of Yams represented precisely what a campesino life should look like, a reference
point to measure how close we are to getting it right, or not, in our quotidian lives. As a reference
point, the King of Yams was a landmark in the campesino normative landscape, a reference point to
make sense of, or to locate oneself in, the everyday world. The background of the uncanny, on the
other hand, comes to the surface when the perception of the world as making sense is lost, an
experience especially potent when terror distorts what we assume is certain. In Gampel’s words:

[…] the pain and terror of war and social violence often overwhelm and sometimes destroy our
apparatus for perception and its representations because their terrible spectacles often paralyse our
capacity for symbolization (Gampel, 2000, p. 55).28

The paralysis of our psychic zones of certainty (our capacity for meaningful symbolisation)
turns what was once familiar into a threat. I see this process at the roots of the silencing process

28 Pertinent for exploring further aspects of Gampel’s argument is the literature on memory studies that addresses the
relationship between violence, trauma and healing (Augé, 2004; Caruth, 1995; Certeau, 1988; Connerton, 1989, 2011;
Feldman, 2004; Grunebaum, 2006; Halbwachs, 1992; Victor Igreja, 2008; LaCapra, 2001; Robben & Suárez-Orozco,
2000; Shaw, 2007). For some of them, terror (a particularly vicious mode of violence) can inflict disruptions of the
psyche of such kind that its memory needs to be repressed in order to allow the victim to keep on living normally.
This repression, however, does not prevent the memory from emerging in disguise: symptoms. Restoring a normal
life, or healing, is possible by integrating the memory of the traumatic experience into the explicit or conscious
biographical narrative of the subject –potentially with the consequence of transforming the subject in a way that
triggers actions that can change the conditions by which the traumatic memory can remain active. It is evident here
how this diagnosis has inspired the political theory of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission
(Brendese, 2014). The structure of SA’s TRC’s operation assumes that the victims of the Apartheid regime experienced
of terror that operates in both torture and forced displacement. This silencing process must then be considered when defining violence, specially in the case of transitional justice where accounting for violence is meant to bring about peace.

In furthering the discussion of uncanny places, our landscape now shifts from the Caribbean Mountains of Colombia to the torture rooms studied by Elaine Scarry. In Scarry’s analysis of torture in contexts as diverse as Brazil, Greece and the Philippines, among others, she found that torture is also a process of silencing, or, in her words, of the “prisoner’s world dissolution” (Scarry, 1985). According to Scarry, in torture contexts the purpose of several torture techniques is to twist that which is familiar into horrible pain. Take the torture room, for example. A room in a normal situation is one of the simplest forms of shelter and security. It resembles a benign potential for human life to grow and to be cared for. And there, in a place that resembles shelter and security, everything is transformed into a potential source of pain: walls, doors, chairs, tables, or any object located within it incites fear after torture. Many torture techniques quoted by Scarry are even named after popular or familiar objects or social practices: ‘the submarine’, ‘the telephone’, ‘the plane’, ‘the bridge’, or ‘the dance’, ‘the birthday party’, ‘the tea party’ and so on (Scarry, 1985, pp. 41–43).

Two familiar institutions represent this structure when they become pain-production machines: medicine and legal trials. The science developed to care for one’s health is, under torture, transformed into a source of the very precise knowledge required to cause pain to the body. On the other hand, as a simulation of an interrogation, torture resembles the quest for the truth and justice that trials are designed for, even while bombarding the prisoner with unanswerable questions that attempt only to demonstrate the absolute power of the regime the torturer represents.

According to Scarry, the interdependence of these two institutions in torture contexts gives torture it most powerful performance. In the interrogatory processes (a resemblance of a trial) during a torture session, the victim’s answers to the torturer’s questions are never right, and following the “wrong” answers the torturer punishes the victim with pain. The right answers (like

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29 Scarry’s conceptualisation of torture is a theoretical development that aims to reveal the torture-like structure of the oppressive politics of actual regimes. This conception goes beyond the more practical rationale behind the use of torture in most cases where it is used to extract information for military strategy purposes. For a broad discussion on this dimension of torture in democratic contexts, see Rejali (2009).
strategic information, for example) are not what the torturer is looking for. The slogans of South Vietnamese torturers, as Scarry reminds us, synthesise what this technique is about: “If you are not a Vietcong, we will beat you until you admit you are; and if you admit you are, we will beat you until you no longer dare to be one.” (Scarry, 1985, p. 42). In this situation, torture represents the very negation of justice through its mock trials where the torturer displays her attempt to gain absolute power over the victim’s mind.

But it is in the use of the body as a source of pain (resembling medical procedures) that torture reaches its full-fledged performance. The body “encloses and protects the individual within; [it puts] boundaries around the self, preventing undifferentiated contact with the [broad] world.” (Scarry, 1985, p. 38). In torture, our most intimate and familiar environment, our body, is turned into a source of suffering and pain. Our body is no longer within the reach of our autonomy. The self is thus radically split into body and mind, where the body becomes a stranger to the mind under the torturer’s orders.

Our sense of justice and common sense and our bodies themselves, then, are turned into something unfamiliar and threatening under torture. Our bodies, our sense of rightness and care, our most intimate thoughts and beliefs, are shifted from the background of safety to the background of the uncanny. Through this shift, language, a master key of any social bond, loses its capacity to give an account of reality. In Scarry’s words, “intense pain is […] language-destroying: as the content of one’s world disintegrates, so the content of one’s language disintegrates; as the self disintegrates, so that which would express and project the self is robbed of its source and its subject.” (Scarry, 1985, p. 35)

Here the link between the world and voice becomes evident: it is possible to experience the world as familiar when we name the things around us, and for that to happen we need to be familiar with a vocabulary that is given to us. In return, language provides the conditions for those things and their interactions to be understandable and meaningful; even more, to exist for us at all. In this complementary process, we find our place in the world at large. This interlocking link between world and language is what I call ‘voice’, since language and the world together enable a historically and geographically referenced way to experience a meaningful everyday life. Seen from this point of view, torture and forced displacement share a similar structure and aim: through pain
and fear, they both attempt to destroy the subjects’ ability to share and recreate understandings of how the world works; they both attempt to silence particular voices.\textsuperscript{30}

These processes of silencing, however, do not result in the absolute absence of voice. For Scarry, in the case of torture there is an almost territorial war between the world of the torturer and the world of the victim where the final aim is to install the torturer’s voice into the victim, so replacing her voice:

The torturer’s questions—asked, shouted, insisted upon, pleaded for—objectify the fact that he has a world […]. Part of what make his world so huge is its continual juxtaposition with the small and shredded world objectified in the prisoner’s answers, answers that articulate and comment on the disintegration of all objects to which he might have been bonded in loyalty or love or good sense or long familiarity (Scarry, 1985, p. 36).

George Orwell depicted a very convincing picture of this process. In 1984, Orwell described how the pain and fear inflicted on Winston Smith, a dissident of the regime, by his torturer O’Brien, led Winston to betray his beloved. The purpose of Winston’s torture was not exactly to make him give information to the regime. Rather, its purpose was to break Smith’s sense of self-value after making him betray his lover and in so doing destroy his world as a meaningful reference. In this way, O’Brien was blurring the meaningful difference Winston wanted to maintain between himself and the regime. In the final stages of torture, when O’Brien was asking very evident questions and inflicting pain on Winston for not answering them ‘correctly’, O’Brien describes what torture is about:

No! Not merely to extract your confession, nor to punish you. Shall I tell you why we have brought you here? To cure you! To make you sane! Will you understand, Winston, that no one whom we bring to this place ever leaves our hands uncured? We are not interested in those stupid crimes that you have committed. The Party is not interested in the overt act; the thought is all we care about. We do not merely destroy our enemies; we change them. Do you understand what I mean by that? (Orwell, 2008, p. 246).

After Winston comes out of the torture room and reintegrates into his everyday life, we see him absorbed in his inner mind in paternalistic dialogues with O’Brien while sitting powerless by himself in a café, resigned of his faith. In torture, then, the violent act has a specific aim: to

\textsuperscript{30} Here is necessary to highlight that ‘the entire constellation of beliefs, values, techniques and so on shared by the members of a given community’ (Dreyfus, p. 90), or a ‘world’, is what allows any member of a particular community to find a place in the world, to have a position in it. This position is clearly opposed to what I saw as the effect of silence, the main aim of which is to erase such an autonomous position in order to replace it with another imposed one. Since this imposition is a silencing process, I call the autonomous standing towards the world a particular ‘voice’. The coherence of the community that is bound by common beliefs and so forth is an immensely relevant debate. Community conceptualised as a constrained exclusive group may carry the seeds of non-negotiable and potentially violent antagonisms. For a more nuanced exploration of this dimension of community see Giorgio Agamben (Agamben, 2008). For an exploration on how a concept of community can host diversity, see Jean-Luc Nancy (Nancy, 2000).
destroy the self’s own sense of the world and functionally integrate them as an object at the service of the torturer’s regime; in other words, to make the individual speak with the voice of the regime.

So far the uncanny has been extremely useful to compare, at a conceptual level, the experiences of torture and forced displacement. This comparison has disclosed the notion of world and its importance to understand what is at stake in terror and forced displacement: both torture and forced displacement aim to transform the familiar world into something threatening. The concept of the uncanny can only take us up to here. My concern now is not to take this concept beyond this use but to explore the consequences of the notion of world to further understand what is at stake in “world-destruction” and how to do justice to it. This is necessary because the notion of the uncanny can too easily respond to this question by claiming that doing justice to what has been made threatening is to make it familiar again. This conclusion would ignore that harm cannot be undone. In this sense, this concept cannot take us further in our exploration of different political possibilities for transitional justice. Instead, the concept of world is used to gain a more specific understanding of what is at stake in terror. This work is done later in this chapter and Chapter Five when describing terror as the violent break of the link between meaning-making and community economic practices that constitutes a particular world. With this in mind, in Chapter Six I developed an alternative language that aims at restoring/rekindling this link by reflecting on my ethnographic learning in Indonesia.

5. The voice of the entrepreneur

The massacre in Las Brisas was perpetrated in 2000, but the world it belongs to was only truly beginning to become visible around half a decade later. Walking with relatives of the victims to the place where the commemoration was to be held I observed that, between grasslands for raising cattle, new crops were being grown. During the walk I was told that a few years after the massacre people from other regions had come to buy large plots of land. They were growing teak to sell it to international companies. So, they began to grow teak everywhere. During the last five or six years, people had begun to sell their lands. Some have sold them because they had unaffordable loans. Others, because they were directly menaced by the still active paramilitary control all over the region, or they just felt under a tacit threat. Most, simply because raw materials, food, and transportation were more expensive now that big investors had come, so agriculture was no longer a means for survival. The meaningful world in which the King of Yams lived was a particular shared set of understandings: a commerce of being together. His murder symbolically

31 The reader must be reminded that the notion of world was also explored in Chapter One to unpack and critique the modern progressive time-grammar.
sealed a definitive tendency in the way the next decade would transform the campesino economy. Their new universe of expectation, as it is for the family of the King of the Yams, is mainly led by their interactions with the economic activities they have to perform in the city and at the new plantations.

Only very few families have returned to Las Brisas. A middle-age man originally from Las Brisas who fled after the massacres decided to return to his father’s land a year before the commemoration. He and his family hosted all the guests attending the commemoration at their farm. When the man was asked in an interview for a local radio and TV station what his project in the region was (given he was facing all the potential risks of staying), he answered that he did not want to remain that poor campesino from the past. What he wanted, instead, was to become an agro-industrial entrepreneur. In a way, then, the dream of a proud campesino had shifted to a dream of becoming an agro-industrial entrepreneur.

There is no doubt the transformation of the region’s economic landscape was a consequence of the massacres. And the shift in this man’s language is of course a very legitimate way to survive and accommodate this new world brought about after massacres, displacement and dispossession, urbanisation, massive property concentration, industrial agricultural exploitation, proletarianisation of the peasant workforce and the breakdown of traditional social ties. Articulating an entrepreneurial discourse may be seen as a positive outcome after the horror: the brave capacity of these people to keep living on despite the restless violence. However, it must also be acknowledged that a new world, a new voice, a new sense of what is desirable and possible was violently imposed by the paramilitaries and normalised afterwards in the world of agro-industries and the insertion of the region into the anonymous global market.

6. Transitional justice’s world

The Colombian state has tried to deal with gross mass violence during the last decade using policy tools from the legal field of transitional justice. In 2005, Álvaro Uribe’s government sanctioned the ‘Justice and Peace Act’ after a peace negotiation process with the most organised paramilitary armies (Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia, AUC, or Colombian United Self-defence Forces). Under this legal framework, members of illegal armed groups were allowed to pay less stringent penalties (or none) in exchange for surrendering their weapons, dismantling their military structures and confessing to their crimes.

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32 For accounts of this and similar transformations of the economic landscape in other regions of Colombia, see (Escobar, 2008; García, & Chaparro, 2012; Grupo de Memoria Histórica, 2009; León, 2009; Molano Bravo, 2008).
After much struggle between lawmakers, the executive and the Constitutional Court and significative pressure from human rights advocates and survivor organisations, the Colombian transitional justice process was modified, complemented and enlarged by the principle of restorative justice. As pointed out in Chapter One, the practice of reparation has become a key element of the transitional justice policy toolkit. In concordance with current global developments in the field, in cases of mass violence, an extraordinary juridical framework must replace criminal justice, which is said to be overwhelmed by the character and amount of criminal acts under account. Justice is then translated not into punishment but into reparations. In these cases, restorative justice prevails over retributive justice.

In this sense, the main aim of restoration is to re-establish the condition of fairness that existed before the crimes and it focuses justice on restoring the victims’ rights rather than punishing the perpetrator. In Colombia, this idea has been actualised, among other initiatives, in a complex and ambitious attempt to restore campesinos’ land. Legal efforts, though, remain dangerously limited by the progressive narrative embedded in the transitional justice equation seen in Chapter One. Trapped in this narrative of progress, transitional justice’s political imagination is not yet able to overcome the violent drive of developmentarism. In one paradigmatic case in Colombia, the Carimagua state in the eastern flatlands of Colombia, a large plot of land that was confiscated from paramilitaries was assigned to an industrial agriculture company under the argument that they were more likely to make better use of the land because of their advanced technology and global commercial reach. The campesinos of the region were then doubly displaced. First by the violent attack of the paramilitaries and second by a naturalised narrative of how wealth can be produced: industrial agriculture (Molano Bravo, 2008; Van Ho, 2016).

There is no place for the campesino in the imagination of how to produce well-being in the current progressive narrative where transitional justice is nested. This is patently obvious in the master policy of Juan Manuel Santos, president of Colombia from 2010-2018. The Plan Nacional de Desarrollo, or National Development Plan,33 for this period was structured through five main strategies called the “five locomotives of prosperity”, altogether making up the “democratic prosperity” policy of Santos’s government. The idea of a “locomotive” clearly refers to metaphors of command and power, but also of the future, progress and development. It is revealing to note that “democratic prosperity” as a noun is an explicit reference to the previous presidential period

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33 In Colombia, governments have to design a 4-year plan of action called a ‘Plan de Desarrollo’ (development plan). Santos titled his Plan de Desarrollo ‘democratic prosperity’ (following Uribe’s ‘democratic security’). The plan was structured by five ‘growth’ trains, as they were called in the official document, but President Santos referred to them in public speeches as ‘prosperity trains’. Santos’ Plan de Desarrollo for the period 2010-2014 is actually called “Prosperity for everyone”.
of Alvaro Uribe Velez, whose war on terrorism was called “democratic security”. Uribe’s democratic security policies involved, directly and indirectly, massive killings of campesinos and poor youngsters from the slums of the main cities.

These two policies refer to an apparently natural continuum where it is first necessary to secure the legitimacy of the state so development can happen. Both governments have promoted transitional justice policies in order to provide symbolic legitimacy for their policies. The fact that the violent process of expropriation is not meant to be repaired by restoring the life-world of the campesino but by that of the entrepreneur is a telling fact commenting on the perpetuation of practices of violent exclusion. Further, these policies speak of a political imaginary where the campesino life is not seen as a universe of possibilities for well-being.

Henceforth, in Colombia, as in many other contexts, political and economic transformations are characterised by processes that silence existing life-worlds through violence, fear, dispossession, forced displacement and the imposition (directly or indirectly) of a particular and exclusive world-view. Transformations of this kind that don’t recognise this loss silence other narratives that make sense of every day life and then close the political spectrum to the possibility of learning from diverse life-worlds. Instead, transitional justice in this context is trapped by the constraints of inoperative bureaucracy and the continuing paramilitary control over the local and national political and economic landscape. First, paramilitary armies that still operate after the peace negotiation process with the Uribe government continue to exert control over large regions of Colombia, especially along the Caribbean. They have been constantly threatening campesinos who have campaigned for the restitution of their lands, and their threats have been actualised by many selective murders of campesinos’ leaders. Institutions leading the process have declared themselves incapable of dealing with the active paramilitaries who control important regions and institutions at both the local and the national level. (Semana, 2012).

Second, and to the point of this thesis’ argument, transitional justice lacks political creativity. It is still inspired by a teleological notion of progress that is closed to meaningful engagements with non-capitalist economies. As we have seen, economic transformations are far from inclusive, democratic and fair processes. Juan Manuel Santos, the current President of Colombia, states now is the time (as a necessary and logical step forward) to realise ‘democratic prosperity’. ‘Prosperity’ in the case of Las Brisas means, as shown in this chapter, ‘entrepreneurship’; it means engaging with the global agro-industry sector and its new sociability. It thus means leaving behind the world of the campesinos.

It is important to note that there have been attempts to restore lands to the displaced campesinos in the Colombian process. In a very limited number of cases land has been somewhat
restored, but in most cases the process has been contested by the new owners, who bought them “legally” after the displacements were secured. Even more, as in the case of Carimagua, restored land is expected to be “productive”, in the sense of being used for industrial agriculture (Van Ho, 2016).

Seeing how land restoration has been handled in this way, it becomes evident that engaging in a politics of justice requires going further than formal land restoration, as necessary and strategic in the path to enduring justice as that is. I want to propose here that in addition to land restoration, doing justice to the campesino world requires what I call an ethics of listening. As I define it in the next chapter, listening involves being able to understand voice as the actualisation of a life-world, as a bearer of knowledge. In this sense, listening is about being able to let a world (the world of ‘prosperity’ and ‘entrepreneurship’) be interpellated by the knowledge, experience and ethics of a campesino life-world that deserves to be listened to in just terms. The call here is for a meaningful encounter that opens the current narrative status quo to the potential for change under conditions of justice.
Chapter Three

Dwelling in silence and productive listening: Reworking the politics of voice of the late 20th century

My purpose is to hold myself accountable for how I listen to [a] debate and what I choose to offer (or not offer) in return. (Corradi Fiumara, 1990, p. 98)

[I]t is insufficient to invite new voices to speak without altering the structures that excluded them in the first place. (Stenberg, 2011, p. 250)

[W]e can recognise our “innate” capacity to linger with the object and process of thought in a ruminative space of not knowing. Extending this recognition, we might see that we possess the capability (and ever-present option) of opening to what is novel rather than familiar in situations, of cultivating the ability to produce more novelty, of providing a cultivating environment for half-cooked ideas, while at the same time working against impulses to squelch and limit. Acknowledging this option is the beginning of cultivating ourselves as theorists of possibility. (Gibson-Graham, 2006a, p. xxviii)

1. Introduction

The day of the commemoration of the massacre of Las Brisas was quite busy for the survivors who organised the event. As mentioned earlier, apart from organising the logistics of the ceremony and coordinating guests coming from different civil organisations, public offices and international institutions, they also offered the guests a sancocho.

As mentioned above, after the commemoration events and after sharing a sancocho, driven to perform my role as “researcher on the field” I approached the wife of the King of the Yams, Stella,34 to ask her a few questions. Kindly, she said she preferred not to talk to me about any of the details of her husband’s murder or about how she and her children coped after the massacre. I felt that my self-appointed role as a researcher was tremendously inappropriate, not because I did not perform it appropriately (I was supposed to be there to ask those kinds of questions), but because of the research I was pursuing.

Her silence meant more to me than the usual challenges of research on violence. Academically speaking, these challenges have generally been addressed through diverse and very complex questions such as how to relate to a pain that is not yours, how to evoke someone else’s past without actualising the pain of traumatic memories, how to abstract theoretical conclusions about such deeply personal experiences. Stella’s silence did indeed challenge my own distant

34 Alias name I am giving to her in this text to protect her identity
position as a researcher and in that way it also radically challenged my personal interest in matters such as her suffering. However, her silence did not make me recalibrate my research methodology with the purpose of reaching out to her with a different strategy — for instance, to approach her in such a way she would feel comfortable and trusting enough to talk openly. Her silence steered my research work away from a quest to unveil her hidden story. It struck me that her silence, instead, triggered a continuing set of questions that haunts my work and fosters its quest. These questions are related to my own engagement in this whole research and its political agenda: her silence turned me back to my conception of silence as a sign of injustice and made me question it.

This reflexive shift compelled me to engage more openly with my own story as a researcher and, moreover, as a fellow Colombian who has grown up witnessing lives being shattered by relentless cycles of violence. In a way, realising that the massacres in the Montes de Maria region meant that the world of the campesino was being silenced just revealed my motivating research question: how can justice be done to those whose voices have been silenced? How do you dwell in a place that is uncanny? In other words, what does an ethics of listening look like?

These questions demand that I relate the language I am proposing (voice, silencing and listening) to larger debates about the role of communication in matters of justice. When shifting reflexively about my concern with silence, I noticed how prevalent the preoccupation for speaking and voicing was in political activism and critical democratic theory-making. In fact, speaking was the normative landmark set for the South African TRC established in 1994. This becomes evident in the TRC’s normative narrative:

The objectives of the Commission shall be to promote national unity and reconciliation in a spirit of understanding which transcends the conflicts and divisions of the past by [...] restoring the human and civil dignity of such victims by granting them an opportunity to relate their own accounts of the violations of which they are the victims [...]. (Parliament of the Republic of South Africa, 1995, p. Section 3 (c)).

Or in the TRC’s final report:

By providing the environment in which victims could tell their own stories [the Commission] also sought to contribute to the process of reconciliation by ensuring that the truth about the past included the validation of the individual subjective experiences of people who had previously been silenced or voiceless. (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 1998, p. 112)

The TRC, in fact, was not just a macro-policy strategy to give dignity back to the victims by restoring their voices. Its underlying normative horizon was constituted by a democratisation agenda where giving back voice to the victims was meant to make them citizens of the new democratic South Africa. The time span of the TRC’s investigations (1960-1994) and its human rights normativity (the epitome of democratic politics in the 1990s) delimited very precisely what
would then be voiced and, of course, what would not. The democratisation agenda of the TRC (the characteristic tool of transitional justice) thus carried on its own silencing practices.

The TRC model has been the object of critique focused on the political centrality of voice and its role in history/memory creation and political subjectivity. These works complicate the location of voice as the only active agent in communicative exchanges and hence they offer an entry point to acknowledging the epistemological and political relevance of silence (Castillejo-Cuellar, 2009; Feldman, 2004; Grunebaum, 2006; LaCapra, 2001).

Inspired by the insights of this critical scholarship coming mainly from history and anthropology, I decided to reflect on silence and listening as tools to re-think the voice-based democratisation agenda of TJ. Silence as a concept invited a further enquiry into the late 20th century democratic theory making and activism. To counter silence, democratic theory and activism makes voice the centre of their claims. I call this agenda the “politics of voice”.

In this chapter I give an account of how the politics of voice marks a prevalent normative landmark. I begin by showing how the Habermasian scholarship on communicative action is actually based on an assumption that making legitimate moral utterances is the site of political agency. In this way, both silence and listening are left out of the equation of democratic communication, meaning that political agency does not reside in them. I move to analyse politically inspired scholarship that developed an epistemological understanding of voice that challenges simplistic understandings of communication. I show how they are also normatively bound to voice, although with their critique they provide very useful insights into silence and listening. In the case of new social movements scholarship, its voice-based politics is evident. Because of the exhaustion of representative politics in post-industrial countries, where neither leftist nor right wing parties were able to articulate new popular demands, activists took to the streets to claim back their voice from the rusty political system. This activism was inspired by other previous struggles mainly coming from the anti-colonial tradition. I consequently engage with a few anti-colonial and postcolonial canonical texts to show how postcolonial scholarship complicated the character of voice by showing the violent imposition of the coloniser’s voice over the voice of the colonised. Homi Bhabha would argue, though, that this imposition produces an excess result of the never matching trajectory of these two voices in contexts where the colonised is forced to imitate the coloniser. The production of this excess becomes tremendously relevant for an ethics of listening, as I will show later. In tracking scholarship on listening I found that feminism had provided the grounds for the feminist rhetoric studies that explores and develops substantial elements for and ethics of listening. In this vein, I assess some aspects of the history of the feminist critique. Coming from a politics of reclaiming the silenced voices of women, they nonetheless
identify the politics of voice with phallocentrism in a way that challenges the prevalence of the subject in western philosophy as the site of argumentation and reason.

From this literature I have gathered a number of elements that illuminate the idea of listening. They are: listening is productive; like speaking, listening is also meaningful; it is, then, a site of agency; it is open-ended and transformative; and it requires a disposition to dwelling. In this last aspect, dwelling, these elements gain their conceptual strength. They explicitly articulate determinant aspects regarding what I experienced in my thinking and writing since my walk with Stella. Following Gemma Corradi Fuimara’s use of Heidegger’s re-work of the concept of logos, I see listening as a permanent state of holding to what has been gathered (words, experiences, stories, snippets of world-views) in order to allow it to flourish in ways that cannot be advanced or predicted beforehand. Under this understanding of listening, the potency of silence may change us in return.

Although tremendously inspiring, I find Corradi Fiumara’s contribution to be restrained by the way she metaphorically equates dwelling with winery farming. While farming conveys most of the meanings just mentioned above, it misses the significance of being dislocated, thrown to the unexpected, which is the result of a productive listening. This conception of listening, then, corresponds to haunting, as haunting is also an opening to alterity that holds no pretence of predicting the outcomes of such encounters. I embrace the dislocation dimension of haunting and listening following Castillejo-Cuellar’s reflections of forced displacement and Said’s lessons on a de/postcolonial humanity, as a mode of being in travelling/theória. In the next chapter I describe théoria as a methodology.

2. The politics of voice of the communicative action theory

That the Habermasian communicative action theory has played a determining role in locating voice and speaking at the centre of democratic theory making and practice seems self-evident. Inspecting its core claims, though, may reveal the character of the communicative interaction Habermas is proposing and, therefore, to what precise extent his theory is short-sighted for not giving an account of the role of listening. In his account, Habermas is expecting a communicative exchange to happen out of an exchange of rational arguments. In his framework, communication happens when rational individuals lay forward reasons in defence of their moral stands. What makes a validity claim good, or, to put it more precisely, what makes it exchangeable in a communicative interaction, is its rational structure. That is, a validity claim must be stated following certain necessary conditions: it must be logical (principle of non-contradiction), accountable (provide justification), and free (not the object of coercion). These are the conditions
of possibility of a communicative exchange, or, in his words, a discourse ethics. Once this structure is accomplished, discourse ethics “[...] forces itself intuitively to anyone who is at all open to this reflective form of communicative action” (Habermas, 1994, p. 1). By claiming that rational arguments force themselves onto those involved in the communicative exchange (by the sake of them being rational or complying with his discourse ethics), Habermas can sidetrack the question about what the conditions for listening are. In his definition of communication as the proper arena of democratic politics, it is voice which bears power, both to attack or to defend. Listening is devoided of any significant role and, further, devoided of any political significance. For this reason, in his work the conceptual development of the condition for listening is subordinated to those for speaking, as we will see next.

This aspect is of key importance, since Habermas' discourse ethics aims at providing foundations for contemporary democratic societies, and it has been widely influential. According to Habermas, the end of effectively functioning world-views brought about by modern secularism has meant that modern societies lack a prevalent and fundamental moral core. Instead, in highly diverse democratic contexts, diverse moral stands based on religious/ethnic world-views compete for what course of action must be taken on many substantial issues. How is it possible to preserve democracy when there are claims for action based on conceptions of the good that are radically different? In Habermas’ framework, this can be reached by referring to discourse ethics as the basic structure into which conceptions of the good must be translated in order to be considered in public. Claims for the good based on partial world-views are then translated into the language of rational arguments that can be accepted by anyone regardless of their partial world-view. A claim for an (absolute) good under his theory becomes a claim for (adequate) rightness, and it is then the subject of either acceptance or rejection. Therefore, the emphasis here is on the formulation of a claim to rightness, and so “Habermas’s moral theory can be understood as an explication of what it means to make good a validity claim to rightness. To that extent, it is a pragmatic theory of the meaning of moral utterances” (Finlayson, 2005, p. 77). Surely, the Habermasian communicative action theory gives an account of the other end of the communicative exchange. In order to convey the meaning of an utterance or validity claim, the receiver of the message must at least be able to recognise its literal meaning, assess the speaker’s intentions, comprehend the speaker’s reasons and accept or reject them (Finlayson, 2005, p. 38). Nonetheless, it is the speaker who is conceptually located in the place of positive action, of political initiative. Although the hearer has some degree of agency, as a receiver he is conceptually passive,
and so is the role of listening in the whole communicative action theoretical edifice. Under this framework, listening is passive, and so it is not political.

The far-reaching positive reception of Habermas’ theory only speaks of a context where voice had become politically relevant to an unprecedented extent. The simultaneous emergence of a discursive theory of democracy and all sorts of renewed reflections on legitimate political agency is evidence of the ideological turn in the last decades of the 20th century. This conception of democracy’s normative structure became a sort of pre-reflexive background for debates about contemporary democratic politics. As a result, the preoccupation with an inclusive democracy was translated into the vocabulary of voice. The development of key trends in democratic theory and practice (recognition, inclusion, participation) located voice at the centre of their political motivation. In the late 20th century, lack of democracy meant lack of voice.

3. New Social Movements take their voices to the streets

In the second half of the 20th century, in what Alain Touraine called “post-industrial societies”, the parliamentary model of democracy was rusting and a different set of political strategies started to emerge (Touraine, 1971, 1981). After WWII and especially during the most heated moments of the Cold War, industrialised societies became interested in a new political agenda that the traditional parties were initially unable to integrate. Demands for equal rights among males and females, blacks and whites, demands for self-determination in colonial and post-colonial countries, or the emergent preoccupation of ecological

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35 It is important to notice that Habermas’ work belongs to a philosophical tradition already at work in what Richard Rorty called the “linguistic turn” (Rorty, 1992). According to Rorty, from the early 20th century on, it is possible to trace a reshaping of the philosophical questions claiming to define the discipline. In a way, philosophers started to be less preoccupied about the entities and their order and functions and more interested in how those entities are expressed in language. By doing so, they located language (or formal logics) at the centre of the philosophical questioning, as it is itself the tool by which reality can be accessed and thought. The second half of the 20th century would see a reaction against the formalism of the linguistic turn. It was upon this critique that works like Habermas’ or intellectual movements like poststructuralism emerged. Rorty, nonetheless, locate them in the same philosophical trajectory and horizon of enquiry.

36 In the Greek pre-modern origins of democratic theory and history, speaking was indeed very important. Being able to speak and participate in the important decisions of the city was tantamount of personal worth. This is why rhetorics was so cherished in ancient Greece. Having a voice meant a medium to put forward ideas that could be evaluated and adopted or rejected. Voice was functional. Contemporarily, voice has become substantial, in so far as having a voice (and the identity attached to it) is itself what democracy is for. After the second half of the twentieth century, voice was not articulated into politics as rhetorics, reason and knowledge, but as recognition and inclusion.
abuse, none were organically integrated into party politics because at the time they were not translatable into class politics. The growing importance of these demands found its momentum during the anti-war global movements of the 1960’s. Back then, the struggle between liberalism and socialism, staged in the parliament by liberal versus labour parties, did not successfully articulate new discourses of civil rights, human rights, global ecological devastation, or gender and identity politics. Charles Tilly conceptualised these movements as “new” insofar as they opted out of party politics (Tilly, 2004). Surely, party politics were strategic, but these new movements were more significantly self-organised and in immediate connection with their constituencies. In democratic political theory, this shift was conceptualised as the exhaustion of the representative delegation of the constituency’s voice in parliamentary politics. The takeover of the streets was therefore seen as the new scenario where self-organised groups of citizens would publicly stage their claims. In very straightforward words, the Blackwell Companion of Social Movements so defines them:

Social movements are one of the principal social forms through which collectivities give voice to their grievances and concerns about the rights, welfare, and well-being of themselves and others by engaging in various types of collective action, such as protesting in the streets, that dramatize those grievances and concerns and demand that something be done about them. (Snow, Soule, & Kriesi, 2008, p. 3)

4. Postcolonialism

From a different perspective, cultural and postcolonial studies also highlight how those under colonial regimes experienced the loss of a genuine voice. Scholars and activists in this tradition complicated the centrality of voice by theorising the subaltern subject’s conditions for speaking in what became popularised as “epistemic violence”.

Consider the inaugural text of postcolonial studies, Orientalism, by Edward Said. In it Said makes a case for how European academia in France and Britain constructed the non-European other, “The Orient” in his study, as an object of research according to a ready-made historicist interpretative framework. This interpretative framework consisted in ontologically and epistemologically locating the Orient as the West’s other, as the place of lust, mysticism, despotism and barbarity, against which the West could stabilise its identity as rational, civilised and, in synthesis, superior. In its depiction of the Orient, the 19th century French and British intellectual and political imagination drew from the accounts of missionaries, travellers, the military and all sorts of western visitors to the Middle East (especially biblical lands) and India to give itself authority to name the Orient. In its blunter political practice, this meant a self-appointed control over this vast geographical area, legitimising direct and indirect colonial intervention. But at an
intellectual and epistemological level, this meant furthermore to represent the “Orient”, or, in more relevant words for this research, to speak for/on behalf of the other. In his comment on Flaubert’s encounters with an Egyptian courtesan, most likely registered in the latter’s “Cahiers de Voyage”, Said states:

[...] Flaubert’s encounter with an Egyptian courtesan produced a widely influential model of the Oriental woman; she never spoke of herself, she never represented her emotions, presence, or history. He spoke for and represented her. He was foreign, comparatively wealthy, male, and these were historical facts of domination that allowed him not only to possess Kuchuk Hanem physically but to speak for her and tell his readers in what way she was “typically Oriental.” (Said, 2003, p. 7)

Said’s refined literary analysis, though, was inspired by the writings of Frantz Fanon, a Martinique born Algerian soldier and psychiatrist whose intellectual and political work was largely influential during the anti-colonial struggles from the 1950’s on. Fanon draw from psychoanalytic concepts to describe what he defined as the “colonised complex”, a concept that evokes what Spivak would call decades after “epistemic violence”. This complex consists in a paradox in which the “black man” is trapped: when the white man imposes his worldview over the black man, wrecking the colonised world, the cultural tools with which the black man is left to find his sense of self-value again are, ironically, the linguistic and intellectual tools of the white man. Fanon makes this process evident by showing how the French language was the symbolic actualisation of the colonial regime’s power upon the minds of the “black men”: those who spoke it, those who went to the “mother land”, felt they had culturally ascended, bettered. According to Fanon, speaking metropolitan French, as opposed to creole or pidgin, meant that the desire of the colonised man was articulated onto the coloniser world. In his words, “To speak a language is to take on a world, a culture” (Fanon, 2008, p. 25). For him,

Every colonized people—in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality—finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation; that is, with the culture of the mother country. The colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country’s cultural standards. He becomes whiter as he renounces his blackness, his jungle. (Fanon, 2008, p. 9)

Notice here the epistemological tone of Fanon’s critique: what is at stake in the very issue of language is first of all the possibility of speaking by and for oneself, of the validity and legitimacy of one’s knowledge and the character of the necessary codes to make it accessible. In Ziauddin Sardar’s 2008 preface to a new edition of Fanon’s “Black Skin, White Masks” the point is made clear:

37 Remember that for Fanon the category “black man” is properly colonial. In referring to some colonial subjects as “black men” he highlights that those under colonial rule who accept the classification of races by their skin colour are to be called, precisely, “black men”. 

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[T]he back man is presented with a problem: how to posit a “black self” in a language and discourse in which blackness itself is at best a figure of absence, or worse a total reversion? […] At issue is thus not just language but also the civilization of the white man […]. Can the non-West develop its own self-definition by using the tools and instruments of western civilization? (Sardar, 2008, p. xv)  

It is important to highlight that the reading of Fanon in the vocabulary of speaking, of voice, was later developed in the context of the Western revitalisation of politics in the late 60’s and 70’s and philosophically matured in the 80’s and 90’s. So, postcolonial studies and critique must be located in an ongoing conversation about the location of voice in a new stage not only of post-industrial economies in the West, but also in the newly independent ex-colonies. According to Robert Young, the development of new social movements (and the analysis that emerged with them) drew its strategies and discourses from the political stock developed during the anti-colonisation struggles a few decades before:

[T]he beginnings of the political reformation of the left towards the politics and political formations of what were subsequently to be called ‘the new social movements’ are here already discernible – ‘new’ precisely to the extent that they opened up the boundaries of the left to include the women’s movement, struggles against racism, homophobia, issues of environmentalism, ecology, sustainable development, etc., in the context of an increasing sense that classical European Marxism was in its own way as problematic as Western capitalist development theory for the new nations of the South. These new social movements were also new to the extent that they modelled themselves on non-mainstream political paradigms and forms of political activism that had been developed outside the West, largely in anti-colonial struggle. (Young, 2004, p. 4)  

But it is with the work of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Homi Bhabha that postcolonialism gained its conceptual strength by defining it in terms of epistemic violence. Spivak’s reading of Foucault’s ideas on knowledge and power, Lyotard’s conceptual innovations on the “differend”, and Derrida’s deconstructionism, together with her feminist and Marxist outlook, were key elements in Spivak’s development of her postcolonial critique. Borrowing from Foucault’s language, she defined the particular character of colonial violence as “epistemic”. Quoting Foucault, she defined the knowledge of the colonized subject as “subjugated knowledge”:

The clearest available example of such epistemic violence is the remotely orchestrated, far-flung, and heterogeneous project to constitute the colonial subject as Other. This project is also the asymmetrical

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38 Although relevant in the context of anti-colonial struggles, this epistemological style of questioning became a central critical feature in postcolonial studies only decades after Fanon’s work was published. In Jenny Sharpe’s account, the literature of decolonization to which Fanon’s writing belongs is often identified as the intellectual antecedent to postcolonial studies. While the process of decolonization has played a central role in shaping the political objectives of the field, it is also important to remember that the writings of Frantz Fanon, C. L. R. James, Aimé Césaire, Amilcar Cabral, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, and Albert Memmi (among others) were geographically and historically removed from the institutional development of postcolonial studies. Unlike the literature of decolonization, which was bound up with the Third World national liberation movements of the sixties and seventies, postcolonial studies is primarily a First World academic discourse of the eighties and nineties. (Sharpe, 2005, p. 114)
obliteration of the trace of that Other in its precarious Subjectivity. Perhaps it is no more than to ask that the subtext of the palimpsestic narrative of imperialism be recognized as ‘subjugated knowledge,’ ‘a whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naive knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity’ (Spivak, 1988, p. 76)

The work of the epistemic violence exercised against the colonial subject in this way subordinates her to a position of silence (or no-voice) by obfuscating, obliterating and imposing meaning over her knowledge and experience. This epistemological emphasis is the postcolonial politics of voice. Spivak has identified it with the opening up of possibilities that Said provided. For her, “The study of colonial discourse, directly released by work such as Said’s […]], blossomed into a garden where the marginal can speak and be spoken, even spoken for” (Spivak, 1993, p. 56).

The emphasis on voice had since then defined the characterisation of the postcolonial critical project. Extracting its philosophical roots, Jane Hiddleston states that “[t]he significance of this thinking [referring to Guha and Spivak] lies above all in its conception of a decisive political agency claiming a voice of its own” (Hiddleston, 2009, p. 12). It is very telling that the author of the widely influential White Mythologies, Robert Young, in his Oxford Very Short Introduction to Postcolonialism, defines the condition and project of postcolonialism in the following terms:

[T]o be from a minority, to live as the person who is always in the margins, to be the person who never qualifies as the norm, the person who is not authorized to speak […]. How can we find a way to talk about this? That is the first question which postcolonialism tries to answer. (Young, 2003, pp. 1–2)

Although equally invested in the politics of voice, I find that the work of Homi Bhabha opens up a line of argumentation that I see as fruitful for an ethics and politics of listening. Bhabha’s approach surely helps to consolidate and enlarge the politics of voice of the postcolonial critical project. Indeed, his work discuss the epistemological deadlock of the colonial subject. However, he finds in the colonial situation constitutive cracks that allow a paradoxical agency. He calls it “mimicry”, where the imitation of the coloniser is not only evidence of subjection but simultaneously, and paradoxically, of the impossibility of absolute imposition. Although epistemic violence still operates at the level of imitation, in Bhabha’s work something else also emerges. For him, “colonial mimicry is the desire for reformed, recognisable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same but not quite” (Bhabha, 1984, p. 126). In an epistemological vein, Bhabha insists on the dislocation of the colonial other as an agent of her own knowledge and self-representation by the colonial knowledge/power system. In this way, his critique remains located in the site of voice as a democratic normative priority. Nonetheless, I want to highlight that his contribution of the “not quite” is an opening or insinuation of listening as production (a conceptualisation addressed in feminist rhetoric studies, as I will show below). Bhabha’s not quite of postcolonial mimicry signals a phenomenon located at the interstice of colonial epistemological
silencing and postcolonial (potential) agency. In the process of imitation, the colonial subject strives to, or is forced to, become the coloniser. The colonised never reaches the same status of the coloniser because that would mean the disruption of the hierarchy of the colonies and its exploitative nature. The coloniser needs the colonised to remain in subordination to maintain the colonial situation, needs him to remain Other. On the other hand, in his striving to fit, survive and even resist it, the colonised mimics the colonised, although never being able to be him. Bhabha defines this process as ambivalent and finds in it an important disruptive and productive force: “the menace of mimicry is its double vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority” (Bhabha, 1984, p. 129).

Because of the ambivalent conditions in which it is produced, this disruption can neither be re-articulated in the sovereign language of the coloniser, nor expressed in an equally unstable “purity” of a pre-colonial self. Spivak’s radical Derrideanism reads this situation as an impossible paradox: Spivak’s answer to her own question “can the subaltern speak?” is that she cannot. My suggestion is that, from reading Levinas (1979, 1981) and Derridean (1995, 2001), it is noticeable that it is precisely this excess that activates or signals the possibility, the invitation, of a particular kind of communicative exchange that dwells in the infinite questioning of the sovereign self and locates political agency in the site of listening. At this gap between being and not being, at this not quite, an epistemological excess occurs and something new is produced. 39

Holding to the productivity of the postcolonial excess as a concept useful for an ethics of listening, as shown below, I proceed to give an account of the politics of voice in relevant feminist texts. In this way, in what follows I am going to briefly assess how the operative critique of feminism has at its roots a conception of the working of gender epistemological violence. In this way, its normative horizon still remains in the politics of voice, although it sets the background for the contribution of feminist rhetoric studies to listening.

5. Feminist critique

The feminist political and intellectual movement can be also read as navigating the politics of voice. This becomes clear when one identifies the movement’s major concerns as the epistemological oppression forced by a phallocentric understanding of the world. In her widely cited article “Current controversies in feminist theory”, Mary G. Dietz classifies the great diversity

39 The suggestion to activate the agency of listening by relating the Levinasian/Derridean conception of otherness to the postcolonial excess is an original claim and needs to be further clarified and argued. Dedicating space in this thesis to this claim would digress the discussion from its core subject: crafting a new vocabulary for transition justice. As it is fundamental for the theory of listening that I am only starting to develop here, this claim will indeed be further explored in future writing.
of feminist scholarship. In it, she provides a sketch of the history of feminist thought in terms of generations or waves, each concerned with a particular set of issues and perspectives. In one of the specific areas of enquiry of second generation feminism, “social difference feminism”, she states that feminism of this variant “[…] does not merely register women’s difference from men; it mobilizes gender difference in order to shed a ‘distinct light’ (MacKinnon, 1987, p. 57) on epistemological issues, to espouse the superiority of women’s ways of knowing, or to reclaim their moral voice” (Dietz, 2003, p. 405).

Dietz classification, updated later by Sharon Krause, helps to trace the epistemological character of a particular brand of feminism. According to this classification, “difference feminism” Dietz labels scholars who defend a specifically female way of knowing and knowledge production. Because of male domination, such knowledge has been obliterated and, hence, should be acknowledged as an act of emancipation and as an enrichment of the human experience. Nevertheless, according to Dietz, “diversity” and “deconstructivist” feminisms would react against this position. From the diversity perspective, scholars found that the female producing such knowledge was tainted by partiality, that is, that the woman they devised as universal was actually the white middle class educated housewife. In this sense, the experiences of poor and non-white women were not considered in the knowledge production of difference that feminism scholars were defending. Even further, “deconstructivist” feminists would claim that both diversity and difference approaches fail in reproducing the structuration of knowledge production in binaries of male/female, man/nature, etc., that bow to the dominant phallocentric epistemology.

I want to build on Dietz classification while departing from her progressive waves narrative. I propose, then, to read the feminist field not as a succession of generations but as a permanent conversation that draws from many sources to uncover both intellectual and political deadlocks and practices of oppression while simultaneously opening up avenues of theoretical disclosure and political exploration. In this field, then, the epistemological questioning has been always a substantial and even characteristic tool for critique, although only explicitly formulated during the last decades of the 20th century. Seen from this perspective, as a dialogue mainly driven by epistemological questions, I find that, while it belongs to the same tradition of voice politics, it has also explored extremely relevant and straightforward aspects of an ethics and politics of listening.

Consider, for example, early English literary feminism. It can be said that the literary work of English female writers of the 17th century was dismissed for being produced by women.

40 I join Stacy Gillis in pointing out that the waves approach blocks more fluid inter-generational borrowings (Gillis, 2007). Such an approach turns feminism into an intellectual minefield rather than a space of political exploration.
Women were judged as second level writers (at best), bringing the themes of home and marriage to mingle with the high themes of literature. They were too sentimental, worldly, vulgar even. Their stories and narrative styles, their life experiences, were not considered valid, worth reading. In this sense, they struggled to make those stories become legitimate themes in literature, and for the knowledge they shared in their stories to be acknowledged and considered in fairness.

To a similar extent, the struggle for women’s right to vote was framed in terms of their demand for being legitimate actors in public life, citizens. To a great extent, as Barbara Cain defends, the suffrage movement did not necessarily defend equality to men, but that their particular experience as women should not be constrained to the boundaries of the household, but extended outside it. In this way, their knowledge and experience would be acknowledged as relevant for the construction of a fairer society. Caine quotes Millicent Garret Fawcett in a letter dated on 1891 to make the point:

We do not advocate the representation of women because there is no difference between men and women; but rather because of the difference between them. We want women’s special experience as women, their knowledge of the home and home wants, of child life and the conditions conductive to the formation of character to be brought to bear on legislation. (Caine, 1982, p. 546)

Of course, such a limited view of women’s experience and knowledge has been the object of critique. A century later, many saw the defence of the “woman’s perspective” as an universalisation of one particular kind of woman, the middle class white housewife, over the experience of many working-class women from non-white descent. In the last decades of the 20th century white middle-class women were seen as silencing the expression of the diversity of other women’s experiences by defending their own as of universal validity in a similar fashion that the Victorian moral regime did in the 19th century. This was clearly the case when Bell Hooks famously stated in the first lines of her ground breaking Feminist theory. From the margin to the center:

Feminism in the United States has never emerged from the women who are most victimized by sexist oppression; women who are daily beaten down, mentally, physically, and spiritually -women who are powerless to change their condition in life. They are a silent majority. A mark of their victimization is that they accept their lot in life without visible question, without organized protest, without collective anger or rage. Betty Friedan’s The Feminine Mystique is still heralded as having paved the way for contemporary feminist movement -it was written as if these women did not exist. Friedan’s famous phrase, “the problem that has no name,” often quoted to describe the condition of women in this society, actually referred to the plight of a
select group of college-educated, middle and upper class, married white women-
housewives bored with leisure, with the home, with children, with buying products,
who wanted more out of life. (hooks, 1984, p. 1) 41

Notice here, then, an expansion of the claim for a legitimate voice inside the very same
feminist movement. By the time hook’s work was being read, the language of epistemological
violence had already influenced the intellectual debate around the shape democracy needed to take.
Spivak’s work, in fact, cemented a general critique of the post-structural claims of representing (or
giving voice to) the oppressed, and to Western feminism, which had not been alert to the
redoubling of silencing in the case of subaltern women. Her work would insist, as remarked above,
that from the position of the subaltern, who is forced to strip her world in order to be inserted
into the coloniser's episteme, there is no language available to give her voice. By doing so, she was
 clearing the ground for a critical intervention that would depart from the claim for integration, the
claim for a place in the speakers’ room, to a whole epistemological breakdown that would open
the possibilities for a politics of listening. Spivak’s intervention, in this way, was already inspired
by the deconstructivist mode of critique, from which many other prominent scholars drew. Here
the name of Judith Butler becomes almost obligatory.

In order to engage with Butler’s deconstructivist feminism it is necessary to address
Simone de Beauvoir’s insights that paved the way in which, to some extent, the violent limitations
of the phallocentric language had already been signalled. For her work, especially in The Second Sex,
lays the foreground for an overarching philosophical/conceptual critique of masculinity as a mode
of thinking and as a way of making sense of the world. Her ground-breaking contribution consists
of pointing out the male constitution of reality as built from a differentiation of self and other
where sovereignty resides in the masculine self, while the feminine other is where this sovereignty
is exercised. In short, the feminine is the object of the masculine Subject. In her discussion around
myths and the mystification of the feminine, Beauvoir states:

Women do not set themselves up as Subject and hence have erected no virile myth
in which their projects are reflected; they have no religion or poetry of their own:
they still dream through the dreams of men […]. Representation of the world, like
the world itself, is the work of men; they describe it from their own point of view,

41 It is important to notice that, according to Caine, from the times of the suffrage movement activist women were
aware of their privilege (Caine, 1982). Since the questions guiding this research are not directly related to the history
of feminism itself, I am unable to confirm if their concern materialised into actual actions of meaningful inclusion of
working-class and non-white women into their movement and agenda. The fact that hooks' work was so widely
received signals that there was still a gap in the realisation of the above intention.
which they confuse with absolute truth. (Beauvoir, 1953, p. 162)

Her conceptual contribution provides the foundations of an analysis of the masculine-structured thought in which the feminine Other is claimed as passive object for the male possession. In this framework, then, the possibility of genuine and legitimate female agency in world-creation is blocked, which is to say that she is epistemologically silenced.

Judith Butler would see in Beauvoir a further relevant contribution upon which she built her post-Cartesian performativity theory. In Butler’s reading, her reworking of the masculine binaries self/other, male/female, man/nature, disentangles the necessity of correspondence between sex and gender. This correspondence is not obligatory because the sex or genital constitution of our bodies are arbitrarily assigned a gender in the social context where those bodies happen to exist. The body does not host a set of pre-determined behaviours (gender) that are essential to each sex. As synthesized in a handpicked quotation of Beauvoir, Butler finds the key for unlocking this sex/gender essentialism: “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (Beauvoir, 1953; Butler, 1986, p. 35). Becoming, then, is the culturally located existing of a particular body in which the social impositions of gender roles as bodies are reinterpreted and renegotiated unceasingly. In Butler’s words,

No longer understood in its traditional philosophical senses of ‘limit’ or ‘essence’, the body is a field of interpretive possibilities, the locus of a dialectical process of interpreting anew a historical set of interpretations which have become imprinted in the flesh. (Butler, 1986, p. 45)

Butler would push this project further with her performativity theory through which she would challenge a particular kind of addressing the voice agenda. In her ground-breaking book Gender Trouble, Butler defends a critique of a kind of feminist thought and activism advocating for a pre-defined conception of woman. She asks:

Categories of true sex, discrete gender, and specific sexuality have constituted the stable point of reference for a great deal of feminist theory and politics. These constructs of identity serve as the points of epistemic departure from which theory emerges and politics itself is shaped. In the case of feminism, politics is ostensibly shaped to express the interests, the perspectives, of ‘women’. But is there a political
shape to ‘women’, as it were, that precedes and prefigures the political elaboration of their interests and epistemic point of view? (Butler, 1990, p. 175)

Butler is here pointing out the problematic feminism whose political agenda is to speak for women/to articulate their interests based on the pre-defined content of the feminine. However, Butler, in furthering de Beauvoir’s unlinking of sex and gender, demonstrates that bodies become gender specific by means of performing everyday acts of previously determined gendered behaviours. In consequence, first, she would relocate the feminist agenda from the politics of voice to a whole destabilisation of the already predetermined phallocentric definition of gendered voice (as seen earlier in Dietz’s “difference feminism”). Second, following her study on the performative, she would set a research agenda complicating and enlarging what is considered a legitimate voice, or, in her words, what is counted (epistemologically) as life (Butler, 2009).

The post-Cartesian critique of gender that feminism integrated into its approach since de Beauvoir and was then developed by Butler has inspired an exploration of the feminist destabilisation of voice. The post-Cartesian exploration of voice and its feminist deconstruction has led to a tremendously fertile field of research: listening. I follow here a number of arguments that feminist rhetoric studies have developed. Their insights have illuminated my own experience and reactions in Colombia as accounted in the previous chapter and in the introduction of this one. In the next section I describe my interaction with this literature and set its core elements as a ground guide of the methodological approach I developed and describe in Chapter 4.

6. Feminist rhetoric listening

(T)here is no genuine dialogue without dwelling in another's ideas. (Stenberg, 2011, p. 252)

In the field of feminist studies I have come to find a particular research agenda that illuminated my reflections on listening. Although it also started in furthering the politics of voice, it has developed immensely rich and innovative studies on silence and listening. As noted by Kohrs Campbell, second generation feminism focused on recuperating women’s voices through their unnoticed texts, their literary creations and personal writings and correspondence, their public speeches and civic communications (Kohrs Campbell, 2001). This first exploration was then called “rhetorical feminism” or “feminist rhetoric studies”, and its first mission was to reclaim the voice

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42 James Loxley touches this general point in passing in his detailed study of the conceptualisations of performativity from Austin to Butler. See (Loxley, 2007, p. 114).
of women across history by tracing, compiling and analysing texts produced by women. Buchanan and Ryan mapped the guiding agendas of this relatively new field in the following way: 1) recovery of women rhetors and rhetoricians, 2) analyses of the contextual network of forces in women’s rhetorics, 3) examinations of “gender bias” in rhetorical traditions, 4) critiques of “foundational disciplinary concepts,” and 5) interrogations of established epistemologies and “research practices” (Buchanan & Ryan, 2010, pp. xviii–xix). These paths of inquiry parallel feminism’s larger agenda in its literary origin, its political activism, its race and class inclusivity and its epistemological critique and deconstructivist horizon. In this last agenda (deconstructivist critique of epistemological patriarchy), feminist rhetoric studies have furthered a particularly feminist critique of the binaries male=speech/woman=silence, where speech in a phallocentric world means power and silence means passivity. Working on this critique, feminist rhetoric studies have developed crucial elements for cultivating and nourishing an ethics of listening.

However, because of its disciplinary origin, the majority of this scholarship is located in two main disciplinary fields: feminist literary criticism (Hedges & Fisher Fishkin, 1994) and writing/English teaching (Ratcliffe, 2005). By reason of the debates and pragmatic concerns particular to these disciplines, there are few works that develop in theoretical depth their interest in listening. Here, hence, I engage with those that explore it more explicitly and develop useful concepts for a more embracing understanding of listening.

Let’s consider, first, the work of Susan Bickford (which is often quoted in feminist rhetoric studies). Her work engages with listening in the political theory of communicative action described at the beginning of this chapter. In her account, listening is the necessary counterpart to speaking. She consequently conceptualises communication as an exchange where the counterpart of a rational statement is not a rational response, but a rational listening, that is, the capacity to consider the arguments of others in their own terms. This would counter ideas of communication based on flawed assumptions such as isolated and worldless individuals or unitarian, homogeneous and timeless communities. Although her work still hinges on an individualist rationalism in her defence and the use of Habermasian assumptions on rational statement creation as mentioned above, she does highlight the everyday happening of communication. In her understanding, “politics [...] is not constituted by consensus [Rawl’s theory of justice] nor community [Sandel’s communitarian critique of Rawl’s liberalism], but by the practices through which citizens argue interests and ends -in other words, by communication” (Bickford, 1996, p. 11). Following Benjamin Barber (Barber, 2003), she suggests that these argumentative practices not only enact a meaningful communication, but moreover they have a creative dimension by which the result of a communicative interaction is not a decision among the most rationally acceptable claim, but a whole new set of concerns. In
taking listening as a constitutive counterpart of speaking in the way Barber defines it, Bickford can define communication as productive.

The idea of a communication that is productive when listening is properly enacted can be illuminated even further with the work of other feminist rhetoric scholars who have studied silence. In this formal dimension, Glenn reminds us that both speaking and listening are possible only against a background of silence. Although it is often conceptualised as an absence of communication, Glen argues for understanding silence as a rhetorical art. She defends the idea that “it is silence that reveals speech” (Glenn, 2004, p. 3). By virtue of being the “background” of communication, silence is permanently charged with potential meaning and hence is a primary field of interpretation. Her proposed research agenda, then, lays the foundations for an investigation, not only of the lost or silenced voices of women, but to interpret their silences as meaningful or rhetorical. This agenda would track silence events to reveal their meaning.

Katherine Mack exemplifies this interpretative exercise in her reading of Achmat Dangor’s Bitter Fruit (Dangor, 2004), the story of a raped woman in 1990’s South Africa who refuses to participate in the TRC’s public hearings. In Bitter Fruit, Lydya, the main character, is confronted with the memory of her rape when her husband runs into her raper, a former South Africa’s apartheid policeman. She had tacitly agreed with her husband not to talk about her rape but he decides to break the silence to ask her to come forward to speak at one of the public audiences of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and denounce the policeman who attacked her. She utterly refuses to participate in the TRC special hearings for women and progressively becomes more inward while she gets more interested in her own research on AIDS-HIV. As Mack remarks, in the TRC’s political legitimisation of its work, voice and public hearing were equated with agency and restoration of dignity and citizenship, while silence was identified with passivity, oppression and the political exclusion the apartheid enacted and symbolised. From the TRC’s narrative of voice restoration and democratic future it is not possible to relate to the main character’s dwelling in her “zone of silence” as an act of liberation. If the TRC was a macro-policy designed to lead South Africa to its new democratic future through the restoration of voice, the protagonist’s escape out of the institutionalised space for speaking meant an actual opening to a truly new future:

She [...] continues her literal and metaphorical “journey” away from home and family. The narrator observes: “Time and distance, even this paltry distance, will help to free her. Burden of the mother. Mother, wife, lover, lover-mother, lover-wife, unloved mother. . . . Even Du Boise [the raper] does not matter any more” (281). The “transformed” Lydia sheds these gendered roles in her pursuit of a different, as-of-yet unknown future [...] —a decisive rejection of her role as the “donkey’s arse” of
history (251). This final image of the novel—of Lydia driving into the veldt to an unknown destination—underscores that her freedom and agency lie not in her becoming a speaking subject of the “new” South Africa, as the TRC suggests, but rather in her ability to disentangle herself both from family and the new nation. (Mack, 2011, p. 210)

If, from the perspective of the Bitter Fruit’s main character, silence is a dwelling space for agency, then, from the side of the one who wants to listen, silence can also become a space for relentless productivity.

Studying Aspasia, the renowned intellectual companion of Pericles whose words were never registered, Melissa Ianetta suggests that listening to her silenced voice (or absence of speech) is a call to reflection, it allows its resonance to create an open-ended rhetoric space. Ianetta’s work proposes a different approach from the one Glenn suggested. In Ianetta’s words,

[R]ather than defining Aspasia’s rhetoric through evidence of her words, we might instead focus on the repetitions that make up responses to this figure and so take an approach that [...] centers on the unknowability of the signified, thereby positioning Aspasia’s absent words as possessing a rhetorical power in their own right. (Ianetta, 2011, p. 30)

In this way, she insinuates a different research approach, one that is not interested in chasing down the ultimate meaning of a silence in order to translate it into voice. Doing so would precisely cancel silence’s potency. In contrast, it might be more consistent with the character of silence to dwell in the “[rhetoric] space created by Aspasia’s absence” (Ianetta, 2011, p. 34). In this way, it would be possible to recognise its power in the richness of the tones and characters of the myriad of conversations it triggers again and again.

I have gathered here a number of elements around the idea of listening that have been debated in the feminist rhetoric field. To recap, they are: listening is productive; like speaking, listening is also rhetorical; it is, then, a site of agency; it is open-ended and transformative; and it requires a disposition to dwelling. In this last aspect, dwelling, these elements gain their conceptual strength and explicitly articulate determinant aspects of what I have experienced in my thinking and writing since the Stella’s silence.

Let me, then, give an account of Gemma Corradi Fiumara’s understanding of listening as dwelling. One of the core foundations of her engagement with listening is her critique of logocentrism. Drawing inspiration from Heidegger and from a feminist outlook, she sees in the classic Western philosophical tradition a fixation on speaking (the logic of assertion) that is ontologically linked to a kind of knowledge meant to serve simplification, mastery and control.
Corradi Fiumara finds in such an exclusivist privileging of a particular kind of “rational” voice the main obstacle for listening to flourish as a mode of thinking. In order to shift this logic, she makes use of Heidegger’s reinterpretation of the Greek word logos as a noun, to the word *legein*, the action word of logos. According to her reading of Heidegger, it means “[…] to lay down, to lay before. In legein a ‘bringing together’ prevails […]. Legein properly means the laying-down and laying-before which gathers itself and others” (Corradi Fiumara, 1990; Heidegger, 1975). Corradi Fiumara follows Heidegger’s metaphor of the vineyard to exemplify what this shift entails. A logocentric approach would highlight the wine itself and its conformity with a previously established and definitive standard of what a good wine is. But a winery requires gathering of not only grapes. It also gathers or puts together a number of concrete processes, spaces and techniques. This gathering reaches its fullest moment of self expression when the produce is stored in barrels and cellars in order to ferment it. These processes, then, make a particular kind of wine with only formal reference to a general idea of wine but that gain their particular character out of this contingent gathering of processes. As a winery, thinking requires the active gathering of arguments, ideas, memories or affects that stored to let them ferment. Winery is presented in this way as a metaphor whereby gathering as listening is understood as the driving process of wine-making/knowledge creation. The evocative attitude here is that of “abiding-by”, putting together, a form of cohabitation and sharing quite opposite to mastering. In her words,

> It is not a matter of using our conceptual accounts in order to impose them on something, but rather of abiding-by in order to listen, and to do so genuinely: which means to be in an indefinite state of hearing, freeing ourselves from any ‘standard’ limitations of time. Heidegger’s thinking seems unambiguous when he suggests that we should ‘take up residence in language?’ This ‘taking up residence’ can in fact be referred to a form of cognitive interaction which has no trace of ‘predatory’ or ‘hunting’ paradigms and no sign either of a tendency to colonize; it attempts to be ‘agricultural’ and ‘pastoral’, in the sense that it implies a coexistence and cohabitation, in which the risks, the produce and the destiny can be shared. (Corradi Fiumara, 1990, p. 156)

I want, in this same spirit, to gather together the conceptual contributions of postcolonialism and feminism for defining listening as dwelling in a rhetorical space created by absence, in listening as a haunting form of cohabitation. This form of cohabitation in a rhetorical
space is accomplished by understanding listening as a site of agency where the search for meaning is open-ended and transformative, hence, productive.

7. Conclusion

The insights of the feminist rhetoric school are certainly illuminating for exploring the kind of listening demanded from me by the uncanny effect of the Las Brisas massacre, the attempted destruction of the world of the campesino and the specific silence of the Stella. They propose a listening process that, to some extent, I was myself already going through. Only after, in dwelling on it for long time and nourishing it by gathering insights from diverse intellectual origins, has it started to become conceptually articulated. In summarising some of the core elements of the kind of listening process the feminist rhetoric school suggests, it is possible to highlight their shared idea that, because of the prevalence of voice in Western philosophy and politics, listening must be relocated from its positioning as a subordinate of voice to its core. Such relocation requires conceiving listening as a place of political agency, which, in turn, demands from us a cultivation of certain dispositions to recalibrate our capacity for listening. One of these dispositions is openness, the capacity for letting oneself dwell in the world of the other, an attempt to make sense of her words in their own particular historical, political, cultural and economic location, and to let these words slowly grow into their own new articulations. In this way, a necessary consequence of being open is being exposed to uncertain outcomes. This uncertainty is populated by possibilities that otherwise wouldn’t be visible or audible. In this way, listening as dwelling is to be open to gather and grow meanings that nourish new possibilities. Listening in this way is a transformative experience.

Listening as dwelling has been for me an invitation to reflect on the first reactions that I experienced while walking, talking and eating with the survivors and their friends in solidarity with Las Brisas massacre. Las Brisas compelled me to undertake not just a scholarly descriptive task, where my focus would have been on scrutinising the survivors’ suffering. It meant a reflexive journey. It compelled me to write not only the story of the massacre, but also the story of my dwelling in this silence and how it changed the way I made sense of what I saw and heard. This experience changed the way I see and this change has allowed me to see new things. My ongoing listening to Stella now inhabits my writing.

In the aftermath of the Nazi Holocaust, and especially after the popularisation of the post-apartheid South African TRC model, doing justice to the victims of mass violence requires an ethical stance that positions voice at the centre place of democratic politics. I propose to re-think the way courts and TRCs relate to testimony, the most immediate actualisation of voice. From the
perspective of the listening project advanced in this thesis, it becomes evident that doing justice to the victims of forced displacement requires both providing the conditions that enable victims to maintain, create and recreate a meaningful world, and being able to meaningfully dwell in their world to the extent that this experience changes those listening. Such work can’t be done through legislation alone. It needs the capacity to acknowledge the haunting remnants of the conditions for silence to be perpetuated. Furthermore, it needs a kind of listening that can enable those involved (victims and those in search of a more just world) to change in fair terms, that is, by the process of listening. Seeking change through meaningfully listening in the world to those who have been silenced is, in fact, a genuine project for an active ethics against terror as activated by a haunting research agenda. My conceptualization of listening has been until now greatly influenced by Corriadi Fiumara’s contribution. Her approach, though, bears two features that limit its disclosing capacity. First, her use of the winery farming metaphor drives her to suggest a highly problematic binary. She uses this agricultural metaphor to evoke an attitude of nourishing and gathering and opposes it to that of hunting as mastery and destruction. Not only are such radical distinctions anthropologically flawed (the coexistence and interdependence between agriculture and gathering and hunting is widely documented), but it makes her conclude that hunting and agriculture are sequentially evolutionary. Secondly, this arbitrarily abstract assumption makes her dismiss a tremendously important aspect of hunting: dislocation, movement, travelling, and, ultimately, the encounter with alterity. I see in dislocation, in being thrown to the unexpected, a constitutive aspect of a productive experience of haunting. I embrace being dislocated, following Castillejo-Cuellar’s reflections of forced displacement and Said’s lessons on a de/postcolonial humanity, as a mode of thinking and being in travelling/theoria. In the next chapter I describe theoria as a methodology apt for a haunting research agenda that would take me to re-think the language of transitional justice.
Chapter Four

Methodology: Theôria, or traveling with concepts

To theorize, one leaves home.
(Clifford, 1989)

Critical consciousness seems to be closely associated here with dislocation or decentering.
(Balibar, 2004, p. 204)

Our model of academic freedom should therefore be the migrant or traveller.
(Said, 2000, p. 408)

Landing in Yogyakarta was in itself uncanny. After coming out of the luggage belts into the external taxi area I was almost attacked by taxi drivers. They all wanted me to climb into their cars and take me to wherever I was going, just like at any small city in Colombia. In fact, once I took one taxi and dived into the city, the resemblance of Villavicencio, my father’s birth place and the major city in the Colombian flatlands where I spent most of my childhood holidays, was disturbing. The billboards everywhere, clouds of motorbikes, the heat, the cars shamelessly beeping, the heat!, all was very similar. Did I travel to the exact opposite side of the planet just to arrive where I had started? Field reflection, Yogyakarta, February 2013.

1. Introduction

This thesis, as a theôria, has indeed taken me to uncanny destinations. In Chapter One, my inquiry into pragmatic conceptualisations of transitional justice first led me to trace its vocabulary via the historical link between processes of colonisation and the narrative of progress that legitimised them. Indeed, progress conveys a familiar idea traceable too in American narratives of civilisation and modernity. Transitional justice, as an academic field of research fostered as a foreign policy tool by American scholarship, belongs to this tradition and it also bears its contradictory character, whereby the imposition of this narrative of progress only creates the conditions for further violence. I formulated a research agenda interested in listening to the haunting call for justice to challenge the idea of “moving forward” toward a ready-made idea of the future (progress/modernity/peace= democracy + capitalism) that the narrative of progress politically articulates.
In Chapter Two I showed how this narrative of progress is actualised today in the Colombian transitional justice process. Fleeing from massacres, survivors have been forced to leave their land and their familiar lives behind, both on spacial and temporal terms. Indeed, the government’s idea of how to deliver justice to them is to disregard their lives as campesinos and embrace the new world of the industrial agricultural entrepreneur. In this case, the world of the entrepreneur (seen as the actualization of progress by the Colombian government) is forced over the world of the campesino. I redefine the concept of violence thus, showing that violence is about silencing worlds as a consequence of the terror of brutal violence that ultimately imposes the entrepreneur world-view upon the survivors. In one of my attempts to talk to the wife of one of the victims she confronted me with her silence. Her silence instilled a haunting question on my work: how to relate to her silence, how to do justice to it?

In Chapter Three I explored this question in the context of political theory to find out how this scholarship, and the activism it inspires, is focused on countering the violence of silence by engaging it in what I call the politics of voice, by allowing the many silenced voices to become legitimate. I argue, though, that we still lack the adequate form of listening to make these voices actually powerful. Furthermore, feminist rhetoric studies revealed that silences are charged with meaning. Following their work, I find that haunting as a mode of active engagement with loss, death, displacement and silence can better articulate listening in the context of crafting a different language for transitional justice.

This chapter, first explains the principles of a research agenda that operationalises haunting in a research methodology which I call theôria, or travelling with concepts. Theôria means, first, to leave home. In one sense, leaving home meant, for me, physically travelling from Colombia to Indonesia through Australia. But theôria also means moving across different modes of sense-making: academic debates, films and community lives. Ultimately, it means leaving behind traditional analytical frameworks and embracing the uncanny experience of otherness. Secondly, I define the rationale for travelling to Indonesia, defining it as a privileged site for the exploration of haunting. The next section further delves into a discussion of theôria’s anthropological background and clarifies its concrete and delimited purpose for this thesis. Finally, I give a brief account of the concrete research activities I undertook when reflecting on Indonesia as a site of haunting. In short, this chapter works as a bridge to move my theôria from Colombia to Indonesia and presents a set of principles to characterise the encounters that provided the experience necessary to craft a different language for transitional justice.

The work of the previous three chapters was to explore the kind of violence transitional justice should be able to account for and to provide a vocabulary capable of grasping it. With this
vocabulary in mind, I set out to Indonesia. Here my study of Indonesian political history and participation in spiritual practices in Central Java helped me to specify with more precision what violence as silencing entails. This experience also provided me with a vocabulary to further understand what listening entails and, hence, to rearticulate transitional justice in a language that can activate a different set of political possibilities.

2. Wonderment and travelling thinking

Writing about the experience of self-exile, of dislocation and of forced displacement, Alejandro Castillejo evokes the figure of the *theorein* to imagine the task of the academic, the intellectual (Castillejo, 2014). In ancient Greece, the government of a polis would send an envoy, the theorein, to other cities to witness and participate in their major religious celebrations. During the visit, they observed the ceremonies with an interest in religion, political organisation, economic practices, technologies and a general grasp of the everyday life of other people. Upon their return, the envoy would report back to his polis of origin. People would be intrigued by the new knowledge they were bringing, but also concerned since they were aware of the potential of the travel for transforming the theōros: they could have changed their religious loyalties and could use their knowledge and power against them.

Castillejo is interested in the transformative potential of the theória, and sees the mission of the contemporary intellectual as that of the theōros. His concern emerges from reflections on the role of academia and the intellectual in giving an account of violence, especially in the context of forced displacement and disappearing in South Africa and Colombia. His experience as a travelling scholar, as a theōros perhaps, made his writing, as he describes it, “…a witnessing device, a narrative in which a series of relationships…are articulated with the objective of interpellating the academic profession” (Castillejo, 2014, p. 8). His theória, it seems to me, rather than producing a report of the witnessed events, which it is as well, renders a particular experience of witnessing, one that triggers and structures a mode of questioning. For pre-socratic sages, such questioning made a theōros a borderline character: he had the potential to be transformed by the experience of learning from the foreign beliefs and practices, and as such his knowledge could threaten the imagined sense of self of the polis. This borderline situation put him at high risk, indeed, since the

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43 In the context of the dictatorships that took over the government in most countries in South America or the democratically elected but brutally aggressive governments of Central America, the *desaparecido* was a person who was taken by the military or paramilitaries and who never returned home. That person would remain disappeared because their body was never found, leaving families and friends with the ongoing uncertainty of their deaths and under an almost impossible mourning burden. The word *desaparecido* is often used in English writing in its Spanish form because of its specific origin and the difficulty of grasping its sense as a noun in English.
theôros could be seen as a traitor to his city and potentially sentenced to death. What it is at stake here, then, is the possibility of a form of enquiry that has the potential for transformation, for change, or, as I would like to add, of revealing political possibilities. Let me explore further the concept of theôria, and the experience of wondering, and show how travelling might simultaneously become a thinking practice and a research methodology.

Castillejo’s use of the word theôria is inspired by the work of historian and philosopher Andrea Wilson Nightingale (Nightingale, 2001, 2004). Her interest is in the transition from wisdom to philosophy in 4th century classical Greece and how it reframed the Greek understanding of theôria. According to Nightingale, before Plato, great people used to gain prestige and recognition by being able to achieve a series of practical goals and perform articulated and convincing discourse. Skilful success in these two arts was seen as wisdom. Pre-Socratic thinkers were as talented in public speech as they were physicians, engineers or warriors. How, then, did the separation of thinking and practical life, as depicted by Aristotle, become the model of thinking and philosophy? Nightingale proposes that this shift was the result of the post-Socratic philosophers’ re-appropriation and re-conceptualisation of the practice of theôria, widely popular in the Hellenic world before the 4th century.

As mentioned earlier, theôria was a journey that a person or group of people would take to visit foreign cities in order to witness religious practices and to assess others’ worldviews in order to report back to the city of origin. In Nightingale’s words,

[T]he defining feature of theôria in its traditional forms is a journey to a region outside the boundaries of one’s own city for the purpose of seeing a spectacle or witnessing another kind of object or event. This activity emphasizes "autopsy" or seeing something for oneself: the theôros is an eyewitness whose experience is radically different from those who stay home and receive a mere report of the news. The activity of theôria also emphasizes an encounter with something foreign and different. This encounter with the unfamiliar invites the traveller to look at the customs and practices of his own city from a new vantage point. The journey abroad may end up confirming the theorist in his own perspectives and prejudices, but it may also function to unsettle him and even to transform his basic worldview.

(Nightingale, 2001, p. 33)

For pre-Socratic thinkers, focused as they were on the practice of public speech and persuasion for practical purposes, the prevalent metaphor of effective reasoning was hearing. In their project of transforming this thinking practice, post-Socratic philosophers started to re-locate vision as the model for thinking. Instead, their strategy was to reformulate theôria as the travel of
the mind to the world of abstract/true forms. This shift to visual metaphors and to thinking as traveling allowed Socratic philosophers to detach themselves from the everyday practical world, claiming that the world of pure abstract forms was the only one worth experiencing. Nightingale, however, provides tremendously pertinent insights on how the language of théoria that was functional for this mode of thinking remained in their language. In so doing its pre-Socratic pragmatic value survived in their philosophy. We see this in his description of the use of a related word in Plato’s and Aristotle’s work: thauma or wondering.

In such travels to the world of true knowledge, then, a philosopher wonders. This verb, nonetheless, takes a different meaning in Aristotle and Plato. For Aristotle, “to “theorize” or “see” the cause of something perplexing is to move from a state of wonder to a state of certainty. Philosophy, then, begins in wonder and ends in theória” (Nightingale, 2001, p. 43). Thinking here is narrated in a linear progressive sequence of scene set up/beginning, conflicting situation and resolution/end, which in modern philosophical terms would be called thesis, anti-thesis and synthesis. For Plato, in contrast, the experience of wondering has little to do with an early stage in the process of gaining full knowledge. Wondering is both an intellectual and affective experience that happens when one is in a state of knowledge. Plato’s use of the word “wonder” is more related to the simultaneous world of humans and gods in Homeric narrative. In a moving and illuminating scene, Priam visits Achilles to ask him to give back his son’s dead body. Homer describes the arrival of Priam through Achille’s eyes, as looking with wonder upon such godlike a being. In this scene, the feeling of wonder is experienced when each finds in the other the son and the fat her, the god and the human, the familiar and the unknown.

This is a wonder that persists from beginning to end -it does not cease when the perceiver has achieved certainty or solved a puzzle. It is more like awe or reverence than perplexity or curiosity. But it is a reverence that does not bow down before the alien presence and power of god. This kind of wonder looks upon what is godlike and alien and finds some sense of kinship with it. (Nightingale, 2001, pp. 45–46)

Here we are not presented with a linear narrative where the unfolding of a quest for the truth ends in certainty. Instead, we are exposed to a particular state of wonderment, a moment when we face otherness, strangeness, and find in it what is familiar. There is something similar to this experience in the anthropological gaze, where the researcher is asked to see what is familiar in the other and what is strange in the self. Marc Augé and Jean-Paul Colleyn call it “systematic astonishment”. In order to gain this look, “the researcher must constantly question his own a priori
and adopt a learning posture” (Augé & Colleyn, 2006, p. 12). Could this state endure as a mode of thinking, as a way to see, to relate to the other, as a method to enquire into one’s own questions?

A further reflexion may help us to link théoria, wonderment and systematic astonishment, in a methodological approach and a thinking mode. In Catillejo’s “Utopia and uprootedness”, the experience of estrangement, where one is faced with the unfamiliar result of the dislocation produced by forced displacement, exile, or even travelling as an intellectual (the anthropologist), allows one simultaneously to find personal recognition: “a personal memory sedimented through multiple encounters and dis-encounters, a cumulate of wishes and possibilities that emerge as product of a peculiar history where personal itineraries and social processes of large scale are interwoven” (Castillejo, 2014, p. 4). Estrangement, as Castillejo suggests, resembles what Freud called the uncanny. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the uncanny is the experience of finding something disturbingly familiar in what seems to be utterly strange. In the context of Castillejo’s reflexions, this means that “…even in the most terrible circumstances, facing the most abject human degradation, something blossoms” (Castillejo, 2014, p. 30). Castillejo’s use of the uncanny suggests, seeing not what of the torturer is in the victim (what a brutal and irresponsible conceptual tour de force would that be!), but what of the human still remains in a monstrous situation: “an empathic look, the echo of another human sighing in the distance, a lucky instant in the darkness of death, the inconclusive look of a boy on his mother’s lap” (Castillejo, 2014, p. 30). The opening brought about by this sense of kinship with alterity allows me to activate haunting in its questioning of full presence as a listening mode. Indeed, my intention when travelling and being dislocated to places like rural Colombia or Central Java, places I am certainly not familiar with as I am an urbanite and an intellectual, is to let my encounter with otherness challenge ‘normality’ or my own familiar thinking practices. By effect of dislocation, of being exposed to a different landscape of possibility, my intention is to gather a vocabulary that can help me to unlock thinking, to learn from the other without the objectualisation that happens when the modern aspiration of “knowing” is the main driving force in the encounter with alterity.

3. Leaving home

In this way, although I find Castillejo’s work tremendously inspiring and illuminating and it has shaped and sharpened my thinking, I differ from Castillejo in approach. In his work on political transitions, he focuses on the political workings of voice, memory and silence, especially the form they take in their institutional existence and their historical occurrence. His interest is to track how such institutionalised historical narratives operate against the background of the
everyday experience of surviving structures of oppression. His reflections on the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, on the Peruvian Truth Commission or on the current Colombian Historical Memory Commission, have been traveling with him to Vienna, Johannesburg, Lima, Dubai, Bogota, etc. In his travelling, witnessing and thinking he can see how attempts to engineer political transitions have failed to assess intimate violence in their systemic dimension. At the systemic level, violence is excluded from the task of contemporary models of political transition due to the formal and legalistic language of human rights upon which the post-apartheid transitional legislation was based, a legal and political model of transition that has become the global model of transitional justice.

The scope of the mandate hardly allowed a careful examination of phenomena located beyond the limited definitions of the National Unity and Reconciliation Act, such as other forms of violence that were constituent with apartheid itself. The enquiry [of the TRC] left out the “social distribution of pain and suffering”, to use Veena Das’s phrase, through dislocation, displacement, dispossession, and the experience of a systemic, overarching, and all-embracing segregation system. The experiences of an unjust system were not, theoretically speaking, part of the knowledge and history produced by the commission (Castillejo-Cuéllar, 2007, p. 32).

His location as an anthropologist in dialogue with a specific literature sets for him a specific intellectual agenda. His reflections have with no doubt illuminated my work (Ruiz, 2010, 2014). However, my specific trajectory has entangled –to borrow Latour’s language (Latour, 2005)– my reflections with a diverse set of literatures that departs from the enriching insights in Castillejo’s work. As is Castillejo, I am indebted to a number of subfields in anthropology (of violence, of law, of the state, of memory, of knowledge), a literature widely influenced by critical theory and French late 20th century philosophy. For the project of this thesis, I am, furthermore, establishing a more embracing dialogue with feminist rhetoric studies, eco-philosophy, critical human geography and community economies scholarship.

In this sense, my théôria has an intellectual trajectory and but also a destination. Its openness towards what the exploration can present to the traveller is delimited by the traveller’s goals and desires. My théôria is, then, oriented towards wondering in the lessons of haunting. Here is where I find the most explicit formulation of my methodology: haunting as a research agenda became a space of listening, a field of exploration, of scrutinising and disclosing, a place of possibilities, of experience and imagination, of lived narrative, understanding, learning and transformation. From this perspective, theorising about transitional justice involves a process of dislocation, of moving from the certainty of the “commonsensical” modern understanding of time
and presence in which transitional justice operates, to wondering in haunting, both conceptually and quite literally.

4. Indonesia: break on through (to the other side)

For haunting to be explored I had to travel to places where a relationship with haunting is an everyday life experience. I could have travelled to any location, for the belief in the continuing agency of the past and the many forms of (non/more-than-human) agency are widespread. As Taylor points out, the prevalence of a secular normative landscape does not foreclose the possibility of people still ordering their affective dispositions according to a diversity of world views (Taylor, 2007, pp. 964–617). Despite being able to choose from, say, campesino/indigenous/African Colombia, I decided to continue my théòria in Indonesia. This is for a number of reasons. Firstly, I am interested in a south-south learning that is open to “leaving home” or dislocation, in being exposed to difference and finding in it a commonality that can ignite a political imagination pertinent for re-thinking transitional justice's theoretical foundations.

In this sense, my interest in Indonesia comes from it also having had a violent past that haunts its present national politics and local everyday reality. By 1965, Sukarno, 1945’s independence hero and then semi-autocratic president, was facing a political crisis caused simultaneously by poor harvests, increasing bellicosity with regional neighbours and strategic allies, and the increasing concern of the West about the growing influence of the Indonesian communist party. That year Suharto, a young army general, took over the government in the name of saving the nation from the communists. The forces he led massacred around one million people, banned the Communist Party and set up an authoritarian regime he called the New Order that lasted for three decades. During that time, any expression of free association - ranging from dance performance groups to union movements - that was not acquiescent with the ruling power structures was persecuted, labelled communist and then legally and illegally dealt with. Apart from the massacres, Sukarno’s New Order regime imprisoned thousands, and monitored and excluded for a lifetime from access to basic rights relatives and descendants of suspected communists. In 1998, Sukarno was deposed after what some scholars believe was a result of Suharto’s pressure, but that according to the official version was a voluntary deposition because of health issues (Roosa, 2006a). Today, after two decades of a new democratic political system, concerns about how to account for the 1965 massacres and other emblematic events of brutal state sponsored violence are still a delicate matter that politicians have never been willing or able to put forward effectively. Indeed, a Truth and Reconciliation Commission was the foreseen mechanism to deal
with the aftermath of state repression. Drafted in 2001, the Constitutional Court in 2006 finally nullified the act that would establish an Indonesian TRC due to many legal flaws and the political unrest it would cause (Juwana, 2006).44

Despite never being able to reach any sort of institutionalisation of trials through the national legal system, many other local and partial initiatives have taken place. There have been massive regional investigations, specific local inquiries and even significant individual prosecutions. Due to the global flow of human rights discourse and practice, experiences of truth-telling and reconciliation practices have been initiated by local governments, religious organisations, NGOs, local communities and several civil organisations and academic hubs (Bräuchler, 2009). In sum, Indonesia is a country that is dealing with the past of state repression using, among others, the tools of transitional justice.

Chart 1. Transitional justice initiatives in Indonesia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Joint Fact-Finding Team on the Event of 13-15 May 1998</td>
<td>This team looked into the events of May 1998, a three-day riot that led to Soeharto’s resignation, to investigate human rights violations during that event. The team worked for three months in different areas where these violations occurred: Jakarta, Solo, Palembang, Lampung, Surabaya and Medan. It drew from 124 victims and witnesses, in addition to data from civil society groups, and testimonies from senior members of security forces.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Report from a national investigation committee established by presidential decree.</td>
<td>Fact-finding Team on the Assassination of Theys Eluay, a Papuan leader who led Papuan groups to advocate for the rights to self-determination.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Report from a national investigation committee established by presidential decree.</td>
<td>Investigation to facilitate peace agreement of conflicted religious groups in Maluku and North Maluku after violent conflict in 1999.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Fact-finding Team established by presidential decree.</td>
<td>Set up to investigate the violence that occurred in Poso, Central Sulawesi, in late 1998.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>A Commission for Truth and Friendship (CTF) is established after peace agreements between</td>
<td></td>
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44 In early 2010, the recently elected Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (2004-2014) mentioned his government was drafting a new TRC bill (ICTJ & KontraS, 2011). There was no further development on this initiative.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Fact-finding Team established by presidential decree.</td>
<td>Set up to investigate the assassination of Munir, a leading human rights lawyer and advocate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>A TRC for Aceh is created after peace agreements.</td>
<td>Though established by the peace agreement and passed by law, Ache’s TRC has not been set up.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>The CTF reported crimes against humanity committed by the Indonesian military and civilian government in 1999.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Indonesia’s National Commission on Violence against Women launches a report on 40 years of violence against women.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>A victims’ group in Lhokseumawe, Aceh holds a public hearing on a massacre, known as Simpang KKA, to commemorate the incident in which 49 people were killed and hundreds wounded.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Indonesian and international human rights activist form the “international people's tribunal” in the massacres of 1965.</td>
<td>Activists organised a symbolic tribunal in La Hague. They named army officials responsible for the massacres and found the Indonesian state guilty of the killings.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In recent years there has been a growing local and international interest in Indonesian mass violent events, especially the 1965 massacres. This comes as a consequence of the striking impact and popularity of Joshua Oppenheimer’s documentaries about Indonesian death squads and their contemporary legitimacy. Oppenheimer’s *The Act of Killing* (2012) shows the actual murderers, who are celebrated as local and national heroes, playing out their crimes as Hollywood film scenes, while *The Look of Silence* (2014) follows the brother of one of the victims confronting the killers with the moral truth of their crimes. The first reception of these documentaries at the local level stirred dormant questions about the New Order official history. University students in major Indonesian cities have decided to screen the films even at the risk of being attacked by either paramilitaries or reactionary religious groups that still control local social life in most parts of the country (Lakesana, 2015; Nugroho, 2015; Susanto, 2015). This opening for talking publicly about Indonesian state-sponsored violence has even triggered an international solidarity group hosting the “International People’s Tribunal 1965.” The recent election of the relatively progressive

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45 Heryanto (Heryanto, 2014), however, places this emerging interest in the 1965 massacres in the Indonesian national political scenario to show how still very limited its influence could be.
president Joko Widodo may signal the possibility for a free speech policy around the issue that could potentially turn the tables for the political structure associated with the killings which still keeps a strong hold on power.\textsuperscript{46}

Third, Indonesia in general, and Java in particular, is a very fertile soil for stories of haunting. As described by Clifford Geertz, in the rural areas of East Java (Modjokuto, specifically), one among the three main religious practices, abangan, is based on an “extensive and intricate complex of spirits beliefs…and a whole set of theories and practices of curing, sorcery, and magic” (Beatty, 1999; Geertz, 1976, p. 5). In fact, both in Beatty’s fictional ethnography of East Java (2009) and in the outstanding historic-anthropological work of John Pemberton (Pemberton, 1994) of Central Java the role of spirits play an important role in mediating different kinds of situations of uncertainty in the context of economic and political transitions. Pemberton points out how Suharto’s New Order reconfigured cultural diversity by objectifying a set of vaguely differentiable cultural trends placed on a geo-cultural map. This cultural map was actually built as a human size diorama called “Beautiful Indonesia” inspired by Disney Park.\textsuperscript{47} In the early 1980’s, during his ethnographic work, Pemberton noticed how the spirit of a legendary death shadow puppet master (dhayang) forbade any performance of the important rituals of village cleansing of bad spirits (berisih desa). In his words:

On the eve of the village’s 1983 berisih desah, the cranky old spirit came to the village headman in a dream and made one final customary demand: “I will not be ‘ritual’ –ized!” (di “upacara” kake). This was the dhayang’s last communication, and from then on, this annual event has not happened and instead has been left suspended in a sort of ritual limbo. Thus, the refusal to be located on “Beautiful Indonesia”’s extending map is articulated finally through a silence, an absence that itself serves as a continued reminder of the village spirit’s power, a reminder accompanied by a sense of waiting. (Pemberton, 1994, p. 267)

\textsuperscript{46}At the book launch of “Demokrasi” (McDonald, 2014) at the University of Sydney, Andreas Sudarsono, senior journalist and representative of Human Rights Watch in Indonesia, stated that after the election of Widodo the possibility of a TRC had increased (book launch held on 01/09/2014). According to Sudarsono, at a meeting with representatives of civil groups Widodo had himself committed to having an accountability process in this sense, although he first had to set aside the politicians who could be against it. Later in 2015, at a talk given by Oppenheimer and Adi (protagonist The Look of Silence) at the Sydney Film Festival, I asked Sudarsono about the current developments of the issue. He told me that the configuration of president Widodo’s cabinet suggests that he still will be surrounded by the old political elite associated with the killings, so the possibility of a national accountability process seems to be fading away again (informal conversation on 11/06/2015).

\textsuperscript{47}Pemberton’s work demonstrates how this fixation process was already present in the enlightened anthropological studies of early Dutch colonization. This fixation in turn was used to settle contending local parties for royal predominance for different kingdoms in the geographical Java. In so doing, the historic-anthropological definition of what is “Java”, as a “culture”, helped to fast-track the colonial process of privileging particular power structures that would favour Dutch rule.
Because of the persistence of repression, because of the never totally silenced calls for justice, and because of its dynamic and rich spiritual life, Indonesia is a privileged site to witness haunting.

5. Sharpening the anthropological gaze: beyond empathy

As stated in the previous sections, the general theoretical orientation of this thesis claims that théoría, as a methodology, implies a conceptual and ethical commitment to the encounter with the other; that is, it is ethnographic in its outlook. This approach was developed in the context of my reflections on the experience of everyday life, especially as an elaboration of my suppositions being debunked after my ethnographic work in Colombia with survivors. This experience compelled me to complement the interpretation and adaptation of philosophical discussions with a more overarching, life-oriented, contextual and conceptual exploration. In what follows I explain the kind of ethnographic enquiry that informs théoría as a research methodology.

Ethnography, as it is well established, is the defining methodology of anthropology as a discipline of the social sciences. Indeed, what is most characteristic of the anthropological outlook is its injunction of being able to see, in the ethnographic encounter with the other, what is different in the same and what in the same is different. In other words, anthropology is a discipline particularly well positioned for hosting the challenge of the haunting of presence. It destabilises fixed conceptions of the self and the other.

Furthermore, this injunction also demands from us not to succumb to the compartmentalisation of the world into “cultures”, an imperial project itself, as Said reminds us (Said, 1991). Of course, anthropology, and more so ethnography, emerged in the context of European imperial expansion. Early anthropology was embedded in the European colonial imagination, exacerbated by the Victorian obsession with the past and its ambition to explain it in the language of the natural laws of human development. It thus played a determinant role in reinforcing ideas of universal human progress and European superiority (Asad, 1991). However, core ideas and values have been reimagined because of the long history of Western encounters with other worlds, and the many encounters of the rest of the world with the West have also changed non-Western worldviews.\footnote{Observe, for example, the intellectual reflections of J.J. Rousseau and their impact in the work on anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss. Partly inspired by his reading of the accounts of travellers, explorers and missionaries, Rousseau reformulated modern political theory and set the blue print for a future anthropology. In search of Rousseau’s imagined ideal of the good savage, intellectuals would undertake field work in Africa, Asia, and America. His depiction of Montesquieu, Buffon, or Diderot as travellers was Claude Lévi-Strauss’ inspiration for laying the structural anthropology agenda (Luhrmann, 1990). Later on, though, Emmanuel Levinas, Jaques Derrida and other philosophers}
Anthropology, though, by historicising its own origins in the context of the colonial expansion of the 19th century, provided the intellectual foundations for a reflexive turn. Reflexivity highlighted the historical conditions in which anthropology as knowledge of the other is produced and compels anthropologists to disclose the power structures in which their work participates in order to make them part of the ethnographical analysis itself (Clifford & Marcus, 1986). The reflexive turn is just an instance of the role that the dislocation of travelling and the encounter with the Other plays in provoking thought. This dislocation challenged their own certainties and familiar realities, creating the conditions for seeing differently, for changing perspectives to see other aspects of life; in other words, to disclose new possibilities.

Theôria then activates this principle whereby the encounter with the other is not only an attempt to “know” the other, but to let the encounter trigger thought. Theoria is then an active and intentional decision of learning (not necessarily knowing) from (non-Western) others. I approach these encounters with an explicit intention. I am aware as much as possible of the intellectual and political trajectory I come from and the potential of imposing my preconceptions on my interpretations and encounters with others. I have allowed significant elements of my conversations and observations in the field to be integrated into my thinking instead of attempting to describe or represent the other. In this way, this encounter has in turn let me provide new landscapes of possibilities for the debate I am intervening in (transitional justice).

My intention to design my theôria to explore haunting in Indonesia is also guided by the post-colonial commitment to furthering south-south learning. In this context it is important to qualify what this learning means. Edward Said reminds us that historically, many independence movements in North Africa and the Middle East claimed the restoration of local languages, culture and values as policies of reinforcing national identity against the legacy of the imperial cultural politics that often banned local traditions or deemed them backwards and useless. This meant, paradoxically, a post-independence nationalism that closed up the possibility of exchanging knowledge and experience across cultures in the name of their particularism. In Said’s words,

To assume that the ends of education are best advanced by focusing principally on our own separateness, our own ethnic identity, culture, and traditions ironically places us where as subaltern, inferior, or lesser races we had been placed by nineteenth-century racial theory, unable to share in the general riches of human culture. (Said, 2000, p. 408)

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revolutionised philosophy through a renewed understanding and location of the figure of the Other in reaction to Lévi-Strauss’ project of finding the laws structuring human interaction across cultures, a project rooted in XIX century social science positivism and classic logocentric philosophy.
I see Said here not as a universalist in search of human reconciliation. Instead, in his invitation I see the injunction of an ethical, intellectual and political opening for shared learning. Of course, my approach and interpretation of Indonesian politics and cultures are indebted to American and European scholarship. Because of Imperial strategic interests (past and present), their encyclopaedic academic trajectories and abundant resources, the “West” has produced the large bulk of knowledge available about Indonesia.

However, from a théoria perspective, travelling there matters. It matters that a Latin American scholar who is interested in learning about mass violence, legitimising narratives, economic transformations and political possibilities experiences first-hand how people cope with their everyday lives in such contexts. Questions like: what is different in the Indonesian case from the Colombian one? and what is akin? take an intimate and personal character. This is the case, not just in the sense of my personal preoccupation with providing answers to concrete political problems in both contexts. Even further, in the larger sense of a personal trajectory, my experience locates me in a position that allows me to see from a particular point of view that is just not the same as the Western scholar. In other words, I am located in a position where I can see differently and disclose different possibilities.

This particular conceptualisation of what it means to learn from the other also motivated me to focus my ethnographic field research on more general experiences of haunting and not necessarily on those related to the Indonesian massacres of 1965-66. This was a deliberate decision stemming from three factors, one ethical, another academic and a last one pragmatic. Ethically, the silence of one of the survivors of Las Brisas massacre in Colombia marked a break in my understanding of my task as a researcher. As stated in Chapter Two, silence motivated more than the usual ethical concerns of academic research on violence that are normally related to questions about how to deal with a pain that is not yours, how to evoke someone else’s past without actualising the pain of traumatic memories, and how to abstract theoretical conclusions about deeply personal experiences, etc. To me, it meant something different than an invitation to follow a hidden story, to unveil her secrets. Silence did challenge my own distant position as a researcher and also radically challenged my own personal interest in matters such as her suffering. Silence, furthermore, triggered a continuing set of questions related to my own research and its political agenda. Because of this ethical self-questioning, I concluded that one of the core normative commitments of transitional justice (giving voice to the survivors) needs a specific sensibility, one that enables a meaningful listening to the world of those who have been silenced. Listening became my project for an active ethics (and politics) of writing against terror.
Academically speaking, the motivation of my enquiry shifted. My reflexion around the silencing effects of transitional justice’s progressive narrative and its actualisation in the Colombian context was the main interest of the first part of this thesis. In this sense, it was analytical. However, in my research on Indonesia my preoccupation was to explore a mode of listening, a set of observational strategies, more explicitly related to the figure of haunting. In this sense, my approach was theoretical in the precise sense given to this word here; that is, as an exploration of the possibilities that emerge from observing everyday life practices when interpreted from a specific approach, in this case, haunting.

Finally, there was very important practical limitation to my research. On very reasonable grounds, as I mentioned earlier, the interaction with victims and survivors of violent and traumatic events requires a specific sensibility. This sensibility is preferably acquired through specialised psychological and clinical training or longstanding and proven experience. Apart from my work for two years with survivors’ organisations in Colombia, a life-changing and enlightening experience at the commemoration of a massacre with the relatives of the victims, and extensive reading on issues of violence, trauma, memory and psychoanalysis, I have no formal training in psychology or social work. Since this issue is very delicate in terms of the negative effects on the participants of the research that would investigate (and hence recall) traumatic experiences of violence, I found my professional skills ill equipped for the very delicate sensitivities at stake.

6. Principled encounters

The above mentioned reflections inform the way I articulated into this research my encounters with the many people that generously let me enter into their words. In this sense, théoria as a methodology does not only imply a set of research activities, but furthermore, it enacts a set of principles that are the intellectual and ethical roadmap that oriented my search and framed encounters while travelling. Summarised as follows, these principles define what théoria as a mode of intellectual inquiry and research methodology is:

a. First of all, théoria requires dislocation. Théoria is the experience of leaving familiar certainties behind to be exposed to different ways to see the world.

b. It is open to the experience of wonder. The researcher doing théoria aims to be sensitive to those moments or elements in his experience with the communities he visits where he can feel akin to them, where he finds a sense of paradoxical commonality despite their substantial difference.

c. The destination or purpose of théoria is to disclose possibilities. In finding a common element experienced differently in the world of the other, the researcher is then able to re-read his academic
trajectory and research problems from a different perspective. This is meant to open to view different landscapes of possibility in his own world.

d. Theôria is active listening as defined in Chapter Three. In this way, the whole theôria approach requires listening to be located in the privileged site of active agency. This proposes a different approach to an ethics and politics of discourse and speech.

e. As structured in the ethics of listening, theôria is reflexive. During the experience of wondering, the researcher is an inhabitant of a dialogical and reflexive borderland. The dialogue between his trajectory and his encounters with the other changes the terms under which each of them (self and other) are thought of and experienced.

f. Theôria is, then, transformative. The borderland feeds back to the self. This is, it opens a space of possibilities that changes the very way the researcher sees and understands his research trajectory.

g. Theôria is experimental. As an exploratory and dialogical project, the pertinence of the findings in the field for thinking political possibilities can be re-articulated in ways that re-energise political imagination.

7. On the field

This last section provides a brief account of a number of processes and activities that not only operationalised my methodology in Indonesia, but that also introduced haunting as a lived experience right from the setting up of my fieldwork. Getting permission for doing research in Indonesia, for example, is evidence of the agency of the past in the Indonesian present, blurring neat distinctions between the authoritarian times of Suharto’s regime and contemporary Demokrasi. Indeed, since Suharto took power in 1965 censorship has been common in Indonesia, making it very difficult, if not impossible, to get research permits. Although today explicit bans are very rare, there are still a number of cryptic and time-consuming bureaucratic processes that make up, intentionally or not (hard to tell), a wall of discouragement. After the demise of Suharto in 1998, such tacit barriers, though relaxed, still represent the first great challenge to overcome on the journey of learning from Indonesian reality. Bureaucracy, then, was the most immediate articulation of the haunting remnants of Suharto’s despotic regime, and makes it very difficult to set clear boundaries between the past and the present in Indonesian politics and everyday life. In order to be allowed to do research in Indonesia I got the support of the Australian Consortium for In-Country Indonesian Studies. After 20 years of bridging undergrad students with Indonesian Universities, ACICIS have developed a local know-how, a sort of responsive adaptation to a

49 Anderson was expelled from Indonesia in the early times of Suharto’s regime, and his studies on the events on 1965-66 were banned (Anderson, McVey, & Bunnell, 1971), as many other artistic and intellectual works critical of the regime.
seemingly arbitrary bureaucratic environment. ACICIS, to a very important extent, has learned from this bureaucracy’s timing, tacit codes and power structures, a sort of non-explicit state language, in order to facilitate academic experiences in Indonesia for students coming from Australian Universities.

I spent two semesters in Indonesia doing two of ACICIS’ programs. In the first semester of 2013 I did the Flexible Language Immersion Program that ACICIS hosts at Universitas Gadjah Mada (UGM) in Yogyakarta, Central Java. And then again, my academic experience also seemed embedded in this simultaneous and living monument to the complex living past in the present and its imagination of the future. For the mainstream Indonesian political imaginary, UGM represents Indonesian intellectual independence in its political meaning: independence as a new project called Indonesia. The Independence movement, as the work of Pramoedya bears witness, was a project of enlightenment. Schools and universities started to mushroom everywhere during and after Independence. Indonesian was in fact the language unifying the Indonesian archipelago as a single independent political project. Learning working Indonesian, nonetheless, is surprisingly difficult, although its basic grammar is fairly easy. Despite its strategic relevance for the Indonesian political project, and in contrast with the highly controlled accounts of Indonesian history, the Indonesian language is experiencing rapid and uncoordinated changes. The teaching program I went through at UGM resulted in way too vague an attempt to give me enough slang, so to speak, to keep up with the language’s dynamic development.

Upon finding my language learning not improving at the necessary rate to hold even small talk interactions, I decided to find alternatives. Many of the foreigners I had met during the first couple of months in Yogyakarta had already commented on the interesting offer of language courses in Yogyakarta designed specifically for foreigners at private institutes. I decided to try them.

50 UGM was founded exactly one year after the re-occupation of Indonesia by the Netherlands in 1948. Founding a nation-wide Indonesian university was indeed a challenge to the still active aspirations of control by the occupation forces and hence a powerful gesture of political Independence. From its set up, UGM has provided the country with a new intellectual elite. Its prestige and influence is strong to the extent that the current president of Indonesia, Joko Widodo, is an UGM alumnus.

51 Pramoedya’s most renown work, a series of four novels called The Buru Quartet published from 1988 to 1998 and composed during Pramoedya’s years in prison under de New Regime, narrate the woes of a young medicine student come journalist and member of the Javanese nobility who, both inspired and troubled by the principles of the Enlightenment, becomes a protagonist in the struggle for Independence.

52 Along with my language classes, I also undertook a subject on “Javanese Ethnography” at UGM. Interestingly, over the semester we were taught about the cultural particularities of each region. The content of the class seemed to resemble those atlases where you can see each country depicted in a little person wearing her country’s “traditional” custom. In a way, and following Pemberton’s insights, the class enacted the kind of uncritical cultural fixation that the Suharto’s regime so thoroughly and successfully established as a state policy and national standard. Upon my questioning of the lecturer’s bibliographical selection, that included only local publications by regional governments and other semi-official institutions, she only answered at the end of the semester suggesting to other students to visit texts such as Geertz’s as a reference in the future. Although it seemed to me parochial, it also had a hint, again, of intellectual independence, resisting being described and categorised by foreigners.
and immediately my learning experience improved. Their teaching strategy was as effective as straightforward: it involved highly trained young teachers tutoring on one-to-one sessions in different degrees of intensity. The schedule was suitably flexible and teaching available any time of the year. I learned at a quicker pace. The young professionals, though, had to be equally flexible and available at a very low wage. These new institutions were my first window into the realities of contemporary Indonesian urban everyday life. Some of the teachers at the institute where I did my extra language classes were originally from rural neighbouring localities. This new generation is in existential need of professional training, both in terms of survival and in terms of their aspirations in life. They do not see themselves as farmers anymore, perhaps as their parents did. Nonetheless, their new dreams of an urban professional future are plagued by the many uncertainties that the new global generation, to which I too belong, faces: unemployment, casualisation, impossible living costs, and a furiously entrenched economic/political elite profiting from their historic privilege and highly protected structures of exploitation. In this particular sense, and being well aware of the power imbalance between these teachers and me (backed by an Australian university, a higher academic status and more cash at hand), my théoria had brought me to experience this sense of familiarity with people on the other side of the world. Interestingly, their world and my world both share the narrative of liberation from a rural past through professional training (enlightenment, progress) and are also haunted by historically built structures of exploitation. My théoria made possible the powerful experience of human kinship that is only possible by being there.

My research activities started with the generous help of one of these language teachers, Wulan, who very insightfully understood my research interests, put me in touch with the first people I contacted and, soon after, became my translator and interpreter. With her help, I scanned possibilities for a field site in Yogyakarta region. My first explorations were loosely guided by Geertz’ accounts on spiritual life in Java. In his account, I found an interesting spiritual practice that challenge the modern underrating of time and presence: the slametan. The slametan is a prayer meal that involves acknowledging spirits of the dead and the landscape among other deities and God(s) for the purpose of provoking the appropriate conditions for material and spiritual well-being. In search of practices staging similar haunting experiences, we attended a number of celebrations such as royal weddings, layman funerals, one-year birthday blessings, forgiveness and cleansing collective ceremonies, harvest slametans and possession dance performances. At these social and spiritual events we talked to many people about these practices’ historical, symbolic and practical elements.

I decided to focus my research on the rice mountains of Kulon Progo, west of Yogyakarta city. There I met Pak Paiman, a Catholic deacon who generously introduced me to a number of
spiritual practices including *slametans* for the dead, which I found very patently portray haunting as actualisation of the agency of the past in the present in a context of simultaneous religious loyalties. Another practice also grabbed my attention for its portrayal of haunting. The *jathilan* challenge neat ideas of presence when dancers are possessed by spirits of the landscape and dead people.

In this thesis, this chapter aims to work as a bridge between Colombia and Indonesia. The work of the previous three chapters was to explore the kind of violence transitional justice should be able to account for. I developed a vocabulary that brings it to light. With this vocabulary in mind, I travelled to Indonesia to further my understanding of violence as silencing and activate listening to learn from spiritual practices in Central Java, Indonesia. It was there where the staged experience of haunting enabled my thinking to explore a new vocabulary for transitional justice.
Chapter Five

The silencing strategies of Indonesia’s New Order: splitting the power of economies.

1. Introduction

This chapter is a theoretical into the relationship between narrative and silencing processes in the context of Indonesia’s New Order regime (1965-1998). As seen in Chapter One, the pragmatic understanding of transitional justice (synthesised in the transitional justice equation, TJe) is embedded in the narrative of modern liberal progress and a particular understanding of time and presence. As we saw in Chapter Two, there is a conflict between the “practical” aim of transitional justice (a political transition that can provide durable peace or the end of terror) and the actual transitional justice. In the case of Colombia, this conflict is actualised when the politics of doing justice to the victims is articulated in terms of recognising their voices as victims but not recognising their voices as inhabitants of a world. Their world, the campesino world, is being shattered by the violence of land dispossession and the imposition of a new form of production that forces the world of the entrepreneur onto them. The world of the entrepreneur is not foreign to the narrative of liberal progress that informs the TJe. Indeed, we can see in Colombia that, in order to survive in the new world of agri-business that the massacres brought about, the campesino must in turn become an entrepreneur. In this particular sense, the TJe is part of the consolidation of that world and hence it is unable to effectively assess the conditions that gave rise to the violence of the massacres in the first place. Consequently, the TJe is part of a larger silencing process: the silencing of the campesino world. However, more conceptual understandings of transitional justice open up possibilities for other narratives if only by questioning what reparation and reconciliation mean for transitional justice. How can we engage with this kind of violence? In other words, what is to be repaired and what is to be reconciled? Chapter Three explored these questions and concluded that our contemporary progressive politics are articulated in a politics of voice that delivers little in terms of listening. Listening not only requires us to make sense of what is said (the testimony), but to let the silences of the survivors challenge our narratives. It is in this way that an ethics of listening is located in a research agenda interested in haunting: silence in this context represents a challenge to our certainties, to the pretended global fulfilment of presence imagined by the narrative of modern liberal progress and development. Silence becomes rhetorical and meaningful when it is a haunting call for doing justice, the kind of justice that then requires us to challenge such certainties.
As defined in Chapter Two, my experience of being confronted by silence allowed me to see the campesino life-world as a community economy constituted by a set of common understandings and livelihood practices that make cooperation of all kinds possible. This chapter will explore in the very different context of Indonesia how modern narratives of progress split the power of community economies by separating these two interconnected and mutually feeding processes. Unlinking them functions as a silencing process that politically neutralises communities’ world-making power. The Indonesian history of repression showed me that the operation of silencing is articulated by modern global-reaching narratives. The TJL is unable to address this silencing at its local, national and global scales because it is precisely articulated by the narrative of liberal progress.

The first section of this chapter introduces the actualisation of the workings of this global silencing processes in Indonesia by reflecting on scenes from Joshua Oppenheimer’s documentary work. In these scenes the Cold War narrative justifies the violent silencing experienced by Indonesians up until today. They make a powerful call for listening to this haunted silence.

Following this call, the second section of this chapter briefly recounts scenes of silencing structured by modern narratives of progress that further clarify this silencing process. First, I show how the construction of “Java” as a modern field of study by early Dutch philologists initiated a narrative silencing process. Second, I assess how the knowledge production practices of the colonial times served to consolidate the Cold War narrative of the New Order as a refurbished silencing strategy. Third, I discuss post-New Order Demokrasi and the way foreign social and economic interventions have a very clear liberal narrative of modern progress that articulates contemporary ideas about how to consolidate the transition to democracy that in its own particular way is also a silencing process.

I conclude that silencing processes in Indonesia are haunted by a modernist appropriation of culture whose effect is to break the social link between meaning creation and community economic practices. This conclusion further illuminates previous conclusions about the character and function of violence in Colombia. In this way, it is possible to say that, conceptually, violently separating meaning creation from community economic practices by imposing a modern narrative of progress amounts to silencing a world. This is not the kind of “truth” of human rights-based transitional justice. Human rights violations are undoubtedly important as they reveal a powerful dimension of violence. By carefully listening and being open, this deeper historical, sociological and political truth is able to challenge mainstream policy making and established rights language. In
this way, it renders a significantly different understanding of terror and injustice that opens up our political imagination to the question of what should be done.  

In search for an answer to this question, I ask why Oppenheimer’s documentary work has been so effective in operationalising the haunting silence of 1965-66 anti-communist massacres even though many other strategies had been deployed in the past for this same purpose, not least many transitional justice initiatives. I acknowledge in his work an effective skill at developing a poetic language that is able to disclose the working of progressive narratives. By witnessing his evocative scenes, by reading in them a powerful poetics, language itself, in retrospect, became the raw material of this thesis. From the perspective of transitional justice and the politics of voice, haunting can be made operative to conjure up the violent past in the present. Metaphorically speaking, that is what Oppenheimer so skilfully and powerfully does.

In the next chapter I will discuss my ethnographic fieldwork in Central Java to show how the link between symbolic creation and economic practices is enacted at the community level in the context of ceremonialisled interactions with the spirits of the death and the landscape. Delving into these practices, letting their haunting power (one that survives capitalism) be revealed to me, allowed a new language by which to talk about transitional justice as the recreation of community world-making power. While Oppenheimer uses haunting to make the narrative of the New Order visible, deeper and more engaging, my aim is to use haunting to instigate new political possibilities against terror away from uncritical narratives of progress.

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53 It can be seen as contradictory that I seem to be claiming that transitional justice promotes the violence embedded in narratives of progress while expecting that transitional justice's truth telling should eventually deal with the violence promoted by narratives of progress in Indonesia. As mentioned in the Introduction and Chapter One, I argue that my critique of transitional justice is focused on pragmatic definitions and scholarship on transitional justice. It is this conception of transitional justice that bears the inheritance of discourses of progress and that can reproduce the conditions for terror. On the other hand, I do find potential in transitional justice’s normative goal of, as I define it, “writing against terror”. My project is about developing a different language to dispel terror. My concern with the New Order is to show how narratives of progress silence others. This is the truth I am interested in and it is a kind of truth that truth commissions would find odd to defend because of their legal and technical constraints. Instead, my particular aim is to articulate a methodology of listening to this silenced truth that is capable of unlocking political imaginations other than simplistic assumptions of liberal peace.
2. The act of haunting


The still above is taken from Joshua Oppenheimer’s *The Act of Killing*. In this film, Oppenheimer, a young Danish-American filmmaker schooled in philosophy and mathematics, documents Indonesian death squad leaders narrating their stories about their role in the anti-communist pogrom of 1965-66. How Oppenheimer has got the thugs-come-paramilitaries to not only openly talk to the camera but to boastfully re-enact their crimes in Holliwoodesque scenes is what makes this documentary a powerful insight into silencing processes both in Indonesia and globally.

When Oppenheimer first went to Indonesia, he was planning to shoot a documentary with plantation workers. He was documenting their struggle to form a union and act collectively against the use of a poisonous pesticide that was killing them. He found that the farm workers were wary of violent reprisals if they did. He soon realised that they feared those who had committed the massacres in 1965. The houses of the then death-squads were pointed out to him. They were in fact public personalities in the area, still strongly influential in local and national politics and economy. Most workers, in refusing to participate in his documentary, suggested that he instead should talk to the perpetrators. Oppenheimer embraced this turn of events (Sabarini, 2014).

One of these death squad leaders particularly drew Oppenheimer’s attention: Anwar Congo (first on the right in the still). Congo was not only open and boastful in his retelling of the time of the massacres. He was also very colourful and imaginative, narrating his murders as though they were Hollywood movie scenes. By the time of the massacres (1965-68), Congo was a ticket
reseller at the doors of his local cinema. Here he became a committed fan of American movies. Congo told Oppenheimer that he used to imagine himself walking from the film theatre to go to his “office” to kill suspected communists with the confident swing and bravado of the gangsters in the movies.

Oppenheimer, who is interested in exploring more evocative and poetic languages in documentary filmmaking, offered Congo to stage his murders in film the way he narrated them. *The Act of Killing*, then, documents Congo and other thugs producing and directing Congo’s Hollywood-inspired scenes: as musicals, westerns, mafia thrillers, or even Vietnam war films. While directing their own films, we see how paramilitaries find this strategy as an opportunity to showcase their power to narrate and to silence other narratives.

In this way, Oppenheimer offers us a thoroughly uncanny look into a silencing process. Unlike the Colombian case as analysed in Chapter Two, the narrative element here is utterly and eerily explicit, revealing the haunting cracks in silence and the always open opportunity to make it meaningful. Oppenheimer’s films offer the opportunity for ethical listening.

The still above is taken from one of the studio shootings documented in *The Act of Killing* where Anwar Congo’s crew are enacting an interrogation scene. In the film, we see Congo, Adi Zulkardi and Herman Coto, his gangster-come-actor partners, discussing directing ideas. A member of the film crew present at the studio, Suryono (second left in the still), interrupts a direction meeting between Congo and his partners to provide some “input” into their brainstorming. Nervously giggling, and excusing himself for bringing his experience up, not meaning to criticise, he says, Suryono tells them how his stepfather was abducted from his home, how he found the body under a barrel, how he and his grandfather buried the body by the side of the road “like a goat”, how he and his family were exiled to the jungle for being “communists” and how he had to learn to read and write by himself because he was not allowed to go to school. He says all of this to the faces of three of the most insidious killers of Medan and perhaps of all Sumatra and Indonesia. Congo and his mates analyse Suryono’s “input” and decide it is too complex a story to be included in their film.

Instead, they enact a torture scene where Suryono acts as the victim. They use it as a perverse pedagogical example of how they tortured their victims: a directing exercise meant to “motivate” the actors in the studio. Congo’s film crew members (second and third from the right on the still) want a more realistic torture as the scene progresses. They put a sword on Suryono’s neck, they demand of him to pray, to look disoriented, they call him communist, they ask him to confess, they blindfold him and gag him, some even say that they may end up killing him for real but that it would not matter. And then they bring a wire to strangle him in the way that Congo
and his gang partners killed their victims, a method Congo is so proud of: bloodless, noiseless. Suryono breaks down and bursts into tears: “Have mercy of me… Wait! Would you give a message to my family? Or could I speak to them one last time?” He is not acting anymore. His pain, his tears, his plea is all too real. He disrupts and subverts their whole silencing narration by completely shattering it with a haunting and redoubled blow of reality, the reality of his pain that no one can ignore: the perpetrators-come-actors and directors, the film crew… and the audience of Oppenheimer’s documentary, us.

In this scene, the paramilitaries-come-filmmakers are silencing Suryono’s memory by symbolically affirming their very real and overwhelming power over him and over all their victims. His oblique testimony is denied any claim for justice and thus neutralised. Adi Zulkadry, Congo’s partner in crime (third from the left in the still), stated, as advice to the staff in the studio, what his torture methods and style were meant to achieve. His words are an insight into the ultimate purpose of their whole narrative strategy: “I tried to make them accept that they were going to die”. Dying as in silencing, vanishing from the world of the living, killing their agency.

But Suryono’s brave testimony as documented by Oppenheimer is a haunting reminder of the impossibility of Zulkadry’s project: Suryono reached meaning way beyond the paramilitaries’ assertion of power. It is in this way that this scene powerfully performs what I define as haunting the disruptive re-emergence of a silenced world. Haunting insinuates multiple layers of meaning and power without taking absolute or total shape; it is a social fact imposing itself in an uncannily real experience rather than a structured theoretical or historical narrative. It is the apparition of a redoubled reality that challenges silencing narratives, a force to reckon with that nonetheless never takes any positive form. In this chapter I let the haunting power of this scene guide me to disclose a conceptual insight into a larger and longer silencing process.

Following this cue, then, the powerful persistence of haunting demonstrates the fragility of silencing processes. Suryono’s pain disrupts the silencing narrative of the murderers-come-film directors: a loud reminder of the (never totally) suppressed wound created by the massacres. The question is how can haunting disrupt silencing at a conceptual level? How can I engage it to make it rhetorical, meaningful to me as a thinker of transitional justice?


The authoritarian regime that begun with the massacres in 1965 formally came to an end when Suharto, the autocratic president of Indonesia, stepped down from power in 1998. The new formally democratic political system, Demokrasi, that was initiated in 1998 has been unable and/or unwilling to come to terms with the numerous criminal actions and human rights violations
perpetrated by Suharto and his cronies. Furthermore, it has perpetuated the legitimising narrative that tells Indonesians that the massacres were necessary and that Suharto saved the nation from barbarian, atheist and genital-mutilating communists. This version of the events remains so dominant because thirty years of fear and control during Suharto’s regime, the New Order, and the ongoing political dominance of his cronies after him created a living reality where that story was valid. Indonesians are assured that the communist threat will never rise again. This has the double effect of warning them of never challenging “order”. Today, people who were directly involved in the killings still hold positions of power: from army generals and presidential candidates to local authorities and lay gangsters. Even the charismatic and progressive president of Indonesia elected in 2014, Joko Widodo, whose campaign capitalised on his clean record, effective policy delivery and humble origins, has been unable to tackle this entrenched political elite (McDonald, 2014).

Today, subtle and explicit forms of authoritarianism still operate by imposing silence about these events. Recent evidence of it is that Oppenheimer’s Indonesian film crew had to keep anonymous during the eight years of filming, production and distribution of his documentaries (Kwok, 2015). The popularisation of Oppenheimer’s films in Indonesia rocketed among youngsters who have little or no knowledge about the massacres and their role in Indonesian history. But this popularity has been welcomed with threats of violence at many of the now thousands of screenings across the whole archipelago (Hearman, 2014; Lakesana, 2015; Nugroho, 2015; Susanto, 2015; Wandita, 2014). Most recently, the Indonesian police threatened to cancel the 2015’s Ubud Writers and Readers Festival in Bali if one of the panels scheduled to discuss literature engaging with the 1965-66 massacres was actually held (Hearman, 2015).

Since “demokratisasi” began in 1998, the memory of 1965-66 has been haunting, though ineffectively, the New Order’s narrative. Indeed, there have been many attempts to create momentum for a state-led transitional justice process.54 A mentioned in Chapter Four, a truth and reconciliation commission, the contemporary “by default” mechanism of transitional justice, was the foreseen strategy to deal with the aftermath of state repression. Soon after Suharto stepped down from power, the transition government of B. J. Habibie -and after him President Abdurrahman Wahid- introduced two substantial legislative measures towards the protection of human rights in Indonesia and processes of accountability of past mass atrocities. These were the Law on Human Rights (1999) and the Law on Human Rights Court (2000).55 These laws required

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54 The fall of Suharto also reinvigorated the interest and public intervention by many scholars (see (Anderson, 2000; Dittmer, 2002; Mary Sabina Zurbuchen, 2005).

55 This legislation also permitted the formation of case-specific tribunals. Two tribunals of this kind were established in 1999-2000 to address the violent events in East Timor in 1999 and Jakarta in 1984. The tribunals’ verdict granted
the government to draft a bill that would establish a truth and reconciliation commission. Although the bill was drafted in 2001, it took until the end of Megawati’s term in 2004 to pass the parliament. Many human rights organisations found that the legislation granted amnesty to the perpetrators and challenged the most problematic articles of the bill at the Constitutional Court. The Constitutional Court decided to take up the case and in a dramatic decision declared the whole legislation anti-constitutional. In this way, despite intense advocacy by national and international human rights activists, the most important tool of transitional justice at the state level was fatally dismissed.

Despite this turn of events, the Indonesian Human Rights Commission (Komnas HAM) has produced reports on several mass violence events. In 2012 it released a full report on the 1965-66 massacres, declaring them a “gross human rights violation”, an unprecedented straightforward statement by an office of the Indonesian state. The Komnas HAM investigated the 1965-66 massacres for over four years and interviewed 349 witnesses from East Nusa Tenggara, South Sulawesi, Bali, Sumatra, Maluku, and Java. It handed over the 850-page report to the Attorney General’s Office with a series of recommendations regarding the prosecutions it expected to be followed. Despite the hundreds of testimonies and other previous academic investigations brought forward by the Komnas HAM, the Attorney General dismissed the findings arguing that “the evidence Komnas has gathered was insufficient to justify an official legal investigation” (Prakoso, Sihite, Marhaenjati, & Novialita, 2012).

What is more, in April 2015, Joko Widodo announced that his government was to create a special task force to investigate past human rights abuses, including the 1965-66 massacres. The structure of the potential task force, human rights organisations pointed out, is highly problematic. This task force would be composed by officials from the Attorney General’s Office, Komnas HAM, the National Intelligence Agency, the police, the army and civil society organizations. Human rights organisations see the composition of the potential task force heavily loaded with officials that have been reticent to open any serious investigations, such as the Attorney General, or that have been directly and in-directly implicated in the crimes, such as the armed forces and the police (Sundaryani, 2016). It seems, then, that this task force is a new attempt to formalise “reconciliation” bypassing non-biased processes of accountability that may lead to challenging the status quo built under Suharto.

These few examples, and more introduced in Chapter 4, are evidence of ineffective human rights protection and bureaucratic negligence at the top level of Indonesian politics. This

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no penalty to those that many human rights organisations considered the perpetrators (Bräuchler, 2009; ICTJ & KontraS, 2011; Sulistiyanto, 2007).
systematic blocking of an overall accountability process adds to the consistent record of the post-Suharto Demokrasi regime’s attempts to foreclose conversations about the massacres and other violent events (Ehito, 2015). It constitutes, then, evidence of the continuing repressive politics established during the New Order throughout the democratic transition.

Other less formalistic attempts to hold the New Order crimes accountable also refuse to be silenced. Brigit Bräuchler recently compiled a number of studies that illustrate many independent active remembrance and reconciliatory initiatives. In them we see various fortunate and unfortunate ritually staged restorative justice initiatives as well as encounters between survivors and perpetrators (Bräuchler, 2009). Although Bräuchler observes, with very legitimate reservations, the extent to which such initiatives can change the large national reality of the perpetuation of silence, she nonetheless highlights the challenge it does present to the patronising international humanitarian discourse by which survivors are treated as “victims” in need of state-building and democracy literacy.56

Very recently, there has been, though, an unprecedented surge of new non-state based attempts to break with the New Order’s silencing narrative and the status quo it promotes. Journalists have been bravely contributing to challenging this silence. In its October-December 2015 issue, Inside Indonesia, a very influential independent publication, published an issue dedicated exclusively to the relevance of the massacres today by contrasting the continuing power of official historical narratives with communal experiences of remembrance (Klinken, Edwards, & Boonstra, 2012). With similar intention, in its October 1-7 of 2012 issue, Tempo Magazine, another of the major Indonesian investigative journalism outlets, published a separate special edition on the 1965 massacres that provides an independent account by collecting and analysing testimonies of many of the perpetrators.57

Furthermore, in a remarkable gesture of political challenge to the New Order political elite, a group of human rights activists and organisations from the Indonesian civil society held an International People’s Tribunal for crimes against humanity in 1965. Hosted in The Hague, the Tribunal is perhaps one of the most ambitious nationwide non-state accountability strategies, generating visibility of the crimes and drawing attention to the lack of political will from the Indonesian government at a symbolic location recognised by its commitment to international

56 Wardaya has also recently published a very influential compilation of testimonies of victims and perpetrators. In contrast with Bräuler’s volume, Wardaya’s provides less of an analysis of the testimonies than the testimonies themselves. See (Wardaya & Lindsay, 2013). In relation to critical humanitarian studies see, for example, Abu-Lughod (2002); Chandler (2001); Guilhot (2005); Kennedy (2005); Merry (2006); Mutua (2001); Orford (2003); Williams (2010)

57 This special edition was published also in October, 2012, in Bahasa-Indonesia under the title “Pengakuan Algojo 1965: Investigasi Tempo Perihal Pembantaian 1965” (Confessions of 1965 Executioners: Tempo’s Investigation into the 1965 Massacre). Simultaneously, Tempo also published a special issue in English titled “Requiem for a Massacre”.

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justice. The Tribunal analysed the testimonies of victims, human rights organisations, academics and even independent members of the Komnas HAM. It found that the Indonesian government was responsible for the crimes and for its negligence to promote accountability processes (Katjasungkana & Wieringa, 2015). Perhaps in response to this initiative, Joko Widodo’s government, in a gesture never seen from any other post-New Order governments, held a two-day symposium called ‘National Symposium on the 1965 Tragedy’ where officials from the government and the military joined representatives of some survivors and human rights organizations to publicly address the 1965 massacres (Hermansyah, 2016).

This truly extraordinary return of the haunting call for justice that is disturbing the silencing narratives of the New Order is the result of, first, of course, the relentless work of Indonesian human rights organisations like KomnasHAM, Kontras, Indonesian Legal Aid Foundation (YLBHI), and the Human Rights Working Group Indonesia among others. Their work has been absolutely essential for the struggle against silence for decades. But the recent impetus of the appeal and power of the haunting demands for justice can be derived, according to some commentators, from the political opening triggered by Oppenheimer’s The Look of Silence (Kwok, 2015; Melvin, 2016). Despite the abundant academic, journalistic and artistic productions around the events of 1965, and despite the brave and patient human rights activism, it was not until after the release of The Act of Killing that the haunting of the Indonesian present by the past massacres became so apparent and powerfully appealing. This has triggered important reflections that have led to more and more ambitious activist and legal initiatives in Indonesia and abroad. Its power, I argue, resides in what has been a recurrent topic of this research: how narratives of progress silence community life. Oppenheimer’s film may have struck a cord in Indonesians and foreigners like me because its depiction of haunting and narrative presents the audience with a particular notion of injustice. For this notion to be comprehended, I followed the lead of Suryono’s silence to grasp the narrative that makes it so powerful. By listening and dwelling in this silence, I was able to disclose another dimension of silence that would lead me to continue my théoria towards a different language for transitional justice.

4. The Cold War narrative in Indonesia

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58 It is important to note that the Indonesian trial is part of a long tradition of popular tribunals that started with the Russell tribunal in 1966. The Russell tribunal was established to trial the crimes committed by the American government in Vietnam. The tribunal was then made semi-permanent in Bologna and named the Permanent People’s Tribunal. Its task is to judge state sponsored crimes. It has judged dictatorships in Latin America, Asia and the Middle East. Moita, Luis (2015). “Opinion Tribunals and the Permanent People’s Tribunal”. JANUS.NET e- journal of International Relations, Vol. 6, N.o 1, May-October 2015
Let me take you back to Amir Siahaan, the Commander of the Snake River death squads whose plea opens the Introduction to this thesis. As mentioned there, Siahaan wanted the American government to acknowledge his contribution to the US-led global war against communism. His claim for compensation (“at least [...] a trip to the States”), for justice in a way, locates Suryono’s silence in a historical narrative at work in Indonesia and indeed globally. Siahaan seems totally confident about his own claim, about the irony of his situation, because in this narrative it makes sense. Siahaan was acting from a script in the same way that Congo was when performing the massacres in his Holliwoodesque film scenes: their stories act out the Cold War narrative. According to Siahan, he helped the “free world” defeat communism, and to achieve this America taught him “how to hate and kill communists”. In this section I describe the formation and operation of this narrative in the concrete Indonesian context to show how, like Congo’s torture scene, it is a silencing device. Furthermore, in scrutinising the Cold War narrative in Indonesia it is possible to abstract a general principle of its operation that is tremendously useful not only to understand narrative silencing but also for addressing silence.

The Cold War narrative in its New Order articulation should be put in the context of the rise of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) in the 1960’s. By the mid 60’s, the PKI was the third largest communist party in the world after those in the USSR and China. Its sheer size, and Sukarno’s ambiguous stance in regards to its potential surge to power, had the West seriously concerned. In 1965, Indonesia, under Sukarno’s lead, faced a delicate crisis that proved propitious to dispel the communist threat. His increasing bellicosity against Malaysia, a policy Sukarno called konfrontasi, upset Malaysia’s important supporters: the UK and USA. For the Allies, Malaysia was a safe bastion in South East Asia, where China was gaining decisive influence.

Domestically, Indonesia was facing a growing challenge as well. Unpropitious weather and limited adaptation to new agricultural technologies had brought about a severe famine. At the time, survival of most of the country’s population depended on growing food. Having no access to land became a pressing issue for certain sectors. In this context, landless farmers that had been receiving training and aid from organisations vaguely or directly supported by the Indonesian Communist Party started to mobilise and grab land. The local land-owning aristocracy and the conservative wing of the army became increasingly weary of the situation. Not only was the PKI becoming a concrete political option for the masses, the conservatives were concerned that Sukarno himself was not taking sufficient distance from the PKI. Religious associations and organised landowners
pressed the government to take action against the PKI land occupations as well as denouncing the
PKI, inaccurately, as an atheist organisation.\textsuperscript{59}

The global oil price crisis worsened this already delicate political climate. Low oil prices meant a limited cash flow into Indonesia and this slowed down Sukarno’s industrialisation policies. Sukarno’s modernisation narrative was a key element of the ideological backbone of the independence movement. Its actualisation took the form of ambitious public infrastructure like highways and bridges, modern office buildings and hotels, public spaces for recreation and commemorative monuments. They were meant to symbolise, domestically and overseas, Indonesia’s insertion into global politics as a peer by resembling modern industrial cities. Without the cash inflow from selling Indonesian oil, Sukarno was not able to fund finishing some works and stopped building new ones. His public image as a powerful man able to provide for the nation all of a sudden seemed to have shifted—he now appeared to be an impotent and senile leader. Under these conditions, the conservative elite seemed to be expecting a more favourable power shift. The crisis was about ripe for it.

On the night of the 30\textsuperscript{th} of 1965, a dissident commando from the army kidnapped six top rank army generals and killed five of them. Suharto, a relatively young but well positioned commander in the army, took advantage of the event to take over power. The concrete details of the events of that night are still not fully clear. Suharto, however, was ready to provide a version of the story that would consolidate his reign. According to Suharto’s official account of the events, the group of rebellious soldiers that abducted the generals was a communist cell inside the army.

The official depiction of the crime is a very graphic drama. In it, the generals are abruptly taken from their peaceful homes in full sight of their relatives, and driven to a secret location where they were tortured and murdered. The official depiction of the torture scene is rather bizarre. It accuses the Indonesian Women’s Movement (Gerakan Wanita Indonesia, Gerwani), closely associated with the PKI, of mutilating the generals’ genitals, only to kill them a short time after. Under these accusations, Suharto claimed the legitimacy and right to unleash a nation-wide pogrom against the PKI.

What a “communist” meant was from the outset unclear, for not only formal members of the PKI were targeted, but any other organisation closely or loosely related with it, including Gerwani affiliates, land-grabbers, pro-Suharto journalists and artists, progressive teachers and

\textsuperscript{59} In the Indonesian context, the accusation of atheism is very serious. The Indonesian Constitution is based on five foundational principles called \textit{Pancasila}, one of them requiring all Indonesians to pledge to one the five major and state-approved religions. Being atheist, then, meant opposing the very constitutional principles of a nation that was struggling to survive as a unified political entity that hosted radical ethno-religious differences led by groups who were, in many cases, belligerent to the whole Indonesian political project.
students associations, unionists, etc. With the quiescence and support of America, which provided hit lists to the Indonesian army, Suharto actively organised, and/or put no resistance to, massacres of around one million people across the country. Besides the actual killings, he banned the PKI and imprisoned a few thousand others. A few weeks after the first massacres of 1965, Suharto demanded that Sukarno delegate all executive functions to him due to the state of emergency. The parliament soon after chose Suharto as President of Indonesia, finalising a much formalised and indirect coup d’état. Suharto then declared his a New Order with the responsibility of re-establishing and maintaining security and order. The West indeed celebrated Suharto’s win over communism in Indonesia –regardless of the mass murders-, and was ready to help him settle into power. For the West, Suharto represented the Indonesian transition into democracy and progress: “A glimmer of light in Asia”, read the headlines on New York Times (Reston, 1966).

“A glimmer of light in Asia” can very well epitomise the Cold War narrative in Indonesia that structures the Indonesian everyday world. According to it, Suharto saved Indonesia from atheist genital mutilating communist traitors to become the Father of Development (Bourchier & Hadiz, 2003; Heryanto & Lutz, 1988). In this sense, documenting how the Cold War narrative still operates today in Indonesia is one of the striking achievements of Oppenheimer’s work. What Oppenheimer made evident is how lay paramilitaries revealed the narrative foundations that made their crimes imaginable, cognitively articulated, and ultimately practically possible. As these

60 The events surrounding the night of September the 30th are still controversial in Indonesian historiography. Nonetheless, the events I mention are broadly agreed upon. The most influential literature on this debate is, firstly, the legendary “Cornell Paper” (Anderson et al., 1971). A detailed and more researched account that has gained wide acceptance is John Roosa’s “Pretext for mass murder” (Roosa, 2006). Widely cited edited volumes on the topic (Cribb, 1990; Kammen & McGregor, 2012). A contemporary reflection of the events produced by Indonesian analysts can be found in (Wardaya & Lindsay, 2013). An overview of the literature up to 2002 can be found in (Mary S. Zurubuchen, 2002). Succint accounts can be found in very useful short works summarising Indonesian history such as (Ricklefs, 2001; Vickers, 2013).

61 Separatism and “radical” Islam were also ruthlessly repressed. However, it was communism that was put in the symbolic space of Indonesia’s “evil other”. Islam is the religion that the vast majority of Indonesians profess. A “radical” militant Islam, such as in some regions of Sumatra or Central Java, among others, is seen as an extreme and destructive version of what Indonesia in fact is: constitutionally, Indonesian citizens must vow to any of the five state sanctioned religions. Separatism, on the other hand, represents merely the attempt to quit the Indonesian national project, to refuse to join in the sense of greatness gained through Sukarno’s independence discourse by “ungrateful” populations. But communism seems to be interpreted by the repressive elites as always lurking in the dark corners, a latent twin presence that must be conjured off relentlessly and repeatedly in rituals such as the commemoration of the “30 of September movement” at the Luang Buaya Museum, where every president (even Jokowi in 2013!) bows to their commitment to fight the shadow of communism. On the phantom of Communism in Indonesia see (Heryanto, 1999; Schreiner, 2005).

62 It is important to notice the twisted continuity between the Cold War narrative and transitional justice as articulated by the narrative of modern progress, specially in its American version. In many Cold War scenarios, USA supported authoritarian regimes in the name of democracy. This narrative tour de force was possible against a background where communism symbolised oppression and absence of freedom and (semi) dictatorships were seen as saviours rather than oppressors. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, the symbol of oppression shifted from communism itself to dictatorship in general (whatever the ideological allegiance). The narrative of progress then operated to symbolise the past as human rights violations of oppressive regimes and kept then the imagined future as the progress towards liberal democracy and free market capitalism.
paramilitaries narrate their murders, so the Indonesian state does: they killed the communists to save the nation and to develop it. Furthermore, Oppenheimer’s films powerfully show how the massacres were also legitimised as a heroic act on behalf of the Allies in its war to gain the strategic control over a highly contested region that was about to be seized by the communists.

The work of human rights activists, journalists and academics has provided rich material for demonstrating the New Order’s systematic abuses and challenging the status quo built under Suharto. But what Oppenheimer brought into the debate was something not previously done with such powerful effect: indeed, after almost twenty years of democratic transition (1998-2016), the Cold War narrative of the New Order is still fully operative. As with Congo’s narrativisation of their own crimes, the Indonesian official history of how Suharto saved the nation from the communists and restored the country to “order” is a strategy to deliver the narrative coherence that articulates an Indonesian consistent self, even despite its evident factual inaccuracy.

In Indonesia’s capital, Jakarta, for example, the *Lubang Buaya* (Crocodile’s Pit) Museum is an uncritical recreation of the events of the night of the 30th of September 1965 where the audience is exposed to real size dioramas of the kidnapping, torture and assassination of the six generals. This museum is only the most evident demonstration of the Indonesian government’s policy over the account of the massacres. Furthermore, there is an all embracing pedagogical strategy to reinforce, generation after generation, the New Order’s historical narrative of the events –and the need to perpetuate “order”: from the early days of Suharto’s regime until today. School kids read it in their history text books, while every year they have to watch a film produced by the government where this narrative is deployed to full dramatic effect (Ratih, 2012; Tan, 2008). It is important to inquire further, listen in the sense given to this word here, to the consolidation of this narrative and the order it imposed through a number of indoctrination strategies. Listening in this way can reveal the particular form of silencing of the New Order’s narrative, which in turn is key for understanding the silencing processes that modern narratives of progress perform.

5. Silencing as splitting community economies

The New Order’s narrative not only instigated, facilitated and legitimised the massacre of around a million Indonesians. Its function was to create a new world able to infuse fear among all non-compliant kinds of social initiatives, then dubbed as communists and enemies of the nation.\(^63\) Dissident activists, organisers, independent journalists, intellectuals and artists, were targeted

\(^63\) I use the concept of *world* here in the way it is used in Chapter Two. There, this concept works to draw attention to the mutually constitutive relationship between protocols of social interaction and economic production and the existential meaning these practices give to everyday life. This relationship is further discussed in this Chapter.
during the pogroms as well. The massacres dismantled many independent organisations whose purpose was to provide different kinds of social cooperation such as teacher guilds, women’s associations, artistic groups, farmer cooperatives, etc. In this way, the anti-communist narrative – as it emerged from the urgencies of the Cold War- has served the Indonesian political elite by covering up actual oppressive and exploitative policies until today. But Suharto’s messianic narrative can be further understood when political repression takes the form of a particular kind of control over cultural production. The New Order’s control over “culture” tells us how it was necessary in order to consolidate Indonesia’s definitive transition into extractive and exploitative capitalism.

To illuminate this point, I want to draw attention to the Taman Mini Indonesia Indah (Garden of Beautiful Indonesia in Miniature) as a metaphor of the cultural politics of the New Order, an example that many academics draw from. The Taman Mini was an initiative by Siti Hartinah, Suharto’s wife. In 1970, she envisioned a Disneyland-like theme park for Jakarta. The fantastic worlds staged in Disneyland, famously represented by life sized castles from movies like Cinderella, are replaced in the Taman Mini with life sized dioramas of the “typical” architecture, objects, costumes and people from different regions and “cultures” of the Indonesian archipelago. The “cultural” expressions of each region are carefully curated as representative of each region. Put together, they represent the New Order’s narrative of the kind of national harmony that was threatened by the communists and that, hence, justified the massacres. Indeed, in Adrian Vicker’s words,

Selected aspects of cultural performance that were considered to be representative of regions –without, of course, being at all political in content- were selected for display […] in the Garden of Indonesia in Miniature. (Vickers, 2013, p. 189)

In the context of the Cold War in Indonesia, “culture” thus meant a safe language to address community life. After the massacres, “culture”, together with development, were effective narrative strategies deployed to bypass the economic and political demands that Communism symbolically represented and politically articulated –and the many others that were only a marginal part of Communist politics but that nonetheless became targets of the pogroms and subsequent persecution. Pemberton (1994) points to how Suharto attempted to harmonise Indonesia’s demographic diversity. According to Pemberton,

[A]n implicit displacement of the issues of class, of power, of rulers versus ruled [was produced by] an object of ethnographic desire [local culture] that no sooner discloses its contradictions -local to whom, for whom?- than it bypasses such contradictions in the name of culture. (Pemberton, 1994) p. 10-11. Inserts added)
Pemberton refers to “culture” as an “object of ethnographic desire” intentionally. With this he is referring to the systematic study of other people’s lives that emerged together with social sciences of the 19th century as part of the actualisation of the Enlightenment project. The Indonesian Cold War narrative shares a historical trajectory opened by the colonial study of “Javanese culture”. In particular, Pemberton’s genealogical study of the concept of “tradition” from the Dutch colonial control of Java (especially during the 18th and 19th centuries) to the New Order’s Indonesia (1965-1998) helps us to understand its use as a strategy of control and silence in the service of exploitation.

Indonesian Archipelago at the Taman Mini.
Satellite view, Google Maps. April 2016

Pemberton realised this historical trajectory when witnessing a Pesta Demokratik (Democratic Festival) in Solo/Surakarta. Staged elections repeatedly put Suharto in power for over thirty years. Pemberton was puzzled by the way Suharto framed his regime in terms of a national slametan. The slametan is a prayer-meal celebrated by Clifford Geertz as the “the centre of the whole Javanese religious system” (Geertz, 1960, p. 11). In a slametan neighbours and relatives get together to acknowledge the spirits inhabiting the surroundings so they would not disturb the delicate social balance in moments of everyday life significance (harvests, moving house, blessing a new motorbike, etc.). How an everyday religious practice become a tool of presidential legitimacy is not self-evident. This political use of a “cultural” practice reveals how culture, paradoxically, was depoliticised by unlinking meaning creation and economic practices.
During the early XIX century the Dutch Indies Company (DIC) experienced the strongest resistance to colonial presence in Java before Independence. King Diponegoro (1785-1855), from the Humengkubuwono royal house, decided to challenge the authority of the DIC regime and waged a war against it. After a long struggle (1825-30), Diponegoro was finally defeated. Taking advantage of the regular antagonisms between the myriad of different political forces negotiating, competing and sharing power in Central Java, the Dutch decided to support one of the royal houses in order to outsource political and symbolic power to only one of them. The chosen house was a faction of the Yogyakarta’s sultanate that challenged the sultan’s power. With the support of the Dutch, this faction moved to Surakarta and established their own *kraton* (royal palace) there. As a protected faction, Surakarta’s *kraton* interacted closely with colonial authorities. Pemberton documents how the Dutch were particularly interested in the local “culture” and how they used their privileged local associates at the *kraton* of Surakarta to study the “ancient” literary production of the region. Following the encyclopaedic movement thriving in Europe at the time, the Dutch set out to find, store, classify and analyse all “cultural” production from the royal tradition.

By doing so, the Dutch and their informants from Surakarta produced two powerful effects. First, in compliance with a larger search for the most distilled instances of the purest Javanese culture, they created a narrative of cultural height and decay. In her insightful analysis of Dutch Javanese philology, Nancy Florida summarises this narrative as follows:

*Such philology teaches that Javanese literature attained its zenith of its sophistication and aesthetic value in the distant pre-Islamic past with the classical Hindu-Buddhist Kawi literature. The classical literature is said to belong to the serial glorious courts of the Old Javanese heartland. Its products, the Old Javanese kekawan (poetic texts composed mostly in East Java from the ninth to the fifteenth century), are the closest thing to genuine originals in Javanese literature; the real originals, however, are not to be found in Java at all but in the Indian subcontinent, which produced the Sanskrit prototypes on which the Old Javanese poems were based. The classical discipline of philology teaches that the robust florescence of Old Java’s literary culture was crushed by the coming of Islam in the late fifteenth century.* (Florida, 1995, p. 26)

Internal wars in Java’s heartland, the Dutch philological account held, prevented the Javanese continuing this progressive trajectory and achieving the hight of its potential. According to this progressive narrative of Javanese cultural development, the *pax Nederlandica* provided the
conditions for a “renaissance” of Javanese literature, expressed in the translations of Old Javanese poems produced by natives from the very same Dutch-favoured royalty in Surakarta.64

This “renaissance” produced a second effect. A kind of holiness or sacredness was added to these texts, which became the core of the cultural unity that represented the remaining dignity of the “Javanese” after being subjected to Dutch power. Indeed, Suharto’s New Order regime later on picked up this “culturalisation” of the kraton tradition with a quite specific function. In Florida’s words,

“New Order adiluhung rhetoric [a discourse of sacred origins and cultural purity] is eerily reminiscent of the late colonial voice. Highlighting what is imagined as the super-refined spiritualized ways of traditional priyayi [Javanese royalty] and then contrasting them with the so-called coarse and material West, the New Order Javanese elite have invented a vision of their very own adiluhung heritage as the somewhat endangered pinnacle of cultural development, the preservation (and reservation) of which they see as a “sacred duty”. (Florida, 1995, p. 33)

Suharto’s self-assigned duty of cultural preservation, then, provided legitimacy to the “Javanese” political theory that sustained Suharto’s despotic security regime (Anderson, 2000, 2006b; G. Benjamin, 2015; Holt, 2007)

Observe here, then, similar strategies of control over cultural production between the Dutch colonial philology and the New Order’s political use of cultural symbolism: their raw military power and its use for political repression and economic exploitation had to be legitimised in terms of saving and protecting arbitrarily defined “culture(s)”. Defining which cultures where worth enough to be validated, promoted and protected depended on who the power centres defined as the most developed or purest expression of a particular cultural tradition. In this process, the source of meaning production was dislocated from actual communities and transferred to power centres. The silencing strategies in operation through narratives of progress here: the meaning-creation power of communities (historically contingent, flexible and resilient) was symbolically taken from their everyday existence and then abstracted into fixed performances that could be defined as prototypical of certain regions.

But the role of this conception of culture in silencing processes can be better grasped when it is observed alongside the New Order’s narrative of development. “Culture” became the political tool of the New Order to silence the haunting and fertile power of the diversity of community life

64 Literature on this structuration of colonial societies by hierarchies of development located on a progressive timeline is illuminating of the political use of the mirror concepts “civilization”, “progress” and “development” critiqued here. For a more detailed account, see for example (Donaldson, 1996; Fabian, 1983; Greenhouse, 1996).
after Communism was terminated. Virginia Matheson observed that the New Order’s development politics needed control over cultural production. In her words,

By linking culture to officially sponsored betterment, the five year [development] plan slanted the understanding of culture away from popular inspiration and toward state policy. That bias, in turn, invited conformity and control. Unfettered creativity and expression were muted in the plan, while “a sense of solidarity” and “social responsibility and discipline” were stressed. “National culture” itself was redefined away from artistic experimentation and toward collective hopes and goals, to become “the totality of values and behaviour” reflecting “the desires and wishes of Indonesian society” to accomplish “national development” […]. Such language gave notice of the government’s intention to exercise its legal right to control and interpret cultural diversity and to foster that interpretation. (Matheson Hooker, 1999, pp. 263–264)

Art and culture became under the New Order regime a matter of high politics while, paradoxically, the same move de-politicised, muted or silenced them. Larasati’s auto-ethnography as a “traditional” Javanese dancer for the international official dance troupe during the New Order makes the case patently (Larasati, 2013). During her youth in East Java, Larasati learned dance forms that had been passed on by generations of female dancers to her grandmother. In the time of her upbringing and dance training, the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) and other associative and solidarity-oriented organisations like Gerwani were an active part of the social and political life in the region where she grew up. After 1965, female performers in any way related to them became enemies of the New Order and subject to murder, torture, illegal imprisonment and a lifelong and intergenerational stigma. Among the many female performers murdered was Larasati’s grandmother, her mentor. Larasati herself was object of suspicion by the local authorities of the New Order. Her talent as a dance performer, though, was still officially acknowledged and, thanks to her family connections with the new authorities, the Ministry of Arts employed her as member of the International Culture Mission of Indonesia.

She travelled around the world (especially to the West) to perform what the New Order regime considered “original”, “pure” or “high” traditional dance styles. This pureness during the New Order’s Cold War narrative also acquired another meaning. Many popular pre-1965 dance styles were labelled by the New Order as subversive for their supposed connection to PKI activities. They were considered “contaminated” as opposed to “pure”. In the case of Larasati,
then, she had to completely erase the dance styles she had learned with her grandmother from her repertoire and avoid at all cost her body to betray any movement that may signal PKI influence.65

As mentioned above, a number of organisations, directly, vaguely or non-related to the PKI and Sukarno’s economic agenda had provided social and economic services essential for the well-being of Indonesians who struggled under the concentration of land, wealth and power at regional levels. After the massacres, these organisations and their members were indifferently persecuted if they dared to challenge the new anti-communist status quo. Here, then, it is crucial to show that artistic practices of meaning creation at the local level (dance, for example) were co-opted, translated into a language of cultural purity and articulated into a national development agenda. As symbolic strategies that articulated community economies, these meaning-creation practices were stripped of their capacity to facilitate autonomous forms of political, social and economic organisation in two ways. They were made static, abstract, ahistorical and irrelevant at an everyday life level where they had worked to provide the symbolic conditions for autonomous community life. In this way, the New Order narrative of development neutralised, de-politicised and silenced autonomous community life by breaking the constitutive link between meaning-making and economic practices that make up community economies.

Articulated in the Cold War narrative, the New Order’s anti-communist project lined up “culture” and “development” and seamlessly integrated them into the default communist other: American backed capitalism. Even before the massacres, America had been providing development aid to Indonesia with the purpose of challenging the Soviet and Chinese popularity in Indonesia. The anti-communist pogrom, though, provided America with the appropriate conditions for furthering its development agenda in a key region of the world at one of the most crucial crisis points of the Cold War. As quoted by Bradley Simpson, Odd Arne Westad

[…] argues for a basic reconceptualization of the dynamics of superpower rivalry in which “the most important aspects of the Cold War were neither military nor strategic, nor Europe-centred, but connected to the political and social development in the Third World.” (Simpson, 2008, p. 6)

Indeed, for Simpson, America was more interested in consolidating its ideological, military and economic hegemony in the region through consolidating the insertion of Indonesia into the

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65 This process was consolidated during the New Order in what Larasati calls a “system of desire”. During the long three decades of Suharto’s rule, a whole institutionalisation of regional cultural practices of each of Indonesia’s regions’ “traditions” took place. In the case of dance performances, New Order university dance trainers were in charge of systematising and labelling which of the performances where “clean”/“pure”: being related to the PKI meant, then, not being properly or purely “traditional”. Students were more likely to be incorporated into state dance troupes or become university dance professors by achieving the most accurate performance of what, according to the New Order, was considered “pure”. Many students did (and do) want to perform the New Order-approved dances, which, hence, became what younger generations, unaware of this subtle censorship, considered “traditional”.

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Western capitalist market than in facilitating the conditions for accountability over the New Order’s regime. The American narrative of progress thus provided the conditions for the New Order to utilise the liberal modern understandings of culture and development to silence community economies by splitting their constitutive links between meaning-production and economic practices. It was through this silencing that the American development/progress narrative became naturalised as the default non-communist world, a world where Siahaan’s claim for justice does make sense.

6. The Cold War haunts transitional justice

It is important to observe that the Cold War was the backdrop to the emergence of the transitional justice. Indeed, transitional justice came into existence as an academic field of study in the late 1980’s and 1990’s, just as the Cold War was “ending”. As the early discussion on transitional justice were mostly dedicated to compiling experiences of what they defined as transitional justice, their focus was the practical realities of the transitions of many regimes that were collapsing as a result of the global restructuring of power that came about during the end of the “Cold War”. The transitions that these studies fostered were fit to bring about democratic regimes and market economies as guarantors of long-lasting peace at the precise moment of the Fall of the Berlin Wall. This is telling of how the universe of political possibilities in transitions from both communism and dictatorship capitalism was thought of as democratic politics and capitalist economy in the hope that by so doing violence would never happen again. In hindsight, it becomes clear that transitional justice scholars/experts assumed that there were only two alternatives to political and economic organisation. That assumption has become a certainty by narrating the “Cold War” as an “irreconcilable ideological gulf”(Wallerstein, 2010, p. 16; see also Kwon, 2010) that represented opposite conceptions of modern development that cancelled each other out in military terms.

At a global scale, the “end” of the Cold War with the fall of the Berlin Wall as the result of the collapse of the USSR, meant, analogously with the Indonesian massacres in 1965-65, that liberalism became our default political language to imagine political transitions. In this sense, as with the New Order, the TJe allows very little room to address the destruction of community life that was the result of the burning hot scenarios of the “Cold” War in South East Asia or Latin America. For the same reason, it equally limits the available language to make community life visible as constitutive of any assessment of what justice and democracy are about and how they can be actualised. Oppenheimer’s work helps us to make visible how the Cold War narrative still
haunts Indonesia’s contemporary democratic transition, and this haunting also calls us to see that transitional justice is equally haunted by it as well.

7. Conclusion

The “Cold War” narrative legitimises the crimes of Oppenheimer’s protagonists by locating them at the service of the cause of fighting the communists—just as Americans did. More importantly, it keeps their selves (their fictionally created identities as heroes of the nation and of the “free world”) from falling into an ethical abyss of guilt and remorse, unable to bare the brutality of their crimes. Their testimonies, as registered by Oppenheimer, make evident, in a crooked and reversed way, how such narratives serve the same function for our current global status quo. This prosthetic function gives it a sense of self-legitimacy by declaring its historical necessity after surviving the Cold War. For this narrative, the best of the two models has prevailed.

Indonesia exemplifies this case in its own concrete circumstances: the haunting of communism—the iteration of its relevance that its brutal suppression has meant for over fifty years—powerfully signals the absence of a truly post-Cold War world. The Indonesian democratisation process has been unable to do justice to the violence of the Cold War, not only as accountability for human rights violations, but furthermore as the ongoing violent reconfiguration of the link between meaning-making and economic practices in order to silence community economies. In the next chapter, though, I enquire performances of haunting in itself (symbolic practices to relate to spirits of the dead and the landscape) to show how the world actualised by community economies survives despite the narrative of the Cold War.

Pragmatic debates of transitional justice as defined in Chapter One are based on a legalistic language of human rights. This language has been the language of the “post-ideological” global transition (Buergenthal, 2000) that gained momentum at the end of the Cold War simultaneously with the rise of neoliberalism and its also global reach (Moyn, 2015). The narrative of liberal modern progress that articulates the pragmatic scholarship on transitional justice should then be seen as part of the reproduction of the belief that there are only two worthy ways of living in the world: one is dangerous and a failure, the other peaceful and successful. So is the case for transitional justice, since it has been the policy tool of preference in the transition from the Cold War to our “post-ideological” world based on the American conception of what modernity, progress and peace means. The argument put forward in this chapter is that, because the liberal-American narrative of progress was the default narrative of moral social order, even authoritarian and semi-democratic regimes like the Indonesian one used it to articulate oppressive policies. Transitional justice, which emerged simultaneously with the fall of the Berlin Wall, was also
structured in this narrative. The point is that this narrative has been used to legitimise oppressive politics and hence it is insufficient to prevent violence and terror.

Indeed, the challenges to the New Order’s silencing and to the global narrative status quo that the few academic, artistic and activist initiatives mentioned above represent are, without a doubt, documents of political denunciation. Along with the re-enactments, in Oppenheimer’s documentaries we see politicians shaking hands with Congo. We observe TV shows congratulating Congo and his partners as heroes. We even see high ranking army officials and the vice-president publicly supporting paramilitary groups that were created to perform the massacres and keep control during Suharto’s time and after. Indeed, the documentaries tell us that politicians backed by paramilitary armies that gained their positions thanks to their close ties with the New Order’s authoritarian power structure are still key decisive agents in the new complex and contradictory process of democratisation in Indonesia. Oppenheimer’s work is indeed uncannily powerful because it shows us Indonesia as a mirror in which we can see that despite the abhorrent crimes of the Cold War, they were and are necessary for our narrative of liberal progress to become normalised at the expense of silencing other worlds of political possibility.

Of course, in regimes of terror like New Order’s Indonesia or indeed paramilitary-controlled Colombia, narrative silencing strategies are not just aimed to conceal the truth of horrendous acts with fairy tales of national salvation and unity. Their purpose is to consolidate power through the blatant legitimisation of murders, persecution and obsessive control. This procedure is analogous to a vicious kind of cynicism: we know things are horribly bad, we laugh about it, and we cheerfully play the game. And you, shut up or else! In this scheme, everyone knows what’s going on. Everybody knows who holds power and why. There are no lies because there is no secret. There are no facts to uncover, at least in a general sense; everyone is aware that there is an unfair political and economic structure based on fear and that a small group of people profit from it. Anthropologist Pierre Clastres reminds us that the most protected secret of the State is that there is no secret (Clastres, 1989; M. T. Taussig, 1992). Lies are told not to hide the truth, but to demonstrate that those in command have the power to lie. In other words, the power of narratives does not lie in their veracity, but in their capacity to articulate power into everyday life despite everyone’s awareness of their fictional character. Uncritical and unreflexive transitional justice based on legal “pragmatism” cannot undo the power of the Cold War narrative. This narrative shapes the pragmatic view of transitional justice and in so doing it shapes the universe of unquestioned economic possibilities: the role of unbounded, unregulated companies that largely profit from the wreckage left in the many scenarios of the Cold War. In the context of Colombia and Indonesia, these economic agents are unaccountable because they represent the
heroes of the “Free World”. Empowered by the optimism of the liberal progress narrative, they are rarely brought to account for the larger processes of dispossession and exploitation they have orchestrated and for the disarticulation of community economies and the worlds they constitute. Our current language to talk about political transitions is then unfit for the challenge of doing justice to mass violence. It does not allow us to foreground meaningful transitions because it lacks the genuine political strength to deliver justice in the form of common well-being. Currently, the TJe does not question the violent imposition of a narrative that legitimises wealth extraction out of fear and exploitation, out of violently breaking the link between meaning creation and community economic practices. This is because pragmatic debates on transitional justice do not have a language to talk about this kind of violence and injustice.

Engaging with Openheimer’s work in a listening mode that is in search of haunting calls for justice has revealed, not the “truth” of the New Order’s hidden human rights violations. What I found by listening to Indonesia’s world was a tremendously relevant aspect of the silencing processes of the liberal progress narrative: silencing here operates by attempting to split the world-constitutive link between meaning making and economic practices that make up community economies. Splitting the power of community economies renders them unable to flourish and to produce and distribute well-being. In the next chapter I follow my théoria to the rice mountains of Central Java in order to learn from haunting experiences as articulated by local communities, a language that is able to re-articulate this link and help me reformulate the TJe differently.
Chapter Six

Haunting the tenses of time: Justice as the intersection of cohabitation, communication and commoning.

And what is critical consciousness if not an unstoppable predilection for alternatives? (Said, 1991, p. 247)

1. Introduction

Having identified a crucial dimension of the process of narrative silencing in the Indonesian context, this chapter presents further conceptual openings developed in my thêoria in Central Java, Indonesia. In order to productively reposition transitional justice, I trace how a haunted sense of justice is predicated on re-establishing a link between cultural practices of meaning-making and economic activity. I travelled to Yogyakarta to witness social practices that performed everyday exchanges with spirits of the dead and spirits of the landscape. I see these exchanges as able to host haunting in the form of allowing a lively experience of the past intervening in the present and of the multiplicity of being. By reflecting on the way these practices perform links between meaning-making and economic practices, three concepts emerged as relevant for developing a different vocabulary for transitional justice—cohabitation, communication and commoning. This chapter is structured in four sections, the first addressing haunting in the context of everyday life in Yogya and the other three doing the work of disclosing each one of the concepts of a new language for transitional justice.

A point of clarification must be added. My ethnographic work in Indonesia intentionally did not try to find instances of patent remnants of the 1965 anti-communist terror. My goal was instead to deduct, infer, abstract, learn from cultural practices that deal with haunting in way that could help me rethink transitional justice from the perspective of a past that refuses to be neutralised and archived in the annals of barbarity. Travelling with concepts through a particular mode of listening allowed me to reveal in the Indonesian case a particular kind of silence: it led me to understand that meaning-making and community economy practices are linked and that terror aims at destroying this link. This led me to ask myself how to do justice to them when they have been (almost) entirely broken. This particular endeavour did not require me to scrutinise my participants’ traumatic memories. Indeed, doing research on memories of violent events can reveal very important material for a research interesting in denouncing past atrocities. And I also acknowledge the importance of traumatic memories and the realities they articulate. But I decided not to make them the focus of my work because they are not absolutely essential to answer my
question. On the contrary, scrutinising them could put my participants in danger or indeed reignite past traumas. The guiding purpose of the thinking emerging from my theôria in Central Java, though, is to craft another language for transitional justice that emerges from haunting, not to denounce particular atrocities or yet unstudied traumatic experiences. My theôria is in this sense an experimental work unfamiliar to both ethnographers and human rights scholars. It has proven, though, highly productive. The result was a new vocabulary to talk about transitional justice and potentially about peace and justice in general.

2. Haunting

“Be a hair in the flour,” he explains. He is speaking of the rice flour used to prepare ritual cakes for the appeasement of authority. Communities offer ceremonial cakes to the spirits to keep them from taxing and troubling their human subjects; so, too, such appeasement is understood as the stuff of obedience to the state. A hair in the flour is a disturbance of everyday subservience and routine. A hair in the flour ruins the legitimacy of power. It is a benediction for my work and an inspiration for what I must continue to learn. I have repeated it to myself throughout the research for this book and its writing. (Tsing, 2005, p. 206)

In Yogyakarta city and Kulon Progo, a rural district neighbouring Yogya, I participated in a number of different gatherings involving various practices that relate to the spiritual world. In the mountains of Kulon Progo, Christians and Muslims participate at the same spiritual practices. I concluded from my conversations with people participating in these gatherings, that this simultaneity of diverse religious beliefs was possible because of what I understand as a principle of haunting: imperfection as incompleteness and, hence, as openness. At the end of prayers, people apologise for any potential mistakes made during the recitation of a prayer or in observing the appropriate etiquette. In their view, by making these mistakes they are not properly honouring God’s perfection. Recognising imperfection, for this reason, also implies incompleteness, meaning that unity (with God, with others) is always deferred. In this sense, people easily find it possible that other forms of praying, either Christian or Muslim in this case, are equally (in)adequate to meet God’s perfection.

At the beginning of my theôria in Yogyakarta, at the first slametan that I attended, I was struck by the need for a haunting approach that would listen and learn from simultaneity and multiplicity. Slametans, loosely defined, are prayer-meals aimed at creating the spiritual conditions for well-being for those involved in a particular event or situation, e.g. the first year of a newborn, moving to a new house, etc (Beatty, 1999). According to an informer that Geertz interviewed in his fieldwork in Modjokuto, East Java, during 1953-4,
at a slametan all kinds of invisible beings come and sit with us and they also eat the food. That's why the food and not the prayer is the heart of the slametan. The spirit eats the aroma of the food. It's like this banana. I smell it but it doesn't disappear. That's why the food is left for us after the spirit has already eaten it.” (Geertz, 1960, p. 15)

In order to follow this first clue of haunting staged at slametans where spirits and embodied humans interact through food, my translator, Mbak Wulan (25, language teacher, originally from Solo), put me in touch with one of her friends who invited us to a slametan. On this occasion, it was celebrated to pray at the first birthday of a child in Yogyakarta city. I asked her to arrange a little talk with the ulama, the Muslim religious specialist who was in charge of it before the event began so I could contrast anthropological descriptions of slametans with a local expert.

I enquired about the role of the spirits at slametans. The ulama started laughing right after he heard the question. For him, beliefs in spirits are superstition, to say the least, and even blasphemous. He had gone to a specialised school to learn Islamic scriptures and doctrine and to be authorised to perform Islamic ceremonies and give guidance to fellow muslims. He would be considered, Wulan told me, a “modern” muslim. He rejected the animist traditions usually associated with Javanism as he considered them backwards, a legacy of the past that should not concern a true Muslim whose only interest must be to believe in the one god and the words of his prophet. This religious shift seems to be very influential in Central Java today. For example, the set of ceremonies that follow after someone passes away, inspired by the Javanese calendar and numerology, are now disregarded among some in the new generation. At a funeral I attended I asked if the family would host these kind of ceremonies, to which they replied that they consider those practices not truly Muslim. So, after talking to the ulama, I decided that I wouldn’t follow his practice, since I was interested precisely in the belief in spirits, especially spirits of the dead. Nonetheless, I politely accepted his invitation to a slametan that he was leading in the next few weeks.

This slametan seemed like the ones Geertz narrated. A significant crowd gathered in the house. Around thirty male neighbours and relatives sat cross-legged on the ground along the front of the house on a carpet, while their female counterparts sat more loosely and scattered across the alleyway in front of neighbouring houses. Wulan and I were taken into the living room of the house, where there was a smaller crowd of males dressed in more formal customs (the only woman in the room was Wulan, who was admitted in the room during the prayer with no further questions). The prayer was done in Arabic. The ulama sang verses by memory, sometimes checking on his small prayer book. His singing was very rhythmical, effectively and beautifully paced, and
the attendants similarly responded to his prayers. The prayer was all very formal, and faces were heavy and serious. At the end of the prayer, though, everyone started smiling and chatting again. Soon after we were offered steamed rice and a very aromatic yellow curry chicken brought in by some women, although they didn’t sit with us. Plates and bowls with food were passed around. Each person took a politely small portion. There was no display of the food as described by Geertz, so it seemed to confirm that they were not interested in pleasing or feeding the spirits. Eating took a very short time and after we finished we were given a cardboard box with some homemade sweets and cakes to take home.

The mother of the child brought the little one out and we had the chance to say hello to him. The child was very smiley and his eyes were wide open looking at the crowd. We shook hands with each and everyone in the living room. Then, just when we were leaving the house, Wulan pointed out a sesaji placed right by the front door of the house. A sesaji is a small offering to the gods and spirits that is normally done in more Hindu traditions. Its composition varies, but normally it includes incense, some small offering of food (e.g. an orange, a bit of rice wrapped in plantain leaves), petals and water. We asked about the meaning of the sesaji in this case and were told that it was just a formality, downplaying its symbolic/spiritual relevance. Nonetheless, this sesaji contained the umbilical cord of the child they were praying for. What had looked to me like a neatly coherent Islamic ceremony, now was revealed as a practice that acknowledged the simultaneous coexistence of the solidarity between Islam and animism. An important, yet non-explicit element of the ceremony was the “contradictory” location of a non-Muslim symbol alongside the prophet and his believers. I found this sort of absent presence repeatedly in Central Java. What seemed to me to be a plain contradiction was revealed as something more significant. For some of the people I talked to, the coexistence of Muslim and animistic symbols was a constitutive aspect of how they dealt with the fact that the past is still alive in the present. Multiplicity was a fact of life rather than a sign of incompleteness.

It was strikingly clear from the beginning, then, that I would have to deal with what at first sight might appear to be contradictory. Geertz places the slametan at the core of his systematic anthropological analysis of Java, giving through it some sort of general coherence to what he called the “religion of Java”. Geertz’s work, though, has been criticised for providing ahistorical accounts of Javanism as a cultural system. Indeed, one of his greatest achievements was taking religion out of hermeneutical theology to think of it as a set of socially shared symbols and practices (equally subject to interpretation). However, his methodology, paid little attention to the historical unfolding of those symbols and practices over time and consequently overlooked important power relationships that shaped their form and use (Asad, 1983). Moreover, his attempt at systematising
a culture for further “reading” excluded considerations of outside influences from both cultural borrowings brought about by cohabitation and violent imposition. Therefore, Geertz’s perspective, valuable as it is in terms of freeing religious and cultural debates from their philosophical elitism, fails to account for simultaneity and multiplicity. Here I am distancing myself from Geertz’ reading of religious life. Instead of forcing “contradictions” into coherent classificatory systems, which was Geertz’s approach, I would rather let their dynamic and complex simultaneousness speak to me. How would that be possible?

3. Cohabitation

Since my first experience at a slametan in Yogyakarta, my curiosity about simultaneous diverse religious traditions grew, as did my sense that they provided a vivid experience of haunting. This sense was further deepened after I was invited to the house of Pak Paiman, a Javanist Catholic deacon, farmer and builder in Kulon Progo, Yogyakarta province. As I have mentioned, Indonesia is the country with the largest Muslim population, and Central Java is certainly no exception. However, in Pak Paiman’s village there is a significant Catholic population that live side by side with Muslims. Compared to the cohabitation between modern Islam and animism I described earlier, this other coexistence was more explicit and less conflictive judging from the conversations I had with him.

I asked Pak Paiman if he had muslim relatives and if in such case he would attend a slametan with them. He said that in his village muslims and catholics share prayers, although he said that not everywhere in Java, let alone Indonesia, would this be the case.\(^7\) When a muslim neighbour or relative hosts a slametan at a sewab (crop field), for example, both Muslims and Catholics would pray to the same set of spiritual beings: dewi-sri (goddess of harvest), sim mbau rekso (spirit of the land), hantu-hantu (ghosts), aruah (spirits of dead humans), etc. “Of course,” Wulan intervened, “we are all Javanese” (she is muslim herself). “We all pray to the same nenek moyeng” (ancestors). Pak Paiman clarified that what the ancestors appreciate is the act of praying itself, and the religion that frames the prayer is ultimately less relevant. God is one, Pak Paiman tells me, and after death the spirits are closer to him. They are more perfected in this sense, and they hence are less concerned about human imperfections, including their different forms of praying.

Indeed, this experience illustrates one of the forms haunting takes in cohabitation. At all the slametans I had attended until then, the person leading the prayer would ask for apologies to God, the nenek moyeng and the guests for not performing the ceremony perfectly. From a Muslim perspective, this is a very important element of any prayer, since form (the right words, the right
pronunciation and intonation, the right pace and order, etc.) is essential to acknowledging and honouring God’s perfection. So, aware of their imperfection as humans, and their ontological distance from God, the perfect one, the prayers always end with an apology of this kind. Recognising imperfection, or, in other words, incompleteness, suggests that unity is always deferred. Maybe that is why at slametans for people who have passed away, Pak Paiman shared with me, the immediate relatives of the deceased sometimes invite someone from another religion (Muslim or Catholic) to be the leader of the prayer. This ability to recognise their own imperfection allows them, at least symbolically, to allocate a place for others equally imperfect. In a way, not claiming perfection or total coherence provides a belief of others as equally fallible. This belief is enacted in the way the other is treated in a formally humble and respectful manner. Although it seems a precarious situation, it actually provides the conditions for sustaining complex cohabitation in a way that is flexible and open enough to resist the rigidity and danger of fundamentalism and open confrontation, which makes cohabitation impossible when it turns violent.

Other ceremonies revealed to me different, and sometimes odd, haunting scenarios. Pak Paiman invited me to the misa (Catholic mass) and slametan in commemoration of one year since the death of his uncle’s wife. The misa was held at the house where his uncle and his wife used to live located beside own. At least 250 people were expected to come from all over Java and even from Sumatra and Sulawesi. Pak Paiman’s uncle, I was told, was the pioneer of Catholicism (in its Javanese version) in the region, so he was well regarded I was told.

Women cooking the day before the ceremony

Credits: Hermann Ruiz
Over a couple of weeks, Ibu Marina, Pak Paiman’s wife, together with her neighbours and relatives, had been buying all the supplies for the meal to be offered to the attendants of the misa. The day before around fourteen women gathered to cook together at Ibu Marina’s kitchen, a broad earth square hut with a wood stove and scattered chairs and tables. During three days of cooking, they all talked to each other, either in small groups or as a whole, about the most recent events in the village. On the final day of cooking, I asked them about stories of the spirits of dead people in the area. Ibu Marina sceptically told me she was more concerned about the living than the dead. She, as well as the others, was very confident about their safety in regards to dangerous spirits. She told me that because she prayed she was protected from them. After the sunset, though, Ibu Tina, one of the cooks, started to tell some of her own ghost stories. Nervous giggling spread around the kitchen. One woman in her 70s was especially nervous, and the others comforted her with jokes. Ibu Marina asked them to stop telling stories. Later in the night Ibu Tina and her friend wanted to go back home. They asked me if I wanted to walk them home so they could show me a haunted tree nearby. I of course accepted the invitation. However, Ibu Marina, alarmed, asked me to stay. She was concerned that a spirit could possess me. As her guest, I was her responsibility. And judging from her straightforward request, which is not common for a Javanese whose politeness equals her worth as a host, she was serious about it. As a guest who has been trusted to attend this important ceremony, I had to politely concede to her and decided to stay.

Another emergent theme of this haunting scenario, then, is that, under conditions of uncertainty one must care for the other’s well-being. This derives in a set of explicit and implicit responsibilities towards the other. In this case, for example, the hosting relationship I had with Ibu Marina obliged her to insist on not letting me go to the haunted place, knowing there would be a chance I could be harmed. And I felt equally bound to her in this host-guest reciprocity, knowing that if anything happened to me, her family would be accountable for it. When living in an uncertain world inhabited by unruly spirits, caring becomes a mode of inhabiting, and this caring binds people in reciprocal relationships of responsibility.
At six in the morning of the day of the misa, around ten males both Catholics and Muslims, all neighbours, gathered and sat together on the floor, cross-legged, in the front living room. The chatted a little bit and then started to pray. They prayed for around half an hour. After they finished praying, they came to the dining table, where the women had food already served in pots, and started to pray again, this time to a crucifix and a food offering, a sesaji. I decided to talk to the man praying to the crucifix and the sesaji. I asked him why food was offered on this occasion. He said that, before the spirit of a person finally gets to heaven, his or her spirit must be sampoerna (perfected). That is why the dead’s family and neighbours must pray for him or her on the day of her death, and then on the 3rd day, the 10th, the 40th, the 70th, after 100 days and then after a year and the final one three years (or 1000 days) after the death. In the meantime, though, the spirit still wants what she enjoyed when she was alive. The food, then, is for her to feel menghormati: at home, honoured and acknowledged.

As an academic, I am expected to carry around a scientific mind in order to classify and separate to make order and sense. It was surprising, then, that the food in the sesaji was not just offered to her, confusing my suppositions about individual identity even in the hereafter. The sesaji was also offered to the spirits in the area in general, both from a human and non-human origin, like spirits living along the river or on trees, or disturbed ghosts, so they can also feel acknowledged, welcomed, menghormati, and perhaps in return they would not disturb the living. In this sense, a certain kind of abundance and generosity was required from those praying to acknowledge the haunting multiplicity of beings that are potentially and simultaneously present.

_Misa opening speech_
Before the mass commenced, I talked to the priest in charge of the Catholic, and most popular, part of the commemoration. I was curious about the pastur’s (pastor) take on the prayer meal and its animist dimension. The pastur’s version of the life of the spirits differed from the one I had read of in the academic literature. He explained his view in these terms: in the beginning God created the spirits, some of them were human, some not. Some of the non-human spirits got jealous of the human ones. Human and good non-human spirits coexist and for this coexistence to be “respectable” people host slametans and all kinds of ceremonies. However, it is not possible to deal with bad jealous spirits so humans must ask God for protection from them in their prayers. This relationship constitutes a bond between God and good spirits, and a boundary between the good and the bad ones.

In a conversation with Pak Paiman, a Catholic deacon himself, I asked direct questions about the content and form of his prayers. Pak first focused mainly on the formal prayers directed to the Catholic God, on how he prayed the Lords Prayer and other standardised Catholic prayers. But after further enquiry, he started to talk about the more mundane spiritual world. In the case of this kind of prayer in particular, he gave some words to the spirit of the rice, dewi sri or dewi padi. I also asked specifically about ghosts, or bantu-bantu, in the area. I had inquired of lay people around Yogyakarta region about hantus. The belief in hantu stories is widespread, and there is a very popular film and TV industry dedicated to them. There are many popular ghost stories in Java: pocong, kuntilina, tuyul, genderuwo, leyak; are only a few of the staple ghost stories animating many popular TV shows today. Pak Paiman said that very recently a neighbour had had a bad harvest and that he thought it was a consequence of an upset spirit. Pak called this spirit sing mbaw rekso, a kind of force or power that belongs to the agricultural land, that is specific to each padi. In this case, the sing mbaw rekso had not been properly acknowledged/menghormati, and in consequence the harvest had not been as productive as expected. This usually happens when slametans are poorly performed, often because an inexperienced person leads the prayer or the sesaji is not properly arranged, or when someone does something disrespectful to the spirit. In some cases, even the owner or manager of the land can fall ill or a pestilence can fall onto the land. In others, this power can even possess him. In such cases, the sing mbaw rekso would speak through the kesurupan (possessed) person’s body, confessing, to someone able to understand, the source of his discomfort and sometimes suggesting the way it could be fixed. According to Pak Paiman, quieting down an upset spirit usually involves reperforming slametans or other kinds of spiritual practices to correct the flaws in previous ones. Even more, he said, it is possible for a person (male) who wants to become prosperous to manipulate this power through fasting and meditating. The power of the land, then,
is transferred to the one asking for it. This power, though, should be regarded carefully, as it can overpower the human host and harm him and even damage the land itself. Pak Paiman and his neighbour had hosted a *slametan* at the unproductive *padi* to pacify the spirit.

Central Java seems at first a place of contradictions where modern Muslims inexplicitly condone ancient Hindu and animist traditions; and where the rural Catholics insert pagan beliefs in quite unique theological blends. As I mentioned earlier, when I first attended a *slametan*, the *ulama* in charge told me that beliefs in spirits are superstitions, implying that a righteous and modern Muslim like him wouldn’t give importance to them. Nonetheless, as we saw, his *slametan* set-up included a *sesaji*, and there was also one at the Catholic mass. But seen from a haunting perspective, placing a *sesaji* in these contexts means also acknowledging the simultaneous habitation of a diversity of spiritual beings present in that place. What appears to be a contradiction can also be seen as a moment in a history of longstanding and highly complex religious cohabitation.

In many conversations I had in Central Java (with the important exception of the *pastur*) I was told that flesh and bone humans and spirits share the same level of existence. They inhabit the world simultaneously. Ceremonies like *slametans*, then, are social practices to relate with spirits as you would with neighbours. So, these ceremonies are very real acts of interaction and exchange with spirits. They are moments to formally, explicitly and collectively acknowledge, honour, and recognise them. This exchange is translated into many different communicative exchanges involving food, music, mannerisms, clothing, etc.

4. Communication

![Dalang interpreting a shadow puppet performance.](image)

*Credits: Hermann Ruiz*
In interviews with Mas Ibrahim, the internationally renowned sculptor and mystic from East Java who lives in Bantul, a district south of Yogyakarta, I was told about some of the basic concepts of *kejawen*. This is a set of mystic and openly animist beliefs held by people mainly in Central and East Java that has ancient origins (earlier than Hinduism, the first world religion to come to the island). To introduce me to the world of spirits, Mas Ibrahim explained the ambiguous nature of shadows. Shadows are located in between our internal and external world. They are evidence of an outward world in the sense that we see the shadow we cast on surfaces: they are a consequence of the outside light that our body blocks. For this last reason, they are also evidence of our own existence and as such, then, constitutive of our own spirit. Shadows represent the hinge between the spiritual and the material world, they are evidence of the simultaneity of both worlds.

From that entry point it is easier to understand the captivating art of the *wayang kulit* (shadow puppet theatre). In *wayang kulit* performances, the *dalang* (puppet master) plays an epic story generally from the Ramayana, obviously with some local additions, like Semar, a character only present in *wayang kulit* in Java and who represents the contribution of Java to the Hindu tradition. In these performances, the audience is presented with a white canvas. On the other side of the canvas is the *dalang* (the puppet master), and behind him there is gas or electric lamp. What the audience observes is the shadow play, while they listen to the dalang’s dramatic narration and interpretation of characters accompanied by a-tonal mystical music interpreted by a large *gamelan* orchestra (an arrangement of tens of gongs and xylophones) and a female choir. In its more romanticised interpretations, the dalang enters into a trance during which the spirits and gods possess him. The shadows he casts on the canvas become the visible worldly appearance, the actualisation, of the characters in the play. The audience is not attending a representation of the gods. They are there with the gods themselves. As such, the relationship they experience with their spiritual world is one dimensional: the spirits live with them in the same dimension. This allows more intense and quotidian hauntings where the concepts and experiences of the divine and the human are less strict and more interdependent.

Consequently, it is possible to illuminate the communicative exchanges the people I talked to in Central Java establish with the spirits from a haunting perspective. Such exchanges can happen in many ways, from possession dance performances and meditation, to cooking. I started to pay more attention to a spirit possession dance performance called *jathilan* which is usually performed in the rural and semi-rural areas of Central and East Java. It has many style variations according to the region and level of free interpretation. It is performed for different reasons,
sometimes as entertainment but in more rural communities it is held mainly to appease unruly spirits. In its village form, the jathilan lasts from noon to midnight. At this performance, dancers recreate two parties in war. Each party is composed of three dancers mounting toy horses and swaying bamboo swords in their hands. The dancers perform repetitive scenes of struggle to the rhythm of a small gamelan band, aggressively clashing bamboo swords, running after each other to exhaustion and in that state the spirits enter their bodies.

Pak Ngadiman, a neighbour of Pak Paiman, invited me to a jathilan performance in Kulon Progo. He wanted it to be part of the welcoming events dedicated to a new member of the family: his daughter in law was moving in to his family house. Early in the morning that day there was a very formal welcoming ceremony led by the ulama, the village head and the father of the family. When my translator, a photographer and I arrived at Pak Ngadiman’s we were greeted, as any of the other guests, by a line of mature members of the family and neighbours, both male and female. We shook hands one by one and then we were let in under a marquee set by the side of the house. Everyone was wearing their formal clothes, sitting on plastic chairs lined up looking at the front, where a stage was set with the names of the new couple hanging from the backdrop. Then the
couple came out dressed in a classic Javanese attire and sat on the stage. The kepala desa (head of the village), the ulama, and Pak Ngadiman, all gave speeches and prayers, all of them thanking the guests for coming, praying for everyone, welcoming the bride to the family, claiming the neighbours as part of the extended family, and asking forgiveness for any flaws in their prayers, wishing not to offend Allah or anyone. Right after, chicken curry with plain rice in white bowls was distributed around to everyone. On this occasion males and females ate under the same marquee, and cardboard boxes filled with homemade sweets were given to everyone to take home.

A few hours later, at around 2 p.m., when everyone had rested, the jathilan commenced. Right by the side of Pak Ngadiman’s house there was a square presided by a regular sized house. After getting dressed in the house, two dance teams of three members each came out. Wearing shiny and colourful cowboy costumes, riding quite heavy toy horses and dancing in a semi-repetitive loop, they represented opposing parties in a knights’ war. A reduced gamelan band, composed of a leading drum, a couple of cane xylophones and a few copper tonal gongs, accompanied the dancers. The dance was energetic, and the dancers progressively became tired, their bodies sweating and their faces making increasingly exaggerated gestures. Some dancers started to leave the square, exhausted. One of the remaining dancers broke the dancing loops and started to dive into the ground, his eyes turned white, his hands over stretched, his limbs stiffening. He began to run chaotically around the square. The audience, populated by a significant number of children, was serious, some visibly scared.

The jathilan in the interpretation of this dance cadre is composed of three long sessions each subdivided into another three sessions. It is well known that kesurupan (possessed) dancers can perform superhuman stunts, like eating glass, peeling coconuts with their teeth, climbing tall palm trees, breaking chicken necks with their mouths and sucking their blood, and in general behaving very randomly. This behaviour is particularly upsetting, especially in the context of a very polite and restrained culture like the one in rural Central Java.

By the middle of the second session of the performance, the couple came out to the square. Most dancers were kesurupan by that moment. Pak Ngadiman gave a short speech and then the dancers stared to interact with the couple. They touched them (unthinkable for a non-kesurupan person!), kneeled in front of them and with mimics and gestures asked the couple to feed them seeds and water with rose petals. They then started dancing again, following vaguely the previous dance sequence and improvising moves along with the gamelan music. Where the drum suggested a pace, the dancers followed, and then the dancers would change the pace and then the drum followed them. The drum, I was told, speaks the language of the spirits. The drum calls the spirits
to the square, and the loops of the dance performance hold them. Once the dancers are terribly
tired and weak, the spirits can possess them, taking over their bodies.

Weak or tired spectators can then be also possessed. Around the end of the same session,
someone from the audience got *kesurupan*. He started to walk loosely from one side of the square
to the other, sometimes diving into the ground and rolling over the dust, getting up and running
into the audience. He then chose two males from the audience and started hugging and kissing
them. He wouldn’t let go of them. Then the coach of the dance cadre, in charge of keeping the
dancers from harming anyone in the audience, of feeding them and of taking them back from the
trance, took charge of him. *Kesurupan* people cannot speak any articulated language, I was told. So
finding out what was going on with him was more a matter of another kind of communication.
The coach usually would communicate with the spirit possessing a dancer through some kind of
non-speech exchange. In this case, the coach couldn’t sense what the spirit wanted, who he or she
was, and hence how to deal with it. They took him inside the house, where they tried a few
techniques to get him out of the trance. After trying a number of strategies unsuccessfully, they
decided to wrap him in a white sheet, as if a dead body in a burial cloth. The point was to persuade
the spirit (in this case it was a spirit of a dead person) that he or she was actually dead, to re-
perform its burial so it would release a body that was still alive. The trick worked and the man,
visibly tired and disturbed, stopped shaking and fighting and fell asleep for a while.

I attended a number of *jathilans* during my stay in Central Java. There was one that
particularly surprised me. This *jathilan* was being held a couple of hundred meters from
PakPaiman’s. I asked permission of Ibu Marti, Pak Paiman and the *kepalada desa* to attend. They
agreed and the *kepalada desa* introduced me and my translator to the owner of the house where the
*jathilan* was being performed. They allowed me to observe it.

*Coach feeding possessed dancer.*

*Credits: Hermann Ruiz*
Although the occasion was a housewarming, the public showed up in good numbers. Hence, food stalls and snack vendors were located a few meters away from the centre of the square in front of the house. The structure of the jathilan was the same and possessions took place at the end of each session. Again, at the end of the second one, the last remaining dancer on the square started to violently convulse on the dirt, demanding with gestures, but unable to articulate any word, the presence of one person in particular. It was an intense and extended drama before the person he wanted made it to the performance. He had been sent from a neighbouring district. Meanwhile, the dancer’s random and fast movements, roaming around the square, diving into the ground, eating green leaves and drinking water from a bowl on the ground, heightened the tension in the audience. People wanted to come closer to the dramatically possessed dancer, but he would get up and then everyone ran away. Once the man he was asking for got there, the possessed dancer started to mumble words to his ears. The man declared himself unable to understand. The dancer, in desperation, finally started to shout and cry out loud barely articulating words. All the audience surrounded the talking possessed dancer in a very packed circle. A talking kesurupan dancer was indeed extraordinary. According to my inquiries, a possessed dancer is not able to articulate any speech. His message, though, as passed on to me by my translator, was shocking precisely because, despite the extraordinary set-up, it was as simple as deep. The spirit possessing the dancer, an old man who lived in a tree nearby, I was told, was sad, angry and frustrated that people were throwing garbage all around. He commanded them to be tidier if they loved their village and their neighbours. In a rapidly industrialising Indonesia garbage has become overwhelmingly present in all kinds of landscapes.

5. Commoning

That was the first time I realised it wasn’t just humans who came to the market-places of the world. Spirits and other beings came too. (Okri, 1993, p. 15)

When I got invited to the commemoration of the death of Pak Paiman’s aunty I decided to follow the process of the organisation of the ceremony. Ibu Marina was in charge of coordinating and doing the other most important activity of the ceremony apart from the prayers and speeches: the food. It was through following Ibu Marina, and not the religious experts and local authorities, that I started to realise that food was a part of the spiritual practice itself and that, hence, these practices were in fact actualisations of commoning.
Indeed, Ibu Marina introduced me to how onerous the commemoration was. For starters, this ceremony was only one of the many that must be performed to properly comply with the accustomed mourning protocols. As mentioned above, prayer-meals are held on the seventh day after someone’s death, and another on the fortieth, again on the hundredth and then one on the thousand day. Once someone passed away, Ibu Marina told me, the immediate and distant relatives arrange a common money pot to afford the high expense of these events. The ceremony she was organising was the 100th day one, and this one alone was Rp$3’000.000 (AU$3.000), a quite onerous expense for any middle income nuclear family in the region.

This monetary value, though, only referred to the costs of what she had to buy in the markets. Most of the rice and spices, chicken, plantain leaves and bananas, coconuts, and other vegetables and ingredients, however, came from their own home produce or was contributed by relatives and neighbours. It took careful planning for Ibu Marina to coordinate the gathering of all that was necessary to make the food for the ceremony. Days and even weeks before, she visited relatives and friends to pick up ingredients, or they visited her to drop them at her house. In these visits, they were expected to perform the time consuming protocols of the good guest and host of rigour in rural Central Java, which requires the distribution of homemade snacks and tea and polite (and mandatory) chitchat. Even shopping required some degree of collaboration. Ibu Martina had been purchasing some of the ingredients over the last weeks but two days before the ceremony she had to go to the market to get many other ingredients, mainly those very special ones like dry meat and special spices, but also other bulkier ones that she could not get in the area because of limited supply, such as watermelons or extra cooking oil. A small troupe of scooter motorcycles banded to go together to the next big market, about a twenty minute ride from her place. I joined them and after she and Pak Paiman bargained and purchased the ingredients, each scooter was loaded with a good share of the shopping. We then rode these little motorcycles that struggled to climb the steep road, taking us across the green mountains, overseeing rice, casaba, corn, chili, peanut and tobacco crops to finally get back to Ibu Martina and Pak Paiman’s (see picture). The day before the ceremony the cooking action was even more intense. Around fourteen women, neighbours and relatives, joined in for the cook up. They started to get together at Ibu Martina’s kitchen from six in the morning. The women cooked all day and night long while chatting and bantering. Ibu Martina and one of her neighbours stayed up all night until all the food was ready. In total, they made enough food to feed almost three hundred guests, including the very important take away each family took back home. To my surprise, she looked fresh and ready in the morning for the first prayers of the *slametan*. 
Ibu Marina proudly commenting on the feast they made.

Credits: Hermann Ruiz

The long and labour intensive collaborative work of gathering of ingredients and cooking had to be finalised with the adequate symbolic positioning. As mentioned above, senior males from the family and neighbours made it to the house early in the morning and gathered and sat on mats for a first Muslim prayer. Prayers were soberly minimal and lightly muttered in rhythmical intonations. Right after, they stood around the dining table and delivered a slametan where the food that Ibu Marina and her cooking partners prepared was laid for the prayers. They were meant to acknowledge, honour and give comfort to the soul of Pak Paiman’s aunty, while simultaneously offering the feast to the spirits of the landscape as a token meant to actualise the commonality shared by humans, human spirits, and spiritual non-humans. Apart from the food for the guests, cigarettes, glasses of water with rose petals, money, and other pagan offerings on the table were presented to the spirits as well. A couple of hours after the slametan was finished, friends, family and neighbours started to arrive. Once most people had arrived, the catholic mass started, conveying another layer of symbolic work. The mass required much more participation by the guests, who, sitting on mats spread all over the house’s main lounge or on plastic chairs outside, responded to prayers and psalms by singing accompanied by a small band of gamelangs and drums.
After mass was done, the guests proceeded to help themselves to the food so carefully arranged by Ibu Marina on the dining table. The guests were now more relaxed and informal, and chatter broke out despite the generally solemn mood. Not too long after catching up, the guests quickly delivered the gestures of acknowledgment to the hosts, Pak Paiman and Ibu Marina that protocol required. They, in turn, provided the guests with a take away bag with small snacks including the sweet and sour rice cakes with dry shreds of beef—scarce as it is Central Java—tightly wrapped in banana leaves, a delicacy characteristic of the region. One by one, the guests left the house, touching hands (not shaking them) to say good bye.

The haunting agency of a dead person put in motion such a complex operation. Ibu Marina channelled, transformed and redistributed multiple collaborative resources in order to fulfil the protocols for acknowledging the haunting relevance of the past life of Pak Paiman’s aunty and the spirits of the landscape. This haunting agency is then performing commons in at least in two senses: a. in the creation and recreation of a shared symbolic world and b. in the collective production and distribution of livelihoods.

Here it is necessary to introduce a conceptual clarification of what commons mean in order to show its relevance for allowing haunting to re-make the link between meaning-making and economic practices. A link that, though broken by the liberal narrative of progress, may counter silence in the context of transitional justice theory work. By referring to the concept of the commons I join a particular academic tradition derived from the work of Karl Polanyi interested in debunking the liberal understanding of the economy as an autonomous social field ruled by abstract, rational and universal laws independent from historical or cultural contingency (Polanyi, 2001; Polanyi & Pearson, 1977). In the context of the debate about the significance of the commons, Garrett Hardin defended the point of view that a common plot of grass-land (as a metaphor of common resources like water, air, etc.) cannot be kept healthy because rational selfish individuals (the universal man of liberal economic thought) would each feed their cattle with disregard for the lesser amount of grass left for others. In his understanding, this amounted to the naturally unavoidable “tragedy of the commons” (Hardin, 1968). Contrary to this conceptualization of the commons, other authors have extended the idea of common recourses to demonstrate the inaccuracy and narrowness of the liberal analysis. The commons, in Stephen Gudeman’s definition,

[…] is a shared interest or value. It is the patrimony or legacy of a community and refers to anything that contributes to the material and social sustenance of a people with a shared identity: land, buildings, seed stock, knowledge of practices, a
transportation network, an educational system, or rituals [...]. (Gudeman, 2001, p. 96)

Moreover, drawing from this expansion of the concept where socially assigned value is what makes something “common”, Peter Linebaugh concluded that, in fact, the commons should not be conceptualized as an object/resource, but as the very social process that allows anything to become common. In his words, “[…] the commons is an activity and, if anything, it expresses relationships in society that are inseparable from relations to nature. It might be better to keep the word as a verb, an activity, rather than as a noun, a substantive” (Linebaugh, 2008, p. 279). To highlight this action oriented conception of the commons, J.K. Gibson-Graham, Jenny Cameron and Stephen Healy prefer to call it commoning (Gibson-Graham, Cameron, & Healy, 2013, 2016). Commoning and commons as different concepts here begin to blur in the sense that the materiality of the commons start to be constituted by the process of commoning it, so this constitutive process is part of the commons itself.

Ibu Marina and Pak Paiman’s slametan actualizes commoning that goes beyond the material things that are shared and that gives sense. It brings into existence the very things that are shared. In this sense, it is possible to understand their slametan as an instance of the symbolic commoning that makes possible the particular social arrangements for negotiating, producing and distributing livelihoods both in the form of food and in the form of symbolic acknowledgement of sense and meaning to embodied and disembodied, human and non-human, life. The commons here the is the symbolic universe that conveys this sociality but that, in turn, is only possible in the very performance of enacting it, of commoning it.

6. Community economy as a counter-silence.

Indeed, commoning in this symbolic sense is fundamental for the production of material well-being in such a way that this binary (symbolic/material) can be also challenged. Furthermore, it breaches the divide between culture and the economy that the liberal narrative of modern progress has forged with terror in order to silence communities and their worlds of possibility.

Let me then reflect back on the concept of the commons to bring this idea to safe shore. For the commons to be “common”, it needs to be shared. Although it may sound redundant, this obvious observation leads us to a complex issue: who is entitled to share in the commons? Gudeman’s straightforward answer provides us with a start. In his words, “Without a commons, there is no community; without a community, there is no commons” (Gudeman, 2001, p. 27). But if we are to understand the commons as a verb, then it is the commons which creates the conditions for a community to be actualised. This community, though, is an economic entity in
charge of livelihoods since “the commons […] provides direct input into social and physical well-being” (Gibson-Graham, 2006a, p. 96).

As it becomes evident from the work of Ibu Martina and her friends and neighbours, the particular form in which the spirit of a dead person is integrated into symbolic life requires the common provision of the resources necessary for a common feast, an actualisation of communal livelihoods. This process demonstrates that symbolic commoning enables the production of livelihoods not only in the form of food production and distribution, but in the maintenance and (re)production of the symbolic framework necessary for people to join together in the production of livelihoods themselves. It is in this sense that I find Andrew Beatty’s clarification on what slametans do very valuable when he points out that “[the slametan aims to] create a state of well-being […]” (Beatty, 1999, p. 30).

The question that must be addressed, tough, is who composes the community that the well-being of the commons brings together. Commonality here, though, does not mean “communion” in its Christian religious meaning. “Communion” evokes ideas of mystical unity, homogeneity and harmony far from what I in fact witnessed in Kulon Progo. Indeed, the commemoration ceremonies were successful in hosting diversity without aiming for an ultimate agreement in content. This is evident especially if we consider that even the friends, neighbours and relatives who contributed with the feast ingredients and the cooking were both Catholics and Muslims who were comfortable working with each other. If we were to analyse this as a manifestation of harmonious communion, we would be missing precisely the character of the conditions of possibility for cohabitation here.

Indeed, the “community” producing and sharing this well-being is hardly homogeneous and identical. In these practices, slamet as well-being is asked of many spiritual sources coming from a diverse set of religious traditions. This diversity of spiritual beings ranges widely from Allah and Hindu mythical heroes and deities to the spirits of ancestors and landscapes. Relatives, neighbours and spiritual beings join in prayers and performances and share the well-being enabled, produced and distributed by these symbolic commons. They form what Gibson-Graham calls a community economy in its symbolic dimension. Her distinctive approach, which draws from Nancy’s

66 Pemberton also acknowledges this potential in his ethnography, although he did not conceptualise it in the terms I am using here and hence was unable to disclose more conceptual and political potential in these practices. In 1983, Pemberton observed that a tutelary spirit in a village in East Java appeared in a dream of the head of the village asking him not to ritualise it. In the context of the New Order, as we saw in the previous chapter, “culture” was highly policed by the regime, which is exemplified in the official cultural catalogue that the Taman Mini represents. Pemberton comments that

From this moment in 1983 on, the annual event [tutelary spirit rituals] that otherwise would have secured the position of this village on Mini’s extended cultural map as an exemplary representation of “local tradition”, has not, in fact, occurred. What remains is a recollection of what is not happening, the active trace of the past that cannot be enframed and treated as “tradition”. (Pemberton, 1994, p. 13)
redefinition of the Heideggerian being-in-the-world into his own being-in-common, allows me to understand the sharing of this diverse set of beings in their complex cohabitation as “the ‘commerce of being together’” (Gibson-Graham, 2006b, p. 88; Nancy, 2000). The being-in-common of diverse economic processes depends on moments of production, appropriation and distribution of surplus labour that occur in highly diverse, fluid and diffuse assemblages of human and non-human agencies (to use Latour’s terminology). In this sense, “[…] our own existence at every level can be seen as the effect of the labor of others. For our purposes, then, labor has an inessential commonality […]” (Gibson-Graham, 2006a, p. 88). The labour put into invoking and provoking well-being in the slametan, for example, connects many instances of religious diversity in Java, performing in it a community with no ultimate positive content, highly formal and inessential in this particular sense. It is the symbolic labour necessary to provoke and celebrate well-being rather than any particular religious content that is accentuated. The inessential element of this commonality is thus key to understanding what actually happens at these kinds of spiritual practices. Beatty, challenging and expanding Geertz’s work, has reported that the slametan stages such commonality:

The slametan is a communal affair, but it defines no distinct community; it proceeds via a lengthy verbal exegesis to which all express their assent, but participants privately disagree about its meaning; and, while purporting to embody a shared perspective on mankind, God, and the world, it represents nobody's views in particular. Instead of consensus and symbolic concordance we find compromise and provisional synthesis: a temporary truce among people of radically different orientation. (Beatty, 1999, p. 25)

Following Nancy's theoretical contribution, we can assert that the being of the community that the slametan hosts is not invested with any essential and abstract characteristic. Instead, a community is formed from its contingent being-in-the-world, out of the pragmatics of living together in the concrete circumstances of the everyday that requires a shared symbolic commons for the production and distribution of livelihoods. Furthermore, if a community is the actuality of being-in-common in itself, we can understand that the well-being produced by symbolic commoning is the very condition of being-sharing, the conditions for the sociality necessary for producing and distributing actual livelihoods. This is to say that symbolic commons are simultaneously the condition for creating well-being and the well-being that it produces. Well-being, thus, is the continuing possibility of reciprocity that symbolic commons enable and which constitutes contingent communities.
Perhaps *jathilans* can help us to grasp further the meaning of this “inessential” community economy. As mentioned early, the *jathilan* I described where the possessed dancer spoke to the audience is spectacular evidence of it. In that case, common knowledge held that possessed dancers do not speak a human language. The whole *jathilan* dance performance is precisely a formalised communicative exchange with the spirits, only without uttered human words. The music, the dance moves, the costumes, and indeed food are tools to provoke communicative exchanges between embodied humans and spirits. But this communicative strategy is “unsystemic” in the sense that the felicitous exchange is uncertain: spirits may or may not make sense to embodied humans and spirits almost never make sense to humans, although they sometimes do. All these precise codes and symbolisms, though, are meant to provide the conditions for the spirits to appear, to get in touch, to communicate, to interact, to conjure their evocative haunting power where multiple meanings can be conjured up. These tools, then, form what I called communicative protocols in the previous section. In this sense, these protocols serve only as an opening or clearing that serves a symbolic common space for hosting the spirits. This opening even allows the protocols themselves to be stretched, modified, contested or utilised whenever necessary; in other words, these protocols host haunting. In a way, dancers and spectators host the spirits in a certainly more dramatic but still analogous way than cooks and parishioners: they are creating the conditions for well-being, for welcoming haunting spirits, and indeed for well-becomings, as they allow listening to the haunting habitation of simultaneous times and tenses with the potential of triggering change.

7. Conclusion

My theôria in Indonesia and Central Java has certainly dislocated the way I think about transitional justice. It allowed me to consider a different language to think and talk about political transitions by enabling haunting to instigate an explicitly productive response to the serious challenges and flaws of the liberal narrative of progress. While observing how the haunting agency of the spirits mobilises people, I realised three key words that designate processes that can mobilise transitional justice differently.

First, *cohabitation* acknowledges how any notions of unity are haunted by difference. But the significance of difference in the context where I learned it refers to the simultaneity of beliefs, the multiple spiritual beings they conjure and the many spiritual practices they enact. This cohabitation of difference does not simply refer to the contiguous existence of individually differentiated “cultures”, “religions” or even “systems of belief”. Cohabitation here acknowledges
the partiality or imperfection of any religious unity and then recognises (if not always explicitly) the borrowing and sharing that happens between them when they live together.

Second, this kind of cohabitation needs then a particular kind of communication. Communication here refers to the protocols that allow these borrowings to occur in the first place. The exchange of meaning in this context required a wide variety of communicative strategies whose purpose was to acknowledge, host or invite these diverse spirits. These communicative strategies are consequently performed to approximately fit the particularities of these differences and their location in the politics of everyday, always aware of the haunted boundaries between them.

Third, the cohabitation that these communicative strategies allow creates the conditions for commoning well-being. Indeed, these spiritual practices in Central Java aim to produce a state of slamet: a situation of commoning as the being-together that can be possible because of functioning communicative protocols that allow diversity to cohabit for the purpose of producing well-being. This commoning, though, is simultaneously symbolic and material. In the symbolic sense, it is the axis of symbolic strategies that opens up a common symbolic space where communicative interaction can happen. In its material sense, it provides the conditions for the sociality necessary to produce livelihoods that can then be redistributed. In a way, these symbolic commons constitute a contingent inessential community economy that is able to welcome, host and listen to the haunting power of the past and of the multiplicity of being in a way that can ignite becomings where well-being can be organized differently.

In the following conclusion chapter, I articulate cohabitation, communication and commoning (the CCC language) to provide a different notion of justice to think about and enact the political possibilities of transitional justice differently.
Conclusion: visions of a traveller

In a conversation with historian Alexander Karn during a Conference of the Dialogues on Historical Justice and Memory Network at Lund University in 2014, he sharply pointed out what a luxury is to look at the past, to think about it. He is right. Survivors of mass atrocities can only look ahead. Unlike ordinary middle class people, they experience everyday reality in ways that are more existentially pressing. Because most survivors in Indonesia or Colombia are left in precarious economic conditions, they have to find a way to keep life going despite the scars they bear. Most are aware that those who hurt them got away with it and have the power to benefit from and reproduce a status quo built upon terror.

Very few people have the privilege to look at the past and make it morally relevant for collective action and change. Some of them are brave survivors and activists whose outrage fuels their fight for justice. Others find injustices have impregnated their world so all embraceingly that they prefer to escape, to other lands, or to death. But there are a few people who, despite not having experienced these injustices, have the chance to reflect on the past so as to make it more accessible, more understandable, more bearable, for themselves and those who might pay attention. Those people are academics and intellectuals, I thought, when I found myself in Lund surrounded by an audience whose work is to think about “dialogues” between different experiences of past injustice.

This network is well respected among scholars and activists in Colombia and perhaps other places dealing with the everyday consequences of violence and terror. Coming from Colombia, I had attended their conference twice (in Swinbourne-Melbourne and Lund), full of excitement about meeting other people from other parts of the world interested in issues of historical injustice. In Lund I realised, though, that this global network of academics was oriented in an intellectually “humble” direction. The spirit of this “dialogue” appeared to be more about facilitating the exchange of ideas between professional historians and human rights scholars who could afford to travel to New York, Melbourne, Lund, Amsterdam, etc., and less about doing justice to the past. “Dialogue” was the name given to a retreat of academics who adopted the role of passive observers, librarians of human horror. The group retreated from the overwhelming task of addressing the moral weight of past atrocities. Perhaps they were terrified, as we all are, by the realisation that the “past” can only be understood as being in the past in the comforting fiction of “progression”. Tellingly, there was only one person, as far as I am aware, coming from an actual conflict zone. This was a brave Pakistani woman who told the small audience that attended her panel how the American intervention in Afghanistan had turned her part of the world into
complete chaos. Now, she told us, because of her work in search for justice, she cannot go back home, unlike all of us at the Lund conference.

It was then when I decided that transitional justice could no longer be conducted as an “historical dialogue” where testimonies of survivors of mass atrocities are archived in the files of human horror. To counter this relationship with the past, transitional justice should break its articulation in the narrative of liberal progress and embrace its normative call to end terror and the political impetus it conjures. I felt called to action by this normative claim, and found that the strategy to actualise it was to produce a different language that could articulate political possibilities other than the readymade ones prescribed by simplistic and uncritical progress narratives. This has been the purpose of this thesis: to craft a language that can establish a relationship with the “past”, not leave it behind in the archive of horror, in the museum of things dead, but to acknowledge its haunting relevance today and actively engage with it.

The language I have laboured to produce in this thesis acknowledges firstly that forced displacement, dispossession, exploitation and ecological devastation, are not random acts of incomprehensible savagery, but are acts of violence that deliberately silence other worlds of political and economic possibility that are imaginable and doable under particular narrative constructions. Secondly, this language is not designed to give voice to the silenced words/worlds, but to generate the listening ethics necessary to let their haunting latency appear to us in a way that questions those narratives of progress that we take for granted and fosters the conditions to become, and remain open to, other worlds of political possibility.

This thesis has attempted to perform this kind of listening ethics. I made listening practically operative as a research methodology in what I called theoria. Theoria entails travelling and dislocation, it means leaving the certainties of the familiar, such as the narrative of progress and my common-place critique of it; academically sanctioned methodologies and shy academic writing; my outrage, frustrations and expectations, even my country and language. I have abandoned these things in an eager search of the unfamiliar, of the others, of alterity, of haunting. I travelled with a specific research agenda, though, and that was the only tool I packed for the journey. My search was to witness experiences of ‘haunting’, a concept that helped me to disclose other conceptions of violence and other modes of relating to it. My hope was to become exposed to how other people accommodate death and past lives in their everyday world with the expectation that I might learn something that could transform the way I was thinking about transitional justice.

The first dimension of my theoria in Indonesia was to explore how silencing operates to keep the 1965-66 anti-communist massacres unaccountable. In order to exert control over
communities demanding social, political and economic justice (communist or not), the New Order regime spread terror by supporting mass killings and lifelong persecution. Accompanying this process, the New Order consolidated its power by exerting control over the meaning-making power of community economies. This was possible because, like the Dutch during the colonial occupation, the New Order utilised a modern conception of culture that consisted of identifying particular aspects of communities’ symbolic production and turning them into fixed and distinctive “cultures”, then forcing autonomous meaning-making processes to fit with government-approved “cultures”. In this way Suharto could articulate a narrative of harmonic coexistence between pure, never-changing and politically passive cultural units. Furthermore, this harmonic coexistence became the safe social background on which the narrative of liberal development was deployed to insert Indonesia into the capitalist global market. Ultimately, the New Order's silencing strategy consisted in conceptually, narratively and politically breaking the link between meaning-making and economic practices that constituted the power of community economies and the worlds they perform.

In Indonesia, though, and specifically Central Java where I travelled, spiritual life is intense and dynamic, old and new, creative and rigid, providing in this way rich experiences and narratives of haunting and proving how life-words, unlike “cultures”, are ever changing and adapting. Indonesian spiritual worlds have fascinated major anthropologists and they with no doubt have learned to understand the world differently by witnessing them. In this spirit I also learned from them. In the rice mountains of Kulon Progo and Yogyakarta city I witnessed a number of spiritual practices that illuminated the way transitional justice can be articulated in a vocabulary that acknowledges haunting as a fundamental way of experiencing the world. Haunting is articulated in these practices in Kulon Progo as the cohabitation of simultaneous religious traditions that overlap, challenging the claims of religious experiences as perfect or pure, fully developed. These practices also demonstrate that cohabitation is possible because of shared communicative protocols that nonetheless remain open to interpretation and adaptation. Finally, these spiritual practices also showed me that cohabitation facilitated by communication nourishes the conditions for commoning well-being, both in the form of production and distribution of livelihoods, and in terms of maintaining the shared symbolic world from which people can draw communicative strategies to articulate collective action. This process of commoning performs the link between meaning-making and economic practices as experiences of well-being. It is simultaneously spiritual and material, constituting a community economy that is able to articulate life in common, a meaningful world where even silence becomes rhetorical. Community economies in this way counter silence.
in at least two ways: by enlivening the link between meaning-making and economic practices and by hosting silence and providing the conditions for making it meaningful.

These three concepts (cohabitation, communication and commoning) compose what I call the CCC language. With it, it is possible to activate a mode of listening that acknowledges the haunting survival of silenced worlds underneath the hard shell narratives of progress that obscure our capacity to see in them worlds of political possibility. Transitional justice can activate this mode of listening through the CCC language if it is to do justice to silenced worlds. Let me illustrate very schematically how listening can rearticulate political possibilities for transitional justice by drawing a parallel with the three moments of community economies as identified by Ethan Miller.

In his work on furthering the concept of community economies as conceived by Gibson-Graham, Miller (2013) established that it is possible to grasp the practical challenges specific to the community economies project by emphasising what it entails in its ontological moment, its ethical moment and its political moment. The ontological moment requires us to acknowledge that being is always being-with. Unlike the modern emphasis on the sovereignty and coherence of the rational individual, the measure of all things, the community economies ontology makes visible our interconnections and interdependencies with others. In this sense, the ontological moment corresponds to cohabitation, to the very immediate fact of a life shared with others and with all that is required for it to thrive. Cohabitation, as I observed it in Kulon Progo, not only means the contiguous life of many individuals, but the possibility of acknowledging radical difference that nonetheless can find practical strategies for negotiating the conditions for life in common.

The ethical moment names the openness that is necessary when action is required in a community economy. This is the moment when our being-with can be articulated by coordinates or protocols that can enable the openness that is fundamental for effective communicative exchanges in situations when negotiations about practical matters need to take place. Gibson-Graham has defined these ethical coordinates elsewhere (Gibson-Graham, 2006a), but I want to emphasise two dimensions of these ethics that I found in my research. First, this openness can be better understood when qualified as listening. As reiterated in this thesis, the concept of listening allows us to understand being open to the other’s claims as actively becoming literate about the conditions from which these claims are articulated (the world of the other), learning from them and as a consequence being open to change. Second, a listening ethics can also be understood as the active process of creating the conditions for that openness itself to become possible; that is, listening as the active practice of creating and nourishing the symbolic, linguistic and even institutional repertoire that can effectively host the ones who we are to listen to.
Finally, the political moment refers to the enactment of the community economy, the moment when decisions are put into action. Miller is interested in how these political and economic actions, articulated by an ontology of being-with, and guided by listening I would add, take forms that challenge traditionally capitalist organisations that are hierarchical, selfish and not interested in negotiating their place in the world. Gibson-Graham, Roelvink and St. Martin (2015) identified commoning as an active process constitutive of a community economy. I agree that commoning is constitutive of the making of a community economy and in a particular sense it is accordingly highly political. As defined here, silencing through narratives of modern progress breaks the link between meaning-making and economic practices. However, by re-making this link, community economies challenge the status quo reproduced by silencing narratives of progress and in this sense they are highly political. Enactments of community economies are indeed moments of condensation of a commoning process. As Miller reminds us, these moments of condensation are temporary since they are founded on an ontology of being-with and an ethics of listening that remains open, flexible and adaptive.

The community economies approach opens up a different universe of political possibilities than the liberal narrative of progress that structures pragmatic transitional justice debates. The transitional justice equation (future=democracy+rule of law/capitalism) from this perspective can then be unlocked to allow for a different political imaginary. Take democracy. If we conceptually open democracy to an ontology of being-with and coexistence, what I call cohabitation, then focus cannot be only aimed at developing reliable election processes. Often, this is limited to allow excombatants to participate in elections. This is, of course, essential, but necessarily insufficient. While this may deescalate the conflict and save precious lives, it nonetheless does not explicitly offer more autonomy and participation to empower communities on the ground in a way that can guarantee various the cohabitation of interests, activities and relationships. When power structures based on labour and natural resources exploitation can still exclude people from political and economic processes after peace agreements, important protection and nourishment should be paid to autonomous communities.

Take furthermore the rule of law. Its function is normally to bring equality and stability to a political system. But empowering these communities through fostering coexistence will not only facilitate more equal power distribution but will nourish the local knowledge necessary to deal with disagreement and conflict of interests, what I call communication. In this latter sense, the emphasis on the rule of law, as important as it is as well, has little to do on the ground when patron-client power structures override formal legality. What is furthermore necessary is again to empower these
communities in their capacity to facilitate and mobilise collective action for which locally established protocols of interaction have been developed over time.

Finally, take capitalism. It is precisely when cohabiting communities are able to communicate effectively to mobilise collective action that commoning of well-being is more likely to occur. That is, that unequal distribution of power is renegotiated to achieve collective goals. Commoning around cohabitation and communication as described in Chapter Six and Conclusion can counter capitalist values like individualism and self-interest that in contexts like the Colombian or Indonesian ones become rampantly violent, with democracy and the rule of law unable to control it.

The landscape of pragmatic transitional justice in this way breaks open to multiple political possibilities. Legalistic articulations of transitional justice are preoccupied with top down policies of state building, institutional reform and human rights accountability (in some cases marginally interested in social justice), while the CCC language offers a bottom up grounded political imaginary. This project, however, can be critiqued for an overpositive and naïve understanding of the local and the communal. Indeed, exploitative and violent practices and power structures that survive centralised transitional justice policies are localised. The point here is nonetheless to be able to acknowledge the interlinked relationships between globalised exploitative capital and local violent power in a way in which it is possible to see it and listen to it so policies can counter and balance it to empower people working to common well-being. This process can be facilitated in many ways and at many levels. Only when the liberal progress narrative is debunked as the main framework of political imagination in transitional justice, can policies that facilitate an evening out of power at the local level become imaginable.

Furthermore, introducing ideas of haunting and community economies can challenge the future oriented meta-narrative of pragmatic debates of transitional justice. As used in this thesis, haunting is a conceptual figure signalling the agencies that survive their assumed vanishing, an immanent latency capable of doing things without manifesting a full presence. When thinking about how terror aims at destroying meaningful worlds and how uncritical transitional justice processes reinforce narratives that legitimise the economic projects of those who exercised terror, haunting reminds us that listening can enable us to recognise the surviving remnants of those worlds. Indeed, as developed by Gibson-Graham, post-capitalist politics and ethics compels us to read for difference. For them, capitalocentrist economic narratives describe how either capitalist expansion is inevitable and even desirable precisely because it has naturally overcome non-capitalist worlds. Gibson-Graham questions this narrative by showing how non-capitalist economic practices are present in multiple forms in our everyday lives. Transitional justice could
let the haunting of multiple economic practices that have survived terror come to play an active role in supporting communities on the ground. In this sense, there is no need for promises of future redemption through democratic and capitalist peace because community economic practices survive in everyday life and only need nourishing in the here and now.

Consider, for example, economic reparation policies. In a simplistic liberal perspective based on an ontology of being as coherent, isolated and sovereign, reparations are given to individual victims of human rights violations in the form of cash. When ambitious, reparations assume that improving individuals’ capacity for engaging in the capitalist economy is a matter of ‘better’ development policy in which survivors can become successful entrepreneurs. From a community economies approach, reparations must acknowledge that terror aimed to break the shared symbolic universe that sustains economic practices and its capacity to nourish a meaningful life. In that sense, reparations should aim at nourishing the conditions by which survivors can be-in-common and support the meaning-making practices and economic activities that produce and distribute well-being. As we have seen, in cases like the Colombian or South African transitions, the inadequacy of the transition to challenge the narrative of liberal progress has, as a consequence, had limited effects in countering the violence of exclusion that transitional justice was supposedly committed to reverse.

Testing the capacity of this language to articulate concrete practices of transitional justice is a matter for further research. The vocabulary crafted in this théôria in my haunting encounters while travelling, in the challenge of being dislocated and indeed in the learning and disclosing that they triggered, delivered a more existential and political understanding of what is at stake in transitional justice. By using this language it is possible to say that narratives of modern progress, including the pragmatic and uncritical use of transitional justice, have since colonial times silenced other-than-modern worlds of political possibility, other narrations, other subjectivities, other socialities, other economies. These silencing processes, though, are never complete. They are haunted by the undead remnants of those silenced worlds that in the vacuum of their absence become calls for justice. Listening to this haunted silencing in order to do justice to them requires positioning ourselves in the place of not-knowing, of incompleteness, of suspended fulfilment, of fragmentation. We need, in other words, a strong awareness of our existential interdependence, of the numerous potential contributions to our learning, in sum, of our being-in-common, of our being-together. If transitional justice is about ending terror, it must allow itself to listen to its own haunting silences, the echoes of its origin in narratives of progress that have legitimised colonial imperialism for centuries and whose contemporary articulations still legitimise the silencing of other worlds of political possibility. Transitional justice may as well acknowledge that haunting can
be a more conducive approach to enabling our capacity to coexist with alterity. This is the contribution of the CCC language: being-with others (cobhabitation) requires an adequate language (communication) that can nourish the conditions for commoning well-being.

Justice as commoning well-being suggests that there is a political theory still to be developed. The work of the community economies scholarship, postdevelopment, postcolonialism, feminism, poststructuralism and critical theory have populated my political imagination with concepts and cases that enabled me to think alternatives to the liberal narrative of progress in the context of critiquing pragmatic debates of transitional justice. However, I have crafted here a vocabulary that is specialised in purposefully articulating the challenge to the modern grammar of time that haunts transitional justice: justice as commoning well-being is a conclusion I arrived at by listening to the hauntings I witnessed in my théoria to Colombia and Indonesia, where I learned that coexistence, communication and commoning (re)create the conditions for meaning-making through community economic practices that produce and distribute well-being. This vocabulary can be further explored to think about the kind of institutions that are necessary to enact and further this notion of justice in a way that the scholarships I have used in this thesis are not directly designed to do. Feminists scholars who have been recently focusing on peace agreements, policies of post-war reconstruction and peacebuilding, have pointed out that violence against women survives after war not only in terms of sexual and gender biased violence, but importantly in its political economy dimension (Davies & True, 2015; Sjoberg, 2013, 2015; Tripp, Ferree, & Ewig, 2013; True, 2012, 2015). Bergeron, Cohn, & Duncanson (Forthcoming) have pointed out that this critique “[…] reveals the importance of developing new economic models for feminist peacebuilding”. The aim of my future conceptual exploration of the CCC language and the conception of justice as commoning well-being aims to contribute to this scholarship.67

Second, this language enable me to also articulate more explicitly the global scale of the terror that transitional justice aims to address. Indonesia gives us an insight into our global togetherness. As we saw, the anti-communist massacres of 1965 installed powerful military, political and economic elite that are still in control of the country today. With the help of the World Bank and development money from major Western countries, this elite has allowed (and profited from) the clearing of massive areas of tropical forest to grow oil palm and other industrial mono-crops in Kalimantan, West Sumatra and other regions. In 2015, the human-made seasonal fires that are meant to prepare the land for a new cultivation cycle went out of control. The fires lasted for weeks emitting enormous quantities of toxic fumes throughout South East Asia. It

67 This thesis has been a conceptual exploration. The alternative vocabulary that my théoria has produced has yet to be used “on the ground”. Any discussion of the practical possibilities of this language would be speculative at present. I look forward to post-doctoral research on this area.
created not only a human health catastrophe across the region but it might have increased the planet’s temperature. These fires alone may have diminished our chances of preventing disastrous global weather disturbances. Oppenheimer, director of *The Act of Killing*, describes the dimension of our global togetherness as exemplified by these apocalyptic fires:

While palm oil producers [mainly multinational companies] and their military partners [whose current power was founded on the 1965’s massacres] profit from the fires, the people of Indonesia pay an incalculable price. Last year’s inferno [the three weeks long fire in Kalimantan’s palm oil plantations] spread an unremitting, sickening haze over 43 million people. Half a million sought care for respiratory illnesses, while an average of 110,000 south-east Asians die every year as a result of the conflagration. And the never-ending rows of oil palm spread brutally exploitative labour conditions – including child labour and poisoning by lethal herbicides and pesticides. [Furthermore,] according to Pep Canadell, director of the Global Carbon Project, the fires were “the global tipping point” that will push the world beyond 2C of warming, and squarely into the acknowledged danger zone for the planet’s climate. This is both the world’s worst ecological disaster and a human rights catastrophe – and we are all implicated. (Oppenheimer, 2016. Emphasis added)

The modern narrative of progress, and since the 1960’s the liberal and neoliberal narratives of development, bear a substantial share of responsibility for this particular catastrophe. This catastrophe, though, is only an instance of the ongoing financial, political, social and ecological crises that are building up a level of global human and ecological distress that may materialize in mass forced displacement, civil unrest and probably international wars. We need a transitional justice movement that does not stop at prosecuting individual criminals and their organisations, as essential as it is. We need a stronger and more political transitional justice that can free itself from the constraints of the language of nation states and individual-oriented human rights and that can take up the challenge of understanding justice as global commoning of well-being.

From this perspective, unexpected questions start to emerge: can “pragmatic’ transitional justice account for the silencing of communities that have been victims of the mass violence necessary for indiscriminate resource exploitation? Can this account let the communities that have lived in relative balance with the planet teach us something about how to prevent violence? Further, can this knowledge help us to learn how to care for the Earth at a spiritual, social, economic and political level? Can we understand their loss as our loss too, as the potential loss of a knowledge key for our common survival as a human species? Can we imagine a transitional
justice for the planet? Or at a conceptual level: what understanding of human rights can this notion of justice yield? Furthermore, can we articulate more explicitly our being-with other non-humans into our understanding of justice? What would be our understanding of what it is to be human if we do so?

The vocabulary I use to write against terror can be seen as naïve, unrealistic, utopian or even outright delusional. Today, almost two decades into the 21st century and facing an exponential increase in tension in all dimensions of our lives, there is no time to be conservative, there is no time to repeat the same formulas that have brought us here. The work of the traveller is precisely the opposite: to risk the comfort of the familiar and dive into the world eagerly, openly, thirsty for new visions of other worlds. Of course, when travellers return home, the citizens regard them as uncanny fellows, convertees, mystics, traitors perhaps. But in the dead of night, the wise councillors of the city come to the travellers’ quarters to listen to their stories.
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Jathilan mask and horse
Credits: Hermann Ruiz