

## DEALING WITH COLLECTIVE SHAME AND GUILT

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### RESUMEN

Se analizan las funciones de la comunicación informal en la protección de la identidad social. Se describe la culpa y vergüenza colectiva, la asociación entre la influencia de información referente y la credibilidad del rumor, y la validez ecológica de la transmisión triádica como opuesto a la transmisión persona a persona respecto al proceso social de memoria. La reproducción serial se concibe como un paradigma para estudiar representaciones sociales de pasado o la memoria colectiva. También se analizan datos anteriores y teorías en relación con las Comisiones de la Reparación de las violaciones de los derechos humanos.

### ABSTRACT

We discuss the functions of informal communication in protecting social identity and dealing with collective guilt and shame, the association between referent information influence and rumour credibility, and the ecological validity of the triadic transmission as opposed to the person-to-person transmission in relation to social process of memory. Serial reproduction is conceived of as a paradigm to study social representations of past or collective memory. Previous data and theories are also discussed in relation to Truth and Reparation Commissions that deal with collective human right violations.

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**Key words:** collective guilt, informal communication, social process of memory

Queens, New York, is known to most people, even outside the United States. What less people know, is that Queens is associated with the name of Catarina of Bragança, the sister of a XVII century Portuguese king. Recently, the New York Portuguese community arranged for a statue of Catarina to be erected in Queens, to celebrate her ruling there. What less Portuguese people did know is that Catarina was associated to slave trading. However, the Queens' African-American community was aware of it and the statue is now waiting for a new plan. Undoubtedly, the African-American and the Portuguese communities in Queens agree that slavery is one of the most immoral endeavours in human history. Nevertheless, it is likely that, from the standpoint of their historical identities, the two groups stand on quite different grounds. The negative feelings of contemporary African-Americans towards slave traders who brought African people to the 17th and 18th century America is more than legitimate. But, contempo-

rary Portuguese are not proud of remembering their slave trader ancestors who clearly threaten their image as a group.

### **Collective guilt and shame**

The same may apply to other former colonial countries, such as Spain. In fact, Spain has a more negative historical stereotype than Portugal: so called Black Legend attributes to Spaniards an image of brutal and arrogant conquerors, in comparison to a more lenient historical stereotype of explorers and more open minded settlers of Brazil. Spaniards have been blamed for many atrocities and these were real but it is fair to remind that Britain, Portugal and France were also involved in brutal colonial wars (Restall, 2004; Thomas, 2004).

In any case, Spaniards and Portuguese, as members of national groups, probably experience negative emotions like shame and guilt, as a consequence of the negative groups' history. Shame and guilt are conceived of as resignation emotions. Negative emotions are related to an appraisal of low control over events and usually lead people to reduce activities and to internal focus. People experience guilt when their personal behaviour is inconsistent with their moral attitude and this emotion involves negative evaluation related to specific behaviours.

Lazarus (1999) posits that the core relational theme for guilt is having transgressed moral rules or norms. Action tendencies related to guilt are reparative actions. Guilt also prevents from acting destructively against others. Shame is related to the failure of self or when the exposed self is found inadequate and is felt when a negative evaluation of the global self is involved. For shame the core relational theme is failing to live up to an ideal-ego or not reaching goals (Lazarus, 1999). The action tendency related to shame is wanting to hide or conceal actions. Shame leads to self-improvement and to restore identity (Izard, 1993; Lewis, 1993).

Guilt and shame have intra-group social functions: strength the bonds between members of a group. Shame encourages pro-social behaviour, conformity and responsibility. Guilt increases compliance and reinforces social bonds, with a sense of interpersonal obligation and empathy (Echeberría, 2000).

These self-conscious emotions may be felt at group level, this means felt not as a consequence of personal experience, but as a consequence of the experience and behaviour of social categories like nation, ethnic group and so on. In guilt, attention is focused on collective behaviour: We (German people) made this awful thing (Holocaust). Guilt's main adaptive social function is to prevent interpersonal and inter-group exploitation. In

shame, attention is focused on the collective identity: We (German people) made this awful thing (Holocaust). Shame's main social function is to restore collective positive identity.

However, at the group level little difference is perceived between characterological (We German people...) and behavioural (...German people made...) attribution of negative collective events. Moreover, usually in front of negative in-group past collective behaviour subjects perceive lower level of control – and lower level of control of behaviours is associated with shame, as high control is related to guilt (Branscombe, Slugoski & Kappen, 2004). This is why a negative past experience usually elicits both shame and guilt: for instance, university students belonging to the third generation after the WW II, report first, feelings of shame (65%) and second, feelings of guilt (41%) when thinking about the Holocaust (Rensman, 2004).

This does not mean that collective guilt and shame are the same emotional reaction. Guilt is strongly related to reparation and apology and shame is usually associated with tendencies to escape, hide or distancing motivation – like avoiding reminders of negative collective event, distancing from the in-group or punishment and derogation in-group black sheep members (Lickel, Schmader & Barquissau, 2004). Usually people feel collective guilt when they categorise themselves in the group of perpetrators, perceive the group as responsible for negative actions that could have been controlled, actions are perceived as illegitimate and morally unjustifiable, harm done remains uncorrected and cost and reparative actions are not perceived as costly or the harm impossible to repair (Branscombe, 2004).

Guilt and, particularly, shame are usually felt by victims, because shame is related to negative outcomes that can not be controlled and, in public, portrays an image as weak, inferior or “tainted” by stigma – guilt and shame feelings related to massive women’s rapes in the war by loser nations soldiers are the prototype of this situation. Victims of human right violations, more than perpetrators, feel a lack of ability to control and lower responsibility for negative events. This explains why feeling shame is strongly related to being victimised and usually associated with anger towards the perpetrator and retaliation tendencies, whereas anger is usually unrelated to guilt experience and aggression (Branscombe, Slugoski & Kappen, 2004).

In spite of this important difference, guilt and shame reports covariate in self-report studies and both are social emotions that motivate against anti-social collective behaviour and reinforce compliance with norms and pro-social behaviour. Motivated by feelings of collective shame and guilt, people are inclined to restore a positive collective identity or make up

amends for their behaviour. Reparative and compensatory actions could serve to repair damaged inter-group and interpersonal relations and to restore in-group self-image (Hoffman, 1982).

Wallbot and Scherer (1995) in their large cross-cultural study found that guilt is elicited by immoral behaviour and self attribution (internal factors) and that shame is elicited by “inappropriate” behaviour and more often by other people (external factors). In individualistic and low power distance cultures shame experiences are very similar to guilt experiences – explaining why German subjects report at the same time shame and guilt.

Doojse, Branscombe, Spears & Manstead (1998) demonstrate that people may experience socio-centric or collective guilt related to the behaviour of fellow in-groups members (Dutch confronted with their group’s colonial unfavourable past behaviour in Indonesia) even when they personally actually played no role in harming other national groups. Studies show instances of collective guilt in different European, American and North-African countries (Branscombe & Doojse, 2004).

Of course, we are not talking about collective judicial guilt: as Jaspers posits from the point of view of law, only individuals can be guilty. This means that individuals assume responsibilities in trials and receive penalties for crimes and not for collective guilt (Jaspers, 1947, quoted in Rosoux, 2002).

It is also important to be aware that attributions of collective guilt are also a weapon in ideological struggle. Social representations of past that feed violent conflicts focus on the rumination of in-group suffering usually: a) represent or define national in-group as a victim (We, Serbians, excluded, discriminated and attacked from the Middle Age to World Wars). b) national outgroups are defined as aggressors or perpetrators and the responsibility and guilt of real or symbolic current and past injuries are attributed to these social categories (they, Croatians nazis and Muslims fascists collaborators, killed our people and commit genocide in the WWII). c) Retaliation appears as legitimate, and social representations reinforce inter-group aggressive action tendencies, war and collective violence being only a rational and justified response to past aggression of the out-groups and in-group suffering (Rosoux, 2001b).

However, in this text we analyze the role of collective guilt as part of in-group social representations of a negative past. Guilt and shame are conceived of as the emotional side of collective responsibility. These emotions are related to constructive reparative actions at actual or symbolic level. On the other hand, collective criminal guilt implies the justification of penalty and aggression towards a whole social category, because their members

belong to a criminal nation or because subjects were bystanders of a criminal regime.

Collective guilt and shame, as feelings related to collective and not personal behaviour, are more probable in new generations unconnected to historical crimes (Rensman, 2004). At the opposite of common sense, people directly involved in collective traumatic events as perpetrators or passive bystanders, do not usually report guilt and shame and feel positive towards institutions involved in such human right violations. For instance, interviews with old guards of killing fields in Cambodia and murder gangs' members of the Rwanda genocide, suggest that active participants did not feel guilt or regret (Hatzfeld, 2004).

In the same vein, observers of immediate post-war years in Germany wrote about self-pity, fear and sadness felt by the population, but also stated that guilt was not a dominant feeling (Baier, 1988; Grosser, 1989). Only 5% of 80 Germans psychiatrist, psychologist and priest reported confessions of WW II crimes of war (Bar-On, 1989).

These observations of lower feeling of guilt were confirmed by representative samples of public opinion: only 32% of a German survey in 1951 answered that Germany carried the guilt for the war. In 1967 it was 62 %. Discussion around the role of the German Army and of "normal German people" in the genocide and human right violations arise in the sixties and particularly after the seventies and eighties: it was sons asking to their parents and grandparents about what they did or not did during the WW II, in very critical manner. In the eighties and nineties most of the German population (60%) was born after WW II.

A recent survey (1995) shows that German people report lowest historical proud (Do you feel proud of your nation history? Yes 8% in Germany versus 34% general mean) of 23 European, American and Asian nations. Such collective condemnation was possible because the younger generation viewed itself as different from the older generation and as unconnected to the Nazi regime and II World War and at the same time feel involved, but not committed, to collective in-group violence.

Austrian and Japanese samples show a medium high level of historical proud (40% and 33%), suggesting that in these cases collective guilt and shame in part related to WW II and genocide's in Europe and Asia exist at a lower level (UNESCO, 2000). Cultural explanations of German learning versus Japanese *amnesia* refer to a dichotomy between cultures of shame, focused in public image and external punishment, and cultures of guilt, related to internalised self-critic (Conrad, 2003). However, this argument could not

explain the case of Austria –nobody could argue that Austria is not a culture of guilt-.

One plausible explanation for lower historical guilt is lower levels of institutional self-criticism in both nations facilitated by Allied political decisions: Hirohito Emperor was never judged as criminal of war despite of his involvement in Japanese Army commandment. Austria was designed as a victim of Nazi Germany in spite of high support of population to nazi's regime and Holocaust. In Austria 6.000 war criminals were judged, but only 35 death penalty were executed, for a six millions of inhabitants – 15% belonging to Nazi organisations. Trials were larger in Germany than in Japan: in Japan, for 74 millions of inhabitants, 28 leaders and another 5.700 people were judged by war's crimes by Allied trials, including 920 death penalties until 1951 (Grosser, 1989). In Germany, for around 80 millions of inhabitants, 21 leaders and 15.000 other war criminals were judged by Allied trials. French, British and American Governments executed 800 death penalties and probably a similar or higher toll by Russians –this means a ratio two to four times higher than in Austria and Japan. German trials judged 60.000 war criminals between 1947 and 1990 –even if only 10% of them received low strong penalties and most of old nazis became successful citizens in the German post-war (Barahona, Aguilar and Gonzalez, 2001; Bourke, 2001; Laqueur, 1985).

Another related explanation could be the lower assumption of responsibilities: Japan and Austria reject responsibility of war crimes in Asia and Europe and rejected to paid in the case of Japan or paid lower reparation than Germany in the case of Austria, to their victims. These nations cope with a negative collective past by means of successful silence and denial, inducing a social representation of past that actively forgets national crimes (Olick & Levy, 1997). Even in the case of Germany, in a survey dated in 2000, only 30% agreed with a guilt statement like "German citizens supported the nazis and were involved...". 40% believes that German people were passive bystander and 23% that they were victims of Nazis. 51% agrees with putting a final line over past and only a minority agrees with continued debate – 41% (Langenbacher, 2003). In spite of institutional self-criticism, trials by German judges, laws against the denial of Holocaust and crimes against the humankind, current public opinion in Germany rejects collective guilt and agrees with forgetting the negative past (Rensman, 2004).

The present studies aim to analyse how group members deal with such threatening memories, from a social identity perspective, using studies of rumours, political history and experimental studies as resources to under-

stand this social dynamic. There is evidence that group members normatively construct recollections of relevant past events through informal communication (e.g. Halbwachs, 1992; Vansina, 1985). Informal communication may thus help structuring individual memories about the historical and actual patterns of inter-group relations (e.g. Halbwachs, 1992; Kaplan, 1982; Kimmel & Keefer, 1991; cf. also Billig, 1990; Tajfel, 1978) and we will explore this issue first.

### **Social Identity, Rumour and Collective Memory**

How does informal communication help people establishing a positive social identity? Research on rumours, which we see as an instance of informal communication, may help answering this question, because cross-generation oral transmission of informal history is one of the most important processes related to how cultures and collective memory emerge, persist and change.

Rumour is a proposition for belief, passes from person to person, usually by oral transmission, without secure evidence being present. When statements refer to old times (like William Tell figure in Switzerland) rumours are alike cultural legends, they are manifestations of collective memories. Moreover, themes of many rumours are long-lived and reproduce central values and symbols of culture. Rumours usually reproduce unofficial or alternative memories, like in the case of the long-lived idea of President Kennedy murder by a ruling class conspiracy, in spite of Warren Commission official statement of an individual murder (Rosnow, 1980).

Rumours are not only a manifestation of collective memory, but allow to understand informal social communication or communicative memory. Serial reproduction of rumour and information, like in classic Bartlett or Allport and Postman studies, is a paradigmatic contribution to the study of social representations of history or collective memory (Schaller & Crandall, 2004; McIntyre, Lyons, Clark and Kashima, 2004).

Traditionally, rumour research focused on the factors that reinforce rumour transmission and processes through which rumours distort facts (Allport & Postman, 1947a; Difonzo, Bordia & Rosnow, 1994; Kapferer, 1987; Knapp, 1944; Ohja, 1973; Peterson & Gist, 1951; Rosnow, Esposito & Gibney, 1988). Rosnow (1991) meta-analysis found that personal anxiety, related to emotional tensions associated to the topic, is the first predictor of rumour transmission:  $r=.44$ .

Our study in five European regions and five rumour also found that anxiety (how anxious do you feel when you hear the rumour for the first time?) was an important predictor of rumour transmission (meta-analytic

$r=.40$ , Paez & Marques, 1999). Probably the more stressful, fearful or negative emotion arousing the situation, the more likely it is to reinforce rumour transmission. Second predictor of rumour transmission was credulity or trust in the rumour, related to the credibility or veracity of content and source of rumour:  $r=.30$ . In our synthesis credibility or veracity (How sure you feel about the veracity of the rumour the first time you hear about it?) was also important,  $r=.21$ .

Rumour, urban legends, oral stories about collective past, are more transmitted depending on whether the teller finds it trustworthy. Uncertainty or situational ambiguity is the last predictor of rumour transmission (Rosnow effect size  $r=.19$  and our  $r=.21$ ). Historical rumour flourishes in a social climate of uncertainty because it attempts to relieve the tension of cognitive unclarity.

Another important predictor that appears in rumour theories is the relevance or thematic importance. Two studies found that subjects spread more unimportant rumours: rumour was more passed by subjects who perceived the topic or theme as lower rather than higher in importance. This suggests that probably rumours about topics that involve the collective self or are related to value or relevant out-comes for the in-group tend to elicit more critical examination. Finally, empirical data show that the tendency to accept or believe on a rumour increased as a function of having heard them. In our synthesis study on rumour, one of the most important predictor of rumour transmission was the number of people that tell the subject or talk with him about the rumour,  $r=.39$  (Páez & Marques, 1999). Rumour repetition by a higher number of *sources* bolsters belief and supports retransmission.

Concluding, based in rumour studies, transmission of informal information about past group events should be positively related to negative affect arousal, to credibility or trust in the source and perceived kernel of truth of the content and to social persuasion or number of people that share with the subject about the rumour. On the other hand, relevance is also a moderator factor – relevant topics elicit more criticism and limit rumour transmission. More interesting than establishing the factor that reinforces rumour transmission, however, is to analyse processes of information modification and their functions as an instance of informal social communication (cf. McCann & Higgins, 1990; Ng, 1990).

Based on Bartlett's (1932) analysis of memory processes, Allport and Postman (1945) argued that rumours operate through three distinct processes: (1) *levelling or forgetting*, i.e., the omission of information units in the course of serial transmission. (2) *sharpening or selective recall*, i.e. the



accentuation of some details and change in the structure of relationships among them as compared to the source materials and (3) *assimilation or reconstruction*, i.e., the modification of details, in order to increase coherence between the message and the person's beliefs. A review of studies on serial reproduction concluded that as information is passed along chains details tend to lose, descriptions of events and groups tend to become abstracts, information tend to become stereotyped and conventionalised, following expectations, values and dominant attitudes (McIntyre et al, 2004).

Omitting unfavourable details, accentuating favourable, to the detriment of unfavourable details, and reconstructing negative events under a more positive light, has been observed both in rumour transmission and in recollections of historical events (cf. Baumesteir & Hastings, 1997; Marques, Páez & Serra, 1997).<sup>1</sup> As a case in point, the findings by Allport and Postman (1945, 1947a, 1947b) indirectly support the idea that these processes help protecting social identity. In describing an event involving, among other things, a White's aggression to a Black, White participants discarded most secondary details, and reversed the roles of the central characters in the course of serial transmission. In the end of the rumour-chain, the White character was portrayed as the victim, whereas the Black character was given the role of aggressor. In addition, in a survey of one thousand different rumours, Knapp (1944) found that 66% were negative rumours about out-groups.

Allport and Postman processes could be associated to specific forms of coping with negative past events. a) forgetting or levelling is related to dissociation from the group and event, in terms of omission, denial and silence about traumatic collective events, b) selective recall or sharpening is related to social creativity, by reframing, psychological distancing and similar forms of coping with past negative events; c) assimilation is related to positivistic reconstruction of negative past events. These processes related to information transmission, operate well as an individual or repeated reproduction (intra-personal or personal memory) level (Herman, 1997) as well as on a social level, at a collective and inter-personal social dynamics, like serial reproduction or cross generational rumours about past events or collective memory. As an example at societal and institutional level, Rosoux (2001a) shows how official memories in Germany and France accentuate heroic narratives reinforcing proud and national cohesion. These memories emphasise past persecutions and martyrs, reinforcing fidelity to national goals and values, but conceal shameful past episodes. We will discuss these forms of coping in the framework of Social Identity Theory (SIT) and contemporary developments.

### **Social Identity and coping with a negative past**

Following social identity theory (SIT) people's self-concept derives in part from the social groups to which they belong. National identity is a source of collective self-concept, self-esteem and collective emotions. Collective feelings are sociocentric affects, this means emotions felt in relation to in-group behaviour that are evaluated in an inter-group context. For instance, social or fraternal relative deprivation is a feeling of injustice related to perception that the In-group receives less than they merit in relation to other groups.

On the basis of self-categorisation identity, people may experience guilt or shame as a result of group membership. People confronted with their national in-group negative past behaviour (e.g. raping and murdering Indian people), if they categorise themselves at the group level, because of depersonalisation, should feel guilt and shame related to this threatening evidence. Unable to perform compensatory behaviours related to guilt and shame action tendencies, because the past is difficult to change, subjects should show compensatory cognitive responses or cognitive coping behaviour (Doojse et al, 1998).

When people believe that lower social status is fair or at least stable, and inter-group boundaries are rigid, facing threatening past events or occultation of negative identity is a reasonable strategy (as Nazis did in the forties in Germany and Austria). When social situation is similar to previous one, but boundaries are perceived as permeable, individual strategies of social mobility are possible. When lower status is perceived as fair and stable, but group boundaries are rigid, an in-group identification is high, and individual's mobility is not possible, social creativity coping responses are common, including positive intra and inter-group comparison, partial re-evaluation of the negative event or dimension, and construction of new dimensions. Finally, when social evolution questions the stability and justification of lower in group status, forms of social competition and global symbolic reconstruction appear as possible (Hogg & Vaughan, 2001). In the following table we show coping responses to a negative in-group past in the framework of social beliefs and identification with the in-group, using political history and particularly the German post war experience as an illustrative case:

*Member of a group with a negative past*

Socio-psychological context	Coping response Historical Studies Second Half XX Century: between ( )
Negative evaluation perceived as legitimate, stable, not possible social mobility and lower identification (Germany and Italy in the forties)	<i>Dissociation:</i> a) dissociation of group and collective past by means of forgetting, silence and denial of credibility and relevance of information and minimisation of affective arousal
Negative evaluation perceived as legitimate, stable, lower identification and social mobility is possible (Germany in the fifties, during the cold war)	<i>Distancing from in-group:</i> b) psychological distancing and actual or symbolical social mobility, recategorization in another high status group or in a supra-category (we Europeans or free nations)
Negative evaluation perceived as legitimate, stable but because of high identification or rigid group boundaries social mobility is not an alternative	<i>Social creativity by means of intra and inter-group comparison, redefinition of events and construction of new dimensions of evaluation</i> c) Psychological distancing by means of: 1) agentic state or rejecting personal responsibility “we follow orders” (most of nazis’ in Nuremberg and post-war trials); 2) making in-group social comparison, specifically cutting of reflected failure and symbolic exclusion of extreme in-groups perpetrators of human right violations (conservatives like Adenauer in Germany fifties; French repression of collaborationist and myth of massive French Resistance) d) Defence of identity by means of social creativity: redefining value of existing dimensions or re-evaluation of the negative collective past event by means of minimisation (lower relevance, credibility and low attributed frequency) and selective memory like focusing in “our suffering” or German as victims and Germans as perpetrators downplayed (German nationalist in forties and XXI century) e) Social creativity by means of new dimension of social comparison, on which the group may be evaluated more favourably, by means of reframing, selective attribution of causes and blaming the victims (German historians’ debate and nationalist Germans in the eighties) f) Social creativity by means of positive social comparison with an out-group doing worse (conservatives Germans comparing Stalinist and Nazis’ crimes)
Negative evaluation perceived as only partial legitimate, unstable and the group has some status to use for social competition at least at symbolic level alternative (Italy, Austria and France in the 40-50s, as losers winners nations; Anglo-Saxons nations to WWII mass destruction in Japan and Germany)	<i>Symbolic social competition,</i> g) by means of a global positivistic reconstruction of negative past events (political lobbying for reconstructing the past, like Japanese politicians and historians reconstructing positively Japanese past)

### **Identification and intra-group comparison and social creativity**

When actual social mobility looks difficult, no cognitive alternative is afforded, because subjects believe the situation as stable and legitimate and share a high identification with the national group. Individuals following SIT groups tend to adopt social creativity strategies or cognitive coping, usually redefining the value of existing dimensions (minimization for instance), constructing new dimensions (reframing for instance) or positive inter-group social comparison (comparison with a national group doing worse, for instance).

Making the most intra-group comparison is another form of coping with a negative social identity, not included in cognitive strategies but important to cope with negative collective events. Another form is to consider individuals responsible for collective past traumatic extremely negative events, not typical from the in-group. In other terms, subjects construct a sub-type of in-groups *black sheep* that are devaluated and symbolically excluded.

In the fifties, Adenauer's policy in Germany is a instance of this form of coping: only the SS were supposed to be responsible of Human right violations, while German Army and German majority were conceived of as normal and moral people not committed to Nazi's crimes. In fact, the Wehrmacht was implicated in mass murders from the beginning of the war in Poland and more than 15% of the German and Austrian population was involved in Nazi organisations (von Plato, 1998). A 1995 German survey shows that 63% of people older than 65 years (cohort that experience the II WVS) believed that the Wehrmacht was not involved in genocide and mass murders. However, 71% of younger generations believed in the Wehrmacht participation in mass murders during the II WVS (Pätzold, 1995). Of course, purge of black sheep are also complementary to global positivistic reconstruction.

Gaullist myth of massive French Resistance implies also the purge of a *handful of wretches*. In fact, about 9000 collaborationist people were killed in the *wild purge* of 1944 Summer. About 350.000 people were questioned in legal purge, 120.000 tried, 95.000 sentenced and 1.500 executed. About 30.000 functionaries were penalized and 48.000 people condemned by *indignité nationale* – a kind of public shaming and, in some cases, loss of civic rights. Purge was a massive social upheaval, however, it did not reform the state, it was slow and produced wide disparities –journalists and intellectuals were harshly punished and businessmen judged more leniently. An amnesty was approved in 1953, in the frame of cold war (Baruch, 2004; Rosoux, 2001b).

When individuals face a negative event related to national identity, perceive that it is difficult to leave the group and identify strongly with the group, they usually try to alter the valuation of the group's past –they could use cognitive alternatives or social creativity responses as SIT posits.

First, if they cannot silence the crimes, perpetrators attack the credibility of their critics. Assignment of lower credibility to sources of information about negative events is very common. Negationist literature about the Holocaust is a clear case in point.

Second, minimisation of crimes is also very common. For instance, in Japan it is common to minimise the number of victims of the expansionist war in Asia 1930-1945. The official name of the II WW in Japan "Pacific War", highlights the War against USA (1941-1945) and minimises the long period of fighting on the Asian mainland with its estimated toll of over 20 millions Chinese victims (Conrad, 2003). In 1944, a spokesman for Franco's Ministry of Justice admitted that over 190.000 people were executed or died in prison –for a thirty million population. Historians posit that 30.000 people disappeared in the first period of Francoist regime. The repression, if not denied, was always dismissed by Franco's regime as a legitimate police operation (Preston, 2001). In Australia, the number of aboriginal children forcibly removed from their families in the past was minimised as an attempt to at least decrease the perceived severity of harm done (Branscombe, 2004).

Third, omission of some events and selective retention of others is very common. For instance, in the post-war years in Austria and Germany it was very common to remember human right violations (rapes, robbery, murders) provoked by the Red Army, but, at the same time it was usual to forget and not mention German Army's rapes and human right violations in Eastern Europe. 20 million URSS citizens were killed, 57% of 3,3 million Russian prisoners of war died, 500.000 Jews were killed in the URSS and hundreds of thousands of civilians, communist militants and soviet officials were murdered (Kerschauer, 1998).

Another more complex social creativity coping response or cognitive alternative is to reframe the trauma: *it was the war* or *it was understandable because of the characteristics of this era*. Criminal of war Klaus Barbie's final declaration in his trial is a good example of reframing human rights violations: "I was never involved in mass repression in Izieu (village in which he was involved in mass murders). I hardly fought *Resistance*. I respect *Resistance*". But it was the War and the War has finished" (Finkelkraut, 1989). Similarly, exaggerating the benefits that native or aboriginal victims received from colonisation in America, Africa or

Australia is common and helps to legitimate past in-group collective behaviour as less unfair, or simply just and fair (Branscombe, 2004; Licata & Klein, 2004).

Emphasising one cause over others and blaming the victims are instances of this form of coping. German historian Nolte proposed in the eighties that Nazi's concentration camps should be understood in the context of an *European civil war*. Stalinist destruction of Russian bourgeois and kulaks and Gulag "cause" as a response Nazi concentration camps. The fact that a lot of Gulag victims were Jews and Bolsheviks or that Stalin tried to have stable relationships with Hitler's regime were neglected. Another good example is the version of Hiroshima and Nagasaki atomic bombing, as a response for Pearl Harbour (Baumesteir & Hastings, 1997).

Attribution of cause and responsibilities to the victims (victims brought it upon herself) is another form of cognitive coping and a way of maintaining a belief in a fair and meaningful world. In an 80's survey, a third of the German population, and most of these over 40 years, are in total or partial agreement with the idea that "it is the Jews own fault if they have been persecuted for centuries" (Paez, Marques & Serra, 1997). The wife of a Russian civil servant who worked in concentration camp states, even in 1989, believed in a just world in relation to the gulag: "There were innocents who were unjustly jailed, that is true, but the rest, the majority, those were bandits" (Brossat et al, 2002).

### **In-group vs Out-group membership, identification, stereotypes, recall**

Not only studies on rumours and historical analysis, but also experimental research confirm selective memory and recall reconstruction. At least two previous studies found that subjects recall better in-group positive behaviour and out-group negative behaviour (Alper and Korchin, 1952; Howard and Rothbart, 1980).

This selective recall could be understood as a normative mechanism that reinforces a positive social identity. In the same vein, and congruent with the SIT's perspective, high identifiers with the national in-group should be more defensive in recalling past group behaviours. Subjects with a high in-group identification in front of negative national past should display more forms of coping and collective self defences than low identifiers, as Doojse et al's (1998) study partially shows. In some case, high identifiers report more collective guilt, particularly when information is portrayed by important in-group sources that focus on the constructive reparative actions (Branscombe, 2004). However, in the case of Germany, qualitative and quantitative studies confirm that higher nationalist

identification is negatively associated to feelings of collective guilt and shame, and related to strong defensive attitudes and mechanisms – claiming collective victimhood and collective innocence for German people, blamed unfairly for their past (Rensman, 2004).

On the other hand, subjects could reject and show higher more defences in front of an out-group critical source, that sends a negative message about the historical past. Studies on the inter-group sensitivity show that people reject more criticism from out-group than from in group sources, because they attribute out-group criticism to envious motives and inter-group hostility. However, a critical message from an in-group source induces lower reactance, is agreed more and could have higher impact in collective behaviour, because criticism from in group sources are attributed to more constructive motives (Horney & Imani, 2004 ). Similar results were found in studies on collective guilt (Branscombe, 2004).

Finally, assimilation of expectancies, themes, values and stereotypes is common in informal transmission of information. Stereotypes are related both to inter-group conflicts and to defence of collective self-image, but also to a kernel of historical truth. As an example of the first process, Pakistanis students during the Indo-Pakistan war read a passage about the Indian army and reproduced it serially: each person retold it to other person, who in turn repeated it to another, and so on in an eight person chain. At the end, the final version reproduced the stereotype of the Indian Army as lazy and unprofessional (McIntyre, Lyons, Clark and Kashima, 2004). Students from different countries asked about most prominent world historical events and leaders converged to mention a majority of eurocentric socio-political events and *White European Males*, particularly Second World War and Hitler. These results suggest that people reproduce stereotyped knowledge about what is important in history, including some kernel of truth –II WW and Hitler are prototypical instances of Wars and negative leaders (Liu, et al 2005).

### **Implications for Truth and Reparation Commissions**

These studies and theoretical discussions have some implications for social processes in political transitions from regimes involved in collective crimes to more democratic regimes (see also our empirical studies). How to deal and remember past collective crimes is a frequent problem. Truth, Justice and Reparation Commissions, like South-African Truth and Reconciliation Commission are a common response. There have been more than 20 official truth commission established around the world since the seventies (Hayner, 2001). We will briefly expose some ideas related to these

collective ways of dealing with negative historical events associated to strong emotional reactions, particularly, those related to the problem of confronting past crimes and the collective learning of the truth. Acceptance of events is a first step towards the negotiation of a shared representation of the past. Acceptance of real facts, including others suffering, is essential for reconciliation, because acceptance of different meanings and pluralities of social representations about a collective catastrophe, does not imply to question the existence of a reality. What is important is to acknowledge the reality of crimes and victims, “to keep it from happening again...” but to forget the emotions of hate and not awaking ancient sufferings (Haynes, 2001; Rosoux, 2001b).

First, absence of personal and collective guilt is a modal response in perpetrators of collective crimes and violence. It is not realistic to think that a majority of perpetrators should feel guilt and react with reparative and compensation behaviours towards victims. Denial, justification, and other forms of cognitive coping, allow perpetrators to share a positive collective identity and reject critics about human right violations. Only a minority feels guilt and an important group could display public guilt and shame, but only as compliance – public acceptance and private reject, as the case of Hitler’s minister Speer shows. Third generation of the perpetrators group could be more sensible and feel more guilt, shame and responsibility, than the generation involved in collective crimes. Even in this case, it is reasonable to expect the presence of “defence mechanisms” oriented towards negation, minimisation and positivistic reconstruction of criminal collective behaviour.

Second, internal procedures should be more important for public opinion than external trials and procedures. In Germany, Nuremberg Trial has a lower impact on public opinion than the normal action of German justice on human right crimes (Evans, 2003). Credible leaders are more able to gain population’s adherence to social representations of past that assumes past crimes and, errors, and, furthermore, can reinforce truth and reconciliation trends –like Mandela and Archbishop Tutu in South-Africa (Rosoux, 2001 a,b).

Third, groups and societies are better and more accurate remembering and evaluating collective crimes of political, ethnic, cultural and ideological out-groups, than their own criminal collective behaviour. Societies forget more their negative behaviours and also remember and emphasise more positive aspects of their history. This means that external judges, historians and witnesses should be more accurate and less reconstructive – but at the



same time, their opinions could be less accepted by the group of perpetrators.

Fourth, when dealing with the evidence of collective negative past behaviour, people should question the credibility of the sources. If critical sources are internal and appear as constructive, people would probably engage in positivistic cognitive coping. They would minimise emotional reaction and question the relevance of events – “these are old stories, they are not important in the present”. They would also frame in-group criminal behaviour as more understandable in the historical context, attribute negative and criminal behaviour to a minority of black sheep – extreme atypical members of the nation - and minimise frequency of criminal behaviours. Official reports should be able to overcome these collective defence mechanisms.

Fifth, more cohesive groups, with higher collective self-identity, should display more cognitive coping and should react more to Truth and Reparation Commissions. Subjects highly identified with national and ethnic groups should reject critics strongly, particularly by means of minimisation of the frequency of in-group human right violations. At the opposite, nations with lower level of collective self-esteem and collective proud should accept more critics and suggestions of reparation and compensatory actions.

Sixth, the tendency to punish a minority of criminals could be correlated with a global positivistic reconstruction that denies the general apathy and diffuse global responsibilities – as the German case suggests. Even in this case, generations not involved in crimes could be reactive to historical critics and allow human right movement to demand truth, justice and reparation. In these cases, self-criticism by in-groups high status sources are important. Good examples are recent historical exposition the German Army’s crimes that questions the Adenauer’s statement, reducing war crimes to a black sheep group of SS, or the official assumptions of violations of human rights by Argentina’s Army and Government officials or IRA self-criticism for the practice of political violence, particularly massive and indiscriminate murders.

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