



MA in Construction and Representation of Cultural Identities

Witnessing and Testimony of Traumatic Events and the Function of Cultural and Collective Memory in Harold Pinter's *Ashes to Ashes*

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TO MY FAMILY

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER I	
TRAUMA, TESTIMONY AND MEMORY	
1. Witnessing and Testimony of Traumatic Events.....	8
a) The Importance of Listening.....	14
2. Testimony and Truth.....	18
3. Trauma and Memory.....	21
4. Cultural Memory and Collective Memory.....	25
a) Representation, Simulacra and the Real	28
b) Althusser's Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs).....	31
5. Narrating Trauma in Literature and Theatre.....	33
CHAPTER II	
HAROLD PINTER'S <i>ASHES TO ASHES</i> : IN A FAR AWAY DROWNING	
LANDSCAPE	
1. Introduction: Pinter and Reality.....	39
2. The Play.....	43
3. A Play on the Holocaust?.....	46
4. Rebecca as a Witness.....	50
5. Listening to Atrocities.....	54
6. Rebecca's Fallible Memory.....	56
7. The Function of Cultural and Collective Memory.....	58
8. Personal and Political Voices.....	61
CONCLUSIONS.....	69
WORKS CITED.....	73

ABSTRACT:

Ashes to Ashes (1996), one of Harold Pinter's overtly political plays, depicts a world of violence, political oppression and brutality through the character of Rebecca, whose memory is haunted by the imaginative witnessing of atrocities that mainly resonate with the Holocaust. The play is about the past and how it constructs reality in the present. However, Rebecca's fallible and unstable memory distorts reality, and instead provides the audience with versions of different realities. This instability in her memory questions the credibility of her testimony to the atrocities recounted. Despite the fact that the truth and reality of the play stay elusive, *Ashes to Ashes* points out a social reality—that of brutality, violence, torture and oppression—present throughout the world history, which haunts the conscience of humanity reflected in the character of Rebecca. In this sense, the play offers no comfort to its audiences, who share the same cultural and collective memory as Rebecca, as it creates the same sense of responsibility for human suffering in the past and warns the audience about the possibility of acts of oppression and violence taking place in their comfortable countries that seem to be far away from the atrocities recounted in the play. In this regard, this study aims at analysing Pinter's *Ashes to Ashes* with a focus on the process of witnessing and testimony of traumatic events, the relation between testimony and truth, and between trauma and memory, the function of cultural and collective memory through an analysis of the relation between reality and its representation, and finally the possibility of representing traumatic events, not least the Holocaust, in literature and theatre.

INTRODUCTION:

“When we look into a mirror we think the image that confronts us is accurate. But move a millimetre and the image changes. We are actually looking at a never-ending range of reflections. But sometimes a writer has to smash the mirror – for it is on the other side of that mirror that the truth stares at us”. (Pinter 2005: 12)

What Harold Pinter poetically crafts in *Ashes to Ashes* (1996) is a way in which to smash the mirror that the whole world is looking into and reveal the truth, which points out humanity’s responsibility for human suffering in the past. While the play brings forward the questions of reality and truth in art and life, it self-consciously makes a distinction between them. The reality in art can be both true and false, whereas, as Pinter clearly states in his Nobel Prize Lecture, “to define the real truth of our lives and societies is a crucial obligation” in order to “restore the dignity of man” (Pinter 2005: 12). Thus, the reality of the play becomes “the reality of political oppression, torture and violence” (Aragay 2001: 252). The play is about the past and how it constructs reality in the present. “It is about two characters, a man and a woman, Devlin and Rebecca” (Pinter qtd. in Aragay 1997: 10) and it is shaped by Rebecca’s memories, haunted by the imaginative witnessing of atrocities, not least the Holocaust. However, the instability of her memories distorts reality through the use of language and provides the audience with versions of realities. The broken mirror is scattered around and every piece of it has blood stains on it; every piece has another reality, another atrocity from the past. Therefore, even though the play contains many images resonating with the Holocaust, Rebecca may not have experienced them herself, which, according to Pinter, “is the whole point of the play” (qtd. in Aragay 1997: 10). Rebecca’s experience could be caused by the effects of cultural memory, through the representation of such atrocities via art. However, is it possible to live such a traumatic experience through the representation of such tremendous events from a “comfortably distanced” (Taylor-Batty 2009: 105) point of view? In Rebecca’s case, she is totally haunted by the traumatic events, which are imaginatively

attributed by her as part of her memory. Thus, she is an indirect, imaginative witness of the atrocities that she reveals through the images in her memory. And this distant experience formed by cultural memory, which is constructed and represented by media and art, emphasizes the social responsibility towards human suffering in the past. As the audience also share the same collective memory with Rebecca, the play addresses their consciences in order to create the same sense of responsibility, and it warns them against the potential of oppression and violence in their comfortable countries that seem to be far away from atrocities.

Considering that Rebecca identifies herself with the victims of the atrocities haunting her mind and that most of these images are reminiscent of the Holocaust, it is noteworthy to analyse the nature of the process of witnessing and testimony of traumatic events, which will be thoroughly analysed in the first chapter, “Trauma, Testimony and Memory”. Narrating the ‘horror’ of such traumatic events is an arduous process as there are some obstacles to bearing testimony to this kind of events. Initially, language becomes incapable of articulating such a horrific experience, and thus the victims/witnesses of such events fall into silence. However, as long as this silence persists, “survivors who do not tell their story become victims of a distorted memory” (Felman and Laub 1991: 79). Therefore, traumatic events that are not narrated constitute a barrier before victims’/witnesses’ daily lives in a way that they make them “doubt the reality of actual events” (Felman and Laub 1991: 79). In this regard, Rebecca’s experience can be interpreted as a process of constructing and articulating the truth. In this process, she falls into silence many times, and she struggles to articulate the horrific reality haunting her. However, like the survivors/witnesses of traumatic events, she is entrapped between the reality of actual life and the delusion of her constructed memory of the events. She cannot differentiate the past from the present, as she cannot differentiate her actual memories from the invented ones. Her accounts are always contradictory and elusive.

One of the significant factors in the process of bearing testimony is the presence of a diligent listener who shares the process of testimony and thus accompanies the survivor/witness in his/her journey to re-construct the truth about the past. As Laub argues, “testimony is the narrative’s address to hearing; for only when the survivor knows he is being heard, will he stop to hear—and listen to—himself” (Felman and Laub 1991: 71). Thus, in the process of articulating the horror of the historical occurrence, the listener plays a crucial role by sharing the agony of the past. And this sharing gives birth to some hazards on the part of the listener by leading him/her into existential interrogation, which may also lead to the issue of responsibility towards the human suffering in the past. As a result, as Laub points out, listeners may develop some “listening defences” (Felman and Laub 1991: 72). Assuming that Rebecca is a witness of the atrocities in her memory, she can be interpreted as a listener of the testimonies causing her to assume the role of the victims/witnesses through cultural memory or supposedly lived experiences, and Devlin can also be considered as a listener of her testimonies throughout the play. Therefore, the role of the listener in the process of bearing testimony is significant in the analysis of the characters, Rebecca and Devlin.

Another theme to be discussed as regards the trauma victims is the validity of testimonial truth. As the truth about traumatic events is not only about the historical facts and details, it contains the incomprehensibility of the horror of the traumatic event more than the empirical data. As Cathy Caruth argues, “for the survivor of the trauma, then, the truth of the event may reside not only in its brutal facts, but also in the way that their occurrence defies simple comprehension” (1995: 153). In Rebecca’s case, truth becomes the horror of the atrocities from history that ceaselessly haunts her mind, especially the horror of the twentieth century, the Holocaust, and this truth reflects the shared responsibility for the human suffering in the past, from Bosnia to Auschwitz.

In addition, memories of traumatic events do not always reflect the truth about historical occurrences; instead they are fallible and elusive, since the knowledge of the traumatic experience cannot fit into any pre-existing mental scheme in the survivor's mind. Thus, the survivor tries to integrate this horrific knowledge in logical schemes in his/her mind. However, as such an event surpasses any logic, as Edward O. Wilson explains, "the brain invents stories and runs imagined and remembered events back and forth through time" (qtd. in van der Kolk and van der Hart 1995: 171). In this regard, the play is shaped around Rebecca's fallible and elusive memory, as she cannot integrate the knowledge of the atrocities to any mental scheme in her mind and she invents stories in a way that her mind mixes "imagined and remembered events" in order to overcome this situation.

On the other hand, memory is not an individual account of a past event; it is indeed constructed through social and cultural artefacts. As Elizabeth Jelin points out, "memory is not an object that is simply there to be extracted, but rather it is produced by active subjects that share a culture and an *ethos*" (2003: 68; emphasis in original). Therefore, individual memory is an inseparable part of collective and cultural memory. And collective memory structures the individual memory about the past in the present through various artefacts i.e. art and media. In some cases, according to Maurice Halbwachs, "groups can even produce memories in individuals of events that they never experienced in any direct sense" (qtd. in Olick 2008: 8). In this regard, considering that Rebecca says: "Nothing has ever happened to me" (Pinter 1998: 413), her imaginative identification with the victims/witnesses of atrocities, namely the Holocaust, could be caused by the effects of cultural memory and collective memory. And the images haunting her mind could stem from the representations of the Holocaust, or other atrocities in world history in art, especially in cinema and TV. Through Rebecca's imaginative identification with the victims/witnesses of the atrocities in her mind, which are constructed under the effect of cultural memory, the play urges its audience to share

Rebecca's responsibility for human suffering in the past, bearing in mind that the contemporary audience are exposed to same cultural and collective memory.

Besides, taking into account that representations are significant in the construction of individual memory about historical occurrences, it is noteworthy to argue the credibility of representation and its difference from the simulation in the light of Jean Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation*. According to Baudrillard, "the real is a hyperreal, produced from a radiating synthesis of combinatory models in a hyperspace without atmosphere" (1994: 2). Thus, he rejects the reality created by representations through signs and symbols by showing that there is only one truth: that there is none. Besides, Baudrillard condemns the representation of the Holocaust on TV as creating an "artificial memory", through which forgetfulness and annihilation reach an aesthetic dimension and are elevated to a mass level, leading to "a good aesthetic conscience" (1994: 50). On the other hand, Louis Althusser's concept of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) reinforces Baudrillard's argument on representation. Althusser argues that "ideology is a representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (1972: 162). Thus, ideology creates imaginary representations and interpellates individuals by making them believe in imaginary versions of reality. In the light of Baudrillard's and Althusser's ideas, one can assume that reality is shaped by imaginary signs and symbols, and it is no more than an illusion. In this regard, the many wars and atrocities throughout history have been presented as a televised reality and an illusion, which distorts the reality of historical occurrences and offers a ready morality. *Ashes to Ashes* rejects this illusion and ready morality by pointing out the audience's responsibility for the atrocities in the past, which are experienced by them via their representations in art. Thus, the play urges the audience to empathize with the victims/witnesses of the human sufferings in the past, just as Rebecca does.

The representation of traumatic events in art is a controversial issue. If art is interpreted as an illusion of reality, the depiction of such an event through art would be impossible. At the same time, the reality of the Holocaust cannot be conveyed with any aesthetic purpose, as explained by Theodor Adorno, who states that “[a]fter Auschwitz it is barbaric to write poetry” (2003: 162). Another problem related to the representation of the Holocaust in art is the possibility of trivialization of the event and the suffering it created. However, on the other hand, representing the Holocaust in art can be useful in some ways. It can “educate the audiences who may be unfamiliar or naive about what has been described”, and it can force us to confront the human suffering and share the responsibility (Plunka 2009: 15). *Ashes to Ashes* is not a play that directly represents the Holocaust on stage. However, through Rebecca’s memory it opens a wound that is shared by the audience through their collective memory. As for the issue of representing traumatic events, as Mark Taylor-Batty argues, “in representing aspects of the Holocaust in his play, and activating a moral inquiry into whether one has the right to discuss such atrocities, Pinter is addressing both the ethics of representation [...] and also the cultural processes by which memories of human abomination are necessarily kept alive” (2009: 105). Thus, the play does not intend to convey the truth of the historical occurrence, rather it leads the audience to a shared responsibility with the images resonating with the Holocaust, as the contemporary audience share these images with Rebecca through cultural memory.

As to the structure of this dissertation, in the light of the above discussion, I have divided the work into two chapters. The first chapter consists of the methodological framework. In this regard, the process of witnessing and testimony of traumatic events, the importance of listening in this process and the credibility of testimonial truth are thoroughly analysed. Therefore, the function of memory and the fallibility of the memory of trauma victims are discussed. In relation to the construction of memory in the aftermath of traumatic

events, the function of cultural memory and collective memory are analysed. Besides, as for the relation between the real and its renderings concerning the representations of traumatic events in art, Baudrillard's ideas on representation, simulacra and the real are analysed, together with the analysis of Althusser's concept of ISAs. Finally, the discussions around the representations of the Holocaust in art, especially in literature and theatre are also analysed.

The second chapter, "Harold Pinter's *Ashes to Ashes: in a Far Away Drowning Landscape*" is devoted to the analysis of the play. While it begins with a discussion of Pinter's ideas on the truth in art and truth in real life based on his Nobel Prize Lecture, the chapter gives a brief production history and synopsis. Then, the play is thoroughly examined in the light of the methodology introduced in the first chapter. Initially, it discusses if it is a play on the Holocaust, and it explores Rebecca's experience as an imaginative victim/witness of the atrocities she mentions. In relation to that, the importance of listening in the play is discussed. Other themes to be examined are Rebecca's fallible memory and the effects of cultural and collective memory on her experience. Lastly, the relation between personal and political affairs in the play is analysed in conjunction with Pinter's other overtly political plays.

CHAPTER I

TRAUMA, TESTIMONY AND MEMORY

1. Witnessing and Testimony of Traumatic Events

“In the brutal nights we used to dream
Dense violent dreams,
Dreamed with soul and body:
To return; to eat; to tell the story.
Until the dawn command
Sounded brief, low
'Wstawac'
And the heart cracked in the breast.

Now we have found our homes again,
Our bellies are full,
We're through telling the story.
It's time. Soon we'll hear again
The strange command:
'Wstawac”

“Reveille” by Primo Levi (qtd. in Giuliani
2003: 77-78)

In the poem above, the narrator tells what he used to dream “in the brutal nights” during the Holocaust, and having fulfilled his dreams, in the second stanza, he expresses his concerns for the future, believing that any form of atrocity may break out at any moment. As a witness of the ‘inconceivable’, he is “telling the story”; he bears testimony to a brutal past “that cannot be fully captured in thought, memory and speech” (Felman and Laub 1991: 78). But how can people who experience harrowing events react? Is it possible to bear witness to such traumatic events? And is it possible to tell the truth about the past? These questions with a focus on the Holocaust survivors’ situation will be explored in this part.

In *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (1991), co-written with Shoshana Felman, Dori Laub divides witnessing into three separate levels: “the level of being witness to oneself within the experience; the level of being a witness to the

testimonies of others; and the level of being a witness to the process of witnessing” (Felman and Laub 1991: 75). The first level, for Laub, is his “autobiographical awareness as a child survivor” (Felman and Laub 1991: 75). The second level is his role as an interviewer of survivors for the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale University. And the third level is “the process of witnessing as it is being witnessed” (Felman and Laub 1991: 75). On the other hand, Elizabeth Jelin points out that the word ‘witness’ has two meanings: the first one is “a person who lived through an experience or event and can, at a later moment, narrate it or ‘give testimony’”, and the second one is an “observer, someone who was present at the moment of an event as an onlooker”, whose testimony “can be used to verify that the event actually occurred” (2003: 61).

The Holocaust was an event that involved tremendous suffering and agony in the sense that not only did the Nazi system destroy Jews, gypsies, communists, and homosexuals among others, but also they were negated their humanity. In this way, it is different from all the other genocides and atrocities performed throughout the world history in different places.

Plunka points out this difference:

Perhaps it was its sustained barbarity or the unimaginable enormity of the slaughter that has led historians and philosophers to describe the Holocaust as the seminal event of the twentieth century. While genocide obviously involves widespread killing, the Holocaust seems to be unique in the way that a race was degraded, forced to suffer, and dehumanized (in order for the murderer to be less burdened with the guilt when exterminating “vermin”); thus Jews were not allowed just to die, for they must also die in agony. [...] Unlike any other historical experience, the Holocaust has altered our notions of human dignity, our conventional concepts of God and humanity, and the humanistic idea of civilization aspiring to the norms of cultural existence. (2009: 3)

Therefore, how can a survivor experiencing this agony and seeing the limits of humanity transmit the truth to the new generations? How real or true will his or her accounts be? What are the obstacles and hindrances for narrating the experiences of the “brutal nights”? According to Jelin, the problematic issues involved in bearing testimony are 1) “the impossibility of constructing a narrative and the symbolic lapses and voids involved in

trauma”, 2) “deliberate silence, as the foremost indicator of the dual extreme or limit character of the concentrational experience”, 3) “the voids and the lapses that characterize it [the testimonial], what makes or does not make sense for both the person narrating and the listeners”, 4) “the uses, effects, and impacts of testimonials on society and the social setting at the moment in which they are narrated”, and 5) “appropriations and meanings that diverse audiences may ascribe to the testimonial over time” (2003: 61). Often the survivors cannot articulate their experiences in an adequate language and deliberately or not they fall into silence because of “the phenomenon of ambiguity and the absence of rhetorical tools” (Jelin 2003: 67). This is either caused by a “semiotic incapacity” (Jelin 2003: 67) or the lapses and voids in the traumatic experience. Survivors cannot explain the unknowledgeable brutality. This silence distorts their memory, and as a consequence, they feel guilty by forming a false memory about the event that they cannot explain within any pre-existing logical scheme. Therefore, silence also functions as a protecting wall for them; any step out of it will revive the catastrophe again, in their memories. However, within this protecting wall, silence, survivors do not find any comfort; it is just a protection from the outer world. It is also a barrier between the survivor and the daily life and the actual events. This situation can be called “self-inflicted emotional imprisonment” (Felman and Laub 1991: 79). Laub comments on this silence:

None find peace in silence, even when it is their choice to remain silent. Moreover, survivors who do not tell their story become victims of a distorted memory, that is, of a forcibly imposed “external evil,” which causes an endless struggle with and over a delusion. The “not telling” of the story serves as a perpetuation of its tyranny. The events become more and more distorted in their silent retention and pervasively invade and contaminate the survivor’s daily life. The longer the story remains untold, the more distorted it becomes in the survivor’s conception of it, so much so that the survivor doubts the reality of the actual events. (Felman and Laub 1991: 79)

In addition to falling into silence, there are other problematic issues behind bearing testimony and reaching the truth. One of them, according to Laub, is that the Holocaust is an

event without any witness indeed; he claims that “during its historical occurrence, *the event produced no witnesses*. Not only in effect, did the Nazis try to exterminate the physical witnesses of their crime; but the inherently incomprehensible and deceptive psychological structure of the event precluded its own witnessing, even by its very victims” (Felman and Laub 1991: 80; emphasis in original). Laub points out, however, that there might be possible witnesses both from ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ during the actual event. By outside witnesses, he means “the next-door neighbor, a friend, a business partner, community institutions including the police and the courts of law, as well as bystanders and potential rescuers and allies from other countries” and also he mentions the “Jews from all over the world”, “the executioner, who was totally oblivious to the plea for life” and even “God himself” as an outside witness (Felman and Laub 1991: 81). Therefore, history was taking place before all these supposedly outside witnesses and no one actually witnessed the truth itself. As Jelin argues, “what was missing was the human capacity to perceive, assimilate, and interpret what was going on. The outside world was not able to recognize it, and therefore nobody took the place of the observer/witness of what was taking place” (2003: 63). On the other hand, none of the “historical insiders” could keep out of the “contaminating power of the event so as to remain a fully lucid, unaffected witness”, and “no observer could remain untainted, that is, maintain an integrity—a wholeness and a separateness—that could keep itself uncompromised, unharmed, by his or her very witnessing” (Felman and Laub 1991: 81). In addition to this “lack of responsiveness of bystanders”, “the very circumstance of *being inside the event*” made the presence of a witness impossible (Felman and Laub 1991: 81; emphasis in original). The so-called inner witnesses’ world was an isolated one, for the image of the outer world or the ‘other’ was impossible in their mind. As Laub explains, “there was no longer an other to which one could say ‘Thou’ in the hope of being heard, of being recognized as a subject, of being answered” (Felman and Laub 1991: 82). Hence, the possibility of addressing the ‘other’

was hindered and the possibility of witnessing was denied. Laub explains how the Nazi system persuaded the victims to believe in their inhumanity:

[The Nazi system] convinced its victims, the potential witnesses from the inside, that what was affirmed about their “otherness” and their inhumanity was correct and that their experiences were no longer communicable even to themselves, and perhaps never took place. This loss of the capacity to be a witness to oneself and thus to witness from inside is perhaps the true meaning of annihilation, for when one’s history is abolished, one’s identity ceases to exist as well (Felman and Laub 1991: 82).

This disbelief in the self imposed by the Nazi system made the survivors believe that their suffering was part of a “secret order” and therefore they thought that they were the “bearers of a secret” (Felman and Laub 1991: 82). Thus, the historical truth about the Holocaust and their experiences becomes a delusion and they prefer to fall into silence. As Laub states: “They feel that the rest of the world will never come to know the real truth, the one that involved in the destruction of their humanity. The difficulty that prevents these victims from speaking out about their victimization emphasizes even more the delusional quality of the Holocaust” (Felman and Laub 1991: 82).

On the other hand, another issue that can be discussed as one of the obstacles to bearing testimony is “the historical gap”, mentioned by Laub. During the actual occurrence of the event, there were many attempts to bear witness through diaries, pictures, messengers and escapees. However, all these attempts were in vain. Laub comments on this issue:

The historical imperative to bear witness could essentially *not be met during the actual occurrence*. The degree to which bearing witness was required, entailed such an outstanding measure of awareness and of comprehension of the event—of its dimensions, consequences, and above all, of its radical *otherness* to all known frames of reference—that it was beyond the limits of human ability (and willingness) to grasp, to transmit, or to imagine. (Felman and Laub 1991: 84; emphasis in original)

Therefore, at the time of the event there was no possibility of witnessing the very event that was beyond the human ability to comprehend. The witnesses and testimonies could not be performed at the time of the event and now, after a “historical gap”, there is an “abundance of

retrospective testimonies” (Felman and Laub 1991: 84). Laub explains this “ultimate historical transmission of the testimonies beyond and through the historical gap” as the “human will to live and the human will to know” (Felman and Laub 1991: 84). At this point, Jelin comments on this inevitability of witnessing as the “‘paradox of historical trauma’, which reveals the double void in the narrative: the inability or impossibility of constructing a narrative due to the dialogical void—there is no subject, and there is no audience and listening” (2003: 64). And this impossible dialogue can only be possible many years after the actual occurrence. Thus, “when the dialogue becomes possible, he or she who speaks and he or she who listens begin the process of naming, of giving meaning and constructing memories”; within this process of construction, “a new truth” has started to be born, the truth of the brutality that should be shared with all the future generations to warn them against humanity itself (Jelin 2003: 64).

Despite all these serious obstacles and hindrances to bear witness and testimony, “it is essential for this narrative that *could not be articulated, to be told, to be transmitted, to be heard*” (Felman and Laub 1991: 85; emphasis in original). However, in the process of bearing testimony the most important thing is not the truth or the historical fact, but the very notion of testimony itself. As Laub comments: “what ultimately matters in all processes of witnessing, spasmodic and continuous, conscious and unconscious, is not simply the information, the establishment of facts, but the experience itself of *living through* testimony, of giving testimony” (Felman and Laub 1991: 85; emphasis in original). But what is the use of testimony? Can it bring all the agonies and losses back? Can it give life to the old ones, the beloved ones? As Laub states, “[t]he testimony cannot efface the Holocaust. It cannot deny it. It cannot bring back the dead, undo the horror or re-establish the safety, the authenticity and the harmony of what was home. [...] it is a dialogical process of exploration and reconciliation

of two worlds—the one that was brutally destroyed and the one that is—that are different and will always remain so (Felman and Laub 1991: 91).

In addition, bearing witness is a “duty to remember”, to testify in the name of others, as a delegative narrator” (Levi qtd. in Jelin 2003: 62) for the survivors. Levi explains this as follows:

...we, the survivors, are not the true witnesses... The destruction brought to an end, the job completed, was not told by anyone, just as no one ever returned to describe his own death. Even if they had paper and pen, the drowned would not have testified because their death had begun before that of their body. Weeks and months before being snuffed out, they had already lost the ability to observe, to remember, to compare and express themselves. We speak in their stead, by proxy. (qtd. in Jelin 2003: 62)

Thus, the survivors also become the narrators of the many lost, through witnessing for the others as well as for themselves. This is in a way a “realization that the lost ones are not coming back, the realization that what life is all about is precisely living with an unfulfilled hope” (Felman and Laub 1991: 91). Throughout the process of witnessing and testimony, the survivor needs a companion to share; that is the listener, who is another witness to the event to overcome this realization and reconciliation, “someone saying ‘I’ll be with you in the very process of losing me. I am your witness’” (Felman and Laub 1991: 92).

a) The Importance of Listening

Adolf Eichmann’s trial¹ was significant for the Holocaust survivors’ testimonials in that the issue of witnessing gained importance afterwards. As Plunka argues, “[u]nlike the Nuremberg trials², which focused primarily on crimes against peace and humanity, the Eichmann trial made the Holocaust specific to the annihilation of the European Jewry, as dozens of witnesses testified about the devastation of the Shoah” (2009: 8). Also the broadcasting of the trial made

¹ Adolf Eichmann was seized in Argentina and taken to Israel to be judged in May 1960. He was found guilty and sentenced to death for his crimes during the Holocaust, and executed in 1962.

² Major political and military leaders of Nazi Germany were tried for the war crimes and crimes against humanity during the Nuremberg Trials, held from 1945 to 1949

it possible to be witnessed by many people, and the moral issues were being discussed. Plunka states that “[w]hen Arendt coined Eichmann’s role in the Final Solution³ as ‘the banality of evil’, it seemed to hit a nerve that began to haunt the consciences of those who had previously ignored, or were unfamiliar with the horrors of the Holocaust” (2009: 9). Thus, with the Eichmann trial, the Holocaust witnesses began to address more listeners. This is very important because the role of the listener(s) is very significant in the process of bearing testimony. The listener, “by definition partakes of the struggle of the victim with the memories and residues of his or her traumatic past” (Felman and Laub 1991: 58). Laub explains the necessity and the importance of the listener in the testimony as follows:

The victim’s narrative—the very process of bearing witness to massive trauma—does indeed begin with someone who testifies to an absence, to an event that has not yet come into existence, in spite of the overwhelming and compelling nature of the reality of its occurrence. [...] The emergence of the narrative which is being listened to—and heard—is, therefore, the process and the place wherein the cognizance, the “knowing” of the event is given birth to. The listener, therefore, is a party to the creation of knowledge *de nova*. The testimony to trauma thus includes its hearer, who is, so to speak, the blank screen on which the event comes to be inscribed for the first time. By extension the listener to trauma comes to be a participant and a co-owner of the traumatic event: through his very listening, he comes to partially experience trauma in himself. (Felman and Laub 1991: 57)

The listener, in a way, becomes an outer witness to the event; he accompanies the survivor in his/her difficult journey into the midst of brutality, to the edge of humanity. With the presence of a listener, the narrator finds the ‘other’ to address, the listener becomes the “Thou” that recognizes and hears the victim’s voice. Because “the testimonies are not monologues” and “they cannot take place in solitude,” the listener becomes “somebody they [the witnesses] have been waiting for a long time (Felman and Laub 1991: 70-71). Thus, with the help of the listener a belated journey begins; the survivor begins to share the wounds and agonies of the past, not to forget them but to form a new truth out of this shared responsibility.

³ Final Solution was a euphemism used by the Nazis for the systematic genocide of European Jews.

Even though the listener shares the process of witnessing with the survivor, there is an “alter, who is present and actively listening” (Jelin 2003: 65). Therefore, it is very important that the listener should be empathetic towards the survivor. Otherwise, the narration can turn into a “reactualization or repetition of the event narrated,” and it doesn’t “provide any relief but entails a reactualization of the trauma (Jelin 2003: 65). Laub comments on this point as follows:

The absence of an emphatic listener, or more radically, the absence of an *addressable other*, an other who can hear the anguish of one’s memories and thus affirm and recognize their realness, annihilates the story. And it is, precisely, this ultimate annihilation of a narrative that, fundamentally, *cannot be heard* and of a story that *cannot be witnessed*, which constitutes the mortal eighty-first blow. (Felman and Laub 1991:68; emphasis in original)

On the other hand, the position of the listener is also significant in that s/he should not be someone sharing the same collective memory with the survivor. Because, as Jelin clearly points out, “in those inward oriented spaces, testimonial narrative can at times become ritualized repetition rather than an act of creative dialogue. What is needed are ‘others’ with the ability to ask, to express curiosity for a painful past, as well as to have compassion and empathy” (2003: 65). Therefore, the ritualising of the survivors’ testimonies is another problem in the process of bearing testimony. We listen to survivors again and again and “still not hear anything” but “affirmations of courage, resistance, and the joy of the survival” (Greenspan 2006: 28). Hank Greenspan’s comments are noteworthy at this point:

Indeed, to the extent that [survivors] are able to convey it, and to the extent that they themselves are able to bear it, they usually tell us the truth. So here, in order to listen to survivors but still not hear anything, I think we do something quite interesting: we ritualize the very act, even the very idea, of survivors’ testimony. That is, we surround survivors’ speech with so much hype, so much ceremonial and rhetorical fencing, that we are almost able to seal it off completely. (2006: 29)

Therefore, listening to survivors is not witnessing their survival stories and ‘celebrating’ them, but it is the witnessing of the agonies, pains, and sorrows in the “brutal nights”, it is also sharing the witnessing of the survivor with a sense of responsibility.

That said, witnessing the agonies of the survivors and sharing them is not an easy task. The listener/interviewer must be careful handling the situation. Therefore, the listener should also control his/her position in the process of testimony. Laub explains the position of the listener/interviewer in testimony as follows: “[t]he interviewer has to be, thus, both unobtrusive, nondirective, and yet imminently present, active, in the lead. Because trauma returns in disjointed fragments in the memory of the survivor, the listener has to let these trauma fragments make their impact both on him and on the witness (Felman and Laub 1991: 71).

The difficult task of the listener has also some hazards. Throughout this dangerous path, “as one comes to know the survivor, one really comes to know oneself; and that is not a simple task” (Felman and Laub 1991: 72). By sharing the witnessing with the survivor, the listener begins to question the world around him/her, he finds himself/herself within existential interrogations. Laub explains this situation as follows:

The Holocaust experience is an inexorable and, henceforth, an unavoidable confrontation with [existential] questions. The listener can no longer ignore the questions of facing death; of facing time and its passage; of the meaning and purpose of living; of the limits of one’s omnipotence; of losing the ones that are close to us; the great question of our ultimate aloneness; our otherness from any other; *our responsibility to* and for our destiny; the question of loving and its limits; of parents and children; and so on. (Felman and Laub 1991: 72; emphasis added)

While the task of the listener is both very difficult and significant in the process of testimony, the listener also experiences “a range of defensive feelings,” which are, as Laub explains: 1) “a sense of total paralysis by the fear of merger with the atrocities being recounted”; 2) “a sense of outrage and of anger, unwittingly directed at the victim—the narrator”; 3) “a total withdrawal and numbness”; 4) “a flood of awe and fear [...] to avoid intimacy in knowing”; 5) “foreclosure through facts, through an obsession with factfinding; an absorbing interest in the factual details of the account which serve to circumvent the human experience”; and 6) “hyperemotionality which superficially looks like compassion and caring” (Felman and Laub

1991: 72-73). The listener shares the process of bearing testimony with the survivor/witness of the traumatic event, and the trauma of the event haunts him/her, as well. Therefore, s/he develops these reactions as a defence mechanism in order to protect himself/herself upon encountering the horrible nature of trauma.

2. Testimony and Truth

“Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent”
(Wittgenstein 2005: 189)

Wittgenstein points out the human inevitability to reach at concrete ‘truth’ or ‘reality’ in the world. There are times in life where humanity reaches its limits and ceases at that limit, one cannot go further, one cannot know, and even if one sees, one cannot comprehend the truth within its pure form. However, human beings have always been in a quest for knowing and naming the unknown. The complicated, incomprehensible truth, thus, is simplified and rendered lucid so that it can fit into our pre-established schemes. This simplification can be attributed to many things in nature and history as well, for we comment, or prefer to comment on the surface of the nature rather than the incomprehensible under it. However, “what is pretty in nature is confined to the thin skin of the globe upon which we huddle. Scratch that skin and nature’s daemonic ugliness will erupt” (Paglia 1991: 5). And this simplification can also be attributed to history and historical reality; because “the greater part of historical and natural phenomena are not simple, or not simple in the way that we would like” (Levi 1988: 37). Can atrocities, brutalities and genocides be comprehended within the limits of humanity? Or is what we are doing, as the listeners of the survivors, just a simplification of reality? Levi also asks the same question, but as a survivor:

Have we—who have returned—been able to understand and make others understand our experience? What we commonly mean by ‘understand’ coincides with ‘simplify’: without a profound simplification the world around us would be an infinite, undefined tangle that would defy our ability to orient ourselves and decide upon our actions. In short, we are compelled to reduce the

knowable to a schema: with this purpose in view we have built for ourselves admirable tools in the course of evolution, tools which are the specific property of the human species—language and conceptual thought. (1988: 36)

“The specific property of the human species”, “language” and the “tools”, as Levi mentions, can only supply us with a limited, simplified version of reality. The historical truth can be perceived as the factual details of the historical occurrence; but truth is something more than facts. On the other hand, traumatic events cannot be comprehended within these simplifications; because “trauma is the confrontation with an event that, in its unexpectedness or horror, cannot be placed within the schemes of prior knowledge” (Caruth 1995: 153). Besides, for the victims of trauma, the truth does not only belong to the past; it is not just a memory from the past, it is a recurrent phenomenon in the actual life. Caruth touches upon this point:

In its repeated imposition as both image and amnesia, the trauma thus seems to evoke the difficult truth of a history that is constituted by the very incomprehensibility of its occurrence. For the survivor of the trauma, then, the truth of the event may reside not only in its brutal facts, but also in the way that their occurrence defies simple comprehension. The flashback or traumatic reenactment conveys, that is, both the truth of an event, and the truth of its incomprehensibility. (1995: 153)

The truth of the traumatic event haunts the survivor with recurrent images throughout his/her whole life. That is the horror of the traumatic event and the horror is, as Laub claims, “compelling not only in its reality, but even more so, in its flagrant distortion and subversion of reality (Felman and Laub 1991: 76). The horrific reality of the traumatic experience stands separate from the reality; Laub, as a child survivor of the Holocaust, expresses his feelings about the reality of his witnessing: “It is as though this process of witnessing is of an event that happened on another level, and was not part of the mainstream of the conscious of a little boy. Rather, these memories are like discrete islands of precocious thinking and feel almost like the remembrance of another child, removed, yet connected to me in a complex way” (Felman and Laub 1991: 76). The reality of the traumatic event surpasses the concept of

reality in actual life; it is a different experience. Laub comments further on the issue as follows:

The traumatic event, although real, took place outside the parameters of “normal” reality, such as causality, sequence, place and time. The trauma is thus an event that has no beginning, no ending, no before, no during and no after. This absence of categories that define it lends it a quality of ‘otherness,’ a salience, a timelessness and a ubiquity that puts it outside the range of associatively linked experiences, outside the range of comprehension, of recounting and of mastery. Trauma survivors live not with memories of the past, but with an event that could not and did not proceed through to its completion, has no ending, attained no closure, and therefore, as far as its survivors are concerned, continues into the present and is current in every respect. (Felman and Laub 1991: 69)

The ‘ubiquitous’ reality of the traumatic event haunts the reality of the actual life for the survivor and s/he, in a way, gets caught in a dilemma between these two worlds. Therefore, “the consideration of the ‘truth’ is displaced from factual description to subjective narratives that convey the truths that reside inside the silences, fears, and ghosts that visit the narrator in his or her dreams, in smells or in repetitive sounds” (Jelin 2003: 67). Thus, the best way to rescue the survivor from the dilemma is “a process of constructing a narrative, of reconstructing a history and essentially, of re-externalization of the event” and in this way the telling entails a reassertion of the hegemony of reality and a re-externalization of the evil that affected and contaminated the trauma victim (Felman and Laub 1991: 69).

It is quite clear that a new knowledge, a new truth is being constructed within the process of testimony, which suggests that the survivor has no pre-established knowledge about the truth that is being constructed, which is not about the factual details of the historical occurrence but the experience of the testimony itself. Within this process of constructing the truth, as previously stated, the listener has a significant role. The listener should also know that the “trauma survivor who is bearing witness has no prior knowledge, no comprehension and no memory of what happened” (Felman and Laub 1991: 58). Thus, ‘the new truth’ emerges from an “absent narrative”, as Jelin clearly puts it: “the narrative of the victim begins

as an absence, as a narrative that has yet to be substantiated. Even if there are evidence and knowledge about the events, the narrative that is being produced and listened to is the location where and the process through which something new is being constructed. One could say that it is in this act that a new ‘truth’ is being born” (2003: 64). In this regard, the knowledge and the truth in the process of witnessing and testimony do not contain the historical facts about the specific historical occurrence. The truth and reality are constructed within the process of witnessing and testimony with the help of a diligent listener.

3. Trauma and Memory

“Trauma does not simply serve as a record of the past but precisely registers the force of an experience that is not fully owned” (Caruth 1995: 151). Therefore, it is clear that witnessing and testimony of traumatic events do not solely consist of memory. Memory, in a way, is a construct formed up during the process of bearing testimony, and “the testimonial, as a construction of memories, implies a multiplicity of voices and the circulation of multiple ‘truths’ and ‘silences’” (Jelin 2003: 73). In the process of constructing the truth, past and present should be clearly separated in order to prevent the reappearances of the horrors of the memory of the past. A clear distinction between past and present enables the survivors to construct the reality of the past without any further re-enactment of the horrific events. Jelin comments on this point as follows:

The possibility of giving testimony [...] requires a time for subjective reconstruction and for distancing past and present. This process involves the elaboration and construction of a memory of the lived past but not a total immersion in the past. [...] Locating memory in the present gives that memory a fundamental quality that enables survivors to access and construct that past without fully returning to its horrors. (2003: 72-73)

One of the aims of the Holocaust memory, as Plunka also states, is to “provide historical information and knowledge about the genocide”, as there are other important reasons for preserving the memory: “to bear witness, to commemorate the dead, to absolve

individuals from any notions of complicity, to seek justice, and to warn humanity of its future potential for similar genocide” (2009: 300-1). Thus, the memory of the incomprehensible event is a truth showing the responsibility of humanity for the past and warning about the potential dangers in the future. Jelin also points out the aim of memory: “many of these [the testimonial] projects are driven by political and educational concerns—to transmit the memories of collective experiences of political struggle, as well as, the horrors of repression, in an attempt to imagine desirable futures and to forcefully underline the notion of ‘never again’” (2003: 73).

The memory of traumatic events is different from that of the pleasant events. Human beings tend to, or prefer to remember the pleasant events rather than the horrific events that give them pain, agony, sorrow and loss. Karein K. Goertz states that “As Sigmund Freud, Joseph Breuer, and Pierre Janet observed more than a century ago, the brain cannot process traumatic experiences as it does other experiences” (qtd in Plunka 2009: 302). Plunka comments on the selective nature of the human memory as follows:

Human nature tends to dwell on pleasant memories and bury painful ones in the inner recesses of the mind, and since the Holocaust produced such an imposing burden on any survivor, memory inevitably becomes diminished, suppressed, or selective. [...] Such memories of trauma are not stored in words and symbols as normal memories would be but instead are retrieved through somato-sensory levels, such as during nightmares or in response to certain stimuli. (2009: 302)

The mind, while receiving new knowledge, “engages in two paradoxical activities: on the one hand, it creates schemes, and tries to fit all new experiences to fit its preconceptions” (van der Kolk and van der Hart 1995: 169). Therefore, the new knowledge, or truth of an event is understood by the pre-existing schemes and it is tried to be integrated into the pre-established categories in the mind. Van der Kolk and van der Hart state that “Janet had said that the basic function of the memory system is the storage and categorization of incoming sensations into a matrix for proper integration of subsequent internal and external stimuli”

(1995: 169). Thus, it is clear that memory is constructed on the pre-existing mental schemes. Van der Kolk and van der Hart also explain how memory becomes distorted: “[a]s Janet pointed out a century ago, once a particular event or bit of information becomes integrated in a larger scheme it will no longer be accessible as an individual entity, and hence, the memory will be distorted (1995: 171). Then, they quote from Edward O. Wilson:

The brain is an enchanted loom where millions of flashing shuttles weave a dissolving pattern. Since the mind recreates reality from the abstractions of sense impressions, it can equally well simulate reality by recall and fantasy. The brain invents stories and runs imagined and remembered events back and forth through time. (qtd. in van der Kolk and van der Hart 1995: 171)

In short, the mind tries to assimilate the new knowledge or truth into the pre-existing mental schemes and define it. However, as the new knowledge does not fit into any prior mental scheme, the brain imitates the reality by forming up stories “by recall and fantasy”. Therefore, the survivor becomes a storyteller, who tells the very story that he is forming up during the process of bearing testimony with the help of the listener. Greenspan also points out this fact in testimony: “Related references to survivors as ‘storytellers’, ‘tellers of tales’, or - more postmodernistically – ‘weavers of narrative tapestries’ are almost as ubiquitous” (2006: 30). Having said that survivors function as storytellers in the process of bearing testimony, it is clear that their memories are uncertain and fallible up to a certain point. This is also because of the concept of truth itself; truth cannot be always the same, it may change according to the time, conditions and the point of view. Plunka comments on the fallible and tainted nature of memories as follows:

Memory, by its very nature, is always fallible and therefore tainted. When writing or speaking from any present vantage point, memory is particularly unlikely to recall what was truth twenty, thirty, or forty years ago, when, as a young person, one viewed the world differently. There is always an abyss between the reality of an event and its recurrence in memory years later. Moreover, memory may fade with time, shift as a result of brain or bodily traumas, fragment, remain selective or modified, be challenged by competing memories, or be repressed. (2009: 301)

Therefore, it is clear that memory is not a certain and factual detail of historical occurrences, but it is a precarious construct open to change or fading away. Thus, as Primo Levi states: “at any rate, the entire history of the brief ‘millennial Reich’ can be reread as a war against memory, an Orwellian falsification of memory, falsification of reality, negation of reality” (qtd. in Plunka 2009: 302).

On the other hand, a distinction between narrative memory and traumatic memory should be made at this point, as we are talking about storytelling and the fallibility of memory. As stated before, narrative memory uses pre-existing mental schemes in order to integrate new knowledge. However “under extreme conditions, existing meaning schemes may be entirely unable to accommodate frightening experiences, which causes the memory of these experiences to be stored differently and not be available for retrieval under ordinary conditions: it becomes dissociated conscious awareness and voluntary control” (Van der Kolk and van der Hart 1995: 160). When the pre-existing mental schemes are insufficient to integrate the new experience or the knowledge, the reality of the experience gets distorted, because the new experience cannot fit into any logical order in the victim’s mind. The horror of the experience has no connection with the reality in the mind of the survivor; it is “maintained in the testimony as an elusive memory that feels as if it no longer resembles any reality” (Felman and Laub 1991: 76). Pierre Janet’s ideas on the difference of narrative and traumatic memory are noteworthy at this point:

It is only for convenience that we speak of it as a “traumatic memory.” The subject is often incapable of making the necessary narrative which we call memory regarding the event; and yet he remains confronted by a difficult situation in which he has not been able to play a satisfactory part, one to which his adaptation had been imperfect, so that he continues to make efforts at adaptation (qtd. in van der Kolk and van der Hart 1995: 160).

Traumatic memory, on the other hand, is a fixed memory about an historical occurrence and while it cannot be fitted into a pre-existing mental scheme, it is repressed by the survivor. Thus, “lack of proper integration of intensely emotionally arousing experiences into the

memory system results in dissociation and the formation of traumatic memories” (Van der Kolk and van der Hart 1995: 163). However, as narrative memory is a construct, it is flexible and variable; it is open to any change as mentioned before. According to van der Kolk and van der Hart, “in contrast to narrative memory, which is a *social act*, traumatic memory is inflexible and invariable. Traumatic memory has no social component; it is not addressed to anybody, the patient does not respond to anybody; it is a solitary activity” (1995: 163; emphasis added).

To conclude, Van der Kolk and van der Hart also state that “traumatic memories are the unassimilated scraps of overwhelming experiences, which need to be integrated with existing mental schemes, and be transformed into narrative language. [...] the traumatized person has to return to the memory often in order to complete it” (1995: 176). Therefore, it is necessary for the survivor/traumatized person to turn the traumatic memory into narrative memory in order to get rid of the ‘horrors’ of the traumatic memory/experience. In this way, trauma gains “flexibility” and “loses its power over current experiences” (Van der Kolk and van der Hart 1995: 178).

4. Cultural Memory and Collective Memory

So far, it has been established that memory is not an account of an historical occurrence, but a construct formed during the process of bearing testimony, and that the experience/memory of traumatic events can only be explicable with the help of narrative memory rather than traumatic memory, which limits the comprehension of the actual occurrences. Therefore, it is noteworthy to state that individual memories of the traumatic events cannot be separated from collective and cultural memories. If the only way to relate the ‘horror’ of trauma is narrative, then one should note that the dynamics of narrative constitute an important role in the formation of culture. As Brockmeier states, “narrative is essential in connecting other forms

of discourse and symbolic mediation, and integrating them into the symbolic space of a culture” (2002: 28). Narrative is similar to the structure of the mind, for it is a “deeply textual construction as it is the case for memory, the temporal organization of the mind” (Brockmeier 2002: 25). Thus, in the process of constructing memory, there are signs and symbols that lead to limitless versions of meanings, and thus to truth and reality. Brockmeier touches upon the issue as follows:

In this endlessly meandering dialogical weave, our consciousness (and subconsciousness) is related to all possible and impossible experiences, creating in this way limitless frames (i.e. texts and contexts) of individual remembering and forgetting within an all-encompassing cultural memory. Such an (inter-) textual conception of cultural memory comes close to Lotman’s (1990) conception of cultural memory as a ‘semiotic universe’ that is constituted by all sign and symbol systems of a culture, interacting among each other, at a given point in history. (2002: 25)

Defining cultural memory as a “semiotic universe”, Brockmeier states that cultural memory is not only a social process, but the social process itself “is culturally mediated within a symbolic space laid out by a variety of semiotic vehicles and devices” (2002: 25). In this aspect, it is impossible to talk about the presence of an ‘independent individual memory’ free from the sign and symbolic systems in the social process of constructing cultural and collective memory. Therefore, even the most personal memories of individuals have close ties with cultural and collective memory. Jelin comments on this issue from the point of view of testimony:

The issue of testimony returns to an arena where the individual and the collective meet. Even individual memory, implying an interaction between the past and the present, is culturally and collectively framed. Memory is not an object that is simply there to be extracted, but rather it is produced by active subjects that share a culture and an *ethos*. (2003: 68; emphasis in original)

The human memory, therefore, is intermingled within a net of texts, signs and symbols, and it is constituted upon social and cultural artefacts. Brockmeier sees this layout of memory “as an array of texts, documents and other artifacts that have become intermingled with the texture of one’s autobiographical memory” (2002: 25). Then, he goes on to claim that “we are immersed

in lifeworlds of memory, made out of texts” like “identification and membership cards”, “birth certificates”, “documents”, “diary entries”, “CVs”, “copies of job applicants”, “private letters”, “tapes”, “videos”, “boxes with photographs”, “books and papers with notes in their margins”, “address books with phone numbers”, “computers whose hard disks are full of documents and internet bookmarks” (2002: 26). These “lifeworlds of memor[ies]” intertwine the individual memory with cultural and/or social memory. Brockmeier argues the connection between individual and social/cultural memory as follows:

They demonstrate that there is a continuum between selves and communities, individual and social memories. If we, after all, still want to use these categories, we should be aware that we are talking about fleeting textual and discursive realities. These realities are simultaneously social and individual, embedding the individual mind into the corpus of culture. Without this meandering connective structure of memory, without this symbolic space populated by countless memory texts, we are unable to remember what our ‘individual’ lives have been all about. (2002: 26)

Individual memory, therefore, is an inseparable part of the cultural and social constructions and cultural and collective memory. Society and culture structure memory; as Maurice Halbwachs, who developed the concept of collective memory, states, “it is in society that people normally acquire their memories. It is also in society they recall, recognize and localize their memories” (qtd. in Olick 2008: 8). Therefore, all individual memories are part of social memories, and social memories shape the formation of memory. As Olick states:

Halbwachs thus argued that it is impossible for individuals to remember in any coherent and persistent fashion outside of their group contexts. Group memberships provide the materials for memory and prod the individual into recalling particular events and into forgetting others. Groups can even produce memories in individuals of events that they never experienced in any direct sense. (2008: 8)

Collective memory structures the memory of historical occurrences in the present, and it is decisive in both remembering and forgetting. As stated above, it can make us believe in the events that we did not actually experience, while it may also make us forget what we actually went through. This process, the construction of memory and truth, involves the social

and cultural artefacts which constitute a sea of signs and symbols. These social and cultural artefacts reconstruct the reality and memory of the historical occurrence in the present, and introduce this memory/reality into the minds of individuals by reshaping their memory or 'lack of memory' about the past. In this respect, Brockmeier comments on the "Berlin memorial to the 1933 bookburning" as follows: "The monument, then, is about the process in which the past becomes the subject of present reflection and reconstruction. It foregrounds not just the past, but how the past is built into the present" (2002: 33).

Historical occurrences are represented in the present through cultural and social artefacts and these representations form up collective memory which simultaneously affects individual memory. Mark Taylor-Batty touches upon this issue while defining cultural memory: "Cultural memory, by definition, does not in itself imply experience of the incidents of history, but, instead, implies a subscription to the significance of representations of the past, consumed as contributory to individual and group identity. Art has a specific capacity to tailor or contribute to that individual or group subscription" (2009: 105). Thus, the reality of historical occurrences can only be perceived via representations, and the representations are formed by culture and art among others. And as Taylor-Batty claims, "cultural memory as regards the Holocaust (for those other than those who experienced it) is itself digested and articulated by the processes involved in mediating those realities. We acknowledge it, consume its significance and articulate it via representation" (2009: 105). Therefore, what we generally experience is the representation rather than the reality of historical occurrences.

a) Representation, Simulacra and the Real

According to Baudrillard, representation and simulation are two completely different things: "Representation stems from the principle of the equivalence of the sign and of the real [...]. Simulation, on the contrary, stems from the Utopia of the principle of equivalence, from the

radical negation of sign as value, from the sign as the reversion and death sentence of every reference” (1994: 6). At the same time, the real for Baudrillard, “is produced from miniaturized cells, matrices, memory banks, modes of control – and it can be reproduced an indefinite number of times from these. [...] It is no longer really the real, because no imaginary envelops it anymore” (1994: 2).

Previously it was stated that the mind is intermingled within a net of text and the underlying signs and symbols, and that the cultural and social artefacts constitute memory. With the signs and symbols we create a world of representations, and these representations are thought to reflect the reality in the world of images. However, with Baudrillard’s conception of simulacrum, reality and its representation within the realm of signs disappear. He quotes from the Book of the Ecclesiastes: “The Simulacrum is never what hides the truth – it is truth that hides the fact that there is none. The simulacrum is true” (1994: 1). The very Western attempt to define the world within certain meanings and truths is challenged with the negation of the signs and symbols. Baudrillard explains this as follows:

All Western faith and good faith became engaged in this wager on representation: that a sign could refer to the depth of meaning, that a sign could be exchanged for meaning and that something could guarantee this exchange—God of course. But what if God himself can be simulated, that is to say can be reduced to the signs that constitute faith? Then the whole system becomes weightless, it is no longer itself but a gigantic simulacrum—not unreal, but a simulacrum, that is to say never exchanged for the real, but exchanged for itself, in an uninterrupted circuit without reference or circumference. (1994: 5-6)

Furthermore, the image can be examined in five phases according to Baudrillard: 1) “it is the reflection of a profound reality”; 2) “it masks and denatures a profound reality”; 3) “it masks the absence of a profound reality”; 4) “it has no relation to any reality whatsoever”; and 5) “it is its own pure simulacrum” (1994: 6). Thus, with the concept of simulacrum, the sense of the real disappears and what is left is a world of simulacra, which signifies that there is no reality at all.

According to Peter Barry, “in this extreme Baudrillardian form, the ‘loss of the real’ may seem to legitimise a callous indifference to suffering. In a now notorious pronouncement Baudrillard maintained that the Gulf War never happened, that what ‘really’ took place was a kind of televisual virtual reality” (1995: 89). Reality collapses and gives way to the simulacrum; reality, as we see, becomes a world of images. Barry asks a remarkable question at this point: “Likewise, if we accept the ‘loss of the real’ and the collapsing of reality and simulation into a kind of virtual reality, then what of the Holocaust? Could this, too, be part of the reality ‘lost’ in the image networks?” (1995: 89).

According to Baudrillard, “forgetting extermination is part of extermination, because it is also the extermination of memory, of history, of the social, etc.”, and this “essential” and “dangerous” forgetting, “unlocatable and inaccessible in its truth” “must be effaced by an artificial memory”, which “efface[s] the memory of man, that efface[s] man in his own memory” (1994: 49). The medium of representation that is condemned by Baudrillard is television, through which, “forgetting and annihilation” reaches an “aesthetic dimension” and it is “elevated to a mass level” (1994: 49). Baudrillard believes that any representation of the Holocaust on TV will only lead to “a tactile thrill, and a posthumous emotion, a deterrent thrill as well”, which will make its audience “spill into forgetting with a kind of good aesthetic conscience of the catastrophe” (1994: 50). Thus, the objective of the televised representations can serve nothing but “capturing the artificial heat of a dead event to warm the dead body of the social” (1994: 50). Thus, it trivialises, and utilises the tremendous suffering of others. His ideas on the representation of the Holocaust on TV can also be applied to other mediums, which carry the risk of trivialising historical occurrences for the sake of their profits.

b) Althusser's Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs)

Having established the difference between representation and the simulation, it is noteworthy to state that representation does not necessarily reflect reality, but it distorts it. Therefore, what remains are the versions of reality rather than a single reality with a fixed meaning. In this respect, representation is also a process of constructing reality; it creates a world of simulacra, which affects collective memory, and accordingly individual memory. In the process of representation and construction of reality, cultural and social artefacts are at work by shaping reality and thus individual memory.

On the other hand, in the light of Althusser's ideas, this process of construction and representation of reality, or the various versions of realities, includes the presence of various Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs), which, in his own words, "are a certain number of realities which present themselves to the immediate observer in the form of distinct and specialized institutions" (1972: 143). These apparatuses are "the religious ISA, the educational ISA, the family ISA, the legal ISA, the political ISA, the trade-union ISA, the communications ISA (press, radio and television, etc.), and the cultural ISA (Literature, the Arts, sports, etc.)" (1972: 143). According to Althusser, "ideology interpellates individuals as subjects" (1972: 170), and all ideological state apparatuses result in the "reproduction of the relations of production"; for example, "the political apparatus subject[s] individuals to the political State ideology"; "the communications apparatus cram[s] every 'citizen' with daily doses of nationalism, chauvinism, liberalism, moralism, etc. by means of the press, the radio and television" and "the religious apparatus recall[s] [...] that man is only ashes, unless he loves his neighbour to the extent of turning the other cheek to whoever strikes first" (1972: 154). The list of these apparatuses and their rendering the individuals subjects of the hegemonic ideology could be extended in many aspects. Althusser draws attention to another important point for the issue of representation, reality and ideology: "Ideology is a

'representation' of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence", and he adds that various ideologies such as political, religious, cultural etc. defined as "the world outlooks" "do not correspond to reality" but "they constitute an illusion, they do make allusion to reality, and they need only be 'interpreted' to discover the reality of the world behind their imaginary representation of that world"(1972: 162).

Althusser's concept of Ideological State Apparatuses and their role on the *interpellation* of individuals are significant for the argument we have discussed previously that memory/reality is constructed by cultural and social artefacts through a net of signs and symbols. Althusser makes it clear that these signs and symbols and the cultural and social artefacts are merely imaginary representations, and through these imaginary representations the hegemonic ideology interpellates individuals by making them believe in these imaginary realities with the help of imaginary texts, signs and symbols, or in other words, cultural and social artefacts, which turn out to be the Ideological State Apparatuses in Althusser's discussion. Namely, the important point to be drawn here for our discussion is that the representation of a single reality and/or truth is impossible. What we have instead is the imaginary representation of versions of realities. Therefore, the idea of a fixed, true memory is impossible. Considering the fact that there is not only one reality, there is not only one memory which reveals the truth either; but there are various memories that reveal different perspectives about various historical occurrences. And one should also note the importance of the current cultural and social artefacts or the Ideological State Apparatuses for the construction of the memory of the past, because they construct the reality of history in the present through an imaginary representation. And accordingly, collective and individual memory is formed around these imaginary representations.

5. Narrating Trauma in Literature and Theatre

Previously it has been stated that the experience of trauma, especially for the Holocaust survivors, is beyond human comprehension, and thus narrating the real ‘horror’ of the event is impossible. Witnessing and testimony of traumatic historical occurrences is not a process of revealing the truth about the past, but it is rather a process of constructing the reality of the past in the present. And it has also been established that the memory of the victims/witnesses can be fallible in most of the cases, as collective and individual memory are shaped around various artefacts through time. Then, how can such a traumatic experience, which could not be comprehended and “*could not be articulated*” (Felman and Laub 1991: 85; emphasis in original) even by the witnesses of the event, be narrated in literature and performance? Or as Hank Greenspan, the writer of *Remnants*, the acclaimed play on the Holocaust, asks: “How is it possible for me, for you, to speak at all about these things? What are you expecting, even insisting, to hear from me as a survivor? Could you bear it if I told you differently?” (2006: 32).

Theodor Adorno states that “[a]fter Auschwitz it is barbaric to write poetry” (2003: 162). The concern reflected in Adorno’s idea is that the Holocaust is an event that cannot be comprehended, and transmitted via representation, especially with an ‘aesthetic’ purpose. Thus, it cannot reflect the reality of the events, even if it is represented. Schumacher discusses this issue: “[...] the Holocaust is an event of such magnitude that no play, text or theatrical performance can hope to get anywhere near the truth. And, whatever Adorno said, or meant to say, about the barbaric impossibility of writing music after Auschwitz, his remark touched a nerve and it cannot be dismissed lightly” (2006: 4). Adorno’s statement certainly created a discussion on the representation of the Holocaust. The Holocaust experience was thought to be incomparable to any other historical event in its reality and it was considered to be unconceivable through any kind of art. As Michael Wyschogrod discusses: “I firmly believe

that art is not appropriate to the holocaust. Art takes the sting out of suffering ... Any attempt to transform the holocaust into art demeans the holocaust and must result in poor art” (qtd. in Plunka 2009: 12).

Lawrence L. Langer points out that “Holocaust writing must be recognized as literature of atrocity” (qtd. in Plunka 2009: 12). In this regard, he sees the Holocaust experience as a unique event distinct from all history. As Plunka comments, “[s]ince the Holocaust has no point of historical or even mythical comparison, it would seem to transcend the metaphoric expression of literature; in short literature’s imaginative realm must inevitably fail in converting the Holocaust into universally understood terms” (2009: 13). In other words, if we think that art is a representation of reality, the dynamics of art fall apart while representing such an event that cannot be fitted into any meaningful perception of reality. Besides, the Holocaust distorts reality of all previous conventions and beliefs of humanity. As Laub points out, “in the wake of the atrocities, and of the trauma that took place in the Second World War, cultural values, political conventions, social mores, national identities, investments, families and institutions have lost their meanings, have lost their context” (Felman and Laub 1991: 74). Plunka comments on this point:

The Holocaust forces us to reconsider the previous humanistic concerns of faith, dignity, religion, heroism, the righteousness of the human spirit, and the respect for death and mourning. Holocaust writing is therefore now asked to conjure up images of a world in which a reality too atrocious to imagine exceeds the imaginative vision. As Holocaust survivor Giorgio Agamben writes, “After Auschwitz, it is not possible to use a tragic paradigm in ethics.” (2009: 13)

Therefore, such an event that distorts all the fixed values and conventions of humanity and that defies all kinds of reality cannot be articulated within the aesthetic conventions of art. Thus, the experience of the ‘horror’ of the Holocaust, as Ellie Wiesel comments, “defies literature” (qtd. in Plunka 2009: 14).

The inadequacy of language is one of the problems for the artistic representation of the Holocaust. Language is limited in its signs and symbols to relate the horror of the event. As Plunka states, “[i]f the literature of atrocity must face the fact that the Holocaust has no historical precedent and is thus beyond the metaphoric spirit of imagination, language also must be insufficient to convey its spirit” (2009: 13).

Another problem of the artistic representation of the Holocaust or traumatic events in general is the possibility of ‘trivializing’ the experience of the victims. According to Plunka, “the artistic representation of the Holocaust can degenerate into its trivialization by eliciting pleasure from an audience titillated by the sadism of torture, violence, and degradation of innocent sufferers—at times, even the titillation of naked bodily pain could well represent the historical record” (2009: 14). For this concern, Wiesel suggests that “rather than approaching the Holocaust by way of poetry, novels, theatre, television, or film, interested individuals should read the diaries of victims, [...] study the historical accounts, [...] or view documentaries” (qtd in Plunka 2009: 14).

Although it is risky and problematic to articulate the experience of the trauma, or the Holocaust, in art and literature, as it has previously been mentioned, the process of witnessing is very significant for both the victim/witness and the listener. If we consider the representation of trauma as a process of witnessing, the representations can serve a useful purpose. Plunka points out the significance of the Holocaust literature:

[T]he literature of the Holocaust educates audiences who may be unfamiliar or naive about what has been described as the most significant historical event of the twentieth century. The Holocaust forces us to confront some of the most challenging moral and ethical issues of modernity, including the philosophical debate of good versus evil, the existential notion of individual and collective responsibility in a Judeo-Christian society, the value of art in times of extreme situations, the role of God in the modern wasteland, and the need to understand survivor guilt and our own as well. (2009: 15-16)

Therefore, literature and art can be useful in many ways instead of a silence about the event. The important point in the literature or text of trauma is to have a “dialogue” rather

than an “identification” (Jelin 2003: 69). Jelin draws out several key issues about testimonial texts and literature: 1) “the recognition of the mediating role of the editor of the text, which reinforces the notion that dialogue is a constitutive element of testimonial narratives”; 2) “a distinction between the individualized autobiography and a testimonial with a plural subject, an ‘I’ that is representative of a particular social condition and particular social struggles”; 3) “although the narrative establishes the author’s complicity with the reader, the text invites dialogue rather than identification”; 4) “the control and manipulation of silences and of what is not said are key rhetorical instruments for marking these differences and for clearly establishing the ‘alterity’ of the reader” (2003: 70). In this regard, the editor or the writer of testimonial texts should act with an awareness that the texts should create “dialogue” rather than “identification” by positioning the reader, or the audience as ‘the other’ to the experience narrated.

According to Plunka, theatre is an “ideal medium” to represent the Holocaust, because “[t]heater affects us emotionally, subliminally, or intellectually (sometimes simultaneously) in a direct way that poetry and fiction cannot. The theatre also possesses a powerful immediacy effect between actor and audience that no other art form can match. The audience can serve as a community participating in a palpable rite of mourning for the Holocaust victims” (2009: 16). However, how can an event that cannot be articulated even by its victims/witnesses be performed? Or as Schumacher asks, “can theatre provide the artefact that will help the spectator towards a better ‘grasp’ of the Holocaust?” (2006: 3).

It has been emphasized that the process of witnessing is itself very important for the victim/witness of the traumatic experience. However, witnessing and its performance are totally different things. As Schumacher points out, “to bear witness is one thing, but to ‘perform’ the testimony is another” (2006: 4). As the real ‘horror’ or the truth of the event cannot be represented in any artistic form, the representation, or performance in the case of

theatre, should not have any concern for creating the representation of the reality of the event.

As Schumacher states:

Theatre which has true integrity and the highest artistic standards – does not try to create an illusion of reality (that cheap kind of mimetism found in cinema or television), and it is precisely in the absence of mimetic *trompe-l'œil* that real strength of the theatrical performance lies. True theatre affords the spectator a heightened experience ‘liberated from the lie of being the truth’. (2006: 4)

According to Schumacher, “theatre, by the very presence of the actor on stage, underlines the absence of the character” (2006: 5), and the presence of the actor reminds the audience that the performance is not real. As Schumacher points out: “His being there proclaims the absence of the ‘other’ and the spectator must, in order to make sense of what is presented, reconstruct in his mind the missing reality and lend his own being, thoughts and emotions, to the character evoked by the actor” (2006: 5). Therefore, theatre, as Robert Skloot comments, is “the only art form that will convey ‘the reality of an unreality’ whose aim was genocide” (qtd. in Schumacher 2006: 15).

It has been discussed that the theatre is an ideal medium for the representation or performance of the Holocaust, but can there be any model for representing the Holocaust in theatre? Robert Skloot has suggested some objectives for the playwrights narrating the Holocaust: “pay homage to the victims, educate audiences, induce an empathetic response from the audience, raise moral and ethical questions for discussions and debate, and draw lessons from history” (qtd. in Plunka 2009: 16). However according to Schumacher, “there is no model, there can be no model of representing the Holocaust” and “each playwright must solve the problem of representing the unrepresentable, of offering staging suggestions for the unstageable which will stimulate the imagination of directors and actors and challenge the spectator” (2006: 8). Schumacher also argues that “the successful Shoah drama or performance is one that disturbs, offers no comfort, advances no solution; it is a play that leaves the reader or spectator perplexed, wanting to know more although convinced that no

knowledge can ever cure him of his perplexity. It must be a play that generates stunned silence” (2006: 8).

On the other hand, the form of the play is also a matter of great importance. According to Plunka, “on the one hand, Holocaust is an historical event that would seem to benefit from an objective realistic staging. However, [...] realism is problematic to represent the Shoah” (2009: 16). Then, Plunka goes on to argue the reasons for this:

In truth, the abject degradation of the Holocaust is virtually impossible to imitate on stage through any sort of attempt at mimesis. Realism appears to be inappropriate to represent an event that is so horrifying, “unnatural,” nightmarish, unimaginable, and irrational that logic and scientific inquiry—the nineteenth century origins of realism and naturalism—seem to be undermined. (2009: 16-17)

Lawrence L. Langer also discusses the insufficiency of realism: “To establish an order of reality in which the unimaginable becomes imaginately acceptable exceeds the capacities of an art devoted entirely to verisimilitude; some quality of the fantastic, whether stylistic or descriptive, becomes an essential ingredient of *l’univers concentrationnaire*” (qtd. in Plunka 2009: 17; emphasis in original).

The Holocaust has been represented so far in a number of plays by various playwrights in many different narrative forms, including realism notwithstanding its problematic nature for the representation of the Holocaust because of the impossibility of imitating the ‘horrific’ nature of the event. Since providing a list of these plays will be impossible in this study, the following are some examples of different forms: Arthur Miller’s *Incident at Vichy* (realism), Tony Kushner’s *A Bright Room Called Day* (epic theatre), George Tabori’s *The Cannibals* (surrealism), Peter Barnes’s *Laughter!* (black comedy), Nelly Sach’s *Eli* (verse drama), Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett’s *The Diary of Anne Frank* (melodrama), Rolf Hochhuth’s *The Deputy* (classical tragedy), and Peter Weiss’s *The Investigation* (documentary theatre) (Plunka 2009: 17-18).

CHAPTER II

HAROLD PINTER'S *ASHES TO ASHES*: IN A FAR AWAY DROWNING LANDSCAPE

1. Introduction: Pinter and Reality

“No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main; if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friend’s or of thine own were; any man’s death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee”
(John Donne, “Meditation XVII, pp. 108-9)

In his Nobel Prize Lecture, Harold Pinter asks “What has happened to our moral sensibility? Did we ever have any? What do these words mean? Do they refer to a term very rarely employed these days – conscience? A conscience to do not only with our own acts but to do with our shared responsibility in the acts of others? Is all this dead?” (2005: 7). These rhetoric questions resonate with John Donne’s expression about the sharing of responsibility. If each of us is “a piece of the continent” or “a part of the main”, every human being is a part of humanity. Thus, if a bell tolls for someone, it tolls for the others, as well. In *Ashes to Ashes* (1996), Pinter addresses the ‘conscience’ of the audience through the character of Rebecca. In other words, the play disturbs the conscience of spectators by urging their sense of responsibility with a similar effect to that of Donne’s words. In a way, as Pinter quotes from Pablo Neruda’s poem “I’m Explaining a Few Things” in his Nobel Prize Lecture, he urges humanity to “come and see the blood in the streets” (qtd. in Pinter 2005: 9). He takes the audience from their comfortable seats into the blood drenched depths of history; he shows them the “veins running through the white bumpy snow” (Pinter 1998: 418)⁴.

In *Ashes to Ashes*, as in his other overtly political plays such as *One for the Road* (1984), *Precisely* (1985), *Mountain Language* (1988) and *Party Time* (1991), Pinter depicts a

⁴ All the following references to *Ashes to Ashes* will be to the page only.

world of personal and state violence, political oppression, torture and brutality. In these plays, as Mireia Aragay points out, “we are left in no doubt as to what reality is – the reality of political oppression, torture and violence – or where truth and value lie – with the tortured and the oppressed” (2001: 252). This reality of life points at humanity’s responsibility for the human suffering in the past, even if there is no active participation in it.

Ashes to Ashes brings forward the questions of reality and truth in art and life, while it self-consciously makes a distinction between them. The truth in art is elusive and it can be both true and false, whereas as Pinter argues in his Nobel Lecture, “as citizens, to define the *real* truth of our lives and our societies is a crucial obligation which devolves upon us all. It is in fact mandatory. If such a determination is not embodied in our political vision we have no hope of restoring what is so nearly lost to us – the dignity of man” (2005: 12). Thus, according to Pinter, the truth in life and society should be clearly defined, and it should be distinguished from the truth in art. In this regard, the truth in drama is also elusive and slippery. There are not established and stable meanings in drama, as in other forms of art. Pinter defines the role of truth in drama in his Nobel Lecture as follows:

Truth in drama is forever elusive. You never quite find it but the search for it is compulsive. The search is clearly what drives the endeavour. The search is your task. More often than not you stumble upon the truth in the dark, colliding with it or just glimpsing an image or a shape which seems to correspond to the truth, often without realising that you have done so. But the real truth is that there never is any such thing as one truth to be found in dramatic art. There are many. These truths challenge each other, recoil from each other, reflect each other, ignore each other, tease each other, are blind to each other. Sometimes you feel you have the truth of a moment in your hand, then it slips through your fingers and is lost. (2005: 1)

What Pinter does in *Ashes to Ashes*, as in his other overtly political plays, is to juxtapose the elusive nature of truth in art and the reality of life – the reality of violence, brutality, torture and state oppression throughout the world history. While the artistic truth is multifarious, the figurative meaning behind the play leads to an important point from these various paths, to the shared responsibility for all the atrocities in the past, to say ‘never again’.

Thus, as Michael Billington states in *The Life and Work of Harold Pinter*, “the play has its own utterly distinctive, haunting tone, in which the real and the dreamlike, the concrete and the phantasmagoric, effortlessly merge [...] Like much of Pinter’s work, [it] demands and yet at the same time tantalisingly resists total explication” (1996: 375, 382).

Pinter, as he states in his Nobel Prize Lecture, starts writing his plays by calling the characters A, B and C. He defines the following process as “fitful, uncertain, even hallucinatory, although sometimes it can be an unstoppable avalanche”, and he explains how real and uncontrollable his characters are: “To a certain extent you play a never-ending game with them, cat and mouse, blind man’s buff, hide and seek. But finally you find that you have people of flesh and blood on your hands, people with will and an individual sensibility of their own, made out of component parts you are unable to change, manipulate or distort” (2005: 3). Likewise, the language in his plays is another important motif that distorts reality. Language in art, as argued by Pinter, is a “highly ambiguous transaction, a quicksand, a trampoline, a frozen pool which might give way under you, the author, at any time” (2005: 3).

Pinter actually reveals the uncontrollable nature of works of art. Once it is performed, or written in this case, the author loses his/her control. He shares the same inability with the reader in fully comprehending ‘the truth’ of the work. But as he states, “the search for the truth can never stop. It cannot be adjourned, it cannot be postponed. It has to be faced, right there, on the spot” (Pinter 2005: 3). The following anecdote, which is a letter from one of his readers demanding explanations about *The Birthday Party*, is noteworthy for Pinter’s ideas on his characters, language and the truth in art. The letter reads:

Dear Sir, I would be obliged if you would kindly explain to me the meaning of your play *The Birthday Party*. These are the points which I do not understand: 1. Who are the two men? 2. Where did Stanley come from? 3. Were they all supposed to be normal? You will appreciate that without the answers to my questions I cannot fully understand your play.

To which Pinter replies:

Dear Madam, I would be obliged if you would kindly explain to me the meaning of your letter. These are the points which I do not understand: 1. Who are you? 2. Where do you come from? 3. Are you supposed to be normal? You will appreciate that without the answers to your questions I cannot fully understand your letter. (qtd. in Esslin 1992: 29-30)

Pinter's dialogue with his reader actually reflects the philosophical discussions around the quest for truth in art, or as Victor L. Cahn states, "the dominant theme of twentieth century art: the struggle for meaning in a fragmented, unfathomable world" (1994: 2). The reader, like many readers, tries to learn the identity, background and motivation of the characters to be able to verify, and thus to know and control. However, Pinter, with his letter and his plays rejects these very Apollonian attempts to define everything within concrete meanings.

While Pinter points out the need to define reality in life, and reveals this need especially in his overtly political plays with seemingly real characters and dialogues, these plays are implicitly laden with versions of reality in a sea of possible meanings. As Martin Esslin argues, "Pinter is not a naturalistic dramatist. This is the paradox of his artistic personality. The dialogue and the characters are real, but the over-all effect is one of mystery, of uncertainty, of poetic ambiguity" (1992: 29). This "uncertainty", "mystery" and "ambiguity" is actually what one is faced with in real life. One cannot even grasp the reality of everyday events, people, their backgrounds or their motivations. As Esslin rhetorically asks, "[w]e do not know, with any semblance of certainty, what motivates our own wives, parents, our own children – why then should we be furnished with a complete dossier about the motivations of any character we usually encounter on stage?" (1992: 31). Hence, Pinter puts the audience into a real life situation in his plays. In this regard, both the audience and the playwright himself cannot totally know the motivation behind all the characters on stage. Therefore, the audience's desire to know everything about the characters and the background is denied by Pinter's plays. As Pinter states, "[t]he desire for verification on the part of all of

us, with regard to our own experience and the experience of others, is understandable but cannot always be satisfied” (1983: 11).

To sum up, Pinter’s overtly political plays reflect a reality of violence, torture and oppression, but their over-all effect distorts such reality mainly through the treatment of the characters and use of language. As Pinter himself states, “what goes on in my plays is realistic, but what I’m doing is not realism” (1996: ix). Thus, whereas dwelling on the elusive nature of truth and reality in art, *Ashes to Ashes*, at the same time, presents in a non-naturalistic way a harsh social reality through the depiction of major atrocities from the past.

2. The Play

Ashes to Ashes was first performed in Dutch by Toneelgroep Amsterdam and then was performed in the Royal Court Theatre at the Ambassadors’ Circle in London in September 1996. The London première was directed by Harold Pinter with Stephen Rea acting Devlin and Lindsay Duncan as Rebecca. The Royal Court production was also performed during the Pinter Festival in Barcelona⁵. Afterwards, the play has been staged worldwide, and it is one of Pinter’s widely acclaimed plays.

The one-act play is set in “a house in the country with a “*large window*” and a “*garden beyond*” (393). The time is “[*e*]arly evening” in “[*s*]ummer” (393). The room, where the action takes place, “*darkens*” and “*the lamplight intensifies*” during the course of the event (393). In a very Pinteresque way, the play opens *in medias res* with Rebecca and Devlin talking. During the course of the play, Devlin questions Rebecca and forces her to give him more concrete information about her past and about the man she defines as her ex-lover. Initially, she explains the abusive actions of the man who stands over her, makes her kiss his fist, and puts his hand round her throat. While Devlin is “compelled to ask her questions”, and

⁵ Barcelona hosted a Pinter Festival in 1996 from September to December, during which several of Pinter’s plays were staged. *Ashes to Ashes* was one of them, and it was staged by The Royal Court Theatre with Lindsay Duncan as Rebecca and Stephen Rea as Devlin (Aragay 1997: 4).

asks her to “define him more clearly” (400), Rebecca tells him about her lover, his occupation, and in the dreamlike sequences that ensue, she narrates the atrocities that she imaginatively witnesses. She states that her lover used to work for a “travel agency”, a kind of “courier”, and then she denies it by saying that it was “a part-time job” and that he was a man of high responsibilities (403). Lastly, her ‘distorted’ or ‘invented’ memory reveals that he was actually a “guide” (403).

In one of the dreamlike sequences resonating with Holocaust images, she tells Devlin about a factory with “workpeople” “wearing caps” and taking them off as show of respect to her lover for his “purity and conviction” (405). She tells him that these men “would follow [her lover] over a cliff and into the sea”, and “sing in a chorus” for him, and that “they were in fact very musical” (405). She also recounts that she could not find any bathroom in the factory. After a pause, she recalls that her lover “used to go to the local railway station and walk down the platform and tear all the babies from the arms of their screaming mothers” (406-7). After a silence, she suddenly says that she is upset because of a police siren they have just heard. She states that she hates it echoing away. Afterwards, abruptly she talks about the “pen” that “rolled off” when she put it on the coffee table, and they discuss if the pen is guilty or innocent (410).

Having lost his authority throughout the course of the conversation, Devlin states that he is in a quicksand. Upon Rebecca’s comparing his situation with that of God, Devlin refuses that “disgusting perception” and he tells her that the world without God is like “England playing Brazil at Wembley and not a soul in the stadium [...] an absolute silence, absence, stalemate, paralysis, a world without a winner” (412). While Devlin questions Rebecca’s authority to talk about some kind of atrocity, she denies having experienced any.

In another dreamlike sequence, she tells Devlin that in “a beautiful, warm Dorset day” she witnessed some “guides” “ushering” a crowd of people “walking across the cliff and

down to the sea” (416). Afterwards, she declares that she has never lived in Dorset. She suddenly changes the topic, and talks about “mental elephantiasis”, which means that “when you spill an ounce of gravy, for example, it immediately expands and becomes a vast sea of gravy” (417). While Devlin tries to change the topic and talk about more personal things, she continues to explain what is haunting her mind. She describes a railway station in a frozen city under the snow that has “veins running through it” (418). Afterwards, she tells him that she watched her “most precious companion [...] walk down the platform and tear all the babies from the arms of their screaming mothers” (419).

After a silence, Devlin brings her back to ‘reality’; they talk about Rebecca’s sister and her kids. Then, she talks about seeing a comedy film, which did not make her laugh at all. What struck her in the cinema was the man sitting next to her, who never moved or laughed and sat like a corpse. After another silence, Devlin asks her to “start again” but Rebecca says that they cannot “start again”, but “end again”, to which Devlin opposes because of the “misusing” of “the word ‘end’” (425). Rebecca states that one “can end once” and then “end again” (425). After a silence, they sing together the lines:

Rebecca: (*singing softly*) ‘Ashes to ashes’ -
Devlin: ‘And dust to dust’ -
Rebecca: ‘If the women don’t get you’ -
Devlin: ‘The liquor must’ (425).

Afterwards, she recounts the image of “an old man and a little boy”, and of another “woman carrying a baby in her arms” (427). She describes how the baby breathes in the woman’s arms. Meanwhile, Devlin assumes the role of her ex-lover and begins to enact the first scene of the play, forcing her to kiss his fist. However, she doesn’t speak or move, and starts to speak with an echo. In the first person, she says: “They took us to the trains [...] They were taking the babies away [...] I took my baby and wrapped it in my shawl [...] And I made it into a bundle” (429). While she hides the baby under her arm, a man calls her back and stretches his hand for the bundle, and she gives him the bundle. However, when a woman she

knows asks her what happened to her baby?, she replies, “I don’t know of any baby” (432). And the play ends with a long silence.

3. A Play on the Holocaust?

One of the many questions concerning the meanings behind the text is if it is a play on the Holocaust. Is Rebecca a witness of the Holocaust or is she haunted by the collective and cultural memories constructed in its aftermath? When Mireia Aragay asks Pinter if *Ashes to Ashes* is a play about Nazism, Pinter replies as follows:

No, I don’t think so at all. It’s about the images of Nazi Germany; I don’t think anyone can ever get that out of their mind. The Holocaust is probably the worst thing that ever happened, because it was so calculated, deliberate and precise, and so fully documented by the people who actually did it. [...] But it’s not simply the Nazis that I am talking about in *Ashes to Ashes*, because it would be a dereliction on my part to simply concentrate on the Nazis and leave it at that. [...] The word democracy begins to stink. These things, as you can see, are on my mind. So in *Ashes to Ashes*, I’m not simply talking about the Nazis; I’m talking about us and our conception of our past and our history, and what it does to us in the present. (qtd. in Aragay 1997: 11)

As Pinter himself reveals, the play does not only focus on the Holocaust experience. What it reflects actually is the contemporary audience and their sense of responsibility, not only towards their actions in the present, but also for the sorrows of the past, to which their only tie is their own humanity. If one man is the seed and humanity is the tree, everybody is responsible for the other, as one should diminish by the other’s death. In this regard, Rebecca is a character who is diminished by multiple deaths she is indirect witness of through the cultural and collective memory she is exposed to.

The stage direction for the time of the play is “[n]ow” (391), which addresses the contemporary audience in each production of the play. Thus, the play will aim at urging the responsibility in its audience as long as it is staged. Even though the light in the room becomes “*very bright but does not illumine the room*” (393), it will always illumine the conscience of the audience. On the other hand, considering the time of the play as ‘now’,

bearing in mind that the play was first produced in 1996, one can easily assume that Rebecca or Devlin could not have experienced the Holocaust. As Plunka argues, “[s]ince Pinter designates that the play occurs ‘now’, which at the time of the writing was 1996, Rebecca, in her forties, could not have personally experienced the Holocaust; even if she were forty-nine years old, her birth would have been in 1947” (2009: 323). In the play, even though she identifies herself with the Holocaust survivors and recounts the events as if she personally experienced them, at the same time she openly denies having experienced them. She says, “[n]othing has ever happened to me. Nothing has ever happened to any of my friends. I have never suffered. Nor have my friends” (413).

Thus, *Ashes to Ashes* is not a play about the Holocaust. However, it is haunted by its images. Even though it addresses more universal issues, each dreamlike sequence narrated by Rebecca resonates with the Holocaust, or actually with the representations of it. Pinter’s own words are noteworthy in this sense:

I think that one of the things that was happening to me when I was writing the play is the realization that what we term “atrocities” and “catastrophes” throughout the world—by the way, not, by any means, limited to what happened in the Holocaust—there is a Holocaust more or less every day of the week. Certainly the Holocaust images do stay with me. They are all contained within people’s experience. [...] the woman [Rebecca] that I felt to be haunted—and, if you like, possessed—by this world around her, which, I remind you, she had never herself experienced—I mean, she had never herself gone through *any* of these things *at all*, and, I hope that that’s made absolutely clear in the play. So that we’re talking about, I think, we’re talking about a *haunted* person, and a man who really essentially wants to bring her back to just the ordered state of affairs... (qtd. in Merritt 2001: 74-75; emphasis in original)

In this regard, Pinter reflects upon how history is full of “atrocities” and “catastrophes” by using images from the worst atrocity ever, the Holocaust. He uses a very familiar setting, a comfortable house in the country with a garden, which might very well be in England. However, the garden beyond, “created all by Rebecca” (424), can turn out to be somewhere with a history of atrocities and catastrophes, and therefore could be placed anywhere in the

twentieth century Europe. As Billington states, “this elegant country drawing-room opens up into European history” (1996: 377).

As Billington explains the play’s process of writing, “one of the central images of the play came from Pinter’s choice of Holiday reading in Barbados: Gitta Sereny’s biography of Albert Speer, who was Hitler’s favourite architect, Minister for Armaments and Munitions from 1942 and virtually the Führer’s second-in command” (1996: 374). And Pinter’s ideas on the book are as follows:

It’s a staggering book and I was very struck by the fact that Speer organised and was responsible for the slave labour factories in Nazi Germany. Yet he was also, in some ways, a very civilised man and was horrified by what he saw when he visited the factories. The image stayed with me. Also, the fact that these factories had no proper lavatories and that there were these primitive privies on the factory floor that were, literally, full of shit. Reading the book also triggered lots of other associations. I’ve always been haunted by the image of the Nazis picking up babies on bayonet-spikes and throwing them out of windows. (qtd. in Billington 1996: 374-5)

The associations of Sereny’s book, *Albert Speer: His Battle with Truth* (1995), can be clearly observed in the play. Initially, the factory with the workpeople, who, as has been stated, “would follow Rebecca’s lover over a cliff and into the sea” (405) is a clear association of the slave labour camps in Nazi Germany, organized by Speer. And the improper lavatories and the primitive privies on the factory floor that Speer mentions are reflected in Rebecca’s description of the factory, where she could not find any bathroom at all. Also, the place is very damp and the workpeople are not dressed suitably for the weather. As Billington points out, “the image inspired by the Speer book, is of a cowed workforce and an autocratic controller” (1996: 377). Besides, as has been seen, one of the central images of the play is that Rebecca’s lover “walk[s] down the platform and tear[s] all the babies from the arms of their screaming mothers” (419), which resonates with the image in Sereny’s book that haunted Pinter. According to Katherine H. Burkman, “if Rebecca’s former lover seems to be in charge

of such factories and can be identified with Speer, Devlin, and Rebecca themselves embody Speer by playing out aspects of his character and ‘his battle with truth’” (1999: 89).

According to Plunka, “during his trial at Nuremberg, Speer began to have a change of conscience and gradually began to debate taking responsibility for the Holocaust and for crimes he did not commit and of which he had no direct knowledge. And this admission of guilt becomes the collective memory that Rebecca responds to in *Ashes to Ashes*” (2009: 320). Commenting on the ideas of D. Keith Peacock that “Pinter’s conception of Rebecca may have been inspired by an unnamed German woman, mentioned in Sereny’s ‘Postscript’, who was married to an Englishman, had two children, and resided in England”, Plunka mentions that “at the age of seventy-five, Speer had an affair with this woman who was nearly forty, approximately the same age as Rebecca. She was particularly impressed by Speer’s book, *The Secret Diaries*, which dramatically altered her guilt feelings about her German past and about her own persona” (2009: 320). Apparently, Rebecca and the woman who had an affair with Speer have parallels in their relationships and the following guilt feelings for even having been indirect witnesses of the Holocaust. Thus, they also share a sense of responsibility, which is also created in the audience with an identification of Rebecca.

Even though most of them are part of collective and cultural memory, *Ashes to Ashes* contains a lot of images that evoke the Holocaust. Initially, Rebecca’s lover’s occupation is that of a guide who is highly respected by the workpeople in the factory for his “purity” and “conviction” (405). Drawing from Manuela M. Reiter, Plunka points out that “one translation of the German ‘Führer’, besides ‘leader’, is also guide, which ironically may refer to his role in deportations”, and he states that the words “purity” and “conviction” are euphemisms or code words that call to mind the justification for Nazi genocide (2009: 322). Later, Rebecca tells Devlin that in a house in Dorset, she saw guides ushering a crowd of people “across the cliffs and down to the sea” (416). This image is reminiscent of the previous image of

workpeople, who “would follow her lover over a cliff and into to the sea” (405). Meanwhile, Rebecca hears a police siren, and she gets upset. The police siren also resonates with Holocaust experiences, while it stands for state oppression. Penelope Prentice argues that “the sound triggered a free association to the Gestapo sirens signalling people forcibly taken during the Nazi Holocaust” (2000: 369). And Plunka also comments on the associations brought about by police siren in Holocaust survivors: “Strangely enough, Holocaust survivors often have mentioned that police sirens can be prompts that elicit latent or repressed visions of life in the concentration camps” (2009: 322).

Rebecca’s description of the railway station, where her lover “walk[s] down the platform and tear[s] all the babies from the arms of their screaming mothers” (419), calls to mind another association with the Holocaust, but it can also be anywhere drenched in the blood of innocent people throughout the history of the world. She says that “the city was frozen [...] and the snow was a funny colour. It wasn’t white. Well it was white but there were other colours in it. It was as if there were veins running through it” (418). The picture drawn by Rebecca is that of a railway station in a frozen city, the surrounding area covered with snow, whose funny colour is because of the mud and blood in it. The trains in this railway station might be bound for Auschwitz. Rebecca also says: “When I got to the railway station I saw the train. Other people were there” (418). This speech calls to mind the deportation of the victims to the extermination camps, and combined with image of the railway station it is reminiscent of the entrance gates of Auschwitz.

4. Rebecca as a Witness

The parallelism between Rebecca and the woman having a relationship with Albert Speer brings forward the issue of witnessing the Holocaust. As has been seen, she is totally haunted by its images and experiences with a sense of guilt and complicity. Thus, Rebecca

imaginatively identifies herself with the victims of the Holocaust and appears to be an imaginative victim/witness of the Holocaust.

According to Dori Laub's division of witnessing into three separate parts, as it is discussed in the first chapter, Rebecca's witnessing can be classified as "the level of being witness to the testimonies of others" (Felman and Laub 1991: 75), assuming that she might have witnessed the testimonies of Speer, and also that she might have been affected by the testimonies of other witnesses through media and art. With her imaginative identification as a victim/witness, she tries to narrate the truth about the Holocaust, the truth of violence, torture, and tremendous sorrow. She struggles to transmit the narrative of the Holocaust, which actually "could not be articulated" (Felman and Laub 1991: 85). However, as the process of witnessing and testimony of traumatic events involves serious obstacles and hindrances, Rebecca suffers from the problematic nature of this process.

In the light of Elizabeth Jelin's ideas on the obstacles of bearing testimony, discussed in the first chapter, initially Rebecca suffers from "the impossibility of constructing a narrative", and her testimonials have symbolic lapses and voids. Also she falls into silence as an "indicator of the dual extreme or limit character of concentrational experience" (Jelin 2003: 61). She cannot recount her experience due to a "semiotic incapacity" (Jelin 2003: 67), the language falls apart, the words do not mean anything for such a tremendous experience that shows the veins of the snow, and that even makes it bleed. Rebecca mostly falls into silence because of her inability to convey the events in a proper way. However, she is haunted by the images in her memory, and the only thing that relieves her is articulating those images. She cannot find any relief in those silences, either. The images act as a barrier between her and the daily life, between her and the normality that Devlin pushes her into. In this regard, she experiences "self-inflicted emotional imprisonment" (Felman and Laub 1991: 79). She is trapped within the images in her memory, and the only way out is to break her silence and

talk. Otherwise, the memory of the survivor can destroy memory and thus reality. And this invades the survivor's social life.

The play begins with a silence and there are silences and pauses nearly in every two or three sentences that Rebecca utters, as she struggles to articulate the images haunting her in a proper way. Thus, silences and pauses in her speech stand for the lapses and voids in her memory. They are always before or after an image, resonating with the Holocaust. In this regard, she tries to comprehend and construct the truth of the events in these silences and pauses, and she articulates it afterwards. Also, these silences and pauses separate the daily life from Rebecca's memories. There are two different worlds for her: the normality, her daily life with Devlin, and her distorted memories, imaginative identifications with the Holocaust victims/witnesses. She is talking to Devlin, and seems to be listening to him, but she is haunted by her memories. For example, towards the end of the play, when Devlin asks her why she never told him about her lover and states that he has a right to be very angry, Rebecca, after a silence, changes the topic and talks about the woman with the bundle. Therefore, her memories distort reality for Rebecca, and the reality of her traumatic experience, or her constructed memory, surpasses the reality of her daily life. In this regard, her experience parallels with the ubiquitous nature of traumatic events, because, as discussed in the first chapter in the light of Laub's ideas, trauma continues into the present and it is current in every respect, as far as its survivors are concerned.

On the other hand, silences and pauses are significant for Pinter's use of language. As Esslin states, silence for Pinter is "an essential, an integral part, and often the climax of his use of language" (1992: 37). Pinter explains silence as follows:

There are two silences. One when no word is spoken. The other when perhaps a torrent of language is employed. This speech is speaking of a language locked beneath it. That is its continual reference. The speech we hear is an indication of that we don't hear. It is a necessary avoidance, a violent, sly, anguished or mocking smokescreen which keeps the other in its place. When true silence falls we are still left with echo but are nearer nakedness. One way

of looking at speech is to say it is a constant stratagem to cover nakedness. (qtd. in Esslin 1992: 38).

Therefore, in a speech what is not spoken is as significant as what is spoken. And in the analysis of the character of Rebecca, the silences and pauses in her speech are as important as her words. When she falls into silence, the echo of her words stays with the audience, and when she speaks, she tries to cover the naked truth, the truth of the Holocaust. The echoes appear in her speech towards the end of the play. As Plunka argues, “with Devlin’s voice silenced, Rebecca is left only with an echo that reverberates throughout the theatre the Holocaust imagery associated with loss: ‘the trains’, ‘the babies away’, ‘a bundle’, and ‘my baby’” (2009: 325). Thus, what dominates her language as well as her memory is the Holocaust, both in speeches and silences. Her silences are haunted by these images as well as her words. Jeanne Colleran’s comments on the echo at the end of the play are also noteworthy at this point: “that echo, a reverberation between worlds, connects the unseen, inexperienced but determinative past history of twentieth century atrocity and Rebecca’s growing sense that she must make a moral response lest it overwhelm her” (2009: 96). In this regard, the echo of her speech also connects the two worlds for Rebecca, the world of her memories that she cannot escape and the real world. Her moral response is to articulate the ‘horror’ of the event in her memories and transmit it to prevent it from ever happening again. Thus, she also addresses the audience, most of whom share the collective memory of the atrocities committed in the twentieth century.

Rebecca, assuming the role of the victims/witness of the Holocaust, feels an urge to talk about her memories. And she does so even when she is silent. In this regard, she also becomes the narrator of the many lost. She recalls her memories as a “duty to remember, to testify in the name of others, as a delegative narrator” (Levi qtd. in Jelin 2003: 62).

In the play, Rebecca’s silence caused by a “semiotic incapacity” and inability to narrate her experiences is shared by the man she comes across in the cinema, where she went

to see a comic movie. She depicts the man as follows: “He was absolutely still throughout the whole film. He never moved, he was rigid, like a body with rigor mortis, he never laughed once, he just sat like a corpse. I moved away from him, I moved away as far away from him as I possibly could” (424). And she falls into silence. The man is apparently a victim of trauma, which might be caused by the Holocaust as well as by any other personal or social reasons. However, Rebecca definitely sees his suffering and paradoxically does not want to face him. They share the legacy of a horrific event, which cannot be defined in any logical form. Both of them witnessed the ‘horror’ of it and thus Rebecca refrains from the man’s eyes that share the horrific images in her memories. Colleran comments on the scene as follows:

Part of the reason she cannot take part in the fun is that the man seated in front of her is apparently a rigid corpse. He is like her vision of the families walking into the sea or the women losing their children before boarding the trains, an example of Levi’s “complete witnesses”, that is, the dead or the utterly reduced, the only ones who fully know the horror but cannot speak. They are the “submerged” and “the drowned”. (2009: 93)

Thus, Rebecca is afraid of re-experiencing the event that haunts her memory to the point that she cannot turn back to reality. Half of her life has a deadly quality like that man in the cinema, and the dead part haunts the living part.

5. Listening to Atrocities

As discussed in the first chapter, in the process of witnessing and testimony, the role of the listener is crucial. The listener is ‘the other’ for the narrator accompanying his/her difficult journey into the depths of his/her memory. In this process, with the help of the listener, a new truth about the survivor’s experience is constructed out of a shared responsibility, because the listener becomes a “participant and a co-owner of the traumatic event” (Felman and Laub 1991: 57).

In the play, there are three listeners to traumatic experiences: Rebecca, Devlin and the audience. Initially, assuming that Rebecca is inspired by the woman having had a relationship

with Speer, she might have listened to his testimonies and shared his legacy of the events. In this sense, Rebecca comes to be a “participant and a co-owner of the traumatic event” and she partially experiences the trauma with an imaginative identification. On the other hand, as everybody else she is affected by cultural and collective memory, and thus she is an indirect listener to atrocities all around the world. The second listener is Devlin; he listens to Rebecca’s haunting memories and he tries to disengage her from their brutal nature. He listens to her memories, but he does not share her responsibility. He wants to know and control everything about his lover, even her memories. But he cannot even grasp her situation; he is a passive listener in this regard. The third listener is the audience, who witness Rebecca’s identification with the victims/witnesses of atrocities. The play incorporates the audience in Rebecca’s situation and asks them to share Rebecca’s complicity and responsibility for all the atrocities throughout the world history. Because the audience, as well, are indirect witnesses of the atrocities through cultural and collective memory.

In the process of witnessing and testimony, listening also involves some hazards for the listener. If the listener shares the witnessing with the survivors, s/he finds himself/herself within existential interrogations. In the play, while Rebecca’s mind is occupied with existential questions, Devlin attempts to take her back to the normality, order, and comfort of their daily life. After they talk about the rolling pen on the coffee table, Devlin states that he is in a quicksand, because of his loss of power in the course of the conversation. Rebecca answers, “like God” (412), and she expresses her distrust in such a world and thus in God, who witnessed the ‘horror’ of the Holocaust.

In response to these hazards, the listeners develop various ‘listening defences’ in order to maintain their safety. Rebecca, the listener of testimonies of others, performs some of these defences from time to time. For example, after recounting the story about the woman with the bundle, with whom she identifies herself, Rebecca feels a sense of “total paralysis with the

fear of merger with the atrocities being recounted” (Felman and Laub 1991: 72). Afterwards, while Devlin enacts the first scene by forcing her to kiss his fist, she does not move and gets totally numb. On the other hand, it might be said that the main listener in the play is Devlin, who listens to the haunted memories of Rebecca. In this regard, he can be interpreted as a psychotherapist, or an interviewer to the trauma victim. Nevertheless, he performs some of the listening defences. Initially, he shows “a sense of total withdrawal and numbness” (Felman and Laub 1991: 72), and he does not care for the stories she tells. He is only interested in the details of her old relationship. And towards the end of the play, in a way, he experiences “a sense of outrage and of anger, unwittingly directed at the victim—narrator” Rebecca (Felman and Laub 1991: 72). In the middle of her speech, “he goes to her”, “puts his hand on her throat” and “presses gently” (428), even though she is totally numb at that moment. Besides, Devlin experiences another listening defence that is “foreclosure through facts, through an obsession with factfinding” (Felman and Laub 1991: 73). Devlin is apparently obsessed with the facts about Rebecca’s past and always demands more details. As he says, “I’m compelled to ask you questions. There are so many things I don’t know. I know nothing . . . about any of this” (399). And he wants “a concrete image” of her ex-lover that he can “carry about with him” (400).

6. Rebecca’s Fallible Memory

As discussed in the first chapter, memories are fallible, and they are not factual details about historical occurrences, instead they are constructs open to change or fade away. As for the witnesses of traumatic events, memories are constructed in the process of testimony, with the help of a diligent listener. The knowledge of the traumatic event does not fit into existing mental schemes; the human mind invents stories “by recall and fantasy” (Wilson qtd. in van der Kolk and van der Hart 1995: 171). And thus as Jelin points out, “the testimonial implies a

multiplicity of voices and the circulation of multiple ‘truths’ and ‘silences’” (2003: 73). The play’s main themes are shaped around the images of Rebecca’s distorted memory. Her memory is flexible and fallible. She cannot incorporate the haunting images, which are constructed either through art and media or through her ex-lover’s testimonies, into any logical scheme in her mind, and thus she invents stories “by recall and fantasy”. Her memories, as in the process of testimony, imply a “multiplicity of voices”, and her speeches reveal a “circulation of multiple truths and silences” (Jelin 2003: 73). Rebecca’s memory is contradictory. She tells Devlin her memories about her lover, his occupation as a guide and how he used to tear all the babies from the arms of their screaming mothers. But when Devlin questions her authority to talk about such atrocities, she states that nothing has ever happened to her and her friends. And towards the end of the play she identifies herself with the woman who gives her baby away, but she suddenly says: “what baby/I don’t know of any baby” (432). Her memory, thus, constantly invents and distorts reality. Her mind has the burden of such a ‘horror’ that she cannot articulate it within a concrete image of reality. Thus, she constructs the truth through her narrative memory, which, as discussed in the first chapter, is elusive, flexible and variable. About the fallible memory of Rebecca, drawing from British psychologist Frederick Bartlett’s research on memory, Prentice states that “memories are formed as incomplete fragments, completed afterward as constructs of imagination coupled with prior experience. Rebecca’s ‘memory’ of her lover has become real for Devlin. [...] And the hypnotic quality of her trancelike recollection introduces her story as real into the minds of the audience” (2000: 380). Namely, Rebecca constructs her memory upon an imaginative identification, and the audience, together with Devlin, believe in her memories.

As Pinter states in the interview with Aragay, “I am talking about us and our conception of our past and our history and what it does to us in the present” (1997: 11), *Ashes to Ashes* is about Rebecca and how her past haunts her in the present. She lives in the present

time, probably in an English country house. However, her mind lives in the memories of the past, most of which are actually constructed by her. According to Billington, “belief in the omnipresent power of memory is another of his [Pinter’s] hallmarks. Pinter’s characters live as much in the past, as in the present, and are haunted by a recollection, however fallible, manipulative or imaginary, of some lost and vanished world in which everything was secure, certain, fixed” (1996: 387). Thus, the characters in Pinter’s plays, not least Rebecca, urge the audience to bring out the memories of the past, where violence and oppression abide, in order to share the responsibility for a hopeful future. In this regard, as Billington states, “[memory] also, in an age of historical amnesia, motivates a lot of his political thinking” (1996: 388).

7. The Function of Cultural and Collective Memory

As discussed in the first chapter, memory is intermingled within a net of signs and symbols, and it is constructed through social and cultural artefacts. Thus, individual memory cannot be separated from collective memory. And while collective memory structures individual memory, it can make individuals forget the things they experienced and remember the things they have never gone through. Therefore, collective memory constructs the past in the present through various artefacts, such as culture, art, and media. As for the memory of atrocities, for most of the people who have not experienced them, it is the memory of a represented reality.

As Rebecca claims that nothing has ever happened to her, the horrific images haunting her mind could stem from the vast number of representations of the Holocaust, or likely, any other mediatised atrocities around the world haunting the minds of dozens of people sharing the same collective memory. As Plunka states, “Rebecca, through her imaginative vision, has adopted the collective memory of the Holocaust as her own. She has taken on the role of bearing witness and commemorating the dead, becoming the mouthpiece for remembering the Shoah from generation to generation, or from ashes to ashes” (2009: 323). Thus, with the

effect of the representations of the Holocaust in literature, film, and documentaries, and other atrocities of the twentieth century, not least the Bosnian Genocide, Rebecca realizes the violent and horrific nature of humankind and identifies herself with the victims of the atrocities. Therefore, the “*large window*” of the comfortable country house becomes a screen, or an illustrated page, through which Rebecca can only see the world history full of atrocities. And the audience look through the same screen and share her vision. For her, the reality and the representation, the local and the global intermingle; when she looks down out of the window in the house in Dorset, she sees guides ushering people into the sea, which resonates with the Holocaust. However, as Devlin asks: “When did you live in Dorset? I’ve never lived in Dorset” (416), it can be assumed that she invents these images under the effect of her cultural memory.

As has been mentioned, the images created by Rebecca’s distorted memory can be associated to some of the representations of the Holocaust in art, especially in film. According to Mark Taylor-Batty,

Rebecca’s account of handing over a baby is reminiscent of a scene from Alan Pakula’s film *Sophie’s Choice* (1982) in which, on a railway platform, the eponymous character is obliged to choose which of her two children to hand over to be killed. Her accounts of factory workers doffing their caps to their superior, and having beautiful singing voices, are reminiscent of scenes in *Schindler’s List*, as are accounts of people dragging luggage on cobbled streets. (2009: 107)

And also, as Susan Hollis Merritt argues, “Rebecca’s memory of witnessing refugees led into the sea to drown off the coast of Dorset, their luggage bobbing in the waves recalls scenes in Kenneth Madsen’s film *A Day in October* (1992)” (qtd. in Taylor-Batty 2009: 107). These associations show the effects of cultural memory on Rebecca’s individual memory. She appropriates those images from the representations of the Holocaust on screen, and she assumes the role of the victims. Pinter expresses his opinion on Rebecca’s situation and the effects of cultural memory on himself as follows:

From my point of view, the woman is simply haunted by the world that she's been born into, by all the atrocities that have happened. In fact they seem to have become part of her own experience, although in my view she hasn't actually experienced them herself. That's the whole point of the play. I have myself been haunted by these images for many years, and I'm sure I'm not alone in that. I was brought up in the II World War. I was about fifteen when the War ended; I could listen and hear and add two and two, so these images of horror and man's inhumanity to man were very strong in my mind as a young man. They've been with me all my life, really. You can't avoid them, because they're around you simply all the time. That is the point about *Ashes to Ashes*. I think Rebecca inhabits that. (qtd. in Aragay 1997: 10)

At the same time, the representation of atrocities, not least the Holocaust, is problematic because it involves the risk of trivializing the experience of the historical occurrence, and some of the representations on popular culture, TV or cinema, distort the reality about the events with a ready morality. As discussed in the first chapter, Baudrillard condemns the representation of the Holocaust on TV as creating "the same process of forgetting, of liquidation, of extermination, same annihilation of memories and of history", and argues that "it [the Holocaust] will make them spill into forgetting with a kind of good aesthetic conscience of the catastrophe" (1994: 49, 50). Besides, the Althusserian Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) create imaginary representations, and the hegemonic ideology interpellates individuals to believe in those imaginary representations. Thus, what appears on the screen signifies no more than a fiction for the individuals looking at it. Therefore, wars and atrocities all around the world appear to be a televised reality, and this breaks the ties of empathy between people. *Ashes to Ashes* reveals the effects of cultural memory on individuals through the images from films on the Holocaust, and it demands from its audience to avoid the ready morality of representations, urging them to empathize with the victims in order to understand the horror of the events with a sense of shared responsibility, just as Rebecca does. As Taylor-Batty argues, "Rebecca, then, represents 'a psychic process of remembering, repeating and working through' and crucially, initiates the same process in us through the dislocated and dislocating structures of trauma" (2009: 110).

As Rebecca's memories are elusive and fallible, because some of them are merely fictions from works of art, the credibility of them can be questioned. However, the 'truth' about the experience of traumatic events, not least the Holocaust, is not about the historical empirical facts about the event, but it is about "resistance", "affirmation of survival", and the "breakage of the frame of death" (Felman and Laub 1991: 62). Therefore, Rebecca does not reveal any truth about the Holocaust, or any other atrocity, but she unfolds the horrific nature of traumatic events. In a way, she resists the destructive power of such horrific events, and she narrates it to the audience with her speeches as well as her silences. As Billington comments: "The play gets under one's skin precisely because it is not dealing with some alien or distant world: it acknowledges the potential for oppression and resistance that lies within all of us [...] it implies that we all have within us the capacity for resistance and for imaginative identification with the sufferings of others" (1996: 382, 383). Rebecca, with her "imaginative identification", shows the audience, who have the comfort of distance, that these images are not actually far away from them and that such atrocities may break out in any state at any time. As Pinter says, "there is no 'them' and 'us' and [...] the Fascist instinct is universal and compatible with a regard for the external forms of civilisation" (qtd in Billington 1996: 383).

8. Personal and Political Voices

As discussed earlier, Pinter's overtly political plays portray a ubiquitous reality of violence, oppression and torture. And Pinter draws attention to the importance of politics, as he considers that "what we call our democracies have subscribed to these repressive, cynical and indifferent acts of murder" (qtd. in Aragay 1997: 11). He also points out the need for the political theatre as follows:

Political theatre is even more important than it ever was, if by political theatre you mean plays which deal with the real world, not with a manufactured or fantasy world. We are in a terrible dip at the moment, a kind of abyss, because the assumption is that politics are all over. That's what the propaganda says.

But I don't believe the propaganda. I believe that politics, our political consciousness and our political intelligence are not all over, because if they are, we are really doomed. (qtd. in Aragay 1997: 6)

Thus, *Ashes to Ashes*, like his other overtly political plays, deals with the real world with a political consciousness, and at the same time this political consciousness is applied to the personal affairs. Therefore, the political and the personal are intermingled in such a way that the local setting of the play and the relationship between Rebecca and Devlin reflect a more political and global context. As Merritt states, “[w]hile the apparently realistic domestic setting of *Ashes to Ashes* is a contemporary English setting room in which a man and a woman are having an intimate conversation, the dialogue encompasses a far greater, global context and raises issues relating to the Holocaust” (2001: 74). Therefore, while on the personal level it reflects Rebecca’s dysfunctional relationship with Devlin and her much more perverted relationship with her ex-lover, on the political level it reflects the dysfunctional world politics, state oppression, torture, and violence. As Billington argues, “the play also conclusively proves that for Pinter the ‘personal’ and the ‘political’ are not separate, vacuum-sealed categories; it operates both as a twisted, perverted love story and as an evocation of the arbitrariness and cruelty of state power” (1996: 375). Thus, this private country house and the relationship between its inhabitants reflect more public issues dealing with “the *real* truth of our lives and our societies” (Pinter 2005: 12). As Marc Silverstein argues, this country house “creates an aura of bourgeois comfort and security—the kind of security that both conservatism and liberalism see as transforming domestic space into an impenetrable haven from the ravages of the public, historical and political realms” (1999: 75). However, the images that Rebecca’s memory brings forward break through this comfort and security, and this domestic realm morphs into public, historical and political realms. The sound of police sirens, crying babies and drowning workpeople distorts the comfort of this room, and Devlin’s desire for authority, order and control over Rebecca in this private sphere parallels with that

of the authoritarian states, which impose violence, torture, and suffering on its people. Thus, Pinter, combining the personal with the political, does not distinguish political violence from personal violence, and points out a need for a shared responsibility for the sufferings of the others.

The dysfunctional relationship between Rebecca and Devlin reflects the reliance on order, authority and rationality. Devlin, “[a] man with guts and application [...] A man with a rigid sense of duty” (415) is obsessed with facts and order. He always asks for more details, because knowing for him means authority over Rebecca. He feels he is compelled to ask questions, and he asks for concrete images and shapes. He is the only authority in the room; when Rebecca talks about the images of “babies and mothers, et cetera” (413), he says, “what authority do you think you yourself possess which would give you the right to discuss such an atrocity?” (413). Thus, he denounces any interaction in his authority and order in general. According to Colleran, “Devlin embodies literality—a literality shored up by an uninspected ideological reliance on God, Nation, and order—and so he wants the details of Rebecca’s past, the bits and facts, so he isn’t in the dark” (2009: 94). Thus, Devlin, obsessive about the “bits and facts”, searches for the meaning and history of everything, not just Rebecca. When Rebecca says “I put my pen on that little coffee table and it rolled off into the carpet [...] This pen, this perfectly innocent pen”, Devlin judges the innocence of the pen: “You don’t know where it had been. You don’t know how many other hands have held it, how many other hands have written with it, what other people have been doing with it. You know nothing of its history” (410). So, he interrogates every detail of Rebecca’s history, just as he does with the “innocent pen”. According to Prentice, “his comically attributing volition to a pen allows him to escape acknowledging his own volition and responsibility and, more importantly, hers, as his real concern” (2000: 373). Thus, the rolling pen also points out humanity’s responsibility for the atrocities around the world, as they, like the rolling pen, rolled off in

front of them. Immediately after that dialogue Devlin says to Rebecca, “You can’t sit there and say things like that”, and she replies, “[y]ou don’t believe I’m entitled to sit here? You don’t think I’m entitled to sit in this chair, in the place where I live? (411). As Prentice argues, “[s]itting, as always in Pinter’s plays and screenplays, denotes stasis, passivity, a position of powerlessness as opposed to agency and action—a *choice* to place oneself in an inferior position, never in his work an admirable choice” (2000: 373; emphasis in original). Thus, his insistence on her “sitting and say things like that” reflects Devlin’s desire for authority and order within this domestic field. He wants to keep her silent to establish his control over her, especially with the use of language. As Silverstein argues, “the narrative ‘authority’ as a tactic for reducing the other to silence while simultaneously establishing one’s own hegemonic control of language is a familiar motif in Pinter” (1999: 81). However, afterwards, Devlin feels that his authority is disrupted by her speeches full of images resonating with the Holocaust. He says: “I’m letting you off the hook. Have you noticed? I’m letting you slip. Or perhaps it’s me who is slipping. It’s dangerous. Do you notice? I’m in a quicksand”, to which Rebecca replies, “like God” (412). Rebecca, thus, questions the authority of Devlin and God in a world of brutalities and atrocities, as an “imaginative witness” of them. She, in a way, rejects the idealism of a world of harmony and order. However, Devlin does not accept such a “disgusting perception”—God in a quicksand—and he replies:

God? God? You think God is sinking into a quicksand? That’s what I would call a truly disgusting perception. Be careful about how you talk about God. He’s the only God we have. If you let him go he won’t come back. He won’t even look back over his shoulder. And then what will you do? You know what it’ll be like, such a vacuum? It’ll be like England playing Brazil at Wembley and not a soul in the stadium. Can you imagine? Playing both halves to a totally empty house. The game of the century. Absolute silence. Not a soul watching. Absolute silence. Apart from the referee’s whistle and a fair bit of fucking and blinding. If you turn away from God it means that the great and noble game of soccer will fall into permanent oblivion. No score for extra time after extra time after extra time, no score for time everlasting, for time without end. Absence. Stalemate. Paralysis. A world without winner. (412)

The image of God in a quicksand is a threat to authority, order and the status quo. For Devlin, God is “the ultimate guarantor of absolute certainties” (Aragay 2001: 253) and the absence of God means “paralysis”, “stalemate” and “[a] world without winner” for him. As Silverstein argues, ““a world without winner’ necessarily entails a world without losers, without the marginalized, the excluded, the other, the women subjected to abuse, the workers exploited in the factory, the mothers deprived of their babies and herded into railroad cars [...]” (1999: 79). Thus, such an image of God distorts the hegemony of the winners, whose presence depends on the losers. In this regard, as Billington argues, “it [the horrifying picture of absence of God] is a reminder of a society polarised, like the capitalist world, between triumphalist victors and hopeless losers” (1996: 378). Pinter himself comments on Devlin’s speech on God as follows:

God is something that keeps the tent up [...] and I think that he’s very upset irritated and annoyed and, finally, *angry* at her [Rebecca’s] deviation from this principle or *order*, because if you raise the kinds of questions that she is raising, there is not much order about; there is a lot of *disorder*, and something that’s actually threatening and menacing the status quo, you know. (qtd. in Merritt 2001: 75; emphasis in original)

On the other hand, this horrific picture of God in a quicksand also challenges the very Western attempt to define the world within concrete meanings, which is reflected in the character of Devlin in the play. And this image of God parallels with Baudrillard’s ideas on the Western faith and God. As discussed in the first chapter, Baudrillard believes that the Western faith according to which a sign could be exchanged for meaning and this exchange can be guaranteed by God is a wager. And he argues that if God himself can be simulated, “the whole system becomes weightless” (Baudrillard 1994: 5), and it is no longer itself but a gigantic simulacrum. The image of God in a world of simulacra drawn by Baudrillard is analogous with the image drawn by Devlin. Devlin’s definition of a world without God as a vacuum renders “the whole system” as “weightless”. Thus, the Western wager on representation is lost, and the imaginary realities, as that of God, fall apart.

In a later scene, after relating the image of the workpeople walking into the sea ushered by guides, Rebecca talks about “a condition known as mental elephantiasis”:

When you spill an ounce of gravy, for example, it becomes a sea of gravy which surrounds you on all sides and you suffocate in a voluminous sea of gravy. It’s terrible. But it’s all your own fault, you brought it upon yourself. You are the cause of it. Because it was you who split the gravy in the first place, it was you who handed over the bundle. (417)

And Devlin, in return, asks her, “[a]re you prepared to die for your country?” (418). However, what Devlin cannot understand is the way in which she renders herself as both the victim and victimizer. With an imaginative identification, she feels the agonies of the victims of the atrocities, but at the same time she becomes complicit in the atrocities, as the audience, together with Devlin, should do. As John Lahr points out:

In the face of Devlin’s pompous incredulity at another horrific memory, she tries to explain how the acceptance of little bits of evil in the community can metastasize into something virulent and engulfing—a kind of ‘mental elephantiasis’. Her outrage at the psychic numbing that comes in the wake of atrocity turns Pinter’s frequently stated political point into powerful stage poetry. (1999: 183)

Thus, with this “powerful stage poetry”, Pinter combines the social and political with the personal in that every personal act gives birth to social and political acts. Going back to John Donne’s words at the beginning of this chapter, since “every man is a piece of the continent”, “if you spill an ounce of gravy, it becomes a sea of gravy”.

In another very private dialogue, Devlin tells Rebecca “Let’s start again”, to which Rebecca replies, “I don’t think we can start again. We started . . . a long time ago. We started. We can’t start again. We can end again [...] Again and again and again. And we can end again. And again and again. And again” (425). Devlin, who does not want to lose the linguistic control, warns her: “Aren’t you misusing the word ‘end’? End means end. You can’t end ‘again’. You can only end once” (425). This conversation about their personal relationship opens up into a world of atrocities. While Devlin simply focuses on their relationship and their future, for Rebecca “end again” means the end of humanity, which has

ended many times upon witnessing the history full of violence, oppression, and atrocities. And it also means that atrocities do not only end once, they end again and again in different parts of the world, from Auschwitz to Bosnia, so actually they never end. As Merritt argues:

The political atrocities echoed by the imagery of Rebecca's personal memories 'can't start again', because they *never truly* do end. Such atrocities can be said 'to end once' (in one place) and then said 'to end again' (elsewhere) [...] If the end is a dying of the 'start' of a life, if the 'end' is the dying of humanity in the human race, if the 'end' is the obliteration of humankind and human kindness through inhumanity and human cruelty, then there is no possibility that we 'can start again.' We 'can' *only* 'end again.' (2001: 78)

Therefore, Rebecca reflects her distrust in humanity and thus the possibility of starting again. The images of atrocities haunt her memory. They do not "start again" and "end once". They end again and again one after another: babies torn from the arms of their screaming mothers, workpeople ushered by guides into the sea and police sirens. Since she suffers from mental elephantiasis, she is "suffocating in a voluminous sea of" images. After a silence, she starts to sing softly, "'Ashes to ashes' -/'And dust to dust' -/'If the women don't get you' -/'The liquor must'" (425). The song and thus the title of the play suggest "the circularity of such genocide" (Plunka 2009: 326-27). The song is a part of the images of atrocities that haunt her memory, and it reflects the same despair at humanity.

In his Nobel Prize Lecture, Pinter expressed his ideas on the play and on Rebecca's situation in the same poetical way as he used in the play itself:

Ashes to Ashes, on the other hand, seems to me to be taking place under water. A drowning woman, her hand reaching up through the waves, dropping down out of sight, reaching for others, but finding nobody there, either above or under the water, finding only shadows, reflections, floating; the woman a lost figure in a drowning landscape, a woman unable to escape the doom that seemed to belong only to others. But as they died, she must die too. (2005: 3)

Thus, Rebecca's hand, desperately "reaching for others", finds no one but the audience, who identify themselves with her and share the same guilt and responsibility for the atrocities recounted, as they also witnessed them through the same collective and cultural memory and, like Rebecca, experienced the same imaginative identification. In this sense, the play leaves

the audience in the middle of this “drowning landscape” amidst “shadows” and “reflections” of many other reaching hands from the depths of history haunting their consciences.

CONCLUSIONS

This study has aimed at analysing Harold Pinter's *Ashes to Ashes* with a focus on the process of witnessing and testimony of traumatic events, testimonial truth, the effects of cultural and collective memory, the relation between representation and reality, and the representation of traumatic events, not least the Holocaust, in art, especially literature and theatre. While the first chapter, "Trauma, Testimony and Memory", has analysed the methodological framework, the second chapter, "Harold Pinter's *Ashes to Ashes*: in a Far Away Drowning Landscape" has studied the play proper.

In the play, Rebecca is haunted by the images in her mind that highly resonate with the Holocaust and that can also be related to other atrocities throughout history, especially twentieth-century European history. Even though she recounts these images as a part of her memory, the credibility of them is questioned when she refuses having witnessed them. In this regard, it is interpreted that her experience is caused by cultural and collective memories. Therefore, she imaginatively identifies herself with the witnesses/victims of traumatic events. Even though she is not a direct witness/victim of the atrocities in her memory, she is affected by cultural memory so much that her experience is, in some ways, analogous to that of victims/witnesses of traumatic events. Initially, she suffers from the problematic nature of the process of bearing testimony to traumatic events. In some occasions, she cannot articulate the images in her mind and she falls into silence, like the survivors/witnesses of traumatic events. The silences and pauses dominating the play are caused by the lack of an adequate language, and they unfold the traumatic experience as much as the words. When the words stop, echoes begin to speak the images in Rebecca's mind. These echoes do not reflect the truth about the historical occurrences but convey their horror. Besides, Rebecca is entrapped between her actual life and the delusion of the memories haunting her mind. The solution to undo this entrapment, as Dori Laub discusses, is to set in motion "a process of constructing a narrative,

of reconstructing a history and essentially, of re-externalizing the event” (Felman and Laub 1991: 69). And Rebecca sets in motion the same process, as she begins to construct a narrative in order to articulate the horror in her mind.

As the survivors/witnesses of traumatic events need an ‘other’, the listener, to share this process, Devlin becomes the ‘other’ that can accompany Rebecca in the process of narrating the images in her mind. In this regard, as has been established in the second chapter, the presence of a diligent listener is very significant in Rebecca’s case as is in the case of the survivors of traumatic events. In this sense, it has been discussed in the second chapter that there are three listeners in the play, Devlin, the audience and Rebecca herself. Devlin listens to Rebecca’s testimony, while Rebecca is a listener of the testimonies from the representations of atrocities in art that she imaginatively identifies with. And the audience are incorporated in Rebecca’s situation in a way that they can identify with Rebecca and share her complicity and responsibility for human suffering in the past. On the other hand, the ‘hazards of listening’ and ‘listening defences’ developed by the listeners of testimonies of traumatic events, explored in the first chapter, have also been analysed in Rebecca’s and Devlin’s case in the second chapter.

The fallible nature of the memories of the survivors/witnesses of traumatic events has been discussed in the first chapter. In this regard, the second chapter has studied how Rebecca’s memories are fallible and elusive. The knowledge of traumatic events cannot be fitted into any pre-existing logical scheme, and the mind invents stories and believes them to be a part of the real. Rebecca cannot incorporate the horrific images haunting her mind into any logical scheme, and she invents stories by recall and fantasy, like the survivors of traumatic events. Rebecca’s memories’ significance lies in their revealing of the horrific nature of atrocities, especially the Holocaust, rather than in an account of historical facts.

On the other hand, it has been established that memory is constructed through cultural and social artefacts, and that collective memory structures the individual memory, making individuals forget the things they have experienced and remember the things that they have never gone through. Cultural memory is a part of this collective memory that shapes individual memory through works of art. Considering that Rebecca is not a direct witness of the atrocities that she recounts through the images in her mind but an imaginative witness/victim of them, her recollection of such atrocities might stem from the representations of such events via art. And considering that most of the images resonate with the Holocaust, they might be caused by the representations of the Holocaust in cinema and literature. In this regard, the play urges the audience to follow Rebecca in her imaginative identification with the victims of atrocities in order to share the responsibility for the human suffering in the past, which is also indirectly witnessed by the audience through cultural and collective memory.

Besides, in the first chapter the credibility of the representation and its difference from reality has been discussed in the light of Baudrillard's and Althusser's ideas. In this regard, it has been discussed that representations of traumatic events have the risk of trivialising historical occurrences. In this sense, the first chapter has also explored the discussions around the possibility of representation of the Holocaust. The inadequacy of an aesthetic language is especially revealed through Theodor Adorno's statement that "it is barbaric to write poetry after Auschwitz" (2003: 162), and the usefulness of narrating the Holocaust for the purposes of educating the audiences and making them confront the past are juxtaposed. In this sense, *Ashes to Ashes* does not directly represent the Holocaust on stage, but it subtly points out a collective shame for the tremendous suffering of the twentieth century. However, while the images resonate with the Holocaust, the shame entails all the atrocities throughout history. And the play leads the audience to realize this shame and share the responsibility for all the

human suffering in the past, which has indirectly been witnessed by all of them through the same cultural and collective memory as Rebecca's.

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