



Factual Truth and Deliberate Lie in Hannah Arendt

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Abstract

The subject of investigation in this essay is the reflection on the hypothesis that there is, contemporarily, the edification of “forgetfulness policies”, which are presented as blunt threats to the formation of the public space and the constitution of collective memory. “Forgetfulness policies” come in many guises, either through the imposition of collective amnesia through Amnesty Laws or in attempts to modify the factual truth, as the revisionists do.

Keywords: “Forgetfulness policies”; Collective memory; Collective amnesia; Revisionism

Revisionism: The Edification of Collective Amnesia

The revisionists’ onslaught threatens various layers of the public fabric, including the fabric of memory: the shrine of treasures that fuel the faculty of thought. This assault against memory leads to the risk of dismantling the activity of thinking, thus there is the possibility of deterioration of the “raw material” that the faculty of thought uses in its activation. This deterioration is fostered as follows: for the faculty of thought to be activated, it is necessary first and foremost that the objects of the senses undergo a deserialization process, i.g., imagination, the most elementary experience of thought, reverses the usual relationships by turning sensitive objects into images capable of being manipulated by the activity of thinking. Arendt calls these images, the invisible ones, the “raw materials” of thinking, namely *thought-things*,¹ when gathered and made present to the spirit they are retained in memory – which is guarded by the goddess Mnemosyne (Memory) [1], mother of the “Muses” who takes care of the memory – always ready to be

remembered in a critical-reflexive activity. This implies that thinking can be considered, without conceptual damage, as a “rethinking”:² the bringing into the presence of the absent spirit, transformed into metaphor³ by the reproductive imagination [2,3]. On the contrary, productive imagination handles the images fostered by the reproductive imagination

2 “[...] there is no determination of the meaning of thinking in general before the experience of thinking in particular, nor then a general determination of what thinking is separate from particular interpretation of things already worked out in thought. Moreover, ‘thinking always implies remembrance, [and] every thought is strictly speaking an afterthought’ (Arendt 1978: 78). The thinking about thinking is thus the remembrance of remembrance, always already implicated in what one has already thought and the sense one has already made of things. There is for thought then no neutral encounter with the world as if, in thinking, one merely ‘sees’. Nor then is there a neutral account of thinking itself, free from the interpretation one has already made of things” (BURCH. Recalling Arendt on thinking. In: YEATMAN. et al. *Action and Appearance: Ethics and the Politics of Writing in Hannah Arendt*, p. 12).

3 “The metaphor achieves the ‘carrying over’— *metapherein* — of a genuine and seemingly impossible *metabasis eis alio genos*, the transition from one existential state, that of thinking, to another, that of being an appearance among appearances, and this can be done only by analogies. (Kant gives as an example of a successful metaphor the description of the despotic state as a ‘mere machine (like a hand mill)’ because it is ‘governed by an individual absolute will... For between a despotic state and a hand mill there is, to be sure, no similarity; but there is a similarity in the rules according to which we reflect upon these two things and their causality” (ARENDR. *The Life of the Mind*, p.103).

1 Celso Lafer says: “With Heidegger, Hannah Arendt learned to distinguish ‘between an object of scholarship and a thoughtful thing’. In other words, thinking is not thinking about something, but thinking something” (LAFER. *Hannah Arendt: Pensamento, Persuasão e Poder*, p. 81).

at its own pleasure, promoting the selection of images that will be put before the thought, so that it can give meaning, signifying them⁴. According to Bethânia Assy, “Arendt points out that we have decided not only what to remember, but also how to remember, by emphasizing the role of the productive imagination in the activity of thinking” (p. 63) [4].

It is important to note that the revisionist onslaught against the “raw material” of the faculty of thought begins with the threat to the preservation of the common world since the efforts to alter the facts also means an effort to alter what is said over the world, creating a fictitious world: “the work of the hands” of totalitarian ideologies⁵ [5]. The fictional reality fostered by ideologies closes the field from which the faculty of thought emanates, which is the experience of human affairs that occurred in the common world, for if thinking were to feed on the reality wrought by ideologies, one would have at the end momentary activation,⁶ not the construction of meanings, but the lack of understanding of what is the world.

4 According to Bethânia Assy “The difference between the mere apprehension of an image and the deliberate act of remembering through the activity of thinking leads, by analogy, to the reconsideration of the distinction between passive and active perception.” Thus, “The ability to de-sense a sense-object, which in itself is never apparent to the spirit, transforms the object apparent to the senses into an image that belongs to the imagination. Hannah Arendt points out that this operation is performed by a so-called ‘reproductive imagination’. This brings us to the idea that the storehouse of memory reflects a passive perception, i.e., the ‘even more elementary ability to de-sensorialize and to be present before (and not only in) your spirit what is physically absent’. On the other hand, although directly dependent on the reproductive imagination, Arendt names a ‘productive imagination’, which promotes deliberative selection, relocation, and meaning attribution to an image” (ASSY. *Ética, Responsabilidade e Julgamento em Hannah Arendt*, p. 62-63).

5 In her analysis, when Hannah Arendt defines ideology as “the logic of an idea” (ARENDR. *Origins of Totalitarianism*, p. 469), the author characterizes it as a logical tool that seeks to foster a unitary and homogeneous view of the world, thus rejecting the possibility that any kind of unpredictability could tarnish a chain of thought based on logical premises. Since a syllogism (to be unambiguous) cannot contain in its principles the uncertainty of the “or/or”, one would reach an undoubted conclusion, but a provisional opinion. From this outlook, ideology intends to make reality conditioned to a process within which whatever happens it takes place according to the logic of an idea since the supposed contradictions arising from concrete facts are stages of a coherent movement. This worldview must be understood in the manner of a syllogism, by applying an idea in history, it will reveal a cohesive process that does not need factual reality to confirm, nor to deny it. Therefore, within the framework of totalitarian regimes, ideology seeks to carry out a demonstration whose purpose is to arrange the facts from the deduction of the premises of an infallible syllogism. Wich gives reality (in the sphere of human affairs) a coherence that does not exist. This coherence becomes possible because the movement of logical thinking does not emanate from experience, but it generates itself by making the premise the only credible element.

6 “From which it follows that the business of thinking is like Penelope’s web; it undoes every morning what it has finished the night before. For the need to think can never be stilled by allegedly definite insights of ‘wise men’; it can be satisfied only through thinking, and the thoughts I had yesterday will satisfy. This need today only to the extent that I want and am able to think them anew (ARENDR. *The Life of the Mind*, p. 88).

From this perspective, “telling what it is” means pronouncing a truth of the factual type, thus promoting the survival of the common world since one is talking about a fact that occurred in the public sphere. For the meaning of the world to be effective, it is necessary to exchange experiences about it and to *talk* about these experiences, otherwise, the world loses its “reality”, that is, it is no longer experienced as an immortal abode of mortal beings, because, as Arendt says:

If one wants to see and know the world as it is “really,” he can only do so if he understands the world as something common to many, which is between them, separating and uniting them, shown differently for each one, therefore, only understandable to the extent that many talk about it, exchanging their opinions and perspectives to each other and against each other. Only in the freedom to talk to each other is the world about which one speaks, in its objectivity visible from all sides, arises (p. 60) [6].

At the moment facts are deliberately sought to be changed the world is threatened, consequently, this threat extends to memory and to the faculty of thought since thinking focuses on the facts that occurred in the search for meaning. Then, who are the perpetrators of this menace? Jean Pierre Vidal-Naquet in his work *Assassins of Memory* calls them “revisionists”, Paul Rassinier being one of its greatest exponents. Before diving into Vidal-Naquet’s criticisms of the revisionists, it is more productive to briefly understand the characteristics that form the structure upon which his practices are based.

Eduard Bernstein led one of the first revisionist movements at the end of the 19th century, a review of the history of Marxism as its main motto, which is often related to Bernstein’s views on social democrats. Bernstein defended the revision of the fundamental thesis of Marx and Engels, mainly concerning dialectics, to offer the theoretical foundations for the reformist practices.⁷

7 “The author’s first efforts to carry out a comprehensive review of Marxist theories were made through a series of articles entitled ‘Problems of Socialism’, published by *Neue Zeit* between 1896 and 1898. At the request of Karl Kautsky and Viktor Adler, they were further developed in the book ‘The Assumptions of Socialism and the Tasks of Social Democracy’ in 1899. In these writings, Bernstein committed himself to compose the basic principles of revisionism, to which he remained faithful until the end of his life. Its primary aim was to refute the collapse theory propagated albeit paradoxically by the leaders of the German social democracy and established in the theoretical part of the Erfurt Program. These, as Marx and Engels had advocated, aligned the immediate practice of fighting for political and economic reforms with the unshakable confidence in the imminent final collapse of capitalism, brought by the worsening of the economic crises” (ANDRANDE. *O Revisionismo de Eduard Bernstein e a negação da dialética*, p.155).

Conform Bernstein, the contradictions present in the Marxist theory would be the reason why a theory that starts from the determining influence of the economy on the political power would end up in “a truly miraculous faith in the creative virtue of the political power” and the subordination of all scientific pretensions to utopia. Such ambiguity would have its roots in the incorporation of Hegelian dialectics and its premises - notably the reciprocal confluence of opposites and the transformation of quantity into quality - to Marxism (p.154) [7].

The aims of one of its founding fathers made explicit the constitutive characteristic of revisionism, indicating what would be its primary purposes, i.e., to deconstruct an understanding of history, generating a change to the commonly accepted interpretation, and consequently to the factual truth.

The advancement of the revisionist movement inscribes itself in the emergence of the neo-Nazi and left-wing revisionists seeking to deny the *III Reich*. Paul Rassinier is one of the main propagators of this denial of the *III Reich*: a left-wing political activist and French writer who, although a prisoner of concentration camps, devoted much of his life from 1906 to 1967 to argue about the number of people victimized during the Nazi government, and thus to deconstruct the idea that there was a holocaust. Therefore, Paul Rassinier appears in Pierre Vidal-Naquet’s work as one of his main theoretical opponents. Paul Rassinier, in Vidal-Naquet’s understanding, seeks to “destroy not the truth but the awareness of the truth” (p. 9) [8] when touching the factual matter, to modify reality, because how can one become aware of the truth of something if that something is tampered with?⁸

In the face of this revisionist offensive, Vidal-Naquet warns us of the fear of reality that manifests itself in a discourse that seeks to obscure reality. This fear of the real reveals a difference between memory and history. For the selection of historical facts to be narrated functions differently from the selection of remembering and forgetting. Namely, according to the author’s understanding, there are misleading truths spread by a “story” chosen as official, which leads to the erasing of memory. In this perspective, Vidal-Naquet warns us that “When the survivors of deportation [Jews] have disappeared, perhaps future researchers will have papers hidden in their hands today; but they will no longer have the main source, that is, the living memory of the

witnesses” (p. 29) [8,9].⁹

However, even when the survivors are gone, there will still be a huge obstacle to revisionist intentions: the fact that they face crimes perpetrated against humanity, which are imprescriptible – not forgettable – unlike war crimes¹⁰. In other words, crimes committed against humanity are crystallized facts, so that one does not lose sight of them even if the eyewitnesses, or rather the “eye victims”, no longer exist. Been imprinted on their bodies and minds, the memory of the crimes committed against them will continue to be irrefutable proof of the crimes against humanity, even to the chagrin of those who try to tell the story from their point of view, remembering that a fact doesn’t have points of view, only the narrative has disparate points.

Consequently, Vidal-Naquet says that historical truth is a pure product of a “higher truth”: political-economic truth. How can one envision the promotion of the “higher truths”? They see the light through the practices of those in strategic positions from both an economic and a communicative point of view and thus use these powerful tools to build a worldview that suits their interests. Numerically, the developers of “higher truths” don’t need to constitute the majority in a given society; it is sufficient if they have the tools necessary to develop an understanding of the world that is useful to them. So once these “superior truths” emerge, competent propagators are needed, renowned people in their fields of expertise, to spread them and infiltrate the social network. Following the reasoning of Vidal-Naquet, they could be called revisionists. From this perspective, revisionists promoted the theory that the Jews declared war on Hitler in 1933, which characterizes an attack on the facts. Much like in Brazil, where there are still people who “ween” that there was no civil-military dictatorship between 1964 and 1988. Revisionist authors constructed this type of narrative spread on Brazilian soil, among whom Marco Antônio Villa can be emphasized. Villa attempts to deconstruct the memory of the atrocities committed during the dictatorship, albeit in a somewhat perplexing manner in his book *The Dictatorship for Brazilians* [10].¹¹ Other revisionist narratives must

9 “[...] Everything that was, with great effort, kept in memory by this generation of survivors to be conveyed to those who follow it threatens to fall into oblivion, and soon Auschwitz may repeat itself under another name. How can the danger of forgetfulness linked to the entire generational change be eliminated?” (WEINRICH. *Late: Arte e Crítica do Esquecimento*, p. 257).

10 “Now, what is a crime against humanity? According to the Nuremberg Military Tribunal Statute, Article 6c, ‘atrocities and offenses that include, but that are not limited to, murder, extermination, slave capture, deportation, imprisonment, torture, rape or other inhumane acts committed against the civilian population, or persecution for political, racial or religious reasons, with or without violation of the domestic laws of the country where these actions were perpetrated’” (VIDAL-NAQUET. *Assassins of Memory*, p. 204).

11 The objective outlined by Marco Antônio Villa in his book *Dictatorship to the Brazilian is*: to refute fallacious versions about the military governments

8 According to Vidal-Naquet, the revisionists realized that it was necessary to change the enemy and so “In the spirit of the far left, the importance of Nazi crimes must be diminished, and the blame of the Western and Communist worlds increased to make common oppression appear” (VIDAL-NAQUET. *Assassins of Memory*, p. 140).

be brought into the light of the present considerations to support this hypothesis, such as the one that goes against the understanding of how the enslavement of large numbers of African people during the colonial period happened. In his work *Slavery Rehabilitated*, Jacob Gorender rejects the recent neoliberal offensive that rehabilitates the old revisionist understanding rooted in Gilberto Freyre, who tried to build the idea of a supposedly patriarchal and benign Brazilian slavery to justify the existence of perpetual subjugators [11]. Jacob Gorender attempts to point out the lack of argumentative and theoretical force in this revisionist analysis that tries to smooth over Brazilian slavery, for enslavement and smoothing are not related terms, but excluding ones. The denial of the massacre in Nanjing, the former capital of the Republic of China, which lasted for six weeks, between late 1937 and early 1938, during the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945), is another example. During the occupation of Nanjing, the Japanese army committed numerous atrocities including, rape, looting, arson, and the murder of hundreds of thousands of people, including civilians and prisoners of war. The revisionist onslaught on this historical episode is an attempt to reduce the number of victims - estimates put the death toll at more than three hundred thousand - and the duration of this massacre. The Japanese government has decided that this fact should not be taught in public schools, confirming the revisionist offensive against the Nanjing Massacre. The Japanese imperial family and the emperor, Michinomiya Hirohito, benefited from this denial of the massacre and were not punished for it.¹²

Given the above, one can see the undeniable influence of revisionist movements on how some understand certain historical events. This influence becomes clearer when two

that presided over Brazil between 1964 and 1985. The historian seeks to present a picture of Brazil's political and social situation in the 1960s, a situation supported by part of the civil society (represented by entities such as CNBB, OAB, and Fiesp), leading to the seizure of power by the military. In Villa's overview, Brazil constituted itself as a politically divided country with economic problems leading to strike movements, so the threat of the military seizure of power was imminent. "Amid the climate of the coup, the democratic regime survived with difficulties, as it was attacked by both the 'coup/revolutionary' left and right", the author continues in the construction of the Brazilian historical scenario. "In this scenario, democracy would end up destroyed. Opening the door to two decades of arbitrariness and violence" (VILLA. *Ditadura à Brasileira* p. 07). These quotes highlight the revisionist attempt to reconstruct the world from a relevant angle. However, Marco Antonio Villa's writing betrays the author in his intentions. Brazil lived a dictatorship in its fashion, i.e., a non-dictatorship or a dictatorship only started after the promulgation of the AI-5 because we were in the middle of a coup climate that would lead to two decades of arbitrariness and violence? Exception regimes (dictatorial regimes) have "coup" and "violence" as constitutive elements. These elements have been present since the beginning of the coup movement, which fostered the epiphany of the exception regime on March 31, 1964, and lasted for twenty-four years.

¹² In this regard, see Ryuho Okawa's work *The Truth of Nanking and Comfort Women Issues: A Spiritual Reading into World War II* by Edgar Cayce (Spiritual Interview Series).

revisionist efforts are examined and explored in greater detail in this text. On one front there is an attempt to reconstruct history from 1933 to 1945 without the yellow stars, the ghettos, the mass transportation of human beings in degrading situations, the mass graves, gas chambers, and without the disappearance of the physical body and the memory of more than six million Jews in concentration camps, ultimately, without the holocaust; on another front, there is an attempt to reconstruct history from 1964 to 1988 without the ousting of a democratically elected president, without political persecution, censorship, exiles, the hold of the DOPS, the tortures, and without the many deaths... These two revisionist fronts empty the public sphere because collective memory has the task of constantly reviving the public sphere. It is the place where human plurality appears and manifests itself in actions and words so that the past has a proper place to be remembered and revived.

These two seemingly contradictory possibilities become a single source: factual truth, which, though constitutive of a common world, is not self-evident, since it cannot be subsumed under rational truth and is thus at risk of being altered by deliberate lies while being confirmed by plural witnesses.

In addition to stimulating the development of what Arendt calls the factual truth, talking about a fact that occurred promotes the survival of the world, as previously mentioned. In light of such a claim, it can be said that the construction of a truth of the factual type takes place on two fronts that ultimately overlap. First, facts and events must be understood as the result of people's collective actions and thus constitute the true fabric of the public domain. Second, other people confirm the factual truth because these truths result from events involving many actors and spectators. For these facts to be true, they must be corroborated by eyewitnesses, records, and documents, i.e., there is a need to make a case for them and talk about what happened. In other words, the actions of people together constitute what Arendt calls facts and events that many must speak about and bear their verifiable testimony¹³ for it to rise to the level of factual truth [12].

The limitation of factual truth that enables the revisionists' enterprise to be fruitful can be described as: Factual truth consolidates itself upon a ground of facts and events. They are more fragile and vulnerable than the axioms discovered by scientific theories because they come

¹³ According to Primo Levi: "When confronted with testimonials that constitute existing historical evidence - to be examined as to any document - that, cannot be set aside, all the problems raised by revisionist historians, all objections to the Lager [Field] lose their substance and become impossible to defend." (LEVI. *O dever da Memória*, p.10).

from the realm of human activity, that is, from an unstable and unpredictable realm. If factual truth comes from this unstable soil, a fact or event that occurred could be said to have happened with another bias or even not have happened at all. Upon this ground of instability, the revisionist stomps his feet and seeks to change the facts, in Arendt's perspective this could be termed as a deliberate attempt to lie, making the revisionist a liar "[...] he says what is not so because he wants things to be different from what they are, that is, he wants to change the world" (p. 250) [13]. A fact hardly can be restored to its true hue after it's forgotten or deliberately changed by a complete lie or falsehood. Deliberate liars are true actors, for they are intended to alter the world by turning factual truths into opinions, erasing the difference between these two phenomena of public life, although both are not self-evident" (p. 243) [13].

Factual truths are born from events that occurred in such a way that one cannot give an opinion contrary to the nature of that event. "[...] Germany's support of Hitler, or France's collapse before the German armies in 1940, or the Vatican's policy during World War II are not a matter of historical record but a matter of opinion" (p. 236)¹⁴ [13]. Thus, it is

14 We can add, as a factual truth, the involvement of Dictator Ernesto Geisel in torture practices during the years since his administration, as witnessed in the document that we transcribed in full: "FOREIGN RELATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES, 1969-1976, VOLUME E-11, PART 2, DOCUMENTS ON SOUTH AMERICA, 1973-1976

99. Memorandum From Director of Central Intelligence Colby to Secretary of State Kissinger Washington, April 11, 1974.

SUBJECT

Decision by Brazilian President Ernesto Geisel To Continue the Summary Execution of Dangerous Subversives Under Certain Conditions

1. [1 paragraph (7 lines) not declassified]

2. On 30 March 1974, Brazilian President Ernesto Geisel met with General Milton Tavares de Souza (called General Milton) and General Confucio Danton de Paula Avelino, respectively the outgoing and incoming chiefs of the Army Intelligence Center (CIE). Also present was General Joao Baptista Figueiredo, Chief of the Brazilian National Intelligence Service (SNI).

3. General Milton, who did most of the talking, outlined the work of the CIE against the internal subversive target during the administration of former President Emilio Garrastazu Médici. He emphasized that Brazil cannot ignore the subversive and terrorist threat, and he said that extra-legal methods should continue to be employed against dangerous subversives. In this regard, General Milton said that about 104 persons in this category had been summarily executed by the CIE during the past year or so. Figueiredo supported this policy and urged its continuance.

4. The President, who commented on the seriousness and potentially prejudicial aspects of this policy, said that he wanted to ponder the matter during the weekend before arriving at any decision on [Page 279]whether it should continue. On 1 April, President Geisel told General Figueiredo that the policy should continue, but that great care should be taken to make certain that only dangerous subversives were executed. The President and General Figueiredo agreed that when the CIE apprehends a person who might fall into this category, the CIE chief will consult with General Figueiredo, whose approval must be given before the person is executed. The President and General Figueiredo also agreed that the CIE is to devote almost its entire effort to internal subversion, and that the overall CIE effort is to be coordinated by General Figueiredo.

5. [1 paragraph (12½ lines) not declassified]

legitimate for a future generation who didn't eyewitness an event to have the right to write its own story and shed light on an event from its point of view. However, it is not legitimate for this same generation to modify facts according to its interests, that is, it has no "[...] right to touch the factual matter itself" (p. 239) [13,14]. In other words, each generation can interpret and give opinions about a fact, but they cannot change its nature. This property of factual truth seems to hinder revisionist pretensions, for the testimony of various people or documentary existence diminishes attempts to change the nature of things that have happened.

One can see the theoretical foundations that allow Arendt to say that the opposite of factual truth is neither error, illusion, nor opinion, but deliberate falsehood and utter lies. One can see then that the other side of the coin of factual truth is not opinion but a deliberately orchestrated lie designed to make things appear differently than they are. "Since everything that has actually happened in the realm of human affairs could just as well have been otherwise, the possibilities for lying are boundless [...]" (p. 258) [13].

Truth-tellers appear as those who engage in political affairs in the face of this pair of opposites - factual truth/deliberate lie - because they contribute to the preservation and of the world with their true testimony. In particular, to a movement of neutralizing violence, for the lie always seeks to destroy that which it purports to deny. Thus, the one who tells the truth preserves the possibility of having political thoughts. Due to its representative character - To make the point of view of those who are absent present in one's mind -, this thought is based on the formation of opinions, which are built from facts or events. From this perspective, Arendt warns us that "Facts inform opinions, and opinions, inspired by different interests and passions, can differ widely and still be legitimate as long as they respect factual truth" (p. 238) [13]. What the philosopher wishes to emphasize is that the truth which is of uttermost relevance to the field of politics is the factual truth, for it is only on the ground of facts and events that one can express one's views and opinions about

6. A copy of this memorandum is being made available to the Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs. [1½ lines not declassified] No further distribution is being made.

W.E. Colby

1. Summary: Colby reported that President Geisel planned to continue Médici's policy of using extra legal means against subversives but would limit executions to the most dangerous subversives and terrorists.

Source: Central Intelligence Agency, Office of the Director of Central Intelligence, Job 80M01048A: Subject Files, Box 1, Folder 29: B-10: Brazil. Secret; [handling restriction not declassified]. According to a stamped notation, David H. Blee signed for Colby. Drafted by Phillips, [names not declassified] on April 9. The line for the concurrence of the Deputy Director for Operations is blank" (DEPARTMENT OF STATE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA - OFFICE OF THE HISTORIAN. Available in: <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve11p2/d99?platform=hootsuite#fn:1.5.4.4.12.61.8.6>).

the world. It is the preservation of the nature of a fact or event that maintains the survival of the world, consequently, of the “raw material” that feeds the memory and the faculty of thought. If the revisionist attacks are effective, the “scissors from the palace of memory”¹⁵ will go through a process of corruption, causing men, when they activate thinking, to focus on manipulated materials [15,16],¹⁶ fostering a meaning of the world that derives from deliberately forged lies, i.e., lies about what the world is [17].¹⁷

In light of the above, one can say that memory has a fragile nature that carries the imminent risk of distortions and modifications. The progress of a liar can deliberately alter facts and events, leading to a movement of generalized forgetfulness since facts and events are the basis and support of memory.

Conclusion

As an argumentative development of what has been reflected here, it is inquired that modern societies suffer from a kind of collective amnesia, which determines not only what kind of public sphere will be erected, but what kind of “citizen” will make their epiphany in that sphere as well. In the Arendtian perspective, one of the consequences of collective amnesia is the loss of the core of communal norms in favor of purely formal norms that spring up within liberal democracies, which have the defense of the “good life” over norms that stabilizes the public space as its main motto: The arena of appearance of the plural man [18].¹⁸ From this

15 In this sense, says Augustine, who exerted so much influence on Arendtian analysis: “And I come to the fields and spacious palaces of my memory, where are the treasures of innumerable images, brought into it from things of all sorts perceived by the senses. [...] When I enter there, I require what I will to be brought forth, and something instantly comes [...] All these doth that great harbour of the memory receive in her numberless secret and inexpressible windings, to be forthcoming, and brought out at need; each entering in by his own gate, and there laid up. Nor yet do the things themselves enter in; only the images of the things perceived are there in readiness, for thought to recall” (AUGUSTINE. *The Confessions*, Book X).

16 According to Odilio Alves Aguiar: “[...] Arendt understands that the only way out for those who persist in the exercise of understanding the world, in its chaotic contingency, is to become storytellers. When thought and reality depart, according to Arendt, telling stories is the most appropriate way of referring to the reality that our abstract concepts are no longer adequate to penetrate and illuminate” (AGUIAR. p. 216, In: BIGNOTTO Newton; MORAES, Eduardo Jardim (Org.). *Hannah Arendt: Diálogos, Reflexões, Memórias*).

17 « La lien entre la pensée et la mémoire tient en ce que toute pensée consiste proprement à réfléchir-à-une-chose. Dans la mesure où la vérité est un événement, la vérité serait ainsi l’origine (et non pas la conséquence) de la pensée » (ARENDDT. *Journal de pensée*, p. 680).

18 “Historical ruptures affect not only existing traditions and social norms, but also institutions and the law. Following such caesurae, individuals can tear down the old walls of the polity (both physical and symbolic) and break the laws of their ancestors” (VEROVŠEK. *Unexpected Support for European Integration: Memory, Rupture, and Totalitarianism in Arendt’s Political Theory*, p. 403).

perspective, norms won’t play their role as stabilizers of the public space, consequently, won’t be able to guarantee that plural words and actions will emerge within the public arena and that when stored by memory, will constitute a “collective memory”. Once again, an intrinsic relationship of mutual dependence appears: It is in the public space that concerted actions emerge, which will be remembered by future generations, whom by telling the facts, will exchange experiences about what the world is, contributing to the preservation of a common space on which other consensual actions may take place, adding other “treasures” to the “palace of memory.” In this sense, the absence of memory will lead to the desertification of the public space, causing collective amnesia [19-21].

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