

THE VICTIM THAT SPEAKS IS NOT A VICTIM

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Abstract:

The article deals with how victims respond to the situation of victimization by “speaking” or the politics of articulation. It touches on the role of the social order in the creation of torture as a means to achieve control and the role of victims who inadvertently become accomplices to victimization in a system “that makes men torture and imprison innocent people.” The paper also examines the nuances of the word “speaking” and its deeper connotations in terms of resistance to an unjust order. Victims are as complex as the phenomena of victimization. Therefore an interdisciplinary perspective is essential to understand what the speaking of the victim means; that is the perspective I used to make my point about the victim who in the process of *speaking* ceases to be a victim.

Keywords: victims, speech, silence, resistance

Resumo:

Este artigo incide sobre o modo como as vítimas respondem à situação de vitimização através da «fala» ou sobre uma política de articulação. Aborda o papel da ordem social na criação da tortura como meio de alcançar o controlo e o papel das vítimas que inadvertidamente se tornam cúmplices da vitimização num sistema «que faz com que os homens torturem e prendam pessoas inocentes». O artigo examina igualmente as nuances da palavra «fala» e as suas conotações mais profundas em termos de resistência face a uma ordem injusta. As vítimas são tão complexas quanto o fenómeno de vitimização. Por esse motivo, uma perspectiva interdisciplinar é essencial para compreender o significado do acto de falar da vítima; essa é a perspectiva aqui seguida para sustentar a minha visão sobre o modo como a vítima deixa de ser vítima durante o processo de «fala».

Palavras-chave: vítimas, fala, silêncio, resistência

That victim who is able to articulate the situation of the victim has ceased to be a victim: he, or she, has become a threat. (James Baldwin, *The Devil Finds Work*)

Even now my voice is reaching millions throughout the world, millions of despairing men, women and little children, victims of a system that makes men torture and imprison innocent people.

To those who can hear me I say "Do not despair". (Charlie Chaplin, *The Great Dictator*)

I. A "threat" called the victim

The victim that speaks is a threat. The victim that does not speak is in the process of going insane. The victim that does not know she/he is a victim is half-dead and living the life of a vegetable. But, the word "victim" like "outsider" is a dubious term and hard to distinguish from another as complicated term "accomplice." Sartre says that "the moment of pleasure for the torturer is that in which the victim betrays or humiliates himself" (403). Self-betrayal defines the victim before anything else. Since betrayal as a word carries within its semantic framework a betrayal of oneself, the torturer is the tortured and the victimizer an always already victim. Fanon in the chapter "Colonial War and Mental Disorders" from *The Wretched of the Earth* discusses the case of "A European police inspector who tortured his wife and children" (267). This man was used to torturing Algerian prisoners and would not hesitate to hit his wife and "even the baby of twenty months, with unaccustomed savagery" (268). Fanon thus concludes the case:

This man knew perfectly well that his disorders were directly caused by the kind of activity that went on inside the rooms where interrogations were carried out, even though he tried to throw the responsibility totally upon "present troubles." As he could not see his way to stopping torturing people (that made nonsense to him for in that case he would have to resign) he asked me without beating about the bush to help him to go on torturing Algerian patriots without any prickings of conscience, without any behavior problems, and with complete equanimity. (268-270)

Fanon observes that there is no escaping the consequences of torture, certainly not for the torturer. The violence of a man in the outside world is bound to have repercussions on how he behaves at home with his family. A man cannot be as schizophrenic as to be violent with the rest of the world and yet be a normal family person. Violence can be addictive as a form of power and once a man is used to it he requires a regular dosage of violence to keep him functional in the same way that an alcoholic needs alcohol to feel that he could be himself outside the domain of contradictions in which he lives and acts out his personhood on a day to day basis. From an attitude, violence has a way of becoming synonymous with one's nature. The police inspector did not want to stop

torturing people. All he wanted was to behave “normally” with his family and “without any prickings of conscience.” Speaking of the “cruel bond between physical pain and interrogation,” Scarry says in “The transformation of body into voice,” “Just as interrogation, like the pain, is a way of wounding, so the pain, like the interrogation, is a vehicle of self-betrayal” (46-47). The pain is physical and psychological for the victim but for the victimizer it is more about dealing with an abstract condition called normalcy. The latter has to bind those threads that give one’s personhood a sense of wholeness; in the absence of the wholeness a man shows all the signs of confused reactions to the slightest provocation. The inspector in Fanon’s case was worried about “behavior problems” that he could not deal with which were in fact symptoms of a deeper malaise rooted in his personhood derived from a colonial racist framework.

More importantly the question that needs to be asked is what happens to the mind of a victim when the “pain” turns her/him into a “vehicle of self-betrayal.” At what point does the victim become an accomplice and at what point does the accomplice decide to *speak* and stop being a victim – *that is the question!* Is it nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of humiliation and despair or take arms against self-deception and naivety and by opposing end them? Or something better – to die or sleep and forget that the whole thing happened! The role of memory in victimization especially for the victim can hardly be minimized. The thought of having gone through avoidable pain where one had the choice to say ‘no’ is what makes being victimized a difficult thing to accept. Scarry mentions that, “For what the process of torture does is to split the human being into two... The goal of the torturer is to make the one, the body, emphatically and crushingly *present* by destroying it, and to make the other, the voice, *absent* by destroying it” (48-49).

The destruction of the body and the voice that argues for the integrity of the body must be understood in the larger context of torture in relation to entities such as the state. Violence has a strangely impersonal quality to it; the capacity for violence automatically dies where there is no soil to nurture it on a daily basis. Theories of men being innately violent are thus innately flawed because they do not contextualize individual behavior. The torturer experiences the splitness of his own body before he *splits* the body of the victim. He cannot be *himself*, as in a self that reflects and feels the body of another person as if it were her own. In the absence of an instinctive empathy a distance is created between one’s body and the ability to perceive oneself as a body. Through this splitness the victimizer achieves the status of a victim and psychologically becomes what he is physically not. In an almost haunting manner, the victim in oneself is one’s always already other. “Here’s the smell of the blood still” (Act V Scene I) says Lady Macbeth in her madness that Shakespeare movingly shows as the plight of the victimizer. Such an impersonality that torture demands but whose consequences can only be personal, as in the case of the police inspector that Fanon talks about, is embodied in the functioning of the state. As Lazreg argues,

The Algerian case reveals that the democratic state is in constant danger of allowing its predemocratic core to emerge and engage in violations of laws guaranteeing civil liberties, the sanctity of the person, and due process. It also reveals the fragility of the democratic state when it operates as a colonial institution and finds itself defending the privileges of colonists over and against the rights of its native citizens qua subjects. (253)

At one level it is too simple to view the “victim” as a facet of the victimizer. At another level, it is necessary to note that impersonal and larger forces or contexts are play-grounds where individual and personal feelings act out an internalized social logic of how we treat people at the receiving end of power. It is at those points that it becomes difficult to draw the line between victims and victimizers. Feelings of resentment towards oneself and others – who, we falsely assume, have escaped what we’ve been through – are natural to one’s situation. Bitterness needs an ally for it to thrive or it kills the embittered like a parasite feeding on the body and mind that produced it. Sometimes it needs another being to play the role of a victim – a role that it is tired of performing. For a change it wants to be a victimizer to experience something different. History offers instances where victims have had no problems turning into victimizers. In the article “From victims to victimizers: on the “mass psychology” of Israel” the sociologist Lauren Langman notes:

Fear and insecurity is constantly reinforced by the all pervasive domination of the Shoah (holocaust) in everyday life-especially by elites who use the Shoah and “never again” as rallying calls for their every political initiative. The result of this fear, located within a hegemonic ideological matrix shaded by the Holocaust, has shaped the “mass psychology” of Israel. (6)

The accomplice that used speech to free herself/himself has no qualms in suppressing the possibilities of speech in a victim. Having been a victim once, you are aware of the nuances of speaking and therefore the suppression is much more subtle and effective. In the case of the state of Israel every possible attempt was used to make historic victimization of Jews in Western Civilization the basis for an aggressive, victimizing attitude towards Palestinians. Langman posits that the need to victimize comes from a feeling of insecurity reinforced through ideology. He extends the argument to show the American over-reaction in the case of the 9/11 attack, a reaction at once irrational and thus one that is ready to accept the blatant lies of the government and the corporate media.

For example, shortly after 9/11, most American feared another terrorist attack, and in turn, they rallied around W and tolerated little dissent from the “received wisdom”- especially when the wisdom they received told them that Saddam Hussein was behind 9/11, he had WMDs and was about to use them against the US. (5)

However one may explain the vicious cycle of victims turning victimizers using historical instances, this could never be an excuse for victimizing in the first place and at all times the point of view of the victim needs to be given due consideration. Such a point of view makes sense when we begin to look at the contexts of repression. To prevent speech is another way of taking away the personhood of the person. But, speech has a way of coming out into the open; the speaking victim drops every other mask to come out with the face of utter emptiness, the vacuum, the blank, the cipher that will drain the energy and passion of the victimizer, bring the latter out of his/her nostalgia for a time when things were simpler and meaningful, force him/her to become more vicious than he/she could dream of being, and make him/her confront the same pointlessness that is the essence of being a victim.

The point in the victim knowing that she/he is a victim is that she/he breaks a man-made limit. Speaking of “The Price of Dignity” with reference to the Palestinians who are imprisoned and tortured, Kim Bullimore observes that

While the Israeli state and its military machine may break the bones and tear the flesh of its captives, it will fail to break their resistance because these young boys, men and women understand the struggle in which they are engaged is not just a struggle for a homeland, but a struggle for human dignity, equality and freedom. And no man or woman or child, no matter how hard pressed by their oppressor, will ever give up the struggle for such basic and inalienable human rights. (Bullimore)

The struggle for “human dignity, equality and freedom” is an existential need and Faulkner in his Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech says that “man” is immortal not just because he will “endure” but more because “when the last dingdong of doom has clanged and faded from the last worthless rock hanging tideless in the last red and dying evening, that even then there will still be one more sound: that of his puny inexhaustible voice, still talking.” The “puny inexhaustible voice” that will “talk” to the very end is owing to the fact that it will never “give up the struggle for such basic and inalienable human rights.” Short of remaining silent except as a strategy to fight, the victim will think of every possible means to preserve her humanity.

The victim that knows how to swear and curse is not a victim. “Cursed be I that did so!” says Caliban for having shown Prospero “all the qualities o’ the isle, / The fresh springs, brine-pits, barren place and fertile” in exchange for “Water with berries in’t, and teach me how / To name the bigger light, and how the less, / That burn by day and night: and then I loved thee” (Act I Scene 2). Caliban is no fool and yet all he can do is curse himself for having given away the island in exchange for “how to name.” The language of the victimizer has given Caliban nothing more than the power to curse and swear. Caliban’s consciousness of his state of being a victim is itself a moment of liberation. It

is a prelude both to resistance and transformation of one's condition. Frederick Douglass in *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave* eloquently speaks of the suffering that knowledge brought him; once he could "read" he more and more felt the pain of slavery imposed on him depriving him of his humanity. Says Douglass with an almost feverish intensity:

I would at times feel that learning to read had been a curse rather than a blessing. It had given me a view of my wretched condition, without the remedy. It opened my eyes to the horrible pit, but to no ladder upon which to get out. In moments of agony, I envied my fellow-slaves for their stupidity. I have often wished myself a beast. I preferred the condition of the meanest reptile to my own. Any thing, no matter what, to get rid of thinking! It was this everlasting thinking of my condition that tormented me. (54)

Yet it is the anger and the pain of being enslaved that made it possible for Frederick Douglass to resist an inhuman condition called slavery. The victim that dies dreaming of freedom is not a victim. To keep the idea of freedom alive – that's the historic destiny of the oppressed individual and groups. The most dangerous of all victims is the one that is silent. You cannot be silent for the sake of silence. You can be silent because you're overwhelmed by the situation. If it's joy it's joy, if pain it's the pain, if anger – an anger that is unbearable to the extent that it has an eerie silence to it! The silence that comes from anger is the most profound of all silences. No one knows the eyes of a victim like the victim herself/himself. The drama of the eyes – the victim has perfected the look through sleepless nights and dark days. It's the drama of changing facial lines that we see among the blind; the strange movement of lips and the attempt to listen with the eyes that we see among the deaf and the dumb. The victim exists in a vacuum outside her/his conscious life responding in a Pavlovian manner to an unconscious force generating feelings and thoughts that might come as surprise to the victim herself/himself. What we *know* of the victim as a contribution to "knowledge" outside the framework of power relations can only be a superficial one.

Remember the stunning scene at the end of Orwell's *1984*: "He gazed up at the enormous face. Forty years it had taken him to learn what kind of smile was hidden beneath the dark moustache. O cruel, needless misunderstanding! O stubborn, self-willed exile from the loving breast! Two gin-scented tears trickled down the sides of his nose. But it was all right, everything was all right, the struggle was finished. He had won the victory over himself. He loved Big Brother." Orwell's insight that human will can be broken down under torture is a real one for the majority of humanity. The fear of hurt and humiliation works as significantly as ideology in perpetrating violence of the worst kind. The Human Rights Watch *World Report 2011* records how "threats" could be sufficient to break the will of common people who would rather stay away from violence than openly confront it.

Threats alone can be very effective in shutting down schools in environments where violence is widespread and perpetrators go unpunished. A teacher in rural Laghman province, Afghanistan, told Human Rights Watch that a third of her students dropped out after a so-called “night letter” was left at the mosque, which stated: “We warn you to stop sending your girls to these classes or you cannot imagine the consequences. Your classes will be blown up by a bomb, or if any of your daughters is raped or kidnapped, you cannot complain later on.” (40)

The human cunning for survival as resistance is not to be dismissed though. A person will wear a million masks before he or she knows for a fact that power is in their hands which is why betrayals often come as terrible surprise. The betrayer knows what he or she/he is getting at. She/he has planned those countless moves before the coup de grace. How do we know for a fact that Mr. Smith has not planned those tears and that “victory over himself” in the dark recesses of the unconscious! The tragedy of power in its “naked” forms is that it succumbs to its own illusions, the reason being that it does not achieve its target of acquiring the genuine consent of its victims. Bertrand Russell says “Power is naked when its subjects respect it solely because it is power, and not for any other reason” (75). Having lost the ability to exist except in a state of nakedness, such a power is bound to diminish sooner rather than later. In his pamphlet “The meaning of Birmingham” the civil rights activist Bayard Rustin warns: “The Negro masses are no longer prepared to wait for anybody; not for elections, not to count votes, not to wait on the Kennedys or for legislation, nor, in fact, for Negro leaders themselves. They are going to move. Nothing can stop them from moving. And if that Negro leadership does not move rapidly enough and effectively enough they will take it into their own hands and move anyhow” (111). Where the resistance has determined to “move” no matter what, power cannot thrive in such an atmosphere. Therefore, the logic of inevitable failure is built into the exercise of power. When Macbeth says “There’s nothing serious in mortality: / All is but toys” (Act II Scene III), it is but an honest recognition of the limitations of power. The tragedy of power is finally that of the “poor player / That struts and frets his hour upon the stage / And then is heard no more” (Act V Scene V).

II. Speech and its Discontents

James Scott in *Weapons of the Weak* speaks of a different type of a “victim” – the victim who knows how to fight back; the victim that’ll use every means at her/his disposal to fight the world that has unfairly pushed her/him into a situation of subservience; in this case it’s the “peasant.” The changes in technology are a blessing to the new order; but the older values suit the interests of the poor peasant for no other reason except that he or she has more to gain from those values in an unequal system. The landless peasant has to

negotiate in a nuanced language with the new order using the older values as a base. In the chapter “History according to winners and losers” Scott makes the following observation:

If it is true that events are not self-explanatory, that they do not speak for themselves, it is also, alas, true that *human subjects do not entirely speak for themselves*. If they did, it would suffice merely to turn on the tape recorder and offer a complete transcript to the reader. This social-scientist-as-recorder technique has been tried with illuminating results, most notably by what might be called the “Oscar Lewis school of anthropology.” Even Oscar Lewis, however, has found it necessary to arrange and edit the transcript and to add a preface or postscript. The necessity arises, I believe, for at least three reasons. First, *the human subjects themselves often speak with a kind of linguistic shorthand with similes and metaphors that they have no need to clarify to their neighbors but that would, without explanation, mystify an outsider*. (138-139) [my italics]

Scott’s central point that “human subjects do not entirely speak for themselves” is paradoxically true because so much of what is said is by way of implication rather than adding words to words and more words. One can only speak *partially* of oneself. In any dialogue including the Socratic with a tendency to lead to a conclusion at once unexpected and as logically determined as a Sherlock Holmes mystery, it is the context that shapes the meanings of words. Contexts, by default, have a tendency to be interpretations. That’s how for instance the word “sceptre” is used twice by Portia to defend the cause of a man’s life in Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice*. It does not make an appeal to the law and justice; it makes an appeal to the vulnerabilities of human condition greater than the law and outside the scope of a demand for justice. Portia appeals to the “quality of mercy” which is “the throned monarch better than his crown.” What Portia does is to place the question of power in an existential humanist context. Do we understand power as a way to inspire “dread and fear” or as a way to break barriers imposed upon us by social and economic conditions? The politics of mercy is about creating bonds of friendship where there are none. Thus Portia says of the true monarch:

His sceptre shows the force of temporal power,
The attribute to awe and majesty,
Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings;
But mercy is above this sceptred sway;
It is enthroned in the hearts of kings,
It is an attribute to God himself;
And earthly power doth then show likest God’s
When mercy seasons justice. (Act IV Scene I)

The scepter is a symbol of power “Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings” but there is a creative misreading that could turn the dread and fear into its opposite. A power that comes from authority could only be “temporal” connected to earth and time. Real power like real strength is the ability to show mercy because the claims to justice are not infinite. By attributing infinity to the quality of mercy, Portia expands the scope of the symbol beyond what is normally implied taking the sceptre from “temporal power” to the eternal, from the hand that holds the sceptre straight to the heart – the seat of compassion and from devastating anger to boundless forgiveness. Further, the metaphor marches outside the domain of the human into the discourse of the divine becoming an “attribute to God himself.”

Like the peasant of Sedaka in Scott’s book, Portia uses an older value to defend a man’s life in a system and against a law that is new. Nothing serves the context more than a subtle use of the metaphor to include meanings hitherto concealed. Thus Portia continues to make her appeal to the humanity of the affronted party in the spirit of English Humanism:

Therefore, Jew,
Though justice be thy plea, consider this,
That, in the course of justice, none of us
Should see salvation: we do pray for mercy;
And that same prayer doth teach us all to render
The deeds of mercy. I have spoke thus much
To mitigate the justice of thy plea;
Which if thou follow, this strict court of Venice
Must needs give sentence ‘gainst the merchant there. (Act IV Scene I)

The same sceptre is the source of the power to sentence a person to death and a power to show mercy. In the latter kind of power the sceptre is symbolic of something greater than “earthly power.” The textuality of Portia’s argument is constituted through a clever understanding of “differences” that Derrida speaks of in the essay “Plato’s Pharmacy.” The word *pharmakon* is both remedy and poison – the cure is in the illness, the silence in the sound, the metaphor is a prisoner of the literal and what is considered as absence is a hallmark of presence.

When a word inscribes itself as the citation of another sense of the same word, when the textual center-stage of the word *pharmakon*, even while it means *remedy* cites, re-cites, and makes legible that which *in the same word* signifies, in another spot and on a different level of the stage, *poison* (for example, since that it not the only other thing *pharmakon* means), the choice of only one of these renditions by the translator has as its first effect the neutralization of the citational play, of the “anagram,” and, in the end, quite simply of the very tex-

tuality of the translated text...Textuality being constituted by differences and by differences from differences, it is by nature absolutely heterogeneous and is constantly composing with the forces that tend to annihilate it. (98)

The permutations and combinations of meanings are rooted in the context. The user of language plays on latent possibilities. Therefore, my expression of myself as a *self* can only be a partial one. The “linguistic shorthand” of the human subject is how language functions in day to day life. The nature of speech is that we suggest more than what we say. The victim turns the suggestion into a language in itself and makes the shorthand into an art form and a way of life. That’s how the poor in Sedaka have manufactured their “weapons” despite being “weak.” The discontents of speech are at the level of suggestion where meanings are relative and in a fluid state but that is where the victim can blow the trumpet signifying a victory of sorts.

III. The “pitiful wail” that cut through us

Hecuba, why the shrill cries you cry?
Where will your outburst take us? Even from
Inside the tent I heard you keening.
Your pitiful wail sent fear cutting through us,
Right through the hearts of Trojan women
Mourning indoors their day of bondage.
(Euripides, *Trojan Women*)

“Your pitiful wail sent fear cutting through us” says the half-chorus to Hecuba. There’s something in a victim’s cry that is both scary and dangerous and one that incites fear as Euripides rightly understands. If the cry of the victim is a protest for visibility, what is the point of such visibility where “bondage” seems inevitable! What is it that victims of torture and humiliation communicate to their oppressors? The memory of a cry that cuts through us is the most terrible of all memories. The death-like scream of Pyle in Kubrick’s *Full-Metal Jacket* (1987) when he’s pinned down with a blanket and beaten on his belly with bars of soap by the members of the platoon! Pyle had to be taught a lesson for hiding a jelly doughnut in his foot locker. The drill instructor punishes the entire platoon and that night even Pyle’s friend Joker joins the others in teaching Pyle a lesson that not only breaks him down but turns him both suicidal and homicidal. To the end of the movie the sniper who turns out to be a young Vietnamese girl is seriously wounded and in her death-like pain that comes out in her voice begs to be shot dead. The questions we ask about victims of torture are also questions we ask about the torturer and about torture too. Is there an ‘x’ element in human nature that comes out in the form of torture?

Elsass points out that torture comes from the society we live in and therefore has little to do with human nature.

Torture is among the most gruesome of human manifestations, particularly because it does not have its origin in animals, primitive man, or pre-culture. On the contrary, it is planned, and it stems from social order. It is a display of force, the aim of which is to break an individual's judgment. As a consequence, it breaks down parts of the victim's personality. The greatest challenge to the torture survivor is therefore to remain a human being under these inhumane conditions. (1)

An understanding of torture offers an insight into the social order in which we live. The society that produces a torturer or the means of torture ought to share the guilt as a whole. A social order where people do not resist what their governments do to others is the most dangerous kind of a social order. Indoctrinated to the point where a craving for amusement becomes the only reality an individual exists for, such a society is willing to tolerate anything that does not come in the way of its amusement. Darren Aronofsky's *Requiem for a Dream* (2000) deals with the addiction to illusions and the need to be forever on a holiday along with its devastating consequences. As Elsass notes:

Torture gives an insight into some terrifying contradictions. For instance, torturers are not particularly perverse or sadistic: they are often "normal" people. Their crime is a consequence of a social order that often has mutual popular support. The victims themselves are dehumanized by the crime, inform against their friends and families, and admit to crimes they may never have committed. All these contradictions are so difficult to sustain that they cause the worst repressions of all—silence and indifference. (1)

When victims "cry," it is because they protest against the "silence and indifference" of the majority in any social order. That is the meaning of the "pitiful wail" of Hecuba. This does not reduce the victim to a creature of innocence that "wails" for lack of anything else to do. Speaking of the Jews who were victims under the Nazis, Erica Bouris makes the point that "Holocaust theology emphasizes Jewish innocence and purity" (59). Such innocence imposed from above is problematic because it stereotypes the victim and reduces her/him to a state of passivity. This kind of a reductionism does not speak of those who survived the holocaust or bravely resisted it to the point of dying. Bouris adds:

Holocaust theology takes this identity further; however, it is not merely a self-image, but it places this identity at the forefront of Jewish and Israeli politics. In other words, for Holocaust theologians, narrating the Holocaust became one and the same with crafting the Jewish identity. (59)

The Jews are neither more nor less innocent than the others which include the Nazis as well and the same goes for “Jewish and Israeli politics.” These claims of innocence are usually racist assumptions meant to disguise oppression of another kind. The criminal colonization of Palestinian Territories and victimizing of Palestinians who resist the occupation is evidence of neither “innocence” nor “vulnerability” on the part of the occupiers. The issue here is one of whether there ever was a “simple” victim in history. Being “simple” is something we do not expect either from victims or victimizers. We’ve to keenly observe and study the social order that creates the categories of victim and victimizer. Thus Bouris comes up with the term “complex political victim.” According to her, “The complex political victim can be understood as a victim who knowingly and purposefully supports certain discourses that contribute to the space of her political victimization” (84).

The role of the victim in the victimization process must be put in perspective. The victim accepts the unjust system as natural before she indeed becomes a victim. The mere tendency not to speak out against wrongs that happen to others makes one responsible for the making of an unjust social order. The “complex political victim” might be a supporter of nationalism as an identity “that she values” without cognizing that the other face of nationalism could be fascism. In some sense as citizens of a particular state, we’re all “complex political victims” in the making by virtue of the fact that we take for granted a system based on inequality without raising a voice against it. A social order that permits torture, humiliation and the politics of murder, while going on with its daily life, is one that has sown the seeds of its own eventual destruction. The failure to “speak” is a moral one as much as it is a political one.

IV. Speak - it is our only hope!

At the end of the movie *The Great Dictator* the renegade Nazi officer Commander Shultz is escaping with the Hitler-look-alike Jewish barber; at the point that the barber is mistaken for Hitler and asked to speak, Shultz pleads with the barber: “Speak – it is our only hope!” In the speech we see that Chaplin the historic person and Chaplin the performer are almost indistinguishable. The anti-Nazi propaganda is obvious and the rhetoric does not mince words in those it identifies as enemies of human brotherhood. “Dictators free themselves but they enslave the people” says the barber. The enslavement of another person as a necessary price for one’s freedom is what makes victimization a discourse of power. If it is necessary to examine the social order in order to understand the relationship between victimization and power, at the risk of falling into metaphysics, it is equally essential to look at a theory of “human nature” to realize why such power will never go unchallenged.

Towards the end of the movie *Rome, Open City*, the drunken Nazi tells his fellow-officer: "Twenty-five years ago, I led firing squads in France. I was a young officer then, and I thought like you, that we belonged to a superior race, but the French preferred us to execute them than tell us anything. We'll never understand that people want to live in freedom." Tortured and finally killed, the protagonist of the movie refuses to confess finally disproving the theory of the Nazi officer that the blood of a German is superior to that of an Italian. "I've nabbed a man who has to talk before morning. And an Italian priest who claims he won't talk because he'll pray for him...If he keeps quiet, it would mean an Italian is equal to a German, and there's no difference between the blood of an inferior and a superior race. Men are divided in this way." This is not to romanticize the victim as a person with an unbreakable will. On the contrary, Orwell is more than right. Torture, the weapon of the strong, almost unfailingly succeeds in breaking individual will. History does not offer too many examples of people who could be "normal" following the experience of torture. The cruelty of memory is at its worst in the case of a person who has been through a process of dehumanization. Their world-view alters and they're in no mood to be reconciled to the present.

Yet, every situation where a person is left with no alternative but to fight back is also a situation where a person *does* in fact fight back. The victim who resists does not usually fit our image of a victim. Darius Rejali makes the observation that "pain may in fact reinforce one's sense of self during torture" (442). This is why it is hard to torture "hard-core revolutionaries" whose mental preparation to endure pain is sometimes greater than the torturer's ability to inflict the pain. Rejali notes that "colonial torturers held that an Algerian peasant would be unmoved by tortures that would shatter Europeans, and this was why more painful torture was required" (449). The will to assert one's selfhood in the face of humiliation and pain is after all *human nature*. The will to resist at the expense of the breaking body can be as transcending in its determination as the will to power. Says Gandhi in the movie version: "They may torture my body, break my bones, even kill me. Then they will have my dead body, not my obedience." Rejali's point below substantiates what Gandhi says about willing to be tortured and killed rather than submit to power.

...pain is not *sufficient* to destroy a prisoner's sense of reality. Several studies of torture victims have made this point. For example, in his study of Irish republican prisoners, Allen Feldman shows how Irish republican prisoners harness the pain of torture to transform themselves. The Irish paramilitary prisoner exploited interrogation violence to achieve "self-detachment of his body," grounded himself more firmly in his cause, and moved "from being the object of violence to the subject position of the codifying agent," thereby "emptying it [state violence] of its ideological content."...Lastly, some victims describe how brutal torture induced in them intense spiritual and mystical states that helped them resist their tormentors. (442)

Following the death of his friend and mentor Karl Marx, Engels in a letter writes movingly and with admiration of his revolutionary friend who would have preferred to die than to be humiliated by a cruel system – especially a system that he fought and “so often annihilated in the prime of his strength.”

Medical skill might have been able to assure him a few more years of vegetative existence, the life of a helpless being, dying -- to the triumph of the doctors' art -- not suddenly, but inch by inch. But our Marx would never have borne that. To live, with all the unfinished works before him, tantalized by the desire to complete them and unable to do so, would have been a thousand times more bitter than the gentle death that overtook him. (Engels)

That Marx was a proud man who through his work could impose his indomitable will on generations of revolutionaries is one thing; that he died proud as ever preserving his dignity as a man and a great revolutionary is another thing.

In the entire argument I've used speech in a specific sense to mean the assertion of one's will in the face of inhuman circumstances more often than not man-made rather than “natural.” The rejection of one's body is the basis of victimization. You cannot be a victim unless you are taught to hate your body. Scarry notes: “It is only the prisoner's steadily shrinking ground that wins for the torturer his swelling sense of territory” (36). In any other case you may be physically made to suffer but you haven't given your “obedience.” The moment of psychological submission to the idea of being a victim is what makes the victim a reality. Western feminism's fundamental premise that women in patriarchal societies are indoctrinated into looking down upon their own bodies is an insight that is true of other oppressed groups as well. Adrienne Rich thus dedicates her book *Of Woman Born* to her grandmothers Mary Gravely and Hattie Rice “whose lives I begin to imagine and to the activists working to free women's bodies from archaic and unnecessary bonds” (“Dedication Page”). The freedom of a woman is a freedom of her body and likewise the alienation that women experience in patriarchal societies is to be distanced from their bodies. A woman's life gets reduced to “waiting” which is another word for a dreadful kind of passivity without a creative side to it.

When I return to the body of the young woman of twenty-six, pregnant for the first time, who fled from the physical knowledge of her pregnancy and at the same time from her intellect and vocation, I realize that I was effectively alienated from my real body and my real spirit by the institution – not the fact – of motherhood... Women have always been seen as waiting: waiting to be asked, waiting for our menses, in fear lest they do or do not come, waiting for men to come home from wars, or from work, waiting for children to grow up, or for the birth of a new child, or for menopause. (Rich 39)

The speech I talk about is an articulation of the body as the body fighting for freedom from “archaic and unnecessary bonds.” Scarry points out that, “As torture consists of acts that magnify the way in which pain destroys a person’s world, self, and voice, so these other acts that restore the voice become not only a denunciation of the pain but almost a diminution of the pain, a partial reversal of the process of torture itself” (50). There is no other body but my own and this is the body through which ‘I’ as the subject invent the world in the process of becoming a self. The idealization of the body that we see in popular Hollywood movies is in fact a dehumanization of the body because it does not have a self of its own. A real body is connected to itself as body through a life that can imagine both that of others as well as its own. It speaks – the *ideal* body – but it does so in the language of the victimizer. It does not speak the language of the victim. The victim that speaks of the situation of the body as *body* outside the world of ideals is not a victim. He or she is a threat to a crumbling system built on false aesthetics and equally false values.

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