

Between Violence and Its Representation: Ethics, Archival Research, and the Politics of Knowledge Production in the Telling of Torture Stories

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Abstract

This paper explores the ethics of archival research by reflecting on the challenges of doing research with highly descriptive and gruesome archived testimonies of torture. This reflection leads me to unpack the character of archives and research as power/knowledge devices that at their very core imply violence: a violence of representation enacted in the representation of violence. I propose that the inseparable representation-violence relationship requires that we situate ourselves in the narrow, hazardous, and ever-shifting space between violence and its representation in order to turn representation into a performative, discursive, and self-constituting ethics in which we can engage in political and strategic practices of representation.

Keywords: archives, archival research, ethics, representational violence, Foucault

It is by the use of signs that we conjure up the violence after the fact. For the survivors of bloodletting, words can evoke the memories, almost like echoes, reverberating still in the tremble of the flesh. For others who are not the victim, language can call images of blood to the mind. Whether by analog memory or metaphor image, the linguistic act and event brings red to the fore.

(Arteaga, 2003, p. vii)

Certain things are not good to read or to write.

(Coetzee, 2004, p. 173)

In a scene from the movie *Star Wars, Episode II, Attack of the Clones*, the Jedi Master Obi-Wan Kenobi visits the archives searching for a planetary system that does not appear in the charts.¹ He enlists the help of archivist Madame Jocasta Nu who, upon searching the records, concludes that the planetary system does not exist. When Obi-Wan states that “perhaps the archives are incomplete,” the archivist responds: “One thing you may be absolutely sure of: if an item does not appear in our records, it does not exist!” (Lucas, 2002). While admittedly science fiction, this scene provides a glimpse into the kind of power archives wield and their ontological effect as sites where not only events, experiences, and histories get recorded, but also

¹ This example is also cited in Burton (2005) and Ketelaar (2002).

where their very existence is negotiated. Yet, we rarely stop to consider ethics in relations to archival research. What are the ethics, for example, of working with archival records that are produced through processes of inclusion and exclusion that determine what life gets recognition and is, thus, rendered socially relevant, and what life does not? More specifically, what are the ethics of working with archives that contain, at times, quite descriptive records of violence? What kind of ethical negotiations are possible and necessary when researchers encounter archived stories of any kind and decide what, how, why, and under what conditions to reproduce or retell those stories in research reports?

This preoccupation with ethics in archival research emerges from my own experience working with archival records that contain quite explicit and gruesome testimonies of torture. My doctoral research on how these stories appear in the archives and how they are used to mediate nation-building projects was prompted by my political need to call attention, not just to the violence the stories attest to, but also to the violence implicit in archiving practices. Such practices involved processes of containment, registration, inscription, and representation that mediated the recognition of the stories and their coming into being as “true” accounts of violence. Yet, my own work with the archives required that I performed other operations of inclusion and exclusion that, themselves, imply violence. I enacted this violence in practices of “containment and ordering,” in “the labeling of representation” (Grosz, 2003, p. 137), and in moments in which, for example, I made decisions about: how to code archived stories and transform them into data; how to (de)(re)contextualize the records and use them to frame and/or substantiate arguments; which stories to quote or cross-reference (the more or less graphic, violent, dehumanizing, uplifting, etc.); and which records to write and which to leave out of writing. These practices and decisions constitute the “less obvious, and rarely called by this name” forms of violence that are at the core of any research. They are part of the “the domain of knowledge, reflection, thinking, and writing” (p. 134) and of the violence—the “cutting”—that discourse does to things and which Foucault associates with knowledge production and with the constitution of the knowing subject (Foucault, 1981).

In this paper, I undertake an ethical reflection that is situated at the moment we encounter archived stories and make decisions about what to do and how to represent them. This paper makes three main arguments. The first is that an ethical reflection of what we do with archived human stories requires that we unpack the violence that is at the very core of practices of representation, practices that constitute both archives and research. The second is that any discussion of ethics in archival research requires that we render thinkable and problematic the brief moment and narrow space between the encounter with archived stories and decisions about what to do with them, the moment or space between violence and its representation in which we negotiate between the need to account for violence and the violence implicit in processes of accounting. In these moments and spaces we find that deontological conceptions of ethics as codes and rules of conduct fail us, and that post-deontological conceptions—based on the idea that ethics happens in the embodied encounter with the face of the Other—are also by themselves insufficient

(see, for example, Cummings, 2000). We also confront what Mignolo (2009) called the “formal apparatus of enunciation”—the linguistic, institutional, and geopolitical practices—that makes possible the production of knowledge and that determines not only what archives contain and accomplish, but also what is possible for researchers to say, and what can be heard, about violence and representation.

The third and final argument is that in the narrow space between violence and representation, we can formulate a conception of ethics as performative. That is, ethics in a Foucauldian sense understood as an uncertain and never completed “‘self-forming activity,’ a concrete and active process of becoming, a technology, and an aesthetics of self.” This ethics inevitably binds us to the archived stories, to the bodies that the stories represent, to the violence of representation, and to the politics of knowledge production informing and shaping research (Foucault, 1994a, p. 265, cited in Macías, 2012, p. 6). By understanding ethics in this way, we come to see that between violence and its representation, there is an uncertain and unsettled space, a space that resembles quicksand. In this quicksand, research with archived stories is a precarious agentic action, an action in which doing and being—reading or writing the stories and becoming a subject—are inseparable and always situated in social power relations. My concern with the ethics of archival research, then, is not meant to be a search for better or less violent ways to represent violence. Neither is my goal to argue that institutional ethics review protocols should pay more attention to archival research. Rather, my concern is with the very issue of representation as a (self)(other)-constituting ethics that is never free from violence or from the geopolitical and institutional practices that regulate research and researchers. A conception of ethics as performative allows us, as Mignolo (2009, p. 160) suggested, to render questionable long-held beliefs in the “transparent” and “desincorporated” character of archives as institutions for the containment of history, research practices as tools for the production of knowledge, and researchers as un-implicated knowers.

To be clear, this paper is not about torture, torture stories, or their individual and/or social effects. Neither is this paper intended to recount torture narratives, or to deny the importance of survivor testimonies for social justice work in global and transnational sites.² In fact, I caution the reader against the temptation to immediately and unproblematically insert real or imaginary torture stories into the reading of this paper. Such insertion would defeat the purpose of this paper by skirting over the relationship between violence and its representation that is so central to the ethical reflection I propose.

The remainder of this paper is divided into four sections. In the first, I situate my preoccupation with ethics in archival research in my own work in order to more

² A wealth of multidisciplinary scholarly work attends to experiences and effects of torture, including critical literature on the function of torture as a tool of power. For recent research on the impact of torture on survivors in a global context, see, for example, Hárđi and Kroó (2015) and Thapa, Van Ommeren, Sharma, de Jong, and Hauff (2014); and for specific work on torture in Chile, see Corral (2011). For research on the experiences of torture survivors see, for example, Stirr (2014). And, for an example of critical work on the function of torture as a tool of power, see Razack (2009).

clearly delineate the narrow space between violence and its representation, and between archived stories and their recounting in research. The second discusses archives as politically and historically relevant social devices implicated in the constitution of knowledge and history, and in representation as violence. This section also includes a short discussion of the issue of representation in relation to testimonies. In the third section, I focus on research as a power/knowledge device that, at its very core, contains violence, and I emphasize the performative and political character of research and writing. In the fourth section, I come back to the question of ethics and use the relationship between violence and representation to argue for a conception of ethics as a technology of self and of knowledge production, and as a constantly shifting, unsettled, and uncertain endeavour, an endeavour that is always aware both of the impossibility of producing knowledge without violence and of the political need for knowledge.

Setting the Stage: The Question of Ethics

My doctoral research was centered on the question of how the post-authoritarian Chilean nation accounts for the authoritarian regime's systematic practice of human rights violations, among which torture is one example.³ The research unpacked the power/knowledge regimes at work in state-organized strategies to account and produce national truth about torture, and their reliance on testimonies of survivors. The research revealed that through the accounting of torture, the nation sustained neoliberal nation-building projects and subject-making practices (Macías, 2014). My research data consisted, among other sources, of official documents, records of parliamentary debates, media reports, and the report and records of the Commission on Political Imprisonment and Torture (Torture Commission) instituted by the Chilean government. I did not collect torture testimonies, nor did I interview survivors about their experiences with torture. However, the data presented me with countless stories of violence collected, organized, contained, and recounted in the records. These stories were difficult to work with, not only because they contained horrendous descriptions of imprisonment, torture, rape, hunger, homelessness, etc., but also because the archiving tools, such as statistics, deployed by the state to collect, organize, and archive these stories resulted in the subjugation of stories of violence and their submission to hegemonic nation- and subject-making projects (Macías, 2013). Furthermore, the archives also captured the use and reuse of these stories in ways that reflected not only their instrumentality for the building the post-authoritarian Chilean nation, but also the multilayer and performative character of archival documentation (Caswell, 2014).

The archives constituted a mediating device between the people whose stories they contained and me; the stories had already been captured in the archives and produced by the discursive and material practices that make up the work of archiving (see, for example, Brothman, 2002; Frohman, 2008; Hardiman, 2009). In many

³ The Chilean authoritarian regimes ruled the country between 1973 and 1990.

cases, testimonies could not even be traced back to an actual survivor; they were either presented anonymously or fused together into a generalized and un-individualized torture narrative. In other cases, testimonies had been fragmented, broken up, decontextualized, and re-contextualized to fit within dominant and normative national narratives or human rights discourses. I could not assume, as a result, that my encounter with the testimonies was unmediated or similar to an encounter with the face or bodies of victims or survivors. Neither could I assume that these mediating roles and representational practices caused the torture stories to be less true, less embodied, or less authentic. Rather, the archives posed ethical questions that I could not easily answer through available conceptions of ethics. For instance, what kind of ethical response is possible in view of the lack of control I had in how archival material and records were collected and made available? Should I avoid including archived torture stories in my own research writing? If not, under what conditions and for what purpose should the stories be recounted? Does it matter that my inclusion of torture stories in my research is done for the purpose of uncovering the epistemological violence inflicted for the purpose of nation building? Finally, what are the ethical implications of writing about archived torture stories from Chile within the racial and geopolitical conditions that determined how my research would be situated and read in the North?

These ethical questions materialized for me most specifically in the process of writing and publishing the results of my research. My argument that stories of violence mediate nation- and subject-making required that I use some of those stories in my own writing, making me complicit in their representation, appropriation, and circulation. As my thesis supervisor commented, without using some of the stories as illustration, my arguments about the violent inscription of torture stories in archives and in national truth and their problematic appropriation by national subjects did not make sense. If I was going to unpack not only the function of authoritarian violence, but also the use of the stories by post-authoritarian nation and subject, I needed to engage in the retelling, discursive appropriation, and representation of the stories. I needed to, in Arteaga's words at the beginning of this paper, "conjure up the violence" and "call images of blood to the mind." Yet, as an anonymous reviewer for one of my publications commented, these stories "*should not* be repeated ... as they accomplish the same thing you seem to condemn, that is, misuse of torture stories and re-victimization by retelling details." This reviewer seemed to agree with the arguments made by Coetzee (2004, p. 173), through his character Elizabeth Costello, that "certain things are not good to read or to write."

As I have argued (Macías, 2013), the issue of what to do with archived stories of violence is not easily resolved through a decision about whether to reproduce those stories in research reports. Forms of violence such as state-organized torture rely on the deprivation of voice, the imposition of silence on victims, the use of euphemisms to speak about torture, and the rendering of stories of torture socially unspeakable and thus unrecordable on official state records and social memory (Fietlowitz, 1998). For survivors, therefore, speaking of violence and having their stories recorded and archived constitutes a necessary condition for social recognition

and for the reassertion of their subjectivity and citizenship (see, for example, Avelar, 2001; Fuentes, 2004; Simpson, 2007; Stanley, 2004).

However, the capture of torture stories in archives and in speech, as well as their reproduction in reports and in my research involves another form of violence: a violence that, as Grosz (2003) argued, is intrinsic to the work of discursive representation. Levi (1989) associated this violence with the compulsion to reduce and simplify complex stories in order to render knowable experiences that by their very nature are complex and messy (see also Mathews & Goddman, 2013). Furthermore, in conjuring up the violence as a racialized woman from, and writing about, the Global South, I also risk becoming complicit in the circulation of, and trafficking with, stories from the South. Within geopolitical and racial structures of knowledge production and circulation, these stories can get consumed, as Razack (2007, 2009) argued, by national and imperial subjects in the North. These politics of consumption continue to simultaneously produce the Global South as a place of evil and the North as a place of humanitarianism and modernity. In attempting to negotiate a space for ethics in the narrow space between violence and its representation and within the racial and geopolitics of knowledge production, I come to the realization of the need to render thinkable, not only archives as the site of my research, but also the very work and nature of research. It is to that endeavour I turn in the next two sections in order to come to terms with the (im)possibility and necessity of ethics in archival research.

Power, Knowledge, and Archives

What is not in the records does not exist.

(ancient adage cited in Ketelaar, 2002, p. 222)

Archival research is generally understood as work done with records—“documents, writings, charts, files, paper clips, maps, [and] organizational devices” (Latour 2005, p. 76)⁴—collected, preserved, and contained in the physical space demarcated as an archive.⁵ However, as the scene from *Star Wars* (Lucas, 2002)

⁴ Archival records can also consist of audiovisual material, architectural plans, institutional policy records, parliamentary debates, media reports, and lately, digitalized and online sources. In the context of social work, archives can be the source of information concerning the history and policies of social agencies, as well as of institutional records related to client or patient files containing personal histories and intervention plans. With the introduction of computerized business systems for case management and filing in social work agencies, computer servers and databases have also become depositories of archival material in the form of assessment forms, case management files, intervention plans, minutes of supervision and case management meetings, etc. Records may contain the “life experiences” of clients (commonly recorded and told from the point of view of social workers). They may also contain the professional assessments and interventions put in place by professionals; as well as the bureaucratic, temporary, and evidentiary relationship between documents, the organizing methods, and principles; as well as the “fine crafts of cribbing and culling” that grant narrative or organizational coherence to otherwise apparently dispersed forms of documentation (Stoler, 2009, p. 20; see also Caswell, 2014).

⁵ While, as Manoff (2004, p. 10) observed, some researchers make a distinction between archives as “repositories of documents, manuscripts, and images,” libraries as containers of

suggests, archives have a more critical and complex historical and social function. Archives are not un-implicated, apolitical, and ahistorical institutions or systems of recording; rather, they are active producers of records and history. That is, archives have onto-epistemological effects; they produce the things of which they speak through dynamic and ever-evolving power/knowledge relations that, by the “historical dynamic of naming,” enable certain experiences, statements, documents, artefacts, etc., to become archival records (Hacking, 2002, p. 26). As a result, rather than speaking about archives as institutions or instruments, we may as well speak of archiving practices: of the processes, procedures, norms, etc., that allow for the constitution of archival records.

As Foucault (1972, p. 145–146) argued, “The archive is first the law of what can be said,” not as “an amorphous mass” of statements or records (dis)organized “in an unbroken linearity ... at the mercy of chance external accidents,” but “grouped together in distinct figures, composed together in accordance with multiple relations, maintained or blurred in accordance with specific regularities.” In other words, as Duff and Harris (2002, p. 275) proposed, archival practices are “a way of constructing knowledge through processes of inscription, mediation, and narration.” Archives are, therefore, active sites where social power is negotiated, contested, and confirmed. They create and manage the construction of records through social power relations that implicate archivists, researchers, and social institutions such as state and empire (Cook & Schwartz, 2002; Fritzsche, 2005).

As power/knowledge devices with ontological characteristics, archives have a historically significant and mutually constitutive relationship to the power regimes and systems of rule that sustain and are sustained by the archive. For example, in her study of colonial archives, Stoler (2009) observed that by capturing on paper how issues related to the colonies are addressed within the bureaucratic arrangements of the empire, archives capture imperial governance. And, as Richards (1993, p. 37) proposed, the “administrative core of the [British] Empire was built around knowledge-producing institutions” like museums, universities, and archives demonstrating not only how “data intensive” colonial bureaucracies were, but also how important archives were for the constitution of imperial power. Recording and documenting created, Richards noted, the “fantasy of an imperial archive in which the control of Empire hinges on a British monopoly over knowledge” even when actual control of the distant and geographically vast colonies was difficult to achieve and sustain (p. 6–7). Furthermore, as tools of power, archives constitute what Burton (2005, p. 7) called “full-fledged historical actor[s]” implicated in the establishment of colonial power, conquest, and hegemony. They also sustain the violent imposition of “scales of credibility,” legitimacy, and civilization through, for example, the hierarchal differentiation of written and oral history on which colonial violence is predicated.

published works of all kinds, and museums as places for the containment of cultural artifacts, what these institutions have in common is their role as repositories of records that have been preserved for contemporary and future use. Mbembe (2002, p. 19) provided a valuable critical discussion of the archive’s “architectural dimension” without which, he argued, it “has neither status nor power.”

In the era of nationalism and nation building, as Harris (2002) proposed and my work on the Torture Commission demonstrated, archiving practices play a critical role in the exercise, consolidation, and legitimization of state power. As Butler (2007, p. 953) suggested in her work on photography, state power is constantly materializing through practices of framing that determine the “field of representability.” The constitution of this field, Butler continued, is achieved through processes of inclusion and exclusion that simultaneously determine what is explicitly captured in the picture or record and what is cast out. That which is left outside of the record constitutes the field of perceptible reality in fundamental ways. Through these continuous and dynamic processes of explicit capture and casting out, power simultaneously produces the archival record and imprints itself on bodies—those included and those cast out—in order to produce and render some experiences and some lives knowable and recognizable.⁶ These practices, Butler continued, constitute violent systems of representation that determine

whose lives are grievable, and whose are not ... which human lives count as human and as living, and which do not ... when and where a life can be said to be lost, and that loss registered as the violent loss of life ... [and] when and where the loss of life remains ungrievable and unrepresentable. (p. 953)

As Foucault (1995) proposed, modern governmental regimes require the constant deployment of surveillance and disciplinary power exercised through observation, registration, filing, and recordkeeping in order to render certain populations explicitly visible and the target of power. This relationship between archives and power suggests that in addition to producing archival records, archival practices have biopolitical functions that, as Agamben (1998, p. 119) proposed, facilitate the “growing inclusion of [human] life in the mechanisms and calculations of power.” Archives exercise these biopolitical functions through practices of inscription/inclusion and erasure/exclusion that capture life through recording, filing, registration, and organization. In this way, archives constitute, according to Fassin (2008, p. 533), the site for the enactment of “various ordeals of truth” that enable the political constitution of life captured in records and made objects of study and the making of the hegemonic subject: archivist, researcher, citizen (see also Ketelaar, 2002; Latour, 2005; Valderhaug, 2010).

In the case of my research on the Torture Commission in Chile, the gathering, verification, and organization of torture testimonies was a highly regulated and bureaucratic process that relied on the collection of individual testimonies in which “tortured survivors were required to exhibit the wounds of torture, to make their bodies visible and the object of observation and evaluation by the commission’s staff” (Macías, 2014, p. 317). The exhibition of wounds was a condition for the recognition of torture as an actual event and a requirement for the admission of torture stories into the archives. Through these regulated practices, the Torture Commission discursively

⁶ For further discussion of the role of archives in constituting records, as well as the role of archivist in the production of archives, see, for example, Brothman (2002); Cook & Schwartz (2002); Fritzsche (2005); Gomes da Cunha (2004); Kormendy (2007); Nesmith (2002).

produced the body that became known as torture survivor: a social category that granted recognition and mediated the acquisition of compensation and benefits.⁷ These practices, in turn, allowed the commission to organize and construct a national narrative about torture: to shape how the nation would perceive torture and the legacies of authoritarianism (Macías, 2014). By extension, the Commission's archiving practice mediated and sustained any subsequent appropriation and redeployment of torture stories, which having been legitimized as actual events by their recording in the archives, could then be used and reused to constantly reconstruct national narratives (see also Ghosh, 2005; Stoler, 2002).

Nevertheless, as Stoler (2009) suggested, the work of power in archives is never absolute, complete, or secured. Rather, said Stoler, archives are "sites of contestation" where knowledge and power are deployed with "piecemeal partiality" and through "spasmodic and sustained currents of anxious labor" (p. 19). This contested and ongoing work of power is also recorded in the torture archive in the form of discrepant accounts, dissenting voices, and subjugated knowledge that in spite of excluding practices, still leave traces in the archives in the form of silences, deceiving or subversive speech, or contradictory stories and records. In this way, the torture archive is not just a "dynamic, contested" space "through which meaning is constructed and memory shaped" (Caswell, 2014, p. 22). It also evinces failures of representation: failures that leave "fingerprints which are attributes to the archive's infinite meaning" (Caswell, 2014, p. 16; see also Bowker, 2005). These conditions signal not only the continuous work of power in archives, but also the struggles that result in constant shifting and changing, which make archives an ever-evolving power/knowledge device. For instance, the Torture Commission and its Report became tools that survivors, human rights organization, and the media used and reused, not only to retell torture stories and to gain social recognition and visibility, but also to contest, refute, and shift official national narratives. These appropriations, contestations, refusals, and alternative narratives, in turn, became part of an ever-evolving torture archive.

Finally, if archives constitute fields of "representability" that embody failures of representation, as Butler (2004) suggested, so are the testimonies and human stories collected in archives contested forms of representation. This contestability is the result of the limitations and failures associated with the process of signification and symbolization that is characteristic of processes of giving voice and assigning meaning to unspeakable experiences.⁸ While a conscientious discussion of the extensive literature on testimonies and testimonial writing is well beyond the scope of this paper, a short exploration of the contested character of testimonies is

⁷ For a similar discussion of how humanitarian and medico-psychological discourse produce the traumatized Palestinian body in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, see Fassin (2008). And, for a discussion on how archiving practices make possible the recognition of *war children* as a social category, see Valderhaug (2010).

⁸ What in semiotics can be associated with the signifier–signified combination that make up the sign (Saussure, 1983)

necessary if we are to reach as close as possible to the problematic of representation that complicates the ethical reflection I attempt in this paper.

Authors such as Beverley (1989), Tagore (2009), and Yúdice (1991) have argued that testimonies constitute “an authentic narrative” in which truth “is summoned in the cause of denouncing a present situation of exploitation and oppression or in exorcising or setting aright official history” (Yúdice, 1991, p. 44).⁹ However, in his work on testimony and witnessing in the case of Auschwitz, Agamben (1999) suggested that testimonies are themselves forms of representation that, by their very relationship to violence, contain a failure of representation, and an “impossibility” to represent (p. 34). Levi called this impossibility a “lacuna,” adding that “to some degree” all survivors who lived to give testimony and bear witness to violence “enjoyed a privilege.” This privilege is associated with their condition as survivors who did not experience death as the ultimate purpose of the violence and, as a result, cannot claim that they truly experienced the gas chambers (Levi, 1989, p. 216–217. See also Felman & Laub, 1992; Sklodowska, 1996; Sommer 1996).

In the case of torture, as Scarry (1985) argued, the ultimate purpose of the violence is to devoice the prisoner, to return her to a state that preceded language, and to reduce her to unusable sounds and screams, a voiceless body that betrays and hurts the prisoner (Richard, 1998). To be a true victim of torture is to have become completely voiceless. As a result, those who later reacquire voice and bear witness through testimony can never “bear witness from the inside” as “there is no voice for the disappearance of voice” (Agamben, 1999, p. 35; see also Rojas Baeza, 2004). As Sumic-Riha (2004) argued, “what is at issue here is a different kind of impossibility which reduces to silence even those who are willing to testify.” Bearing witness “to some traumatic experiences,” continued Sumic-Riha,

is doomed to failure not only because one cannot find words to convey to others what is unbearable for him or her. Rather, it is condemned to fail because that to which one is summoned to bear witness resists all attempts at symbolization. (p. 18–19)

What we find in the archives related to the Torture Commission are not only the failures of representation resulting from the biopolitics of documentation, legitimation, organization, and re-articulation that subjected torture stories to hegemonic nation-building practices. We also find failures of representation associated with processes of wording and constructing testimonies that subject experiences of violence to a process of symbolization that always risks breaking down as a result of the impossibility to give voice to unbearable and unspeakable experiences. To recognize this failure does not mean to suggest torture testimonies are false or untrue or to ignore the embodied ways in which survivors carry the experience of torture. Neither does it mean to ignore that testimonies have the effect, as Tagore (2009, p. 7) proposed, of facilitating “subaltern resistance and agency,” or

⁹ The testimonial voice, Beverley argued, is the voice “we are meant to experience as the voice of the real rather than fictional person, is the mark of a desire not to be silenced or defeated” (1989, p. 28).

of historically, politically, and ethically intervening and interrupting hegemonic power relations. Rather, like archives, testimonies always denote and carry within silences and lacunas that leave traces in the testimonial narrative and, by extension, in the archival record. These failures of representation, as Avelar (2001, p. 183) argued, can “tell us something about what the practice of torture does to discursive representation.” They can also provide methodological direction in regards to how to read and what to look for in archived testimonies.

Furthermore, the issue is not just that some aspects of violence resist representation. Rather, attempts to represent violence through testimony constitute in themselves a “tearing of that which, unknowable and unspeakable as it is” hopelessly struggles to retain its “self-presence in the face of [the] active movement of tearing, cutting, breaking apart” that constitutes the act of representation (Grosz, 2003, p. 136). As I discuss in the last section of this paper, the silences and lacunas inherent to the representation of violence, as well as the violence inherent to representation, constitute critical sites on which to mount questions about the ethics of archival research.

Research, Representation, and Writing

It is through writing that we know the awful truths of being human.

(Arteaga, 2003, p. viii)

If archives and testimonies are contested devices with historical and social functions that, through inclusion and exclusion, simultaneously constitute and fail to constitute that of which they speak, revealing the violence of representation embedded in the representation of violence, can we not say something similar about archival research, its relationship to violence, and its function as a knowledge-production device? Is not archival research, and all research for that matter, another archiving practice that inherits not only failures, but also the violence of representation? There are three interrelated and mutually constitutive conditions of archival research I want to discuss here. First, archival research is a specific activity and a practice that embodies violence. This violence, Grosz (2003, p. 134) argued, is inherent to the work of knowledge production and materializes in the specific activities of data collection or analysis associated with methodology,¹⁰ and in the “violence of writing, of thought, and of knowing.” Second, through research work, research constitutes researchers, as subjects with claims to disciplinary belonging. And third, archival research is shaped by politics of knowledge production and by the historical, geopolitical, racial, and institutional apparatus of enunciation that determine the production and reception of knowledge.

When referring to research as representation and violence, I am clearly situating myself within a post-structural conceptual framework that since the 1980s

¹⁰ While the central concern of this paper is archival research as a methodological tool, there exists a significant body of literature that provides critical analyses of other methodological frameworks. I call attention, for example, to Janes’s critique of community-based participatory research in this special issue.

has consistently challenged and unsettled positivist and scientifically based research claims to absolute truths, to “a God’s view of the world,” and to the idea that “objective observers could turn the world and its happenings into things that could be turned into data” (Richardson, 2000, p. 928).¹¹ This position also challenges, as St. Pierre proposed, the belief that “knowledge *accumulates* and has *gaps* that *findings* can fill” (2015, p. 42). Post-structuralism sees research as a site of struggle within which power and knowledge battle for the constitution of truth (Foucault, 1982, 1984, 2003) and in which, through practices of representation and writing, researchers engage in the performative work of systematically creating data, meaning, and knowledge (Bruce, 2013; St. Pierre, 2011).

In the case of my work on the Torture Commission, my research took me to the physical space of the archives in which I encountered the many ways in which torture stories were described, organized, recounted, and recorded on pieces of paper, forms, reports, acts of political parlance, newspaper clips, memos, legal briefs, etc. I also found in the archives the multiple relationships between records, the technical process of inscription, citation, recalling, and contextualization that form part of the records’ provenance and continuous social life (Caswell, 2014; Ketelaar, 2002; Stoler, 2009). Yet, these records and their relationships, while having been produced through the archival practices already discussed, did not a priori constitute data. They became data through my actual intervention in them, through the many operations of collection, classification, coding, summarizing, cross-referencing, noting, etc., and through the cacophony of theoretical voices that informed, interrupted, interrogated, and deciphered the performative work of knowledge production in which I was involved.

The archival data in my research came into being in the “particular ontological, epistemological, and methodological structure” of my research (St. Pierre, 2013, p. 223; see also Bruce, 2013; Bridges-Rhoads & van Cleave, 2013). Foucauldian discourse analysis determined what and how I considered data. In fact, this framework allowed me to see that the actual pieces of paper, and the words on them, which together make up the archival records, did not in themselves constitute data. Rather, something else came into being as data: the discursive practices, rhetorical moves, and semantic gestures captured in the records, as well as the historically specific processes of explicit denial, disavowal, and exclusion, or acceptance, avowal, and inclusion that in tandem produced and shifted a truth about torture (Macías, 2015b). Further, a Foucauldian ontological framework allowed me to see the data, not as expression of true or authentic experiences that needed to be recounted, but rather as sites where larger discourses, theories, values, histories, cultures, politics, and power manifested so as to produce reality, truth, and subjectivity (St. Pierre, 2013, p. 225; see also Popkewitz, 2004). When I encountered

¹¹ For a succinct but very helpful overview of the “paradigm wars” that since the 1980s have questioned the supremacy of positivism and quantitative research in social sciences and brought forward critical, emancipatory, and post-structural approaches to research, see Denzin and Giardina (2015).

torture stories in the records, I did not see them as expressions of an authentic experience, though that was at times difficult not to do. Instead, I looked at how torture stories were being allowed to exist or come into being in the records, how they were being deployed, organized, and recounted so as to produce narratives and subjectivities. To be sure, while I remained aware that torture is felt and lived on the bodies of victims who, through testimonies, attempt to bring to light experiences previously ignored, my attention was on how archives capture, represent, and construct national truth out of those testimonies. In the process, other forms of violence, such as the violence of representation, began to reveal themselves as data in the ways in which torture stories were discursively produced and deployed.

Moreover, the representational violence displayed in the archives was not an immobile condition of a past in which the records had been created, and it was not separate from my own collection, reading, and writing of and about the records. The violence was, in fact, being produced as data through my own intervention in the archives. That is, the violence was ongoing, it was constantly being enacted and re-inscribed through my research work. My own representation of violence was representation piled on top of other representations, and my own writing of the representation of violence was in itself a violence of representation.

Part of my research looked at parliamentary debates concerning compensation policies and benefits for survivors. In the records of these debates, I found many examples of politicians engaging in practices of torture-telling in which stories of electrocution; rape; torture-induced abortions, pregnancies, and births; mutilations, etc., were recounted in great detail in order to justify monetary compensation and secure national reconciliation. Through torture-telling, “dispossessed widows and tortured women were discursively materialized along narratives of bodily need and dehumanizing violence to turn them into the terrain on which concepts of monetary compensation were contested and negotiated” (Macías, 2013, p. 127). In my research, themes such as “torture-telling,” “gendered torture stories,” “pricing of violence,” and “pornographic appropriation” became coding categories that simultaneously turned the records into data and allowed me to theorize and transform data into writable evidence of the discursive materialization of tortured bodies. Through the labour of research, every time my eyes rested on sections of the records in which torture stories were retold, my mind classified, and my fingers and hands highlighted, annotated, cross-referenced, cut and pasted the records into the coding structures and documents of my research. Through this process, the torture stories continued their journey and made their way from archived testimonies, to the torture-telling practices captured in archives, to my own coding and analysis, and later into my writing of the research. The journey had concrete effects on the records; they did not remain unscathed as they traversed from testimony, to archive, to research. At different stages, things were done to the stories through the many operations involved in discursive representation. For instance, while in the archives, the stories were systematically removed from the systemic practice of violence during the authoritarian regime, in my research the stories were re-tied to violence, this time, to the violence enacted through processes of accounting. Yet, in binding torture stories

to the violence of accounting, I engaged in other forms of retelling that retained violence now in the representational practices of my own research.

In her reading of Derrida, Grosz's (2003) argued that it is not just that representation and writing, as fundamental conditions of research, resemble violence, but that they are themselves forms of violence. Not only does representation miss something in violence, as I discussed above in regards to testimonies and archives—something that leaves a lacuna or constitutes a failure of representation—but also the process of abstraction and symbolization can simultaneously “open and occlude certain abstract forms of violence that form our reality” (Noys, 2013, p. 13). In determining, for example, which torture stories to reproduce in my writing in order to make evident the violent representation of torture in the archives, I engaged in what Grosz (2003, p. 136) proposed are the “modes of divergence, ambiguity, impossibility, [and] the ‘aporetic’ status” of inscription and difference, which are deep-rooted in the constitution of truth. In other words, my attempts to reveal the framing practices present in archives and expand them in order to include in the field of perceptible reality the hegemonic nation building and subjectification processes at work in the accounting for torture, I had to engage in other forms of framing and representation. These framing practices are associated not only with the decision of what stories to include, but are also implicit in the very act of writing that, by following rules of proper order, well punctuated rhythms, and meaning making, bring the world into existence and us within it (Whitehall, 2013, p. 9). Thus, my own condemnation of the violence is, as Grosz continued, “implicated in the very thing it aims to condemn” (2003, p. 138).

The realization of the violence inherent to representation leads us to the role that research has in the constitution of subject/researcher. As St. Pierre argued, conventional conceptions of qualitative research, whether positivist, interpretative, or critical, are sustained on the idea that “there is a researcher who exists ahead of the research—which is out there somewhere—a self-contained individual who moves right through the process from beginning to end, whole, intact, and unencumbered, already identified and secured in the subjectivity statement” (2015, p. 110).¹² This conception of the researcher, noted St. Pierre, simultaneously reinforces concepts of the immobile human at the centre of any research activity and enables conceptions of truth, reality, and experience that continue to organize our way of understanding the world (p. 108). However, this notion of the researcher ignores that research is a performative activity, an activity that, as Foucault (1982; 1994b) argued, allows for continuous and never completed operations of subjectification through which we not only constitute the object of study—the data or even the bodies about which we want to write—but also ourselves as subjects. Research is a “constitutive action” and a “productive mechanism,” with the power to reify and dismantle representational practices and power/knowledge regimes (Pelias, 2015, p. 274), and to call us, as

¹² Colombian philosopher Castro-Gómez described this detached and neutral position from which the researcher is perceived to observe, catalogue, and classify the world as the “*hubris of the zero point*” (2007, cited in Mignolo, 2009, p. 160).

researchers, into existence mediating—though admittedly with different levels of certainty—our entrance into disciplinary fields (Denzin, 2013; Koro-Ljungberg & MacLure, 2013).

Performativity was and continues to be evident at all levels of my research. For instance, it was in the deployment of ambiguous and at times contradictory subjectivity discourses I used to name myself, or were used to name me, in order to justify the research, obtain credentials, or gain access to the archives. Citizenship and scholarly discourses were some of these. They required or allowed me to call on my Canadian or Chilean citizenship, to claim institutional and disciplinary belonging, or to speak in voices attuned with those national and scholarly narratives, in order to gain access or credibility. Performativity was also in the aesthetical practices in which I engaged in order to develop and secure the relationships with archivists and librarians needed for data collection. It was, and continues to be, in the internal chatter and dialogue through which I convince myself that the research was worthwhile to do. It was and is in the writing and presentational practices in which sometimes I purposefully made, and continue to make myself (in)visible in the text while rendering intelligible the violent constitution of national truth about torture. Performativity is in the minutiae associated with research, in routine and quotidian activities, and in the professional discourses that constitute the “cultural locus” of meaning on which—even if at times in conditions of precarity—I can claim belonging in certain disciplinary fields (Butler & Salih, 2004, p. 23). Finally, the very act of writing this paper, of speaking with and along specific theories in order to render bare the ethical challenges associated with archival research, is itself a performative and self-constituting action through which the researcher in me is called into being. To be sure, none of these performative acts constitute a choice made by a pre-existing stable and conscious identity that exists before the research, an identity that conventional researchers assume can be rendered visible and known through self-positioning or self-reflection (St. Pierre, 2015, p. 110). Rather, the subject/researcher, the “I” in my research, was and continues to be constituted within power/knowledge regimes, and through my own speaking in the scholarly discourses that allow me to continuously come into being as a researcher.

Finally, as researchers we continue to carry out our work within highly regulated apparatuses of enunciation that determine the position of research and researcher within regimes of truth and within global and historical geopolitical and racial structures (Mignolo, 2009). Research is shaped and regulated by politics of knowledge production that, through funding structures, publishing politics, institutionalized disciplinary hierarchies, politics of evidence, regulated and precarious academic labour structures, and geopolitical relations determine, not only what knowledge counts and what counts as knowledge, but also who is able to claim the role of the knower (see, for example, Bogo, Mishna, & Regehr, 2011; Canaan & Shumar, 2008; Church, 2008; Giroux, 2002, 2015; Macías, 2015a; Naidoo, 2008; van Heugten, 2011). These apparatuses of enunciation determine, for example, the place that qualitative research occupies in hierarchies of knowledge that continue to see quantitative and evidence-based research at the top and qualitative research at the

bottom (Morse, Swanson, & Kuzel, 2007). These hierarchies, in turn, determine fundability and publishability of research, as well as the hireability of academics and their capacity to succeed in the academe.

By engaging in this research as a woman from the Global South living and working in the North, my attempts to render decipherable and comprehensible Chilean processes of accounting for torture were always situated within “geopolitics of knowing” (Mignolo, 2009, p. 160). That is, my research exists with the global social and political conditions that regulate the circulation of knowledge and bodies between North and South, and that shape how research from and about the Global South is taken up in the North. I was not only researching a historical moment of great personal significance, I was also participating and becoming implicated in the global politics of knowledge production that constitute the Global South as knowable object within “a racial system of social classification that invented Occidentalism (e.g., *Indias Occidentales*), that created the conditions for Orientalism ... [and that] remapped the world into first, second and third during the Cold War” (Mignolo, 2009, p. 161). Within this racial system of classification, my research on national processes of accounting for torture can more easily be read in the North within normative colonial/imperial discourses of development–underdevelopment, civilization–savagery, advanced democracy–backward dictatorship.

Although research, as I argued above, is contested and my subjectivity as researcher performative, these racial and geopolitical conditions strive to fix, crystallize, and contain the research within social power relations and racial systems of classification that consistently shape and restrain what we can know about the Global South and what happens there. For instance, I consistently insist on understanding the politics of representation regarding torture within larger governmental regimes and apparatuses of ruling. However, I always run the risk of being taken up as a native informant, as someone expected to speak in the restrictive language of testimony and humanitarianism, or within well established dichotomies of First World development (civilization) and Third World underdevelopment (savagery). Moreover, while my research on the archives had as its goal to render visible hegemonic nation-building projects and their reliance on the careful appropriation and containment of torture stories, within the geopolitics of knowledge production already in place, I am more likely to be taken up as a voice that speaks of, or for, the suffering: an “authentic” voice that can allow readers and listeners in the North to feel they have had a “true” encounter with torture (Razack, 2007).

Conclusion: The Ethical Quicksand of Archival Research

For representation to convey the human ... representation must not only fail, but it must show its failure.

(Butler, 2004, p. 144)

Returning to the example from *Star Wars* (Lucas, 2002), in his search for the planet that does not appear in the archives, Obi-Wan visits Master Yoda and his young students, who help him once again search the charts. When Yoda asks how it can be that, while a “gravity’s silhouette remains ... the star and all its planets have disappeared,” one of his students replies that “someone [must have] erased [the planet] from the archive memory.” After praising the young pupil for having such an “uncluttered mind,” Yoda instructs Obi-Wan to go to the centre of the gravity pull to find the missing planet. Confronted with the dilemma with which I started this paper—the dilemma concerning not simply the question of what to do with archived stories *of violence*, but what to do with the issue of representation *as violence*—should we answer Master Yoda’s hail and search for what is erased from archives? Should we assume that ethical archival research requires that we search for that which, while being erased, leaves a trace, a gravitational silhouette, or a silence that loudly speaks through its absence? Is ethical archival research one that searches for “truer images, ... more images, [or] images that convey the full horror and reality of the suffering” (Butler, 2004, p. 146)?

In searching for absences or silences, we may home in on the gravity pull, the silences and absences that leave a trace in the archive marking the place where the Other has both disappeared and can potentially be found. This search may also require us to fall silent and unclutter our minds in order to let the unheard voice of the Other speak: an unheard voice that speaks loudly through its silence or absence in the records (Sumic-Riha, 2004). We may, for instance, search for what the archived torture stories do not or cannot say about torture as a systemic state practice. We can search for that which, while being erased from the archival record, remains implicit in the consistency and repetition of the testimonies.

However, as I hope I have made evident in this paper, we should not be tempted to believe that in adhering to this practice of searching for silence and falling silent, we can ultimately find or get a glimpse of a truer experience that the archives cannot or refuse to capture. This ethic could lead us to re-establish and secure the existence of both an authentic Other who exists prior to representation, and an essential subject/researcher who, through her search for truer stories, can secure her innocence. The pursuit for the authentic Other would necessarily take us not only out of the archive but also to a space of unquestionable truth, a space that not even the testimonies of victims can reach. In this search, we may imagine possible an authentic Levinasian encounter with an Other that precedes, overflows, and resists representation, an other that invokes us into existence as subjects that

precede and transcend representation and history (Hofmeyr, 2006; Levinas, 1969).¹³ We may also imagine, as Badiou (1992 cited in Sumic-Riha, 2004) warned, that the silences in the archives signal the existence of an unquestionable universal truth outside representation, a truth awaiting our discovery that can free us from the narrow space between violence and its representation.

As I have discussed in this paper, the search for a practice of archival research that is outside the violence of representation is a futile endeavour, not only because archival practices and practices of representation always convey violence, but also because the very work of research and writing—not only in archival research but in any research—always implies a violence of representation. This argument does not mean that archival research is unethical and should not be done, or that the violence of which I speak does not have the potential of being productive. Rather, it means that conceptions of ethics grounded either on the search for nonviolent ways of doing research or on a more authentic encounter with the Other, fail us when it comes to archival research. In order to propose an ethics of archival research, therefore, we need to turn our gaze toward the very work of representation as violence implicit in research and to the subject/researcher, engaged in the performative work of representation. In other words, rather than searching for innocent places outside representation, we must tackle the very issue of representation, what it accomplishes, and what it makes possible. We need to turn what is at work in representation into an ethics.

This approach is in tune with a Foucauldian conception of ethics as a technology of self in which the subject is constituted and constitutes herself, not through an encounter with an Other outside representation, but through the discursive practices, the power/knowledge regimes at work in representation (see, for example, Foucault, 1989, 1990, 1994a). To be sure, the subject in this ethics is not passively constituted, but rather actively constitutes herself in an *agentic* fashion by using representation to affirm a truth about who she is and to bind herself to this truth (Foucault, Brion, & Harcourt, 2014). This ethics is, therefore, performative in the sense that Butler (Butler, 1999; Butler & Salih, 2004) suggested: They do not only regulate who the researcher becomes, but also how one does research. Ethics as performativity means, as I have stated (Macías, 2012), that ethics is not a set of rules or a code of conduct; rather, as Foucault (1994b, p. 286) observed, ethics is a “way of being and of behaviour ... a certain way of acting”; it is work that subjects perform, “a distinctive form of intellectual practice, a singular form of critical thought” (Rabinow, 1994, p. xxxv).

This conception of ethics allows us to render thinkable, as ethics, the very work of representation as violence, not to free representation from violence, but rather to deploy representation in ways that disrupt the power/knowledge relations that affect how the archived story comes into being and becomes known and how we come into being and render ourselves known. The impossibility of freeing ourselves from the violence of representation requires that we recognize that the space between violence

¹³ For an excellent critique of Levinasian ethics from the perspective of race, see Massara (2007).

and its representation is more than the “razor’s edge” identified by Rossiter (2011): a space that while being narrow retains some of its concrete substance. Rather, this space is one of uncertainty, insecurity, diffuseness, and a quicksand that is always shifting and always at risk of falling through, of failing. It is a place not only in which we are always working with representations on top of representation and with the failures of representation, but also in which our own representational practices fail, and their failure needs to be shown.

This quicksand between violence and representation is, nevertheless, politically and ethically significant because it is in this place that we can engage in other forms of representation. We can, for example, engage in Derridian deconstruction that while disclosing the lines of construction of the archive and laying bare its inner contradictions, remains suspicious and aporetic, always aware that any accomplishment is itself also a defeat (for example Derrida, 1976; see also Duff & Harris, 2002). In this quicksand, we can also engage in what Pelias (2015) called “performative writing”: writing that takes place within the entanglement and danger of representation as violence while remaining aware of the “inbetweenness of self/other/context” (Spry, 2011). Performative writing can also take the form of “subversive repetition” or “subversive citation” that, while still a practice of representation, searches for other ways to represent and for other ways to become discursively constituted (Butler 1999, p. 135; see also St. Pierre, 2015).

Whatever strategies we use to negotiate the performativity of ethics in the quicksand between violence and representation, we need to recognize that ethics cannot be separated from politics, that ethical action always takes place within the social power relations and the apparatus of enunciation that Mignolo (2009) identified. It is in our commitment to come to terms with representation as a political action, aware of how it is politically situated, that we may find possibilities for transformative and strategic action in archival research. For instance, we can remain committed to what Butler (2004) called “precarious life.” This condition of precarity is not only evident, as I have discussed in this paper, in the way in which archives render some life precarious (as in the case of the torture). It is also evident in the very ethics I propose in which, by recognizing that as subjects we are always constituting ourselves and others through research and representation, we can render such constitution a precarious project. Due to its precarity, this project can be undermined, shifted, changed, and transformed in order to achieve the social justice and political projects to which we are committed. In rendering ourselves and the Other precarious, we can recognize, as Rossiter (2011) proposed, that the violence and the cutting of representation are necessary for justice. At times, we must fix the Other and ourselves in some form of representation and in our writing if we are going to call attention to violence and to conditions of injustice. Such fixing needs to remain political, aware of our own performativity as researchers, as well as committed to rendering evident, and thus questionable and ultimately precarious, our own constitution and the constitution of the stories of others in the narrow space between violence and its representation.

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