



Situating the silencing and de-silencing of traumatic memories in 2016 students' protests in Hyderabad, India: an auto-ethnographic analysis

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Abstract Psychologists, anthropologists, and historians have researched, revered, and replenished the past. Although the substance of their research is the same, their respective interpretations of the retrieved objects paint a plethora of images. This paper is a peek into the process of silencing and articulating memories. Both silencing and expression of memories are facilitated by temporal and spatial conditionalities, as would be argued here. With the help of an activist petition written by the author during the anti-Caste Discrimination Students' Movement, known as “Justice for Rohith Vemula”, at the University of Hyderabad (India) in 2016, this study not only delves into the realms of individual memory but also critically evaluates the carrier of the memory undergoing the act of silencing and de-silencing (expression). As the Indian state brutally crushed the protest, the embodied memories carry the mark of the state's brutality. This paper seeks to ask why and how memories and experiences are silenced, and how those memories find conduits for expression through narratives. How does trauma facilitate the silencing and anticipate the de-silencing of memory? Although the reading of trauma and memory as constitutive of each other helps us to place the narrative within a theoretical debate, the analysis of the author's petition as an ‘evocative autoethnography’ helps to construct and follow the making and un-making of silence and expression and goes beyond the individual carrier of the traumatic memories. The petition serves as an ‘emotional recall’ and allows the author to enact the felt-emotions that engender the traumatic memory.

Keywords Memory · Trauma · Social movement · Autoethnography · Activism

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Verortung des Verstummens und Entstummens traumatischer Erinnerungen bei den Studentenprotesten 2016 in Hyderabad, Indien – eine auto-ethnographische Analyse

Zusammenfassung Psychologen, Anthropologen und Historiker haben die Vergangenheit erforscht, verehrt und aufgefrischt. Während der Inhalt ihrer Forschungen derselbe ist, zeichnen ihre jeweiligen Interpretationen der gefundenen Objekte eine Fülle von Bildern. Der vorliegende Beitrag gibt einen Einblick in den Prozess der Unterdrückung und Artikulation von Erinnerungen. Sowohl das Verschweigen als auch der Ausdruck von Erinnerungen werden durch zeitliche und räumliche Bedingungen erleichtert, wie hier argumentiert werden soll. Mit Hilfe einer aktivistischen Petition, die der Autor während der Studentenbewegung gegen Kastendiskriminierung, bekannt als „Gerechtigkeit für Rohith Vemula“, an der Universität von Hyderabad (Indien) im Jahr 2016 verfasst hat, taucht diese Studie nicht nur in die Bereiche der individuellen Erinnerung ein, sondern bewertet auch kritisch den Träger der Erinnerung, der den Akt des Verstummens und des Entstummens (Ausdrucks) durchläuft. Da der indische Staat den Protest brutal niedergeschlagen hat, tragen die verkörperten Erinnerungen die Spuren der staatlichen Brutalität. In diesem Beitrag geht es um die Frage, warum und wie Erinnerungen und Erfahrungen zum Schweigen gebracht werden und wie diese Erinnerungen durch Erzählungen zum Ausdruck gebracht werden. Wie erleichtert das Trauma das Verstummen und wie nimmt es das Verstummen der Erinnerung vorweg? Die Analyse der Petition des Autors als „evokative Autoethnographie“ hilft dabei, das Zustandekommen und die Aufhebung des Schweigens und des Ausdrucks zu konstruieren und zu verfolgen, und geht über den individuellen Träger der traumatischen Erinnerungen hinaus. Die Petition dient als „emotionaler Rückruf“ und ermöglicht es dem Autor, die gefühlten Emotionen, die die traumatische Erinnerung hervorrufen, zu inszenieren.

Schlüsselwörter Erinnerung · Trauma · Soziale Bewegung · Autoethnographie · Aktivismus

1 Introduction

Memory forms the essential bridge between what has already happened and the ability to recall that happenstance periodically. As Michael Lambek and Paul Antze have summarised, “[...] memory begins when experience itself is definitely past” (1999, p. xiii). Events that take place in the past are revoked with the summoning of memory, so, in essence, it is a conduit to the days gone by. It can be “conceptualized as a force in conflict with the counter-force of repression and as highly compromised by the encounter” (ibid. xii). It is only by unpeeling the different layers of this conflict that we can look at memory as embodied practice. Involving “[...] neuronal, medical and psychological as well as literary, cultural, social and political studies [...]” (Assmann 2006, p. 210), memory has attracted a wide gamut of research that can tap into the inner sanctum of the creolised images (Basu 2013; Hacking 1999). There is a need to move beyond the laboratory setting of the psy-

chologist and delve into the “full complexity of the mind in culture and history” (Bloch 1999, p. 215) to extract the lost narratives. I bring forth one such narrative, written as a petition in 2016:

On the 22nd of March, after the police force had brutally lathi-charged protesting students who were armed with slogans and songs, they did not stop the onslaught there. After driving away the students from the premises of the VC's lodge¹, the police started pushing us backwards.

I was sitting in the parking lot of School of Humanities, some 100m from the VC's lodge, after the brutal attack on students. Getting hit a few times, I was trying to get myself composed to face the prevailing situation. Suddenly I was picked up by a few constables and they dragged me to a police van. I must have posed a great threat to the nation, for two constables held my collar and hair while others started beating me with their sticks and one came and kicked me. Prof. B. Shobha, from School of Mathematics and Statistics, came to my rescue but she was manhandled and pushed out of the way by the police. After boarding the bus, a constable punched me in the abdomen and slapped me a few times. In the same manner, the others were made to board the bus. Prof. K. Y. Ratnam, a senior faculty from Dept. of Political Science, was pushed and forcibly made to sit in the bus. His only fault was that he questioned why the police were beating the students so much. A student who [sic] taking a video of this brutality from some distance was caught and made to endure the same fate. After they put him on the bus, the policemen told him that he should take nude videos of his sister and mother. ... For the next forty minutes, we were continuously kicked, slapped, punched, our hair was pulled, poked by the stick. They called us anti-nationals, ISI agents, Pakistani. Why? Because we protested against an institutional murderer? They abused Rohith Vemula, calling him a ‘motherfucker’ and said how does the death of one matter so much? We were told that our sisters and mothers would be raped, that the girls of UoH are ‘sluts’, ‘prostitutes’ ... Our phones were snatched immediately and we were cut off from communication for the next 72 h. I cannot but think this as an abduction. We were taken to multiple police stations, treated worse than criminals, all the while threatened. We were told that every time there is unrest in the campus, we will be picked up by the police, even if we have not done anything. Along with the physical assaults, the verbal abuses of sexist, racist nature continued till we reached Miyapur police station. A handicapped student was hit more for being handicapped visually. Our names and caste were asked and Muslim students were selectively tortured more. I requested them not to hit my face since I wear glasses. They heeded to the requested by hitting me more. My glasses broke by incessant slapping and right now somehow I am managing with the broken glasses.

We were taken to a doctor at a government hospital who simply prescribed painkillers and declared us fit for the court. We were clueless about what was

¹ The Vice-Chancellor is the highest body of administration in Indian universities, who looks after the daily happenings and is in-charge of all university matters.

going to happen next. Every time we asked them, they said our future is ruined so it doesn't matter much. We were presented in front of a magistrate, after over 30h of arrest, which is a clear violation of the law. The magistrate, at her residence, saw only just a handful of us and sent all of us to judicial custody. Neither was there any evidence nor any immediate reason, but the police wanted to make a point, and they did by subverting all the institutions of the state. Our rights were suspended, we were tortured and beaten mercilessly, we were not allowed to have any legal aid, and we were not allowed to inform our friends and family of our whereabouts.

I refuse to believe that any crime, which has not even been proved, will call for such inhumane treatment. ... I have been told that my future, academic and otherwise, is doomed forever. I cannot express in words, for they won't do justice to the experience, about what happened on the 22nd of March and thereafter. It goes much beyond the physical torture.

(Written in May 2016)

I wrote this petition a month after I was released on bail from one of the high-security prisons in India. The petition, circulated over internal university emails, was intended to inform my peers and professors of one of the highly acclaimed central Universities about the consequences of taking part in protests, and ask for more like-minded individuals to speak up. The protests were triggered by the suicide of an exceptionally brilliant student Rohith Vemula on 16 January 2016; as he, along with four other students, was punished for getting into an altercation with students from the right-wing political outfit. Coincidentally, only the Dalit students were selectively punished, that too through social boycotting—they were not allowed to appear or be in public spaces of the enclosed university. Although I have never aligned myself with any student political groups, this incident, however, caused a tremor within me and shattered my caste privileges and social positioning as an upper-caste, middle-class, cis-gender, heterosexual man. The need to proclaim my position here is not merely to wash off or sanitise my caste-privileged identity but rather I intend to introduce myself—not hiding behind carefully pruned, rational, academic objectivity. I joined the protests, outraged at this 'institutional murder' of yet another Dalit student². I stood in solidarity with the historically oppressed section of my country. I was beaten up by the police multiple times, arrested, sent to prison and slapped with too many sections of the Indian Penal Code. This article is a study of the process of silencing and articulating memories of traumatic events experienced during the anti-caste discrimination protests at the University of Hyderabad in 2016. It puts forth the conditions resulting in the silences and those that facilitate expressions. Last but not least, this paper is an expression of the audacity to resist 'culture's canonical narratives' (Ellis 1997, p. 134) about students' protests and corresponding police actions that have become all too familiar in contemporary times. The idea is to highlight the experience and paint the memory, rather than look for or be outraged by the systemic nature of violence, which is not within the scope of this paper.

² For more, see Teltumbe (2016), Hegde (2016).

This article looks into the evolving discourses on memory and memory studies to locate the role of trauma in the making of silence and the circumstances that enable the expression of traumatic memories. The petition not only sets the context for exploring the silencing of memories but also helps in understanding the reasons and conditions that facilitate de-silencing. I ask why and how memories and experiences are silenced, and how those memories find conduits for expression through narratives. How does trauma facilitate the silencing and anticipate the de-silencing of memory? Using Lambek and Antze's (1996) theorisations on traumatic memory, various aspects of bodily and mental memory are explored in this paper to understand how both play an active role in the production of fear and anxiety in everyday life. To counter the normalisation of these traumatic, embodied memories (of events mentioned in the petition), the need for de-silencing is probed. To aid the process of de-silencing, I argue that temporal and spatial distancing enables the retelling, thereby forming favourable conditions. The petition, in this paper, acts as an 'emotional recall' (Ellis 1997) as in order "[...] to give a convincing and authentic performance, the actor relives in detail a situation in which she previously had felt the emotion she wants to enact" (p. 130). This enables my petition to be read as an autoethnographic text and analysed in the light of Ellis' (1997) framing of 'evocative autoethnography', which will be dealt with in detail in the following section. By framing the questions of memory, expression, and traumatic experience within the ambit of a social movement, this paper contributes to the methodology of de-silencing of narratives and suppressed voices, and would add to the evolving field of psychological anthropology—the multi-layered interaction between psyche and society.

2 Autoethnography as a method

As I started working on this paper a few years ago, I asked myself how much I actually want to tell; how much would not get me into trouble with the powers-that-be; how can I express intense emotions without turning them into my version of history. After trying to be cryptic and vague in the last versions of this paper, lest too many details inform the state of my academic transgressions, it dawned upon me to use a text—the petition—written 7 years ago right after police action on protesting students at the University of Hyderabad, to ascertain the veracity of the events. The usage of this text, then, can be read as an autoethnographic analysis: "Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno)" (Ellis et al. 2011, p. 273). The advantage of using this petition as an autoethnographic text enables the researcher "to give a convincing and authentic performance", in which "the actor relives in detail a situation in which she previously had felt the emotion she wants to enact" (Ellis 1997, p. 130). This is what Carolyn Ellis would deem as an 'emotional recall', which helps in the analysis of psychological processes regarding traumatic events. Thereby, rather than reproducing the traumatic narrative 7 years after the events taking place, an archived ethnographic text can circumvent the politics of reproduction. The recounting would

have to rely on archived written memory, thereby relying on the pillars of ‘history’³. Here, autoethnography is a valuable tool for moving around the temporal scale, and exploring the changes taking place (*ibid.*, p. 132).

Even though autoethnography can be both a process and a method, in this paper, I will limit the usage of autoethnography as a method to read and analyse the petition (mentioned in the introduction) and the life-events. Autoethnography as a method can be understood to have three functional aspects—performative, reflexive, critical. The performative aspect of the petition highlights the autoethnographic nature of the text. It transports the readers to a world where “praxis, ethnography, rhetoric, and activism in public (and private) life” (Denzin 2018, p. 51) come together to create not only an enacted telling but also an enacted reading. Although the reader is not at the scene of the incident, the evocative telling as a performance enables the reader to witness the genesis of the traumatic memory. The reflexive aspect, I would surmise, points to the ability to reflect and be self-reflexive in undertaking an emic analysis. As the researcher is enmeshed in trying to understand specific social phenomena, autoethnography helps in positing the researcher within his/her research, rather than being a reclusive observer with no stake (Hackett et al. 2016). This calls for a self-reflexive methodology (Gergen and Gergen 1991) that can adequately enable the analysis of not only the research but most importantly, of the person undertaking the research. The critical aspect is underlined by the need to use “critical standpoints as a way to theorize about lived experiences contextualized in intersectionalities” (Tilley-Lubbs 2018, p. 14). Although aware of my positionality, I seek to explore my narration as a testimony to events that have transpired. Not unmindful of the manner “in which stories are embedded in historical, political, economic, and ideological worlds” and “the ways in which narratives create those worlds” (Young 1996, p. 25), I do not claim to deny any of those predispositions in this recounting. On the contrary, I use it as a trope to delve into the formation and execution of the act of silencing, which will be explored in the next section.

3 Trauma weds memory: silencing of narratives

The idea of watching police videos has always been traumatic for me since my custodial torture by the police, back in 2016. So, when my friend naively asked me a few years later if I wanted to watch something ‘funny’, my expectations of something amusing soon turned sour as it turned out to be a video where a policeman is brutally punishing a woman for violating the law. It made me visibly upset and I chided my friend for his purported ‘macabre’ taste. It was unexpected for my friend and an expected reaction for me. Ever since the police beatings, incarcerations and hounding, the police seem like malaise to be kept as far away as possible. But why

³ Scholars have often questioned the veracity of reproduced memory as an ever-changing flux that can erode with time and cannot be relied upon. Written annals, as against the former, are often argued to be truer to the temporality of time and space and can be entrusted with archiving ‘true’ events, thereby adding to the perennial debate on history and memory. For more, see Nora (1989), Lambek (1999).

is it so? Why does the simple sight of the police hitting someone trigger a whole chain of reactions that make me uncomfortable?

Although the mind can only retain so much information from one's vast number of experiences, efforts beyond the corporeal frame aid the selective forgetting of events to fulfil the selective individual and collective amnesia. Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1995) has contested that "[...] any historical narrative is a particular bundle of silences" (p. 27), essentially pointing to the fact that all telling is a portion of what transpired at a point in time. Looking closely at the functionality of history, Trouillot sums up that silencing can occur at various stages in the process of crystallisation of the past—sources, archives, narratives and making of history. What is important to take away from this formulation is the efforts made by the various 'actors' and 'agents' at different points in time to ensure that this remembering is silenced. This is further magnified in repressive state orders where 'illiberal democracies' (Jaffrelot 2017) engage in a modern exculpatory version of history. In the book *Origins of Totalitarianism* (Arendt 1951), Hannah Arendt captures the elements of totalitarian states practising the erasure of memory to create a "continuous past". This is to curtail the grief accumulated, which can find its way through remembrance and question to the positionality of authority.

Incarceration for 2 weeks in a high-security central prison in 2016 was preceded by physical torture and succeeded by mental harassment for months. This transfer from the body and the mind to the memoryscapes⁴ is retained and revisited in intervals when triggered by ambient events. In the third edition of *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders of the American Psychiatric Association* (DSM III 1980), traumatic memory is defined for the first time as the remembrance of a "traumatic event that is outside the range of usual human experience" (p. 236), and that would cause marked distress to nearly anyone. This was the watershed moment, as sociologically-induced diseases such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) were introduced into the clinical psychiatry nomenclature (Scott 1990). The DSM III goes on to say, "The traumatic event may be experienced in a variety of ways. Commonly the individual has recurrent painful, intrusive recollections of the event or recurrent dreams or nightmares during which the event is reexperienced" (1980, p. 236). That would explain my uncomfortable reaction to my friend's showing a video of a policeman beating someone. The traumatic stress is "often intensified when the individual is exposed to situations or activities that resemble or symbolize the original trauma" (ibid., p. 237). Allan Young (1996) has studied this kind of traumatic memory in depth to figure out the nitty-gritty of "cruel and painful experiences that corrupt or destroy one's sense of oneself" (p. 89). Young also highlights the need to read traumatic memory as being of two types: mental memory, which he defines as "the mind's record of the patient's own traumatic experience" (ibid., p. 96); and bodily memory where the body retains the past experiences, and it manifests in different forms. I will attempt to contextualise these two kinds of

⁴ Paul Basu (2013), while coining the term 'memoryscape', defined it as "comprised of a multiplicity of different forms of remembering: those that are intentional and communicable through language, narrative or material form, as well as those which are unintentional and 'inherently non-narrative', such as embodied forms of memory" (p. 116).

traumatic memory first, and then propose a third advent of traumatic memory—fear of reliving the past in the present.

In the case of mental memory, the first indicator was the recurrence of nightmares. The APA Dictionary of Psychology defines nightmares as: “a frightening or otherwise disturbing dream in which fear, sadness, despair, disgust, or some combination thereof forms the emotional content” (online). One of the typical reasons for nightmares is ‘post-traumatic stress disorder’ (APA 1980). For many months after my incarceration, I was visited by a single nightmare over and over again which caused a considerable amount of discomfort. This was the mental memory that kept repeating itself and still does at intervals. This memory is of being pushed into a bus and tortured as the bus kept moving. This was instrumental in my hesitation to even board buses after the incident, which manifested in marked distress for many months. As I had to rely on public transport, I had to relive the traumatic experience of being inside a moving bus many times over. Although the nightmare would be a copy of the experience of being tortured inside a moving bus and end with me waking up in utter distress, the mental memory manifested in creating a conscious discomfort during my bus rides. Every time I had nightmares, I would wake up with an acute sense of fear and anxiety but also relief and solace that it was just a dream and not reality; which was not possible during conscious bus rides. Robben contests that the flashbacks are “unresolved traumas about past atrocities” (2005, p. 122) and as there is but no resolution to the past, these are dealt with within the memoryscapes, which seems like the only viable medium of the transaction of the past and the present. This is where the mental memory becomes aligned with the traumatic events in the past to find a conduit in the present.

The bodily memory manifested itself as a result of the torture that was inflicted, which resulted in an array of physical ailments, including chondromalacia patella (CMP) and quadriceps tendonitis. The embodied memory from the traumatic events enables the mind to instantly relive the moment when the physical pain from any of these ailments is triggered after arduous physical work. CMP is a result of a blunt injury to the knees and has no cure other than adequate rest. What that also means is that there is no way of washing off the memory or the traumatic revisiting that it causes. Herbert Spencer’s idea of phylogenetic memory can come in handy in the understanding of this marriage between body and mind. ‘Phylogenetic memory’ is the “[...] pre-determined internal relations ... [that] have been determined by the experiences of preceding organisms” (c.f. Young 1996, p. 92). Simply put, that the police are emblematic of violence is well-settled in popular culture, and that is further reinstated through the embodied memories of trauma, as there is a constant fear of harm. The repeated exposure to the same set of physical injuries attributes to itself a “mnemonic power” whereby the actor is forced to relive the distress and trauma every time s/he encounters pain. Antze and Lambek note, “[...] the body is called upon to provide signs of import” (Antze and Lambek 1996, p. xiii) of memory, thereby making the events of the past legitimate. The bodily memory is a perennial companion, which keeps the past traumatic events alive (Nora 1989; Antze and Lambek 1996), even many years after it happened.

The third advent of traumatic memory, I argue, is the fear, stress and anxiety that is aroused by the fear of reliving the past in the present. I propose to connect

fear with physical injury as a mechanism to keep away certain ambient structures that can arouse pain through the re-enactment of bodily memory. What it means is that the conscious mind has developed a mechanism to fear the events that cause injury. This is probably why I would look over my shoulder every time I see a police car approaching me. In the aftermath of the incarceration, my fellow arrestees and I had to regularly visit the local police station, which was a condition of our bail arrangement. This time was utilised by the police to subscribe to a brand of fear production that is supposed to imbibe a feeling of desperation and anxiety. They would sit us down and drown us in threats starting from destroying our futures, ensuring that we do not get jobs, or be able to study abroad, or anything that society has come to regard as 'success'⁵. Furthermore, we were categorically told that if there is any disturbance of the law and order situation in the future, we would be picked up by the police even if we have no role to play in it, because they had our personal information, enough to herd us like sheep for slaughter. This reminds us of the "letter of good behaviour" that was refused to the people of South Bali who had been accused of involvement in the communist protests (Dwyer 2009). Interestingly, such letters were also a matter of significance in my case, as to obtain a passport or any other employment, the local police have had to provide a police clearance certificate, which the policemen categorically mentioned, would not be in my favour and would be impossible for me to get a job or study abroad. In the years following, all my jobs and studies have been marred by this same anxiety of being refused or targeted. My passport can easily be revoked, and I might not be allowed to leave the country for work or studies or be deported from a foreign nation. These fears make the memory of the events from seven years back as fresh as ever. It ensures that the mind does not forget, as it leads to the normalising of fear in everyday life (Young 1996). This, along with mental and bodily memory, is a perennial reminder to maintain silence and never forget.

Through the three aspects of traumatic memory, the mind and body remember and are also made to remember periodically through ambient, everyday, banal events—naïve actions such as sharing a video of the police beating someone, riding a bus, or hearing a police siren passing by. The embodied memories keep the traumatic events alive and force the mind to silence these traumatic events and let them dwell on the memoryscapes lest they cause further injury. "Psychoanalysis states that people resort to repression or dissociation to protect themselves from memories too painful and destabilizing to admit to consciousness" (Robben 2005, p. 123). This explains my inability to speak about my experiences with my family or friends. I made the utmost effort that my workplaces don't find out about it, so that I am not asked to leave for my records or face awkward questions. Similar testimonies from those who were arrested along with me, sound the cautionary tale of not mentioning the past events of arrest, torture, incarceration in any official/state communication.

⁵ Hannah Arendt makes an interesting case of what entails 'success' in society in her work *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (Arendt 1963), where individuals would not jeopardise their futures in lieu of careerism and social mobility. The theoretical framework of 'fear for the future' is being developed in another article by the author of this paper, which addresses questions of how the state can shape behaviour of youth by threatening to spoil their 'career prospects'.

But then why do we need to express these suppressed memories? What allows the expression of these silenced memories?

4 De-silencing: why and when?

It is important to note that although some narratives gain importance, others will be lost in the routinisation of the dominant narratives. The ‘dome of silence’ (Hirsch 2012) becomes symptomatic of the hidden memories that are too uncomfortable to see the light of day. Why is it important then to ensure that these memories become part of the visible narratives? Ann Stoler (2009), while studying Dutch colonial archival documents, highlights the acute anxiety that is caused by the colonised for the coloniser when the exculpatory version of events is sidetracked to finely read through the historical documents, which reverts the history written so far. It not only causes anxiety about undermining the coloniser’s version of the narrative but also rejuvenates the anxiety of losing power. This is important to expose the silences that have been normalised.

Trouillot (1995) has stated that the silences in history reveal the winner and losers. It has always been intriguing that the carriers of history and silences have particular roles to play when it comes to revisiting each. For history, institutional memory and periodic remembrances suffice to keep it afloat. The silences are often relegated to the realm of memory, reduced to an individualistic existence. I intend to delve into this existence and the threat that it entails, which makes it even more relevant to ‘de-silence’ the events of the past. It is interesting to note that the elderly often recount stories from the ‘good ole’ days’ after a certain point in time (Adorno 1986; LaCapra 1994). Although this may appear inconspicuous and mundane, I would contest that this is a product of a realisation that these stories are on the verge of losing, and it needs to be passed on for the sake of the events that transpired.

Silences are maintained because the powers of the day refuse to acknowledge any narrative that can essentially challenge their authority. Silences are also maintained if there is a threat to existence from the powers of the day or the fear of reliving the past. The police, although institutionalising me, made it abundantly clear that if I try to speak to others or give interviews, talk about our experience, then I should be prepared for the consequences. Thus, to expose these silences would entail a certain spatial and temporal distancing that can ensure that no harm is done to the narrator of the silences. Perhaps that is why most recount their traumatic memories during the last stage of their life when there is considerably less threat to life. Plenty of works on anthropology document the recounting of events after a while by the elderly, across the globe. “The traumatic event is repressed or denied and registers only belatedly after the passage of a period of latency” (LaCapra 1998, p. 9). So why is it that the elderly suddenly feel the need to tell their stories? My thesis is that they realise that these stories would soon be obsolete or forgotten if not transferred to another realm of memory or consciousness. I base this on Robben’s (2005) reading of accounts of competing narratives that emerged after the end of the military rule in Argentina in 1983. It was essential to challenge the narrative of the perpetrators and archive the silenced memories by passing them down to others and in the public

domain. This is the first factor that aids in the de-silencing of suppressed narratives. The timing is also convenient as these old-aged individuals have considerably less to lose owing to their remoteness from the events that took place (the temporal shift) and the harm that can befall them from the powers of the day (the spatial shift). If either of these two or both are invoked, then the natural urge to tell the silenced narratives gains precedence. To apply this in the reading of my narrative would be a shift in the direction of psychological anthropology—by autoethnographically analysing the petition and the life-choices made thereafter, in this case, to study the affective nature of the events.

Since the events of 2016, I have seldom talked with anyone about what transpired. None of my workplaces ever had a clue about my past, nor did I feel the need to give it away. The threat was palpable—what if someone got to know about the court proceedings against me, what if I am asked to leave my job, what if I am asked to report to the local police as a preventive measure—were some of the premonitions. There were those, amongst the arrestees, who did lecture tours and appeared visibly on television shows, but they had political careers ahead of them, so an 'active record' is better than none. For the rest of us, the instructions from the police were clear—speak and you will be in trouble. It was not a veiled statement, rather it couldn't be any more direct. There was an 'official version' of the truth and facts from the state authorities, that there was a 'law and order' situation caused by protesting students that needed to be 'handled'. The 'unofficial' version, of the brutal police torture, illegal detention, false imprisonment, and trumped-up charges, was relegated to the memoryscapes as they were silenced. It is quite interesting to note that only after I came to Germany and that after months of staying there did I decide to share the stories with my peers. The spatial distance was indeed a boon in the recovery of this narrative and its expression of it. I did not have to worry if sharing my experiences would alert law enforcement officials as I am far away from their jurisdiction. Yet, being an *Außländer* (foreigner/alien) in Germany, the thought of being deported for having an active record did cause some consternation. The temporal shift is negligible as the period is just a few (7) years. For most, I would surmise that it is usually decades before they start telling their stories.

But the question remains, was the urge to share the silenced memories so strong that only a spatial shift facilitated it? This is where the second factor of memories becoming obsolete comes into play. As discussed earlier, if the memories are not shared, then they die a silent death with the death of the carrier of the memory. This is where the conscious mind ensures that these silenced memories are transferred to the nearest set of carriers of memory—in this case, postmemory⁶—in order to not become obsolete and dead. Interestingly, when I analyse my behaviour in sharing these stories, it became even more apparent when I realised that there was a good chance that I might be deported back to India, as I had to renew my passport while

⁶ "Postmemory" describes the relationship that the 'generation after' bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before—to experiences they 'remember' only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right" (sourced from <https://postmemory.net/>). For more, see Marriane Hirsch's "The Generation of Postmemory" (2012).

in Germany in 2019, and there was a chance that the renewal might not take place owing to the pending police cases back in India. With this presumption of events taking place shortly, it became apparent that sharing my narrative with people would ensure that it does not become obsolete even if I have been removed from that time and space. Upon retrospection of my actions (that of sharing my narrative), it is apparent that this sharing is not a naïve or innocent act unto itself, but it is loaded with the political and social implications of foregrounding the silenced narratives, which, I argue, are also closely linked to that of identity and its continuous evolution. This is also connected to the fact that “remembering trauma may be personally empowering and sometimes lead to collective organizing” (Lambek and Antze 1996, p. xxiv). It helps to create a space for solidarity, and both resist and frame the emotion repertoires.

5 Discussion: the shaping of identity

From the previous section, it has become important to locate the identity of the carrier amid the silencing and de-silencing of traumatic memories. By ‘identity’, I refer to the “[...] sets of meanings that define who we are in terms of the roles we have, the groups or social categories to which we belong, or the unique characteristics that make us different from others” (Burke 2020, online edition). The de-silencing of memory is discursive, as Lambek and Antze have highlighted that “there is a dialectical relationship between experience and narrative, between the narrative self and the narrated self” (1999, p. xviii). We draw from our experiences to shape our narratives and in the process, our narratives shape our identity and character (Prager 2001; Cole 2004). The meaning-making is undertaken with the help of the emotion repertoires that encapsulate and enable both the silencing and de-silencing of expressions under circumstances. Emotion repertoires “are specific configurations of cultural repertoires that guide human actions and meaning in durable, practicable, and relationally intelligible ways (von Poser et al. 2019, p. 241).” I was told by the police to not talk about our experiences during the arrest, lest I would be punished, and my future would be ‘ruined’. For the police and law enforcement, it was of paramount importance to have control over the narratives expressed. The repertoire of ‘futures at stake’ from the police officials helped to normalise the silences because I was scared that arrest, torture and incarceration could follow at any moment if I didn’t do as I was told by the police. The institutionalisation of protesting voices helps to create the schemas that ensure that the state’s narratives become the dominant ones. ‘Institutionalism’ is read here as a tool to subjectify (Foucault 1983) actors or citizens to comply with state diktats “because refusal or failure to do so results in feelings of anomie and, at the extreme, mortification” (Cooper et al. 2008, p. 676). This is an important facet of remembering and expression because these “repertoires are the ‘glue’ that connects individuals within different affective communities” (von Poser et al. 2019, p. 241). Thus, to be a ‘normal citizen’ and be part of the peaceful citizenry, I had to forego my right to express my traumatic memories, incurred at the cost of state brutality.

Analysing the operative terms 'durable', 'practicable' and 'relationally intelligible' also helps us to understand the process of de-silencing and how the repertoires "take shape during the processes of socialization" (ibid.). The de-silencing is a performance of negotiating and creating "relational spheres of affective resonance" (ibid.) and creating affective communities (Zink 2019) of solidarity. I started talking about my traumatic experiences with people who could empathise and help to create solidarities that can effectively facilitate "feelings of belonging" (ibid.) but also the sense of loss. By speaking candidly with my peers and like-minded individuals, I realised that the silenced narratives were being given an outlet. Owing to my spatial and temporal situatedness (of being away from the site of traumatic events), I was able to use the repertoires of violence and injustice to create 'emotional collectives'. Thus, although the state had its own set of emotion repertoires to silence me, I operationalised my repertoires of speaking and educating like-minded individuals to de-silence those suppressed, traumatic narratives. Of course, the act of expressing suppressed memories involves a careful estimation of what is at risk and what could be at risk.

Antze and Lambek have stated that "Memories are produced out of experience and, in turn, reshape it. This implies that memory is intrinsically linked to identity" (1996, p. xii) This is an important summation of the linkage between memory and identity. It has been established that the process of telling itself is not unidirectional and what is at stake is the time, space and audience, which would all in some way affect the narrator. This is what makes the recounting different each time, although the content remains the same and the traumatic emotions it arouses remain the same, as has been from experience. But it is also true, as scholars of memory and trauma have come to show that with every telling there is a growing inability to feel the pain that would inadvertently be created by the telling. This is the normalisation of pain and fear in the lifeworld where the memory of past traumatic events has comfortably settled, only to be recalled in instalments (Young 1996). What is essential to study is how it affects the individual and her/his identity. There is an agential understanding of the process of de-silencing as well, because the repertoires not only empower the carrier of the traumatic memories and experiences but also open up the portals for reaching out to others with similar embodied memories. Thus, I used the emotion repertoire of blatant injustice and trauma caused as a toolkit, to facilitate the de-silencing of the memories, with the help of spatial and temporal distancing. If I carefully analyse my process of de-silencing, it becomes clear that I have learned "how and when to display and respond to feelings in certain ways, and which positive or negative sanctions to anticipate in view of their own and others' affective and emotional enactments" (von Poser et al. 2019, p. 243). This is not to say that in the near future, I won't be harmed by the police or other agencies. The act of writing this paper, upon reflection, may also be read as a genesis of an emotion repertoire to tell my silenced story, which has mostly been dealt with in the memoryscapes. On the other hand, the repertoire of 'future at stake' adds a layer of hesitation if the silences were a more pragmatic choice.

Memories play a crucial role in determining which aspects of our identities get prominence and which aspects are silenced. The need to mention this here is because the shaping of identity would also affect the memories that are being recounted and

the way in which they have been recounted. “[...] any invocation of memory is part of an identity discourse and thus the conceptualisations of memory and the ‘self,’ or ‘subject,’ mutually imply one another” (Lambek and Antze 1996, p. xxi). While seated in a group with my peers during an academic excursion in Berlin on memory studies in 2019, I started telling my story of incarceration. After a long day of study-related activities, my peers and I were relaxing in a park. I had until then never spoken about my past with anyone in my study cohort at Heidelberg University. After recounting the events, the entire group went silent, till someone in the group suggested that we should call it a day and head back to our hostel. The next day, one of the people from the group came up and apologised for not being able to come up with a response to my story. I told him that it didn’t need any response and that I was not sure why I had even told the story in the first place. Upon reflection, I realised that I was intending to renew my passport, so I was battling the fear of being deported and the need to share the story became essential as an act of de-silencing. While writing this paper, I asked myself multiple times whether it would be safe, prudent or reckless to talk about my experiences with law enforcement. As stated previously, earlier drafts of this paper have often been cryptic with or wanting of details. It has been exhausting to ponder over which silences to express and which to linger upon. These calculations are further complicated in everyday encounters with questions of which group of people would be more receptive to the repertoires, or which group would pose a threat.

These exchanges determine how we conduct our day-to-day activities. In the vast spectrum of rituals and habits, memory keeps shaping the identity or rather the act of revisiting the memory keeps shaping the identity. “The inner workings of the self must be investigated in a reciprocal relationship with the other: concrete action, dialogue, emotion, and thinking are featured, but they are represented within relationships and institutions, very much impacted by history, social structure, and culture, which themselves are dialectically revealed through action, thought, and language” (Ellis 1997, pp. 132–133). These encounters are open-ended insofar as the repertoires are yet to be normalised and accepted. It is these responses (or the lack thereof) from ambient agents that leave a mark and affect the way in which the story will be told (if at all), or which aspects of the story will be silenced. It is a dynamic process of affecting and getting affected that makes remembering and expression highly contestable.

6 Conclusion

The primary objective of this article has been to trace the role of trauma, silence and expression in the realm of memoryscapes in a rather personal understanding of each of these terms and the implications it has had for my psyche and the act of telling or narrating. By fine-combing the intentionality of narrating, I have delved into the why and when of expression of silences marred by trauma. Navigating through the works on memory studies and personal experience, I have analysed the conditions that result in the silencing and de-silencing of traumatic events. Works on memory have usually been research on individuals or collectives that are narrated to

the researcher—so in essence, the researcher becomes an audience to that memory. This article, however, delves into the traumatic memories of the author—as I have explored this narration by critically reflecting on my behaviour, after the events of 2016.

The act of telling is difficult and seldom fluid. It comes in bursts and then it dries away completely, only to be reminded of the experiences through a trigger and the need to dispense with it before becoming obsolete. In this paper, I argue that the de-silencing of lost or silent narratives is accomplished when the person is either spatially or temporally removed from the events of the past. Furthermore, there must be a palpable sense of becoming obsolete that generates the need to tell or narrate. Under other circumstances, the mind senses the threats and chooses silence as the memories get crystallised in the memoryscape, to be retrieved under favourable circumstances. The interplay of distance and the excavation of memory is an important point that needs to be highlighted. Only at a distance does the process of remembering ease up and it becomes possible to recount without immediate threats.

Being well aware of Durkheim's dictum of social facts being *sui generis*⁷, I have taken my own experiences from the past to make sense of the present. The transculturality of repressive orders necessitates a thorough reading of the "cultural tropes and social forms" (Lambek and Antze 1996, p. xiv) that can shed light on the silencing and de-silencing of traumatic memories. This paper started with the audacity to even express a silenced memory, marred by trauma. So, it is only apt to end it with the audacity of hope that more silenced memories will be expressed under favourable circumstances and that we are more mindful of our telling and retelling. These formulate and are products of emotion repertoires that enable the building of affective communities. This not only adds to the emotion repertoires but also helps to reconcile with the past, accept the present and prepare for the future. As much as we claim to be, no action is naïve, and neither is the actor. And to trace these ruptures of action would enable a better understanding of our minds.

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⁷ It refers to the claim that social scientists should not take claims of individual minds at face value and should rather focus on the collective representation of the past to get a clearer picture.

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