

The World Humanities Report

# Memory Work Needs to Be Infused with the Power of Imagination

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Elizabeth Deligio in conversation with  
María del Rosario Acosta López



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The World Humanities Report gratefully acknowledges the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation for funding this project.

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This publication is available online at <https://worldhumanitiesreport.org>.

Suggested citation:

Deligio, Elizabeth. "Memory Work Needs to Be Infused with the Power of Imagination." Interview by María del Rosario Acosta López. In *Memory Work in Colombia: Past and Present Experiences, Legacies for the Future*, edited by María del Rosario Acosta López. World Humanities Report, CHCI, 2023.

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# Memory Work Needs to Be Infused with the Power of Imagination

Elizabeth Deligio Chicago Torture Justice Center

María del Rosario Acosta López University of California, Riverside

**María del Rosario Acosta López:** First of all, thank you so much for being here. It is for me a pleasure to have the opportunity to talk to you about these subjects, particularly because it is thanks to you that I got involved with the Chicago Torture Justice Center and Memorials.<sup>1</sup> I learned so much from working with you, from reading your work, from picking your brain—every single time—but also, truly, from just seeing you in those contexts. I’ve always admired the way you are present in those contexts, and I’ve learned a lot from that. So, thank you so much.

**Elizabeth Deligio:** Thank you.

**María del Rosario Acosta López:** I want to start by asking you to recount briefly for us the path that led you to get involved with historical memory issues. And in this path, I would like you to tell us a little bit about your experience both in the context of the Colombian transitional process, and, of course, in the context of the Chicago Torture Justice Memorials (CTJM) and now the Chicago Torture Justice Center (CTJC).

**Elizabeth Deligio:** I was a part of a social movement in the United States that’s called the School of the Americas Watch. They look at US interventions that had happened in Latin America, with a specific focus on militarism through the School of the Americas, which is a US military training installation that brings soldiers from Latin America to the US, trains them in counterinsurgency methods, and then sends them back. This training was at the heart of the worst violence that came out in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s in Latin America. And, for

\* All interviews included in this project took place in June–July 2021. To keep their original nature and tone, they were not significantly updated and therefore might contain information, references, or comments that have become outdated by the time of publication.

<sup>1</sup> See Chicago Torture Justice Center (<http://chicagotorturejustice.org/>) and Chicago Torture Justice Memorials (<https://chicagotorture.org/>).

context, such violence in Colombia is ongoing of course. So, being a member of that movement, I became a representative of the Ethics Commission, which was a commission put together between the Inter-Church Commission for Justice and Peace and the Movement of the Victims of State Crime (MOVICE).<sup>2</sup>

The Ethics Commission was created after the Justice and Peace Law was passed under Álvaro Uribe's presidency in 2005. Their concern was to look more closely at the way Uribe was approaching both the ongoing conflict and traumatic events that had already happened, with the risk that there was going to be a selection of memories that would be OK to keep nationally, such as "guerrilla violence," but that the memories of people who had experienced state violence or violence from paramilitaries or corporate actors would not be kept, that they would not be honored, redressed, or addressed.

So this was a commission of partners from around the world, and we would come together in Colombia and visit with communities that were impacted particularly by state and paramilitary violence. We would receive testimonies from them about what was happening, but we would also get to listen to what they were trying to envision for the future. It was then that I experienced what it meant to be inside that kind of simultaneity between the past, the present, and the future, so necessary and productive for building memory: watching them in the present tell the stories of what had happened in the past and then using that knowledge to envision a future. In that way, it was Colombians who taught me about the concept of historical memory and the kind of tension that exists between history and memory, and it was them who taught me what it means for people who are impacted by violence and written out of history to do the work of creating memory. So I was, with really amazing generosity and passion, taught by these Colombian communities.

And then I was seeing similar conditions where communities in the United States are impacted by state violence. There are histories that are written that don't recognize that violence, and then these folks are left to prove that something happened, prove that it mattered, and then try to create a different future. I could see some of the same conditions, with differences that are unique in each context. And that led me to work with a specific community in Chicago that was dealing with a history that the city of Chicago refused to recognize, which

<sup>2</sup> MOVICE is a movement in which organized groups of victims of state crime converge. State crimes are mainly those perpetrated by state agents or by nonstate agents (such as paramilitary groups) acting in complicity with, or whose crimes are tolerated by, the state. These crimes include, among others, murder, extermination, slavery, forced disappearance, forced displacement, expulsion, or persecution of the civilian population for social, political, economic, racial, religious, or cultural reasons. See <https://movimientodevictimas.org/en/que-son-los-crime-nes-de-estado/>.

had happened with a specific group of police officers.<sup>3</sup> They weren't calling it "historical memory work," but in their work to have that recognized and to have a form of repair for the community that had been impacted, I saw the relationship between the two contexts, and I wanted to be able to have those worlds talk to one another, because I felt like they needed each other.

**María del Rosario Acosta López:** Thank you, Liz; this starts mapping out how all these connections can actually happen, and it is so serendipitous that several of us ended up being part of those two worlds in the same place and at the same time. So it's really beautiful to see that and how it allowed me to be part of that, too.

I think I want to dwell a little bit longer on this notion of historical memory, not only the notion that you brought with you from Colombia, but also the notion that you have developed in connection to your work in Chicago with police torture survivors. As you point out clearly when you write about your experience with them, these are communities that have been surviving structural forms of violence and oppression—violence that needs to be seen and understood therefore as such, as structural, in addition to and without losing sight of the specific circumstances that surround these singular stories. I think your own work draws on this use of the notion of historical memory in a very pertinent way, by showing that trauma in these contexts is also structural and cannot be treated only as individual "cases."<sup>4</sup> Thus, you talk about memory, in these contexts, as "a force that draws the world together" and also as a site for social contestation and transformation.<sup>5</sup>

But you also go deeper and combine this approach with a decolonial framework or lens. So you use very creatively the work that is being done today in decolonial studies for memory studies in psychology. You point to two fundamental issues here. On the one hand, you talk about the need to open ourselves to a different understanding of temporality in the context of memory building, while also pointing to the power structures at play at the very level of temporal frameworks—something one does not encounter often in psycho-

<sup>3</sup> For further analysis and descriptions of the many connections between historical memory work in Colombia and the CTJC, see Laura Zornosa's contribution to this volume, "How We Remember: Memory Work in Chicago and Colombia," in *Memory Work in Colombia: Past and Present Experiences, Legacies for the Future*, ed. María del Rosario Acosta López (World Humanities Report, CHCI, 2023).

<sup>4</sup> Elizabeth Deligio and Troy Harden, "Politicized Healing: Addressing the Impact of State-Sponsored Violence," *Global Journal of Community Psychology Practice* 12, no. 2 (2021): 1–12.

<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth Deligio, "Memory: More than Recall," in *A Critical Introduction to Psychology*, ed. Robert K. Beshara (New York: Nova Science, 2020), 2–13.

logical accounts of memory and trauma. You refer here, for instance, to Resmaa Menakem’s proposal to read the *p* in PTSD not as “post” as in *post*-traumatic stress disorder—which entrusts its interpretation to a linear conception of time and thus of healing as “leaving behind”—but rather as the *p* in “pervasive” as in a *pervasive* form of trauma.<sup>6</sup> And even now, when you were describing your work with communities in Colombia, you were emphasizing precisely this idea of a simultaneity of temporalities that you relate in your work with a decolonial approach to memory.

And then, on the other hand, you insist on the need to relate to memory as something present, not fixed in the past—and to relate to the past, in turn, as something that is not yet over—in order to be able to sustain and reclaim accountability in the present for structural forms of harm. You write: “Understanding the past as over misses the needs, questions, and challenges that transcend linear time as well as the opportunities to transform and repair.”<sup>7</sup> And in this context, you bring in, once again, the importance of historical memory, as a perspective that allows us an understanding of memory building as social agency and resistance to forgetfulness, but also an understanding of history as a site for contestation.

I am just trying to recount some of the very powerful ideas that I think come from your work, to ask if you can tell us a bit more about this perspective you’ve been developing in connection to your experience with communities. I would like to hear more about how you see all this in your own praxis, more specifically now in connection to the wonderful work you’ve all been doing at the Chicago Torture Justice Center.

**Elizabeth Deligio:** Yeah. I think being in Colombia and learning the language of historical memory gave me a vocabulary for something that, in a sense, I had already been seeing, which was that especially inside North America people who were experiencing systemic and structural violences were always rendered as individuals. It was a private problem, like poverty was a private problem or racism was a private problem, and it was ahistorical. So there was no history that made the circumstances in which the person was living. It was without a context. People were taken out of history. They were taken out of the collective, and the fact that it was an entire community that was experiencing this and that it had been experiencing this generationally was just completely off the table.

<sup>6</sup> Resmaa Menakem, *My Grandmother’s Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies* (Las Vegas, NV: Central Recovery Press, 2017), 15.

<sup>7</sup> Deligio, “Memory: More than Recall,” 10.

So, working in Colombia with those communities and seeing how they were putting the individual and the collective together, how they're putting the past and the present together, I could also see how that came automatically together with an analysis of the sociopolitical structures—and within a conception of a living history and a communal form of healing. The conversation never required the communities to say why something was meaningful; at the larger scale it was different, but this was my experience at the level of smaller local communities. They could talk about their experiences without having to prove that they were real, that they had happened, and why they mattered. And part of the reason why I felt like that was done in such a rich and important way was because the rest of the context in Colombia was erasing these experiences, right? So they knew they had formed a kind of resistance that really opened my eyes and helped me to make connections.

And then, being back in the United States, I felt like I began to see more and more. And this is over a fifteen-year period. So although a lot has changed in fifteen years both in the US and in Colombia, I really began to see a kind of healing that happened when someone didn't have to struggle to prove that racism is real. It impacts them when they no longer have to struggle to prove that the poverty, the vulnerability, the racism that they might be encountering in their life wasn't their fault and, most importantly, that they weren't alone. It had a history to it. All of those became really important pieces of healing. And it made me begin to think that in North America, the left side of politics had made, perhaps mistakenly, two separate spaces. One was for seeking justice and one was for seeking healing. And the healing was dealt with mostly at the individual level. It was private. It was in therapy. And justice was the collective space where we could connect to history and the sociopolitical analysis. I wanted to be able to put those two levels together because that's how I had experienced them in my work in Colombia.

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**María del Rosario Acosta López:** Tell me a little bit more about how you have actually done that, how you have, as you say, put them together both in theory,

because your dissertation was about this (I had the privilege of reading your dissertation<sup>8</sup>), but also in your praxis. You have indeed been one of the forces behind the entire idea of giving shape to the Chicago Torture Justice Center as a place where precisely these two levels come together, which has been an opportunity, but also a challenge. So I would like to hear more about how you do this, how you put these two levels together, as you say.

**Elizabeth Deligio:** Well, one thing is that memory is inescapable, right? So whether you're thinking about that from a psychological perspective or you're thinking about that from a humanities perspective, or a social, cultural perspective, every moment of every day of our lives makes sense because we remember where we come from. We are always inside of memory. So it was important to me, especially within psychology, that memory could become free of a notion connecting it only to an exploration of a past that is kind of remote and to perfecting behavior that moves us past a kind of pathology. When I was reading about concepts of traumatic memory and how to heal from it, it really felt like it was almost about a sanitizing process, as in: "We're going to get your mind in order, and we're going to put things into the past, and then you're not going to have things that interrupt the present and maybe also disorder the future." And I just thought: "This is not what I see people do." People who have experienced trauma are not confused about the past, present, and future. They're not having a temporality problem. If they are having a problem with temporality, it is that the way they're living in time is not recognized. A psychological perspective, a PTSD perspective is very linear. There is a discrete past, a current present, and an unknown future, and that's not how most of us experience time when we're being honest. The past informs our present; it's part of what might shape our desires or our wounds or what we're curious about, and that moves into the present. And those things are happening all at the same time. I also didn't see in many of the people that I worked with a desire for the past to be over, but for the harm to be over. They had events that had happened in the past, and they had contemporary events that were happening. So these forms of trauma, like a racialized violence or a colonial violence, are historical *and* contemporary. They are about an ongoing form of violence. And so concepts of the *post-* or the past don't work within that.

And what I saw in Colombia that began to really work with my imagination was that nobody was trying to say that what they were doing was writing a

<sup>8</sup> Elizabeth Deligio, "Coming Home: Restoration after State Violence" (PhD diss., Pacifica Graduate Institute, 2019).



kind of perfect, progressive history. That's not what historical memory is doing. Historical memory is opening up the past to make meaning in the present and envision the future. That does not mean that you don't look for a kind of narrative. It's not that you're not telling the story that might involve dates and times and places and people. But its sole responsibility is not an accurate chronology; its responsibility is to open a space for people to make meaning in the present and envision the future. And that really brought to mind for me a thread between a kind of imagination and a kind of resistance. The imaginations that go with different forms of resistance and creating justice are always woven through memory. So I think that I couldn't escape memory in my work. I was curious about it, and the way that I saw it functioning in communities was very liberatory. But then the way that I saw it written about wasn't accurate; it didn't reflect how I saw people engaging.

**María del Rosario Acosta López:** And this corresponds to that framework you call “politicizing healing.”<sup>9</sup> Healing, you say, can be political, while the political—a very specific notion of it, a critical one—can also be healing. So, reading, for instance, the article you wrote recently together with Troy Harden on this, I thought it was so helpful because I kept thinking: this is what I have been thinking, but I did not have a name for it! You talk in that article about “healing, dismantling, and creating” as three different essential sides of politicized healing. And this is a combination that allows to address, as you propose, the kinds of harm that result from structural forms of oppression as an anti-racist praxis in the United States.

I'm going to quote something, because I think that that quote summarizes a lot of what the Chicago Torture Justice Center is about. And I think it's great that as part of the board you are orienting the work but also theorizing about what is already being done in the context of these communities. You say: “Treating state violence and racialized violence will require looking at historical legacies, methods for individuals and communities, a critical examination of assumptions in Western liberal societies of a rights-bearing ontology”—which, by the way, I thought to be very thought-provoking and essential—“and re-imagining of ‘past’ to protect against erasure for survivors.”<sup>10</sup> So how about you talk to us

<sup>9</sup> CTJC responds to community members harmed by police violence and race-based trauma with comprehensive support rooted in politicized healing, which is the belief that our healing is political and our politics are healing. Politicized healing addresses the harm—felt by individuals and communities—caused by historic and evolving systems of oppression. See <https://www.chicagotorturejustice.org/politicized-healing>.

<sup>10</sup> Deligio and Harden, “Politicized Healing,” 5.

more about how this actually happens in the Chicago Torture Justice Center? And I want to underline here something you emphasize a lot in all your written work and also every time you give a talk: that this is not a framework that you bring in, but rather something these communities were already doing. You—we, those of us working on these issues—are ultimately mostly just theorizing the kind of knowledge production that is already happening within these communities, who have found ways to deal with such forms of violence and historical structural forms of oppression. So why don't you tell us a little bit more about all this?

**Elizabeth Deligio:** The language of “create, heal, and dismantle” and the concept of politicized healing were both provided by the survivors; that's how they proposed to describe their own process. The city of Chicago's reparations ordinance was passed in 2015,<sup>11</sup> and I think we got to the language of politicized healing in 2019. So it was a lot of conversations that took us all there, and the conversations were just what we've been talking about: “Let's look at what we do; let's look at how we've survived. There's ancestral wisdom here. There are the people who we came from; there are the communities that we came from; there is the current moment, which has its own specifics, etc.” And so I think this language is really like everything else that I'm putting down right now. It does feel like I'm writing in pencil and not in pen, because it's capturing something that will change again, and I want it to change again. There's a way in which memory is always emerging as the meaning making and the relationships around events happen, so there needs to be a very light touch about how it happens.

The Chicago Torture Justice Center provides counseling services. I would say, it provides services of *accompaniment*. They help people find work and help people find homes as people are transitioning out of the carceral system in the United States and coming back to communities that they may have been absent from for upward of thirty years. The world has been rewritten, and they have lived it and they have not, and they have family and they've lost them. There are some very complex needs that are there, and they require a kind of accompaniment, which, for many people, would look close to what we think of as the traditional social services. And that's one part of the healing. When you get into the “create and then dismantle,” this is the part that we're not used to seeing. We

<sup>11</sup> See the complete ordinance, which includes the package of economic reparations for the victims, Chicago City Council, “Ordinance SO2015-2687: Establishment of ‘Reparations for Burge Torture Victims’ Fund,” May 6, 2015, [https://www.chicago.gov/content/dam/city/depts/dol/supp\\_info/Burge-Reparations-Information-Center/ORDINANCE.pdf](https://www.chicago.gov/content/dam/city/depts/dol/supp_info/Burge-Reparations-Information-Center/ORDINANCE.pdf).

are positing that part of the healing of this community is also the ability to say what's wrong and to dismantle those structures that have reproduced oppression in their lives and to be at the center of creating what is next, at the center of creating a world in which their oppression is no longer a generational legacy—a world that gives their children and their grandchildren the ability to certainly stand very proud within this history but also to have something finally different.

Regarding psychology and how I relate the work to that: it's not that I think that psychology doesn't recognize all these other sides of the healing process; it just doesn't pay as much attention to them. Much of the literature does not write about social change as a form of healing. It may cover social movements, pulling apart some of its own theory and the theory of trauma, but it doesn't critique its own approach and does not offer something new to address that critique. It continues to speak to the same models. It speaks to individuals. It speaks to discrete episodes of abuse, which is why I connect it to a rights-bearing ontology—this assumption that every person walks through the world and is seen as rights-bearing. But we know that there are entire communities that know very personally and very viscerally that they are *not* perceived as rights-bearing. So if I approach therapy with them like “You had a bad experience with the police; that's ‘over,’” I am missing literally the entire landscape of their lives, completely. It doesn't work. It fails utterly. And I don't think it requires that psychology give up too much. Quite the opposite; bearing this in mind might allow psychology's approach to be more plural.

This is also where I think the decolonial has been so important to me. The liberal Western is one set of epistemologies; it's not all of them. And there's important information there, but it hasn't worked for reasons. And so let's deal with the fact that something needs to change, fundamentally, and it can be indeed a painful process, but it is very much needed. Take, for instance, the debate in the United States right now around critical race theory, and this absurd idea that we don't need to talk about racial oppression historically because it will be upsetting to White children. It's just nonsense, and it deserves to be considered as such. But it does point to a problem in the canon of liberal Western thought, which is that somehow, since our liberal values were written down, they exist for all people. Because we wrote down beautiful principles in the Constitution, they exist and there's not some way in which they have to be consistently and rigorously tested as a reality in the lives of all.

**María del Rosario Acosta López:** This is great, Liz, and it also gives more materiality, I think, to this question of “the political” that Troy and you mention

but do not really develop in your article. When you say the political can be healing, what I hear is precisely, as you've been explaining, that memory work and healing also involve dismantling the structures that have turned the political into this space grounded on the constitutive exclusion of the very possibility of making audible the histories and memories of entire communities. So when you talk about the political also as dismantling these ontologies that do not allow for these voices to be even audible, that determine in advance what gets to be audible in such a way that these memories never get to be, you are also proposing to understand memory work as a radical form of critique—a form of critique and of resistance—but also of imagining an otherwise. This is something I find so powerful in your way of seeing things and also, of course, in the way you are all doing things at the center, namely, how imagination and envisioning the future are central to the task of healing—and how envisioning the future is not only a question of the future, but mostly, really, of the here and now. This all seems to be part of what you are calling “the political” in this context. Am I understanding correctly?

**Elizabeth Deligio:** Yes. I know that you've seen this in Colombia as well, but when I was doing reading for my dissertation, I felt like I kept reading these psychological studies, where after twenty or thirty pages the conclusion was that racism is a stressor, and it blew my mind that that even had to be written. Why was that? Why was that researched? I do not mean why was racism researched—it needed to be—I mean the absurdity of asking impacted communities to prove that it is harmful. There's something about that that is deeply problematic, and it makes me think of Nelson Maldonado Torres's idea of misanthropic skepticism. I think he is the one who mentions this important difference about how, when the colonizers landed, their question wasn't “Who are you?” but “What are you?” And I just like pausing on that for a minute. What does it really mean to have entire communities that, in both a contemporary and historical way, have to consistently prove that they're human in order to have that audibility that you're talking about, to be recognized and to be heard? They do the work and tell their experiences of harm to the systems that are there to protect their lives only to find their experience is not recognized. They live in this split screen where all of the language is reduced to this liberal, Western-dominated world (whether you're in Colombia or in Chicago), this human rights framework, and yet the rights-bearing language is somehow not applicable to your life, the way in which you are harmed. The law says you do have rights even when your lived experience is that you do not. This cover of the language of rights allows

systems to pretend there is something in place to deal with those harms and that there is no need to correct the system. So impacted communities are pushed all the way to the edge of all the protocols to prove that they're a community, then prove that something happens, then prove that the thing that happened had an impact on them . . . I see all this as a form of harm, a deep form of harm, and it makes the source trauma—let's say the source trauma is displacement or police violence—even deeper and more difficult to relate to. I see psychology participate in this misanthropic skepticism when it queries, Is racism harmful?

This is where the kind of believability you talk about in your work becomes essential.<sup>12</sup> I think there are two things here. There are people saying, "It didn't happen," and then there are people saying, "It doesn't matter that it happened." And those are things that get reproduced, and I think it's unintentional that they get reproduced in the way that psychology approaches memory and in the way that we approach history. There's a foundational flaw in thinking that there's one history and one set of memories that have all the facts in the right order and that are verifiable. It's just not how memory works. And I don't think we have to be scared of the fact that three people are going to remember the same community event differently. It doesn't mean that it's not true, right? And that each of their perspectives provide pieces that then give us the space to decide and figure out what happened and what it means.

And imagination comes in for me here for a lot of reasons. But any psychologist will tell you that one of the key things that trauma does is it shuts down that side of the mind. And the minute that you can see someone's imagination come back to life, that's when you know that they're regaining some kind of interiority, they're regaining some resilience, and then they're going to be able to begin to move around what is traumatic. And they're going to be able to look at it from different angles. But when you're working with someone and they tell the same story over and over again in the exact same way, and they can't deviate from it, they can't move around in it, that's a sign that the trauma is holding and they just need more time to be able to have that experience of repeating it. It's not that the repetition is empty, but it's an indicator of the level of trauma. And when you begin to see imagination coming in and they begin to reflect and think differently, then you know that part of the pressure and the pain is lifting. I think of imagination almost as a diagnostic tool in this context. It indicates well-being, and so it needs to be tracked.

<sup>12</sup> See María del Rosario Acosta López, "Gramáticas de lo inaudito as Decolonial Grammars: Notes for a Decolonization of Memory," *Research in Phenomenology* 52, no. 2 (2022): 203–22.

**María del Rosario Acosta López:** That is super interesting, because it connects perfectly with the next question I wanted to ask. You take from Mary Watkins and Helene Shulman this notion of an aesthetics of interruption,<sup>13</sup> in the context

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Any psychologist will tell you that one of the key things that trauma does is it shuts down [the imagination]. And the minute that you can see someone's imagination come back to life, that's when you know that they're regaining some kind of interiority, they're regaining some resilience, and then they're going to be able to begin to move around what is traumatic.

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of memory as resistance and as meaning making—and also in relation to memory in a social context and as social agency. You explain how traumatic memories require a kind of witnessing—and of believability, I would say—that victims cannot perform alone.<sup>14</sup> I want to inquire more about this “aesthetics of interruption,” particularly because of the very singular connection that

is there between the history of CTJM and the role that art, artists, and art-informed activism have played in that context. I think this centrality of art and imagination has given shape to the way in which both CTJM and CTJC are interpreting the reparations package. Can you tell us a little bit more about how you see these connections going on in that context?

**Elizabeth Deligio:** Yes, so I think this refers to one of the most important moments, whether it's inside of an individual's healing process or inside of a collective movement, when there's an interruption, when something breaks through the framework that's been imposed for a long, long time. And for people on an individual level, we can think of it as that epiphany moment, when you suddenly realize: “Now I know why I'm always thinking of my ex”; something disrupts the pattern, and you have a new thought. So this can happen on an individual level. When it happens collectively, when something interrupts on the social and political level, that collective level inside of that space of historical memory, it can become an event. So, for example, in the United States, the death of George Floyd in May 2020 served as a big interruption. It can also happen

<sup>13</sup> Mary Watkins and Helene Shulman, *Toward Psychologies of Liberation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 129.

<sup>14</sup> Deligio, “Memory: More than Recall,” 11.

through art and images, or through literature, poetry, spoken word, where the artist or the imagination is rearranging something that's always been in the same order. And suddenly we are thinking about racism differently, and we are thinking about what a safe community looks like differently. And this is where I think imagination isn't giving us a blueprint. It isn't giving us an answer, but it's kind of hijacking us for a minute. It's spinning the chair around, and it's making us suddenly consider possibilities that were not available to us before. And I think that is deeply human. I think that we need it. It's a natural and necessary piece of any kind of transformative work. I don't think it needs to be in a museum. I don't think it needs to be a person who's well known or famous, and that's exactly what CTJC is doing following what CTJM has been doing for years. So they had artists who were organizing around the issue, and they were applying an artist's lens to the concept of transforming police violence. And it led to some really unique interventions. The reparations ordinance that was eventually passed was itself a piece of art that was in an exhibit, that was an example of many different things that could be reparative to the violence that had occurred. So, yes, CTJM is a great example. In 1999, if you had said to someone, "We're going to pass a reparations ordinance in Chicago on police violence," no one would have believed that. So, it can not only open up new horizons, but it can also direct our work to take new risks; we can risk more with imagination.

**María del Rosario Acosta López:** That's a beautiful answer. And I was smiling while you were talking because it's amazing how different registers coincide sometimes in unexpected ways. You know I work on historical memory, but I also work on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century aesthetics. And I was writing a paper on how eighteenth-century aesthetics, particularly through Friedrich Schiller's project, understood the political power of imagination, precisely because of this moment that you describe so powerfully as one of hijacking and rearranging. Schiller, already in the eighteenth century, talks about the kind of suspension that art allows for, so that we can suddenly be disrupted, and that disruption brings in or inaugurates new ways of seeing and imagining our present, not only the future. That's beautiful, and it is powerful, and I think it helps us understand a lot of what's going on today with anti-racist social movements in the United States, as you were pointing to in your answer.

This gives me the chance to follow up with a question I am interested in asking everyone I am interviewing for this project, and it has to do with the level of "indisciplinarity" that is needed in order to approach the humanities differently, but also in order to understand the pertinence and the power of the

humanities in these contexts. We need to be transdisciplinary, and interdisciplinary, too, when working together in memory-building initiatives that want to be truly transformative, the way CTJC is conceiving it and making it happen in their praxis. What I felt working with such an amazing group of people in Chicago was that it was not only an opportunity to come together and put our strength together toward this wonderful goal but also how that needed the humble recognition of every single one of our limits—some of them definitely tied to our disciplines. So let me ask you, what is the role of the humanities in this context of memory building? And how do you relate to it from your discipline as a psychologist? I know you want to go beyond the medical model, as you write in some of your work, but I also know you want to combine strategies creatively to make the work as powerful as it can be.

**Elizabeth Deligio:** Right. So just as a quick word on the medical model. I think the medical model is attempting to and, in some ways when it originally came into being, was trying to destigmatize issues of mental health. So, if someone had an experience of mental illness in the past, prior to the medical model, it could be seen as a demonic possession, for instance. And so the medical model was trying to put it into a different context, and I think in its early stages it was good. I think, in an extended stage, what it's done is just very reductive. And so it becomes a conversation about the chemicals of the brain, and I just don't think that captures what the psyche holds. The humanities, to me, and especially interdisciplinary humanities, introduce an element of humility, where we get to learn it from one another. So this isn't expert talking to expert. As a psychologist and as a poet, I can receive and learn. Our two perspectives can inform one another, but neither one of us is fully an expert in the room. So I think it does one of those kinds of things where we can, especially for academics, encounter each other with a little more vulnerability. It's not wrong to have the CV with the lists of all the published articles and conference presentations; expertise is important, and it's been hard won, and I don't want to deny this. I just want it to become something that allows you also to have a disposition toward learning and an orientation of discovery together.

In this sense, I would say psychology simply needs to recognize that it can't operate by itself. And certainly, it has got to stop considering itself solely a science, because that's headed in a very scary direction. We're going to map the brain, and then we've figured out humanity. No. So I think interdisciplinarity allows us to learn from one another. It makes possible a very important orientation of vulnerability and a posture of humility in the way that we construct



knowledge. And we need this. This is reparative to centuries in which knowledge has been this ironclad thing, held by few and held away. And some of this comes through in the disruption of Western canons, for example. But I think it also needs to be on a relational level. So that would be one part of it. I think, on just a cultural level, the humanities really encourage us to be in imagination, in a way, as a space of not knowing. So poetry and music and philosophy, these things point, they gesture, but they don't say everything, right? And so then we have that ability, that chance, that opportunity to engage and create and discover together.

Humankind, at this point, we have an existential threat from the environment, and it's the end point of a lot of violence that has happened. If we don't learn how to be with imagination, we won't be able to think our way out of what we've created here. We need to be able to relate and imagine and hold our way out of this, and by "hold" I mean literally holding each other in the process, like holding communities, holding space, holding time, in a way, as we open up. And so, I think sometimes the humanities are presented as a flourish or a cherry on top, a luxury. Something that makes

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things pretty. And I'm thinking: No! This is going to be as necessary as pen and paper, as gas in the car. The humanities are going to be, should always be, in a position to infuse us with enough light, to cast into the unknown, and to lure us forward. I was reading Octavio Paz's *Double Flame*, where he was talking about love and eroticism, and where he warns us: if we get rid of the erotic (which he saw threatened in the latter half of the twentieth century, with the rise of computer technology), we're going to reach a point of technological barbarism, where we're really believing that computers can do anything that a human can do. And if we so mistake what is mysterious and unique and emergent about the human erotic imagination, desire, love, if we really think a computer can do that, then we've already lost ourselves. And I think humanities are the antidote to some of the overinvestments of technology. It's not that technologies aren't really important, but they can't write a poem, and they can't open up imagination in the same way that a person can.

**María del Rosario Acosta López:** Thank you, Liz. What a wonderful way of thinking of the humanities and of imagination as infusing us with enough power to envision other possible outcomes for humanity at this point. Actually, you anticipated my last question, which has been my last question for everyone. What are the voices that keep you company? Who are the authors that help you through your thinking and keep you going?

**Elizabeth Deligio:** Well, Octavio Paz was one recently. Toni Morrison is very important for me, especially with memory and imagination. She was very formative, and she's a guide for me. I'm also doing a lot with Aurora Levins Morales and the way that she approaches history and memory as a form of medicine. And then, honestly, John O'Donohue. He has a book called *Benedictus: A Book of Blessings*, and he has what I think of as a wild form, where he blesses the sea and the sky, like he's constantly giving perspectives on the living world and how it is speaking to us. That's another one that's important for me.

**María del Rosario Acosta López:** Well, thank you so much. This was great.

**Elizabeth Deligio** holds a PhD in community psychology. Her writing focuses on state violence, memory, and collective healing, and she has over ten years of experience in psychosocial counseling and the accompaniment of affected communities in Chicago and internationally.

**María del Rosario Acosta López** is a professor in the Department of Hispanic Studies at UC Riverside. Her main research interests are aesthetics, modern and contemporary political philosophy, German idealism, and, more recently, philosophical approaches to trauma and memory, with an emphasis on Latin America and a decolonial perspective. She has written books and edited volumes on Schiller, Hegel, art and memory in Colombia, philosophy and violence, contemporary political philosophy and philosophy in and from Colombia. Her current research project and work in progress is titled *Gramáticas de lo inaudito: Pensar la memoria después del trauma* (*Grammars of the Unheard-Of: Thinking Memory after Trauma*) (expected in Spanish in 2023 and in English in 2024). Her most recently published work is a coedited volume on transitional justice in Colombia, *Justicia transicional en Colombia: Una mirada retrospectiva* (2023).