

## Introduction

In his conciliatory work with indigenous people, Peace Activist, John Paul Lederach (2005) recalls a moment of enlightenment arising from an intellectual initiation into a *native* hermeneutic of time, which interwove the past, present and future to form an overlapping, yet paradoxically, single narrative. In this particular social space, the pendulum of time swung freely between the past and the future, simultaneously preserved as an *ancestral domain* to strengthen communal bond and a living reality to ensure continuity. Lederach (2005, p.149) described this phenomenon succinctly:

To live between the memory and potentiality is to live permanently in a creative space, pregnant with the unexpected. But it is also to live in the permanency of risk, for the journey between what lies ahead and what lies behind is never fully comprehended or ever controlled. Such a space, however, is the womb of constructive change, the continuous birthplace of the past that lies before us.

This insightful quote provides a template for the content and context of this paper: collective memory and nonviolent resistance. On one hand, this paper will attempt to construe the place of collective memory in nonviolent resistance using a critical hermeneutic that will deconstruct the narrative of the Civil Rights Movement with intent to show how collective memory can be an instrument of nonviolent resistance. On the other hand, in accordance with Lederach's (2005, p.149) quote that "living with memory is to live in the permanency of risk," this paper will explore the danger of collective memory, particularly in the construction of identity and legitimization of violence during the process of nonviolent resistance, using the Civil Rights Movement as a central case study for both objectives. However, it is pertinent to state that this paper will not provide an overarching history of the Civil Rights Movement; rather it will examine the patterns of nonviolent resistance in the Civil Rights Movement in relation to collective memory. In this regard, while this paper will situate collective memory in a landscape of nonviolent resistance in relation to social change, it will

also, to a lesser extent, approach collective memory through an interpersonal framework, altering between the two in the course of analysis. This is because, in reality, collective memory is not just a human phenomenon with social implications, but an equally social phenomenon with human implications. The rationale for this twin faced approach to Collective memory lies in the assumption that collective memory is an intimate part of humanity which enfolds individual and social reality. This point will be further explicated in the course of this paper. Furthermore, it is well worth mentioning that the phrase 'struggle for justice 'and' social change' will be used interchangeably in the course of this discourse for two major reasons. Firstly, this is because, in essence, every struggle for justice requires social change, which implies that the struggle for justice is in itself is a process of social change. Secondly, in the case of the Civil Rights Movement, and given the nature of the injustice, the two terms seemed to coalesce to connote a similar meaning: in this regard, justice in the form of desegregation and equality required a radical social change of the American social order. Furthermore, for the purpose of this essay, the Civil Rights Movement shall refer to the nonviolent social activism spearheaded by the student nonviolent coordination committee, (SNCC) Southern Christian Leadership Conference, (SCLC), Congregation of Racial Equality (CORE), Fellowship of reconciliation (FOR) and similar organisations following Rosa Park's revolutionary civil disobedience in 1955. However, this is not to discredit the contribution of similar groups which embodied the dreams and aspiration of the Civil rights Movement, neither does this claim to be the complete story of the Civil Rights movement, as it was, , a rather loosely coordinated, and heterogeneous movement. Rather, this decision is based on the relevance of this organisations to the argument of this paper and the need for a pragmatic timeline that corresponds with the required word limit.

## **Methodology**

Using a critical hermeneutic, this paper will critically examine the vast body of literature on the Civil Rights movement, including manifestos, speeches and founding documents of the major organisations involved in the Civil Rights Movement with intent to deconstruct the pattern of nonviolent resistance employed in its social activism. In this vein, by representing the Civil Rights movement as a narrative, critical hermeneutic will provide a useful tool of analysis in deriving a coherent argument, not simply in the sense of exploring collective memory but in interpreting the underlying philosophy behind the constructive use of collective memory in the Civil Rights Movement. Kogler's (1999, p.1) insightful comment on hermeneutic encapsulates the premise for this methodology: "by a systematic explication of critical interpretation, I mean exposing and analysing the underlying structures of the interpretive act so as to provide us as interpreters with a more reflexive and adequate approach to interpretive practise." In other words, this paper will be more interpretive than descriptive but will nevertheless approach nonviolent resistance through the historical particular particularity of the Civil Rights movement while correspondingly, exploring its underlying Christian roots as a moral philosophy. In accordance with the interpretive model of hermeneutic, this paper will seek to deconstruct Collective Memory through an interpretative discourse on the existing literature on Collective Memory.

## **Bearing the Burden of Memory**

In his Magnus opus, *Collective Memory*, Halbwach's (1992) noted a distinction between individual and collective memory, showing the interplay between them in a social milieu, which he describes as a 'social framework of memory'. (Halbwach's, 1992, p.38). Following this distinction, he posits the claim that individual memory is shaped by the perspective of the social group, and that the memory of a group manifest in individual memories within a social milieu is what constitutes 'collective memory. In essence, individual memory cannot be detached from collective memory, insofar as it socially constructed through the lens of the social group, which implies that collective memory derives its power from the memory of the individual. Treading a similar path, Elliot ( 1995, p.3) asserts a distinction between social memory and collective memory, deconstructing the latter is as a form of shared memory which strengthens communal bonds and common identity, subsequently shaping way in which people see the world/ according to Elliot (1995) "memories, whether conscious, half-remembered or temporarily lost in the unconscious, cohere with the present, they are part of a continuing self-narrative." (Elliot, 1995, p.3)

Simply put, in contrast to history which represents an overarching narrative of the past with a broad scope of inquiry, collective memory constitutes a microcosm of history; a selective narrative, which affirms the bond of kinship between a people. Put metaphorically, it is a communal burden which a people must bear, either with joy or sorrow, depending on the content of the memory.

However, while Halbwach's (1992) undoubtedly broadened the debate on collective memory in social science, it is in the shadow of the holocaust and similar atrocities of the twenty-first century that we come to understand the renewed interest, if not preoccupation with memory in academia and beyond; the burden of memory. At this point, the words of the holocaust

survivor and Nobel Peace Laureate, Elie Wiesel (2008) finds a penetrating echo in the hearts of those who wrestle with this burden: “never shall I forget those things; even were I condemned to live as long as God himself, never”. (p.340). The emotional profundity of Wiesel’s words reminds us that, memory, in this case, collective memory is an integral part of the human experience, particularly for those who have been victims of injustice, and pursuing social change. This does not, however, reduce the burden of memory to a post holocaust phenomenon insofar it is equally important to acknowledge the antiquity and ubiquity of memory as an intimate part of humanity with no cultural or social boundaries. This can be observed in the monumental role of the Griot in pre-colonial West Africa (Hale: 1997) as historians and story tellers upon whose shoulder rested the burden of preserving the history and traditions of the people. Similarly, the ubiquity of memory can also be discerned in the theme of ancestral domain that distinctly mark the social thought of different indigenous people all over the world. (United States Institute of Peace: 2005). As Lederach (2005) eloquently put it, , “the past and future are not seen as dualistic, polar opposites. They are connected, like ends of a circle that meet and become seamless. (P.136)

In light of the trajectory of endemic violence that haunts our ‘*age of modernity*, , it might be argued that the burden of collective memory poses one of the greatest moral dilemmas of our time which has great implications for peace and justice, particularly for oppressed people engaging in the struggle for justice. As a problematic thematic, the burden of collective memory, however, is not just a matter of social theory or applied ethics, nor a moral bone of contention to be devoured by philosophers and theologians. Rather it lies at the core of human experience as an existential struggle, both in the literal and non-literal sense. In the literal sense, the burden of memory, which can also be construed as the ‘struggle to remember rightly’ can be considered existential insofar we live in a culture which enshrines memory at its core, embodies memory in various forms of representation as can be observed

in symbols. This is to say that humanity lives in the shadow of the past and that social reality is a continuity of an already existing narrative which precedes the present; therefore to deny collective memory would be to deny human existence in itself. In the non-literal sense, the burden of collective memory can be considered an existential struggle insofar as it poses a formidable threat to peace in light of the history of injustice and oppression which, tragically haunts social relations between people, families and nations; and can be used to engender a cycle of retaliatory violence which can threaten human existence. It is in view of the latter burden of collective memory, the non-literal existential struggle, that we come to truly appreciate the constructive use of collective memory during the Civil Rights movement; an appreciation that can potentially enlighten humanity to a much higher way of remembering rightly in the struggle for justice.

### **The African American Experience**

As a well preserved collective memory, the African American experience in the 'New world' can be said to revolve around the twin themes of estrangement and dehumanisation. In view of the former, it is the disruption of the bond between a people and their land through slavery, and their subsequent denial to be part of American community through segregation which creates the foundation for the American caste system. Correspondingly, it is the denial of their humanity through misguided scientific assumptions and a distorted interpretation of the constitution which excluded them from the privileges promised to "all men created" that confines them to an isolated existence of poverty and racial discrimination. This begs for a concise narrative of the African American experience; a tragic tale of man's inhumanity to man, which cannot be captured adequately with words, as the Mozambique poet, J.Craveirinha (1967, p.316) acknowledges in his poem, the Song of the Negro on the ferry:

If you could see me die

The millions of times I have been born...

If you could see me weep

The millions of time you have laughed...

If you could see me cry out

The millions of time I have kept silent...

If you could see me sing

The millions of times I have died

And bled

I tell you, European brother,

You would be born,

You would weep

You would sing

You would cry out

And you would die

Bleeding

Millions of times like me!!!

It is in light of this experience of slavery and segregation that the collective memory of African Americans can be truly understood as a narrative of injustice and oppression, with the struggle for justice at the epicenter. This struggle for justice, which essentially was a struggle to dethrone the unjust, and structurally violent American social order, and to enthrone a social order of human dignity and universal brotherhood was summed up eloquently by Earl and Lewis (2006) in the preface of their book *"To Make Our World Anew:*

“The history of African Americans is nothing less than the dramatic saga of a people attempting to remake the world. Brought to Americas against their will as commodities to be bought and sold, Africans and their descendants struggled to change their conditions and thus turn the new world of their European Masters upside down.

With the theme of slavery assuming a towering importance in this narrative, Eyerman (2001, p,2 ) is right to assert that “It was the memory of slavery and its representation through speech and art works that grounded African American identity and permitted its institutionalization in organization like the National Association of Colored People (NAACP)”. Nevertheless, while this is not an attempt to reduce the African American experience to slavery and segregation, insofar as this narrative contains both a literary renaissance and spiritual awakening amongst many moments of triumph, it clearly shows the correlation between the African American identity and collective memory. It is In light of this intimate connection between identity and collective memory that we must ask why this collective memory was not harnessed into an instrument of violence during the Civil Rights Movement. Why did the Civil Rights movement not use this collective memory to dehumanise White America and inspire revolutionary violence in the course of social change? In order to elucidate the constructive use of collective memory in the Civil Rights Movement, we shall draw upon the power of the imagination, using a pictorial allegory.

### **Memory in the Moral Imagination**

Let us imagine a picturesque landscape consisting of trees, land and sky. Now to consider the implication of this allegory for collective memory, we must unearth the interplay of natural forces that create this picture: by virtue of its existence, a tree attest to interdependence of the natural order because a tree can only be planted in the soil, and the soil can only nurture a seed if it has sufficient rain and the rain must come from the sky. This implies that tree, soil and sky are mutually bound in an interdependent existence. Similarly, collective memory is



not, in its entirety an isolated reality, but a part of a larger narrative, which must contend with other competing narratives. This is exactly what happened in the Civil Rights movement insofar as the collective memory of slavery and segregation, which lay in front of the movement, was grounded on the soil of American history under a sky of another transcendent and redemptive memory. The Civil Rights Movement did not suddenly suffer from a collective amnesia that made them forget the African American experience rather they juxtaposed it with two other narratives in the course of social change. In practical terms, this meant that the African American experience of oppression, embodied in the collective memory was conjured through various creative ways but was not allowed to monopolise the social space of memory or used to dehumanise White America. In this regard, the Civil Rights movement can be described, metaphorically, as a social movement cocooned in a shell of collective memory, with the outer shells representing another memory which shielded the white community from violence. This point can only be truly appreciated in light of the peculiar modality of protest, in this particular case, the songs that were used to accompany social activism. To someone unacquainted with African American history, the music of the Civil Rights Movement would constitute mere aesthetic expressions of discontent or religious chant to create uniformity in the course of protest: nothing could be further from the truth. These songs, particularly the Negro Spirituals, constituted an oral expression of a collective memory which racial discrimination and violence featured prominently. Otherwise known as sorrow songs (Dubois), the Negro Spirituals represented a direct link to the slavery, as they were, by origin, song of resistance, or as Dubois (1994:159) put it, “in these songs, the Slave spoke to the world.” Therefore, the prominent use of these songs during the Civil Rights movement was both a means of nonviolent protest and a re-enactment of the memory of slavery. Elizabeth King (2011, Para.20) explicates this point:

During the US civil rights movement, "freedom songs" raised courage, stated the goals, declared commitment, united separated communities, and sometimes took melodic aim at notorious police chiefs. As a contemporary expression of spirituals, freedom songs derived from the black choral tradition that developed from the African and American experiences, matured in the fires of southern slavery. They addressed frustrations, forged bonds of personal loyalty, assuaged fear and dread, and fortified a people under stress.

This resonance of collective memory was not restricted to the songs of the Civil Rights Movement but could also be discerned in the rhetoric of resistance, as evidenced in Fannie Lou Hamers (1964, Para.18) speech at the Williams Institutional CME Church, which has come to become a classic of Civil Rights oratory: "For three hundred years, we've given them time. And I've been tired so long, now I am sick and tired of being sick and tired, and we want a change."

The Civil Rights Movement was able to bear this burden of Collective memory of oppression, embodied in song and rhetoric, constructively by inserting it into another frame of memory. In this case, the collective memory of slavery shared the social space with a transcendent memory: the memory that humanity belonged to God and one another. This transcendent memory was rooted in the Judea Christian narrative of human origins which affirmed the inherent dignity and worth of every human as Creations of God, which implied that humanity belonged to God, and one another- including the oppressor. The power of this transcendent memory lies in the theme of mutual belonging and common humanity which it embodies at its core, as it re-cast human identity in a transcendent light that prevents social actors from dehumanizing their opponents in the struggle for justice. The Jewish philosopher, Martin Buber (1958, p.15) expresses the implication of this transcendent memory in interpersonal relations:

“When I confront a human being as my Thou and speak the basic word I-Thou to him, then he is no thing among things nor does he consist of things. He is no longer He or She, a dot in the world grid of space and time, nor a condition to be experienced and described, a loose bundle of named qualities. Neighborless and seamless, he is Thou and fills the firmament. Not as if there were nothing but he; but everything else lives in his light.”

Put simply, to preserve the identity of the oppressor as ‘*Thou*’, to borrow Buber’s term, is to engage in a transcendent and redemptive memory which recast the identity of the oppressor in a divine light while conjuring the collective memory of oppression. It is here that we confront the paradox of collective memory: memory is inherently selective, and can function both as a verb and a noun. This distinction is more ontological than linguistic and cuts through the heart of collective memory in the struggle for justice where the memory of injustice seemingly appears to be the only sacrosanct and impenetrable social reality. Here again we must deconstruct memory both as a noun and a verb, in the sense that the spectre of memory, as an embodiment of time is a noun while if it is construed as an action in the form becomes a verb. Therefore, to remember the collective memory of oppression in the struggle for justice, oppressed people must also remember that their oppressor belongs to God and the oppressed insofar as they are created in the image God. This means that in the framework of this memory, oppressed and oppressor are linked in a mutual embrace. The Civil Rights Movement was able to reconcile the paradox of memory through its unique method of nonviolent resistance which enshrined this transcendent memory in the fabric of nonviolent resistance. This transcendent and redemptive memory represents the sky of the mental picture painted earlier to illustrative the nature of collective memory. It is a memory that affirms the dignity of the oppressed and the humanity of the enemy whilst recollecting the act of injustice. Glenn Smiley (2000, p.56) rightly noted that “Nonviolence recognises the essential humanity of every person and in its struggle aims at the conscience of the evil doer and not at the person.”. In the case of the Civil Rights Movement, nonviolent resistance was rooted in

the Christian ethic of mutual belonging and common humanity in God and an equally corresponding pragmatic principle of civil disobedience, with the overall aim of reconciling the oppressor and oppressed. According to the founding documents of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC, Para.1.):

We affirm the philosophical or religious ideal of nonviolence as the foundation of our purpose, the presupposition of our belief, and the manner of our action. Nonviolence, as it grows from the Judeo-Christian tradition, seeks a social order of justice permeated by love. Integration of human endeavour represents the crucial first step towards such a society. Through nonviolence, courage displaces fear. Love transcends hate. Acceptance dissipates prejudice; hope ends despair. Faith reconciles doubt. Peace dominates war. Mutual regards cancel enmity. Justice for all overthrows injustice. The redemptive community supersedes immoral social systems.

This theme of common humanity and mutual belonging, which threads through the social activism of the Civil Rights movement acted as a guiding light to protect the movement from the contagious fervour of retaliatory violence. Having already noted that the dehumanisation of the African American through slavery and segregation constituted the social fabric of racial injustice, it was not surprise that this transcendent memory alternatively inspired the social activism of the Civil Rights movement and provided them with a moral shield against the temptation to dehumanise white America in their agitation for social change. In essence, while the collective memory of slavery impeded self-worth, this transcendent memory affirmed their worth and value of the African American community as Gods creation, subsequently providing a rationale for resisting the injustice of segregation.

Hogan ( 2007, p 21) credits this self-realisation and rediscovery of dignity with the Nashville sit in:

Once they accepted that they did not deserve segregation, they could see clearly why they could challenge this system: it unfairly relegated an entire group of people to second class status and engendered feelings of

powerlessness and worthlessness for no other reason than an unchangeable and arbitrary physical characteristic.

This corresponds with the claim by another commentator that “It is the notion of dignity that drove the Civil rights movement. It is the notion the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr says he learned from his grandmother, “Martin don’t let anyone ever tell you that you’re not a somebody”. (Sulmsay, 2007, p.14)

However, the epitome of this epiphany was not the rediscovery of self-worth, but the inclusion of the oppressor in this transcendent memory. It is in this light that we captured the power of nonviolent resistance in asserting the dignity of the oppressed and reaching out to the oppressor in reconciliation. In the case of the Civil Rights Movement, transcendental memory was used as an instrument of nonviolent resistance reconciliation; however this was only made possible by inserting the gift of forgiveness in the framework of Collective memory. This demands inserting forgiveness into the struggle for justice whereby forgiveness does not function as a moral skin to cover the memory of injustice but a mechanism to ensure the continuity of social relations between the oppressor and the oppressed in the face of a collective memory of oppression. In the case of the Civil Rights Movement, this constructive use of collective memory made room for the reconciliation of two opposing memories; the memory of injustice and the memory of the identity of the oppressor as God’s creation. It is the gift of forgiveness that reconciles these two conflicting memories thereby preventing the dehumanization of actors on the course of social change. The nonviolence resistance of the Civil Rights Movement, which was rooted in the Christian ethic of Love for enemies and forgiveness, as witnessed in the language of its social activism, made this possible. We shall now proceed to analyse the second constructive use of collective memory in the Civil Rights Movement.

## Collective Memory and Conscience

Equally threading through the social activism of the Civil Rights Movement was the idea of 'the American dream, denoting the American ideal of democracy and human progress enshrined in the constitution. In light of the encompassing nature of this ideal, it can be this construed as an unequivocal Collective memory from which America derives its identity. Therefore, it should not surprise us that the Civil Rights Movement conjured this memory in its struggle for racial justice and used it constructively to appeal to the conscience of the American people. This can be observed in the language of nonviolent resistance which distinctly marked Civil Rights Rhetoric. In the classic I have a dream speech, King (1963, Para.16) reiterates this theme unequivocally:

*I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream. I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal"*

Similarly, this line of thought was expressed in the Birmingham Manifesto (1963, para.5), a document released by the Alabama Human Rights Council, a key Civil Rights organization: We believe in the American Dream of democracy, in the Jeffersonian doctrine that "all men are created equal and are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, among these being life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

This point is well worth noting as it shows the resolve and loyalty to the Civil Rights Movement to the Non-violence creed insofar as collective memory was not used to dehumanise the oppressor, by deliberately distorting his history. Instead, in the face of this reoccurring memory of the African American struggle, and the temptation of violence, the Civil Rights Movement remained loyal to their non-violent creed by recognising the

democratic heritage and humanity of America. Furthermore, the used this democratic heritage, embodied in the statement “we hold these truth that all men are created equal “to put America in trial against its own constitution. In the course of this judicial experiment, the promises of the oppressor as codified in the declaration of Independence is prosecuted, yet never is collective memory used to create a collective identity that dehumanises white America; rather it is used to appeal to the conscience of America. It is here that the title of Adam Fairclough’s’ book, *To Redeem the Soul of America*(1987), assumes a deafening resonance, as it encapsulates this appeal to conscience which is an inherent feature of nonviolence: for in inserting collective memory into the framework of American history, the Civil Rights Movement was reaching out to the soul and conscience of America whilst affirming the humanity of America embodied in the ideal of freedom. In practical terms, this involved unmasking the violence inherent in American social order by upholding the Collective memory of the American dream enshrined in the constitution, and further , inviting America into a mutual suffering by sharing in the experience of the oppressed African American community through nonviolent protest.. The choice of words, in this case, ‘*unmask and invite*’ is quite telling in many respects. Firstly, it showed that by inserting the collective memory of slavery into the American ideal of freedom, the Civil Rights Movement was able to expose the injustice of the American order which was in contradiction to its true nature, while at the same time, invite America into the wounds of the African American community. This was a moment of both tragedy and triumph: tragedy in the sense that it involved a mutual suffering of guilt. And triumph in that it allowed America to discover its neglected duty of Love and brotherhood towards the African American whose humanity was also affirmed in the constitutional mandate of’ all men are created equal.’ This bears witness to the power of collective memory as an instrument of nonviolent resistance which can be used to unmask the legacy of violence and appeal to the conscience of those who create, consent,

or cooperate with an unjust order. However, this constructive use of collective memory can only take place in the framework of reconciliation. At this point the question why do we remember assumes more importance than what do we remember? for regardless of what we remember, if we remember to be reconciled and to transform the oppressor, what we remember will not be an obstacle to restored communion but a reason to challenge structures of injustice and transform the oppressor. As a theologian put it,

When victims remember untruthfully, their stories are often attacks on perpetrators in response to injuries suffered: they retaliate illicitly. To remember untruthfully is not only to continue but also to deepen in memory the conflict created by the initial injury. It is to add fuel to the fire of the already existing conflict. To remember truthfully, on the other hand, is to render justice both to the victim and to the perpetrator and therefore step toward reconciliation.”(Volf, 2006: p.56)

It is important to note that this constructive use of collective memory was set against a background of structural and direct violence ranging from police violence, assassinations, beatings and church bombing, to mention but a few. Therefore, it cannot be claimed that the constructive use of memory in the Civil Rights Movement was a consequence of a nonviolent and democratic social space which provided an atmosphere for a vision of social harmony. Even if such spaces existed in the Civil Rights Movement, it does not negate the fact that violence is an act of will, not condition, and although it might be determined by conditions, it remains a deliberate social action. Here again, this paper will not make the reactionary violence of white supremacists the focus of the discourse. However, it is important to acknowledge that in the struggle for justice, there is a tendency to conjure history through a nihilistic lens that assumes that all members of the oppressed group are inherently violent, thereby legitimizing violence against them as the Theologian John Dear (1999, p.31) observes that “violence occurs in those moments when we forget and deny our basic identity as God’s children, when we treat one another as if we were worthless instead of priceless.”



Tragically, the Civil Rights Movement was not exempt from this tragic amnesia that John Dear described above and its case, its crisis was precipitated by the series of ongoing reactionary violence of White supremacist, epitomised in the shooting of James Meredith, an African American activist who had embarked on a solo March against fear was shot. (Fairclough, 2001, p.312). In the aftermath of the shooting, the SNCC, one of the leading advocates of Racial Equality embraced Black Power doctrine, which although advocated racial justice had a contradictory note of supremacist dogma. In the words of one its passionate advocate of Black Power, Stokely Carmichael (1966, para.3) “

Thus the white people coming into the movement cannot relate to the black experience, cannot relate to the word black, cannot relate to the nitty gritty, cannot relate to the experience that brought such a word into existence, cannot relate to chitterlings, hog's head cheese, pig feet, ham hocks, and cannot relate to slavery, because these things are not a part of their experience. They also cannot relate to the black religious experience, nor to the black church, unless, of course, this church has taken on white manifestations.”

The quote above reveals the danger of remembering without the framework of reconciliation, although it must not be divorced from the social milieu of racism and reactionary violence of white supremacist which it emerged. The point here is not to make a case for the notion of the black power but to attempt to explain its origin and how it was used to create a collective identity of white America that denied the common humanity and mutual embrace in God hence laying the foundation of exclusion, which is a form of the violence. Thus, memory borne in the bosom of the oppressed can be a weapon of violence, and its release has the potential and to create a climate of distrust and bitterness, which can radically define the course of social change. This reveals the danger of remembering without the context of community. Thus collective memory borne in the bosom of the oppressed, if not properly channelled in the struggle for justice can be used to initiate and legitimise cycle of retaliatory violence in the process of social change. Meanwhile, in contrast, the affirmation of human

dignity through nonviolent resistance in the struggle for justice, as demonstrated by the Civil Rights Movement, affirms the humanity of the oppressor, in the face of this memory, consequently preventing the initiation of retaliatory violence.

## Conclusion

This paper has shown how collective memory can function constructively in the struggle for justice if conjured, not as an isolated narrative but a part of a larger narrative of social reality that affirms the humanity of the oppressor and the mutual belonging between the Oppressor and the oppressed in God. In embodying this theme of common humanity and mutual belonging, nonviolent resistance offers oppressed people a path of social change which can potentially transform the social actors and the social order. As an instrument of nonviolent resistance, collective memory unmasks the legacy of injustice and existing violence, while, simultaneously, appealing to the conscience of the oppressor, not in a passive plea for justice but in an active thread of social activism. Ultimately, the burden of Collective memory leads us beyond social science into the realm of transcendence where forgiveness wrestles with bitterness; Love with hatred, and hope with nihilism. It is here that the weight of this burden is felt, not as a moral dilemma or intellectual reality but as a burden of the human heart. This is the creative space of risk and hope that Lederach's describes, and where nonviolent resistance offers its most potent power: disarming the human heart. As one writer (Maguire, p.159) puts it, "As our hearts are disarmed by God of our inner violence, they become God's instrument for the disarmament of the world. In Christian tradition, it is the memory of the Cross which captures God as a victim of human violence yet, who still forgives humanity, that disarms the human heart; for it is a memory that implicates humanity in violence and yet affirms God's forgiveness.. It is the end of history, and the beginning of a new memory of restored communion between God and humanity.

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