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# Introduction

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## 0.1 Issues Surrounding Trauma

In recent years, the term “trauma” has become one of the keywords of Western culture. When a person or a group goes through an experience that seems to shatter the foundations of their lives, its use seems to impose itself as if it were a pristine and self-evident idea. Subjectivities constructed around a past event that continues in the present, or peoples that today experience the present consequences (all too present) of past sufferings; in both spheres, the notion of trauma is called upon to explain a particular alteration of memory and mental functioning, becoming one of the categories derived from “psy” discourses most embraced by contemporary thought.<sup>1</sup>

However, this notion is not clear or univocal, nor did it originate in psychological or psychoanalytic territories. Until the mid-nineteenth century, the term was inscribed in the medical-surgical domain, where it was used to designate (local or generalised) *somatic damage* which was not caused by an infectious disease or by hereditary factors (Hacking, 1995; Leys, 2000; Micale & Lerner, 2001; Young, 1995). The trauma, therefore, corresponded to an area of pathology which established an accident as its cause. The accident exerted on the organism a mechanical action such that it produced an injury and created the conditions for the emergence of morbid phenomena. Broken bones, internal or external haemorrhages, perforated organs and functions disturbed by the material deterioration of tissues: these constituted the injuries that were most frequently encompassed – along with the event that caused them and the subsequent consequences – in the semantic field of the notion. Such meaning still exists in certain sectors of medicine; above all, within emergency teams in hospitals and in the speciality named “traumatology”.

However, it is clear that this meaning is no longer the most common one. Currently, the notion of trauma generally remits to the idea of *psychical damage*, to a wound that is impossible to locate in the body that, nevertheless, affects the mind in a lasting way (that is, not only during the course of the event considered traumatic but also, and fundamentally, after its conclusion). It is as if the cessation of the situation does not prevent its effects from lasting continuously, or, more precisely, as

if the cause of the damage becomes independent of the past event and becomes a source that is still present, capable of generating malaise.

This *shift* in meaning also entailed an *extension* of the term's use. If its use was not limited to cases in which it was possible to demonstrate the existence of a material injury, then it could be used in reference to other situations. The range of these currently seems to expand from exceptional events (such as the extermination camps) to more everyday or banal experiences that generate suffering (Hacking, 1995; Leys, 2000).

Along with its shift and extension, there has been an *insertion* of this category in new areas. It is not only fully implanted in the medical and psychopathological domains but also in the legal domain – generally associated with the categories of damage and abuse – and, for at least 30 years, in the field of studies on social memory and the history of the recent past. There, it is used to refer to the collective effects of certain historical experiences such as the Shoah, the Vietnam War, some wars and some Latin American dictatorships (Caruth, 1995; Franco & Levin, 2007; Friedlander, 1992; LaCapra, 2008, 2009, 2014). It can also be affirmed that the notion has been installed in common sense and the colloquial language of a good part of Western culture. Here, it is often used to legitimise demands for reparation or exceptions for damages allegedly suffered. This type of petition or complaint (not necessarily understood in legal terms) has grown considerably in recent years (Assoun, 2001; García, 2008).

Finally, we wish to highlight the high degree of *institutionalisation* of the notion in certain sectors of the “psy” disciplinary field. For example, since the third version of the influential *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)* of the American Psychiatric Association (APA), edited in 1980, a specific nosographic category has been included to account for the pathological effects of trauma: post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). For its part, in the equally powerful American Psychological Association, there is a section fully dedicated to the investigation and dissemination of this subject: Division 56, called “Trauma Psychology”.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, in the United States, there are periodic academic publications specifically dedicated to the subject, such as *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice and Policy*, the *International Journal of Stress Management* or *Traumatology*.

However, the high degree of institutionalisation has not prevented the *multiplication of conceptions* regarding trauma. There is no consensus on its definition or a homogeneous field of problems to which this notion can refer. It is not even possible to find a conceptual agreement between the works that claim to be inscribed within the Freudian legacy. It is possible to indicate some common features that differentiate the psychoanalytic notions of trauma from those of other theoretical or therapeutic orientations. However, in the strict sense, multiple psychoanalytic conceptions of trauma exist.

In the face of so much diversity, it does not seem possible to speak of trauma in the singular. Nevertheless, some continue to refer to it as a single concept, valid

for all times and places. According to these approaches to the subject, often linked to practitioners of “psy” disciplines who adhere to some of the contemporary conceptions, history only allows us to see the past *errors* and the *antecedents* that led to current knowledge. For example, in the paragraphs introducing a historical perspective in the widely read *Traumatic Stress: The Effects of Overwhelming Experience on Mind* (Van der Kolk, McFarlane & Weisaeth, 1996), the authors seem to conceive trauma as a transhistorical and universal phenomenon, with a short psychiatric history that advances without a solution of continuity from the end of the nineteenth century to the present day.

People have always known – the authors say – that exposure to overwhelming terror can lead to troubling memories, arousal and avoidance. This has been a central theme in literature, from the time of Homer to today. In contrast, psychiatry as a profession has had a very troubled relationship with the idea that reality can profoundly and permanently alter people’s psychology and biology. Psychiatry itself has periodically suffered from marked amnesias in which well-established knowledge has been abruptly forgotten, and the psychological impact of overwhelming experiences has been ascribed to constitutional or intrapsychic factors alone.

(Van der Kolk, Weisaeth & Van der Hart, 1996, p. 47)

The paragraph is eloquent: trauma would seem to be a universal experience and a real object that, despite being known by common sense, could not be seen or was forgotten many times by psychiatric knowledge. According to these authors, the weight given to constitutional or intrapsychical theories prevented the recognition of a truth (considered unquestionable) that, nevertheless, had already been perceived by “well-established” knowledge (addressed in the historical chapter) which served as an antecedent of current knowledge (which would be the object of the book).

To this type of approach, we can apply the same criticisms that concern the traditional history of the “psy” disciplines. In this case, the authors seem to naturalise their objects of study, justify and celebrate the present as the moment of greatest epistemic development, believe in the linear and necessary progress of knowledge and be unaware of the existence of immeasurable discontinuities. The traditional perspective also sometimes constructs myths of origin, according to which a prestigious figure created a new discipline or branch of knowledge on their own initiative and thanks to their genius, without the intervention of collective factors, be these epistemic, cultural or political.

In an attempt to distance ourselves from these perspectives, we seek to conceive trauma as a strictly historical object of investigation and, therefore, as being contingent, transformable and diverse. Thus, the term’s current dispersion is not a mere illusion that hides the true notion of trauma; rather, it illuminates the web of problems, theories, practices and uses that this term covers.

For our part, in our investigation on trauma, we have emphasised the works of Sigmund Freud. Nevertheless, we have not done so intending to consecrate his ideas as the only truth on the matter. We consider, rather, that the path this category took in the writings of the founder of psychoanalysis *and his interlocutors* allows us to illustrate many of the central problems and the most famous debates that accompanied its historical transformations, such as:

- What is the nature of trauma?  
(Is it somatic or psychical? Is it anatomical or physiological? Is it the product of ideas or affects?, etc.)
- What are the determining factors of a traumatic experience? Are they the objective and/or external conditions of the situation or the subjective and/or internal particularities of the person going through it? Are they the current elements or the predisposition?
- What relationship exists between trauma and memory?
- What role does trauma play in aetiology?
- How should trauma narratives be interpreted? (Reality or phantasy?)
- What is the relationship between trauma and sexuality?
- Can a trauma be inscribed into a web of representations? Or, rather, does it circumscribe the limits of these webs?<sup>3</sup>
- Could a community be affected by collective trauma and remain fixed ('petrified') to that past experience?
- Can trauma be transmitted and affect those who have not lived through the traumatic experience?

In other words, the fact that this book on trauma is focused on Freudian ideas does not imply that it follows the guidelines of an *internal* history, which considers conceptual transformations to be the result of the development of ideas in an author, in their works or in a professional community. Just as trauma seems to interrogate the limits between the internal and the external, the history of this notion forces us to question the borders – which are often judged as precise and invariable – between different discourses and between each disciplinary field and its context. Therefore, to address it, we believe it necessary to reconstruct the *web* of interlocutors, knowledges, practices and cultural processes, within which the Freudian conceptualisations of trauma found their conditions of possibility. In this sense, we seek to base our research within the framework of *intellectual history* (Vezzetti, 2007). We consider that the transformations in the field of trauma do not depend only on the conceptual discussions but also on the clinical problems and technical and therapeutic procedures through which the notion of trauma found its place, as well as on the impact that certain social and cultural experiences had on the field of psychopathology.

For example, during the final decades of the nineteenth century, a process of “psychologization” of trauma took place (Gauchet & Swain, 2000; Hacking, 1995;

Leys, 2000; Micale & Lerner, 2001). The different forms of this process were determined by epistemic transformations within medical knowledge but also by the legal and economic problems associated with the expansion of a crucial technological advancement: the railway. The accidents caused by this revolutionary mode of transport and the expansion of health insurance in some European countries generated a great debate around a class of cases in which it was not easy to find the injury that justified the symptoms, but where the existence of simulation or fraud was not evident either.

Following this, around the 1880s, this medical-expert debate intersected with two other fields of problems. On the one hand, with discussions about the status of hysteria. This nosographical category not only posed clinical and epistemic enigmas regarding its ultimate nature and its mechanisms but also entailed a moral dimension (accusations of deceit, lies and simulation) and a gender issue (the rapid association of hysteria with the female sex) (Edelman, 2003; Foucault, 2006; Gauchet & Swain, 2000). On the other hand, railway accidents and cases of hysteria converged, in the same period, with the history of hypnosis and suggestion. This history not only referred to the development of new research and therapeutic techniques but also brought with it ethical and political debates (which reached journalistic coverage and a public dimension) about the dangers of the excessive influence that some men could exercise over others (Carroy, 1991; Edelman, 2003).

By the 1890s, the notion of trauma had not only reached a high degree of psychologisation, but was also beginning to be related, for the first time, to the question of *memory* (Hacking, 1995; Leys, 2000). Both Janet and Freud conceived trauma and its therapy as a novel articulation between different forms of forgetting and remembering (Assoun, 1981; Dagfal, 2013; Ellenberger, 1970; Gauchet & Swain, 2000). In doing so, they not only intervened in the limited scope of the clinic of the neuroses but also inscribed their work in a broader territory, that of the problematisation of memory. At the same time that tradition (understood as the transmission of past teachings still in force) was beginning to lose importance in the face of an increasingly accelerated rate of transformation (Hartog, 2003; Koselleck, 1993), different scientific conceptions of memory were developed in Europe. Among these, we can find clinical approaches to neurotic and traumatic amnesia, neurological studies on the localisation of different types of memory and experimental research on different memory functions (Hacking, 1995). To these three approaches, we must add the hereditarian psychiatric tradition, which assumes the existence of a biological memory whose traces can be passed down from generation to generation.

In the following century, several of the conceptual transformations and the variations in the relative significance given to the issue of trauma were linked to major war events, fundamentally, the World Wars and the Vietnam War (Friedlander, 1992; Hermann, 1992; Leys, 2000; Ramirez Ortiz, 2007; Young, 1995). For example, the First World War newly forced a discussion about the somatic or psychical nature of trauma, led to rethinking the role of sexuality in trauma and in the aetiology of

the neuroses and pushed Freud towards developing a fundamentally “economic” conception of trauma (Leys, 2000; Ramirez Ortiz, 2007). The Second World War influenced this theme in two moments. First, shortly after it ended, it generated a debate on the illnesses of the survivors of the concentration camps (Bonomi, 2007). Afterwards, around the 1980s, the insertion of the notion of trauma in the field of collective memory studies coincided with the reinterpretations of the Shoah as a key event in Western culture (Badiou, 2009; Franco & Levin, 2007; Friedlander, 1992; Hartog, 2003). Finally, the demands of the Vietnam veterans for the recognition of the psychological consequences of war prompted the trauma category to be included in the third version of the DSM (Borch-Jacobsen, 1996; Hacking, 1995; Hermann, 1992; Young, 1995).

In other words, the complexity of knowledge, practices and interests tied to the category of trauma led us to approach this topic from the perspective of intellectual history. Hugo Vezzetti understands this perspective as “an approach and inclusive domain which receives something from different historiographic genres” (2007, p. 161). We consider that different historiographic methodological tools become necessary to address an object such as trauma and place it

in a web that inevitably exceeds the limits of the discipline or the institution. A history conceived in this way is characterised by a plural placement, disposed to shift to the extent that its ‘objects’ are organised into constructions that can be differentiated into two spheres: sociocultural and conceptual.

(Vezzetti, 2007, p. 162)

Following the suggestion of this author, we attempt to avoid the “reduction to the logic of scientific thought”, which ignores the context and only constructs “internal” histories; however, neither do we aspire to develop an “external” history, which limits itself to the “description of the uses and the social forms” and is unaware of conceptual problems (Vezzetti, 2007, p. 162). At the same time, we attempt to submit to a certain standard of precision in the handling and analysis of psychoanalytic concepts and practices (precision that is often lost in certain histories of psychoanalysis elaborated by professional historians without a psychoanalytic background). Simultaneously, we try not to leave aside the critical distance that a historical investigation must have with respect to the object of its inquiry (a distance that is usually missing when insiders interested in legitimising the domain to which they belong, develop narratives on the history of a discipline or discourse).

By basing our research on the framework of intellectual history and making use of its historiographical tools, we attempt to reconstruct *the different models*, *the diverse conceptual configurations* (theoretical and practical) and *the varied images* that have been used to think about trauma or to guide the interventions conducted on those who have gone through a traumatic experience. We identified these models, configurations and images at different moments of the historical route we set out to cover, extending from the decade of 1860 until the end of the

thirties of the following century. Such periodisation reflects our intention to analyse the totality of the Freudian work, although without reducing our research's scope to it. We consider that the conceptions of the Viennese psychoanalyst discovered their field, found their interlocutors and defined their particular features in relation to broader problems (that exceed an author's ideas) and with the contribution of some of his colleagues (Erichsen, Page, Oppenheim, Charcot, Janet, Jung, Jones, Abraham, Ferenczi, among others), whose ideas influenced Freud or with whom he discussed. At the same time, the periodisation we put forward does not develop linearly and continuously from the mid-nineteenth century to 1939. Instead, each chapter circumscribes a series of different problems, the reason for which it is possible to find temporal overlaps, recapitulations and fragmented developments that respond to the problem that was intended to be analysed at each moment.

## 0.2 Previous Approaches

Developing an intellectual history of the notion of trauma based on the works of Freud and his interlocutors implies delving into heterogeneous bibliographical sources, which constitute different corpora: the history of psychoanalysis, the history of the clinic and psychotherapies, the historiographical reflections on the forms of producing disciplinary, intellectual and cultural history. To this, we must add, obviously, the primary sources of research: the psychoanalytic, medical and psychopathological writings that address the problem of trauma.

Regarding the history of Freudian psychoanalysis, the bibliography is extensive and heterogeneous. For many years, the reference text has been the biography written by Ernest Jones (1953–1957). This work had the merit of considering not only the texts included in the *Standard Edition* but also a large part of the unpublished manuscripts and correspondences. In addition, the Freudian trajectory was included in a web of relationships, collaborations and disputes with those who accompanied him or with whom he rivalled, establishing the idea that in order to understand the Freudian conceptual developments better, it was also necessary to be familiar with the history of the psychoanalytic movement. His text established a tradition of reading that became canonical in the International Psychoanalytic Association, characterised by holding an idealised vision of the father of psychoanalysis and circumscribing research within the interior of the analytic movement, leaving aside the different (epistemic, clinical and cultural) contexts in which it was able to develop.

From the 1960s onwards, the historical works on psychoanalysis multiplied and differed from the previous tradition. Firstly, because many of these works abandoned the aim of addressing the entire Freudian trajectory or the entirety of psychoanalysis in favour of focusing on specific aspects of each one of them. Secondly, because several of these works were written by people external to psychoanalytic practice. This novel situation made it possible to better highlight the continuities and differences between Freud's works with previous or contemporary authors

(Ellenberger, 1970), to address the relationship of his thought with his time (Gay, 1989) or to show in more detail the connection of his ideas with scientific traditions and epistemic discourses alien to strictly psychoanalytic problems, such as neurophysiology, pathological anatomy, energetics or evolutionism (Assoun, 1981; Gauchet, 1994; Sulloway, 1979, 1991).

However, it is necessary to clarify that, up to now, no book on the history of psychoanalysis has focused its research on the various notions of trauma. In the state of the art, it is possible to find work on the history of psychoanalysis that only deals with certain aspects related to the topic, or books on the history of trauma in which the psychoanalytic point of view is just one more among a series of theories used to address the subject.

For example, the now-classic book by Kenneth Levin (1985), *Freud's Early Psychology of the Neuroses*, addresses in depth the early years of Freud's work from a historical perspective without making trauma the centre of its research. For his part, the psychoanalyst Guy Le Gauffey includes, in some of his works, certain historical references that allow the psychoanalytic practice to be situated in relation to other techniques and therapeutic orientations (2001) or that make it possible to understand that certain features of Freudian thought depend on the characteristics of the scientific discourse of its time (1995). The connection of these references with the subject of our research exists but is limited. On the other hand, the work of Ramirez Ortiz, *Psicoanalistas en el frente de batalla. Las neurosis de guerra en la Primera Guerra Mundial* (2007), and Kurt Eissler's work, *Freud sur le front des névroses de guerre* (1992), constitute some of the few books specifically dedicated to addressing the question of the involvement of psychoanalysts in the First World War. Furthermore, the Argentine historian Omar Acha studied the psychoanalytic conceptions of time and history, which are closely related to the problem of trauma, but without being equivalent (Acha, 2007, 2010).

There is abundant literature with a historiographical perspective that deals with the Freudian hypotheses referring to childhood sexual trauma, often classified under the title of "Seduction Theory" (Carter, 1980; Esterson, 1993, 2001; Gelfand, 1989; Good, 1995; Israel & Schatzman, 1993; Triplett, 2004). Among these texts, on the one hand, Masson's book *The Assault on Truth* (1984) stands out, in which Freud is accused of abandoning an alleged complaint about the existence of child sexual abuse for fear of reprisals from his colleagues. On the other hand, some works by Borch-Jacobsen also stand out, which highlight the involvement of suggestion in the Freudian practice of that time and conjecture the possibility that the patients' reports of childhood sexual trauma may have been induced by Freud using suggestion (Borch-Jacobsen, 1996; Borch-Jacobsen & Shamdasani, 2006). More recently, several works by Mauro Vallejo (some written in collaboration with the author of this book) have contributed to making these debates more complex. They did so by placing the Freudian postulates within the context of his search for an aetiological factor that could displace heredity from the central role it had until then, and by relativising the classic opposition between phantasy and reality, with which the problem of seduction was usually approached (Sanfelippo & Vallejo, 2013a,b; Vallejo, 2011, 2012).

The works mentioned in the two previous paragraphs are among those that address, from a historical perspective, some aspects of psychoanalysis related to trauma. Now we wish to mention some historiographical texts whose primary object of inquiry is trauma itself and no longer psychoanalysis.

Ian Hacking explicitly addresses the issue of psychological trauma in one of the chapters of his book *Rewriting the Soul: Multiple Personality and the Sciences of Memory* (1995). In this chapter, this category is inserted into a web of clinical (nosographic discussions), cultural (the effects of the emergence of the railway) and conceptual problems (the debate between Freud, Charcot and Janet regarding therapy, memory and truth). However, his analysis is reduced to early moments of the Freudian works, leaving out both later conceptual modifications and critical historical events in the history of this notion (such as the First World War).

Probably one of the most important books on the notion that we set out to investigate is *Trauma: A Genealogy* (Leys, 2000). In this book, the author intends to examine the history of the term by placing it at the crossroads of knowledges, practices and social events, without neglecting the conceptual and technical debates within the doctrines, the disputes over therapeutic approaches or the impact of events such as wars and the Holocaust. However, given its claim to address the notion from the perspectives of the different psychological schools over a period of more than a hundred years, the chapter dedicated to Freud ends up losing precision and reflects more work on commentators rather than on primary sources (Leys, 2000, pp. 18–40).

In 2001, an important collective work on the issue was published, articulating the psychiatric notion of trauma with the cultural processes that took place towards the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. Entitled *Traumatic Past: History Psychiatry and Trauma in the Modern Age, 1870–1930*, the book includes several articles that allow for the weighing of the relationship of the category of trauma with the changes in means of transport, with the constitution of a Welfare State, with hysteria and certain gender issues and with the First World War (Micale & Lerner, 2001).

For their part, some of the most important theorists of the neurobiological conceptions of PTSD have written several historical texts on the subject (Van der Hart & Horst, 1989; Van der Kolk & Van der Hart, 1995; Van de Hart, Brown & Van der Kolk, 1989; Van der Kolk, McFarlane & Weisaeth, 1996). The problem with this type of approach usually lies in the assumption of the ahistorical nature of the object being investigated (in this case, trauma). These kinds of works are usually developed as if the only modification that time and humankind could make to the object was introducing a new way of conceiving it.

There are also historical studies that address problems linked to the clinic and psychopathology without specifically focusing on psychoanalysis or on trauma, but which have contributed enormously to this present research. We would first like to mention Gladys Swain and Marcel Gauchet's book on Charcot (Gauchet & Swain, 2000). To the exhaustive, original and rigorous nature of their work based on Charcotian sources, a detailed analysis of the French clinician's trajectory is

added, allowing us to understand his impact on the psychologisation of trauma. Also, Swain's article "*Du traitement moral aux psychothérapies*" (1994) constitutes an essential synthesis of the main characteristics of the therapeutic orientations of the beginning of the twentieth century.

Furthermore, Nicole Edelmann's book on the transformations of hysteria in the nineteenth century and Jacqueline Carroy's on hypnosis and suggestion, provide relevant data on the relationship between gender and hysteria, the role given to sexuality, the different images of trauma and the role of research techniques in conceptual transformations (Carroy, 1991; Edelman, 2003). Danziger's works (1984 and 1990) are also relevant to thinking about the role of research practices in the history of trauma. Moreover, an extensive article by Alejandro Dagfal (2013), clearly presents the state of the art of historical research on Pierre Janet and makes a precise analysis of the debates between the French author and the founder of psychoanalysis. All of these works illuminate certain aspects essential to thinking about the origins of psychoanalytic conceptualisations.

The hypotheses of Michel Foucault (1978) on the existence of "devices of sexuality" in the West allow us to better weigh the influence of sexuality in the conceptions of trauma in the work of Freud and his contemporaries. In addition, the French philosopher approached our theme more directly by proposing the connection between the medicalisation of hysteria, the problem of simulation and the medical and expert controversies on the nature of the symptoms of traumatised people (Foucault, 2006).

In this way, by connecting clinical and judicial discussions, another of the great contemporary problems related to trauma opens up: the nature of victims of traumatic experiences and the claims and attempts for reparation, which many authors have approached from different perspectives (Assoun, 2001; García, 2008; Hermann, 1992; Leys, 2000).

We also wish to mention some of the countless works on trauma written by psychoanalysts. At the very moment in which this investigation was coming to an end, Sandra Leticia Berta's doctoral thesis, defended in Brazil, entitled "*Escribir el trauma, de Freud a Lacan*" (2014), was published in Argentina. This work provides valuable insights into the temporality of trauma and its psychical inscription. It probably constitutes one of the most ambitious and systematic attempts to approach the conceptions of trauma in the works of both psychoanalysts. Unlike our research, it focuses its attention solely on the interior of their respective works, excluding from its objectives the study of the epistemic, cultural or political contexts of psychoanalytic ideas.

In an article published in the *Revue Francaise de Psychanalyse*, Françoise Brette (1988) posits the existence of three theories of trauma in Freud's work. The first is of Charcotian inspiration; the second is constituted by the seduction theory; the third takes the war neuroses as a model. The author seeks to underline a common characteristic between the three: the persistence of an economic perspective. Although her analysis could help to organise these issues, her reading simplifies

conceptual transformations of great complexity and does not consider the context of debates and authors in which the Freudian work is immersed.

In a very interesting publication, H. Thoma and N. Cheshire (1991) differentiate the Freudian notion of *nachträglichkeit* from Strachey's supposedly analogous conception called "deferred action". The axis of this article resides in the way of conceiving the temporality of trauma in both authors. Similarly, we also wish to mention a text by Javier Alarcón, entitled *Trauma y apres-coup* (1996), and a brief paper by Gerhard Dahl, called "The Two Time Vectors of *Nachträglichkeit* in the Development of Ego Organization: Significance of the Concept for the Symbolization of Nameless Traumas and Anxieties" (2010). Other articles, such as those written by Thierry Bokanowski (2005) and Alicia Lowenstein (1996), also distinguish between terms that are usually equated: *traumatism*, the *traumatic* sphere and *trauma*.

For his part, Paul-Laurent Assoun refers to the topic of trauma in several of his books. In addition to having posed the relationship of trauma with the body and with anxiety (Assoun, 1998, 2003), this author set out to study the topic from the feeling of prejudice (Assoun, 2001). For this author, the "prejudiced" is considered "exceptional" because of the damage received and, therefore, is reluctant to abandon a victim position that tends to be idealised, despite the suffering that it could entail. The book presents an original approach to pointing out the links between trauma, the victim position and the demands for reparation. However, unlike our research, it does not carry out a detailed historical analysis of Freud's work.

In the publications mentioned above (and in most of the writings of practitioners of psychoanalysis who deal with the issue of trauma) we can observe that in the corpus of sources and secondary bibliography many texts written by psychoanalysts are included, in which almost no attention is paid to the works of authors with other clinical orientations or to the historical studies on psychoanalysis written by authors outside the psychoanalytic movement. We believe that, in this way, a great risk is run: that of adhering (implicitly or explicitly) to the assumption that ideas can only arise from the internal development of an author's work or a professional community. Furthermore, on many occasions, the works cited are concerned with determining and making explicit what they consider trauma to be. Our purpose is another: to investigate the transformations that the notions of trauma have undergone at different times, transformations that not only depend on motives which are "internal" to Freudian thought but also depend on factors usually considered to be "external", which exceed the restricted framework of an author's work. In other words, we are not trying so much to provide an answer to a problem as to reconstruct a "problematic" (Danziger, 1984) in the frame of which Freud's proposals not only found interlocutors, allies or detractors but also their conditions of enunciability. In order to achieve this, it is necessary to consider the context (intellectual, professional, cultural, etc.) as an essential element in understanding the construction process of a category.

Finally, given that the notion of trauma has not extended its reach from the medical-surgical field to the psychological field but has also been incorporated into the domain of social memory and the history of the recent past, we wish to point out some of the literature that has analysed the problems linked to the consideration of past experiences such as “collective traumas”.

Firstly, a vast amount of literature deals with Freud’s ventures into group psychology. In particular, we are interested in mentioning those researchers who analysed “Moses and Monotheism” (Freud, 1939), the only text by the founder of psychoanalysis that deals explicitly with the issue of the transgenerational transmission of collective traumas. Without claiming to be exhaustive in our enumeration, this Freudian text was approached from historiography (Acha, 2007; De Certeau, 1999), philosophy (Derrida, 1987, 1997), literary criticism (Assmann, 1999; Blum, 1991), psychoanalysis (Le Gaufey, 1995), the history of psychoanalysis (Gay, 1989; Jones, 1953–1957) and the studies on Judaism (Yerushalmi, 1996).

Secondly, other investigations have dealt with analysing the presence of the notion of trauma (and of the related field of problems) in the specific field of historical studies of the recent past. Some of them intend to account for the historical conditions that made possible the displacement of the notion from psychology and psychoanalysis to historiography (Acha & Vallejo, 2010; Badiou, 2009; Ricoeur, 2008; Sanfelippo, 2011a). Others try to investigate the possibilities and limits of the utilisation of these concepts in the field of history (Franco & Levin, 2007; LaCapra, 2008, 2009, 2014; Mudrovic, 2005, 2009; Sanfelippo, 2011b; Vezzetti, 2002, 2009).

### **0.3 Preliminary Hypotheses**

In order to better organise and make more explicit some of the ideas expressed in the presentation of the issue at hand, we would like to introduce the general orientations that we have adopted and the main hypotheses we have tested in our research.

First, as we have already anticipated, we do not consider trauma to be a natural object, identical in all times and places, waiting to be discovered. Therefore, the transformations it has undergone should not be understood as changes in the interpretation of the concept or the discourses about the object, but as variations in the object itself (Canguilhem, 2009). The same term refers to different objects at different times and is linked to dissimilar problems, uses and domains.

Second, if the object “trauma” has changed over time, then the history of its variations cannot be thought of as a unique and necessary development (Leys, 2000, p. 8). The fact that trauma has changed meanings, extended its uses and been displaced towards other domains and problems is not due to a natural evolution or to the flourishing of its supposed essence (nor is it due to the intention or genius of certain well-known authors). Instead, these variations are due to multiple heterogeneous and contingent factors: the internal obstacles of each author’s theory, the works of their colleagues; epistemic changes that exceed the specific territory of the clinic of the neuroses; historical processes independent of psychopathological

knowledge (such as railway accidents or wars), etcetera. Therefore, the study of these transformations should not be reduced to the description of a linear journey but instead should reconstruct the web of knowledges, practices and institutional and cultural processes which generated the historical conditions of possibility for the different notions of trauma to appear. This historical web provided the interlocutors and propitiated the debates that allowed for the transformations of “trauma” to occur.

Third, regarding Freud’s ideas, we aim to test the following hypotheses:

- A single Freudian conception of trauma does not exist; there are several, whose differences are usually avoided by using a single term that, nonetheless, carries very different meanings and referents.
- Contrary to the thesis that arises from certain readings that understand psychoanalysis as a theory of desires and internal impulses that disregards the trauma (Van der Kolk & Van der Hart, 1995), we believe this notion has always played an important role in the Freudian conceptual edifice and was linked to many of its central problems and concepts: the unconscious and psychical conflict, sexuality and aetiology, non-linear temporalities, repetition in transference, the drives and the unbound energy.<sup>4</sup>
- Despite the transformations undergone by the notion, there is a common factor among all the conceptual configurations constructed by Freud. The trauma has always been defined in *relative* and never in absolute terms. In other words, it depends on the type of relationship established between an element and an entity that intends to function as an organised totality (and not on the intrinsic characteristics of the element or the entity).
- The characteristics attributed to the trauma stemming from the clinical experience with neurotics can be applied to group psychology. In particular, for Freud, the traces of past traumas persist beyond the situation that caused them and could produce posthumous effects, either in the life of an individual or in the life of a people, thanks to a process of transgenerational transmission.

Fourth, there are other recurrences despite the numerous changes that the notion has undergone. We are referring to the existence of two significant tensions in the debates about what determines that an experience becomes traumatic. On the one hand, the objective/subjective tension. Would an experience be traumatic due to the objective conditions of the situation (supposedly identical for all participants)? Or would it depend on the subjective particularities of the person who goes through it? On the other hand, the tension between the past and the present. Does an experience become traumatic because of its current characteristics? Or because of the background of the protagonists? Both axes can be combined, but they must be distinguished since the four alternatives could be possible. In addition, extreme positions are sometimes derived from these tensions. These positions are presented as exclusive oppositions, since they take into consideration only one of the two possible poles of each axis (for example, when affirming that the trauma solely

depends on the objective conditions but not on the subjective ones; that it is entirely determined by the antecedents, but not by the current characteristics of the experience, etc.) Throughout this book, we will attempt to analyse the consequences of such dichotomous positions, and we will also aim to investigate if the Freudian conceptions have been able to avoid this type of exclusive disjunctions.

#### **0.4 Brief Methodological Clarifications**

As anticipated, we attempt to inscribe our research on the notion of trauma within the framework of intellectual history. Therefore, it does not seek to address the – supposed – “totality” of facts involved in the history of trauma but, instead, to organise the historical narrative around different “problems” (Vezzetti, 2007, p. 161): the emergence of psychological conceptions of trauma at the crossroads between railway accidents and clinical hysteria (Chapter 1), the – conceptual and therapeutic – relationship between trauma and memory (Chapter 2), the search for the ultimate cause of the neuroses and the intersection between reality and phantasy in the stories of trauma (Chapter 3), the debates surrounding the war neuroses and the limits of representation (Chapter 4), the persistence and transmission of collective traumas (Chapter 5).

At the same time, the fact that our analysis deals with the works of Sigmund Freud does not imply limiting the investigation to his texts, his work or his image; we do not even reduce it to the movement that he founded. Instead, we attempt to reconstruct the web of interlocutors, knowledges, practices, institutional developments and cultural processes that constituted the *field of problems* in which the Freudian ideas and practices (as well as the different notions of trauma) found their conditions of possibility.

This intellectual history of trauma exceeds the reduced framework of enumerating and describing the “ideas” about trauma. It also does not solely address merely epistemic considerations (although it does not neglect this dimension, thus avoiding the risk of becoming a social or cultural history). Clearly, it is not a history “of the intellectuals” or of the “intellectual field” (Bourdieu, 2008). Rather, it is a history that deals with the conceptual and practical transformations of the notion of trauma, understanding that these depend on both epistemic issues and socio-cultural factors (Vezzetti, 2007, p. 162).

To better address the complexity of this web, we have resorted to three axes, with the expectation of them allowing us to structure the material better and more clearly illuminate the characteristics of the transformations produced. On the one hand, we study the impact of other problems, discourses, practices, instruments or disciplines that came to function as *models* (in the broadest sense of the term) for conceiving different forms or different aspects of trauma.<sup>5</sup> Then, we outline and explain the different *conceptions or conceptual configurations* of trauma. With the latter term, we intend to refer to the fact that none of the notions of trauma constitutes a simple entity; rather, it is composed of at least three elements. First,

an *element* that is determined as being traumatic (such as a mechanical action, an idea or an affect). Second, the *organisation* that is affected by the element (the organism, the nervous system, the ego, the psychical apparatus, etc.). Finally, the *type of relationship* that is established between that element and this organisation. As we will see, the variations in these *configurations* or *conceptions* have depended both on theoretical and doctrinal developments and on the practices put forward to mitigate the effects of trauma (since changes in the practices generally imply conceptual alterations and vice versa). Lastly, we rely on a third axis: the *images* of the traumatised subject (the injured person, the hysteric, the hypnotised individual, the abused child, the neurotic soldier, etc.) We consider that these images (which constitute the objects of the different knowledges and practices on trauma) help to better understand the variations in the conceptions of trauma. But in addition, they illuminate the social place that has been given to those who lived through an experience considered traumatic, as well as the strategies that have been implemented to mitigate the latter's effects. In summary, *models*, *conceptual configurations* and *images* will be some of the tools we will use to address the history of the notion of trauma.

## 0.5 Internal Organisation

This book is organised into five chapters that refer to different periods and problems. The first chapter addresses the process known as the “psychologization” of trauma (Gauchet & Swain, 2000; Hacking, 1995; Leys, 2000; Micale & Lerner, 2001). In it, we attempt to justify why this process cannot be considered a homogeneous development or a clear jump from a somatic to a psychological conception of trauma. Instead, different authors (especially Erichsen, Page, Oppenheim and Charcot) introduced different elements that are now associated with the idea of psychical trauma (such as suspicions of simulation, latency in the appearance of symptoms, the role of emotions and ideas in its development and the impossibility of eliminating symptoms through consciousness and willpower) but which at that time were still inscribed in an eminently medical (anatomical or physiological) field. We also seek to highlight the successive changes in the boundaries between the organic and the psychological spheres, as well as the role played by forensic and clinical techniques and practices in conceptual transformations.

In the second chapter, we try to explain the historical origin of the relationship between trauma and memory. Although both terms seem, at present, inconceivable without the other, they were first linked together in the early works on neuroses by Janet and Freud. These famous disciples of Charcot were who began to think of trauma as a pathological experience that depends on a particular interplay between remembering and forgetting. At the same time, in this section, we discuss contemporary historiographical approaches that, by recovering Janet's reading, consider him the founder of a traumatic theory of psychopathology; while Freud is seen as someone who impeded the reflection on trauma due to the importance he gave to

drives and phantasies. However, the first works of both authors allow us to observe that the French doctor and philosopher relativised the traumatic situations by virtue of the weight given to heredity. At the same time, his Viennese colleague much more clearly defended pathology's accidental and contingent nature. Lastly, the analysis of their respective therapeutic approaches allows us to identify the original responses that each one was able to formulate in the face of a clinical obstacle they encountered: to overcome trauma, remembering was not enough.

Chapter 3 is dedicated to analysing the construction and abandonment of the Freudian theory known as "seduction". We aim to highlight three aspects that have not been considered in depth by other authors who dealt with it. First, the objective behind Freud's *Neurotica*: to establish an aetiological theory that could displace hereditarian theories and that could establish a specific sexual cause for each clinical picture. Second, the *nachträglich* temporality of trauma, which is distinguished both from the conceptions that establish a linear, causal and deterministic relationship between the trauma and the symptoms, and from those that emphasise an a posteriori resignification, thus relativising the weight of the experience. Lastly, the different versions of the abandonment of the theory, where we still find the debate between the real or phantasmic nature of the narratives about past traumas. Unlike the usual theses, we attempt to justify that the opposition between reality and phantasy is very much relativised in many passages of the Freudian work.

Chapter 4 focuses on the war neuroses. The First World War once again put the problem of psychical trauma at the centre of the scene for those who dealt with the treatment of the neuroses, after a period of 15 years in which this illness had lost the significance it had gained during the final decades of the nineteenth century. This chapter is divided into two parts. Initially, we aim to analyse three major debates that arose regarding the war neuroses during the armed conflict. The first of these consisted of a new discussion on the nature of trauma: somatic or psychical? Was it a new disease or new forms of the old neurotic illnesses? Sexual or non-sexual? In this context, psychoanalytic hypotheses (and psychoanalysts) were met with the possibility of achieving greater visibility and acceptance in the medical world. The second controversy revolved around the attribution of the determining power in the production of symptoms: either to the objective conditions of the situation or to the subjective particularities of the ill person. The third debate was on the efficacy of the different therapies: faradisation, isolation, active therapies, hypnosis, suggestion, persuasion, catharsis and some versions of psychoanalysis.

The second part of the chapter limits its attention to the ethical and conceptual resonances of the war on Freudian thought after 1920. In particular, we attempt to analyse his position regarding the ethical implications of the treatments used in the wartime context. We also try to develop the main characteristics of a new economic conception of trauma. We hypothesise that this conception not only implied a conceptual rearrangement of some key principles of his theory but

also introduced a new problem linked to the limits of the field of representations in processing the quantities of excitation it faced.

The final chapter attempts to circumscribe (within the Freudian excursions into the realm of group psychology) the problem of collective traumas. This problem appears fundamentally in two books: *Totem and Taboo* (1913) and *Moses and Monotheism* (1939). In these texts, we do not find new conceptual configurations of trauma but rather a recapitulation and application (in the collective field) of the different conceptions that the Viennese psychoanalyst had devised from his psychoanalytic practice. This application was possible given his assumption that the same laws govern individual and group psychology. For Freud, certain collective experiences from humanity's past, despite being excluded from the explicit narratives about past times, persist in social memory, insist on compulsively returning and contain elements that resist being bound to the webs of shared representations. In particular, Freud conjectured the existence and permanence of two traumas: on the one hand, the murder of the violent leader of the primal horde at the hands of his sons, which would have led to clan organisation and the transition from nature to culture; on the other hand, the repetition of that crime in the murder of Moses, founder of the Jewish people, who tried to impose a monotheistic religion of Egyptian origin. The preservation of these traumas supposedly experienced by our ancestors introduced another relevant issue: the transgenerational transmission of past experiences, which would end up affecting those who did not directly participate in the experience.

It can be seen that the ordering of the chapters does not respond strictly to a chronological criterion but to the consideration of certain key problems: the tension between the event as an objective fact and its subjective representation; the relationship between trauma and memory; the question of causality; the problematic nature of narratives (or testimonies) of past traumatic experiences; the problem of sexuality; the link between trauma and war; the limits of the webs of representations; and collective trauma and its transmission.

We consider that these problems are not only central in the psychopathological and clinical field but also have relevance in the debates on trauma in the field of collective memory and the history of the present. As some of Europe's most renowned historians point out, we live in an era characterised by a "great wave of memory" (Hartog, 2003, p. 16), by an "obsession" with memory (Traverso, 2007, p. 69), by a "proliferating and multiform commemorative endeavour" (Revel, 2005, p. 271). From a Freudian perspective, not only some individuals but also some peoples seem to have been "absorbed in mental concentration upon the past" and have abandoned "all interest in the present and future" after having gone through "a traumatic event" which shattered the foundations of their lives (Freud, 1916–17a, p. 276). Addressing these problems historically without reducing them to the strict domain of the clinic is our way of being explicitly consistent with the context in which our work is produced,<sup>6</sup> and of building bridges between psychoanalysis, the history of psychoanalysis and the history of the recent past.

## Notes

- 1 In this regard, Dominick LaCapra refers to the question of trauma in the following way: “This problem has become crucial in modern thought in general and is especially prominent in post-World War II thought bearing on the present and the foreseeable future” (2005, p. xxix).
- 2 See: <http://www.apatraumadivision.org>.
- 3 *Translator’s note*: We have translated the author’s original notion of “*trama de representaciones*” as “web(s) of representations”. This decision implies a double compromise. The vital Freudian notion that in Strachey’s translations is referred to as “idea”, in José Luis Etcheverry’s translation into Spanish is called “*representación*”. Throughout this book, we have attempted to adhere to the use of “idea” as a replacement for the Spanish “*representación*”, despite the semantic implications this may have. Therefore, we wish to advert the readers that when the word “representation” and its derivatives appear, it has connotations to the Freudian “idea”; and vice-versa, “idea” alludes to the semantically richer “*representación*”. Furthermore, we believe “web/webs” is the English word that most suitably substitutes the Spanish term “*trama*” and its variety of condensed meanings and connotations. This term stems from the infinitive verb “*entramar*”, similar to the English “to weave”. “*Trama*” also means “plot”, as in the development of a story, which fits well with this book’s themes. Lastly, note the formal likeness of this word (“*trama*”) with the one that is central throughout this book (“trauma”); this will become especially relevant in the book’s final chapters.
- 4 We agree on this point with the opinion of Sandra Berta, who stated that “without it being a fundamental concept, the trauma continues to be a central issue for psychoanalysis, around which revolves an extensive discussion that involves crucial issues such as causality, sexuality, structure and temporality” (Berta, 2014, p. 19; italics in original).
- 5 Some of the models that we come across are pathological anatomy, faradisation, the technique of hypnosis, the hypothesis of a cerebral unconscious and Herbart’s ideas about the conflict between ideas, among others.
- 6 This is something which the traditional “historiographical operation” tries to avoid, although, as De Certeau (from whom we took the previously quoted syntagma) puts it, there are no technical devices that are totally “capable of effacing the *specificity* of the place, the origin of my speech, or the area in which I am researching” (De Certeau, 1988, p. 56; italics in original).

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