

Spectres of the Untold: Memory and History in South
Africa after the Truth and Reconciliation
Commission



UNIVERSITY *of the*
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DECLARATION

I, Heidi Peta Grunebaum, declare that '**Spectres of the Untold: Memory and History in South Africa after the Truth and Reconciliation Commission**' is my own work, that it has not been submitted for any degree or examination in any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

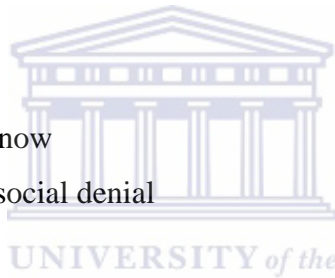
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INTRODUCTION

THE LIMITS AND POSSIBILITIES OF INTEGRATING ATROCITY

From the horizon of the distant past an immense sad wind,
like an endless sorrow, gusts and blows through the cities,
through the villages, and through my life.

Bao Nin, *The Sorrow of War*

Recordar: To remember; from the Latin *re-cordis*,
to pass back through the heart

Eduardo Galeano, *The Book of Embraces*

The time of “transition” to constitutional democracy in South Africa has been one of great hopefulness, of vertiginous possibility and expectation, of quiet sadness and reflection, of much joy and celebration, of contradictions and vexing complexity. The labour of rendering the breathtaking extent of colonial and Apartheid atrocity intelligible has but tentatively begun. Unravelling the lived inscriptions of layer upon layer of sentient injustice that have marked the everyday through the passage of the past three hundred and fifty years in these southernmost parts of the African continent, is only starting. In the global political and moral imaginary the “new” South Africa, however, has come to figure in two fairly stark ways: either as the “miracle” of reconciliation in which the moral victory of good (the struggle against Apartheid) has prevailed against evil (white supremacist rule), or as yet another instance of the failure of neoliberal macroeconomics where huge class disparities, social inequity and structural poverty increasingly paint a gritty canvas depicting the horizons of society as crisis, despair and struggle. Whilst both views hold implicit (though programmatically incompatible) assumptions about time, about history and about oppression, they are seldom interrogated

in the light of what remains vexing, creative, resilient, hopeful, human and, therefore, irreducible in the picture.

This work is a meditation on the shaping of time and its impact on living with and understanding atrocity in South Africa in the wake of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). It is an examination of the ways that the institutionalization of memory has managed perceptions of time and “transition”, of events and happenings, of sense and emotion, of violence and recovery, of the “past” and the “new”. Through this process a public language of “memory” has been carved into collective modes of meaning-making. It is a language that seems bereft of the hopes, dreams and possibilities for the promise of a just and redemptive future it once nurtured. In a review of poet, Rustom Kozain’s collection, *This Carting Life*, Jeremy Cronin captures these sentiments when he writes that “[t]he prevailing sense of loss [in the collection] is not a pining for a dreadful apartheid past but, rather, a conviction that our present reality is less than we had struggled for, less, perhaps, than we deserved.”¹ As time has been made and marked the synchronous moments of human agency, resilience and creativity have been rendered into “events”, into commemorations of times passed. A tight weave of compelling and dominant regimes of meaning, sewn together by and through the “publicly” interpolated process of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa, has rendered lived time into an object and commodity called, the “past”. And it is through the experiential optic of memory that the “past” may be accessed. Of course, the certainties and

¹ Jeremy Cronin, “Kozain carts loss into our SA present as poetry” in *Sunday Independent* (9 September 2005), p.18.

foreclosures of the “past”, in contradistinction to the “new” and to the now, are not uncontested. The signs of a more fractious unstitching of the meanings of the “past”, and therefore of lived time, have begun to show (of which this work is but one instance). And it is this close weft of normative assumptions, meanings and perceptions that is the TRC’s legacy which the work of unstitching must tackle. For, insinuated in different ways in the global and national imaginary, the TRC has been one of the most powerful institutional processes to shape the contours of historical and national “consciousness” since South Africa’s political change to constitutional democracy.

Increasingly, as truth commissions have become *de rigueur* state-instituted tools of transitional justice for countries that emerge from long periods of administrative oppression and atrocity (particularly in the global South), they are becoming deeply and ambivalently threaded into the social politics of memorialisation and into the forms of institutional occlusions that shape social processes of remembrance and forgetting. As the South African TRC has been held up as a “model” to be reproduced (with changes according to local contexts) across the so-called “developing” world which have also experienced prolonged periods of war and state and structural violence - from Burundi, Morocco, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Peru, Colombia and Sri Lanka to East Timor, to name a few - it becomes increasingly necessary to examine how truth commissions, the epistemologies that underpin them, and the forms of knowledge they produce about the social contexts in which they are located, are embedded in the global political economy in very particular ways. Although it is imperative to locate South Africa’s transition, as well as the TRC (as but one institutional tool of transition) in its historical moment of

emergence, and in relation to globally propagated neoliberal forms of democratisation in which Africa is being geopolitically and economically reconfigured, it is equally crucial to examine how the TRC, as a specifically “national” institution, was intended to socially manage political change by “dealing with the past”.²

Truth commissions are profoundly implicated in the social politics of memorialisation. Memory, as a conceptual, historical and experiential discourse about “the past”, relates to the ways in which atrocity is integrated into cognitive and epistemic frameworks and into constructions of social meaning in, of and about the postcolony. The politics of historical truth, of memory and of justice, play out not only in relation to the ongoing struggles for survivors of state terror (regarding the kinds of subjectivities and speaking positions this informs or prohibits as well as for claims for justice that may or may not be mobilised), but also in relation to the ways that the harsh grittiness of the everyday, the shapings of silences, the emptiness of reconciliation and the fracturing of hope remain embedded in the aetiologies of such politics. For the time of the “new” - a temporality in which foundational concepts such as nation, modernity and globalisation intersect and interact in very particular ways - rests on “the past” being constructed as distinct and separate

² For earlier discussions on the TRC and “dealing with the past” debates, see Alex Boraine, Janet Levy and Ronel Scheffer, *Dealing with the Past: Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa* (Cape Town: IDASA, 1994); Alex Boraine and Janet Levy (eds.), *The Healing of a Nation?* (Cape Town: Justice in Transition, 1995) Kader Asmal, Louise Asmal and Ronald Suresh Roberts, *Reconciliation Through Truth: A Reckoning of Apartheid’s Criminal Governance* (Cape Town and Johannesburg: David Phillip and Mayibuye Books, 1996).

from the now and from the “new”. It is a temporality that is *perceived* to be discontinuous with everyday life, which arguably, is the time and place of the political in Africa.³

Historical debts, methodological concerns and theoretical framings

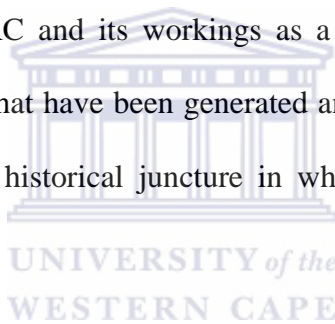
Much of the existing scholarship on the TRC, and on truth commissions more generally, has tended to reproduce the epistemic framings and theoretical frameworks that inform these institutions. This means that both critical studies⁴ and more affirming and supportive analyses⁵ on the TRC reinforce its epistemic framings by evaluating the weaknesses, successes and shortcomings of its proceedings, as well as of the institutional interpretations and implementations of its legal mandate, against the very terms set out in

³ See Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001) and AbdouMaliq Simone, *For the City Yet to Come: Changing African Life in Four Cities* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004).

⁴ See for example, Mahmood Mamdani “Reconciliation without Justice” in *Southern African Review of Books* (46, Nov./Dec., 1996), pp 3-5; Mahmood Mamdani, “The Truth According to the TRC” in Ifi Amadiume and Abdullahi An-Na’im (eds.), *The Politics of Memory: Truth, Healing and Social Justice* (London: Zed Books, 2000), pp 176-183 and Mahmood Mamdani, “A Diminished Truth” in Wilmot James and Linda van de Vijver (eds.), *After the TRC: Reflections on Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa* (Athens and Cape Town: Ohio University Press and David Philip, 2001), pp 58-61. See also, Deborah Posel and Graeme Simpson (eds.), *Commissioning the Past: Understanding South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 2002).

⁵ See for example, Martha Minnow, *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness: Facing History after Genocide and Mass Violence* (Boston, Beacon Press, 1998); Robert I Rotberg and Dennis Thompson (eds.), *Truth v. Justice: The Morality of Truth Commissions* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000); Priscilla B. Hayner, *Unspeakable Truths: Confronting State Terror and Atrocity* (New York and London: Routledge, 2001); James L. Gibson, *Overcoming Apartheid: can truth reconcile a divided society?* (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2004).

the mandate and its interpretative field. Whilst much engaged and rigorous scholarship on the TRC has been produced in the form of published monographs or doctoral dissertations⁶, few studies have examined the epistemic and theoretical frameworks from a metacritical perspective in order to examine the foundational notions that operate in these frameworks, and to ask the following questions: How, why and for whom do truth commissions produce particular “pasts”? How are conceptual categories of memory, trauma, testimony and violence structurally embedded, discursively configured and politically deployed in the production of such “pasts”? What kinds of social meanings do they generate and legitimise, what do they occlude and delegitimise and why? This work, therefore, is *not* about the TRC and its workings as a state institution, but about the multiple circuits of meanings that have been generated and reproduced through the TRC process at a particular global historical juncture in which South Africa’s “transition” features in distinctive ways.



This thesis has been structured around a set of thematic concerns that I have grappled with in my work, life, thinking, research and writing over the past ten years. Arising out of a very personal accounting of my own everyday context during the time of “transition”, these concerns have changed and shifted through this time from the initial Justice in Transition debates that shaped the form the TRC would take, through the public

⁶ See for example, Laars Buur, “Institutionalising Truth: Victims, perpetrators and professionals in the everyday work of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission”, unpublished Ph.D dissertation, Aarhus University, Denmark, 2000; Fiona C. Ross, *Bearing Witness: Women and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa* (London: Pluto, 2003); Christopher J. Colvin, “Performing the Signs of Injury: Critical Perspectives on Traumatic Storytelling after Apartheid”, unpublished Ph.D dissertation, University of Virginia, 2004; Undine Kayser, “Imagined Communities, Divided Realities: Engaging the Apartheid Past through ‘Healing of Memories’ in a post-TRC South Africa”, unpublished Ph.D dissertation, University of Cape Town, 2005; Alejandro Castillejo-Cuellar, “The Invisible Corner: Violence, Terror and Memory During the State of Emergency in South Africa, 1986”, unpublished Ph.D dissertation New School of Social Research, New York, 2005.

hearings of the TRC's Human Rights Violations and Amnesty Committees, to attempting to "make sense" of the insidious and perpetual forms of "race"/color, class, social, economic, spiritual and *human* violence in Cape Town, the city in which my speculations are grounded, shaped and given the form of thought, of penned reflection and analysis. In the early stages of research the ideas and speculations contained within the thematic trajectories of this thesis were anchored in and illustrated by narrative and discourse theory-framed analyses of Human Rights Violations testimonies from transcripts and recordings that constituted, in part, a personal TRC archive. This archive also comprised of newspaper cuttings on the TRC and its hearings (from 1996-2000), audio recordings of radio programmes on the TRC (from 1997-1999), video recordings of television coverage of the hearings and of documentaries (from 1996-2000), of written material produced by the TRC during the hearings, of seminar, workshop and conference papers, of field-notes, personal journaling and email correspondences made during and after the Human Rights Violations Committee, Amnesty Committee and Special Events hearings of the TRC which I attended in Cape Town, Athlone and Guguletu between 1996 and 1999. Whilst this archive provided me with much text for "close-readings" that culminated in a number of publications, I became progressively disturbed by an increasingly widespread pillage, commodification and re-circulation of testimonies that had been borne "publicly" to the TRC. This occurred at a time, in the late nineteen nineties, when a growing national and international memory and truth commission "industry" had begun, simultaneously, to flourish.⁷ With the advent of constitutional democracy and the deep affective pull of the

⁷ In the visual arts, for example, the exhibition, *Faultlines: Enquiries into Truth and Reconciliation* (Castle of Good Hope, Cape Town, June – July 1996, curated by Jane Taylor); Gavin Younge, Fernando Alvim and Carlos Garaicoa's exhibition, *Memorias, Intimas, Marcas* (Castle of Good Hope, Cape Town, 1997); "No.4": *an interactive ceremony about truth and memory* (performance directed and exhibition curated by

TRC's public hearings many researchers, journalists, artists and film-makers from the global North (and from within South Africa) came to find, witness, hear, collect and interpret personal "stories" from survivors, witnesses and actors in the struggle against Apartheid. The TRC itself was being figured in problematic and often contradictory ways in relation to the privileging of individual "stories" as a narrative mode associated with the recovery of "buried" or excluded histories, as a therapeutic mode for psychosocial "healing", as a confessional mode inflected with a Christian ethic of moral redemption and, finally, as a poetic mode for a "rights"-based approach to civil and social pedagogy. As personal "stories" have been foregrounded and subjected to a general tendency of

Nan Hamilton, Old Fort, Kotze Street, Hillbrow, 17-28 September 1997); Judith Mason's exhibition, *The woman who kept silent and the man who sang* (Chelsea Gallery, Wynberg, June 1998); Sue Williamson's exhibition, *Truth Games* (Joao Ferreira Fine Art, Cape Town, 18 October – 28 November 1998); and *Truth Veils* (University of Witwatersrand Art Galleries, Johannesburg, June 1999, Jointly curated by Rayda Becker, Fiona Rankin-Smith, Melinda Silverman, Penny Siopis and Rory Bester) come to mind. In the performing arts, *The Story I am about to Tell*, by Khulumani, a survivor support group, *Ubu and the Truth Commission*, directed by William Kentridge [*Ubu and the Truth Commission* (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 1998)] and Paul Hertzberg's *The Dead Wait* were all staged at the Market Theatre, Johannesburg during 1997; and more recently, John Kani, *Nothing But the Truth* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 2002). Literary texts that came out at this time include, Antjie Krog, *Country of My Skull* (Johannesburg: Random House, 1998); Sindiwe Magona, *Mother to Mother* (Cape Town: David Phillip, 1998); Gillian Slovo, *Red Dust* (London: Virago, 2000); Zoe Wicomb, *David's Story* (Cape Town: Kwela, 2000); Achmat Dangor, *Bitter Fruit* (Cape Town: Kwela, 2001). Besides Krog and Slovo's books which have subsequently been made into full-length feature films, a number of other short and full-length films that deal with the TRC and its discourses have been made. These include, Sechaba Morojele's *Ubuntu's Wounds* (2001); Ramadan Suleiman's *Zulu Love Letter* (2004); and Ian Gabriel's *Forgiveness* (2004) which has been placed on the Department of Education's Literature Resource List for Grades 11 and 12, Sheree Russouw, "Students learn about healing through homegrown movie" in *Weekend Argus* (July 1, 2006), p 14. Documentary films on the TRC include Antjie Krog and Ronelle Lotts' "The Unfolding Sky", in the 4 part series, *Landscape of Memory*; Frances Reid and Deborah Hoffman's *Long Night's Journey into Day* (2000); Mark Kaplan's *Between Joyce and Remembrance* (2003). Besides the many academic works published on the TRC that are referred to throughout this dissertation, a number of memoirs and scholarly texts were written by TRC staff and commissioners. See for example, Desmond Mphilo Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness* (London: Rider, 1999); Alex Boraine, *A Country Unmasked* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Zenzile Khoisan, *Jakaranda Time: An Investigator's View of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission* (Cape Town: Garieb Communications, 2001) and Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, *A Human Being Died That Night: A Story of Forgiveness* (Cape Town: David Philip, 2003). The South African Broadcasting Corporation and the TRC also produced an "oral history" of the commission's hearings in the form of a CD-Rom collection entitled, *South Africa's Human Spirit: An Oral Memoir of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission* (2000).

treating testimony as “text” or “data” with which to interpret or aestheticise history, critical attention has shifted away from the more systemic, organizational, inter-institutional and epistemological processes that comprise the making of a highly accessible and multi-sited “public archive” of TRC testimonies. Instead of theorising the relationship between institutional practices of selection, categorization and judgement which constitute the “production” of testimony as well as of the “public” archive, I chose, rather, to stop working “on” testimony.

In 1999, I was invited to work as a volunteer at the WECAT Project, a recently initiated counter-memory project in Cape Town. This invitation offered me the opportunity to further explore ways in which to engage, act, create, contribute and understand the South African scenario of decolonization and my place and responsibilities inside of it, “outside” of the academy. In 2000, the project took the corporate form of a non-profit organization, the Direct Action Centre for Peace and Memory (DAC), and its founders invited me to work as a full-time employee of the organization.⁸ And it was at the DAC that I worked until 2006 and in which my discussions and understandings that I set out in this thesis began to take a different shape. Over the past years and in many debates, discussions and conversations with colleagues, as well as with participants and students during the DAC’s peace-building workshops, numerous theoretical knots were tied and

⁸ The Direct Action Centre for Peace and Memory is a peace and human rights organization established by former combatants of the liberation struggle in South Africa. The working concepts, published research and grassroots initiatives of the DAC have emerged from the recognition of working through and within the multiple tensions that constitute the context of its interventions. This relates to the challenges for the economic and psychosocial reinsertion of former guerrilla and political prisoners within the broader context of systemically entrenched socio-economic inequality and exclusion. Such tensions include the everyday traces of colonial and Apartheid violence as they impact on the politics of memory and memory-work, and consensual narratives of “the past” as they rub up against the social necessity of alternative modes of history-making and remembrances.

unravelling. These related to the cycles, circles and relations of distance and proximity to the narration, comprehension and interpretation of how and what activists, guerrilla and survivors of the wars (in South Africa, Angola and elsewhere in Southern Africa) “say” and write of their experiences. The theoretical knots also related to how interlocutors/addressees “hear”, internalise, react, respond and understand these “accounts”; accounts which often constitute a deeply personal but also intimately collective experiential matrix of the lived, of the humanly possible and of the humanly endurable.

Through these innumerable discussions, as well as through the memory-work of the DAC itself, a number of compelling questions (political, ethical and economic) were raised for me with regard to academic, scholarly, documentary and artistic justifications for the “use” of testimony. These questions extended to the intersubjective interface of “research”, that interactional and transactional space where “experience” is rendered into “knowledge” by a “researcher” whose intellectual (and progressive political) credentials have been established through the always unequal intimacy of participant-observation and action-research methodologies.⁹ Whilst this thesis is organised around a set of *thematic* issues, my methodological approach to exploring these issues required a different tack. This led to two decisions that have shaped the form and content of this thesis. In response to these decisions, I undertook to write, in the most literal sense possible, a “negativist”¹⁰ critique of the impact of the TRC process on historical

⁹ Here I acknowledge Alejandro Castillejo-Cuellar with whom a shared concern regarding these questions has informed the ways that I have responded to them.

¹⁰ I thank Patricia Hayes for suggesting this provocative description of this work. I wish to stress that whilst the term, “negativist” evokes intellectual trajectories that point simultaneously towards Theodor Adorno’s

consciousness in South Africa. A critique, that is, that would not draw directly, as would a more “positivist” critique or qualitative ethnography, from interviews or from testimonies. The metacritical significance of a methodology that avoids working with testimony in a qualitative or an empirical way relates to two distinct concerns which often converge and overlap with regard to the making of “knowledge” in and about so-called “developing” or postcolonial contexts. The first concern relates to the ways that dominant Eurocentric conceptions of knowledge inform research practices. The second concern relates to the limitations and foreclosures that dominant understandings of atrocity and violence may erect in the rush to produce “knowledge”, particularly when drawing from or instrumentalising testimony. A different methodological approach was also needed, therefore, in order to highlight the challenges of thinking, writing and arguing about the consequences of violence for memory and meaning-making *as* a metacritical issue. I decided, therefore, *not* to use testimonies as the evidence that grounds and illustrates my arguments. The final stanza of a poem I had written called, “Keyhole”, became a metaphor for this “negativist” approach to dealing with the methodological and metacritical knots I have just described: “Is a keyhole, without the key,/ but a tiny cipher of the longer shadows of exile?/Can it be that words are keyholes/embracing the absence of what once was?/ Or is it that memories are the keyholes; and words, the key/ that words alone remain/ the memorials to unhomed dreams?” I thought about methodology as an epistemological category. And I chose to write about the key, metaphorically speaking, by describing and theorising the keyhole.

Negative Dialectics (London: Routledge, 1973) and Jacques Derrida’s *Spectres of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International* (New York and London: Routledge, 1994), I use the term in the most literal sense possible here. In other words, whilst a positivist critique may employ a number of methodological techniques such as the inclusion of testimonies, this study pointedly does not make use of such techniques.

The second methodological choice arises from discussions further in this thesis regarding the narrowing of civic, social and public spaces for memory practices that are activist initiatives in that they embrace a more radical notion of time, of historical consciousness and of social change. These are those practices and forms of remembrance which constitute counter-critiques and, as such, represent new and innovative interventions that may seem to rub against the grain of the social and historical meanings which advocate the foundational perspectives of the “new”. By heeding the ways in which truth commissions may act to reify particular memory, justice and history-related concepts over others in the rendering of time and experience into “the past”, memory-activists - alert and responsive to the broader context in which counter-practices of memory are situated – emphasise, as Benita Parry describes it, our “responsibility of narrating the past in ways that subject the strategies validating violence, exploitation and persecution to scrutiny and judgement, and which animate the desire to bring a just future into being.”¹¹ Given the broader context in which public, social and civic spaces for more radical and socially regenerative practices of memory have narrowed and in which the early stirrings of emergent, fragmentary and contestatory alternative practices of memory are incubating, I do not hold up the counter-initiatives which I describe for the same critique, or evaluate them according to the same measures of critical judgement which I do the dominant regimes of meaning and reference, and of which I understand the TRC to foundationally constitute, in a large part.

¹¹ Benita Parry, *Postcolonial Studies: A Materialist Critique* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), p 185.

Although I draw from a wide range of diverse theoretical and disciplinary orientations in this thesis, a small number of engaged critical and materialist theorists and intellectuals have inspired and informed, if not the content, then the critical drift of my discussions: amongst these are Franz Fanon's, *Wretched of the Earth*; Aijaz Ahmad's *In Theory: Classes, Nations and Literatures*, Arif Dirlik's *The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism* and Benita Parry's *Postcolonial Studies: A Materialist Critique*.¹² In different ways, these texts have provided me with intellectual, political and theoretical road-signs. For me, these road-signs are more than critical tools with which to think, continuously reminding me that “discourse”, “theory”, “the intellectual” and “the academy” are historical and materially determined concepts enfolded within, acting upon and acted upon by a broader and unfinished, a provisional, a determined, an ever-changing, as well as a changeable, macroscopic context. These texts also continuously recall me to the limitations, possibilities and historical debts of critical scholarship, never outside of the social, material and historical context of its production. They urge me to attend to these limitations, possibilities and debts in a locale shaped by the harshness and the hope of the everyday in the wake of administrative violence, and in the wake of the narrowing of social spaces for alternative modes of collective meaning-making where the fostering of a just, secure peace and egalitarian democracy in the longer term ensure that the stakes in the remembrance of lost futures remain high.

¹² Franz Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, translated by Constance Farrington. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990); Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations and Literatures* (London and New York: Verso, 1992); Arif Dirlik, *The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism* (Boulder, Colorado and Oxford: Westview Press, 1998); Benita Parry, *Postcolonial Studies: A Materialist Critique* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004).

Outline of the work

The aim of this work is to interrogate the epistemic underpinnings of the TRC beyond its specifically institutional functionalities. The referential economies and the moral and ideological reach of terms such as truth-telling and nation-building, reconciliation and forgiveness, injury and loss, trauma and healing, victim and perpetrator, transitional justice and conflict-resolution, memory and the past have set the grounds on which certain aspects of human experiences of atrocity are highlighted whilst other aspects are rendered invisible. Constituting a set of (nationally and globally) sanctioned social, moral and political discourses (and practices) of transition, these terms operate to disaggregate “the past” that they underwrite from the historical, material and structural aetiologies of atrocity and violence in which they are embedded. These terms - relating to the past - provide, by extension, a material set of boundaries for what kinds of institutional, community, grass-roots, civil society and state socio-economic, psychosocial and peace-building initiatives receive reparations, resources, attention, support and funding. The concern of this thesis, then, is to unpack how the TRC has generated, beyond its implementation and operation, a set of concepts and discourses that have framed a field of reference which, in turn, has shaped the ways in which “the past” is produced, “the present” understood and “the everyday” inhabited in the postcolony.

Chapter one examines the constellation of key concepts and discourses embedded in and generated through the TRC and reproduced and reinscribed through the public sphere. These concepts and discourses have produced a compelling regime of historical meanings

that have contoured social perceptions of political change and thus of time; time as lived (an experiential category related, in different ways to “memory”), and time as a historical category (what comes to be represented as “the past” and what does not). Time in the postcolony requires theoretical elaboration as it impacts on the ways in which “the past” - as a sign of *knowledge* and *experience* - is produced. I explore, therefore, the ways in which the TRC has organised notions of time in the production of a “past” and a “present”. As I examine the TRC as a part of a growing global economy of institutions of political “transition management”, I unpack how a civic language of remembrance and reconciliation has come to stand in for a state practice of redress and for a social debt of responsibility. It is from this perspective that the referential economies of key discursive terms of the TRC such as truth, reconciliation, and forgiveness are explored. In theorising the relationship between forms of public and institutional discourses of transition, social perceptions of time and subjectivity that these endorse and the material, historical and geopolitical contexts of their production, this chapter interrogates how social and historical meanings (assimilated into the foundational notion of “nation”) have recalibrated perceptions of what is perceived as the *political* in the postcolony.

Chapter two examines the ways in which testimony and voice have figured in giving “life” to the way that time is organised as the “new” and “the past”. This involves examining the interconnections of voice to democracy, of atrocity to narrative and of listening and interpretation to silencing and appropriation. The chapter interrogates how the operative assumptions which frame testimony, how mediations of testimony and how mediatised disseminations of testimonies have contributed to the depoliticisation both of

testimony as a narrative genre for radical social change, as well as of memory as a discourse about “the past”. Central to this discussion is an examination of the ways that pain, trauma and woundedness operate in the framing of testimony. I then theorise the ways that technologies of mass media have insinuated TRC testimonies into the cognitive operations of the public as mediated and mediatised testimonies have been rendered into a poetics of pain for “public” consumption and how this has diluted the interpretative, historical and political substance of testimony and of the act of testifying itself. Drawing from a selection of televisual coverage of the TRC I illustrate this by examining how testimonies are absorbed into a depoliticising economy of witnessing in which discourses of trauma loom large. Instead of enriching, humanising and deepening understandings of politics, the ways in which pain is framed displaces the politics (not necessarily in terms of testimonies’ content but in their broader narratological framing). Finally, I examine the mediation of testimony in relation to how, having been conceived as a discrete corpus of *information* to be interpreted and rendered into *knowledge*, testimony is appropriated and delinked from the lives, experiences and “right of recountability” of the witness-narrator as an issue of ethical, political and economic import.

I turn to the conceptual category of place (and the urban context of Cape Town) in chapter three in order to explore the ways in which constructions of lived and historical time are spatialised. I develop this by thinking how *memorial cartographies* - the routes and networks of emplaced narratives that constellate spatial and temporal relations grounding, materialising and containing historical sensibilities – act as topographical mnemonics, inscribing “permitted” modes of spatialised remembrances. Memorial

cartographies produce historical meaning, mirroring similar processes of historical visibility and social occlusion that technologies of transition management, such as the TRC, inaugurate. For as memorial cartographies map human *experience* into sets of spatial and temporal “objects” they constellate these sets into relations of perceptual and cognitive visibility. I illustrate these ideas by examining how the topographical and symbolic relationship between Robben Island and the mainland of Cape Town shapes the ways that the Island’s core memorial narratives are able to conflate the historical specificity of place with the memorial matrix of the “new” nation. I contrast this examination of Robben Island with an exploration of an alternative spatial and commemorative project of meaning-making. I do this by examining spatial and counter-memorial practices that ask for a more complicated, spatially engaged and activist notion of memory-work by focussing on the spatial and counter-memorial practices of the WECAT project organised by the Direct Action Centre for Peace and Memory in Cape Town.

The central concern of chapter four is to track how the aetiologies of “everyday” violence relate to “the new” and “the past” as they become materially, systemically, symbolically and epistemologically accreted whilst simultaneously being rendered invisible through social denial and historical erasure. Interrogating dominant epistemic frameworks through the optic of “the everyday” is central to this examination as these are constitutive of the ways that historical erasure operates. For it is in the everyday that systemic continuities of violence (in old and new forms) become normalised, that historical erasures are produced and that collective understandings of “the past”, in the here-and-

now, are reproduced. As a composite of practices, performances, discourses and perceptions the time of the new, the time of transition, has structured the time of “development” as a hegemonic temporality that has fractured temporalities of social recovery and self-reclamation. If historical erasure operates and is compounded in the everyday this poses a set of epistemological challenges for responsible critical and creative engagement and for more engaged and regenerative forms of collective memory-work. It is therefore in the everyday that the social and critical imagination is faced with the challenge of mourning lost futures and envisioning alternative ones. I take up the theoretical reflections on the everyday by examining the politics of historical erasure that emerged in relation to the uncovering of human “remains” in 2003 at a burial ground at Prestwich Street in the Green Point area in Cape Town. I frame these politics as a narrative of how histories of enslavement, of land and property dispossession, forced removals and systemic violence (as the human cost of the city’s development as a “modern” city) have been excised both *over* time and *in* time, in the time of the everyday. I then examine how a campaign conducted against the exhumation of the burial ground inserted, for a short time, a contesting notion of time into the hegemonic temporalities of business (property development) and “heritage” management as these intersect with the global temporalities of capital, property speculation and institutions of knowledge production. Finally, I explore how the uncovering of the Prestwich burial ground permitted a temporal and literal resurfacing of historical relations and memorial affinities of material connection between descendants of slaves living in the area until Apartheid-era forced removals and the area’s subsequent gentrification whilst constituting an ongoing economic process of historical erasure in the everyday.

Memory and oblivion

It has become a commonplace observation that, as a deeply important form of social and historical acknowledgment, memorialisation and remembrance constitute a powerful matrix in individual and group understandings and senses of place, of history, of justice and of belonging. It has also become common sense, so as to constitute a first assumption, that in the wake of great social and political upheavals what is collectively “forgotten” is as significant as what is held up as worthy of collective remembrance. What emerges, however, in each of the four chapters in this thesis, is how, in the wake of the TRC, the fuzzy conceptual boundaries between remembrance and forgetting and between memory and oblivion have been redrawn. Increasingly, as these concepts relate to constructions and perceptions of time, they have been configured in terms of a past, as *the* terms of the past. But as they impact so profoundly on historical consciousness, they relate very centrally to the always unsettled matter of the future, to what may yet still come to pass. The “spectres of the untold”, to which the title of this thesis refers, are the lost futures that have yet to be mourned, the untold futures that have yet to be recounted, the possible futures that have yet to be re-imagined. In the wake of the TRC, the dynamic and regenerative possibilities of remembrance and forgetting for a collective work of re-imagining and recuperating the lost futures of enduring yet unfulfilled hopes for justice and a truly egalitarian democracy have, for now, been deferred.

CHAPTER ONE

TEMPORALITIES OF THE “NEW”: THE TRC AND THE DISCURSIVE

POWER OF TRANSITION

*What I remember I never speak about.
I only yearn for what I never recall.
What's the use of memory
If what I lived most intensely
Is what never happened?
Mia Couto, *The Last Flight of the Flamingo**

Under the sign of “the transition”, a sign that holds within its connotative field movement, change, dynamism, crisis, potentiality and transience on a threshold, a passage, a passing through of time and space, Apartheid rule was ended in South Africa. Now, into its second decade as a constitutional democracy and “free”-market economy it consolidates its position as a model postcolony¹ in Africa as South African-based corporations launch into the “markets” of the rest of the continent.

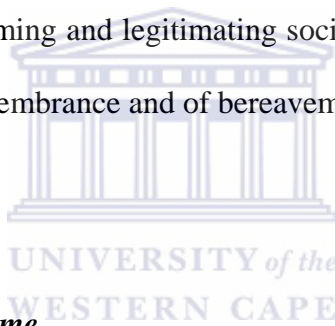
After the politically negotiated “end” to these long centuries of colonial and Apartheid wars of dispossession, plunder and resistance, “the past” - as a metaphoric place contiguous with a bounded temporality - has become the privileged horizon from which temporal tropes of “transition” in representations of the “new” South African nation-state have grown. Out of the lived spatio-temporal overlappings in the lives of its inhabitants

¹ I use the term, “postcolony” after Achille Mbembe’s formulation of the sobriquet to denote simultaneously the *longue dureé* as well as the multiple, intertwined, overlapping non-linear moments of everyday life in the present on this continent that are the lived, inhabited and structural accretions of slavery, colonialism, Apartheid and neoliberal forms of democracy. See his *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), pp 14-17.

and in the continuities of the form of its state temporal tropes of ruptures, endings, beginnings, before and after, refoundings and singularities (the “miracle”?), news and olds have staked out the conceptual and discursive terms that frame the ways the past is historically and socially imagined and the ways that the present is understood. These tropes inform the ways that historical time (figured in spatio-temporal terms as the “new” nation) has been made and marked as distinct, discrete and split-off from the lived experiences of ordinary people.

How, then, do such conceptual and discursive terms, organize our sense of time and, thus, produce particular understandings of personal memory and of history? How do these understandings integrate atrocity, structural violence and the psychosocial afterlife of massive and cumulative trauma? This chapter examines the ways in which the TRC in South Africa has generated – beyond its institutional life – a constellation of concepts and discourses that have drawn on temporal, spatial and moral tropes contouring admissible from inadmissible forms of social and historical meaning-making. Of course, the power of reference is not the TRC’s alone. Its operating terms, however, have contributed in a very significant way towards occluding the structural, material and symbolic forms of everyday violence, socio-economic relations of exclusion, material poverty and privilege and the structures of continuity in which they remain embedded. The TRC symbolically managed a broader social context of conflict of which it was also an historical outcome. Hence, the economies of reference generated by the TRC’s operating terms have organised legitimate from non-legitimate forms of collective meaning-making as a social response to historical suffering.

Although framed as a moral, theological, and psychological project of collective and individual healing, forgiveness and reconciliation, the TRC process has been a mechanism of political conflict-management installed as a project of nation-building². Since its inception, and beyond its lifespan as a state commission, it has become one of the most important institutional touchstones of the current South African social, political, cultural and public history landscape, introducing to South African public discourses a hegemonic set of identity, morality, theology and history-related concepts, keywords and of course, silences. Official and generic reconciliation discourses, for example, have contributed to establishing, framing and legitimating social forms of response and public modes of memorialisation, remembrance and of bereavement in terms of moral notions of “propriety”.³



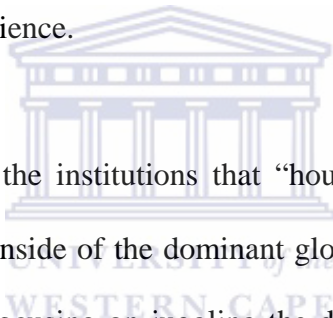
Truth commissions in global time

The present is framed in the linear chronology of Gregorian - Christian - calendar time. From the release of Nelson Mandela and political prisoners in February 1990, the political negotiations of CODESA in the ensuing years culminating in the first democratic elections in South Africa in 1994, “events” have been carved out of many

² Whilst there are many excellent secondary sources which set out and analyse the institutional aims and workings of the TRC, and which are referred to throughout this chapter, a simple and concise information pamphlet that lays out the objectives, functions, structure, aims and terms of reference of the TRC was published by Justice in Transition on behalf of the South African Ministry of Justice, entitled, *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* (Cape Town: Justice in Transition, 1995).

³ The notion of propriety derives from Oren Stier’s discussion on the politics of memorial propriety regarding the Shoah. See his, “The Propriety of Holocaust Memory: Cultural Representations and Commemorative Responses”, PhD dissertation, University of California, Santa Barbara, 1996. I elaborate this further with reference to Julia Kristeva’s usage of the term, *propre*, in chapter three as well as in my “Re-placing Pasts, Forgetting Presents: Narrative, Place and Memory in the Time of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission” in *Research in African Literatures* (32, 3, Fall 2001), pp 198-212.

simultaneous happenings and marked in all of their complexity and contradictions. These are the politics of time-marking and of time-making. We are told it has been a “miracle”. The war, now, we are told, is elsewhere; war as it was known and named. For South Africa, as for so many societies labelled now “transitional” or “emerging” or “developing” as opposed to “decolonising” or “gaining independence”, insertion in the world economy has been determined by the shifts in global power formations that have given rise to what Aijaz Ahmad terms, the “imperialism of our time”.⁴ In these times of new sobriquets, of constitutional democracy and neoliberal macro-economics, the heterogeneity of time and its multiple, entangled, overlapping temporalities fracture the lived structures of human experience.



Reconciliation discourses and the institutions that “house” them subtend geo-political relationships of subordination inside of the dominant global economic order at a time in which South Africa has been focusing on juggling the demands of nation-building with macro-economic reconstruction. Passing through the long entangled moments of “transition” one is compelled to ask, “So, what’s new?” After 1989, in global imperial discourses hailing the victory of “democracy” over the so-called failure of “actually existing socialism”, the “new” in the context of political transitions is subtended by complementary ideological premises. These constitute a language of nation-building, good governance and macro-economic reconstruction placing “emerging” economies at the door (and mercy) of “world” markets as the *quid pro quo* for state access to “aid”

⁴ Aijaz Ahmad, “Imperialism of Our Time” in *Socialist Register* (2004), p 43, accessed at www.yorku.ca/socreg in May 2006. See also, David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

packages, debt-relief programmes, transnational trade agreements and the promise of foreign direct investment. The emergence of institutions such as truth commissions and the discursive networks of reconciliation, transitional justice and “dealing” with the past which they constellate converge historically with the late nineteen eighties shifts in the global politics of Cold War. They are accompanied by technologies of naming, taming and assimilating geopolitical contexts deemed “transitional”, “developing”, “emerging” or “post-authoritarian”. As part of these shifts, a spectrum of social development and macroeconomic policies are promoted by multilateral institutions such as the World Bank, World Trade Organisation and International Monetary Fund that turn around contemporary notions of “development”, democracy and “good governance”. These now constitute part of the qualifying conditions for a country’s “integration” within the global economy. The proliferation of these latest doctrines of structural adjustment corresponds historically to the rise of truth commissions. These have institutionalised “reconciliation” as a globalised *logos* of nation-building, justice-dealing and peace consolidation. The ideological terms of discourses of reconciliation have thus provided the moral and political boundaries for what “counts” as historical truth in the aftermath of administrative violence.

The rhetorical fields that govern officially sanctioned modes and practices of social and political memorialisation institutionalised by truth commissions are shaped and sustained by the macro-economic policies implemented by states in transition from authoritarianism to democratic government. Hence, in a different geopolitical context, Lessie Jo Frazier contends that,

[t]he current vocabulary relies on words like compromise, opportunity, advantage, and reconciliation. The current vocabulary shuns words like fight, right, liberty and most definitely, vengeance and damnation. In this context, the vocabulary of mourning, as a tool for soothing grief in order to supersede it, accommodates neoliberal discourse.⁵

When institutions such as truth commissions are invested with the authorising powers to legitimate pre-inscribed “terms” of state violence and human suffering and the networks of human relations in which they are embedded, they create fields of visibility for what may be “seen”, understood, to be atrocity. They also delineate the conceptual, cognitive and ideological undergirdings of visibilisation, determining, in this way, a range of pre-defined responses (individual, collective, state, political) to atrocity.

As the TRC in South Africa has become one of the latest (global in the guise of local) historical though dehistoricising institutional export “models” in a recent genealogy of such commissions⁶ for staging national ritual performances of (partial) acknowledgement of mass brutality and administrative violence, it could be understood to function symbolically as a powerful social and moral trope and a rite of passage into the global world economy. For the “emerging” or “developing” nation-state such state-institiated

⁵ Frazier’s work focuses on Chile after the Pinochet regime. Lessie Jo Frazier, “Subverted Memories: Counter-mourning as Political Action in Chile” in Mieke Bal, Jonathon Crewe and Leo Spitzer (eds.), *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present* (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1999), p 108.

⁶ Patricia Hayner’s *Unspeakable Truths* (New York and London: Routledge, 2001), for example, provides an account - in the guise of a “developing” nations do-it-yourself “transitional justice” cookbook - of the work of some of the 21 truth commissions that have taken place over the past three decades. Michelle Parlevliet, however, notes that an Amnesty International publication in 1995 estimated that truth commission-like institutions were established in approximately thirty countries across the world since 1991. Michelle Parlevliet, “Considering Truth, Dealing with a Legacy of Gross Human Rights Violations” in *Netherlands Quarterly of Human Rights* (16.2, 1998), p 142, fn 4. See also, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, “Rule of Law Tools for Post-Conflict States: Truth Commissions” (New York and Geneva: United Nations, 2006) accessed in November 2006 at http://www.ohchr.org/english/about/publications/docs/ruleoflaw-TruthCommissions_en.pdf

institutional rites of passage that include reconciliation, some form of amnesty and social forgetting, on the one hand, and “truth” telling, forgiveness and some sort of remembering, on the other, have become increasingly part of the neoliberal model of transitions-to-democracy package-deals.⁷ This places very particular limits on the ways in which the “political” on the continent has come to be understood. Indeed, Achille Mbembe incisively notes that whilst,

[m]ired in the demands of what is immediately useful, enclosed in the narrow horizon of “good governance” and the neoliberal catechism about the market economy, torn by the current fads for “civil society”, “conflict resolution,” and alleged “transitions to democracy,” the discussion, as habitually engaged, is primarily concerned, not with comprehending the political in Africa or with producing knowledge in general, but with social engineering.⁸

Truth commissions and the South African TRC in particular, are then important institutional mechanisms that consolidate the ideological underpinnings of the “new” by shoring up and narrowing down the discursive boundaries of collective meaning-making

⁷ See for example, Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization, *Post-Conflict Reconstruction: Essential Tasks* (Washington: United States Department of State, 2005). The matrix of “essential tasks” emerged from United States interagency discussions “about the requirements to support countries in transition from armed conflict or civil strife to sustaining stability” and “builds on the ‘Joint CSIS/AUSA Post-Conflict Reconstruction (PCR) Task Framework’ from *Winning the Peace: An American Strategy for Post-Conflict Reconstruction*, edited by Robert C. Orr and published by CSIS Press in 2004.” p iii. This document was accessed in November 2006 at http://pbpu.unlb.org/pbpu/library/Sgs_Report_new.pdf I am grateful to Yazir Henri for a series of conversations during 2003 in which these ideas formed a central thread. For an elaboration on the structural and historical relationship between the TRC, reconciliation discourse and systemic racism see Heidi Grunebaum and Yazir Henri, "Where the Mountain Meets its Shadow: A Conversation of Memory and Identity and Fragmented Belonging in Present-day South Africa." Eds. Bo Strath and Ron Robins. *Homelands: The Politics of Space and the Poetics of Power* (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2003), pp 267-283.

⁸ Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, p 7. Pal Ahluwalia tracks the ideological shifts in international institutions “development” frameworks for loan conditions to African states after 1989 to include conditionalities for “good governance”. Reading the shift in documents of the World Bank for example, Ahluwalia argues that this meant that it was “possible to advocate a certain ideology, [...] reflected in a new concern with governance” that translated into “the imposition of conditions aimed at promoting liberal democratic government.” Pal Ahluwalia, *Politics and Post-colonial Theory: African Inflections* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), pp 52-72, this citation at p 54.

as nation-building. In the name of the subject as citizen, the present is remapped over the spatio-temporal archives of atrocity and violence that is also everyday life, the time and place of “the political in Africa” *par excellence*. Life goes on. Inside of the socio-economic nodes that intersect the zones of power, accumulation and speculation in the global economy, it goes on very quickly, remapping in its wake the history of colonial and Apartheid engineering, the histories of experience, experiences of resistance and memories of lost futures.

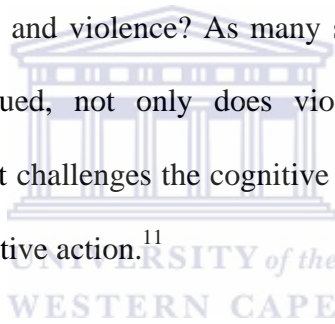
Marking time before narrative

Everyday life now is “uneventful” in these times, here. As Michael Simpson states, “Now [...] the world has decided, whatever the facts of the situation, [...] there is no problem remaining in South Africa.”⁹ “Events” or “happenings” - unless they threaten the perceptions of what counts as political stability for transnational capital and international investors - have moved on.¹⁰ When the multiple, asymmetrical, heterogeneous, entangled temporalities of the invisible moments of the everyday collide or embrace, such encounters of spatio-temporal co-occurrence are called synchronicities. Sometimes they are invisible, sometimes endowed with the temporal structure of “events”, of happenings: succession, linearity, retrospective causality. Events make time and mark time, threading the marked moments of an age through the invisible moments of our small lives, and in

⁹ Michael Simpson, “The Second Bullet: Transgenerational Impacts of the Trauma of Conflict within a South African and World Context” in Yael Danieli (ed.), *International Handbook of Multigenerational Legacies of Trauma*, (New York: Plenum Press, 1998), p 507.

¹⁰ Indeed, in 2005 the biggest ever capital inflow recorded by the Reserve Bank in South Africa was put down to “sound macroeconomic policies in South Africa and continued positive investor sentiment towards emerging markets in general[...].” Sapa, “Record flow of capital into SA” in *The Cape Argus* (March 23, 2006), p 2.

their weaving, transform our sense of life lived. The small moments of our lives become measured against the referent of that which happened, or which is acknowledged as having happened. But what if what happened and what continuously happened have been registered in the collected and curated stories that are told, circulated, performed and displayed - from film, mass media, literature, visual arts, theatre, monuments, museums, official commemorations - as something (colonialism and Apartheid, they are named) that happened, but which bears no resemblance, either in form, aetiology, harm, extent or experience to what “really” happened? Recalling Mia Couto’s words in the epigraph beginning this chapter “Did it really happen?”, can a conceptual language stretch its skin to hold, to incorporate atrocity and violence? As many survivors and theorists of state-sponsored violence have argued, not only does violence threaten to destroy the connective tissue of sociality, it challenges the cognitive foundations of language, of our human capacity for communicative action.¹¹



By the time the South African TRC was mandated by an act of Parliament into institutional existence,¹² generic discourses of reconciliation and nation-building were already symbolically marking the temporal breaks and discontinuities with South Africa’s past of plunder and atrocity. At the historical moment of a “new” and shifting global present, a “new” South African nation (in an old state form) was heralded. In its mediated, mediated, always already disseminated, more-than-the-sum-of-its-

¹¹ See for example, Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Jean Amery *At the Mind’s Limits*, translated by Sidney Rosenfeld and Stella P. Rosenfeld (New York: Schocken, 1986); Veena Das, “Language and Body: Transactions in the Construction of Pain” in Veena Das, Margaret Lock and Arthur Kleinman (eds.), *Social Suffering* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), pp 67-91.

¹² Act no. 34, 1995.

institutional-parts phenomenon, the TRC has been singularly powerful in that it has inscribed and left behind a conceptual, ideological and cognitive map that has staked out a restrictive field of collective terms and responses to recent history. In doing this, it has produced a highly circumscribed sense of the present as comprising the inevitable, linear and logical outcome of such a past. The very “publicness” of the TRC’s institutional proceedings translated into a real-time dissemination of its proceedings electronically, digitally and textually. The TRC has therefore been interpellated by and through a discursive and interpretative network of images, narratives and concepts of which it was simultaneously a product as well as a producer. These discursive networks have, in turn, been instrumental in installing and endorsing so many tropes that have contributed to founding and legitimising a new “civil” lexicon. This has infused the political process of transition with a public vocabulary of nation-building, truth-telling, reconciliation and personal memory in which the emotional pain of “victims” and moral penance of “perpetrators” (or rather, the absence thereof) has loomed large. During the institutional life of the TRC many other state commissions were to be established and many other public hearings and campaigns related to past atrocities were conducted.¹³ However, more than any other single institutional signature of posterity it has been the TRC and the conceptual terms emerging from it which have shaped, in complex and definitive ways, a civic language in which narratives of personal memory have come to displace economic redress and those of collective memory to substitute for social justice.

¹³ The Commission on Restitution of Land Rights, for example, was established in 1995 whilst during 1998 SANGOCO (the South African NGO Coalition) and the South African Human Rights Commission held a national “speak out” campaign, the “Speak out on Poverty” hearings which were publicly conducted.

Whilst examining the power of historical meaning-making, particularly during times of social change, I heed Arif Dirlik's caution to *not*, in his words,

[...] conflate power and discourse, and to move the former into the reified realm of language and representation from its material expressions in everyday economic, social and political relationships, [and] for the necessity of a distinction between the two; not because I do not think that discourses are imbedded in and expressive of power relationships, but because the distinction restores the possibility of a dialectical understanding of the relationship.¹⁴

Indeed, it is precisely in attentiveness to this relationship between forms of discourse, the social meanings they promote and their material, historical and political contexts of production that one may find what has been left out and begin to ask why. For as institutionalised modes of meaning-making have staked out legitimate ways of “dealing with the past” they have simultaneously occluded the structural, material and symbolic forms of systemic violence in which they are historically embedded. At the same time the very grounds of collective social and political struggle which permit us to speak of Apartheid as “the past” have become delegitimised as modes of meaning-making and as collective forms of struggle in the present. In remaining alert to the dynamic relationship between discourses and their contexts of production, then, one is impelled to interrogate how forms of historical representation produced in the wake of the TRC have recalibrated understandings and perceptions of what counts as the *political* in the postcolony. This is a metacritical issue. I am not drawing on those artefacts of knowledge, or of aesthetic and cultural production such as school textbooks, historiographies, novels, plays, visual art,

¹⁴ Arif Dirlik, *The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism* (Boulder, Colorado and Oxford: Westview Press, 1998), p 13.

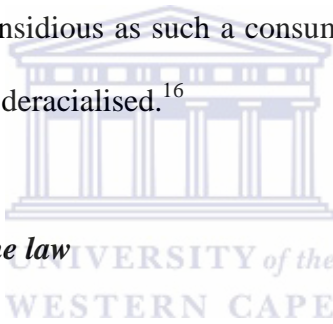
and documentaries and so on in order to examine how concepts such as reconciliation, and forgiveness, victims and perpetrators operate, how they act to mean. My intention is, rather, to understand how these concepts have come to be the taken-for-granted first order assumptions and normative values that underpin discursive terms.

The discursive privileging of the concepts and terms emerging from the TRC is then less about delimiting the narrations of a “new” or more democratic national history (although this has happened and continues) than about inscribing, stabilising and framing economies of meaning and interpretation *before narrative*: the assumptions and values which inform the teleological drift of narrative broadly speaking as an activity of meaning-making. As James Young has postulated, the experience and apprehension of events retrospectively are also shaped by the representational forms and critical methods that mediate them.¹⁵ What may be known and remembered individually comes to be shaped – by affirmation or disavowal – as much through the ways in which what is collectively known and remembered are represented as through the meanings that are created and embedded *a priori* within a matrix of historical, political, aesthetic, and ideological dynamics.

The key concepts institutionally hemmed by the TRC process have contributed towards a depoliticisation of historical representation. The socio-economic conditions and contradictions of the present are therefore rendered as the natural, normal and inevitable outcome of histories of struggle, resistance and revolutionary action. In this way such

¹⁵ James E. Young, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), pp 1-11.

discourses, across their range and elasticity, have recalibrated what may be deemed outside, or morally (as well as socially and politically) non-legitimate modes of interpretation, of collective forms of meaning-making with regard to remembrance and memorialisation, in particular. When the forms of violence that continue to characterise dominant socio-economic structures and forms of resistance to such violence have not been rendered invisible, they have been marginalised through a complex process in which the rhetoric of closure, of “breaking with the past” plays a large part. Moreover, a marginally expanding consumer class of black middle-class citizens ensures now that the ways in which “race” and colour are systemically and historically embedded with class become evermore benign and insidious as such a consumer class becomes economically (though more seldom, socially) deracialised.¹⁶



Transition management and the law

As local variations of generic neoliberal socio-economic features of governance and administration for countries “in transition to democracy” are implemented, the discursive constructions of distance from the past excise the psycho-social and structural affects of what remains of what has come “before”. Institutional mechanisms of *transition management*, truth commissions publicly signpost a distance from the past. They perform a *link* between then and now by assimilating emblematic tropes into narratives that may come to be *associated* with the past as passed. Truth commissions are thus embedded, often ambivalently, in the social politics of memorialisation and the forms of institutional

¹⁶ See for example, Hein Marais, *South Africa: Limits to Change: The Political Economy of Transformation* (London and Cape Town: Zed and University of Cape Town Press, 1998), pp 256-259.

silencing which contour social processes of remembrance and of forgetting that are necessary for legitimising the political and ideological accommodations and compromises which deem change as *transitional* as opposed to *revolutionary*. In this sense, the South African TRC has been a singularly powerful institution of transition management, symbolically performing, enacting and consolidating the power and legitimacy of the state, and provisioning its subjects with the grammatical tools, the *langue*, of a “new” nation.

Richard Wilson elaborates the ways in which the TRC’s institutional power as a symbolic performance has fulfilled such a function: from legitimising the state to underwriting a normative legal and moral framework promoting civic values, such as respect for the “rule of law”, from entrenching a “culture of human rights” to reclaiming “civil dignity” for officially acknowledged “victims”, the TRC has metonymically enacted the transcendent and sovereign legitimacy of the state and its constitution.¹⁷ This has been, in a large part, due to the TRC hearings - both of the Human Rights Violations Committee and the Amnesty Committee – being staged as public events of which wide national and international media dissemination exponentially increased the penetration of the institution, its proceedings, discourses and key ideological precepts into multiple publics.¹⁸ Indeed, as Richard Wilson asserts elsewhere, such institutionally propagated

¹⁷ See Richard Wilson, *The Politics of Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

¹⁸ See Joe Thloloe, “Showing Faces, Hearing Voices, Tugging at Emotions: Televising the Truth and Reconciliation Commission” in *Nieman Reports* (52, 4, Winter 1998), pp 53-55. Initially public hearings were broadcast daily on SABC, the public broadcaster’s television and radio services although this was not continuous due to financial costs. Max du Preez produced and hosted a weekly one-hour review of the TRC on SABC 3 entitled, “TRC Special Report.” Public, private and community radio stations relayed hearings, hosted talk-shows, call-in shows and special features related to the TRC (for example, SAfm held a weekly slot, “TRC Week in Review”). Most newspapers special correspondents provided daily reports

public rituals of legitimation of the state and “new” nation not only underwrite the normative civic values on which constitutional liberal democracies - in their currently dominant globally propagated forms - are based, they also enact and perform such values through their very proceedings.¹⁹

Envisaged in law as a “bridge”, a transient mechanism installing and heralding the symbolic passage called the “transition”, the TRC has constituted a civil lexicon that has dehistoricised and individualised violence through the ways the amnesty process has been mediated whilst depoliticising and collectivizing it through the ways human rights violations hearings have been represented. In doing this it has domesticated, delineated, and constellated the discursive horizons of the social meanings of history by marking out the “inside” of truth and of legitimate modes of collective meaning-making. This has involved staking out the “past” as the horizon against which a reduced range of interpretative frameworks regarding historical outcomes of struggle, resistance and revolution has been endorsed. The power of such a public (and highly public-ised) institutional discourse has been, therefore, to authorise and legitimise a particular *telos* over against any other and, in so doing, to invisibilise the forms of systemic violence of

and commentary on the hearings. The TRC website was regularly updated and eventually came to include an electronic archive of transcripts of the hearings. On this, see also the management and operations report of the TRC’s Media and Communications Department in Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report*, Volume 1 (Cape Town: Juta, 1998), pp 352-363.

¹⁹ Richard Wilson observes that “[...] a general problem besetting transitional regimes is that they often inherit a significantly debilitated state suffering from a legitimation crisis, with unstable and impaired institutions.” Richard Wilson, “The Sizwe Will Not Go Away: The Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Human Rights and Nation-Building in South Africa” in *African Studies* (55, 2, 1996), p 1. Whilst not referring to truth commissions specifically, Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff may have such institutions in mind when they observe that “[a] resort to mass-mediated ritual both to produce state power and national unity and to persuade citizens of their reality is epidemic in the age of millennial capitalism [...]”. “Millennial Capitalism: First Thoughts on a Second Coming” in Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff (eds.), *Millennial Capitalism and the Culture of Neoliberalism* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2001), p 37.

the present, to marginalise alternative – particularly leftist – understandings and to normalise the current contours of the present as the only and inevitable outcome of social and political struggles of the “past”.

In his discussion of the relationship between narrative, normativity, the law and its structural embeddedness with state power, Robert Cover applies the metaphor of the bridge and its temporal projections to law more broadly. Although Cover does not extend his analysis to the ways that law contours the historical imagination, he suggests that the law “may be viewed as a system of tension or a bridge linking a concept of a reality to an imagined alternative – that is, as a connective between two states of affairs, both of which can be represented in their normative significance only through the devices of narrative.”²⁰ The metaphor of the TRC as a bridge was initially introduced in the postscript of the Interim Constitution²¹. It was carried over into the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act, the act constituting the TRC’s objectives and legal mandates. This metaphor is central to official characterisations of the TRC as a “third way”²² approach to the complex compromises that inhere in “transitional justice” as well as to the institution’s performative gestures of staking out distinct temporal markers of “before”, “after” and of “bridge-crossing”. Hence, a three-fold notion of linear time is

²⁰ Robert Cover, “Nomos and Narrative” in Martha Minnow, Michael Ryan and Austin Sarat (eds.), *Narrative, Violence and the Law: The Essays of Robert Cover* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), p 101. Jean Comaroff’s analysis of the political function of the law and its “fetishisation” in the postcolony extends to the ways in which the law impacts on “the shape and uses of history.” Referring to the TRC, she notes that the “law is given the authority to reduce complex historical processes to narratives of intent and culpability, suffering and victimhood, and hence, to arbitration.” Jean Comaroff, “Pursuing the Past in the Postcolony” in Ania Loomba, Suvir Kaul, Matti Bunzil Antoinette Burton and Jed Esty (eds.), *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005), p 133.

²¹ Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 200, 1993. The Interim Constitution was replaced by the final constitution in 1996, the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108, 1996.

²² See, for example, Alex Boraine, “Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa: The Third Way” in Robert I Rotberg and Dennis Thompson (eds.), *Truth v. Justice: The Morality of Truth Commissions* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000), pp 141-157.

enfolded within the rhetorical operations of these two documents of law and into which specific temporal co-ordinates of the TRC's historical employment are inserted. The preamble of the Interim Constitution reads as follows:

This Constitution provides a historic bridge between the past of a deeply divided society characterised by strife, conflict, untold suffering and injustice, and a future founded on the recognition of human rights, democracy and peaceful co-existence and development opportunities for all South Africans, irrespective of colour, race, class, belief or sex.

The pursuit of national unity, the well-being of all South African citizens and peace require reconciliation between the people of South Africa and the reconstruction of society.

The adoption of this Constitution lays the secure foundation for the people of South Africa to transcend the divisions and strife of the past, which generated gross violations of human rights, the transgression of humanitarian principles in violent conflicts and a legacy of hatred, fear, guilt and revenge.

These can be addressed on the basis that there is a need for understanding but not for vengeance, a need for reparation but not retaliation, a need for *ubuntu* but not for victimisation. [...]

Here, the bridge metaphor instantiates the unmarked present as the temporal mode of its authority (the legal text is "here", masking its own historicity of contest, negotiation and compromise; there is no *other* present outside of a self-constituted universal time of its time of declaration). At the same time, the metaphor operates a suspension as it straddles the two temporal trajectories: one, analeptic, projected towards the past ("backwards" in time) and the other, proleptic, towards the future ("forwards" in time). This installs the supreme and overarching authority of the Constitution, of constitutionalism, between the "past" and the "future." Indeed, it is the power of the legal-moral language of the interim Constitution and the Pronura to arrogate the authority of adjudicating and arbitrating the

normative meanings of the past.²³ This is predetermined in a set of historical co-ordinates which connects temporal succession as progression and progression with the *status* (“development opportunities for all”) of progress within a broader *telos* of nation-building.²⁴

The troping of the TRC as a temporal bridge suggests a hierarchical distinction of time. It inscribes an evolutionary, linear and developmentalist notion of historical progress as the temporal referent of the “future” and of the “new” state’s broader project of nation-building. The illocutionary force of these founding documents overwrites the supremely rational logic of colonial and Apartheid racial capitalist modernity with a depoliticised conception of the past as a time of violence (“strife”, “conflict”, “untold suffering” and “injustice”) when irrational forces repressive of progress (rights, democracy, development) were fomented by “strife”, “generated gross violations of human rights”, “the transgression of humanitarian principles in violent conflicts”, which have led to a “legacy of hatred, fear, guilt and revenge”. Over against such a past, the crossing of the bridge implies delivery into a *different* time, a better time, a time “founded on the recognition of human rights, democracy and peaceful co-existence and development opportunities for all South Africans.” The “future” looms on the opposite bank of time as a promise of collective redemption into a chronologically successive and morally ameliorative order of progress, inclusivity, human rights and human development. The

²³ See Robert Cover’s discussion on the normative moral universe projected by the world-creating language of law. Cover insists that “law and narrative are inseparably related. Every prescription is insistent in its demand to be located in discourse – to be supplied with history and destiny, beginning and end, explanation and purpose.” Robert Cover, “Nomos and Narrative”, p 96.

²⁴ For a critique of developmentalist as well as so-called “postdevelopmentalist” narratives of history, see James Ferguson, “Decomposing Modernity: History and Hierarchy after Development” in Ania Loomba, Suvir Kaul, Matti Bunzl, Antoinette Burton and Jed Esty (eds.), *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005), pp 166-181.

teleological trajectory inscribed here indexes “a critical modality that has significant purchase in the post-1994 society” that has much purchase in South Africa and abroad.²⁵

Legal discourse embeds a set of archived formalities²⁶ in its legalistic effects, expunging human experience and emotion as well as systemic and ideological rationality. Against this linear periodisation that constitutes the “past”, the temporal screen, so to speak, a historical time-line, emplotments of action, protagonists and antagonists are projected. Historical experience is reduced to a set of pre-defined narrative co-ordinates: categories of “victims”, “perpetrators”, historical agents, and definitions of harms.²⁷ In this way legal discourse works to contain both the unravelling of meaning in the wake of administrative violence as well as the claims to justice which may arise from this by establishing a typology of harm that is clinical, sanitised, temporally delimited and restricted to the individual subject of human rights discourse. Hence, the Pronura names violence, measures harm and categorises its forms as being:

gross violation of human rights’ means the violation of human rights through – (a) the killing, abduction, torture or severe ill treatment of any person; or (b) any attempt, conspiracy, incitement, instigation, command or procurement to commit an act referred to in paragraph (a), which emanated from conflicts of the past and which was

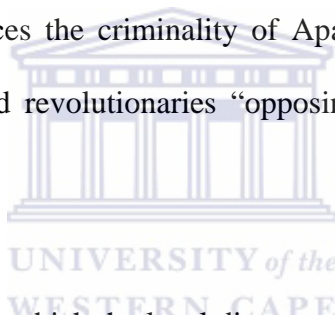
²⁵ Grant Farred, “The Not-Yet Counterpartisan: A New Politics of Oppositionality” in *The South Atlantic Quarterly* (103, 4, Fall 2004), p 592.

²⁶ In this respect, see also Brent Harris, “The Archive, Public History and the Essential Truth: The TRC Reading the Past” in Carolyn Hamilton, Verne Harris, Jane Taylor, Michele Pickover, Graeme Reid and Razia Saleh (eds.), *Refiguring the Archive* (Cape Town: David Phillip, 2002), pp 161-177.

²⁷ The historical time-line of the TRC’s investigative mandate was established to be the period from 1 March 1960 to 11 May 1994. This corresponds historically to the culmination of the anti-pass campaign protests with the Sharpeville massacre and subsequent escalation of state repression, banning of the liberation movement and political organisations as well as the arrest of political leaders. The “cut-off” date was initially set as 6 December 1993 but extended to 11 May 1994 to include paramilitary actions that may have been “pardonable” under the TRC’s Amnesty provisions undertaken by right-wing white supremacist and white nationalist groupings after 6 December 1993.

committed during the period 1 March 1960 to 10 May 1994 within or outside the Republic, and the commission of which was advised, planned, directed, commanded or ordered, by any person acting with a political motive.²⁸

An empiricist grammar of measurement, a measured language, which provides simultaneously a vocabulary of “rights” and a barometer of the transgressions of rights, establishes the normative benchmarks of harms measurement whilst identifying the singular human individual as its site of transaction. Administrative brutality, enforced material poverty, land and property theft, mass pillage and systemic violence are written out of this definition of “gross human rights violations”. Effectively, the legal interpretative framework reduces the criminality of Apartheid to its forms of political repression against activists and revolutionaries “opposing” the Apartheid state and its terror.²⁹



In thinking through the ways in which the legal discourse operates through the institution and underwrites, frames, authorises, mediates and shapes the lived experiences of violence and of resistance as well as of the recollection and re-presentation of such experiences, I am not suggesting that the historical narratives and collective self-understandings (narratives of national identities in particular) that have emerged through,

²⁸ Section 1(1)(ix) of Pronura quoted in Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa, *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report*, Volume 1 (Cape Town: Juta, 1998) p 60.

²⁹ For critiques of the ways in which the TRC’s legal framework contributed towards occluding the systemic criminality of Apartheid see, for example, Jeremy Cronin, “A Luta Dis-Continua? The TRC Final Report and the Nation Building Project” Paper presented at the History Workshop, University of the Witwatersrand and CSVr conference *The TRC: Commissioning the Past*, 11-14 June 1999. Also see Mahmood Mamdani, “Reconciliation without Justice” in *Southern African Review of Books* (46, Nov/Dec, 1996), pp 3-5; Mahmood Mamdani, “The Truth According to the TRC” in Ifi Amadiume and Abdullahi An-Na’im (eds.), *The Politics of Memory: Truth, Healing and Social Justice* (London: Zed Books, 2000), pp 176-183; Mahmood Mamdani, “A Diminished Truth.” in Wilmot James and Linda van de Vijver (eds.), *After the TRC: Reflections on Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa* (Athens, Ohio and Cape Town: Ohio University Press and David Philip, 2001), pp 58-61; Terry Bell with Dumisa Ntsebeza, *Unfinished Business: South Africa, Apartheid and the Truth* (RedWorks: Cape Town, 2001).

after and beyond the TRC's institutional life and process are homogenous or that the moral, political and historical clusters of mutually legitimating referents are uncontested. My contention is rather that an institution such as the TRC has reproduced the effects of the legal discourse with which it is underwritten. In this way it authorises, archives, distils and thus, legitimizes, *selected* aspects of lived experiences of colonial and Apartheid atrocities. This, in turn, validates the ideological and conceptual trajectories of the institution. As political violence and its historical causes have come to be represented as phenomena of the past and as public history becomes increasingly depoliticised, the forms of systemic violence and structural inequality which characterise the impact of extreme material poverty are deemed to be issues to be addressed by "development" (development driven by the logic of free-market fundamentalism rather than by the imperatives of human security and dignity) and not by history. This has meant that organised social protest, dissent and resistance to the material conditions of deepening structural poverty that has been further entrenched by such development practices are depoliticised. Not only, then, are contemporary struggles delegitimised, they have also been criminalised.³⁰

The TRC, a public project

Although I do not share Slavoj Žižek's contention, in his examination of the interconnected

³⁰ Since the late nineteen nineties, for example, as the impact of neoliberal macro-economics resulting in the privatisation of utilities and basic services began to take effect, the rise in social and community protest and resistance in "townships" across South Africa to forced home evictions, water and electricity disconnections have been met by police and private security service harassment, armed force, arrests as well as an increasing tendency to portray this mobilisation as criminal. On this, see, Ashwin Desai, *We are the Poors: Community Struggles in Post-Apartheid South Africa* (Monthly Review Press: New York, 2002). In its recently published report, the FXI, the Freedom of Expression Institute finds that there is a growing trend towards the state repressing protest from groups, movements and organisations critical of the state's neoliberal macroeconomic programmes. The report, accessed in September 2006, is downloadable from the FXI's website www.fxio.org.za.

workings of ideology, desire, fantasy and social narrative that “what we perceive as ‘meaning’ can be *reduced* to an effect of syntactic interrelations” and that therefore “the meaning of the term ‘as such’ is *nothing but* the multitude of its uses [...]”,³¹ I would agree that certain meanings accrue the weight of referential authority in their mediated and mediatised repetition, in “the multitude of [their] uses.” Through the constant repetition of a mutually reinforcing constellation of the TRC’s moral, theological and juridico-legal precepts a discursive economy of saturation extended the penetrating symbolic power of the institution and of course, its simultaneous electronic, digital and print mediations.

The constellation of discourses on the “rightful role” of the past has involved organising historical time according to a particular notion of “the past” and, hence, a “sense” of political transition as a socially lived and morally managed passage. Marking lived time against historical time, through mediated forms of realist historical representations (particularly visual) generated during, beyond and in response to the TRC process, involves the temporal delineation of a “before” and an “after” in order to flag both the existence of the “new” and a discontinuity with what may be consensually acknowledged to be “the past”. In order for these temporal distinctions to operate, not only must their non-identity in temporal status be continuously repeated but their repetition must mediate an analogous non-identity in the status of the “nation”. The performance of these temporal distinctions involves a continuous looping of the “there-and-then” back into the “here-and-now”. To demonstrate the pastness of the past, this continuous looping of the past, the “there-and-then”, into the present time of its enunciation, the “here-and-now” must demonstrate its *difference* with the past as it is enunciated as a distinction both in

³¹ Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies* (London and New York: Verso, 1998), p 93.

time and *status*³² and in order for such a distinction to hold ongoing relevance, still demonstrate other forms of continuity and self-identity.³³ The present time then, into which the past is looped becomes the time of the “now-after”. I examine the power of visual narratives, specifically realist and documentary forms, to condense these looping temporal referents as part of their social and political message in the following chapter.

The dissemination and mediatisation of the TRC through digital, electronic and print technologies have been crucial to generating a sense of “now-after” and its temporal interrelations that mark out “permitted” forms of social meaning. This has been woven into the transaction of civic values by the media through the “public.” The mediation of the TRC *as* a public process is therefore intimately tied to the way that mediatisation consecrates notions of who and what is the “public” (over against the “audience”). Hence, in a comment relating to the “public nature of the Commission” in the TRC’s Final Report, one reads that this

[...] enabled it [the Commission] to reach out on a daily basis to large numbers of people inside and outside South Africa, and to confront them with vivid images on their television screens or on the front pages of their newspapers. People saw, for example, a former security police officer demonstrating his torture techniques. They saw weeping men and women asking for the truth about their missing loved ones. The media also helped generate public debate on central aspects of South Africa’s past and to raise the level of historical awareness.³⁴

³² See James Ferguson, “Decomposing Modernity: History and Hierarchy after Development”, pp 166-167.

³³ Richard Wilson makes a similar point regarding temporality and identity of the “new” South African nation although his description establishes a binary distinction that is more static in its conception. See his “The Sizwe Will Not Go Away: The Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Human Rights and Nation-Building in South Africa” in *African Studies* (55, 2, 1996), p 18.

³⁴ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa, *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report*, Volume 1, p 104. See also the TRC’s media and communications department report in the same volume, particularly the section on media coverage, pp 356-358.

Through the mass media the public proceedings of the TRC were disseminated in most of the country's official languages.³⁵ This ensured that its coverage was extensive and its linguistic reach (through different programmes and channels of the public broadcaster with distinct "target" audiences) cut through color/class/urban/rural divides.³⁶ The institutional language and unmarked linguistic system of the TRC's operations, however, was English and it was from English that the TRC's institutional operations, the translations and simultaneous interpretations of testimonies at hearings flowed.

The operation of the TRC project in English as the target language reified the increasingly unmarked and universalised status of what Neville Alexander terms the "hegemonic position of the English language with its effects on the consolidation of middle-class dominance in society, in the economy and in politics [...]".³⁷ As English has become entrenched as the administrative and bureaucratic *lingua franca* of government and as a dominant language of global economic power its status as the institutional language of the "new" state becomes intertwined with constituting "legitimate" public sites of social debate. The question of language therefore cannot be separated from the kinds of "publics" privileged by the institutional and structural status of class and forms of economic power they represent. In this sense, Hein Marais' suggestion that the TRC has been a state institution of *social* consolidation which extended into the realm of the

³⁵ On the media and the TRC, see Ron Krabill, "Symbiosis: Mass Media and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa." *Media, Culture and Society* (23, 5, 2001), pp567-585.

³⁶ Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report*, Volume 1, p 357.

³⁷ Neville Alexander, *An Ordinary Country: Issues in the Transition from Apartheid to Democracy in South Africa* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 2002), p 8.

social what had been “settled” politically and economically through the CODESA negotiations (and after 1994), calls on a particular notion of the social.³⁸ Thus, whilst many publics-as-audience were addressed, it was a predominantly urban, middle-class “public”, adept in and accessible to media technologies that shape the terms and construct the boundaries of public debate *as* social debate, that was legitimised *through* being addressed.

The reach of such a project as a *public* project is inextricably linked to marking out a “legitimate” public sphere (or public spheres) for the “now-after” in which liberal democratic values of “transparency, public debate, public participation and criticism”³⁹ structure and authorise a normative domain of visibility (and audibility) in the autonomous lives of its rights-filled citizens. This has consequences for the ways that narrative representations of historical suffering, human pain and questions (or non-questions) of complicity are framed and mediated by the “public” as interlocutor-witness. Through multiple mediations of iconic HRV testimonies, in particular, narratives of human suffering have been transformed into a poetics of pain for “public” consumption. The ways in which human pain, framed through image and narrative, have been insinuated “into the cognitive operations of the public sphere”⁴⁰ has produced a sanitised and homogenised anaesthetics of loss. The narrative status of testimony (and interrelated notions of voice, memory and authenticity), the dramatic pull of individual HRV

³⁸ Hein Marais, *Limits to Change*, p 258.

³⁹ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa, *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report*, Volume 1, p 104.

⁴⁰ Negt and Kluge cited in Timothy Murray “Wounds of Repetition in the Age of the Digital: Chris Marker’s Cinematic Ghosts” in Jill Bennet and Rosanne Kennedy (eds.), *World memory: Personal Trajectories in Global Time* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p 204.

testimonies and iconicity of particular testimonies and witness-narrators are implicated in the ways that the mutually embedded tensions between visibility and invisibility, speaking and silencing, have been layered and mediated, of which more in chapter two.

A discourse for the nation

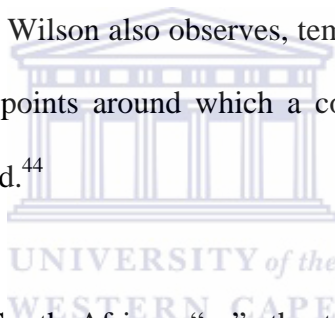
Nthabiseng Motsemme and Kopano Ratele (citing Robert Thornton) observe that the project of the TRC served to “invent [...] allusions to the *conceivable* since there [was] no agreed upon reality, as yet, to which a single discourse can be referred.”⁴¹ The “nation-building” brief of the TRC was one of its stated objectives that underwrote the construction of an “agreed upon reality” and a common grammar with which this could be expressed. This operation relies, in part, on reproducing modernist notions of the space-time of nation in which a putatively “[...] objective and separate space and time are peculiarly linked to the modern identification of a nation with a sharply bounded, continuously occupied space controlled by a single sovereign state [...]”⁴² As they pertain to modern forms of the nation-state, however, the histories of such operations have relied on a range of collective identity constructions, national narratives, symbols, icons, commemorative calendars and memorial pantheons, constructing the mutually reinforcing negative outside (or outsider in the form of an Other).⁴³ The negative outside and “outsider” have all too often been produced through practices of administrative

⁴¹ Nthabiseng Motsemme and Kopano Ratele, “Losing Life and Re-making Nation: The Truth and Reconciliation Commission” in Norman Duncan, Pumla Dineo Gqola, Murray Hofmeyr, Tamara Shefer, Felix Malunga and Mashudu Mashige (eds.), *Discourses on Difference; Discourses on Oppression* (Cape Town: CASAS, 2002), p 308. Italics are mine.

⁴² Jonathan Boyarin, “Space, Time and the Politics of Memory” in Jonathan Boyarin (ed.), *Remapping Memory: The Politics of TimeSpace* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), p 2.

⁴³ See, for example, Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York: Verso, 1995).

violence, forced displacement, mass atrocity and genocide. As a nation-building project in the “new” South Africa, the TRC has had to *delegitimise* exclusionary practices and symbols that characterised “legal” and state implemented colonial and Apartheid “race” supremacist practices. Given the history of Apartheid and its constructions of a white supremacist capitalist society premised on an ethno-nationalist ideology, the new nation could not employ tropes of space or identity in order to highlight a common national belonging. Time has taken this function. In forging a conceptual matrix for the “conceivable”, a shared reality to which nation-building could refer, it has been “the past” that has provided a common symbolic referent in constructing an inclusive notion of *nation*. This is why, as Richard Wilson also observes, temporal tropes, in particular, have been such effective reference points around which a collective and cohesive sense of nation-ness could be constructed.⁴⁴



As a way to forge a “new” South African “us”, the temporal markers and historical periodisation that bracket out the “before from the “after” establish a discontinuity of identity and identification out of which a common collective identity, that of the “new” nation could be mapped.⁴⁵ Constructing a more or less normative public version of the past of the “new” nation has therefore entailed a complex institutional, ideological and narratological⁴⁶ operation of expunging the political and the historical dimensions of the continuities and entanglements that comprise the dissonant simultaneities and human

⁴⁴ Richard Wilson, “The Sizwe Will Not Go Away: The Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Human Rights and Nation-Building in South Africa” in *African Studies* (55, 2, 1996), pp 1-20.

⁴⁵ For the ways in which the temporal containment, or splitting off, of narrative possibilities are mirrored topographically in the spatialised inscriptions of memorial and commemorative practices, see chapter three.

⁴⁶ See Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (Toronto & Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1985).

relationalities (hence, agency, resistance, refusal, responsibility, complicity) of the everyday human experience of the “past”. At the same time *the* past (a euphemism that appears to have increasingly replaced “Apartheid” and almost completely displaced colonialism in the rhetoric of public history and remembrance) must constantly be referred to so that the temporal distinctions of the nation may be convincingly shown to be of a different status and order.

Discursive and visual mediations of the TRC have been founded on a common, mutually constitutive and indeed supplementary endeavour to the political nation-building inaugurated by South Africa’s politically negotiated change from white supremacist rule in the form of legal Apartheid to liberal democracy. These mediations bear testimony to an endeavour to construct a shared sense of historical co-ordinates that may somehow provide a common sense of *national* belonging, in a society structurally shaped by a constitutive *irreconcilability* of individual and collective experiences of colonial and Apartheid administrative violence. The mapping of the meaning of the past onto a collectivity imagined as “the nation” may filter into the intersubjective realms of the social as an *idea*. However, such meanings are disconnected from the historical sensibilities and memories shaped, felt, lived out and expressed in the realm of the intersubjective and the social in the everyday. These meanings implicitly endorse the dominant ideological choices and compromises that are implicated in the deepening structural inequalities of the present times. This has rendered forms of historical imagination that nurture radical theories and practices of social and political struggle redundant or, worse, anachronistic. Thus, experiences of, feelings about, political

commitment to and the possibility of alternative collective responses (over against “acceptable”, legitimated and institutionalised responses) to the lived experience of the “ordinary” horror of Apartheid oppression are absorbed into everyday life. “The nation” as a common “reality” based on a shared historical experience cannot be inhabited. The disconnection between the past of (and for) “the nation” and the irreconcilability of the daily lived realities of its citizens produce, instead, a zone of abjection, an unlivable space which is topographical as much as psychosocial. As the disjuncture between constructing a shared reality and common discourse for “the nation” and the material horizons which circumscribe the comings and goings of its citizens enlarges, “the nation” has therefore continuously to be reiterated and repeatedly to be performed.⁴⁷ Founding or, as in the case of South Africa, re-founding⁴⁸ narratives of nation *cannot* be rooted in everyday experience. For it is in the time-space of the everyday and within the social and economic realms of human activity and interaction that the *possibility* of nation-building, founded on a common *sense* of the past and a common experience of the present, that the shared civic lexicon of history comes apart.

Keywords and economies of reference: truth...

The production of a “unifying” understanding of history as nation-building, and of a consensus regarding the symbolic power of the “past” to achieve this, relies on the public spheres to produce, legitimise and transact the civic values which underlie such a venture.

⁴⁷ Indeed, a common refrain made by TRC commissioners and by public commentators during public hearings was that “the nation” was witnessing the TRC proceedings. So witnesses who gave testimony were thanked for sharing their “painful” experiences with “the nation”.

⁴⁸ Mark Osiel, *Mass Atrocity, Collective Memory and the Law* (New Brunswick and London: Transaction, 1997), p 3.

The dissemination of the institutional discourse through publicly mediated hearings⁴⁹, in print, electronic, visual and aural media and the second order debate and commentary this has generated could be understood, in the words of Mahmood Mamdani, as the “power to *define* the terms of a social debate, and, in so doing, *define* the parameters of truth seeking.”⁵⁰ Linking the power of definition to the realms of public discourse where particular kinds of social knowledge are both produced and legitimated is crucial, particularly since “truth” has been harnessed in service of “reconciliation”. Hence, truth, that elusive concept, has underpinned the problematic and historically relativist notion that no singular historical truth exists, that multiple (historical) truths constitute equal (moral and epistemological) truths and hence, equally “true” versions of historical experience.⁵¹ We need, therefore, to understand its referential economy.

The TRC’s report⁵² discerns four categories that constitute the institution’s operating notions of “truth”, although these overlap in ways that are not acknowledged, particularly as far as the constitutive function of testimony in providing the narrative frames of reference is concerned. These “truths” are “factual or forensic truth; personal or narrative

⁴⁹ Although, as Deborah Posel and Graeme Simpson note, “only some ten per cent of the nearly 22 000 victim [sic] testimonies were aired in public hearings [...]” Deborah Posel and Graeme Simpson, “The Power of Truth: South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Context” in Deborah Posel and Graeme Simpson (eds.), *Commissioning the Past: Understanding South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 2002), p 3.

⁵⁰ Mahmood Mamdani, “A Diminished Truth” in Wilmot James and Linda van de Vijver (eds.), *After the TRC: Reflections on Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa* (Athens: Ohio University Press and Cape Town: David Philip, 2000), p 58. Italics are mine.

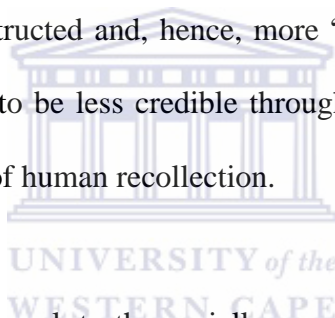
⁵¹ This form of relativism also operates in the spurious ahistorical notion that “two sides of the conflict” exist, that is, that there some kind of moral, historical, ideological and epistemological equivalence may be made between the Apartheid state and the liberation movement.

⁵² The five volumes of the TRC’s report were presented to then-President Nelson Mandela in October 1998. The report was debated in parliament in February 1999. At that time the work of the Amnesty Committee was not complete. The two additional volumes of the commission’s final report including findings of the Amnesty Committee and other codicils were presented to President Thabo Mbeki on 21 March 2003 (on what was Sharpeville Day but is now “officially” called Human Rights Day) and debated in parliament in April 2003.

truth; social or ‘dialogue’ truth [...] and healing and restorative truth.”⁵³ Here, the TRC’s report contributes to the notion of history-as-montage, as being constituted by many, equally “true” versions of truth. This is because it simply presents discrete categories of truth that distinguish, seemingly unproblematically, between the truth of subjective experience, the truth of social negotiation (imagined as “dialogue” but which is structurally and historically precluded from any such reciprocity or equality) and the truth of “objective” data. This is problematic for a number of reasons. Firstly, *all* four orders of truth that the TRC report describes relate to the psychosocial, juridico-legal and historiographic status and functions of that genre of discourse called *testimony*. Thus, these orders of truth are interwoven with testimony. Especially since testimony is traditionally called on to verify, uphold or discredit certain historical truths over others when historical experiences or “events” are contested (a point that will be taken up in the following chapter). Secondly, these distinctions reify hierarchical knowledge practices that cast “expert” researchers (such as “social scientists”) as makers and interpreters of historical meaning. This implicitly reproduces the qualitative distinctions made in positivist knowledge systems between evidence, fact, objectivity and corroboration, on the one hand, and oral history, social perception and “story-telling”, on the other. This underwrites a positivist hierarchy of knowledge distinguishing and privileging historical “fact” from historical “truth”. The authority of evidence as “data” (verified by methodological protocols of properly scientific investigation) and of skilled, trained

⁵³ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa, *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report*, Vol. 1, p 110. Deborah Posel critiques the TRC’s report as a work of historiography by unpacking the methodological and epistemological assumptions underlying its working definitions of “truth” in her “The TRC Report: What Kind of History? What kind of Truth” in Deborah Posel and Graeme Simpson (eds.), *Commissioning the Past: Understanding South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 2002), pp 147-172.

experts to produce social knowledge and historiographic interpretation consigns the interpretative agency of the witness-narrator as a maker of collective meaning (beyond the realm of her/his “personal truth”) simply to the role of a “victim” with a “story” to tell.⁵⁴ Moreover, these notions of truth ignore the fraught process that inheres in surviving atrocity, dealing and living with its effects (embodied, systemic and intra- and intersubjective), bearing witness to its experience in the form of a narrative in testimony and the implications of this for the production of historical knowledge.⁵⁵ Underlying such distinctions are also the complex ways in which material and written evidence, separated in time from their contexts of production and contextually embedded authorial framings are understood to be less constructed and, hence, more “authentic” than oral testimony. The latter is often understood to be less credible through being filtered by “subjective” perception and the fallibilities of human recollection.

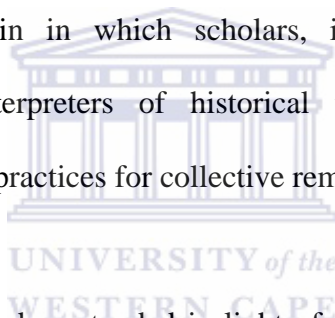


Notions of subjective or personal truth, socially negotiated truth, and the truth of procedural verification evoke the dynamic, complex and nuanced dialectics through which collective meaning is distilled from the human experience of atrocity and resistance. This raises a crucial theoretical knot regarding the ways that historical relativism and more subtle forms of social and historical denial operate. This is because such distinctions (between orders of truth as presented in the TRC’s report) reproduce

⁵⁴ See Rosanne Kennedy’s discussion on Stolen Generation testimony, the politics of “academic” knowledge production and the interpretive agency of witnesses in “Stolen Generations testimony: trauma, historiography and the question of ‘truth’” in *Aboriginal History* (25, December, 2001), pp. 116-131.

⁵⁵ For an elaborated discussion on this point see Heidi Grunebaum and Yazir Henri “Re-membering Bodies, Producing Histories: Holocaust Survivor Narrative and Truth and Reconciliation Commission Testimony” in Jill Bennett and Rosanne Kennedy (eds.), *World Memory: Personal Trajectories in Global Time* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); pp 101-118; Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992); and Saul Friedlander (ed.), *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the “Final Solution”* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1992).

precisely the first assumptions that underlie the ideological and political agendas and discursive procedures of relativism, and even denialism when clothed in the veneer of “academic” respectability or scholarly rigour.⁵⁶ To ignore the metatheoretical questions that this raises is to ignore questions of political and ethical urgency and of epistemological consequence. Disentangling such theoretical knots that have impact on the ways in which historical truth is understood and collective remembrance shaped in public discourse involves raising (still unasked) questions regarding ethical limits on interpretative practices beyond those mobilised in identity politics.⁵⁷ Whilst such questions and debates they evoke do not always produce easy answers they do, however, establish a metacritical terrain in which scholars, intellectuals, artists and other institutionally proclaimed interpreters of historical truth may deliberate on the consequences of interpretative practices for collective remembrance and social forgetting.



The term, “forensic truth” may be extended in light of its etymological affiliations. As Roseanne Kennedy observes, in English, “‘forensic’ means ‘used in courts of law’” although historically it was associated to the “‘forum’ ‘which in Roman antiquity was a ‘place of public discussion’”.⁵⁸ Whilst it has been wryly noted that through the TRC hearings, “nothing new [was] being revealed”⁵⁹, in the sense of being previously

⁵⁶ Such questions went to the heart of what came to be known as the *Historikerstreit* or historian’s debate in (West) Germany during the nineteen eighties. See Richard J. Evans, *In Hitler’s Shadow: West German Historians and the Attempt to Escape from the Nazi Past* (New York: Pantheon, 1989) and Saul Friedlander (ed.), *Probing the Limits of Representation*.

⁵⁷ In relation to the genocide of Jewish people by the Nazis during the Second World War, one of the most exhaustive elaborations of these questions remains the collection edited by Saul Friedlander (ed.), *Probing the Limits of Representation*.

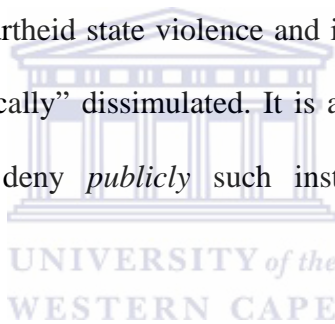
⁵⁸ Rosanne Kennedy, “Stolen Generations testimony”, p.119.

⁵⁹ Eammanuel Chukwudi Eze. “Transition and the Reasons of Memory” in *The South Atlantic Quarterly* (103, 4, Fall 2004), p 757. Wole Soyinka asserts that whilst nothing “new” has been revealed it is the collective recognition and formal public archiving of “concrete particulars” which has been facilitated by

unknown (except perhaps, for white beneficiaries, and even then...), the incorporation of the known into public knowledge and into the official historical record takes place through institutional recognition and acknowledgement. When public knowledge is imprinted by truth that takes an institutional form - “forensic” truth - that is acknowledged and verified through an institutional forum, the lies, myths and deceptions that were propagated by the Apartheid system and its official historical record may begin to be righted. The symbolic power of the TRC as an institutional acknowledgement of acts of brutality and assassination denied by the Apartheid state in its wars against truth, its own historical record saturated by its foundational criminality, cannot be overstated. No matter how the operating notions of “truth” are understood, problematised or critiqued, the import of much of the TRC’s proceedings and investigative outcomes lies in having made these first and absolutely crucial steps in the long road towards rewriting the historical record, particularly regarding the level of Apartheid state-sanctioned political repression. Since the TRC, for example, the Apartheid state’s practices of targeted assassinations and disappearances, its networks, locations and operational procedures of official and informal security and intelligence personnel, its counter-insurgency tactics (particularly regarding Apartheid “total war” strategies and “low-intensity” warfare during the nineteen eighties) can no longer be hidden by the legalised deceptions of Apartheid’s “truth” manufacturers. Many families have also successfully found information regarding the disappearances and deaths of their kin (although many more have still not). In terms of personal, familial and community processes this information provides an opportunity to localise, grieve and thus deal with the pain of such

the TRC process. Wole Soyinka, *The Burden of Memory, The Muse of Forgiveness* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 33.

loss. This could not be undertaken without information-as-truth, without truth as “fact”. This is, arguably, one of the most important contributions that the TRC has made to the historiographic landscape since the demise of legal Apartheid. It has also led to an ongoing process, firstly through the TRC’s Investigative Unit and subsequently through the National Prosecuting Authority, of exhumations of activists and of liberation movement operatives who were killed and secretly buried in unknown graves within South Africa and beyond its borders. Institutionally acknowledged “truth”, moreover, dislodges the violence of state terror from its liminal topographies and shadowy zones of secrecy and impunity (places of torture and murder such as Vlakplaas,⁶⁰ for example). Thus, it is the *extremes* of Apartheid state violence and its modes of political repression that can no longer be “forensically” dissimulated. It is also now no longer possible for Apartheid’s beneficiaries to deny *publicly* such institutionally acknowledged and corroborated happenings.



What does it mean if the “known” and the true circulate without taking an institutional form? For in the overwhelming tide of the aftermath of the TRC process it is not always easy to recognise oneself in the historical truth that has informed public histories, normative histories.⁶¹ In the name of a unity, the “new nation” reconciled with itself, such histories have meant that most of its citizens may now lay claim to a (faceless, anonymous, “rainbow”) collective and an egalitarian historical victimhood whilst the

⁶⁰ Located north-west of Pretoria, Vlakplaas was a farm that functioned as one of the command centres of the Civil Co-operation Bureau, the Apartheid state’s covert operations unit in the nineteen eighties.

⁶¹ In a recent newspaper interview, writer, Denis Hirson, reflecting on the impact of his father’s political imprisonment during the nineteen sixties and early seventies on himself as a child and son observes that, “We all want to remember. With Mandela’s release, and the TRC, memory was kindled. But for many people it wasn’t the memory they’d grown up with.” Jeanne Viall, “Playful and poetic” in *Cape Argus* (21 August, 2006), p 11.

“dirty” work of having policed and protected the benefits, beneficiaries and borders of the white supremacist social welfare state are seen to have fallen onto the shoulders of a few (faced, named, pathologised and morally expunged) individuals acting *mal fides* and outside the “law”.⁶² Thus, such “truth” does not translate into the foundational illegitimacy and criminality of Apartheid and its colonial antecedents being acknowledged. It is here that the ways in which truth, instrumentalised in the name of reconciliation becomes interpenetrated with a generalised historical relativism that has promoted social forgetting (particularly regarding the structural impunity this has granted white beneficiaries in the present).⁶³ The ways in which the social structures of denial operate is a complex and often, very nuanced, phenomenon (see my discussion in chapter four).⁶⁴ Dominant forms of social remembrances and public histories are shaped as much

⁶² In part, this has operated through the way that the TRC’s amnesty process was mediated. In his appearance on behalf of the National Party before the TRC, F.W. De Klerk, the last prime minister of the Apartheid state, continuously repeated the *mal fides* mantra in his response to particular and concrete actions of Apartheid security and counter-insurgency operatives. In this way, state-sponsored violence was implicitly consigned to the symbolic edges of the self-legitimising state through and explained away as the “bad faith” deeds of individual “bad apples” who were purportedly acting outside of Apartheid’s self-declared “legalities.” The ways in which the amnesty hearings of a handful of the state’s torturers and assassins were represented also tended to frame such individuals as “evil” and pathological murderers delinked from the larger integrated structures of military/police/civilian/industry/agri-business, the central pillar of the state security machine. The fact that these were predominantly white Afrikaans males permitted white, Anglophone beneficiary communities (for whom the denial of personal or collective culpability in their support of the Apartheid state policies continues) to project the “evils” and “excesses” of the state back onto the personalized, named and identified “footsoldiers” and assassins of the state. See, for example, Jacques Pauw’s documentary film *Prime Evil* (that took Vlakplaas commander, Eugene de Kock, as its subject), aired by the public broadcaster on national television in October 1996 (copy of recording in personal video archive). This is also a consequence of the Pronura that defined the historical time line, events and actors covered by the TRC’s focus.

⁶³ Jeremy Cronin locates his critique of the historical relativism of the TRC’s Report in the way that its mandate was interpreted “to recognise and acknowledge as many people as possible as victims of the past political conflict”. Cronin’s argument is that on the basis of the blurring of the distinction between “victims” of political conflict (which, in some way, everybody was) and “victims” of Apartheid (which necessarily excludes beneficiaries and perpetrators), the TRC contributes to the now widely held (by Apartheid’s beneficiaries, in particular) perception that “we are all victims” of Apartheid and therefore no specific group of people have right to redressive or redistributive claims since nobody (besides a few “bad apples” in the police and Apartheid state security forces) is really responsible for Apartheid. Jeremy Cronin, “A Luta Dis-Continua?”, p 9.

⁶⁴ See Stanley Cohen, *States of Denial: Knowing about Atrocities and Suffering* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001).

through social structures of denial as through the interconnected workings of institutions of power that archive, occlude, silence, excise and revise.

... and reconciliation

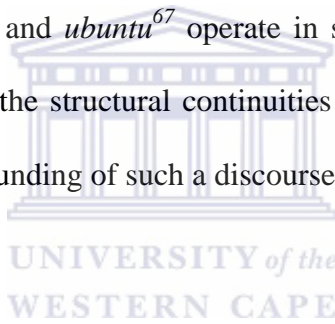
In heeding Amilcar Cabral's cautionary that following periods of political decolonisation the disavowal of history may be structurally reproduced and normalised in the domains of the public one is compelled to examine the forms of denial and disavowal that are sustained by the discourse of reconciliation.⁶⁵ The latter, in its trajectory towards an impossible future, became ossified increasingly through the mediated representations of the TRC's proceedings. In his genealogical unpacking of discourses of reconciliation in the South African context prior to the mid-nineteen nineties, Eric Doxtader suggests that reconciliation has functioned as a rhetorical device marking the temporality of South Africa's movement from Apartheid to constitutional democracy as a "transition".⁶⁶ Reconciliation, in this argument, is the sign that marks a rhetorical creation of a time that brackets, in its turn, a historical moment in order to allow for a discursive moulding of a temporal gap. It was this creation of a new time for speech and for dialogue that, according to Doxtader, contributed to the CODESA negotiations between the Apartheid regime and the liberation movements that enabled a political process to begin. In this reading, reconciliation created the rhetorical grounds for a political shift, a "transition", a change in the political sphere - a ground, space, an anaesthetics, a breath, a pause. In that rhetorical pause another political present could be opened as a gap of time for dialogue,

⁶⁵ Amilcar Cabral, *Unity and Struggle* (London, Ibadan, Nairobi: Heinemann, 1980), pp 129-131.

⁶⁶ Eric Doxtader, "Making Rhetorical History in a Time of Transition: The Occasion, Constitution, and Representation of South African Reconciliation" *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* (4,2, 2001), pp 223-260.

for negotiating political *terms*. From this emerges a space of re-imagining, remaking and inscribing an almost singular present (the “miracle”?) in a predefined, preinscribed archive of a new national symbolic estate.

Reconciliation has subsumed notions of confession, forgiveness, apology, pardon, and healing into its discursive operations. Touted as a social and moral palliative to managing the aftermath of “conflict”, the term has been troped biomedically as the cure for the “wounds of the past” and balm for its scars. Reconciliation discourse has come to dominate the ways in which moral, juridico-legal, social and - more invisibly - economic concepts of justice, restitution and *ubuntu*⁶⁷ operate in social and political discourses⁶⁸ across the region. This masks the structural continuities and historical accommodations that underlie the global foregrounding of such a discourse.⁶⁹



⁶⁷ The notion of *ubuntu* derives broadly from communalist philosophies on the continent that expound the idea that a human being has humanity, is endowed with and experiences her/his humanity through the humanity and being human of another.

⁶⁸ So, for example, the idea of a wealth tax levied on beneficiaries of colonial and Apartheid rule (as Sampie Terreblanche proposed in his submission to the TRC and elaborated in Franco Barchiesi “Socio-Economic Exploitation, Meaning Contestation, and the TRC: Problematic Foundations for a Discourse of Social Citizenship in Post-Apartheid South Africa”, paper presented at the conference, *The TRC: Commissioning the Past*, 11-14 June 1999) is perceived to denigrate the spirit and intention of reconciliation instead of being perceived as a material gesture of responsibility, acknowledgement and reconciliation. The political rhetoric that effectively criminalises landless peoples whose activism may place them outside of the protocols and terms of South Africa’s dismally diluted land restitution policies often represents such activism as being against reconciliation.

⁶⁹ Reconciliation has become a key term in “transitology”, political studies dealing with “transitional” societies and legal-moral issues related to “transitional justice”, “conflict-resolution” and peace-building studies. See for example, Luc Huyse, “Justice after Transition – Dilemmas of Backward-Looking Justice” *Law and Social Enquiry* (20,1, 1995), pp 1-78; Martha Minnow *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness: Facing History after Genocide and Mass Violence* (Boston, Beacon Press, 1998); Neil J. Kritz (ed.), *Transitional Justice: how Emerging Democracies Reckon with Former Regimes*, Vol. 1-3 (Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace, 1996); Alexandra de Brito, Carmen González-Enríquez and Paloma Aguilar (eds.), *The Politics of Memory: Transitional Justice in Democratizing Societies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

The rhetoric of reconciliation and its theologically and morally affiliated notions of forgiveness have come to frame and legitimate most public modes of bereavement that relate to Apartheid-era atrocities. Operating through discourses of morality, theology, psychologised notions of "healing" and closure, reconciliation discourse relies, on the one hand, on unproblematised identities of victims and perpetrators and, on the other hand, on corresponding and unchallenged constructions of "race"/colour, class and identity.⁷⁰ The term hides and operates a slip from the realm of face-to-face relations to the realm of the collective envisaged as the nation. In terms of colonial and Apartheid atrocities and how these are represented in the public domain - in public history and heritage institutions, memorials, monuments, media, literary and cultural production - reconciliation discourse also places very particular boundaries to what is spoken, written, remembered, represented, mourned and claimed and by whom. This is most striking regarding the closure of public, social and collective spaces to expressions of rage, refusals to forgive or to reconcile, as well as politicising and asserting alternative claims for social justice.⁷¹ For example, an activist and co-ordinator within the Landless People's Movement, formed in 2002 as a coalition of groups and organisations comprising South Africa's urban and rural landless poor, has been quoted as saying that in "[...] South Africa it appears if you challenge for land, you threaten the very foundation of 'the miracle' nation."⁷²

⁷⁰ See Mahmood Mamdani's discussion of the ways in which the TRC legislation re-inscribes colonial and Apartheid power relations precisely by not examining the question of the ways in which "race" identities were constructed and systemically entrenched and by not including the beneficiaries of Apartheid, primarily white communities. Mahmood Mamdani, "Reconciliation without Justice" *Southern African Review of Books*, pp3-5 and his "A Diminished Truth" in Wilmot James and Linda van de Vijver (Eds.), *After the TRC*, pp 60-61.

⁷² Rapula Tabane, "Land is the burning issue that unites the dispossessed and makes government and investors nervous" in *Cape Times* (10 October 2002), p 9. In November 2002 and in response to what Terry

The discursive slippage from individual to collective and the conflation of psychologised and theological, particularly Christian, notions of healing with the political project of nation-building, continuously inform the ways that reconciliation and its related concepts of confession, remorse and forgiveness are understood and instrumentalized.⁷³ Starkly illustrating this, following his trip to Rwanda, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Chairperson of the TRC remarked:

We must break the spiral of reprisal and counter-reprisal. I said to them in Kigali “unless you move beyond justice in the form of a tribunal, there is no hope for Rwanda”. Confession, forgiveness and reconciliation in the lives of nations are not just airy-fairy religious and spiritual things, nebulous and unrealistic. They are the stuff of practical politics.⁷⁴

Rituals of confession, apology, forgiveness and reconciliation have been facilitated by the TRC, encouraged by the faith communities, enacted by individuals, widely represented and celebrated by national and international journalists, filmmakers and artists and

Bell and Dumisa Ntsebeza call the TRC’s “unfinished business” [see their *Unfinished Business: South Africa, Apartheid and the Truth* (RedWorks: Cape Town, 2001)], Khulumani Support Group, a South African organisation of survivors of Apartheid, filed a class action suit in the United States against a range of multinational corporations (in finance, armaments, oil, information technology, mining and transport) for their role in financing, supporting and profiting from Apartheid in spite of economic and military sanctions against the Apartheid state. The South African government has opposed the Khulumani suit since “[...] successful claims would *harm both foreign investment and reconciliation* in post-Apartheid South Africa [...]” Christelle Terreblanche, “ANC backs business in reparations case” in *The Sunday Independent* (16 October, 2005), p 4. Emphasis is my own.

⁷³ A critique of current reconciliation discourse from a liberation theological perspective is made by Tinyiko Sam Maluleke. Citing the materialist analysis of liberation theologian, Itumeleng Mosala, Maluleke contends that, “Reconciliation must have something to do with our reversal of alienation; and our alienation is not from white people first and foremost. [It is] from our land, our cattle, our labour which is objectified in industrial machines and technological instrumentation.” Tinyiko Sam Maluleke, “The Truth and Reconciliation Discourse: A Black Theological Evaluation” in James Cochrane, John de Gruchy and Steve Martin (eds.), *Facing the Truth: South African faith communities and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission* (David Phillip: Cape Town and Ohio University Press: Athens, 1999), p 103.

⁷⁴ Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *TRC of SA Report*, Volume 5, p 351.

assimilated into public discourse. The teleology of such practices translates reconciliation into a fetishized claim that has both devalued and displaced the experience of the aggressed.⁷⁵

Whilst acknowledging the necessity of process (not, however, of deferral) in social and individual processes of reconciliation, the TRC Report itself shifts from notions of self-empowerment (for the historically wronged) through voicing out - not in rage and indignation, but voicing out, nonetheless - to self-empowerment through forgiveness.⁷⁶ In an outrageous twist of logic, the moral responsibility of reconciliation and forgiveness is placed onto the shoulders of those who have been denied the right of full humanity because of their skin colour and “race” classification. “Liberate yourselves from victimhood”, people have been told, and then provided with the moral terms, the conditions, the language and mode, whilst the possibility for civic recourse to justice or material and economic restitution have been all but abrogated. “Forgiveness is not about forgetting [,]” it is claimed in the TRC Report, but rather, “[...] about seeking to forego bitterness, renouncing resentment, moving past old hurt, and becoming a survivor rather than a passive victim.”⁷⁷ This establishes a contradictory though symmetrical equivalence of value between the affective and possibly transformative expression of outrage (“bitterness”, “resentment”, “old hurt”) and remaining a “passive victim”. In this formulation the survivor must forego the right to individual or collective expressions of

⁷⁵ Tinyiko Sam Maluleke, “The Truth and Reconciliation Discourse”, pp 101- 113.

⁷⁶ Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *TRC of SA Report*, Volume 5, p.350.

⁷⁷ Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *TRC of SA Report*, Vol. 1, p 116.

indignation or forms of action that may be mobilised by such feelings.⁷⁸ Forgiveness, apparently, brings some sort of “healing” or “moving on”. Reconciliation, on such terms, provides the framing of responses that seem to contain already all conditions, terms, modes and vocabularies to possible endings, healings, and closures. This, rather than the acknowledgement that the historically (and currently) aggressed retain the moral right to define the forms of expression and modes of address relating to the day-to-day violence of “ordinary” atrocity that has been wrought by colonial and Apartheid rule, from forced removals, to land and resource-pillage, to the very affront of these to human dignity. This threatens to imprison and prism the experiences of the wronged in the language of the oppressor.⁷⁹ Indeed, as Steve Biko argued (a few years before he was murdered by Apartheid security police in 1977), the moral right to define terms is at once a political act as well as a fundamental condition for self-restitution, for reclaiming dignity, for ontological survival, for creative meaning-making and for asserting oneself as an active social agent against the structural degradations of colonialism and Apartheid.⁸⁰

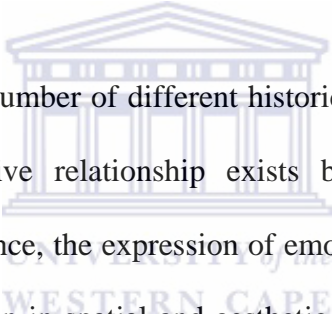
Between the binaries of *ubuntu* and vengeance, understanding and retribution (the language of the Pronura), remains the disavowed process of deferral, of collective mourning, of calling to account and of a democratic and reclamative memory-work. It is

⁷⁸ In a newspaper article entitled, “Forgive the torturer, not the torture”, one woman is quoted as saying, “I don’t know if I will ever be ready to forgive [...]. I carry this ball of anger inside me and I don’t even know where to begin dealing with it. The oppression was bad, but what is much worse, what makes me even more angry is that they are trying to dictate my forgiveness.” The author of the article goes on to say, however, that “[...] forgiveness should be encouraged, perhaps in the first place, as an antidote to the poison of unresolved bitterness and repressed resentment, as a call to those violated to liberate themselves from the victimhood – for the sake of themselves, their children and the rest of society.” Wilhelm Verwoerd, “Forgive the Torturer not the Torture” in *Sunday Independent* (6 December 1998), p 11.

⁷⁹ Thomas Szasz, *Ideology and Insanity: Essays on the Psychiatric Dehumanization of Man* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1991), p 5.

⁸⁰ Steve Biko, *I Write What I Like* (Ravan: Johannesburg, 1996).

in this deferral that non-forgiveness may be installed, not as a threat of retribution or vengeance, but as the reclamation of selfhood, of dignity on one's own terms. Thus, the moral defense of not forgiving lies precisely in the fact that "the primary value defended by the passion of resentment is self-respect, resentment being tied to individual's self-respect or self-esteem, perception of own worth, of what he [sic] is owed."⁸¹ Forgiving may relate to memory and recognition, then, not as a right, a claim, or a demand, but as the deferred and conditional outcome of a longer process that includes mourning loss, honouring the dead, restituting the land, and reclaiming the language of resistance and hope over the muteness of abjection and despair.



It has been observed across a number of different historical and geopolitical contexts on the continent that a correlative relationship exists between responses to extreme degradation and systemic violence, the expression of emotions such as rage and the need for symbolic forms of resolution in spatial and aesthetic forms, on the one hand, and in political processes of reclamation and reparation, on the other.⁸² Symbolic forms of collective and individual processes of mourning would include then the marking of outrage, identifying and working through internalised forms of degradation, reclaiming the stolen property and unrestituted land. However, since there has not been a careful separation and clarification of the needs for political reconciliation, national reconciliation and interpersonal reconciliation, there have been no mechanisms, social or

⁸¹ Jeffrie G. Murphy, "Forgiveness and Resentment" in Jeffrie G. Murphy and Jean Hampton, *Forgiveness and Mercy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p 16.

⁸² Franz Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, translated by Constance Farrington (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), pp 27-84; Wole Soyinka, *The Burden of Memory, the Muse of Forgiveness*, pp 23-92; N. Chabani Manganyi, *Treachery and Innocence: Psychology and Racial Difference in South Africa* (Johannesburg: Ravan, 1991), p 19.

cultural, which allow for the expression of indignation or for the refusal to reconcile which do *not* automatically imply a threat of retribution.

Mourning and social regeneration

Everyday life continues. It goes on now within an environment of psychosocial depression, of continued economic dispossession and the violence of a generalised social denial. It continues within a global paradigm of power relations that indexes the profound though nuanced distinction between being in power - the victory of the South African liberation struggle against legal Apartheid, beyond, even the political compromise of the negotiated transition - and having power, ossified through a global political economy of colour/class supremacism that is structurally embedded in the global power alliances of empire. Of course, this cannot be acknowledged nor accounted for in the sanitizing vocabulary of reconciliation. As a global discourse of “transition”, reconciliation is clearly very much the “stuff of practical politics.” So is the structural fragmentation of discursive, symbolic and social spaces for individual and collective modes of mourning and social regeneration that may run counter to the ideological accommodations and systemic continuities of “transitions”. Particularly as these social issues relate, in the longer term, to the possibility of human security and peace.

Material reparations⁸³ symbolically and materially mark a debt that cannot be paid since it cannot be measured. This is not in contradiction with the reality for so many families

⁸³ There has been substantial debate, discussion and contestation regarding the TRC’s reparation recommendations, government’s response to these recommendations. See for example, Mary Burton,

whose grief at the death of a loved one has been compounded and exacerbated by the daily struggle for material survival. Reparations may ascribe meaning to loss, to social death, to the too many who have died, who were killed. Reparations, however, do not necessarily flag the un-bereaved and ongoing degradations of a generalised and unnamed trauma that remains outside of the TRC's mandate and increasingly interior to the emotional worlds of so many that have survived the long colonial and Apartheid wars against their humanity: ordinary people, as well as the students, workers, parents, intellectuals, activists and militants. Indeed, this generalised and cumulative trauma has been exacerbated by the entrenched and growing socio-economic inequalities between the (black) poor majority and (white) rich minority.⁸⁴ The narrowing of expressive spaces for new collective forms of social action has contributed to this remaining unspeakable within the bounds of sociality. As a penetrating culture, a composite of practices, performances and discourses, the time of the new, the time of transition permeates the senses and perceptions of time and structures the time of "development" as a hegemonic temporality that fractures temporalities of social recovery and self-reclamation. A structural relationship is thus forged between the forms of public culture and socialities promoted by neoliberal democracy, and the closure of public and civic spaces to the work of mourning and the social recovery of hope.

"Reparations – It Is Still Not Too Late" in Erik Doxtader and Charles Villa-Vicencio (eds.), *To Repair the Irreparable: Reparation and Reconstruction in South Africa* (David Phillip: Cape Town, 2004), pp 29-43.

⁸⁴ So for example, John Pilger illustrates this growing divide as also being characterised by (using government statistics) "[...] the decline of income in black households by 19 percent from 1995-2000 while white households increased their income by 15 percent." John Pilger, "'Moribund' social spending is holding back the marginalised majority", on *debate* listserv (posted 20 August, 2006). Recently, research findings of financial research organisation Eighty20 publicised in an English weekly newspaper found that "more than 15% of SA's 46.9-million live well below the largely accepted poverty line of \$1, or R7.18, a day." Futhi Ntshingila, "Dollar millionaires? Try R5 a day" in *Sunday Times* (July 16, 2006), p 5.

Western psychoanalytically and clinically informed mental health paradigms privileged by the TRC's institutional approach to and theoretical understandings of the impact of state violence on memory, speaking, witnessing, mourning and "healing" have also filtered into public discourses on injury and loss. As Christopher Colvin demonstrates, these paradigms, and the aetiologies of trauma they underwrite, in particular, have framed the TRC's rhetoric and modalities of speaking, witnessing, healing, response and intervention especially regarding the HRV Committee proceedings.⁸⁵ Critiques of these models are often based on the ways in which they envisage the human subject as an atomised, autonomous (white male) individual unmoored from the material and social relationships in which subjectivity - in all its layered dynamics - is negotiated, formed and produced.⁸⁶ In his critique of Western psychology as a hegemonic epistemology and practice of mental health (in Latin America), Ignacio Martín-Baró noted (in the years before he was murdered by state paramilitaries in El Salvador in 1989) that psychology's constitutive ahistoricism, individualism and homeostatic vision - which pathologises the dynamic of disequilibrium that inheres in social struggles for change - can serve to "strengthen the oppressive structures, by drawing attention away from them and toward individual and subjective factors."⁸⁷ Accommodated by the socio-political exigencies of the "new", the psychologisation of mourning, for example, renders a collective and truly

⁸⁵ Christopher J. Colvin, *Performing the Signs of Injury: Critical Perspectives on Traumatic Storytelling after Apartheid* (unpublished Ph.D dissertation, University of Virginia, 2004).

⁸⁶ See for example Judith L. Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (London: Pandora, 1992); Laura S. Brown, "Not Outside the Range: One Feminist Perspective on Psychic Trauma" in Cathy Caruth (ed.), *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1995), pp 100-112; Ignacio Martín-Baró "Toward a Liberation Psychology" in Ignacio Martín-Baró, *Writings for a Liberation Psychology* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1996), pp 17-32; and Alcinda Honwana, "The collective body: challenging western concepts of trauma and healing" in *Track Two* (8, 1, July, 1999), pp 30-35.

⁸⁷ Ignacio Martín-Baró, "Toward a Liberation Psychology" in Ignacio Martín-Baró, *Writings for a Liberation Psychology*, p 19.

democratic work of bereavement and transformation as tasks of the individual, envisaged as a classically liberal subject: individuated, autonomous and psychically interior. This has reified reconciliation as a task and “time of speaking”, of giving voice, albeit a dehistoricised and depoliticised one.

This stands in stark contrast to the strong political and social relationship of burials to the social harnessing of collective energy to act, in resistance and protest, in South Africa, particularly in the nineteen eighties during the peak of new forms of Apartheid state political repression, security legislation and intensified mass-based anti-Apartheid resistance. As a social process for assimilating social change, as political action and as a propellant for the social reclamation of hope, mourning has become depoliticised *as* social action. In the wake of the TRC, instead of offering a social tool for collective forms of social regeneration and meaning-making, mourning has been rendered as a solitary and psychologised activity. Social expressions of anger, grief, self-restitution and the refusal to reconcile have been “privatised”. Along with this, the basis for political struggle around the many pressing socio-economic issues have become increasingly fractured and delegitimised as collective tools for social struggle or as the “proper” place for politics. Rather, reconciliation discourse - subsuming a materially constituted set of social and political practices - has been inscribed as a moral touchstone of censure and silence, a social reference point that signs the road to social “development”, bypassing those paths to social recovery or the making of the present from the dream of different futures.

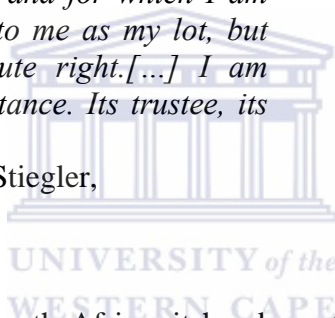
CHAPTER TWO
DISEMBODIMENTS: TESTIMONY, NARRATIVE AND THE
COMMODIFICATION OF SUFFERING

Time is as necessary for remembering as it is for forgetting. Even the smallest embrace of pain needs time larger than a pause, the greatest pause requires an eternity, the greatest hurt a lifetime. A lifetime is longer than an eternity: an eternity can exist without human presence.

Yvonne Vera, *The Stone Virgins*

Heritage or inheritance is what I can't appropriate, it is that which accrues to me and for which I am responsible, which has fallen to me as my lot, but over which I have no absolute right.[...] I am always the tenant of an inheritance. Its trustee, its witness, or its relay...

Jacques Derrida and Bernhard Stiegler,
Echographies of Television



In the passage to the “new” South Africa, it has been the mediations of human rights violations testimonies to the TRC - a narrative genre that “gives voice” to “life experiences” - that reveal the complex interconnections of voice to democracy¹, of atrocity and memory to speech and narrative, of listening and interpretation to silencing and historical erasure. Testimonies borne publicly to the TRC have been subsumed into broader public narratives about Apartheid (though less into Apartheid’s historical precedents in earlier colonial rule) and continue to inform dominant aesthetic, political and academic projects of historical representation and interpretation.

¹ On this point, see Alejandro Castillejo-Cuellar, “The Invisible Corner: Violence, Terror and Memory During the State of Emergency in South Africa, 1986” (unpublished Ph.D dissertation, New School of Social Research, New York, 2005).

In their recursive gestures to voice, “authenticity”, memory, trauma and embodiment, testimonies have been shaped, framed and mediated by the institutional functions of the TRC process and by broader social and ideological dynamics of “the transition” of which the TRC has been but one composite part. It is therefore necessary to disentangle the relationship of testimony to the ways that experiences of uprising, resistance, defiance, loss, grief, and other responses to administrative violence, have been instrumentalised as part of the TRC’s broader functions as a technology of social change management. The hearings of the TRC’s HRV Committee were envisaged as the opening of an institutional forum for the public recounting, in testimony, of “untold suffering and injustice”² in order to further one of the institution’s objectives: the “restoration of the human and civil dignity of victims [sic] of gross human rights violations through testimony [...]”³ As a performative and narrative genre of discourse, personal and political testimony to the TRC has functioned metonymically: it has provided a “human face” and a grammar of feeling to often abstract notions of civic morality and collective memory that the TRC also sought to establish. Thus, the mediation of testimonies to the TRC has involved assimilating the testimonies of the aggrieved (presented to the HRV Committee) into a departicularised and generalised narrative of collective pain and morally expunging the personalised testimonies of “perpetrators” (presented to the Amnesty Committee).⁴

² Preamble to the interim Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 200, 1993 and Preamble to the Pronura, Act 34, 1995.

³ Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *TRC of SA Report*, Vol. 1, p 57.

⁴ The role, reach, function and metonymic power of HRV testimonies in constructing a normative and shared “sense” of recent history is diffuse, nuanced and complex. My focus on the ways in which mediations of HRV testimonies have impacted on this has also been motivated by what I perceive as a need to investigate the centrality of HRV testimonies for the TRC, as a transition management institution. The TRC’s Report itself sets out the centrality of HRV testimonies: “In many respects, the victim [sic] hearings constituted the core of the Commission’s work.” Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *TRC of SA Report*, Vol. 1, p 147.

In this chapter I examine testimony as a narrative genre of discourse that is an intersubjective mode of self-disclosure. I also examine testimony as a political and social tool, as a call to social action, to response and to responsibility. I turn to mediation as a conceptual means to open an interpretative juncture at the interstices and overlappings where the personal, private, psychic, public, social and political converge. Reflecting on the mediations of HRV testimonies offers a theoretical lense through which to explore the different and often contesting modes of remembering, of “voicing”, of emotion, of embodiment and of making meaning, as testimonies are assimilated into the discursive constellations that shape collective historical and memorial projects of the “new” nation. Alternative modes of historical consciousness have been set “outside” of the frames of “nation”. In thinking about the ways in which testimony is mediated and how the abject, the historically inadmissible, the morally contaminating and the ideologically unfitting are implicated in mediations of testimony, we may understand how “voice” has been called upon to metonymically constitute the memorial matrix of the new nation as a democracy. Standing in for “authentic” experience, testimonies have come to constitute the “raw” matrix of a generalised woundedness in new memorial and historical narrative archaeologies (and archetypes). As testimonies are mediated into gendered, classed, racialised and interpretative economies of “voice”, a multi-layered process of disembodiment and commodification has contributed to the increasing depoliticisation both of “memory” as a discourse about “the past”, as well as of testimony as a narrative genre for radical social change. The multiple disaggregations of testimony from the realities and continuities of life, as lived in the entangled and multifaceted presents in the postcolony, plaster over the ways in which systemic violence has become privatised and

the ways that social dissent and contestation are delinked from the political imagination. What remains untold, silenced, occluded or excised, then, is as mediated as what is told, heard, seen and recognised.

Shoah testimonies and ‘testimonios’

Loss, thematised in different ways in law and psychoanalysis around aetiologies of trauma as woundedness - mobilised increasingly for legal claims regarding socio-economic rights, identity politics, recognition and restoration⁵ - is deeply connected to the emergence of late twentieth century theoretical discourses on testimony and on trauma in the global North, particularly in North America and Europe. In critically engaging the mediations and mobilisations of testimonies to the TRC it is therefore instructive to briefly examine some of the striking features in the emergence of testimony as a social and political genre of narrative, and of “testimonial discourse” as a theoretical and critical practice. The emergence of testimonial discourse over the past decades is interconnected with the simultaneous growth, institutionalisation and canonisation of “trauma studies” and of “Holocaust and genocide studies” in North American and European academies. This has given rise to a plethora of interdisciplinary publications, new series titles, journals, debates, conferences and countless undergraduate and postgraduate courses. Consecrating a conceptual grid on which disparate theories of trauma, memory, history, testimony and referentiality have been plotted, these discourses draw together questions related to witnessing, representing, narrating and “understanding” atrocity. They also

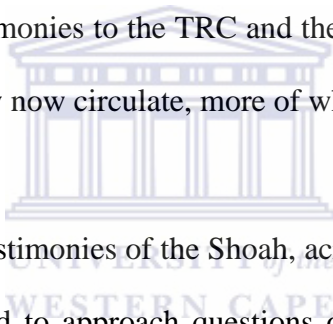
⁵ See for example, Wendy Brown, *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995).

draw together questions concerning the politics of solidarity, advocacy and responsibility; concerning historical representation, aestheticisation and memorialisation, concerning the epistemological relationship of violence to language and of memory to history and the social/psychic economies of trauma for survivors and their descendants.⁶ As thematics of academic and scholarly labour across and beyond the disciplinary boundaries in the humanities and social sciences, discourses on testimony, trauma and genocide have also been translated into curricula for vocational qualifications in human rights, peace-building, conflict resolution, transitional justice, and development studies in an ever-growing global conflict-management, development and humanitarian aid industry.

Besides the theoretical and critical space that testimony has long occupied as a juridical, legal and theological concept, two thematic orientations emerging over recent decades have broadened the theoretical grounds regarding testimonial discourse: one deals with the testimonies of the Shoah by survivors of the Nazi genocide and the other, *testimonios*, testimonial narratives of revolutionaries, social activists and survivors of administrative

⁶ See for example, Bessel A. van der Kolk (ed.), *Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder: Psychological and Biological Sequelae* (Washington, D.C.: American Psychiatric Press, 1984); Nanette Auerhahn and Dori Laub, "Holocaust Testimony" in *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* (5, 4, 1990), pp 447-462; Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York & London, Routledge, 1992); Judith L. Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (London: Pandora, 1992); Dominick LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994); Geoffrey Hartman, "On Traumatic Knowledge and Literary Studies" in *New Literary History* (26, 1995), pp 537-563; Cathy Caruth (ed.), *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995); Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1996); Georg M. Gugelberger (ed.), *The Real Thing: Testimonial Discourse and Latin America* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996); Ruth Leys, *Trauma: A Genealogy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); John Mowitt, "Trauma Envy" in *Cultural Critique* (46, 2000), pp. 272-97; Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2001); Jill Bennett and Rosanne Kennedy (eds.), *World Memory: Personal Trajectories in Global Time* (London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Ana Douglass and Thomas A. Vogel (eds.), *Witness and Memory: The Discourse of Trauma* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

massacres and state violence during the military dictatorships in Latin America. Subsumed into these two distinctive and mostly non-converging⁷ orientations of testimonial discourse are differing theoretical conceptions of temporality, memory, historiography, forms of subjectivity and ideas about interlocutors and audience. Testimonial discourse on the Shoah has tended to foreground the commemorative and memorial functions of testimony and the impact of trauma cognitive integration, whilst that on *testimonios* has tended to emphasise their aesthetic work as “texts” and their extra-textual work of inspiring hope and solidarity, as mobilising for social justice and political change. Both critical approaches provide useful and complementary theoretical tools when thinking about testimonies to the TRC and the economies of mediation, claim and interpretation in which they now circulate, more of which further on.



Regarding the vast corpus of testimonies of the Shoah, across genres⁸, critical scholarship and historiography have tended to approach questions of mediation, interpretation and aestheticisation of testimony as problematics of epistemology and of ethics. In this strand of testimonial discourse the mediation of testimony begins at its translation from memory to language, and it is here that discourses on trauma enter the picture. For the “nature” of what has come to be called “traumatic memory”, and the form and impact of the

⁷ At the annual conference of the American Comparative Literature Association in 1997 (which I attended) Marianne Hirsch and Susan Suleiman convened a panel entitled, “Testimony and *testimonio*: Witnessing in Comparative Perspective” in order, precisely, to bring these different critical orientations into conversation.

⁸ Most testimonies of Shoah survivors appear as written testimonies. Oral history archive projects on the Shoah have been established, however, as a response to ageing survivors passing on and not their testimonies as eye-witnesses remaining “unrecorded”. Two of the most well-known of these oral history projects are in the United States: the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimony at Yale University (accessible at <http://www.library.yale.edu/testimonies>) and the digital archive project of the Shoah Foundation Institute at the University of Southern California (accessible at <http://www.usc.edu/schools/college/vhi>).

temporalities of trauma⁹ on acts of recall rendered into language as testimony are presented as *constitutive* elements of testimony's mediatedness. Testimony, in this understanding is mediated intra- and intersubjectively.¹⁰ Highlighted in this approach are the cognitive challenges that bearing witness to mass atrocity may present to narrative, as a communicative act, both for survivors as well as for the addressees since the possibilities of testimonial narrative to "adequately" represent experiences and survival of atrocity may be undermined in a number of ways.¹¹

Of course, such problematics raise the relationship of testimony to its broader social, cultural and political context of interpellation. This is suggestive for opening different ways of thinking historically. For, as Shoshana Felman suggests, "[a]s a relation to events testimony seems to be composed of bits and pieces of a memory that has been overwhelmed by occurrences that have not settled into understanding or remembrance, acts that cannot be constructed as knowledge nor assimilated into full cognition, events in excess of *our* frames of reference."¹² Although Felman does not clarify whose frames of reference she is invoking I understand this to refer to dominant epistemological, cognitive, social and cultural "frames" of meaning-making and hence, to the ways that the legitimating epistemologies make memory. Testimonial discourse on the Shoah, however, has generally not broached these questions from a political perspective

⁹ In this discourse the impact of trauma is intrasubjectively determined, a view that has been critiqued owing to the universalising (Western, hegemonic) assumptions of subjectivity that it privileges.

¹⁰ In testimonial discourse about the Shoah the intra-subjective aspects of traumatic affect have tended to be foregrounded. See, for example, Bessel A. van der Kolk (ed.), *Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder: Psychological and Biological Sequelae* (Washington, D.C.: American Psychiatric Press, 1984).

¹¹ Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992) and Cathy Caruth (ed.), *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1995).

¹² Shoshana Felman, *Testimony*, p 5. Emphasis is my own.

(although there are a number of critiques on the instrumentalisation of the Shoah for political purposes, for example the way that Zionist nationalist narratives have mobilised Shoah survivor testimonies).¹³ Testimonial discourse dealing with institutionally “canonised” *testimonios*, on the other hand, has tended to approach these questions as problematics of representation from literary and more political perspectives.¹⁴ Testimonial discourse on *testimonios* has by and large avoided addressing the relationship between state violence, mass atrocity, survival, traumatic affect and the shaping of testimony in language as a theoretical or even a political question. It would seem that this avoidance may be less a theoretical “blind-spot” than a response to the ways that the interpretative economy of trauma discourses operates. For when testimonies of suffering, anger, defiance and harm are interpellated as “traumatised”, their political charge and social authority are diluted or even rendered impotent.

Both testimonial discourses on the Shoah and Latin American *testimonios* highlight the evidentiary and documentary thrust of testimony.¹⁵ This is significant since the

¹³ See for example, Tom Segev, *The Seventh Million: The Israelis and the Holocaust* translated by Chaim Watzman (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993); Leora Bilsky, “Justice or Reconciliation? The Politicisation of the Holocaust in the Kastner Trial” Emilios Christodoulidis and Scott Veitch (eds.), *Lethé’s Law: Justice, Law and Ethics in Reconciliation* (Oxford and Portland, Oregon: Hart, 2001) pp 153-173; Idith Zertal, “From the People’s Hall to the Wailing Wall: A Study in Memory, Fear, and War” in *Representations* (69, Winter, 2000) pp 98-126.

¹⁴ This is possibly owing to the ways that representation, subalternity and institutionalisation have been theorised in critical work in the United States regarding “canonised” *testimonios* (often produced in “collaboration” with Western intellectual/academic interlocutors). For an overview of discussions regarding the institutionalisation of *testimonios*, the development of “testimonial” criticism and its consequences regarding the political function of *testimonios* as a cross-border, counter-hegemonic discourse. John Beverley, “The Margin at the Center: On *Testimonio* (Testimonial Narrative)” in *Modern Fiction Studies* (35, 1 spring, 1989), pp 11-28; Georg M. Gugelberger (ed.), *The Real Thing: Testimonial Discourse and Latin America* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996); and Alberto Moreiras, “The Aura of Testimonios” in Georg M. Gugelberger (ed.), *The Real Thing: Testimonial Discourse and Latin America* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996), pp 192-224.

¹⁵ See also Ariel Dorfman, *Some Write to the Future: Essays on Contemporary Latin American Fiction*, translated by George Shivers with the author (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1991), pp 133-195

institutional framing of a narrative *as* a testimony means that a normative account of events or experiences that are being testified to has not yet been established or that such an account is disputed. This is why testimony is always a first-person, eye-witness account by “a narrator who is also a real protagonist [...] of the event he or she recounts, and whose unit of narration is usually a ‘life’ or a significant life experience.”¹⁶ As a narrative genre of discourse, testimony is communicative: it is an address to an (ideally) interested and acknowledging interlocutor. Testimony “blurs the distinctions between the personal, the private, the intimate and the public; between multiple subjectivities, between the personal, the political and moral. It connects, intersects and overlaps legal, judicial, theological, therapeutic and ethnographic discourses.”¹⁷ From the forensic demands of courtroom legalism, to the socially defiant, politically urgent, consciousness-raising gestures of *testimonios*; between the complex dialectics of remembering and forgetting, social denial and justice, responsibility and solidarity, testimony moves back and forth between public address, personal experience and its birth into language. In its address to a listening other, to reclaim, to restore, to resist, to define, to name and to re-author, testimony reminds us of the symbolising power of language. It asserts the possibility of an empowering modality of a psychic and social remaking of the world, reclaiming the world-creating power of language to shape meaning.

in particular.

¹⁶ John Beverley, “The Margin at the Centre”, p 12.

¹⁷ Bella Brodski, “Testimonial Narratives: Autobiography/*Testimonio*/Testimony.” Paper presented at ACLA conference panel, “Testimony and *Testimonio*: Witnessing in Comparative Perspective”, April 1997, p 5.

Testimony as historical narrative

Referring to testimonies given publicly to the TRC, Njabulo Ndebele explicitly links story-telling to memory, and memory to the question of “historical truth” and the work of narrative. “Is it not that we often think of stories as imaginary events which we may call tales, fiction, fables, or legends: stories as narratives of one kind or another?” Ndebele asks, and then responds that “[...] the testimonies we continue to hear at the TRC hearings are the recall of memory. What is being remembered *actually* happened. If today they sound like imaginary events it is because, as we shall recall, the horror of day-to-day life under apartheid often outdid the efforts of the imagination to reduce it to metaphor.”¹⁸ If testimony is the “recall of memory” and testimonies constitute “narratives of one kind or another”, then we need to examine the relationship between testimony and narrative. The etymological interconnectedness of testimony, the making of witness, the construction of historical knowledge and collective memory is intimately tied to the act of making meaning, to the purposive drift of telling as coming to know and narrating as intending to mean. As James Young reminds us, the etymology of the English word, “testimony” derives “from the Latin for ‘witness’ (*testis*), while ‘witness’ in turn derives from both becoming conscious of (or knowing) something and literally seeing a thing. To testify is literally ‘to make witness’ – an etymological reminder that as witness and testimony are made, so is knowledge.”¹⁹ The relationship between knowing, the making of knowledge and its cognitive organisation in narrative is pointed to by Hayden White. So, in another etymological rehearsal, White reminds us that “narrative” derives from

¹⁸ Njabulo Ndebele, “Memory, Metaphor and the Triumph of Narrative” in Carli Coetzee and Sarah Nuttall (eds.), *Negotiating the Past: The Making of Memory in South Africa* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press Southern Africa, 1998), pp 20-21. Emphasis is mine.

¹⁹ James Young, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), p 19.

Latin, Sanskrit and Greek in ways that linguistically embed the idea of knowing or creating meaning as a cognitive process with telling and relating as a narrative process.²⁰

Since the inauguration of the South African national project of historical “recovery”, particularly since the inception of the TRC, it has been the narrative mode of discourse that has been privileged in the representation of the past. The processes by which individual memories are collected, told, mediated and inscribed within the TRC’s institutional site (as well as within other archival and commemorative sites) have been regulated by a variety of narrative modes of discourse. These range from the political to the juridico-legal, historical and testimonial. Regarding testimonial narrative, as Paul Ricoeur points out, in so far as testimony possesses a juridical function, it is not the witness’s perception that is given voice in testimony which is important but, rather, *the report itself*, the narration of events.²¹ Ricoeur goes further, however, than elaborating the narrative exigencies of the testimonial genre. He links testimony, its truth-claims and truth-effects to a *place*, the place of the institution.²² To the significance of place in the material anchoring of narrative, I will return in chapter three. It is, however, relevant that witness-narrators giving testimony at the public hearings of the HRV Committee – the least “legalistic” in structure of the Commission’s hearings - were understood to be “giving testimony” and not “telling life-stories”. Story-telling may share many narrative features of testimony, but giving testimony is not telling a story. The documentary and

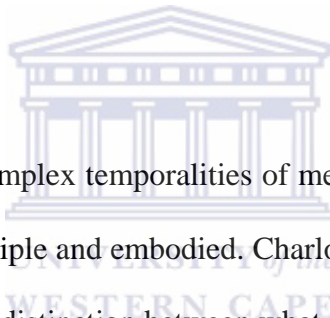
²⁰ White elaborates in a footnote to his discussion on narrativity and reality that “[t]he words ‘narrative,’ ‘narration,’ ‘to narrate,’ and so on derive via the Latin *gnārus* (‘knowing,’ ‘acquainted with,’ ‘expert,’ ‘skilful,’ and so forth) and *narrō* (‘relate,’ ‘tell’) from the Sanskrit root *gnā* (‘know’). The same root yields *γνώριμος* (‘knowable,’ ‘known’) [...].” Hayden White “The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality” in *Critical Inquiry* (7, 1, Autumn, 1980) fn. 2, p 5.

²¹ Paul Ricoeur, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), p 123.

²² Paul Ricoeur, *Essays*, p 124.

evidentiary functions of testimony as narrative raise the stakes of historical truth (and historical truthfulness) in ways that story-telling does not, since testimonies enter historical narratives with an evidentiary status that stories, legends, tales and myths are not granted, regardless of the historical truth-claims that such narrative genres may illuminate.²³ Moreover, as a communicative and relational process of meaning-making, testimony's claims to historical truth implicate multiple and heterogeneous addressees – interlocutors as secondary witnesses – in much more urgent and complicated ways than does narrating as story-telling.

Testimony and listening



In testimonial narratives the complex temporalities of memory, of recall and of narrating experiences of atrocity are multiple and embodied. Charlotte Delbo, political prisoner and survivor of Auschwitz makes a distinction between what she has called deep memory, the sensory recall and embodied imprints of violence, and common memory, the cognitive recall of violence in language.²⁴ For Delbo, as a witness-survivor who remained committed to the politics that led to her participation in the armed underground resistance in occupied France during the Second World War, deep memory, the memory of the skin, of the body, remains outside of language. There are no words for this memory imprinted

²³ For a critical discussion on the relationship between orality, collective memory and leftist historiography in South Africa, see Gary Minkley and Ciraj Rassool, “Orality, memory and social history” in Sarah Nuttall and Carli Coetzee (eds.), *Negotiating the Past: The Making of Memory in South Africa* (Cape Town Oxford University Press, 1998), pp 89-99.

²⁴ See Charlotte Delbo, *La Mémoire et les Jours* (Paris: Berg International, 1995), pp13-14. I follow Lawrence Langer’s translation of Delbo’s concepts of *la mémoire profonde* (deep memory) and *la mémoire ordinaire* (common memory). See his *Age of Atrocity: Death in Modern Literature* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978).

in the body other than those that signal the existence of the embodied traces of an experience that remains unwordable. For deep memory is of a different signifying order. It is the embodied inscription of the terror of state violence carved into the skin and memories of the senses. It is the speech of the body as interminable reminder, for survivors, of the cost of having survived. The “untold” of deep memory is not tellable except at the level of a second order of description (social and cultural space permitting) that signifies the presence of the “untold”. What is important here is less a question of the epistemological validity regarding representability or sayability than a witness-survivor’s *avowal* of alienation, her/his *perception* of something incommunicable as a metacritical observation in and of itself. This is particularly significant regarding the ontologies of silence. Common memory, on the other hand, is the recollection of events, experiences, and impressions that may be worded. Common memory may be organised in testimony as narrative.²⁵ This dimension of memory affirms how the act of testifying may be also an act of sociality, or rather, an enduring or restored *belief* in sociality, in the restoration through language of a practice of human community. The significance of Delbo’s distinction is that it shifts the challenge of understanding and making meaning away from the witness-narrator alone and places it on the interlocutor, whether individual, collective or institutional. This alerts the addressee of traumatic memory to her/his own historical and experiential locatedness, to her/his mediated ways of cognitively engaging testimonies of atrocity. By highlighting the importance of the context of interpellation,

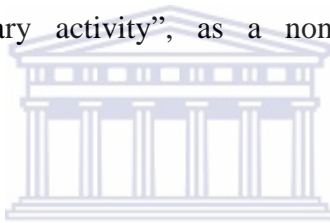
²⁵ For an elaboration of Delbo’s distinction of common and deep memory see Heidi Grunebaum, “Tracing Memory: Representation and the Auschwitz Experience in Charlotte Delbo’s ‘Auschwitz et Après’” (Masters dissertation, University of Cape Town, 1997) and Heidi Grunebaum and Yazir Henri, “Re-membering Bodies, Producing Histories: Holocaust Survivor Narrative and Truth and Reconciliation Commission Testimony” in Jill Bennett and Rosanne Kennedy (eds.), *World Memory: Personal Trajectories in Global Time* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp 101-118.

Delbo points, by implication, to the relationality of testimony to its context of utterance. This renders the testimonial project always already fragile. Dori Laub's emphasis on the importance of the listener, as a secondary witness in the co-creation of testimony reminds us that whilst the rendering of testimony *as* testimony cannot be a solitary labour, the witness-narrator's recall of atrocity may challenge the cognitive and interpretative frameworks of the interlocutor.²⁶ Laub's concerns bring us back to the challenge that Njabulo Ndebele raises earlier in this chapter when he observes that although the events recalled publicly at the TRC "actually happened", they may yet "sound like imaginary events". The horror of what "actually happened" may exceed the interlocutor's imaginative capacity to understand and, therefore, to comprehend. The role of the addressee and interlocutor is one that calls for listening, acknowledging *and* imagining in the process of making testimony. This point is particularly striking when recalling that the TRC called its testimonial forum "hearings" and not "tellings."

In dominant psychoanalytical approaches to traumatic memory and the integration of trauma in testimonial narratives, however, the structure of relationality and the fragility of the testimonial process are inverted. Drawing off psychoanalytical genealogies of trauma theories, Bessel van der Kolk and Onno van der Hart, for example, maintain a distinction between traumatic memory - the voluntary or, very often, involuntary recollection of traumatic experience - and narrative or ordinary memory that are initially not unlike Delbo's. Their distinction underscores Delbo's own in that narrative memory envisages a particular notion of human community in its address through language to a listener.

²⁶ Dori Laub, "Bearing Witness or the Vicissitudes of Listening" in Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), pp 57-74.

Narrative memory is an integrative and “social act”. According to them, however, traumatic memory “has no social component; it is not addressed to anybody, the [witness] does not respond to anybody; it is a solitary activity.”²⁷ In this understanding trauma is a sign for physiological/neurological “disorder”, a symptom of dis-ease that falls back on the “sufferer”. This understanding constructs traumatic memory (as well as nosologies of trauma) as a biomedical and intrasubjective pathology. This approach dehistoricises traumatic memory by detaching it from its historical, structural and material causes. This would ignore then that it is the epistemological undergirding of hegemonic (Western) trauma theory itself (and as it informs mental health practices), which establishes traumatic recall as “a solitary activity”, as a non-address that has “no social component.”²⁸



Whilst critical interventions that highlight the challenge of mass atrocity to normative modes of cognition (and imagination) offer significant theoretical insights, they reify a Western liberal notion of the (universal) subject of trauma as an intrapsychically bounded and “pathologised” individual understood as a “victim” and a survivor. Not only do such theories promote an essentialising biomedical understanding of traumatic experience, they construct a patronisingly reductive subject (and speaking) position for the “victim” (who may very well be “victimized” but who has many other roles, identities, attachments and coping strategies besides) as well as a passive and disempowered subject

²⁷ Bessel van der Kolk and Onno van der Hart, “The Intrusive Past: The Flexibility of Memory and the Engraving of Trauma” in Cathy Caruth (ed.), *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1995), p 163.

²⁸ Ruth Leys’ critique of the underlying theoretical premises of trauma studies rests on her thesis that the theoretical apparatus itself mimetically reproduces that which it seeks to explain. See Ruth Leys, *Trauma: A Genealogy* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2000).

position.²⁹ This displaces the embeddedness of socio-economic and political dimensions of the aetiologies of traumatic experience. Whilst retroactive social and political claims for justice through litigation may arise from the forms of harm that theories of biomedical trauma explain and “prove”³⁰, future-oriented collective narratives (as testimony) for radical social and political change are, rather, unhinged by such theories. Instead of “pathologising” or abnormalising the social and perceptual structures of racial capitalism, for example, or dominant epistemological and cultural conditions that cannot recognise, understand, make social or tolerate traumatic memory as a first step towards addressing the urgent need to change the structures and materiality of context in which the affect of traumatic experience is lived, it is, rather, the individual who is pathologised and in need of change envisaged as “curing” or “healing”. Speech enters the scene, as a “talking cure”, as a privileged one in a range of curative complements to the palliative of time’s passage. This, in turn, establishes “voice” in a particular temporal vector regarding testimony, witnessing and “the past.”³¹

This brings us to the disjunctive temporalities and intentionalities of silence, as it relates to voice, in testimony. Many people did not give testimony at the HRV hearings, either

²⁹ In this regard, see Derek Summerfield’s critiques of the “trauma model” in Derek Summerfield, “The Social Experience of War and Some Issues for the Humanitarian Field” in Patrick J. Bracken and Celia Petty (eds.), *Rethinking the Trauma of War* (London: Free Association Books, 1998), pp 9-37 and Derek Summerfield, “A critique of seven assumptions behind psychological trauma programmes in war-affected areas” in *Social Science and Medicine* (48, 1999), pp 1449-1462. See also, Patrick J. Bracken, Joan E. Giller and Derek Summerfield, “Psychological responses to war and atrocity: the limitation of current concepts” in *Social Science and Medicine* (40, 8, 1995), pp 1073-1082.

³⁰ See for example John Mowitt, “Trauma Envy” in *Cultural Critique* (46, 2000), pp 272-297 and Christopher J. Colvin, “Performing the Signs of Injury: Critical Perspectives on Traumatic Storytelling after Apartheid” (unpublished Ph.D dissertation, University of Virginia, 2004).

³¹ One of the pamphlets distributed publicly in 1996 at the onset of the HRV hearings in April appeals to prospective witnesses to give statements to the TRC by calling on people to “Speak Out”. TRC banners displayed at hearings included the slogan, “Truth Hurts but Silence Kills”.

because they have refused the reductive and passive category of “victim” which may not be a “meaningful” label - particularly for revolutionaries and political activists, or because they were not defined as "victims" according to the definitions of the Pronura, or because they were not prepared to publicly testify for personal, social, familial, cultural or political reasons. The silences of psychosocial recovery, the silences of refusing to give testimony, the silences of embodied affect and its temporalities, the silencing of the listener, institutional and other, are as layered and as mediated as the speech of testimony.³² Silences, whether strategic or constitutive, relate also to the problematic reception of testimonies, in which not hearing what is not said, and not hearing what is may be as silencing as the forms of listening that recast unredemptive or contestatory narratives of atrocity and survival into collective narratives of historical meaning. The challenge of silence in testimony is one that does not call for a trained “expert” to decode the untold, or to recode it in ways that interpret what the witness-narrator is “really” saying, better than the witness-narrator her/himself. This sets up an interpretative framework for hearing and listening that may very well redouble the silencing of the “world”-as-unwilling-listener by refiguring the “world” as listener who interprets in order precisely to avoid understanding. The implications of silences for historical narratives in the context of the TRC’s judicial and forensic findings are significant then. For witness-narrators a referential historical truth *is* an overarching reality. This may refer as much to the horror of Apartheid violence as to the individual and collective cost of resisting and defying. It is to this reality which so many testimonies have been committed and to which

³² For an elaboration on the gendered aspects of testimonial silences and institutional silencing see Fiona Ross, “Bearing Witness: Women and the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission” (Ph.D dissertation, University of Cape Town, 2000). For a discussion on testimonial silences and embodied memory, see Heidi Grunebaum and Yazir Henri, “Re-membering Bodies”, pp 101-118.

their difficult utterance may attest. Yet for normative empirical, legalistic and forensic demands which gird the production of historical truths, the concept of silence may represent more an epistemological resistance to assimilating what remains lodged (strategically, intentionally or not) in the archaeology of testimony as “untold”, than as an undisclosed “fact” waiting to be excavated.

Voice, nation and the “untold”

Premised in the authorising inscription of the Pronura is that if testimony and the memory of “untold suffering and injustice” serves a vision of the future (“human rights, democracy and peaceful co-existence”), implicit in such a vision is a redemptive conception of the past. The promise of the law to the “nation” is analogous to the promise of law to the witness-narrator: a promise of a transaction, of an exchange. In the terms of this exchange set by the law, giving voice to atrocity (described as “untold suffering”) transforms violence into violation, suffering into victimhood, pain into restoration and speaking into healing and the recuperation of dignity. These are the transactional terms of what makes of testimony a commodity and suffering its auratic allure. For the “new nation” the law’s promise is to transform “untold suffering” and the disclosure of individual accounts of atrocity into redemptive narratives of liberation, “healing”, closure. The promise of law is that testimony can be assimilated into discourses of nation-building, into shared representational approaches to the past and into discourses of reconciliation.

The social and political currency of voice in liberal democracy circulates as a metaphor for the forms of individual and collective freedom that such polities, in their current forms, promote. “Having a voice” is deployed, for example, in the rhetoric of electoral campaigns as a metaphor of universal franchise (“Make your voice heard, make your mark”, for example, as slogans on party political campaign posters). Conversely, the “triumph” of voice stands as a marker for the realisation of the forms of (universal) freedom upheld in the promise of constitutional liberal democracy whilst “voicelessness” signs unfreedom, exclusion and oppression. The affiliations of voice-as-empowerment to democracy-as-freedom underpin the transformative terms of exchange offered by the TRC’s intention to “restore the civil dignity” of witness-narrators through their giving voice in testimony and being acknowledged by an institutional witness.

As a narrative genre, testimony to the TRC’s HRV Committee has played a central role, through its modalities and metonymic effects, in contouring new public histories and the “shared memories” or common discourses that absorb the immediacy of “experience” and the truth-effects of authenticity. As discourses of suffering – rendered as harm, woundedness and violation - have underwritten the foundational tropes of the “new” nation, the public telling and electronic dissemination of suffering has functioned as a speaking of the affect of the “past of a deeply divided society”³³ into the present time. When commenting on the relationship of the making of collective memory to the “new” nation, Alex Boraine, Deputy Chairperson of the TRC, citing H. Richard Niebuhr, observes that,

³³ Preamble to the Pronura, Act 34, 1995.

[w]here common memory is lacking, where men [sic] do not share in the same past, there can be no real community and where community is to be formed common memory must be created ... the measure of our distance from each other in our nations and our groups can be taken by noting the divergence, the separateness and the lack of sympathy in our social memories. Conversely, *the measure of our unity is the extent of our common memory.*³⁴

If collective memory is a “measure of unity” then overcoming of the “lack of sympathy in our social memories” would begin through the multiply mediated processes of testimonial dissemination. This involves forging a common discourse for a collective memory to which “the past” could refer. And this, in turn, is shaped by a shared conceptual and emotive language that is constituted from a stock of evocative, identifiable (both in the sense of recognisable as well as identificatory, as that in which people may *see themselves*) and affective symbols, images and tropes. As the many layers of proximity and distance that mediate the relationship between witnesses, testimonies, primary interlocutors, secondary witnesses and broader audiences extend, so testimony, as the embodied speech of “untold suffering and injustice”³⁵, has been distilled into the generalised suffering and depicularised harm that constitutes a new national and “common memory.” However, as another layer of listeners (technically, the radio or television audience as interlocutors and rhetorically, the public and the nation as addressees) are included in the ever-widening circles of the testimonial project as it is publicly mediated, the dynamics of testimony, as an address to an acknowledging

³⁴ Alex Boraine, “Introduction” in Alex Boraine and Janet Levy (eds.), *The Healing of a Nation?* (Cape Town: Justice in Transition, 1995), pp xvi-xvii. Emphasis is mine.

³⁵ Preamble to the Pronura, Act 34, 1995.

listener, and the challenges of listening are, as we shall see further on, increasingly complicated.

Through the naturalised, embodied and taken-for-granted materiality of voice it has been the spoken words of testimony that have constituted the disembodied archive and embodied “repertoire”³⁶ of collective memory for the “new” nation. This has occurred through a double operation. Firstly, the formal features distinguishing testimony from story-telling endow it with the referential authority and ontological attributes of “authentic” experience through the physical presence of the witness-narrator, the first-person narrative voice and the sonorous immediacy of voice. The immediacy of narration, the “living” presence of the witness-narrator as she/he speaks index the authenticity of pain as historical experience lived. Secondly, the corporeality, the physical presence of the witness-narrator whose testimony is framed in biomedical tropes of trauma, of damage and woundedness comes to stand in for the metaphoric and “wounded” corporeality of the “new” nation that requires “healing”. “Voice” and the act of speaking in testimony metaphorically embody this passage to the new “bringing” into the here-and-now of transition, the then-and-there of “violent strife, conflict, untold suffering and injustice”. Testimony, its multiple temporalities and registers, thread the past into the present of enunciation through narrative and “performance”. This temporal looping indexes an affective relationship of past to present.

³⁶ I take this term from Diana Taylor’s work on performance and cultural memory. For Taylor, the repertoire requires presence people participate in the production and reproduction of knowledge by “being there,” being a part of the transmission.” Whilst the performances, actions, and narrative underpinnings that constitute a given repertoire of cultural remembrances may shift over time and change through the specificities of context and transmission, the meanings they embody, perform and express may often remain the same. Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), p 20.

Testimony, in its immediate context of utterance within the HRV hearings was an address to an institutional “community” of listening others (commissioners, media, and family, political and local community). In its electronically disseminated form, however, testimony was an address to a dispersed and heterogeneous “national” community that was being constituted as it is being named, being referenced in its absence. So whilst witness-narrators gave specific testimonies of moments and events of immense significance in the ongoing flux and flow of their lives, the institutional framing, from the architecture of hearings, to commissioners’ comments - as punctuations, interruptions, recallings to the institutional “script” or as response and epilogues – referred to the absent and “suffering” nation as interlocutor and addressee during the hearings. For example, a TRC commissioner’s address in response to the testimony of a former liberation movement combatant called up this emergent though not-yet-existing “community” of interlocutors, the “wounded” nation when he stated:

We trust that the courage that you displayed will be taken into this new country of ours, and the very tough thing you had to say about discrimination, which is much, much wider than we ever imagine, much, more hurtful. [It was] not easy for you to say that, and to say it publicly. I'm not sure if you know, but your voice is being carried all over South Africa, on radio, and I'm very glad of that because I think the whole country [needs] to be healed. Thank you very much.³⁷

In the process of creating a common historical and memorial lexicon, a depoliticised poetics of loss and suffering is forged from “saying tough things.” What is “wider” and

³⁷ In Johannesburg, July 21, 1997. From transcript of hearing in my personal possession.

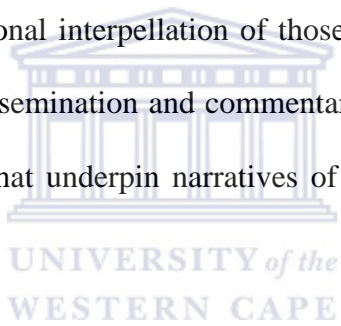
“more hurtful” than “we ever imagine” is drawn into the stock of symbols, images, tropes and concepts with which collective narratives - sanitised of their avowedly political dimensions - are shaped. In effect, this stock or constellation of tropes and concepts constitutes both a form of canonisation as well as a national repertoire, less of narratives, than of the composite of discursive and ideological elements which underwrite narrative. The forms of elision, occlusion and “disarming” of the more political dimensions of testimony that metaphorical canonisation and incorporation into a collective repertory produces may very well nurture the grounds of historical relativism. “In the case of traumatic events,” notes Dominick LaCapra,

[c]anonisation involves the mitigation or covering over of wounds and creating the impression that nothing really disruptive has occurred. Thus one forecloses that possibility of mourning, renders impossible a critical engagement with the past, and impedes the recognition of problems (including the return of the repressed).³⁸

What is helpful in this understanding is the implication that in the framing of testimony, the instrumentalisation and generalisation of historical suffering as a particular form of canonisation, are themselves historical and structural processes that *act* to occlude, to displace, to deny and to disavow the forms of historical suffering they inscribe. This is of consequence to the possibly transformative and integrative potential of the psychic and social power of “voicing” out, of speaking back *and* being heard that bearing testimony may offer. In the complex, layered and non-linear movement of emergence to speech from the shadows of historical abnegation, speaking in testimony may become an action of self-empowerment and reclamation. It may lay the grounds for a re-righting of and re-

³⁸ Dominick LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994), p 23.

insertion into institutional and official historical records from which new possibilities for asserting the need for justice and accountability may emerge (regardless of the current closure to legal forms of civil recourse). However, testimonies and the experiences they recount have been inscribed into an archive and repertoire that are located within the institutional and discursive framework of the TRC. They are also framed by broader constellations of institutions and hegemonic social processes of knowledge production. This has meant that in a myriad of ways, from definitions of “victims” and “gross human rights violations” in the Pronura to the statement-taking process from the victimised, from institutional decisions regarding the selection of HRV testimonies presented at public hearings to the institutional interpellation of those testimonies, from the media’s selection of testimonies for dissemination and commentary, testimony has been made to “fit” the discursive demands that underpin narratives of a “new” South African public history and collective memory.



Media and the commodification of pain

As testimonies have circulated through the public and real-time dissemination of HRV hearings, the “public” addressee - as viewer, interlocutor and secondary witness - has been implicated in the transactional dynamics of testimony’s narrative economy. Through the mediatization of testimony an imagined interlocutor has been constructed: the citizen of the “new” nation who could celebrate the “new” in rejecting the “old” by collectively witnessing the “authenticity” of a previously disavowed history of woundedness. This is accomplished through a visual and aural encounter and identification with the

embodiedness of pain and human loss. But how has this contributed to the ways that testimonies – always already framed, mediated, selected, atomised – have been assimilated into homogeneous, depoliticised, dehistoricised and increasingly commodified “accounts” of loss? Allen Feldman’s examination of the ways that institutional technologies of mediation anaesthetise violence offers one explanatory response. He observes that,

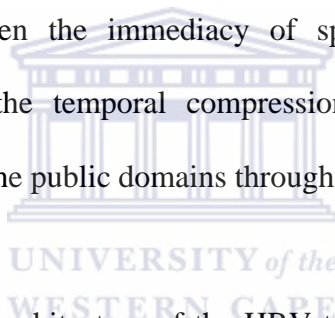
State, legal and media rationality, separately or combined, can erect a *cordon sanitaire* around disseminating public violence to the same extent that they successfully infiltrate social perception to neuter collective trauma, to subtract victims and to install public zones of perceptual amnesia which privatise and thus incarcerate historical memory.³⁹

Technologies of mass media, and the institutions of power they may reify, are constitutively implicated in the “perceptual amnesia” or cultural anaesthesia they cultivate in the ways that images and narratives of violence and human pain circulate in a perceptual economy where the interlocutor is addressed, seduced and numbed by what she/he witnesses.⁴⁰ However, as collective memory is shaped by the forms of electronic mediation that alter our sense of temporality as well as our sense of proximity to the histories it embodies, a structuring of perceptual *intimacy* and *identification* must, necessarily and simultaneously, be at work in these technologies. Watching, looking, seeing, hearing, listening and responding to the testimony is as part of the framing and

³⁹ Allen Feldman, “From Desert Storm to Rodney King via ex-Yugoslavia: On Cultural Anaesthesia” in C. Nadia Seremetakis (ed.), *The Senses Still: Perception and Memory as Material Culture in Modernity* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p 103.

⁴⁰ In this sense, it would be productive to respond to Andreas Huyssen’s challenge to explore how technologies of electronic and digital media impact on our understanding of memory as they affect perceptions of temporality and the ways in which memory is lived, experienced and understood. Andreas Huyssen, “Present Pasts: Media, Politics, Amnesia” *Public Culture* (12, 1, 2000), pp 21-38.

mediation of the testimony as the forms of institutional address/witness in which the testimony is offered. For the secondary witness as an interlocutor, wherever she/he is located in dynamic relationality to the witness – in proximity or distance, in personal investment or interested curiosity - the testimonial encounter is never passive. In order to create the *perception* of intimacy for the interlocutor who witnesses from afar and from outside the immediate testimonial forum of the hearing, technologies of media bridge the spatio-temporal and experiential structures of distance between the speaker of testimony and the multi-sited addressee. To the degree that technologies of media are technologies of control, they breach distance by constructing the perception of proximity. They bridge the spatial disjuncture between the immediacy of speech and hearing within the institutional setting through the temporal compressions of relay: the simultaneous dissemination of testimony in the public domains through television and radio.



In its institutional setting, the architecture of the HRV testimonial space itself has been significant for the ways in which a *depoliticised* and therefore generalisable poetics of pain could be assimilated into the mediatised dissemination of testimonies presented at hearings. For the architecture of the testimonial forum, the public spaces in which the hearings took place signalled the performative and ritualistic structure⁴¹ of public hearings. The architecture of the testimonial space standardised a spatial, relational and theatrical template⁴² for the institutional stagings of HRV testimonies as “stories” of

⁴¹ For an elaboration of the performative ritualistic aspects of the HRV hearings see Belinda Bozzoli, “Public ritual and private transition: The Truth Commission in Alexandra township, South Africa 1996” in *African Studies* (57, 2, 1999), pp 167-198.

⁴² William Kentridge describes the TRC itself as “a kind of ur-theatre.” William Kentridge, “Director’s Note: The Crocodile’s Mouth” in Jane Taylor *Ubu and the Truth Commission* (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 1998), p viii.

personal harm. At the hearings that I attended, for example, the panel where commissioners sat and the panel for the witness-narrators were often set on a stage, facing towards one another though some metres apart.⁴³ The witness-narrators' panel included seating for TRC briefers as well as for invited guests of the witness-narrator – often a close friend or family member. TRC banners adorned the walls of the hall or hung “stage back”, facing the audience. The tables were covered with cloths on which carafes of water, audio equipment for simultaneous translations, microphones with on/off switches were also placed. And as Fiona Ross has noted, “[a] box of tissues, placed at hand on the witness stand, was a potent symbol of the hearings.”⁴⁴ At the hearings that I went to the front row seating for the “audience” was signed and reserved for “media”. The second row for “special guests” including family and friends of the witness-narrators, “official” visitors and commission observers from abroad and then behind these designated rows, the seating for the “public”, that is, none of the other categories of “audience”. After an official greeting, welcome by the presiding commissioner (and a prayer when the presiding commissioner was Archbishop Tutu himself), “housekeeping” comments regarding the programme and protocols of the day’s hearings for the apparent benefit of media and audience, the hearings proper would begin. This was often in the form of prolegomena, “context statements” given by a deemed “expert”, an authority (never a witness-narrator), often an academic or representative of an NGO (non-governmental organisation) which historically framed and contextualised the events being testified to at the hearings.

⁴³ For a more detailed description of the architecture of public hearings see Fiona Ross, *Bearing Witness*, pp 34-38.

⁴⁴ Fiona Ross, *Bearing Witness*, p 36.

Potentially a potent mode of political and psycho-social reclamation and of claim, HRV testimony as an address to a listening, acknowledging addressee held the promise and the possibility to reclaim from the oppressor and the torturer, from the master, the madam and the scholar, the power of self-definition and the right to re-story (and restore) the self as an agent and subject of history.⁴⁵ Whilst cultivating a necessary sense of institutional decorum as well as of solemnity and respectfulness towards the testimonial process, the standardised architecture of the hearings, however, allowed for the framing and selection of mediated testimonies to be assimilated into testimonial “sound-bytes”. The voices, memories, lives and experiences of witness-narrators could be disembodied, as it were, split-off from the real bodies and real lives of those in whose name the new nation, in the idealised metanarrative of reconciliation, was being imagined into existence. The structures of power, dissemination and narrativity that technologies of mass media represent determine, to a large extent, the narrative forms that testimonies take as they are reframed in their dissemination. Hence, the ways in which testimony is mediated, disseminated, assimilated and interpreted into a foundational narrative may produce second or third order narratives that are far more widely circulated and known. And it is at these levels of secondary and tertiary narratives, as documentaries, daily news items, televisual magazine programmes, radio talk-shows and so on that the footprints of institutions of power, from media, to social commentators, from politicians to academics are inscribed.

⁴⁵ See for example, Inger Agger and Soren Buus Jensen, “Testimony as Ritual and Evidence in Psychotherapy for Political Refugees” in *Journal of Traumatic Stress* (3, 1, 1990), pp 115-130.

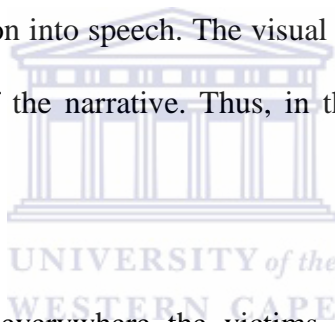
Media technologies enable the simulated intimacy of the face-to-face encounter. These permit an identificatory encounter with pain and the associative affect of its voice's authenticity. At the same time, they also cultivate the perceptual conditions to *forget* the structural and historical connections of relationality and agency to the causes of the atrocity and modes of complicity, collaboration and benefit that these connections imply. This can be illustrated by examining a short television insert, aired in June 1997⁴⁶ and produced for the weekly actuality program, *Truth Commission Special Report*, the program that presented, summarised and commented on the TRC hearings of the previous week. Fourteen months after the first HRV hearings had begun in East London⁴⁷, television journalist, Annaliese Burgess compiled and narrated this ten-minute insert on the HRV hearings as a "reminder", not to forget the "voices of the 'victims' of the past", as former anti-Apartheid journalist and the program's host and editor, Max Du Preez puts it in his introduction to the insert. The insert begins with the camera slowly panning across the audience and proceedings at this first public hearing of the HRV Committee in East London. Burgess begins the narrative as the camera pans.

Burgess (voiceover) [...] in the glare of the world's media they (the 'victims') stepped where no-one had gone before; and they spoke the first words in the great telling of our shameful and proud past. There were the wounded and the pained, and then there were those with great loss in their heart and anger in their veins. They were the brave pioneers of the Truth Commission, those who led all the others to weave their truths into the patchwork quilt of a new history.

⁴⁶ *Truth Commission Special Report*, Produced by Max Du Preez for South African Broadcasting Corporation Television, SABC 3, June 1997. From personal collection of video recordings of "Truth Commission Special Report".

⁴⁷ Held on the 15 April 1996

As Burgess describes the genesis of HRV hearings over the first year of public operation of the TRC, her voiceover is heard together with a visual track that consists, mostly, of edited footage of testimonies from different HRV and special hearings. In this montage of tightly cropped close-ups, the embodied surfacings of emotion striated across the witness-narrators' faces, onto which the voiceovers of the English-language translations (the voices, that is of the translator/interpreters and not of the witnesses) are spliced, a visual and linguistic poetics of pain is constructed. Masking its construction, the narrative flattens and homogenises testimonies into a "great", departicularised and dehistoricised "Telling", unmoored from the multiple historical, political and social contexts of its enunciation or even its evolution into speech. The visual clips of selected testimonies are edited to "fit" the poeticity of the narrative. Thus, in the third-person narrative voice, Burgess continues,



[...] and from everywhere the victims came. Some were silver-haired elders, others impassioned young lions and some were even small, little lions. The stories were of torture and abduction. They spoke about massacres and wars. They spoke about the killing of whole families. There were those who wept about loved ones who disappeared without trace. There were those who... And there were those who felt their own guilt like a knife. But the common thread was that everywhere, the extent of the horror was more than anyone had ever expected. [...] Few remained untouched as the floodgates were wedged open. [...] And then there were those who became part of the telling and through that sought some reconciliation. But what did all those who came to bare their souls seek? For many it was simply enough to tell their story to a nation whose time it was to listen. Others wanted to lay the past to rest. Again and again they asked for the remains of those who disappeared. Over the fourteen months the South African truth process developed its own unique identity. Even while listening to the most harrowing testimony people could still laugh, people sang, gave comfort

to others and when there was nothing more to say, they
prayed. (End of insert)
Max du Preez: Now for something entirely different.

The splicing of testimonies into this televisual narrative of history-weaving splinters the historicity, social and political specificities, as well as the cultural and linguistic embeddedness of the witness-narrators' testimonies from the ebb, flow and continuities of their lives. Whilst homogenising and generalising the pain of the "victim", the soundtrack of the third person narrative voice is superimposed on the voices of the witness-narrators who take an iconic function through the visual force of montage but whose voices are effectively *spoken over*. Not only do such visual and narrative poetics neutralise the social and political potency of the witness-narrator's speaking position, they undermine the witness-narrator *as* a speaking subject (outside of the "sound-bytes" that are tracked in, though these affirm the use-value of testimony rather than the witness-narrator's active speaking position). This, together with the montage of visual footage reifies the ways in which the TRC witness-narrator is set up as a potent, though silenced, post-Apartheid icon of Apartheid suffering.

The montage of close-up shots of the witness-narrators, commissioners (the iconic image of Archbishop Desmond Tutu, in particular) and of the audience draws the television viewer into the *piercing* emotion of the edited scene. The television viewer, wherever she or he is located, becomes another witness, an addressee in a simulation of a face-to-face encounter. The "viewer" - as both a spectator and an addressee of testimony - is drawn into a *non-reciprocal* relation of witnessing: a dynamic of seeing, hearing and encounter that creates the perception, an illusion (the screening) of a face-to-face encounter which

allows for an empathic substitution (through a framing that permits an over-identification with the pain of the witness) in witnessing rather than an “empathic unsettlement”⁴⁸ in witnessing, as Dominick LaCapra calls it. The latter would open the cognitive space for a witnessing that may build social solidarity and transformation rather than annulling its possibility.⁴⁹ Instead, “we” all become “victims” and the crucial disjuncture between the addressee/spectator as secondary witness and the witness-narrator of testimony in which such a cognitive space and social possibility would be installed is breached. This televisual mediation and re-presentation of the HRV hearings stands as but an instance of the ways that a spatio-temporal interface of personal memories and public history-making is constituted as it empties both of their potent charge for rallying social change. This is about witnessing in order to “lay the past to rest”. Assimilated into the discursive foundation of the “new” nation, “whose time it was to listen”, testimony is transacted by and into the TRC's discursive thrust of a syncretic nation-building. Predicated on notions of reconciliation, collective memory and shared history, or rather, history as a tapestry of “versions”, this thrust dissimulates historical relationality, human agency and responsibility in the making of a testimonial project.

⁴⁸ Dominick LaCapra, “Trauma, Absence, Loss” *Critical Inquiry* (25, 4, Summer, 1999), p 699.

⁴⁹ In his theorisation on the distinction between absence and loss, LaCapra warns that, [...] in post-traumatic situations in which one relives (or acts out) the past, distinctions tend to collapse, including the crucial distinction between then and now wherein one is able to remember what happened to one in the past but realize one is living in the here and now with future possibilities. I would argue that the response of even secondary witnesses (including historians) to traumatic events must involve empathic unsettlement that should register in one’s very mode of address in ways revealing both similarities and differences across genres (such as history and literature). But a difficulty arises when the virtual experience involved in empathy gives way to vicarious, and empathy with the victim seems to become an identity.

Dominick LaCapra, “Trauma, Absence, Loss”, p 699.

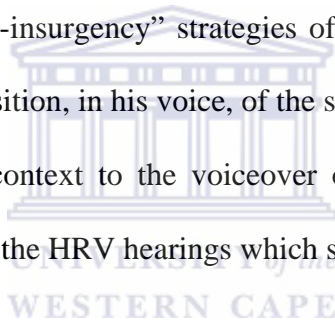
Unhinging the political

The mediation and mediatisation of testimony as embodied marker of a collective ontological woundedness of the new nation involves a disembodiment of testimony which has displaced both the interpretative, historical and political substance of testimony and of the *act* of testifying itself, of bearing witness. It would seem that where a poetics of pain is so central and constitutive to the ways in which testimony is mediated, witnessed and consumed, there exists a constitutive and antagonistic tension between the perception and identification of woundedness and an engagement and encounter with the political, therefore, socially transformative aspects of testimony. This has consequence both for the question of the restoration of “civil dignity”, insofar as this was envisaged by the TRC, as well as for the issue of responsibility as it relates to acknowledgement, social change and historical consciousness. Televisual narratives, such as the insert discussed above, resolve this tension by framing and foregrounding those aspects of testimony that unambiguously index the witness-narrator’s “woundedness” whilst unhinging testimony from its political dimensions.

Instead of enriching, humanising and complicating our engagement with politics, pain rather displaces the politics and our engagement with it. In this sense, televisual mediations of testimony enter a depoliticising economy of witnessing in which tropes of dominant (Western) discourses of trauma loom large. A particularly striking example of this is seen in another *Truth Commission Special Report*.⁵⁰ It includes an insert reporting

⁵⁰ *Truth Commission Special Report* Produced by Max Du Preez for South African Broadcasting Corporation Television, SABC 3, 28 July 1996.

on the HRV hearings during the previous week in Worcester,⁵¹ a small, agricultural town in the Western Cape, about two hundred kilometres north of Cape Town. Leading up to the hearings a little further in the insert, the journalist-narrator⁵² introduces a “guide”, a resident of Zwelathemba⁵³ and anti-Apartheid activist. The “guide” is invited to provide a historical context to the hearings. This includes an explanatory background to the forms of political resistance in that region as organised resistance encountered and was encountered by evolving forms of Apartheid state terror: from the mid-nineteen seventies (following the national student uprising that began in Soweto and then across the country in June 1976) as well as later phases of Apartheid state repression: developments in the state’s “security” and “counter-insurgency” strategies of the nineteen eighties. The clip moves from the activist’s exposition, in his voice, of the specificities of local resistance in a broader national historical context to the voiceover of the journalist who links the activist’s historical narrative to the HRV hearings which she now introduces.



The journalist-narrator presents the witness-narrators selected for the insert as political activists who, deciding to not go into exile, remained in the country, and “[...] this week they told the commission of torture, of killings and of the pain that is so hard to forget.” The visual footage cuts to the first witness-narrator. His name and a brief description of the “violation” he has experienced, flash momentarily at the bottom of the television screen. He appears in the frame of the camera and the television screen, in a tightly cropped close-up. The clip selected from his testimony is of the moments in which he

⁵¹ Hearings of 24-26 July 1996

⁵² The journalist-narrator who compiled the insert on the Worcester hearings is not named in this particular edition of “Special Report”.

⁵³ Zwelathemba is the “township” located on the peripheries of Worcester, established to provide forced black labour to the town’s agricultural and domestic sectors.

speaks of his torture whilst in prison. Testifying in isiXhosa, his voice is faintly audible below the audio track of the translator's voice.⁵⁴ The camera cuts to the commissioner's panel and slowly pans horizontally across their table, registering the expressions and responses of the commissioners as they listen. It cuts to the audience; another slow pan across the hall, punctuated by the zoomings in and out of individual faces in the audience. Cut to the clip of the second witness-narrator who, in his own voice, in English, speaks of his experiences as a political prisoner and his "interrogation" by security police. Cut to the clip of the third witness-narrator. He too speaks in isiXhosa. Again it is the voice of the translator that is heard on the audio track. The parts of this testimony selected for the insert are those where the witness-narrator speaks about the psychological effects of having been detained under Section 29 of the Apartheid state's Internal Security Act.⁵⁵ The three testimonies are edited into a successive sequence. The clip now cuts to the voiceover of the journalist-narrator and visual track of a woman outdoors portrayed in a close-up shot as well. There is a change of setting: the natural light of the outdoor shot, the trees that quiver lightly. The journalist-narrator introduces the woman and states that she "had similar experiences *but* she stopped being a victim." Now the woman speaks: "I want to say I am healing somehow. Ek is gesond. Ek is okay. Ek het dit deurgegaan; ek

⁵⁴ Of course, the simultaneous interpreting of testimonies at the TRC hearings adds another layer to the ways in which "voice" is associated affectively to testimony. On the role of interpreters in the "voicing" and translating of testimonies at TRC hearings, see Tony Weaver, "Anguish of the Glass Booth" in *Siyaya* (3, Spring 1998), pp 10-12.

⁵⁵ Section 29 of the Apartheid state's Internal Security Act, No.74, 1982 allowed for the indefinite detention, "interrogation", and torture of political detainees in solitary confinement. See Don Foster with Dennis Davis and Diane Sandler, *Detention and Torture in South Africa: Psychological, Legal and Historical Studies* (Cape Town and Johannesburg: David Phillip, 1987) and Max Coleman (ed.), *A Crime Against Humanity: Analysing the Repression of the Apartheid State* (Johannesburg: Human Rights Committee, Bellville: Mayibuye Books, Cape Town: David Philip, 1998).

het gepraat daaroor [...]” (I am healthy/healed. I am okay. I went through it; I spoke about it). Her words frame the narrative of the insert on the Worcester hearings as an epilogue and the journalist-narrator then introduces the HRV hearings that took place in Ashton (also in the Western Cape and near Worcester). By juxtaposing the selected fragments of the three men’s testimonies from the Worcester hearings with the interview “outside” of the hearings (edited to communicate a moral message, to equate speaking with healing and with choosing to stop “being a victim”), an image of the witness-narrators as homogenous and wounded “victims” of human rights abuse is set up.

Coming to voice, speaking in testimony in a public forum, is equated to the facile and reductive notion that bearing and witnessing testimony publicly may bring “healing”. Acknowledgement for the witness-narrator of testimony here (in the terms of the narrative framing of the televisual insert), is not for the witness as a self-defining author of social action and meaningful change, as a social and political commentator, or as an agent of history and historical interpretation but for the witness as a damaged *individual*. Overlaying the atomisation of the witness-narrator from the broader socio-historical context and the infantilisation of the speaking subject as social activist *and* survivor are the conflated assumptions that public testimony offers a catharsis and a healing. Linking Christian confessional notions of disclosure as revelation Western psychotherapeutic notions of speaking as healing, telling as "narrative therapy", and the televisual mediation of testimony establishes an homogenising iconic template of the witness-survivor as “victim” in which pain is the central feature of this identity. If the *political* framings of these three testimonial moments were foregrounded the speech in testimony of these

witnesses could be heard as a witness of commemoration *as well as* a witness of evidence and accusation. This would crucially affirm the social and political importance of speaking as a (symbolically also) reclamative act, and not only as a (possibly only) therapeutic one. It would also attest both to the struggle to effect socio-political change and to the psychosocial, individual and collective price of that struggle (living with the after-effects of administrative detention, political imprisonment and torture).

By masking the particularities and complexities of political testimonies of uprising, survival *and* pain the multiple, complex and often contradictory speaking positions that witness-narrators occupy is covered over. For the most part, testimonies to the HRV hearings was presented either by political activists or, in the case of those who were disappeared and those who were killed, the testimony of a family member, comrade-in-arms or next-of-kin. Many witnesses assumed speaking positions both as subjects of their testimony as well as of agents of the revolutionary struggle for liberation speaking *for* collective political aspirations. Such speaking positions are complex, multiple and dynamic. In their multi-faceted locations, roles and relational identities (individual and collective) they challenge the reductive category of the witness-narrator as simply a “victim”. Such speaking positions are constitutively endowed with the ontological authority of the survivor/eye-witness. This strengthens testimony’s metonymic function to represent a collective claim for social justice that is at once historical and future-oriented. Framing testimony under the sign of pain alone, however, inscribes the heroism of everyday forms of resistance, the courage of resistance and of hope and the forms of repression with which the state met such collective expressions as anonymous, as

ahistorical as they are emptied of the radical politics of change to which such testimony has borne witness.

Testimonial appropriations

Testimonies and transcripts of testimonies borne publicly to the TRC exist in multiple forms (electronic, printed, audio-visual) and in many sites (the internet, the ministry of justice, the national archives, university archives abroad, the public broadcaster), ostensibly as a “public archive”. This raises a number of complex challenges concerning the forms of knowledge that are produced through the never-neutral, never-passive act of witnessing. These challenges are informed, in turn, by a set of ethical, political, critical and *economic* questions regarding the appropriation and use of testimonies. Many creative, cultural and academic responses to witnessing have justified the use of testimonies to the TRC as a “giving voice” to the experiences of an insurgent oppressed who, having been tortured, mutilated, silenced and excluded from official national histories, are now inserted back into history. When these responses frame secondary and tertiary narratives the use of testimony is often justified as an act of historical reclamation, as a form of civic and “human rights” pedagogy (through literature, theatre, academic research) and, increasingly, as a universal “expert” knowledge (learning from “the past”) applicable to so called “developing” countries grappling with the devastations of war. As testimonies to the TRC have circulated in the public realm appropriated, framed, edited, analysed, interpreted and rewritten, the extraction and commodification of suffering has increasingly come to be characterised by what could be understood as a

general and violent plunder of testimonies. Underlying the appropriation of testimony is the unproblematised conception of TRC testimonies - and the iconic personae of witnesses themselves - as constituting a “public archive” from which their voices, images and words may be extracted, fragmented, edited, poeticised and re-circulated. This is justified against the claim that since testimonies were given publicly at hearings they unproblematically and continuously constitute a “public archive.”⁵⁶

The question of testimonial appropriation goes to the core of what has made the South African TRC qualitatively different to truth commissions that preceded it: the public modes of its institutional proceedings and the multiple framings and sites of “voicing” this entailed. Although the TRC as an institutional process has come and gone, and whilst much public debate, advocacy and lobbying continues regarding its “unfinished business”⁵⁷ (relating to symbolic reparations, post-commission prosecutions and social remembrance), the issue of testimonial appropriation raises critical questions as to the local, national and international capital of testimony as information and of individual “life experience” as knowledge (ethnographic, historical, literary, aesthetic and so on). For as testimonies have entered into an increasingly digitised global information and knowledge economy they have become disconnected from the witness-narrators’ life circumstances, and hence, from the historical, socio-political and material contexts, meanings and intentions of their utterance. Increasingly, testimonies circulate nationally and internationally for the edification of many a career and for the consumption of many

⁵⁶ This “public” archive is also a “virtual” archive. Testimonies presented “publicly” have been transcribed, translated, housed on the internet and open for unconditional and unconditional access. They are downloadable from the South Africa’s Department of Justice’s website at <http://www.doj.gov.za/trc>

⁵⁷ I borrow this term from the title of Terry Bell and Dumisa Ntsebeza’s book, *Unfinished Business: South Africa, Apartheid and the Truth* (Cape Town: RedWorks, 2001).

audiences, multiple (usually white, middle-class) publics and diverse purposes - from juridical and rights-based claims for solidarity, reparation or prosecution, to academic and aesthetic production - as commodified “sound-bytes” and homogenised “stories”. Crucially, on entering the global information economy, testimonies are delinked from the witness-narrator’s “right of inspection”.⁵⁸ Testimonies may be and are continuously downloaded from the internet, accessible through institutional archives - with varying degrees of difficulty according to the institution in which they are housed – and are used, edited, interpreted, aestheticised and circulated in so many secondary and tertiary narratives ranging from the literary, dramatic, documentary film, and academic to prescribed reading lists for TRC-related courses at universities.

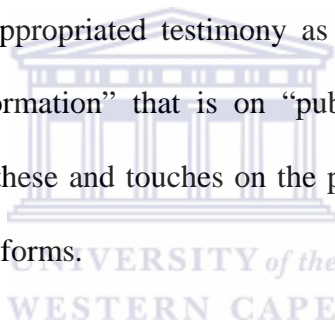
For anyone with a passing familiarity with the South African TRC industry a few singular examples of testimonial appropriation have starkly stood out.⁵⁹ Indeed a number of scholars, critics, intellectuals and activists have critiqued these individual instances of testimonial plunder and have raised the stakes of such plunder by putting the ethics of appropriation, aestheticisation and interpretation of the testimonies of witness-narrators by “expert” interlocutor/interpreters on the critical agenda.⁶⁰ However, to critique

⁵⁸ Jacques Derrida and Bernard Stiegler, *Echographies of Television. Filmed Interviews*, Translated by Jennifer Bajorek (Cambridge: Polity, 2002), p 31.

⁵⁹ Antjie Krog’s *Country of My Skull* (Johannesburg: Random House, 1998) stands out as one of the most obvious and cited examples of testimonial appropriation.

⁶⁰ See, for example Rosanne Kennedy, “Stolen Generations testimony: trauma, historiography and the question of ‘truth’” in *Aboriginal History* (25, December, 2001), pp. 116-131; Jill Bennett, “*Tenebrae* after September 11: Art, Empathy, and the Global Politics of Belonging” in Jill Bennett and Rosanne Kennedy (eds.), *World Memory: Personal Trajectories in Global Time* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp 177-194; Fiona Ross, “Bearing Witness to Ripples of Pain” in Jill Bennet and Rosanne Kennedy (eds.), *World Memory: Personal Trajectories in Global Time* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp 143-159; Paul Gready, “Introduction” in Paul Gready (ed.), *Political Transitions: Politics and Cultures* (London and Sterling, Virginia: Pluto Press, 2003), pp 9-12; Yazir Henri, “Reconciling Reconciliation: A Personal and Public Journey of Testifying Before the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission”

individual examples of testimonial appropriation may be a caveat that occludes how these examples are symptomatic of a more diffuse and systemic issue in the global economy of knowledge production. As important as critiques of testimonial appropriation are in interrogating the ethics and politics of voicing and the use of testimony in professional interpretative, aesthetic journalistic practices, they foreground these at the expense of the *economics* of such practices. Debates on testimonial appropriation may play out in relation to identity politics (who speaks for whom) and the politics and ethics of representation (it is generally middle-class white academics, consultants, artists, writers and film-makers – from South Africa and the global North - that have, with varying disclaimers or justifications, appropriated testimony as an assertion of entitlement-as-right to freely use such “information” that is on “public record”⁶¹). But testimonial appropriation extends beyond these and touches on the political economy of knowledge production in its current global forms.



To think about appropriation as part of the multiple layers of testimony’s mediations is to connect the politics of “voice” to the production of “expertise” in interpretative and institutional makings of knowledge-as-product. For the politics of “voice”, interpretation and dissemination are embedded in the socio-economic and institutional power relations of extraction, appropriation and interpretation of life *experience* as information. As an ongoing though shifting global form of structural power, white supremacy has and

in Paul Gready (ed.), *Political Transitions: Politics and Cultures* (London and Sterling, Virginia: Pluto Press, 2003), pp 262-275.

⁶¹ Indeed, Yazir Henri asserts that “Serious thought needs to be given to the ethics of appropriating testimony for poetic licence, media freedom, academic commentary and discourse analysis. Arguing these lines and ‘It’s on the public record’ are too easy positions to take since they do not address the rights of self-authorship and the intention of the speaker [...]”, p 266-267.

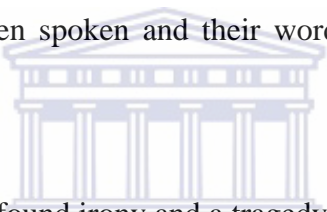
continues to subtly underlie the ways that Eurocentric (unmarked, universal) knowledge is conceived and recognised. These conceptions continue to inform research practices (not uncritiqued or uncontested, of course) which, “provincialise”⁶² the experiences, histories, words and life-worlds of the “oppressed” as they are rendered into testimony, and then translate the subject-as-object into “data” to be extracted and shaped into knowledge through the analytical procedures and discourses of “expert” interpreters. These conceptions of knowledge are informed, in turn, by the economic and social class interests vested in and promoted through the institutional sites of their production. So when the “public archive” signs the institutionalisation of the witness-narrators’ testimony as “data”, it also signals the promise of the use-value of that “data” unfettered by the necessary complications which come with discussion, negotiation, contestation, conflict and consensus that engaging the witness-narrator (as “informant”, interviewee, or even, co-author) necessarily implies. Using the testimony of the witness-narrator, without engaging the witness-narrator as an equal human being, vested (ideally and imperatively) with the equal right to self-narration, interpretation and inspection and, what Joseph Slaughter calls, “the right to control representation”⁶³, bypasses these political, ethical *and* economic tensions and contradictions. Since these tensions constitute the very interface of research, interpretative and artistic projects involving survivors of atrocity in postcolonial contexts, they are also not necessarily resolved through a collaborative or

⁶²I invert Dipesh Chakrabarty’s term here in order to foreground the ongoing monologic universalism that underpins Western and Eurocentric research methods and practices in which “Africa” continues to function as an empirical and undifferentiated “field” site. Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincialising Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

⁶³ Joseph Slaughter, “The Question of Narration: The Voice in International Human Rights Law” in *Human Rights Quarterly* (19, 1997), p 430.

participatory engagement with the testimonies' first "authors", the witness-narrators themselves.

The experience of many witness-narrators whose testimonies have been used as well as those who have participated as interviewees in interpretative projects has been characterised by a sense of exploitation as well as of retraumatisation.⁶⁴ Not only does this redouble the ways in which testimonies are disembodied, it also produces another order of violence. This may compact the effects of living with and integrating violence to which witnesses testified in the first place and impact the lives of witness-narrators long *after* their testimonies have been spoken and their words recycled. This, as Alejandro Castillejo-Cuellar points out,



[...] creates a profound irony and a tragedy: that of wanting to speak while at the same time avoiding it. When the circuit of silence is broken in the context of the distancing interviewing encounter, when the word apparently becomes an instrument of recognition, and the academic its conduit, the testimony is often "recolonized" and "robbed", as I have heard it been called by these survivors. In this way, "acknowledgment", and of course, "placing on record", become vague realities, fictional devices invented by the expert to legitimate himself, in which the victims' utterances and voices – often out of context - fill in the "gaps" left in experts' texts.⁶⁵

As the TRC "model" has been promoted internationally as a replicable mechanism of transitional justice, it has given rise to a veritable industry that has substantially enlarged the international non-governmental and academic employment sector for development, "post-conflict" and peace-building experts. Testimonies rendered into "stories" or

⁶⁴ See for example, Alejandro Castillejo-Cuellar, "Unraveling Silence: Violence, Memory and the Limits of Anthropology's Craft" in *Dialectical Anthropology* (29, 2, June 2005), pp 159-180.

⁶⁵ Alejandro Castillejo-Cuellar, "Unraveling Silence", p 173.

“narratives”, therefore, also accrue their use-value in the promise of ongoing economic benefit and professional currency.

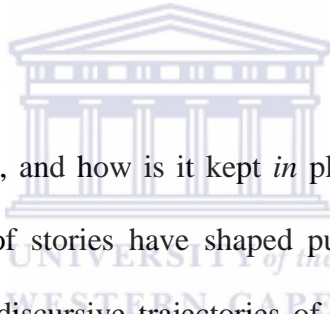
As many witness-narrators have become publicly recognisable icons through the many circulations and circuits of their TRC testimonies, their life histories and current lives are reduced to moments frozen in testimony. As their words are rendered into so many other academic, poetic, visual and interpretative forms, witness-narrators find themselves defined by the narratives of others based on a thirty minute tranche in the larger and longer adventure of their lives. Testimonies of the historically aggressed have been borne by ordinary and exceptional people. They are of political, social and student activists, of political prisoners and revolutionary combatants, of parents, lovers and siblings, of shopkeepers, children and neighbours. They have provided a fragmentary glimpse into a tormented and inspired social universe of despair and love amidst the tumult of struggle and courage. Instrumentalised, however, in a poetics of authenticity and pain, in claims for experiential proximity, in the name of a vague and ahistorical moral didacticism of “Never Again” and in the disavowed economics of career-building, the political intentions, moral and social urgency and revolutionary aspirations of testimonies become diluted by the ideological, aesthetic and interpretative agendas which may never have been present in the testimonies themselves. Such appropriations denude the witness-narrator of her/his interpretative agency, strip her/his testimony of its collective social energy and, through a disembodied narrative “effect”, consign testimony to a manageable archive and repertory that is called “the past.”

CHAPTER THREE

KEPT IN PLACE: MEMORIAL CARTOGRAPHIES AND THE POLITICS OF CONTAINMENT

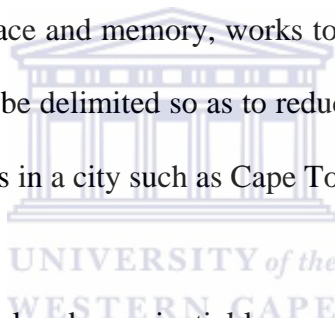
As this wave from memories flows in, the city soaks it up like a sponge and expands. A description of Zaira as it is today should contain all of Zaira's past. The city, however, does not tell its past, but contains it like the lines of a hand, written in the corners of the streets, the gratings of the windows, the banisters of the steps, the antennae of the lightning rods, the poles of the flags, every segment marked in turn with scratches, indentations, scrolls.

Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*



Where does the past find its place, and how is it kept *in* place? In the time after the TRC the stories of places and the places of stories have shaped public histories and commemorative practices in ways that mirror the discursive trajectories of the “new” nation’s imaginings. As certain narratives of place and emplaced narratives translate sites of memory into memorials and monuments, they constitute the historicity of place through the meanings they evoke. They concretise sites of memory into *perceivable* (and materialised) *objects* of the historical imagination. Other sites of memory however become naturalised, fading into the daily lived environment and the private reminiscences of individuals who carry the memories that such places evoke. For many and often conflicting reasons, unmarked sites of memory, usually located within urban topographies, are made invisible to collective social and historical meaning making.

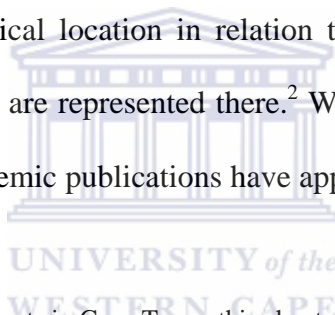
Concretised in monuments, memorials and sites of memory, places of memorial affect contain, sanitise and spatially domesticate histories of atrocity. How then do place, memory and narrative become woven together in memorials and monuments in order to constitute the kinds of regimes of “symbolic efficiencies”¹ that mediate and canalise collective expressions of historical consciousness? In addressing these questions in this chapter, I focus on the ways that spatial representations of “the past” mirror and concretise the modes of temporal, discursive and performative distinctions between past and present that are elaborated in earlier chapters. As “the past” becomes concretised in a mutually reinforcing relationship between narrative, memory and spatialised representations I explore the ways that narrative, when interceding in the mutually evocative relationships between place and memory, works to mark out *evacuated* spaces, spaces whose associative resonances may be delimited so as to reduce the deeply contested associations and experiences that “place” evokes in a city such as Cape Town.



In Cape Town the accreted historical and experiential layers of forced displacement, colonial and Apartheid land pillage, socio-economic relations of exploitation and psychosocial geographies of dislocation remain as distinct and unchanged as ever. What I call *memorial cartographies* - the routes, circuits and networks of emplaced narratives which constellate spatial and temporal relations grounding, materialising and containing historical sensibilities – map and authorise “permitted” modes of spatialised remembrances. Memorial cartographies map historical meaning, simultaneously reflecting similar forms of historical visibilisation and social occlusion that technologies of transition management, such as the TRC, inaugurate. For as memorial

¹ In the sense of the term that Slavoj Žižek evokes regarding the hypnotic force of liberalism’s symbolic injunctions. Slavoj Žižek, “What Can Lenin Tell Us About Freedom Today?” in *Rethinking Marxism* (13, 2, Summer, 2001) at <http://www.nd.edu/remarx/rm/zizek/lenin1.html>. Visited in May 2004.

cartographies map human *experience* into sets of spatial and temporal “objects” they constellate these sets into relations of visibility. In this way memorial cartographies render certain places of memorial affect into objects of cognitive contemplation and engagement, on the one hand, whilst naturalising others as part of the material and everyday environment, on the other. Space, place and the production of memorial cartographies are therefore embedded within a politics of containment. This contributes towards the ways that the socially regenerative potential of alternative modes of remembrance is displaced by the economies of reference of the “transition” that were explored in previous chapters: nation-building, reconciliation and forgiveness, for example. I illustrate this by way of an examination of the relationship between the topography of Robben Island (and its topographical location in relation to the mainland peninsula of Cape Town) and the core narratives that are represented there.² Whilst a substantial number of visual documentary, testimonial and academic publications have appeared on Robben Island³ it remains

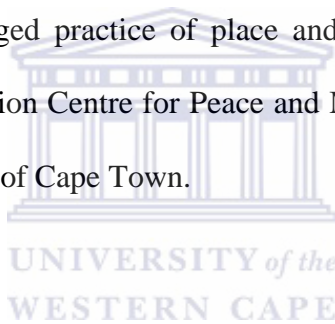


² Although I ground my theoretical arguments in Cape Town, this chapter does *not* offer a comprehensive survey of sites of memory, monuments and memorials in the city. Such a survey is beyond the scope of this study in its present form as well as tangential to the core arguments and set of ideas which are its focus. My examination of Robben Island is itself restricted. My focus on Robben Island serves, rather, to highlight the ways that its topographical location permit a particular kind of narrative and spatial anchoring which intersects with and reinforces the discursive and ideological drifts of the “transition”. This becomes spatially grounded in reciprocally edifying relations of place to memory and to narrative. Robben Island’s topographical relationship to Cape Town is vital in understanding how this occurs. Particularly since the historical “meaning” of Robben Island, as the first national museum to be consecrated following the first democratic elections in 1994 and as an international “heritage” site, was shaped at the time of the TRC and whose core narrative relates to discourses of reconciliation and nation-building that gained currency at that time. This is particularly useful in order, as James Young observes in his study on memorials and monuments of the Shoah, “to draw back into view the very process, the many complicated historical, political, and aesthetic axes, on which memory is being constructed.” James Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), p x.

³ Here I am referring to material on Robben Island that has appeared since the late nineties and not to the considerable body of documentary and testimonial work that was published earlier. See for example, Harriet Deacon, “Remembering tragedy, constructing modernity: Robben Island as a national monument” in Sarah Nuttall and Carli Coetzee (eds.), *Negotiating the Past: The Making of Memory in South Africa* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp 161- 179; Noel Solani, “The Saint of the Struggle: Deconstructing the Mandela Myth” in *Kronos* (26, August 2000), pp 43-56. Ahmed Kathrada, *Letters from Robben Island: A Selection of Ahmed Kathrada’s Prison Correspondence 1964 – 1989* (Cape Town: Zebra, 2000); Mac Maharaj (ed.), *Reflections in Prison* (Cape Town: Zebra and RIM, 2001); Fran Buntman, *Robben Island and Prisoner Resistance to Apartheid* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Annie E. Coombes *Visual Culture and Public Memory in a Democratic South Africa* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 2004), pp 54 -115.

relevant to my argument, in this chapter, for illustrating the ways that spatial splinterings and materialisations of “time” work to contain “the past”.

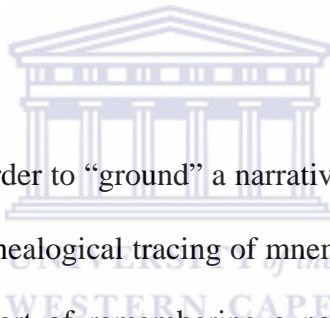
In the two previous chapters I have argued that the multiple axes on which “the past” has come to be produced, named and enumerated have fractured social and public spaces for more radical historical understandings. In the final two chapters I explore what such alternative engagements may be. So, the second half of this chapter engages the question of alternative projects of meaning-making by reflecting on a counter-memorial practice that ask for a more complicated and more activist notion of memory-work. I do this by reflecting on a project in Cape Town that promotes a more politically engaged practice of place and of memory. This is the WECAT project, a project of the Direct Action Centre for Peace and Memory, which conducts “Journeys of Remembrance” through the city of Cape Town.



Memorial cartographies

As we have seen in the discussions of the previous chapters, a number of complex and interconnected material and discursive processes govern the making of pasts, as well as the making of certain subjects into objects of the historical imagination and of memorial and commemorative practices. As new sites of memory are transformed into the memorial and commemorative landscape of the “new” South Africa, memorial cartographies are shifting, altering and deepening. At the same time certain sites of memory are deemed to be of sufficient historical and national significance to justify their transformation into memorials and monuments. Whilst this process of selection should be understood in relation to the ways that

certain sites of memory may come to reflect the civic values and ideological resonances of nation-building better than others, the physical location of such sites, particularly in cities and urban settings, significantly contributes towards the ways that some sites appear to suggest themselves for such transformation as distinct from others. For there appears to be a proportional relationship between the binding of memorial sites, spaces that effect and demarcate a visible marking off from the public and from public space, with the effective grounding of a memorial narrative (such as the core celebratory narrative of Robben Island, as we will see). The success of this relationship is linked to the degree of separation and of markings-off that are constructed between the site of the grounded narrative from the indistinct continuities of public spaces, transient spaces and thoroughfares.



This idea of spatial separation in order to “ground” a narrative has an analogy in mnemonics, the “arts of memory”. In a Western genealogical tracing of mnemonics, the rhetorical tools of recall, Francis Yates describes how the art of remembering a narrative, of “grounding” it in one’s memory is spatially troped. It is likened to the internal inscriptions on a wax writing tablet.⁴ For the rhetorician who delivers an oration must be capable of easily recalling what he/she has memorised. Yates presents the reader with the story of Simonides of Ceos, a poet and purported “inventor” of the Western arts of memory.⁵ It is said that Simonides was invited to a nobleman’s

⁴ The relationship of memory, spatial inscription and recall (as an “inner writing” and reading) to death has been reconfigured during the last century in Western epistemologies deriving from Freudian psychoanalysis to Derridian deconstruction. The persistence of *topoi* as spatial as well as psychic metaphors for memorial inscription draws attention to the continuities, resonances and blurrings of place in the marking out of distinct boundaries between the internal, subjective, psychic and cognitive “inscriptions” of memory, and the external, concrete and objectified ones. See Jacques Derrida’s analysis of Freud’s “Note upon the Mystic Writing-Pad” in Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, Translated by Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 1993), chapter 7; and Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok, *The Wolf Man’s Magic Word: A Cryptonymy*, Translated by Nicholas Rand (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

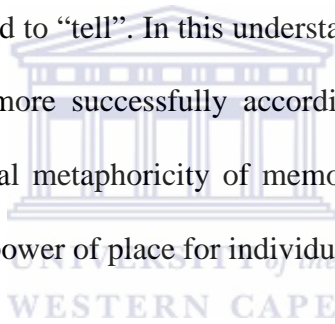
⁵ Francis Yates, *The Art of Memory* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), p 17.

banquet and summonsed outside to meet two messengers. On returning to the meal, he saw that the roof of the banquet hall had collapsed and that all those who were seated in the room had been killed. He identified the dead by recollecting where they had sat at the banquet. By remembering their places, Simonides could give the dead back their names. This allowed them to be buried and mourned by their relatives, for their symbolic place to be restored to the social order. Thus, it is said that Simonides “accidentally” discovered the power of mnemonics through recollecting the places of the dead. And it is out of the social imperative to identify, bury and grieve the dead that the early Western arts of memory arise.

In the rhetorical treatises that Yates examines the art of memory proceeds from an exercise of imaginative visualisation which calls on a mental evocation of a concrete place. An *existing* place, such as a house must be selected and a mental image of it must be formed. One must place the contents of the narrative to be remembered by allocating the different components of its contents to different rooms of the imagined place and then store these content-images in the interior spaces of the place. This is so that “[...] the order of the places will preserve the order of the things, and the images of the things will denote the things themselves, and we shall employ the places and images respectively as a wax writing-tablet and the letters written on it.”⁶ These imagined places are the *loci* of memory, places which may be easily grasped by memory. Private spaces, such as houses, are understood to be more receptive to being "inscribed" in and by memory. This is because private places are less frequented and less peopled and so may act as stronger containers of memory. Further on Yates cites another mnemonicist who suggests that the place which the rhetorician visualises in his imagination be a place that is set apart in reality,

⁶ Cicero quoted in Francis Yates, *The Art of Memory*, p 17.

in its external and physical location since such a place, set apart from the daily bustle of people, is more effective as a holder and trigger of memory. “It is better to form one’s memory *loci* in a deserted and solitary place for crowds of passing people tend to weaken the impressions. Therefore the student intent on acquiring a sharp and well-defined set of *loci* will choose an unfrequented building in which to memorise places.”⁷ Many of the rhetorical treatises that Yates studies make a distinction between places that are set apart and between places that are frequented, passed through by many people, for recalling or cognitively mapping a narrative. Although Yates’ text provides a fascinating insight into the metaphoricity of place for mnemotechnics, the “arts of memory”, it provides a striking insight, by analogy, into the ways that sites of memory are constructed to “tell”. In this understanding, places that are set apart hold and absorb particular narratives more successfully according to their physical, material and socio-psychic locations. The spatial metaphoricity of memory relates as much to psychic and cognitive place as to the affective power of place for individual and collective consciousness.

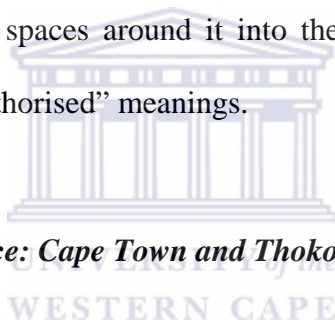


John Gillis unpacks the assumptions bound to the often twinned notions of collective memory and collective identity and the political and national projects served by the mobilisation of these concepts. He does this by stressing both the continuities and the constructed nature of spatio-temporal referents of memory.⁸ Drawing from Pierre Nora’s now-famous study on *lieux de mémoire*, sites of memory, Gillis maintains that often “temporal and topographical memory sites emerge at those times and in those places where there is a perceived or constructed break with

⁷ Francis Yates, *The Art of Memory*, p 23.

⁸ John R. Gillis, “Introduction” in John R. Gillis (ed.), *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp 3-24.

the past.”⁹ Nora’s assertion of the power of memorial spaces to function as an identificatory mnemonic, so to speak, is an assertion of the auratic power of place. It affirms the material thingness of history where one can say, “Here something happened and this is what it was.” The identificatory power of memorial sites is, however, ambivalent and contested, evoking different meanings, memories and associations for different visitors. As the spatial grounding of narrative becomes hemmed into the architectonics of the monument or memorial it also becomes a zone where desire, fantasy, memory and ideology meet. For sites of memory are also spaces of deep affect. Topographical location, the constructed materiality of a monument or memorial and the narratives that congeal around it give a place to remembrance-as-meaning. But it also draws the associations and meanings of the spaces around it into the combined reach of its centripetal materiality and into its orbit of “authorised” meanings.



Containing inscriptions of violence: Cape Town and Thokoza

These reflections inform the way that I understand the memorial cartographies of Cape Town, the interlocking networks of routes, paths and itineraries¹⁰ that link and mark sites of memory together as *topographically* and *cognitively* visible spaces. For in this city, memorial cartographies map historical memory onto the urban topography in ways that often blur the important distinctions and relationships between the historicity of memorials (and their constructions) and the historicity of urban spaces. Beneath the wisps of cloud cloth that blow across its flat-topped summit, Table Mountain stands as its own primordial monument at the

⁹ John R. Gillis, “Introduction” p 8.

¹⁰ This term and the way that I use it was suggested to me by Alejandro Castillejo-Cuellar, deriving from his conception and use of the term.

centre of the city. It is located at the core of the city's white economy and a ring of still predominantly white middle class suburbs clusters around its base. At once a geological and symbolic centre, Table Mountain is fixed in a topographical relationship of proximity to the central city and its "suburbs" and a psychological relationship of distance to the outwardly radiating urban peripheries: the "township" ghettos of the Cape Flats where social and political economies of forced resettlement, exclusion and historical erasure form the shadow side of the city's development.¹¹ In many ways Table Mountain and its relational perspectives of distance and proximity to the city's centre is a metaphor of the city's history. From the "back" of Table Mountain, a looking from the ghetto "townships" of the Cape Flats, is structured historically through a psychology of distance and disavowal. From this view of its "back", the mountain stands as a memorial to the human cost of the city's economic development; a monument to theft and pillage.¹² Here, a key pillar of the racialised socio-economic engineering of colonialism and Apartheid has been the spatial practices of urban planning. Colonial and Apartheid urban planning have all but erased the traces of the destruction of human residence not deemed "white" from the urban topography since the times of slavery and the construction of the early modern colonial city in the early nineteenth century up to the Group Areas Act and forced removals

¹¹ As the city expanded from modern colonial to late Apartheid times, its urban peripheries expanded into the Cape Flats which served as a "dumping ground" to which communities "racially" classified into which all shades of black and brown were categorized were forcibly removed. For a discussion of historically divergent yet structurally connected perceptions of Table Mountain according to the historical, racialized and class-based location of the looking subject see Heidi Grunebaum and Yazir Henri, "Where The Mountain Meets Its Shadow."

¹² "To me", writes journalist, Fred Khumalo resonating the observations above, "the mountain is a monument, a reminder of the past. Whenever I climb it [...] I get catapulted into a pensive mood and all these ugly questions about our past as a nation flood to mind." From this meditation of standing on Table Mountain, from the metonymic resonances of the mountain, he then extrapolates onto the city reflecting that in "its beauty, Cape Town is a metaphor for the times we live in as South Africans: a splendiferous life for the chosen few and a vile, sad and maddening existence for the majority." "Cape Town has its giddyding, plunging way with me" in *Sunday Times* (26 March 2006), p 21.

during Apartheid in the mid-twentieth century.¹³ Urban spatial and architectural forms continue to attest to a barely contested hegemony of colonial and Apartheid material inscription, urban organisation and the structural relations of oppression and entitlement of class, colour and “race” that these have spatialised. Increasingly, and in the logic of the rampant free-market fundamentalism that underpins current urban planning practices, the city’s urban topography of division, exclusion, exploitation, access and privilege has been reified. Around ten kilometres (and many universes) lie between the mostly white gated, restricted access, private security patrolled suburbs and the mostly black-of-all-shades ghettos of subsistence, survival and exclusion that comprise most of the neighbourhoods in the townships of the Cape Flats (“middle-class” areas, notwithstanding). Structurally two sides of the same historical coin, this topography of division and displacement is both normalised and reified through the ways in which the city is represented and the ways it represents itself. The urban planning and “development” paradigms of the present-day city maintain and, indeed, reinforce the historical forms of violence as unremarkable, ordinary and hence, as normal and banal. Distilled through the multiple spaces of the public, the private and the domestic, socio-economic and “race” violence continue both in old and new ways to be systemic and generalised.

A vital and constitutive, though often masked, historical and structural connection exists, therefore, between the naturalised spatial, socio-economic and “racial” divisions that persist under neoliberal urban planning practices and forms of historical memory that have come to be spatialised and narrativised in “new” memorials and monuments. The multiple ways in which memorial spaces are produced as visible “sites” and the networks of public and private sectoral

¹³ For example, the Masters and Servants Acts of 1856-1910; Black Land Act No. 27, 1913; Black (Native)

interests, practices and discourses that shape, act on and intersect with the production of such sites, create a stabilising and holding relationship between memory, narrative, place and spatial structure. This displaces and evacuates the meanings generated through these sites from the many spaces of everyday life that surround them, of which more in the following chapter. Containing and being contained by narrative, memorial sites and the narratives that interpret them, shore up and reduce the ranges of possible meanings generated by the memorial or monumental structure. Of course, sites of memory come to mean differently according to the affective and associative connections of the visitor, viewer, former resident, passer-by or addressee to the place. However, it is this mutually mediating relationality of sites of memory to place and narrative that the range of possible contestations for collective forms of meaning making (not necessarily individual forms) which constitute the “work” of public memory, give memorials their power as civic sites of remembrance. As memorial narratives and commemorative performances congeal around sites of memory the concreteness of monuments and memorials generate, contain and receive meaning. They visibilise and archive histories that they are constructed to represent as much as they invisibilise and “forget” the histories they may be constructed to displace. As nodal points of meaning-making they also act to “tame the memoryscape”.¹⁴ For their concrete objectness often serves to erase the traces and scars of war from the urban topography. Outside of the ways that topographically inscribed traces of war are

Administration Act No. 38,1927; Population registration Act No. 30, 1950 and Group Areas Act No. 41, 1950.

¹⁴ This evocative phrase is Lisa Yoneyama’s. The context for her discussion on the forms of historical containment that monuments, memorials and urban planning practices constitute is Hiroshima, Japan. Lisa Yoneyama, “Taming the Memoryscape: Hiroshima’s Urban Renewal” in Jonathon Boyarin (ed.), *Remapping Memory: The Politics of Timespace* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994,) pp 99-135.

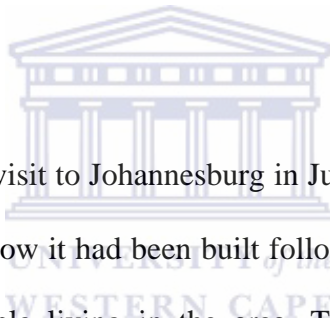
carried by individual survivors, if they are to be made collectively visible, need to be mediated, interpreted and translated.¹⁵

When sites of memory are transformed into monuments and memorials they provide spatial and narrative containers. Containment is a form of mediation that frames, holds and pins down meaning. Whilst this may create an interpretative, ideological and cognitive field that is restricted as it is narrowed, it may also, however, work against the cognitively and socially disintegrative affects of mass violence. For when sites of memory are transformed into monuments and memorials they also open the possibility for localising grief by materially and externally marking places that evoke painful associations. This is particularly significant when thinking about public spaces where death has occurred: where protests, street battles, ambushes and assassinations have taken place. When these places are located in areas characterised by structural material poverty and social abjection, such as in the ghettos and labour camps, known as the “townships”, memorials and monuments also “speak back” to the monumentalisation of white supremacy (that is, as it is represented by colonial and Apartheid memorials and monuments around the central city).¹⁶ So the forms and functions of spatial containment - as

¹⁵ So, for example, one critique of the public memorial function of the District Six area as standing in for the experiences of displacement and socio-economic dislocation caused by the Group Areas Act and forced removals is that it has displaced the experiences of forced removals everywhere else throughout, along and around the Cape Peninsula. See, for example, Zuleiga Adams, “Memory, Imagination and Removal: Remembering and Forgetting District Six”, (M.A. Mini-thesis, University of the Western Cape, 2002); Michele Paulse, “An Oral History of Tramway Road and Ilford Street, Sea Point, 1930’s-2001: The Production of Place by Race, Class and Gender”, (unpublished Ph.D Dissertation, University of Cape Town, 2002), p 11.

¹⁶ Since 2000 three memorials and monuments have been constructed in deeply charged and contested processes in townships on the Cape Flats: In 2000 a memorial was erected in Gugulethu in honour of seven young liberation combatants who were lured into an ambush in 1986 and executed. This memorial was removed and another was constructed in its place, unveiled in March 2004 after families and community support organisations intervened to replace the initial monument. The earlier monument had been rejected (and the process through which it was constructed) by the families of the seven men as insulting and undignifying. In 2000 a second monument was unveiled in Athlone in honour of four young boys who had been murdered by Apartheid state agents in August 1985. This too was rejected by the families and community and a second monument was unveiled in 2004 at the site

containment relates to multiple experiences of war and of state and structural violence - are dynamic, complex, highly nuanced and sometimes, seemingly contradictory. For there is also a deep reciprocal charge in the relationship between cognition, memory, the experiences of violence and places of war that may also overwhelm the social and psychic frameworks of a peace that works - in its lived-in contradictions - into the fabric everyday. It is all too easy to critique the forms of forgetting installed through the economies of reference that fetishise reconciliation, forgiveness and nation-building whilst “forgetting” the ever-present closeness in time and experience of war, state violence and its afterlives. By way of illustration I want to briefly digress from the regionally specific and geographically situated focus of the reflections in the rest of the chapter.



This illustration draws from a site visit to Johannesburg in July, 2000. I had heard about the new monument in Thokoza and about how it had been built following a delicate and complex peace-making process brokered by people living in the area. The memorial site for the Thokoza memorial was one of three that had been identified during negotiations with community stakeholders and the city council in 1997.¹⁷ The site on which the memorial came eventually to be constructed was chosen since it was in an area on Khumalo Street. Khumalo Street had been notorious as a “sniper’s alley” as well as a territorial boundary demarcation across and along which many running street battles had taken place - and snipers’ invisible occupation - during the wars of 1990-1994 in the Vaal townships between armed fighters of the liberation movement,

that the community had informally and unwaiveringly consecrated as a site of memory. In December 2005 a third monument was unveiled in Athlone in honour of Colleen Williams and Robert Waterwitch, two young liberation combatants that had been executed by Apartheid state agents in 1989, of which more further in this chapter.

¹⁷ Lazarus Kgalema, *Symbols of Hope: Monuments as Symbols of Remembrance and Peace in the Process of Reconciliation* (Johannesburg: Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, 1999).

“migrant” hostel-dwellers and the Apartheid state’s local paramilitary proxies. I contacted an acquaintance who lives in Thokoza, just off Khumalo Street and he offered to take me to the Thokoza memorial.

The memorial is set inside of a big grassy area, enclosed by a face-brick wall into which panels painted with doves, olive branches and memorial candles are set. A large gate opens into a bricked pathway that leads up to the memorial, a pentagonal structure comprising of engraved panels of more than six hundred names of those who were killed or disappeared during the wars as well as victims of earlier political violence.¹⁸ On the day that I visited the Thokoza memorial the gate was locked and we could not find anybody to open it for us. From outside of the gates, in the gardens on the right side of the memorial I saw two large white railway containers. The containers were closed and locked. As we stood outside waiting to see if someone would come along to open the gates for us, my acquaintance explained that the two containers housed a visual history project of the community in Thokoza. He told me that people in the community had been asked to donate photographs of friends, relatives and loved ones who had been killed or disappeared during the wars. The project was intended to extend the memorial work of naming and remembering the dead and the missing. However, whilst people in the community live with daily reminders of the war, with death, loss, injury and displacement, the photographs stirred up painful memories and bitter feelings. The recentness of the wars, the irreparability of death and loss made the photographs still too raw to “look” at. Attesting both to the piercing, pricking affect of photographs, as well as to the “points of fracture that can dissolve categories [temporal,

¹⁸ Lazarus Kgalema, *Symbols of Hope*.

spatial, conceptual] and translate visual images into real-life experience of a past [,]"¹⁹ a decision was taken to close the exhibition and to seal the containers. The experiences of war were still just too close, still too naked on the skin and not yet settled into “memory”. The containers had to be “sealed” off until the forms of “forgetting” that temporal distance permits can emerge into the settled forms of remembrance that may do it justice but may also contain (or displace) it.

The Island of the Past

Although the TRC has been but one institutional pillar shaping the contours of what is deemed to be the past and of a public and normative version of that past, the terms, concepts and ideological values – in the guise of civic and moral ones – generated through its mediated and institutional processes have deeply impacted upon the myriad of ways in which social, political and cultural meanings are attached to the past. Contemporaneous, to the unfolding processes of the TRC during the nineteen nineties, the official consecration of cultural and political heritage sites such as Robben Island resonate with the commemorative and memorial ethos of the “new” nation. That is, an ethos that promotes remembrance and celebration of a public history which projects, represents and “performs” the values of a civic morality underpinned by reconciliation and nation-building.²⁰ Moreover, the construction of a periodised and distinct temporal demarcation

¹⁹ Elisabeth Edwards, *Raw Histories: Photographs, Anthropology and Museums* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2001), p 21. See also, Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* Translated by Richard Howard (London: Vintage, 1982); Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1997); Wolfram Hartmann, Jeremy Silvester and Patricia Hayes (eds.), *The Colonising Camera: Photographs in the Making of Namibian History* (Cape Town: UCT Press, 1998).

²⁰ For further discussion see Gary Minkley, Ciraj Rassool and Lesley Witz, “Thresholds, Gateways and Spectacles: Journeying through South African hidden pasts and histories in the last decade of the twentieth century” Conference on *the Future of the Past*, University of the Western Cape, South Africa, July 10-12, 1996; Veronique Rioufoul, “The Making of a New Past for a ‘New’ South Africa: The Commemoration of Robben Island” (Masters thesis, University of Cape Town, 1999).

between past and present is spatialised in the representational practices of institutions such the Robben Island Museum (RIM).

Although its work as a national museum and UNESCO World heritage site is different from that of the TRC, as an institutional custodian of the task of nation-building, however, RIM's core narrative can be located within the same referential and ideological field as the TRC. If the TRC and official sites of memory such as RIM act as markers in the imaginary of national identity, of nation-building, it is an unpacking of the reciprocal relationship between narrative, memory and place that makes visible the processes by which the historical imagination becomes canalised and by which individual life experiences - rendered into "stories" - become assimilated into the national political project of "reconciliation."²¹ Robben Island achieved international notoriety as a political prison for anti-Apartheid activists. Although the island – a site of memory whose geology is inscribed with the accreted traces of colonial and Apartheid carceral replies to insurgency, resistance and revolution – continues to symbolise the victory of the moral integrity, courage, dignity and resistance of those who fought against oppression, its global currency as a site of memory is in its association as the prison in which former South African president, Nelson Mandela was incarcerated. During the late nineteen nineties, the island became the site of widely disseminated and highly visible commemorative performances as well as the recipient, at that time, of a large portion of the state-funded budget allocation for national heritage sites and monuments.²² To the visitor or tourist to RIM, not only is "the past" produced through the lens of

²¹ For an elaboration of the metonymic force and currency of political biography in the production of "new" South African histories, see Ciraj S. Rassool, "The Individual, Auto/Biography and History in South Africa" (unpublished Ph.D Dissertation, University of the Western Cape, 2004).

²² Veronique Rioufol cites the statistics as 28.8 million rands or 35% of the 1997 budget. "The Making of a New Past for a 'New' South Africa", p 157.

a commodified spectacle²³ but it is also the place in which the narrative of the “new” nation concretises itself, congealing, specifically around the prison cell of Nelson Mandela.²⁴ In this way, the “Isle of Makana”, as Robben Island was known, is transformed into the Isle of Mandela.²⁵

As much as the emplacement of narratives that spatialise the histories of places and the life-stories (as sanitised political biographies) associated with those places work to exclude disruptive, unassimilable or overly contestatory individual or collective memories and experiences, sites of memory (and now “heritage”) such as RIM still retain important pedagogical and memorial functions. RIM, however, as one of the only “national” sites of memory in Cape Town, stands in a very particular topographical relationship to the rest of the city. And it is also this relationship that shapes the ways in which the public historical narratives associated with the island are produced. In the mid-nineteen seventies C.J. Driver wrote that one of the “truest” “views of South Africa is not the view from the finance-houses of Johannesburg or the suburbs of Cape Town or the Department of Economics at this or that university, but the

²³Gary Minkley, Ciraj Rassool and Lesley Witz, “Thresholds, Gateways and Spectacles.”

²⁴ On this point, see Noel Solani, “The Saint of the Struggle: Deconstructing the Mandela Myth” in *Kronos* (26, August 2000), pp 43-56. For many activists, revolutionaries and intellectuals, Robben Island is also known as Makana Island. Named for and claiming a historical continuity of resistance to Makana, a leader and strategist in the anti-colonial insurgencies. He was imprisoned on the island during one of the so-called Frontier Wars (1818-1819) against colonial expansionism in the Eastern Cape and drowned in the Atlantic Ocean following his escape from Robben Island.

²⁵ In terms of histories of political repression, detention and imprisonment, the metonymic function of RIM and, more recently, the former prison at the Old Fort on Constitution Hill (now the site of the Constitutional Court) in Johannesburg, may spatially act to displace the experiences of administrative detention, of the political imprisonment of “ordinary” activists, as well as the post-prison experiences of former political detainees from the dozens of still operational prisons across South Africa (and in which most political prisoners were held during Apartheid). These histories continue to constitute the “unfitting”, more ambivalent and still less assimilated experiences of moral and political heroism, as well as of resistance and survival in the “new” South Africa.

view from Makana Island.”²⁶ In its affirmation of the power of location - the grounds and place from which South Africa, as a geopolitical entity as much as a social reality and a symbolic construct, is “viewed” – this claim has enduring resonance. For in the metaphorical view of the “new” nation from RIM and from the temporal vantage point of the current times, these other views - from universities, finance-houses, white residential suburbs, as a composite of spaces that represent institutions of the power of capital in its current forms - are occluded.²⁷

Whilst one can acknowledge the important place of narratives of sacrifice, liberation, moral victory and redemption, it is necessary to critically examine the ways that other narratives which may disturb or unsettle the teleological trajectories of these narratives are displaced. For not only is Robben Island a focal celebratory narrative of the history of about three thousand male political prisoners that represents and sanitises the experience of incarceration, of political imprisonment and of the detention of hundreds of thousands of political prisoners through the prism of one man’s experience, it also renders an individual life as a metonymy for a particular kind of collective: the “nation.” In the passage from the personal to the collective, and in the displacement of other forms of collectivity, what must be “forgotten” is as significant as what is remembered. In the light of this forgetting, the metaphoricity of the notion of recovery is important. For in the theologically and biomedically charged language of recovery and healing buried histories are revealed, memories of trauma are recovered and individuals begin to heal, to convalesce. But re-recovery also contains the sense of a covering over again, of reburial. The

²⁶C.J. Driver, “The View from Makana Island: Some Recent Prison Books from South Africa” in *Journal of Southern African Studies* (2, 1, 1975), p 119.

²⁷ Interestingly, the trope of occlusion is present in Mtutuzeli Matshoba’s short story, “A Pilgrimage to the Isle of Makana” as emphasis of a residual and symbolic unassimilability of Robben Island. For in Matshoba’s short story, the main character, who makes a pilgrimage to visit a prisoner on the island, persistently tries to “see” the island

recovery of the past within the context of creating a consensual public history, is also the containment of the possibilities of individual and collective (mapped against collectivities that are not national) remembrances within that context. In the case of RIM, this is evident in the representation of the former political prisoner who transcends bitterness or anger at social and systemic injustice that endures as one of the core narratives of the Island's public history. In scores of official pronouncements and addresses this view is continuously emphasised.²⁸ Thus, former Robben Island prisoner and now RIM board member, Ahmed Kathrada, in his opening address at the *Esiqithini* exhibition in 1993, exemplifies this representation:

If I were to sum up in a sentence our years in prison, I would say: While we will not forget the brutality of apartheid we will not want Robben Island to be a monument of our hardship and suffering. We would want it to be a monument reflecting the triumph of the human spirit against the forces of evil; a triumph of freedom and human dignity over repression and humiliation; a triumph of wisdom and largeness of spirit against small minds and pettiness; a triumph of courage and determination over human frailty and weakness; a triumph of non-racialism over bigotry and intolerance; a triumph of the new South Africa over the old.²⁹

Importantly, sections of this portion of Kathrada's speech cited are also reproduced on a display board visible to the visitor on leaving the C Section of the prison complex at the end of the tour.

from the mainland of the peninsula, whilst the island seems to persistently evade his view. Mtutuzeli Matshoba, *Call Me Not a Man* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1979), pp 92-142.

²⁸ RIM's website, for example, affirms that "Robben Island came to symbolise, not only for South Africa and the African continent, but also for the entire world, the triumph of the human spirit over enormous hardship and adversity." <http://www.robben-island.org.za> visited on 1 October 2006.

²⁹ Ahmed Kathrada, cited in Veronique Rioufoul, "The Making of a New Past for a 'New' South Africa", p 151.

This underscores the centrality of the moral victory narrative *as* a narrative of reconciliation in the Island's public history as it is represented in the tours.³⁰

In order for this shift from the individual narrative to its metonymic function to take place, the narrative, its site as well as the site of its narration must be unproblematically linked in a relationship that appears to be seamless and given. When the site on which an occurrence quite literally takes place has become cognitively and discursively linked to the recollection and recounting of that occurrence, a reciprocal stabilisation occurs. Affirming the role and power of place for mnemonic memory, James Young extends the implications of the place, memory, narrative relationship a little further when he asks what the “reciprocal exchange”³¹ between the built memorial and its site of construction could be. He sets out the terms of that exchange by comparing the memorial which “brings events into some cognitive order” to narrative “which automatically locates events in linear sequence.” The site on which the memorial structure is located would necessarily be transformed by the narrative framing of its built structures. This relationship is akin a symbolic “pinning down temporarily [of] what is essentially an unstable field”.³² Bunn elaborates by citing Slavoj Zizek's understanding of the Lacanian *points du capiton* who sees this fixing, stabilising relationship as the structuring of “[t]he multitude of floating signifiers ... in a unified field through the intervention of a certain ‘nodal point’ ...

³⁰ In a newspaper report of the official handing over of the island's management from the Department of Correctional Services to the Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology, William-Mervin Gumede writes that the island “[...] would be a beacon of hope and reconciliation for the whole of South Africa.” William-Mervin Gumede, “Robben Island now ‘lighthouse of triumph’: Prison becomes place of reconciliation after 400 years of infamy” in *Cape Argus* (December 19, 1996).

³¹ James Young, *The Textures of Memory*, p 7

³² David Bunn, “Whited Sepulchres: On the Reluctance of Monuments” in Hilton Judin and Ivan Vladislavic (eds), *blank_* (Rotterdam: Nederlands Architectural Institute, 1997), p 104.

which ‘quilts’ them, stops their sliding and fixes their meaning.”³³ As narrative is imbued with an authenticity arising from the artifactuality of place, the groundedness of the place from which it is narrated, the space, as a framing and containment of narrative, becomes naturalised as the place from which memory performs its truth-effect. Besides “materialising” the traces of the past - linking the remnant or the relic to historical commentary - this fixing relationship effects a temporal splitting-off which gives rise to the possibility of historical narration. This, in turn, allows events, experiences and memories of events and their places to be narrated in terms of a past that is completed, distinct and closed-off. The reciprocal mooring of place and memory in narrative becomes represented as discontinuous with the present time. The discretion of temporal categories becomes spatialised in sites of memory. This is particularly evident on Robben Island since the historical function of the island has ceased. As a carceral universe, Robben Island is now, thankfully, an inoperative space. In this sense it is uninhabited in the present. So the island and its historical representations can be domesticated, its spaces and its narratives can all the more be packaged as a foreclosed past.

At RIM, the public face of the memorial site is projected against the national, the “new” nation. This is why the public history presented at RIM constructs such a strong sense of spatio-temporal differentiation, of the sealing-off of narrative possibilities. The sense of narrative possibilities being contained is compounded by the topographical location of the island geographically split-off from the mainland and yet clearly visible from it. In such a highly differentiated space the topography mirrors the temporalities of “transition”. For in the production of “the past”, the temporal constructions formulating a break between past and present – articulated, as we have

³³ David Bunn, “Whited Sepulchres”, p 104.

seen in the founding documents of the “new nation”, the Constitution and Pronura, for example - are thus maintained *in place*. The truth-effects of these temporal claims, as they infiltrate collective perceptions of historical time, remain persuasive and intact.

RIM comes to represent a past that further girds the possibility of a sanitised national history by emplotting the narrative on a *topos* that is bounded geographically by the sea, set apart from the mainland, ritualised through commodified journeys of access, entry and departure, and is “uninhabited”. Severed from the peninsula of the mainland of Cape Town, the island is also constructed in other ways as a foreclosed space, a space into which one’s entrance is regulated. By packaging the island’s history as a “tour”, negotiating access to the island for the visitor begins from the purchase of the tickets (unaffordably expensive for most South Africans), to the RIM Gateway embarkation point at the Victoria and Alfred Waterfront. From the encounter with the island’s historical archaeology through the windows of a tour bus to the mediation of its history through the narratives of the tour guides (contesting narratives of the “prison” guides, former political prisoners of the island, notwithstanding), a relatively stable and homogenous narrative is reiterated and remains consonant with the institutional aims of RIM and with national heritage management guidelines. What is striking and of importance to this discussion is that it is precisely because the island is a space that is set apart in a myriad of ways, it is at the same time rendered more visible in imagining the “new” nation. The displacement of the real bodies of the nation is necessary in order for the imaginary body, the unified nation, the ideational one, to take its place. The successful grounding of the metanarratives of reconciliation and nation-building, much like the mnemonic tools of recall that Francis Yates describes, is premised on the spaces in

which they are anchored as being separate from the lives, the bodies, the entangled comings and goings of the very “nation” whose identity is represented, performed, established.

Counter-memory practices in everyday spaces

In setting out the “terms” of coming to terms with the past, the language of propriety refers to place metaphorically: the past has its rightful or proper place. In the preceding chapters I have discussed what, by corollary, is considered to be “improper.” According to the prescription for giving the past its place, the refusal to reconcile or the claiming of alternative social and historical meanings that unsettle the structural accommodations of capital, for example, have come to be considered as “improper”. In what *places* do these responses to state brutality, systemic violence and continuing structural socio-economic inequities find expression and how are they expressed? Can we understand the metastasis of social violence in South Africa in terms of the closure of public and social space to the expression of collective and individual outrage or of collective and individual grief? What if the notion of what is “proper” - right, fitting, consensual - is understood, rather, in the sense of the one of the French usages of the word *propre* as “own”? In this sense, the place, the property and the propriety of remembrance could be understood as claiming authorship and authority to assert (and to have recourse beyond assertion) one’s “own” personal and collective experiences. This would also be claiming the continuity of experience and the right to self-representation as a social expression of agency in our everyday lives and life-worlds. I recast “propriety” here in order to challenge the construction of a rhetoric of memorial boundaries that marks an inside and an outside in the binary terms of cleanliness/filth, purity/impurity, order/disorder which Julia Kristeva’s

understanding of “*propre*” as both clean and proper (over against the unclean and the improper) evoke. Kristeva reminds us that, “it is not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite.”³⁴ Alternative practices of counter-memory, then, are the reclamation of one’s own (“*propre*”) memories as a direct address (and symbolic redress) to the forms of social denial and systemic violence that are introjected as despair, self-loathing, and hopelessness (and that operate in the name of the memorial propriety of “official” memory).

On the mainland of Cape Town, the WECAT project, an initiative of the Direct Action Centre for Peace and Memory, navigates the faultlines of the places, people, experiences and memories that constitute Cape Town's less visibilised memorial cartographies. The WECAT project is (amongst many other things besides) a counter-memory and alternative spatial practice that works with, in and through narrative, movement and the everyday, transient spaces of sidewalks, street-corners and public space as a re-iterative and reclamative *memory-action*. WECAT inaugurates “Journeys of Remembrance” that move through the city centre and the “townships” of the “Cape Flats”. In a practice of *defamiliarisation*, this journey of movement, narrative, performance and engagement weaves together the naturalised historical and invisibilised systemic connections between the city centre (the core of the white economy) and the widening peripheries of the “townships” (with their psychosocial economies of dislocation).

The WECAT project facilitates spatial, narrative and embodied encounters that re-member (in the sense of historicising, reconnecting as well as commemorating) the social and political

³⁴ Julia Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, Translated by Leon S. Roudiez (New York:

histories of these communities and the enduring effects of their histories on people's lives and lived environment. It also connects these to the newer forms of socio-economic marginalisation contoured by systemic violence as well as to possibilities of and for social change. During the course of a WECAT "Journey of Remembrance" with former guerrilla (the WECAT project's facilitators and narrators) everyday places are transformed as they become "visible" through the narratives, interpretations, experiences and recollections that are told in, about and through them. In this process, all distinctions between the "sacredness" of dedicated memorial spaces and the seeming ordinariness of everyday places are blurred.³⁵ What emerges in this blurring, rather, is a different "sense of place"; a sense of place which foregrounds the historicity of the making of the city, past and present, as well as an acute and nuanced differentiation (of class, colour, ethnicities, languages, diasporas, locations and histories) of the multiple and distinct, though intersecting, histories of the areas that constitute the "Cape Flats". So whilst passers-by stop, listen, engage in debate, discussion, comment and personal recollection, participants engage with (and are, in turn, engaged by) community leaders, activists, healers, shopkeepers, housewives and schoolchildren. Whilst the WECAT project intentionally works with, in and through spaces it asks for active participation from those who undertake its "Journeys of Remembrance" and for forms of address and response that risk questioning, dare transformation and commit hope. By creating ephemeral spaces of speaking in the here-and-now of public places and transient spaces of the outdoors, roadsides and sidewalks, the WECAT project transmits collective memory through reiteration, repetition *and* innovation. For besides participants in the journeys passers-by

Columbia University Press, 1982), p 4.

³⁵ These places are townships on what is known as the "Cape Flats", an undifferentiated designation for an area that masks a history of spatial differentiation based on "race", colour, ethnicity and class and the enduring socio-economic effects of forced removals. The places and the relationships that the WECAT project maps through narrative and movement, however, are mediated in ways that contest the undifferentiated "flattening" effect of this

and children often gather around, many contributing their own opinions, interpretations and remembrances, many also hearing stories about their neighbourhoods and their communities for the first time.

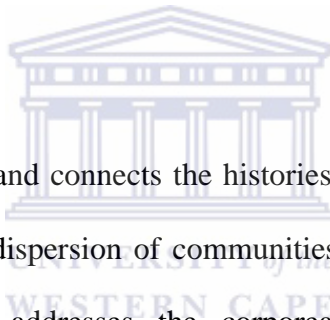
Through the counter-memorial practices of the WECAT project the rhetoric of propriety is radically recast. In these practices the notion of what is “proper”– right, fitting, consensual – in remembrances of the past is understood, rather, in the sense of one of the etymological resonances of the French word, *propre* as “one’s own.” Properly remembered becomes the assertion and claim to frame, author and have witnessed one’s “own” experiences. In giving them meaning and by claiming of the continuity of memory in everyday life and life-worlds, the WECAT project reclaims what is also “proper” to the body. For it is in the continuities of memory as marked in and by the body - mobile, still, speaking, listening, marked as insider, outsider, visitor, resident - moving through the townships that the “proper place” of memory challenges the rhetorical claims and moral premises of public institutional discourses of propriety. If these discourses also designate place, the places where memories of the past becomes “property”, then the counter-memorial practices of the project challenge the grounding of the past on land that is set apart.

Es’kia Mphahlele links the primacy of place, its function in South Africa’s history of colonial and Apartheid pillage and dispossession, to an aesthetic that “has very much to do with a sense and quality of place and the language that grows there.”³⁶ The places to which Mphahlele refers

vast area’s sobriquet. The WECAT project’s mediations de-homogenise and differentiate the multiple and intersecting histories of the areas that constitute the “Cape Flats”.

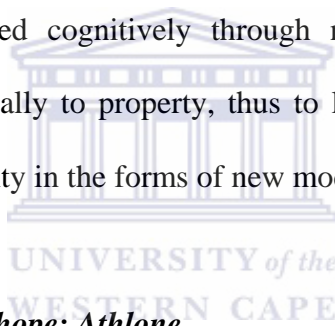
³⁶ Es’kia Mphahlele, “The Tyranny of Place and Aesthetics” in *English Academy Review* (1981), p 5.

are not the breached grounds on which the new nation is imagined into being. When moving and stopping through the city and the townships with WECAT project facilitators, the place of the past is everywhere and it is the here-and-now. Indeed, at the beginning of the journey, the WECAT narrators urge participants to look and see, to be aware of the land, its markings and networks of relationship to the highly stratified urban topography: the crossings, roads, highways, footpaths, intersections, *cordons sanitaires*, railway lines and cooling towers that map a different memorial cartography. For these reveal the visible boundaries and invisible thresholds that comprise the relationship between current township demography, socio-economic exclusion and the persisting structural, material and psychosocial atomisation that masks these systemic interconnections.



The WECAT project also evokes and connects the histories of enforced journeys of land theft, psycho-geographic displacement, dispersion of communities and resettlements by colonial and Apartheid state machineries. It addresses the corporeally absent communities, “white” “communities” in whose names, identities, colour, class locations and ongoing claims of entitlement to structural privilege remain by and large *unmoved* within the urban centre and suburbs around Cape Town. This establishes a relationship through historical connection, topographical association and structural affiliation that recontextualises memorialisation within a history of specific power relations. There is a context and we are all, in very different ways, implicated in it. In speech and silence, listening and conversation, movement and embodiment, the spatial and memorial practices of WECAT traverse and inscribe another memorial cartography that links to, intersects with, reclaims from and re-interprets colonial and Apartheid memorial cartographies. This, in turn, reinserts a degree of agency into the unfolding processes

of remembering, of celebrating and of mourning. By reclaiming memory back to the individual body and the material grounds on which selfhood, family and community are constituted, the project operates a memorial aesthetic that speaks to the “tyranny of place”. This is what Mphahlele refers to when he states, “There is a specifically African drama in the ghettos that the writer cannot ignore. So he replays the drama. He has got to stay with it. He must simply come to terms with the tyranny of place or grapple with it, because he *must* have place, because his writing depends on his commitment to territory.”³⁷ Such a memorial aesthetic is at once personal, social and political. It reminds that disavowed individual memories are not only true and real and are externally mirrored and affirmed. It reminds also that in this context, one’s “own” (*propre*) experiences and memories ordered cognitively through narrative and somatically through movement, are linked very materially to property, thus to land, as well as to the continued regulation of movement and mobility in the forms of new modes of socio-economic exclusion.



Transforming place, transferring hope: Athlone

As it constitutes and reconstitutes transient but contextualised collective spaces of witness and remembrance, the counter-memory practices of the WECAT project intervenes and acts in place, which in turn acts upon narrators and participants. Such practices perform, what Diana Taylor calls, “acts of transfer”³⁸ in socially and personally transformative ways. As a spatial practice, the project works against those aspects of monuments and memorials that spatially contain and restrain the affect provoked by sites of memory; affect that is not only reactive but also integrative and transformative in psychic, experiential, embodied, cognitive and social ways.

³⁷ Es’kia Mphahlele, “The Tyranny of Place and Aesthetics”, p 8.

And it is here that its counter-memory practices take space, place and movement as the “grounding” for an affective integration that works on multiple levels (individually, psychically, somatically, cognitively, spatially and collectively) in reclamative ways. Elaborating this reciprocal and multi-layered dynamic of transfer and transformation at work, Yazir Henri discusses how these layers intersect and notes that “[t]he place also transforms with the realisation that where we stand was a battleground only ten years ago. Together we transform and are transformed by this place, which suddenly becomes one of recognition, commemoration, mutual learning, respect, dignity, hope and humanity.”³⁹

In exploring how these transfers and transformations may occur I describe and meditate on one particular “Journey of Remembrance” with the WECAT project in September 1999. This period marked the beginning of my involvement with the organisation, initially as a volunteer and then, from 2000, as a full-time member and employee. My recounting however is focused on one section of the day’s journey located in and around the central business district of Athlone, one of the oldest historically designated “coloured” townships of the Cape Flats.⁴⁰ Walking and stopping on the sidewalks of the main shopping area of Athlone, the WECAT narrators described the significance of the area, not only in the context of Apartheid’s Group Areas legislations and forced removals, but also as testament to forms of socio-economic resistance, the collective working against dehumanisation symbolised by the continuation of vibrant trade in the streets,

³⁸ Diana Taylor, *The Archive and The Repertoire*, p 165.

³⁹ Yazir Henri, “Reconciling Reconciliation: A Personal and Public Journey of Testifying Before the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission” in Paul Gready (ed.), *Political Transition: Politics and Cultures* (London: Pluto Press), p 273.

⁴⁰ On that particular journey I was part of a group of participants that included graduate students from the University of Cape Town who are doing a course on historiography and postmodernism. They were young, white South Africans who had never been to the “townships.” An English professor from Canada who was teaching the course and a young man visiting South Africa from former East Germany also formed part of the group.

open air stalls and shops in the area. It was in Athlone, in front of the public toilets and across the road from the Athlone police station and magistrate's court that we were met by Gerard Waterwitch. There, the WECAT narrators recounted how on July 23 1989 the bodies of two young MK⁴¹ operatives, Robert Waterwitch (Gerard Waterwitch's nephew) and Coline Williams, were found behind the toilets. By framing what until this point, was invisible as a place of death, within a broader spatialised historical context, the WECAT project gave a public "place" of recognition to Robert Waterwitch and to Coline Williams, beyond that of two "victims" of "human rights abuse". As the two young revolutionaries were named and commemorated (and continue to be with each "Journey of Remembrance") within the context of central Athlone and the history of its making, as well as at the place of their death, the WECAT narrators perform a public act of identification in much the same way as did Simonides. And whilst Simonides' act of recollecting the place of the dead could be understood to be assisting the relatives to bury and mourn the identified bodies of their loved ones, the WECAT project's act of recollection could be understood as socially restoring and integrating the dead, Robert Waterwitch and Coline Williams, into a more inclusive public, collective and political memorial order. As the two revolutionaries are named and commemorated in the public place associated with their death, so their social aspirations, their political hopes and dreams come to be named and enumerated and, in this way, recuperated and recommitted to the specificities of the present-time.

One of the versions that explain the events around the death of Waterwitch and Williams is that they were on the way to place a mine at the magistrate's court across the road from the public toilets. This was in protest against the tricameral parliamentary elections. In this version, Robert

⁴¹ Umkhonto We Sizwe, the military wing of the African National Congress.

Waterwitch and Coline Williams were intercepted by Apartheid state security agents, blown up and their bodies were placed behind the toilets. The WECAT narrator, however, illustrated the contested nature of the story of the murder of the two activists by relating not only how Apartheid state propaganda represented their death at the time, but also by referring to the TRC's report that failed, after extensive investigation, to clearly establish the events that surrounded their murder (and the state agents implicated in it). It is worth quoting the TRC's "official" findings regarding the murder of Robert Waterwitch and Coline Williams, specifically as the inconclusiveness of the finding is framed finally as a raising of questions:

Coline Williams and Robert Waterwitch

Four limpet mine attacks in the Peninsula were planned for the evening of Sunday 23 July 1989 as part of an anti-election bombing campaign by MK. Magistrate's courts were targeted as they were to be used for election nominations the following day. Mines exploded at a police station in Mitchells Plain and at the Somerset West magistrate's court. At the Bellville magistrate's court security forces intervened to prevent the blast. The fourth mine, intended for the Athlone magistrate's court, detonated behind public toilets opposite the court. The bodies of MK operatives and youth activists Ms Coline Williams (22) and Mr Robert Waterwitch of the Ashley Kriel unit were found at the scene.

Subsequent inquests found that they had died as the result of an explosion. While initial impressions suggested that the operation had simply gone awry, a number of questions have remained concerning the circumstances of their deaths. Suspicions existed that the explosives had been 'zero timed' for immediate detonation.

229 The Commission was unable to make a conclusive finding in this matter. However, the Commission obtained evidence that security forces had agents in or very close to the unit concerned.

This fact raises questions regarding the operation and the deaths of the two operatives.⁴²

The murder of Robert Waterwitch and Coline Williams has many different meanings depending on whom one speaks with. For many activists, the murder of these two young operatives symbolises the hope and courage of the younger generation of anti-Apartheid fighters during the decade of the nineteen eighties, when intensified state repression was met with increasingly mass uprising and insurgency. For me, on that day, when Gerard Waterwitch joined us in Athlone at the place where his nephew's body was found, the account of this murder stood for the unjust and tortuous choices that young people who were not racially classified as "white" were faced with in South Africa. The murder of Waterwitch and Williams represented the ways in which one's young years were robbed by a criminal state. Thousands of children and teenagers faced the impossible choice of submission to the carceral logic of the Apartheid universe - increasingly brutal in those years in its forms of repression and suppression - or of embracing other fraught and difficult options, such as armed resistance. But the WECAT account also represented, for me, the vitality and contribution of young people as potent social actors and as agents of revolution. On that day, this is what I felt was being memorialised in front of the public toilet in Athlone. But this understanding began to shift when Gerard Waterwitch began to speak.

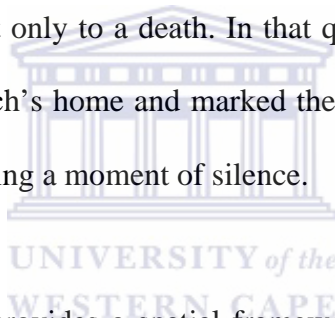
In front of the public toilets behind which his nephew's body was found, Gerard Waterwitch spoke about remembrance as the embrace and reaffirmation of the hopes, dreams and ideals for which his nephew died. He understood bearing witness as a transfer and claiming of the social

⁴² Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa, *TRC of SA Report*, Volume 3, pp 459-60.

and political vision of his nephew. So whilst WECAT narrators frame their own experiences and interpretations of history as social actors and activists, participants must confront, in very different ways, their own agency as creators of social meaning (and as agents of social change) as it relates to the historicity of the present times.

After this our group, silent and reflective, moved on to Thornton road, a thoroughfare in Athlone not very far from the public toilets, to gather before a wall on Thornton Road in front of which three young boys, Jonathan Claasen, Michael Miranda and Shaun Magmoed, were killed by Apartheid security forces in 1985 in an ambush that has become known as the Trojan Horse Massacre. Later, we carried on walking and stopped again nearby, almost around the corner. We were in front of Robert Waterwitch's house, although the participants only learned this when Gerard Waterwitch left the group. He went inside the house and then came out again soon after. In his hands he carried a photograph, framed. It was a photograph of a young, teenage Robert Waterwitch smiling, strumming a guitar. Gerard Waterwitch's memories of his nephew are stirred and captured by the photo, he told us: his nephew's bright smile and love of music. Outside of Robert Waterwitch's house, this name, the account of his death and of the courage of hope and of political resistance became anchored to another place. This was not a place of death but of life. And so Robert Waterwitch became linked to a home, to a street outside, to an uncle who recalled his smile, to a photograph of a beautiful young man who made music. Robert Waterwitch and Coline Williams' murder no longer stood in only as a metonym for thousands of others killed by the state. It did that but it also did much more. Standing in front of his house, accompanied by people who did not *speak for* Robert Waterwitch but who spoke in relation to him, Robert Waterwitch's life was being commemorated and not only his death. Gerard

Waterwitch spoke for himself, for the loss that his nephew's death left him. He did not speak *in the place of* his nephew. In that speaking, the narrative of the person who is identified with his nephew only in as much as he is identifiable as someone who has lived together with, known and loved his nephew, Gerard Waterwitch marked a network of familial relationships that remembered Robert Waterwitch by indexing his absence evermore. It was no longer simply the tragedy of Robert Waterwitch's death that was striking. It was the gap that he left and continues to leave in his family. And it was the gap that he left in the complex reconfigurations of the "new" South Africa. In this way his presence was remembered and his absence acknowledged but not re-placed. It is only registering this absence that witness is borne to a life not lived, to a future abruptly foreclosed, and not only to a death. In that quiet, suburban street, we stood in a circle in front of Robert Waterwitch's home and marked the continuity of his absence with that symbol of discontinuity, by observing a moment of silence.



Such a counter-memory practice provides a spatial framework in which the social, public and intersubjective meanings and affects of loss may be acknowledged. This does not symbolically fill or affectively restore the absences that endure in the wake of socially disavowed and unacknowledged loss. Rather, this works with the forms of traumatic affect which, within dominant discursive and therapeutic frameworks, have conventionally been individualised, personalised and psychologised. When collective and public dimensions of loss and its affect are expressed, and its personal impact is expressed in social, collective, spatialised and externalised modes, loss may be acknowledged and integrated *as such*. Elaborating the levels (intrasubjective and personal, intersubjective and dialogic, spatial, social and political) on which the WECAT project operates, Yazir Henri writes, "For people speaking about their loss and trauma – an

opportunity to ‘normalise’ their experience by externalising, making it everyday in a way that also recognises the fact that there can be no forgetting but that life continues.”⁴³ Collectively acknowledging loss opens a way to collectively affirm hope. This is what I understand by the phrase, “life continues”. It also opens a way to think about and appreciate the lives of those who may no longer be with us (and of those who, having survived, still are). In this way, we (as participants, witnesses and social agents) are impelled to acknowledge that memory-work, in order to be socially relevant, is very much about how *we* act now, how *we* take forward a social and political inheritance of ideals, dreams and possibilities which, in being named, enumerated and commemorated, are celebrated *and* regenerated.

Haunting public spaces



Since 1997 the WECAT project has continued the “Journeys of Remembrance” across the city two, three times a week. Each journey is at once dynamic, embodied, repeated, re-iterative and unique. In the larger context of that particular journey that took participants into encounters with people and places from Athlone to Langa, from Bonteheuwel to Gugulethu, from Crossroads through Phillippi and back up the mountainside to the University of Cape Town, the morning with Gerard Waterwitch and the story of the life and death of his nephew was one of many moments marked through the speech, silence, movement and stillness that transformed the spaces around us. As the morning passed and we visited other sites of memory around the area of the Athlone CBD alone, it became clear, visible that is, that this is more than a central business district: it is a place that bears the invisible scars and traces of war and its aftermath. The sites of memory that

⁴³ Yazir Henri, “Reconciling Reconciliation”, p 272.

were visited during the journey described here - the public toilet in the Athlone CBD and the wall in Thornton Road, for example - are places of death where people have been killed. They are not sites of burial, graves where they were laid to rest.

By not visiting the graves, the WECAT project implicitly challenges the possibilities of privatising and localising loss in the forms of mourning promoted by discourses of reconciliation and nation-building. By visiting public places of death and not the gravesides where the dead are buried, this counter-memory practice claims and connects public space to the need for publicly visible and accessible socially restorative spaces and collective processes for mourning loss, for affirming the regenerative energy of hope. In this way the WECAT project challenges the closures of the neoliberal public sphere (and its time-spaces) to more collective and public practices of social regeneration that such politicised notions of memory-work inaugurate. For as long as the intimate, private spaces of rituals of bereavement and remembrance at the graves of the dead remain the “proper place” for mourning, the revivifying potential of integrating loss into collective frameworks for alternative social constructions of meaning remains fractured. Grieving remains a private, personal and psychologised activity. Visiting and remembering at the place of death underscores, rather, the persistence of residual forms of violence that resist symbolic integration in social and collective ways of ascribing meaning that are shared and democratic but not superimposed modes of expression. But it also underscores the persistence of hope, the commitment to hopefulness and to the unfinished work of social change. In this sense, the WECAT project inserts counter-memory practices in public places as repeated acts of affirmation that connect and reactivate the (as yet) unmaterialised hopes for a different present to the one which we live currently.

CHAPTER FOUR

BURIALS AND REMOVALS: HISTORICAL ERASURE AND EVERYDAY LIFE

*I do not feel the wound
The house dresses on my heart.
I do not suffer the nightmares
The house is exorcising from my head.
You would I remember the Struggle
This museum, memorabilia of massacres;
But television on my mind has imprinted
Worse day-to-day horrors I am only
Startled, wounded, by the spectacle of kisses
and kindness.*

Dambudzo Marechera, “Under Anaesthetic”

*Those who have died have never left
The dead have a pact with the living*
Birago Diop, “Breaths”¹



An oft-repeated critique of the TRC’s implementation of its mandate has been that its focus on the forms of political oppression employed by the Apartheid state and the experiences of activists and opponents of the Apartheid system occluded the bureaucratised forms of “everyday” and systemic violence as it impacted on the day-to-day life of ordinary people from blood to burial, and that intruded into the most private and intimate realms of human activity, internal life-worlds and states of being.²

¹ The extract from Birago Diop’s poem, “Breaths” is taken from a pamphlet for one of the weekly vigils held at the Prestwich Street burial ground that were organised by the Hands Off Prestwich Street Ad Hoc Committee. The vigil at which Diop’s poem was read took place on 19 October 2003.

² See Mahmood Mamdani, “Reconciliation without Justice” in *Southern African Review of Books* (46, Nov/Dec, 1996), pp 3-5 and “A Diminished Truth” in Wilmot James and Linda van de Vijver (eds.), *After the TRC: Reflections on Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa* (Athens, Ohio and Cape Town: Ohio University Press and David Philip, 2001), pp 58-61; Steven Robins, “True national reconciliation is imperilled” in *Cape Argus* (17 February, 1997); Steven Robins, “Don’t forget the unsung victims” in *Cape Times* (9 April, 1997); Steven Robins, “TRC must look at ‘ordinary’ apartheid” in

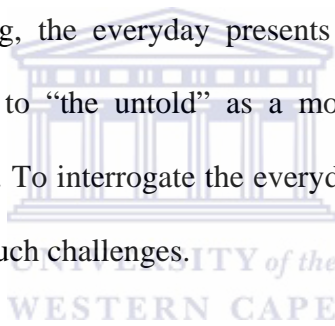
As I have argued in previous chapters, the material, institutional, social and psychic conditions in which a collective discourse of “terms” of atrocity and human suffering is set - and of course, its corollary, responsibility - is inextricably bound to what is “seen” and therefore recognised to be atrocious and causing suffering. As generic neoliberal socio-economic prescriptions for governance for countries deemed to be “in transition to democracy” - or “post-conflict”, or “developing” - are integrated into local frameworks of “development” (service delivery, poverty reduction, land reform, privatisation of state resources and services, removal of protectionist trade barriers, land and agricultural reform and regulation, and so on), temporal and spatial constructions of distance from the past are simultaneously cultivated. As this perception of distance is created, so the mechanisms of structural violence and the psychosocial affects and material impact of what remains, changes and continues of that violence are excised. The central concern of this chapter, then, is to examine how the violence of historical erasure is embedded in systemic violence and how it is made invisible.

The everyday is the time-space of historical erasure. It is here that the discursive, epistemological and material modes of excision are woven into the perceptual and experiential fabric of life. I therefore examine the concept of “the everyday” in order to track the ways in which structural and symbolic violence is reproduced and normalised. For in the everyday, structural violence and historical erasure-in-time³ act to shape lived

Cape Times (5 August, 1997); Steven Robins, “No-name people who kept cogs of apartheid oiled” in *Cape Times* (6 August, 1997).

³ This suggestive term along with the related concept, erasure-over-time, is Patricia Hayes’. I am deeply grateful to her for suggesting these terms as a way for me to theorise the distinctions between sociohistorical processes of erasure over

experiences in the here-and-now. And it is in everyday life that this becomes masked and *disrecognised*. And so it is in the everyday as erasure-in-time in the postcolonial, postapartheid, neoliberal present that the living with and living out of injustice is configured and normalised. Moreover, both erasures-in-time as well as erasures-over-time are disaggregated from the everyday which renders them extremely difficult to address and therefore, to redress. This is because collectively perceiving, naming and attending to historical erasures may lie outside of normative frameworks of meaning-making, calibrated as they are, by "apartheid laws of perception"⁴ (in Ndebele's words). This, in turn, shapes epistemological silences relating to structural violence and to social injustice. In this understanding, the everyday presents the social imagination with a number of challenges related to "the untold" as a mourning of lost *futures* and the envisioning of alternative ones. To interrogate the everyday is therefore crucial precisely for the reasons that constitute such challenges.



The second part of the chapter takes up the theoretical reflections on the everyday in the form of a narrative about the recent uncovering of a burial ground in the central city - what has become known as the Prestwich Street burial ground - in which the buried ancestral remains of slaves on which the foundations of the modern city of Cape Town are quite literally built. This section responds to what Michelle Paulse notes in her study of forced removals in Tramway and Ilford Roads, Sea Point (in Cape Town) as an absence of discussions on the "built environment of residential areas and the forces and

longue durees and the forms of disaggregation, social denial and historical excision that are reproduced in the present. As I will argue in this chapter, these two processes are interconnected.

⁴ Njabulo Ndebele quoted in Kelwyn Sole, "The Witness of Poetry: Economic Calculation, Civil Society and the Limits of Everyday Experience in a Liberated South Africa" in *New Formations* (45, Winter 2001-2002) p 183.

relations of production of the political economy.”⁵ The necessity of such a discussion, she continues, is pressing since it historically situates and deepens understandings of the “social and political link between residential areas and the city and nation at large.”⁶ I respond to Paulse’s observation in the form of an account of the resurfacings of disavowed histories of violence, of enslavement and of land and property dispossession *as* the unaccounted human and social cost of the city’s development over time. This is about the re-surfacing of archaeologies of *erasure-over-time* (the spatio-temporal accretions of erasures-in-time) that are buried beneath the material surfaces of the city at its historical, topographical and socio-economic heart. What emerges is a glimpse into the complex interactions between the processes of social, intellectual, political and private sector management of the city and the many layers of structural and symbolic violence which works to occlude the centrality of slavery in social consciousness and its ongoing psychosocial impact. It is also a narrative that engages the everyday by tracking the ways that historical erasures-in-time are produced. In this recounting of how the buried traces of erasure-over-time surface, it is the “ordinary” erasures-in-time - the institutional and social actors, the historical processes and disavowals related to the legacies of slavery compounded by those of forced removals - that are normalised in the everyday. For historical silencings and epistemological occlusions are actively shaped in the everyday, not by anonymous agents or ahistorical accidents, but by institutions, class-interests and social groups that are discernable and nameable.

⁵ Michele Paulse, “An Oral History of Tramway Road and Ilford Street, Sea Point, 1930’s-2001: The Production of Place by Race, Class and Gender” (unpublished Ph.D dissertation, University of Cape Town, 2002), p 25.

⁶ Michele Paulse, “An Oral History of Tramway Road and Ilford Street, Sea Point, 1930’s-2001”, p 25.

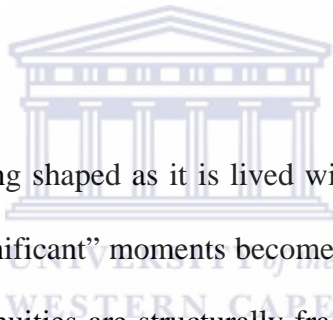
Everyday life

Critiques of the TRC's exclusion of the "everyday" aspects of Apartheid imply that whilst the TRC's interpretation of its investigative mandate excluded (and thus occluded) the "banalised" aspects and lived impact of structural and administrative violence of the Apartheid legal and bureaucratic machinery, the "horror of day-to-day life"⁷ under Apartheid are available to the descriptive, analytical and narrative impulse of a pre-existing language of experience: a language of suffering and outrage, a language of insult and loss that enfolds within it the historically lived collective experience of uprising, of defiance, of hope and of counter-meaning. In such a view, the *consequences* of structural denials of historical experience relating to the "horror of day-to-day life" in contouring epistemological silences, is ignored. Related to the idea of a buried narrative waiting to emerge or to be excavated from the silence of systemic disavowal is the assumption made by historical relativists (and celebrants of multiculturalist or rainbow histories promoted by history-for-nation-building) that a society's "sense" of its history is comprised of fragments and shards which, when woven into a grand patchwork narrative of the past, share a moral, historical and political equivalency.

In an analysis of the broader material contexts in which discourses of reconciliation are embedded, Scott Veitch observes that part of the power of "ordinary social features and mechanisms" lies in the very "ordinariness" of social and institutional mechanisms that routinise everyday life. Veitch argues that it is the ordinariness of such mechanisms that

⁷ The phrase is Njabulo Ndebele's. Ndebele, "Memory, Metaphor and the Triumph of Narrative" in Sarah Nuttall and Carli Coetzee (eds.), *Negotiating the Past: The Making of Memory in South Africa* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1998), p 19.

structure perceptions of social responsibility and non-responsibility for atrocity in its multiple forms and indicators. These are the dispersed but materially regulatory technologies that socially and symbolically manage morality and social action. The everydayness of these multiple forms of social management translates into a material and conceptual practice of disaggregation. This allows for atrocity to be *perceived* as disconnected from the realm of acknowledgeable human experience.⁸ Conversely, these disaggregatory practices structure a cognitive and political disconnect in which historical relations of responsibility, agency, complicity, benefit and power between “actually existing human beings” are abstracted from the material and historical grounds on which they come into being.



The sense of the everyday being shaped as it is lived within a continuum of time-space punctuated by historically “significant” moments becomes increasingly tenuous when the perception of life’s lived continuities are structurally fragmented from the perception of momentous happenings. As the taken-for-grantedness of the world around is inhabited in its fragmented given-ness it ceases to be experienced as constructed (which is not to say less “real”) and structure ceases to be apprehended as ideological. It is this taken-for-grantedness of everyday life that “naturalises” a materially inscribed pre-determined (though not unchangeable or unchanging) world in which the perceptual reach of the ideologies of the “new” in the “new South Africa”, as lived experience, are played out.

⁸ Scott Veitch, “Reconciliation and Responsibility: Assymetries and Diversions” in Emilios Christodoulidis and Scott Veitch (eds.), *Time, Law and Reconciliation* (Forthcoming).

The concept of the “everyday” - elusive, slippery and difficult to pin down theoretically - offers a critical conceptual tool with which to explore the relationship between structural silencing and denial, the invisibility of social suffering and the dehistoricisation of systemic violence as it constitutes the ways that the material conditions of the mundane, ordinary and quotidian remain invisible to the social imagination. Such is the challenge to name, to define, to enumerate.⁹ It is the challenge to find conceptual forms for the ontological and structural violence that resided and continue to reside, precisely and invisibly, in the everyday.

So what is the “everyday”? For European and North American feminists, Marxists and phenomenologists, the everyday is associated with the social, cultural and economic conditions reproduced and regulated under advanced capitalist modernity. As a critical concept, everyday life is associated, through the writings of historical materialists, of which those of Henri Lefebvre are canonic, with those aspects of (Western) urban, consumerist modernity that regulate, structure, define and shape all forms of social reproduction.¹⁰ For Lefebvre, naming and conceptualising the invisible - through the repetitive re-production of routine, of the familiar - yet lived out, inhabited, experientially and bodily inscribed and consummately material aspects of everyday life in urban, modern capitalist France is an intellectual/political/ideological project to denaturalise the quotidian as “[...] a compendium of seemingly unimportant activities and of products and

⁹ The concept of enumeration as I use it in this chapter as a discursive action of counter-memory, was suggested to me by Rustum Kozain in a personal communication.

¹⁰ Henri Lefebvre, “The Everyday and Everydayness”, Translated by Christine Levich in *Yale French Studies* (73, 1987), pp 7-11; Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*, Vol.1, “Introduction”, Translated by John Moore (London, New York: Verso, 1991); Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*, Vol. 2, “Foundations for a Sociology of the Everyday Life”, Translated by John Moore (London, New York: Verso, 2002).

exhibits other than natural [...]”.¹¹ For Alice Kaplan and Kristin Ross, everyday life names “[...] the myriad activities and conditions for existence that must be satisfied in order for relations of production to take place at all.”¹² Everyday life, for these theorists, is “situated somewhere in the rift opened up between the subjective, the phenomenological, sensory apparatus of the individual and reified institutions.”¹³ Rita Felski maintains that everyday life “[...] is the ultimate, non-negotiable reality, the unavoidable basis for all other forms of human endeavour.”¹⁴ Michel de Certeau explicitly spatialises the everyday. He dedicates his study on the everyday to the anonymous pedestrian whose traversing avenues and sidewalks of the city inscribing routes of social, economic and creative meaning is its emblematic figure.¹⁵ Common to the theoretical trajectories of most scholars, materialist and critical, writing from diverse Western metropolitan contexts is the observation that the hegemonic codes of social regulation under late capitalism are reproduced in the lived minutiae¹⁶ of the everyday precisely due to their naturalised ordinariness.

As a temporal *and* spatial concept, the everyday invokes the cyclical rhythms of cosmic time that define human beings as embodied and circadian creatures. The everyday includes the routines, repetitions, routes and habits of daily living and life that are anchored in both the permanence and constant change of environmentally perennial

¹¹ Henri Lefebvre, *Everyday Life in the Modern World*, Translated by Sacha Rabinovitch (New Brunswick, USA and London: Transaction, 1990), p14.

¹² Alice Kaplan and Kristin Ross. “Introduction” in *Yale French Studies* (73, 1987), p 2.

¹³ Alice Kaplan and Kristin Ross. “Introduction”, p. 3.

¹⁴ Rita Felski. “The Invention of Everyday Life” in *New Formations* (39, Winter, 1999-2000), p.15.

¹⁵ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Translated by Steven F. Randall (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1984).

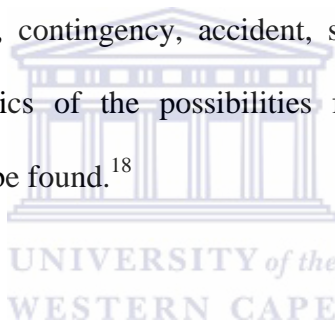
¹⁶ This suggestive term was communicated to me by Yazir Henri following his unpublished intervention at a conference on political transitions, Commonwealth Institute, University of London, September 2000. Henri formulated it precisely in relation to the invisibilised effects of war’s aftermath and the afterlives of trauma for war survivors in the everyday.

rhythms. As it pertains to reproducing socio-economic, gendered and racialised structures of domination, the everyday is also encoded in our sense organs and bodies determining the ways in which we apprehend the world and the people we encounter in the world.¹⁷ Since the temporal structures of everyday life are simultaneously constituted by the “natural” cycles of cosmic time and the bracketed linearities of calendar time, everyday life contours an intra-subjective matrix in which perception, recollection and historical consciousness are embedded. The temporal forms of everyday life shape our apprehension of “happenings”: of the exceptional, the singular, the particular, of the events that stand out from the textured canvas against which the enfolded, entangled flowing of time’s passage is corporeally experienced and materially embodied. The time-space of the everyday is multiple, synchronous, simultaneous and divergent. Yet it is also cut through continuously by contingency, by surprise, by the momentousness of creativity and spontaneity. Into the arhythmic patterns of the ordinary and the trivial, historical consciousness emerges through the spatio-temporally structured apprehension of life’s flow as it becomes measured and marked against a backdrop of happenings, of events and of epochs. The permanent transience of structure and the violent persistence of its reproduction cultivate the perception of daily life as inevitable within a circumscribed spatio-temporal horizon of the lived.

Yet whilst the everyday is generically shared by all people - we all eat, sleep, make love, bathe, commute, consume, go out, rejoice, create, dream, and so on - its forms are the

¹⁷ For a detailed discussion of the ways in which “race” supremacist “looking” persist as embodied modes of perception and invisibilised in the everyday, see Heidi Grunebaum and Yazir Henri, “Where the Mountain Meets its Shadow: A Conversation on Memory, Identity and Fragmented Belonging in Present-Day South Africa” in Ron Robin and Bo Strath (eds.), *Homelands: Poetic Power and the Politics of Space* (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2003), pp 278-280.

measure of the ways that structural power and relations of exploitation and superordination are lived out. Its forms determine what we may eat, where we may sleep, make love, bathe, how we commute, what we may consume and where and how we may go for leisure and social activity. In this sense then, the everyday is multiple, simultaneous and differentiated according to one's socio-economic, gendered, classed, color-categorised "place." Its structures - in the ways that structure is made invisible to the experience of the everyday - maintain one "in one's place." Indeed, in his "theory of moments" Lefebvre maintains that it is in apprehending precisely the ways in which the temporalities of cosmic time and linear calendar time are intersected by random and structural moments of chance, contingency, accident, spontaneity and surprise in the everyday that a micro-analytics of the possibilities for subversion, resistance and collective social change are to be found.¹⁸



The everyday here-and-now

But what of the "everydays" in the here-and-nows of neoliberal democracy in contemporary South Africa? Now that the technologies of transition management have heralded a time of the "after" (... happily ever after?), what of the aftermath? How is the historical apprehension of the everyday filtered by a structural erosion of visibility, a muting out of the lived consequences of systemic violence? For if it is in everyday life that material inequality, socio-economic marginalisation, the corrosive dehumanisation of structural poverty for certain classes of people are made morally, politically and ideologically acceptable and become both entrenched and normalized, then it is precisely

¹⁸ Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*, Vol. 2, pp 340-358.

to the realm of the everyday that we should turn to find the accreted hauntings and quiet continuations of war - colonial, Apartheid, neo-colonial, neoliberal.¹⁹

Njabulo Ndebele's oft-cited essay, "The Rediscovery of the Ordinary" holds enduring relevance for this discussion.²⁰ For Ndebele the "ordinary" is to be distinguished from the spectacular, the extraordinary and the monstrous aspects of life under Apartheid that have informed much creative representation of Apartheid as a starkly Manichean universe in order to explore the more complex and less striking aspects of day-to-day life under Apartheid (and beyond). It is not surprising that discussions on the "everyday" evoked by Ndebele's intervention have focussed on literary production in particular, since the import of his observations bears on the responsibility of the creative imagination to craft a "sense" of the spiritual, psychosocial and political complexities of living the everyday. By extension, it is in the realm of the creative imagination that the stranglehold of normative perceptual and conceptual paradigms, shaped by "the laws of perception that have characterised apartheid society"²¹, may be eroded or subverted. These "laws of perception" are characterised by the internalised and often unconscious normative modes of cognition that constitute what is collectively perceived (in the sense of what is "seen",

¹⁹ An observation made by Alejandro Castillejo-Cuellar in a personal email communication, January 21, 2006.

²⁰ Njabulo Ndebele, *Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Essays on South African Literature and Culture* (Johannesburg: COSAW, 1991). Ndebele's essay was a pivotal reference point in debates on the social and political role of "culture" in times of political change and inserted the "ordinary", his synonym for the "everyday", as a critical concept in the academic domains in literary, cultural and postcolonial studies. See for example, Derek Attridge and Rosemary Jolly, "Introduction" Derek Attridge and Rosemary Jolly (eds.), *Writing South Africa: Literature, Apartheid and Democracy, 1970-1994* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) pp 1-13. Kelwyn Sole takes up Ndebele's formulation (as well as other theorists of the everyday) in his important analyses of the ways that poetry in contemporary South Africa functions as a grassroots genre and as an expressive domain of critique, contestation and enumeration of structural violence in Kelwyn Sole, "The Witness of Poetry: Economic Calculation, Civil Society and the Limits of Everyday Experience in a Liberated South Africa" in *New Formations* (45, Winter 2001-2002), pp24-53. See also, Kelwyn Sole, "'The Deep Thoughts the One in Need Falls Into': Quotidian Experience and the Perspectives of Poetry in Postliberation South Africa" in Ania Loomba, Suvir Kaul, Matti Bunzil, Antoinette Burton and Jed Esty (eds.), *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005), pp182-205.

²¹ Ndebele quoted in Kelwyn Sole, "The Witness of Poetry", p 183.

recognised as visible) and by corollary, what is rendered unseen, hence, invisible. The significance of Ndebele's comments endures. More than ever there is an urgent need to grapple with, understand and explore alternatives to the ways that historical consciousness in South Africa has been shaped at the fault line of these "laws of perception." Now more than two decades after it was written, Ndebele's call for a "return to the ordinary" resonates with the challenge to articulate and enumerate forms of socio-economic, psychic, intersubjective, structural, material and spiritual violence that are so "normal", so "everyday", at present. Moreover, the critical directions in which Ndebele's discussion points, challenge the unhelpful, flattening and disaggregating conceptual dichotomies of self/society, private/public, individual/nation, good/evil and victim/perpetrator. Rather, the concept of the ordinary, the "day-to-day", is located at the dynamic nexus where class, color, gender and subjectivity intersect both with structure and with the micro-entanglements of the inter-subjective in which motivation, reflection, decision, fantasy, desire and action are lived out.

In the naming and measuring of the human cost of atrocity wrought in the name of progress, modernity, civilisation, racial capitalism, development and globalisation on this southern edge of the African continent, grappling with the everyday remains the work of the *critically* creative imagination. More recently, Ndebele holds that whilst meaning in the wake of the TRC has yet to be made, it will be through integrating historical facts with metaphor that the ruminations, choices, dreams, hopes, disappointments and

aspirations of human experience may be distilled from the everyday.²² So the extent to which everyday life has been informed by the unaccounted human cost of the capitalist modernities of colonial settlement, Apartheid development, neoliberal democratisation and the ever-changing modes of resistance which constitute the social archaeology of the South African nation-state in its current form, and the extent to which this remains invisible to the social imagination, the greater the struggle for reinvigorating collectively imaginable alternatives for an egalitarian, *democratic* peace. Conversely too, the greater the challenge becomes to recognise, acknowledge and support nascent and already-existing alternatives. As the structural violence of and in the everyday is normalised it becomes increasingly compounded by multiple factors: psychic numbing, a generalised psychosocial depression and socio-economic fragmentation; the atomisation of the resourced and privileged realms of public debate from cultures, socialities, work and labour; structural unemployment, struggles for material survival and urban-rural relations of subsistence and dependence; as well as the fracturing of social and political spaces for the forms of self-reclamation and social re-making. These, in turn, are overlaid by the glaring disjuncture between the lived daily realities of the majority, and the rhetoric of promise and delivery which characterise the pronouncements of the state speaking to its citizens.

²² In relation to the work of the TRC, of the possibility of memory-work more broadly and of the role of metaphor in this work, see Njabulo Ndebele, "Memory, Metaphor and the Triumph of Narrative" in Sarah Nuttall and Carli Coetzee (eds.), *Negotiating the Past*. Ndebele affirms that:

"[...] we have yet to find meaning. In fact, it is going to be the search for meanings that may trigger off more narratives. If and when that happens, the imagination, having been rescued by time, will be the chief beneficiary. The resulting narratives may have less and less to do with facts themselves and with their recall than with the revelation of meaning through the imaginative combination of those facts. At that point, facts will be the building blocks of metaphor. (pp 20-21)

When interrogating the everyday, the performative instants of the “new nation” and its promise of “development” and “progress” - set apart from the everyday of the majority in whose name it is called upon to represent and to constitute both as a cohesive, geopolitically bounded identity category *and* a political promise - unravel in ways that highlight the hauntedness of the present by historical disavowal. In the flux and flow of the everyday, the “forms of living in the concrete world”, as Achille Mbembe names the everyday, symbolic and ideational constructions of the South African “new nation” show themselves as hollow referents.²³ For in the concrete world foundational concepts of “nation”, the rights-filled “citizen” and the “new” meet, collapse, disintegrate and reconstitute in ambivalent and highly fraught ways. As the minutiae and entangled, overlapping, contemporaneous here-and-nows of everyday life are disentangled from the multiple temporalities they hold together, the new nation, as an idea and a referent for a set of political, economic, historical, imaginative and material practices, comes apart. These are the multiple though unequal temporalities of the everyday that tug at the bounded edges of the hermetic time-spaces of the new nation: its marked out and sealed off time-spaces for the consumption of the citizen-as-consumer of national commemorative days, museums, monuments, television and radio docu-dramas, print advertisements, international sports events and so on.

Non-responsibility and social denial

In an examination of dominant forms of African (and Africanist) historiography, Jacques Depelchin insists on the conceptual necessity to distinguish "paradigmatic silences" and

²³ Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2001), p 17.

silencings in diverse genres of historical representation and historiography from the silences that may attend the complexities of witnessing, relating, and acknowledging the more individual silences of survivors of atrocity.²⁴ This distinction is important since it signposts the existence, on the one hand, of the many temporalities and genealogies of silences in processes of psychosocial re-integration and of social mourning. On the other hand, it points to the silencings and occlusions shaped by institutions of historical denial which often appear to be, and are also partially, institutions of acknowledgement and remembrance and epistemological erasure in the wake of atrocity. From a more generic notion of historical meaning-making, Michel-Rolph Trioullot argues that structural and epistemological silences are constituted by visible and dominant forms of historical knowledge (and their forms of production) as traces of the incessant and intertwined workings of different institutions of power (including dominant modes of perception) in the production and circulation of those historical narratives.²⁵ These observations signpost the need for vigilance in attending to historical erasures produced through institutions of knowledge (as signatures of epistemological power) and how these shape social knowledge (and dis-acknowledgement) of historical injustice.

The everyday in the city of Cape Town is currently characterised by a socio-economic situation of rapid change. Increasingly, under the weight of its contradictions and structural inequalities, it is a situation of emergency. The connotative resonances of

²⁴ Jacques Depelchin, *Silences in African History: Between the Syndromes of Discovery and Abolition* (Dar Es Salaam: Mkuki Na Nyota, 2005), pp 3-12.

²⁵ Michel-Rolph Trioullot's notion of history derives from his theorisation of the historicity of the social, institutional and epistemological *process* of producing knowledge and dominant narratives regarding the first modern revolution initiated and led by slaves in Haiti. Michel-Rolph Trioullot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), pp 22-30.

emergency bring to mind a situation of extreme crisis, of basic survival and in areas of severe material poverty, the struggle for “bare life.”²⁶ However, emergency evokes equally the dynamism and movement of opportunity, of emergence, of possibility and access to the gain promised by the global economy to local elites that represent and benefit from the opportunities of “emerging markets.” With structural unemployment, the failure of delivery and privatisation of basic services from water, electricity, humane housing and adequate health care, the day-to-day realities for most people are becoming increasingly desperate, particularly for communities that remained structurally “trapped” in the working-class areas of “townships” of the Cape Flats. With the exponential exclusion of so many people from the “formal” economy as labour is casualised, protectionist trade regulations are dismantled and municipal services are privatised, the structural gap between extreme wealth and extreme material poverty ever widens. On the other hand, as local business opportunities intersect transnational capital flows *la dolce vita* has never been as sweet or as fulfilling of its promise for the beneficiary and elite classes both within the country and abroad. There is more than a vital interest in maintaining extant the historical grounds and its foundations on which the lucrative business of the everyday in a “shrinking globe and expanding markets”²⁷ is conducted. Simultaneously, the business of the everyday is disaggregated from the prosaics of atrocity that haunt it. The challenges presented by such disaggregation for a collective memory-work so crucial for meaning-making and political and spiritual regeneration are redoubled when one considers that it is from within the material conditions of emergency

²⁶ The term is Giorgio Agamben’s from *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Translated by Daniel Heller Roazen (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1998).

²⁷ Yazir Henri and Heidi Grunebaum “Jenseits der Regenbogenation: Reflektionen über Gewalt und Erinnerung im heutigen Kapstadt”, translated by Elisabeth Vorspohl, in Anne Jung and Usche Merk (eds.), *Im Inneren der Globalisierung: Psychosoziale Arbeit in Gewaltkontexten* (medico-Report 26, 2005), pp 82-91.

that such memory-work is constrained from emerging. Thus, the possibilities of interpretation, enumeration and social recovery that an alternative collective work of memory may open up are curtailed precisely due to the crisis that necessitates such a work. And as Abdoumalig Simone resonantly reminds us, “Emergency leaves no time for accounting, no time to trace out the precise aetiology of the crisis, for the sequences of causation are suspended in the urgency of a moment [...]. The past brings the community to the brink, and at this precipice, what can there be to remember?”²⁸ As historical consciousness is shaped by the paradigmatic silences informed by a political trade-off that has entrenched a time of change, of “emergency,” of moral impunity for the “unexceptional” violence of systemic material poverty and of epistemological erasure, the everyday is also the time-space of “non-responsibility.”²⁹ It is through and in the everyday that social and historical denial is structured through carefully managed doses of historical acknowledgement.³⁰ This has been promoted, in part, by the ways in which discourses of reconciliation have been formulated through and beyond the TRC process.

As we have seen in the previous chapters, responsibility (as a corollary of reconciliation) has been conceived of primarily in non-materialist, moral and individual terms. Not only

²⁸ Abdoumalig Simone *For the City yet to Come: Changing African Life in Four Cities* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004), p 4.

²⁹ Scott Veitch suggests the notion of “non-responsibility” over against responsibility in his analysis of atrocity and the disaggregation of mechanisms of social management from the lived perception of the world around which creates a psychology of distance and disconnection. Scott Veitch, “Reconciliation and Responsibility”, forthcoming.

³⁰ Eric Santner’s work on mourning, melancholia and historical denial relating to social acknowledgement and “working through” in post-Nazi West Germany formulates the idea of measured doses of historical acknowledgement in more Freudian terms in his elaboration of the notion of “homeopathy” in Eric Santner, *Stranded Objects: Mourning, Memory and Film in Postwar Germany* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1990), pp 20-26. In his exploration of the social embeddedness of denial and acknowledgement of human suffering and atrocity, Stanley Cohen makes the significant observation that the “line dividing denial from acknowledgement is blurred since the opposite of each term is not the other [and that] ‘official’ and public histories, commemorations, memorialisations and truth commissions ‘forget’ and ‘deny’ as much as they ‘remember’ or acknowledge.” Stanley Cohen, *States of Denial: Knowing about Atrocities and Suffering* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001), p 118.

has responsibility been envisaged as an individualised response but it has also been delinked from the material and historical context which has given rise to that which necessitates responsibility (and redress) to be taken in the first place. As I have argued in chapter one, the simultaneous mediation of individual “victim” testimony into a collectivising and generalising historical discourse - a “shared national memory” of pain – and of “perpetrator” testimony, particularly agents of the Apartheid state, into a personalised and vilifying moral discourse, is a significant factor in contributing to this delinking. So not only has the structural relationship between the beneficiary classes and the historically violated not been addressed but its workings in the present time have been occluded. Such notions of responsibility are therefore almost untranslatable into collective practices for social justice in the context of the everyday where invisibility, complicity, non-reciprocity, historical denial and the consistent privileging of whiteness as an unmarked global socio-economic identity category of power cultivate multiple forms of non-responsibility.

The “Mother City”

Nowadays the daily commute on a public transport system – time-tabled to coincide with the temporal rhythms of work, not leisure – to and from the townships of the Cape Flats, to socio-economic locations of systemic depression and peripheralisation for most of the city’s residents who were forcibly taken from the areas around the city centre rehearses daily one of the few visible and embodied traces of the historical claim and material connection of “communities” of the Cape Flats and its townships to land once owned,

tilled, worked, built on and inhabited in and around the central city. Whilst the “production” of racialised urban space as a social (and economic) management tool is well rehearsed, this daily commute illustrates the ways in which the simultaneous, multiple and diverse everydays of commuting for the city’s population are highly stratified as class, history, gender and skin-colour intersect. The development of the city continues to rest on entrenched and always already racialised class relations of entitlement, domination, servitude and dispossession. “This is visible,” as Yazir Henri and myself have written elsewhere, “in every sphere of society from who works in restaurant kitchens to who owns them; who cleans the roads and sidewalks and who are shop owners, whose children are cared for by nannies and whose children have to fend for themselves.”³¹ Viewed spatially, these relations constitute, what, in another context, Arjun Appadurai calls, “disjunct, yet adjacent histories and temporalities.”³² As lived experiences, however, they are always the entangled though perceptually disaggregated parts of the same historical processes which gave rise to them.

This, then, is the “Mother City”, the settler toponym by which Cape Town continues to be called³³; a naming which recalls the world-creating/world-destroying power of colonial toponyms as “representations of space”, in the sense elaborated by Henri

³¹ Heidi Grunebaum and Yazir Henri, “Where the Mountain Meets Its Shadow”, pp. 276-277.

³² Arjun., Appadurai, “Spectral Housing and Urban Cleansing: Notes on Millennial Mumbai” *Public Culture* (12,3,2000), p 627.

³³ As John Western demonstrates in his study of forced removals in Cape Town, the appellation of Cape Town as “the Mother City” illustrates the enduring linguistic and ideological power of myths of white settlement. He observes that the linguistic and ideological reach of such myths simultaneously underwrite a *historical* claim of the origins, at the foot of Table Mountain, of a “White South Africa” and its attendant ideologies of white supremacy, civilization, and development as well as a *geographical* claim of these origins rooted in the centre, to the centre, of Cape Town as a “European” city. John Western, *Outcast Cape Town* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: California University Press, 1996), p 137.

Lefebvre³⁴, which continuously inscribe the institutional and ideological worldviews of the empowered. This is the city that slaves built, a port city, a slave city, a colonial city, an Apartheid city and now one of the country's most rapidly changing urbanscapes in which some of the continent's most valuable real-estate is located.³⁵ Since South Africa's first democratic elections in 1994 the dismantling of legal Apartheid and the subsequent adoption of a neoliberal macro-economic strategy called GEAR³⁶ the landscape of Cape Town has increasingly reflected and entrenched the forms of land dispossession and socio-economic exclusion inaugurated from times of early settler rule. South Africa's inclusion in the global economy has been attendant on implementing new forms of structural adjustment as part of its transitional compromises.³⁷ Whilst the structural accommodations of transition to constitutional democracy have facilitated the growth of a small urban "black" middle-class, the prime beneficiaries of South Africa's "transition" continue to be the privileged and wealthy "white" middle-classes. And in the logic of this transition, Cape Town has become a property speculation and investment opportunity for transnational capital, as land and property restitution, as well as other forms of restitution,

³⁴ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, Translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford, UK and Cambridge, USA: Blackwell, 1991), pp 38-39.

³⁵ This enumeration of the accretions of epochal layers of Cape Town's development as a modern city is my colleague's, Yazir Henri. "Seminar in Motion" through the city, January 10 2006.

³⁶ The Growth, Employment and Redistribution plan. From 1994 to 1996, the newly and democratically elected government under the ANC, the more "redistributive" macro-economic strategy as set out in the Reconstruction and Development Plan was replaced by GEAR in consultation with a technical working group comprised, predominantly, of Harvard-trained World Bank economists. See, Nigel Gibson, "Calling Everything into Question: Broken Promises, Social Movements and Emergent Intellectual Currents in Post-Apartheid South Africa" in Nigel C. Gibson (ed.), *Challenging Hegemony: Social Movements and the Quest for a New Humanism in Post-Apartheid South Africa* (Trenton and Asmara: Africa World Press, 2006), p 3.

³⁷ For elaborated discussions see, Hein Marais, *South Africa: Limits to Change: The Political Economy of Transformation*. London and Cape Town: Zed Books and University of Cape Town Press, 1998); Patrick Bond, *Elite Transition: From Apartheid to Neoliberalism* (London: Pluto Press and Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 2000) and his *Against Global Apartheid: South Africa Meets the World Bank, IMF and International Finance* (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 2001).

have been sacrificed in the name of “reconciliation” and nation-building.³⁸ The business of land development and property speculation has never been more lucrative and it is to the business of the everyday where the haunting remains of disavowed histories and foreclosed futures return.

Prestwich Street: from burial ground to building site

A cold Monday in mid-July 2003. A leaden rain blows off the Atlantic Ocean from Table Bay towards the slopes of Table Mountain. I am standing off Somerset Road, on Prestwich Street in an area called Green Point, on the western outskirts of Cape Town’s central business district. Nearby, boutique coffee shops, designer couture and lifestyle “concept” stores mushroom elegantly along the sidewalks beside quaint roads and cobbled side streets. Off the sidewalks and from the cafés the polyglot accents of the shiny bright local and international jet-set waft, like Babel, skywards. Snuggled between the breathtaking monumentality of Table Mountain, the Victoria and Alfred Waterfront development and Table Bay harbor, this area, adjoining the already gentrified De Waterkant³⁹, offers global chic to the global chic in its most exotic, otherly as well as homogenous forms. From Green Point westwards along Cape Town’s own “Riviera” - the Atlantic seaboard - from Three Anchor Bay to Sea Point, Bantry Bay, Clifton, and

³⁸ See Uma Mesthrie, “Land Restitution in Cape Town: Public Displays and Private Meanings” *Kronos* No.25, 1998/99, pp 239-258. For a critique of the limitations to land restitution as set out in legislation governing the restitution of land rights see Andile Mngxitama’s “National Land Committee, 1994-2004: A Critical Insider’s Perspective” in Nigel Gibson (ed), *Challenging Hegemony: Social Movements and the Quest for a New Humanism in Post-Apartheid South Africa* (Trenton, NJ and Asmara: Africa World Press, 2006) pp 157-201.

³⁹ De Waterkant is a residential area that was inhabited by the descendants of slaves and the “underclasses” of the city buried at the Prestwich Street burial ground. Residents “racially” classified into all the categories of black and brown were forcibly removed during the late nineteen sixties to townships on the Cape Flats such as Manenberg, Guguletu and Bonteheuwel under the Apartheid Group Areas legislations.

Camps Bay; and, in the opposite direction, eastwards into the central city, almost every street block has a building construction or major renovation in progress.

The building cranes that hover phoenix-like across the skyline of the central city and its well-heeled coastal suburbs attest to the extent and speed with which the city's urban topography is rapidly becoming a monument to newer forms of "accumulation by [older forms of] dispossession."⁴⁰ It is no historical coincidence, nor an ahistorical anomaly that the land, property and business owners in these areas are "white" and the purveyors of all forms of wage labor that provide service support (to the private and public sectors) are "black" of all shades. Such a phenomenon is merely in integrity with the continuum of the development logic of Cape Town as a modern colonial/Apartheid city and as a structurally and historically facilitated hub of economic opportunity offered through consensus economics with currently dominant global models.⁴¹

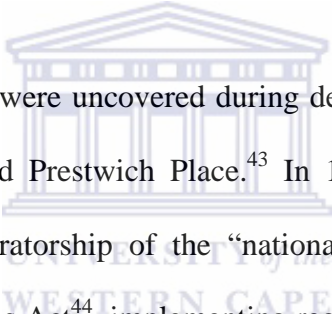
But let us return to that wintry Monday in July 2003. I am standing beside a very recently erected wire fence which encloses one city block of approximately 1200 m² that is bounded by Prestwich, Alfred, West and Schiebe streets. The building that once stood there has been demolished and the privately owned land is being prepared for the development of a seven-storey exclusive - the entry price is just under R1000 000,00⁴² - "New York style" residential and leisure-use apartment building. On this "construction site" the loose surface of sand uncovered on the open ground has washed away with the

⁴⁰ David Harvey quoted in Nigel Gibson, "Introduction", p 3.

⁴¹ See Patrick Bond, *Against Global Apartheid*, pp 22-24 and pp 54-79.

⁴² In US dollars this translates into approximately \$143 000-00. The buying power of a rand, however, is similar to that of the dollar. This would mean that the entry level price for property developments such as this are out of the range of affordability for most middle-class South Africans.

water run-off following heavy rains. But construction has been stopped. Close to where I stand on the corner of Alfred and Schiebe streets I see, jutting through the surface of the ground, at an angle that seems to accuse the sky, a disarticulated adult human femur. Nearby, from the wall of a trench on the boundary, stares a human cranium, crushed on the side by a bulldozer's digger. Towards the centre of the opened ground I see the spoor left by archaeologists: the mounded contours of identified burials, here string stretching and delineating, there sticks marking and measuring. They too have been busy here. First a construction site, now an "exhumation site", or so proclaims a printed official notice attached to the fence. A "site" already.



In May 2003 human skeletons were uncovered during demolition operations on the city block which came to be called Prestwich Place.⁴³ In 1999 Apartheid legislation that governed management and curatorship of the "national estate" was replaced by the National Heritage and Resources Act⁴⁴, implementing regulations that require developers to notify the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA) upon uncovering a grave or burial ground, "the existence of which was previously unknown."⁴⁵ This was done and following an archaeological assessment by the Archaeology Contracts Office (ACO) attached to the University of Cape Town and employed by the developer, SAHRA granted ACO⁴⁶ a permit for the "rescue exhumation" of the more than one thousand

⁴³ The development was called, at that time, the Prestwich Place Development Project. For reasons that will become clear further in the chapter, the developers changed the name of the development to The Rockwell.

⁴⁴ National Heritage and Resources Act No. 25, 1999.

⁴⁵ National Heritage and Resources Act No.25, Section 36(6).

⁴⁶ The Prestwich burial ground is the second burial ground to be uncovered in the area since 1994. The first was in 1995, four years prior to the declaration of the National Heritage and Resources Act. The burial ground was located two blocks west from the Prestwich burial ground on Coburn Street, uncovered and exhumed in the course of demolitions for development of the site.

bodies buried at Prestwich Place.⁴⁷ Exhumations began in early June whilst, also in accordance with the new legislation, a sixty day notification period was begun in order for a public participation process to be initiated so that agreement could be reached between the developer and “interested parties” as to the future of the burial ground.⁴⁸ The drive to notify the “public” then conducted through print media and radio is how the burial ground came to my attention. This is what brought me, that rainy Monday in July, to stand beside the open ground and behold the naked bones whose “resting place has become some of the most sought-after real estate in the country.”⁴⁹

The electronic marketing brochure promoting the pre-construction sales drive for the luxury development that is to be constructed on this unsettled site, this burial ground, that has now been renamed, in an act of wilful excision, The Rockwell, describes the sweet attractions of the city for the investor/visitor:

Voted as one of the top three tourist destinations in the world, Cape Town has it all.

The iconic Table Mountain. Two oceans. White beaches. Fynbos. Ocean drives, wine farms, first-world service [sic], Mediterranean climate, vibrant nightlife, and a relaxed outlook on life.

Local and foreign investors are looking towards Cape Town, because it is the next big thing. And as the next big thing, property in this highly lucrative market is becoming more exclusive. The demand for world-class apartments is on the increase.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ SAHRA, “Permit No.80/03/06/001/51” Cape Town, 5 June 2003, appears as “Appendix A: The Permit” in SAHRA, *Prestwich Place: Appeal Documentation*. These documents form part of the Prestwich Place Project Committee’s collection which is currently housed at District Six Museum. The documents cited in this chapter are in my personal collection. Subsequently almost three thousand bodies have been exhumed from the Prestwich burial ground.

⁴⁸ National Heritage and Resources Act no.25, Section 36(5).

⁴⁹ Gill Moodie, “Old Bones of Contention” in *Sunday Times* (25 January 2004), p 12.

⁵⁰ www.therockwell.co.za Accessed 24 March 2006.

The development and investment in prime real estate and the desecration and exhumations of burial grounds of oppressed, dispossessed and disavowed peoples - particularly indigenous peoples - continues to be a global and historical phenomenon. Here the gaping ground and its unsettled bones beneath which this “next big thing” was imagining itself and demolishing everything else into being, cast a very large shadow on the shiny promise of such an “exclusive” and “first world” dream.

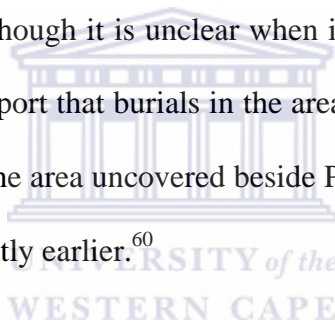
In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, this section of Green Point below Somerset Road fell into the beyond and outside of the demarcated boundaries of the colony; a liminal zone that from the mid-eighteenth to the late nineteenth centuries comprised of a number of formal church, military, hospital and prison graveyards.⁵¹ Outside of the many formal, walled cemeteries in the area was a massive “informal” burial ground.⁵² Early colonial maps of the city, archival and oral records, whilst “forgotten” by city planners and administrators granting permits to purchase and build in the area, show this “informal” burial ground to be a “slaaven begrafplaas”⁵³, colonial Dutch meaning “slave graveyard”. The dead buried in this vast burial ground are, therefore, those erased from institutional economies of knowledge production - referencing, naming, classifying, recording and acknowledging - that construct the dignified posterity of History’s

⁵¹ For a discussion on the topographical location of the Prestwich burial ground in relation to formal colonial burial grounds and in relation to the colonial slave city, its production of space and management of slave bodies see Michael Ian Weeder, “The Palaces of Memory: A reconstruction of District One, Cape Town, before and after the Group Areas Act” (M.A. mini-thesis, University of the Western Cape, 2006), pp 11 -46.

⁵² It has been estimated that the size of this “informal” burial ground, of which the Prestwich burial ground is only a portion that has been uncovered, approaches approximately 300 000 m². SAHRA Permit Committee, “Prestwich Place Burial Ground: Report of SAHRA Permit Committee for the Appeal Scheduled for 23 October 2003”, p 8., in SAHRA, *Prestwich Place: Appeal Documentation*.

⁵³ Antonia Malan, “Prestwich Place: Public Consultation Process, 9 June to 18 August” (Cultural Sites and Resources Forum, University of Cape Town, 25 August, 2003) p. 6, appears as Appendix E: Final Report: Social Consultation (Antonia Malan, CSRF) in SAHRA, *Prestwich Place: Appeal Documentation*.

concretely and symbolically marked graves. The dead buried here were “slaves”,⁵⁴ “free-blacks, artisans, fisherman, sailors, maids, washerwomen and their children [...]”⁵⁵ They were also “the free poor, convicts and political prisoners”⁵⁶ and constitute the social undesirables of Cape Town that remain “buried in Green Point under buildings, streets, homes, business and schools.”⁵⁷ Moreover, this burial ground is in the immediate vicinity to surrounding parts of Green Point and lower Bo Kaap/De Waterkant from where residents “racially” classified as “non-white”, many of whom would be descendants of the dead buried at the Prestwich burial ground, were forcibly removed under the Apartheid Group Areas legislation. Burials at the Prestwich burial ground are thought to have begun around 1700.⁵⁸ Although it is unclear when it stopped being used for burials it is speculated in SAHRA’s report that burials in the area ended between the mid 1800’s and early 1900’s.⁵⁹ Burials in the area uncovered beside Prestwich Street referred to here, however, may have ended slightly earlier.⁶⁰



The lower Bo Kaap/De Waterkant and Green Point residential areas are located above Somerset Road just two blocks south of the burial ground and below the Signal Hill stone quarry where rock quarried and carried by slaves was used to build and pave the early

⁵⁴ This included enserfed indigenous people as well as slaves brought through different phases of Dutch and British colonial rule for a short period from West Africa and later, East Africa, as well as from Madagascar, Mozambique, Indonesia and its islands, the Indian subcontinent and China. See Robert Shell, *Children of Bondage*, pp 40-65.

⁵⁵ Nick Sheperd, “Archaeology Dreaming; Post-Apartheid Urban Imaginaries and the Bones of the Prestwich Street Dead” in *Journal of Social Archaeology* (Forthcoming). I am grateful to Nick Sheperd for sharing the unpublished version of his paper with me.

⁵⁶ SAHRA Permit Committee, “Prestwich Place Burial Ground”, p 10.

⁵⁷ Tim Hart, “Technical Report on Archaeological Excavations at Prestwich Place, Green Point, Cape Town” (Archaeology Contracts Office, University of Cape Town, August 2003) p 5 appears as “Appendix C: Interim Report: Archaeological Excavations (August 11) (Archaeology Contracts Office) in SAHRA, *Prestwich Place: Appeal Documentation*.

⁵⁸ SAHRA Permit Committee, “Prestwich Place Burial Ground”, p 9.

⁵⁹ SAHRA Permit Committee, “Prestwich Place Burial Ground”, p 8.

⁶⁰ According to SAHRA’s report, the first private title-holding was granted by the Burgher Senate in 1827 to a certain James Molton. SAHRA Permit Committee, “Prestwich Place Burial Ground”, p 10.

colonial city. The docks of Table Bay harbour are a little further north, down towards the sea. These places stand as material and topographical connections of residence, of labour and of sociality between the area's residents forcibly removed in the nineteen sixties, the periods of slavery and "emancipation" when slaves and the "underclasses" of the city, and when their descendents lived in the area. Besides the area of "unmarked" or "forgotten" burial grounds, the stone quarry, the buildings and homes in, for example, De Waterkant, the docks; all these places still stand. They stand as "a register of significant, yet inadequately understood, elements of the making of Cape Town."⁶¹ Missing, however, are the people who lived in this neighbourhood until they were removed. Forced removals and the extent of psychic dislocation, social fracture and economic devastation (for the removed) caused have fractured these material links. Understood in historical relation to its location in the lower Bo Kaap/De Waterkant and Green Point area, the Prestwich burial ground uncovering represented a spatial decompression. This permitted a temporal resurfacing of excised material relations and historical connections between living people and the area from which they were removed.

At the meetings held as part of the public participation process many people appealed for "time" to come to terms with the meaning of the burial ground in the centre of a "major node of development expansion in the City."⁶² The stunning extent of social and historical destruction represented by this "accidental" uncovering which, at that time, consisted of one human body per 1 m² in an area of 1200 m², was only beginning to be glimpsed. There was a strong appeal for the exhumation permit to be repealed and for a

⁶¹ Michael Ian Weeder, "The Palaces of Memory", p 2.

⁶² SAHRA Permit Committee, "Prestwich Place Burial Ground", p 2.

moratorium on construction to be placed as a first step to apprehending the presence of the bones as material evidence that the city is built over the graves of slave ancestors and the building over represents an architecture of erasure; a concrete plaqueing over of the traces of that memory. As a woman at the first public meeting explained, “We grew up with haunted places; we lived on haunted ground. We knew there were burial grounds there.”⁶³ It was clear, however, that the pause in development offered through the change in legislation necessitating public consultation was to be a temporary situation --and apparently for the developer, a costly one. In the framing of the public meetings as a consultation regarding the most “proper”, dignified and befitting reburial and memorialization options for the exhumed bodies out of sight, in another location, the rights of the developer to realize the investment-value of the land and the rights of archaeologists and heritage practitioners to realize the research-value of the bones were pre-inscribed as the prevailing and privileged claims.⁶⁴ The outcome was settled then, despite the call to suspend exhumation and construction in order to grapple with, in the words of a community activist, “the significance of the site in terms of history? Not just scientific importance. We need to come to terms [with] what happened to those people – our ancestors. Do bones have to be moved? We should decide that – with the sons and daughters of those slaves.”⁶⁵

⁶³ Antonia Malan, “Prestwich Place: Public Consultation Process, 9 June to 18 August”, p 5.

⁶⁴ SAHRA Permit Committee, “Prestwich Place Burial Ground”, p 12.

⁶⁵ Antonia Malan, “Prestwich Place: Public Consultation Process, 9 June to 18 August”, p 4.

The time of the dead

At the beginning of September, despite an overwhelming appeal at public meetings for the exhumations to be halted, SAHRA announced the resumption of exhumations. A few days later the “Hands off Prestwich Street” Ad Hoc Committee (HOPSAHC) was formed in reaction to SAHRA’s decision and in order to further the claims for “time” made by so many who attended the public meetings. HOPSAHC turned to the new heritage legislation’s appeal procedures to launch an appeal challenging SAHRA’s decision to proceed with exhumations. A second and unofficial public process was inaugurated, informally and simultaneously, by HOPSAHC. With the approval of St George’s Cathedral, the Anglican Church at the centre of the city, a large signboard was erected on the Church’s public announcement board calling for exhumations to be stopped. The typeset on the signboard calling for the end to exhumations was framed by two columns: lists of names, familiar slave surnames common to the city and its inhabitants, to call names back to the “nameless” dead buried at Prestwich Street.

With the appearance of the bodies at the burial ground, a temporal gap had been pried. This gap inaugurated another time: a time for naming, a time for assimilating the extent of the accumulated effects of a social destruction that has been premised on the active destruction of memory and memory traces. This time for the dead heralded a time for the memory-work necessary for social justice to be done. Memory-work as naming, as listing, as re-calling, as re-storying, as accounting, as deferring, as listening, as speaking. HOPSAHC’s work was to extend the brief moment offered by the unfulfilled promise of

the law in order to open what could be the beginning of a collective space for the politically and socially regenerative work of mourning. The HOPSAHC campaign included airtime on community radio discussing the relationship between the city's history of slavery and its expunging of the traces of slave memory from public consciousness. It also included lunch-time pickets in the centre of Cape Town, weekly candle-lit vigils at the burial ground in Green Point, and the distribution of pamphlets and petitions. HOPSAHC located itself along the temporal fault-line opened by the new legislation which revealed the causal connections between the social impact of a rapidly shifting urban landscape and the highly compressed temporalities of development in global time. The campaign called for a slowing down of the development machine in order for a social and historical reckoning to begin. Underlying this call is an acknowledgement of the tensions that inhere between temporalities of psychosocial recovery after atrocity and temporalities of development that structure historical denial and its modes of complicity (through, for example, the containment of historical narratives within sanitising spatial practices of heritage management, interpretative sites, "routes", museums and monuments).

In a neoliberal market economy, the social impact of rapid urban change and its lived effects in the everyday are imperceptibly shaped by the dominant global economy in such a way so as to lag behind already changing urbanscapes. Such a relationship is often both disaggregated and masked. On these fault-lines where multiple temporalities exist in entanglements of normative domination, subordination and disavowal within the same spaces, an opportunity was opened for a counter-temporality to emerge, the time of the

dead. However, the possibility for a politics of restoration, of naming, claiming, and reckoning which, after long years of insult and indignation, constitutes a humble yet beautiful promise of historical justice that was glimpsed with this counter-time, the time of the dead, was connected to the bodies *remaining* in the burial ground. It was premised on the necessity for the open ground of the burial ground and the bodies buried there remaining intact, in integrity and visible *as* a burial ground.

As the appeal procedure followed its course and SAHRA upheld its decision regarding the exhumation permit, HOPSAHC's hopes rested on the final review or appeal mechanism for which the new heritage legislation provides: a special tribunal was constituted by the national Ministry of Arts and Culture to review SAHRA's decision and the HOPSAHC appeal against it and to make recommendations to the national minister. Around the question of exhumation of the bodies buried at the Prestwich Street burial ground, a number of different institutional stakeholders, from diverse perspectives and for different reasons, found common cause. By the middle of 2004, more than a year since the uncovering of the burial ground, the developer had already lost millions in the stalled development and felt penalized for following the prescriptions of the law; city managers and planners were meeting with heritage consultants whilst placating property investors and developers; archaeologists and heritage practitioners were planning research protocols, public history projects and tourist attractions. As the national minister for Arts and Culture explained in a private meeting with HOPSAHC⁶⁶ members following the ministerial tribunal's decision to uphold the exhumation decision of SAHRA, the need to affirm for local and international investors and property owners that

⁶⁶ By this time (August 2004) HOPSAHC had been renamed the Prestwich Place Project Committee.

private property ownership and land rights of owners are inviolable⁶⁷ and that South Africa's new democracy remains safe for international investors was a priority.⁶⁸ It was contended that this would not necessarily be in contradiction with the respectful re-interment of the exhumed bodies and dignified memorialisation of their presence as long as they would be reburied *somewhere else*.

Of the multiple temporalities that inhabit the city's architectural and subterranean landscapes the two different orders represented by the powerful institutional interests that I have elaborated, on the one hand, and HOPSAHC on the other, exhumation would reassert the economic priority of the temporality that enfolds, sustains and supports the former. Retrospectively, exhumation was consistently the assumed and imposed starting point for any negotiations regarding the burial ground and not the need for a reckoning by slowing down the lucrative business of the everyday in this glittering global city.

Buried bodies as transient objects

What has been at stake, then, in leaving the integrity of the burial ground, in the centre of the city, intact, *as* a burial ground? Why was the exhumation of the bodies buried at Prestwich burial ground a pre-determined outcome of the public participation process which seemed to be instrumentalized in order to “rubber stamp and legitimize decisions

⁶⁷ SAHRA's emphasis of the need to observe the constitutional entrenchment of property rights attests to its political privileging of the current use-value of the land for the owner and developer over against the competing claim for communities that were forcibly removed from the area regarding the historical value of the land in material and economic terms. SAHRA Permit Committee, “Prestwich Place Burial Ground”, p. 4

⁶⁸ Comments from personal notes made following the meeting.

that favor[ed] the interests of the developer”?⁶⁹ For the multiple institutional interests promoting the legally justified exhumation of those interred at Prestwich Street the acknowledgement of the “hidden” presence of their bones in the centre of the city was as good as accomplished. As SAHRA’s Permit Committee writes in its report for appeal hearings in October 2003,

While fully acknowledging the unusual significance of this site, the permit committee took the decision to allow the continuation of the disinterment on the understanding that a working group would be established to negotiate with the city about the identification of a suitable site in the Green Point area for memorializing and re-interment, to advise SAHRA about multidisciplinary research to allow better understanding of this site and to support public participation. [...] This process is intended to enhance the significance of the site through *proper* interpretation, while restoring dignity to the remains by relocating them to a proper and permanent resting place.⁷⁰

The moral power of “restoration” to public visibility, hence to remembrance and dignity that is arrogated by the permit committee is underwritten by an epistemological, moral and ideological ascription of transience to the dead of the burial grounds. In this arrogation the dead, yet again, become objects, defined not as human beings violated, but in terms of their use-value as resources, relics and commodities for “multidisciplinary research.”⁷¹ Overlaid by a sense of paternalistic entitlement in the push to “rescue” and

⁶⁹ Hands Off Prestwich Street Ad Hoc Committee, “Substantiation of Appeal”, 15 October 2003, p 2.

⁷⁰ SAHRA Permit Committee, “Prestwich Place Burial Ground”, p 6.

⁷¹ For a discussion of the ways that institutions of knowledge and curatorship, such as archaeology, evade accountability and responsibility for complicity with the forms of genocide practiced against Native American people in the United States through the “translation” of burial grounds, bodies and sacred objects into the object systems of dominant epistemologies see Pemina Yellow Bird and Kathryn Milun’s “Interrupted Journeys: The Cultural Politics of Indian Reburial” in Angelika Bammer (ed.), *Displacements: Cultural Identities in Question* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), pp 10-18. In the South African context, Nick Sheperd provides an incisive critique of the archaeological sciences and practices of complicity. Nick Sheperd, “Archaeology Dreaming”, forthcoming.

rebury the dead of Prestwich Street burial ground, this extract, as an institutional signature of authority and power, suggests that a supremacist notion of history continues to be allied to entrenched class and racialised interests of the structurally privileged and ruling elites.

In a bizarrely amnesiac tautological manoeuvre, the officially “forgotten” status of this burial ground for the city’s management and in institutionally sanctioned forms of public history, instead of functioning as an index to re-member, precisely as forgotten, the “forgotten” status of the people who “tilled the soil, built buildings, drove wagons and served their masters”⁷² has functioned, rather, as a further justification for the twilight status of the dead as (still) not human enough. This, in turn, is overlaid by a stunning forgetfulness regarding the ongoing and lived effects for the majority of the city’s inhabitants - previously classified “racially” within a pseudo-biological continuum of shades of blackness - of exploitation, enslavement, multiple removals, economic dispossession and psychic, spiritual and geographical dislocation⁷³. As HOPSAHC describes it,

[f]or a large section of Cape Town’s community, whose existence and dignity has so long been denied, the discovery and continued preservation of the Prestwich Street burial ground can symbolically restore their memory and dignity. The significance is further enhanced by the fact that it is symbolic of other sites in the immediate vicinity from which

⁷² Antonia Malan, “Prestwich Place: Public Consultation Process, 9 June to 18 August”, p 2.

⁷³ Julian Jonker historicises the historical and political framing of the struggle against the exhumation of the Prestwich burial ground in a genealogy of struggle that grew out of earlier resistance campaigns against forced removals from, for example, District Six, on the eastern boundaries of the city centre. See Julian Jonker, “Excavating the Legal Subject: The Unnamed Dead of Prestwich Place, Cape Town” in *Griffith Law Review* (Forthcoming). I am grateful to Julian Jonker for sharing the unpublished version of his article with me.

people were forcibly removed in terms of the Group Area's Act of 1950.⁷⁴

For descendants of slaves who have also survived and continue to live the daily realities of racialised violence, systemic injustice and structural impoverishment, *perceiving* the bodies of the dead as symbolic objects that are moveable resonates with further affront thick with the injustice of early colonial and more recent Apartheid history.⁷⁵

For a short time the gaping red earth in the centre of the city and the imprints of the bodies found there traced and foregrounded the historical relationship of injustice between the creation of the ghettos, labour compounds of the Cape Flats and its townships and the human cost of the construction of the modern white city. In uncovering the bodies buried beneath the material surface of the city a mimetic link was established between the disavowed experiences of the living and the historical processes of erasure which underwrite these disavowals. In this sense, the uncovering of the burial ground made visible the extent to which these living connections have been erased by the consequences (including intra-subjective, transgenerational and psychosocial) of multiple displacements, topographical erasure as well as by institutional practices of knowledge production (and to which SAHRA's invocation of "multidisciplinary research" attests).

⁷⁴ HOPSAHC, "Substantiation of Appeal", pp 1-2.

⁷⁵ This is particularly significant given that the medicated dose of historical reckoning represented by the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa occluded a reckoning with the forms of systemic violence caused through policies of forced removals, "race" registration, pass laws, land and property expropriations.

Erasing slavery from the cityscape

In Cape Town at present, inner city re-development projects and its immediate environs represent a coming together of international and local investment-as-development capital⁷⁶, a growing global tourism industry and the “business” of heritage management for the consumption of global tourism, through, for example, the UNESCO Slave Route Project.⁷⁷ The city’s slave foundations are, simultaneously though not coincidentally, coming to be increasingly acknowledged yet contained and managed increasingly within the sanitized and depoliticized spaces of museums and “heritage” locations. In these times of neoliberal democracy and the promise of plenty - offered to the already privileged few through carefully regulated processes of market liberalization - the transformative power of a truly democratic work of mourning is disconnected from social and political change. The restorative moral, social and political value of heritage is unmoored from the necessity of restitution and social justice. In this way, heritage becomes an industry that contributes towards erasing-in-time the psychosocial impact of slavery for those who are not only its historical and genealogical descendants but also its trans-generational progeny. By splitting off the lived legacies of slavery from the current time and consigning it to a mythical time out-of-time, heritage institutions disaggregate the psychosocial impact of its experience and its traumatic re-experiences through

⁷⁶ In a bizarre though emblematic enactment of the economic and ideological economy of “reconciliation” discourse, for example, one such inner-city development project (comprised of a syndicate of local and international investors and developers, Eurocape), is called Mandela Rhodes Place. The site is located between the former Slave Lodge (now the Cultural History Museum) and St George’s Cathedral. Apparently, this development is “the next step forward –turning Cape Town’s inner city, still largely a ghost town at night, into another must-see attraction”. Murray Williams, “Enter the City’s New Heart” in *Cape Argus* (7 June 2004), p 1.

⁷⁷ See, for example, Carohn Cornell, “Whatever Became of Cape Slavery in Western Cape Museums?” *Kronos* (25, 1998/99), p 259. See also, Nigel Worden and Kerry Ward, “Commemorating, Suppressing, and Invoking Cape Slavery” in Sarah Nuttall and Carli Coetzee (eds.) *Negotiating the Past*, pp 201-203.

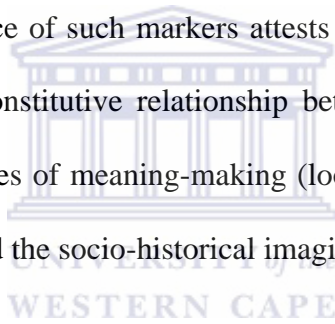
Apartheid-era forced removals from the urban topography of the city. In this way, heritage becomes an institution serving the interests of business and development-for-profit, benefiting those who have been privileged through colonial and Apartheid socio-economic engineering. It does not serve the interests of the ordinary people who were removed to the ghettos of the Cape Flats and who have no possibility to return or reclaim their place in and around the city centre.

Whilst the development of Cape Town from early colonial times to the modern Apartheid city was founded on the forced labour economy of slavery, the uncovering of the Prestwich burial ground provided the grim and inescapable evidence of the social cost of this disavowed history. The social cost of lost futures is also the cost of what can be neither repaired nor recuperated. In this brief restoration of the historical link and undisputable claims of the city's inhabitants who resided in the city centre and across the peninsula before being forcibly relocated, an opportunity was opened to begin the slow process of enumerating loss and its erasures. It opened the possibility to reclaim new futures based on the restored visibility of multiply severed historical links. The refusal of institutions of politics, business, city and heritage management to *see*, to acknowledge such links was to witness a further severing in progress in the present.

Dislocating forced removals: De Waterkant

The excision of systemic violence, its aetiologies and psychosocial consequences in the everyday relates not only to the ways it is disaggregated by social management mechanisms but also to normative and super-imposed modes of perception. So whilst the

psychic and social economies of violence and its afterlives provide an epistemological challenge for collective modes of meaning-making, such challenges are compounded when human experiences of injustice are simply unregistered as “worthy” of acknowledgement and redress. As a crime and as an act of war against the human body, spirit and countenance, the absolute affront of forced removals remains relatively unspoken *as such* and, with a few stark exceptions, such as in District Six, topographically unmarked. There are no “visible” indexes or counter-markers inscribed on the urban landscape that may rupture the almost seamless “complicity of architecture and nature”⁷⁸ that render the violence of displacement and the registration of outrage both invisible and mute. The absence of such markers attests rather to the process of erasure itself. This underscores the constitutive relationship between the metaphoricity of the ocular field for collective modes of meaning-making (looking and seeing as a metaphor for cognition and visibility) and the socio-historical imagination.



Until the late nineteen sixties the lower Bo Kaap/De Waterkant/Green Point area beneath the Signal Hill stone quarry, the burial grounds two blocks north and the docks at Table Bay harbour existed as a living and material connection between residents in the area and the period of slavery when slaves and the city's “underclasses” lived there, on the then colonial town's peripheral edge until forced removals. Almost two centuries later forced removals were to sever that living connection and interrupt the undeniable materiality of networks of spatial, social and economic relations of labour, service, leisure, residence, family and neighbourhood that attested to such embodied, historical and community connectedness. Nowadays it is an area where accelerated gentrification and

⁷⁸ Julian Jonker, “Excavating the Legal Subject”, forthcoming.

aggressive development proceeds apace. It is a locale in which the dehistoricised “heritage” value of the architecture has been protected by heritage legislation⁷⁹ whilst the right of return for its former inhabitants has been abrogated.

It is significant that the built environment, especially the houses and cottages in the area, stands intact. Forced removals have caused violent, irreparable and unbridgeable tearing in the lives, life-worlds and economies of people, of families, of communities and of neighbourhoods who continue to live with its consequences. This seems to be less assimilable into epistemological and narrative frameworks when the built environment, the houses, sidewalks and roads remain intact. It is as if the intactness of the built environment masks a massive disjuncture between the affront of the appearance of continuity for the white residents who came to occupy the homes of the forcibly ejected and the irreparability of the violation of the removals for previous inhabitants. Conversely, when homes, buildings and roads were destroyed so that “only” rubble and open land remained and struggles to prevent a total building over were successful (such as in District Six), a psychic and social space seems to have been opened over time that is mirrored by the topographical traces of destruction on the landscape. Indeed, it could be argued that the “victory” of the struggle to prevent the redevelopment of District Six (during Apartheid) was a victory for the posterity of the *inscriptability* of collective memory, as much as for the posterity of socio-cultural memory. For the inscriptability of collective memory, spatially, textually, materially, and its generative potential for land and other restitution claims, continues to be mirrored by the materiality and visibility of

⁷⁹ National Heritage and Resources Act No. 25, 1999.

the rubble of destruction.⁸⁰ Again, recalling Simonides (in the previous chapter), the District Six Museum, itself, could be understood to have inaugurated a collective mnemonic practice of spatialising memory in order to name, remember and mark both the destruction of the area, as well as the lives of its residents.

Home demolitions and radical visible changes to the urbanscape may externally reflect the ruptures interior to the life-worlds and being-in-the-world for families and communities forced from their homes and off their land. The visibility of destruction on the land may avow the forms of psychosocial dislocation that are less “visible” but no less devastating. This mimetic link between the external and material traces of demolition and the ways in which the experience is carried is truncated when the built environment and building facades have remained intact and their functionalities uninterrupted. And this, in turn, is of consequence for generating collective forms of cognitive expression and claim.⁸¹ So when one visits the lower Bo Kaap/De Waterkant area today it is striking how the intactness of the area is promoted as architectural evidence of its *age* and of its “unique” and “romantic” features. Take a marketing brochure for an “exclusive” guesthouse, accommodation establishment-cum-estate agent in Loader Street (from

⁸⁰ Significantly, District Six stands out in terms of the sheer number of social, cultural, political and activist processes of reclamation and volume of memorial, cultural and interpretative production. As a number of scholars note, the construction of collective memories of forced removals from District Six often frames the narrativisation of experiences of forced removal and relocations in other areas across the peninsula. See for example, Michele Paulese, “An Oral History of Tramway Road and Ilford Street, Sea Point, 1930’s-2001”, p 11. Annie E. Coombes notes that “District Six has assumed an iconic status” and that “in a sense it has become metonymic of all those dehumanising instances of forced removals that were an integral part of apartheid’s master plan [...]”. Annie E. Coombes, *Visual Culture and Public Memory in a Democratic South Africa* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2004), p 117.

⁸¹ With regard to this area in the lower Bo Kaap/De Waterkant area, I have not found any published sources regarding forced removals except for a book that is also a memorial text by Gloria Kube and Ruby Hill, *Living in Loader Street: Reminiscences of growing up and life in Loader Street before the forced group removals of July 1966* (Cape Town: Rue Publications, 1996). Indeed, in the preface Ruby Hill notes that “[...] there is a lot of material concerning ‘the rape of District Six’, I have found little on Loader Street.” Hill explains, “Of course there is a radical difference between the two areas. Loader Street was upgraded [sic] and renovated. It can be visited today.” Gloria Kube and Ruby Hill, *Living in Loader Street*, p 1.

where black and brown residents were removed in 1966), “De Waterkant Village.” Under a sub-heading in the brochure entitled, “*Our Village*” (my emphasis), the area is presented as follows:

De Waterkant Village lies in the historical Bo Kaap area of beautiful Cape Town, which was built to house freemen and slaves in the 1700’s. Trendy and fashionable it is known as the Greenwich Village of South Africa with its quiet tree-lined streets, elegantly restored cottages, spectacular views of Table Mountain and friendly village ambience.

With a distinct feeling of living the past in the present, international designers and architects have enthusiastically participated in mixing Cape Antiques, rich colours, contemporary art and modern comforts in décor and design to create a funky and very desirable destination.⁸²

This is but one illustration of the ways in which the historical conjuncture between *why* and *how* the area “built to house freemen and slaves in the 1700’s” came to be denuded of their descendents (and the area’s inhabitants) in the later twentieth century, and *why* and *when* the preservation of the architectural “heritage” of the area came to be prioritised, is strikingly erased. This also highlights the ways in which consumerist representations of the history of the city are imprinted with the epistemological signature of the economically empowered.

⁸² De Waterkant Village brochure, De Waterkant, no date. In a panel of the brochure subtitled, “And so much more!”, a collage of thumbnail photographs illustrate the added attractions of service and security that this luxury accommodation establishment affords to its guests: one shows a uniformed group of smiling (of course!) women domestic workers (black, of course!), another shows a uniformed, smiling (of course!) security guard (black, of course!) with his dog, another shows a glass of wine, a swimming pool, and still others show the delights and beauty of the “village”.

Where homes have remained intact and re-occupied the violence of *how* re-occupation and *how* gentrification have proceeded - apparently seamlessly - and the lived effects of that violence are *dis*-acknowledged. It is this double outrage of the all too recent forced removals and the disavowal of its devastation in human terms that were also evoked with the uncovering of the Prestwich burial ground. For me, the disjuncture between the startling *sight* of human beings lying unburied in the glaring *openness* of the ground and the architectural intactness of the area around it evoked these many erasures-in-time. For erasures-in-time are externalised as material traces of psychosocial fragmentation, of economic injustice and of the outrages of silence and complicity which constitute the human cost over many periods of the central city's development. The open ground made visible this disjunctive contrast between the "here and now" of the built and material intactness of the area, its security-guarded, restricted access, gentrified tranquillity⁸³ with the "here and then" of less visible, but no less traumatic, forms of the violence of forced removals. As with many forms of systemic violence that are not directly "evidenced", physically, externally and materially, its experience becomes more challenging to name *as such*. The economic destruction and psychosocial dislocation of removals and the structural relations of entitlement and access that are entrenched spatially become all the more difficult to enumerate whilst the complex relationship between the crime of forced resettlement and socio-economic justice, material and "symbolic" reparations become harder to articulate.

⁸³ Under the section subtitled, "And so much more!" of the "De Waterkant Village" brochure, thumbnail photographs illustrate the added attractions of service and security afforded by this luxury establishment to its guests: a uniformed group of smiling (of course!) women domestic workers (black, of course!); a uniformed, smiling (of course!) security guard (black, of course!) with his dog, a glass of wine, a swimming pool, and other "village" delights.

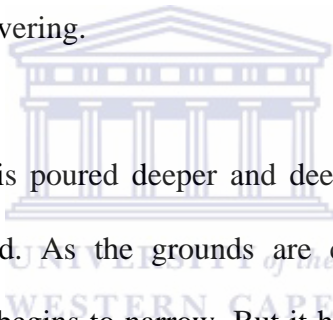
Erasures-in-time

Whilst the historicity of the Prestwich burial ground itself may represent erasure-over-time, in relation to its location in the lower Bo Kaap/De Waterkant/Green Point area, the appearance of the bodies of the historically “forgotten” revealed the extent to which erasure-over-time simultaneously constitutes one of many of the conditions of the everyday, as erasure-in-time, for many of the city’s population. This was the everyday - overlaid by the dominant ideological and conceptual paradigms of the "new" – that was interrupted with the uncovering of the burial ground. This interruption of the business of the everyday, of erasure-in-time as a process in progress - literally and metaphorically, provides a localised glimpse into the ways that global capital organises time and forgetting. For the dominant time of capital’s drive works to erase the historicity of the social and material grounds of its reproduction in the comings and goings of the everyday. With the uncovering of the burial ground, the pause inserted into the dominant temporality reveals the ways in which dominant time shapes and is shaped by perceptions and practices of space, of history, of justice and of human-ness. The dominant time thickens social denial and perceptual disaggregation. It does this by re-presenting urban spaces within a seamless continuity of inevitability and of “progress” (the homes in the lower Bo Kaap/De Waterkant, the new developments in Green Point, of which “The Rockwell” is but one), on the one hand, and by setting aside dedicated, domesticated spaces such as a “slave” memorial, a mausoleum for reburial or a museum, on the other. In this sense, the "forced removal" of the bodies from the burial ground reasserted the power of the temporality of capital so that it could get on with its business of

“development”. For a short while, however, the transient integrity of the burial ground made visible the ways that erasures-over-time are overlaid by and constituted through many accumulated erasures-in-time. It made visible the ways in which structural dispossession (through the land and property pillage of forced removals) is normalised and structural privilege (the constitutional right for landowners to gentrify and develop “their” property in the area) is naturalised. And it provided the topographical markers of living links to this part of the city by calling of attention to the ways that these connections have been further fractured by forced removals.

The inauguration of a collective work of mourning was disrupted by disinterring the dead from their burial ground and reburying them elsewhere. A truly democratic work of mourning was foreclosed by the implication of the politics of this work for the nation-state through its various institutional agents. Whilst foreclosure affirms the outrageous insult of the refusal to name the dead as “forgotten”, it is also an implicit acknowledgement that the burial ground has been *actively* produced and conceived as “unknown” (and the dead as unnamed). By removing the bodies of Prestwich burial ground and reburying them “in a proper and permanent resting place”, the agents that interpret, manage and curate the “national estate” assume the power to neutralize and domesticate the political energies that the dead hold for the living. For in the burial ground, the dead are located in a material relationship to their site of burial, and the burial remains in a material relationship to its location in the city. This material connection establishes a network of historical relationships of complicity, denial, agency, erasure, benefit, loss and responsibility between “actually existing human beings”. Conversely,

exhuming the bodies performs a material delinking of the historically aggressed from the moral and historical grounds of claim: for mourning, for justice, for social, spiritual and political regeneration and for the modes of enumeration that proclaim, “This happened here. Here and not there. This is the place and it happened here.” As the bodies become “mere” bones that will eventually be buried in another place, they will enter a narrative economy of containment and its modes of carefully constructed authenticity. Safely preserved, translated, archived and artifaced into “heritage”, into public history, into “cultural” sites, and into memorials to the slavery of mythic time, of “once-upon-a-time”, the bodies of the burial ground will be excised once again from the here-and-now that was disturbed in their uncovering.



Each day, a viscous concrete is poured deeper and deeper into the place that was the Prestwich Street burial ground. As the grounds are covered, the temporal fracture symbolized by its bare lament begins to narrow. But it has not been closed. It cannot be closed. It is said that this ground is haunted. Beneath another 300 000 m² of these streets and sidewalks, homes and boutiques, nightclubs and wine-bars lie the covered remains of many, many more “forgotten” dead. Their time, too, approaches.

AFTERWORDS

The TRC has come and gone. In its wake a collective language of “memory” has been inscribed on the horizon of time, called the “past”. The uncovering and exhumation of the bodies at the Prestwich Street burial ground is but a symptom of how the production of a past from the entangled everyday of South Africa’s transition has denuded “memory” of its social, psychic and political energy. Increasingly shaped by the complex imperatives of the “new” nation-state, “memory” has become an object. As a category of “experience”, memory has come to stand in as an index of the authenticity of human suffering. And as “memory” has been made into a thing, a product, a commodity, the tasks of remembrance (and of mourning) as particular forms of human labour, have been drained of their restorative possibilities. So as historical consciousness and public memorial culture have come to exclude less resolute and less “fitting” engagements with the “past”, the possibilities for mourning, renewing and reclaiming forgotten futures have become more remote.

The terms that have been set for “dealing with the past”, however, come to mean differently when their temporal vectors are inverted and their spatial metaphoricity is turned upside down. AbdouMaliq Simone evokes these different meanings in his own more future-oriented formulation of commemoration. This is remembrance as the work of memory so as to acknowledge and celebrate modes of world-making and human creativity in the everyday:

If there were an opportunity lost, and if there is certain social possibility that continues to haunt the city it is this capacity to become many things. In this way, African cities do not operate simply as modernity yet to be made or as the evidence of its failure. There are worlds to assume outside of structural adjustment, incessant low-intensity warfare, good democratic government or rampant piracy. Commemoration is memory of this capacity.¹

Meaning, clearly, is not made by time. Neither is it created by events or by happenings. Making meaning, as Simone observes here, is the everyday work of human beings. And it continues to be the everyday work of those for whom hope remains viscerally immediate and socially urgent. The work of making meaning - of which rendering atrocity intelligible remains a crucial part, if highly fraught - is also the slow but sure work of the creative, sentient and engaged imagination. The “spectres of the untold” evoke this capacity for the socially engaged imagination to avow the potentialities of what may have been, and to translate this into shared images of the still possible. In this sense, the “untold” relates less to the imaginary of what “memory” is before it is mediated into speech, than to the work of mourning forgotten *futures* so as to recommit to more just and hopeful ones.

¹ AbdouMaliq Simone, “Among Ruins: On the Spirits of Commemoration” in Edgar Pieterse and Frank Meintjies (eds.), *Voices of the Transition: The Politics, Poetics and Practices of Social Change in South Africa* (Sandown: Heinemann, 2004), p 31.

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- (b) A copy of Prestwich Place Project documentation in author’s personal collection.

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