

## PLAYING RUGBY WITH THE TRUTH

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**Abstract.** *This paper attempts to think about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in a different way, by examining a particular event that happened in South Africa while the TRC was in process, namely, the court battle between President Mandela and the South African Rugby and Football Union (SARFU) over racism. This exploration flows into an argument about a political struggle the TRC was caught up in, over who would construct memory. To illustrate this struggle, selected media portrayals of the TRC are compared with ways in which the TRC portrayed itself. Important to these considerations was an examination of the cost (to survivors) of notions of "reconciliation", "truth" and "healing", especially when reparations are not paid. Finally, the paper uses various psychoanalytic lenses to explore the TRC process as a way of seeing the construction of so called white and black psyche.*

"The capacity to speak to others is a human right, and perhaps the most fundamental human right. If this capacity is forbidden, whether de facto, by some injustice of fate, or on principle, for example, as a punishment, a harm is inflicted on the speaker thus constrained. He is set apart from the speech community of interlocutors. To no one is he any longer something other, nor is anyone now his other ... There are many ways of imposing silence. The right to impose silence which the community grants itself is always dangerous. Any banishment is a harm inflicted on those who undergo it, but this harm necessarily changes to a wrong when the victim is excluded from the speech community. For the wrong is the harm to which the victim cannot testify, since he cannot be heard. And this is precisely the case of those to whom the right to speak to others is refused." (Lyotard, 1993:134-136).

### INTRODUCTION: THE RAINBOW LANDSCAPE.

In this paper, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) will be seen as an

obscure creation, a rainbow nation. This highlights the construction of a new tradition, the "invention of a biography" made up of "new idioms and metaphors for understanding collective experience" and rendering "real" the identity of the rainbow nation (Antze & Lambek, 1997:xx). The TRC will be seen as the truth-production machine of the rainbow nation with the (re)creation of new idioms and metaphors, for example, terms like "forgive", "forget", "reconciliation", "trauma", "healing", etc.

This creation needs thoughtful attention so that something of its inventiveness can be extracted, and thereby propel us into the future. Yet, it is also a creation that functions much like a "screen memory" that simultaneously conceals as well as reveals the production of new taken-for-granted truths. This is what Antze and Lambek call the "cultural shaping of memory, to the roles of trope, idiom, narrative, ritual, discipline, power, and social context in its production and reproduction" (Antze & Lambek, 1997:xii).

In this paper, no one theoretical line will be taken, instead what is offered is an attempt to illuminate practices of reification that attempt to "make dead" the richness of the TRC debate. Tools - ideas - will be offered in the hope that these will resist the stranglehold of those authoritative discourses which try to speak and think for the TRC, as opposed to think of the TRC (cf. Oakley, 1997).

Each critic will no doubt approach the TRC with vested interests and introduce a particular view of the atrocities of the past. While our paper is not without political bias, and can correctly be read as a rather idiosyncratic list of pet gripes dressed up in sophisticated theory, it is through the connection of these dissimilarities that we try to imagine different relational possibilities. For example, we will explore the relation between rugby and the TRC, so as to reframe the way in which the law functions in South African society. It is perhaps the task of critics to expand on the work of the TRC so that various patterns or assumptions may emerge. It is a credit to the TRC that so much can (and will) be extracted from its practice and texts. Thus, academic writing carries on the work of the TRC, to obviate repetition of the past horrors in our society.

The TRC is not a homogenous institution, on the contrary, and it falls prey to many conflicting agendas which speak not only of its aims, but which mirror our at present unregulated society in a state of transition. Within this montage of conflicting agendas, the TRC finds itself walking several tightropes, some more apparent than others. For example, how to establish a sense of justice without granting blanket amnesty, or prosecution of everyone who had committed human rights violations? This tension is exacerbated by the fact that the liberation movement was seen to be fighting a morally justifiable war, and as such, would want the human rights violations committed by them to be seen in this light.

This paper pursues three main arguments. Firstly, it explores what is at stake in the process of trying to make public the horror of the past. It would appear that thinking about the horror of the past is resisted through an over-simplification and distortion of what transpired. The truth, while appearing as a totality - whole - encompasses a series of errors and contradictions which are *essential* to the final product. Such is the nature



of any truth, and it is the task of the critic to unravel these oversights and slippages.

For example, the past horrors of the Apartheid State have been packaged into carefully chosen sound-bites that tell a good story. Media presentations are important because, through these representations, the TRC tried to create a new imaginary that people could identify with. The way people identified with the new imaginary was rather unexpected, the focus being on what Lars Buur calls "the secret, the powerful and the painful" (Buur, 2000). As Buur explains, the effects of this are that the TRC "gave everybody an easy escape, be it the African National Congress (ANC), most Apartheid operatives, and maybe most importantly the white / Indian / Coloured beneficiaries. This is the real paradox of the TRC process. On the one hand, the construction of the big two: Apartheid versus ANC; bad versus good; evil versus heroic; past versus future. On the other hand, the language, images, and metaphors used redeemed everybody, because the 'real' was secret so we could not have known" (Buur, 2000).

Secondly, the paper will explore the (psychoanalytic) question of the Law in the Name of the Father. The struggle over power in language is significant here, because this is what the TRC should have dealt with and tried to do, but as will be argued, yet another "language" which did not listen to what the speakers really said, emerged. Instead, the TRC re-framed stories in the name of reconciliation, forgiveness, explanation, etc., thereby objectifying the voices within its own working agenda. For those struggling over language in this way - for access to the Law in the Name of the Father - it was a life and death struggle. Without access to the Symbolic Order, the subject is foreclosed and sacrificed, becoming an object to enhance the privilege of the Other.

Finally, this paper will explore the way in which two sets of victims have emerged. These two groups include: firstly, those who have been affirmed by way of work opportunities and important positions in society - which makes it possible for those individuals to make worthy contributions to South Africa's future; and secondly, those whose life circumstances have changed very little. Clearly the first group provides a structure / construction that can help screen out the intolerable effects of suffering human rights violations (Harper, 2000). However, the relation between these two groups needs to be considered, or rather, what happens in the spaces between them. Is this a space for shared experience and support between former comrades? Or perhaps a space for alienation and phobic disgust, as the abject desperation of the second group serves as an unwarranted reminder of something that is too painful to remember. Simply put, a space which reminds of the past present and present past (Harper, 2000).

This categorisation, no doubt overstated in the manner of all categories, is interestingly implicated within the workings of the TRC process. As Buur (2000) has noted, the TRC "decided to a large extent what could be written and presented in the media ... They chose between 22 000 statements which stories should be heard ... and although the TRC writes that most victims was poor and uneducated ... the stories in the Final Report ... (are about) well educated, relatively rich black / Coloured / Indian / white victims in the ANC elite."

## REMEMBERING.

Aristotle proclaimed that there is "a desire to know", to see and concern oneself with seeing what has come to pass, not only in order to attempt to understand, but to have witnessed what has been seen. Similarly, Nietzsche posits that to bear witness is a human imperative. Yet, as Foucault (1972:41) makes apparent, what is seen, the "new surfaces of appearance", is/are always constructed through a complex group of discursive practices.

Lets begin with *Kumbula*<sup>1</sup>, the ghosts of the past, our African ancestors. The ancestors, which constitute the "discourse of the Other", wish to speak of those sacrificed for the struggle, so as to be able to bury the dead<sup>2</sup>. When denied a proper burial, these ghosts of the past haunt the living. It is these ancestors who bear witness to a self that narrates not just his/her individual story, but the narrative drama of the collective past and present. Narrates, that is, not a collective unconscious, nor memories that are "uniquely theirs, as specifying singularity", but memories that form part of a living embodiment of the past and present (Antze & Lambek, 1997:xx).

The permission to speak is a human right that came about through a protracted, and violent, protracted struggle against an authoritarian Apartheid regime. The political struggle may have ended in negotiation, but remnants of that authoritarian Apartheid psyche remain in place. These remnants are those discursive practices which structure the present day objects of perception within the framework of an us-them narrative. One example of this is the endless and non-specific talk of "the violence" which, in a peculiarly South African way, dresses old racist ideas up in new clothes.

It seems that the right to speak can come about only through an ideological war which involves not only mass action, but also the development of strategies to read the intentions / actions of those forces which seek to perpetuate Apartheid and destabilise change. Strategies to read can only come about when there is the creation of space to think. It is the creation of a space to think that traumatised South African society finds itself struggling to do. For example, one wonders if the dominance of the image-based identity amongst certain sectors of the Cape Town population is less about being "cool" or "laid back", than a refusal to think about the (impossible) contradictions which fracture a homogenous Cape Town.

The ancestors' desire to know and to speak of the past can then only take place where there is a relentless seeking out of those discursive practices which aim to inhibit the liberating power of the stories of the past - in particular, those agendas which subject stories of the past to a trial by media. In this context, one could ask what the TRC is: a media fiction, a re-writing of history, a form of psychological healing, the construction of a new national identity (collective memory) or a pawn in a political struggle? Before discussing the manner in which conflicting agendas are able to impact on the

<sup>1</sup> Kumbula, which means to remember, is an organisation which has being set up to acknowledge those who played a role in the struggle: to bring the dead home and give them a proper burial. The organisation was built around the words of Chris Hani, who said we need to remember.

<sup>2</sup> The cultural need to bury the dead takes a tangible form in the operations and effects of the TRC: to find bodies in secret graves, etc.



perceptions of the TRC, let us explore some of the strategies (discursive practices) involved in reading public events.

### WAYS OF READING.

When looking at the ways in which different discourses - as "language games"- compete for a monopoly on the portrayal of history, Wittgenstein's useful idea is that we can speak of a form of reasoning which is not only subject to a particular grammar of thought, but which asserts its explanations as both the cause and truth (Bouveresse, 1995). For an example of the form of reasoning to which Wittgenstein refers we might look no further than the Gulf War. In *The spectre of ideology*, Slavoj Zizek (1994a) remarks that the way in which the mass media portrayed the Gulf War led the public to "read" Saddam Hussein as an irrational, evil outlaw, or, more pertinently, as a malignant growth which needed to be cut away by the "good" and rational Western Democracy / Health Surgeon. This reasoning was used to justify the need for the United States' military operation, and involves a form of ideological mapping which inevitably simplifies what is happening.

In South Africa, it seems as if the struggle of the heroes and heroines of the past are now subsumed into an ongoing ideological simplification of what transpired, where a plurality of voices are condensed. In this scenario, the trial of O J Simpson, the death of Princess Diana and Winnie Mandela's appearance before the TRC all make prime-time viewing. For example, through the death of Princess Diana, the general public and press created a mass hysteria, and an opportunity to live out private lives through vicarious identification with a (victimised) public persona. Was her death a media fiction or a historical event?

It would appear then that we live in a world in which people want to see history unfold in front of their eyes; a world where the symbolic is overshadowed and dominated by an imaginary universe. People no longer read, but surf the Net or phone Talk Radio, and cyberspace reasserts what Derrida has referred to as "the metaphysics of presence". There is a negation of Otherness / difference through assimilation of the Other (Arendt, in Lyotard 1993:136)<sup>3</sup>. In South Africa, the Other is assimilated through the implicit assumption that we are now One - the rainbow nation, "Simunye!"

The TRC might usefully be seen as a microcosm of the bigger picture, in which a new set of conflicting agendas have come to the fore. These agendas stretch beyond South African national confines to the global arena. Globalisation, in turn, impregnates local narratives, perhaps no more so when the signifiers are sex and power. This "sexy" discourse displaces the focus from economic marginalisation and issues about third world debt, as was evident when the United States president, Bill Clinton, visited Africa; his official status and economic policies were constantly undermined by jokes about his sex life. More importantly, however, globalisation corrupts traditional cultural practice, creates peculiar hybrids within developing contexts.

<sup>3</sup> "What makes human beings alike is the fact that every human being carries within him/her the figure of the Other. The likeness that they have in common follows from the difference of each from each" (Arendt, in Lyotard, 1993:136).

## LANGUAGE AND THE NAME OF THE FATHER.

In deciphering the manner in which the unremembered past is enacted in the present as a contemporary event, it could be said that the original acts/Acts which created the context of Apartheid became the "agency of the letter" (script) of Apartheid, which both insists and repeats itself within the context of the present.

Apartheid, a particularly brutal form of institutionalised segregation, did not come from nowhere but had its roots in European imperialism. As such, it was a form of colonial discourse - a discourse pushed to the limits. The legacy of Apartheid can perhaps best be traced to the division of land on the basis of race in the Glen Grey Act, passed by the British in the 1890s.<sup>4</sup> This paved the way for the Land Act of 1913, and a series of new Acts which institutionalised Apartheid in ever more oppressive and pervasive forms, e.g. Suppression of Communism Act, Population Registration Act, Group Areas Act, etc. These Acts combined with disciplinary machinery, like detention without trial, torture, states of emergency, banning, assassinations, etc., to create a climate of fear.

The Apartheid regime embarked on a violent "total onslaught" against the disenfranchised black majority, depriving them of basic life necessities and subjecting them to propaganda. Not only were blacks taught in Afrikaans, but they were told why Apartheid was a good system in Afrikaans. What followed in 1976 was an incineration of the texts which had scripted "official" South African history, when Soweto youths refused Afrikaans-schooling. This act broke the "transference spell" and brought about a deciphering of the implicit and explicit dynamics of the Apartheid regime.

It was this battle over language that was the heart of the political struggle, a struggle not only about language, but about those vehicles which give the child access to language. For Lacan, language comes by way of the Name of the Father. In South Africa, the Apartheid regime attempted to foreclose the Name of the Father to black children. The black father was humiliated by manual labour, and removed from the domestic scene. To survive this foreclosure, black children used the struggle as a means to have access to the Name of the Father, through entrance to a symbolic universe (public discourse), and to step outside of the non-space produced by the violent onslaught. The struggle gave the child a means to create a name for him/herself through identifying with and taking on the role of activist. This identification gave the individual a means to bind together unbound excess emotions and vent these emotions through political acts. Simply put, the struggle acted not only as a voice of liberation, but also as a site of therapy - a symbolic container.

Having access to the Name of the Father is often inscribed through an initiation ritual, and in South Africa, a new initiation ritual was forged. For many activists, this involved undergoing police brutality (torture) through whose violence, a kinship was established with those fore-fathers incarcerated on Robben Island. Without access to the Name of

<sup>4</sup> This is, of course, a gross oversimplification. If anything, Apartheid could be said to be a direct result of (British) capitalist mining endeavours, whose need for cheap labour produced a situation in which Apartheid system benefited white workers and at the same time, guaranteed that black workers could not move up the scale. The 1913 and 1926 Land Acts were of course, integral to this process of dis-inheritance of the black population. This suggests a whole conflagration of forces and factors "at play" in a colonial context, and not that Apartheid simply continued a linear process set in motion by the British.



the Father, and by implication if we accept the Lacanian argument, the Symbolic Order, the individual does not have the tools to create a space to think and find a voice. It is this privation that many of the townships in South Africa still face and enact in various forms of violence, e.g. poverty, criminality, victimisation, etc.

This process becomes problematic in post-Apartheid South Africa when the role of activist is taken away from the individual, and is exacerbated when the TRC categorises an individual as not being a victim of Apartheid, or of not having sufficient evidence to "prove" victimhood. This act of categorisation undermines those very identifications the individual used to hold his/her psyche together and breaks down psychic defence. The fantasy of victory and longed for recognition, as a container, is removed. At this point, the old pain resurfaces and new containers might be sought. In extreme cases, gangs seem a viable option in that they replicate some of the chaos felt in the internal world, and yet, at the same time offer a holding space. Gangs also provide a home in a situation where the family has broken down.

### THE BATTLE OVER LANGUAGE.

The summoning of ex-President of the Apartheid regime, P W Botha, to appear before the TRC to account for his role in atrocities was characterised by refusal. He refused to appear before the TRC, thereby refusing the authority of the TRC, and was subsequently subpoenaed to appear in juridical court. Once in court, P W Botha's refusal both to speak English and to appear before Victor Lugaju, a black judge, constituted a refusal of the authority of the Law. Thus, P W Botha sets himself up as the Law - a perverse Father - and insists that the black man speak the white man's language. Botha's refusals then, recycle past scripts in present contexts, scripts in which the black individual is without a language (voice) and is as such invisible.<sup>5</sup>

However, the questions which need to be asked are not only about language, but also about representation: what TRC stories were making front pages of the historically white newspapers? In the instance of P W Botha's court appearance, his Apartheid-era atrocities were displaced by a series of jokes about "The Old Crocodile" (his nickname), his finger-waving rhetoric, and his questionable fitness to stand trial on mental and physical health grounds.

A possible interpretation of this representation of P W Botha follows. There should be no public grieving at the horrors committed by one of Apartheid's icons. Botha is portrayed as a pitiable, sick, old man, who is *different* from the normal white South African. The mad and bad killers in the Apartheid system are set against the rational, ordinary white majority, who can then be positioned as innocents, subjected to the horror of these madmen. In this scenario, death-squad hit-men like Ferdie Barnard and Eugene De Kock, become the malignant growths to be cut away from society - a role not unlike that of Saddam Hussein during the Gulf War.

This process, what Freud would refer to as the creation of false-connections

<sup>5</sup> Within the context of Apartheid, the black individual was not only invisible but subject to a series of projections as to what constituted the signifier "black". These signifiers seemed to be made up of physical features that negated intelligence as often seen in films.

(transference) so as to repress the existence of hidden unconscious motives, enables a white audience to distance themselves from the "mad" atrocities of the past. The strategy is two-fold: to equate the Apartheid atrocities with the actions of the liberation struggle, thereby equating the suffering of blacks and whites; and to distance themselves, psychologically and morally, from those who committed the murders. As Viola Shackleton remarks: "Whites seem to perceive a new 'privileged' area - the moral high ground of having suffered and forgiven. Instead of gracefully accepting this as a consequence of monopolising privilege, the ever opportunistic and 'entitled' whites seek to appropriate this place too. The principle seems to be that it's OK for us to have more of something, but we should *never* have *less* than an equal share of anything" (Shackleton, 1998).

What this text sets up is P W Botha's illness, instability and lack of culpability, counterpoised against more rational and reasonable citizens, for example, Nelson Mandela or F W De Klerk. Furthermore, Botha is positioned as pitiable, that reasonable South African citizens should feel sorry for him. Thus, it is possible for a white audience to come away from such court appearances and TRC hearings as "good" and "forgiving" citizens. The understanding of P W Botha, Ferdie Barnard, Eugene De Kock, etc., as "abnormal" is not unlike an earlier process of Othering: English speaking whites' portrayal of white Afrikaners as "irrational", "undemocratic" agents of Apartheid, very different from "rational", "democratic" English-speaking whites.<sup>6</sup> Yet, as Vlakplaas death-squad commander, Eugene De Kock, points out, "F W De Klerk can't pretend he didn't know" (**The Sunday Independent**, April 12, 1998: 20). De Kock articulates his indignation towards being positioned as solely culpable for atrocities committed during his spell in the security forces, thus:

"It's not because I [De Kock] can prove without a shadow of doubt that he [De Klerk] ordered the death of X or cross-border raid Y. Not even because of the holier-than-thou attitude that is discernible in the evidence he gave before the TRC on behalf of the National Party. It is because, in that evidence, he simply did not have the courage to declare: Yes, we *at the top levels* condoned what was done on our behalf by the security forces. What's more, we instructed that it should be implemented. Or, if we did not actually give instructions, we turned a blind eye." (**The Sunday Independent**, April 12, 1998:20 - our emphasis).

De Kock's interpretation would unravel further had he omitted the words "we at the top levels", and included whites alongside De Klerk in the pretence of not knowing and the non-culpability of denial. By implication, then, whites knew of the atrocities and most whites condoned what was being done.<sup>7</sup> It is easier to create a side-show through Botha's senility than focus on De Klerk's culpability. If Botha is of sound mind, and he

<sup>6</sup> Several social commentators, including comedian Pieter-Dirk Uys, have pointed to the lack of evidence of this so-called "democratic position" amongst English speaking whites in the election polls.

<sup>7</sup> Anecdotal evidence suggests that many whites claim ignorance of the atrocities that were revealed through the TRC process. It was, however, fairly common knowledge that soldiers brought home "trophy" items from the border war, e.g. the jersey of a terrorist, or even an ear. How might we understand this "disappeared" common knowledge? Lacan's belief is that what is unconscious is the discourse of the Other - it is the Other who knows (perhaps even other whites), and this (Other) memory is repressed to the unconscious.



claims this is so, then Botha and De Klerk are no different from the white public at large. What is (psychically) unbearable is the fact that there is no discernible difference between the bloodthirsty killers of the Apartheid system and normal white citizens. It is this insight which needs to be defended against through the creation of various false transference connections (or decoys).

However, it is too easy and simplistic to wander down a road of binary opposites: Apartheid versus ANC; white (bad) versus black (good); evil versus heroic; past versus future. What is left out is how the spaces between these terms is negotiated. How do those who fought a morally justifiable war think about and work through the human rights violations they committed? Clearly, their acts cannot be equated with the acts of the white Apartheid state; but this does not mean that these acts do not warrant thinking about the greater danger of becoming a perverse Law unto themselves.

### **THE SPRINGBOK AS SIGNIFIER OF PATRIARCHY.**

In this section we would like to counterpoise two court appearances which occurred during the process of the TRC, viz. then-President Mandela, who appeared before the Law, and ex-President P W Botha, who would not.

The questions that frame this section are:

- Why was then-President Mandela taken to court due to his request for a formal inquiry into the *South African Rugby and Football Union (SARFU)*?
- Why, in contrast to this, are perpetrators of Apartheid human rights violations not taken to a court of law but to the TRC? Why do these perverse "father-figures" end up in a commission of enquiry and not a law court?
- What are we to make of the word *Commission*?
- What is the relationship between sport, politics and psyche? Is there a "pathological" relationship between sport and politics in South African psyche / society?

An elaboration of President Nelson Mandela's position before the law will be presented so as to situate the Law in the Name of the Father in a South African context. From this, we will move on to a Lacanian anthropology of the "white male psyche" so as to explore how whites constructed an identity at the expense of the Other. The psychic universals in Apartheid – black/white masculinities – were inscribed initiation rites. For white men this involved playing rugby (or sport) and being a soldier, while for black men this meant circumcision and being a comrade/activist. The leap from the TRC to sport may appear arbitrary and gratuitous (and probably is). However, we hope to open up a space to think about what happens when "the perverse father figure" falls from grace and power. Put another way, Apartheid discourse has structured a "con-text" that leads to a disordered and corrupted text. In this con-text, we apply similarly fractured logic in the conflation between the TRC, Law, racism, sport and "white male psyche".

The rather strange details of the court-case are these. Louis Luyt, then-president of SARFU, took then-President of South Africa, Nelson Mandela, to court over Mandela's "interference" into rugby-affairs, namely, calling for a formal inquiry into racism in South African rugby. A possible interpretation of what is going on here deconstructs the ways

in which (phallic) power was constituted in the past. The icons of the past can no longer guarantee fixed meanings, but are instead subject to a decentering which brings into question unexamined (sub)texts. The white South African psyche found its fixity through a particular investment in the construction of the white male; a construction which could only be maintained at the expense and negation of the value of the Other / difference (e.g. blacks, women, homosexuals, etc.).

By agreeing to appear in court, Mandela is making a profound statement: no subject is above the Law. As a speaking subject, Mandela is able to resist the seduction of being the totemic and perverse father of the primal horde, and acknowledges the Law in the Name of the Father. This is the very thing P W Botha and F W De Klerk - and perhaps the majority of white men - cannot do. This introduces an observation that the Mandela versus Luyt saga is gendered, a "dick waving affair" from which the feminine is entirely absent. Furthermore, implicated within the "institution" of rugby are psychic issues of homosexuality, sexism and fear of intimacy.<sup>8</sup> Yet, at the same time as the court-case, Mandela appeared secure enough in his masculinity to be interviewed on prime time television by a (gay) drag artist, Pieter Dirk Uys. Mandela is more than a politician, he is a charismatic leader, perhaps a Christian mystic (Klein, 1997). He is a man who can lack, be in want - what Lacan refers to as a "want-to-be" - and who can live outside the field of identification (Klein, 1997). It is this humility which enables him take up a position of a man before the Law.

White South Africans who have historically acted as a law unto themselves (e.g. Louis Luyt) now come up against the Oedipal authority of the Symbolic Father (e.g. Mandela), by way of the invocation of castration anxiety in the threatened removal of the Springbok rugby emblem. Within this phallogentric struggle, the old icons become problematized, and what was previously marginal, comes into view. Yet it is the "loss of the Springbok" (as signifier of white maleness) that might be the necessary price for a renewal of *all* South Africans' faith in rugby. This loss is analogous to the Lacanian motif that without the function of the Law in the Name of the Father, there is a potential psychosis or perversion due to "a lack of lack, a pure presence without absence" (Klein, 1997). The psychic violence is manifest in the negation of lack and the attempt to force the Other into the position of an object to satisfy the self's needs - most notably through various forms of gendered violence (e.g. rape, sexual abuse, intimate violence, etc.).

At the Rugby World Cup Final in 1995, Mandela's overtures of reconciliation involved dressing up in a Springbok rugby jersey so that goodwill might be enacted. In the context of (the very new) South Africa, this gesture united a divided nation on the rugby field. However, this theatrical arrangement culminated in Mandela's appearance in court. One wonders (fleetingly) what the effects might have been had Mandela worn the

<sup>8</sup> Zizek's argument on the reason why homosexuality is not allowed to be an "open" issue in the United States army applies to rugby in South Africa, viz. "It is not because homosexuality poses a threat to the alleged 'phallic and patriarchal' libidinal economy of the Army community, but, on the contrary, because the Army community itself relies on a thwarted/disavowed homosexuality as the key component of the soldiers male-bonding ... the discourse of the military community can only operate by way of censoring its own libidinal foundation ... the mechanism of censorship intervenes predominately to enhance the efficiency of the power discourse itself" (Zizek, 1997:32-33).



famous rugby jersey to the court proceedings? The link to rugby-goodwill and reconciliation could scarcely be extinguished.

The strange appearance of a head of State in court over rugby might have been stranger still had the racism charges formed part of another institutional space, the TRC hearings, which were happening simultaneously. What underlies both spaces is a "let us tell a story and get on with our lives" attitude. This is manifest in how, for example, Chris Hani's killers articulate their motives: they killed because it was a war situation. This is a boast not an apology. This example is used here to underline the lack of remorse shown by the perpetrators of human rights abuses. The very same people whom Mandela wants to reconcile with still see black liberation as the enemy, while at the same time trying to co-opt Mandela - as a symbol of reconciliation - for their own ends. Finally, this power struggle is about who has the ultimate power, he or the economic or political might?

White South Africans used to believe they occupied the centre of the universe; that they were the chosen race in Africa<sup>9</sup>. This belief was confirmed by way of subjection of black female domestic workers and male manual labourers to the narcissistic whims of whites who ordered them around. This narcissism is not without effects. Not only do these actions breed a sense of entitlement, but in psychoanalytic terminology this could be described as a refusal of lack (vulnerability) and negation of Otherness (Klein, 1997). By association, the white child is brought up to believe that s/he has the phallus - that which can fill up the lack in the Other - is a law unto themselves (Perverse Father) and the chosen master race. Yet to become a subject, a speaking being, involves both a necessary separation and negotiation of lack, so as to negotiate otherness and submit to the Law in the Name of the Father (via the Oedipus).

Without this necessary subjection to the Law in the Name of the Father - embodying the incest taboo - there is non-integration of the subject into the Symbolic Order, with the result that the Oedipus configuration is unable to introduce a third, symbolic position, a perspective from which to view the imaginary part-object world from which the child has emerged. Instead it is "as if" the person is a subject - s/he going through the motions by imitating empty gestures. The (often paranoid) white male subject exists "as if" s/he were human through an imitation of empty gestures (Zizek, 1994b:21).

Any belief that one has the phallus to fill up the lack in the Other only ends up in the person making a "prick" of themselves. If only in order to invert the notion of penis envy, it is important to remember that while some women may envy men because they suffer from the lack of equal access to the Symbolic, it is men who are more preoccupied with penis envy and having the phallus which they imagine fills up the lack in the Other. According to Fanon (1967), within an African context it is black penis envy which has occupied the imagination of the colonial mind and informed the racist responses of whites to what are believed to be a more endowed (with phallus) Other.

Rugby lies deep in the heart of the construction of the white masculine psyche. Playing

<sup>9</sup> Perhaps this sense of entitlement has not left us, if the reports of South African arrogance in relation to the rest of Africa are anything to go by.

rugby was never simply sport but about instilling a set of values, for example, the Aryan ideal. The white male was put under a great deal of pressure to conform and identify with those identity-bearing signifiers which were the axiomatic form through which male identity was constructed. Rugby was also an initiation ritual into (white) manhood. When schoolboys prayed before a match, the manifest content of the prayer was about winning, the latent content involved a worshipping of those who fought in the Boer war and in the battle of Blood River. So instilled were these values that many a rugby schoolboy would willingly sacrifice himself for the team - to die for one's country.

What happened on the rugby field was no less than a preparation for the army - to fight on the border. It would not be surprising to find in a white family photo album, childhood pictures, followed by pictures of the school rugby team, followed by snapshots taken during military service. Sometimes, these army pictures would include a picture of a dead "terrorist". This is shocking not only in itself, but also in the absence of horror in the reaction of those proudly showing their pictures. This situation is perhaps analogous to what Mark Tomlinson characterises as the epitome of the TRC - "a description of torture and murder accompanied by the traditional rugby braai" (Tomlinson, 1998).

### THE HOLE THEATRE OF HELL.

This section shifts the analytic gaze from the white male psyche, with the concomitant structuring of the capacity for violence towards an Other; to *the Other* - the corporeal-psychic experience of suffering a human rights violation. Much of this experience is documented from one of the author's work with traumatised victims of human rights abuses (e.g. Harper, 1999). The gaze then shifts to consider the operations and effects of a third position, those who are called to bear witness to this trauma.

A human rights violation occurs when there is a "thinking for, as opposed to of the Other" (Oakley, 1997). To think for, as opposed to of the other is to leave someone without choice, and to "appropriate the thoughts of the other" (Oakley, 1997). The effect of this is to leave the subject without a sense of personhood. When someone is subjected to a human rights violation something external impinges on the individual's psychic skin - what Freud calls the "protective shield". An effect of this is to leave the person with a residue of something excessive that is too much to bear. There is a breaking down of thought, and an inability to put into words what transpired. The experience cannot be absorbed into any symbolic framework.

It is to be present in a bodily form, but no longer a free conscious agent; a subject without choice. Instead of self-representation there is a void / hole. Simply put, trauma involves a breakdown in translation, leaving the person in an imaginary, fragmented world without a Symbolic (Harper, 1999). There is a shrinkage of one's world view (*weltanschauung*) such that everything is "bad". This is what Lacanian analyst, Richard Klein, refers to as "a pure presence without absence, a lack of lack" (Klein, 1997).

This horror is something that people cannot believe is happening to them as they cannot believe their own eyes. The subject is unable to witness, that is represent to themselves, what is occurring. Individuals who undergo torture will speak of being



utterly helpless and unrecognisable to themselves - a state of helplessness that includes a loss of control, agency and dignity (Harper, 1999). When asked to speak of the traumas in order to establish the facts of the case, the person subjected to trauma is confronted with an impossible situation. What is remembered are surrounding events, often apparently arbitrary details, which offer some kind of way to frame the trauma. Even if the abusive event is remembered in detail, the hole remains. This hole - what Foucault (1972) has termed a "discontinuity", "rupture", "threshold" or "limit" - places the subject outside of the community of speech (Klein, 1997); the subject is unable to "represent (re-present) themselves to themselves" (Oakley, 1997) and there is a break in the social bond (Klein, 1997).

The effect is a dropping from the stage of language (self representation) in which the subject is pushed to act out that which cannot be represented and remembered. The person is an outsider, with the effect that the social bond of language is broken. The social bond is broken with an affect of depersonalisation and shame. In place of the social bond is shame and a subject who all too often comes to identify themselves as a no-body - a body-in-pieces, without a name (Harper, 1999).

The body of pleasure becomes the body of shame. The subject is no longer able to connect with themselves or others. Instead they die of shame, as do all marginalised people in the process of dehumanisation, but at the same time what is traumatic and unrepresentable, insists and repeats. The subject is unable to reconstitute themselves in and live through his/her traditional forms of identification but is forced into an identification with the horror. The person becomes nothing but the horror, they become an object without human attributes. The person is no longer human in the way s/he was before the trauma; they are alien to themselves in that something alien - a remainder, a foreign body - resides inside them (Harper, 1999).

Bearing witness to these human rights violations is horrific and raises the question as to what cost is involved in looking the beast in the eye? The TRC stories which have made the front pages of newspapers are those depicting Dante's Inferno, The Heart of Darkness, and a show case of evil. Put another way, can the horror be depicted or is it possible to only bear witness to horror in the guise of witnessing something "other" than looking the beast in the eye? As with star-gazing, the look needs to be off-centre so as to take in what is seen.

The horror is something which defies representation, yet when the TRC came face-to-face with the horror / hole what the general public witnessed was a mixture of charismatic evangelism, legal process and something unspeakable and too terrible for words. Outside of the public arena, we encounter the TRC bureaucracy, what Buur (2000) has called "the invisible inside", made up of some people traumatised by what they have had to bear witness to. The TRC bureaucracy is invested in a categorisation process, "a will to order" (Buur, 2000), which can be seen as an attempt to negate not-knowing and feeling helpless. This type of intervention is a way of screening out the horror of the situation; the horror remains masked over with categories (the bureaucracy), and meaningful platitudes (religious and political rhetoric).

To sum up, to bear witness to the stories of those subjected to horror is a difficult procedure.<sup>10</sup> The listener listens from a particular perspective which organises and edits what is heard. To listen to horror in a thoughtful manner demands a great deal of the listener.<sup>11</sup> To witness the trauma involved in human rights violations is not about whether or not you can understand the Other. To believe that one can understand another is absurd, and this assumption often gets in the way of listening. The witness does not operate from an objective position as the enlightenment project would have us believe. Furthermore, as Adorno points out, instrumental reason limits and restricts our capacity to be with the experiences, and instead the experience is reduced and codified so as to fit into some pre-established rational project (Reijen, 1992).

The debate over how such a body of listeners is constituted<sup>12</sup>, while important, is only half the story. This dilemma can introduce a demand for the perfect listener - a subject of "supposed knowledge" - who has a privileged and transcendental position from which to view the situation. Yet, no-one can take up a neutral position in relation to what is said. It is not only a select few who are called upon to listen, but the living present history of South Africa at large. The way in which the TRC seems to have approached the horror of the past is through an appeal to that which was absent - a just law - the Law in the Name of the Father. It is a paradox for if there had been a just law, there would be no need for a TRC.

#### **RECONCILIATION: THE WHOLE THEATRE OF HELL.**

This section considers some of the limits of reconciliation as espoused by the TRC. The *whole theatre of hell* represents a play on the words "hole" versus "whole", with the letter "w" (and "whole") masking the intolerable hell of "hole". In the struggle-years, the seductiveness of (w)hole could be seen in politicised "grass roots" literature that circulated. Readings which grew out of resistance and brought into being critical communities, gave birth to new interpretations of what was repressive. For example, during the Apartheid years, the Robben Island Prison was transformed into a political academy for those incarcerated activists. The struggle was about, in several senses, how to read: to unravel the relationship between different discourses (e.g. media, schooling, sport, etc.) which construct coherent and ordered explanations; and to listen to what is excluded, discarded or what slips through texts.

It is ironic that, at the very moment in South African history where the individual who has suffered human rights violations and oppression is given a voice and space to speak - and the TRC process is momentous in this regard - that resistance / struggle

<sup>10</sup> Many unofficial anecdotes circulate about the ways in which the TRC staff did (and did not) deal with, or "work through", what they called upon to witness. More research is needed to unravel the operations and effects of institutional dynamics on the TRC staff's coping strategies.

<sup>11</sup> Eric Harper's clinical work suggests that all too often there is internal noise which stops the listener tuning into the words of horror. This internal noise can take many forms, for example, the assumption that one knows what will be said; rushing in to make sense of a chaotic and painful situation; over-identifying with what is said (Klein, 1997); getting bored; developing counter-arguments; interjecting with instructions to manage more efficient information flow, etc.

<sup>12</sup> This messy debate implicates the (huge) financial compensation that was offered to those who were commissioned to judge over the proceedings, namely, to judge which stories would be "classified" as worthy of recognition and entitlement to reparation. This represents another group of individuals who have greatly benefited from the TRC process.



discourse is displaced by the concept of "reconciliation". Each testimony takes place within the TRC's explicit framework of reconciliation. Where does this word *reconciliation* come from and who / what is getting framed in the process of reconciliation?

The notion of reconciliation can be seen to have similarities to the Kleinian psycho-analytic concept of "reparation" (Hinshelwood, 1991). Yet, within the Kleinian doctrine, reparation comes about when the individual feels pity for the real or imagined wounds inflicted on the Other. Hence, the impulses of cruelty and pity are turned into remorse. This remorse involves both acknowledgement of the cruel attacks, as well as acts of reparation. Reconciliation has in some cases involved an acknowledgement of what has been done, but the lack of remorse exhibited by many perpetrators has been problematic in this process. Instead, the perpetrator receives a reparation in the form of amnesty. Thus, reconciliation must be seen for what it is: not as a form of *therapeutic* reparation, but a *political* compromise, which has ensured that the monopoly of wealth remains in the hands of white minority and emerging black elite.

The TRC is not about the healing of individuals' suffering; this pain will not go away as a result of the TRC hearings. The TRC is a political and historical discourse engaged in both the creation of national symbols of transformation, and creation of a new history. The need for reconciliation is implicated in this reconstruction, as it is within the concomitant religious discourse of the TRC, which valorises forgiveness. Clearly, not every one can (or should) forgive those who committed the atrocities of the past. Why should someone who has being brutalised offer redemption of his/her perpetrators because the word "sorry" is used?<sup>13</sup> In Cape Town recently, Jacques Derrida (1998) began and ended his paper on "forgiveness", with the word "pardon". Derrida holds that forgiveness is something that can only take place between the perpetrator and victim; that one can only forgive that which is impossible to forgive and that this is impossible. Yet, the act - word and deed - of asking for forgiveness is what the victim waits to encounter.

### THE LONG WAIT.

This section continues the ideas of pardon and forgiveness as forms of healing, but from within a critical context that considers the (im)possibility of reparations. The observations in this section are made by one of the authors - Eric Harper - who has worked with ex-political prisoners and torture survivors at, and by way of, the Trauma Centre in Cape Town.<sup>14</sup> As a kind of descriptive "case-study", Harper explores some of the issues, expectations and frustrations that beset his therapeutic work in the shadow of the TRC (cf. Harper, 2000). The sentiments expressed in this section *do not* reflect the opinion of both authors of the paper.

<sup>13</sup> This process is problematized when the role of activist, both as a form of social status and a way to channel anger, is no longer applicable. For many, there is no new role except illiteracy (due to disrupted education), unemployment and poverty. Their heroic stories are displaced by an imperative to "forgive" whites.

<sup>14</sup> The Trauma Centre is a non-profit, non-governmental organisation, which specialises in providing group-support, counselling and longer term psychotherapeutic care to victims/survivors of any kind of violence, imprisonment or torture. Its work is constantly under threat of disruption due to funding shortages.

The work at the Trauma Centre has shown that it is very difficult to think about human rights violations. It is harder still to talk about what happened. For some individuals who have been in long-term, one-to-one therapy, it has taken three years for them to talk about the actual torture itself. Some individuals suffer from amnesia, and memories only return some months later, during the therapeutic process (Harper, 2000). While a few of these individuals know about the operations of the TRC, and have made statements about their imprisonment and/or torture, many others did not understand what the TRC was about and/or suffered from gaps in memory of abuses, and as such now find themselves ineligible for reparations. Mostly older women, they have lost their children and/or husbands, spent time in prison, were beaten, raped or deported to the rural areas of the Transkei. Many of these women suffer from physical and psychological ailments as a result of these experiences, and live in abject poverty.

The process of torture and imprisonment is a systematic attempt to break down the individual. The effects of this are multi-layered and long-lasting. The diagnostic category of *Post Traumatic Stress Disorder* (PTSD) is commonly associated with the effects of experience of violence, although its simplification of causality is somewhat problematic (Harper, 2000). The most common psychological difficulties in the aftermath of a violation are the struggles to re-establish one's self / life (internally and externally), and to re-establish connections with others (e.g. family relationships, friendships, community networks, etc.). At a psychic level, symptomatic effects include amnesia, concentration deficits, violent ideation (and behaviour), blunted affect, suicidal impulses, hating oneself, etc. This vulnerability is exacerbated through finding themselves further marginalised and/or unacknowledged through the TRC processes (Harper, 2000).

When an individual is given symbolic recognition for their role in the struggle as well as the opportunity to work for a living to meet basic needs (e.g. food, shelter, etc.), a psychic structure is created which can screen out some of the effects of imprisonment / violence. It is at this point that therapy can begin. However, the Trauma Centre is engaged with therapeutic work and basic needs support with individuals who have not met the above criteria (recognition, and employment). In addition, their desperation and poverty has further alienated them from their families and communities, and they have nowhere to turn. Many of these individuals articulate betrayal and bitterness towards the ANC government and the TRC, due to the sense of having sacrificed their lives in the struggle for liberation of South Africa (e.g. family, physical health, education, youth, etc.), and the circumstances of their lives have further deteriorated, rather than improved, since 1994. They are now without identities, and without voices, which re-enacts the experiences of violation and dehumanisation (Harper, 2000).

The TRC was a political compromise and promised more than it could deliver: truth about what really happened, healing pain at national and individual levels, and reparations. The TRC statements of human rights abuses opened individuals' painful memories, but offered no containment or closure. However well-intentioned the agenda of the TRC, this has produced secondary victimisation, recycled abuse and further psychological damages, as has witnessing perpetrators' amnesty (as a form of



reparation). These survivors find themselves in a political context where action is endlessly deferred through bureaucratic "tabling of issues" and policy paper-shuffling; and in public discourse, a growing reluctance to bear witness to further horror and destitution (Harper, 2000).

## CONCLUSION.

In this paper, we have created an environment, confusing as it is, for the reader to search for what the TRC is and does. Clearly the question of "truth" remains to haunt the quest for reconciliation. What is the truth? The telling of the truth is the attempt to signify something with a correspondence to that thing-in-itself which showed itself in an original form (Outhwaite, 1987). Truth, as it is traditionally conceived, involves a set of assertions, judgements and, finally a consensus about the way things fit together. Statements (or stories) appear to be true if they correspond to the facts of the matter (Outhwaite, 1987).

But whose truth? There are many different readings of what transpired in South Africa's past. Every description of the truth is a judgement in as much as it offers a new interpretation of the events. The best that the TRC might hope for is a co-constructed narrative that creates the conditions for engagement in thoughtful dialogue. Within this co-constructed narrative there is a necessary exaggeration and amplification of the subjective experience of past events so as to allow the opening up and discovery of a new telling of the past. The aim is not necessarily explanation, but description and understanding. What is produced - at individual and collective levels - is a new kind of awareness of the events, which leads to a "learning from past experiences", and which, hopefully, enables "transformation" (Bion, 1962).

Although these co-constructed narratives would offer a provisional version of the truth, the interested and subjective description would be to a large extent devoid of deliberate lies and deception. This co-construction *ideally* offers a sense of emancipation from the past, where the subject is in control of the experience and has the power to create his/her own narrative of the events, without being subject to another's description. However, it is questionable to what extent each and every subject felt in control of his/her experience when telling his/her story to the TRC.

The TRC embodies a socio-political and historical discourse which permeates contemporary South African debate, geared towards the unfolding reconstruction and regeneration processes currently being implemented by the ANC government, though its constitutional and legislative obligations. But, the TRC is also part of a wider struggle over who will tell the (most) truthful story of South African history. The battle over language and those who authorize speech is revisited in the philosophical framework for reconciliation and nation-building. There is a quest for "truth", and in this process of searching, strategies are encountered which deliberately obscure truth.

The TRC should enable *all* South Africans to create a new meaning of life and metaphors for themselves. In the process of constructing new symbols, they are re-writing history for a new generation. In this process of history-making, there must be a relentless seeking out of those stories which break the deadly gagging of the past.

The TRC process is doomed to failure if the hoped for outcome is absolute "truth". A deconstruction of truth is necessary in unraveling those oversights and blunders which were essential to the construction of the end-product.

The paper attempted to unravel the possible truth within reconciliation, to see truth not as a set of ideas as to how things were or should be, but as an undertaking to open up new possibilities for action. Reconciliation as a spoken word, whether expressing genuine feelings or not, becomes another metaphorical substitute of lack, what is not there. Without reconciliation at individual (within oneself) and national levels - that is, true reparation in the Kleinian sense - Apartheid will live on in ever more refined, subtle and covert forms. We need to develop practices in South Africa that reveal and confront racial segregation.

At the level of theory, it can be demonstrated that segregation and racism occurs when there is a universalisation of something that is particular (Klein, 1997). In this context, words like "black" and "white" function as universalising, truthful categories, and the particularity of each subject is lost. What we advocate is to move from the universal to the particular. For example, a therapist does not work with a "torture" or "rape" case, but a particular individual whose experience includes torture or rape, and other experiences. Categorisation comes about through depersonalisation and a hatred of difference (Žizek, 1997). A human face is needed that does not inscribe and fix identity through any universal category.

We have sought in this paper, to explore the unknown and inexplicable space between the experiences of victims and the perpetrators, categories which are lacerated by within and between group differences at many levels. It is in this way that the easy assumption in the TRC process, between truth-telling and reconciliation, might be interrogated. This assumption implies a simple, linear approach, which clearly justifies the means and the ends of the institution of the TRC. However, it is not our intention to discredit the TRC process per se. It is clear that "discourse" in South Africa has shaped the way we think, feel and act. The Apartheid legacy has spawned a powerful construction of identities which cannot be changed overnight. However, shifts in socio-political discourse might produce interesting configurations of new norms and values which fashion contemporary experience and consciousness.

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