Economic & Political WEEKLY

Between Truth and Reconciliation: Experiments in Theatre and Public Culture
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Source: *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 36, No. 39 (Sep. 29 - Oct. 5, 2001), pp. 3763-3773
Published by: Economic and Political Weekly
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/4411172
Accessed: 25/10/2011 08:23

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Special articles

Between Truth and Reconciliation

Experiments in Theatre and Public Culture

Drawing on the discourse of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa, this essay reflects on some experiments in truth and conflict resolution on the borders of theatre and public culture. By calling attention to the interstitial space between truth and reconciliation, it posits new points of departure in reflecting on the tensions of 'factual truth' and 'personal or narrative truth'; memory and evidence; victimhood and resistance; silence and articulation. Working through the non-verbal and gestural dimensions of different performances and testimonials relating to violence, the essay affirms the need for new languages in dealing with the historical traumas of the past. Questioning the validity of commemorating the pain of entire communities through memorial museums, it recontextualises the possibilities of reconciliation beyond the limited time-frame of Truth Commissions into a more dialogic confrontation of the unease underlying any struggle for 'transitional justice'.

RUSTOM BHARUCHA

Traversing a series of fragments – stories, anecdotes, memories, and testimonials – this essay will attempt to reflect on the instabilities of truth and reconciliation within the relatively marginal sites of theatre and public culture. I would stress these 'instabilities' not only because truth and reconciliation mean different things to different people in different cultures at different points in time, particularly at moments of crisis; more critically, I would emphasise that the relationship between truth and reconciliation is essentially volatile. And yet, this would not appear to be the case when we see these terms coupled together as it were, bound by a seeming causality. At a normative level, an exposition of truth would seem to result in the possibility of reconciliation, but in actuality, this is not always the case. My strategy in this essay, therefore, will be to infiltrate the seemingly innocent conjunction 'and', in order to open up its troubled dynamics. Indeed, 'and' could be more explosive than either 'truth' or 'reconciliation'.[1]

It is, perhaps, only inevitable that the performative mode of analysis adopted in this essay should draw on my own background in theatre. Indeed, I have consciously opted for a certain play in the narrative, marked by an informality of tone and non-linear structure, to expose some of the 'sacred cows' of the Truth and Reconciliation discourse.[2] Not that this discourse is the immediate subject of my essay, but, arguably, no reflection on truth and reconciliation today, in whatever context, can afford to ignore its spectral omnipresence. Now hegemonised as a model for Truth Commissions elsewhere, the post-apartheid Truth and Reconciliation discourse of South Africa, or TRC as it is more widely recognised, serves both as an inspiration and as a provocation for my own problematisation of truth and reconciliation in this essay. Even as I do not confront its historical moment directly, it interrupts my narrative, asserting its presence when I least expect it. At times, it disappears strategically, only to haunt my own unanswered questions. Unavoidably, I deal with the TRC experiment obliquely, or through erasure. What is *not* said about it is, perhaps, more significant than what gets written into this essay.

Genocide, torture, massacres, institutionalised racism: these axiomatic horrors underlying the quest for 'transitional justice' are not the primary points of reference in this narrative, even as I focus on communal violence in the Indian subcontinent. But here again, the references are oblique; when they do appear in a more direct register, they are mediated through representations of different kinds. Likewise, even as I shift the grounds of this essay from theatre practice to public culture, the legacies of Dachau and Hiroshima are mediated through spectatorial speculations within the imaginary recesses of memorial museums, located within the interstitial tensions of the civil and the political. I make these qualifications at the very outset of my essay to prepare the reader for the indeterminacies of what is perceived to be marginal. What is marginal need not be valorised, but it has the potential to offer another perspective on dominant narratives, if not to deflect their hegemonic assumptions. My intervention in the Truth and Reconciliation discourse is one such 'experiment' in telling a different story.

The 'Truth' of Story-Telling

There can be few illusions about truth in the practice of theatre – it is neither an 'absolute' nor a 'given'. Indeed, there is no one Truth. Rather, there are many possible truths – mutable, fluid, and above all, deviant – that have to be constantly *produced* from the guts, the bodies and voices of actors. Given the transitory nature of theatre, truths are constantly breaking down; given its repetition, truths have to be reconstructed, re-lived. The paradox of truth-making in theatre increases when one acknowledges that theatre could be one of the most illusory places in the world, where it is legitimate to lie knowingly.[3] And yet, truth matters.

I will not be focusing here so much on the gradations of lying in relation to truth, but on three motifs that run through my

discourse – evidence, memory and story-telling. Stories matter in any exposition of truth not only because they enable us to illuminate particularly elusive realities, but because they help us to deal with the aporias of pain. The writer Isak Dinesen once said, 'All sorrows can be borne if you put them into a story or tell a story about them' [quoted in Arendt 1993:262]. The word 'borne' is equivocal – within the context of Dinesen's statement, it means 'endured', but it also suggests that pain is actually 'born' – created, stimulated, embodied – through the telling of the story itself. Endorsing Dinesen's statement, though not my equivocal reading, Hannah Arendt extends it in her reflections on *Between Past and Future*: 'To the extent that the teller of factual truth is also a story-teller, he brings about that "reconciliation with reality" which Hegel...understood as the ultimate goal of all philosophical thought' [ibid]. Perhaps this is a magisterial assumption on Arendt's part, even though it is generous in its qualification ("*To the extent* that the teller of factual truth is also a story-teller..."). There is no such qualification in the Report (1998) that emerged out of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa, where it becomes only too clear that the teller of factual truth is not a story-teller, or more emphatically, that the story-teller is no teller of facts.

In fact, the Report differentiates very sharply between 'factual or forensic truth' and 'personal or narrative truth', among other truths. Predictably, 'factual truth' is defined as a form of scientifically 'corroborated evidence', drawn on 'accurate information through reliable (impartial, objective) procedures', framed within a social scientist methodology of research [quoted by Sanders 2000:74]. This truth has been unequivocally prioritised in the Report. In contrast, 'personal or narrative truth' conveyed through the medium of story-telling, is granted, at best, some kind of 'healing potential' for the victims in particular [TRC Report 1998:112]. And yet, it would be disingenuous to deny that these stories provided the primary evidence of the Truth Commission – indeed, the most terrible truths of the violence of apartheid were voiced through personal stories. But to what end? Ultimately, it would seem that the 'truth' of story-telling was too 'subjective' to hold up as accurate evidence. Within the rigours of the written word, as opposed to the volatility of the spoken word, the 'veracity' of stories was called into question, even if 'they provided unique insights into the pain of South Africa's past' (ibid). With such a patronising attitude, it is hard to imagine that apartheid's story-tellers could be reconciled with reality, still less with their fractured selves, even though this lapse would be emphatically denied by TRC's advocates.

Having acknowledged this lapse, I would also emphasise that there is a privilege in telling a story, even a sense of empowerment. Some stories become epics in their own right, so much so that it is possible, in retrospect, to view the entire TRC proceedings as one master narrative, out of which have emerged best-selling documentary meta-fictions like Antjie Krog's *Country of My Skull* (1999). This masterpiece of reportage, compiling the testimonies of both the victims and perpetrators of apartheid, has all the ingredients of a Hollywood blockbuster in the Steven Spielberg tradition. Sadly, many hundreds of truths that were never submitted to the TRC Commission are not likely to be part of this blockbuster. It should be remembered that out of the millions – literally millions – of South Africans who were persecuted, humiliated, tortured and evicted from their homes during the apartheid regime, only 21,400 victims submitted statements in around 140 public hearings countrywide. While this is a record in its own right, it also falls terribly short of exposing 'the entire truth'. We need to acknowledge, therefore, that not every history of pain finds itself articulated in a story: this truism has yet to be fully acknowledged in the globalising of human tragedies and world crises.

In India as well, we are seeing how the narrative of the Partition, for instance, is getting centralised as the master narrative on the basis of which the trauma of the subcontinent can be assessed. I would not deny the importance or the pain of articulating this narrative – the problem is that it threatens to become *The* Partition, thereby marginalising other partitions that have yet to be narrativised. What happens to these unacknowledged partitions, these undisclosed truths? Their stories, I suspect, remain submerged in the unarticulated narratives of pain, and it is these narratives – these very minor stories and small instances of pain – to which I would like to call your attention in this essay. I draw inspiration in this regard from Walter Benjamin's finely inflected refusal to distinguish between major and minor events: 'A chronicler who recites events without distinguishing between major and minor ones acts in accordance with the following truth: nothing that has ever happened should be regarded as lost for history' [Benjamin 1968:62].

Questioning Ancestry

With this truth in mind, I present my first fragment of evidence drawn from a meeting with an Australian aboriginal story-teller, a grandmother figure, who greeted me at a conference in Brisbane with the words: "You are walking on the land of our ancestors." I remember responding very tentatively: 'Yes?' A question rather than an affirmation, because her statement left me with doubt, unrest, and yet, a need to believe in its truth.

(1) At one level, I doubted the statement because there was no visual evidence to support it – the words of the story-teller signified one thing, but the site of our conversation (an anonymous, modern hotel lobby) seemed very far removed from the land of anyone's ancestors. I could not relate what I was hearing to what I was seeing.

(2) But I also felt uneasy because I couldn't help picking up a fundamentalist echo in the words 'land of our ancestors'. This echo comes from the politics of my own location in post-Ayodhya India, where invocations of ancestry by the Hindu Right invariably affirm an exclusionary, territorial, atavistic Truth. This 'Truth' gets verified through quasi-fascist uses of traditional categories like 'pitribhumi' (fatherland) and 'punyabhumi' (holy land),[4] which have assumed very specific anti-minoritarian connotations in contemporary Indian political culture, apart from legitimising claims on land and 'disputed sites' on a communal basis.

Of course, I am aware that these are different contexts of ancestry. Within the context of Hindutva, ancestry is claimed by sections of the majority community in power, who are inexplicably threatened by 'minorities' who remain 'foreigners', 'barbarians', if not 'traitors' at a civilisational level, and who refuse to be accommodated within the assumedly 'tolerant' norms of brahminical Hinduism. In contrast, land rights and the restoration of dignity are claimed by the First Peoples of Australia on ancestral grounds, even as they have been ruthlessly minoritised over the years, and inadequately represented in government. Obviously, there are different political constituencies that shape contexts of ancestry in specific ways, but the fundamentalist echo remains, and I am disturbed by it.

(3) There is a third dimension that needs to be acknowledged. Not every truth reg-

isters at a general, ideological level. When the aboriginal story-teller is telling me, 'You are walking on the land of our ancestors', it is a very direct statement, made personally to me, with full eye-contact (the much-fetishised sign of 'authentic' communication in theatre language). For all my reservations, I am compelled to recognise its 'emotional truth.' Indeed, I can't deny that it is the land of *her* ancestors, though these ancestors are not necessarily *ours*. Indeed, I have no particular desire to connect to the land of *my* ancestors, because it would be irrelevant to my sense of truth.

The relativity of truth, therefore, depends not merely on different locations and contexts, but on different needs, privileges, and deprivations. For whom is it absolutely necessary at an existential or political level to assert a particular truth relating to ancestry? And for whom is it an irrelevance, if not an embarrassment? How does one justify critiquing the valorisation of one truth at the expense of ignoring another? And conversely, how can one not critique a particular truth if it offends one's 'moral sense' to appropriate a phrase by Gandhi?

Memory and Evidence

In any invocation of the past, there is the activation of memory, which could be one of the most volatile agencies in determining the evidence for any context of truth and reconciliation. Recently, I conducted a workshop on 'Land and Memory' with a group of indigenous people called the Siddi from the state of Karnataka in India. Of negroid descent, the Siddi had migrated to India some two centuries ago as slaves or as traders from the eastern states of Africa. Today they live in scattered settlements in different states of South India and in Gujarat, speaking different languages, practising different faiths, almost oblivious of each other's existence. Not only do they fail to constitute an identifiable 'community' within the nomenclature of the state, they are so marginal that they don't seem to matter at all. This is the fate of those minorities in India who fail to constitute a viable vote-bank. As the unacknowledged blacks of the subcontinent, the Siddi of Karnataka live for the most part an extremely marginalised existence on forest land, which is, technically, illegal.

Unlike the aboriginal peoples of Australia, there would seem to be no primordial link between land and memory for the Siddi. From my interaction with the community of Manchikeri, who work as agricultural labourers, it became very clear that the Siddi do not – indeed, cannot – claim land on ancestral grounds. This would be counter-productive for them given that their origins in Africa (marked by the colour of their skin) continue to highlight their 'foreignness' in India. The more salient point is that the Siddi have no articulated 'memory of Africa' as such, nor are they particularly traumatised by this absence of knowledge relating to their racial origins; indeed, they are not even curious about it. However, if they have no memory of Africa, this does not mean that they have no memory of the land on which they may have lived for 20-30 years. Memory, it should be remembered, is an elastic phenomenon; one can go back thousands of years, or one can call attention to the moment that has just passed, and which is already a memory.

From the Siddi I learned that memory is not 'a storehouse of the past'; it is more like a processual agency that is constantly transforming 'the present' into an historical record. Significantly, the primary source of mnemonic transformation for the Siddi is song, through a musical tradition called Damami (which literally refers to a drum), and the richest evidence of their history is also song. Damami is both a means of recording the present and an inventory of the past. Unlike Truth Commissions where there is a very definite rift between what is remembered through stories, and what gets accepted as evidence in written historiography, there is no separation for the Siddi between what is remembered and what counts as evidence.

Inevitably, the problem arises when this evidence is not acceptable or intelligible within the language of the state. For example, in their struggle for political identity, the Siddi seek to be categorised within the official nomenclature of the state as scheduled castes (SCs) or scheduled tribes (STs) – these categories come with specific benefits and privileges relating to loans for housing and educational facilities for children. The difficulty concerns the negotiation of this language of the state with the oral tradition in which Siddi history is documented and lived. During my workshop on 'Land and Memory', I confronted precisely this schism of conflicting languages not least when we encountered the minister of social welfare from Karnataka, who disrupted our workshop with a thoroughly meaningless visit. After enduring his paternalistic non-sequiturs directed at a bunch of 'lazy natives', I realised that it was time for an experiment.

"Why don't we improvise the minister?" I suggested to the Siddi. In the re-enactment that followed the minister's visit, the actor-minister, appropriately masked, sitting regally on a red plastic chair, demanded to see the documents of the Siddi: "You're liars. You don't have any rights on this land. Where are your documents?" To which one of the Siddi women pointed out some trees – "See those trees, we planted them with our own hands some 20 years ago. Those trees are our documents." This, I realised, was a subaltern truth that countered the official truth of documentation by reversing its logic and thereby asserting a different criteria of evidence based on ecology rather than bureaucratic certification.

This is not the place to elaborate on how the process of conscientisation through theatre can be activated in real life. What I would emphasise is that my work with the Siddi could only begin after I had confronted their seeming 'reconciliation with reality' through song. Only by rupturing this tradition of song through improvisations and exercises was it possible to arrive at some critical confrontation of political truth. I had to move from reconciliation to truth, thereby reversing the dominant assumption that reconciliation is only possible through an exposition of truth. Let me now focus on this causality, indicated earlier in the essay, and demonstrate how it can be ruptured through a reflexive intervention in yet another theatre experiment.

Fiction of Reconciliation

For this I will have to tell you a story – or more precisely, a story within a story. I have narrated this story elsewhere in other contexts relating to secularism and intercultural exchange [Bharucha 2000a: 121-22; 1997:34-35]. If I narrate this story again, it is because it has not yet been exhausted; indeed, from its fictional interstices, it yields new insights into the possibilities of reconciliation. Underlying the story I wish to tell is the problematic reality of caste in India, which is at once a politicising agency for social change as well as one of the most enduring forms of dehumanisation. Caste is a particularly tricky reality to tackle in theatre, not least because it tends to get 'invisibilised' within the seemingly secular structure of 'modern' theatre. I remember a company of actors who once reassured me: 'We don't have any caste in our theatre. We're all outcastes anyway.' This, I thought, was

a joke until I actually started to cast the production I was directing for them. Only then did I realise how casting could catalyse a caste war in the group.

Some years ago I conducted a workshop in the rural area of Heggodu in Karnataka where I have conducted most of my theatrical experiments. Before the workshop started, I had seen a photograph of a low-caste dalit landless labourer, which had been taken not very far from Heggodu. In this photograph, the labourer was shown tied to a stake, stripped almost entirely naked, with a shit-smeared 'chappal' (slipper) rammed into his mouth (as the caption to the photograph indicated). This instance of 'documentary truth' detailing the atrocity on a particular dalit testifies to the widespread phenomenon of caste violence, particularly in rural India.

I cannot say that this photograph catalysed my interaction with the actors, but it was there somewhere in the back of my mind. In my theatre work, I have found that the moment I articulate the intention underlying my intervention in a workshop, the process of finding truth has already been instrumentalised. The reality is that when you posit truth, you are not likely to find it, because it has already been assumed or predetermined. To discover truth in theatre you have to accept that it is inadvertent; it hits you when you least expect it through an unfolding of the political unconscious.

Another truism of theatre: you have to work with what is available. In this particular workshop, I found myself in a large empty room with 15 young actors from different parts of Karnataka. The only object in the room was a water container with a stainless-steel glass from which we all drank unconsciously. I began an exercise with this glass, which got transformed into different objects. At one point it became a bomb. I took the bomb from the actor who had transformed it, and placed it in the centre of the room. "Can you believe that this is a saligrama?" I asked.

What is a *saligrama*? A small fossil-like sacred stone that can fit into the palm of your hand, it embodies the godhead. I had not seen a *saligrama* at that time, but I had imagined it through the fiction of the writer U R Anantha Murthy from Karnataka, more precisely from an episode in his novel *Bharathipura*. In this episode a young brahmin socialist returns from England to his ancestral home adjoining a temple-town in Karnataka. Fired with socialist truth, he embarks on a mission to free the untouchables in his village by making them enter the temple, which they have been prohibited to do. Being something of a performer, he is not content to merely facilitate the action; he is compelled to *perform* it in a ritual of de-casteing himself (and others). Taking the *saligrama* from outside the prayer room of the ancestral home into the public space of the outer courtyard, where the low-caste labourers have assembled, he shows them the *saligrama* and asks them to touch it. Instinctively, they retreat with fear – after all, it is a taboo for them even to see it. The more our socialist hero tries to reassure them that 'it's only a stone', the more its sacred aura is enhanced. Finally, he commands them to touch it – he may be a socialist, but he is also feudal. And they have no other option but to do so. They flee in terror as he is left alone examining the *saligrama*, which he then throws into the darkness.

"Can you believe that this glass is a *saligrama*?" How this question surfaced from my own political unconscious I cannot say, but I do know that even as I was uttering this question, the coercive possibilities of my directorial intervention were not lost on me. Such is the trust of imaginary explorations in theatre, however, that I found the actors exposing their individual caste truths through very specific gestures in relation to the '*saligrama*'. While some of the upper-caste actors had no difficulty in caressing, anointing, and prostrating themselves before the object, the low-caste actors either retreated from the '*saligrama*' altogether, or else, tried to touch it with great diffidence. It was a very moving and painful revelation of the differentiations of caste, which were surfacing for the first time in our group. Needless to say, our secular solidarity was completely shattered.

It was at this point that I felt the need to intervene with another fiction, but one of my own making. When truth is exposed in theatre at very personal levels, you can't retreat from it. You can't stop the process right there because it would be too painful. You have the responsibility to transform that moment of pain into something else, or you risk disrupting the possibility of reconciliation. Entering the narrative of the actors as an actor in my own right, I thought aloud: "This was a glass which we took entirely for granted. At some point it became a bomb. Then it became a *saligrama*, in which some of you believed, and others didn't. But now, when I look at the '*saligrama*', I realise that it's only a glass of water, from which we can all drink in a ritual of our own making." We pass the glass around, and when it returns, I ask: "Does the glass feel different from the time when you first started the exercise?" And from the smiles and intimate solidarity of the group, I could feel that it was very different, because *we* were different. Something had happened to us as a group. We had travelled from a rather painful exposition of individual truths to a reconciliation as to how we could relate to each through an acknowledgment of difference.

On a less euphoric note, I would acknowledge that even within the protected confines of theatre, no reconciliation is absolute. Indeed, most reconciliations are fragile, partial, and in constant need of renewal. While one group of individuals could be reconciling to each other's differences, this very reconciliation could be the source of tension with another group. Such was the insight I received all too harshly following the *communitas* of the 'saligrama' experience. In an adjoining room to the theatre workshop, another 'experiment' was at work, conducted by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), who were indoctrinating the young boys of the village with familiar invocations of militant Hinduism, reinforced through allusions to 'our' Vedic ancestry. Needless to say, there is no place for minorities in this ancestry, as I mentioned earlier in my reference to the aboriginal story-teller.

The questions that I am now compelled to ask in the aftermath of the workshop necessarily complicate the imagined comfort and endurance of reconciliation. In resolving caste differences within a theatrical framework, is it possible to extend these lessons to anti-secularist forums? What are the limits of conflict resolution through imaginary processes? Can the imaginary be translated into the political? More concretely, is it possible to reconcile differences across religious and political communities? Or do we accept that, at the best of times, in the most democratic of circumstances, reconciliation is only possible between and across individuals? The reconciliation across entire communities is a harder proposition.[5]

Limits of Truth Commissions

With these questions, we have obviously entered the political domain to which the experiments in theatre that I have described so far are linked, and yet, separated. Now I would like to further complicate the agencies of truth and reconciliation as I confront the immediacies of the emotional dynamics of Truth Commissions. Obviously, there can be no direct transference

between the process of truth and reconciliation facilitated through the intimacy of a workshop, and the more formal proceedings of a Truth Commission. The workshop, it could be argued, is far too private, if not hermetic, in its process of exploring truth through fiction and symbol. It can prepare the ground, as the '*saligrama*' workshop did, for a more inflected secular bonding and interactivity with cultural difference, but it would be a mistake to read in this preparation any guarantee of political enlightenment. The workshop was nothing more, though nothing less, than a performance.

Likewise, it could be argued that the Truth Commission in South Africa functioned as a performance in its own right – indeed, a grand performance represented 'live' in the actual forums of the hearings, but also disseminated through daily radio broadcasts and television programmes. On these multiple sites, the 'extravagant drama' of the TRC, as Albie Sachs describes it, was played out in a wide range of registers, at levels of pain and trauma that would be hard to imagine. Witnesses broke down periodically, and unlike judges in court, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the Chairperson of the Truth Commission, would be seen to weep openly during the sessions, apart from praying, lighting candles and bursting into song. Tellingly, this 'extravagant drama' was, at once, authenticated as the primary site of 'truth' and discredited for its emotional 'excess'. Instead of accepting the tears, cries, and sobs of the victims as 'non-verbal' signs of the destruction of language through pain, they became the very grounds on which the exposition of truth was distrusted. Archbishop Tutu was taken to task for reducing the hearings to 'tearful occasions', thereby undermining his own impartiality. As Claudia Braude has assessed the situation accurately, the Commission's impartiality was undermined by 'truth that is *felt*'. Tears 'raise[d] questions about the TRC's legitimacy'. Indeed, 'truth and tears counter[ed] each other' [Braude 1996:61].

Only a few independent interlocutors of the TRC process were able to deal with the phenomenological complexity of emotional breakdowns in illuminating the truth underlying the witnesses' testimonials. Here is one such analysis that focuses on a particular eruption of crying that interrupted the testimonial offered by Nomonde Calata:

> For me, the crying is the beginning of the Truth Commission – the signature tune, the definitive moment, the ultimate sound of what the process is about. She was wearing this vivid orange-red dress, and she threw herself backwards and that sound...that sound... it will haunt me for ever and ever...
>
> [T]o witness that cry was to witness the destruction of language...was to realise that to remember the past of this country is to be thrown back into a time before language. And to get that memory, to fix it in words, to capture it with the precise image, is to be present at the birth of language itself. But more practically, this particular memory, at last captured in words, can no longer haunt you, push you around, bewilder you, because you have taken control of it – you can move it wherever you want to. So maybe that is what the Commission is all about – finding words for that cry of Nomonde Calata.[6]

Deeply sensitive as this analysis is to history and sound, the reality is that it constitutes a minority view. It would be more accurate to say: "What the Truth Commission is all about – *not* finding words for that cry of Nomonde Calata."

Apart from its incapacity to deal with the non-verbal dimensions of truth-telling, there was a fundamental discrepancy built into the very structure of the hearings. If the radical, though unconventional premise of the TRC was to facilitate the voicing of truth in a public forum, where the perpetrators of the crimes had the assurance of receiving amnesty for their actions (so long as they could be related to 'political objectives'), then the possibility of reconciliation for the victims via the negotiation of reparations needed to be followed through within the non-judicial structure of the hearings. To posit a non-judicial structure for the exposition of truth and, at the same time, to accept a judicially 'rigorous' mode of verifying the truth through an independent committee, is to risk abdicating truth after facilitating its utterance. While amnesty for the perpetrators of political violence was the *condition* on the basis of which the TRC Commission was allowed to be set up in the first place, the legal and moral right of the victims to obtain reparation was *postponed* until after the hearings could be adequately assessed and discriminated. Clearly, there is a disruption in the time-continuum of this truth and reconciliation process, which demands a critical rethinking on the political implications of telling stories in public.

The irony is staggering: Even as the victims continue to wait for their meagre reparations, the perpetrators of violence have assumed their new roles as the beneficiaries of the South African global economy. Instead of using this irony to initiate a new process of truth, the majority of TRC's supporters continue to uphold the reconciliatory power of sharing 'the pain of South Africa's past' through stories. 'What is important', as the TRC Report implies, is 'not so much *what* is told (which has to be verified, and is thus suspect), but rather *that* telling occurs' [Sanders 2000: 75]. Likewise, sceptical as he is that 'truth' can be regarded as 'a road to reconciliation', the philosopher Avishai Margalit is sanguine because even if retributive justice for the victims is not available – 'this can be too costly or a political impossibility' – the positive outcome of TRC was that the suffering of apartheid's victims was duly 'recognised' [Margalit 2000:3].

One could quote many other instances of how the perceived emotional catharsis following the telling of stories has been interpreted as a contribution to the culture of reconciliation. Here is a diary extract from one of the Commissioners of the TRC, Piet Meiring, who approaches an old Xhosa woman, shortly after she has narrated the brutal torture and subsequent killing of her 14-year-old son:

> 'Please, tell me: was it worth it?
> 'The tear marks were still on her cheeks. But when she raised
> her head and smiled, it was like the dawn breaking:
> 'Oh yes, sir, absolutely! It was difficult to talk about these
> things. But tonight for the first time in 16 years, I think
> I will be able to sleep through the night.'
> [Meiring 2000:5-6]

One wonders if this is still the case, or whether the old woman has been summarily forgotten after her heartbreaking evidence. It would be useful to know, for instance, if she received any medical or material help while waiting to hear from the Reparation and Rehabilitation Committee, if indeed she qualified for any compensation in the first place. Reconciliation without reparation, it would seem, is, at best, a wish-fulfilment for TRC's historians; at worst, a perpetuation of injustice for apartheid's victims. First the victim tells her story, she is ostensibly 'healed' through the process, she 'touches the hearts' of her listeners, the Truth Commission is duly 'enriched' through the process, but ultimately, she is subject to the rhetoric of a reconciliatory discourse over which she has no control. It is assumed that she endorses the official point of view being articulated in her name, when, in actuality, the possibility of her dissent or sense of

betrayal or frustration with the TRC process is not even acknowledged.

As the TRC has formally come to an end, the utopian hope built into the voicing of victims' stories becomes increasingly more difficult to sustain, both at human and ideological levels. It would be better to acknowledge the limits of the South African 'experiment', whose premises, however idealistic and quirky, were not intrinsically flawed; the problem is that the experiment didn't go far enough on its own terms. It allowed itself to be hijacked by other bureaucratic, judicial, and political protocols and strictures that not merely compromised the moral authority of the Commission, but may even have perpetuated the trauma of the victims themselves.

Between the exposition of truth and the possibility of reconciliation, there needs to be a modulation of energies, whereby the listeners and interlocutors of truth, including the perpetrators, assume a collective responsibility in caring for the future of the victims. The keyword here is 'care' which, more often than not, is circumvented within the non-judicial processes of Truth Commissions, despite tokenistic gestures for providing remedial and psychological facilities for the victims and their families. In the absence of any sustained follow-up in consolidating new modalities for 'caring', it could be charged that the TRC in South Africa merely imitated the formal judicial procedures in which the very idea of 'caring' is obliterated within the mechanisms of justice.

In this regard, I would call attention to an astonishingly 'transgressive' truth acknowledged by the Indian legal scholar Upendra Baxi in relation to the absence of the 'spheres of caring' within 'the governing rhetoric of rights and justice' [Baxi 2001:928]. I emphasise 'transgressive' because Baxi's prioritisation of 'care' works totally against the grain of judicial omniscience and non-negotiability, which is the source of much activist disillusionment in India today. As he puts it, "Constitutional decision or policy-makers present themselves as being just, even when not caring...it is notorious that constitutional cultures remain rights-bound, not care-bound" (ibid). While Baxi attributes this indifference to 'the poverty of social theory imagination', where justice is, in actuality, separated from fraternity (or sisterhood) – fraternity, 'in its most minimal sense, of concern for fellow-citizens' – it becomes necessary to uphold other agencies of caring that can supplement the amnesia of the law. 'Just' verdicts 'beyond all reasonable doubt', can and frequently *do* result in the traumatisation or displacement of ordinary people with no adequate rehabilitation or reparation, still less reconciliation to their fractured lives. This is a *fact* that demands a different reading of truth in relation to the abdication of justice.

Performativity of Suffering

Moving further outside of the theatre into the public sphere, I will now elaborate on other ways of giving testimonials, which are not catalysed by directors or writers or Truth Commissions, but which are performed by ordinary people in states of crisis. I consciously use the word 'performed' because there is a strong gestural, somatic, and visual dimension to the ways in which victims *choose* on occasion to present themselves, not to highlight their victimhood but rather to protest against the crimes inflicted on them. In this regard, I would like to focus now on the sociologist Veena Das's research on the anti-Sikh riots in New Delhi in 1984 following Indira Gandhi's assassination by two Sikh security guards, which resulted in a carnage of communal violence that activated memories of Partition. In one fragment of her research, Das describes a group of Sikh women whose men have been slaughtered in the riots:

> As long as their suffering was not acknowledged and addressed, [the women] insisted on sitting outside their ruined houses, refusing to comb their hair, clean their bodies, or return to other signs of normality. Here the somatic practice drew deeply from the Hindu tradition of mourning and death pollution...I am not claiming that this discourse was explicit – it functioned rather as an unconscious grammar, but fragments of it were evoked when the women insisted that the deaths of their men should not go unavenged. I remember one instance in which there were rumours that Mother Theresa would visit the colony. X [a politician from the Congress Party]... implored the women to go back to their houses, to clean up the dirt and to return to some normality. They simply refused, saying he could himself sweep the remains of the disaster if that offended him [Das 1996:201].

Anger and revenge, so emphatically silenced in the proceedings of the Truth Commission in South Africa, are the two motifs that surface in this fragment. What matters to these women is not reconciliation but the recognition of the truth of violence on their own terms, which assumes a performative dimension. On the one hand, there is the collective display of bodies in a state of 'pollution', which, as Das reminds us, recalls at a mythic level the violated figure of Draupadi from the *Mahabharata*. Shared by the five Pandava brothers, lost in a game of dice, and subsequently, humiliated and raped, Draupadi refuses to remove the 'signs of pollution from her body', notably her dishevelled hair that is invariably used as a sign of her anger. In Kathakali performance, the actor playing Draupadi invariably tugs 'her' hair as a reminder of what has been done to her. In their Draupadi-like mythic personae, the women described by Das are not grieving widows and victims; they are not doing what we expect them to do, as demonstrated in documentary reportage and the television news, which capitalise on the grief of others. Rather, they are witnesses to their own suffering; indeed, they are sentinels of their own suffering.

Along with this witnessing, there is also a decision-making process at work here which relates specifically to how the women wish to be seen in the eyes of the law, which in turn would prefer *not* to see them in that state. In this process, Das emphasises that the 'passive display of pollution' is so 'terrible' that 'it could not even be gazed at.' However, this very difficulty (if not assault on the eyes) converts the 'female body into a political subject that forcibly [gives] birth to a counter-truth of the official truth about the riots' [Das 1996:201]. The body, therefore, is not just a source of pollution; it becomes a site of political evidence.

There are many such instances in the contemporary history of activism in India where women activists have been assaulted and even gang-raped. Instead of covering up their scars, they have vigilantly 'guarded' the signs of violence on their bodies *as evidence*, in order to obtain adequate testimonies of the crimes inflicted on them through medical examinations. While these testimonies have not always resulted in justice, they invariably assume a symbolic significance, as they become 'stories' feeding the imaginaries of resistance, provoking renewed struggle in the absence of reconciliation.[7]

Representing Victimhood

Once again we return to stories and to what happens to the truth of evidence in the process of telling stories. It is one thing for a woman to tell her own story; it is quite

another when it is told for her. While one cannot assume that the first narration is necessarily more 'true' than the other, the exploitative potential of another's story of her life cannot be ruled out. It all depends on *how* the story is told, and to *whom* it is being shared in the first place, and *why*.

At one point in the multi-layered narrative of *Country of My Skull*, which is as much an experiment in story-telling as it is an agonised reflection on telling the truth of the TRC in South Africa, Antjie Krog recalls a conversation with Ariel Dorfman. Known for his stories dealing with the Truth Commission in Chile, which unlike the TRC in South Africa was held 'behind closed doors', and therefore not open – or verifiable – to public scrutiny, Dorfman acknowledges that his writing is a hybrid of 'what he's heard' and of 'what he makes up' [quoted in Krog 1999:361]. Krog questions him: "[I]sn't that a sacrilege – to use someone else's story, a story that has cost him his life?" to which Dorfman responds candidly: "Do you want the awful truth? How else would it get out? How else would the story be told?" [ibid].

This stark revelation is made 'fictional' in an extraordinary stroke of reflexivity, as Krog incorporates this conversation into another, more intimate conversation that she is having with an unnamed male companion. [8] While she agonises about the fact that writers in South Africa should 'shut up for a while' since they have no right to 'appropriate a story paid for with a lifetime of pain and destruction', her companion remonstrates her '*over*-respectfulness' to the victims' suffering with allusions to German cultural history [Krog 1999:360]. More specifically, he calls attention to the taboos relating to the representation of Auschwitz, which almost assumed a 'holy character' that could not be 'trivialised' through fictional narration. Encapsulating the anti-representational argument, Krog's companion says: "It's all well and good to listen to victims in court cases...but artists should keep their grubby hands off the stories. German artists could not find a *form* in which to deal with Auschwitz. They refused to take possession of their own history. So the inevitable happened. Hollywood took it away from them. A soap opera laid claim to the statistic, the metaphor, the abstraction that was Auschwitz" [ibid:361].

From this intervention, it is possible to reiterate the endless debate on the ethics and necessity of representing the unspeakable horrors of ethnic cleansing, genocide, and mass slaughter, even while acknowledging the difficulty, if not exploitation of the enterprise. For the purpose of this essay, however, I would like to steer the discussion back to the modalities of reconciliation. Taking Auschwitz as a cue, I will focus now on memorial museums, wherein the dialectics of solitude and trauma are played out in increasingly more complex and controversial ways in public culture. If the earlier sections of this essay have dealt with different modes of performing (or dissimulating) truth, I would now like to focus on the aporias of spectatorship. Moving away from my participatory interaction as a director with the truths unfolding in theatre workshops, I would now like to enter the more anonymous, yet troubling intimacy of museums as dream-sites.

As a prelude to this closing section of my essay, and as a bridge with the earlier sections, I would like to raise a few questions: What happens when you are not a victim yourself, but you become a spectator of someone else's pain? How do you deal with it? How do you resist the obvious possibilities of voyeurism, or the mere consumption of other peoples' suffering? How do you sensitise yourself politically to the histories of others, which might not have impacted on your own? Memorial museums enable us to problematise these questions. Since they constitute a vast area of research, I will extrapolate my analysis around two moments of spectatorship through which I will further question received assumptions of truth and reconciliation.

In Dachau, the journey through the concentration camp, at once simulated and real, ends in a statement that underlies the raison d'etre of every memorial museum: *What happened must never happen again.* This reads like an affirmation of world citizenship and humanitarian solidarity, which one is compelled to endorse dutifully. However, as one exits the protected civil space of the museum, where one passes as a tourist, and enters the public sphere, where one is marked a foreigner, one realises that the statement could be something of an illusion. Back in the desolate anonymity of one's hotel in Munich, one suffers with the memory of Dachau, and it is this post-Holocaust museumised suffering to which I would like to call your attention now.

Is this suffering not essentially narcissistic, masochistic, parasitic, unproductive, even factitious? How can one accept the condition of becoming an imaginary surrogate victim of a reality to which one is not connected at an historical level? The writer Ian Buruma (1999) has written ironically about the "joys and perils of victimhood", which he contextualises specifically within the second generation of Holocaust survivors, who fabricate identities for themselves. He makes the strong point that the survivors of Auschwitz themselves did not mark themselves as victims. They wanted to get on with their lives and integrate with society as far as possible. It was their sons and daughters who developed a 'vicarious virtue' by marking themselves as minorities through a "sentimental solidarity of remembered victimhood" [Buruma 1999:4]. In an even more scathing critique, Buruma dwells on the effects of the Holocaust industry – its celebration of 'kitsch and death', its 'pseudo-religion', and even its stimulation of the 'Olympics of suffering'. These are epithets used by a growing number of the Holocaust's critics, some of whom would regard the Jewish tragedy as being overwhelmingly represented at the expense of acknowledging other tragedies faced by other communities.

Buruma's critique is legitimate, but it is also insufficiently reflexive, if not unconsciously derisive of the suffering of others. There are at least three problems with his position:

(1) In focusing on the second generation of victims and survivors in predominantly western societies, particularly in the US, and in assuming all too readily that they have been atomised by an homogenised, metropolitan, global culture, Buruma uses his critique of fictitious victimhood to undermine the legitimate search of minorities in diasporic cultures to assert new identities for themselves. Not every assertion of a minority identity is necessarily a product of victimhood, imagined or real, though this seems to be the underlying assumption of Buruma's critique. In essence, this position cannot be separated from a larger agenda of multicultural-bashing from a liberal, secular humanist perspective.[9] It is one thing to expose the limitations, if not racist implications of multicultural statism, but it is quite another to play into the anti-minoritarian rhetoric that reduces advocates of identitarian politics into opportunistic 'victims'.

(2) While there is evidence that 'historical truth' is being replaced in academia by theories of 'social construction' and 'subjectivity', Buruma overstates his fears by claiming that, "When all truth is

subjective, only feelings are authentic, and only the subject can know whether his or her feelings are true or false" [Buruma 1999:7]. Feelings, for Buruma, can only be 'expressed, not discussed or argued about' [ibid:8]. This is precisely the unstated animus that underlies the reticence on the part of the TRC Report to acknowledge the veracity of 'personal or narrative truth', as conveyed through stories and testimonials. Buruma is merely articulating the same prejudice, but with considerably more eloquence and precision.

Other echoes of the anti-performative prejudice examined earlier in the essay can be traced in Buruma's refusal to accept any ritualisation of suffering or healing – he even has problems with the lighting of candles in the precincts of Auschwitz. Without undermining the possible excesses of relating such rituals to larger instances of historical trauma, it is necessary to point out that these seemingly ahistorical signs of subjectivity and emotion have a place in the writing of history. They do not necessarily *replace* facts; they *complicate* them. And that is what Buruma fails to acknowledge, that while the history that replaces 'historical truth' for 'subjectivity' is flawed, the omniscient, objective, fact-bound history that seems to 'write itself' in Roland Barthes' words, is also flawed in its own right.

(3) Finally, there is an unacknowledged cosmopolitan insularity in Buruma's position. As he puts it somewhat too breezily, "It is perhaps time for those of us who have lost religious, linguistic, or cultural ties with our ancestors to admit to that and let go" (ibid). Perhaps, it would be prudent to qualify that there are millions of people in the world for whom such ancestral ties cannot be so easily severed. We may have problems with these ties – and I have indicated the 'fundamentalist echoes' of such ties in my encounter with the aboriginal story-teller earlier in the essay – but we cannot dismiss these ties as irrelevant, as indeed I had in my first response to the subject. The surest way of playing into fundamentalist prejudice is to dismiss claims of ancestry, instead of subjecting them to critical scrutiny.

Problematising Memorial Museums

Having acknowledged these problems, I would also admit that the cult of victimhood has been uncritically celebrated in the context of memorial museums, where there has been a tendency to spectacularise suffering, and in the process, to market it within the logic of global capitalism. Curatorial practices have also reified the remnants of destruction and genocide, without sufficiently historicising them. The hermetic confines of the museums themselves have enhanced the self-absorption of specific communal histories. In this regard, it would be almost blasphemous to imagine that a Jewish Museum could have even a fleeting reference to the predicament of Palestinian peoples. Memorial museums do not deal with the process of history as such, including peace processes, however flawed. Essentially, they are embodiments of time-warps, where it is assumed that 'what happened' should 'never happen again', even if there is no confrontation of 'what has happened' in the intervening years. The memorial museum memorialises itself.

The way out of this impasse could be to seek a dialogic space within the museum, whereby the seemingly heuristic divisions of the civil and the political can be brought into crisis. To activate this dialogic space one may have no other option but to invite controversy rather than to pretend that it doesn't exist. Perhaps, memorial museums are not meant for reconciliation alone, but reconciliation ruptured with disturbing truths. The reality, however, is that the rhetoric of reconciliation more often than not camouflages truth, as in the declarations of peace that have accumulated since Hiroshima was destroyed, eliding any real confrontation of Japanese imperialism and colonial aggression with its Asia-Pacific neighbours during the war. The nationalist historiography around the war has yet to be destabilised.

Within this impasse, the Peace Memorial Museum of Hiroshima can be regarded as a particularly strong propagandist agency of reconciliation, cast in the symbol of 'peace', not least because this propaganda is implicit and rendered through some undeniably heart-wrenching evidence. To submit my own spectatorship to critical scrutiny, I would call attention to one particular image in the museum dealing with the reconstruction of Hiroshima, which, inexplicably, had a more harrowing effect on me than the meticulous documentation of the bombing itself. It is well known that every living being in the human, animal, and plant world in the immediate periphery of the bomb blast in Hiroshima was reduced to nuclear dust. Miraculously, however, beyond the planned agenda of the reconstruction process itself, a sign of ecological renewal manifested itself a few years later. This renewal was represented through a photograph of a particular bamboo plant, if I remember correctly, that started to grow out of Hiroshima soil devastated by ecocide.

Today I continue to be profoundly moved by this image, but I am also troubled by what it compels me to forget – namely, the ruthless policy perpetrated by the Japanese government in levelling entire forests in poorer Asian countries, in order to protect its own environment. The most excruciating lesson – I am tempted to say, blessing – of ecology, embodied in the photograph of the bamboo plant, needs to be juxtaposed in my view with the ongoing ecocide, legitimised by the Japanese government within the priorities of industrial capital and national environmental protectionism. Ecology cannot be used to justify ecocide.

However, there is another symbol of the Peace Memorial Museum in Hiroshima that I would uphold precisely because it incorporates its own contradiction: the flame of peace, which flickers outside the museum precincts, is meant to burn 'forever', so long as there are nuclear weapons in this world. This is a troubling symbol, because fire is sacred and is meant to last infinitely, without any conditions imposed on its longevity. Symbolically, the extinction of fire signifies the end of the world. Here I cannot 'unmark' my Zoroastrian background, where fire has a very specific religio-cultural significance that I do not, for all my secular priorities, question. Perhaps, the *atash* (the Holy Fire) is the only sign in my life that approximates the condition of an absolute. And yet, in confronting the flame of peace in Hiroshima, I realise that almost nothing could be a greater source of celebration – indeed, the beginnings of a nuclear-free utopia – than if this flame could be extinguished forever. I am caught in an aporia, between wanting to accept the reconciliation provided by the sacredness and eternity of fire and recognising the truth of its extinction. This in-between space, I believe, is not just liminal, but troubling. If memorial museums can create trouble, then they are worth supporting.

Rethinking Silence

One other reason for the significance of the flame of peace could be linked to the inter-civilisational, inter-religious and inter-cultural resonances that are, perhaps, inadvertently tapped through the cultural memories of the museum's international spectators, of which I am one. Memorial

museums need to work across the borders of the imagination, in order to destabilise the nationalist holds of specific governments in territorialising the tragedies of the past. Perhaps, we need to hyphenate museums – Jewish-Palestinian, Japanese-Korean, Indo-Pakistani – or better still, we need to get rid of these national and communal categories, and imagine an altogether different nomenclature for museums on a conceptual and symbolic basis.

However, it could be argued that some cultures could resist the very idea of memorial museums as an aberration, a deviation from their own civilisational norms. In India, for instance, we do not have memorial museums commemorating the Partition, among other communal atrocities. A pragmatic explanation could be that, while we have many museums in India, we don't have a museum culture, unlike Germany, for instance, where going to the museum is part of everyday cultural life, at least for a large section of the population. Within this culture, the Jewish Museum in Berlin is merely a postmodern extension (and partial subversion) of a museological ethos and grammatology that have been nurtured over the years.

At a more political level, one could argue that memorial museums in the Indian subcontinent at this point in time could only intensify the xenophobic hold of nationalists in claiming cross-border tragedies on an exclusionary basis. At a more philosophical level, one could question whether 'the past' can be meaningfully museumised in a country like India, where the past is alive in so many ways, hybridising, mutating, and intersecting with conflicting 'presents' [Bharucha 2000b:15-8]. At a moral level, however, it is questionable whether 'suffering' and 'trauma' need to be memorialised at all.

Here it becomes necessary to question the cultural valences and resonances of silence, which more often than not are equated in monolithic terms with repression, cowardice, or fear. Indeed, if there is any element in the discourse of Truth and Reconciliation that is consistently rejected, it is silence. Silence is unacceptable in dealing with any tragedy or atrocity, even if the absence of justice is tolerated. You have to speak out. That is the underlying imperative of almost any exposure of violence, whether it concerns apartheid or the genocide in Rwanda or the Partition in India. While it is ethically and morally questionable to endorse silence, when the truth of a particular crime has yet to be acknowledged, it could also be argued that the 'breaking of silence' should not be made into a dictum. Silence can be a political or cultural choice. As 'the other side of silence' [Butalia 1998] gets articulated with significant effect, we should not forget the worlds within silence, for which it is much harder to find an adequate language in words. Perhaps, we should acknowledge that silence can be, in certain cases, for particular individuals, the only means of 'reconciling with reality'.

Time and Reconciliation

Along with silence, we need to open the dimension of time, which underlies whatever I have addressed in this essay, as I have traced the instabilities of evidence, memory, and story-telling through experiments in theatre and public culture. It is commonly assumed that time heals, and that with the passing of time, the scars are supposed to fade away. Certainly, we know that this is not the case when there is a time-frame on particular processes of truth and reconciliation, as in South Africa, where there were specific schedules for hearings, consultations, meetings, and submissions of reports. This bureaucratic pressure of time seems almost ludicrous when one confronts the truism that "centuries of oppression cannot be removed overnight." And yet, as the veteran of the Chilean Truth Commission Jose Zalaquett has affirmed: "The process [of Truth and Reconciliation] must stop! Just as a patient undergoing a critical operation should not stay in theatre too long, a truth commission should know when to call it a day" [quoted in Meiring 2000:9]. Hopefully, one assumes that the unacknowledged doctor in Zalaquett's metaphor will not prematurely stitch up the patient before attending fully to his or her problem, or worse still, after dismissing the patient as a 'hopeless case'. Whether or not the operation is 'successful', the point is that while the process of reconciliation may begin with the deliberations of a Truth Commission, it certainly doesn't end there.

We should not presume to imagine that new societies can be born in the aftermath of even the most time-conscious and efficient of Commissions. This would be a kind of hubris that would place an act of social engineering over and above the capacities of human beings to understand and live together, through the violence that continues to divide them at civic and political levels. In her epilogue to *Country of My Skull*, Antjie Krog acknowledges that few people believe that the TRC process achieved reconciliation, and indeed, surveys indicate that "people are further apart than before" [Krog 2000:448]. This does not mean that the process of reconciliation is not going on, but to realise its outcome, we need a larger envisioning of time. As Krog sees it, "Reconciliation is not a process. It is a cycle that will be repeated many times" [ibid:449]. The unspoken assumption here is that, if reconciliation is destined to repeat itself, so will the memories of violence that refuse to die.

Rejecting any attempt to read reconciliation as 'a mysterious Judaeo-Christian process', Krog implicitly works against the ethos of forgiveness which animated Desmond Tutu's almost evangelical faith in the redemptive powers of the TRC. The point is not, as some dissenters have argued, that forgiveness is a specifically Christian virtue that is psychologically unacceptable or unintelligible in indigenous African contexts, even though, in Xhosa, 'reconciliation' is rendered as '*uxolelwano*', which is much closer in meaning to 'forgiveness' [ibid:243]. Forgiveness, it could be argued, is an important element of many other faiths, and indeed, it may be necessary to forgive in order to survive the trials of the past.[10] The problem does not concern the cross-cultural epistemological valences of 'forgiveness' as such; the problem is whether forgiveness can be activated across individuals and communities for the restoration of a new society. Sadly, the realities on the ground in South Africa reveal that forgiveness, insofar as it has been activated, individually or collectively, has not produced the kind of reconciliation that was anticipated by the TRC.

Confronting this reality, Krog opts for more secular solutions to human co-existence, for which she draws on evidence that is more likely to be associated with a social scientist than with a poet. Pragmatically, and in a tone that is totally at odds with the questioning nature of her book, Krog falls back in the closing paragraphs of her epilogue on the most banal truism of conflict resolution. She reduces reconciliation to "one of the most basic skills applied in order to survive conflict"; its 'essence' is 'survival', its 'key' the art of 'negotiation' – less negotiation than an almost biological need to get on with life [Krog 2000:448]. This resilience is determined less by civility or good faith than by 'our genetic make-up', as Krog puts it all too emphatically, in a vocabulary that is clearly not her own.

An equally unconvincing source of evidence comes from the post-apartheid refashioning of identities, which Krog views as a 'fundamental step' towards reconciliation (ibid). It is hard to share this optimism, particularly as she views 'blacks' redefining themselves within the 'African renaissance'. One is compelled to ask: Which sections of the blacks are in the process of 'redefining' themselves in this mode? Can this so-called 'renaissance' (replicating the 'Asian renaissance' of east Asian global capitalism) not be seen as another form of neo-imperialism in the new South Africa? Even as the beneficiaries of global capital among the black elite are ready to assert a new cosmopolitan, neo-liberal, 'renaissance' identity for themselves, the reality is that they are not prepared to share the economic benefits of this 'renaissance' with their less privileged brothers and sisters. Nonetheless, they hold on to the racial category of 'black' in its most literal and essentialising sense. This privileged position of 'wanting to have it both ways' – race and capital – can certainly fuel the propagation of new identities, but are these likely to produce a culture of reconciliation, as Krog seems to imply? Or is not a new culture of emergent disparities and divisions in the making?

I have problematised just one 'identity' here to point out that the politics of identity can catalyse, metabolise, and disrupt the hierarchies of any given society, but there is no guarantee that in this process new hierarchies are not likely to emerge, or that reconciliation across older divides is likely to be stabilised. To seek reconciliation beyond the constraints of specific identity constructions, we need to do more than posit multiple or hybrid identities, which have become postmodern tropes. Perhaps, we need to counter the very concept of 'identity' with the enigmas of the 'self', just as we have to complicate the exigencies of 'time-frames' for the implementation of Truth Commissions with the 'cycles of time' in which reconciliation is destined to play itself out.

For this, we need another vocabulary and perspective for which I would like to turn, unexpectedly perhaps, at the conclusion of this essay, to the philosophy offered by the one of greatest seers of time in the contemporary world, Jiddu Krishnamurti. Unlike the architects of Truth Commissions, Krishnamurti questions the very assumption that there *can* be a positive outcome in negotiating a path from truth to reconciliation, or from violence to non-violence. In his barely veiled critique of Gandhi, for instance, he emphasises that the evolution from 'violence' to 'non-violence' implies that you need time to become non-violent. In working towards this 'ideal', which Krishnamurti equates with an 'escaping process', all that emerges is a 'division' in the mind, which can only perpetuate 'conflict' [Krishnamurti 1983: 87]. Indeed, "the very resistance to conflict is itself a form of conflict" [Krishnamurti 1986:134].

If this is not a language that one associates with activism of any kind, I should qualify that Krishnamurti is not addressing political time, but what he describes as 'pyschological time', which is determined by the interval, the division, the gap between 'this' and 'that', between 'one action and another', between "one understanding and another", between "seeing something, thinking about it, and acting" [Jayakar 1995: 250]. This very *movement* embodied in time, carrying the conceptual baggage of our thoughts, memories, desires, and motives, which are the very cause of our suffering, compels Krishnamurti to posit 'a time of non-movement', which is without momentum, direction, or continuity [ibid:250-51]. Calling attention to the state of 'passive awareness' in which the dissolution of psychological time becomes possible, he advocates nothing less than 'the ending of time' (1996).[11] This is not an apocalpytic narrative, but a very tentatively posited 'new beginning' by which we can begin to re-invent and sustain our inner selves on a different 'ground' of being.

If I choose to inscribe 'the ending of time' at the end of my essay, it is not because I see it as some kind of solution. Indeed, Krishnamurti would not want us to believe in solutions, because that would imply a progression in time, which is the very source of our pain. Indeed, he would be sceptical of our attempts to articulate this 'ending', as indeed he was frustrated by his own attempts to put vision into words: "We are using words to measure the immeasurable, and our words have become time" [Jayakar 1995:254]. I use Krishnamurti as a provocation, because in a sense he works against the premises of this essay, he complicates the agenda. He makes us want to re-question its priorities. Most decisively, he infiltrates the conjunction 'and', separating (and linking) 'truth' and 'reconciliation'. He breaks the causality by collapsing these terms. And in that sense, he fills us with profound unease. Should it be otherwise? EPW

Notes

[This essay is an enlarged version of a lecture delivered at the Documenta 11 conference on 'Experiments with Truth: Transitional Justice and Processes of Truth and Reconciliation', held at the Habitat Centre, New Delhi, May 8-12, 2001. I am grateful to the organisers of Documenta for giving me permission to publish the essay, and to Premesh Lalu, Rajeev Bhargava, and Teesta Setalvad for some invaluable research inputs on Truth and Reconciliation.]

1 By problematising what lies *in between* 'truth' and 'reconciliation', rather than 'truth' itself as 'the road *to* reconciliation', my strategy is somewhat different from that of the philosopher Avishai Margalit, who also questions 'the putative causal relation' between truth and reconciliation. For a pithy critique of this causality, read his opening address, 'Is Truth the Road to Reconciliation?, at a working conference on Truth and Reconciliation organised by the Prince Claus Fund for Culture and Development, The Hague, July 6, 2000.

2 This discourse has grown in several languages, spanning different continents, where Truth Commissions have functioned in emergent societies confronting the vicissitudes of 'transitional justice'. Between 1974-1994, there have been at least 19 such commissions in Bolivia, Chile, Argentina, San Salvador, Uganda, Chad, and Ethiopia. However, in recent years, it is the commission in South Africa that has dominated the Truth and Reconciliation discourse through the sheer depth and range of its coverage, not least on the global media.

The TRC officially started its work on February 1, 1996, following its formal sanction in the South African parliament in July 1995 through the Act on the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation. Seventeen commissioners of the TRC were appointed by president Mandela in December 1996, who along with eleven co-opted committee members formed three committees – the Human Rights Violations Committee, the Amnesty Committee, and the Reparation and Rehabilitation Committee. While the proceedings of the TRC ended on July 31, 1998, and its final report was handed to president Mandela on October 29, 1998, its repercussions in post-apartheid South Africa continue to spawn a growing discourse on Truth and Reconciliation, both in the civil and political sectors of society.

3 This is somewhat different from the political realm where lying could be regarded as the unconscious prerogative of politicians, their 'second nature'. Certainly, Hannah Arendt in her essay on 'Truth and Politics' (1993) has no illusions in this regard as she designates lies as "necessary and justifiable tools not only of the politician's or the demagogue's, but also of the statesman's trade". While the professional truth-teller is out of place in the world of politics, the liar is 'already in the midst of it'. An 'actor by nature', he refuses 'to say what is' (the truth-teller's responsibility); rather, he "says what is not so because he wants things to be different from what they are". In short, he is a 'man of action', which the truth-teller is not. The question is: How do we view the actor in theatre who is neither a professional truth-teller, nor an habitual liar? It would seem

that the actor's position is more liminal, as s/he is committed to conveying the truth of 'what is', while recognising the illusion of what 'is not'.

4 The history of these terms goes back to the rhetorical foundations of Hindutva, whose ideologue V D Savarkar defined 'The Hindu' in 1923 as "a person who regards the land of Bharatvarsha from Indus to the Seas as his Fatherland [*pitribhumi*], as well as his Holy Land [*punyabhumi*] – that is the cradle land of his religion" [quoted in Basu et al 1993:8]. Since this particular authentication of ancestry is not available for other religious communities, notably Muslims, they are inevitably branded as foreigners, if not as *mlecchas* (barbarians).

5 The paradigmatic example of reconciliation across communities is the much-cited aftermath of the Great Calcutta Killing of August 16, 1946, in which 4,000 people were killed. Through Gandhi's historic intervention, in which he became a one-man Truth Commission to whom perpetrators and victims on both sides of the communal divide presented their testimonials, peace gradually prevailed with the acceptance of collective responsibility and the advice of the Mahatma to "turn the searchlight inwards". While this is a landmark in the history of conflict resolution, it does beg the question whether the reconciliation across communities could have been initiated and sustained without Gandhi's messianic and highly personalised intervention. To whom were 'Muslims' and 'Hindus' reconciling? To each other or to Gandhi, or to each other via Gandhi?
For a sound analysis of this event in a larger cross-cultural perspective on Truth Commissions, read Bhargava 2000.

6 This fragment from the dense analysis of Nomonde Calata's cry is made by one of Antjie Krog's numerous interlocutors in *Country of My Skull* (1999), see pp 55-66. The analyst in question is identified as 'professor Kondlo, the Xhosa intellectual from Grahamstown', who intersperses his commentary while listening to extracts from Nomonde's testimonial recorded on tape. Krog is both a listener and the recorder of the entire event, including both the voices of Nomonde (on tape) and Kondlo (live).

7 The case of Bhanwari Devi is symptomatic here. A *sathin* or social worker based in the most feudal constituencies of Rajasthan, she was the target of a gang-rape by a group of upper caste men, who reacted violently to her activist interventions in the propagation of child marriage. While her exemplary courage in testifying to the violence inflicted on her is widely recognised, the rapists were acquitted of all charges in November 1995 by the district session judge in Rajasthan, who claimed: "Since the offenders were 'upper' caste men and included a brahmin, the rape could not have taken place because she (Bhanwari Devi) was from a 'lower' caste" [quoted in Setalvad 2001:13]. This is the kind of 'judgment' that legitimises dalit women's slogans like "We are untouchable by day and touchable by night" [ibid:9].
More recently, Bhanwari Devi has been subject to yet another form of violence through a sensationalised version of her life story in a commercial film, which raises much the same controversy that had been precipitated by Shekhar Kapur's representation of Phoolan Devi's life in 'Bandit Queen'. While I do not deal with these specific controversies in this essay, I have them in mind as I question the politics of representation in the next section.

8 The intimacy of the conversation is framed – and distanced – by Krog's prefatory note that she is drawing on at least four texts – "*Het Loon van de Schuld*, by Ian Buruma; *Guilt and Shame*, edited by Herbert Morris; *Imagination, Fiction, Myth*, by Johan Dagenaar; and *After the Catastrophe* by Carl Jung" [Krog 1999:359]. These citations contribute to the meta-critical dimensions of Krog's conversation, which can also be read as an unacknowledged love story. For a Derridean reading of how Krog invents the figure of the beloved to complicate her mode of story telling, read Sanders 2000:80-83.

9 It comes as no surprise that Buruma should endorse Anthony Appiah's (1997) urbane, yet condescending dismissal of the search for new identities by middle class, 'hyphenated Americans', who seem to "fear that unless the *rest of us* acknowledge the importance of *their* difference, there soon won't be anything worth acknowledging" (my italics). It would be interesting to question how Appiah positions himself to 'the rest of us' – as a non-hyphenated American, or as a hyphenated American-Ghanaian, upper class and cosmopolitan, who doesn't need "the rich, old kitchen comforts of ethnicity?" There are far too many put-downs in this disparagement of the less cosmopolitan seekers of multicultural identity that needs to be countered – or at least, counterpointed – by the more sympathetic reading of 'new ethnicities' offered by Stuart Hall (1995).

10 Read the concluding section of Bhargava 2000 for a broader perspective on 'forgiveness' that counters Mahmoud Mamdani's (1996) more provocative position that forgiveness is an "invitation to reconcile with rather than conquer evil."

11 *The Ending of Time* (1996) is a series of 13 dialogues that Krishnamurti conducted with the quantum physicist David Bohm. The keyword here is 'dialogue', the kind of which there is very little evidence in political and social forums, even as 'dialogue' is prioritised by NGOs, Truth Commissions, and activist groups. Countering the seemingly apocalyptic resonance of its title, *The Ending of Time* is an extremely tentative, yet rigorous process of questioning that moves from abstract subjects like 'Ground of Being, Mind of Man', 'Mutation of the Brain Cells?', and 'Ending of 'Psychological' Knowledge', into a very fundamental question: 'Can Personal Problems be Solved and Fragmentation End?' There is a humbling process of 'truth and reconciliation' here that is explored through active thinking – and listening.

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