

‘This thing called reconciliation...’
forgiveness as part of an
interconnectedness-towards-wholeness¹

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Abstract

Regular reference is made, within the discourse around the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, to the fact that ubuntu, an indigenous world view, played a role in the process. This paper tries to show that despite these references, important analysts of the TRC (as well as many South Africans) had insufficiently accounted for this worldview in their critical readings of the Commission’s work and therefore found aspects of the process incoherent and/or morally and legally confused. I am not arguing that the TRC was not a deeply flawed process, but want to establish how powerfully this indigenous world view brought a coherency that not only enabled the TRC to do its work without incidences of revenge, but imbued politically and legally trapped concepts with new possibilities. The pervasiveness of this world view within eg. the second round of TRC testimonies is noticeable and show how often the critique on the TRC fails to take this dominant role into account and how many, seemingly contradictory or confusing, positions become coherent when regarded within this worldview. This view of interconnectedness, consistently expressed throughout the life of the commission, has wide implications for the interpretation of healing, the asking of amnesty, the rehabilitation of perpetrators, the interdependence of forgiveness and reconciliation in the process of achieving full personhood within a healed society. In the footsteps of Richard Bell, this paper locates this world view within a particular framework formulated as ubuntu by Desmond Tutu, as communitarianism by Kwame Gyekye, as ethnophilosophy by Paulin Hountondji etc. The paper also tries to understand how this interconnected moral self is formed and who the community could or should be that influences this moral self.

Introduction

In his Nobel Prize speech (1986) Wole Soyinka expresses astonishment at how some Africans seem to forgive and reconcile enmity after much suffering and injustice. He links it to their world view:

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(T)here is a deep lesson for the world in the black races' capacity to forgive, one which, I often think, has much to do with the ethical percepts which spring from their world view and authentic religions, none which is ever totally eradicated by the accretions of foreign faiths and their implicit ethnocentrism. (Bell, 2002: p. 87)

Elsewhere Soyinka warns that: '(w)e should differentiate first of all between the deliberate use of Christian or Islamic symbolism, metaphors or historic archetypes,' and the application of 'African indigenous values' (Soyinka 1976: p.76).

According to Bloomfield, Barnes and Huyse, the South African TRC differed in several important and useful ways from the previous (at least more than 15) Commissions that investigated human rights abuses. I want to focus on only two of the ones they mention as well as on one they don't. The South African TRC was the first to individualize amnesty and to allow victims to testify in public. What, to my knowledge, is not mentioned anywhere, is that it was also the first commission to allow people from both sides of the conflict to testify at the same forum as victims. In this paper I will argue that these differences, also described by Boraine and others as breakthroughs, were at least partly made possible by a particular cultural commonality. This is not to say that political and other factors did not play an important role in the transition, but the peaceful acceptance of the specific work of the TRC by the black community (whether as victims or perpetrators, e.g. more black perpetrators asked amnesty than whites) as well as the way in which concepts such as amnesty, reconciliation and forgiveness were innovatively used and understood, is indicative of something broader and deeper than some of the TRC critics would allow. Although they mention the word ubuntu, it plays hardly a role in the formulation of their critique. I will return to the criticism later, but two examples are in order:

Probably the most often quoted analyst of the TRC, Richard Wilson, regards ubuntu as mere 'wrapping' for an ANC agenda out to use the TRC to legitimize a new government.

Ubuntu should be recognized for what it is: an ideological concept with multiple meanings which conjoins human rights, restorative justice, reconciliation and nation-building within the populist language of pan-Africanism. In post-apartheid South Africa, it became the Africanist wrapping used to sell a reconciliatory version of human rights talk to black South Africans. (Wilson 2001: p.13)

In her published thesis on forgiveness at the TRC, Annelies Verdoolaege regards ubuntu as part of a 'political agenda' in a nation-building project (Verdoolaege 2005: p. 403).

In short, most critics saw the world view of ubuntu as superficial and confusing, as agenda and ideology, used by the powerful to present political, legal and/or personal religious agendas in palatable form to more or less unsuspecting people. I want to argue that it was the other way round: the world view was the essence and foundation of the TRC process, but it only became visible to some via the wrapping of Christianity and restorative justice. In this essay I want to adhere to the call of Kwame Gyekye that 'issues and problems unleashed by cultural and historical situations' should be responded to on a conceptual level' (Gyekye 1997: p. 34).

Clarifications

There is tension between those who claim the word ‘philosophy’ for ‘higher’ arguments and those who feel that philosophy, worldview, ethos and cosmology overlap in many areas. I prefer to use the term worldview (and not believe structures or social imaginings) in the sense of ‘a particular system of values, beliefs and attitudes held by a specific group’. (Rapport 2000: p. 395) Of course, the term worldview has its own baggage, but to define and develop the appropriate terminology for this kind of analysis in the space of an essay is highly problematic, especially when one is reminded of further contestations around words such as African, Pan African, Sub-Sahara African etc. Similarly, the over-use and exploitation of the word ubuntu makes it nearly unusable as well.

Aware therefore of the risks of ‘ethnophilosophy’ (Hountondji, 1983: p. 39) in taking the route of theoretically understanding something that is so abundantly and pervasively present, yet still so grapplingly and tentatively theorized, I prefer in this essay to use the term ‘interconnectedness-towards-wholeness’ and place it firmly within the well defined and formulated broader African communitarianism as well as the more Southern African localized term of ubuntu.

Interconnectedness-towards-wholeness in this essay is more than just a theoretical knowledge that all things in the world are linked, it means both a mental and physical awareness that one can only ‘become’ who one is, or could be, through the fullness of that which is around one – both physical and metaphysical.

Wholeness is thus not a passive state of nirvana, but a process of becoming in which everybody and everything is moving towards its fullest self, building itself; one can only reach that fullest self though, through and with others which include ancestors and universe.

Finally, the words forgiveness and reconciliation are used in this essay within the concept of interconnectedness-towards-wholeness. Much has been written about the difference between forgiveness (letting go, personally, of resentment and the past,) and reconciliation (mutual commitment to an improved ethical future). In their research on these concepts in Rwanda, Staub, Pearlman, Gubin and Hagengimana defined forgiveness as presenting a change in the harmed party, while reconciliation a change in *both* parties:

Forgiving involves letting go of anger and the desire for revenge. It can help in diminishing the pain that results from victimization and in moving away from an identity as a victim. ... Since the definition of forgiving usually includes the development of a more positive attitude toward the other (McCullough, Fincham, & Tsang, 2003), reconciliation and forgiveness are clearly connected. We define reconciliation as mutual acceptance by members of formerly hostile groups of each other. Such acceptance includes positive attitudes, but also positive actions that express them, as circumstances allow and require. (Staub, Pearlman, Gubin and Hagengimana 2005)

In the research quoted above, as well as research on the conflict in Ireland, (see eg *Collective guilt: International perspectives* (2004) pp. 193-215) all discuss the possibility of forgiveness without reconciliation, or of reconciliation without forgiveness.

However, within the concept interconnectedness-towards-wholeness, the notions of forgiveness and reconciliation cannot be separated. They are not only closely linked,

but also mutually dependent: the one begins, or opens up a process of becoming, while the other is the crucial next step into this becoming. As the TRC testimonies and texts will show, within the world view of interconnectedness-towards-wholeness, in order to grow into one's fullest self, one's fullest potential personhood, the deed of asking for forgiveness and forgiveness itself, needs to lead to recovery, reconciliation and eventually to a fuller personhood.

It is important to remember that the Xhosa word for reconciliation in the concept Truth and Reconciliation, is forgiveness (*uxolelwano*). The TRC literally means in Xhosa: the Truth and Forgiveness Commission. When looked at from a human rights view, one could say that forgiveness was forced on people through this name. When looked at from an interconnected view, the word indicates the first step towards changing into a more humane self that would include both victim and perpetrator.

I will use the testimonies of the second week of TRC hearings as well as some other TRC texts to indicate the unobtrusive traces of interconnectedness in the TRC hearings and how awareness of them contribute to a powerfully coherent, yet often unnoticed, logic. The focus is also on the participants in the process and not only on those who set up and ran the Commission.

Formulations of forgiveness and reconciliation during the TRC

The most coherent and deeply understood sense of interconnectedness related to forgiveness that I know, had been articulated by one of the Gugulethu Seven mothers, Cynthia Ngewu, during the second week of TRC human rights violation hearings.

Mrs Ngewu's son, Christopher Piet formed part of a group of seven young men, lured by askaris (guerillas who secretly changed loyalties and spied for the South African Police Force) to receive military training inside the country, in order to join Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), the military wing of the African National Congress (ANC). During their first mission all seven of them were ambushed and killed by security police early on the morning of 3 March 1986. Eyewitnesses from a nearby hostel testified that some of the young men came out of the bushes with their hands in the air and that Russian hand grenades and guns were placed on their dead bodies. A television news crew of the state broadcaster, the SABC, was called to document the killing of 'terrorists'. A police video was also made. (See TRC Report Volume 3, p. 451). This incident became known as the Gugulethu Seven.

One of the black perpetrators, the askari Mbele, requested a private meeting with the Gugulethu mothers in order to ask forgiveness. Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, committee member of the TRC, oversaw the meeting between the killer and the mothers of those who died. The following translated quote of Mrs Ngewu given after the meeting, was afterwards broadcasted on SABC radio.

This thing called reconciliation ...if I am understanding it correctly ... if it means this perpetrator, this man who has killed Christopher Piet, if it means he becomes human again, this man, so that I, so that all of us, get our humanity back ... then I agree, then I support it all. (Krog 1998: p.109)

In simple terms Cynthia Ngewu spells out the full complex implications of being interconnected-towards-wholeness and the role of reconciliation in it.

Her words, firstly, mean that she understood that the killer of her child could, and did, kill because he had lost his humanity; he was no longer human. Secondly, she understood that to forgive him would open up the possibility for him to regain his hu-

manity; to change profoundly. Thirdly, she understood also that the loss of her son affected her own humanity; she herself had now an affected humanity. Fourthly and most importantly, she understood that if indeed the perpetrator felt himself driven by her forgiveness to regain his humanity, then it would open up for her the possibility to become fully human again.

This is a remarkable formulation! It affirms how somebody, who would be regarded by many as not effectively literate, let alone schooled in African philosophy, intimately understood her interconnectedness and could formulate it succinctly. Together with the formulations of the Commissioners themselves, especially the chairperson, Mrs Ngewu's words throw off the imposed paradigm in a way that Tsenay Serequeberhan describes as 'an antidote to colonialism (Serequeberhan 1994: p. 84, p. 91). I argue that it is precisely this understanding and knowledge of inter-connectedness-towards-wholeness that underpinned most of the testimonies delivered before the TRC and was largely responsible for the absence of revenge and the way anger was articulated.

(To put it more bluntly, the daily living of interconnectedness, and not simply Christianity, was the determining factor both in 'making the TRC work' and the tone of the hearings.)

But what is the difference between forgiveness inspired by Christ and forgiveness inspired by interconnectedness-towards-wholeness?

Christian forgiveness says: I forgive you, because Jesus has forgiven me (*Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespassed against us*). The reward of this forgiveness will be in heaven and also holds the possibility that one can forgive without reconciling. (Indeed General Tienie Groenewald, who refused to appear before the TRC, said in a radio interview: 'This is between God and myself. I have nothing to say to Tutu' (Krog, 1998: p.17)). Furthermore, Christian forgiveness also has the possibility of reconciling without forgiving: one can live in peace with sinful neighbours without forgiving them their deeds.

On the other hand, interconnected forgiveness says: I forgive you so that you can change/heal here on earth, then I can start on my interconnected path towards healing. The effort is towards achieving full personhood *on earth*. This means that forgiveness can never be without the next step: reconciliation, and reconciliation can not take place without it fundamentally changing the life of the one that forgave as well as the forgiven one. Although it allows for the perpetrator to ask for forgiveness (and in fact prefers the perpetrator's quest for forgiveness to be the beginning of the process), it also allows for the possibility of the victim to move towards wholeness *without* the perpetrator asking for forgiveness – in other words, the victim may forgive without even being asked and thus the power towards wholeness stays firmly in the hands of the victim. After the act of forgiveness, however, the perpetrator must change.

(Tutu's response to Groenewald's refusal to ask for forgiveness of people, befits interconnectedness: 'If you beat your wife, you can't simply say this is between me and God. You also have to go to your wife and say: I'm sorry.')

Another example of how interconnectedness informed forgiveness, came from the rev Frank Chikane. After the trial of apartheid chemical warfare expert Wouter Basson, Chikane, as one of his victims, said that he had forgiven his tormentors, but 'until the perpetrator says 'I'm sorry' and want to change and lead a different life, he becomes a prisoner for ever, even if I have forgiven him. So my forgiveness does not liberate the perpetrator'(Brand, 2002: p. 90). In other words, the circle of forgiveness

can only be concluded when the perpetrator tries to restore his own wholeness (want to change) and through that restores the wholeness of society (actively contributing to produce a better society).

When on 3 Aug 2006, former Minister of Police, Adriaan Vlok, in an act of asking forgiveness, derided by many, washed the feet of rev Frank Chikane, the latter responded as follows: 'I shared it with the congregation and people just broke down and cried. And there is no way that you can have that experience and keep it quiet.'

TRC testimonial responses to forgiveness

During its first round of hearings through the country, the TRC held a four day hearing (22 – 25 April 1996) in Cape Town. A total of 44 testimonies focusing on 25 cases were heard over four days, focusing on some important and well known names such as Anton Fransch and Anton Lubowski, well known massacres like those of Gugulethu and the St James Church, as well as incidences of violence committed during the infamous years of 1976 and 1986.

Although it was only the second week of hearings, the accumulative effect of listening to the human rights violations was already beginning to exact its toll from the Commissioners and staff. Both Archbishop Tutu (East London) and Mary Burton (Cape Town) had broken down in public and first attempts were made to council Commissioners and staff.

Being only too aware of the slippages in simultaneous interpretation and how difficult it is for philosophical concepts to survive the crossing from one language to another which does not share the same culture, the following observations could be made from the English transcriptions of testimonies delivered during the second week of hearings in Cape Town:

Not once in any of the Xhosa and Tswana testimonies was Christ mentioned in terms of forgiveness. This could indicate that the 'reason' to forgive (Derrida's miracle) was not located in Christ, but was found elsewhere. (In contrast to this, the coloured victims as well as their white minister explicitly said that they had forgiven the perpetrators, because Jesus had forgiven them.)

At least nine direct references were made to interconnectedness: four by Chairperson Tutu, two by Commissioner Ntsebeza and three by victims.

The direct references to interconnectedness by the Truth Commissioners focused on the sharing of pain and loss:

- (a) ...we need to keep reminding ourselves we do belong in one family. And to help those who lost their humanity to recover their old (*Chairperson Tutu to Kwisomba family*)
- (b) This is not just your pain only, it is shared by all of us (*Tutu to Ms Gishi*)
- (c) Your wound is ours too (*Commissioner Ntsebeza to Juqu family*)

The idea here is not to classify these expressions as uniquely ubuntu-ean in content, but to warn that they should also not be read as mere expressions of people misled or pressurized or confused into kindness, because within a particular 'social imagining' they could well be signifiers of a hitherto unnoticed worldview. Note further that, although these may sound like common and ordinary sentences, Alex Boraine, in his very kind welcoming words, never makes this kind of interconnected claim – also not to white victims. (I would certainly have found it difficult to believe if he said that Mrs Ngewu's pain was also his (Boraine's) pain. But I realize that I also would have had

the same difficulty if he said that Mrs Lubowski's pain was his pain – but when Tutu and Ntsebeza shared the pain of black and white, I believed that.)

(d) Nomatise, now I am going to speak Xhosa with you, I am going to ask you to please bear with me, your pain is our pain as well (*Ntsebeza to Mrs Tsobileyo*)

Tutu makes two references to the healing that forgiveness will bring through sharing:

... thank you very much my sister, please have forgiveness in you. We hope that you will be healed spiritually and physically thank you (*Tutu to Ms Tsobileyo*)

Thank you for your spirit of forgiveness which joins the spirit of forgiveness of so many others (*Tutu to Bishop Retief*)

While the Commissioners emphasized the interconnectedness of pain; the victims underlined the *break-down* in interconnectedness, but often suggesting at the same time how it could be healed. Especially Mrs Ngewu and Mr Maliti were articulating the need of victims to grant forgiveness in order to re-humanise themselves:

...we still have this big lump in our throats. If - if they can be put here in front of us maybe that lump can go away. (*Mrs Ngewu in the Gugulethu Seven case*)

'Nobody even bothered to ask for forgiveness. When we saw each other, they just looked down.' (*Mr Maliti in the Delato case*)

(If) the Truth Commission (can) assist in the education of that boy, as well as accommodation of that boy. Because in the old end, he is got to contribute maybe to peace - towards peace in this country, he will have felt the pain, and he will have felt maybe how to forgive, thank you (*Mr Kama in the Mzimkulu Johnson case*)

The quotations above show that these remarks of interconnectedness were made in the African language mother tongues, by educated and uneducated people alike.

Restoring wholeness in psychology

The need to restore wholeness is also articulated in the work of psychologist Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela. In her book *A Human Being died that Night* she finds the post-holocaust notion that it is impossible to forgive the unforgivable 'unhelpful'.

She wants forgiveness as a normalising factor '(T)o say that some evil deeds are simply unforgivable, does not capture the richness and complexity of all the social contexts within which gross evil is committed' (Gobodo-Madikizela 2003: p.124). She insists that 'philosophical questions can and should give way and be subsumed to human questions, for in the end we are a society of people and not of ideas, *a fragile web of interdependent humans, not of stances*' (my italics).

Gobodo-Madikizela gives several reasons why a victim would want to interact in a non-revengeful way with those who violated his or her rights.

We are induced to empathy because there is something in the other that is felt to be part of the self, and something in the self that is felt to belong to the other.

The victim needs forgiveness as part of the process of becoming rehumanized. The victim needs it in order to complete himself and wrest away from the perpetrator the fiat power to destroy. Far from being an unnerving proposition and a burdensome moral sacrifice, compassion, for many, is deeply therapeutic and restorative. (Gobodo-Madikizela 2003: p. 127 - 132)

The victim now becomes the gate keeper to what the outcast desires: namely re-admission into the human community. Forgiveness or salvation does not overlook the deed, but rises above it. 'This is what it means to be human,' it says. 'I cannot and will not return the evil you inflicted on me,' and that is the victim's triumph. (Gobodo-Madikizela 2003: p.117)

Interconnectedness-towards-wholeness as part of a communitarian African world view

The importance of interconnectedness had been stressed many times by African philosophers (Gyekye, Hountondji, Wiredu), theologians (Setiloane, Tutu, Tempels), sociologists (Gobodo-Madikizela, Ratele) etc., but seemed often to fall on deaf western scholarly ears when it comes to using it in analysis and assessment.

Thus, ubuntu or interconnectedness is not an isolated exceptional phenomenon, but part of a much broader, more general context found in a variety of forms, under a variety of names, manifesting in a variety of cultures across the large African continent. In his famous essay on African Philosophical thought, Kwame Gyekye says that communitarianism is being held by most of the scholarship involving cultures of Africa, as the most outstanding trademark as well as the most defining characteristic. He quotes Kwesi Dickson's somewhat essentialist remark that this sense of community is a 'characteristic of African life to which attention had been drawn again and again by both African and non-African writers on Africa. Indeed, to many this characteristic defines Africanness' (Gyekye 1997: p.36).

Ifeanyi Menkiti also maintains that 'as far as Africans are concerned, the reality of the communal world takes precedence over the reality of the individual life histories' and therefore comes to three conclusions: the community defines the individual; personhood is not bestowed on somebody simply through birth, but is something to be acquired; personhood is something at which an individual could fail (Gyekye 1997: p. 37).

Gyekye states that communitarian logic 'assumes a great concern for communal values, for the good of the wider society as such. ... (it) deeply cherishes the social values of peace, harmony, stability, solidarity and mutual reciprocities and sympathy' (Gyekye 1997: p. 65).

He says that the basis of a caring society need not be religious:

It is also possible to derive a conception of human dignity ... not from theism but from reflections on human nature, particularly on the qualities that will dispose the human being to function at his best in human society and realize his potentials to the full. (Gyekye 1997: p.63)

He makes a stern distinction between being driven by 'caring or compassion or generosity' rather than justice (Gyekye 1997: p. 70).

If one were to look for a pervasive and fundamental concept in African socio-ethical thought generally – a concept that animates other intellectual activities and forms of behaviour, including religious behaviour, and provides continuity, resilience, nourishment, and meaning to life – that concept would most probably be humanism: a philosophy that sees human needs, interests, and dignity as of fundamental importance and concern.

Taking this interconnectedness, from which a person 'builds' himself into a caring being, as a basis, the South African theologian, Gabriel Setiloane, in his seminal work on the image of God among the Sotho-Tswana, suggests that Christianity became embedded within this communitarian spirituality: '... while passing all the orthodox criteria to make it 'Christian' (it) is nevertheless understood within the assumptions of the *mekgwa ya bo-rra rona*' (customs, beliefs and ways of life) (Setiloane 1976: p.161).

In other words, Christianity (or human rights, restorative justice, or for that matter the theology of Tutu, the politics of Mandela) is not simply linked to, or a (pagan) add-on to interconnectedness, but is in fact imbedded therein, it forms the interpretive foundation of it. It is this foundation that enabled people to re-interpret western concepts such as forgiveness, reconciliation, amnesty, justice etc in a new and useable way.

In other words: these concepts moved across cultural borders and were infused and energized by a sense of interconnectedness-towards-wholeness. Setiloane stresses that the Sotho-Tswana 'has taken over Christian concepts and understandings and moulded them anew giving them an interpretation more reminiscent of their traditional practice' (Setiloane 1976: p.185).

In his book on African Philosophy, Richard Bell deals extensively with moderate communalism and describes ubuntu as a notion rooted in 'whatever form of communalism that may have survived in South Africa.' He quotes Alex Boraine who described ubuntu as an ancient Philosophy that gave rise to a need 'for a more community-orientated jurisprudence that acknowledges the reality that individuals are part of a much larger social context' (Bell 2002: p. 89).

After the Rwandan genocide Tutu noted that it was clearly not a mechanical and inevitable process to know that one has to build oneself into a good person through caring for others. Not to know that, however, could be regarded 'as a moral deficiency' (Bell 2002: p. 89).

This pervasive world view throws a different light on some of the remarks about the failures of the TRC.

When Mahmood Mamdani asks: if 'truth has replaced justice in South Africa – has reconciliation then turned into an embrace of evil?' (Krog 1998: p. 112; see also Mamdani's 'Reconciliation without Justice'), he ignores a world view that suggests that embracing the evil-one could be the beginning of a humanizing process in which compassion and change brings the ultimate form of justice. The fact that only a few perpetrators became scapegoats and that land reparations were not properly addressed during the TRC process, only becomes deeply problematic within a human rights and western post second world war milieu, but within a communitarian world view, one could have assumed that everybody would feel themselves interconnected with the scapegoats and that amnesty would therefore be the start of a process of change into reparation involving everybody. That it did not happen is more an indication of a dominating non-interconnecting culture clashing with an indigenous one, than a moral failure or confusion of those involved in the TRC process from a grassroots level. (Even the TRC legislation itself could imagine no reciprocal connection between amnesty seeker and victim.)

Maybe even Derrida would not have regarded it as a 'confusion' on Tutu's part 'to oscillate between a non-penal and non-reparative logic of 'forgiveness' (he calls it 'restorative') and a judicial logic of amnesty'. (Derrida 2001: p. 32) Tutu was not simply linking human rights and amnesty to religion, but was using the foundation of inter-

connectedness to allow people back into humanity through processes such as forgiveness and amnesty.

Amnesty, as a process of admitting a wrong and wanting it to be set aside, fits in neatly with the victims' desire to rebuild a humane and caring community. The fact that many, mostly white and western people, did not read amnesty in that way and preferred to see it as being 'let off the hook', is to be laid rather at the feet of Christianity and human rights, in stead of suggesting an indigenous confusion.

Within a communitarian framework the term 'religious-redemptive ethos' (Wilson 2001: p.109) is also out of place, as well as the suggestion that the TRC was used to politically legitimize the new ANC government (Wilson, Verdoolaege). It was the knowledge among ordinary people, attending and participating in the TRC process in their thousands, of the possibility that one could only fully 'build' oneself within a caring reconciled community, which drove the process rather than any political agenda or pact between the new elites (Van Binsbergen 2001). The Commission did not necessarily have a 'dual consciousness' with practical justice and forgiveness on the one hand and a confused understanding of human rights on the other (Wilson 2001: p.153). It was talking from a sense of interconnectedness which lit up concepts like justice, amnesty, forgiveness, reconciliation and human rights in a particular new and I would suggest very coherent way.

When Annelies Verdoolaege notes that the ruling ANC party is using the TRC and reconciliation as a nation building exercise, she is ignoring the possibility that many of the forty million not-white South Africans could be interested in restoring a traumatized community through affirming its interconnectedness towards wholeness which would entail equal sharing of resources.

The South African TRC is credited for being the first commission to: hold victim hearings in public; individualize amnesty and allow victims fighting against and for apartheid to testify on the same forum. All three of these innovations can be traced back to the desire to restore the interconnectedness of a community:

- because people share each others pain, the audience has as much right to be in the presence of the testimony than the testifier;
- because people who are prepared to apply for amnesty are willing to admit that they have done wrong and could begin to change to be re-admitted into society;
- because mothers who lost their loved ones, fighting for the 'right' or the 'wrong' side, suffer alike and are interconnected.

The interconnected moral self

As a white South African I am disturbed by the fact that I always notice this interconnectedness as a kind of second thought. Something does not make sense and then I realize that is because I think as an unattached individual. In order to learn interconnectedness and live appropriately within it, I need to philosophically understand two things: who is the community to which I am interconnected? And how is the interconnected moral self formed?

The community

Prominent Xhosa intellectual, Tiyo Soga lamented in 1860 the loss of wholeness after the entry of Christianity into Southern Africa. In his essay 'The Believers and the Pagans' he pointed to the widening gulf between pagan and converted – the latter not allowing pagans into their houses (Sanders 2002: p. 124).

Nearly a hundred years later the writer of 'The Wrath of the Ancestors', AC Jordan, took this idea one step further by redefining interconnectedness in terms of African hospitality. He said ubuntu was no longer merely what was expected of people within a community towards members of that community, but ubuntu was what took place between the community and strangers. For Jordan, as formulated by Mark Sanders, hospitality and reconciliation were synonyms; it was a way of becoming, in a limited sense, the one who was not one's own, the one through whom one owned oneself and became who one was. One was a person through others and became a person through the stranger (Sanders 2002: p. 125).

Jordan warned that the figure of the stranger ought to be continually reinvented, because there would always be an outsider who ought to be remembered, or not-forgotten, who called into question the existence of the collectivity. Jordan seemed to conclude that in terms of the African world view, it was the task of the intellectual to be an advocate for the figure of the stranger - to insist on responsibility for the stranger as constitutive of collectivity itself (Sanders 2002: p.129). The 'stranger', who threatens the stability of the society, who puts the society at risk, also provides the possibility of restoring and saving it (Sanders 2002: p.129; see also Gyekye 1997: p.74).

Moral self (self-in-one)

After the Holocaust, Hannah Arendt took up Socrates's proposition: 'It is better to suffer wrong, than to do wrong'. But who decides what is wrong? The self. For Arendt the self stands in the center of the moral consideration of human conduct (Arendt 2003: p. Xx). Even religious commands like 'Love thy neighbour as thyself', or 'Don't do unto others what you don't want done to yourself', couldn't get away from the Self (Arendt 2003: p. 68).

Arendt points out that Socrates said that it would be better for him that most men disagree with him, than for him to contradict himself. In other words Socrates was arguing with himself. He was two-within-one. Arendt re-phrased it:

Though I am one, I am two-in-one and there can be harmony or disharmony with the self. ... (but) I cannot walk away from myself ... if I do wrong, I am condemned to live together with a wrongdoer in unbearable intimacy. (Arendt 2003: p. 90)

Arendt says that the conversation with the Self was the beginning of thinking and knowing which would make a moral entity possible (Arendt 2003: pp. 91, 95,101,112, 162).

Maybe it is at this point that an African awareness could say: I constitute the self in another way.

Of course there is an I. Of course there should be the mind changing conversation. But the conversation that eventually creates the moral entity is not with the self, but with the people around one, the stranger-accommodating-community. One's self awareness is not formed by splitting oneself into two, but by becoming one-in-many - dispersed as it were among those around one.

The fundamental point of departure between an African and Western worldview could be, I suggest, in the place and the way the moral compass is formed: for Arendt it is formed in the *self* through conversations with the *self*. For African awareness it would be formed in the *self*, but through conversations with *those around one*.

The departure point for Arendt lies inside the individual moving towards the self. The departure point for African awareness also lies inside the individual, but moving towards the community.

Arendt suggests that an individual who would like to be 'good', should become completely selfless and then would embark 'upon the most lonely career there can be for man' with only God as company (Arendt 2003: p.117).

According to my hypothesis of African awareness, however, it is precisely this moment of doing good towards others, which makes one belong in the world as a full human being; it is this working for others that gives one a soul. The self-er one gets, the more self-focused, the less one's awareness of one's community and the more spiritually dead one becomes (Comaroff, 1991: p.143, Brown 1926: pp.137-138).

Conclusion

Why is it important to disentangle interconnectedness-towards-wholeness from the other credited driving forces of the TRC such as Christianity, human rights, legitimizing liberation politics etc.?

Firstly, it would assist towards a more complex interpretation of the TRC process and testimonies instead of assuming that they were mainly or exclusively informed by Christianity and therefore usurp-able into a whole range of judgments and critique.

Secondly, it could make those 'exporting' the South African version of the TRC aware of the presence of a rather decisive element in the process that, although deeply spiritual, does not (yet) fall into one of the main religious or legal categories of the world.

Thirdly, (some)one (like me) could start to learn how to 'read' interconnectedness as the core value and bedrock of many of the actions of South Africans in different fields and at last begin to effectively critique and value the 'groundbreaking ways' developed here. It is this, almost *a priori*, sense of interconnectedness that enabled the South African oppressed to re-define concepts such as reconciliation and forgiveness, even amnesty, which had become trapped in unusable religious and aggressive social or legal contexts in many parts of the world. It means turning around Samuel Imbo's warning against emphasizing differences, for 'in the dominant frameworks of Western philosophy, 'different' means 'inferior' (1989:139). In the case of the TRC, difference brought a creative tension that had produced productive results.

Being aware of this particular worldview also makes it possible to understand the current groundswell of anger and frustration of victims, those very same people who seemed to have been so forgiving during the TRC process itself, expressed in letters to the media and group actions demanding compensation. Although their anger is used as proof that the TRC pressurized them into forgiving, interconnectedness means that they could well have been expecting for the perpetrators to show signs of regaining humanity after forgiveness was extended to them. This seldom happened. Many perpetrators expressed surprise by a sentiment of: I want to forgive, but I do not know whom; to them it seemed to indicate that they could continue their lives as unperturbed as before.

Initially interconnectedness made victims forgive, but because no reciprocal sign of change and *widergutmachen* came from the interconnected perpetrators, victims NOW become angry. So fourthly, and perhaps most importantly, only by identifying interconnectedness-towards-wholeness as the foundation of the TRC process, would one

be able to understand that TRC resentment has more to do with thwarted beliefs now, than with the use of Christianity to suppress anger then.

Finally, the usurpation of the TRC process into Christianity and a human rights culture obscures the fact that a radically new way, embedded in an indigenous view, had been suggested of dealing with gross injustice and cycles of violence. This throws a sharp light on a different way of becoming and being. Sustained scholarship into the formation, sustainability, integrity and moral compass of interconnectedness-towards-wholeness could lead to a more informed discourse around events happening on the African continent.

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