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# Towards (Re)Conciliation: The Post-Colonial Economy of Giving

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> Everyone knows that a place exists which is not economically or politically indebted to all the vileness and compromise. That is not obliged to reproduce the system. That is writing. If there is a somewhere else that can escape the infernal repetition, it lies in that direction, where *it* writes itself, where *it* dreams, where *it* invents new worlds.
>
> Hélène Cixous

In his book, *Africa in Chaos*, George Ayittey writes how Keith Richburg, the African-American journalist, appalled by the Rwandan and other African crises, was tormented emotionally and moved to write, *Out of America: A Black Man Confronts Africa.* Ayittey narrates the events at a book launch in Virginia, where Richburg, "concluded that he was glad to be an 'American' and the designation 'African-American' was meaningless - devoid of content. Perhaps the slave traders did him a favour by shipping his ancestors out of Africa in slave ships for America" (1998: xiii). As one would expect, the audience who Ayittey reports was about forty percent black did not share Richburg's sentiments. Ayittey also notes his own disgust at the images of the Rwandan genocide, " I could say that one television scene probably did more to smash my African dignity and pride than 200 years of colonialism, but *non-African* blacks would probably misinterpret that statement" (1998: xiv, my emphasis).

It is precisely the images of the Rwandan genocide by which I was also appalled. As an African whose parents migrated to North America, and as somebody who now lives in Australia, it was difficult to fathom how such inhumanity and cruelty could be inflicted by one group of people upon another. In order to understand this process, in 1995, I spent nearly six months in Rwanda and the former Zaire. It quickly became clear to me that it was not African but human dignity which was at stake. This was all the

more so, because of the commitment of the world community in the aftermath of the Jewish Holocaust that never again would there be another genocide. The roots of the Rwandan tragedy, I discovered, are located firmly in the continent's colonial past as well as in its post-colonial present (Ahluwalia, 1997).

The stance adopted by both Richburg and Ayittey is part of the general rise of Afro-pessimism. It is hardly a new revelation that Africa is in crisis. The "African crisis" has been recorded, reported, analysed and widely discussed for more than a decade (Leys, 1994; 1996; Mamdani, 1996; Davidson, 1992; Rush and Szeftel, 1994, Chabal and Daloz, 1999). Patrick Chabal provides a good summary capturing the extent of the crises by categorising it into four distinct but interrelated factors: "an acute economic crisis, political instability, the so-called 're-traditionalisation' of African societies, and the marginalisation of Africa on the international scene" (1996: 29). The African crisis feeds into the prevailing representations of both Africa and Africans, as the "dark continent" - primordial, tribal, violent, unable to feed itself and with a permanent begging bowl in hand. If the power of representation in earlier centuries led to the colonisation of Africa by Europeans who embodied the civilising mission, in the closing stages of the millennium there are echoing calls for the re-colonisation of the continent (Pfaff, 1995; Mazrui, 1994; 1997; Helman and Ratner, 1992).

The ascendancy of Afro-pessimism, of which this type of thinking is representative, has a tendency to homogenise the "African tragedy", concluding that Africa has neither the political will nor the capacity to deal with its problems. The African condition, it is claimed, is largely of Africa's own making and therefore there is little or no hope for improvement. Afro-pessimism resonates in metropolitan centres where both former colonial powers as well as the United States, in the aftermath of the Cold

War, are seeking ways to disengage themselves from Africa. This is a convenient way for the West to wash its hands of a problem largely of their making.

This does not mean that Africans and in particular their leadership can be absolved of the responsibility for the African crises. Rather, it entails a recognition of the manner in which the cultures of both the coloniser and the colonised are deeply intertwined and implicated and that they are a product of colonialism and its continuing legacy. As Robert Young has observed, both have a responsibility:

> The means of administration may have often moved from coercive regiments to regimes supported by international aid and the banking system, the 'white man's burden' may have been transformed by the wind of change into the TV appeal for famine in Africa. But the burden of neocolonialism remains for all those who suffer its effects; and responsibility cannot be ignored by those who find themselves part of those of societies which enforce it (1991: 3).

The notion of shared responsibility is an important one, for it marks its distance from a "rhetoric of blame". What is called for is a different mode of analysis.

This paper demonstrates that the need for reconciliation is not the exclusive preserve of Africa but that it is one which arises in a number of post-colonial locations. To this end, three different post-colonial sites, which may appear to have little in common, are examined. By examining these sites through the notion of the uncanny, it is possible to demonstrate the manner in which these diverse sites have communities which are traumatised, albeit for very different reasons. In order to meet the challenge presented by such trauma, it is vital that processes of reconciliation be inaugurated. Such processes involve a cathartic exercise which can be carried out through such institutions as truth commissions, symbolic trials

or by the telling of stories. It is in this way that a healing process can begin to take place. There is, however, the need to go further. I argue that it is in this context that the gift and a post-colonial economy of giving be embraced in order to further the process of reconciliation. The gift is an indispensable tool for breaking the cycle of revenge, hatred and violence that characterises such societies. In short, the gift is the metaphor for a genuine process of reconciliation. So for example, in the case of Australia, the Prime Minister, John Howard could have given such a gift by apologising officially for the "stolen generation" children. The stolen generation are those children who were removed forcibly from their indigenous parents and placed in the care of Anglo-European homes in order to facilitate the process of assimilation. The gift here would have been a tangible and positive sign of the willingness and desire for reconciliation between the Anglo-European and Aboriginal communities.

**The Uncanny and Post-colonial Sites**

It is in this context that three post-colonial sites, Australia, Palestine and Rwanda, are examined through the notion of the uncanny. This notion is derived from Freud's 1919 essay entitled "The Uncanny". Freud's exposition of psychic ambivalence and the uncanny double emerges anew in Homi Bhabha's adaptation. It is Bhabha's use of the uncanny in this particular way that is pertinent to the post-colonial sites examined here. Bhabha explains the uncanny double in this way:

> For the uncanny lesson of the double, as a problem of intellectual uncertainty, lies precisely in its double-inscription. The authority of culture, in the modern *episteme*, requires at once imitation and identification. Culture is *heimlich*, with its disciplinary generalizations, its mimetic narratives, its homologous empty time, its seriality, its progress, its customs and coherence. But cultural authority is also *unheimlich*, for to be distinctive, significatory, influential and identifiable, it has to be translated, disseminated, differentiated,

> interdisciplinary, intertextual, international, inter-racial (1993: 136-137).

It is this double inscription which the uncanny portrays - the combination of the familiar and the unfamiliar at the same time - that is extremely useful. This notion is captivating precisely because it illustrates the manner in which the differing identities within each nation-state appear familiar and strange at the same time. In the case of Rwanda, for example, the uncanny can be seen in the manner in which both the Hutu and Tutsi appear to be so familiar - they speak the same language, share a common culture and religion - yet they are so different in the way in which they construct their identities. The coexistence of the familiar and the unfamiliar is one that is particularly pertinent to post-colonial situations where "one remains within the structures of colonialism even as one is somehow located beyond them or 'after' them" (Gelder and Jacobs 1998: 24). It is important to examine different and diverse political sites such as Australia, Palestine and Rwanda in order to understand the complexities, divergences and differences across post-colonial locations and yet still to note the uncanny similarity which characterises all three post-colonial societies. It is through such a reading of these diverse locations that it is possible to reflect on the particular crisis in Africa and to learn from the shared experience of post-coloniality.

## Australia

In 1992, Australia's highest judicial body overturned, in a ruling, the founding myth of *terra nullius* upon which the modern nation had been built. The decision was a response to the case mounted on behalf of a Torres Strait Islander group by Eddie Mabo who claimed that his native title had not been extinguished and that consequently the group that he represented retained proprietary rights over their land. In deciding in favour of Mabo, the court went much further than most expected, ruling that Aboriginal Australians had,

and as such, retained native title interests in the land. The High Court ruled that in those cases where the state had not explicitly extinguished native title, the indigenous population had, and retained, title as long as they maintained the traditional customs, beliefs, and practices which allowed them to sustain their separate Aboriginal identity. The Mabo case triggered a process of recognition of the dispossession and marginalisation of Aboriginal peoples. The then prime minister, Paul Keating, embarked upon reconstructing the nation around the imaginary of a shamed and redeemed nation by recognising that Aboriginal people had been wronged. But as Elizabeth Povinelli has observed:

> The potential radical alterity of indigenous beliefs, practices, and social organization was not addressed. Instead the court decision and the public discourse surrounding it urged dominant society on a journey to its own redemption, leaning heavily on the unarguable rightness of striving for the Good and for a national reparation and reconciliation (1998: 587).

If in the aftermath of the Mabo decision there was an appearance of progress, there was equally a backlash led by the National Farmer's Federation and the mining industry which argued that their land and industry were under threat from Aboriginal claims. Furthermore, in a scare campaign, they suggested that even suburban Australia (which was clearly excluded in the decision) could be subjected to land claims and that every one's backyard was insecure. At the very time that indigenous Australians were seen to be gaining some ground, it was those who had marginalised and dispossessed them the most - large-scale farming interests and the mining industry - who claimed that they were the victims. It was these debates which were being played out when the Labor government lost the 1996 election and John Howard's Liberal party took over the reins of power. The election of a conservative government unleashed a backlash not only against Aboriginal peoples but against the notion of a multicultural Australia which had been fostered by the Labor government.

It is important to question why such a backlash occurred at this time. Was it a mere response to the Keating government's stance on indigenous questions as well as Australia's position in the Asian region - one which envisioned an Australia whose future prosperity and security would be linked inextricably to the Asia-Pacific region? Clearly, Keating was reflecting the reality of a globalised world in which cultures are increasingly hybrid. However, it was this stance that notably was challenged by John Howard who proclaimed that Australia was unquestionably European. The backlash manifested itself also in the political programme of Pauline Hanson, the Federal Member for Oxley, who subsequently formed her own political party, One Nation. Hanson claimed to be the spokesperson of a disaffected "mainstream" Australia which was being rampaged by Aboriginals and multiculturalism. This reassertion of the mainstream evoked by Hanson had much in common with Howard and his views about culture. Jon Stratton points out that both Hanson and Howard "believe that the official government policy of multiculturalism threatens the unity of Australian society by undermining the homogeneity of the Australian culture which provides the basis for that unity" (1998: 14). Pauline Hanson's use of emotive language, vitriolic exaggeration and spurious argument were strategic weapons designed to create an "other" - Aboriginal and multicultural - against which mainstream Australia needed to defend itself. It is in this context that John Howard's position was untenable. His refusal to denounce unequivocally Pauline Hanson left little doubt that he sought a reassertion of the mainstream which he imagined had been eroded by the Keating government (Ahluwalia and McCarthy, 1998).

These examples illustrate the uncanny. At the very time when Anglo-European Australia appeared to be shedding its racist past by dealing with the indigenous population, it was more interested in self-redemption and atoning for its sins. Although proclaiming the dawn of a new era

characterised by the recognition of Aboriginal people, it sought simultaneously to draw the indigenous population within its own unmistakably Anglo-European liberal referents. All the indigenous people could do was once again react to a discourse which was defined by their protagonists, those who had pursued a policy of obliteration and assimilation. Aboriginal peoples in order to retain the status which they had legally gained, had to do this within the confines of proving their authenticity, their very Aboriginality which once again was mired in conceptions of race and identity formation reminiscent of the nineteenth century. In an uncanny manner, the structures of colonialism reappeared at the very time that a post-colonial moment of reconciliation was being inaugurated.

**Palestine**

Over the last five decades, relations between Israel and Palestine often have resulted in violent conflict. The major periods of conflict can be witnessed in the 1948 War of Independence, the Six Day War in 1967, the 1982 war in Lebanon and the *Intifada* which erupted in 1987 (Gazit, 1998; Beinin, 1998; Lieberfeld, 1999). In addition, both sides have for the want of a better term engaged in acts of "terrorism". Edward Said points out that the "question" of Palestine is how to understand "the contest between an affirmation and a denial," a contest that is well over a hundred years old. This entails shaping history, "so that this history now *appears* to confirm the validity of the Zionist claims to Palestine, thereby denigrating Palestinian claims" (1980: 8).

The 1948 War of Independence which led to the displacement and dispossession of the Palestinian people can be traced to the recommendation of partition by a British Commission. The British played a key role in Palestine as part of the League of Nations mandatory system (United

Nations, 1988). In this sense, the processes leading to the formation of Israel have been equated with a process of colonisation. However, this colonisation was not simply a matter of establishing a settler class for whose benefit an indigenous population could be mobilised. Rather, it was a project which entailed displacing the Palestinians as well as creating a state which was the state of all Jewish people with a "kind of sovereignty over land and peoples that no other state possessed or possesses" (Said 1980: 84).

Since that time, Palestinians have resorted to various campaigns, often violent, to exercise their right to self-determination. It was not until the *Intifadah* began in December 1987, a movement that can be equated to some of the great acts of anti-colonial resistance, that public opinion shifted, as a result of the images aired on television screens in the West of the Israeli soldier killing Palestinians. The initiative seized by the *Intifadah* , however, was lost, in part by the PLO's support for Iraq during the Gulf War. Nevertheless, Israel's vulnerability - demonstrated by the Iraqi scud attacks as well as changed domestic conditions with a large proportion of the Israeli population advocating peace in aftermath of the Gulf War - meant that Middle East peace was negotiated with a much-diminished role for the PLO in the actual negotiations (Beinin, 1998). Within Israel, there were increasing pressures for the establishment of a successful European secular state without the twin pressures of Zionist traditionalism and Palestinian suppression. That process finally concluded with the accession to power of a Labor government which was able to reach agreement over limited Palestinian autonomy and the signing of a Declaration of Principles (DOP), commonly called the Oslo Peace Accord, with ill-defined parameters relegating Palestinian demands for sovereignty and territory to final talks (Said, 1994). Joel Beinin has summarised the major forces which led to the DOP. It was a way of maintaining U.S. hegemony in the region, regional Israeli dominance, the political and diplomatic isolation of the PLO in the

wake of the Gulf War as well as of allaying Arafat's fear of being marginalised in the occupied territories. In addition, the signing of the DOP was aided by Israel's failure to conclude a peace treaty with Syria over the Golan Heights as well as by the Israeli elite's adoption of neo-liberal vision of a secular and capitalist market economy (Beinin 1998). The peace process, however, stalled because of the intransigence of Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud party which defeated the Labor party on the issue of Israel's security. Although Labor once again has regained power with a clear majority following this year's May 17 elections, it is too early to predict what this new government will achieve. Nevertheless, it is important to note that Prime Minister Barach has committed himself to resuming the stalled peace process.

Palestine demonstrates a number of paradoxes which illustrate the notion of the uncanny. It is a post-colonial nation where the imperial power, Britain, was able to recommend only the very strategy that it deployed in India, namely partition. In the process, the group of people who had been subjected to perhaps one of the greatest tragedies of the twentieth century came to occupy the mantle of power and reproduced the very practices of colonialism which sought to marginalise and dispossess the Palestinian people. In an uncanny manner, the victims become the perpetrators, thereby blocking the narratives of the Palestinian people. It is in this context that the Palestinian demand for the "permission to narrate" has been undertaken increasingly by Israel and the United States. While the Oslo accord may have signalled a departure from and a fundamental shift in policy for some, including Yasir Arafat, there is for critics such as Said, no atonement of past injustices, no remorse for the Palestinian losses or dispossession but an indefinite relegation of the Palestinians to the occupied territories. There is no acknowledgement of the millions of Palestinians outside these areas who continue to remain in exile. Again, the uncanny

can be witnessed in the way in which the Palestinian leadership under Yasir Arafat, after a long and arduous process, simply accept the colonial solution of separate states. In essence, it was the colonial solution of partition, albeit with considerably diminished conditions, that Arafat accepted. Here again we can see that, at the very dawn of the post-colonial moment, the structures of colonialism reappear uncannily.

## Rwanda

Rwanda, in 1962, gained independence from Belgium which had ruled the country since 1916 as a mandate of the League of Nations. The colonial administrations, German[1] and later Belgian, ruled through the existing order which can be delineated roughly in ethnic terms - with a Tutsi minority at the top with a *Mwami* or King and a large Hutu majority at the bottom. In addition, there was a very small Twa population, stereotyped as "pygmies", who were deemed to be irrelevant to the dominant political order.

In Rwanda and Burundi, although the Tutsi dominated the Hutu, there was considerable evidence of peaceful coexistence. As Davidson points out:

> ...the manner of this nineteenth-century dominance was mild, and was regulated by 'lord and vassal' relationships...'The rich man in his castle, the poor man at his gate' appear to have been the outward and visible forms of a mutually acceptable relationship between Tutsi and Hutu; at least in principle these forms represented an agreed sharing of rights and duties (Davidson 1992: 249).

Clearly, there were certain commonalties which gave pre-colonial Rwandan society some coherence and basis for organisation that allowed it to exist

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1. From 1889, Ruanda and Urundi were part of German East Africa, a portion of Germany's spoils from the "scramble for Africa" of the 1880s which divided the continent between the leading European powers. Germany was divested of its empire as part of the Versailles treaty.

with some order. This order was altered fundamentally with colonisation. The colonial powers, the Germans and the Belgians, disrupted the balance that existed. They compartmentalised the Tutsi and Hutu on explicitly racist assumptions whereby the Tutsi were considered to be more intelligent because they appeared to be "more European". By utilising such racist assumptions, Rwanda was administered through the Tutsi monarchy and an elaborate system of chiefs. The Tutsi were privileged in every aspect of the colonial state. What the colonisers failed to recognise was that the differences between the two groups were not marked; they spoke the same language, practised the same religion and shared the same culture. The colonial policy of "divide and rule", however, ossified and heightened differences that fundamentally altered the manner in which the two groups viewed each other. As Alain Destexhe has noted, the Belgians, "passed on the notion of ethnic difference to the Rwandans themselves" (Destexhe 1994: 6; see also Hunt, 1990; Mamdani, 1996a).

The decolonisation project which aimed to devolve political power to the Rwandese was hampered by the death of the *Mwami* in 1959, which in turn sparked bloody Hutu uprisings against the Tutsi minority.[2] In the light of such violence, the pre-independence elections of 1961 resulted in the electoral victory of the Hutu Emancipation Movement, commonly known as the Parmehutu. In short, at independence, Rwanda's traditional political order was transformed with a Hutu-dominated government, led by Gregoire Kayibana as President.

The virtually identical ethnic mix prevalent within Rwanda and neighbouring Burundi has meant that the ethnic tensions and politics in the two countries are linked inextricably. There has been a pattern whereby

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2. This uprising caused a large number of Tutsis to seek refuge in Uganda where there was already a steady flow of migrant Rwandan labour (See Ahluwalia, 1995).

violent events in one country are mirrored by reprisal killings in the other. The events have been described by a Burundi priest as "double genocide" (Nursey-Bray and Ahluwalia, 1994; Lemarchand, 1994). In September 1990, Rwanda again faced confrontation between the Hutu and the Tutsi. This time, the violent confrontation was sparked by the invasion of Ugandan-based, mainly Tutsi exiles of the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) (Mamdani, 1996a). The RPF sought to topple the Habyarimana government, claiming that it operated a policy of discrimination against the Tutsi. The government's efforts to quell the outbreak of violence and suppress the RPF were not as effective as in the past when it had dealt successfully and brutally with opposition. Between 1990 and 1994, there were numerous attempts to end the war and to embark upon a project of democratisation. On both counts, little progress was made due to Habyarimana's intransigence. The deaths of both the Presidents of Rwanda and Burundi, Juvenal Habyarimana and Cyprien Ntaryamira, in 1994 as a result of a rocket attack on the plane that was returning them from a peace summit in Tanzania, provided the catalyst which sparked inter-communal violence that culminated in genocide. This genocide witnessed the killing of over a million people as well as the fleeing of over two million people into the neighbouring countries.

The most pressing issue arising out of the Rwandan genocide is to bring to trial those involved in the genocide. Given the large numbers of people involved, this is no easy task. Currently, Rwandan prisons are overcrowded with more than 100,000 prisoners awaiting trial in prisons designed to accommodate less than 20,000 people. An elaborate classification system, whereby crimes during the genocide are categorised, has been devised (Zarembo, 1997). And yet, progress remains slow as it does in the special UN international criminal tribunal for Rwanda which is located in Arusha, Tanzania. In both Rwanda and Arusha, justice has been

slowed not only by an ineffective bureaucratic system but also due to the enormous difficulty of securing testimony from witnesses. In addition, the war in the Democratic Republic of Congo and the reformulation of Hutu paramilitary organisations mean that not only is Rwanda in a particularly precarious position but the entire Great Lakes region has been destabilzed. The RPF government which came to power in 1994 urged the refugees to return, advocated tolerance, coexistence and respect for human rights. It was a government that gained considerable international admiration for its stance. However, four years on, that level of admiration has been gradually eroded as many international observers and agencies realise that the new regime has come to resemble its predecessor. As Samantha Power has noted, "the government has locked up tens of thousands of Hutu without explanation, harassed its political opponents, and expressed little public remorse about massacring civilians while ferreting Hutu rebels" (1998: 16). Despite the uneasiness of international human rights organisations, European and American governments have provided the Rwandan government with unprecedented aid, and last year President Clinton paid a visit to Rwanda announcing further assistance.

In Rwanda, we can again see the notion of the uncanny, where the minority Tutsi and majority Hutu community which coexisted prior to colonialism have been rendered separate and incompatible by the processes of colonisation. The end product of such a policy was that at independence the very modes and practices of governance were reversed with the triumph of the Hutu over the Tutsi aided by the colonial power. This was an uncanny process where the coloniser which had encouraged the dominance of the Tutsi simply reversed the prevailing order at the time of decolonisation. More importantly, these identities were polarised into Hutu and Tutsi, identities which previously had been more fluid and which allowed movement to occur from one to the other. In an uncanny manner,

the very structures of colonialism continue to predominate within post-colonial Rwanda with the process of identity formation firmly locked into the representations and practices once ascribed by the colonial power. Hence, for a people inseparable in terms of culture, language and religion, it is the colonial identity card which above all becomes the signifier of difference. It is through this process that Rwanda's post-colonial history has oscillated like a pendulum between the oppressor and the oppressed.

Each of these three post-colonial sites illustrates the way in which these societies have been bedevilled with division as a result of the processes of colonisation. The uncanny double demonstrates the reappearance of colonial structures within the post-colonial moment. It is because of the uncanny that these communities become traumatised. More importantly, it is the uncanny which inhibits reconciliation.

**Traumatised Communities**

The effects of the uncanny can be highlighted through the suffering which people endure and the traumatic reaction that inevitably results. But traumatic recall is not merely a simple memory, it is a process that cannot be subjected to conscious recall. The paradox of trauma is that it is an experience that is repeated after its forgetting and it is only through forgetting that it is experienced. In a sense, memory appears to repeat what it cannot understand. It is a process that Freud documented:

> [People] think the fact that the traumatic experience is forcing itself upon the patient is proof of the strength of the experience: the patient is, as one might say, fixated to his trauma....I am not aware, however, that patients suffering from traumatic neurosis are much occupied in their waking lives with memories of their accident. Perhaps they are more concerned with *not* thinking of it (1920: 13).

Cathy Caruth has noted that the study and treatment of trauma is beleaguered by "the problem of how to help relieve suffering, and how to

understand the nature of the suffering, without eliminating the force and truth of reality that trauma survivors face and quite often try to transmit..." (1995: vii). The manner in which trauma is treated, by drugs or through the telling of stories, is one that Freud recognised as part of the cure, a mechanism through which the event can be eventually forgotten. To those who listen to the stories of the trauma, the task is to move beyond the "truth" that is being told and to find a way to avoid the repetitions of traumatic suffering.

Although trauma is generally conceived of as a phenomenon encountered by individuals, it is important to note that trauma has a social dimension and that it is possible to think of traumatised communities. Kai Erikson points out how trauma can become an important concept for social scientists:

> Sometimes the tissues of the community can be damaged in much the same way as the tissues of the mind and body...but even when that does not happen traumatic wounds inflicted on individuals can combine to create a mood, an ethos - a group culture, almost - that is different from ( and more than) the sum of the private wounds that make it up (1995: 185).

It is this sense of shared trauma that galvanises a community, that serves as a source of communality in which "there is a spiritual kinship there, a sense of identity, even when feelings of affection are deadened and the ability to care numbed" (186). In the context of events like the genocide in Rwanda, it is the community that has to act as the main locus for the sharing of pain, intimacy and tradition. Because the community itself is affected, it becomes possible to see that the community is damaged in a manner analogous to the individual damaged body. It is because of this sense of community damage that the healing has to take place at the level of the community and it is through such cathartic undertakings as symbolic trials - which deal with the genocide, which try to recollect the past, which provide a space for

speaking and for the telling of stories - that the basis of a new "imagined community" emanates from the abyss of the past. Nevertheless, it is important to move beyond recollecting the past, beyond the space of telling and listening to different narratives. It is here that the notion of the gift is instructive.

## The Gift

In his seminal study, *The Gift*, Marcel Mauss, examined the notion of gift-giving which, he argued, although seen to be a voluntary act entails systems of repayment and obligation. His focus was on prestations which signified gifts that were given either freely or under obligation and could include not only material goods but also services, entertainment, courtesies, ritual, military assistance, women, children, dances and feasts (1969: 3). This system of exchange between ethnic groups in which individuals and groups exchange everything was characterised by Mauss as total prestations and he called it potlatch. He explained that:

> Total prestation not only carries with it the obligation to repay gifts received, but it implies two others equally important: the obligation to give presents and the obligation to receive them (10-11).

The gift has clear implications in the "primitive" societies which he examined. It was meant to confer meaning and establish a complex system of exchange which defined social, political, economic and cultural relations between different groups. It represented mechanisms through which a sense of stability and coexistence-existence could be fostered. However, for Mauss, when reason is opposed to emotion, "peoples succeed in substituting alliance, gift and commerce for war, isolation and stagnation" (80). For Mauss, the squandering of fortunes during ritual were an important part of those societies because those who had excess wealth could not consume

their wealth in private. In short, fortunes had to be "wasted" but in the process it entailed the possibility of gaining status.

In his book, *The Accursed Share*, Georges Bataille, the theorist of expenditure as excess, is interested in examining aspects of human culture which cannot be simply reduced to the classical economic balance between production and consumption. Bataille seeks to illustrate the difficulties associated with viewing human existence in a mechanistic manner. By using the example of the sun, he is able to argue that this is an example of giving without receiving:

> Solar energy is the source of life's exuberant development. The origin and essence of our wealth are given in the radiation of the sun, which dispenses energy - wealth - without any return. The sun gives without ever receiving. Men were conscious of this long before astrophysics measured that ceaseless prodigality; they saw it ripen the harvests and they associated its splendor with the act of someone who gives without receiving (1991: 28-29).

By drawing on the analogy of the sun, Bataille examines the theory of the potlatch, which Marcel Mauss had posited, arguing that the system of exchange did not necessarily entail a reciprocity. For Bataille, the purpose of gift giving is not to merely receive gifts in return, but that through the act of giving there is an acquisition of power. He explains this: "And this action that is brought to bear on others is precisely what constitutes the gift's power, which one acquires from the fact of losing" (70). But the one who receives then feels obligated to return a gift, and in the process seeks to outdo the original gift-giver in order to obliterate the effect of obligation. And yet, for Bataille, the ideal potlatch would be one which could not be repaid. It is this sense of spending and dissipation which determines and measures wealth. He points out that the purpose of the potlatch is not simply reciprocity but the conferring of rank for whoever has the last word.

It is in this way that he argues that the potlatch should be seen as an example of the general economy where excess and luxury are the key defining aspects. The general economy is an economy without equilibrium and one characterised by loss and expenditure without return. In short, gift giving without the expectation of return within the principle of the general economy is a luxury - the excess which is necessary to keep the system in balance.

It is this notion of the gift that Hélène Cixous appropriates from Bataille. Much like the distinction which Bataille makes between the economy proper and the general economy, Cixous makes a distinction between the Realm of the Proper and the Realm of the Gift with the former equated to masculinity and the latter to femininity. For her, there are two types of gift giving, the one masculine and the other feminine. The former is tied up in mechanisms of exchange with expectations of immediate return whilst the latter is a form of giving without receiving. She points out:

> Can one speak of another spending? Really, there is no 'free' gift. You never give something for nothing. But the difference lies in the way and how of the gift, in the values that the gesture of giving affirms, causes to circulate; in the type of profit the giver draws from the gift and the use to which he or she puts it (Cixous and Clement 1986: 87).

It is these differing conceptions of giving that Cixous argues are characteristic of an alternative feminine writing practice. While Cixous is interested in determining differing writing practices, it is a feminine form of writing which she advocates. It is a form of writing that breaks down binaries, rejects fixed categories, and recognises the possibility of multiple identities and subjectivties which are plural and dynamic. It is precisely these functions that a post-colonial economy of giving must embody.

**The Post-colonial Economy of Giving**

The notion of the gift, I want to suggest, is one that is critical to the process of reconciliation within post-colonial societies. It is a notion that I seek to develop and understand through an elaboration of post-colonial theory. In other words, I wish to understand the manner in which post-colonial theory can be developed in order to facilitate reconciliation. Gift-giving is a process which needs to be inculcated in order to break down the cycle of revenge which has come to characterise many post-colonial societies. It is a process of giving which does not entail a direct return, but rather one which can be manifested in post-colonial situations. It is in this context that I suggest that the gift be considered under the rubric of a post-colonial economy of giving. However, it is important to clarify what is meant here by the post-colonial and post-colonial theory.

In current debates, the post in post-colonial no longer accepts the mere periodisation of the 1970s debates which signalled a new era after decolonisation. Rather, the post-colonial seeks to problematise the cultural interactions between both the colonised and the colonisers from the moment of colonisation onwards. Such a reworking of the post-colonial means that the post-colonial condition is not universal, and cannot be generalised as a theory. As Bill Ashcroft notes:

> ...'post-colonial' does not mean 'after colonialism'...It begins when the colonisers arrive and doesn't finish when they go home. In that sense, post-colonial analysis examines the full range of responses to colonialism...All of these may exist in a single society, so the term 'post-colonial society' does not mean an historical left over of colonialism, but a society continuously responding in all its myriad ways to the experience of colonial contact...(1997)

A particularly important trope in post-colonial theory is the notion of binarism. If one looks at Western rationalism as a product of modernity and development as its social signifier, we begin to see how the notion of "traditional" society is embedded deeply within imperial culture and the colonial imagination. Binarisms allow us to establish meaning by defining concepts in contradistinction to each other. Hence, when we look at reason or rationality, it can be juxtaposed to emotion or madness. What such binarisms suggest is that there are no positive terms in isolation, "in language, there are only differences *without positive terms*" (De Saussure 1974: 120). Just as feminist theory has demonstrated that binarisms operate within Western patriarchal thought where reason is associated with masculinity and emotion and hysteria with femininity, there is a similar binarism that operates within developed and developing or first and third world countries.

These binarisms are clearly in opposition but, more importantly, they are unequal and hierarchical - replicating the master/slave relationship. This is precisely the kind of relationship which Frantz Fanon captures in his *The Wretched of the Earth*, where there are two opposed zones. First, there is the settler's town, occupied by white people which is a "well-fed town, an easy-going town, its belly is always full of good things". The other zone is the town of colonized people, "a hungry town, starved of bread, of meat, of shoes, of coal, of light...a town of niggers and dirty arabs"(1967: 30).

The example of Fanon and the binary oppositions which he deploys confirm the binary logic of imperialism which represents the way in which Western thought in general views the world. This is where post-colonial theory differs. It endeavors to breakdown the tyranny of imperial structures and binaries which seek to dominate the subject. In post-colonial formulations, such dichotomies are no longer adequate. By seeking to

disrupt imperial binarisms, post-colonial theory investigates the interstitial space which arises out of the post-colonial condition that raises the possibility of an ambivalent and hybrid subjectivity. It is this which leads to the possibility of social transformation. It is this sense of agency which makes the post- in post-colonial different from other post- formulations. An important dimension of such disruptions is that, while imperial binaries suggest a unilinear movement of domination from coloniser to the colonised, post-colonialism opens up the possibility of movements in both directions.

It is that interaction between the coloniser and the colonised that post-colonialism highlights and which underscores this paper. It deploys a post-colonial perspective in order to elucidate the complexities of the post-colonial condition. It is a process which recognises that Africa has to deal with its past in order to understand its present and confront its future. This is where post-colonialism is instructive as it does not degenerate into establishing binaries which ascribe a politics characterised by a "rhetoric of blame". How does one transcend this dividing line which so easily degenerates into a rhetoric of blame? It is through the evocation of a post-colonial economy of giving that such a question begins to be answered. The very idea of reconciliation can be found in the breaking down or examining of the etymological roots of the word. (Re)conciliation entails returning to a prior stage, a stage where there was conciliation. In each of the three post-colonial sites which we examined, this sense of conciliation was existent and it is because of this that it is possible to conceive of a post-colonial economy of giving which has the capacity of returning these societies to a new state of reconciliation. In each of the three sites, Australia, Palestine and Rwanda, it is colonialism which fundamentally alters the basis of society. It is colonialism which changes the very course of history. While some critics have questioned the efficacy of allowing colonialism such prominence

within the very long histories which these societies have, it is important to recognise that colonialism fundamentally alters historical trajectories. More importantly, as post-colonialism has demonstrated, it is no longer possible to return to some essentialised pre-colonial conception, because the very act of colonization has a fundamentally rupturing effect. It is colonialism that breaks down conciliation and necessitates (re)conciliation. And it is here that post-colonialism is instructive, recognising that it is possible to imagine both a reconciled present and future. It is in this act of re-imagining that the gift occupies a key role. It is through the gift that the attendant cycle of revenge and counter-revenge can be broken. In the case of Africa, the phenomenon of founding fathers provides an important example of this process of gift giving.

Nelson Mandela and Jomo Kenyatta are two of a long list of founding fathers who the struggles against colonialism and the formation of nation states in Africa have produced (Ahluwalia, 1996). In both instances, the narratives of nation and man elide to breathe life into the abstract social and political concept of nation. What founding fathers have been able to do is to bridge past and present, dignifying and affirming the post-colonial nation through their personification of the rightness of daring to struggle against colonial rule and the reality of self-determination.

These founding fathers come to represent the interpenetrating histories of the post-colonial struggles of the sub-Saharan African nations. And here the relationship between the narratives of Kenyatta and Kenya and Mandela and South Africa are suggestive. They emerge from prison not with a sense of revenge but with the intention to break the cycle of revenge. In both cases, they are able to draw on all the decolonisations which precede them. They not only draw upon them but transform them. In each case, they come to symbolise the very space from which the nation

can re-imagine and reconstruct itself. It is this sense of transformation which becomes central to a post-colonial economy of giving. It is one which recognises that cultures are not static but dynamic and that they constantly appropriate from other cultures and, in the process, transform themselves. It is in this way that the post-colonial economy of giving seeks to break down the cycle of revenge. However, it cannot be limited to founding fathers but it is one that has to be imbued within the organic intellectuals of societies and must be operationalised through a different conception of democracy.

Within post-colonial sites - rent with violence, genocide and characterised by difference - notions of citizenship centred around questions of nationality and physical space alone are not enough. In the practice of everyday life for the majority of Africans, boundaries and borders have little meaning or relevance. Every day, people cross borders in many parts of Africa as part of their daily lives. These borders and boundaries can hardly be policed given their colonial artificiality and they hold little meaning for the millions of people in Africa who cross them without the trappings of passports, visas and immigration departments Hence, it is not "who are citizens" that becomes important, because most people are ascribed citizenship either by birth, by choice as in the case of migration, or by being ascribed a particular citizenship out of necessity as in the case of refugees. Similarly, one's citizenship can be taken away through dispossession and displacement. Hence, for citizenship to have any meaning, the question that needs to be asked is "who is *the* citizen". It is this form of citizenship which has meaning beyond allegiance to a specific geographical space and becomes rooted in a sense of community. It is also a form of citizenship which has the potential to be tied to forms of democracy that recognise difference (Mouffe, 1993; 1995). It is important to recognise that despite the association of nation-states with citizenship, it is at the local level and in the

local contexts that people experience being and express themselves as citizens. In short, citizenship is not something which is simply ascribed and results in a fixed identity allocated by the state. Rather, post-colonial subjects have multiple identities which are shaped continually by the practice of everyday life in which they have the capacity to resist, to speak and to act as citizen/subjects. It is in this way that the role of organic intellectuals and an alternative form of citizenship, one that is not simply tied to a specific geographical space, is vital. It is through organic intellectuals and a form of democracy rooted within local communities which recognise difference, that a post-colonial economy of giving can operate effectively.

*Conclusion*

This paper has examined three different post-colonial sites where there is a need for reconciliation. The mode of analysis suggested here is based on the notion of post-colonialism. This is not a repudiation of the African past but an engagement with the manner in which Africa has dealt with institutions and practices that it has inherited. The three sites, Australia, Palestine and Rwanda, were examined through the lens of the notion of the uncanny. Although each of these locations is different, they nevertheless share the experience of colonisation. It is an experience which has divided all these societies. The effect on post-colonial subjects living in these societies is one of trauma. It is the uncanny which must be overcome if any genuine process of reconciliation is to take place. It is argued that this can be accomplished through the gift. A post-colonial economy of giving is necessary in order to break down categories and identities which have been ascribed or constructed in order to maintain power structures. A post-colonial economy of giving which is linked inextricably to organic intellectuals and a reconceptualised sense of citizenship is one that can further processes of (re)conciliation.

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