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To be considered... a post-TRC age?

by

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(acknowledge Fiona Ross)

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To be considered... a post-TRC age?

> "What ultimately matters in all processes of witnessing, spasmodic and continuous, conscious and unconscious, is not simply the information, the establishment of the facts, but the experience itself of *living through* testimony, of giving testimony. [...] repossessing one's life story through giving testimony is itself a form of action, of change [...]." Dori Laub (1992: 85)[1]

This paper seeks to explore some of the multiple testimonial spaces[2] in which the pain that people have suffered under apartheid finds expression in South Africa. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) opened a formal space for the possibility of speaking Apartheid testimony in South Africa, yet this testimonial platform was limited in its time and frame. The TRC was seen by some as "the full stop at the end of apartheid". Desmond Tutu hoped for a possibility to "finally close the book" on apartheid history. Does this mean the end of the Commission's proceedings also mark the end of giving apartheid testimony? The varieties and dimensions of the proposed closures have been debated and largely rejected, yet the conundrum between the desire to "leave the past behind" and the necessity to acknowledge the pervasive continuities that determine everyday life in South Africa remains. Where does this leave the idea of speaking about the experiences that the apartheid system has facilitated - where does this take apartheid testimony after the TRC? This question does not only concern the archive the TRC has left behind and the forms of authorisation for the multiple representations that may be derived from the testimonies given to the Commission. It is also engages the memories of individuals that are not involved in this process.

In my discussion I will redraw and enlarge the parameters that view testimonial practice as inevitably linked to a (institutionalised) space that assigns somebody's story the 'credentials' of testimony. Rather I want to suggest a reading of testimony as *an insertion in time* that can take place anywhere. The *moment of sharing the experiences of the past between narrator* and listener thus creates its own 'timespace' (Boyarin 1992) that in turn creates its own testimonial legitimacy in and outside of 'appropriate' spaces.

Beyond the TRC could it be then that people's enactment of apartheid testimony will develop an agency of its own, appearing in other formal and informal settings, 'breaking through' without the ‚authorisation' that the TRC space (which is now discontinued) had granted and disrupting the temporal and moral chronologies that the Commission sought to restore? Are we witnessing the development of a 'public culture of telling' and to what extent does the idea of speaking about the memories of personal past experiences now find reception in institutional and informal spaces?

The paper looks at testimonial 'incidents' that have taken place in direct and indirect response to the TRC model but outside its formal space. I base this approach on the assumption that the nature of testimony itself continuously disrupts the frameworks appropriated for its telling in a way that eludes containment within a singular historical representation. The power of

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[1] my emphasis

[2] My ideas of space and time are inspired by Jonathan Boyarin's concept of *Remapping Memory* (1994). I use space as a term that can be read along temporal as well as physical/literal lines, both readings complementing one another to enable a better understanding of the processes and processings of testimony.

testimony may lie in the very dissonance it creates. - What *forms of expression* does testimony find after the TRC and what *modes of listening and bearing witness* to apartheid testimony have developed that may be informed by the Truth and Reconciliation process? The way in which we approach, define and handle testimony after the TRC may challenge our understanding of temporality and the assumption of a linearity where the past is followed by the present is followed by the future. Have we now entered a kind of ‚post-TRC' time span, in the sense that the process of dealing with the past is passé as the TRC's testimonial space is closed, or could it be useful to try a reverse reading of time and view the act of giving and receiving testimony as a means to *approach* the past?

These questions take me on a journey through different concepts of memory, time and space that should be placed in the context of my ‚transgenerational post-Holocaust experience' as a German of the 'third generation'[1] as well as insights from closely following the TRC hearings and participating in the Healing of Memories process over the last three years in Cape Town.

1.) A culture of telling?

The TRC - Testimony proper?

The TRC claimed the creation of a formal space for apartheid testimony to be told, recorded and - at least in theory - contained within the frame of a new national narrative of apartheid history. Yet as many have pointed out the massive state-sponsored intervention in public memory that the Commission represented can also not contain the stories of harm. The TRC report has been highly contested even before its publication and cannot be read as the inclusive framework to a new collective history that it set out to be. It was published as an 'interim' version, which speaks to the various degrees of postponement and continuity inherent in the process. This questions the totality of the moral and temporal chronology that the Commission aimed to restore when subscribing to:

> "[...] a commitment to break from the past. We must embark upon the journey from the past, through our transition and into a new future [...] enabl[ing] South Africans to come to terms with their past on a morally accepted basis and advance the cause of reconciliation." (Justice Minister Dullah Omar, JIT 1995)

Yet the motion from past to future within the TRC process has not been a continuous flow along time's arrow but has been fraught with ruptures, intrusions and pockets of interim. Meanwhile the political as well as temporal contestations may support the credibility of the TRC narrative as a first path-making version paving the way for a multitude of further testimonial voices to emerge. They mark the TRC process as a foundation rather than a completed monument of testimonial remembrance.
The Commission implemented a process of telling that it cannot and of course should not stop. The examples I will discuss point to the idea that people's acts of placing testimony in the public sphere have an agency of their own that preceded the Commission and that will outlive it. The ways in which testimonial 'offerings' are received and the creation of specific means and intervention methods for a 'post-TRC' speaking of testimony (and its documentation) remain open.

[1] The concept of 'generations after the Holocaust' is useful even though one must take into account that generations have fluid boundaries. As such the first generation includes those who experienced the events of the Nazi period themselves, the second generation consists of the children and the third of the grandchildren of those who lived and died through the Third Reich.

Taking a brief look at the concepts of 'telling stories' and 'victim's testimonies' as the TRC has employed them I want to define my understanding of testimony within a broader frame than its socio-legal, theological and historical interpretations might suggest. The notion of historical testimony is informed by the idea of the relevance of a particular individual narrative within a larger historical context. The individual's spoken memory becomes a powerful agent, a credible source and despite its subjective nature (or because of it) a significant account of past events. The TRC has operated with both terms, storytelling and the act of giving of testimony. Archbishop Tutu pointed out the role of 'story' in the testimonial culture of the TRC :

> "Storytelling is central, not only to many religious practices in this country but also to the African tradition of which we are a part. Ellen Kuzwayo is quoted [...] as saying: 'Africa is a place of storytelling. We need more stories, never mind how painful the exercise may be [...]. Stories help us to understand, to forgive and to see things through someone else's eyes". (Archbishop Tutu, in: *Forward to Remember and Heal*, 1996: 7)

The conceptual idea of reading TRC stories as 'apartheid testimony' is to a large degree product of the Commission's work which admitted a language of pain (and forgiveness) and the narration of the experience of atrocity into South African public discourse in a manner that was without precedents. While TRC testimony appeared mostly in form of a story told publicly, can story and other expressions of remembrance outside the institutional space, made for a particular mode of hearing, attending and witnessing, also claim legitimacy as apartheid testimony? Or can 'story' only become 'testimony' if told in a designated space that validates its claim to truth? I want to suggest that it is the listener/witness to the story who can ascertain its testimonial significance in a number of different settings despite the original framework that may or may not appropriate the act of telling.

In the mode of listening/witnessing lies a sense of the inviolable momentum of the testimony and the respect it demands. It marks not only a spatial set-up but *a shared moment in time* between the witness to the event and the witness to the testimony (narrator and listener), a moment where past and present interact and that acknowledges the disturbing potential of the testimony as well as the out-of-place intervention it may ask for. In this sense testimony has a core that is untouchable - the value of the experience of another. The memory it generates is true to itself in that it reflects a larger historical truth of human experience rather than a necessarily factual truth (Laub/Felman 1992: 60-62). The speaking of testimony disrupts order; it interrupts time flow and the assumed chronological boundaries that are assigned to it. It speaks to a (possibly uncomfortable) presence of the past in the now and the notion that one may 'stumble upon' the past unexpectedly in the future. The process of testimony then is one that precludes its own closure and may resist its own telling as it is balancing the 'imperatives to tell' and 'the impossibilities of telling' (Laub/Felman 1992: 79). In the case of trauma testimony can become fragile and may be in need of protection, and in itself it may render impossible the proposed ‚closing of the book'.

I would suggest that every individual's account or story of the apartheid years can be heard and read as testimony within but also outside its relevance for an archival project. If testimony was merely concerned with the collection of facts for documentation, if the archive is seen merely instrumental, then it is possibly already sufficient. However, if the power of testimony lies in its 'live' enactment and the very rupture it creates when spoken that refuses to comply with a set framework, then it could offer opportunities for individual and interactive transformation. The experience of telling and listening becomes "a journey onto an uncharted

land" and a creative process (Laub/Felman 1992: 59). I am interested in what Laub calls the experience of "*living through testimony as a form of action and change*". Apartheid testimony then speaks to the complexity of human experience and suffering under an inhumane system and testimony's potential of evoking change. Yet one may ask where we draw the line that prevents the conflation between different narratives of the past if all stories can be heard as testimony - especially if they contest one another in a context of power and oppression as the discourse of the amnesty hearings has at an early stage challenged the survivor's voices in the TRC process. We may come to the conclusion that there is a need for a 'safe' space for those testimonies that are fragile, a need to protect those stories that speak of trauma, of incessant memories of the past and their destructive potential in a present that remains irretrievably damaged (Grunebaum-Ralph 1997). Meanwhile granting a space is in itself an attempt at containment and must attend to the dangers of facilitating ‚artificial' closure. This leaves us with the questions of where testimony can take place and who facilitates or 'triggers' it?

Eruptive Testimonies

November 1995, Cape Town (The VIIth International Symposium on *Caring for Survivors of Torture*) - The TRC is not yet in existence. At an international conference on torture a young woman stands up at a panel discussion and speaks emotionally about the state of the country to which she has returned from exile. Almost in tears, she comments on the need for some mechanism through which people can speak about the pain that they suffered as a result of institutionalised racism. Eventually she cries. Her speech is interrupted by her emotions. There is a silence in the audience and then a man takes the floor and moves the emotional intervention back onto a more academic level of discussion. Later Bea Abrahams (then of the Trauma Centre) tries to bring the conversation back to the emotions and comments on the earlier intervention, but the discussion once more veers from the personal.

Faultlines Conference, 1996, Cape Town - Mark Behr appears as a guest speaker. The TRC has just finished its first round of Human Rights Violation (HRV) hearings, and he has just published *The smell of apples*. He stands up and speaks about his role in working for the security police while he has been a member of NUSAS and the SRC at the University of Stellenbosch. He comments on his awareness that after this revelation all his possible identities: lover, friend, writer, academic, gay man, etc. will be subsumed under one single consuming identity - 'informer'. He is right. People in the audience are divided over the act. Some feel that a public speech is not the place for revelations of such a personal nature. Others think that he has no right to appropriate such a space in order to tell his story. Again others voice that he has been very brave to stand up and announce himself in public. Some people are furious and hurt because they know someone who has been harmed by Behr's actions or they can imagine the harm caused by them. A number of people denounce him in the print media.[4]

January 1999 - The World Archaeology Conference (WAC) is held in Cape Town. One of the slots presents a day on the memories of District Six and the experience of forced removals. Later there is a talk on the possibilities of healing the youth through art therapy by a woman from Soweto. She starts her presentation but after a few minutes interrupts herself: "I am sorry, but I have to tell you this. What is really going through my mind all the time at this moment is the memory of how we were forcefully removed from Sophiatown." She starts to cry and with tears on her face tells the audience of her personal experience. Her story of the trauma of being uprooted from her home is ruptured in its time flow and full of small details as she explains where the tree stood under which she had to bury the puppy she loved so much. The audience is silent, some confusion but also empathetic

[4] I thank Fiona Ross for providing me with a detailed account of the first two examples.

listening. After she stops the panel is not resumed but a discussion begins that addresses the role of the individual in the community. A man holds a passionate plea to white people in South Africa to contribute to the present. But the session has lost its thread and shall not retrieve it. The next panel is cancelled altogether as people disperse into the hall.

Three conferences present three unannounced public testimonies relating personal experiences of the apartheid years. And thrice we experience the confusion over the appropriateness of time and space on the side of the (involuntary) witnesses and their helplessness in addressing the emotions elicited in both narrator and listeners. There are many other examples like the ones I have just described where the telling of apartheid experience 'breaks through' the frame of a formalised setting of social interaction and causes a rupture. In most cases the immediate reactions of the witnesses represent an attempt at containment as happened in the first example, the act of readily steering the (potentially dangerous) narrative back into the formal frame[5]. But this endeavour either fails or seems a violation to the testimony itself while the sense of rupture remains.

Conferences are highly formalised settings harbouring a specific technology of speaking and listening that is reflected in their temporal and spatial set-up and that seeks to stabilise and order the uncertainty and instability of the spoken word. Academic practice is directed at fixing, containing and grounding the infinite complexity of human thought and expression. There are a number of factors that make the conference space akin to the TRC. A designated audience sits opposite the podium receiving the address of an appointed speaker whose very position assigns her the credibility that underlines the event and its purpose.[6] The TRC in the event of the HRV hearings created a similar formal space especially appropriated as a "holy ground" (Desmond Tutu) for the speaking of apartheid testimony. Meanwhile an academic conference adheres to a contained discursive format of privileged intellectual practice that misappropriates the speaking of story and experience as disruptive and declares the personal as 'ordinary'.

The first example at the Torture Conference articulates the need for a platform where apartheid testimony could be spoken before the TRC came into existence. The reaction to the woman's emotional plea is silence and discomfort followed by an intervention aimed at steering the discussion back into its formal frame. At the 1999 conference (WAC) on the other hand, more than three years later and after the implementation of the TRC process, the audience's reaction is different, more empathetic and accommodating to the woman's act of speaking her pain and experience of forced removal that was triggered by the morning session on District Six. The discussion is not moved back into the academic format and the audience does not follow the immediate impulse to contain and resolve, but rather allows her emotional testimony to move the session into a more personal mode of speaking. The sense of rupture created by the intervention lingers after the panel dissolves. I would argue that it is exactly this effect that operates in a number of ways and speaks to a more empathetic mode of listening that may be possible in an audience that is at large familiar with the TRC process. Allowing her testimony to impact upon the listeners grants respect to the experience itself or her memory of it, and as such acknowledges the interrelation between past and present. In

[5] Dangerous is meant in the sense that the narrative threatens to disrupt the comfort zone within the frame that the setting subscribes to. It seems as if often the reaction consists of moving the discussion onto the macro-level addressing broad economical and political questions (creating distance) whereas the micro-level of individual questions stemming from personal accounts is avoided (as it facilitates closeness) or seen as separate from structural and institutional questions. Even if the intentions of the intervener may be good the action results in a dismissal of the testimony.

[6] Yet in the conferences testimonial 'offerings' were given from the panel as well as the floor.

tolerating the discomfort and helplessness the testimony generates the audience opens a space for it that appropriates her painful story into the context of the conference. One may argue that this incident took place within an audience that is concerned with the subject of memory and remembering as well as forced removals and as such may constitute a professional response. However, for the 1995 conference on torture one might have expected a more empathetic response to personal revelation in an audience that works with the survivors of atrocity. Still, the responses then were significantly different.

Mark Behr's story stands out because it presents a testimonial revelation of a 'perpetrator', an informer. He also speaks to an experience of pain, yet it is the narrative of betrayal that constitutes his pain in the present as he acknowledges the consequences of his actions and their meaning for his understanding of self. He is aware of the way in which he will be positioned in the public after his revelation. Subsequently his personal announcement of moral failure represents a re-narration of his public persona within the context of the "nation re-telling itself" through the TRC process. Behr's act suggests that there is a need for those who participated in the apartheid system to place confessional testimony in the public sphere. The mode of the narrative of harming is one of justification and explanation, in his case drawing on his multiple identities, which include his experiences of discrimination as a gay man. The audience's reaction is more diverse in this case as the role of his testimony and the possibilities for its accommodation are more contested. While his remains a calculated and voluntary confession it also created disturbance as an act of telling in a space that was not considered appropriate for the personal. Yet the emotional reactions to the testimonial revelation that signifies Behr as an informer are more carried by anger than compassion. Placing his story into the public sphere right after the TRC's first round of HRV hearings had taken place positions the audience's reaction into a specific emotional context. Behr's case leaves open questions around where to place the testimony of the 'participant oppressor' that is part of the larger apartheid narrative and that constituted such a powerful part of the TRC discourse after 1996.[7]

The testimonial incidents that took place within the conference spaces I have described are interesting for the particular dissonance they create. The responses of the scholarly audience reflect how the emotions elicited by the narratives refuse to be contained because of the unsettling nature of the testimonial revelation itself. While the TRC audience operated on the expectation of this very disturbance[8] and the Commission space enabled the breakdown and rupture of the testimony to be enacted (within limits[9]), the setting of the conferences assumed the opposite. Yet the conference audience also offered itself as an addressee and enabled the speaking of the testimonies by granting a public forum. The fact that this forum was then used to speak memories points to an agency of testimony that consciously or unconsciously, planned or unplanned, subverts formal frameworks. It speaks to the fact that the need to bear witness to the experiences of the apartheid years has not subsided with the official end of the TRC. It also speaks to a process where memories are triggered into expression verifying their own relevance by confronting the listeners with their force. Anthropologist Jonathan Boyarin refers to a simultaneous presence of past and present in the act of spoken memory:

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[7] It seems that in the TRC context 'perpetrators' - maybe due to a 'fascination with evil' - are granted more public attention than 'victims'. See the latest example of a two and a half page report on Eugene de Kock and Jann Turner in the Mail&Guardian (May/June 1999).

[8] And in some cases it even gave way to its commodification as when a journalist told me at the amnesty hearing of the Gugulethu Seven case that he had "come to record some good crying today".

[9] But it has been pointed out that the Commission's frame for testimony also aimed at containing, resolving and controlling the rupture created by the narrative of trauma (Grunebaum-Ralph 1997 and others).

> "Memory is neither something pre-existent and dormant in the past nor a projection from the present, but a potential for *creative collaboration* between present consciousness and the experience of expression of the past." (Boyarin 1994: 22)[10]

It is the mode of witnessing/listening that links past and present and that may inform the ways in which the Truth Commission's legacy[11] will be translated into various public spheres and discourses, not merely in terms of an archive that may or may not become accessible to a broader audience[12] but in terms of the (re)actions public (and private) testimonial revelations may generate.

2.) Bearing Witness - listening to an-'other': The Healing of the Memories

> "The listener [is] to be a guide and an explorer, a companion in a journey onto an uncharted land." (Laub 1992: 59)

The Healing of Memories process was initiated even before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's formal start when a group of faith leaders and activists in Cape Town decided to devise a process that would "put the onus on organisations and faith communities to constructively engage in programmes and activities to assist all South Africans to tell their stories" (Newsletter, Religious Response, 11/95). The group concerned itself with the problems around the "accessibility of the TRC to victims and survivors of human rights violations" and the "danger of the commission becoming one where all focus and media attention fall on the amnesty issues". The intervention method that was developed in Cape Town under the auspices of Father Michael Lapsley, then chaplain at the Trauma Centre, is now implemented in the Western Cape and nation-wide by the Institute for the Healing of Memories and the Centre for Ubuntu (former Religious Response to the TRC). It consists of a weekend workshop where South Africans of all colour and creed come together to tell each other the story of their personal experiences during the apartheid years with the aim of embarking on a joint journey towards healing. The storytelling takes place in a small group setting using creative means like drawing and sculpting as forms of expression. It is carried by the idea of creating a 'safe space' for the sharing of memories and experiences, focusing not just on the stories but on the emotions that go with the processes of remembering and telling:

> "[One of our aims is to] provide people with the opportunity to wrestle with the Apartheid years and their effects psychologically, emotionally and spiritually." (HOM report 1997)

Similar to the HRV hearings of the TRC the Healing of Memories workshop space is specifically designated as an appropriate frame for the speaking of apartheid experience. Volunteer facilitators assist the participants in 'telling their stories'. Yet it is significantly different to the platform the TRC offered for testimony in that it neither records nor documents the stories nor seeks to make them public in a wider context or use them for

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[10] my emphasis

[11] It will be of interest to see what is considered as the TRC's legacy. At the moment it constitutes of a report, a memory as its archive is not accessible yet. Yet the archive is seen by Archbishop Tutu as "the Commission's greatest legacy" (TRC report 1998/1).

[12] The archival project in South Africa will have to concern itself with questions of access and relevance in the multiple cultural contexts of post-colonial South Africa. This extends to questions around illiteracy as well as to political and economic questions of power over cultural and historical representations.

lobbying purposes[13]. Neither does the workshop seek to define divisions between 'victims' and 'perpetrators' nor are stories told in the immediate political context of amnesty and reparations. The understanding is promoted that *every* South African suffered damage from the apartheid years, therefore each story is of value to a process of healing:

> "Our experience has taught us that all people have a story to tell about the past. [...] At the same time many people are quite fearful of dealing with their deepest feelings in relation to their past history." (HOM report 1997)

Participants at the two and a half day workshops enter into a verbal contract that formalises their 'testimonial encounter' as intimate and confidential ritual and declares the experience of listening and telling as 'sacred'. The personal story is subject to protection within the temporal and spatial frame of the workshop set-up and beyond while the integrity of the narrator and her choices is not subject to moral interrogation within this 'safe space'. People who decide along the way that they do not wish to tell their stories can chose not to participate in the session. The different approach that this setting offers as compared to the TRC seeks a different way of 'working with' memory and story. Looking at the Healing of Memories project through the lens of 'testimony' I view the listeners/witnesses to the stories as 'enablers of testimony'[14].

Defining the concept of testimony within the enlarged frame of the speaking of apartheid experience as I suggested earlier, the Healing of the Memories process enables participants to occupy both positions simultaneously, that of the narrator whose testimony is 'brought into being' (as stories are often told for the first time) and that of the listener/witness who becomes the 'enabler' of another's testimony, the empathetic listener who accommodates the other's memory and the emotions it may evoke. Unique in this regard is the idea that a variety of different stories are allowed to 'interact' within the small group session as the participants jointly 'live through' and witness each member's testimony[15]. The mode of speech is most of the time monologue while a story is told; yet the group set-up often accommodates a broad range of different life experiences under the apartheid system. Stories are told that within the TRC setting would be classified as 'victim' or 'perpetrator' testimonies, but beyond that frame many stories testify to the infinite complexities of involvement and non-involvement, awareness, oppression, participation, resistance, ignorance and suffering that were part of individual experience during the apartheid years. The outline of the Healing of Memories concept voices it thus:

> "To speak about what we did in the past, what was done to us and what we failed to do."(HOM Manual 1997)

In this the project not only authorises the participants to speak regardless of their personal background and history, but it creates a community of listeners that cuts across the deeply engraved divisions embedded in any racially and culturally diverse group of South Africans and makes them for the time of the workshop agents of the important process of bearing

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[13] Like, for instance, the Khulumani Survivor Support group in Johannesburg.

[14] In a psychoanalytical context Dori Laub speaks of the witness to testimony as "the one who triggers its [the testimony's] initiation, as well as the guardian of its process and of its momentum. [...] The listener has to feel the victim's victories, defeats and silences, know them from within, so that they can assume the form of testimony" (Laub/Felman 1992: 58).

[15] A group consists of 6-8 participants and the facilitators also tell their story. Participants have drawn pictures of their lives, often taking symbols and colours which are used to facilitate the telling.

witness to one another[16]. In this regard the process has multiple folds - often listening to the stories literally means witnessing the birth of the testimony itself as the setting may enable a mode of telling that the narrator has not experienced before. On another level participants are acknowledging the story of an-'other' and it may be the first time to intimately listen to the experience of someone who lived 'on the other side of the tracks' - be it as part of the disadvantaged or the beneficiary communities. Against some expectations the interest in one another's story at the workshops is great on all sides which points to the fact that many South Africans have in fact not 'met' one another in a way that integrates those past experiences that shape their present thought and action.

The Healing of Memories project places testimony as an agent for creating community and raising mutual awareness without denying the disturbing and disruptive facets in each life story and the difficulties the group may encounter in placing them into the frame of one single session of telling. Through the ritualised process of listening and sharing 'story' that demands intense emotional investment from all participants there is a sense of empathy across divisions, an understanding that is not build on the notion of 'forgetting' and 'moving away' from the past but that rests on the idea of encountering one another *through* the past and via its memories address its continuities in the present. This is a process that may evoke difficult moral questions posed by the different stories and narrators. After the storytelling session the workshop provides plenary discussions where people share their thoughts and feelings. In acknowledging the conflicts and ruptures these testimonial encounters may facilitate, the process could also be read as taking part in the creation of a space where such conflicts can be enacted, thus fostering a 'conflict culture' that acknowledges the hurts and divisions of the past and does not evade the emotional consequences. I would take the Healing of Memories as a process that enables people to approach the past on an individual and personal level rather than promoting the notion of moving away and leaving behind.

As such the project constitutes one example of possible intervention measures that seek to address the 'imperative of testimony' and implement the idea of speaking and working *with* the past outside the TRC setting. It subscribes to the ideas of sharing memories as a possibility for encounter between contemporaries, between generations, maybe even between the living and the dead. Testimony is thus seen as a continuous participatory opportunity for all South Africans. This may not least be a concern for the South Africa's 'future generations'.[17]

3.) Speaking through an-'other': Holocaust and apartheid memory

In 1997 I proposed to Dr. Oren Stier, then lecturer in the Religious Studies Department at UCT, the idea of a postgraduate course on representations of Holocaust testimony and memory. He agreed but was concerned whether he would find enough interested participants for this topic. When the course started in the first half of 1998 however, he found himself opposite a substantial audience consisting mostly of white, broadly interdisciplinary students and interested members of the public. Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, then member of the Human Rights Violations Committee, the director of the District Six museum and other non-student participants joined the course. It was interesting to see that the course generated much inte...

[16] One could view the act of bearing witness to one another as a vital part of what could be called reconciliation 'on the ground'.

[17] I have been working with the Healing of Memories process as a participant, volunteer and facilitator since 1997. This account of the Healing of Memories process is meant to present 'snapshots' of the project read through the focus of testimony. The process raises a number of other questions that would extend beyond the aims of this paper.

among white South Africans[18]. Also, the interaction between Jewish and non-Jewish South Africans and me as the only German created a space for multiple perspectives on questions of remembrance and representation.

Parallels and opposites between the strategies of dealing with the Nazi past and approaching the legacy of apartheid in South Africa have been pointed out throughout the Truth and Reconciliation process (Asmal et al. 1995). However, the danger of conflating the historical contexts and consequently not doing justice to either, led the course convenor to concentrate on the questions and issues drawn from Holocaust memory and not to include the TRC in the course agenda. On the other hand it proved impossible to approach the subject of the Holocaust and its remembrance practices without acknowledging the South African context in which we were speaking and acting. The discussions were lively and often intensely exhausting as participants invested extraordinary time and energy into the course.
The interactions as well as the written reflections participants submitted on a weekly basis mirrored the level of disturbance and reaction that the sessions created for a number of individuals. I was often under the impression that while we were speaking about the Holocaust we were in fact speaking about South Africa and the TRC process using the Holocaust as a lens through which to view the subject. But without having to address the South African situation in its immediacy we spoke about it through an-'other', more distant, more removed past onto which current South African problems and questions could be projected. Somehow this setting created a distance, possibly a sense of safety, that enabled a more personal and intense encounter than may have been possible if the course had focused on the TRC process itself.

During the last session the boundary that we had been upholding between the two historical contexts broke and a participant started speaking very emotionally about her childhood in 'white South Africa' that reminded her of 'post-war' silences in the German context. This revealed that the emotional detachment inherent in the intellectual framework that dictated the authorised modes of speaking within the course could also not contain the testimonial momentum of the present context. The displaced 'space-time' (Boyarin 1992) which enabled us to speak about one past through another could instantly be reworked to express the memory it had triggered. Similar to the examples that I gave of the conference 'incidents', the course participants were uncomfortable with the 'breaking' of the course's framework. This leaves us with the thought that memory can be perceived as 'intrusive' and unsafe and evokes continuous attempts at its containment.

To me the experience posed the question of *distance,* temporal and spatial, literal and imagined, as central to the idea of speaking about memory and the attempt of 'dealing' with the past. Distance may present a concept that bridges and filters different dimensions of remembering so as to allow us to approach the past rather than strive to move away from it. It is worth asking what role processes of 'distancing' can play in the South African context. How far is distance a factor that enables or precludes speaking about the past? How far may distance[19] be a necessity in face of the fears generated by a past of atrocity? Does it pose an alternative to the controversy around forgetting as the most promising vehicle to 'flee the horror' and get to the .safe ground' of the future? Through the interplay of distance and closeness one could read the temporal motion of remembrance as one that does not enlarge the distance to the past as we are moving into the future, but one that actually addresses the

[18] This may result from the present student infrastructure at UCT's Religious Studies Department, but the course was avertised in various departments that have a more diverse student demography.
[19] In this respect silence may also be read as a form of distancing and become a necessary part in the process of remembering.

threats the past and its memory pose to the present and thus reduces the distance to the past as it opens possibilities to approach it. The TRC on the other hand envisaged a 'safe' (post-TRC) future where 'the past is known', contained and in this sense becomes 'manageable'.

Where the afterborn meet the ancestors

While the course on the Holocaust may have offered opportunities for South Africans to 'safely' speak about the past one could interrogate in the same context why so many young Germans were attracted to the process of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa. I would argue that this phenomenon operated on similar principles. It reflects the search for an identity within a history of atrocity and testifies to the Benjaminian[20] notion that "the past is not unproblematically known" and "as long as it remains the stakes of contention in the present, it is not dead" (in: Boyarin 1992: 11).

Contemplating the changes that our understanding of time and its relation to memory and history undergoes at present I want to suggest another reading of time in the project of dealing with a past of atrocity. At the World Archaeology Conference in Cape Town a man started talking about the fact that for him speaking about the past does not mean moving away from the past, but rather marks a way of '*walking towards the ancestors*'. Instead of seeing the act of speaking about the past as a means to 'leave behind', he suggested a motion of 'moving towards' that very past employing the individual bond to the past that he has within his own sense of temporality – that is an intimate connection via his ancestors. This resonates with Walter Benjamin's idea that

> "one of the ways that life is maintained is through a constant effort to retain the image of the past – to rescue the dead and oppressed ancestors by giving their lives new meaning." (in: Boyarin 1994: 27)

in the literal sense that speaking of the past is to become the vehicle that enables communication between those remembered and those remembering within the act of 'living through testimony'.

As a young German, member of what could be termed the third 'post-Holocaust generation', I can look back onto fifty years of 'processing' the history of Nazi atrocity. Over different decades each generation has found its own questions, led its own debates and approached the past in a need for understanding and transforming historical and personal identity within the devastating master narrative of the event that at the time was "like an earthquake so powerful it destroyed the instruments of its own measurement" (in: Lyotard 1989). The narrative movement of German memory has been one fraught by silences. On the other hand it represents in some ways an exercise in forgetting through prescriptive telling, never adopting a dialogical mode among individuals outside the assigned public sphere that was appropriated for 'the ways in which Germans can speak about the Holocaust' (Krondorfer 1995; Mitscherlich 1970; Schwan 1997).
For a number of decades the academy and political representation concerned themselves with the establishment of truth and fact and the debate on causality leaving aside the 'personal dimension' of the events and rarely addressing emotional, psychological and spiritual questions. This resulted in a situation where most Germans could tell 'the story' of the Holocaust without knowing the role their parents or grandparents played during the years 1933-45. A part of my generation then is driven by the need to make history intensely

[20] after German-Jewish philosopher Walter Benjamin

personal in a quest for an identity that negotiates the master-narrative of accepted historical 'truth' and the silences of parents and grandparents.[21] Meanwhile we have been termed the '*afterborn*',[22] those who are lucky not to have experienced the Nazi years. Supposedly this also signifies a release from the question of guilt and culpability for young Germans. For the afterborn, however, the past is far from being past:

> "Whatever issues our grandparents and parents were unable to resolve in their lifetimes have been transmitted to post-Shoah generations - although the young often do not acknowledge the emotional, personal, and cultural ties that bind them to the Shoah and to each other as Germans and Jews. Many of the unresolved emotions and conflicts have gone underground, only to resurface quickly once Jews and Germans are put into the same room." (Krondorfer 1995: 9)

Israeli psychologist Dan Bar-On who conducted interviews with the children of Nazi perpetrators speaks of the need to "work through the untold story" among the later generations in Germany (Bar-On 1989).

Could it be then that testimony is the 'timespace' where *the afterborn can meet the ancestors*? That is to say, for those who have not experienced there may be a need to reduce the distance to the past and question the silences that may have been necessary for the parents to be able to live with the immediacy of their memories. Approaching the past then literally becomes a way of actively seeking and approaching the ancestors. I would suggest that this goes beyond the idea of creating an archive for future generations, but pleads in favour of a mode of dealing with the past that keeps the possibility to speak and perform memory alive. In this way the opportunity of a dialogical mode within the enactment of testimony allows for a conversation among the ancestors, the living 'carriers of remembrance' and the generations of 'afterborn', in key with Barbara Heimannsberg who says:

> "Probably a *knowledge* of history in and of itself makes up a comparatively small part of one's sense of identity. More relevant is one's *relationship* to history." (in: Krondorfer 1995: 47)

4.) Finally, a post-TRC Age?

South African time finds itself defined within multiple stages of posterity. The notion of a post-apartheid South Africa accompanies the belated post-colonial age in Southern Africa. The government is now in its 'post-Mandela' state, and it might seem convenient to add a little 'post' to the TRC and declare that the past has finally passed away.
Yet the testimonial 'offerings' that I have discussed suggest that the end of the Commission's proceedings neither contain nor mark the end of apartheid testimony. We have seen that memory seeks multiple forms of expression but also generates fear. The notion that such a past cannot be surpressed but that the way towards the future goes via 're-visiting' the past was the TRC's assumption. Yet the Commission's goal was originally to 'leave behind' and to provide closure to a past that would otherwise 'come back to haunt'. But it seems that the past has a momentum of staying present and even gaining more influence with time.

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[21] Denialists and people who reject remembrance are equally part of this generation. but my focus here concentrates on those who seek to remember as the complexity of the matter would by far exceed the capacities of this paper. If I embarked on a discussion of the facets within each generation.

[22] Adhering an expression made by former German chancellor Helmut Kohl who spoke of the 'grace of late birth' that is given to those who were born after 1945.

Therefore it is even more relevant to address the emotions and conflicts it generates.

Even Bishop Tutu who coined the phrase of "closing the book" at the onset of the Commission, acknowledges in his introduction to the TRC Report that

> "[i]nevitably, evidence and information about our past will continue to emerge, as indeed they must. The report of the Commission will now take its place in the historical landscape of which future generations will try to make sense - searching for clues that lead, endlessly, to a truth that will, in the very nature of things, never be fully revealed." (TRC Report 1998/I: 4)

I would suggest that in addition to "evidence and information" testimony will not cease to be 'performed' in South Africa making the experiential potential of witnessing into one of the most powerful tools for conveying the complexities of the apartheid experience to one another as contemporaries as well as to the 'afterborn'. Testimony then is not confined to an institutional framework like the TRC but allows people to enact their individual significance within a larger national history through story, song and performance and other forms of expression that act as communicators among those who share the experience as well as between the afterborn and the ancestors. The afterborn may need testimony to personalise history, to get close to it, to make it accessible and to own it. This includes the story of the immediate family and community that places them into the context of a national history. The greatest legacy of the TRC might then be if there were no 'post-TRC age', if in a sense 'the book' would not cease to be written.

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