African Yearbook of Rhetoric

Volume 10

2020

At Your Own Risk:
A Celebration of Rhetoric

AFRICAN YEARBOOK OF RHETORIC

The *African Yearbook of Rhetoric* is a multi-lingual, peer-reviewed scholarly journal devoted to the development of rhetoric studies on and in Africa.

The Journal proudly represents the scholarly interests of the Association for Rhetoric and Communication in Southern Africa, an officially affiliated member of FILLM-UNESCO.

All correspondence is to be addressed to the Editor:
philippe.salazar@uct.ac.za

Editor
Philippe-Joseph Salazar
Centre for Rhetoric Studies
Department of Private Law
University of Cape Town
Private Bag X3
Rondebosch 7701
South Africa

African Yearbook of Rhetoric Vol. 10 2020

This volume was guest edited and copy edited by Klaus Kotzé

The South African National Library holds a printed version as per legal requirements.

Cover illustration by Martha Gille

Online ISSN 2305-7785
Abbreviated online key title: Afr. yearb. rhetor.
Open access on SABINET: http://journals.co.za/content/journal/ayor

October 2020

✦

At Your Own Risk: A Celebration of Rhetoric

✦

Contributors:
Sergio Alloggio and Kylie Thomas, Abdelhai Azarkan, Mariano Dagatti, Erik Doxtader, Eric Opoku Mensah, Reingard Nethersole, Sifiso Eric Ngesi, Sisanda Nkoala, Ivo Strecker, Thapelo Teele

Guest Editor: Klaus Kotzé

Contents

The Editor's note

i

Reflections on 10 years of rhetoric studies

Klaus Kotzé

1

Songs that shaped the struggle: A rhetorical analysis of South African struggle songs

Sisanda Nkoala

7

The quietude of transitional justice: Five rhetorical questions

Erik Doxtader

17

Statecraft and sovereignty in Mohammed V of Morocco's Tangiers speech (1947)

Abdelhai Azarkan

31

Forgetting responsibility: Hannah Arendt and the work of (undoing) psychic resistance post-apartheid

Sergio Alloggio and Kylie Thomas

39

J.M. Coetzee: Reluctant public intellectual

Reingard Nethersole

47

Political discourse in the egalitarian society: The Hamar of Ethiopia

Ivo Strecker

57

Former President Thabo Mbeki and the racism debate in South Africa: Through the rhetorical lens

Sifiso Eric Ngesi

65

The justicialist rhetoric of Néstor Kirchner

Mariano Dagatti

75

In response to the "wind of change": The statecraft of Kwame Nkrumah

Eric Opoku Mensah

85

A song of forgiveness: The dialectic between the rhetoric of place and the rhetoric of self in Marlene van Niekerk's *Agaat*

Thapelo Teele

95

The Editor's note

Ten years have elapsed since with my colleague in Namibia, Jairos Kangira, we embarked on putting together what would become the first issue of the *African Yearbook of Rhetoric*. The wheel of Fortune has turned a full ten rotations – in spite of spanners thrown in its spokes. But AYOR, as we call it among ourselves, has survived.

Over those past ten years AYOR can be proud to have achieve two aims: furthering the cause of rhetoric as an academic discipline in Africa; and bringing to our fold international luminaries such as Alain Badiou, Toni Negri, Cheryl Glenn, Gerard Hauser, Barbara Cassin, Claudia Hilb, Erik Doxtader and Ivo Strecker – I shall stop here this roll call. Those not named, but no less central to rhetoric studies, are to be found in the Journal.

This ten-year issue is a celebration. It is a reprise of ten articles already published. I leave it to the Guest Editor, Klaus Kotzé, to explain why and how. He is particularly suited to the task: he belongs to the second generation of rhetoric scholars trained in Cape Town. He holds an AW Mellon Foundation-University of Cape Town Postdoctoral Fellowship in Rhetoric Studies, which gives me the opportunity to recognize the Foundation and thank them for their contribution to our postgraduate programmes.

The Journal is self-supported. It is freely available. It is not a profit-making venture. That was the choice I made when the title was registered. The reason was simple: freedom from red tape, and editorial liberty. AYOR is beholden to no one, except rhetoric studies. Yet, it is read widely, and is accredited by the prestigious SABINET platform – a mainstay of scholarship in Africa. Whether AYOR can sustain this old-fashioned, truly liberal approach to scholarship (which is not what managerial ideology calls "research") for another ten years, remains to be seen. We shall see. For now, enjoy this celebratory volume.

Philippe-Joseph Salazar

Reflections on 10 years of rhetoric studies

Klaus Kotzé

This tenth edition of the *African Yearbook of Rhetoric* (AYOR) it a jubilee. It marks ten years since its founding by republishing ten articles from previous editions. Together these articles represent the Yearbook's ambitions as well as its achievements. AYOR which is also the acronym for *At Your Own Risk*, the title we chose for this edition, recognises the risk we took with this journal, and the risk we take in treating rhetoric as a critique of democracy. AYOR is a provocation of public affairs. It interrogates the rhetorical processes that shape democratic life.

AYOR is compiled as the primary publication of the Centre for Rhetoric Studies based at the Faculty of Law, University of Cape Town. Its location at Law affords it the space to pursue multidisciplinary research in public rhetoric and argumentative culture while being firmly rooted in the South African experience. Graduates of the Centre are encouraged to publish in the Yearbook, thereby advancing their career development. By regularly publishing the work of global leaders in the field of rhetoric, AYOR has become a bastion of African scholarship.

The articles in this edition are authored by students, graduates and friends of the Centre. Together they demonstrate a broad range of multidisciplinary approaches. The articles are valuable academic contributions on rhetoric. All but one focuses and reflects on African rhetoric. The exception provides insight from Argentina, a global-south compatriot whose rhetoric has been central to several AYOR editions. Collectively, the articles of this edition form a celebration.

In a year marked by pandemic-related disruption and destruction, AYOR averts topical retort. Instead of merely responding to this dominating global episode, AYOR continues to set its own path. To develop the field of rhetoric on the African continent. With rhetoric taking place in space and time, this moment of disruption serves to recognise AYOR's critically perceptive research. When AYOR launched as *salvatory* (AYOR 1, 2010), it was found upon the "desire to affirm that for ideas not to be transient and vanish…they have to be set and to last and to effect change". Rhetoric as celebration signifies the realisation of change. For ideas to be celebrated, they first need to be recognised. A function of the Centre and AYOR is to amplify Africa's rhetoric. Instead of narrowing specifications, the Yearbook has been a platform from which Africa can speak. It critically contributes to the study of transitional democracies and social transformation, transcending the continent's many historical and academic restrictions. To recognise is to know again or to recall meaning that is established. In order to refer to, to return to, signification must be clear and complete. With so much

© *African Yearbook of Rhetoric* 10, 2020, Online ISSN 2305-7785:
Klaus Kotzé, "Reflections on 10 years of rhetoric studies", pp. 1-6.

perception of Africa being imposed from beyond the continent's own thinking and doing, these essentialising descriptions are often limiting and detrimental. Deeply shaped by external meaning-making, African rhetoric has often been denied its voice. Instead, it must be proclaimed in its ways and to its ends. Without latent or explicit knowledge of concepts, the act of recognition remains confounding. In celebrating its jubilee, AYOR recognises African rhetoric. Instead of being a taker of diverging meaning, the continent is itself a place where meaning originates. If we look past that which modernity has made knowable, we start to uncover meaning that runs beyond placeholders and common places.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union as argumentative counterpart, Western rhetoric has become globally dominant. "The effect has been to remove a fundamentally adversarial component and a well-argued ideology from the way in which the world transacts persuasion", suggests Philippe-Joseph Salazar.[1] The result is that "the diversity of the modes of argument heard in contemporary global discourse", have been diminished.[2] While this may be the case, meaning takes shape through argumentative culture. It is not simply the domain of some. It is universally applied and performed. Much like the exercise of power is universal to man so too the discovery and application of the available means of persuasion, along particular paths, towards specific ends, is of universal application. Salazar points to this being visible in the rhetoric of the Caliphate which is also operational in Africa. It does not simply apply the modes of argument of the dominant West. Its meaning is not derived from another. To the Caliphate its rhetoric is not the chaotic monstrosity as suggested by the Western media. True meaning is not imposed but is manifest through cultural and traditional ways. The rhetoric of the Caliphate uses analogy, poetry and hyperbole.[3] By denying these ways, by invalidating their persuasion, we do not prevent their significance but our own ability to see the productive force they hold. "Public discourse as an art form", argues Smith (1971) in his considerations on African rhetoric, "can only be complete when it is productive".[4] Rhetoric makes meaning within a specific situation. Meaning is carried by the performing subject. Their cultural essence and experience matters. Ideals are not concealed in signifiers but emanate through the expressions of life.

The agreement between political rivals in South Africa to collapse Apartheid and to reconcile took place through the recognition of each other and the exposure of crimes. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) represent a voicing of experience. The TRC was established a year after the Centre was created in 1995. Its proceedings and outcomes have contributed to the Centre's overall project to draw from experience and put to work intellectual enquiry of social concerns. All this

---

[1] Interview with Ambre Nicolson. "Can the global dominance of Western rhetoric be challenged?" https://www.news.uct.ac.za/article/-2016-02-29-can-the-global-dominance-of-western-rhetoric-be-challengeda [accessed October 5, 2020].

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] *Ibid.*

[4] Arthur Smith, "Markings of An African Concept of Rhetoric", *Today's Speech* 19,2 (1971): 13-18.

contributed to UCT becoming the first African university to offer graduate degrees in rhetoric. Its first PhD in Rhetoric Studies graduated in 2001.

The proceedings of the TRC provided participants, researchers and the public at large an opportunity to recall through words, through confession and silence, through pain and trauma both present and buried. This all was recalled for the state and the people to hear the voice of those who before were voiceless, for all to share in the process of reconciliation. And so, the people in stating their experience of the old made the new. The TRC which was established in terms of the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act (Act) concluded after two years of recognising unbridled articulation. On 29 October 1998, the Commission released its first Report responding to its legal mandate to provide "as complete a picture as possible of the nature, causes and extent of gross violations of human rights".[5] Bound together over five focus-specific volumes, the Report released its findings in text. While the books captured a repository of experience, the Act instructs "the rehabilitation and restoration of the human and civil dignity".[6] The Act calls for a productive force, a revelation of meaning that would not emanate from reading a text. Instead, the revival of dignity was performed at the hand-over of the Report, by Commission Chairperson Desmond Tutu and President Nelson Mandela. Together the two leaders revealed the life of the nation through dance. In a celebratory moment, they closed the confining previous period[7] not through a coded record but in a way that cut through difference. Together they performed the expression of achievement; a celebration.

Closing divisions through dance is a powerful example of persuasive African rhetoric. Here dancing is a mainstay of argumentative power. Under Apartheid, the politically, legally and economically repressed rallied their suppression through the impressive and militant *toyi-toyi*. In shattering the bans on assembly and movement, masses of people united to give shape to their demonstratively irrepressible will. In concert, the powerless performed power. A boisterous collective armed with the jagged movement of their bodies drummed together, not to resist but to attack. Accompanying the dance were the piercing and evocative songs that shot out towards their opponents like bullets. These "struggle songs", writes Sisanda Nkoala in this volume, "are a fundamental part of South Africa's political past, present and future". Like the weapons of the successors, the songs retain historic and political power. They reverberate into the democratic era where some are used in service delivery protests. In so doing memory is instrumentalised. They are turned on the very political establishment they helped usher in. Today the performers of the songs remind that they still only have their bodies. That the promises of salvation have been deferred. The war dance and the struggle song are

[5] South African Government, *Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act*, 1995. https://www.gov.za/documents/promotion-national-unity-and-reconciliation-act

[6] *Ibid*

[7] Philippe-Joseph Salazar, *An African Athens: Rhetoric and the Shaping of Democracy in South Africa* (London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2002), p. 76.

intimate symbols of memory. They are employed rhetorically, to convey meaning, to inform, to please and to move.

These arguments while traditionally placed in relation to the colonial or Apartheid adversary are not of the opponent but are spoken for their own sake. The stayed reference to the colony in the description *post-colonial* denies the recognition of the expressive self. Remembering through the eyes of another maintains its power. The description post-colonial keeps the colony in place and in name. It rejects expression. To liberate and to recognise liberation is to demonstrate in the way of Mandela and Tutu. Their relentless being prevails as presence, foregrounding certain elements in the consciousness of the audience[8]. This approach is a testament to rhetoric's creative capacity, not simply in making a previous master fall. It extends beyond the rational to sensory experiences acting upon our sensibilities. Arguments carry the audience along an illuminating path.

The rhetoric of South Africa's democratic transition and in particular that of Nelson Mandela formed the core of the Centre's first extensive project between 2000-2010. The *admiration* of Nelson Mandela for the law served as a lynchpin in this project. Before Mandela shaped and stated the democratic nation as rhetor in chief, he declared upon the illegitimacy of the Apartheid state. It is through the admiration for the capacity of justly applied law, writes Jacques Derrida, that Mandela condemned the application of the law which outlawed him. In admiring Mandela, we admire the admiration he had of the law. "Mandela becomes admirable for having known how to admire… and for having made of his admiration a force, a power of combat, intractable and irreducible. The law itself, the law above laws. For what has he admired in the end? In a word: Law".[9] It is through his reflection on and speaking to the law that he frees himself from the hegemony that the state claimed over the law. His strategic communications upon leaving prison, during his presidency and the legacy he forged all aligned with invent and embody the rhetoric of the reconciliatory state. His leadership was a celebration of the act of unity; a place of becoming.

Following an earlier brief reference to Nkoala's opening piece, we will now turn to the other entries in this volume. The discussion of the articles does not align to their order here.

Rhetoric's productive force is observed throughout AYOR's editions. It is especially the case here as poignantly illustrated by Moroccan philosopher Abdelhai Azarkan's article on the statecraft and sovereignty of Mohammed V of Morocco. The king's courage and determination to claim sovereignty is a singular act of African liberation. Through proclaiming as sovereign over Morocco, Mohammed V manifest an independent state; speaking it made it so. The king understood that true liberation

[8] Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca in Sonja Foss, Karen Foss and Robert Trapp, *Contemporary Perspectives of Rhetoric* (Illinois: Waveland Press, 2014), 93.
[9] Jacques Derrida, "Admiration of Nelson Mandela", *Law & Literature*, 26, 1 (1986): 9-30.

cannot be given, it must be claimed through the act of being sovereign. A true lesson in rhetoric and politics.

Eric Opoku Mensah piece discusses the statecraft of another great African leader, Kwame Nkrumah. Akin to Azarkan's piece; here Africa speaks. We are shown how Nkrumah opportunely used the African tour of British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan to shape the debate on Africa's liberation. Nkrumah did not merely respond to Macmillan's message. Instead, he held up a mirror to the former master's policy decisions. He exhibited national power, claiming the values of the Commonwealth as an active member but rejecting simple alignment for an independent position of non-alignment. Through his rhetoric he claimed independence.

Periods of awakening, of finding and developing a voice are essentially transformative. They establish new meaning. Sifiso Ngesi's article provides an analysis of the foundational speeches of Nelson Mandela's successor, Thabo Mbeki. Mbeki's commitment to deliberative rhetoric encouraged the debate on racism and social justice. Through democratic rhetoric he helped to build the national social compact. By unpacking Mbeki's speeches, Ngesi assesses the standing of the nation beyond its formative stage. Transformation is a process that cannot simply be willed. It must be put into action. By republishing Ngesi's piece we recall the measures taken and the effects they had. We recognise the prevailing discourses and realities of social justice and racism, today.

In "The Justicialist Rhetoric of Néstor Kirchner", Mariano Dagatti looks at Kirchnerism as a reconfiguration of Peronist identification. The article is about reconfiguration. How identity and meaning are shaped through the political word. By including the piece AYOR recognises the influence and contribution of South American rhetoric over the last decade. The article cuts the divide by speaking to the practice of politics and how it is exercised universally.

Ivo Strecker's piece is a valuable exhibit of African rhetoric's vast range. From an anthropological approach, Strecker provides insight into the rhetoric of the egalitarian Hamar tribe of Ethiopia. While they remain a traditional society, little affected by global forces, the Hamar's grass-root politics function similarly to those in contemporary democratic societies. Strecker shows us that in traditional societies oratory is a productive force, "its study leads us straight to the heart of politics".

The articles by Alloggio and Thomas, Doxtader, and Teele all speak to forgiveness and transformation as productive forces. Alloggio and Thomas point to the learnings that South Africa can take from Germany's experiences. Drawing from Hannah Arendt's work on post-war Germany not recognising the horrors of Nazism, the authors "advocate for a post-apartheid pedagogy that seeks to unearth the problem of responsibility from the sinking sands of reconciled national history". Doxtader also draws from Arendt, suggesting that the acknowledgement of traumas should be an ongoing process. Without full disclosure, forgiveness and transformation remain stunted. Instrumentalising memory, ensuring that the victim becomes through finding a

voice, says Doxtader, shows forth that "transitional justice is a function of expression…a practice that takes place *through* words and an event that takes place *in* the word". The author reminds that where there is no voice, there we must re-animate public spaces with a story. Thapelo Teele, whose debut paper appeared in AYOR's most recent edition, looks at forgiveness in Marlene van Niekerk's novel *Agaat.* a famed allegory for democratic South Africa. In line with Doxtader stressing the need move *on* through expression, to Teele the exercise of voice is central. The author offers a contemporary deliberation on the national ethos of forgiveness and suggests that "unlike forgiveness, reconciliation requires the victim to speak and to understand and even agree with the offender". Here it is "the recognition of the initial violence that sets the scene for the possibility of forgiveness".

The concluding article, by Reingard Nethersole, sums up and questions "our current state of the commerce of thinking…in a world ruled by economic rationality and fashioned by celebrity culture". She answers by celebrating the commitment and essence, not simply the achievement, of J M Coetzee's writing. His creativity, his pursuit of excellence, his public intellectualism that does not seek to be public but intellectual. She acknowledges his raising of difficult, African problems into the public domain. As Nethersole does to Coetzee, so we recognise the articles in this edition. In celebrating the productive force of African rhetoric, we publish this celebration.

Klaus Kotzé is a A W Mellon-UCT Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Centre for Rhetoric Studies, University of Cape Town.

Songs that shaped the struggle: A rhetorical analysis of South African struggle songs

Sisanda Nkoala

Struggle songs are a fundamental part of South Africa's political past, present and future. Being such significant entities in South African politics, much research has been done into tracing the history and significance of liberation songs. However, to date, not enough scholarly work exists which has discussed struggle songs as musical texts, and which looks at the fundamental argument that permeates each of them as such. The consequence of this is that very few political actors have been able to harness the persuasive power inherent in struggle songs in South Africa's post-apartheid dispensation. Currently it is only the governing African National Congress and its alliance partners, the Congress of South African Trade Unions and the South African Communist party, that appear to have the monopoly on the use of struggle songs. There have been attempts by the opposing Democratic Alliance to use these songs in campaigning, however because the party does not yet fully understand how these songs function as tools of persuasion, and because the party has not yet managed to effectively utilise the historical memory imbedded in these songs to their advantage, these efforts have not yielded the desired outcome. Thus, a research paper such as this provides a model of how one can begin to analyse the elements that make struggle songs 'work', and then in turn utilise this knowledge to better persuade would-be supporters and voters in future.

Research of this nature runs the risk of coming across as placing too much emphasis on the role of music in South Africa's journey to liberation, at the expense of actual human life that was lost during this period. However as Perkins notes, "inspiration play[ed] an important role in mobilising the hearts and energies of people to strike back at forces which appear[ed] to be insurmountable".[1] Further, as Pring-Mill explains, "the sound of song is described as a blow at the invader, a rampart in defense, a weapon against injustice".[2] Struggle songs 'work' because in these songs one finds historical "events recorded passionately rather than with dispassionate objectivity, yet

[1] E. Perkins, "Literature of combat: Poetry of African liberation movements", *Journal of Black Studies* 7, 2 (1976): 226: http://www.jstor.org/stable/2783968. (Accessed 2 August 2012).
[2] R. Pring-Mill, "The roles of revolutionary song — A Nicaraguan assessment in popular music", *Popular Music* 6, 2 (1987): 183. http://www.jstor.org/stable/853420. (2 August 2012).

© *African Yearbook of Rhetoric* 10, 2020, Online ISSN 2305-7785:
Sisanda Nkoala, "Songs that shaped the struggle: A rhetorical analysis of South African struggle songs", pp. 7-16.

the passion is not so much that of an individual singer's personal response, but rather that of a collective interpretation of events from a particular 'committed' standpoint".[3]

1 Liberation songs

1.1 Definition of liberation songs

In this paper the terms 'liberation music', 'liberation songs', 'struggle songs', 'struggle music', 'protest songs', and 'protest music' have been used interchangeably. The term 'protest song', became popular in "the context of the anti-war movement in the United States during the 1960s".[4] It was used to describe songs of "socio-political commitment which… developed out of traditional folksong".[5] But as Pring-Mill notes the phrase 'protest song' is:

> Misleading insofar as it is interpreted to imply that all such songs are 'anti' something, denouncing some negative abuse rather than promoting something positive to put in its place.[6]

A more accurate description is that of "songs of hope and struggle".[7] This is because over and above expressing 'resistance' to some form of oppression, these songs are about 'projecting hope' for the day when the oppression will be no more.

1.2 Using rhetorical analysis techniques in analysing struggle songs

According to Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, the discipline of rhetoric in its strictest sense is:

> Concerned with the modes of persuasion. Persuasion is clearly a sort of demonstration, since we are most fully persuaded when we consider a thing to have been demonstrated.[8]

If one considers aspects that made liberation art effective as part of a strategy to overthrow oppressive regimes, one can see that the efficacy of struggle songs lies largely in their ability to persuade. Through being functional, inspirational, educational, instructional, ideological and political, they were able to be persuasive[9]. Since the ability to persuade is what informs other rhetorical texts such as speeches and debates, struggle songs can thus also be analysed using rhetorical analysis techniques. As Aristotle notes:

---

[3] *Ibid.* 179.
[4] *Ibid.*
[5] *Ibid.*
[6] *Ibid.*
[7] *Ibid.*
[8] Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, W. R. Roberts, trans. (1994) 5. www.bocc.ubi.pt. (Accessed 25 September 2012).
[9] Perkins, *Journal of Black Studies,* 230.

> Of the modes of persuasion furnished by the spoken word, there are three kinds. The first kind depends on the personal character of the speaker; the second on putting the audience into a certain frame of mind; the third on the proof, or apparent proof, provided by the words of the speech itself.[10]

In liberation music all three modes are indeed present — the singers who fulfil the role of orator, the songs which play the role of the text, and the audience to whom the songs are being sung. However, the manner in which these modes manifest in struggle songs differs from the conventional arrangement of speeches.

1.2.1 Orator

Firstly, unlike instances where a speech is being delivered by a single orator, the delivery of struggle songs often occurs in a group context.[11] When one listens to interviews by struggle veterans, one gets a sense that the comradely spirit that was experienced, as people sang in unison about their struggles, as well as their hopes, unleashed a dynamic that would have been unachievable outside of the group context. Thus in the same manner that one would analyse the character and mannerism of an orator, in order to gauge their unique power to persuade, one needs to bear in mind the group dynamics present that made struggle songs such effective tools in the fight against apartheid.

1.2.2 Audience

The second aspect in which the employment of the modes of persuasion used in struggle songs differs from conventional speech delivered, is in the manner in which the orator (or singers of the song, in this case) were often simultaneously the audience to whom the song was being performed. Other than in instances where people were directly marching against apartheid authorities, and thus subsequently singing to these authorities, when groups gathered to sing struggle songs, they were in essence singing to themselves. In these instances, the purpose of the singing was still to persuade, even though the singers were persuading themselves, in a sense. Likewise the songs were a "means used by... people to speak of... poverty... sufferings [and]... exploitation",[12] to rouse their fellow oppressed peoples to grow even more indignant against the injustices that they were being subjected to. This occurrence is important to note because in conventional rhetorical addresses:

---

[10] Aristotle, 8.
[11] Pring-Mill, *Popular Music,* 181-182.
[12] Pring-Mill, *Popular Music,* 181.

> Of the three elements in speech-making-speaker, subject, and person addressed — it is the last one, the hearer, that determines the speech's end and object.[13]

Thus when the hearer is the same person as the speaker, as is the case in the performance of struggle songs, the dynamic changes altogether.

1.2.3 Speech

The final dynamic that one encounters in the analysis of struggle songs using rhetorical techniques is the fact that the struggle songs were not static texts, and were often not written down. With each phase of the struggle, songs were often modified in order to capture the emotions and articulate the conditions of the time. The consequence of this is that the lyrics, and even the structure of the songs, were often subject to change, which implies that the meaning was also often altered. Further, the fact that the actual physical and musical performance of a song were part and parcel of how it was used to be persuasive, implies that one cannot simply read lyrics and then perform a rhetorical analysis on that basis. Rather, one needs to watch the songs performed in order to get a sense of not only what they sounded like, but what kind of actions accompanied them. This is not always mandatory when one analyses at a conventional speech because the assumption is that the techniques of persuasion are primarily expressed in the text.

Yet despite these interesting additional dynamics, the fact that struggle songs are texts that were used to persuade implies that they can be analysed rhetorically to come to a better understanding of how they employed rhetorical genres and proofs in order to persuade.

The songs that will be analyzed are *Senzeni Na?* and *Pasopa Verwoerd*.

2 Discussion

By way of lyrical content, *Senzeni Na?* is a very simple song. The lyrics as per a recording of a performance by the Bangor Community Choir are as follows:

Senzeni Na?

Senzenina? (x4)

Sonosethu, ubumyama? (x4)

Sonosethuyinyaniso ? (x4)

Sibulawayo (x4)

[13] Aristotle, 15.

Mayibuye i Africa (x4)[14]

(Translation)

What have we done? (x4)

Is our sin the fact that we are black? (x4)

Is our sin the truth? (x4)

We are being killed (x4)

Return Africa (x4)

In a documentary on the history of South Africa's struggle songs called *Amandla! A revolution in four-part harmony*, one of the interviewees, Duma Ndlovu, a former apartheid activist said:

> *Senzeni Na?* like W*e Shall Overcome,* will take her rightful place in society, because at one time a mass body of people related to that song and touched each other's hearts using that song.[15]

The song was sung mainly at funerals, protest marches and rallies.[16] Without a real indication of when the song first appeared, it is difficult to speculate on what events may have triggered its composition, however what is clear is that it formed part of the struggle repertoire from the earlier days of apartheid right through into the country's democratic dispensation post-1994.

Three of the four verses of *Senzeni Na?* are posed as rhetorical questions, leading to the conclusion that part of the song's efficacy lies in its approach of posing probing questions that are not meant to be answered, but rather are meant to evoke an internal response from the subconscious of those being questioned. In this regard, a study by Burnkrant and Howard shows that "introducing a counter-attitudinal message with questions leads to more intensive processing of message content than introducing it with statements".[17] Used in this context, where there really were no concrete or logical answers as to what black South Africans had 'done' to deserve the harsh treatment that they were being subjected to by the apartheid regime, the use of the rhetorical questions in *Senzeni Na?* is a way of exposing the absurd nature of the race-based laws of apartheid. Speaking in an interview which is featured on the same documentary singer, songwriter and activist Sibongile Khumalo alluded to the power of the song lying also in the repetitive nature of the lyrics. She says, "if you ask *senzeni na*? (what have we done?) four times, someone is bound to get the message".[18]

---

[14] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7sMKm1Ulc0U

[15] Lee Hirsch, *Amandla! A revolution in four-part harmony* (Kwela Productions, 2004).

[16] Hirsch, *Amandla!* 2004.

[17] R. E. Burnkrant and D. J. Howard, "Effects of the use of introductory rhetorical questions versus statements on information processing", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 47, 6 (1984) 1227.

[18] Hirsch, *Amandla!* 2004.

According to Aristotle's principles on rhetoric, *Senzeni Na?* falls into the forensic genre of rhetoric, in that it is concerned about the past, and what the oppressed black nation 'had done' to warrant being treated so unjustly. That is why the employment of the enthymemes, as they are expressed in the questioning form of the song, are so effective. Aristotle notes that "it is our doubts about past events that most admit of arguments showing why a thing must have happened or proving that it did happen".[19] Thus the songs is effective because it makes compelling statements by posing these statements as questions, and thereby demonstrates that there are no good reasons why such atrocities, as were perpetuated under apartheid, should have happened.

In his discussion on what makes a statement persuasive, Aristotle notes: "[a] statement is persuasive and credible either because it is directly self-evident or because it appears to be proved from other statements that are so".[20] The argument being made in *Senzeni Na?* is posed in question form, but is in fact the statement "we have done nothing to deserve this treatment". Instead of stating this directly, however, the statement is made more persuasive by framing it as a question with an obvious answer that effectively implicates those who were responsible for perpetuating the injustices of apartheid. The syllogism that is being made in this song can be given as follows:

1. Atrocities are perpetuated against bad people,
2. Being black does not automatically make you a bad person, therefore,
3. We do not deserve these atrocities that are being perpetuated against us simply because we are black.

Looking over the structure of the entire song, one observes that *Senzeni Na?* adheres to Aristotle's prescription for the structure of a conventional rhetorical speech, namely that "[a] speech has two parts. You must state your case, and you must prove it".[21] The question-statements in the first three verses of the song state the claim and prove it simultaneously because they cause the listener to arrive at the obvious conclusion themselves.

> What have we done? Nothing.
>
> Is our sin that we are black? No.
>
> Is our sin the truth? No.

Thus, while being simple and somewhat repetitive, these properties render *Senzeni Na?* a text that makes a compelling argument rhetorically.

The last verse of the song is interesting to note because it deviates from the verses preceding it. It is a demand, and somewhat of an instruction, that based on the fact that there really was no logical answer to why black people were suffering, they now need to act to claim Africa back for Africans. It is as though it is compelling the singers that

[19] Aristotle, 44.
[20] Aristotle, 10.
[21] *Ibid.* 166.

now that they have argued and proved the absurd nature of the injustices that they were being subjected to, they must work at reclaiming the Africa that they know and love, in order to restore it to its former glory and its original people. This is an important aspect of how the song manages to be persuasive because without a call to action, it would merely be deliberation of what had happened, and not really a rhetorical text that persuades the audience to some form of action.

Looking at the performance of *Senzeni Na?,* the repetitive lyrics, combined with the somewhat slow and sombre tune, meant that it was easy for a person to speak while the crowd hummed or continued to sing the song softly in the background. This style of performance for this song can be seen in a scene in the documentary *Amandla!* In the segment that looks at *Senzeni Na?* there is footage from a funeral. While *Senzeni Na?* is being sung quietly, two youths break out into monologues. Following in the wake of the questioning nature of the lyrics of the song, they too ask questions such as "how long, mama, will our people continue to die", as they mourn their fallen comrades.[22]

For a song that was not nearly as militant in content and tune as some of the other songs that were composed during the latter years of the struggle, the performance of *Senzeni Na?* in contexts such as these, manages to evoke anger and communicates a sense of frustration at the injustices of the time.

Before considering the second song, *Pasopa Verwoerd,* a brief discussion must be held on the issue of language use and translation when it comes to liberation music. One of the complexities of attempting to translate struggle songs into English is that a great deal of meaning is lost in the translation process. The isiXhosa and isiZulu lyrics that were used when composing these songs were deliberately chosen by the composers because of their political and linguistic significance. Attempts to translate them into English often fail because the ideas embodied are specific to those languages and cannot be adequately articulated in one or two English words. This is not to say that words do not exist to accomplish this, but rather this means that the corresponding English words have different meanings and discourses to their vernacular counter parts. Take for instance the isiXhosa word and concept of *ubuntu*. Simply translated, it means "one's humanity". If you ask a Xhosa speaking person to explain it though, you will most likely get a paragraph long discussion which includes aspects such as culture and belief, all of which fail to be captured by the literal English translation. Such is the plight of many of the words used in struggle songs, and hence a great deal of misunderstanding has arisen as South Africans have attempted to discuss liberation music in the post-apartheid era by using English as the primary language when conducting those dialogues in the public sphere.

For the purposes of this research, the translations given have been as literal and as verbatim as possible. This was done for simplicity, so as to avoid drawn out discussions on the translation. Venturing into the realm of interpretative translation would have required extensive discussions on other linguistically relevant topics such

[22] Hirsch, *Amandla!*

as grammar and context. Thus, simplicity was chosen, although at the expense of thoroughness. Such a sacrifice is warranted, however, especially in the case of this study which seeks to discuss meaning in context.

Pasopa Verwoerd

Nantsi'ndodemnyama, Verwoerd (x4)
Pasopa nantsi'ndodemnyama, Verwoerd (x4)
Nantsi'ndodemnyama, Verwoerd (x4)[23]

(Translation)

Here is the black man, Verwoerd (x4)
Watch out here comes the black man, Verwoerd (x4)
Here comes the black man, Verwoerd (x4)

As with the preceding song, the lyrics to this song are simple and repetitive, making them easily transferable in a group context. Also without delving too deeply into the intricate musical components of the discussion, the stoical tune and almost daring melody of this song, add to its confrontational feel. Lyrically, *Pasopa Verwoerd* is a direct warning to Hendrik Verwoerd who is said to have been the "architect" of apartheid.[24] Verwoerd was the Prime Minster of South Africa from 1958-1966. It was during his tenure in the South African government that liberation movements such as the ANC and the Pan Africanist Congress were banned. He is described as the architect of apartheid because it was while he was minister of Native Affairs, and then subsequently South Africa's Prime Minister, that the policy of racial segregation, as espoused by apartheid, was formulated and passed as law.[25]

It is interesting to note that the one key word that indicates this warning, namely the Afrikaans derivative *pasopa* (or *passop* in proper Afrikaans), has a Xhosa equivalent, *lumkela*, which means "look out" or using a slightly stronger tone, "watch out", and yet this Xhosa word is not used. Instead a word similar to the Afrikaans warning word *Passop* is used. Because this song was normally used when struggle activists were marching in direct confrontation to the apartheid police or army,[26] it can be assumed that the Afrikaans word was deliberately chosen so that the apartheid authorities could

[23] Hirsch, *Amandla!*
[24] H. Kenney, *Architect of apartheid: H.F. Verwoerd, an appraisal* (Johannesburg: J.Ball, 1980).
[25] C. M. Cole, *Performing South Africa's Truth Commission: Stages of Transition* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010): 31.
[26] Hirsch, *Amandla!*

comprehend that a direct warning and challenge was being issued to them. By simply singing "Pasopa Verwoerd" or "Passop Verwoerd" the marches ensured that the apartheid authorities were able to understand that a warning was being issued. As freedom-fighter and current ANC National Executive Committee member Thandi Modise put it: "When you really, really wanted to make the *Boers* (Afrikaners) mad, you sang *Pasopa Verwoerd* because you were almost daring them".[27]

Pasopa Verwoerd also falls into the deliberative genre of rhetoric because it warns the audience of an event that is still to come. As Aristotle explains, the deliberative orator "is concerned with the future: it is about things to be done hereafter that he advises, for or against".[28] For the deliberative orator, the end is "establishing the expediency or the harmfulness of a proposed course of action".[29] In the case of this song, the warning is that if 'the white man' as personified by Verwoerd, continues on the oppressive path that he is on, the black man will retaliate. It is a warning that the black man (*ndod'emnyama*) will one day have his day of revenge. At its core, the deliberative genre is concerned with what actions or choices will result in future good. Some of the advantageous things that Aristotle notes include health, beauty, justice, honour and reputation. Most pertinent to this song, however, is the issue of justice, and to some extent honour and reputation for the oppressed black nation.

The predominant artistic proof used in this song is ethos. This is because *Pasopa Verwoerd* deals strongly with expounding on "human character and goodness".[30] Because the ethos proof functions mainly by drawing on the values espoused by the audience, as opposed to the orator, the song's direct address to Verwoerd personalises the message being delivered. Further it plays quite strongly on the sense of fear that existed in both black and white South Africans, based on the fact that the conditions under apartheid were so turbulent that at any moment violence could break out on either side. This song warns the apartheid government of a pending day when the oppressed black South Africans would decide to rise up against the regime, and in so doing successfully draws on the fears of white South Africans. This combination of the use of the deliberative genre, together with the ethos proof, renders this a persuasive text.

In conclusion, by considering the songs above, it has been shown that it is possible, through textual analysis, to analyse struggle songs as texts and in so doing to decipher the methods and techniques they employ to make rhetorically sound arguments. The songs have been viewed primarily as texts capable of persuasion. That the history of the songs has also been a key feature of the discussion is a consequence of their meaning being deeply imbedded in where they come from and how they were used in the past. The purpose, however, has been to move the discussion around South

[27] *Ibid.*
[28] Aristotle, 15.
[29] *Ibid.*
[30] *Ibid.*

Africa's struggle songs from one that focuses primarily on the history and context in which these songs were written and sung, to one that analyses and discusses the actual content of the songs in order to understand them as texts with relevance in relation to the country's political communication field post-1994. What is interesting about these songs is that they do not remain lost in the apartheid days, and still form a very important part of South African political culture, especially in political entities with a strong liberation history such as the governing ANC (African National Congress) as well as parties like the Azanian People's Organisation and the PAC (Pan African Congress).

The second issue that has been unveiled in relation to liberation music is the fact that language will always be a barrier when dealing with South Africa's past, particularly where struggle songs are involved. It is a pity that the national debates around this music, that have occurred since 1994, have been conducted primarily on English media platforms. This issue of translation has been particularly contentious in the South African media, as controversy has arisen as a result of the singing of certain songs that, when directly translated from the vernacular into English, have violent undertones which are not necessarily present in the original isiZulu and isiXhosa versions. It must not be forgotten that even language was contested terrain during the struggle because of the recognition that a people's culture and ideas are intimately linked to the language that they spoke. As such, the exclusive nature of struggle songs was deliberate and must be born in mind, even as some of the lyrics have had to be translated for the purposes of academic writing that can be understood by a larger audience.

For the foreseeable future, struggle songs will continue to play a prominent role in South African political communication. Even though many of these songs are strongly linked with the ANC, it is worth noting that because they are so organic, different political parties that were not around during the apartheid era can indeed begin to appropriate them to communicate their own messages if they educate themselves on some of the issues of meaning discussed in this dissertation. By doing so, they too can begin to draw on the rich historical significance that these songs possess and harness the political clout that these communication tools carry.

Sisanda Nkoala is a lecturer in the Media Department at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology. She is also a Ph.D candidate at the Centre for Rhetoric Studies, University of Cape Town.

This article first appeared in AYOR Volume 4.1

The quietude of transitional justice: Five rhetorical questions

Erik Doxtader

1 Dealing with a criminal past

What are we talking about? For a day, a virtual eternity in the governing "news cycle", the left-leaning international media buzzes with commentary regarding the South African government's decision to parole Eugene de Kock.[1] For those familiar with South Africa's history and its transition to non-racial democracy, de Kock requires no introduction. An Afrikaner who "distinguished" himself in the apartheid government's "border wars", he is best and widely known as the leader of an apartheid death squad that took its name from the farm outside of Pretoria where it was headquartered —Vlakplaas. Operating from the mid-1980s into the early 1990s, de Kock's Vlakplaas unit kidnapped, tortured, and murdered scores (the precise number remains unknown) of anti-apartheid activists, many of whom were members of the ANC's Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK).

Arrested for some 89 different crimes and sentenced in 1996 to over 200 years in prison, de Kock was branded "Prime Evil", a nickname that has led to more than a few comparisons to Eichmann and which set him out as a symbol of apartheid's crime against humanity. He was also a star of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) amnesty process, at least in the sense that he was one of the few members of the old government's security regime who seemed to embrace the TRC's call to come forward and detail the nature and extent of apartheid-era human rights violations. From prison, de Kock thus launched myriad amnesty applications and gave testimony to the Commission regarding his actions and the operations undertaken by the Vlakplaas unit. To the satisfaction of some and the horror of others, he consistently maintained that the leaders of the apartheid state, including Presidents PW Botha and FW de Klerk, were aware of the unit's existence and activities. In the end, the TRC's Amnesty Committee granted amnesty to de Kock for all but two applications, finding in the latter that while he had made a "full disclosure" regarding the murder of several individuals, the crimes were not "politically motivated" acts and thus fell outside the established criteria for amnesty.[2] With this judgment, de Kock was returned to prison for "ordinary" murder. For the rest, as he received amnesty

[1] The decision is announced on 30 January 2015, just a few days after commemorations of the 70th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. The proximity of the two events passes without reflection or commentary on their (non)relation.

[2] News24 Archive: http://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/Politics/De-Kock-denied-amnesty-20010517. The archive of amnesty hearing transcripts and decisions by the TRC's Amnesty Committee can be found on the TRC's archived website: http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/amntrans/index.htm. Also see Erik Doxtader and Philippe-Joseph Salazar, *Truth and reconciliation in South Africa – The fundamental documents* (Cape Town: David Philip, 2007).

© *African Yearbook of Rhetoric* 10, 2020, Online ISSN 2305-7785:
Erik Doxtader, "The quietude of transitional justice: Five rhetorical questions", pp. 17-30.

(not a pardon) for the vast majority of his applications, de Kock's "acts and omissions" were deemed "not to have taken place".[3]

Provoked by the news of de Kock's parole, the international media manages to capture almost none of this history. The coverage unfolds over the course of a day in which I am away from South Africa, driving across the American southwest, a landscape defined by the semi-industrial poverty (including the casinos) that attends life on Native American reservations and tribal land. Reading over a lunch break, it is clear that the New York Times has failed to grasp the difference between an amnesty and a pardon.[4] Back in the car, I listen to broadcasts on BBC, CNN, and National Public Radio, all of whom are quick to report that Desmond Tutu, the former Archbishop who chaired the TRC, has blessed de Kock's parole and that the Ministry of Justice has defended the decision on the grounds of "nation-building" and reconciliation.[5]

Over the course of several hours, in which various experts are mobilised and forums convened, what proves most interesting is an absence – at no point in the discussion and quasi-debate over de Kock's parole is the word "amnesty" uttered. Not once. The concept seemingly does not exist. At the very least, it is unspeakable. With this omission, the entirety of de Kock's record is put on trial – and in isolation; the relative justification for the parole unfolds as if amnesty did not occur and without concern for De Kock's claim that the existence of Vlakplaas was known at the highest levels.[6] In a single stroke, a criminal past is cast in a way that erases any legal distinction at the same time that is contained by law. In part, this means that for commentator after commentator, the idea of reconciliation functions only as a pretense, a gateway from guilt to arguments about the possibility of forgiveness and contrition, neither of which were a condition for amnesty, but which serve to support various moral-legal claims about the demands of justice and what is necessary to reconstruct the conditions of collective life and restore rule of law. Wound around all of this, sealing the logic, is an expressed consensus that it is counterproductive to question the concepts that ground and enable the debate. Again and again, such theoretical reflection is derided as unhelpful "abstraction". For those that applaud the parole and those who oppose it, the controlling law that underwrites their respective positions *is* the law, a law whose rule defies question in the name of securing a restorative or retributive justice.

---

[3] This is the explicit language of the TRC's authorizing legislation. In some detail, I have traced and considered the development and terms of this legislation, see Erik Doxtader, *With faith in the works of words: The beginnings of reconciliation in South Africa* (Cape Town/Lansing: David Philip/Michigan State University Press, 2009). Elsewhere, I have taken up the controversial terms and justification for amnesty in South Africa, see Erik Doxtader, "Easy to forget or never (again) hard to remember? History, memory and the 'publicity' of amnesty," in Charles Villa-Vicencio and Erik Doxtader (eds.), *The provocations of amnesty: Memory, justice and impunity* (Cape Town: David Phillip, 2003): 121-155.

[4] http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/31/world/africa/eugene-de-kock-south-african-death-squad-leader-is-granted-parole.html?src=xps.

[5]http://www.tutu.org.za/archbishop-tutu-welcomes-eugene-de-kocks-release; http://www.rdm.co.za/politics/2015/01/30/why-i-freed-eugene-de-kock-and-not-clive-derby-lewis.

[6] There is nothing surprising about this glaring omission given the way in which standing accounts of transitional justice go to significant lengths to formally and informally ban the use of amnesty.

The de Kock case, including the parole, is instructive for the way in which it suggests that the criminal past is that which refuses to pass into the past. Evident in the way that de Kock is figured and indeed reduced to a symbol, the abiding presence of such criminality cannot be divorced from the function of law; it is a claim to its transgression and a standing cause to invoke its power of redress, a rule of law that may in fact legitimise itself by invoking the criminal past in order to conceal the way in which this past follows from what Hannah Arendt called "legal violence", a violence that may be exposed only as the law takes exception to itself and opens the question of its rule – as a question. Put in a slightly different way, the memory of the criminal past may often depend on the law's invitation to forget the way in which this past is implicated in a rule of law whose self-constitution can be recalled only as the law is led to forget the self-proclaimed necessity of its own expression. And put differently still, it is not always a straightforward thing to differentiate individual, collective or systemic histories of criminality and it is not always easy to differentiate these from the criminality of history that is frequently supported if not underwritten by law. In this light, the idea (the concept?) of the criminal past constitutes a tight and complex knot, a (triple) problem of how to best grasp its presence, redress, and source. Perhaps more than any other, this problem marks the exigence of transitional justice and its concern that deeply-divided societies find a way to "deal with the past" and move forward. As it is well-expressed and reflected in the thin coverage of de Kock parole, this interest often begins by begging the question at hand, the question of what it means to speak in the name of "coming to terms".

2 Dissoi-Logoi

WHAT TO SAY FIRST?

[↔]

In the name of transition, the voices of dissent reach a critical mass. Grievances are announced. Offences are documented. Calls for more or less radical change find a larger audience. The tradition-clinging claims of governing institutions fall on increasingly deaf ears. Visions of change are articulated by leaders who claim to speak on behalf of the public. The case for the new and the case for the old coalesce into a *stasis*, a moment of decision, a moment in which no single language suffices. Those who sense that something must give begin to talk about talk, to discuss the possibility

The critical dissonance of transition is the threat of noise that relieves the name of its referent. Grievance blurs with counter-grievance, their meaning thrown open as the announced traditions that differentiate acceptable and unacceptable behavior are called into fundamental question. Institutions react with emergency decrees that fracture the public and silence its voice. Conflict escalates, until violence and language fold into one another. Announced positions harden into absolute principles that have nothing to give. The cost of stepping over the party line let alone attempting to speak with the enemy is

of interaction between those who have long contended that they have nothing in common. Tentative exchange yields signs of good faith and a basis to negotiate a language with which to turn announced rationales for violence into productive forms of disagreement. Visions of a new dispensation are presented and debated. Constitutive words are crafted, debated, and revised.

A transition is announced. Its declared promise of the future is interrupted by the assertion of the past. There is untold suffering. The truth has (yet) to be told. The silence is deafening. And it threatens a return to the violence that forecloses the future. Calls for "coming to terms" with the past thus appear and gather momentum. An architecture for giving accounts and breaking silence is advocated and negotiated. It is time for a trial of words. The voice of wounded bodies must be restored and the damaged body politic must be healed, with and through the pronouncement of legal judgments, open-ended dialogue, and the performance of understanding, all of which sit atop inquiry which allows for a declaration of the facts and the formation of consensus about history, a consensus that opens space for the emergence of symbols that memorialise and represent. Juridical and executive institutions issue indictments and deploy "campaigns of persuasion" to mobilise public interest and to convince perpetrators and collaborators to disclose if not confess their acts and omissions.

Into various forums, victims are called to give testimony and articulate statements about their experiences. They are asked questions that open space for expression and guide its direction. Narratives are offered, sometimes easily, sometimes with sobs that echo across the gallery and which are noted ("witness

treason. Good faith is a function of silence, the discipline to stand pat and stay the course in the face of the other side's treacherous gestures and hollow words. Endless promises of incremental reform legitimize the violence and deter dangerous talk of the new. If and when it arrives, the decisive break is a turn that sets language's constitutive power against itself.

A transition begins, equally a fracture of continuity and the emergence of form. Between the opening of an abyss and the appearance of an ideal, the old and the new swirl, combining in ways that defy the rules of predictability. Telling the truth rests on the fantasy that lattices of time and space are not bending in ways that unhinge the given meaning of history and culture. With the damage not yet (un)done, the aura of violence leaves language beyond and beside itself such that the call to come to terms presupposes ground that remains to be created. The silences are overwhelming and an open secret, the disclosure of which marks a threat to young institutions with democratic aspirations. The law's announced and standing precedents are suspect. Too many words are an unbearable trial. Old vocabularies of power remain, a scaffolding that provokes opposition as much as it supports consensus about the need to move forward in a different way. If they say anything at all, the criminals who sustained the old regime shrug off their indictments as so much hypocrisy and plead guilty on the grounds of socialisation.

Some of their victims appear and give words that are then cited for their paradigmatic iterability, a precedent that lacks the force of context. Others, caught between the pressures of contributing to a new nation and a wish to remain with their thoughts, offer words with more than a bit of reserve. Others still are not asked to speak. The narratives appear in a scene both

pauses") in transcriptions that are often translated, circulated, and claimed to underpin the formation of a shared history that renders expression of plausible deniability implausible and (re)constructs the ground rules – the common sense – of collective life. The words bring catharsis. Rage is relinquished in exchange for recognition, a recognizing expression that marks the return of dignity, a sense of standing and the beginning of reparation. The deliberative fabric of citizenship is restored. The capacity to appear in public life is returned. Exclusion and factioning are supplanted with gestures that build trust and allow old conflicts to be transformed into productive disagreements, the aim of which is to build a path from past to future, an archive and a discourse that promises to transform legacies of deep division into an abiding unity in difference.

controlled from the top and held to be evidence that "everyone is damaged". The claim that all stories need to be heard sits with arguments about the ongoing effects of subjugation, the violent subjection of human beings to the point where they can neither be seen nor heard, a bare life that possesses no recognizable vocabulary and no standing to speak. The claimed healing value of public discourse collides with the contention that publicity is corrupted and that the meaning of collective life has been disappeared. Narratives do not reach audiences and defy translation across cultures divided by deep distrust. The archive provokes debate if not outright division over its constitutive exclusions and how it fails to recognize the reparative "value" of so many wounds.

3 This is (not) a language game

> For there would be no truth without that word-hoarding [thesaurisation], which is not only what deposits and keeps hold of the truth, but also that without which a project of truth and the idea of an infinite task would be unimaginable.[7]

In how many ways are words at work? Perhaps the truth is that the promise of transitional justice abides in the potential of (its) language. This idea is as obvious as it is enigmatic. To begin, take a moment for a though experiment: subtract language from any of the standing theories, accounts, and recipes for transitional justice. What remains when victims cannot testify and perpetrators can neither confess nor hear their indictment, when there is no chance for citizens to articulate, discuss, or contest the meaning of history, when individuals, communities, and institutions cannot debate the meaning or articulate the need for retribution, reparation, or reconciliation, when there are no announced judgments from courts or no final reports from truth commissions?

Transitional justice does very little without words. Its work not only entails but demands various and variable *forms* of expression: institutional, public, and legal

[7] Jacques Derrida, *Edmund Husserl's Origin of geometry: An introduction*, (trans.) John P. Leavey, (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1989).

argumentation; negotiation, debate, and controversy; dialogue, discussion, and persuasion; individual and collective narration; interpretation and translation – across battle lines, communities, and cultures; literary (re)presentation and aesthetic performance. While this list can and likely does need to be extended, the more pressing point is that transitional justice is a function of expression. At times operating as a discourse, it takes form with(in) language and appears through modes of address that define its aims, enable its practices, and justify its value. When heard "on the ground", a common place instantiated through a commonplace, the call for transitional justice frequently places a premium on the ability of individuals to find their voice, tell (their) truth, and come to terms. This is not straightforward work. Whether conciliatory, restorative, or retributive, the coming of terms whereby it is possible to come to terms presupposes the ability of citizens and institutions to construct and advance extended arguments that articulate the necessity of talk and codify its rules.

In the name of transitional justice, words about words matter. Indeed, the ongoing (and somewhat overdrawn) controversy over whether the centre stage of transitional justice belongs to trials or truth commissions is a question about who must speak, what they might say, and how particular modes of speech alter the conditions of individual and collective life. It is a mistake, however, to view this question only in instrumental terms, as a call to find and fit means of expression to a set of pre-given ends. If transitional justice is in fact addressed to transition, if it is addressed to an undefined if not undefinable moment that exceeds or defies "ordinary" justice, its work proceeds through speech acts that disclose its goals, compose its goods, and instantiate its values. This is to say that the experience of transition is an experience of loosening (and losing) taken for granted meaning. It is the experience of an opening, a space in which the ends, modes, and methods of (inter)action are thrown open to question. In the midst of transition, to borrow from Wittgenstein, the call of transitional justice stands before the problem that "Because skill at playing the game is no longer enough the question that keeps coming up is: can this game be played at all now and what would be the right game to play?"[8] In the words that enable and enact transitional justice, the ends and means of expression blur. The evident necessity of speech proceeds without clear let alone stable grounds. Playing the language game requires setting the very language of the game into play. And, as the game throws us back to the question of its rules, as the given rules that codify the appropriate goals and proper methods of transitional justice are seen to beg the question of their invention, meaning, and power, its theory and practice (now undifferentiated and mutually constitutive) take shape in a rhetorical economy, a contingent field of expression and exchange in which it is tasked to speak as if it knows what it is talking about at the same time that it troubles and relinquishes (its) taken for granted language.

This dynamic explains precisely why it is important to begin in two places at once. The question of beginning (again, and often in the name of "never again") that drives transitional justice is a question of what to do with words that are altogether necessary and altogether outside the control of common understanding, convention,

[8] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and value,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984): 27e.

tradition. Confronting this problem is surely awkward, often anxious, and sometimes terrifying – precisely, as it entails thinking the dispossession of that which counts as a certain possession: language. Without a doubt, it is far more comfortable to remain above the fray that appears when the problem of beginning can no longer be severed from a question of origin, the question of how we (be)come by the way of words that we cannot claim to possess, the question of the violence that abides in the decision to simply assert the language which may only emerge *through* the work of transitional justice. It would be far easier to assume otherwise, to assume that language remains – intact, at the ready, and meaningful. And, it is just such an assumption that tends to define contemporary theoretical and practical accounts of transitional justice. Again and again, the word remains a given – a ground that can be taken for granted and a mechanism of expression that is thought to merit little theoretical reflection.

If transitional justice does very little without words, it has yet done very little with the question of (its) words. In no small part, this means that the announced logic of transitional justice tends to be a logic of transitional *justice,* an assumption that the language of justice remains – without question – in the midst of transition, a moral foundation, an end that simultaneously underwrites and directs expression. Evident in the way that dominant accounts of transitional justice stress the priority and integrity of rule of law, this vision of talk that requires no talk about talk may secure the moral at the cost of ethical life.[9] It betrays that what remains largely un-thought is the possibility that transitional justice is a practice that takes place *through* words and an event that takes place *in* the word. As a professed *responsibility* to alleviate suffering and cultivate a culture of human rights, transitional justice may turn on an ability to constitute and enable an ethics of *response-ability* in the midst of inhumane violence, a capacity to reply to what remains unspeakable. Its demand for *accountability*, a disclosure of truth and a reckoning with evil, may then turn on the creation of *account-ability*, the ground (rule) which secures the power to make a definitive (sovereign) claim. Promising the restoration of dignity and the emergence of democratic action, its call for *recognition* may turn on the discovery of *recognize-ability*, a turn from the language of recognition to the recognition of language as such, a struggle to grasp how the laws that govern the relation between individual and collective life take shape only as the standing word – the word with standing – is dispossessed in the name of recollecting and reconstituting its necessity.

4 The appearance of last words

[9] The pervasive and rarely questioned priority of the "rule of law" as the guiding principle of transitional justice is readily evident in its theoretical and policy literature. For an account of this presumption and its rhetorical cost, see Erik Doxtader, "A critique of law's violence yet (never) to come: United Nations' Transitional Justice Policy and the (fore)closure of reconciliation", in Alexander Hirsch (ed.), *Theorising post-conflict reconciliation: Agonism, restitution & repair* (New York: Routledge, 2011): 27-64.

> Poetic language takes place in such a way that its advent always already escapes both toward the future and toward the past… The word, taking place in time, comes about in such a way that its advent necessarily remains unsaid in that which is said.[10]

What of all this obvious chatter? People do speak, thank you very much—enough with this didactic nonsense! These so-called "rhetorical questions" are simply a distraction, a theoretical luxury. It is time to actually get some work done. After all, for goodness (or god's) sake, people are suffering!

This impatience is the norm. It is understandable, at least insofar as it conveys the modernist faculty of expression that Cheikh Anta Diop saw as a mechanism for the colonial attempt to erase language as a question. Thus before rushing off to do the good on the ground, an impulse that usually overwhelms *kairos* with distraction, it is instructive to consider that just a few months before it declared in no uncertain terms that the promise of transitional justice demands a "standard language", a common vocabulary and grammar that might tame its unruly "multiplicity of definitions and meanings", the United Nations hosted a lecture in which its members gathered to hear Chinua Achebe and Paul Muldoon reflect on "the use of language in war and peace".[11] It is worth wondering after the connection between the proclamation and the lecture, and, more precisely, whether the UN's "definitive" statement of (its) transitional justice policy is nothing less than evidence that the renowned Nigerian author and the wild-haired Irish poet went largely unheard.

The lecture is a remarkable scene. Muldoon steals the show, with a sonnet sequence, a set of lines entitled "The old country". Words of a place in time. Nowhere in particular and perhaps then everywhere at once, this place is the found object of transitional justice – and its founding object. In time, it appears to us through its collusion, a network of tacit agreements and implicit (mis)understandings:

> Every runnel was a Rubicon
> where every ditch was a last ditch.
> Every man was a "grand wee mon"
> whose every pitch was another sales pitch
>
> now every boat was a burned boat.
> Every cap was a cap in hand.
> Every coat a trailed coat.
> Every band a gallant band
>
> across a broken bridge
> and broken ridge after broken ridge
> where you couldn't beat a stick with a big stick.
>
> Every straight road was a straight up speed trap.
> Every decision was a snap.

---

[10] Giorgio Agamben, *Language and death*, (trans.) Karen Pinkus with Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).

[11] Report of the Secretary General, "The rule of law and transitional justice in conflict and post-conflict societies", United Nations, Security Council, 23 August 2004 (S/2004/616). The Achebe-Muldoon forum is available on streaming video: http://www.un.org/webcast/sg/lectureseries.htm.

Every cut was a cut to the quick.[12]

And so it goes, verse upon verse, a play that leads Kofi Annan to squirm and sets the UN's translators to giggle. What is taking place here? What sense can be made of this apparent non-sense? The lesson is serious, according to Muldoon. In part and whole, the sonnet is "mimetic of the tedium it is describing", a demonstration of the cliché's ubiquity, a disclosure of the homonymic rituals and taken for granted platitudes that coalesce and collude to form ordinary language. Its lines testify to what happens when the word is appropriated as a simple tool, an instrument that relieves us of the need to think about language, the way in which human beings stand before it. As Muldoon puts it, the sonnet is a call to "be humble before language rather than going into any circumstance with a sense of what the appropriate thing to say might be, to go into it with a spirit of humility".

That this is the wrong thing to say while standing before UN delegates is precisely the point. The fluency borne of standardised expression marks a path of self-certainty, a road littered with dead bodies. The difference between peace and war, the difference that transition is called to negotiate, hovers around the "fine line" between the instrumental fictions that enable human beings to take (their) place with language and the "genuine barbarities" that take place when being human requires forgetting that we make far less with language than it makes with us. These barbarities prove telling. They betray that the question of *poiesis* is not a question of how to fashion and fix a new language. It is a question of discerning a responsibility, a response-ability in which giving an account begins by recognizing language, a concession that we do not necessarily know what takes place in the taken for granted word. The call to "be humble before language" is a calling, a humble and perhaps even humiliating act of giving away the word in the name of hearing its question.

What then of the refrain, "Actions speak louder than words". So be it, for a moment. Consider what is *done* in the decision – or is it simply a curiously recurring accident? – to punctuate much of the transitional justice "literature" with the words of the poets and the playwrights. Milan Kundera cannot be quoted enough, although rarely in context. Celan and Brecht's laments are repeated again and again. Vaclav Havel's samizdat truth is held up as a beacon, as Ariel Dorfman's deep sadness and subtle sense of absurdity is heard to pronounce a warning. Antjie Krog's poetic account of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, perhaps the only existing book on the Commission that matters, is mined for its life-giving turn of phrase.

These appeals are not rhetorical flourishes. Their appearance is less a matter of calculation than a telling exigence, an experience that unfolds as transitional justice confronts the limits of given words. The poets appear when "proper" words afford nothing meaningful to say and when standardized language is understood – too late – as a source and form of violence. Their invocation thus betrays a moment of exhaustion and a hope for inspiration, the return of breath and its voice. In the literature of transitional justice, this means that the poet functions as secular cover for

[12] Muldoon reading at the UN forum includes this transcribed sequence. The full work can be found in Paul Muldoon, *Horse latitudes,* (London: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006).

the unasked question of the word, an angelic figure who has experienced the "poverty of words", who grapples with the unspeakable that abides in what is said, who struggles to show hospitality in the face of a most difficult gift –language. The difficulty, of course, is that this turn to the poetic may well beg the question and does so precisely as it fails to reflect on Adorno's now infamous claim: "To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric. And this corrodes even the knowledge of why it has become impossible to write poetry today".[13] For the moment, the point is not that this dictum is necessarily or timelessly true, but that the theory and practice of transitional justice has yet to think it in any serious way; it has yet to reflect on the condition of the poetic – the "how" of its creativity and its potential as something more (and less) than a kind of sheer magic, as something other than an invocation if not "drive toward the unspeakable", a forgetting of that which is not present – to make it present – that amounts to the "fury of one who must talk himself out of what everyone knows, before he can then talk others out of it as well".[14] In the fold and logic of transitional justice, the invocation of the poets is a manifestation of panic, a deep-seated if not unspeakable fear of being at a loss for precisely that which transitional justice is called to create.

5 The unspeakable sound of the aftermath

> There is a question and yet no doubt; there is a question, but no desire for an answer; there is a question, and nothing that can be said, but just this nothing, to say. [15]
>
> There is no document of culture which is not at the same time a document of barbarism.[16]

What cannot (not) be said? The question amounts to an imperative, or more precisely, it is heard to express an imperative, the precise duty for which the poets are mobilised: the silence is intolerable – it must be broken. Marginal voices call for a hearing. Untold stories need narration. Experience demands expression. History requires articulation. The gap between what people think and what they say must be closed. The empty forms that sustain illegitimate power must be challenged and replaced with meaningful content. Announced and internalized systems of censorship have to be replaced with vibrant debate that can occur only as citizens re-inhabit and re-animate public space. Lost languages need to be recovered and recuperated. Everyone must begin to listen – again.

---

[13] Theodor Adorno, "Cultural criticism and society", in *Prisms*, (trans.) Samuel Weber and Shierry Weber Nicholson, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1967): 34.

[14] Theodor Adorno, "Education after Auschwitz", 2. Online at: http://josswinn.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/AdornoEducation.pdf; Theodor Adorno, "The Meaning of Working through the Past", in *Critical Models* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 92. Looking broadly, it is remarkable that Adorno's claim is difficult if not impossible to find in the mainstream literature on transitional justice, an absence that speaks rather loudly to the narrow confines of its theoretical perspective.

[15] Maurice Blanchot, *The writing of the disaster*, (trans.) Ann Smock (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1995).

[16] Walter Benjamin, "On the concept of history", in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, 4., (eds.) Howard Eiland and Michael Jennings, (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2003).

All of this is held out as a matter of necessity, an imperative that defines the impulse and aim of transitional justice. In Priscilla Hayner's unsophisticated but popular account, the possibility of change rests on whether countries are able to "lift the lid of silence and denial" and "effectively unsilence" banned and taboo subjects. Transition founders if it fails to break the "conspiracy of silence" that perpetuates political violence, enforces deep division, and thwarts justice. The lynch-pin to the case is Hayner's contention that "psychologists universally confirm" the value of talk's restorative power.[17] With silence figured as pathology, the word's virtue and necessity can be denied only at the cost of denialism. In the aftermath, speech must be freed. It must be free. Against the desire for impunity that legitimises silence, the past must be disclosed and debated. In wake of human rights violations that mark and enforce silence, deliberation must become the norm.[18] Transformative justice, as Wendy Lambourne puts it, requires a "model of two-way communication, participatory or cogenerative dialogue, which supports collaborative decision-making, civil society participation and local ownership".[19] All of this, in Pierre Hazan's view, amounts to a "new *doxa*", a widespread and increasingly institutionalised presumption that transition hinges on a turn from "silence to speech" which counters "a potential return(s) to barbarity".[20] The word must be brought to bear and it must prevail. So goes the mantra, an appeal to the power of language that remains a fantasy precisely as it assumes that the word stands at the ready, a servant to all those who would employ it.

Setting aside the obvious possibility that some forms of quietude are a precondition of expression and that writs against silence may amount to forced confession, the pressing problem is how transitional justice pronounces a moral-political call to speech that rests on an unspoken assumption of language. This assumption is both a naïve preconception and an act of appropriation. In the aftermath, it is assumed that language is available, intact, and trusted. In the name of transition, the word is to be taken, as if it is ready-made and ready to serve, as if it is simply waiting in the wings, at the command of any and all who seek to vanish and vanquish silence from the stage. In the theatre of transitional justice, this restorative magic becomes a shell game precisely as it forgets its own claim that dehumanisation strips being of language. The result is a shell game – the word is here, now it's over there; but wait it's gone over here and wait now it's back. The game is a cheat, an undue appropriation of the word that plausibly denies the need for inquiry into how language is (dis)appearing. In the architecture of transitional justice, the game

---

[17] Priscilla Hayner, *Unspeakable truths*: *Facing the challenges of truth commissions* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2003), 25. Here and in many other accounts, the case rests on a single work: Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of wtnessing in literature, psychoanalysis and history* , (London: Routledge, 1992).

[18] For one view of this position, see Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, "The moral foundations of truth commissions", in Robert Rotberg and Dennis Thompson (eds.), *Truth vs. justice: The morality of truth commissions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000): 22-44.

[19] Wendy Lambourne, "Outreach, inreach and civil society participation in transitional justice", in Nicola Palmer, Phil Clark, Danielle Granville, et al (eds.), *Critical perspectives in transitional justice* (Cambridge, UK: Intersentia, 2012): 258.

[20] Pierre Hazan, *Judging war, judging history: Behind truth and reconciliation,* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2010): 40.

becomes self-confounding if not dangerous precisely as it fails to account for how the violence to which it is addressed unfolds through a calculated language that amounts to an attack on the possibility of language itself.

Beyond silence as the "absence of speech", an absence that does not necessarily function to preclude speech, Peter Haidu turns to a 1943 address by Heinrich Himmler to demonstrate how the leader of the SS composed a silence that was "both the negation of speech and a production of meaning".[21] With horrifying subtlety, Himmler's "speech of silence" coalesces into a discourse that "breaks" language – it constitutes "active subjects" who are called to silently carry out their "scared orders", an extermination of those who have been desubjectified, precisely to the extent that they have been stripped of their voice such that they can be declared "subhuman" and thus eligible for elimination. There is nothing to say precisely as expression is mobilised and set against its own power. There is nothing to say precisely because this discourse attacks the given terms of language. With a form that is "not anything that is readily dismissible as pure alterity", it "deploys the linguistic structures from the most exalted reaches of human poetry and spirituality" and draws from "the ordinary furnishings of our institutional, intellectual, and aesthetic lives" such that a "language of responsibility" becomes the basis of an extermination that denies and endeavors to negate the response-ability of language.[22]

What remains is the question of the unspeakable. What cannot (not) be said in the aftermath? This question is a fault-line – choose a side on which to stand or fall into the abyss.[23] For Haidu, as the "process of extermination" to some extent "resulted from the language of silence on which Himmler insisted and which he and Hitler practiced", the unspeakable is a discursive construction. It was "argued by Himmler". It constituted a discourse, one that developed from a genealogy of value in which we are implicated.[24] In this light, Haidu contends, the question of the unspeakable constitutes a call for inquiry into the "sequential linkage between the speech of silence and the Event", an inquiry that neither permits the erasure of "the narrative that history performs with the silences of its agents upon the bodies of its victims" nor endeavors to "redeem the dead by asserting their death possessed and inherent redemptive significance".[25] Both within and beyond the problem of the Shoah's uniqueness, its (in)comprehensibility and its (in)comparability, the appeal for words that might support, enact, and secure transitional justice is potentially unjustifiable, an argument for speaking that can neither account for its own words nor give an account of what violence and atrocity have done *to* language *with* language, the ways in which violence renders language to its purpose and the ways in which this erases, distorts, and short-circuits (its) expression. In this light, Haidu's account has heuristic value precisely as it suggests that the aftermath, the beginning of transition, is a

[21] Peter Haidu, "The dialectics of unspeakability: Language, silence and the narratives of desubjectification", in Saul Friedlander (ed.), *Probing the limits of representation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992): 278.
[22] Haidu, "Dialectics", 292.
[23] For one example of this deep fault line see J.M. Bernstein, "Bare life, bearing witness: Auschwitz and the pornography of horror", *Parallax* 10, 1, (2004): 2-16
[24] Haidu, "Dialectics", 294.
[25] Haidu, "Dialectics", 294, 296.

moment in which the assumption of language in the name of breaking silence begs the question at hand precisely as there may be no ready-made language to assume. What's more, as George Steiner has put it, such an assumption may mimic the logic that it seeks to oppose to the extent that it conceives language as little more than a machine:

> The world of Auschwitz lies outside speech as it lies outside reason. To speak of the *unspeakable* is to risk the survivance of language as creator and bearer of humane, rational truth. Words that are saturated with lies or atrocity do not easily resume life.[26]

In the midst of the dehumanisation that defines the aftermath, the word does not stand at the ready, a tool that can pry open the past or turn the levers of transformation. Who can speak? Who is eligible to speak? What does and does not admit to words? The opening of transition holds a question of language, a question of language as such – its condition, its ability to be claimed, its ability to support the (ex)change that it has potentially served to corrupt. A great deal of concern has been shown for whether and how individual victims of atrocity can best reach toward language and bear witness. This work, undertaken primarily within the registers of psychoanalysis, is altogether important even as it may not be close to enough, at least insofar as the promise of transitional justice is hinged to a "coming to terms" that promises to transform the terrain of communal, public, cultural, and national life. Recalling Adorno once more, the task at hand may begin only in a concession, an admission that language constitutes a "hollow space", a space unduly and prematurely filled in the rush for normalcy with words that lack for referents, with struggle slogans that no longer reflect the times, with sentiments of a general mood that simply (re)inscribe official taboos, with historical discourses that distort the concept of factuality, with commonplaces that conceal their corruption.[27] The task is made all the more difficult by the desire for action, a "cult of action" that races to redress the wounds "on the ground" without pausing to consider that this ground is precisely what remains in question.

All together: a profound and deep double bind, though it may in fact be triple. In confronting the dehumanisation that echoes from the criminal past, transitional justice struggles to (re)turn language, the very thing that has for so long defined the meaning of what it means to be human, a capacity to speak which, when assumed – attributed and taken for granted – renders language into an instrument, a tool that amounts to both the degradation of language itself and the possibility of violence that turns the human condition against itself. The need for language and its relinquishment must then be thought in the same breath, a moment in which the losses inflicted by the word turned violent touch the terror of being without words. And in all of this, the third thread of the bind, the onset of transition set out in the name of justice amounts to a struggle to reconcile (a concept that is not and cannot be a synonym for forgiveness) the tension between the presumption that talk is so much dangerous

---

[26] George Steiner, "K", in *Language and silence: Essays on language, literature, and the inhuman* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998): 123. For a contrasting view, see Naomi Mandel, *Against the unspeakable: Complicity, the holocaust, and slavery in America,* (Richmond: University of Virginia Press, 2007).

[27] Adorno, "Working through the past", 91-95.

(in)action and the call of a rhetorical creativity that exceeds the rule of (its) law. For now, in the midst of transition given to dealing with the criminal past, it will not do to proclaim the necessity of speech while refusing to reflect on the creative potential of talk about the potential of talk. Such a gesture is not simply disingenuous. It is a form of thought riddled with the echo of barbarism.

Erik Doxtader is professor of rhetoric in the Department of English, University of South Carolina; and Senior Fellow at the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation. He is a former Honorary Associate of the Centre for Rhetoric Studies, University of Cape Town.

This article first appeared in AYOR Volume 6.1

Statecraft and sovereignty in Mohammed V of Morocco's Tangiers Speech (1947)

Abdelhai Azarkan

> *Any speech which is mere rhetoric is stillborn. Of all the speeches to have survived, not a single one has not been an act, therefore one cannot but weigh up the act against the word.* [1]
>
> — *Joseph Reinach*

In this article, we analyse the speech delivered in Tangier on Thursday 10 April 1947 by His Majesty the late Mohammed V. The essential objective of the speech was to develop one key idea and it is this idea which, in our view, renders the speech historic. The speech is generally alluded to when illustrating the King's courage and determination to proclaim his country's independence, as well as to recall the major error of judgment by the French State in exiling the Sultan after he made the speech.

While sharing in this conviction, I wish to revisit the contents of the speech with a view to determining its true originality and real strength at the political level. It undoubtedly constitutes a demand, addressing as it does the country's need for independence, but what I should like to dwell on in particular are his views on the transformation of the Moroccan State.

In the Tangier speech, the King manifests his determination to gain independence for his country, despite the actual word 'independence' not being mentioned. But what needs to be noted in particular is the sovereign's post-independence political agenda, namely the type of sovereignty to be re-established and the type of State to be rebuilt.

The idea which we attempt to develop through a brief reading of this speech revolves around the transformation after independence of the Alaouite monarchy — the royal institution — by Mohammed V, that is to say the transformation of the modern Moroccan State by, and within the context of, the Alaouite dynasty.

We believe that a reading of the Tangier speech not only affords us insight into aspects of the past but also, and more importantly, a clearer understanding of the nature of present-day Moroccan politics. King Mohammed V, scrupulously respecting theoretical and practical rhetorical principles, begins by outlining the nature of the monarchy and the government in an independent Morocco. Unlike the political

[1] For this text see Philippe-Joseph Salazar, *L'art de parler, Anthologie des manuels d'éloquence* (Paris: Klincksieck, Cadratin Series, 2003): 302.

© *African Yearbook of Rhetoric* 10, 2020, Online ISSN 2305-7785:
Abdelhai Azarkan, "Statecraft and sovereignty in Mohammed V of Morocco's Tangiers Speech (1947)", pp. 31-38.

movements calling for independence at the time, both in the Arab world (including within Morocco itself) and on the African continent, the King of Morocco is not satisfied with simply trying to attain that first step, *viz.* national sovereignty, but also envisages the nature of the government to be constituted. The royal speech of Tangier informs us that these two political acts go hand in hand and, once achieved, would result in the restoration of that continuity which had been interrupted by the protectorate period. The purpose of independence is very clearly determined: to restore, first of all, the power solidly in place before the arrival of the French and the Spanish, and secondly, the political system of that former power.

At the time of the speech, two fundamental elements constituted a hindrance to the King's sovereignty: the effective presence in the country of two foreign forces, and the rise of a national political movement drawing legitimacy from its call for the country's independence.[2] Attaining independence thus became an imperative first step for the monarchy, if it were to embrace the first political rule corresponding to its very nature, namely, to be sovereign. Throughout history, the principle underpinning any traditional monarchy has been that the representative of the people is One, and this principle is summed up very well by one of the great founders of modern political thought, Thomas Hobbes, who writes as follows:

> That king whose power is limited is not superior to him or them that have the power to limit it; and he that is not superior is not supreme, that is to say, not sovereign. The sovereignty therefore was always in that assembly which had the right to limit him.[3]

So this, then, is Mohammed V's first objective: to affirm his supremacy over any other existing force in the country as a means not of claiming his sovereignty but rather of exercising it.

This is followed by the second step to be taken, that of asserting such sovereignty as would ensure continuity in the nature of the Moroccan monarchy, in other words a monarchy in step with Islamic political thinking and practice. The King of Morocco's legitimacy derives from his Sharifian ancestry; he is the representative of divine law and therefore the leader of the believers. Thus sovereignty covers the various aspects of social life, so that subjects submit to no other force or recognise no other commands save for those emanating from their Sovereign. Gratitude and submission are the key words characterising the relationship of the subjects to the sovereign, thanks to — or because of — the religious dimension.

As we shall see when we begin analysing the speech, the transformation of sovereignty requires total clarity in respect of the relationship between the king and his subjects: it must be vertical and in one direction only. This single direction, moreover, denotes the clear difference and removes any confusion between this sovereignty, based on religion

---

[2] We refer to the Istiqlal Party (meaning "independence" in Arabic), whose leaders had signed and presented to the French occupiers on 11 January 1943 (declared a public holiday some years ago) a manifesto calling for independence.

[3] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan,* 98 (Toronto: Broadview Literary Texts, 2002).

and therefore classic, and a sovereignty which is based on reason and referred to as modern. In the first instance, the subjects, not having entrusted their rights to the governing party, are not, to use Hobbes' term, the ones who brought about their relationship with the governing party. Just as the latter is not, to use the same philosopher's expression, a mere player, in other words their representative. The sovereign speaks and acts in order to apply The Book as revealed by God through His Prophet, from whom he descends, and not to ensure rights entrusted to him by men who are his equals. The sovereign is not someone entrusted with common and public power but rather, as stated in the much-used Arabic expression, "the protector of belief and religion", the one responsible for a divine mission, having divine power.

Before moving on to the main ideas in the speech, what needs to be stressed is that Mohammed V is addressing the people of Tangier and, through them, all Moroccan people, as a true Sovereign, the only Sovereign, one who fully exercises his powers and carries out his duties and programmes; in other words, he addresses them as a Sovereign governing his people throughout the entire country. Nowhere in the speech is mention made of the terms independence, protectorate, colonisation, foreign forces, nationalist forces, resistance forces or national political parties. Throughout the speech, there is reference to what the Sovereign is doing, what he plans to do for his nation and his subjects, and what the latter will have to do for their country and for their Sovereign. It was undoubtedly this announcement of the exercise of total sovereignty, inseparable from the act of governing the whole country and all its subjects, which enraged the French colonial forces and drove them to make the choice of exiling the Sovereign.

To us it would seem that it was on this day of the Tangier speech, 10 April, that a fundamental practice saw the light of day in the act of governing, on the eve of independence and after independence, by the Moroccan monarchy, a practice which, one could state, became an integral part of the rules of the political game.

We consider that the main strength of the Moroccan monarchy, once it was restored after independence and to which Mohammed V alludes in this speech, is its assimilation of the political game rules, essentially those concerning the exercise of power in terms of the modern notion of power. To speak of modernity in relation to the Moroccan monarchy at a political level means, in actual fact, to understand that institution in terms of a modern notion of political power, to understand how it adopted that notion in order to exercise better control over the Islamic theory of this phenomenon and to continue applying it by adapting it to the times. For the monarchical institution, if I may so say, it was a question of incorporating the essential elements of Muslim tradition into political practice, while revising and adapting them in accordance with certain aspects of modern political thinking and activity. This has become one of its fundamental features distinguishing it from other purely traditional Arab monarchies as well as completely modern Western monarchies.

Let us move on to the main ideas expressed in the royal Tangier speech. In his exordium, the sovereign recalls the first principle of the Muslim religion on which the community (or collective) is based: the belief in Allah, the true and only God. Islam is a religion which governs the behaviour of the faithful within society, the foundation of the social fabric; it is, if you like, a religion which has as its main objective to provide a foundation for the community. This objective must, however, be underpinned by convictions held by all members of the community, thereby serving as the guarantor and guide for any action taken within the social context. A Muslim community demands that every member believe, firstly, in Allah, the only and true God, and secondly, that he or she should apply the law dictated by the sacred book, the Koran.

> The believer distinguishes himself amongst the members of humanity by the perfection of his belief, the quietude of his conscience and the fact that he trusts his God, in his activities as in his repose, in his joys as in the misfortunes of life… Thus we move into action only after firmly establishing the belief that we are truly one of Allah's faithful creatures.[4]

Having stressed the obligation of the Muslim believer to respect this first ethical principle, the King moves to the second section which, in terms of the rhetorical language of narration and argumentation, one may call a description of the situation of Morocco, of the Arab nation and of the Muslim community in general. Here he sets out his main initiatives to date as well as those required in future to ensure his subjects' well-being. He moves, in brief, from a description of the social, religious and political situation of his believer subjects, emphasising his commitment at government level to ensure the fundamental values dictated by Islam of peace, dignity and prosperity, to describing the emancipation and progress of the subjects and the nation.

The political element constituting the main thrust of this section is the distinction made by the King between two periods in Moroccan history, namely the period before his reign and that of his reign, the period of regression and that of construction. It must, however, be pointed out that no link is made in the speech between the first period and the presence in the country of foreign forces, nor is there any reference to colonialism. It is his audience's passion which the Sovereign is addressing with a view to rekindling their religious, cultural and nationalistic sentiments, so that these sentiments become both the cause of the citizens' misfortunes and the source of their salvation. The attitude of the colonisers, or protectors, is thereby neutralised because, *vis-à-vis* the people, he attributes no role to the foreign forces, while, *vis-à-vis* the foreign forces, no responsibility is attributed to them — whence the lack of any justification on their part to resort to any form of sanction.

---

[4] Mohammed V, Tangier speech of 10 April 1947, "The Historic Voyage of the Sultan Martyr Mohammed V to the city of Tangier", Mhand El Bajlaji (Tangiers, Club de Tanger Ibn Batouta, Mhand El Bajlaji, 1997). This quotation we translated ourselves, whereas, for those which follow, we relied on the translation done and published by the Association for the Promotion of Tangier, copyright deposit 1988. For purely technical reasons we were unfortunately unable to consult the official translation. The Tangiers speech is available in *The great speeches of Africa's liberation*, *African Yearbook of Rhetoric* 2, 3 (2011): 19-25 — which is the first English translation (by Mohamed Shahid Mathee, introduced by Ph.-J. Salazar).

What then are the reasons for the misfortunes of Muslims (and not only Moroccans) and the cause of the catastrophes that have befallen them? According to the royal speech, the Muslim community previously possessed scientific knowledge, which had abandoned it in favour of ignorance; it had chosen justice but had deviated from this path, so that justice had given way to injustice; it used to be known for its charity but greed had got the upper hand over all generous behaviour; throughout its history it had enjoyed unity and cohesion, yet disunity had become the order of the day, separating not only the Maghreb from the Mashrek but also giving way to a split within a single country, to the extent that the individual had become a stranger to his true brother. Thus, concludes the Sovereign, "we have become alienated from our sacred rights due to our ignorance, and the unity of our country is torn apart because of the mistakes we have made in this regard".

If, however, a certain degree of fatalism was to blame for this unfortunate situation, the Divine Will had shown mercy on the country. "Providence", states the King, "has fortunately inspired us in the indulgence of its mercy and guided us along the right path of salvation by elevating us to the dignity of Sovereign of this country". As a sovereign elected by God, the King was determined to assume his duty and accomplish his mission:

> We have deployed all our means to redress our mistakes and remedy our misfortunes. We have endeavoured to point out the means of attaining present and future happiness, without ever deviating from the principles of our religion, which has brought together the hearts of all Moslems and made them to beat in unison; which has pushed the Arab and Muslim peoples to assist one another, so that the basis of this league, which has strengthened the ties amongst all Arabs wherever they might be, has finally enabled their Kings and leaders, both in the East and the West, to unify their paths and march towards moral progress, the greatness of Islam, and Arab glory.

And finally, the King relies on a fundamental rhetorical procedure to lay a firm foundation for the new era of the Alaouite monarchy, which is the method known as analogy. The sovereign speaks of the period of obscurantism and darkness characterised by ignorance, injustice, greed and disunity, following which the Divine Will intervened to elect the man who would save them, and thanks to whom all this would be reversed. Thus, in irreversible fashion, would begin the future period of light, knowledge and justice, of benevolence and unity. Here the clear reference is to the transformation of the Arab-Muslim community, alluding to the beginning of the community's foundation with the coming of the prophet Sidna Mohammed.[5] In the

[5] The Moroccan monarchy thus assimilates a fundamental principle pertaining to the foundation of a community, that of considering it as sacred, something which is, in fact, not specific to the Islamic tradition. Hannah Arendt mentions this in relation to the Romans: "At the heart of Roman politics", she writes, "from the beginning of the republic until virtually the end of the Imperial era, stands the conviction of the sacredness of foundations, in the sense that once something had been founded, it remains binding for all future generations. To be engaged in politics meant first and foremost to preserve the foundation of the city of Rome": Hannah Arendt, *Between past and future* (New York: The Viking Press, 1961): 21. (See too pg. 121 on the religious dimension of this sacred foundation). We should add that, in order for the founding of a community to be endowed with a sacred character, the king must

history of the Muslim community, the demarcation between the periods before and after the revelation of the Holy Koran is made in terms identical to those used by the sovereign.

This analogy is acceptable in religious terms because it is made by a King of Sharifian descent, whose ancestry goes back to the Prophet himself. Politically, it is relevant because it glosses over the whole Protectorate period, thus avoiding any allusion to responsibility, either of the Kings who preceded him to the throne or of the foreign colonial forces.[6] The analogy is also relevant because, as pointed out earlier, it furthermore brushes aside all local movements claiming in any way to represent the Moroccan people, whether they be purely political movements, resistance movements, or both.

Moving on to the second part of this section devoted to narration and argumentation, which in itself is very closely related to the analogy just mentioned, the late Mohammed V, not satisfied with confirming his status as the supreme guide, also and especially wishes to emphasise the exercise of that which his calling as Sovereign confers on him, namely power and government. The King, placing himself in the present, describes his manner of governing, enumerates the various construction works in which he has invested, mentions the projects he has completed and speaks of those he still intends undertaking.

In this context, Islam once again remains the fundamental reference, whether implicitly or explicitly. It is through its teaching that the Sovereign begins to list his accomplishments:

> Being convinced that those means which contributed to the progress of our glorious Ancestors represent the only way for our people to progress, we aim to expand the teaching of subjects taught formerly and also introduce new ones, the former to light up the soul with the light of faith and the torch of morality, the latter to facilitate progress and acquire the wherewithal to fight for a living… Schools are established for young Moroccans to be taught the tenets of virtue, and fortunately we are seeing the breaking dawn of an encouraging success.

What is the relationship between schooling and Islam? Firstly, it is through schooling that one passes from darkness to light, from ignorance to knowledge, and it must also not be forgotten that, in the Islamic imagination, any reform, any renewal, any improvement in behaviour or a situation, either individual or social, depends on writing and reading. In such instances, it is difficult for any Muslim not to recall the first

---

pronounce himself to be a descendant of the Prophet; in the case of fundamentalist movements, they must endeavour to reproduce the type of government practised by the four khalifes who succeeded the Prophet; while for the Shiites, they must bestow some form of continuity on the reign of the fourth Khalife, Ali Ibn Abi Talib, the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet.

[6] Let us not forget that historians speak of the weakness of the Kings reigning from the beginning of the 1912 Protectorate up until Mohammed V's accession to the throne. Others go so far as to recall that those Kings gave their backing to the French and Spanish colonisers' repression of resistance movements in both the North and South of Morocco. The only King to whom Mohammed V refers in his speech is Hassan I, who reigned long before the Protectorate, and whose reign he refers to as being that of a great King of Morocco of the Alaouite dynasty.

verse of the Holy Koran received by the Prophet: Ikrae, which means Read (imperative form of the verb to read). Neither should we forget the importance of the Madaris (plural of Madrassa, meaning school) throughout the history of the Arab-Muslim civilisation, both in the East and in the West.

From teaching, the Sovereign moves to other areas where his government needs to intervene:

> Through His divine grace and the effect of His goodness, we are guarding the integrity of the country, we are working to guarantee a brilliant and glorious future, and we are moving towards the attainment of this hope, which will bring new life to the heart of every Moroccan… We have travelled everywhere in order to give our full attention to all the regions of Morocco and attend to the fulfilment of their needs.

Finally, following a description of the exercising of government activities, the sovereign raises that of power. Here again, the King speaks of his present achievements and his future projects. What does the exercise of power entail? It means appointing his representatives across the various regions of the country, determining their prerogatives and, in the final instance, defining the nature of the relationship between the King and his people.

The King enjoins all his representatives in the various regions of the Kingdom to work in the general interest of the Moroccan people:

> In absolute devotion to the Sharifian Throne which, for centuries, has ensured the unity of the people, the integrity of the Empire and the happiness of its inhabitants of all categories. Given these considerations, we exhort all delegates, pashas, local governors, *cadis*[7] and civil servants of every rank whom we honour with our trust and in whom we place all our hope, to observe properly this imperious national duty.

Representation is always in a vertical direction and it is granted by the Sovereign so that social projects and projects in the general interest may be carried out in his name. All power to act in the service of the people and the nation is power emanating from the King and granted by him. Power is not divisible, neither at its source nor at its destination. Any progress which the country may experience in future must incorporate this constant element: that being invested with any power whatsoever and exercising that power may only take place and be carried out through the power emanating from the Sovereign, just as it may represent no source or force other than that of the Sovereign.

Thus the relation of the people to the Sovereign is one of submission, and the consent of the people in respect of their sovereign is expressed exclusively through allegiance. One does not transmit one's rights to the King for him to take care of them; rather one shows respect and gratitude to the sacred person of the King. Regarding the transmission of rights, the logic pertaining here is that of a contract to be respected by the person to whom those rights have been transmitted, since his person represents the contracting parties as a whole. In the second case, on the other hand, the logic is that of

[7] *Cadi* is the Arabic term for a magistrate.

a prayer for the Sovereign to be guided, protected and helped by the One he represents, the Supreme Creator Allah.

In our view, this is the salient line in the speech made by King Mohammed V in Tangiers and the reason for it being called historic. It redefines the nature of monarchical power in Morocco, for his own reign but also for the future of the monarchy. He chooses an Islamic conception of power, or at least the most widely spread interpretation of Islam throughout the history of the Arab world, as much on a practical level as on the level of the imagination. According to this interpretation, a king is on the throne to reign, but to reign essentially means to govern. We would almost want to say that it is precisely because a king must govern that he must also be sovereign. Sovereignty is necessary in order to meet the demands and prerequisites of government. It is around this relationship between sovereignty and government that the game is played out by existing political forces, while casting a favourable eye on the democratic spirit.

(Translated by Bas Angelis)

Abdelhai Azarkan is a Moroccan philosopher, professor of philosophy (ethics and politics) at the Mohamed V University in Rabat, Morocco. He is a former Honorary Associate of the Centre for Rhetoric Studies.

This article first appeared in AYOR Volume 4.1

Forgetting responsibility: Hannah Arendt and the work of (undoing) psychic resistance post-apartheid

Sergio Alloggio & Kylie Thomas

> *It's not that I forgot. It's just that I don't care.*[1]
>
> *The critical writing of history is a continuous struggle to liberate the past from within the unconscious of a collective that forgets the conditions of its own existence.*[2]

This paper engages with some of the writings of Hannah Arendt in order to draw a political parallel between the complex nexus of responsibility, judgement and sociality in post-war Germany and post-apartheid South Africa. In her writings on post-war Germany Arendt described the failure on the part of the German public to recognise and respond to what she terms "the horror" of Nazism.[3] In her report on the aftermath of war, written on her return to Germany from the United States in 1949, Arendt recounts how she found "an inability to feel", "absence of mourning for the dead" and a "general lack of emotion"[4] in those she encountered in Germany at that time. In this paper we connect her insights on post-war Germany to her later work on the difficulties of judging; this allows us to cast light on the problem of the evasion of responsibility in contemporary South Africa. Read in conjunction with some of the concepts developed by Sigmund Freud, Arendt's later work helps us to open up the trans-generational trauma of apartheid and to approach the redoubled form of repression that, we argue, characterises the post-apartheid condition. We employ psychoanalysis not as a therapeutics but as a means for approaching questions about the constitutive relation between the psychic and the political, drawing in particular on Freud's theorisations of the meanings of symptoms, repression, resistance and memory. In conclusion, via Theodor Adorno's essay "The meaning of working through the past"[5] we advocate for a post-apartheid pedagogy that seeks to unearth the problem of responsibility from the sinking sands of reconciled national history.

The post-apartheid state recognised the intensive economic and social restructuring necessary to positively transform South African society and in 1994 the new ANC-led government launched the Reconstruction and Development Plan.

---

[1] Comment printed on the t-shirt of a white student at the University of Cape Town, South Africa.
[2] Susan Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti and universal history* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009): 85.
[3] Hannah Arendt, *Responsibility and judgment* (New York: Schocken Books, 2003): 2 - 3.
[4] Arendt, *Responsibility and judgment*, 249.
[5] Theodor W. Adorno, *Can one live after Auschwitz? A philosophical reader,* Rolf Tiedemann (Ed.) (San Francisco, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003).

© *African Yearbook of Rhetoric* 10, 2020, Online ISSN 2305-7785:
Sergio Alloggio and Kyle Thomas, "Forgetting responsibility: Hannah Arendt and the work of (undoing) psychic resistance post-apartheid", p. 39-46.

Addressing the psychic effects of apartheid and finding the truth about the history of the country was also acknowledged as essential to the so-called "peaceful transition to democracy". The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) hearings that took place in South Africa between 1996 and 1999 opened a space for both victims and perpetrators to testify to their experiences under apartheid. The TRC was a site through which the wounds of the national body were made public; a *temporary* arena of witnessing that made visible the damage of a nearly fifty-year political configuration. The symptoms that were made visible at the hearings were, however, for the most part, signs that South Africans failed to diagnose or to read in any depth, nor did they attend to them in ways that would allow for recognition of the *on-going* nature of the trauma of apartheid. In the post-apartheid present a form of selective national amnesia has taken hold, both through the propagation of reified forms of national history and as a result of the exigencies of the present. As numerous scholars have noted, the TRC was a symbolic process, only the start of the material work required to alter the society for the better[6]. But more than a decade after the end of the TRC hearings, the unbearable psycho-political legacy of apartheid remains. Ongoing violence, poverty, the chasm between rich and poor, the persistence of racism and the still largely segregated social worlds of South Africans make it increasingly clear that this legacy will not simply disappear over time. Focusing on the powerful forms of psycho-political resistance that characterise life in post-apartheid South Africa, and drawing on Arendt, Freud, and Adorno, we argue for the importance of critical responsibility for the emergence of alternative forms of post-apartheid subjectivity.

For a South African psycho-political: Arendt *and* Freud

In the 1930s Arendt was a student of two of the most important philosophers in Germany — Martin Heidegger and Karl Jaspers. In 1929 she submitted her doctoral dissertation on Augustine's concept of love, but her promising career as an academic in Germany, like that of many other Jewish scholars, was swiftly brought to an end by the rise of Nazism. The events of the war and its aftermath inaugurated a radical shift in Arendt's political philosophy. From 1941 Arendt lived and worked in the United States and in 1963, with the publication of *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, Arendt's name became synonymous with a powerful critique of the unexamined inner workings and consequences of Nazism and their effects on everyday life. Through her impassioned account of the Eichmann trial, at which she was present as a journalist, and in her subsequent analysis of Eichmann's testimony, Arendt provides insight into how Nazi officials saw themselves as 'moral agents'. In this way Arendt began to engage with what was to become her life's work — thinking the problems of judgement and responsibility within the horizon of totalitarian monstrosity and its aftermath. For

[6] See for instance the work of Erik Doxtader, Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, Chabani Manganyi, Fiona Ross and Joseph-Philippe Salazar.

Arendt, the scale and depth of the historically unprecedented events of post-Weimar Germany created an abyss in understanding and rendered all prior systems of knowledge useless:

> "We had to learn everything from scratch, in the raw, as it were — that is, without the help of categories and general rules under which to subsume our experiences… The more these things are discussed, the clearer it becomes, I think, that we actually find ourselves here in a position between the devil and the deep sea."[7]

However, Arendt also points out that this abyss in understanding extends to a time prior to these events and prefigures them. It is as if, in Arendt, we can perceive a subcutaneous passivity in the political body that is retroactively dated and that provides us with a way to begin to fathom the origins of totalitarianism. For her, "Without taking into account the almost universal breakdown, not of personal responsibility, but of personal *judgement* in the early stages of the Nazi regime, it is impossible to understand what actually happened".[8] It is important to emphasize that Arendt is not simply talking about an *inability* to judge — she is unequivocal in her dismissal of the 'cog-theory' as a mode of explanation for the institutional functioning of Nazism.[9] On the contrary, there are two instances in Arendt's analysis that seek to fundamentally contest those understandings of the rise of Nazism within which questions of agency, critical thinking and responsibility are suspended. The first is to be found in a fascinating passage in her article entitled "Personal responsibility under dictatorship" in which she responds to those who have reacted against her claiming the right to pass judgement on moral and political issues and on those who were complicit in Nazism by noting "how uncomfortable most of us are when confronted by moral issues".[10] She also draws attention to her own discomfort in occupying the seat of judgement and goes on to relate why this should be so:

> "My early intellectual formation occurred in an atmosphere where nobody paid much attention to moral questions… To be sure, every once in a while we were confronted with moral weakness, with lack of steadfastness or loyalty, with this curious, almost automatic yielding under pressure, especially of public opinion, which is so symptomatic of the educated strata of certain societies, but we had no idea how serious such things were and least of all where they could lead. We did not know much about the nature of these phenomena, and I am afraid we cared even less. Well, it turned out that we would be given ample opportunity to learn."[11]

Arendt notes the deeply entrenched suspension of critical thinking within Germany prior to the war and for her the absence of personal and public spaces of deliberation is intimately bound to the disintegration of the very precondition for what would be considered a just social life. In her final, unfinished volume, *The life of the mind*, she compares those who fail to think to "sleepwalkers" and describes thinking as that

---

[7] Arendt, *Responsibility and judgment*, 25
[8] *Ibid.* 24.
[9] *Ibid*. 29 - 30.
[10] *Ibid*. 22.
[11] *Ibid*. 22 - 3.

which "rouses you from sleep".[12] It is clear that for her, thinking is a conscious process inextricably bound to political understanding that results in judging that proceeds outside and beyond any form of pre-ordained morality. In her reading of SS official Adolf Eichmann's decision to blindly follow the dictates of the Nazi regime, what he, at his trial described as *Kadavergehorsam*, Arendt points to how, in ceasing to think, Eichmann willingly gave up what for her would constitute his humanness.[13]

The second instance in which Arendt's account undermines a linear explanation of the 'total collapse' of morality is her well-known analogy between the changing of morality/*mores* and "the changing of clothes".[14] In this conception morality is understood to be a set of superficial and replaceable norms and values that are disconnected from any kind of critical responsibility. As Arendt's work shows, such forms of 'morality' make possible and legitimate the most inhumane violence. Within such 'moral' rhetoric Auschwitz is made a 'medical matter', and the murder of anti-apartheid activists like Steve Biko and Siphiwo Mthimkulu is termed "elimination".[15] In the end, for Arendt the only antidote to this collective breakdown in moral thinking lies not in:

> a.) "highly developed intelligence or sophistication in moral matters, but rather the disposition to live together explicitly with oneself, to have intercourse with oneself, that is, to be engaged in that silent dialogue between me and myself which, since Socrates and Plato we usually call thinking."[16]

Arendt goes on to explain that such forms of reasoning are not limited to professional thinkers but may be achieved by anyone, who, in spite of external circumstances, makes use of critical reasoning to "examine things and to make up their own minds".[17] In *The life of the mind*, Arendt returns to the question of the conditions under which it became "no more difficult to change the mores and habits of a people than it would to change their table manners".[18] She observes that the reversal of "the basic commandments of Western morality" under Nazism should not be thought apart from its "sequel — the reversal of the reversal, the fact that it was so surprisingly easy "to re-educate" the Germans after the collapse of the Third Reich, so easy indeed that it was as though re-education was automatic — should not console us either. It was actually the same phenomenon".[19]

---

[12] Hannah Arendt, *The life of the mind, 1: Thinking* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978): 191, 178.

[13] See José Brunner's "Eichmann, Arendt and Freud in Jerusalem: On the evils of narcissism and the pleasures of thoughtlessness" in *History and memory* 8, 2 (1996): 61 – 88, for a psychoanalytic reading of Eichmann's character as described in Arendt's book, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*.

[14] Arendt, *Responsibility and judgment*, 43.

[15] See the testimony of South African Security Policeman Gideon Johannes Nieuwoudt delivered at the TRC and also in Mark Kaplan's film *Between Joyce and remembrance*.

[16] Arendt, *Responsibility and judgment*, 44 - 5.

[17] *Ibid*. 45.

[18] Arendt, *The life of the mind,* 177.

[19] *Ibid*. 178.

In what we read as Arendt's philosophy (although of course, she famously resisted such labelling), thinking can only take place after a 'withdrawal' that allows consciousness to begin that 'silent dialogue' that the self conducts with the self. In *The life of the mind*, Arendt explicitly focuses on mental activities without borrowing from the lexicon of psychoanalysis.[20] She refuses to read inner life as determined by unconscious drives, and instead resolutely insists on the possibility of describing the workings of "Thinking, willing and judging"[21] without recourse to psychoanalytic terms or concepts.[22] *The life of the mind*, like Arendt's other works, employs an approach to the study of complex matters such as memory, imagination, will, and the relation between inner and outer life that remains faithful to "protocols of transparency, scenarios of operationality".[23] There is simply no space in her reflections for repression, latent content, sublimation, or the multiple ways in which traumatic experience affects psychic life. The inner life of the Arendtian subject proceeds through the 'silent dialogue' between the part of myself that raises questions and the part that seeks to answer them. This inner dialogical arena is the locus of the struggle that takes place as I strive to be in agreement with myself. This "duality of the two in one" is for Arendt a critical component of any ethical being.[24] For her the accordance of my inner selves is the precondition for living *first* with myself and then with others.[25] The two inner actors of the "soundless dialogue" are characterised by a thoroughgoing rationality, and in this way Arendt's "two in one" theory dispenses with the productive elements of psychoanalytic thinking rather too swiftly.

Recognising what we read as a reductive aspect of her otherwise insightful analysis, in this paper we draw on the writings of Freud *alongside* Arendt in order to think about psychic repression during and after apartheid. The writings of Freud help us to recognise the burden of history and its weight on both the individual psyche and within the social body as a whole. However, just as Arendt refuses the unconscious psychic dimension of the political, Freud does not take into account the political construction of the inner geography of the subject.[26] Our intention in positioning Arendt

---

[20] In *Without alibi* (San Francisco, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002): 57, Jacques Derrida points out that "the work of Hannah Arendt signals but… never deploys" what he terms "a symptomatology of the unconscious". See also his remarks on Arendt's studious avoidance of psychoanalysis: *Ibid.* 67.

[21] Derrida, *Without alibi,* 67.

[22] See, for instance, *The life of the mind*, 113, for Arendt's resistance to psychoanalysis.

[23] We draw this phrase from Jean-François Lyotard *The inhuman* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992): 201.

[24] Arendt, *Responsibility and judgment*, 187.

[25] There is a way in which the TRC process can be understood as having operated in exactly the opposite way — by calling for an external reconciliation between perpetrators and victims without first confronting the multiple forms of psycho-political resistance that would make such reconciliation not only possible but meaningful.

[26] For a critique of Freud's own blindness to his own historical moment and the racist, sexist, hetero-normative presuppositions at work in order to produce the dream of psychoanalysis as science, see for instance Luce Irigaray's *To speak is never neutral* (London: Routledge, 2002), Derrida, in *Without alibi*, 272; also addresses some of the deadlocks in Freud's attempts to think the psycho-political and draws

alongside Freud is to show how the political is informed by the unconscious and how the unconscious is in itself a political construct. In the section that follows we ask: what are the psychic effects of the vast biopolitical experiment called apartheid? How has this affected the ability of South Africans, both black and white, to judge their past? How might fusing the work of Freud and Arendt offer a way to think the fallout of apartheid differently? What kind of political subject might be imagined into being if we refuse the routine division of the psychic and the political?

Repression²: States of Emergency

In 1900 Freud published *The interpretation of dreams* and in 1901, *Psychopathology of everyday life*. In these works Freud began his reading of dreams as the projection of unconscious desires and inaugurated a new 'science': psychoanalysis, a form of 'therapy' that "does its work by transforming something unconscious into something conscious".[27] As Freud has taught us, the psyche is a site of permanent conflict between different instances, two connected but at the same time heterogeneous realms — the conscious and the unconscious. In the unconscious, space and time are unfixed and follow neither a linear chronology nor causal dynamics. In the unconscious, cause and effect are not the primary laws: time, space and causality succumb to the living fabric of pleasure, pain and emotional life.

According to Freud, insistent desires, whose content the individual feels she or he must repress, will often find alternative paths towards satisfaction and therefore manifest themselves as symptoms. He defines a symptom in the following way, "A symptom is a sign of, and a substitute for, an instinctual satisfaction which has remained in abeyance. It is a consequence of the process of repression".[28] For him, symptoms are signs that the subject cannot read themselves but that the work of psychoanalysis renders legible, and ultimately cures. Freud's psychoanalysis operates through its (his) desire for the conservative normalisation of the patient and in his formulation of the ineradicable presence of evil within any collectivity. His theorisations allow no place for a positive plurality — from his claims about the primordial origins of the human psyche to the dysfunctions of metropolitan life, the possibilities for radical agency are at their best deferred and, at worst, practically negated.[29] For Freud when the psychoanalytic process is successful it is able to produce

---

attention to how Freud's general pessimism finds its cure in a "dictatorship of reason". "The ideal, Freud then says, and he even speaks at this point of utopia, would be a community in which freedom consisted in submitting the life of the drives to a 'dictatorship of reason (*Diktatur der Vernunft*)'".

[27] Sigmund Freud, *Introductory lectures on Psycho-analysis* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1922): 237.

[28] Sigmund Freud, *Inhibitions, symptoms and anxiety* (Toronto: Hogarth, 1959): 91.

[29] For Freud's applications of psychoanalysis to the study of society see *Totem and taboo, timely reflections on war and death* (London: Moffat, Yard and Company, 1918) and *Group psychology and the analysis of the ego* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1922). For a radical account of the political possibilities of

subjects who are at peace with themselves and also at peace with others. Thus, the desire of Freud's psychoanalytic thinking and of Arendt's political philosophy is a similar one: to formulate a way for subjects to live with themselves, which will also affect, necessarily, their conduct within the collective. However, the peace that Arendt argues will come about in the subject who can live with his or her self is of a different order from that brought about by psychoanalysis — for her, being able to live with oneself entails a constant process of self-reflexive thought. Arendt resists the victimisation of the subject by psychoanalysis and insists on the transformation of the inner faculties of thinking, willing and judging as immanent political activities.

Yet, as we argue here, the psyche is a permanent battlefield in which we cannot perceive the workings of the faculties Arendt describes in *The Life of the mind* as naturally given as she claims — what kind of thinking, willing or judging can be analysed during and after apartheid without taking apartheid itself as a constitutive part of such forms of thought? What we call repression² is a kind of historical repression that redoubles what was operating during apartheid and manifests in multiple ways across different people in South Africa. The redoubling effect is a combination of the first experience of repression under apartheid — a repression needed in order to make bearable the unbearable — apartheid as a State. The elevation squared operates to efface the first repression and, in this way, to make possible the repression of how economic, social and political life in contemporary South Africa continues to be overdetermined by the racism, injustice and inequality of the past. Our analysis of the forgetting of responsibility draws attention to the constant work required to continually *forget-deny-repress* both past and present injustice. We argue that in order to achieve the conditions of possibility for Arendt's 'silent dialogue' in contemporary South Africa we must unearth the relation between the rational and the irrational, the conscious and the unconscious, history and the present, the forgotten and the remembered, the acknowledged and the disavowed.[30] Such work, that of *undoing* the redoubled forms of psychic resistance, would result in a psycho-political configuration in which such tensions are not buried in the unconscious but provide the political grammar for breaking the vicious cycle that binds violence and reconciliation.

In his essay "The meaning of working through the past",[31] Adorno takes up the question of memory and psychic resistance in Germany — post-Nazism. Like Arendt, Adorno is disturbed by the lack of critical reflection and engagement with what both thinkers refer to as "the horror" of the past:

---

psychoanalysis, see Frantz Fanon, *The wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove, 1963); and, *Black skin, White masks* (New York: Grove, 1967).

[30] Peter Sloterdijk develops the term "*metanoia*" as a means of describing what he understands to be the positive transformation of the psycho-political legacy of war in his *Theory of the Post-War periods: Observations on Franco-German relations since 1945* (Vienna: Springer, 2009): 14. His diagnosis of the "*metanoia*" of the present significantly differs from the approach we follow here, in particular in his proclamations of so-called "normalisation" (see in particular 36 - 43).

[31] Adorno, *Can one live after Auschwitz?*

> "One wants to break free of the past: rightly, because nothing at all can live in its shadow, and because there will be no end to the terror as long as guilt and violence are repaid by guilt and violence; wrongly, because the past that one would like to evade is still very much alive."[32]

Adorno's reading of "the effacement of memory" in Germany complicates Arendt's position on thinking and judging as critical subjectivity. For him:

> "The effacement of memory is more the achievement of an all-too-alert consciousness than its weakness when confronted with the superior strength of unconscious processes. In the forgetting of what has scarcely transpired there resonates the fury of one who must first talk himself out of what everyone knows, before he can then talk others out of it as well."[33]

Like Arendt, we understand critical reflexivity to be the *conditio sine qua non* of an anti-authoritarian society. As long as South Africans remain bound by the psycho-political knot of redoubled repression, critical reflexivity remains beyond their reach and the society will continue to bear the marks of apartheid-era authoritarianism. As Adorno has written, "This bears directly on democratic pedagogy".[34] For Adorno there are both conscious and unconscious processes that constitute the life of the mind and it is necessary to address the workings of both in the psycho-political "re-education" of the subject.[35] In Adorno's theorisation of the troubled relation between the German people and their history, what in various places he refers to as "the unmastered past",[36] there is both what South African scholar Pumla Dineo Gqola has termed "unremembering",[37] a deliberate, wilful refusal to engage with the events of the past, and psychic resistance, repression and traumatic repetition. In response, Adorno calls for "a precise and undiluted knowledge of Freudian theory" as an indispensable component of the radical transformation of education that must begin with the education of "the educators themselves".[38] The work of undoing psychic resistance through an engagement with apartheid, and its psycho-political legacy as trans-generational trauma, is what we understand to be one of the most important tasks of scholars in our context. Without this, we are not merely unthinking somnambulists but those who desire a hollow ataraxia in the "anticipated oblivion of a better future".[39]

Sergio Alloggio is Research Associate at the Department of Philosophy, University of Pretoria. He is a former A W Mellon-UCT Postdoctoral Fellow at the Centre for Rhetoric Studies, University of Cape Town. Kylie Thomas is a Marie-Sklodowska-Curie Research Fellow at the Netherlands Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies, Amsterdam.

This article first appeared in AYOR Volume 3.2

---

[32] *Ibid*. 3.
[33] *Ibid*. 6.
[34] *Ibid*. 14.
[35] *Ibid*. 15.
[36] *Ibid*. 10. See Arendt's discussion of this term in her *Responsibility and judgment*, 23.
[37] Pumla Dineo Gqola, *What is slavery to me?* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2010): 8.
[38] Adorno, *Can one live after Auschwitz?* 15.
[39] Hannah Arendt, *The origins of totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt and Brace, 1951): ix.

J. M. Coetzee: Reluctant public intellectual

Reingard Nethersole

> Complacent and yet not complacent, intellectuals of the kind I describe, pointing to the Apollonian "Know yourself", criticize and encourage criticism of the foundations of their own belief systems. Such is their confidence that they may even welcome attacks on themselves, smiling when they are caricatured and insulted, responding with the keenest appreciation to the most probing, most perceptive thrusts. They particularly welcome accounts of their enterprise that attempt to relativise it, read it within a cultural and historical framework. They welcome such accounts and at once set about framing them in turn within the project of rationality, that is, set about recuperating them."
>
> — J. M. Coetzee, *Giving Offence*[1]

Why should concern about public intellectuals be topical everywhere, not least in South Africa as evident from recent publications by Jonathan Jansen[2] and Themba Mbadlanyana?[3] And why focus on notoriously publicity shy, writer-teacher J. M. Coetzee who *Mail & Guardian* critic Shaun de Waal once called "the Greta Garbo of South African literature"? What can be gleaned from a disjuncture between "sceptical rationality" and "sincere outrage"[4] that is the subject of Coetzee's deliberations on censorship, but more importantly what insight can be had from the hauntingly dense narrative. "He and His Man",[5] read in lieu of the customary address expected of a laureate at the occasion of the prestigious award of the Nobel Prize for Literature in Stockholm in December 2003? These questions, I suggest, open a window into our current state of the commerce of thinking, into the space of Literature, and of our imagining a place for ourselves in a world ruled by economic rationality and fashioned by celebrity culture; a global world that places insoluble tension between the "intellectual" and the "public". After all, the ideal of an examined life embodied by Plato's Socrates that lies at the heart of secular moral authority, is being rapidly

---

[1] J. M. Coetzee, *Giving Offence* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996): 4.

[2] See Jonathan Jansen's chapter "South Africa: Intellectuals, the state and universities" in the recently released book, *Poverty of Ideas – South African democracy and the retreat of intellectuals.* http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20091211084236622

[3] See Thembani Mbadlanyana's guest column of the Centre for Politics and Research under the somewhat alarmist heading: "The tragedy of our public intellectuals" (3rd May, 2010) http://www.politicsresearch.co.za/archives/444

[4] J. M. Coetzee, *Giving Offence* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996): 5.

[5] Further references to the Nobel Lecture "He and His Man" are from http://www.nobel.se/literature/laureates/2003/coetzee-lecture.html

© *African Yearbook of Rhetoric* 10, 2020, Online ISSN 2305-7785:
Reingard Nethersole, "J.M. Coetzee: Reluctant public intellectual", p. 47-56.

drowned in the cross-currents of what Appadurai has called the "five dimensions of global cultural flows" (in form of "*ethnoscape, mediascape, technoscape, financescape*, and *ideoscape*") that define the current "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy"[6] as something utterly unprecedented. What Coetzee sets into motion in his Nobel Lecture is the necessary preying "upon the old [stories]" that tend to be swamped by these "flows" in so far as "the young are to be forbidden", to connect with the (Western) past, having to "sit for ever in silence."

Socrates, you'll recall, when speaking in his defence in the Agora of Athens, famously referred to himself as "a kind of gadfly" that "the god has placed … in the city" for the purpose of serving its better conscience.[7] Never entirely erased from Western intellectual memory, the Socratic position dedicated to finding the inconvenient truth in a society given over to amassing "wealth, reputation, and honours"[8] reappears in Coetzee's autobiographical fictions *Youth* and *Summertime*, transcribed into 14th century Middle English as "Ayenbite of Inwyt",[9] literally "prick of conscience". Albeit confined to the literary text, and not published in a newspaper or uttered in the public square, Coetzee's dissence from the political power of the day, memorably exemplified in the figure of Mrs. Curren in *Age of Iron,* arguably the prototype of a caring intellectual, bears comparison with Zola's famous "J'accuse" of 1898 with which the French novelist called for justice in the Dreyfus Affair.

Figures of speech have a history and so have the subjects thus designated; the curious amalgam of "public" and "intellectual" made its appearance first in Russell Jacoby's *The Last Intellectuals: American Culture in the Age of Academe* in New York in 1987. Soon thereafter the trope "public intellectual" entered South African discourse, undoubtedly gaining momentum from a survey organised by America's *Foreign Policy* and Britain's *Prospect* magazines. Their "thinkers list" sought to identify the world's "Top 100 Public Intellectuals", among them scientists, economists, philosophers, clerics, judges, scholars, and environmentalists, not to mention eleven writers, including Coetzee, Achebe and Soyinka, who have "shown distinction in their own field along with the ability to communicate ideas and influence debate outside of it".[10] The Africa-focused website africapedia was undoubtedly aware of this global list when proudly citing J. M. Coetzee as one of the eight distinguished intellectuals from the African continent: "The 2003 winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature, Coetzee wrote his most

---

[6] See this seminal chapter in Arun Appadurai's *Modernity at Large – Cultural Dimensions of Globalization,* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003, 27-47):33.

[7] Plato, *Apology* in *Five Dialogues,* trans. G.M.A. Grube, revised by John M. Cooper. (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett, 2003, 21-44): 35.

[8] See above p. 34.

[9] See J. M. Coetzee, *Youth* (London: Secker & Warburg, 2002): 130, and *Summertime. Scenes from Provincial Life* (London: Harvill Secker): 4.

[10] See here the site of *Foreign Policy*, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/story/cms.php?story_id=4379

famous novels – *Waiting for the Barbarians, Life & Times of Michael K,* and *Disgrace* – while a university professor in South Africa and the United States."[11]

Aside from the fact that Coetzee has settled in Adelaide in 2002 and become an Australian citizen in 2005, albeit important only to those who keep national scores of achievement, the degree to which this particular author and, for that matter, any writer devoted more to literary inspiration than the lime-light should be a "public intellectual" remains debatable. It is not obvious at all what constitutes public discourse in a data-driven world of statistics, news-eventisation in the media, blogs, social networking and sound-bite celebrity culture that undercuts debate. Coetzee most certainly deserves the epithet "intellectual"; but the "public" aspect in terms of score-cards handed-out by list keepers seems restricted to the "rhetorical event" of the Nobel award generally tied to academic inaugural occasions.[12]

Nevertheless, Jane Poyner seems to think otherwise when devoting an essay collection to *J. M. Coetzee and the idea of the public intellectual.*[13] Adamant to frame the writer as "public intellectual", the Exeter University critic prods Coetzee, in a rare interview, to comment on Said's suggestion that the intellectual assume a public role and to "raise embarrassing questions, to confront orthodoxy and dogma (rather than to produce them), to be someone who cannot easily be co-opted by governments or corporations, and whose raison d'être is to represent all those people and issues that are routinely forgotten or swept under the rug". Coetzee, with an always finely tuned ear to reasoned use of language, answers lapidary [lapidarily – ed.]: "[this] constitutes a definition, not a comment". Deflecting Poyner's oblique request to show his cards as "public intellectual", Coetzee offers a critically illuminating, historically contextualizing explanation instead: "The resurrection of the term *public intellectual,* which for years was not part of public discourse, is an interesting phenomenon. What is the explanation? Perhaps it has something to do with people in the humanities, more or less ignored nowadays, trying to carve out a niche for themselves in the body politic".[14] The candour of Coetzee's response alludes to the malaise of literary studies today, as staged so eloquently in "The Humanities in Africa" in *Elizabeth Costello* (2003) on the one hand, on the other, it points to the politicisation of the intellectual that underlies the peculiar American coinage of a trope precariously tying the idea of the "public" to the much older idea of the "intellectual".

---

[11] See http://africapedia.com/TOP-AFRICAN-PUBLIC-Intellectuals

[12] See for details on the "Nobel Prize" as "rhetorical event" tied to academic inaugural occasions Philippe-Joseph Salazar's contribution that, besides offering a genealogy, also places the South African Nobel Prize (Literature and Peace, respectively) winners in context. Philippe-Joseph Salazar, "Nobel Rhetoric; or, Petrarch's Pendulum", in *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 42, 4 (2009): 373-400.

[13] Compare with David Attwell's empathetic, and highly informative contribution "The life and times of Elizabeth Costello. J. M. Coetzee and the public sphere", in Jane Poyner, ed., *J. M. Coetzee and the Idea of the Public Intellectual* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2006): 25-42.

[14] Poyner, *J. M. Coetzee and the Idea of the Public Intellectual,* 22-23.

Whereas the idea of the intellectual has a strong provenance in France, the United States, where Jacoby introduced the pleonasm "public intellectual"[15] before the horizon of a bitterly fought Culture Wars between politically conservative (Republican) and progressive (Democratic) academics and journalists, has always displayed an uneasy relationship between "public life" and the more insular "life of the mind". In America the venerable tradition of anti-intellectualism was scarcely dented by the scholar-writer Emerson who, in the late 19th century, poignantly called the intellectual the "world's eye". Less concerned with what for French thinkers, like the late Pierre Bourdieu,[16] constitutes a necessary critical counter-power without which there can be no effective democracy, the American discourse seems to respond to structural changes in the vocation, role, and place of the intellectual; adverse changes that also affected South African life as seen not only in Jansen's and Mbadlanyana's concerns, but also in Coetzee's response to Poyner. And who will forget Coetzee's portrayal of Lurie's disenchantment with the sorry state of literary studies in the "Cape Technical University, formerly Cape Town University College" in *Disgrace.*[17] "Professionalisation and academisation", Jacoby argued,[18] explain the dearth of successors to earlier thinkers who, orientating themselves toward an educated public, informed in "straightforward prose" a "non-professional audience" what stand to take on contentious subjects. Echoing a predominantly American anxiety about the viability of what is still sometimes called "the profession of thought", Richard A. Posner on the right of the political spectrum bemoans the decline of what he terms "public intellectual products in a low cost market".[19] Posner's much discussed 2001 *Public intellectuals: a study of decline* neither adds to Jacoby's earlier account nor does it say much about the profound transformation of the public domain historically ruled by the Fourth Estate, journalism and the newspapers, born with the Republic of Letters in the Enlightenment. Moreover, Posner's contentious tabulation, based on statistics derived from media, mentions and scholarly citations, of 546 people he determines to be "public intellectuals", does not venture much beyond Régis Debray's much more insightful, because historically more astute, *Teachers, Writers, Celebrities: The Intellectuals of Modern France,*[20] (and a likely

---

[15] Of interest in this regard :Francois Beilecke and Katja Marmetschke, eds., *Der Intellektuelle und der Mandarin* (Kassel: Kassel University Press, 2005) and Helen Small, ed., *The Public Intellectual* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002): 1-18.

[16] Pierre Bourdieu, *Science of Science and Reflexivity,* R. Nice, trans. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004): 274. Rather than taking reasoned disagreement as a catalyst of progress, as suggested in the wake of the debate by British sociologist, Barbara A. Misztal's exhaustive study, *Intellectuals and the Public Good. Creativity and Civil Courage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) that examines Nobel Peace Prize laureates, the American discourse like the recent South African one seems to be more concerned with a lack of impartiality and commitment due to "Professionalisation".

[17] J. M. Coetzee, *Disgrace* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1999): 3.

[18] Russell Jacoby, *The Last Intellectuals: American Culture in the Age of Academe* (New York: Basic, 1987): 27.

[19] Richard Posner, *Public Intellectuals: A Study of Decline.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001): 19.

[20] Régis Debray, *Teachers, Writers, Celebrities: The Intellectuals of Modern France,* B. Mulhern, intro., D. Macey, trans. (London: Verso, 1981), published originally in France in the late seventies.

source for Jacoby). Debray, drawing three consecutive intellectual cycles from university to publishing and media, had already argued, in the words of Said,[21] that "once an intellectual's circle is widened beyond a like group of intellectuals — in other words, when worry about pleasing an audience or an employer replaces dependence on other intellectuals for debate and judgment — something in the intellectual's vocation is, if not abrogated, then certainly inhibited". Thus, Posner's attempt to prove "with precision" that "public intellectuals" gain attention as they lose scholarly credibility should not come as surprise in a market and media driven world.[22]

Different nations look upon their thinkers and writers differently, yet there has always been general consent about the self-defined right on the part of the intellectual to worry the world and to believe that there is a symbiotic relationship between the private world of the thinker and the public world he or she wishes to address by means of reasoned persuasion or storied expression. That the intellectual should conscientiously pursue truth, even if it leaves people "uncomfortable" seems to be the consensus since Socrates' time; considerable disagreement, though, exists over whether an author like Coetzee, for instance, should have followed in Zola's footsteps and publicly offered pronouncements on national and transnational politics. In short, opinion as to where the writer-intellectual ought to position himself in public discourse, and if he should advocate specific causes differ sharply. On one side of the spectrum, Julien Benda in his seminal treatise, *La trahison des clercs* of 1927,[23] taking sides with Dreyfus, argues that the intellectual must maintain independence from all organised social bodies, especially political ones, in order to speak the truth to power. On the other end, Sartre in the 1940s openly sides with the French Communist party, sharply critiquing Benda (and Camus among others) for not advocating *litterature engagée*, committed literature.[24] That taking sides and championing political causes can turn out in retrospect to have been misguided and even false, as Mark Lilla[25] argued recently when chastising "European intellectuals" on both sides of the Rhine between the World Wars, is not the issue. At stake, rather, is Benda's suggestion that true intellectuals — as seems to be the case with the author-persona Coetzee[26] — might serve humankind best by being committed to universal ideas, while at the same time staying detached from the political passions of the masses and not taking sides in politics.

---

[21] Edward W. Said, *Representations of the intellectual: The 1993 Reith lectures* (London: Vintage, 1994): 51.

[22] As it seems to do for Jansen and Mbadlanyana referred to earlier.

[23] See English version: Julien Benda, *La trahison des clercs – The treason of the intellectuals,* R. Aldington, trans. (New York: Norton, 1980).

[24] It should be noted that Sartre's stance concerning politically engaged literature became more nuanced than originally pronounced in an accusatory tone similar to that of Benda in his epochal *Les Temps modernes.* See here Ungar's introduction to Sartre's "*What Is Literature" and Other Essays,* intro. by Steven Ungar. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988): 18.

[25] Mark Lilla, *The Reckless Mind. Intellectuals in Politics* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2001): 215.

[26] Coetzee was subjected to strong attacks in the SA press in the 1980's by among others, Gordimer, for not taking a more active stand against the Apartheid regime.

An intellectual's mission in life, according to Edward Said's 1993 Reith Lecture *Representations of the Intellectual,*[27] is to advance human freedom and knowledge. This mission often means standing outside society and its institutions and actively disturbing the status quo. At the same time, Said's intellectual is part of society and should address his concerns to as wide a public as possible. Thus Said's intellectual is constantly balancing the private and the public, something Coetzee demonstrates in his occasional public pronouncements on animal welfare. While his or her private, personal commitment to an ideal provides necessary force, the ideal must have relevance also for society. In a more recent 2002 essay, "The Public Role of Writers and Intellectuals",[28] the late Said, champion of the Palestinian cause, albeit not uncritically, rejects heroic assumptions on the part of intellectuals to better the world by formulating utopian alternatives purportedly more just, visions of a morally grounded social and political order. This would too far exceed the current bounds of the potential of reason. Rather, the critical theorist must fundamentally aim to retain and promote an awareness of the contingency of such conditions and the extent to which such conditions are capable of being changed. Instead of succumbing to instrumental reason, Said suggests with recourse to Adorno that "overlapping yet irreconcilable experiences demand from the intellectual the courage to say that *that* is what is before us, …the intellectual's provisional home is the domain of an exigent, resistant, intransigent art into which, alas, one can neither retreat nor search for solutions".

This position seems to suit Coetzee who in temperament is closer to Renaissance man Desiderius Erasmus than Martin Luther, and whose writing fits the avangardist template of Adorno's rather than Lukács' aesthetics. Typically referring to himself in his interview with David Attwell in the third person, Coetzee says: "Sympathetic to the human concerns of the left, he is alienated, when the crunch comes, by its language — by all political language, in fact".[29] Neither pronouncements nor the public persona of the writer count but, as demonstrated in the Nobel Lecture, of utmost importance is the dogged work in and with quotidian language as measure of life, art, history, and truth. "It is hard for fiction to be good fiction while it is in the service of something else", Coetzee asserts in the interview with Poyner[30] mentioned earlier. Hyperaware of the limits of his own authority — "the authority of the author has never amounted to anything more than a bagful of rhetorical tricks", he says[31] — and almost pathologically guarding his private thoughts and feelings before a public hungering after personal information and intimate confessions, Coetzee refuses in both interviews and narrative fictions to state his personal beliefs: "I am a writer", he has his alter ego, Elizabeth

[27] Said, *Representations of the Intellectual.*

[28] Edward W. Said, "The Public Role of Writers and Intellectuals" in Helen Small, ed., *The Public Intellectual* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002): 19-39, [39].

[29] J. M. Coetzee, *Doubling the Point. Essays and Interviews,* ed., David Attwell (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London: Harvard University Press, 1992): 394.

[30] Poyner, *J. M. Coetzee and the Idea of the Public Intellectual,* 21.

[31] J. M. Coetzee, *Diary of a Bad Year* (London: Havill Secker, 2007): 149.

Costello say, "It is not my profession to believe, just to write. …I do imitations, as Aristotle would have said".[32]

Not surprisingly, Coetzee responds to Alfred Nobel's vision that a prize-worthy author writes for the sake of certain ideals, and gives us lessons in the application of those ideals, with a (post-Barthes, post-Foucault))refusal to set himself up as a purveyor of authorial truth. Nobel awardees in Literature usually reflect on the creative process and present themselves in the light of what they intended to achieve with their work, referring straightforwardly to influences that fashioned their oeuvre, and to positions taken in respect of specific issues. Coetzee's Nobel address is no exception, although unlike his 1991 predecessor: Nadine Gordimer, who explicitly refers to Sartrean commitment,[33] Coetzee eschews "deliberative" and "forensic", political argument. Meticulously avoiding the personal pronoun "I", and opting for a storied "ceremonial oratory of display",[34] he demonstratively aims not at persuasion based on argument but on narrative seduction founded on *aethesis* or what for Hume amounts to the "sympathetic imagination" that connects the subject of the narrative with the narrating subject and the addressee (listener or reader) on a tour de force into the writer's laboratory. Although "the genesis story of a writer. …the story that wrote her or him into being", to use Gordimer's words, is inferred in Coetzee's Address, the drama that unfolds between "He and his Man" does not so much exhort or defend creative writing than stages it. Setting the scene with a motto[35] taken from a passage of Defoe's epochal adventure tale *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), Coetzee's epideictic narrative discourse constructs creative writing as an event — in the present tense, reflecting on the past — of someone, "he", Robin, sitting "in his room by the waterside in Bristol", in the process of writing while also reading and reflecting, with a mixture of incredulity, curiosity, and empathy on numerous reports, sent to him by "his man" about how "decoy ducks" lure their fellow foreign ducks promising plenitude to greener shores, only to be ruthlessly slaughtered by Englishmen; about "an engine of execution" in Halifax, and the heart wrenching afflictions that befell the people of London in "the year 1665" when "the plague descends upon the city".

These reports are derived from Daniel Defoe's (1661-1731) *Tour Thro' the Whole Island of Great Britain* (composed between 1724 and 1727 as a vivid county-by-county review and celebration of the British life and industry), and *A Journal of the Plague Year* (1722) that displays enticing powers of self-projection into a situation of which Defoe,

---

[32] J. M. Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello*. *Eight Lessons* (London: Secker & Warburg, 203): 194.

[33] See Nadine Gordimer, "Writing and Being", *Nobel Lecture in Literature* (Stockholm: Swedish Academy, 1991) at http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1991/Gordimer-lecture.html

[34] Aristotle, *Rhetorica,* trans. W. Rhys Roberts in *The Works of Aristotle. Translated into English,* ed. W. D. Ross, 11 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925): 1358a.

[35] The motto reads: "But to return to my new companion. I was greatly delighted with him, and made it my business to teach him everything that was proper to make him useful, handy, and helpful; but especially to make him speak, and understand me when I spoke; and he was the aptest scholar there ever was."

having been four years old, only had experience through the narrations of others. Thus drawing his listener/reader in the guise of one of literature's most influential characters, Robinson Crusoe, identified, besides the motto, by his paraphernalia "parrot" and "parasol", into a narrative world that, according to Aristotle, explains action by motive (to write), relates behaviour to personality (a writer), and appearance to reality (the already written), the Nobel Lecture makes the reader look at the early 18th century world of acclaimed author Defoe who, together with Fielding and Richardson is usually regarded as originator of the modern novel.

Coetzee describes Defoe, in his "Foreword" to *Robinson Crusoe*, whose spectre hovers also over the 1987 novel *Foe*, as "a businessman trading in words and ideas, with a businessman's clear sense of what each word or idea weighs, how much it is worth. As a thinker he may not be original, but his mind is acute and curious about life in all its aspects". Tellingly, Coetzee's (self-)portrait of the imagined writer, Robin, entails considerable speculation about what sort of a person "his man" (Defoe), the author of these writings of disaster, might have been in the quotidian surroundings of family, friends and acquaintances — foreshadowing Coetzee's most recent autobiographical fiction *Summertime.* As a character in his own tale that was to elevate him into a powerful vision and role model for generations of readers, "He", Robinson Crusoe, wants to fathom his mysterious author-father, Defoe,[36] who based on the life of historical mariner and castaway Alexander Selkirk (1676 - 1721), invented him in the first place and whom he ultimately eclipsed in the literary after-life. In like manner, Paul Rayment, in Coetzee's *Slow Man* (2007), seeks to get to know the persona of his inventor (fictitious) author, Elizabeth Costello, who battles to narrate him into life.

Inscribing himself into the protagonist, He—Robin, without ever using the pronominal shifter "I", thus deflecting an authorial subject's self-articulation by emphasising a zone of pronominal non-distinction, a "waterside" metaphorically speaking, between an internal world of the imagination and the external world from whence the reports originate, Coetzee in his characteristic mode of palimpsestious writing[37] performs in the Nobel Lecture the double act of reading and writing as fourfold reciprocity: (1.) between interlocutors (as illustrated by the choice of a particular passage as motto because it refers to teaching Friday, Robinson's island companion and servant, to "speak, and understand me when I spoke"); (2.) between a historical life (Selkirk) and narrative fiction (*Robinson Crusoe*), lived-experience and the quest for transcendent meaning; (3.) between the world and the text (the "reports" sent by "his man" and their transformation in a solitary *situation d'énonciation,* [scene of uttering] "[i]n the evening by candlelight", by way of balancing, what Coetzee once called in a brief "Note on Writing"[38] "the possibility of the threefold opposition active-

[36] See the Nobel Lecture for the varied descriptions that bear an uncanny resemblance to Defoe's biography.
[37] See my "Reading in the In-between: Pre-scripting the "Postscript" to *Elizabeth Costello*", in *South African Journal for Literary Studies* 21, 3/4 (2005): 254-276.
[38] Coetzee, *Doubling the Point,* 94.

middle-passive. 'To write' is one of these verbs".); and (4.), between "He, scripteur, self-conscious narrator, and agent — not psychological subject — of the action, and "his man", counter-voice, fellow writer, deliverer of statements (*énoncé*), "companion", whom he "yearns to meet" but who remains infinitely unreachable.

When viewed within Aristotle's tripartite typology of discourse and its timeline, narrative (present), interpretative (past) and deliberative (future) the Nobel Lecture moves in the *hic et nunc,* the present tense, typical of sense experience; interpreting the past always from the standpoint of an affected ethical self who recognises in Literature's stories "life itself, the whole of life", charging us to make, as the Nobel Lecture teaches, "due preparation for death, or else be struck down where we stand". As he, Robinson, was made to see when of a sudden, on his island, he came one day upon the footprint of a man in the sand". This Coetzee reads as a "sign" of our human condition: "*You are not alone,* said the sign; and also, *No matter how far you sail, no matter where you hide, you will be searched* out" (Italics Coetzee's). Nothing escapes the Emersonian "world's eye", at least not on the plane of Literature.

Yet when considering Aristotle's four tropes - the generic "metaphor", its refinement by "metonymy", "synecdoche" that marks transition into literal discourse, and, finally, "irony" that, in opposite to metaphor, represents the emergence of an ironic sensibility enabling conscious use of figurative language — Coetzee's thoroughly "ironic" Lecture unmistakably engages a fourth discourse that stands in a reflexive relation to the other three in so far as it evidently recognises the constructed discursive nature of the experience offered by epideictic capturing of data (in Coetzee's case 18th century novelistic fiction) and the world (i.e. capitalist economic production), the forensic pursuit of meaning, and deliberative discourse in quest of validity with reference to reason. This fourth or historiographic discourse takes account of the fact that experience (of the writer) takes place in a world already organised and semantically charged by discursivity, realizing that we live in a man-made world determined by human activity (narrating in its various modes and forms) in the shape of contingent facticity (the already narrated), demonstrated in Coetzee's "awareness, as you put pen to paper, that you are setting in train a certain play of signifiers with their own ghostly history of past interplay".[39] It is this consciousness of history as prologue, not as commoditised (national) tradition but as irreducible spectre, that ought to make readers of this and all other texts issued in the name of Coetzee look for the genesis of the (scriptural) experience bound to any given situation, and it must identify the forces and diverse discourses that interact in such a situation. It should be immediately obvious that historiography, in this sense, has nothing to do with a mere narration of events or their interpretation — as insinuated more often than not by contemporary mass media — but everything to do with a discursive labour on these discourses, as well as the deliberative one.

[39] Coetzee, *Doubling the Point,* 63.

The Nobel lecture, despite its multilayered 'weaving' of sometimes heterogeneous voices and rhetorical discourses, remains essentially a soliloquy. It is an imaginary conversation with the self in a situation of writing-as-performance, out of which both self and subject have to forever write themselves anew, in an act of doubling back that is typical for Coetzee's counterpuntal voice, a voice immediately undercutting any authorial ascription and authoritative judgment, thus abstaining from all advocatory intervention usually demanded from public intellectuals. Although the Nobel Prize bestowed celebrity status on Coetzee, he is not, on Posner's terms, a public figure issuing opinions, at least not until publication of the novelistic hybrid *Diary of a Bad Year*. In a format that juxtaposes *aethesis* with authorial comment, the protagonist, acclaimed author Senor C., assumes a public role by pronouncing freely in opinion pieces for a newspaper on current affairs from the standpoint of (universal) human freedom and knowledge. However, attractive, young Anya finds her employer's "*lone voice of conscience*" insufficient: "His track record is not so hot. In fact his track record is virtually blank" when it comes to "fighting" for human rights in the "real world",[40] Anya surmises. Obviously expecting some kind of direct intervention from a moral authority, she forgets that epideictic rhetoric is already praxis. How if not from storied worlds will we know that a certain kind of (modern) literary achievement and a certain kind of ethical integrity are inseparable? Coetzee's narratives for which "He and his Man" must here stand as example, display publicly an unflinching examination of self and world for which popularity scores are no measure.

Reingard Nethersole is Professor Emerita of Comparative Literature, University of the Witwatersrand. She is a former Honorary Associate of the Centre for Rhetoric Studies, University of Cape Town.

This article first appeared in AYOR Volume 4.1

[40] Coetzee, *Diary of a Bad Year,* 197. Italics are Coetzee's.

Political discourse in an egalitarian society: The Hamar of Ethiopia

Ivo Strecker

The Hamar belong to those "tribes without rulers"[1] which have non-centralised political systems and live without formal laws or punishments, without great distinctions of wealth, without social class, without nobility, chiefs or kings. This paper is aimed at contributing to our understanding of the way in which such egalitarian systems work.

The Hamar have hereditary ritual leaders *(bitta)*. They also select political spokesmen *(ayo)*, leaders for war *(djilo)*, guardians for grazing land *(kogo)* and for cultivated land *(gudili)*, but the basic agents of politics are the married men *(donza)*. Conceptually they are likened to a grass, which has roots that spread like a web on the ground *(zarsi)*.

Hamar politics is thus grass-root politics similar to the way people in contemporary democratic societies like to speak of and engage in grass-root politics. An important difference is, however, the fact that in Hamar the women are completely missing from public politics. They nevertheless exercise an important influence, which is hidden and difficult to fathom.

As some of the literature on the ethnography of speaking has shown, oratory plays an important role in traditional societies and its study leads us straight to the heart of politics.[2] The peoples of East Africa are known for their great competence in oratory. Among those who practice a significant amount of pastoralism, occasions of public oratory are often associated with the consumption of an animal or animals. In Hamar this institution, called *osh*, may be held at different levels of social inclusiveness. It may involve only a small neighbourhood, *i.e.*, several adjacent settlement areas (*gurda*); it may involve a larger part or the whole of a territorial segment (*tsinti)*; it may involve several territorial segments or parts of them; or it may even involve the whole of Hamar country (*Hamar pe*). But even though there will be differences in size, duration, general tenor, seriousness of matters *etc.*, the general pattern of the *osh* remains largely the same, and it is this pattern which I explore in what follows below.

Hamar political discourse may be seen as a process that moves repeatedly through four related stages each of which has its own mode of communication.

---

[1] John Middleton and D. Tait, Eds., *Tribes without rulers* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958).

[2] Richard Bauman and J. Sherzer, *Explorations in the ethnography of speaking* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974); Maurice Bloch, Ed., *Political language and oratory in traditional society* (London: Academic Press, 1975); Donald L. Brenneis and F. R. Myers, *Words: Language and politics in the Pacific* (New York: New York University Press, 1984).

© *African Yearbook of Rhetoric* 10, 2020, Online ISSN 2305-7785:
Ivo Strecker, "Political discourse in an egalitarian society: The Hamar of Ethiopia", p. 57-64.

The political process rotates in a never-ending spiral from informal conversation to divination to oratory to blessing and cursing.

When the usual routine of Hamar herding, farming, hunting, gathering *etc.*, is threatened by sickness, drought, internal or external conflict *etc.*, the political process sets into motion. First responses happen on an individual level. People ponder quietly over the seriousness of the affair and individually look for signs in nature, clouds, stars, sounds of animals and children *etc.*, which help them to interpret what is happening. Also, during the early morning hours and in the evenings at the homesteads and the cattle camps, and during the day in the fields and at the water holes, people begin to exchange views about the problems at hand.

Once a problem has reached such proportions that the elders decide that public decisions are necessary, they call the married men (*donza*) of the locality to a public meeting (*osh*). Such a call is always preceded by the search for an animal, which will have to be slaughtered in order to feed the men who attend the meeting. Without such an animal (ox, sheep or goat) no public meeting can be held.

Once a man has been found who agrees to provide the animal, the elders will be informed about the appointed day and the place where the meeting will take place. When the men arrive, they first settle down in the shade of a tree, relax and then enter into informal conversations. This is how the proper political discourse begins. Such informal conversations are always part and parcel of a public meeting and are clearly a customarily proscribed form of action. The most manifest element of the informal conversations is the exchange of news, which allow for a better evaluation of the problem for which the men have been called to the *osh*. First the more junior men who are present will speak, especially when they have been witnesses to events and are well informed about details of the current problems. Later, when the facts have been told and discussed in detail, the more senior men, especially the spokesmen who have come, enter the conversation. Typically they will relate historical events, which have been in some way like the present situation and can act as precedents and models for how to cope with the current issues.

In a more hidden way the informal conversations provide a forum for social and cultural criticism, the articulation of social values and, most importantly, the formation of social con-sensus. Here at the informal conversations people speak their minds and argue with one another. Also they can speak at length for there is usually lots of time at hand and people are willing to listen to one another. A striking theme of the conversations is lamentation. Everyone complains about the fact that others will not listen to him, that things are going wrong because he has so little influence over others and the matter at hand, and that therefore he cannot be held responsible for all the disasters that surely will happen.

I have found that these lamentations follow the structural lines of Hamar society: junior men, for example, will complain about the senior men who will not listen to them, and senior spokesmen from one locality will complain that the spokesmen of

other localities would not listen to them *etc*. That is, everyone complains towards the direction where he finds that his freedom of action and his influence is most severely impeded. It took me some time to understand the logic of such endemic lamentation. Now I think that lamentation goes very well with the egalitarian character of Hamar social organisation and politics: everyone is checked by someone else. No one will ever enjoy complete political success. Complete success would lead to a concentration of power and influence once it was achieved repeatedly. Therefore, frustration must be a perpetual part of egalitarian politics. But the frustration is measured, and the very fact that people indulge in long and colourful lamentation rather than lapse into mute silence is an indication that their political spirit is alive and that their aspirations have only been frustrated but not killed.

If the problem, which is facing a particular locality of Hamar or Hamar country at large, is really threatening, a divination will be held. This happens when the informal conversations are finished. The men move to another shade tree where a diviner has settled down to throw sandals in order to ask questions related to the existing problem and how it may be solved. He asks his questions either directly or in form of propositions, which the sandals may either confirm or reject, depending on the way they fall to the ground. Thus he may say, "we move the herds and the rain will fall", and then the silent answer of the sandals will be "yes" or "no".

On the first and manifest level, Hamar divination acts as a means by which the elders focus on the most difficult aspects of their political decisions. While the diviner throws the sandals, the men sit around him, watch and ask him to pose the questions, which interest them. In this way the diviner does not act all on his own but is to a large extent the medium of others. In the last resort, however, neither he nor the other men matter. Only the sandals "speak" and provide information on which the elders will act. The political implication of this, I think, is obvious: through divination the donza achieve an absolution from their responsibility, because it is not they but a third party, the sandals that is deciding the matter.

The process of divination shares some characteristics with the informal conversations in that it provides an opportunity for the men to air their views and articulate social fears. In fact the latter is more prominent here, because the men may ask the diviner critically to examine the behaviour of others under the pretext that it may be the cause for the existing problem. Thus the divination does not only serve as a shield behind which one escapes responsibilities, it also acts as a way to find scape-goats and allows for accusations which are so indirect that the accusers need not fear any retribution by the accused.

While the conversations and the divination are going on, young men slaughter the animal or animals provided for the meeting and roast the meat over the fire. When the meat is ready, they call the men to come and sit down along a semi-circle of branches with fresh green leaves that will serve as a table from which the men eat. They will slowly pick up the meat from the leaves while they listen to the speeches being

made. Only selected men are allowed to speak at a public meeting. They are called *ayo*. The verb *ai'a* means 'do'. So the *ayo* are those who get things done, they are leaders, and they lead especially by what they say. An *ayo* is selected by his 'elder brothers' and 'fathers' (*i.e.* men of senior age groups) when, at a particular place and in a particular moment in time, there is need for a new spokesman. They bless him and install him by handing him a spear at a public meeting. But the privilege they offer is provisional and holds only as long as his leadership is good and fruitful. To give more colour to this important fact let me quote from a Hamar text:

> One boy is a goatherd, but tomorrow he is a warrior: "When you go that way, if you meet a leopard kill it. Kill the lion! Kill the ostrich with the feathers. Kill the giraffe and when you return in the evening bring the fillet". So the fellow draws forth service. Such a man is an *ayo*. If those who go don't kill the giraffe, the buffalo, the lion, the ostrich, the leopard, but if they meet the enemy and one of them dies, it will be said: "His word is bad, his command is bad. Stop him."[3]

At an *osh* the men sit in order of seniority, the oldest to the right, the youngest to the left, and the principle of seniority applies also to speaking, the older ones speak first, the younger speak later. When a man's turn has come to speak, he gets up from his place at the leaves, takes the spear and walks over to where the animal has been slaughtered and roasted. There he takes some of the chyme, which is the green and only partly digested stomach contents of the animal, and rubs it on to his spear, his forehead, his chest and often also his legs. Then he passes slowly back and forth along the semi-circle of listeners and begins to speak. Old and experienced speakers who know of the respect they command usually begin their speech with a noisy and stylized expression of anger. They reprimand the younger for failing to act properly, for neglecting their duties, for thinking of themselves and not being strong, reliable and courageous. From this intimidation the public meeting has its name, *osh*. *Oshimba* means to be intimidated, shy, in social fear, and the term *osh* implies this intimidation. But let us note that the listeners are not really intimidated, and that it is because of their proud rejection of authority that the spokesmen shout so vehemently and complain that people do not listen and do what they want.

After he has finished with his rhetorical anger, the speaker comes to the particular matter of the day. Typically, he places the current issue in a historical context and looks for parallels and precedents in the past. The older a speaker is, the further back his memories reach. After the first speaker follows a second, a third and so on depending on how important the issue is and how many spokesmen are present. No speaker is listened to in complete awe and silence. On the contrary, one often hears the younger *ayo* who are sitting in the audience call out to the others: "listen, be quiet", which attests to the inattentiveness of the others. Listeners sometimes also interrupt speakers, throw in their comments, tell them what to say, laugh and tease them and

[3] Jean Lydall and Ivo Strecker, *The Hamar of Southern Ethiopia. Vol. I: Work journal* (Hohenschäftlarn: Klaud Renner Verlag, 1979): 109.

generally may begin to chatter with each other when a speech begins to bore them. Of course such a refusal to listen dismays the speakers immensely.

Also, when a meeting concerns matters of war and peace, and when the men are determined to fight even though the speakers urge them to be prudent, the men will begin to chant their war songs (*raega*) with which they indicate their willingness to fight and their rejection of any advice of prudence which might be interpreted as fearfulness by their adversaries. Thus in Hamar a public speaker may be "sung down" rather in the way in which at western political meetings a speaker may be "booed" or "whistled" down.

Usually, there is a limit to which people can continue a meeting. The sun will get hot and the herds will have to be watered *etc*. Therefore, if a matter cannot be finished at one public meeting, another meeting will be called where the debate can be continued. In a sense, no debate is ever really finished and Hamar political history can be viewed (and is told as) a long line of public meetings. At each *osh* preceding ones are remembered and future ones projected and anticipated.

I have called the *osh* a debate, but I must qualify this. We speak of a debate when people try to persuade each other by refuting the arguments of others and by showing the strength and validity of theirs. At a Hamar *osh* such features are surely present, but debate should not spoil the central aim of the *osh* which is to articulate consensus. The *osh* is not the place and time where people should sort out and debate things from scratch. We have seen already how the *osh* is preceded by informal conversations and divination. The debates should have been finished during these earlier stages, and ideally the public speeches should express similar views, and agree on the way, which would lead everyone out of the existing problem.

I now turn to the fourth mode of Hamar political discourse, the curse *(asha)* and the blessing *(barjo aela)*. We have already seen how the first three processes have gradually moved from a very open mode (conversations) to a more stylized and closed mode of communication. The curse and the blessing are even more closed and focused than the preceding divination and oratory. In the act of cursing and blessing the will of the group is expressed most emphatically. Here the consensus is complete. There is no divergence, no debate, no doubt.

Cursing and blessing are closely related to speaking. Only the more senior spokesmen may do it, and they often place it at the end of their speeches. There are various ways in which a speaker may combine cursing and blessing with his speech. Sometimes, when for example a speaker is so upset by a problem that he wants to get rid of it as soon as possible, he may begin his speech with a curse and having thus unburdened himself (and his audience) he moves on to speak.

There are also occasions where after the *osh* the men move to another place where the *ayo* then raises his spear and calls the evil to leave and the good to come forth.

Here is an example of a blessing. The speaker is standing in front of the men and lifting the blade of his spear up into the air while he calls, he makes rhythmic gestures of pulling or drawing the desired thing (state of affairs) towards himself, and the men, who are imitating his movements with their hands, answer in refrain:

Leader: **Chorus:**

Eh-eh!

My herds are at Mello,

which are in the open grass lands,

may my herds come lowing, ... come

grazing the grass may they come, ... come

having eaten may the calves come, ... come

leading their kids may the goats come . . . come...[4]

When a spokesman curses, that is when he "hides away" *(asha)* the undesired, he turns his spear around and jabs with the sharp metal point on the end of his spear in the direction towards which the evil should disappear, usually westward, where it should "get lost with the setting sun":

Leader: **Chorus:**

Eh-eh!

The herds are carrying sickness,

may the sickness go beyond Labur, ... may it go

may the sickness go beyond Topos. . . . . may it go

Cattle owners you have enemies,

down there, the Korre,

if he looks at your cattle, may he die, ... die

may his eyes fail, ... fail

may his heart get speared, ... speared

may they disperse like doves, ... disperse

and leave... . . . . leave…[5]

[4] Jean Lydall and Ivo Strecker, *The Hamar of Southern Ethiopia. Vol. II: Baldambe explains* (Hohenschäftlarn: Klaud Renner Verlag, 1979): 14.

As we can see, Hamar political discourse moves from an open form, in which differences, insecurities and alternatives are expressed and discussed, to more and more closed forms in which the differences are narrowed down and are funnelled as it were towards a consensus. Here lies the decisive difference that distinguishes egalitarian from centralised forms of political organisation. In the egalitarian practice of the Hamar, the ordinary problems of everyday-life set the political process into motion. At the beginning, people's individual views differ and collide about the right ways of action, and only when the differences have been negotiated and consensus has been reached will joint action be taken. Egalitarian politics are here the exact opposite of centralised politics. The former begin with a multitude of wills, which come to a consensus while the latter begin with a single will, which imposes itself on a multitude of others. In centralised political systems, like for example ancient Egypt, all politics emanate from an apex, from the divine ruler whose voice commands downwards reaching each and every-one in the social pyramid. In Hamar things are different. There is no single will which imposes itself on others, but rather many different wills which first diverge and then move towards each other, find consensus and act together. Such agreement never lasts because things change, new problems arise and the political process is set into motion again. Egalitarian political discourse converges from difference of view to consensus.

Besides the funnelling of opinion, several shifts towards seeming "irrationality" characterise Hamar political discourse. The two most important shifts occur when the Hamar move from conversation to divination and then again from oratory to blessing/cursing. How are we to interpret these shifts? Returning to a point I have made above, the shift towards divination may be explained as a way of reducing the social danger involved in decision making. The divination reduces the threat inherent in answers, suggestions, commands, advice, *etc.* separating, as it were, speaking from will. The men express their views and offer their advice freely and without disguise during the informal conversations when nothing they say has any claim of authority. However, when they move towards the formulation of binding decisions, they hide behind the shield of divination. Following the terminology of politeness theory, one can say that they employ a strategy by which they soften the face-threatening act (FTA) involved in proposing decisions affecting others.[6] Not all decisions are equally problematic. It is when decisions are socially threatening and difficult to justify that one should expect divination to be practiced.

---

[5] *Ibid.*

[6] Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson, "Universals in language usage: Politeness phenomena", in *Questions and politeness. Strategies in social interaction,* Esther Goody, Ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1978); *Politeness: Some universals in language usage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); and Ivo Strecker, *The social practice of symbolization: An anthropological analysis* (London/Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Athlone Press, 1988).

What about the shift from oratory to blessing/cursing? Here we find the reverse of what happens in divination. All politics moves constantly between acts of commitment and acts of non-commitment, of saying 'yes' and saying 'no'. While divination embodies a strategy of non-commitment, of saying "no, I have nothing to do with it", blessing and cursing constitute acts of strong commitment and affirmation. They say, "Yes, we want things definitely to become like this or that". But they seem irrational in so far as they express wishes that are beyond human control. In this way, Hamar political discourse moves towards a kind of magical action. But it is important to note that this magical element is intrinsic to all expressions of emotional emphasis, rhetoric hyperbole, mimesis *etc*., and that it can be found in all human communication. That is, whenever people attempt to move others by indirect means of persuasion they enter the realm of magic. The persuasive magic of the Hamar *osh* aims at influencing the future in a kind of prophetic way, and one is reminded of certain Dinka ceremonies led by the "master of the fishing spear" of which Lienhardt writes:

> Like prophecies, the ceremony eventually represents as already accomplished what the community, and those who can traditionally speak for them, collectively intend.[7]

Ivo Strecker is Emeritus Professor in Anthropology and African Studies at the Johannes Gutenberg University of Mainz, Germany, and founder of the International Rhetoric Culture Project.

[7] Geoffrey Lienhardt, *Divinity and experience; The religion of the Dinka* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961): 251.

Former President Thabo Mbeki and the racism debate in South Africa: Through the rhetorical lens

Sifiso Eric Ngesi

Thabo Mbeki was elected President of the African National Congress (ANC) on 18 December 1997 at the ANC's 50th Congress, and that of South Africa on 14 *June 1999.In both these capacities, Mbeki's predecessor was Nelson Mandela – someone on whom a "saintly status had been conferred. While Mandela's presidency was predicated on nation-building and reconciliation, Mbeki's was, in large measure, underpinned by South Africa's socio-economic transformation. He believed that the greatest threat to attaining this goal was* racism. Mbeki was therefore of the view that it had to be extirpated. As the country's President, he had to be at the forefront of this struggle. Racism then became a common thread that ran through Mbeki's speeches. He seemed to have grasped that – as Mamdani aptly puts it – "[i]f the country needed reconciliation, it also needed social justice".[1]

This paper endeavours to give a rhetorical analysis of what, in my view, may be regarded as Mbeki's foundational speeches that quintessentially characterise the prevailing racism debate in South Africa. I will confine my analysis to Mbeki's speeches in his capacities as President of both the ANC and South Africa, and not delve into his views on racism prior and subsequent to these epochs.

Section 83 of South Africa's Constitution asserts that the President is the "Head of State and head of the national executive". In addition, section 83(b) enjoins the President to "[…] uphold, defend and respect the Constitution as the supreme law of the Republic", while section 83(c) entrusts the President with promoting "the unity of the nation and that which will advance the Republic".[2] Part of the President's responsibilities to "uphold, defend and respect the Constitution" is, as per the founding provisions of the Constitution, to promote "non-racialism".[3] It may be contended that Mbeki demonstrated the appreciation of what was expected of him as President, in terms of the Constitution, as he paid particular attention to the creation of a non-racial South Africa. Rhetorically speaking, the arguments that he would advance as he sought to achieve this objective, through persuasion, would derive from the argument of authority (*argumentum ad verecundiam*).[4]

---

[1]Mahmood Mamdani, "Foreword" in *The Thabo Mbeki I know*. Edited by Sifiso Ndlovu and Miranda Strydom (Johannesburg: Picador Africa, 2016): xx

[2]*The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa* (1996): 53.

[3]*The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa*, *ibid,* 3.

[4]Chaïm Perelman, *The realm of rhetoric* – Translation by Kluback W. Notre Dame (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1982): 94.

© *African Yearbook of Rhetoric* 10, 2020, Online ISSN 2305-7785:
S'fiso Eric Ngesi, "Former President Thabo Mbeki and the racism debate in South Africa: Through the rhetorical lens", p. 65-73.

1 Mbeki's acceptance speech as President of South Africa – 14 June 1999

The first reference to racism by Mbeki as President of South Africa can be traced back to his acceptance speech. On this occasion, Mbeki posited:[5]

> And yet all of us are aware that our country continues to be divided along *racial* [my italics] and other lines and is, therefore, that much more difficult to unite around common objectives.

Constrained by the occasion – Mbeki was merely accepting his election as President – it sufficed for him to give his audience merely a glimpse of what would be central to his socio-economic transformation agenda. He could not be expected to expatiate on racism, but would do so at an opportune time (*kairos*).

2 Address at the Opening of Parliament – 25 June 1999

Mbeki accordingly elaborated on racism in his first State of the Nation Address (SONA). In this regard, Mbeki talked about, *inter alia*, building a caring society "[…] without regard to race […]".[6]He also made reference to a system (apartheid) that had treated certain South Africans "[…] as sub-humans […]". In addition, Mbeki raised "[…] the need to end racial […] imbalances within the Police Service".[7]

Having recourse to the argument from authority, Mbeki cited the findings of the study conducted by the Coordination and Implementation Unit in the Office of the Deputy President that had confirmed "[…] the correlation between poverty, crime and race", with "[…] areas of high crime concentration […] being "[…] black and poor areas of our country".[8] Mbeki delineated as he contended that all South Africans had to be treated equally and no race had to be treated as superior to others. Accordingly, he maintained:[9]

> The promotion and protection of the cultural, linguistic and religious rights of all our people must occupy a central place in the work of Government.
>
> […] We consider the work of restoring the pride and identity of all our people of vital importance to the task of advancing the human dignity of all our citizens and ensuring the success of our efforts towards national reconciliation and nation building [*sic*].
>
> We will work for the speedy implementation of the constitutional requirement to establish a Commission for the Promotion and Protection of Language, Cultural and Religious Rights.

---

[5]Thabo Mbeki, "Speech on accepting his election as President of the Republic of South Africa" (14 June 1999): http://www.thepresidency.gov.za/pebble.asp?relid=2561. (Accessed 8 June 2016).
[6]Thabo Mbeki, "Address at the opening of Parliament (25 June 1999): http://www.unisa.ac.za/contents/colleges/docs/tm1999/tm062509.pdf. (Accessed 13 June 2016).
[7]Thabo Mbeki, *ibid.*
[8]Thabo Mbeki, *ibid.*
[9]Thabo Mbeki, *ibid.*

> […] This will be an important contribution to the effort we must sustain to wipe out the legacies of *racism* [emphasis added] and sexism, which continue to afflict our society.

Probably, what was on Mbeki's mind as he couched this argument was the imperative to give expression, using "the authority at [his] command", to the preamble to South Africa's Constitution which makes the following solemn undertaking:[10]

> We, the people of South Africa,
>
> Recognise the injustices of our past;
>
> Honour those who suffered for justice and freedom in our land;
>
> Respect those who have worked to build and develop our country; and
>
> Believe that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, united in our diversity.
>
> We therefore […] adopt this Constitution as the supreme law of the Republic, so as to –
>
> Heal the divisions of the past and establish a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights.

Racial discrimination, dating back to colonialism and culminating in its institutionalisation by the apartheid regime, propagated the false notion that the white race was superior to other races. One of the consequences of this sad and sorry state of affairs was racialized wealth inequality. The apartheid government exacerbated the situation by creating the so-called "bantustans" or homelands that were organised along ethnic lines. The infamous divide and rule strategy, in turn, led to some ethnic groups erroneously believing that they were superior to others.

The democratic dispensation therefore – as Mbeki believed and which is still believed by those South Africans who may be regarded as "progressive" – seeks to redress the "injustices of the past". It also inculcates a culture which holds that "South Africa belongs to all who live in it, united in our diversity", as well as "improve the quality of life of all the citizens and free the potential of each person".[11]

3 Second National Institute for Economic Policy (NIEP) Oliver Tambo Lecture – 11 August 2000

Delivering the Second Oliver Tambo Lecture, organised by the NIEP, Mbeki took a swipe at the then leader of the Democratic Alliance[12], Tony Leon, for having challenged his (Mbeki's) views on the HIV and AIDS pandemic.[13] Prior to him focusing on the business of the day, Mbeki digressed and tore into Leon (argument *ad hominem*),

---

[10]*The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa* (1996): 1.
[11]*The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa*, *ibid*.
[12]The official opposition.
[13]"HIV/AIDS: Thabo Mbeki vs Tony Leon", *Politicsweb* (2000): http://www.politicsweb.co.za/documents/hivaids-thabo-mbeki-vs-tony-leon. (Accessed 15 June 2016).

asserting that the remarks that he had made had racial undertones as they exhibited "disdain and contempt for African solutions".[14] In this regard, Mbeki posited:[15]

> "According to the newspaper, the white politician accused the President of suffering from a "near obsession" with finding African solutions to every problem, even if, for instance, this meant flouting scientific facts about AIDS, in favour of "snake-oil cures and quackery." […]

Mbeki proceeded with deriding Leon (*schesis*) as he maintained:[16]

> Our own absolute Milan [Tony Leon], the white politician, makes bold to speak openly of his disdain and contempt for African solutions to the challenges that face the peoples of the Continent.
>
> According to him – who is a politician who practices his craft on the African continent – these solutions, because they are African, could not but consist of the pagan, savage, superstitious and unscientific responses typical of the African people, described by the white politician as resort to "snake-oil cures and quackery".

Mbeki became more scathing as he intimated:[17]

> By his statements, our own absolute Milan, the white politician, demonstrates that he is willing to enunciate an entrenched white racism that is a millennium old.
>
> This racism has defined us who are African and black as primitive, pagan, slaves to the most irrational superstitions and inherently prone to brute violence. It has left us with the legacy that compels us to fight, in a continuing and difficult struggle, for the transformation of ours into a non-racial society.
>
> Such crimes against humanity as slavery, colonialism and apartheid would never have occurred unless those who perpetrated them, knew it as a matter of fact that their victims were not as human as they.

It is evident that Mbeki had not taken kindly to what Leon had said. He therefore deemed it fit to digress (*ecbole*) with a view to fighting back, as it were.

It became commonplace, especially from the opposition parties, to accuse Mbeki of "playing the race card". This was, so it was argued, a strategy on Mbeki's part to mask the incompetence of his presidency. Indeed, Durrheim, Mtose and Brown aver:[18]

> Tony Leon, then leader of the Democratic Alliance (DA), the official opposition, suggested that Mbeki's 'litany of racist caricatures bordered on the pornographic'. The DA health spokesperson, Ryan Coetzee, accused Mbeki of playing the race card, turning a health issue into a race issue and of refusing that rape was pervasive in the country and was partly responsible for the spread of AIDS.

---

[14]Thabo Mbeki, "Second National Institute for Economic Policy (NIEP) Oliver Tambo Lecture" (11 August 2000): http://www.thepresidency.gov.za/pebble.asp?relid=2650. (Accessed 15 June 2016).
[15]Thabo Mbeki, *ibid*.
[16]Thabo Mbeki, *ibid*.
[17]Thabo Mbeki, *ibid*.
[18]Kevin Durrheim, Xoliswa Mtose and Lindsay Brown, *Race trouble: Race, identity, and inequality in post-apartheid South Africa* (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2011): 195.

4 Speech at the Opening Session of the National Conference on Racism – 30 August 2000

Notwithstanding the "race card" charge, Mbeki remained undeterred arguing that not enough progress had been made to induce the non-racial South Africa that the Constitution envisioned. His address to the Opening Session of the National Conference on Racism, held on 30 August 2000, bore testimony to this. Mbeki started off his speech by giving a synopsis of the views that had been expressed on racism at the time, arguing that from that exercise he had drawn a conclusion that racism was, indeed, a "contentious" subject. Mbeki pointed out:[19]

> The public discussion that has taken place in our country in the last few months on the issue of racism, demonstrates the point unequivocally that in this area, *we are faced with one of the most contentious issues on our national agenda* [emphasis added].

Mbeki delineated:[20]

> Its discussion does not lead to the national feel-good atmosphere we all experience whenever our national sports teams score a victory over a foreign competitor or when other benign events occur that help us to forget the persisting racial divisions in our society.
>
> Arguments are advanced honestly that such a discussion, about racism, can only lead to the division of our country into mutually antagonistic racial camps.
>
> It is also said that it might very well encourage racial conflict, destroying the progress we have achieved towards national reconciliation, towards the birth of a happy rainbow nation.

It stands to reason that dealing with racial discourse in South Africa was so vexed. There were both protagonists, as well as antagonists of the racism debate. Mbeki proceeded to present the arguments that were put forth by these dichotomous forces. Pertaining to the antagonists, Mbeki postulated:[21]

> It has been argued that those who point to the persistence of racism in our country are themselves racist. Those who propagate affirmative action are accused of seeking to introduce reverse racism, or, more directly, of resort to anti-white racism.
>
> Some assert that the description 'racist' is merely an epithet used by bad people to insult others, as well as a means of intimidating and silencing those who hold views critical of the government.
>
> Alternatively, it is said that the issue of racism is brought up by unscrupulous politicians, in an effort to mobilise black constituencies to support them. After all, so it is said, we ended apartheid and therefore racism, when we became a non-racial democracy in 1994.

Juxtaposing the aforementioned arguments with the views espoused by those who may be depicted as pro-racism debate, Mbeki told his interlocutors:[22]

---

[19]Thabo Mbeki, "Speech at the opening session of the national conference on racism" (30 August 2000): http://www.racism.gov.za/substance/speeches/mbeki000830.htm. (Accessed 20 June 2016).
[20]Thabo Mbeki, *ibid*.
[21]Thabo Mbeki, *ibid*.
[22]Thabo Mbeki, *ibid*.

> On the other hand, others within our society argue that those who are most vocal in seeking to suppress discussion on this issue are those who benefited from centuries of colonial and apartheid racial domination.
>
> These will go on to say that the privileged do not want this discussion because they want to maintain their privileged positions at all costs.
>
> It is also said that in order to achieve this result, the privileged work hard to convince both themselves as well as the rest of society, that what is being complained of does not, in fact, exist, except for isolated incidents.
>
> This is categorised as the denial mode, in terms of which the dominant instruments of propaganda, which, by definition, are at the disposal of the privileged, are used to obstruct the recognition of reality.
>
> The aggrieved will go further to argue that the privileged sectors of our society, accustomed to setting the national agenda, continue in the effort to set the national agenda, regardless of what the majority of our citizens might desire.
>
> Of course, by this time, the latter have been empowered by the establishment of the democratic system to believe that they have the democratic right, openly and legitimately, to set this national agenda.
>
> The point is also made that our process of national reconciliation has been somewhat of a charade. In this regard, it is said that only the victims of racism have responded to the call to forgive and to let bygones be bygones.
>
> The charge is made that the perpetrators and beneficiaries of racial oppression have acted merely to defend their interests, refusing to extend their own hand towards the victim, in a true spirit of reconciliation.
>
> The same can be said of the initial response of sections of the media to the decision of the Human Rights Commission to hold hearings on the issue of racism in the media.

As he presented arguments for and against – giving both sides of the story – on the race question in South Africa, Mbeki assumed the role of an educator. Instead of giving his standpoint on the subject matter, at least up to this point, Mbeki embarked on a journey of informing his audience of the prevailing views on racism. Commenting on the role of an educator, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca point out:[23]

> In education, whatever its object, it is assumed that if the speaker's discourse does not always express truths, that is, theses accepted by everyone, it will at least defend values that are not a matter of controversy in the group which commissioned him.

True to his conviction that one could not talk about "South Africanness" until and/or unless racism had been debated, Mbeki made six "propositions" as the premises of his argument[24]:

> First, the practice of racism is both anti-human and constitutes a gross violation of human rights.
>
> Second: as it has been practised through the centuries, the black people have been the victims of racism rather than the perpetrators.

---

[23]Chaïm Perelman & Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The new rhetoric: A treatise on argumentation* – Translated by Jon Wilkinson and Purcell Weaver (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1969): 53.

[24]Thabo Mbeki, "Speech at the opening session of the national conference on racism" (30 August 2000): http://www.racism.gov.za/substance/speeches/mbeki000830.htm. (Accessed 20 June 2016).

> Accordingly, what we have to deal with is white, anti-black racism, while giving no quarter to any tendency towards black, anti-white racism, whether actual or potential, as well as anti-Semitism.
>
> Third: racism is manifested in a variety of ways, these being the ideological, existing in the world of ideas, and the socio-economic, describing the social, political, economic and cultural power relations of domination of and discrimination against the victims of racism.
>
> Fourth, for many centuries racism has been a fundamental defining feature of the relations between black and white, a directive principle informing the structuring of these relations.
>
> Fifth, the legacy of racism is so deeply entrenched that no country anywhere in the world has succeeded to create a non-racial society. […]
>
> Sixth: global experience stretching over a long period of time, demonstrates that the creation of a constitutional and legal framework for the suppression of racism is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition to end this violation of human rights.

Commenting on the use of propositions in argumentation, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca observe:[25]

> The premises in argument consist of propositions accepted by the hearers. When the hearers are not bound by the exact rules that compel them to recognize certain propositions, the whole structure raised by the speaker has no other basis than a factor of psychological nature, the adherence of the hearers. And more often than not, the speaker only presumes that his adherence exists. When his interlocutors disagree with the speaker's conclusions, they can, if they see fit, challenge the presumed agreement on the premises with a denial which will determine the whole argument at its base.

While the other "propositions" that Mbeki made might have been refutable, the first one, it may be argued, was less contentious. His interlocutors might have readily concurred with him that "racism is both anti-human and constitutes a gross violation of human rights". Mbeki did not therefore have to try harder to gain the adherence of his interlocutors. It might have been accepted as a "self-evident truth".

Conversely, Mbeki had to put a lot of effort into winning over his interlocutors, as regards the other "propositions". Notwithstanding this, some in Mbeki's audience would have taken comfort in the contention that racism was not peculiar to South Africa. The logical question would have been therefore what had been/was being done elsewhere to address the race issue. Were there lessons to be drawn from other parts of the world?

Employing the commonplace of antecedent and consequence, Mbeki attributed the skewed power relations with regard to the socio-economic conditions between black and white South Africans to racism which had come about thanks to colonialism and apartheid. This may be viewed as a fallacy that is rhetorically referred to as *the post hoc, ergo propter hoc*, which, when loosely translated, denotes "after this, therefore because of this".[26] This fallacy derives from the assumption that because there is a relationship

---

[25]Chaïm Perelman &Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca, *ibid*. 104.

[26]Edward P.J. Corbett & Robert J. Connors, *Classical rhetoric for the modern student* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999): 69.

between events, something happening after something else, there is also a causal relationship. It qualifies as what Corbett and Connors term "faulty causal generalisations".[27]

Mbeki opined that despite arguments by some that the transition to democracy had altered race relations in South Africa, in effect, the status quo persisted. He argued that what was required was for South Africans across racial lines to join hands in an effort to "defeat the demon of racism". Adumbrating what needed to be done, Mbeki counselled his audience:[28]

> The first step we must take towards the realisation of this goal is the common recognition by all of us, black and white, that racism exists and that it is indeed a very serious problem, without whose solution it is idle to speak of a new South Africa.
>
> Secondly, we must abandon the notion that the problem of racism has nothing to do with me and is the responsibility of another. We have to treat racism as a problem that challenges the black people. We must treat racism as a problem that challenges white people.
>
> It is obvious that it makes no sense whatsoever to argue that the responsibility to end racism resides with the victims of racism.
>
> Another step we have to take is to make the common determination that, precisely because this issue is so fundamental to our future, we have to ensure that it is discussed frankly, freely and openly. We must be ready to take the pain that will be an inevitable part of this open discourse.
>
> None among us should seek to suppress this discussion. To suppress it is to guarantee the perpetuation of racism, with the destructive consequences of which all of us must surely be aware.

A closer examination of this passage makes one to deduce that Mbeki sought to create an environment conducive to deliberative rhetoric. He seemed to subscribe to the Kantian view that holds that humans are equal and autonomous beings capable of judgement.[29] Granting his interlocutors a blank cheque, as it were, created an impression that every South African was qualified to speak about racism or that racism was everyone's business. This would have legitimised the discourse on racism and hopefully consensus would have been reached, even if it meant agreeing to disagree. Indeed, Habermas opines that consensus achieved in an inclusive discursive process is the ultimate legitimacy criterion of public decisions.[30]

One could be forgiven for thinking that almost 22 years into South Africa's democracy, racism would be a thing of the past. Lo and behold, some recent racial incidents in the country unequivocally and poignantly point to the fact that South Africa still has some "unfinished business" to attend to. Racism has again reared its ugly head. While the country has anti-discriminatory laws on its statute book, it is evident that something extra is needed. The views that were held by Mbeki when he asserted, among other things, that racism was the "problem" that needed to be

---

[27]Edward P.J. Corbett & Robert J. Connors, *ibid*. 68-69.
[28]Thabo Mbeki, *ibid*.
[29]See James Rachels, *The elements of moral philosophy* (New York: Random House, 1986).
[30]Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms* (Cambridge, Ma: The MIT Press, 1996): 110.

discussed "frankly, freely and openly" have therefore proven predictive. As Mbeki averred almost 16 years ago, South Africans cannot rest on their laurels and pretend that the "new South Africa" has been attained. Indeed, it seems that Tutu's "rainbow nation" remains elusive. Once again, all South Africans are being called upon to tackle – to borrow Mbeki's words – "the demon of racism" head-on.

Sifiso Eric Ngesi is a researcher at the Portfolio Committee on Transport, Parliament of South Africa. He is a MPhil and Ph.D graduate of the Centre for Rhetoric Studies, University of Cape Town.

This article first appeared in AYOR Volume 7

The justicialist rhetoric of Néstor Kirchner

Mariano Dagatti

The main thrust of this essay is to account for the preliminary results of a discourse analysis research on former president Néstor Kirchner's oratory as head of the Partido Justicialista [Justicialist Party; abbreviated PJ]. Within the frame of discourse analysis current tendencies in the French-speaking field,[1] it examines some rhetorical and argumentative features of the speeches belonging to Kirchner's "justicialist" stage, starting from the hypothesis that the speaker's institutional move from the Presidency of the State to that of the PJ implies a mutation on different levels of its political enunciation, mainly on the forms of subjective agency and on those of control of destination. On such horizon, this work takes into account Eliseo Verón's contributions in his classic article "La Palabra Adversativa" and seeks to explore the link that the word of the leader extends on his positive and negative recipients.[2] We believe that the image of himself a leader offers, the traditions and meanings he brings together in his argumentative weaving, the auditories he seeks to interpellate, the commonplace spaces in which he weaves up his explanations and his passions become ineluctable dimensions of an enquiry concerned with the construction of political hegemony.[3]

Today, the PJ is the most relevant political party in Argentina, the one that gave continuity to the Peronist Party, founded by General Juan Domingo Perón. In its origins, its main commitment was the aid of workers and it remained since then closely linked to the working classes and labour unions. Together with the Unión Cívica Radical, it became one of the most important political parties in the country up to the end of the 20th century. Currently, it is the main electoral actor and boasts the largest territorial structure in our country. Broadly speaking, the national consolidation of *kirchnerism* coincides with the certainty that the PJ is the only party, the control of which guarantees by itself the political stability of a government. Néstor Kirchner's formal

[1] Among the extensive bibliography, see esp. Dominique Maingueneau, *Cenas de enunciação* (São Paulo: Parábola, 2008), Ruth Amossy, *L'argumentation dans le discours politique. Literature d'idée, fiction* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2000), Ruth Amossy, ed., *Images de soi dans le discours. La construction de l'ethos* (Laussane: Delachaux y Niestlé, 1999) and Patrick Charaudeau, *Discurso político* (São Paulo: Contexto, 2006).

[2] The arguments in this article recover the analytical perspective in the field of Silvia Sigal and Eliseo Verón's Argentine political discourse. *Perón o muerte. Los fundamentos discursivos del fenómeno peronista* (Buenos Aires: Legasa, 2004) and Eliseo Verón, "La palabra adversativa. Observaciones sobre la enunciación política", in Eliseo Verón et al., *El discurso político. Lenguajes y acontecimientos* (Buenos Aires: Hachette, 1987): 11-26.

[3] The concept of hegemony has been profusely dealt within the field of the social sciences. A genealogy of the term can be found in Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and socialist strategy. Towards a radical democratic politics* (London: Verso, 1985). The relation among hegemony, democracy and populism has been more recently dealt with by Ernesto Laclau, *The populist reason* (London: Verso, 2005).

© *African Yearbook of Rhetoric* 10, 2020, Online ISSN 2305-7785:
Mariano Dagatti, "The justicialist rhetoric of Néstor Kirchner", p. 75-83.

assumption as President of the PJ's National Council took place on 14th May, 2008, at an event in which the guest departed from the scene, giving the floor to the President of State Cristina Fernández de Kirchner. An article in the newspaper *Página/12*, the most relevant among the ones having an affinity with the Government, by the well-known political analyst Mario Wainfeld, was entitled "Silent eloquence". It was during the days of the conflict with the agricultural and farming sectors due to the enforcement of new taxes to withholdings to exportations.[4] The following day newspaper covers report about Kirchner giving the floor to his wife [President Fernández] in a string of facts involving, for instance, the first of the "*Cartas Abiertas*" (Open Letters) of the group of intellectuals called *Carta Abierta*, under the headline "A climate of political unstableness". The strategy of taking up office as head of the PJ is defined by Kirchner himself as an instance of support to the new administration's good governance.

Kirchner's party leadership can in fact be viewed as the culmination of a plan the party in office had devised three years before, in 2005, to consolidate a framework of governance, which the project of "Plural Agreement" had been basing on quicksand.[5] From the initial mainstreaming to progressive control of the PJ, the turning in the political strategy of kirchnerism is ostensible: after the first stage dominated by the alliance of the government with the PJ (through the Kirchner-Duhalde deal) –marked by the symbolic distance of the first as compared to the second regarding mainstreaming[6]–, the triumph of the party in office in the mid-term parliamentary

---

[4] About kirchnerism and the so called "land conflict" see: Ricardo Aronskind and Gabriel Vommaro, comps., *Campos de batalla. Las rutas, los medios y las plazas en el nuevo conflicto agrario* (Buenos Aires: Prometeo, 2010) and Norma Giarracca and Miguel Teubal, coords., *Del paro agrario a las elecciones de 2009. Tramas, reflexiones y debates* (Buenos Aires: Antropofagia, 2010).

[5] "Plural Agreement" was the name of the elections alliance founded in 2006 to accompany Néstor Kirchner's government and Cristina Fernández presidential candidature. It consists mainly of supporters of the *Frente para la Victoria*, the party founded by the Kirchners, and the *Partido de la Concertación* – FORJA, made up of dissident members of the *Unión Cívica Radical*. About the party in office political strategy, see: Daniel Arzadun, *El peronismo: Kirchner y la conquista del reino* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana-COPPAL, 2008), Nicolás Cherny, Germán Feierherd and Marcos Novaro, "El presidencialismo argentino: de la crisis a la recomposición del poder (2003-2007)", *América Latina Hoy* 54 (2010): 15-41, and Alejandro Bonvecchi and Agustina Giraudy, "Argentina: victoria presidencial oficialista y tensiones en el esquema macroeconómico", *Revista de Ciencia Política* 28, 1 (2008): 35-59.

[6] Mainstreaming [transversality] indicated in the first kirchnerism the concern for a political sphere in which the party structures did not themselves guarantee the articulation between the political and civic instances. In accordance with this expansion strategy of the support bases, Kirchner's government recovered the original values of the peronist tradition with the suggestive omission of every explicit reference to Juan Perón or Eva Duarte an to peronism in general, and attempted to bring them together in a centre-left movement, the identification of which was the breaking with neoliberalism. It is very important to understand that the necessary alliance with the PJ that peronism maintained kept up since its rise to power was not accompanied by a discourse strategy directed to peronist recipients. On Peronism, PJ and transversality, see Isidoro Cheresky, "Un signo de interrogación sobre la evolución del régimen político", in Isidoro Cheresky, ed., *La política después de los partidos* (Buenos Aires: Prometeo, 2006): 27-73, Juan Carlos Torre, "La operación política de la transversalidad. El presidente Kirchner y el Partido Justicialista", en CEDIT, ed., *Argentina en perspectiva. Reflexiones sobre nuestro país en democracia* (Buenos Aires: Universidad Torcuato Di Tella, 2005): 13-28.

elections created the conditions for kirchnerism to put an end to the "double-headed leadership"[7] that dominated the *justicialist* scene in those years (two confronted heads: Kirchner and Duhalde), to strengthen a new leadership and reassert other regional headships, settling an "organization instability" which acknowledged as a starting point, according to the political analyst D. Arzadun, "the breaking of the principle of authority inside the party starting from the 1999 election setback".[8]

With the relative autonomy of formal assumption, Kirchner's series of political speeches as president of the PJ began some weeks before, on 25th April 2008, only a day after his triumph at the party's in-house elections had been confirmed. The taking over of office coincides with a progressive drop of the positive image of Cristina Fernández government, who had comfortably won in national elections six months before, which now appeared unexpectedly remote. Kirchner's presidency in the PJ would be marked by successive internal and external crisis –the so called "land conflict" on the one hand; the international crisis on the other– that, after a meager performance as candidate to national deputy for the Province of Buenos Aires in the mid-term elections, ended up in his indeclinable resignation to office on 29th June 2009, less than fifteen months after having expressly assumed the task. During that interval, Kirchner's activity as an orator fluctuated between two periods of high frequency (*e. g,* the conflict with the agricultural sectors, the election campaign for deputation office) and periods of absolute silence, for instance, the last months of 2008, when he would deliver only three speeches (*e. g.* on 17th October because of the "*Day of Peronist Loyalty*").

We would like to propose, in view of the above, that the mutation of the identification processes offered by the kirchnerist discourse as sources of political absorption of broad sectors and of actors of national life coincides by and large with Cristina Fernandez's assumption as President of the Nation and Néstor Kirchner's assumption as head of the PJ. With the research still in progress, we will now try to expose some rhetorical-argumentative traces of the reconfiguration of the identity of kirchnerism, in view of some signs of Kirchner's political enunciation in his role of head of the party. As it is known, political discourses imply three types of recipients: a positive one, i.e. a supporter, a negative one, that corresponds to the position of the opponent, and an indecisive one, called "*paradestinatario*" by Eliseo Verón, to whom everything is directed with the purpose of persuading him.[9] In this article, we will

---

[7] Natalio Botana, *Poder y hegemonía. El régimen político después de la crisis* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 2006): 74.

[8] Arzadun, *El peronismo: Kirchner y la conquista del reino*, 81. In 1999, the PJ was defeated in the national elections by an alliance of radicals, dissident peronists and independent forces. It was the second and last time in its history the peronism lost an election; the first was on the return of democracy in 1983.

[9] To enunciate a political word consists, according to Verón, in situating oneself and situating three different types of recipients, by means of ascertainments, explanations, prescriptions and promises concerning the identities of the imaginary: on the one hand, concerning those entities by means of which the speechmaker seeks to construe a relationship –metacollectives–, and on the other concerning the entity that is foundation of the legitimacy to take the floor, of the [construction] of a collective of identification. See: Verón, "La palabra adversativa. Observaciones sobre la enunciación política", 23.

concentrate our attention on an essential aspect of this triple destination: the make-up of a Peronist identity. We argue that this search for collective identity is indicated by three rhetoric instances: an identification collective (identity by inclusion), topics (identity by shared knowledge) and anaphor (identity by repetition).

The first thing to be noticed about Néstor Kirchner's "*justicialist*" public speech is the presence of a collective of peronist identification. By this we understand an entity which condenses the characteristic features acquired by the relation between the speechmaker and the positive recipient in political discourse. It is expressed in the inclusive "we".[10] The following is an example:

> First of all I want to greet all the people of San Juan, those who think like us and those who don't. Because we, the peronists, want an integrated Argentina, confrontation-free; we want to embrace each Argentinian to fight for happiness and justice. (Event in the Province of San Juan, 23rd May 2008).[11]

The presence of a peronist collective of identification is no surprise in the speech of who was then president of the PJ. It is evident that the move from the National Executive Power to the presidency of a political party implies by itself a reconfiguration of the enunciation device and a segmentation, no matter how mitigated, of its positive recipients: we switch from the collective "we, the Argentinians" to the collective "we, the peronists"[12]. There are no doubts about the peronist pedigree of kirchnerism, be it because of informed consent, of representations about its previous trajectory, or of the symbolical realms displayed by Kirchner himself in his allocutions as President of the Argentine Republic; but nevertheless, the construction of a "peronist" entity constitutes an enunciation novelty compared to those first presidential speeches: the peronist condition of the ex-president is as undeniable as the non-existence of a collective of peronist identification at the beginning of his national administration. The reluctance Kirchner had shown to speak on behalf of party entities, coherent with his strategies of transversal call of allied political forces, stands in contrast to his new institutional position, that of leader of the PJ, which by definition requires certain operations of party agency.

These identification operations, however, call for the necessity of asking oneself certain questions that have no univocal answers: the first of them is who belong to the

---

[10] Verón, *ibid.*, 17.

[11] The format we have chosen for the fragments extracted from Kirchner's public speeches is the following: we have separately placed the paragraphs with special fonts and margins, followed by details of discourse dates. We must make clear that these fragments are significant regarding the corpus, and, if necessary, others could be offered. Finally, we indicate that the speeches have been quoted as they were found in the web site of the Presidency: www.presidencia.gov.ar, at the end of 2008.

[12] The main identification collective used by Kirchner in his speeches as Argentine President was "we, the Argentinians". This collective coexisted with others. The second most relevant generational collective being: "we, the generation of the seventies". As can be seen, both constitute forms of identification transversal to the party entities. In fact, there is no collective of this kind during the first kirchnerist presidency.

peronist collective.[13] As it is to be expected in a tradition that lacks no everlasting ambiguities, Kirchner's speeches tend to make a mutual approach between the collective of the peronists and that of the Argentinians.

> But the Argentinians, having this great movement as a "spinal cord", but Argentinians who perhaps don´t think as we do but think of the homeland, together with us, we set ourselves to re-build this country, we raised it and this is the sixth year or uninterrupted growth. (Inauguration of a party location in Ezeiza on 24th April 2008).

This tendency to bring the identities nearer does not at all mean an homologation between peronists and Argentinians in the style of the first Perón ("for a peronist there's nothing better than another peronist", he used to say) , and he is not unaware of the highly valued defense of plurality and freedom of speech in contemporary democracies. He rather makes a consideration of peronism as a "spinal cord" of the national cause, and so, as the basic premise of the Argentinians' national struggles. In other words, the key that mediates between peronists and Argentinians (Kirchner, for example, distinguishes between "the justicialist people" and "the Argentine people") is the articulation among all sectors, whether peronist or not, around a national and popular project, of which peronism would be nothing less than the "spinal cord".

Now I would like us to stop for a while in the vindication Kirchner makes of peronism under the topic[14] of peronism as a "movement". The idea would be that peronism is not as much a political structure or a bureaucratic apparatus as a national and popular movement; i.e., peronism would not represent the expression of a sector or a political party, as for example, the Unión Cívica Radical, the Socialist Party or the Communist Party, but the utmost expression of a national identity, of a national saga, which has its origins in the independence revolutions, its continuity in the pioneer's and immigrant's experiences, who arrived in the country at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century (the complete realization of which would be the culture of work and family in the classical peronism), and its destiny, which had been postponed until the arrival of kirchnerism, in the militant activity of youth in the seventies. Identity, project and destiny, continuity; the relevance of the articulation of party identity and national identity appears frequently achieved by means of the use of

---

[13] The issue about a true peronist identity has been one of the great debates in peronism's intellectual history. It constitutes a significant paradox according to which there would be a true peronism the essence of which no one can grasp: "it is an expectation – says Carlos Altamirano – about the virtualities of peronism that constitute its truth. If today that truth does not manifest itself (or only does through testimonies of true peronists), repressed and lost by work of the really existing peronism, it has however shown itself in the past". "True peronism", in this sense, cannot be but a legacy, because "the present is never the time of true peronism": "The present is the time consumed by empirical peronism, the reign of which, however contingent, prevents the truth of peronism to carry itself out". See: Altamirano, *Peronismo y cultura de izquierda* (Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 2011): 132-135.

[14] Here and further on we will use the category of "topic" in the sense of ideologemes that belong to the *doxa* and are considered obvious and beyond all dispute by a certain social group. See: Marc Angenot, *La parole pamphlétaire. Contribution à la typologie des discours modernes* (Paris: Payot, 1982).

anaphors[15], which allows the speechmaker to string together a "national and popular" saga along two centuries of history. Besides, this saga presents the identity of the nation and the people as a transcendental and non-temporal essence, i.e., as the repetition of a spirit identical to itself through time. Let us expose a couple of exemplary fragments:

> This is why on this 17th October 2008, we open our arms as always, we want to embrace all Argentinians, we strongly call together all sectors of the nation to build up the homeland that this country, this Argentina, to build up the homeland that Mariano Moreno, to build up the homeland that General Belgrano, that General San Martín, that Hipólito Yrigoyen, that Juan Perón, that Eva Perón, that our *desaparecidos* [missing] dreamed of, and that we now have to build with all our strength to include everyone. (Event on *Loyalty Day* on 17th October 2008).

That is why, Argentinians [male and female], (…) I ask you to reflect that nobody is perfect, that we make achievements and make mistakes, but I know we are going the right way, that we have the vocation to bring all groups together, that we have the vocation to open our arms to everybody, that we have the vocation to take up our old banners, of the great men and women of our homeland, that we have a *sanmartinian* vocation, that we have Mariano Moreno's vocation, that we have General Belgrano's vocation, that we have Hipólito Yrigoyen's vocation, that we have vocation for struggling and the conviction of the immortal Evita, and that we have the convictions and principles of those Plaza de Mayo Mothers, who gave an example of dignity, an example of courage to defend the human rights in our homeland. (Event in La Plata, on 17th March, 2009).

Mariano Moreno, Manuel Belgrano, José de San Martín, Hipólito Yrigoyen, Juan Perón, Eva Perón, the activists of the seventies, the Plaza de Mayo Grandmothers and Mothers, and the current project of the Argentine government constitute, in the perspective of the orator, testimonies in different periods of a single homeland dream, of a single vocation and a single conviction. As we see, the essence of this "national and popular" identity, woven by the resort to anaphors, appears marked by dreams of a common nation that transcends time (revolutionaries, popular leaders, political activists and kirchnerists share, according to this prose, similar dreams) and emphasizes the proposed identity. Also, the resort to conversational implicatures[16] allows for the recalling of dreams, frustrations and struggles which rest upon a memory shared by the orator and the auditory, so as to favour an enunciation complicity, *ergo* a nearness, a proximity between the leader and the recipients.

---

[15] According to Heinrich Lausberg, "The intermittent repetition of the beginning of a member or a phrase is called anaphor". See: Lausberg, *Manual de retórica literaria. Fundamentos de una ciencia de la literatura* 2 (Madrid: Gredos, 1967): 108. The Spanish Royal Academy makes the anaphor and the repetition equivalent in general terms, and defines it as: "Figure which consists in the purposeful repetition of words and concepts".

[16] Herbert Paul Grice advocates the existence of a series of conversational norms or maxims, known by the speaker as well as by the listener, that guide the conversation and enable that the inferences deduced by the listener be the ones the speaker has wished to communicated. This type of inferences the listener deduces and that does not depend on words but on the conversational maxims is called conversational implicatures. See: Grice, "Lógica y conversación", in Luis Valdés Villanueva, ed., *La búsqueda del significado* (Madrid: Tecnos, 1991): 511-530.

The link between peronist identity and national identity can be read simultaneously from two points of view. On one hand, a vindication of the last Perón, that of pacification and national unity, who no longer said "for a peronist there's nothing better than another peronist", but "for an Argentinian there's nothing better than another Argentinian". This vindication finds its sense in a national context of increasing antagonism, encouraged by the disputes between the national government and the agricultural sector and the main media groups, both sectors with a huge symbolic and economic weight in the country's sociopolitical structure:

> We assume it [the responsibility] as Argentinians, not starting from party sectarianism, [but] as Argentinians thinking of this last message of our leader, that for an Argentinian there is nothing better than another Argentinian. And we continue think the same. (Event in the locality of Chivilcoy, 5th March, 2009)

In an instance of political polarization, the mission of peronism thus appears as a mission for national unity, and that national unity would be favoured, according to Kirchner's view of peronism, by the privileged condition of peronism as a shared social representation about the national an popular issue: the culture of work, political sovereignty, economic independence and social justice. It would not be abusive to point out that peronism provides kirchnerism with a kind of theory of the "national and popular" values that today still retain an efficient symbolic power.

On the other hand, this "national and popular" rather than party-related conception of peronism is argumentatively articulated in the frame of Kircher's ubiquitous criticism of political elites and political parties in general, which does none but alter a set of representations very much expanded in the post-crisis[17] Argentine society.

At first, there is a persistence in the presidential speech of a very extended topic in the first years of the new century, that Kirchner had adopted as its own in the construction of his legitimacy as president and as mainstream [transversality] strategy: the topic of political parties as arbitrary areas of confrontation. In this respect, we should be reminded that the kirchnerist projects of "transversality" and "plural agreement" went for a design of politics on behalf of values and at the expense of party structures and concepts, which according to Kirchner himself, "had become obsolete to

[17] The 2001 crisis in Argentina consisted, according to Pablo Gerchunoff and Lucas Llach in *El ciclo de la ilusión y el desencanto,* in "the deepest and most prolonged productive retraction ever since there have been registers". The confluence of all kinds and sectors of unsatisfied demands accounts for its deep scopes: "cacerolazos" in different cities, "piqueteros" manifestations, massive protest marches and students assemblies, rural protests, gatherings in the country's main routes, massive looting in the major urban centres. The high degree of mobilization and social dissatisfaction foretold a break of the political forms of representation and of the concept of democracy as a delegation government. On the economical perspective, see: Gerchunoff and Llach, *El ciclo de la ilusión y el desencanto. Un siglo de políticas económicas argentinas* (Buenos Aires: Ariel, 2003): 449, and, in the political perspective: Isidoro Cheresky, ed., *La política después de los partidos* (Buenos Aires: Prometeo, 2006).

solve the individuality crisis".[18] Let us insist on this point: the public speeches of the PJ's president recover and activate three of the central topics that operated as commonplace manifestations of that "anti-political discourse", typical of the popular disenchantment with the political elite during neoliberalism: politics as a show, politics as a field of secret operations and politics as exercise of bureaucracy. Here are some relevant extracts:

> Since Cristina became President, from the first day, they were a "hampering machine". When they are asked what ideas they have, they suggest none: 'no, we must come to agreements'. Agreements about what? The resetting of the 90's model in Argentina? No, we come earnestly, not to play phony politics or political bureaucracy, we came to dare risks and to change Argentina. (Event in Ensenada, 7th May, 2009).
>
> [Dear] officers, we are to come out to talk about security, not only when there is a camera; not only when there is a microphone to speak about security. Dear officers: with no cameras as it corresponds to the responsibility the people have given us, get organized, work with the mayors […]. (Event in the Tres de Febrero district, 9th March, 2009).
>
> We must go and speak as militants, as real political cadres, house by house, district by district, again, because it is the way to find the solution, it is the way to find an answer to the media lock up they want to cause us. (Event in the Avellaneda district, 17th February, 2009).

Against these three topics, Kirchner proposed presence, permanent action, militant activity, a model of politics claiming to be public and every day, with no mediations, no intermediaries, no protocols. Action, direct contact, movement, immediacy form part of a lexicon that associates politics with militant activism and the politician's image with that of the activist. The preceding paragraphs make evident a connection which must be stated explicitly: the topics of "anti-politics" do not only define, issuing it down in black and white, a form of making true politics, but do define as well the domains of the opponent: the opposition as "hampering machine", the opposition as bureaucracy, the opposition as a constellation of media figures, the opposition as mere saying. On the same lines, involved in each of these practices, which, from the orator's perspective delegitimize politics, appear the communication media, cameras, microphones and media lock-ups.

Before we finish this work, let us sketch out some features of the *adversative function* of Kirchner's PJ speeches, which for reasons of space will be convenient to develop and exemplify in future works. We may, however, advance three characteristics that contrast with Kirchner's allocutions as President: the first, the emergence of an adversative instance, under the nominal form "the opposition"; the second, the fragmentation of the entity "the Argentinians" and even of entities that do not usually allow for fragmentation like the collective "the Argentine people"; the third, the subordination of political opponents to an adversative instance that transcends them and encloses them: the big communication media business-owner conglomerations. In this sense, opponents in the political field become a "façade" of the

[18] The quotes correspond to Néstor Kirchner's speech as President of the Nation delivered on occasion of the 97th anniversary of the Argentine Chamber of Commerce on 11th December 2003.

real opponents; and as counterpart, the media groups operations become the real reason for the positive image increase of the opposing leaders, or, as was the case in 2009, the true executors of the party in office election defeats. We must say, regarding this issue, that the construction of the media instance as an adversative instance, even as the main and determining one, is a novelty of kirchnerist discourse of this stage that has not yet been properly dealt with.

Kirchner's assumption of the PJ's presidency was the corollary to an adventure that had in fact began with the triumph of the party in office in the 2005 parliamentary elections. The combination of the national Executive in the hands of Cristina Fernández and the PJ's leadership under Kirchner himself exhibited the peak of an accumulation which very few people predicted at the beginning of the Kirchner administration. Beyond the vicissitudes of political daily exercising, the consolidation of kirchnerism as a force enables to catch a glimpse of a political practice that kept varying with the passing of time and the occurrence of events. This mutation in the drawing power is in line with an insistent adscription of kirchnerism to the "national and popular" tradition in our country. The consideration of the peronist identity acquires, in this context, a relevant weight. Our aim has been to broadly outline a sketch of the main identity unit in Néstor Kirchner's speeches during his PJ stage. We have sought to comprehend the way in which peronism has been discursively considered in the framework of a reformulation strategy of the kirchnerist identity.

Mariano Dagatti, University of Buenos Aires, Argentina & Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas (CONICET).

This article first appeared in AYOR Volume 4.2-3

In response to the "wind of change": The statecraft of Kwame Nkrumah

Eric Opoku Mensah

During the first ever tour of Commonwealth countries in Africa, the British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan made his first stopover in Ghana on 5 January 1960.

On 9 January, Macmillan, at a State Dinner organised on his behalf in Accra, made a momentous speech. A speech that is regarded as a rehearsal of a key British foreign policy statement Macmillan was to make a month later in Cape Town. This speech would later be referred to as the "wind of change" speech.

The South African version of Macmillan's speech was delivered on 3 February in Parliament in Cape Town. The Cape Town version completed Macmillan's key rhetorical invention which expressed a new paradigm of Britain's foreign policy in Africa. In the end, the speech resonated differently in the two countries where it was heard, for obvious reasons. That is, there were significant differences between the political contexts in Accra and Cape Town, rendering the speech rhetorically significant in terms of its effects and responses, both immediately and later.

By the year 1960 when the British Prime Minister visited Ghana, it had been independent for three years and was already a proud member of the British Commonwealth. Ghana was on the verge of attaining a republican status. As short a time as it was after independence, Nkrumah was in full gear marshalling resources to help eliminate colonialism in other African territories. It was within this positive political atmosphere that Macmillan's address was received. Macmillan's address in Accra was, in essence, in line with Ghana's new political direction which had been set in motion by Kwame Nkrumah. In his Accra speech, Macmillan carefully stated that:

> The wind of change is blowing right through Africa. This rapid emergence of the countries of Africa gives the continent a new importance in the world.[1]

On the other hand, Prime Minister Verwoerd of the Union of South Africa was strengthening his hand in apartheid and was on the verge of pulling the country out of the Commonwealth. Macmillan was scheduled to give three speeches in South Africa.[2] The climax of the three was to be his address to the South African Parliament in Cape

[1] This excerpt cited by Hunt is found in Colin Baker, "Macmillan's 'wind of change' tour, 1960", in *South African Historical Journal* 38, 1 (1998): 181. The full version of Macmillan's speech delivered in Accra could not be located by the author. However, various sources agree that the version of the speech which was delivered in Accra was slightly changed to be delivered in Cape Town.
[2] *Ibid*. 178.

© *African Yearbook of Rhetoric* 10, 2020, Online ISSN 2305-7785:
Erik Opoku Mensah, "In response to the "wind of change": The statecraft of Kwame Nkrumah", p. 85-93.

Town. In this speech, Macmillan hit on the most key message at the heart of his African tour. He noted:

> The wind of change is blowing through this continent and whether we like it or not, this growth of national consciousness is a political fact. And we must all accept it as a fact, and our national policies must take account of it.[3]

Macmillan's 'bombshell' speech in Cape Town Parliament seemed rhetorically inflicting on the sensibilities of the South African government. It called for a deep reflection and overhaul of the Union government's racial policies. The setting — the South African Parliament — could not have been more appropriate for such a key deliberative invention.

Though both Prime Ministers Nkrumah and Verwoerd responded immediately to Macmillan's surprise in both Accra and Cape Town as custom demanded of them, such immediate responses can seldom ever articulate clearly the most desired responses to the exigencies that would have been created by a key speech such as Macmillan's. By the end of the Cape Town address, Nkrumah had conceived clearly the full spectrum of Macmillan's message in Africa. While Accra's address had seemed to be a rehearsal, the Cape Town delivery became the real performance which completed Macmillan's message to Africa. Be that as it may, Nkrumah gave two key responses. The first speech was delivered at the dinner in Accra; the other, eight months later in New York. My concern in this essay is to examine Nkrumah's craft in responding to Macmillan's central message. By this, I will explain the speech's articulation of a single policy direction between Ghana and Britain on one hand and their points of departure on the other hand. I will examine Macmillan's central metaphor and its application of indirect reference as a form of diplomatic rhetoric. Lastly, I will analyse how Nkrumah employed Macmillan's central message as an appropriate medium for his own argumentation at the United Nations General Assembly, and by so doing served as a means of strengthening Macmillan's message.

The metaphor: "wind of change"

To appreciate Nkrumah's craft as a response to Macmillan's momentous African policy statement, we need to understand the "wind of change" metaphor as a rhetorical commonplace of Macmillan's address. We need to locate its locus in the two speeches (Accra and Cape Town) in order to assess the quintessential nature of Nkrumah's rhetorical choices in his response, both immediately and later. Colin Baker is his work explicates the conception, preparation and execution of Macmillan's 1960 African tour. The tour was to cover strategic British interests bordering on Commonwealth and

[3] See the original full speech in Harold Macmillan "The wind of change", in Philippe-Joseph Salazar, ed., *African Yearbook of Rhetoric* 2, 3 (2011): 28-38.

colonial related issues.[4] With the changing face of Britain's policy in Africa, Macmillan wanted to use the tour to state this new policy direction. Amongst the numerous considerations for the order of the visit, Ghana had been chosen for the grand opening of the tour with the Union of South Africa as the climax and as Baker notes, the speech that the Prime Minister was to deliver in Cape Town was "intended to be the most important of the four major speeches of the tour".[5] The decision to use the phrase 'the wind of change' in Accra, according to David Hunt, was to "assure the Ghanaians that Britain was well aware that numerous changes were taking place in Africa and that far from opposing them, they intended to foster and 'direct them towards useful purposes.'"[6] This choice of phrase seemed rhetorically appropriate for Macmillan's address in that, Ghana had not only become the first Sub-Saharan African territory to claim its independence, but by 1960, it had become the avant garde of nationalism in Africa.

It is important to know that initially, the focal phrase "the wind of change" had been destined to appear only in the Accra speech. However, it got the chance for a second life by being repeated in the Cape Town Parliamentary speech when Hunt decided to include the phrase. Hunt, who contributed in the drafting of Macmillan's address, remarks that, "as nobody had paid any attention to the phrase in Accra I thought I might as well use it again and … put it in with only minor variations".[7] By this destined repetition of the phrase in Cape Town, it became the rhetorical hinge upon which the locus of Macmillan's African policy statement came to rest. In other words, it had summed up the totality of the British Prime Minister's message, bringing forth an exigency which called for a crucial response.

It is within this rhetorical context of the significance of the "the wind of change" that Nkrumah invented a climactic response seven months later at the United Nations (UN) on 23 September 1960. But examining what constituted Nkrumah's response at the UN, we can first take a glance at his immediate response to the "wind of change" as it was first heard in Accra.

We are together but uncommitted

In Accra, Kwame Nkrumah did not hesitate to lay emphasis on Ghana's foreign policy to Macmillan, a foreign policy which he had carefully explicated in his Independence Declaration Speech three year earlier to the world.[8] The visit of the British Prime

[4] Macmillan's tour was to cover Ghana, the Union of South Africa, the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, Kenya and Nigeria. Kenya was later cancelled from the list. See Baker, *South African Historical Journal*, 174.
[5] *Ibid*. 177.
[6] *Ibid*. 177.
[7] *Ibid*. 181. Hunt's remark is captured by Baker.
[8] See E. Powell, *Private Secretary (female)/Gold Coast* (London: Hurst, 1984): 107-109.

Minister gave a platform for Nkrumah's reiteration of Ghana's unequivocal anti-colonial foreign policy in Africa. In view of this, Britain's changing policy in Africa was surprising news to Nkrumah as this brought about somehow strangely, a convergence of African foreign policies between Britain and Ghana, a former colonial master and its former colony. As Nkrumah gave his initial response to Macmillan's address, he clearly gave recognition to this convergence in Accra. The speeches of the two Prime Ministers are considered in Nkrumah's words, as the creation of a new foreign policy pact which places both Ghana and Britain on the same plane. It was welcome news to Nkrumah to see Britain, upon reflection, to have decided to stand up and pursue a new moral cause in Africa. Nkrumah noted:

> We appreciate that the United Kingdom, which is heavily involved in Africa, is faced with very weighty problems in the discharge of her obligations in this Continent. We sincerely hope that it is recognised that Ghana which has been in the vanguard of the freedom movement is also faced with equally great problems. I am glad to observe that the United Kingdom has been among the first to show favourable reactions to the call of independence. We, hope sincerely, therefore, that it will be possible, within the Commonwealth context, to formulate policies and programmes within which our two countries can work together.[9]

Nkrumah's well-crafted remark cast Macmillan's speech within a certain rhetorical light: that Britain had come to see the light and now it (Britain) does not share the same moral principles with other Western Powers that still possess colonies in Africa. Nkrumah, holding a moral code, had endorsed Britain as an epitome of what a World power should be. In an epidictic stance, he was "promoting values that are shared in the community".[10] He therefore hailed the Commonwealth as a representation of the new moral forces which, Britain, a former colonial power represented. In praising Britain, this is what Nkrumah said about the Commonwealth:

> Your visit thus dramatically reflects the growth and constant change of that remarkable institution, composed as it is of old countries and new countries, but all of them dedicated to the same principles of human dignity, and political freedom. Naturally we in Ghana think of the Commonwealth in its present form.[11]

The epidictic tone of Nkrumah's speech placed Macmillan's new foreign policy direction in Africa on a high moral plane — a moral plane which has the potential to influence other world powers to take a second look at their own positions in Africa. Macmillan's speech had given Nkrumah the opportunity to establish and declare Britain as a firm and trusted partner for the sole cause of ensuring freedom in every part of Africa. The "wind of change", both in terms of Macmillan's speech and nationalism in Africa, had begun in Ghana and Nkrumah was poised to blow it, with Britain's rhetorical backing, throughout Africa.

---

[9] K. Nkrumah, "The African hurricane", in Samuel Obeng, ed., *Selected speeches of Kwame Nkrumah Vol. 1* (Accra: Afram Pub. Ltd, 1997): 14.

[10] See Perelman's discussion of the speaker and epidictic speech in C. Perelman and L. Olbrechts - Tyteca, *The new rhetoric: A treatise on argumentation*, J. Wilkinson and P. Weaver, trans. (Notre Dame, Ind.: Notre Dame University Press, 1969): 52.

[11] Nkrumah, *Selected speeches*, 15.

But beyond the common call between Nkrumah and Macmillan to pursue freedom in Africa, Nkrumah did not hide Ghana's neutral position in the Cold War. Thus as long as Macmillan was engaged in the decolonisation of Africa, Nkrumah presented himself in his response as an ally but would not extend the same level of cooperation in support of Western ideological position in relation to the Cold War. Through Nkrumah's craft, he had been able to establish a cooperative positive on one hand with Britain and on the other hand, a non-committal approach to ideological inclination in relation to the Cold War. Through his statecraft he had demonstrated carefully the boundaries of his commitment and neutrality to two key international situations (anti-colonialism and the cold war) whose pursuit, albeit with different approaches, is crucial to ensuring peaceful co-existence within the comity of nations. He noted in the peroration that:

> Again, we have declared our stand in international relations: Ours is one of positive non-alignment… Our neutral position is thus intended to enable us not only to steer a middle course but positively to influence and sponsor whichever cause will ensure the peace of the word.[12]

The non-aligned position which had been taken by Nkrumah was of grave concern to Macmillan. A concern which he would express deeply in his address in Cape Town. Part of Macmillan speech in Cape Town subtly betrays Britain's policy of decolonising Africa — that newly independent African territories may be drawn into the ideological net of the West.[13] Nkrumah was ready for Western collaborators in decolonising Africa but not to use their assistance as bait for Africans to embrace Western ideological trapping. Nkrumah's position of Ghana's neutrality expresses the firmness of his ability to craft a neutral ideological position in order to steer a middle course. Thus, with Nkrumah's speech in Accra, he had concluded, what I refer to as, his introductory remarks to his rhetorical response to Macmillan's initial address in Accra. Upon listening to the complete address of Macmillan in Cape Town, Nkrumah waited for the right opportunity to craft a suitable response to Macmillan's "wind of change". That opportune moment was to come seven months later at the 15th Session of the UN General Assembly.

Sailing on the wind of change

In his UN address, Nkrumah crafted a speech which explicated the "wind of change" metaphor. By September, this important phrase of Macmillan's had gained maturity in view of key political developments in Africa. There was political strife in the Congo involving the Belgians, France was at war in Algeria, and racial political unrest was rising in the Union of South Africa, especially after the Sharpeville massacre in March 1960. In addition to these incidents, as many as fourteen African countries had gained

[12] *Ibid*. 15-16.

[13] See Macmillan's speech, "wind of Change", 32.

their independence between the time of Macmillan's speech in Cape Town and Nkrumah's address at the UN. This was within a record time of eight months. Africa, in view of these fascinating political developments, was continuously making news in the international media. In fact, to the international community, Macmillan's "wind of change" could not have been more meaningful. The phrase, to a large extent, had gained political currency and was evocative of what was happening within the remaining colonies in Africa. In the introductory statement of his address, Nkrumah indirectly evoked the words of Macmillan by stating:

> One cardinal fact of our time is the momentous impact of Africa's awakening upon the modern world. The flowing tide of African nationalism sweeps everything before it and constitutes a challenge to the colonial powers to make a just restitution for the years of injustice and crime committed against our continent.[14]

The statement produces a complex symbolic liaison[15] by ensuring a confluence of Macmillan's position and that of Pan-Africanism as advocated by Padmore. While our current focus is not on Pan-Africanism, pointing to it is relevant as it primarily underpins Nkrumah's statecraft. In this liaison, "Africa's awakening" expresses Nkrumah's known position whilst the phrase "flowing tide of African nationalism" brings Macmillan's words forcefully into the centre of the current argument of Nkrumah's speech. Nkrumah's remarks reiterated the new sense of cooperation between Africa and Britain, a key Western Power. The evocation of Macmillan's words is to give legitimacy to the moral arguments which Nkrumah pursued as he discussed the African situation. Nkrumah crafted his UN address in a manner in order to remain close to Macmillan's message whilst at the same time keeping Macmillan's authority at the centre of his arguments. With such a strategy, the argument which Nkrumah presents will be perceived not only through its logical appeal but also through the attractiveness of Macmillan's position which had already been received favourably by the international community.

While Nkrumah wanted to tailor his UN invention closely to Macmillan's, he also wanted to invoke it albeit with a new level of effect. Though Macmillan had in his address presented a picture of the growing nationalism of Africans with stupendous invention, Nkrumah deliberately crafted his speech to slap on Macmillan's invention another layer of effect. He remarked:

> The wind blowing in Africa is not an ordinary wind, it is a raging hurricane and it is impossible for… any other colonial power, to prevent the raging hurricane of African nationalism from blowing through the oppressed and down-trodden colonies.[16]

Instead of a "wind of change", Nkrumah rather presented his audience with "a raging hurricane" as a means of deepening Macmillan's metaphor in order to create a new

---

[14] Nkrumah, *Selected speeches*, 156.

[15] I apply Barbara Warnick's application of the term in her "Argument schemes and the construction of social reality: John F. Kennedy's address to the Houston Ministerial Association", in *Communication Quarterly* 44, 2 (1996): 190.

[16] Nkrumah, *Selected speeches*, 167.

intensity of rhetorical effect on the audience. As Perelman notes "even the words of other people, when repeated by a speaker, have changed their meaning, for in the process of repetition he always adopts toward them a position that is in some way new, even if only in the degree of importance he attaches to them".[17] In effect, Nkrumah had transformed the meaning of Macmillan's phrase. In other words, he had showed himself influential in the unfolding drama of nationalism in Africa as an insider and also an architect of the movement. The stark evidence of over a dozen independent countries within a period of eight months only lends credence to Nkrumah's justification in intensifying Macmillan's metaphor as "a raging hurricane". Through a careful crafting of his delivery, Nkrumah did not only ride on the sail of the "wind of change" but appropriated it unto himself whilst at the same time giving it a new meaning in New York.

The rhetorical examples

Another key part of Nkrumah's statecraft at the UN was his ability to construct clearly rhetorical examples in his address as a means of delineating Macmillan's "wind of change". By so doing, Nkrumah provides, dare I say it, the real evidence to the Macmillan invention. In his preparation to visit the Union of South Africa, Macmillan was a bit sceptical of Dr Verwoerd's willingness to welcome him in South Africa.[18] When the green light was finally given for the visit, Macmillan's next worry was how to craft the most appropriate message to be delivered in the South African Parliament. This necessitated high-level consultations involving Sir John Maud, the British High Commissioner in Pretoria. Maud had the knack of giving well received speeches in the Union and therefore had to travel to London to meet Macmillan to discuss every detail of the speech.[19]

With this background to the Cape Town speech, it is logical to infer that Macmillan, though with a clear goal for his speech, was very concerned with the reception and impact of his address by the South African government. He needed to be tactful in his approach and tread cautiously to avoid hitting on any wrong emotional chords in view of the seemingly sensitive nature of the subject of his address. Though the successful impact of the Cape Town speech could be clearly assessed on the basis of hindsight, Macmillan, though forceful in his words, resorted mainly to indirect references in stating his argument about the political situation within the Union of South Africa. Raising the delicate subject of the rising political consciousness of black people in the Union of South Africa, Macmillan intoned, "as I've travelled around the Union I have found everywhere, as I expected, a deep preoccupation with what is

[17] Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, "The new rhetoric", 317.
[18] Baker, 174.
[19] *Ibid*. 177.

happening in the rest of the African continent".[20] He carefully did not state in direct terms to the Union Government what seemed to be the obvious. In another instance, he attempted to route his argument of injustice of the apartheid system through Christian morality. He noted:

> Our judgment of right and wrong and of justice is rooted in the same soil as yours — in Christianity and in the rule of law as the basis of a free society. This experience of our own explains why it has been our aim in the countries for which we have borne responsibility, not only to raise the material standards of life, but to create a society that respects the rights of individuals, a society in which men are given the opportunity to grow to their full stature — and that must in our view include the opportunity of an increasing share in political power and responsibility.[21]

It is obvious that at the end of the delivery Macmillan had clearly stated his point but in as much as he yearned to make an impact, he needed to broach the subject of his address with the utmost caution, which he did, in order not to drive the Union Government out of the Commonwealth. Within the given circumstances in Cape Town, Macmillan had pushed his central message to the utmost limits with his rhetorical diplomatic arsenal. But in New York, Nkrumah's invention, to a large extent, provided some flesh to Macmillan's address, stripped his (Nkrumah) verbal attacks of all mild diplomatic strings and unleashed its venom into the heart of the apartheid government. After discussing the precarious situation of the Congo, Nkrumah noted:

> I now turn to the Union of South African itself. The Union Government, against all moral considerations and against every concept of human dignity, self-respect and decency has established a policy of racial discrimination and persecution which in its essential inhumanity surpassed even the brutality of the Nazis against the Jews.[22]

Whilst Macmillan had pointed in a mild seemingly diplomatic tone the problematic situation of apartheid, Nkrumah had rather gone in with an attack. He had continued to talk about the Sharpeville massacre which he had described vividly as "the gruesome massacre of defenceless men, women and children".[23] As I have already indicated, Macmillan diplomatically chose not to state the obvious as regards nationalist movements all over Africa, but Nkrumah in his speech furnished the audience with vivid images of what was happening in Africa. Aside from the description of the South African situation, the speech cited the Congo being "machine-gunned from the air by Belgian Military Aircraft and shell[ing] from the sea"[24] and in talking about war in Algeria, he notes how "for more than six years the sands of Algeria have been stained red with blood.[25] In effect, Nkrumah's address sought to expand Macmillan's arguments and provided the actual rhetorical examples which due to Macmillan's deliberate rhetorical choice of indirect reference were conspicuously omitted in the

[20] Macmillan, "wind of change", 31.
[21] *Ibid*. 33.
[22] Nkrumah, *Selected speeches,* 165.
[23] *Ibid*. 166.
[24] *Ibid*. 159.
[25] *Ibid*. 167.

Cape Town address. Nkrumah had responded to Macmillan's "wind of change" by giving it the needed rhetorical force in New York.

As Nkrumah provided vivid images to buttress his argumentation, it is interesting to note that Nkrumah turned a blind eye on what was happening in yet-to-be independent colonies still under the control of the British Empire. Whilst this seeming silence of the speech is baffling, its justification could perhaps emerge from the goodwill which Macmillan had already expressed clearly as Britain had begun a new moral journey in Africa. Since there was congruity in Britain and Ghana's foreign policies in Africa, Nkrumah's silence on British colonial holdings in Africa was a deliberate rhetorical choice. It was a demonstration of Nkrumah's trust in a new ally working to decolonise Africa. So as Nkrumah had promised friendship to Britain in Accra, he did indeed demonstrate it in New York, using his speech not only as a medium to provide solid evidence to Macmillan's "wind of change" but in a subtle means providing solid defence for the former Colonial Master.

The success of Nkrumah's delivery at the UN arguably is premised on the impact of Macmillan's "wind of change". On the heels of Macmillan's speech, Nkrumah had crafted an address the impact of which will become an extension of Macmillan's speeches in Africa. Through Nkrumah's response, he had joined Britain as an ally for the singular purpose of fighting colonialism in Africa whilst at the same time he argued for a neutral position in the conflict between the Eastern and Western blocs of the world.

Through a careful rhetorical craft, Nkrumah had used vivid images as rhetorical sources of evidence to the central issue, which out of careful diplomacy, Macmillan referred to indirectly. All in all, Nkrumah's response to the "wind of change" was a timely rhetorical intervention. By speaking on the heels of the "wind of change", Nkrumah successfully added a layer of rhetorical proof to Macmillan's invention, therefore forcing the major powers to critically deliberate on colonialism in Africa.

Eric Opoku Mensah is Associate Professor of Rhetoric, Language and Media Studies at the Ghana Institute of Journalism, Accra. He is a Ph.D graduate of the Centre for Rhetoric Studies, University of Cape Town.

This article first appeared in AYOR Volume 4.1

A song of forgiveness: The dialectic between the rhetoric of place and the rhetoric of self in Marlene van Niekerk's *Agaat*

Thapelo Teele

Can forgiveness – a concept that is notoriously difficult to pin down, even under the best of circumstances[1] – be discovered in instances where people who forgive seem powerless to forgive; where the perpetrator does not palpably acknowledge their guilt as a perpetrator; where forgiveness seems radically impossible in light of the numerous and continual instances of the perpetrator's abuse over many years, over a lifetime, in fact? I propose that just such an instance of forgiveness is at stake in Marlene van Niekerk's novel *Agaat*,[2] and that a meaningful conversation about the existence or absence of forgiveness in the novel's circumstances – which function as an allegory for "post"-apartheid South Africa – requires an understanding of the dialectic between the rhetoric of self and the rhetoric of space as it plays out in the novel.

I argue that understanding the workings of the dialectic between the rhetoric of self and the rhetoric of space can assist in mapping out how it is capable of setting the scene for an act of impossible forgiveness.[3] Such an understanding, and the mapping through which it provides access to a scene of impossible forgiveness, requires a holistic and critical engagement with the nature of the discursive[4] relationship between the primary characters – Milla, the Afrikaner "madam", and Agaat, her "maid"[5] – from the first point of contact until the end of the novel.

I shall then proceed to engage with Jacques Derrida's thought on forgiveness in order to analyse critically whether it can be said that there is forgiveness at the end of *Agaat*. The question of this forgiveness gives rise to further questions, such as: if there is indeed forgiveness in *Agaat*, what are its conditions of possibility? I contend that when

---

[1] Audrey R. Chapman, "Truth Commissions and Intergroup Forgiveness: The Case of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission", *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, 13(1), 2007, pp. 51-69 highlights the difficulty of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in conceptualising forgiveness and reconciliation at intergroup levels. As a result, the TRC focused primarily on reconciliation and forgiveness at the individual level, diverting from its mandate of being a transitional justice mechanism for the country as a whole.

[2] Marlene van Niekerk, *Agaat*, trans. M. Heyns, (Portland: Tin House Books, 2006).

[3] Jacques Derrida, "On Forgiveness: A Roundtable Discussion with Jacques Derrida", in J.D. Caputo, M. Dooley and M.J. Scanlon (eds.), *Questioning God,* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), p. 53.

[4] Jacques Lacan, "Du Discours Psychanalytique", in G.B. Contri (ed.), *Lacan in Italia/En Italie Lacan 1953-1978,* (Milan: La Salamandra, 1972), p. 51.

[5] Although one should add that the relationship is more complex than these reductions, as will become clear below, yet its essence is nonetheless captured by these colloquial signifiers.

© *African Yearbook of Rhetoric* 10, 2020, Online ISSN 2305-7785:
Thapelo Teele, "A song of forgiveness: The dialectic between the rhetoric of place and the rhetoric of self in Marlene van Niekerk's *Agaat*", p. 95-114.

the question of forgiveness arises after a prolonged period of abuse, the conditions necessary for the revival of the rhetoric of self are ultimately at stake and these conditions, in turn, depend in a critical way on the rhetoric of space.

Milla and Agaat: The discourse of abuse

Abuse defines the discursive relationship between Milla and Agaat. There are so many instances of Milla abusing Agaat that this entire paper could be written about these alone. I shall, however, limit myself to a few "exemplars" of abuse – those that stand out as lucid examples of the fact that the relationship is abusive through and through. At the outset, it should be noted that while Milla abuses Agaat often throughout the novel, it appears that she is also often remorseful, though this remorse is rarely in the moment, and even if it is, it is never explicitly articulated as remorse, because Milla never articulates it in the spoken word, nor indicates unequivocally her remorse in non-verbal forms of communication. Agaat thus does not know of Milla's remorse and it could be argued that the narrative arch of the abuse is throughout the novel closely constructed in relation to the inability to express remorse, as I will indicate by way of example below.

Milla finds Agaat as a neglected child in a squalid house.[6] Believing that God has called her to take Agaat in and raise her as her own, Milla proceeds not only to tranquillise the child, but also to lock her up in a windowless room for three days on the family farm of Grootmoedersdrift.[7] Her motives for taking Agaat in may very well have been sincere, but the text makes it clear that at least one other primary character, Milla's husband Jak, sees the action in relation to this motive as abusive.[8] As Milla is about to die, many years later, she reflects on this time, thinking to herself: "my child that I forsook after I'd appropriated her, that I'd caught without capturing her, that I locked up before I'd unlocked her!"[9]

Notwithstanding this, Milla – at this point in the novel's time, unable to speak – fails altogether to communicate her remorse. This is clearly indicated when she asks herself in reflection: "why only now love you with this inexpressible regret? And how must I let you know this?"[10] The discursive consequences of the prolonged abuse, and the failure to express remorse in relation to it, are at least threefold: first, they quite literally rob Agaat of the possibility of an own voice (throughout the novel Van Niekerk makes it clear that Agaat's voice in relation to Milla's is a ventriloquism, such that Milla's own discourse constantly returns to her, is repeated back to her, merely in

[6] Van Niekerk, *Agaat*, pp. 469-70.
[7] *Ibid.* 470.
[8] *Ibid.* 637.
[9] *Ibid.* 540.
[10] *Ibid.*

Agaat's inflection of voice);[11] secondly, they cause Milla to forego the external expression of the elaborate vocabulary of Western Christian modernity within which it is clear that she could find the words; and thirdly, in her silence (ultimately a chosen silence, despite the involuntary deterioration of her vocal apparatus and the rest of her body), Milla all but extinguishes the possibility of forgiveness.

The scene in which Milla captures Agaat as if she were an animal conjures, on the one hand, ideas of colonial-era racism which perceived black people as animals,[12] and on the other hand – but in relation to the first point – it is deliberately constructed to put the reader in mind of both the imagery and the procedure of taming that are so vivid in the colonial imaginary. A wild animal is tamed through first tranquillising it and then locking it up in a cage in order that it will frustrate itself upon waking to the point that it will yield to the will of its capturer.[13]

In reflecting on these first moments of interaction with Agaat as an abandoned child, Milla asks herself years later: "what must it feel like to be Agaat […] would you be able to figure it out if she could explain it?",[14] thus articulating the extent of the abyss that yawns between them. While she asks herself these questions, which seem to be an indication of remorse coupled with curiosity, as is often the case as regards the colonised subject, she never actually asks Agaat to give her the opportunity to explain what it must be like to be her. In fact, she makes the assumption that even if Agaat could explain what it is like to be her, that she would be unable to understand her. In other words, the discursive relationship in terms of which such an explanation would be possible is foreclosed from the outset, and it remains foreclosed until the very end of the book.

The second "exemplary" incident of abuse occurs immediately after Milla has cast Agaat out of the main house into a room outside the house, in anticipation of the birth of her son, Jakkie. As if kicking Agaat out of the main house is not enough, Milla seeks to ensure that she has, on the one hand, definitively severed the previously intimate and tender relationship of mother and daughter between them, and, on the other hand, that she has robbed Agaat of the innocence of her childhood, by also forcing her to slaughter her favourite childhood lamb, which Agaat had, until then, fed full-

---

[11] For instance, when Milla accuses Agaat of stealing Jakkie to breastfeed him, Agaat responds not in a discourse of her own making, but by ventriloquising the one that Milla taught her. More specifically, she repeats an idiom of sheep farming that she had learnt verbatim from the *Handbook for Farmers* from which Milla had instructed her *and* says: "weaning time is the most critical time." *Ibid*. 491.

[12] Yvette Abrahams, "Images of Sara Baartman: Sexuality, Race, and Gender in Early Eighteenth-century Britain" in R.R. Pierson and N. Chaudhuri (eds.), *Nation, Empire, Colony: Historicizing Gender and Race,* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), pp. 220-236 writes about the supposed link between black people and animals as ideologically functioning to justify the existence of slavery for white slavers whose conscience was premised on Christian morality.

[13] Heini Hediger, *Wild Animals in Captivity,* (London: Butterworths Scientific Publications, 1950), pp. 27-30.

[14] Van Niekerk, *Agaat*, p. 554.

milk with extra cream.[15] That Milla makes Agaat slaughter her favourite lamb is not a random act of abuse, for it gestures directly at the rhetorical importance of the lamb in the Judeo-Christian tradition as the symbol of innocence. Further, the lamb as an offering of sacrifice is symbolically important in that its death is supposed to mark the end of one era and the beginning of another.[16]

That the slaughter of the lamb marked a redoubled abuse is confirmed when Van Niekerk repeats the thematic concerns of the aforementioned slaughter, except this time years later on the orders of Milla's husband, Jak, that their eight-year-old son Jakkie must himself slaughter a lamb that he is besotted with.[17] This scene occurs in the context of Jakkie's eighth birthday celebration, a day on which Jakkie receives from Agaat, as a birthday gift, a Rodgers penknife from England with two blades.[18] Jak, seeing this birthday as a coming of age for Jakkie, orders Agaat to bring Jakkie to slaughter the lamb with the penknife, saying: "Agaat, go and look for your little baas and bring him here, on the spot."[19] Milla, revealing that she knows full well the traumatic effect of such a slaughter on a child, attempts to prevent this from happening. She recalls the scene: "You signalled at [Agaat] with your eyes, look for him but don't find him, she looked back at you with blunt eyes. It didn't take her very long. Then you heard the crying. Across the yard she was dragging him by the ear … Jakkie straining back."[20]

On the one hand, the scene can be read as an act of resistance – it clearly is Agaat's repetition of the same cruelty that Milla had, years before, perpetrated in relation to her (it is Agaat who gives Jakkie the knife as a birthday present and so sets the scene in motion). Yet, it is this very repetition that reveals just how deeply Agaat is entrapped in Milla's discourse of abuse. Agaat not only ignores Milla's plea, but also subsequently looks at Milla with blunt eyes after having brought Jakkie by force to Jak. In its entirety, Agaat's conduct in this scene amounts to a non-verbal ventriloquism in which Milla's abusive discourse returns to her in inverted, indeed perverted, form: this is what Milla made Agaat do all those years ago, and so she must watch Jak subject her beloved Jakkie to it too. This form of ventriloquist torsion is perhaps the only form of discursive resistance – if it can be called "resistance" – of which Agaat is capable in relation to Milla during the decades before Milla's illness. Thereafter, Agaat's ventriloquist torsion persists as a defining feature of the discourse that remains between them, although it could be argued that it comes to fulfil a different function.[21]

---

[15] *Ibid.* 446.
[16] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, ed. J. Weightman and D. Weightman, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), p. 224.
[17] Van Niekerk, *Agaat*, p. 322.
[18] *Ibid*. 321.
[19] *Ibid.* 322.
[20] *Ibid.*
[21] *Ibid.* 321.

The third incident of abuse to which I will refer is one in which Milla metes out unjustified physical abuse on Agaat when an older Jakkie has lost his confidence in himself after not getting a girl he had his sights on.[22] This incident is chilling for two reasons, the first being that Milla turns her frustration about Jakkie's lack of confidence in himself on Agaat, when the frustration has nothing to do with Agaat. The second reason pertains to the manner in which Agaat takes the abuse as if it were a normal occurrence. Indeed, it is as if Agaat is Milla's punching bag on which she often releases her frustrations and tensions in relation to the other characters. In this scene, Milla is described as having struck Agaat on her shoulders, her breasts and her face, while Agaat is described as having "[s]tood stock-still absorbing the blows without moving a muscle, without retreating a single step, without any retort."[23] After this violent scene, Milla buries her head in her hands and begins to whimper. When she looks up from her hands, she finds Agaat in the kitchen going about her business as if nothing has just happened.

When, many years later, Agaat brings up in conversation the trauma that Milla subjected her to when she made her slaughter her favourite lamb years before, Milla fails to recall it.[24] In response to Milla's failure to recall the incident, perhaps because she is aware that the forgetfulness is disingenuous, Agaat responds by saying: "Please Ounooi, don't force me to get angry, I've long given up being angry."[25] This rare instance of Agaat speaking in a voice that is authentically hers confirms that she has been trained by Milla and has trained herself, long ago, to accept Milla's violence and abuse. However, at the same time, it is also a small indication that Agaat retains, no matter how diminished, an agency of her own.

This instance, it should be noted, occurs in the context of Milla's degenerative condition, which has rendered her bedridden, affects her ability to speak, and deems her ever more dependent on Agaat. During this time, Milla does not see her dependency on Agaat as an opportunity to speak to her, but instead continues with her pattern of internally expressing remorse for what she has done to Agaat – failing, as usual, either verbally or non-verbally, to articulate this remorse. On one occasion, Milla thinks to herself: "Her name is good", referring to the meaning of the name Agaat, and she continues by wondering: "would it be good for her to forgive me? … Would it be good for her to take revenge?"[26]

Notwithstanding all the important questions Milla poses to herself and to the Big Other in relation to the numerous instances of abuse that she meted out to Agaat over the years, Milla, as we have seen, ultimately chooses to remain silent about the remorse she feels about her treatment of Agaat. For even though Milla has suffered a disease that deprives her of the ability to communicate verbally, the novel nonetheless makes it

[22] *Ibid.* 550.
[23] *Ibid.* 551.
[24] *Ibid.* 446.
[25] *Ibid.*
[26] *Ibid.* 439.

clear that even in the face of the degenerative disease, Agaat makes it possible for Milla to "speak". In choosing to leave her remorse unexpressed, she effectively makes it impossible for Agaat, her ventriloquist, and for herself to come to terms with, and engage, the instances of abuse. Withholding her remorse is thus Milla's final act of abuse, poignantly illustrating that it is not only words that are weapons, as Philippe-Joseph Salazar has argued,[27] but also the absence of words that maintain the violence of the relationship of abuse.

The discourse of abuse and the rhetorical situation

Can a prolonged discourse of abuse entirely erase the conditions of possibility of the rhetorical situation? As long as the abuse and the related violence of the verbal and non-verbal forms of communication persist, it is clear that no rhetorical situation exists between the two characters. There is neither deliberation nor negotiation in their discourse, because there is only the dissymmetry of violence, of order and obedience, of abuse and brutality. As Lloyd F. Bitzer has argued,[28] a particular discourse exists because of a particular condition or situation that invites utterance.[29] For Bitzer the situation is the source and the ground of rhetorical activity.[30] To this effect, he explains that the rhetorical situation must exist as a necessary condition of rhetorical discourse, just as a question must exist as a necessary condition of an answer.[31] Therefore, the ability to alter reality through participation is a necessary condition for the presence of a rhetorical situation.[32]

Agaat does not truly participate as an agent in the situation or condition that determines her everyday life during the period marred by Milla's violence, nor can she alter the reality of the situation in which she finds herself. Indeed, even the way she is described throughout the novel is perpetually framed from Milla's perspective, who in a part of the novel goes as far as describing Agaat as *her* legacy, saying: "You watched her, her gestures, her phrases, her gaze. She was a whole compilation of you, she contained you within her […] that was all she could be, from the beginning. Your archive."[33]

For Tracy Symmonds, the description found in the aforementioned quotation is not only quintessential of Milla's arrogance, it is also a brutal and clear commentary on the social conditions of apartheid, in which the white mistress wooed, usurped, and

---

[27] Philippe-Joseph Salazar, *Words are Weapons: Inside ISIS's Rhetoric of Terror,* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017).
[28] Lloyd F. Bitzer, "The Rhetorical Situation", *Philosophy and Rhetoric,* 25, 1992, pp. 1-14.
[29] *Ibid.* 5.
[30] *Ibid.* 6.
[31] *Ibid.*
[32] *Ibid.*
[33] Van Niekerk, *Agaat*, 554.

promised to protect her servant under the guise of maternal generosity, only for her to bind the servant in a stranglehold of duty, love and hatred.[34] Indeed, Milla can be argued to represent in allegorical form the brute force of apartheid's attempt to capture the will of black people. In another passage, late in the narrative, it becomes clear that this proclivity is part and parcel of Milla's pathology: she acknowledges the parasitic dependency she has on Agaat – who she plots to control further – saying: "Perhaps I'll manage to usurp her will on the sly, and keep it warm in me, without her even noticing that I have it, meld it with mine so that we can have one will for these last days."[35]

Taking the aforementioned quotation into consideration, it is not only the capturing of Agaat's will, or Milla's perception of Agaat as her archive that are important, but also that Agaat cannot participate in the situation or condition that determines her everyday life for as long as the violence of apartheid, manifested in Milla-the-mistress, persists. Milla is therefore a definitive constraint on Agaat's capabilities to decide how to live her life, and who to be. Constraints on decision or action are what Bitzer calls an exigence, which he describes as an organising principle for the audience to be addressed in rhetoric, and for the change to be effected.[36] Bitzer argues that it is an exigence that can set the scene for a rhetorical situation to exist, though not all forms of exigence are rhetorical.[37] A non-rhetorical exigence functions to deem the person capable of being influenced by discourse, incapable of mediating change with another – unequal and therefore unrecognised.[38] The exigence that renders Agaat capable of being influenced by discourse, but incapable of mediating change in her own life, is Milla's discourse of abusive violence. Violence of the kind that persists in the discourse between Milla and Agaat is not a rhetorical exigence, for it functions to sustain the dehumanising inequality between speakers,[39] and therefore closes the possibility of the realm of the rhetorical from existing. At the level of allegory, *Agaat* is a novel of apartheid as the constitutive erosion, if not erasure, of the conditions of possibility of the rhetorical exigence.

Megan Foley, writing about Aristotle's view of violence, argues that violence is a force of which rhetoric is a species if one conceives of rhetoric as a kind of force.[40] Foley

---

[34] Tracy Symmonds, "Mourning, Linguistic Improvisation and Shared histories in Marlene van Niekerk's *Agaat*", *M.A.* thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, Faculty of Humanities, School of Language and Literature Studies (Modern and Contemporary Literature), 2013, p. 11. Retrieved from: http://hdl.handle.net/10539/13129 [Accessed 19 October 2019].

[35] Van Niekerk, *Agaat*, p. 132.

[36] Bitzer, 1992

[37] *Ibid.*

[38] *Ibid.*

[39] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?", in C. Nelson and L. Grossberg (eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture,* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1988), pp. 271-313 is pertinent here, because it outlines ideological and historical factors which function to obstruct those on the periphery from being heard. In South Africa, the system of apartheid was state-sanctioned ideological and historical obstruction to the voices of the non-white population being heard.

[40] Megan Foley, "Of Violence and Rhetoric: An Ethical Aporia", *Quarterly Journal of Speech,* 99(2), 2013, p. 191.

argues that, for Aristotle, persuasion manifested in rhetoric, and coercion manifested in violence resemble one another, but that their fundamental difference is hinged on the question of necessity.[41] For Aristotle, the voluntary and persuasion are on one end, while necessity and violence are on another, because the former falls within the realm of deliberation while the latter does not.[42] Thus, while persuasion could be argued to resemble violence purely on the basis that they both contain elements of force, Foley stresses that the two are not identical precisely because necessity exists outside of deliberation.[43] The deliberation that Foley speaks of is in my view homologous with the mediation that Bitzer argues is a crucial component for the existence of a rhetorical situation.

Taking into account the views of both Bitzer and Foley in considering the relationship between Milla and Agaat, it is clear that there is no rhetorical situation to be found insofar as the violence, abuse and brutality persist. However, *Agaat* is written in such a way that the possibility of an emergence of discourse that allows for a rhetorical situation to arise, as the power dynamics shift between Milla and Agaat later in the novel, is never quite foreclosed. *Agaat* is, accordingly, not a novel of Apartheid as Total Domination or, to put it in the terms of late apartheid discourse, of Total Strategy.[44] The power shift between Milla and Agaat shall be addressed and critically unpacked below. For now, understanding that no rhetorical situation exists so long as violence and abuse dominate a discursive relationship is important when it comes to elaborating the discourse of violence's effects on the unequal subject from a psychoanalytic perspective.

Residual rhetoric between Milla and Agaat *vis-à-vis* Jak

While the nature of the relationship between Milla and Agaat is underpinned by a violence that shuts the realm of possibility for a rhetorical situation, rhetoric – and indeed the rhetorical selves of the two characters – rears its head in the kitchen while both characters perform "the work of women": this work occurs through the deliberative efforts of Milla as the Mistress and Agaat as the Maid in relation to Milla's abusive husband, Jak, who is a representation of a patriarchy they must contend with as long as he lives.[45] Part of the novelistic brilliance of *Agaat* has to do with the way in

[41] *Ibid.* 192.
[42] *Ibid.* 194.
[43] *Ibid.* 196.
[44] "Total Strategy" and "Total Domination" are outlined in volume 2 of the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report* (Pretoria: Government Printer, 1998), pp. 26-700 and referred to the co-ordinated efforts of the P.W. Botha government and non-government agents to prevent the perceived "total onslaught" of communist revolution from being successful.
[45] This point is highlighted in a conversation Milla has with her mother where her mother says to her: "we women may be the weaker sex, but we're actually in charge, you know that as well as I. We just work in different ways. We needn't be scared. We've got a hold of [men] where it hurts most […] a good

which it articulates the complexity of the relationship between Milla and Agaat, never quite reducing it to crude narratological archetypes. An important aspect of this attention to complexity is that it enables Van Niekerk to make it clear that there remains an undeniably intimate bond between Agaat and Milla. The intermittent emergence of the rhetorical selves of the two characters is indicative of, on the one hand, the residual role of Milla the mother/Milla Redelinghuys; and, on the other, Agaat's residual role as Milla's adopted child.

It is precisely because of this intermittent emergence of rhetorical selves between the two characters in relation to Jak that *Agaat* is neither a novel of total domination nor one of domination as a discursive totality. On one occasion, whilst fighting with Milla in the kitchen, with Agaat present, Jak himself picks up on the intimacy and care of Milla and Agaat's relationship, and articulates his suspicion about it.[46] It is, for instance, impossible not to notice that Agaat, like Milla's mother before her, is perpetually looking out for Milla's well-being when Jak threatens it. For example, when Milla protests to Jak that Jakkie is too young to kill a lamb, Milla recalls that Agaat had: "plonked the coffee pot down hard in front of your nose. 'Not too much' she'd said to you, 'it's strong'. Her voice was direct. You were silent. She had silenced you. You knew the tone, for your own good you'd better not say another word, the message was clear."[47]Subsequent to this intimate and deliberative form of communication, Milla and Agaat changed the conversation to cake, to which Jak, in frustration, responded by saying: "you two and your everlasting cake".[48] He then proceeded to get up and walk out of the kitchen: in this instance the rhetorical self of Agaat the child persuaded Milla the mother not to upset Jak to the extent that he would beat Milla, as he usually did.

On another occasion, Jak turns violent when Milla questions his spending habits.[49] As if Agaat had been listening to the exchange, she walks into the room before the violence escalates beyond what it already had, and she interrupts by speaking in what Milla describes as "her business like housekeeping voice", claiming that she walked in because she wanted to return the ash pan to the fireplace.[50] It appears that Agaat, perhaps still remembering the tenderness of Milla Redelinghuys's love, and her love for Agaat the child, comes to her rescue. Milla describes Agaat as having boldly stood in the room, the iron poker in her stronger hand, her gaze fixed on Milla – who had covered her face in shame at being seen by Agaat having just been struck by Jak –

---

housemaid […] live[s] for their mistress […] kitchen, co-op, consistory […] a rumour in these regions […] is the best way of keeping a man in his place […] then you can set your terms." Van Niekerk, *Agaat*, p. 145.

[46] In an accusatorial manner, he asked: "what's to become of us [referring to Milla and himself]?" He continues to ask "is that what the two of you want to know? Well, all I can say is: please be patient, your curiosity will be rewarded. Otherwise do use your imagination in the meantime, between the two of you, you can calculate the precise degree of heat at which the earth will perish." Van Niekerk, *Agaat*, p. 360.

[47] Van Niekerk, *Agaat*, p. 323.

[48] *Ibid*.

[49] *Ibid.* 459.

[50] *Ibid.* 460.

and she had said: "Sometimes […] sometimes I wish I could …."[51] In this moment, Agaat was referring to something she wanted to do to Jak, which Milla picked up on, as she often did when Agaat spoke in code to Milla about Jak. It appears that, like the aforementioned kitchen scene with Jak, his presence in any space determines their use of language, but that language also (co-)determines the space. In the scene in which Agaat had barged into the room, Milla tells Agaat to leave, and that it was not her business, and she recalls her disbelief as Agaat responded: "it is … it is most certainly my business."[52] This is an insistence, then, of Agaat once more asserting her rhetorical self in relation to Milla and doing so in order to stave off the threat of Jak's abuse.

Indeed, this scene, and the exchange between Milla and Agaat as if Jak was not in the room, is one of the many intimate moments that Milla and Agaat share through linguistic coding, reminiscent of a different context in which the rhetorical selves of Milla the mother and Agaat the child respected, if not loved, one another. Thus, this scene is a continuation of the pattern in which Agaat looks out for Milla. The irony here is that Agaat's rhetorical self – itself severely diminished by Milla's abuse of her – comes in aid of Milla's rhetorical self, because the violence Milla is currently experiencing is killing off any remnants of the rhetorical self of Milla Redelinghuys that may remain. It is worth noting that this pattern of looking out for one another is usually reciprocated, for indeed in this scene Milla too is looking out for Agaat, for fear that Jak may very well turn violent towards her, which is why she tells Agaat to leave the room. What is abundantly clear is that, regardless of the abuse and violence that Agaat has been subjected to at the hands of Milla de Wet (as the mistress of Grootmoedersdrift) throughout most of her adult life, and the violence that Milla herself is experiencing in her marriage to Jak, whatever small semblance of Agaat the child that remains still remembers and perhaps loves the semblance of Milla Redelinghuys that may be getting systematically extinguished by Jak's beatings.

Stated differently, in the discourse between Milla and Agaat, there remain the residues of rhetorical selves in relation to each other, indeed in alliance with each other. The rhetorical situation that arises, arises itself for the sake of what remains of the rhetorical selves of each of them. It is a rhetorical situation that arises, as it were, in a state of emergency, when Jak's superior violence threatens to annihilate these residual rhetorical selves altogether. Perhaps Agaat ultimately intervenes only for the sake of whatever remains of her own rhetorical self, because she knows that, if she does not intervene in the way that she does, and Milla's rhetorical self undergoes even further regression, she, her rhetorical self, will ultimately bear the brunt of it. Even if this is the case, Milla, as I have shown, reciprocates Agaat's rhetorical intervention. In other words, in these instances, and in these instances of rhetoric alone, Milla treats Agaat as though she is an equal, an equally worthy rhetorical self.

Forgiveness and / or reconciliation?

---

[51] *Ibid.*

[52] *Ibid.*

Bearing in mind the discussions about the fundamentally abusive nature of the relationship between Milla and Agaat, the novel eventually evokes the question whether it can be said that, despite everything, Agaat forgives Milla. The question is textually foregrounded by way of Van Niekerk setting the date of Milla's death as 16 December 1996 – the official public holiday known as the Day of Reconciliation in South Africa. The literature on transitional justice in "post"-apartheid South Africa routinely considers forgiveness as inextricably linked to reconciliation. Indeed, the TRC continues to be criticised for the way in which it Christianised the language of political reconciliation by introducing forgiveness into it.[53] By introducing this intertextuality via the date of Milla's death, Van Niekerk forces the reader to consider not only whether forgiveness *takes place* in *Agaat*, but indeed to consider this question in the context of reconciliation, prompting the reader, as it were, to consider the differences between forgiveness and reconciliation. One question that I will consider by way of the discussion below is whether the date points to reconciliation rather than to forgiveness in the novel, or whether it points to forgiveness as a pre-condition for reconciliation.

In *Agaat,* on the exact date many years back, Milla had found and captured Agaat. For all intents and purposes, Milla accordingly dies on *Agaat's* "birth" day. And yet, Van Niekerk never quite spells it out that the dying (out) of the old is a precondition for the new to be born. For this reason, Van Niekerk also leaves it to the reader to decide whether forgiveness has indeed occurred. She requires her reader actively to engage their mind, taking into account the sum total of events in the novel. Due to the pervasiveness of the discourse of abuse, however, it is difficult to say with sufficient certainty whether forgiveness is possible after so much violence and violation.

My sense is that in spelling out this date as the day that Milla dies, Van Niekerk carves out a space in the novel for thinking about the differences between reconciliation and forgiveness. In order to engage meaningfully the question of reconciliation and / or forgiveness in *Agaat*, it is necessary to engage Jacques Derrida's thought on forgiveness in the context of transitional justice processes that took place all over the world in the early and mid-nineties. The primary focus of the discussion here will be Derrida's short book *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness* (2001), and the essay therein titled "On Forgiveness".[54]

---

[53] Anglican Archbishop, Desmond Tutu, was elected as the chairperson of the TRC, and was quoted by T.A. Borer, "Reconciling South Africa or South Africans? Cautionary Notes from the TRC", *African Studies Quarterly,* 8(1), 2004, p. 24, as saying: "the key concepts of confession, forgiveness and reconciliation are central to the message of this report". Indeed, P.G.J Meiring "Pastors or Lawyers? The Role of Religion in the South African Truth and Reconciliation Process", *Hervormde Teologiese Studies*, 58(1), 2002, pp. 328-339, observed that the proceedings were excessively Christian, with hymns being sung at the majority of hearings, and with an opening prayer and a closing prayer by Tutu.

[54] Jacques Derrida, "On Forgiveness", in *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, trans. M. Dooley and M. Hughes, preface S. Critchley and R. Kearney, (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 27-58; Jacques Derrida, "On Forgiveness", *Studies in Practical Philosophy,* 2(2), 2000, pp. 81-102.

Derrida takes issue with forgiveness in service of finality, regardless of whether or not the forgiveness is "noble".[55] Alex Thomson recalls Derrida's view of his homeland of Algeria in the context of President Bouteflika's inappropriate use of forgiveness for political purposes under the guise of national reconciliation.[56] Indeed, Algeria is the quintessential example to show how forgiveness in service of finality is manifested, and why it is problematic. Thomson argues that it is clear that Derrida believes in the Algerian reconciliatory agenda, and makes it clear that he desires peace for Algeria, because peace is crucial for the Algerian nation to survive. However, Derrida is troubled by a peace that would appear to come only at the cost of destroying ethics.[57] For Derrida, the issue with the idea of political reconciliation, and the kind of forgiveness it proposes, is that it can impose an amnesiac effect in relation to injustice. For Derrida, it is this amnesiac effect that destroys ethics. Referring to a 2006 *New York Times* article by Craig R. Smith, Thomson confirms Derrida's concerns when he refers to an Algerian woman who was quoted as saying: "We don't have the right to talk about these things anymore […] they want people to forget."[58]

For Derrida, the consequence of forgetting is that it functions to cause further injury to victims: by requiring forgetting, a scene is set for further violence to be inflicted on the victims in the name of reducing violence.[59] As Thomson highlights, for Derrida, where reconciliation functions in a manner that requires forgetting, one has a right to make an "indecent" objection to such a form of reconciliation.[60] What makes the objection "indecent" is the fact that, as Derrida himself remarks, "of course no one would decently dare to object to the imperative of reconciliation",[61] but it is nevertheless an important objection if it requires victims to forget injustice. It is clear, then, that for Derrida remembering is a part of justice itself.

From the Derridean point of view, the indecent objection would occur where forgiveness is used in service of finality. To this effect, Derrida highlights the case of the Japanese Prime Minister making an apology and asking forgiveness from Korean and Chinese people for acts Japan committed against their countries in the past.[62] His contention here is two-fold; on the one hand, Derrida argues that the rhetoric of forgiveness is foreign to the traditions of Japan and even Korea, and on the other hand, he finds the incongruity of the Prime Minister's apology as existing within a context of what he refers to as the globalisation of forgiveness, which he describes as "[a]n immense scene of confession in progress, thus virtually a Christian convulsion-

[55] Derrida, "On Forgiveness", 2001, p. 32.
[56] Alex Thomson, "Derrida's 'Indecent Objection'", *Journal for Cultural Research*, 10(4), 2006, p. 296.
[57] *Ibid*. 297.
[58] *Ibid.* 296.
[59] *Ibid.* 297.
[60] *Ibid.* 298.
[61] *Ibid.*
[62] Derrida, "On Forgiveness", 2001, p. 31.

conversion-confession, a process of Christianization which has no more need for the Christian Church."[63]

He argues that this globalised forgiveness is also spectacle-oriented, and is thus "hollow, void, [and] attenuated".[64] This spectacle-orientated forgiveness has its roots in the Abrahamic religious tradition, and has been reshaped to contain elements of political calculation and strategy.[65] For Derrida, forgiveness cannot be used as a manipulative political instrument. He therefore argues that where forgiveness is used as a tool in service of a political agenda and thus in service of finality, especially through the law, such instances of manipulation render this forgiveness obscure in its limits and fragile in its foundations.[66] Derrida warns that generous gestures of offering amnesty or reconciliation, both of which are quintessential to a spectacle-orientated form of forgiveness, have nothing to do with true forgiveness for he argues "forgiveness does not […] should never, amount to a therapy of reconciliation".[67] In other words, in the Derridean taxonomy, forgiveness is more than reconciliation.

Indeed, it is on this surplus quality of forgiveness that Derrida bases his distinction between forgiveness and reconciliation. He notes that the reason why reconciliation is not forgiveness is because, unlike forgiveness, reconciliation requires the victim to speak and to understand and even agree with the offender.[68] Derrida argues that this does not produce pure forgiveness. He points out that the function of reconciliation can help us understand why it cannot produce forgiveness, for he notes that "it seeks to re-establish normality – whether political, social, psychological or national – by means of ecology of memory, mourning, or therapy that produces neither true forgiveness nor its concept".[69] Derrida takes issue with this forgiveness being used for political necessity because he believes that this form of "forgiveness" sacrifices true forgiveness because the former type is intended to provide a degree of security.[70] This is the quintessential example of forgiveness in service of finality.

This brings us to question the choice that Van Niekerk makes when she lets Milla die on the day that came to be known as one of reconciliation in a newly democratic South Africa. Does the name of the day on which Milla dies allude to a view that the only ethico-political possibility for Milla and Agaat, for all the Millas and all the Agaats of South Africa, is reconciliation? With forgiveness as a radical ethical surplus that remains of the order of the impossible? It is interesting that Derrida speaks of the "ecology" of memory and therapy that produces neither true forgiveness nor its concept in light of the fact that a substantial part of the novel consists of Agaat reading

---

[63] *Ibid.*
[64] Derrida, "On Forgiveness: A Roundtable Discussion with Jacques Derrida", pp. 54 and 57.
[65] Derrida, "On Forgiveness", 2001, p. 40-41.
[66] *Ibid.* 30.
[67] *Ibid.* 40.
[68] *Ibid*. 49.
[69] *Ibid.* 32.
[70] Thomson, "Derrida's 'Indecent Objection'", p. 297.

Milla's diary entries, once Milla is wholly dependent on Agaat as her degenerative condition renders her bedridden and unable to speak, walk or bath herself. In reading the diary entries, it is as if Agaat's reading is a form of therapy through the ecology of memory contained in the diary. It is as if, through this reading and also through the embroidery that she performs throughout the novel, perhaps even through the entire procedure of nursing Milla to her death, Agaat attempts to recuperate, or simply attempts to recollect, and perhaps also tries to re-member the residues of her rhetorical self. Whether the therapy is for her alone, or for Milla, or indeed for both of them, is unclear, but what is clear from Derrida's point of view is that this ecology of memory on its own cannot produce true forgiveness.

What is, however, also clear is that in *Agaat* there is no sign of reconciliation as an institutionalised performance premised on the idea of forgiveness, while there is certainly (and finally) only the two singularities required for pure forgiveness: the guilty and the victim. Derrida argues that as soon as there is a third party who is present to bear witness, the scene is transformed from one with the potential to produce true forgiveness to one of either reconciliation, amnesty or reparation.[71] For Derrida, forgiveness exists outside the realm of the law, and he is accordingly of the view that any power in law that purports to offer forgiveness exceeds the bounds of the law.[72] Thus, the day of reconciliation as inscribed by law, if forgiveness is its intention, exceeds the law that purported to create it.

To make the above-mentioned point clear, Derrida refers to the case of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), for the commission's power and formation, like the declaration of 16 December as the Day of Reconciliation by the democratically elected government of Nelson Mandela, were derived from legislation. Here, Derrida cites the words of a witness whose testimony was given in one of the eleven official languages, and was translated into English by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, chairperson of the commission. The witness said: "a commission or a government cannot forgive. Only I, eventually, could do it. And I am not ready to forgive."[73] What would make the "I forgive you" odious, sometimes unbearable, in this political setting, and even obscene in this spectacle-oriented show of forgiveness, is its affirmation by a sovereign (in this instance a commission authorised by law).[74] In *An African Athens: Rhetoric and the Shaping of Democracy in South Africa,* Philippe-Joseph Salazar argues that in the South African context of the TRC, the purpose of presenting a report on the findings of the Commission was to mark the beginning of what he describes as a new social contract. This new social contract is one that was negotiated and sought to set the scene for the enactment of the Constitution as the symbol for the transition to a South

[71] Derrida, "On Forgiveness", 2001, p. 43.
[72] Jacques Derrida, "To Forgive: The Unforgivable and the Imprescriptible" in Caputo, Dooley and Scanlon (eds.), *Questioning God*, p. 32.
[73] Derrida, "On Forgiveness", 2001, p. 43.
[74] *Ibid.* 58.

Africa after apartheid.[75] In Derridean terms, the TRC is a body that could be described as "a scene of confession in progress […] with no need for the Christian Church" as such, because its "Christianity" was self-generated and self-maintained.[76]

Salazar mentions that even the preamble of the South African Constitution – a preamble he argues takes the form of a syllogism – explicitly articulates that the past and present are reconcilable because of the constitutional agreement to create a nation for all who live in it.[77] This nation is one that includes the perpetrators who had previously meted out injustices against their victims in support of the apartheid regime, who now form part of the nation regardless of whether they have accounted before the law for the injustices that they perpetrated.[78] Salazar argues that the form of forgiveness that the commission purported to give perpetrators was politically motivated.[79] In Derrida's meaning, this was not true forgiveness, but rather a shadow of forgiveness put forward in service of finality – finality manifested in the political agenda of nation-building at the cost of silencing victims and creating the scene for more violence than that which has already been inflicted.

Taking both the discussions of Derrida and Salazar into account, if Marlene van Niekerk expects her reader to infer forgiveness from the date of Milla's death and the legislated name of the public holiday, that kind of forgiveness is merely a shadow of forgiveness because it is inscribed by law, and requires a third party spectator; it is a forgiveness in service of finality, and is hollow and attenuated in comparison to true forgiveness. This conclusion leaves the question of forgiveness as such as "true", and, specifically, the question of when the process of true forgiveness can be argued to begin. I propose below that the process towards true forgiveness begins at the very moment when the injustice occurs.

The Remains of Injustice and "True" Forgiveness in *Agaat*

Looking at the three considerably diverse democracies of Ancient Greece, France and South Africa, Barbara Cassin provides insight into the ways in which truth and deliberative politics are linked.[80] She notes that the amnesty decree promulgated in the Constitution of Athens post-civil war in 403BC demanded that one must "not remember" or "recall" the civil war, whereas under South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), the imperative was one of full disclosure.[81] The importance of full disclosure at the TRC was that it was a condition of the possibility for membership of a deliberative community manifested in "the rainbow nation".[82] Cassin

[75] Philippe-Joseph Salazar, *An African Athens: Rhetoric and the Shaping of Democracy in South Africa*, (Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates/London: Routledge, 2002), p. 79.
[76] Jacques Derrida, "On Forgiveness", 2001, p. 31.
[77] Salazar, *An African Athens*, p. 79.
[78] *Ibid*. 85.
[79] *Ibid*. 84.

argues that what counted as full disclosure for the TRC was not that a person declared their *injustice*, but that they *declare* their injustice.[83] At the TRC, Cassin writes, there was no search for truth (disclosure) for truth, but for reconciliation instead,[84] thus highlighting that the TRC was engaged in performative discourse.[85]

At the TRC, anything that was the object of full disclosure received amnesty.[86] Reconciliation, then, as it related to amnesty, allowed for the transformation of evil into a common good.[87] Cassin notes that such a transformation was achieved through speech, for the reassurance of speech produces a common language that allows for the passage from the "I" to the "we".[88] If the *declaration* of injustice allows for the "we" to emerge, then that declaration – a recognition of fact – belongs not to the realm of the ethical, but to that of the political.[89] Amnesty in the context of reconciliation, therefore, functions to construct a community and its institutions on a shared amnesia after disclosure.[90] To this end, Cassin, referring to Hanna Arendt's Sophistic-Aristotelian commentary, says that to consider truth in the political is to step outside the domain of the political.[91] This is to say, truth (disclosure) for truth's sake exists neither in a political setting nor in view of a political objective. History, therefore, if it is to be conceived of as a product of politics, is not the seeking of truth but rather a *declaration* of injustice.

Indeed, Thomson notes that for Derrida history is not reconciliation, but rather an infinite passage of violence in which the affirmation of violence allows for a lesser amount of violence.[92] According to this argument, the acknowledgement of the initial violence and injustice produces a mitigation of the possibility of worse violence and injustice occurring, *rather than* that there shall be no more violence at all. For Agaat, the recognition of being cast out of the house by Milla as the violence of an injustice occurs on the night she decides to bury the suitcase containing not only her childhood belongings, but also the rhetorical self of Agaat that is materially manifested in and through those belongings.[93] The burial of the suitcase thus *marks* the incident as violent and unjust.

---

[80] Barbara Cassin, "Politics of Memory on the Treatments of Hate", *Javnost – The Public*, 8(3), 2001, p. 9.
[81] *Ibid.* 15.
[82] *Ibid.* 20.
[83] *Ibid.*
[84] *Ibid.* 15.
[85] *Ibid.*
[86] *Ibid.*
[87] *Ibid.* 12-13.
[88] *Ibid.* 13.
[89] *Ibid.* 19.
[90] *Ibid.* 12.
[91] *Ibid.* 14.
[92] Thomson, "Derrida's 'Indecent Objection'", p. 297.
[93] On the day in question, she "[t]ook the suitcase filled with the dresses and shoes of the child she'd been and went and buried it deep in a hole on the high blue mountain across the river. And piled black stones on top of it. And trampled it with her new black shoes and cocked her crooked shoulder and pointed with her snake's head hand and said: Now, Good, you are dead." Van Niekerk, *Agaat*, p. 689.

It is, perhaps, the recognition of the initial violence that sets the scene for the possibility of forgiveness, for even when she is subjected to more and more violence subsequent to her eviction from the house, she had already recognised the "original" violence and the subsequent violence and injustice are thereby deemed incomparable. If this line of thinking is pursued, it may also prove helpful in explaining why, when Milla strikes Agaat for Jakkie's loss of confidence in himself over a girl, she stands stock-still and absorbs all the blows[94] – indeed, perhaps no subsequent violence can match the violence of being cast out of the house by Milla.

The recognition of the initial violence and injustice tangibly manifests for Agaat when she decides to create the gravesite, a rhetorical yet heterotopic space that would be the resting place of her rhetorical self, who died on the day she was cast out by a woman about whom she had once proclaimed "Même you're my only mother."[95] As readers, we would assume that Agaat as she once was is dead and buried, but I argue that this Agaat was held in residual form by the mere existence of that grave, and was therefore diminished but not extinguished. The grave contains the remains and it is from the "place" of those very remains that Agaat is, at times, however briefly, able to speak rhetorically, in her own voice. It is, moreover, from the place of those remains that the possibility of the impossible forgiveness, literally and figuratively, arises.

If, as suggested above, it should not be inferred merely from the date on which Milla dies that forgiveness has somehow taken place, and if the question of true forgiveness remains, then it is important to discuss what Derrida understands true forgiveness to be, in order to ascertain whether it can be inferred from the subsequent narrative sequence that Agaat forgave Milla.

For Derrida, there is a paradox to forgiveness, for in even thinking about forgiveness one must ask oneself whether you forgive the person who has done you wrong, or the act that constitutes the wrong, or even whether the person and the act are the same thing. As Derrida asks: "what do I forgive? And whom? What and whom? Something or someone?"[96] From this he proceeds to ask a rhetorical question, saying: "In order for there to be forgiveness, must one not … forgive both the fault and the guilty *as such*?"[97]

When Milla casts Agaat out of the house, she is described as having taken her suitcase of childhood belongings to bury, but it is not clear whether she is angry at being cast out (the fault), or angry at Milla (the guilty), or both. What is, however, abundantly clear is that in burying her belongings, Agaat is also burying (parts of) herself. Indeed it can be said that the mountain on which Agaat buries her suitcase full of childhood belongings, and her rhetorical self too, is a cemetery and, as such,

---

[94] Van Niekerk, *Agaat*, p. 551.
[95] *Ibid.* 483.
[96] Derrida, "On Forgiveness", 2001, p. 38.
[97] *Ibid.* 39.

functions in the space of the novel as a heterotopia.[98] The heterotopic cemetery that Agaat fashions for herself is outside the confines of the farmhouse and its yard. As such, it exists as a peripheral outside of the discourse of abuse as it is practised in the centre of Grootmoedersdrift. Agaat chooses this site because it is remote, so remote that she could forget about it, and yet it is still accessible enough that she could return if she pleased.

As Foucault writes, part of the reason why the cemetery can be regarded as a heterotopia belonging outside of the spaces of the living is because of the contemporary idea that its presence and proximity to those who are living brings the "illness of death".[99] From this comes a notion that death infects the living, and so it needs to be kept as far away as possible. In view of this, perhaps the decision that Agaat makes on the night of the burial is precisely to locate her symbolic cemetery as far away from her as possible so that the death of "Good" does not infect Agaat the adult, the servant, and the caretaker.

Yet, the cemetery is not only the site where the remains can be encountered (again). It is precisely also the site from which the remains can be *retrieved* – and this is exactly what happens when, just as Milla is about to die, Agaat returns to the site and recovers the buried possessions.[100] Taking into account the theory of Bitzer in relation to the exigence, which allows for the discourse of a rhetorical situation to exist, perhaps Milla's imminent death is the purest equaliser of a long-standing grossly unequal relationship marred by violence and abuse. The recovery of the remains marks this transformation as the exigence out of which the rhetorical situation arises. Thus, the situation is transformed from one lacking in rhetorical discourse, to one imbibed with rhetorical discourse. This manifests in Agaat regaining her ability to participate rhetorically in the condition or situation that determines her life.

The scene when Agaat returns to get the suitcase full of her childhood belongings is described as her returning to retrieve the suitcase that she buried "on the night of the burial of the heart".[101] What she does next is arguably one of the most peculiar occasions in the book, for she takes the belongings of her childhood and places them on Milla's bed for her to touch – Milla, at this point, is close to death and has lost her sight.[102] When Milla finally dies and her body is moved out of the room, the contents of the suitcase remain on her pillow in a rather ceremonious manner. This series of events suggests that Agaat, the rhetorically revived Agaat, rather than Agaat the violently abused servant and the caretaker, forgives both Milla Redelinghuys and Milla de Wet as guilty, *as well* as the fault. The placing of the objects that represent the fault *in the presence* of the perpetrator brings the guilty and the fault together, finally to be judged in the presence of the victim.

---

[98] Michel Foucault, "Of other Spaces", *Diacritics*, 16(1), 1986, p. 26.
[99] *Ibid.* 25.
[100] Van Niekerk, *Agaat*, p. 647.
[101] *Ibid.* 495.
[102] *Ibid.* 647.

There is a part in the novel in which Milla, in her characteristically unspoken moments of reflection and possibly remorse wonders: "How will Agaat judge … when Agaat has the 'meaning of everything' carved on my headstone, will it be a 'last curse or blessing'?"[103] When Milla dies, it is Agaat who erects her tombstone. On it she inscribes Milla's name and maiden surname – an intentional decision that could be read to honour Milla's rhetorical self. On the tombstone, Agaat inscribes a judgment, which reads: "and then God saw that it was good".[104] This inscription is undoubtedly intentional considering the practical technicalities of choosing and erecting a tombstone, but is also important in that it is an explicit reference to the Book of Genesis in the Christian Bible, where God looks at his creation, and is satisfied.

Derrida concludes that "forgiveness is mad … a madness of the impossible".[105] To this effect, he invokes another example to highlight the madness of forgiveness: the victim of the worst, as I would argue Agaat is. The victim of the worst is for Derrida a person who has forgiven the perpetrator, and yet demands that they appear before a court to be tried for their crime. Agaat exhumes the original fault and casts one last judgement on Milla de Wet for what she had done to her. The trial of Milla de Wet occurs before she dies when Agaat places the belongings on Milla's bed for her to touch, and to be judged for what she had done to another Agaat all those years ago.

The victim of the worst, while also demanding justice be seen to be done, can forgive. I argue that Agaat, as described by Jakkie at Milla's funeral, is a victim of the worst who has demanded their trial, but has forgiven nonetheless. Jakkie observes her and describes her: "her cap was tighter, more densely embroidered than I remembered it, spectacles on her nose … her steps energetic …."[106] She sounds like the same Agaat of the novel, but she is different. Other than her description, the description of the funeral is important, not only because Jakkie describes Grootmoedersdrift as an abundance that never suffices – referring to the excess of food that was left over a week after the funeral – but related to that description of the farm, and more specifically represented in Milla's funereal shroud.

First, the shroud is significant because its embroidery represents the painstaking process by Milla of not only giving Agaat her first embroidery lesson many years back, but also the manner in which Milla has moulded Agaat in her own image.[107] Secondly, in relation to the first point, the shroud's weaving is metaphoric of the interwoven and "densely embroidered" nature of their lives, for it depicts significant events in *both* their lives.[108] Thirdly, the story woven on the shroud is as much their history as it is the history of South Africa,[109] that is why it is significant that, upon completion, after Agaat

---

[103] *Ibid.* 423.
[104] *Ibid.* 681.
[105] Derrida, "On Forgiveness", 2001, p. 39.
[106] Van Niekerk, *Agaat*, p. 677.
[107] *Ibid.* 541.
[108] *Ibid.* 487.
[109] *Ibid.*

had painstakingly filled in, unpicked and redone patterns,[110] she proclaims to a dying Milla: "before I wash and starch it, I must first put it on and go and lie in your grave with it."[111]

At Milla's funeral, Jakkie describes the shroud as "Genesis and Grootmoedersdrift in one, a true work of art, must have taken a lifetime, every stitch in its place."[112] Both shroud and food are presented under the sign of excess, of surplus, indeed of excessive surplus: Agaat has given Milla Redelinghuys the utopia she so badly wanted to create on the farm, even if but for a day. As such, these excesses tell the story of a forgiveness that has, however painfully, taken place, or, perhaps, is still taking place.

It is therefore immaterial that Agaat never speaks, and says "I forgive you". For Derrida, whether the victim of the worst says that they forgive or do not forgive is a zone of experience that remains inaccessible to others, a secret to be respected.[113] Agaat's forgiveness cannot help Milla to rest easy. Indeed one cannot, quite literally, forgive a dead person if one takes the view that forgiveness happens amongst the living. It is impossible to forgive the dead, and yet it happens that the living forgive the dead all the time.

For Derrida, forgiveness is an event; it is something of the order of the impossible that, all of a sudden, arrives on the scene of the possible. Nothing can predict it; nobody can calculate its coming. By saying it is impossible, Derrida does not mean that forgiveness does not and cannot happen, but rather that it is impossible until the very moment when it happens. Derrida makes this point clear in *On Forgiveness* when writing about what he perceives as Vladimir Jankélévitch's forgiveness of a German man, as a Jew, communicated implicitly by a lengthy exchange of letters after the Second World War ends, to which Derrida declares: "the uncrossable will remain uncrossable at the very same moment it will have been crossed over."[114]

Thapelo Teele is an LLM student at the Centre for Rhetoric Studies, University of Cape Town.

This debut article first appeared in AYOR Volume 9

[110] *Ibid.* 368.
[111] *Ibid.* 584.
[112] *Ibid.* 677.
[113] Derrida, "On Forgiveness", 2001, p. 55.
[114] Jacques Derrida, "To Forgive: The Unforgivable and the Imprescriptible" in Caputo, Dooley and Scanlon, *Questioning God,* p. 41.

THE ELEPHANT AND THE OBELISK

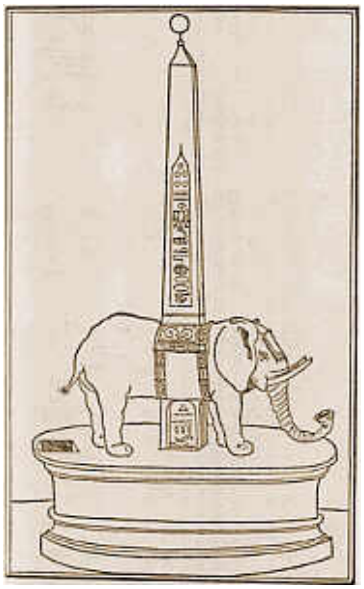
A Special Series and Imprint of the African Yearbook of Rhetoric

In the fantastical imagination Europe has of Africa and the South, the elephant and the obelisk enjoy a lasting presence. During the Renaissance the Elephant meant the energy of memory in heeding lessons of the past while the needle of the Obelisk emblematised the probing penetration of reason – the Elephant carrying an Obelisk was an evocation of lost or recondite virtues European high culture, at the very time of Portuguese descobrimentos, attributed to Africa or to the South, which in turn provoked a sharper investigation into Europe's place in a newly expanded humanity.

Vol. I: UNDER THE BAOBAB: *Essays to Honour Stuart Saunders on his Eightieth Birthday,* 2011 *(original edition de luxe and numbered 1 to 80).*

Vol. II: NEW BEGINNINGS: ARGENTINA & SOUTH AFRICA, 2012.

VOL. III: RHETORIC IN SOUTH AMERICA, 2013 *(ebook).*



The Editor's note

Reflections on 10 years of rhetoric studies
Klaus Kotzé

Songs that shaped the struggle: A rhetorical analysis of South African struggle songs
Sisanda Nkoala

The quietude of transitional justice: Five rhetorical questions
Erik Doxtader

Statecraft and sovereignty in Mohammed V of Morocco's Tangiers speech (1947)
Abdelhai Azarkan

Forgetting responsibility: Hannah Arendt and the work of (undoing) psychic resistance post-apartheid
Sergio Alloggio and Kylie Thomas

J.M. Coetzee: Reluctant public intellectual
Reingard Nethersole

Political discourse in the egalitarian society: The Hamar of Ethiopia
Ivo Strecker

Former President Thabo Mbeki and the racism debate in South Africa: Through the rhetorical lens
Sifiso Eric Ngesi

The justicialist rhetoric of Néstor Kirchner
Mariano Dagatti

In response to the "wind of change": The statecraft of Kwame Nkrumah
Eric Opoku Mensah

A song of forgiveness: The dialectic between the rhetoric of place and the rhetoric of self in Marlene van Niekerk's *Agaat*
Thapelo Teele