

'REWRITE THIS ANCIENT END!'
STAGING TRANSITION IN POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA¹

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Aeschylus based his *Oresteia*, the only full trilogy of Greek tragedies known to us today, on the ancient myth of the house of Atreus and set it in the aftermath of the Trojan War. Nonetheless, the trilogy arguably held great contemporary relevance when it was first performed at the Dionysia festival in 458BCE, as it marked the transition of Athens from a tribal culture to a democratic society governed by constitutional law (Ziolkowski 1977: 20). Throughout the *Oresteia* Aeschylus dramatizes the meaning and political deployment of justice, concluding his trilogy positively with the transformation of justice as vengeance into the legal justice of Athens' new democracy. In this paper, I discuss two dramatic texts that draw on the *Oresteia* within another context of transitional justice: that of post-apartheid South Africa. The first is Mark Fleishman's *In the City of Paradise*, which premiered at the University of Cape Town in 1998. The second is Yael Farber's *MoLoRa* (Sesotho for 'ash'), first performed in Germany in 2004.² In both plays, the distorted family relations within the house of Atreus come to represent the distorted relations within South Africa, a nation that was haunted by a similar cycle of vengeance.

NARRATING THE PAST

Fleishman and Farber draw on Aeschylus' *Oresteia* to dramatize the challenges South Africa faced after the end of apartheid: how to get beyond vengeance, how to reconcile a nation torn apart by decades of injustice, and how to change from a system of apartheid to a non-racial democracy. They make explicit reference to the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), established in 1995 as the result of negotiations between Nelson Mandela's African National Congress (ANC) and F.W. de Klerk's National Party (NP), to avoid the bloodshed everybody expected after apartheid officially ended and, instead, facilitate the transition to a new democratic South Africa.

As its name implies, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was intended to achieve reconciliation by uncovering the truth about the past.³ It set out to compose its narrative out of stories by a variety of people, who were invited to narrate their experiences in their own words (Jolly 2001: 701). For many victims, storytelling thus implied agency, the very agency they had previously been denied.⁴ Fleishman's and Farber's characters repeatedly insist on telling *their* stories, in conveying *their* subjective truths. Fleishman's Clytemnestra tells Orestes about Agamemnon's sacrifice of Iphigenia, starting with: 'Once upon a time, in a land far, far away, there lived a weak and wicked king' (28). She can only talk about her suffering in the distanced form of the fairy tale. In Farber's *MoLoRa*, Elektra confronts her mother with the power of the one who is free to speak: 'With which of your evils shall I begin my recital?' she says: 'With which shall I end it?' (5). Because stories do end and, giving her play wider relevance than the particular context of South Africa, Farber explains how the 'ash' of the title *MoLoRa* refers to this finitude:

Our story begins with Orestes returning home with a tin full of ash. It is the state from which we all come, and—from the concentration camps of

Europe; the ruins of Baghdad, Palestine, Northern Ireland and Rwanda ... to the ash around the fire after the storytelling is done ... it is a state to which we must all humbly return. (Director's note)

Farber's poetic move from the ash that remains after the experience of violence to the ash that remains after the subsequent recounting of this violence demonstrates how storytelling allows victims to transform their inner monologue into social discourse and so bring their private experience into the public realm (Jackson 2002: 15).

It is remarkable that the TRC privileged storytelling, which inevitably remains distanced from the legal narrative of the law court, in its quasi-judicial Human Rights Violations hearings. The Commission did so because it recognized the healing potential of telling stories, because it understood that by telling their stories: 'both victims and perpetrators gave meaning to the multi-layered experiences of the South African story', and because it considered: 'the process of storytelling [was] particularly important' in the '(South) African context, where value continues to be attached to oral tradition' (Final Report I 1998: 112).⁵ Not only did the TRC link storytelling to 'personal or narrative truth', it also distinguished this truth from three other notions of truth: 'factual or forensic truth', which referred to empirical truth; 'social or "dialogue" truth', established through interaction and debate; and 'healing and restorative truth', related to the public acknowledgement of suffering and its beneficial effect on the healing processes of both individuals and the nation at large.⁶

By conceptually distancing 'personal, narrative truth' from 'factual or forensic truth' people's experiences were ultimately consigned to a separate, pre-legal and pre-modern domain. Moreover, while victims were encouraged to tell their stories and state their personal, narrative truth, the hearings of perpetrators were restricted to legal, forensic truth and offered little room for emotional displays or storytelling. It seems problematic that the various hearings employed such different notions of truth, especially if victim and perpetrator accounts were to together construct 'the South African story' (Shore and Klein 2006: 313, 317). Still, the co-existence of different types of discourses on truth does suggest that the Commission intended to emphasize multiplicity and diversity, that it was aware that its story would remain fractured and that the singular 'Truth' of its title required a more nuanced definition.

Rosemary Jane Jolly links the TRC's emphasis on storytelling and narrative to its contribution to South Africa's new democracy, thus establishing a close relation between storytelling and nation-building. (Jolly 2001: 709–10). The hearings enabled what apartheid had oppressed: openness and debate, negotiation and contestation. They promoted and performed values that were to shape the new democratic South Africa. Barbara Cassin (2002:27) specifies the role of storytelling and relates it to ancient Greece:

Just as the discourses, deliberations, epideictic and judicial speeches performed in the Ancient Greek city ... the act of storytelling performs the as yet unheard history of the South African community; and this community constitutes itself through this process, with 'history-history' being unravelled from the 'story histories'. (2002: 27)

The stories that are told in the testimonies together construct the history of South Africa, because testimony performs the transition from the personal to the public domain and thereby, states Paul Ricoeur: 'perform[s] the transition between personal memory and history' (2004: 21). Through testimony, then, storytellers become active

agents of the performance of history; they become history's subjects rather than its passive objects.⁷

Nonetheless, the relation between the role and deployment of narrative within the TRC and the project of nation-building and historiography is more complex than this, because though the constructed narrative was indeed heterogeneous, this heterogeneity was inevitably highly arbitrated and mediated. Stories of victims and perpetrators were automatically framed by and incorporated within the new state discourse, which was concerned with creating a shared point of origin from which a new nation could be constructed. The hearings were highly mediated events in other ways as well, ranging from the initial statement taking prior to the hearings and the selection of testimonies that fitted the TRC mandate of politically motivated human rights abuses, to transcription and translation of testimonies in English (Driver 2006: 5). It was decided beforehand which stories would be narrated at the hearings, and which testimonies would also be broadcast and so reach a wider audience. Blommaert, Bock and McCormick (2006: 41–2, 66) further demonstrate that offering people a space to tell their stories does not necessarily do away with, and can actually accentuate, past inequalities, for example because some people may lack the communicative skills to make themselves heard properly or because the interlocution of Commissioners may result in the misinterpretation of testimonies. In short, the agency that storytelling confers on those who tell the story is always conditional and mediated.

Since only crimes with a 'political objective' were investigated, the countless people who had been victimized on a daily basis were not considered 'victims' of the apartheid state. The emphasis was on the political, but of course apartheid terror did not halt at people's doorsteps. Moreover, because the TRC restricted itself to the human rights violations committed between 1 March 1960 and 5 December 1993, the preceding long history of racism and violence remained unchallenged, as well as the violence that occurred after apartheid officially ended (Holiday 1998: 46). It could be argued, as does Benita Parry, that though the TRC did succeed in recovering fragments from the past, it did not manage to deal with the structural history of power relations and racism (Parry 2004: 120). In its final report, the TRC does acknowledge that the narrative it constructed: 'tells only a small part of a much larger story of human rights abuse in South and southern Africa' (Final Report I 1998: 24). Nonetheless, it remains important to recognize how mediation and fragmentation influenced what was to become 'the narrative' or 'the public memory' of South Africa, the point of departure from which a new democracy would be constructed. As Moon states, in order to fulfil its intended role in the process of nation-building, the TRC had to construct a linear narrative of a past of suffering and inequality, a present of confession, testimony and mourning, and a future of reconciliation and democracy (Moon 2006: 269).

REVEALING AND HEALING

Farber's *MoLoRa* returns emphasis to the personal nature of suffering. The entire action is enclosed within the framework of a TRC hearing, where Elektra has come to hear the testimony of her mother Klytemnestra—the only white character in the play—whom she witnessed brutally murdering her father when she was a child. Through the confrontation between mother and daughter, perpetrator and victim, Farber portrays the brutal human rights violations that the various TRC hearings have brought to light, representing how: 'like Elektra, countless South Africans came to live as "servants in the Halls of their Father's house" ' (Director's note). But unlike the testimonies of many people who spoke at the TRC, Elektra's and Klytemnestra's narratives are not pre-

structured by a discourse of national reconciliation or mediated by Commissioners' interruptions or reinterpretations. Moreover, unlike many women who spoke at TRC hearings, the suffering they narrate is their own.⁸

Farber instructs that the action should be set in 'a bare hall or room', like the simple venues where the TRC held most of the testimonies (2). Klytemnestra and Elektra sit behind two tables with microphones with, in between, a raised stage on which the story will be re-enacted. The chorus of women, Xhosa singers from the Nqoko Cultural Group, sit to the back of the performance area and the audience is located at the front; both are incorporated as witnesses to the hearing. During their testimonies, Elektra and Klytemnestra step onto the raised stage, into the performance space, to re-enact fragments from the past. Farber's use of the metatheatrical device of the play-within-the-play points to the theatrical nature of the TRC hearings, hearings that, as Catherine M. Cole observes, were highly performative events in terms of their 'theatrical and dramatic emotional displays, improvisational storytelling, singing, weeping, and ritualistic lighting of candles' (Cole 2007: 167, 174). The TRC toured South Africa, in Cole's words: 'like a traveling road show', and held hearings on raised platforms in churches, town halls and community centres throughout the country (2007: 172). Entering the venues, victims, perpetrators and audience members were greeted by enormous banners that read 'Revealing is Healing' and 'The Truth Will Set You Free', powerful slogans to frame the entire TRC project, since they legitimized the Commission's name by establishing a direct connection between 'truth' and the sought-after end point of 'reconciliation' and 'healing'. Thus referring to personal healing, national healing and national reconciliation as if they were exchangeable concepts, the TRC created a language in which the different discourses of psychotherapy and politics became conflated.

Benita Parry questions whether: 'the public staging of mourning can truly facilitate national catharsis and psychotherapeutic healing' (Parry 2004: 187). Her use of the word 'catharsis' is interesting, for it presents the TRC's project of national healing as an attempt to purge the nation from all that stood in the way of reconciliation. According to Aristotle, tragedy effects through pity and fear the catharsis, or purification, of such emotions (tr. Heath 1996: 10). In Page duBois's interpretation, Aristotle thereby presents tragedy: 'from the point of view of power, administration, and management of the population', as that which: 'displac[es] the struggle over social power, which generates pity and fear, into the realm of art in order to maintain order' (2002: 24). It seems legitimate to regard the TRC as a state-managed theatre of mourning, which set out to accommodate the nation's emotions in order to contain and control them and so prevent the chaos everybody had expected. Though in this way a major bloodbath was indeed avoided, of course mourning is a complex, long-lasting and personal process that far exceeds its public staging and that far exceeds state control.

Cole suggests that the: 'dramatic, unruly, ephemeral, embodied, and performed aspects of live hearings potently expressed both the power of the TRC as well as its severe limits in truly grappling with the magnitude of the violations of human rights in South Africa's past' and that it was largely because of their performative nature that the live Human Rights Violations hearings were so: '*affective*, and consequently, [they were] effective in facilitating, however imperfectly, a transition from a racist, totalitarian state to a non-racial democracy' (Cole 2007: 179). She compellingly argues that the disjunctions between individual testimonies and the narrative that enclosed them, point to the performative power to challenge the dominance of this overarching narrative from within (2007: 179, 187). Still, even if victims succeeded in performing their truths, the question remains to what extent this resulted in personal healing. Because as

Grahame Hayes observes, in spite of what the banners at the entrance of the TRC venues asserted: '*just* revealing is *not* just healing,' because healing depends on '*how* we reveal, the *context* of the revealing, and *what it is* that we are revealing. [...] *what* people have to reveal might not be healable, or at least not healable by means of the one-off revelation before the TRC' (Hayes 1998: 43, emphasis his).

That the relation between revealing and healing is not self-evident is clear throughout Farber's play. The audience is left to wonder whether Elektra will ever be able to heal from the violence she has been and still is subjected to. Elektra testifies about the torture she has suffered at the hands of her mother, for example with the 'Wet Bag Method', which was used by South African security police to torture political activists (Moon 2006: 271). The audience also sees torture performed when Klytemnestra stuffs a cloth into Elektra's mouth and burns her with cigarettes.⁹ They are led to understand why Elektra feels that: 'if the guilty pay not with blood for blood—then we are nothing but a history without a future' (6). For Fleishman's Elektra, the future similarly demands revenge. She, too, is scarred by years of abuse and imprisonment; she, too, believes that 'only violence can save us' (19). Both playwrights dramatize Nietzsche's warning that 'Whoever fights monsters should take care that in the process he does not become a monster' (1966: 98). Farber's Klytemnestra knows that danger from her own experience and urges her children that 'Nothing—nothing is written./ Do not choose to be me. The hounds that avenge all murder will forever hunt you down' (55). But her warning seems in vain. In what is arguably the most tragic moment of the play, Orestes faces his mother, ready to strike her, crying in rage and pain: 'YOU HAVE MADE ME WHAT I AM!' (56).

Orestes' desperation over having turned into a perpetrator articulates one of the difficulties that arose in the confrontations that the TRC hearings staged: namely that the distinction between perpetrator and victim was often blurred and that some people were both perpetrator and victim at the same time (Sarkin 2004: 82). Claire Moon discusses how the subject categories of 'victim' and 'perpetrator' were central to the TRC's public performances of national reconciliation (Moon 2006: 12). Fleishman and Farber most effectively underline the possible conflation of these two positions in their portrayal of Clytemnestra/Klytemnestra as both abuser and victim. In Fleishman, Clytemnestra talks about the loss of her daughter Iphigenia and about the shame she felt when Agamemnon, portrayed here not as a noble king but as a brutish tyrant, brought his concubine Cassandra into her house. In Farber, Klytemnestra tells Elektra how she first met Agamemnon: 'the day he opened up my first husband and ripped out his guts. He tore this—my first born from my breast. Then holding the child by its new ankles—he smashed its tiny head against a rock. Then took me for his wife' (22). Clytemnestra/Klytemnestra has her own stories of injustice to tell. Not only do Fleishman and Farber challenge the binary of perpetrator and victim, but they also show that these subject positions cannot be distinguished along racial lines.¹⁰

Another important consequence of Fleishman's and Farber's focus on Clytemnestra/Klytemnestra's history of suffering, a suffering that is absent from Aeschylus, is that it challenges her traditional representation in Western tradition. While Clytemnestra could as easily be depicted as a trauma survivor, argues Katleen L. Komar, the literature of antiquity usually figures her as the root cause of violence: 'representing several major roles traditionally assigned to women', namely 'the demonic and vengeful woman, the adulterous wife and the avenging mother' (Komar 2003: 1–2, 6). In undermining the traditional representation of Clytemnestra, Fleishman and Farber address the gender politics this representation embodies. Moreover, rather than essentializing tragedy as an a-temporal, universal myth, through their 'variations on

Clytemnestra' they establish a cross-temporal relation between antiquity and the present, a relation that both illuminates and questions Clytemnestra's traditional representation.

In Fleishman's tragedy, like Aeschylus', Orestes and Electra murder Aegisthus and Clytemnestra, but Farber's story has a different outcome. This is another way to show that the migration of antiquity to the present exceeds the mere re-situating of universal myths. Early in the play, despite the many accusations and shouts of hatred, some hope for reconciliation is expressed when Elektra and Klytemnestra attempt to see each other's humanity. Despite her passionate revenge, Elektra acknowledges her mother's hurt: 'I see your heart mama./ I know it hurts' (19). Klytemnestra, though hesitantly and euphemistically, expresses a murmur of remorse: 'I am not so exceedingly glad at the deeds I have done ...' (20). Aegisthus (here Ayesthus, represented by a large worker's uniform on a washing line) is killed, but when Orestes is ready to murder Klytemnestra, the chorus' singing makes him change his mind, after which he urges Elektra to 'walk away. Rewrite this ancient end!' (57) When Elektra grabs the axe and runs towards Klytemnestra, the chorus overpower her and comfort her as she weeps. The ancient end has been rewritten: Farber's Klytemnestra lives.

Not only is Aeschylus' trilogy rewritten, but also South Africa's (his)story of violence, though residues of revenge remain:

It falls softly the residue of revenge ... like rain.
And we who made the sons and daughters of this
Land ... Servants in the halls of their forefathers ...
We know.
We are still only here by grace alone.
Look now—dawn is coming.
Great chains on the home are falling off.
This house rises up.
For too long it has lain in ash on the ground. (1956:59)

No family resolve, no love can be regained here; no forgiveness can be articulated. But the fact that the children help their mother to her feet and let her walk away signals the beginning of a process of forgiveness, a difficult process because, as Farber writes: 'notions of a Rainbow Nation gliding effortlessly into forgiveness are absurd' (Director's note). Farber has her reasons for making the chorus the main agents in breaking the cycle of revenge, because according to her: 'it was not the gods or *deus ex machina* that delivered us from ourselves in the years following democracy, but the common everyman and woman ... who lit the way for us all' (Director's note).

Though both Fleishman and Farber end their plays on an optimistic note, with revenge giving way to new beginnings and possibilities, none of their characters explicitly articulates forgiveness. This is especially striking since forgiveness came to occupy a prominent position in the TRC's political narrative of reconciliation. Indeed, as Wilson states, the TRC hearings were structured in such a way that any expression of a desire for revenge would seem out of place, so that it is questionable to what extent victims were given the choice to *not* forgive (Wilson 2001:17).¹¹ The emphasis on Christian understandings of forgiveness had much to do with the influence of Church leaders, in particular the chairman of the Commission Archbishop Desmond Tutu. Still, the TRC was never intended to be a religious institution, so that there is something unsettling about the way in which the narrative of the TRC, a secular governmental institution, displayed tensions between a legal-political and a religious-redemptive understanding of truth and reconciliation (Shore and Kline 2006:312).¹² Though the

Christian message appealed to Christian South Africans, it excluded people of other religious persuasions and the absence of a Christian message in Farber's and Fleishman's plays could be seen as a comment on this shortcoming.¹³

To refer to forgiveness in the context of political reconciliation seems inevitably flawed, as it relocates an essentially moral and personal discourse in the political realm. For Hannah Arendt, though some things are unforgivable, forgiveness is nonetheless a necessity of (political) life, because without being forgiven: 'our capacity to act would, as it were, be confined to one single deed from which we could never recover; we would remain the victims of its consequences forever' (Arendt 1958:237). Jacques Derrida also deals with the relation between forgiveness and politics and finds that forgiveness: 'does not, it should never amount to a therapy of reconciliation', because this implies the intervention of a third party within what should essentially be a one-to-one relationship between victim and perpetrator (Derrida 2001: 31–32, 41).¹⁴ However, even within the most private context, forgiveness is always informed by a complex mixture of personal, social and political factors. In Farber, the important role of the community in putting an end to the cycle of vengeance illustrates this well. Perhaps the problem with the TRC was not so much that it drew on a personal and moral concept of forgiveness within a political sphere, but that forgiveness was given such a dominant position that it left victims little room to avoid or denounce it. Moreover, there appears to have been little awareness of the fact that to *state* forgiveness does not automatically mean that the *act* of forgiveness actually takes place. For there is always that other mediating institution Derrida mentions in passing: language (2001: 42).

THE POLITICS OF RECONCILIATION

While forgiveness took up a prominent position within the TRC, amnesty, often understood as the institutionalization and collectivization of forgiveness, was never directly linked to forgiveness, but instead to truth. Truth would pave the way towards reconciliation.¹⁵ The TRC was the first truth Commission that linked amnesty to the uncovering of the truth and the first to be given the mandate to free perpetrators from civil and criminal prosecution for the rest of their lives (Cole 2007:174).

Traditionally, amnesty suggests a collective forgetting of past wrongs and a wish to break clean from the past; indeed, in ancient Greek, amnesty and amnesia are two meanings of same word. In a book on memory and forgetting in ancient Athens, Nicole Loraux writes about the amnesty decree of 403BCE, promulgated by the democrats when they regained power from the thirty tyrants who had seized power over Athens.¹⁶ This decree, intended to heal the community after a severely violent episode in Athens' history, was based on the erasure of memory, on amnesia. It instructed people 'not to recall misfortunes of the past' (Loraux 2006: 15). In contrast, the TRC associated amnesty with anamnesis rather than amnesia (Schaap 2005:113). It emphasized the importance of recollecting the past so that through 'truth' it would become possible to achieve reconciliation.¹⁷ In other words, it attempted to settle between what Parry describes as the competing claims of reconciliation and remembrance (2004: 183).

The emphasis on truth meant that applicants for amnesty were not asked to publicly apologize, express remorse and ask for forgiveness, but solely to state their crimes and to show how these crimes were political in nature. Granting freedom in exchange for truth involves the danger that truth can become a mere commodity and, as such, lose the ethical dimension that is essential to it (Willie Henderson 2000: 459). Though this concern is legitimate, probably the imperative to ascribe to the position of

'perpetrator' to apply for amnesty, as well as having to admit their crimes in public, did force many perpetrators to take responsibility. Then again, responsibility relies on sincerity and sincerity is not only difficult to judge but can also be performed (staged) without actually being *performed* (realized).¹⁸

Fleishman dramatizes part of the amnesty debate in the final scene of his *In the City of Paradise*. After their matricide, Orestes and Electra are hounded by furies in gas masks, among them Clytemnestra's parents Tyndareus and Leda, who do not figure in Aeschylus. Fleishman introduces another generation of people who have been involved in and affected by the violence. Despite his grief and anger, Tyndareus stops the mob from stoning Orestes and Electra, persuading them that: 'we seek not private vengeance here, but public retribution/ Justice will win out/ Our time will come' (37).¹⁹ He urges to replace vengeance with legal action, but his call is not answered. Instead, the court herald announces, speaking lines that are almost identical to those of the 1995 Truth and Reconciliation Act:

... we stand today upon an historic bridge
Between a past of deep division and discord,
And a brighter future of peace and prosperity for all.
There is a need for understanding, not for vengeance,
For forgiveness not retaliation,
For humanity not for victimization.
Our learned judges, seek to reconcile all differences,
To set aside all enmity and hatred,
To build anew our fragile lives in Argos.
They decree, therefore, that amnesty shall be granted
In respect of acts, omissions and offences
Committed in the cause of conflicts of the past,
Where a full disclosure of the facts are made,
Lest we forget our brutal heritage. (38)

Despite Tyndareus' outrage at the decision to grant amnesty to his daughter's murderers, the final image presents the TRC's amnesty arrangement as an imperfect, but necessary tool for democracy. This move away from Tyndareus' personal pain illustrates how in the process of the TRC the attention moved away from the personal towards the national. But Tyndareus' complaint that 'this amnesty pollutes our law' and that it is a 'travesty of justice' (39) remains important and echoes the opinion of many victims of apartheid, who felt that the amnesty provisions denied them the right to seek judicial redress.²⁰ Victims were given no choice to opt for another kind of closure than the reconciliatory one promoted by the TRC.

The rhetoric of the TRC linked amnesty to an idea of transitional or restorative justice and the opposition between restorative and retributive justice came to be identified as the opposition between Africa and the West. Tutu claimed that the notion of a retributive justice is largely Western and that the African understanding is: 'far more restorative, not so much to punish as to redress or restore a balance that has been knocked askew' (quoted in Minow 1998:81). In Wilson's opinion, the creation of a polarity between a romanticized 'African' idea of reconciliation (founded on the notion of 'ubuntu', the Nguni word referring to 'humaneness') and a Western notion of retributive justice (implying vengeance) closed down space to discuss legal punishment as a possible route to reconciliation (Wilson 2001:11). He argues that 'ubuntu' thus became the: 'Africanist wrapping used to sell a reconciliatory version of human rights talk to black South Africans. *Ubuntu* belies the claim that human rights would have no

culturalist or ethnic dimensions' (ibid.:13). In other words, it was implied that if you were truly African, there had to be forgiveness in your heart.²¹

The debate about the TRC's amnesty arrangement points to the inevitable clash in post-conflict societies between different understandings and different demands of justice. Aeschylus' *Oresteia* dramatizes this. Throughout the trilogy, Agamemnon, Clytemnestra, Apollo, Orestes and the Erinyes (the Furies, spirits of wrath) all claim justice on their side, but their different understandings and rhetoric appropriations of justice differ and compete violently. At Orestes' trial, a confrontation takes place between his defender Apollo, who has instructed Orestes to kill his mother to avenge his father's death because justice so demands, and the Erinyes, who want Orestes to pay with his blood for the matricide he has committed. Aeschylus demonstrates not only that justice lacks a fixed meaning but also that its possible meanings depend on the political interests at stake. The *Eumenides*, the tragedy that concludes the *Oresteia*, dramatizes a reconciliatory process between the different demands of different ideas of justice, culminating in the celebration of Athena's judicial court that puts an end to vengeance and instead installs a judicial system based on evidence and trial.

The reconciliation Athena achieves depends primarily on her power to convince the Erinyes to take their place within the new Athens as the Eumenides, the Kindly Ones. They are not banished, nor are their passions of vengeance denied. Rather, in their new function, they will embody: 'that ultimate sanction of fear which underlies the new order, as it dominated the old' (Vellacot, Aeschylus 1956: 20). By transforming 'murderous begetting into blessed fecundity', to use Nicole Loraux's words, Athena attempts to compromise between the demands of the past and those of the future (Loraux 2006:38). The Furies, once transformed into the Kindly Ones and officially incorporated within the new order, will protect the city rather than endanger its inner stability. Athena's mediation signifies the inauguration of a new social and political order; one in which the old is not simply discarded, but reconciled with the new. At least, that would be the official story.

Traditionally, the *Oresteia* is seen as a celebration of democracy and the expression of a progressive movement from chaos to order. Christopher Rocco lists a number of such interpretations, among them the one by renowned classicist John H. Finley who, in Rocco's words, saw the trilogy as: 'nothing less than a founding document of Western civilization' (Rocco 1997:144).²² In Froma Zeitlin's (1978) feminist reading of the *Oresteia*, what is actually founded is a tradition of misogynistic exclusion, since the 'solution' or reconciliation of the *Eumenides* entails the hierarchization of values: the subordination of the Furies to the Olympians, of barbarian to Greek and, most important for Zeitlin, of female to male (Rocco 1997: 144). When the judges of her court fail to cast a final vote, Athena's mediation indeed displays a great amount of gender politics; she votes in favor of Orestes because she considers the murder of Clytemnestra (woman/mother) as less important than that of Agamemnon (man/father).²³ Athena's final judgment, then, is far from impartial and Zeitlin is right that, as Rocco rephrases it: 'through the democratic rhetoric of equality, reason and consent legitimate the institutionalization of exclusionary polarities into systematized hierarchies, rather than creating a truly democratic order' (Rocco 1997: 144). The problem of justice is not solved; rather, one version of justice is privileged over other possible versions (Goldhill 1986: 55-56).

In South Africa, a similar thing happened. Here, too, the new democracy that was created did not, and does still not, correspond with the reality of the majority of the

people. Here, too, one understanding of justice, as reconciliation, was privileged, leaving little room for a retributionist discourse. Maybe justice as reconciliation did best serve the nation-building project; after all, in the new South Africa, people had to find ways to live together and get beyond sentiments that might jeopardize their joint future. Or, maybe Wilson is right that the TRC's effort to: 'forge a new moral vision of the nation', centred on forgiveness and reconciliation, ultimately: 'destroys the most important promise of human rights; that is, its possible contribution to a thoroughgoing transformation of an authoritarian criminal justice system and the construction of real and lasting democratic legitimacy' (Wilson 2001: 230). At this time in history, it is difficult to assess the advantages and disadvantages of the TRC's project of reconciliation.

And so, just as Athena's mediation is imperfect and ambiguous, so the TRC's mediation inevitably entailed sacrifice and loss. Just as the new order that Athena establishes remains precarious, so post-apartheid, democratic South Africa finds itself in a similarly precarious and fragile state. The *Oresteia* dramatizes this complexity. In Rocco's reading, the trilogy, despite its triumphant ending: 'constructs the meaning of the democratic founding, and so of democracy itself, as open to further contest, struggle, and renegotiation' (Rocco 1997:169). Democracy will forever have to be critically re-examined and re-negotiated and reconciliation, despite the finality that the word suggests, can never really achieve its point of closure. The TRC did realize this, which is evident from the recommendations it gave to the new government (Final Report VI 1998: 726–32). The Commission was aware that its years of active practice were only to be the beginning of a long and difficult process, and the failure of the government to adequately proceed with this process greatly discredits its intention of instigating long-lasting societal change.

EPILOGUE

Importantly, the Furies not only represent the spirit of revenge, but also the imperative to remember evil. As Booth states, in societies undergoing the transition to democracy this: 'weight of the claims of the past and their clash with those of the present and future, are most visible' (Booth 2001: 777–78). By accepting Athena's offer to be institutionalized within the new order, the Furies—now the Kindly Ones—not only become the protectors of the city but of memory as well. If we understand memory as a cultural phenomenon, as Bal suggests, the Kindly Ones could be seen as agents of 'cultural memorization', an activity: 'occurring in the present, in which the past is continuously modified and redescribed even as it continues to shape the future' (Bal, Crewe and Spitzer 1999: vii). As the embodiment of memory, then, they have to fulfil the demands of both past and future within the present, a difficult and dangerous task, because the line between keeping alive the past and paralysing the present is thin. It is on this thin line that the Kindly Ones perform their balancing act. One may wonder what has happened to the furies in post-apartheid South Africa. Though the dominant discourse of forgiveness denied them an official place within what was to be the new democratic 'rainbow' nation of South Africa, they undoubtedly still roam under the surface, fighting their fight against forgetting.

Fleishman and Farber dramatize the start of what will be a long process and emphasize the demands of the future, but their most important contribution is that they bring the focus back to the personal, the private realm of personal suffering, inviting their audience to keep considering the individual stories that are involved. Both playwrights seem intent on helping the furies in their fight to remember. Farber brings

the TRC back to life, not the national narrative it helped to construct, but the specificity of the personal stories it originally revealed; stories that now, almost a decade after the TRC's final report was published, have acquired an almost archival status. By returning to the performative aspect of the hearings, she reverses the move from oral testimony to written narrative, from performance to text. Fleishman's most important contribution is that he re-activates the debate about what transitional justice actually entails, the advantages but also the losses. He too calls attention to the individual people involved, inviting his audience to consider those for whom forgiveness remains impossible and for whom the amnesty arrangement remains an unacceptable sacrifice. Both playwrights demonstrate that in post-apartheid South Africa theatre is an important complementary practice. Because, as Fleishman says, theatre is able to make absences present again, to keep the past alive within the present, and to connect the past to the yet unfulfilled future (Lecture 2007b).

But in South Africa, this future is difficult to imagine and Parry may be right that it has been jeopardized by an inadequate dealing with the past. The TRC's intention to create a shared point of origin in history from which the entire nation could depart as one has not succeeded; how could it in a country where the former apartheid government had done everything in its power to divide rather than unite? In this light, it is both interesting and discouraging to view Tutu's and Mandela's emphasis on reconciling the nation and on establishing a non-racial democracy in relation to the racialized discourse that is becoming more and more predominant under Thabo Mbeki's presidency.²⁴ The main challenge for South African artists today is to create new sites where the battle over the past can be fought without the impediment of nationalist, racist or nativist ideologies. A space where people can really come to terms with history, not as the objects of historical representation, but as the subjects of *their* histories. A space where the competing claims of remembrance and reconciliation can be involved in a continuously productive struggle.

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ENDNOTES

¹ A different version of this text will be published in a forthcoming volume entitled *Encuentro II: Migratory Politics*, edited by Mieke Bal and Miguel Ángel Hernández-Navarro.

² I thank Mark Fleishman and Yael Farber for making the unpublished scripts available to me.

³ The TRC was divided into three committees: the Human Rights Violations Committee investigated the human rights violations that occurred between 1960 and 1994 and organized hearings in which victims and perpetrators publicly told their stories; the Reparation and Rehabilitation Committee formulated proposals with regards to victims' rehabilitation and restoration; the Amnesty Committee considered applications for amnesty.

⁴ Mieke Bal further explains that storytelling can also be a means to relegate traumatic experiences to the realm of memory, because only by being made 'narratable' can traumatic events enter memory (Bal, Crewe and Spitzer 1999: x).

⁵ According to Sanders this joining and disjoining 'South' from 'Africa' is problematic, because it puts the focus not on the stories of people who suffered, but on the stories of Africans. In his opinion, the TRC thus leaves: 'a domain of telling of which it constantly risks dispossessing them' because the 'characterization of the act of storytelling as "subjective" implicitly sets it in opposition to "factual [...] evidence" ' thereby 'drawing back from attaching "value", in its own voice, to storytelling' (Sanders 2000: 21).

⁶ Final Report I (1998: 110); Mistry (2001: 3–4); Sanders (2001: 18). As Megan Shore and Scott Kline note (2006: 313), it is remarkable that it was not until the final report was published that the TRC publicly acknowledged that it had been working with these four definitions of truth.

⁷ Ricoeur (2004: 184) further explains that this process is reciprocal, because only through their inscription into history do people's testimonies become accepted and validated.

⁸ Fiona C. Ross (2003: 5) explains that most women who testified at the hearings mainly spoke of men's suffering and only addressed their own experiences indirectly.

⁹ During the interrogation, Klytemnestra quotes from Genesis 9:25 the curse that Ham's father Noah places upon Ham's son Canaan. Ellen van Wolde discusses how this episode was often referred to as a biblical legitimization of apartheid theology, understanding the Africans as the descendents of Ham and, therefore, a people destined to be servants (Van Wolde 2003: 13–14).

¹⁰ It is nonetheless important to emphasize that violence in South Africa was racialized to an extreme extent. Though many white South Africans suffered from the violence apartheid engendered, non-whites (ethnically categorized as 'blacks': 'coloureds' and 'Indians') were the objects of systematic oppression. Farber's presentation of Klytemnestra as the only white character highlights this; when the audience members see her abuse Elektra, they are invited to understand her as the representative of apartheid ideology. The portrayal of Klytemnestra as the object of abuse herself may do more than complicate the perpetrator/victim opposition; it brings up the danger of implying that mitigating circumstances reduce the extent to which Klytemnestra can be held accountable for her acts. Different from Farber, Fleishman gives no instructions with regard to the racial make-up of his cast, and race remains wholly absent from his text. This does not automatically mean race was absent from performances of this text.

For discussions of performances of the play see Mezzabotta (2000) and Steinmeyer (2007).

¹¹ Some victims later complained they had felt expected to forgive their perpetrators. See the report on survivors' perceptions of the TRC by the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation between 7 August 1997 and 1 February 1998:

www.csvr.org.za/papers/papkhul.htm Last accessed November 2007.

¹² 'It is interesting', Tutu himself admits in his memoir *No Future Without Forgiveness*: 'that the President appointed an Archbishop as Chairperson of the Commission and not, for instance, a judge, since we were to some extent a quasi-judicial body' (Tutu 1999: 71).

¹³ Fleishman's title *In the City of Paradise* does contain a religious reference, but its effect seems mostly ironic: this city is by far paradise, nor is paradise presented as an achievable goal.

¹⁴ The focus of Derrida's essay 'On Forgiveness' is on the tension between an 'unconditional forgiveness' and a 'conditional forgiveness proportionate to the recognition of the fault'. In his view, forgiveness: 'is not, it *should not be*, normal, normative, normalizing. It *should* remain exceptional and extraordinary, in the face of the impossible: as if it interrupted the ordinary course of historical temporality' (Derrida 2001: 31–5).

¹⁵ As discussed previously, the TRC defined this truth pluralistically.

¹⁶ After the defeat of Athens in the Peloponnesian war, Sparta replaced the Athenian democratic institution that Pericles had established by a tyrannical regime of thirty oligarchs (the 'Rule of the Thirty'). After more than a year of civil war, the violence between the resurgent democrats and the oligarch-supporters ended in 403BCE, and amnesty was negotiated (see Loraux 2006).

¹⁷ As Cassin notes, there was an important difference between the civil war of Athens, which had lasted nine months and was therefore a recent event known by the citizens involved, and apartheid, which lasted some forty years and involved the systematic distortion of the past (Cassin 2002: 29).

¹⁸ Moon discusses, for example, how former security policeman Jeffrey Benzien (the inventor of the 'Wet Bag' torture method) wittingly manipulated the TRC narrative of reconciliation (Moon 2006: 271–2).

¹⁹ This is different from Euripides' *Orestes*, where Tyndareus does play a prominent role, as the one who threatens to encourage the citizens of Argos to stone Orestes to death.

²⁰ Family members of the murdered anti-apartheid activist Steve Biko, for example, together with other survivors of murdered activists filed a lawsuit against the TRC, claiming that the amnesty arrangement was unconstitutional, as it denied them the individual right to judicial redress. The Constitutional Court rejected the claim and ruled that amnesty in exchange for truth neither violated the constitution nor the Geneva Convention (Minow 1998: 56).

²¹ Wilson claims that this rhetoric of reconciliation forms a great discrepancy with the judicial practice in township courts, where people: 'look back at the past and still feel the burden of a crime that has not been cancelled by punishment', an adherence to a continuity with the past that is: 'dangerous to the new and fragile nation-building project: the new historicity of a reconciling political elite' (Wilson 2001: 209).

²² For other such progressivist readings of the *Oresteia*, see E. R. Dodds (1960) and H. D. F. Kitto (1956).

²³ Athena argues: 'No mother gave me birth. Therefore the father's claim / And male supremacy in all things, save to give / Myself in marriage, wins my whole heart's loyalty. / Therefore a woman's death, who killed her husband, is, / I judge, outweighed in grievousness by his' (Vellacott, Aeschylus 1956: 172). Just before Athena's vote, Apollo has similarly argued for the supremacy of fatherhood over motherhood, stating that the mother is: 'not the true parent of the child' but only: 'the nurse who tends the growth / Of young seed planted by its true parent, the male' (Aeschylus 1956: 169).

²⁴ On the revival of racial classification in post-apartheid South Africa, see the 2006 AfriForum report by Kallie Kriel www.afriforum.co.za/dokumente/the%20revival%20of%20race.pdf Last accessed November 2007.