Sofie de Smet, Marieke Breyne,
Pedzisai Maedza, Christel Stalpaert (eds)

Violence and Trauma in Contemporary Performance

Removing and Remembering Histories

Leuven University Press

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Acknowledgements

Whereas the ongoing, traumatising experience of violence and apartheid in South Africa was the starting point of a joint research project[1] between Belgium and South Africa supported by the National Research Foundation (NRF) of South Africa, and the Fonds Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek (FWO) of Flanders, Belgium, and hence of this edited volume, the continuous and quotidian experience of apartheid is interconnected with practices of violence in societies all over the world. During the international conference *Removing Apartheid* held in September 2017 at Ghent University, Belgium, as part of this joint research project initiated by a Belgian collective of researchers, very diverse performance practices were discussed, emphasising the urgent matter of continuous experiences of violence in post-transitional South Africa, but also practices of violence all over the world. The conference spun off the necessity of a dialogue and silence in discussing scholarly work on trauma and performance beyond initial dominant notions as, for example, 'postdramatic theatre' in the Belgian and West European context. The call for papers for this edited volume, and the process of publishing these writings, as much as the symposium itself, granted space for these emerging and ongoing discussions on terminological, political, and ethical levels. With this publication the editors do not aim to conclude the debate on violence and trauma, but – on the contrary – to allow it to be continuously revisited and expanded, to stay, and to listen. We wish to thank all the authors, participants, students, artists, and collaborators for their contributions, patience, anger, and hope, for their presence at the conference and the dialogues and silences ever since.

[1] *Masks, Puppets and Performative Objects as Tools of Critique, Resistance and Agency in South Africa. Developing a Situational, Embodied and Postdramatic Approach for Dealing with the Cultural Trauma of Apartheid*, Bilateral Scientific Collaboration South Africa FWO-NRF, G000214N, 2014-2016.

INTRODUCTION

Histories of Trauma and Violence: Performance Practices of Removing and Remembering

Christel Stalpaert, Marieke Breyne, Pedzisai Maedza, and Sofie de Smet

This book is an invitation to critically reflect upon the notion of trauma and violence and to question the dominant ways of thinking about the reconstruction of violent pasts within societies. It forms a meditation on the potential that performances and performance practices may hold to critically engage with histories of violence in contemporary societies in new ways.

Since the 1990s, trauma studies has become a major topic of interest in the humanities and social sciences, including theatre and performance studies and practices. Trauma has become 'the signal concept of our time' (Leys 2000: 10) to relate to our past and trauma relief 'a dominant mode of practice and discourse' to reconstruct our past (Thompson 2009: 44). However, in recent debates, scholars have pointed out that current trauma theories are embedded within a dominant social memory regime that seems restrictive in several respects (Fassin and Rechtman 2009; Summerfield 2005; Le Roy, Stalpaert, and Verdoodt 2011). This book responds and addresses three main blind spots, or voids, that prevail in trauma studies discourse and puts forward how performance may provide a critical perspective in creating non-verbal and embodied transformative encounters in violated and traumatised communities.

First, trauma studies mainly examines the 'eventfulness' of trauma. It fails to address the effects of continuous and quotidian forms of violence and crimes against humanity. As a result, non-eventful and less visible forms of traumatic experiences such as sexism, racism, political oppression, colonialism, and the daily fear of persecution have been largely neglected in scholarly work within trauma studies. Research indicates that some forms of recurring violating events may be equally traumatising (Root 1996; Rothberg 2009) and exacerbate processes of post-trauma

reconstruction (Spaas et al. 2022). This realisation underpins this book's focus and integration of non-eventful forms of trauma, such as experiences of discrimination, exploitation, and racism, framing these as crucial issues in thinking about our relationship to the past in contemporary societies.

Second, a dominant way in which traumatic experiences are treated is based on the assumptions that disclosure or 'telling one's story' are the preferred universally methods that lead to 'relief', 'liberation', and 'healing'. The work in this book responds to how the valorisation of confession can sometimes mean that the realities of suffering 'are often prevented from being given their embodied character' (Thompson 2009: 128–9). According to a dominant verbal approach, 'constructing a narrative from the pain of the past allows it to be contained or healed' (Thompson 2009: 45). Yet, an imperative to cure through narrative recall and coherent storytelling is embedded in a positivistic mode of relating to the past, with individual healing as an ultimate goal (Summerfield 2005; Le Roy, Stalpaert, and Verdoodt 2011). It is situated in the realm of individual 'effect', thereby neglecting an 'affective register' (Thompson 2009: 7), not to mention the broader social, cultural, and political contexts in which processes of narrating about the past are developed and are taking place.

Third, trauma studies strongly believes that the human capacity of recognition, description, and understanding is an important tool to subjugate the traumatic past in order to move on with life in the present. This belief is grounded in a modernist historical regime, based on a chronological ordering of time. Modernity's linear conceptualisation of time and its belief that the past lies behind us has been questioned by several scholars (Bevernage 2012). This book builds on the idea that time is a construct shaped and organised within the continuous lived negotiation between people within socio-political communities (James and Mills 2005). In Jacques Derrida's notion of the 'spectral past' (1994: 101), for example, he deconstructs the dominant archeo-teleological concept of history and the linear and chronological alignment of narration with time and space in Western societies. He foregrounds 'the persistence of a present past or the return of the dead which the worldwide work of mourning cannot get rid of' (Derrida 1994: 101; Bevernage 2012).

In providing cases for how performance may create non-verbal and embodied encounters in violated and traumatised communities, we argue in this volume that performance can provide a critical perspective on a restrictive

Western memory regime at work in these dominant practices of healing and reconciliation. The way it aims to do so is embedded within the title of this volume. Indeed, first, two crucial verbs are embedded within the title of this volume: 'remembering' and 'removing', which are applied to reflect on histories of violence and trauma. The prefix *re* in the verbs *removing* and *remembering* refers to the reliving and re-experiencing of traumatic experiences against the backdrop of ongoing structural inequalities in contemporary societies. As historian Berber Bevernage puts it: 'the notion of a persisting "past" … blurs the strict delineation between past and present and thereby even questions the existence of these temporal dimensions as separate entities' (2012: 5). The use of *Removing* entails a critical comment on the discourse of 'relief', 'liberation', and 'healing', as continuous and quotidian forms of violence as racism and discrimination are not easily removed. The action of *Removing* refers to how extreme experiences of the past keep on moving human beings and entire communities in ways that outwit common sense. Furthermore, remembering the past may remain a painful act as a 'memory of offense' described by Primo Levi (1989).

The noun *member*, encapsulated within the word *Remembering*, refers to human beings' membership of entire communities and societies. This interplay between an individual as a being and as a member of a society is fundamental to how this book frames performative interventions that respond to history and trauma. The book hence foregrounds the myriad of ways in which traumatic experiences and relationships towards the past inherently take place within an interconnected social space of community members. This idea emphasises the role that the social, cultural, and political fabrics play in shaping the engagement people have with the past. Following this, the reconstruction of the past does not arise in a social vacuum. Instead, it enters languages with a wider relational, social, cultural, and political meaning (Kirmayer, Lemelson, and Barad 2007; De Haene and Rousseau 2020).

As such, *Removing* also refers to the ways in which performances have the potential to *move* things, to stir the debate, and to disrupt 'the given situation, the social order, and propose a new way of speaking and acting and of being together' (Fleishman 2016: 200) within contemporary societies. Theatre has the playful freedom, though not without risks, to integrate contradictions and multiple narratives as part of its aesthetic realm. Interventions in this book explore theatre beyond being a form of mimesis or an accurate representation of a single truth within society

(Hutchison 2005, 2013). These interventions explore how performances may also *move* archival erasure of certain past memories to the surface (Maedza 2018) as well as *move* stubborn or solidified narratives into perpetual modulation. Performances also have the potential to *move* the spectator in a Nietzschean sense of the word: to bring him or her beyond common sense. For the spectator to be moved in this sense implies considering the act of thinking 'as an act of extreme emotional intensity' (Safranski 2000: 179–80). It entails dealing with the complexity of violence and human rights violations, without 'overlooking it or looking away' (Le Roy, Stalpaert, and Verdoodt 2011: 263), establishing important moments for acquiring 'sensuous knowledge' (Fleishman in Gordon 1997: 205). We do not claim here that traumatic events can be understood in the sense of being grasped by a faculty of reason or a power of comprehension. The sensuous knowledge acquired through performance practices is rather to be considered a kind of 'hyphenated thinking': a thinking between theory and art practice, art and activism, past and present (Stalpaert 2023). It produces a particular modulating kind of knowledge, expanding the transfer of knowledge to a relational imparting of knowledge (Raunig 2013), activating awareness with the participant-spectators in an embodied and implicated way.

In this hyphenated thinking, knowledge is not situated in one individual nor in a single privileged centre, but resurges from the hyphens in-between thinking entities. Thoughts become in ever-evolving perpetual modulation (Stalpaert 2023). A relational imparting of knowledge is at stake, 'moving along a relationship (or multiple posited relationships) without fixing the production of knowledge in a firm center' (Raunig 2013: 58). Not moral conduct, but 'ethical differentiation' is at stake here 'as a movement between various positions. These positions (…) are not at all the same, but (…) they are in the same boat with all their differentness, in the same situation, sharing specific preconditions' (Raunig 2013: 59). It is this 'insinuating a mode of investigation, which leads people to take care of themselves' (Raunig 2013: 59). It is in the hyphens that knowledge resurges, activating awareness and entangled care.

Last, this book acknowledges the value of performances in democratizsing the agency of remembering the past. This counters and resists the hegemony of specific dominant narratives on past histories of violence within societies. As Maedza (2018) has denoted, performances, acted out by and within communities, may exercise alternate memories within society,

broadening the range of memory actors as full *members* of a potentially silenced history and society. Performance practices may therefore mobilise the voices of witnesses and members of society across generations.

We do not prescribe the order in which the contributions in this book can or ought to be read. Yet, the chapters have been arranged to coalesce with the critical actions of *Removing* and *Remembering* histories of violence in performance practices as described above. The chapters in this book have been arranged into three parts to structure the work in performance studies that focus on the engagement with trauma and violent pasts and includes voices of scholars, performers, dramaturgs, artists, and participants. In the following section, we aim to scrutinise the different ways all chapters engage with trauma and violent pasts alongside critical actions of *Removing* and *Remembering*.

The first section in this edited volume invites reflection on the at-times-limited discourse of truth commissions and material archives in transitional justice processes in post-conflict societies. We explore different performance practices in response to and as alternative ways of providing transitional justice schemes. Particular focus and emphasis are placed on narratives of truth commissions and their dynamics of remembering. We move beyond the dominance of words and verbalisation by foregrounding potential forms of epistemic injustice rooted in a dominant legal paradigm of the written word in truth commissions' truth-gathering work.

The second part in this volume builds upon the repertoire of embodied practices as an important system of knowing and transmitting knowledge while shifting towards dramaturgical practice in contemporary performances. The two contributions curated under this second part address and reflect on the importance of the body in dramaturgies both on and off stage. Close attention is paid to encounters with witnesses and within creative processes in performance practices that engage with histories of violence and human rights violations.

The third and final part in this volume presents the voices of artists themselves working with and around their histories of intergenerational trauma, the traces of colonialism, and migration as testimonial practices. In this part, the contributors reflect upon their own work and, as readers, we witness the dialogue that takes place between artists, their work, and histories. This final part puts forward the important value of embodied kinds of knowing embedded within performance practice

as research (PAR) in generating knowledge about the reconstruction of past experiences of violence and trauma. PAR interventions challenge the traditional schism between theory and practice and foreground practice as an embodied knowledge- and meaning-making methodology. The contributions in this book are drawn from contributors situated and influenced by experiences in different world regions. Yet, the initial inspiration of this book was the topic of the ongoing experience of violence and apartheid in South Africa studied in a joint research project between Belgium and South Africa. During the international conference *Removing Apartheid* held in September 2017 at Ghent University, Belgium, as part of this joint research project initiated by a Belgian collective of researchers, very diverse performance practices were discussed. These discussions emphasised the urgent matter of continuous experiences of violence in post-transitional South Africa, but also practices of violence connected to the colonial past of Belgium and the continuous and quotidian experience of apartheid interconnected with practices of violence in societies all over the world. The conference denotes the necessity of dialogues and silences in discussing scholarly and artistic work on trauma and performance, which prompted this book volume. The different voices in this book present, and represent, various modes of reconstructing the past in performances within contemporary societies. The dynamics of removing and remembering form the meta structure that runs through and within the volume. Within each part, we embed several contributions that are thematically linked. Read collectively or as stand-alone units, all the contributions have intersecting roles. The chapters reflect on performance practices as 1) platforms for transitional justice processes, 2) embodied dramaturgies, as well as 3) artistic voices dealing with pasts of conflict, human rights violations, and colonialism.

PART I: Politics of Truth Commissions: Performance Practices as Transitional Practices of Justice

In various parts of the world, Truth and Reconciliation Commissions (TRCs) have been positioned as important and essential tools in dealing with cultural traumas, conflicts, and human rights violations and are championed as pathways towards peace. For example, in 1995, the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission was established to deal with the

country's apartheid past. It aimed at working through the cultural trauma of apartheid, seeking reconciliation between South African perpetrators and victims. Victims and survivors came to the Commission to recount their stories of what was happening to them and/or to members of their families. By publicly recounting their roles and actions, perpetrators of these abuses could obtain amnesty for any crimes they committed if they were deemed to have given full confessions.

Over the past five decades, in more than fifty nation states across the world, truth commissions have been set up in one form or the other. Alongside trials, tribunals, and other institutionalised forms of enquiry, truth commissions are an attempt to reorganise states and social institutions in the aftermath of traumatising, violent events. Previously silenced, disempowered or violated people are offered an official, public forum to testify to the harm done to them. Truth and reconciliation committees are often touted as having a positive impact on democracy and human rights. However, scholars have increasingly pointed at the hegemony of specific testimonial discourses in exercising power (Ross 2003; Shaw and Waldorf 2010). In truth commissions, a particular strategy of re-membering is at work – both in the sense of remembering as commemoration, and in the sense of re-membering, as in reconnecting community members. The first refers to the constitution of a *particular* testimonial discourse as master-narrative, amplifying some voices, while silencing others. The latter refers to the creation of a *particular* sense of belonging (Wilson 1996, 2001), including some members, while potentially excluding others. Critical scholars have put forward the complex relationship between words, silences, and elisions in testimonial practices. In her monograph *Bearing Witness* (2003), South African anthropologist Fiona Ross indicates that, in truth commissions and testimonial practices, silence does not stand in simple opposition to voice. She quotes the American writer Joyce Carol Oates who argues that language is 'all we have to pit against death and silence', but adds that this does not guarantee that 'the opposite of silence is truth' (Ross 2003: 31). 'Suffering, like pain … exists in part beyond language' (Ross 2003: 27).

The first part in this edited volume invites reflection on the at-times-limited discourse of truth commissions and explores performance practices in response to transitional justice processes, particularly in relation to the narratives of truth commissions and their dynamics of re-membering. Human rights scholar Tine Destrooper connects the limitations of truth

commissions to epistemic injustice and forms of structural violence within societies. She refers to how meaning is – implicitly or explicitly – conveyed through the coded actions of formalised testimonial institutions seeking transitional justice (Destrooper 2023: 159). For Destrooper epistemic injustice can take the shape of testimonial injustice or hermeneutical injustice. Destrooper gives the example of testimonial practices in which communities are not included as experts in testimonial practices, but as diaspora, which gives their voices a different weight and meaning. This testimonial injustice gives 'deflated levels of credibility to a speaker's word because of certain characteristics he or she possesses' (Destrooper 2023: 168). Hermeneutical injustice, on the other hand, 'renders it impossible for subjects to share interests or concerns that do not fit the parameters of legibility of the dominant paradigm' (Destrooper 2023: 168). This epistemic injustice has to do with a differential attribution of value to different modes of knowledge production. It crowds out narratives with different epistemic underpinnings (McEvoy 2007).

As Fiona Ross observed, a narrative performs a bridge between event and knowledge, presuming a congruity between an ontological certainty about a traumatising experience, and epistemological confidence in *words* describing the event (2003: 31). The narrative of a truth commission is rooted in the dominant legal paradigm of the written word, and often ignores or disregards embodied practices of knowledge transfer. Considering colonial power relations, the displacement of embodied practices of knowledge by writing is highly problematic. In *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas,* performance scholar Diana Taylor writes that the 'preponderance of writing in Western epistemologies' in fact means that 'histories were burned and rewritten to suit the memorializing needs of those in power' (Taylor 2003: 16–17). She calls them 'elite practices' and 'gender-power arrangements' (17). De Certeau similarly critiques the expansionism of writing in history as inherently connected to colonial practices:

> The power that writing's expansionism leaves intact is colonial in principle. It is extended without being changed. It is tautological, immunized against both any alterity that might transform it and whatever dares to resist it. (de Certeau 1988: 216)

As a result, the 'distorted scripts' that circulate in testimonial practices (Medina 2018: 68) are highly problematic, as they fail to acknowledge

embodied kinds of knowing, thus 'exacerbating the primary injustice experienced by victims by disregarding their experiences' (Destrooper 2023: 168). When the distorted nature of these scripts is not acknowledged, both the truth-revealing strategies of a truth commission and a performance countering erasure are engaged in further 'cementing epistemic injustice' (Destrooper 2023: 166). This book shows how performance and performance studies offer a way to engage with these forms of epistemic injustice and structural violence. The interventions in this book show that 'by taking performance seriously as a system of learning, storing and transmitting knowledge, performance studies allows us to expand what we understand by "knowledge"' (Taylor 2003: 16). We show and explore how performance can 'challenge the preponderance of writing in Western epistemologies' (Taylor: 16). Performances require the bodily presence of transmitters of knowledge, allowing for distorted scripts to be healed, restored, or to resurge. We also consider performance practices in response to the lack of an official testimonial forum reflecting on the epistemic injustice of silencing ongoing non-eventful forms of violence and trauma all over the world. The selected performance practices voice the suffering and ongoing violations of sexism, racism, political oppression, and colonialism, and the daily fear of persecution that have been rarely covered in cultural trauma studies. We suggest that performance practices of removing and remembering may function as reparative rituals. They work 'by means of coded actions and words to give shape to the shapeless, to that which defies words' (Jans 2012: 11). This echoes the proposition that art can contribute to restoring justice by countering erasure in contemporary societies (Destrooper and Herremans 2022).

Furthermore, in testimonial archives, there is a primary focus on eliciting and documenting the spoken and written commentary on human rights violations committed. This creates room for epistemic injustice in a material archive that is solely based on the words uttered during official testimonial practices or victim hearings. In her discourse analysis of the South African TRC, Annelies Verdoolaege similarly observed how the dominant therapeutic tool of narrative recall 'geared' the material TRC archive. She built her argument on Foucault's *procedures of restriction* and his belief that 'truths are "normalized" and it is through these normalized truths that power is exercised very effectively' (2008: 169). Verdoolaege aptly remarks that the TRC archive will never be entirely closed, as the material will always be open to new artistic, academic, scientific interpretations (2008:

38). She considers the archive of the TRC victim hearings as a Foucaultian archive, fostering his idea that an archive is 'the law of what can be said' in a given situation (2012: 285. Diana Taylor proposes to expand the *archive* of supposedly enduring materials (texts, documents, buildings, bones, and so forth) with the so-called ephemeral *repertoire* of embodied practices and knowledge systems (i.e., spoken language, dance, sports, ritual) (Taylor 2003: 19–25). Taylor again stresses the importance of performance and performance studies here, for these allow us to 'take seriously the repertoire of embodied practices as an important system of knowing and transmitting knowledge' (26). Performances and performance studies, then, offers not only 'a way of rethinking the canon' (Taylor 2003: 27), but also of rethinking 'the canonization of the past' (Maedza 2019: 176).

In the first contribution of this volume, dramaturg and theatre scholar Klaas Tindemans adopts a legal perspective. Tindemans suggests that truth commissions embody the paradoxical situation of a transitional state between constituted power and constituent power. He addresses the tension between individual accountability, societal healing, and reparation through truth commissions. He aligns these ambiguities of transitional justice with performance practices, revealing some of these contradictions or translating them in dialectical terms. Tindemans engages with the performance *Rwanda 94* by the collective Groupov. *Rwanda 94* was created in 2000, in response to the NURC (the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission) that was installed in Rwanda in 1999. Tindemans outlines how *Rwanda 94* reorients devices of ancient tragedy to deal with the transitional processes. This casts new light on the strategy of 'naming names' in acts of commemoration.

De Waarheidscommissie (*The Truth Commission*) (2013) by Belgian theatre maker Chokri Ben Chikha and the theatre company Action Zoo Humain is another performance practice involved in re-moving and re-membering a traumatic past, which is explored in the first chapter of this volume. In contrast to *Rwanda 94*, it was not created in response to a truth commission, but in response to the lack of an official forum to testify about the traumatic past and afterlife of Belgian colonial and imperial oppression. This theatrical portrayal delved into Belgium's colonial past. It explored the abusive history of human zoos and, more specifically, the staging of Philippine and Senegalese villagers during the World Exhibition of Ghent in 1913 in Belgium.

In the second contribution to this edited volume, Belgian theatre scholar Christel Stalpaert and art historian Evelien Jonckheere discuss in detail the performance practices of *The Truth Commission. The Truth Commission* is deconstructed as an attempt 'to restore memory through performance' (Nelson 2013: 163). *The Truth Commission* performed what performance scholar Pedzisai Maedza called a counter-memory. It is an example of a performance that counters the archival erasure of the memory of colonial violence across time and space (Maedza 2017). In their contribution, Stalpaert and Jonckheere also highlight how *The Truth Commission*, as a performance, questions the coded actions and the master narrative at work in truth and reconciliation commissions. The counter-memory at work in *The Truth Commission* also revealed the *conditions* of a hypermastery in *narrating* a traumatic event. In other words, the performance also dismantled the strategies at work in 'Truth'-making events. It revealed the limitations underpinning the narrative, representative, and positivist paradigm of the dominant Western memory regime.

In the third contribution to this volume, performance scholar Pedzisai Maedza examines the re-creations and re-stagings of an iconic image of the brutalities of the South African Apartheid regime. Maedza uses Sam Nzima's 1976 photo of a young school woman running alongside a young man carrying a fatally injured Hector Pieterson (19 August 1963–16 June 1976) in his arms while fleeing from the police. The image is both an emblem in memory of the 1976 Soweto riots and of indiscriminate apartheid violence in general. It has come to symbolise and immortalise the student protests and resistance to the injustices of structural racial discrimination. Antoinette Sithole, the young school woman in the 1976 photo, became the first witness to testify at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) hearing sessions in Soweto. She was called on to testify not only in her own stead, but also on behalf of her deceased brother, Hector Pieterson. She gave her testimony in the company of Sam Nzima, the photographer who captured the last moments of her brother's life. This iconic photograph played an important role in the TRC, yet has lives on in other ways as well, for instance, circulating each 16 June on National Youth Day, when the student protests are commemorated.

Maedza's chapter discusses how, in 2015, a music video channel popular with young people, called *Channel O,* placed a full-page recreation advert of the iconic image designed by Don Dlanga to mark National Youth Day Commemorations. Don Dlanga's restaging evokes the original to recreate

a contemporary non-verbal and embodied transformative encounter with the past. Thirteen-year-old Hector Pieterson's slain body has been removed and replaced by a graduation gown and folded certificate. The pain, fear, and anguish on the faces of the young woman and man carrying him have been replaced with triumphant smiles. His run from the police in the original is re-staged as a celebratory jog in the street. The reworked image was dubbed *'Live the Dream the Youth of '76'*. Elaborating on the debates, controversy, and contestations that marked the reception of Don Dlanga's restaging of Nzima's iconic image, Maedza outlines four interconnected strategies of commemoration at work. These include divorcing the past from the present; legitimising the present; forgetting through remembering; and experiencing the past (Teeger and Vinitzky-Seroussi 2007: 64).

PART 2: Performing Trauma: Dialogical Dramaturgies of Embodiment in Transgenerational Landscapes

The second part of this volume builds upon the repertoire of embodied practices in performance and addresses the increasing importance of the body in dramaturgies both on and off stage in performance practices engaging with histories of violence and human rights violations. The contributions in this section urge scholars and practitioners to rethink dramaturgies as a kind of dialogical practice between bodies and members of a transgenerational society (de Smet et al. 2021). A dialogical art practice has been articulated in theoretical conceptual reflections on dramaturgy in performance studies on different levels, including both dialogues outside and inside the creation process. First, a dialogical practice, inspired by the work on dialogism of linguists Mikhail Bakhtin and Valentin Voloshinov, evolves through processes of exchange and conversation and 'shifts its focus from the productive to the receptive side of the creative cycle' (Cools 2015: 120) as performance practices strive towards a dialogue with the audience aiming to produce a polyphonic conversation.

> Thus, all real and integral understanding is actively responsive, and constitutes nothing more than the initial preparatory stage of a response (in whatever form it may be actualized). And the speaker himself is oriented precisely toward such an actively responsive understanding. He does not expect passive understanding that, so to speak, only duplicates his or her own idea in someone else's mind. (Bakhtin 1986: 69)

In the act of public encounter, dialogical dramaturgies search beyond a focus on words and text within their realm by playing with distance and closeness to traumatic content (de Smet et al. 2024). In these encounters participants are surrounded by and connected to meaningful bodily others who listen and witness, holding a potential to work '*around* trauma' (Rousseau and Measham 2007: 286) instead of working 'through' trauma. In this balancing movement between remembering and forgetting, dialogical dramaturgical practices may incorporate the failure to give meaning to, comprehend, and narrate traumatic life-events as an 'embodied poetics of failure' (Stalpaert 2015). Such a search mirrors scholarly work in the field of cultural anthropology that acknowledges both verbal and non-verbal modes of expressing histories of violence. For example, silencing and corporeal responses emerge in cultural communities' practices that operate protectively in dimming overwhelming experience (Eastmond and Selimovic 2012; Kidron 2010; Puvimanasinghe et al. 2015). Remaining silent on histories of trauma may function as a strategy to protect the self and significant others, or the social cohesion within the cultural community (Kevers et al. 2016). In addition, violence may precisely deprive language of its capacity to construct meaning, revealing the constant struggle to apprehend the inapprehensible and the refusal of atrocity to be put in its place (Rousseau and Measham 2007). Aside from the referential, the performative aspects of the creation of beauty in performance practices may alleviate feelings of meaninglessness. Performance practices offer potentially new and overarching meanings in the presence of silence, failure, and the untold, based on a transformed reality and a shared experience of beauty as potential vehicles to transmit suffering in a corporeal encounter (de Smet et al. 2024).

Within such dialogical practices there increasingly lies a focus on performativity as an intense experience of 'interconnectedness of living systems' (Mbothwe and Barnes 2015) and a corporeal immediacy in the moment of performing beyond a focus on long-term socio-political changes in the Boalian tradition. This dialogical practice generates a hyphenated thinking, with knowledge resurging from the hyphens in-between thinking entities of performers and spectators. The relational imparting of knowledge at stake activates awareness, entangled care, and societal change.

> Here knowledge is no longer embodied in a static center, captive, brought to a standstill. Knowledge production lies precisely in the movement from the inquirer to those who are guided by the inquiry to exercise self-care, to give account of the coherence between rational discourse and manner of living. (Raunig 2013: 59)

Herein, the vital role of the bodily presence of the witness in theatre comes to the fore. The uniqueness of the witnessing act in theatre has been attributed to the theatricality of theatre. Theatricality makes witnesses actively self-aware of their own corporeality during the encounter (Bala 2012) in dialogue with other bodies. In that corporeal immediacy, performance has the potential to render a particular time experience. Performances develop in the here and now, and in the simultaneous bodily presence of performers and spectators. Instead of linking the liveness and the ephemeral quality of the performing arts to 'a linear temporality that moves from a past through a present to a future in which it dissolves' (Schneider 2011: 142), performances in fact *always remain*. The moment of performing is always 'punctuated by, syncopated with, indeed charged by other moments, other times' (Le Roy 2012: 32– 41; Schneider 2011: 92). In that way a dialogical practice at play within the encounter embodies a polyphonic dialogue between past and present – a 'cross- or multi-temporal engagement' (Schneider 2011: 35).

The performance practices dealing with histories of violence in this book remind us that it is important to acknowledge how such a multi-temporal engagement integrates not merely memories as an object of remembrance, but an active engagement with past members of society within a transgenerational engagement of 're-membering' (Maedza 2018). Various interventions in this volume call on us to acknowledge that these practices also *always remain ongoing*. In the words of theatre scholar Mark Fleishman, 'we must acknowledge that what we produce in the present about the past, our many attempts to give form to an absence – whether in writing or display, or performance or in any other way – is tainted, imbued with failure, a barbarism' (Fleishman 2016: 22). Fleishman adds that 'we must embrace an anti-monumental impulse which in turn demands a persistent and active return in the work of remembering – a requirement to do it again and again, over and over in an embodied, sensuous and experiential way' (Fleishman 2016: 22).

In dialogical dramaturgies on histories of violence, we observe a breaking away from the constraints of the traditional theatre and its architecture. Some of the performances contained in this book deliberately choose to dialogue with a well-chosen building or landscape. This dialogue establishes a particular corporeal encounter with the past in public settings accounting for an individualised experience of space. In site-specific theatre, the performance space can even be considered as another kind of

body. This may not only provide another multi-temporal and transgenerational experience of time, but it also provides an integration of everyday life in the performance. This notion of time draws attention not only to big gestures accompanying testimonies of histories of violence, but also to everyday 'sedimented acts' of mourning. It pays attention to 'a series of acts which are renewed, revised, and consolidated through time' (Butler 1988: 523; Le Roy 2012: 39–40). Dialogical dramaturgies spotlight the potential risks to bodies in the public sphere, remembering experiences of collective violence as 'they will arrive in the hazardous civil space' (Gielen 2017: 139). This is particularly so in contemporary societies with increasing dynamics of polarisation and the denial of official state acknowledgements. Performance scholars have documented the dynamics at play within interconnected encounters of bodies, which can have potentially retraumatising impacts in reiterating experiences of violence, discrimination, silencing, and injustice (Jeffers 2013; Thompson 2009; de Smet et al., 2018).

The thread of embodied dramaturgical practices is strongly present in this volume's fourth contribution by Mark Fleishman and within the fifth contribution from Marieke Breyne and Sofie de Smet. Derrida's notion of the spectral past and the return of the dead acquires a new dimension in Mark Fleishman's contribution. Fleishman dissects how contemporary young theatre makers in South Africa engage with the concept of haunting. Fleishman reflects on the myriad of ways in which the past remains present in their lives – despite twenty-three years of supposed post-apartheid existence. Fleishman draws on the work of theatre maker and director Mandla Mbothwe in productions such as *Inxeba Lomphilisi* and *Did We Dance: Ukutshona Ko Mendi*. Fleishman argues that for Mbothwe, the failure of the previous generation to deal adequately with the trauma of apartheid has produced an unresolved tension in the lives of young South Africans. Many of these young South Africans did not directly experience apartheid in its strict legal sense but do continue to experience its aftermath in a state of what political scientist Lawrence Hamilton describes as 'unfreedom'. For Hamilton, 'unfreedom' describes a state in which the attainment of political freedom does not translate to possessing the means to be free, given the persistent levels of poverty, inequality, and social marginalisation that the formerly oppressed have had to cope with.

Mandla Mbothwe reckons with the ghosts of this traumatic past in performances such as *Inxeba Lomphilisi*, linking the theme of apartheid with

the theme of migration and the sense of displacement that many people in South Africa still live with. Fleishman reflects on the specific dramaturgical strategies adopted by Mbothwe that are emblematic of his generation and those who follow in his creative footsteps. These dramaturgies of haunting do not entail a 'common memory' of apartheid, with the aim 'to restore or establish coherence, closure and possibly a redemptive stance'. Dramaturgies of haunting engage with a persisting past and memory that haunts the younger generation, as they experience the state of unfreedom, migration, and displacement in the aftermath of apartheid.

Drawing on Judith Butler's work concerning the politically induced conditions of 'grievability' in societies, Breyne and de Smet explore two contemporary performances that deal with the Marikana Massacre in 2012, when thirty-four miners lost their lives in Marikana (South Africa). In their contribution, the authors reflect on how both performances, *Mari and Kana* (2015) and *Iqhiya Emnyama* (2015), create a disruptive act of public mourning and install a grieving ritual in a politically charged performative site at the heart of South Africa's Cape Town. Questioning the dominant public representation of the Marikana Massacre, the performances react to the current distribution of grievability in post-apartheid South Africa. Both site-specific performances, taking place in a public space at the annual *Infecting the City Festival* in Cape Town, zoom in on patterns of inequality against the backdrop of a neoliberal system and on the ubiquitous ethos of resilience for neoliberal subjects in post-apartheid South Africa. Breyne and de Smet unpack how these performances unsettle the dominant focus on resilient subjects. The omnipresence of mourning women on stage and the embodied aesthetics of a vulnerability expressed through the choreography, the physicality, and musicality of the performance, as well as the inclusion of daily practices of mourning and grief, nurture a process of rethinking structural justice by resisting resilience.

PART 3. Artistic Voices as Embodied Testimonial Practices of Loss and Violence

The third and final part of this edited volume traces the experience of violence and trauma in the arts, and investigates how artists and performers display their notions of loss, displacement, and (be)longing in

images, moving beyond the rigid structure of language, words, and meanings. First, two contemporary artists write about their work concerning intergenerational trauma, the traces of colonialism, and migration. Their contributions testify to a 'deep memory', in which traumatic memory 'remains essentially inarticulable and unrepresentable' and 'continues to exist as unresolved trauma just beyond the reach of meaning' (Friedländer 1992: 41). Yet, they also aim to create a 'countermemory for the future' (Gordon 1997: 22). By doing so, this final part puts forward the important value of embodied kinds of knowing embedded within performance practice as research (PAR) in generating knowledge about the reconstruction of past experiences of violence and trauma. These contributions singularly and collectively demonstrate the rising acceptance and validation of performance practice as research (PAR) as a mature methodology in the academia. PAR challenges the traditional schism between theory and practice and, as Haseman sees it, 'its outcomes as all important representations of research findings in their own right' (in Nelson 2013: 54). The rise of PAR speaks to the shift in stage work towards the use of embodied aesthetics. New methods of research are needed, as performance scholar Veronica Baxter puts it, 'that encompass the breadth of work, close the knowledge gap that resulted from imperialism, colonization, and the subjugation of indigenous knowledge, and support the reclamation of cultural and traditional heritage' (Baxter 2013: 164). PAR not only seems to question the gap between what knowledge is and what it is not, but also between who is allowed to know and is perceived as knowledgeable, and who is not. Mark Fleishman reminds us, '[P]erformances involve acts of storying, sounding, moving, feeling and relating that are all embodied and constitute alternative ways of knowing that are non-representational, experimental, and potentially political, both in the sense of transforming knowledge in the academy but also as a means of creating voice in marginalized communities' (2009: 126).

Additionally, this volume further aims to dismantle the criticism that the valorisation of practice-based knowledge often lands in a coherent textual and verbal format, for example by including artworks as written texts in a manuscript. Indeed, performance scholar Nelson stated that 'documentation and complementary writings are not translations of the artwork but serve to augment the articulating and evidencing of the research inquiry' (2013: 70). Yet, performances are often captured in text, hence 'for all that seems to have been achieved within the sphere of PAR over the past decade

or so, we might very well have simply served to refresh and consolidate the hegemony of the textual enterprise' (Fleishman 2015: 12). We advocate not refusing, nor simply accepting, this capture-paradigm, but embodying it in the collection of contributions of this volume. Performances are research objects 'that remain unfinished parts of a continually unfolding thinking process that expands in time and across space, intersecting with other unfinished objects and their thought processes along the way' (Fleishman 2015: 5). We should recognise that 'they exist for themselves and interact with other objects independently of us who made them' (16).

In the sixth contribution to this volume, we witness how the Belgian artist with Armenian roots Mekhitar Garabedian deploys a variety of media such as drawing, video, photography, and installations, in order to draw from his experience as an immigrant and play on the humour and poetic qualities he finds between languages, cultures, and histories. Just as his personal diasporic history is layered, his work vibrates with a multiplicity of references to literature, music, philosophy, and visual arts. In this volume, this multiplicity finds expression in Garabedian's deliberate use of citations in his contribution. This citational exuberance not only refers to the inevitable collaborative constitution of knowledge, but also to the potential of quotes, carrying with them a counter-memory for the future, alongside his own works of art.

In the seventh contribution of this volume, performing artist and scholar Samah Hijawi explores the story of Godefroid de Bouillon departing from his monument in public space at the heart of Belgium's capital, Brussels. The monument, present in the artist's daily life, becomes a point of departure to artistically reflect upon the narration of a subjective art history while intertwining historical figures with family narratives and her lived history in Palestine. Using the format of an artistic text for a lecture-performance, Hijawi explores the performativity of historical figures and paintings that allude to the shared histories of Palestine on both a societal or a personal level. The text creates a tension between words and memory, between historical fact and political performativity, between image and canon. As Hijawi says herself: 'trying to find the language to describe an experience of the past would take away the energy needed for formulating some sense of the complexities of the present – a vocabulary that could describe a dream of the future'.

In the final contribution to this volume, we witness a performance text, which was written by Ayham Salloum during his participation as a performer and actor in a participatory theatre project *Tijdelijk* (2017), translated as *Temporary*, in Belgium. In *Temporary*, nine Syrian young adults resettled in Belgium and the Iraqi-Belgian director Mokhallad Rasem collaborated on staging a public performance, rehearsing weekly in Brussels for several months. Throughout the creative process, several participants decided to write texts, which were brought into the rehearsal space, performed, translated, and finally discussed by the group. 'Zij die net verslagen zijn', translated as 'The Freshly defeated' is a result of that participatory project, in which Salloum reflects upon different refugee experiences in exile in Belgium by integrating many voices and roles. In that way, he gives voice not only to his own experiences as a refugee, but also to those of other refugees with whom he crossed paths, heard, and listened to but who are often forgotten or silenced in public debates. He also includes himself as a writer and participant of the theatre project and designates himself a role in his prose text. In doing so, he critically addresses and increases the awareness of the audience of the public performance and here, the readers of this volume.

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PART I

Politics of Truth Commissions: Performance Practices as Transitional Practices of Justice

CHAPTER 1

Performing Transitional Justice: Individual Accountability and Societal Reparation in *Rwanda 94* (Groupov, 2000) and *The Truth Commission* (Action Zoo Humain, 2013)

Klaas Tindemans

Every new political regime faces, at the moment of its peaceful or violent takeover, a fundamental dilemma. Does it break with the previous legal order against which its protagonists fought, peacefully or not? Or do the new masters accept the continuity of a legal order in order to use this existing legality to confront the scorned past? In political terms, this question touches on the nature of a revolutionary moment, the political *kairos*, and the legitimacy of the sovereign power born in that moment. In legal, specifically constitutional terms, the issue could be framed as the opposition between 'constituted' power and 'constituent' power, between the transformation of an existing, constituted legality, and the idea that the new regime creates, with its takeover and during the transition, a new legitimacy, a new embodiment of sovereignty. Historically, it is remarkable that this transitional *kairos* often maintains this ambiguity between continuity and creation. New regimes construct a myth, sometimes decades or even centuries later – a narrative re-framing of a 'declaration of independence', as a trans-historical performance (Winterer 2016) – but daily politics of transition carefully try to maintain the continuity of regulations in order to maintain a certain stability. And even the symbolic break with the past is clothed in constitutionally sound texts or performances (Osiel 1997: 4).

Legal philosopher Hans Kelsen maintained, however, that self-empowerment is legally unthinkable. When an official body claims to represent a nation, it has to refer to something else, something 'real' outside, or at least to a transcendental notion such as Kelsen's own *Grundnorm* (Lindahl 2007: 488–9). This *Grundnorm* is substantially empty; it simply says 'the law is the law', nothing less and nothing more. So, it could mean that the desire

for a transitional regime to construct its myth of self-empowerment could be considered as compulsory, on a meta-legal level. The universality of human rights might function that way, even when their application has to be framed in strictly legal terms. It also means that the justification of the legal and constitutional consequences of transition is always a regressive operation: a theoretical history has to be constructed, the basic set of norms that allow the actual administration of transitional justice in courts or in other official bodies – for example, a provisional constitution – has to be legitimised *a posteriori* as a sovereign act. Yet, another conception of this meta-legal beginning (or vantage point) is possible, when not this basic law as such is considered, but the collective agency behind it, whether this power is conceived as mythical or actual. This is Hannah Arendt's approach. The constitution of a new regime, including the framework of transition, is always and foremost a political act, says Arendt, thus prioritising 'constituent' over 'constituted', however abstract the latter may be (Lindahl 2007: 490–1). Arendt maintains that an actual moment of unity – the revolutionary *kairos* – is the precondition of empowerment and its legal consequences. On the one side, Arendt affirms the strictly political character of this original act, that is, the creation of a body politic that acquires a monopoly of power:

> a body politic which is the result of covenant and 'combination' becomes the very source of power for each individual person who outside the constituted political realm remains impotent; the government which, on the contrary, is the result of consent acquires a monopoly of power so that the governed are politically impotent so long as they do not decide to recover their original power in order to change the government and entrust another ruler with their power.

On the other side, she illustrates the originality of political emancipation as a 'constituent' act, referring to the American 'founding fathers':

> The very fact that the men of the American Revolution thought of themselves as 'founders' indicates the extent to which they must have known that it would be the act of foundation itself, rather than an immortal Legislator or self-evident truth or any other transcendent, transmundane source, which eventually would become the fountain of authority in the new body politic. From this it follows that it is futile to search for an absolute to break the vicious circle in which all beginning is inevitably caught, because this 'absolute' lies in the very act of beginning itself. (Arendt [1963] 1990: 204)

Kelsen says that this moment is a compulsory construction of the newly empowered regime, not a real foundational act or a privileged moment of agency. Both positions are defendable and, as it happens, it might be wise to consider the legitimacy of a transitional order as circular: everything depends indeed both on the actual administration of justice for past wrongdoings under transition, as on the discursive and performative framing becomes convincing thanks to the 'just' legal handling of this same transition. For example, the ambiguous treatment of forms of violence demonstrates the circular legitimacy of a transitional order well, both in its political and judicial consequences. Human rights scholar Paul Gready concludes that violence should be understood both as an actual threat to democracy and as a symptom of the process of democratisation itself. He observes that violent crime in South Africa is rooted and continues to flourish in the intersection between an oppressive past – in which crime always has a political connotation – and a present that tends to de-politicise violence completely. As such, transitional justice entails 'a shift from political violence obscuring criminal violence to criminal violence obscuring its political implications' (Gready 2011: 127). This political development demonstrates how awkward it is to re-contextualise violence in a transitional period. The amnesty procedure of the TRC (Truth and Reconcilliation Commission, after the end of apartheid) considered political motives as the decisive criterion to allow impunity for violent abuse, both for the apartheid regime as for the resistance from ANC and others. The politicians of the new South African regime tried to circumscribe as accurately as possible the margins of these political justifications, including the social-economical context and the specificities of communities involved. Confronted with so-called waves of crime in the same dispossessed communities, the transitional regime has to reframe completely criminal violence. By excluding a continued climate of violence from the competence of the TRC, which might be a very arguable position, the government creates a clear rupture with the societal and political past, forwarding new legal dogmatics – in the legal sense, that is, a comprehensive interpretative framework – of criminal law, based upon the modified but largely surviving penal codes that continue to be valid. Thus, by positioning itself as a constituent power on the dogmatic level – the level of interpretation of the law – the ANC regime embodies at the same time the constituted power, referring to the continuity of the legal order – the criminal law 'in the books'. Gready notes that the

introduction of democracy can in itself constitute a factor of violence: Central American states after dictatorship, such as Guatemala, illustrate it. The intentionally peaceful struggle for democratic power has to deal with profound economic inequality and rapid liberalisation (of both civil society and economy), and with the weakness of a transitional regime that relies on provisional institutions, too often unable to guarantee its own monopoly of violence (Gready 2011, 117–18; Thoms and Ron 2007, 702–3).

But this circularity is not fatal. Neither is it a prerogative of democratic transition or a purely legal issue. Two very different examples show how a comparable ambiguity can lead to a problematic deadlock. During the Restoration in France, from 1814 to 1830, the restored Ancien Régime established a calendar of commemorations of aristocratic victims of the Revolution of 1789, thus legitimising itself by enumerating dead kings. This effort to restore, as literally as possible, the uninterrupted dynasty of France, turned symbolically in its opposite, since this act of commemoration could as easily be interpreted as a pageant of dead icons, as a buried past without a future (Furet 2007: 520). This memorialising operation is as ambiguous as the stance of the mothers of the disappeared in Argentina, who refuse to mark the closure of the past in their opposition against excavations in mass graves or against reparations, but who claim at the same time to be, in their victimhood, the source of a new political order in a larger sense, not restricted to the transition process anymore (Bevernage 2012: 23–45).

The phenomenon of truth commissions actually gives yet another dimension to the constitutional position of transitional justice, enshrined in judicial procedures and political agendas. In what follows I explore this extra dimension as a tension between individual accountability and societal healing and reparation, a tension that pervades all transitional processes and determines them – before, during, and after the official moment of transition. Criminal prosecution always and exclusively deals with individual guilt, not with the guilt of a system and it cannot cope with societal complicity, says Paul van Zyl, a former staff member of the South African TRC (in Hayner 2002: 101). This is both a practical problem – the chaos of transition itself, especially in a de-legitimised judicial system (van Zyl 1999: 665) – and a principal issue concerning the liberal, individualised notion of penal liability.

In this contribution, I confront the ambiguities of transitional justice with two specific European performances, revealing some of these contradictions or translating them in dialectical terms. The theatrical

performances I refer to deal with very different transitional processes. *Rwanda 94* by the Belgian collective Groupov, created in 2000, documents and comments the genocide of Tutsis and dissident Hutus in Rwanda, 1994, in a combination of plain indictment and tragical working-through (Collard et al. 2002). *Rwanda 94* premiered in Liège, in March 2000, and toured afterwards for several years in Belgium and Europe, with a final performance in Kigali, Rwanda. Groupov is a collective performance group, with writer-director-performer Jacques Delcuvellerie, writer-filmmaker Marie-France Collard, and jazz musician Gareth List as its strongholders. The second performance, *De Waarheidscommissie* (The Truth Commission), by Action Zoo Humain, created in 2013, installs a fictional truth-finding commission inquiring into the historical abuse of Philippine and Senegalese enactments of local villagers during the world exhibition of Ghent in 1913 in Belgium (Ben Chikha 2013). Action Zoo Humain, founded by Chokri Ben Chikha, is an agile theatre collective, focused on the fictionalisation of documentary material, reaching from (auto)biographical testimony to societal topics, all with a strong postcolonial commitment. The actual difference with the comprehensive transition process is important, in both cases. Transition in Rwanda was the result of a military victory and authoritarian leadership, whereas the judicial proceedings took place, in the context of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) in Arusha, Tanzania. Tensions between the Kagame regime and the international human rights community prevented a comprehensive process of reconciliation, and the local National Unity and Reconciliation Commission was toothless. Belgium never knew a transition process concerning its colonial past, and the Ghent world exhibition of 1913 was a symptom of a larger racist culture. A truth commission on these facts is therefore necessarily an intellectual or, in this case, an artistic construct, even though it is informed by factual evidence.

Rwanda 94: The Strategy of 'Naming Names'

Although *Rwanda 94* uses all the dramaturgical tools of Western theatre history since the Greeks and does so in a clearly 'serious' way, the performance presents itself as an 'anti-tragedy' (Collard et al. 2002: 6). This documentary or 'epic' form of theatre refuses to justify the genocidal

events as a tragedy, this qualification implying inescapable or even transcendent fate. Notwithstanding this clearly 'Brechtian' position and the use of explicit film reels in the sense of Piscator's *agitprop*, formal theatrical devices referring to what is commonly known and perceived as 'tragedy' are used or, more precisely, reoriented in *Rwanda 94*: the chorus of citizens, references to (African) mythology, the voices of the dead. The performance opens with a testimony by an actual survivor of the genocide, followed by the appearance of a chorus of the dead, all reciting the stories of their torture and massacre. This suspension of time, this representation of those 'living' in eternal timelessness, raises the pressure on those responsible for the genocide to acknowledge their political and social accountability. These quasi-tragical or even melodramatic sequences are followed by theatrical scenes in which a European journalist, Bee Bee Bee, is fascinated and horrified by reports on the Rwanda genocide. In these opening scenes the tragic shifts to the documentary and even the accusatory. The dead do not confine themselves to the retelling of stories of violence; they also ask questions about the historical causalities of the genocide: the German and Belgian colonisation, the role of the Catholic Church, the influence of fascist ideology, a pertinent interrogation finally touching evidence of indifference or even complicity from Belgian and French government circles and from the United Nations headquarters. We, as an audience, listen to these historical indictments through the ears of Bee Bee Bee; she is the ambiguous representation of our troubled Western mind. When she invites an expert to her television show, this man analyses the history of colonial and post-colonial Rwanda in a dialectical way. He explains how the construction of ethnic identities, as an instrument to create new societal hierarchies and to facilitate in this way colonial administration, has led to reified relationships of mistrust and stereotyping, culminating in the deadly Hutu Power, as an ideology and as a modus operandi. The journalist Bee Bee Bee collapses under the verbal and visual representations of violence, and the performance closes with two last lists of names, one of convicted perpetrators and one of victims of Bisesero, probably the most iconic massacre, due to the controversial involvement of the French military. Following Olivier Neveux, this strategy of 'naming names' of perpetrators and victims claims trustworthiness. It results in, what he calls 'the possibility to force the situation, to create an excess to it, not reducible, without the possibility to appropriate it to its course and its immanence' (2007: 255). He continues:

> The proper names, respectful for the singularity of everyone, acquire the value of *political enunciations*. (…) They impose themselves, as a truth, as a 'supplement' to the ordinariness of existence. They tear fatality to pieces. (…) They sign the events, they claim – without coercion – trustworthiness. (Neveux 2007: 255)

Putting the performance *Rwanda 94* in the context of a transition process, or at least considering it as a gesture in a process of working-through a traumatic experience, the theatrical device of 'naming names' is not a non-committal element. In other transitional contexts, for example after the fall of the Berlin Wall, eventually leading to the implosion of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), the opening of public archives, especially of the Stasi, the secret police, was not only meant to trigger investigations possibly leading to the effective punishment in the legal sense. It was also intended also as a comprehensive cleansing operation of a dubious past where the distinction between victims and perpetrators was not always that clear-cut (Elster 2004: 123). The action of the so-called *Gauck-Behörde* was not a systematic publication of names; it functioned as a tap that leaked, thus creating a strange climate mixing relief with suspicion. The case of novelist Christa Wolf, for instance, was exemplary. Some serious newspapers, triggered by her short novel *Was bleibt* (What Remains), considered as apologetic about her compliant role as a GDR-intellectual, investigated her Stasi-files and found out that she has been, for a very short term and without any harmful effects to anyone, a so-called 'informal collaborator' of the internal security services. Both *Was bleibt* as her later autobiographical novel *Stadt der Engel oder The Overcoat of Dr. Freud* are part of a larger discussion in unified Germany about this 'critical compliancy' with the communist regime. The tap of the *Gauch-Behörde* starts to leak when one of these intellectuals is perceived as reluctant about the German unification process and its consequences, but no official 'cleansing' procedure exists (Vinke 1993: 9–13). Every German citizen can consult the Stasi-archives, if the person has a legitimate motive. The most important difference with the South African TRC is that the latter functions in the framework of a procedure of complaints and that it is closely linked to a penal legal procedure: individuals' claims for amnesty are in fact in interruption of the normal legal proceedings.

Most historical truth commissions did not call names of perpetrators, the South African TRC being a major exception. While other transitional regimes – Brazil, El Salvador – granted a general amnesty, the South

African TRC amnesty procedure was quasi-judicial, by individualising acts and actors. Jon Elster, in his historical survey of transitional justice, observes that most of these quasi-judicial strategies of 'naming names' do not answer the 'due process' requirements of legally sound public prosecution (2004: 117–18). Truth commissions are, from this 'due process' point of view, almost always considered as second-best solutions, since their general narrative constraints clash with the fully adversarial proceeding implied in 'due process': the TRC is no exception to that general observation (Levinson 2000). And if the larger picture of reconciliation and healing is absent – or hidden under references to a necessary efficiency of the transition – the truth effect can be lost completely. During the transitional crisis in Belgium, in the aftermath of the Nazi occupation during World War II, after 1944, administrative punishments were partially meant to reduce the quantity of criminal prosecutions – in the name of efficiency and the idea of a *tabula rasa*. The most obvious cases of military and political collaboration with the Germans were dealt with by military tribunals, but so-called minor offences, committed by officials (police officers, teachers, railway employees, etc.) were treated as administrative cases, as long as no (Belgian) lives were put in danger. Most of these relatively passive bystanders were suspended as government employees, temporarily or for life. But without bilateral proceedings, these measures had more lasting resentment as a collateral result (Huyse and Dhondt 1991: 280–2).

In the examples mentioned above, the naming of names can be seen as the most obvious symptom of the incompatibility of goals a new regime puts forward in a transition process, goals with the key words 'truth', 'justice', and 'reconciliation'. That 'truth' and 'justice' are different objectives is already revelatory, since any judicial proceeding requires a phase of truth-finding. For the TRC, for instance, 'truth' has become an almost autonomous, specific type of (performative) discourse, a genre – in literary terms, as Antjie Krog also acknowledges, quoting Roland Barthes: 'Narrative does not show, does not intimate (…) [Its] function is not to represent, it is to constitute a spectacle' (1999: 122). Or at least an artefact. Official reports create a different regime of truth, based on enquiry, in contrast with the 'theatre of power' of the oppressive past, a regime in which the relationship between the silenced victim and vocal perpetrator is reversed (Gready 2011: 75).

The major discursive constraint, however, is the (narrativised) perspective of national reconciliation. Official reports should establish

a redistribution of power, of discursive power to begin with, and clean language and discourse. Just as Victor Klemperer once tried to liberate the German language from its semantics of fanaticism (Klemperer 1975), the TRC wanted to dismantle a framework of a distorted legality and install 'cleansed' legal relationships, including the most correct connection of names – of material and moral perpetrators – with precise criminalisations. Apartheid was a legalistic system of oppression, and resistance against it used, for a considerable time, this legality as a political instrument. This explains the strictness with which the TRC and the transitional regime in general wanted to respect the legal order – with its particular presuppositions of individual liability and free will, with its focus on passive liberties such as freedom of speech and association – and to re-appropriate the public realm of the law as the arena where power and values were disputed (Gready 2011: 136). The TRC was not unique in this, almost every form of post-war transitional justice is characterised by constitutionalism, that is, by a reference to a legal order of a different level, supposedly closer to universal ethical standards. The qualification of the Shoah as war crimes, as perverted militarism, at the Nuremberg tribunal, is an interesting example: the prosecution argued that the indictment of the Shoah as a crime against humanity – a relatively recent legal concept – had to be associated with the central indictment of crimes against peace (Osiel 1997: 96). This presumed legal necessity was even used by the defence of the Nazis to problematise certain concrete accusations, such as forced labour ('Nuremberg Trial Proceedings' 2008: 465). But this legal-discursive strategy, effective as it pretended to be (and was), caused substantial collateral damage, since it cost years to re-interpret the Shoah as anti-Semitic genocide and not just as a part of the entirety of war crimes (Minow 1998: 47).One can only speculate how this legal ingenuity, justified as it was, has influenced post-war societal (re)constructions in Europe.

In many post-genocidal, post-totalitarian, or post-civil war societies, the notion of the rule of law, as a (meta)constitutional principle is itself undermined by the violence of the previous regime, which claimed to be legitimate, in its creation and implementation of an idiosyncratic legal order. The meaning of 'rule of law' is then as much problematic as the retributory justice, rightly demanded by victims and survivors. Assuming that a liberal-democratic 'rule of law' can be implemented, without acknowledging its problematic character in a given post-violent situation, has a profound de-politicising effect, with the risk of undermining the

societal reconstruction altogether. Transitional justice, with its focus on retribution and, sometimes, reparation doesn't deal – at least not in a structural way – with social reconstruction or in-depth restoration of normativity, and even less with the cultural recovery of a traumatised society (Weinstein 2014: 164–5). Nevertheless, victims expect from national and international tribunals, such as the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY), to bring about a transformation of their social environment, but are more often than not frustrated, if not traumatised, once again, due to their disappointed expectations (Weinstein 2014: 168)

The naming of names of victims and perpetrators in the final scene of *Rwanda 94* supersedes this logic. It interrogates, in a paradoxical enunciation, the individualisation of criminal liability within a liberal constitutional system. By assigning the reconstruction of the historical context – colonisation and its aftermath – to a chorus of the dead, the issue of reconciliation is suspended. Reconciliation can for that matter not mean finding a *modus vivendi* to build a nation on; it can only mean profound atonement. The proper names, as Neveux remarked, become political enunciations, but they don't have to comply with the political logic of reconciliation; they are, to put it cynically, liberated from the future. As such, this strategy of naming names, in its quasi-judicial form, even delegitimises any attempt to create a sustainable system of 'rule of law' – *Rechtsstaatlichkeit* – without a radically traumatic moment. The suspension of law in a legal form, as it happens, creates a moment – a *kairos* – that confirms the new regime in its quality as a constituent power, notwithstanding its public legalism.

De Waarheidscommissie: Apologies and Reparations

The theatrical construction of *De Waarheidscommissie* is predictable: an introduction, a series of testimonies, cross-examinations, conclusive suggestions by the commission, and an epilogue. The setting is the old 'palace of justice' of Ghent, the *cour d'assises*, which is the room for jury trials for serious crime. The commission itself is composed of five experts with diverse backgrounds. The president is a retired history professor and former politician. The other members work in the social and cultural sector or simply represent the population of Ghent. One character is completely fictive, but the others participate under their own name and with their real background, although their dialogues are scripted. In front

of the commission, on the witness bench, are two Senegalese men and a Senegalese woman, representing their ancestors, once exhibited in Ghent. In his opening speech, the president refers to three issues: (1) the nature of the historical 'human zoos', the exotic cardboard villages, temporarily inhabited during the World Exhibition of 1913 in the Belgian city of Ghent, by Philippine and Senegalese people; (2) the cultural legacy of these 'human zoos' in contemporary society and their ineradicable stereotypes; and (3) the lessons for the future. As the first part of the performance focuses on the past, starting with a ritual for a Senegalese villager who once died during the World Exhibition in Ghent and continuing with an academic expert witness on the issue of 'human zoos', the performance gradually shifts to the present. A choreographed portrait of 'black Venus' Saartjie Baartman – once an object of curiosity for the exotic female body in the modern era – ignites a discussion about the right to represent colonial images in contemporary dance. Further discussions tackle the way these stereotypical images linger on in a humiliating TV show in a Papouan village (referring to the popularity of TV series such as *Temptation Island*), and in an arrogant ànd hilarious integration course (referring to existing Flemish integration courses). The conclusions of the commission at the end of the performance are futile: some reparations include quick visas for African artists, or even the official recognition of the 'human zoo' as cultural heritage. But the performance ends with a curious staged incident. Chokri and Zouzou Ben Chikha, present as 'masters of ceremony' throughout the performed Truth and Reconciliation Commission, have held, during rehearsals and even longer, the passport of the Senegalese dancers, to avoid, so they explain, their escape to an illegal circuit. The dancers protest against this patronising attitude, with a strong postcolonial flavour. Finally, the audience has to decide whether the Senegalese dancers should have their passports back.

De Waarheidscommissie deals in fact with the slowest transition process thinkable, which are the societal shifts of the former imperialists after the independence of their colonies. This is a process of generations, and it is very difficult to conceive it in terms of transitional justice. Criminal liability cannot be accounted beyond the perpetrators themselves, even in the case of gross human rights violations. But apologies can be expressed. These apologies, says Martha Minow, make sense only if they imply that the perpetrator – in person, or, in case of official crimes, the authority represented by its highest official – accepts and declares total responsibility, without reservations, without justifications, and in front of the victims (1998: 114–15).

Financial reparations are an option, but most politicians phrase their apologies as moral acknowledgements and carefully avoid any suggestion of civil liability on which claims could be based (Bush 2003). However, precisely the time between acts of injustice and the claim for justice – in the form of apology or reparation – allows, paradoxically, a legal approach. The period immediately after the regime change is a period of 'raw justice', confounding moral indignation and legal accountability and resulting in waves of terror or in its opposite – quick political compromises. In the years that follow sound legal cases can be constructed, exactly determining liabilities – fault, damage, and causality – and carefully circumventing the statute of limitations. Recent cases about the role of Swiss banks during World War II have revealed this possibility, although sometimes an additional causal link between past harm and present need is required (Elster 2004: 184–5). This legal subtlety also demonstrates how difficult it is, in terms of legal qualification, to deal with shifting historical contexts. Legal continuity, the basis of most transitional processes, is often counter-intuitive. The performance of *De Waarheidscommissie* suggests how historic injustice, here embodied in the racist constellation of the human zoos of the World Exhibition in 1913, survives in postcolonial attitudes, in the gaze of even the most morally correct observers of an 'otherness' once reified in colonial hierarchies: the representation of the other in entertainment, the requirements for perfect social assimilation. This discursive continuity is difficult to catch in a legal framework, since civil and penal liabilities are a-historic; they are subject to precise, closed qualifications, and to the syllogisms of the 'legality principle': a singular fact is part of a class of facts, that class of facts is described by a legal rule, so this singular fact is sanctioned by that rule. As such, the heterogeneous performances in *De Waarheidscommissie*, although discursively linked, cannot be qualified as a class of facts.

Conclusion

Both performances deal, in a very different way, with the issue of individual accountability versus societal healing, a tension inherent to most transition processes. *Rwanda 94* reorients devices of ancient tragedy (the chorus of citizens), African mythology (the voices of the dead), and documentary theatre (the film reels, as in Piscator's *agitprop*), and concludes with a litany, spoken by the chorus leader, naming the names

of perpetrators. The chorus answers with a list of victims. Both lists are accurately updated for every performance. The dead represent both the strictness of individual accountability and the impossibility of healing. But they do not break the circularity of sovereignty any transitional justice process is confronted with. *Rwanda 94* suggests perhaps that the authority is situated outside the legal and political institutions – in the realm of the dead, or in a frozen history – but refuses to go further than 'naming names'. In this sense it is foremost a political performance, not bound by individualised evidence rules, not bound by a strict legality – in contrast with real truth commissions of special criminal courts.

De Waarheidscommissie, by its title, refers to existing formats steering transitional processes and procedures. It mixes the decorum and the seriousness of truth commissions with performative interventions – dance as ritual, dance as provocation, dance as conviviality – and participatory gestures. *De Waarheidscommissie* enlarges also the scope of enquiry; it transgresses any thinkable mandate of an official institution that would investigate historic injustices. But the conclusion is dubious: there are some minor recommendations, there is the exposure of hypocrisy. The position of this truth commission itself is rather vague – who took the political initiative? What constitutes the urgency? – but it allows the suggested historical continuity of stereotyping as the discursive red thread of their proceedings. This commission does not problematise its authority; it does not pretend to create a new moral order of acknowledgement of a silenced colonial past; it stops after the apologies. Just before the end of the hearing, a video shows a declaration by Daniel Termont, mayor of Ghent, expressing his official apology for the humiliating treatment of the participants in the human zoos, a hundred years before. The discourse of *De Waarheidscommissie* is finally integrated, at least symbolically, in the mainstream political order. But the question remains open if a real societal acceptance and integration of 'otherness' does not require a real constituent power. Perhaps not a revolutionary *kairos*, but at least a paradigmatic shift.

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CHAPTER 2

The Truth Commission According to Action Zoo Humain: Performing Differential Futures from a Traumatic Colonial Past in Belgium

Christel Stalpaert and Evelien Jonckheere

Introduction

Trauma has become 'the signal concept of our time' (Leys 2000: 10), and trauma relief 'a dominant mode of practice and discourse' (Thompson 2009: 44). This tendency can be noticed in the humanities and social sciences, where memory and trauma studies have been on the rise since the 1990s. Also in contemporary artistic practices, a remarkably wider concern with memory and trauma has been developed. As W. J. T. Mitchell put it, contemporary artworks 'incorrigibly insist on speaking about it, depicting it, and trying to render it in increasingly vivid and literal ways' (2005: 295).

Chokri Ben Chikha, a Flemish theatre maker, historian, and director of the performance company Action Zoo Humain, shares the belief that 'performance has the capacity to function as the space in which trauma can be testified about and borne witness to' (Duggan 2012: 93). With *The Truth Commission*, a performance that premiered in 2013 in the former Court House located at the Koophandelsplein in Ghent (Belgium), Action Zoo Humain examined and testified to the cultural trauma of the exhibited 'other' in the colonial history of Belgium. The performance pointed at the humiliating discourse and the blunt stereotypical images of the black 'other', the Senegalese people in particular, in the exhibitionary complex of the human zoos. As historical research pointed out, 128 Senegalese and 60 Philippine people were exhibited at the 1913 World Exhibition in Ghent, as part of the so-called human zoos. Under the leadership of a French and American impresario, they would travel from one exhibition to the other, with the approval of the French and American colonial superpowers. At least three people died, and there are clear indications that several of the exhibited people were exposed to hunger and cold (Jonckheere 2013: 97–111).

By using the format of a truth commission to unwrap the cultural trauma of this colonial practice, Action Zoo Humain not only questions the mechanism and the structure of cultural stereotypes, the company also critically investigates the particular ways in which a dominant memory regime[1] – and truth commissions in particular – tend to deal with cultural traumas. In this contribution, we discuss the artistic strategies of *The Truth Commission* in relation to recent findings in postcolonial studies and trauma studies. Particular attention will be paid to two important paradigm shifts, namely the post-narrative or post-representative shift on the one hand and the post-positivist shift on the other, and to the ways in which these shifts are articulated in a Western postdramatic aesthetic on a Belgian, European stage.

'Acting Out' and 'Working Through' the Cultural Trauma of the Exhibited 'Other'

By staging a truth commission dealing with the traumatic past of the human zoos, Action Zoo Humain envisages first an acknowledgement of the cultural trauma of the exhibited 'other' during the World Exhibition of 1913 in Ghent. The traumatic experience lies not only in the physical deprivations, but also in the very fact of being exhibited within a humiliating, stereotypical, imperialist discourse. The impresarios exhibited and orchestrated what they called 'authentic craftsmanship' and 'authentic activities of dance and baptism'. Each exhibition was announced by distributing postcards with messages in '*petit nègre français*'. These impresarios in fact extracted multidimensional, socially embedded, and local practices with particular modes of knowledge production from the Senegale people, and reduced them to stereotypical actions that befitted the Western colonial gaze and mind. The imperialist discourse accompanying the exhibitions explicitly supported the benevolence of the coloniser. The local press accredited the 'excellent' behaviour of the Senegalese to the French coloniser who rescued them from barbarism and Arab slave traders, and who provided them with a Western education. The exhibition of the 'other' in these human zoos in fact consolidated the Western racist discourse of subordinating the black 'other' to the white coloniser's superiority. bell hooks calls this the 'colonial imperialist paradigms of black identity which represent blackness one-dimensionally in ways that reinforce and sustain white supremacy' (1990: 28).

Figure 2.1. Maimouna Diao, Moussa Nambé N'Diaye, and Bane N'Diaye as three 'authentic' Senegalese witnesses in Ghent, 2013. Photograph by Kurt Van der Elst.

The persistant nature of this imperialist discourse, and hence, the ongoing need to reveal the traumatising nature of this colonial practice, is indicated in the ongoing, recurrent *reprises* of the performance since 2013. With every staging of a *Truth Commission* in another city, new archival research is conducted, and other testifiers, experts, and performers are invited to participate. With every *reprise* the colonial history of that particular part of the world is delved in, revealing a myriad network of complicity in imperialist, colonial power structures. As such, *reprises* took place in Cape Town (2014), Antwerp (2016), and Malines (2017). In October 2023, *The Truth Commission* premiered in the city of Amsterdam, the Netherlands, to acknowledge the cultural trauma of the exhibited Surinamese and Indonesian men, women, and children at the *International Colonial and Export Trade Exhibition* in Amsterdam (1883), the *Indische Tentoonstelling* in Arnhem (1928), and the Senegalese village at the *Nenijto* in Rotterdam (1928).

Action Zoo Humain brings forth the historical evidence of these human zoos during the staged 'event' of a truth commission so that 'the cognizance' or 'the "knowing"' of the traumatic colonial practice of stereotypical exhibiting is given birth to (Laub 2013: 57). *The Truth Commission* for that matter operates as what theatre scholar Patrick Duggan calls 'a

site of witnessing' (2012: 94); the performance is 'itself a witness and can create the audience as further witness' (113). As trauma theorist Dori Laub has pointed out, in order for the traumatic past to be acknowledged, the telling must be performed in the company of a willing audience to witness the testimony.

> The listener … is a party to the creation of knowledge *de novo*. The testimony to the trauma thus includes its hearer, who is, so to speak, the blank screen on which the event comes to be inscribed for the first time. (Laub 2013: 57)

Following Laub, the listener is not only a participant, but also a co-owner of the traumatic event: 'through the very listening', one comes to 'partially experience the trauma' oneself (57). One 'does not become a "victim", however, as one preserves his own separate place, position and perspective' (58). This position of the participant is a precarious one, lacking a well-defined centre. It situates itself somewhere in between an impartial role and that of a victim. The liveness inherent to the performance medium renders this position even more precarious. Performance studies have indicated how witnessing testimonies in a live medium has a more profound impact than with a reader's relationship to a text. The material presence of voices and bodies not only add emotional weight to the testimonies. The live event before an assembled crowd also creates a particular emphatic and kinaesthetic relationship between spectators and testifiers. The spectators' affective response makes them even more implicated in the traumatic past.

The 'safe' theatrical distance prevents the spectators from slipping into the traumatic experience themselves, but the testimonies nevertheless have a strong impact on the spectator-as-witness. In watching and listening to the testimonies of *The Truth Commission* the audience feels embarrassment and shame for the past (and the ongoingness of imperialist attitudes in the present). Most of the spectators in fact didn't know about this gruesome colonial practice in Belgium. Being implicated as a witness, the theatre audience hence becomes a latent or belated witness of the traumatic practice of the human zoos, one hundred years after the actual exhibitions took place. To put it in theatre scholar Frederik Le Roy's terms: this performance instigates a 'memory community', 'involving witnesses and spectators' (2012: 246) around the focal point of the painful colonial practice of the human zoos.

To tell the story of the human zoos in the theatrical setting of a truth commission is part of Action Zoo Humain's desire to testify to the traumatic events and to record them in history. However, this company is not seeking to uncover the 'Truth' and nothing but the 'Truth'. *The Truth Commission* primarily investigates how 'Truth' works in a dominant memory regime by observing the *conditions* of a hypermastery in *narrating* a traumatic event. In other words, they also point to the limitations underpinning the narrative, representative, and positivist paradigm of the dominant Western memory regime itself. With his psychiatric model of trauma diagnosis, trauma processing, and trauma relief, Sigmund Freud installed a cure-oriented paradigm of narrative-based storytelling. In this dominant memory regime 'telling one's story' is the preferred method for trauma processing. His idea(l) of talk-therapy is that a person not only 'acts out' but also and preferably 'works through' psychic and bodily traumas by talking about them.[2] Following this memory regime, a successful narrative recall leads to relief, liberation, and healing. The underlying knowledge of or 'truth' about the past is waiting to be discovered and the technique for its retrieval is the spoken word. As memory scholar Dominik LaCapra observed, 'acting out' has a mimetic relation to the past; the traumatic event is 're-generated or relived as if it were fully present rather than represented in memory and inscription' (1998: 45). 'Working through', on the other hand, creates a reflective and critical distance to the trauma. The patient recognises the difference between the traumatic past and the compulsive repetition of re-enactments of the past. Recognition of what LaCapra called this specific 'performative relation' allows space for the patient to move on with their life, for a 'reinvestment in life' (45).

This memory regime of narrative recall is based on the founding principles of identity, oppositions, analogy, and resemblance (Deleuze 2004: 174) and builds on the Cartesian law of correspondence (Deleuze and Guattari 2007a: 25). Memory scholar Jill Bennett observed how narrating a traumatic event is for that matter connected with representational memory, 'with the thinking process and with words – the realm in which events are rendered intelligible, pegged to a common or established frame' (2003: 28).

While it is important to find relief in drawing meaning from traumatic experiences, in order to be able to move on with one's life, the danger of a master-narrative is that it constitutes an exclusive identity, a restrictive nationality, or a closed community that is hostile to anything 'different' from the narrative 'mastering' the cultural trauma. As performance

scholar Ilka Saal points out in her study on narrative memory in post-9/11 American theatre, for example, trauma work entails not only 'the mending of physical and psychic wounds', but also 'the reconstruction of narrative structures', affirming particular visions on American nationhood and the Islamic 'otherness' that has temporarily threatened its existence (2010: 353). Despite the fact that the terrorist attacks gave rise to '1,000,000 stories … waiting to be told' (DeLillo in Saal 2010: 353), a unilateral master-narrative was developed in the United States. A 'collective narrative framing of the event' geared the 'working through' of the shock into a particular direction, rarely moving beyond 'unilateral accounts of suffering', and supporting the American foreign policy of the Bush administration (355). Theatrical master-narratives that are used to 'work through' the cultural trauma of 9/11 are hence also 'productions' of a representational memory that founds tradition and safeguards continuity and identity of the victimised 'American citizen' at the cost of stigmatising evil 'others', such as the Islam. 'With those dramatic pieces the theatre perpetuates a particular self-image of a group … which checks and questions itself against the present times. The group encounters itself in its constitutive values whose continuity is thus assured' (Siegmund 1994: 218).

In fact, much in the same respect, the dominant Western memory regime itself is both inclusive and exclusive; it delineates a 'universal' system of norms, values, and differentiations. Already in 1979, Edward W. Said challenged the positivist project in his groundbreaking book *Orientalism*. In this book, he exposed the salient trait modern imperialism holds: it claims to be an *education* movement, consciously setting out to modernise, develop, instruct, and civilise, at the expense of local traditions. When the contemporary psychiatrist Derek Summerfield rightly observes that 'psychiatric universalism risks being imperialistic', he links the dominant Western trauma regime[3] with the colonial era, 'when what was presented to indigenous peoples was that there were different types of knowledge and that theirs were second-rate' (2006: 101). The positivist project to heal and to cure through narrative-based storytelling, and its consequent mere attention for effect rather than affect, hence incorporates 'the ideologies of colonial dependence and racial inferiority into modern psychological discourse' (Summerfield 2006: 101). Not only has the focus of trauma studies been largely, if not exclusively, on Western societies, its focus on narrative recall has indeed exiled culturally particular

modes of mourning, coping, or crisis management. Corporeality, silent retreat, or more ritual modes of storytelling have hence been supplanted by narrative memory.

Judith Butler outlined the ethical implications of such a unilateral representational and positivist memory regime. In *Giving an Account of Oneself* she argues that psychoanalysis has a tendency to regard 'the narrative construction of a life' as the normative goal of all therapy. She acknowledges the values of this narrative work in 'working through' a trauma, but, at the same time, she warns against the exclusive mechanisms of 'the conditions of hypermastery' (2005: 52). In *Precarious Life* she pleas for an ethics of vulnerability, engaging not only with one's own life but also with the lives of others, since a mindfulness of the vulnerability of the self *and* others, she insists, 'can become the basis of non-military political solutions, just as the denial of this vulnerability through a fantasy of mastery can fuel the instruments of war' (2004: 29).[4]

As we will observe, *The Truth Commission* of Action Zoo Humain inaugurates a post-representative (or post-narrative) and post-positivist paradigm shift in order to reveal the conditions for recovering the 'Truth' in a dominant Western memory regime. The artists obviously *stage* a truth commission as a *theatrical* format and for that matter instil reality with fiction, and fiction with reality. As theatre makers they are not *really* entitled to conduct a truth commission. Moreover, it is a truth commission and not a reconciliation commission that is staged. Company Action Zoo Humain had their particular reasons for that. They acknowledge that a staged version of a TRC is doomed to fail as far as 'real' effects of reconciliation and rehabilitation are concerned. After all, it is but a show. They will never be able to 'do justice' to the victims. Moreover, *The Truth Commission* deliberately does not envisage a cathartic relief or a balancing of the emotions and memories associated with the cultural trauma of a colonial practice. Not catharsis in a dramatic aesthetic, but a shock to thought in a Western postdramatic aesthetic (Lehmann 2006) is their artistic endeavour. The mimetic shimmering and undecidability in perception that is at work in *The Truth Commission* inaugurate a profound ethical call for responsibility and accountability with regard to a traumatic colonial practice.

Mimetic Shimmering in a Truth Commission as Theatrical Format

The Truth Commission of 2013 is based on archival research and reveals hitherto unknown, forgotten, or hidden, staggering material about Europe's colonial practice of exhibiting Senegalese people in human zoos in the city of Ghent. Several experts were consulted for both the research and the performance itself, among them art historian Evelien Jonckheere, and scholar in African languages and culture Annelies Verdoolaege. With their archival evidence they present a scientifically sound account of the human zoos. Knowledge about the human zoos in the city of Ghent is gathered and the spectator becomes co-owner of that knowledge. These experts may not be professional actors, but they are definitely gifted speakers. Action Zoo Humain consciously decided to involve untrained actors into the performance and to thus blur the boundary between reality and fiction. Herman Balthazar, cast as the president of the Truth Commission, is not a professional actor either. He actually is the former governor of the Province of East-Flanders. Maimouna Diao, Moussa Nambé N'Diaye, and Bane N'Diaye, three Senegalese performers who are introduced as direct descendants of the people put on show at the World Exhibition in 1913, listen to the testimonies on the witness stand.

By making use of experts, witnesses, and archival material as historical evidence on stage, Action Zoo Humain comes close to the '*neuen Reality Trends auf den Bühnen*' (Le Roy 2012: 248), also called theatre of the real (Martin 2012). The company shuns, however, the dramatic aesthetic and the tradition of the positivist documentary theatre.

Positivist documentary theatre is founded on exhaustive (archival) research in order to convince the spectator of a truth behind a historical event, a truth that needs to be recovered from the folds of history.

> This theatre reports: it presents facts, shows authentics documents (which are often re-enacted), draws connections and attempts to convince the audience of a seemingly objective representation of reality. (Le Roy 2012: 248)

As opposed to the documentary *agitprop* theatre of Erwin Piscator, for example, which represents the positivist historiography (Le Roy 2012: 248), Action Zoo Humain is taking a post-positivist turn. *The Truth Commission* intends a form of documentary theatre that moves away from the representational memory regime. *The Truth Commission* does not claim to

reveal the Truth, despite the title of the performance. Action Zoo Humain is more interested in truth functions than the Truth itself; the performers involved are mostly investigating 'the conditions of its creation'.[5] For them, it is not so much the truth that matters, but the acknowledgement of our habits and attitudes in searching for it. '(It) explores the phenomena of the present through an elaborate understanding of media culture (and) the theory of deconstruction' (Irmer in Le Roy 2012: 250).

As we have indicated above, the dominant Western memory regime claims that *narrating* a traumatic event is the key for success in 'acting out' and 'working through' a traumatic experience. Narrative recall is considered the most important tool 'in the reconstruction of a life that otherwise suffers from fragmentation and discontinuity' (Butler 2005: 52). As Thompson observed: 'constructing a narrative from the pain of the past allows it to be contained or healed' (2009: 45). Master narratives 'working through' cultural traumas enable a community 'to make meaning out of a chaotic world and the incomprehensible events taking place in it' (Bal 2002: 10). From this perspective, the public act of mourning and the narrative recall at work in rituals of commemoration safeguard traumatic relief and healing. As Belgian dramaturg Erwin Jans observes: the act of public mourning consists of 'making a place for the terrible event in the self-definition of a community. The broken story has to be repaired. Collective rituals are needed to deal with collective traumas. Shared suffering is suffering halved. In rituals we try by means of coded actions and words to give shape to the shapeless, to that which defies words. It throws up a protective shield between us and the abyss that the trauma opens up' (2012: 11).

It has been generally acknowledged that truth and reconciliation commissions are a similar important tool in 'acting out' and 'working through' cultural traumas. Truth and Reconciliation Committees, however, not only want to raise awareness or provide healing. They also desire to implement *community change*. The cathartic experience in relation to trauma processing in the TRC has less to do with a purging of emotions. It is rather concerned with 'integration' through a 'process of reconstruction' (Herman 2001: 181). A TRC is thus considered not only as an official organ calling for testimonies from the past (truth), but also as a judicial body aiming at reconciliation between victims and perpetrators. While Truth and Reconciliation Committees are concrete tools with a positive impact on democracy and human rights – the TRC is considered an important

element of rehabilitation in the development towards a post-transitional democracy – we must not forget that they are collective rituals that are constructed along coded actions and that they employ a representational logic that is founded on principles of identity, oppositions, analogy, and resemblance. As Feldman outlined, 'it situates the past as an object of spectatorship … The spectator is witnessing at a remove; in controlled conditions, and within spatial divisions between life and death, viewer and the observed, now and then' (Feldman 2004: 165). Thompson called this the 'strategic memory' at work in collective rituals that 'act out' and 'work through' traumatic events. The self-definition of a community in a collective act of mourning is coded (2009: 97–100).

Research has outlined not only the benefits, but also the imperative discourse of truth and reconciliation committees. The master's therapeutic tool of narrative recall 'gears' a community towards truth and reconciliation. This imperative master-narrative not only maintains or constructs a group's homogeneous and coherent identity; it also excludes differential voices.[6] Verdoolaege describes the constitution of 'ideal testifiers' in the South African TRC as follows:

> Testifiers expressed themselves in ways that were, to a greater or lesser extent, either appreciated or ignored by the HRV [Human Rights Violations] commissioners. … The most-preferred utterances were embodied by … *ideal testifiers*. It was the discourse of these testifiers that the TRC wanted to capture, to spread to the nation and to preserve for future generations. (Verdoolaege 2008: 167)

Action Zoo Humain deliberately uses the term 'truth commission' instead of 'reconciliation commission'. Instead of proclaiming judgement, their *Truth Commission* seeks to postpone judgement constantly. They are not asking for a consensus about the truth of a colonial past. They are consciously installing an ambiguity to keep the debate about the trauma of the colonial practice of human zoos in Ghent open and alive. In that respect they are also criticising the debate-numbing politics of reconciliation and consensus. Next to acknowledging the benefits of a truth commission in 'working through' a cultural trauma, *The Truth Commission* also insists on asking other pertinent questions: What are the coded actions at work in commemoration rituals? How do they function? What are the controlled conditions of a truth and reconciliation committee? What is the strategic memory at work therein? What kind of narrative is impressed upon the

commemorators, upon the 'victims' and 'perpetrators' testifying within a preconceived format? What is the structuring device that maintains a group's homogeneous and coherent identity? Is the process of reconciliation or integration through a process of reconstruction conducted at the cost of different modes of trauma processing or even different perspectives on the traumatic event?

To investigate those questions, *The Truth Commission* profoundly unsettles the binary oppositions that are the foundation of a representational memory regime: fiction versus reality, victim versus perpetrator, object versus subject, past versus present… The postdramatic aesthetic of the performance generates a mimetic shimmering and undecidability in perception. It reveals the conditions of the creation of a 'Truth' in a dominant memory regime and inaugurates a profound ethical call for responsibility and accountability.

A first unsettling artistic strategy that Action Zoo Humain employs is the blurred distinction between fiction and reality in the mode of acting and the choice of actors. A substantial number of the staged 'experts' in *The Truth Commission* are also professional actors or performers in real life. Nonetheless, they present themselves as ordinary people of flesh and blood. Marijke Pinoy may be a celebrated Flemish actress, but she is presenting herself as a mother of five children in the first place. Koen Augustijnen, choreographer of the Sarah Baartman scene, is remarkably present during the performance as both choreographer and spectator. The three Senegalese witnesses are also professional performers who demonstrate their skills in singing and dancing later on in the performance. Their dance training explains their confident presence on stage during the testimonies. The spectator may be less familiar with the fact that Herman Balthazar, the former provincial governor, is also a former actor. He even had a role in plays of Cyriel Buysse, the author who, during the testimonies, is heavily criticised for his inappropriate account of the people he had seen at the 1913 World Exhibition in Ghent. Moreover, the rhetorical qualities developed by Balthazar during his career as provincial governor, appear to be very useful for his role as president of the truth commission. His use of the gavel actually fits him like a glove, drawing from his body-as-archive[7] for performing gestures and/or habits.

The characters in *The Truth Commission* create an alienating mixture between a 'genuine human being', a 'powerful performer', and a 'persuasive rhetorician'. It is often unclear exactly which particle of the performer

Figure 2.2. Herman Balthazar as the president of the Truth Commission. Photograph by Kurt Van der Elst.

Figure 2.3. Ousmane N'Diaye in a dancing scene. Photograph by Kurt Van der Elst.

is speaking. A deliberate blurring of the boundary between reality and fiction is the result. Duggan called this the 'mimetic shimmering' at work in a performance.[8]

> The reality of the images as representation shimmers, constantly and rapidly in and out of focus with the perception of the representation as violent reality. The spectator is kept in a constant state of flux, never deciding on the images as reality or mimesis. … The images refuse resolution and definition. Unable to decide if the actions of the performance are real or representational, the spectator might be thought of as caught between equal gravitational pulls at each pole of the three-way tension between present reality – mimesis – imputed presence of the referent, without ever settling at one point or finding equilibrium in the middle. (Duggan 2012: 73)

As a result of this mimetic shimmering, the spectator-as-witness finds their self in 'a state of constant tension, a state of being perpetually unsettled, and it is a state which is deliberately constructed by the performance' (Duggan 2012: 73–4). It inaugurates an unsettling *undecidability* in perception in a postdramatic theatre aesthetic. As theatre scholar Hans-Thies Lehmann observed:

> In the postdramatic theatre of the real the main point is not the assertion of the real as such (as is the case in … sensationalist productions of the porn industry) but the unsettling that occurs through the *undecidability* whether one is dealing with reality or fiction. (Lehmann 2006: 101)

Undecidability in Perception

A particular unsettling experience of undecidability in perception is the spectator's encounter with Chantal Loial's dance solo, referring to the story of Saartjie Baartman, more commonly known as Sarah Baartman. This solo in the performance, choreographed by Koen Augustijnen, unleashes 'a series of paradoxical rotations' (Duggan 2012: 110) in the gaze of the spectator-as-witness. As we will observe, the unsettling *undecidability* that befalls the spectator dismantles the voyeuristic gaze that lies at the heart of 'the exhibitionary complex' in the human zoos.

The notion of the 'exhibitionary complex' has been coined by Tony Bennett in his book *The Birth of the Museum* (1995), in which he describes the growing popularity of exhibition practices in the nineteenth century. This increase is explained as a strategy to propagate the Western discourse of progress through the voyeuristic gaze.

The power of the spectacle in modern times, where a unilateral Western discourse of progress is imposed on a wide audience, is also endorsed by leading visual cultural historians such as Vannessa Schwartz in *Spectacular Realities* (1999) and Jonathan Crary in *Suspensions of Perception* (1999). The latter even claims that the exhibitionary complex in the late nineteenth century is part of a 'disciplinary regime of attentiveness' (Crary 1999: 13). A complex interplay of technology and forms of culture would stimulate the attentive attitude of spectators, so that visual spectacles can be digested in a most efficient way. This makes the voyeuristic gaze in human zoos supportive of what Ben Chikha labels as a 'spectacle de la différence' (2013: n.p.). The theatre maker is very critical towards this spectacular exhibitionary complex that claims to bring people together from different cultures:

> This kind of picture or 'spectacle de la difference' does not aim at generating more intercultural exchange between the citizens of Ghent and the 'exotics'. On the contrary, it instals a rigid binary-oppositional division, from a power ratio that is determined by only one of both parties. Staged as an encounter with the Other, the actual intersubjective relationship between exhibited, spectator and maker is a joke. (Ben Chikha 2013: n.p.)[9]

Saartjie Baartman is a historical figure and an iconic example of such an exhibited 'other'. Being a black South African woman with stereotypical features – her deep brown colour of her skin, her opulent bosom, and her well-set, curving hips – she was a popular exhibited 'item' in Great Britain at the beginning of the nineteenth century. With a trial in London in 1810, she was the first to raise awareness for the painful living conditions of the exhibited 'other'. The outcome of Saartjie Baartman's trial was, sadly enough, not successful. Reasoning that she was being paid properly for her services, it was judged that she could not be considered as exploited. The trial thus consolidated power structures in the colonial gaze.

In Action Zoo Humain's *Truth Commission*, Chantal Loial is performing Saartjie Baartman behind glass, next to another exhibited object, namely

Figure 2.4. Chantal Loial performing Saartjie Baartman. Photograph by Kurt Van der Elst.

a painting by an unknown neo-classicist artist. The theatricality of this large-scale painting, representing a scene of human suffering, enforces the dramatic power of Loial's dance solo.

Loial's obvious reference to the exhibition modus is similar to Berthe Tanwo Njole's performative rendering of Saartjie Baartman in *Exhibit B* (2014), the controversial performance installation by South African theatre maker Brett Bailey. Her stereotypical image configures the first of eleven 'stations' in the Gésu church. Motionless, she stands on a slowly rotating platform. Just like Action Zoo Humain in *The Truth Commission*, Bailey aims at 'unpacking shameful stories of imperialist Europe' (Bailey 2012). Bailey uncovers the truth of the past by having his performers and visitor-spectators feature in a human zoo, re-enacting the exhibition modus of Imperialist Europe. By repeating the oppositional 'we' versus 'them' discourse, Bailey points at the oppositional discourse at work in the colonial imperialist paradigms of modernist Europe. He also points at the ways this polarising discourse is still at work in contemporary society. A *tableau vivant* displaying the barbarian history of Black slavery is put next to a *tableau vivant* uncovering the painful death of the Nigerian 'illegal immigrant' Sémira Adamu, who, chained to aeroplane seats, (was)

suffocated in a pillow on 22 September 1998 after being forcefully put on a plane in order to be repatriated. Not much has changed, so it seems. In this re-enacted exhibition mode, it becomes clear that immigrants are reduced to *objets trouvés*, reminding us of the shamefully unrespectful and inhuman way in which 'illegal' immigrants or boat refugees are treated in the West. Their position does not differ that much from the African slaves who were treated in the same way as hunting trophies.

Just like Action Zoo Humain, Bailey aimed at a blurred distinction between fiction and reality in *Exhibit B*. For the KunstenfestivalDesArts in 2013, he chose the Gésu church as the location for his performance because 'illegal' refugees turned that space into their temporary home some years before. In doing so, Bailey also pointed at the paradoxical situation of high vacancy rates in Brussels and homelessness.

For every première in a new city, Bailey would work together with local residents. In Brussels, for example, he invited *sans papiers* to perform 'themselves' as *objets trouvés*, again deliberately blurring the thin line between reality and fiction. As a result, the spectator, who finds himself situated in the position of the passive on-looker, feels shame over the victims that these *tableaux vivants* display. In these static re-enactments, the exhibition format unambiguously re-stages an oppositional discourse aligning 'victims' and 'perpetrators' alongside 'performers' and 'spectators'.

With *The Truth Commission* Action Zoo Humain aimed at inaugurating a more heterogeneous connection of the 'we' with the 'other' by profoundly unsettling the rigid binary oppositional modus operandi that founds the cornerstone of representational memory and stereotypical thinking. In an open letter to Bailey Ben Chikha wrote:

> Is it artistically or socially enriching to use the 'zoo humain' to saddle the spectators with a unilateral feeling of guilt? If so, this artistic strategy appears to be pretty successful, judging on the reactions of the audience, myself included. Can guilt, however, be considered as a way to deconstruct the phenomenon of intercultural identity politics? And isn't this, again, a way of excluding the 'Other', of disempowering or victimizing him by locking him up in a golden cage …? (Ben Chikha 2013: n.p.)

Following Ben Chikha, the mere re-staging of stereotypes does not necessarily deconstruct the mechanism of the imperialist gaze. The historical

figure of Saartjie Baartman in *The Truth Commission* is therefore deliberately not stereotypically staged as the 'other', nor univocally as 'victim'. First, she is not wearing the 'primitive' grass skirt, and she is not half naked. However, her brown skin, her bare feet, her voluptuous bottom, and her headscarf are nevertheless easily recognisable as stereotypical images of black women. This stereotypical thinking comes with unsettling questions, though. Do we project these stereotypes onto this dancing body? Is the colonising gaze still at work in contemporary theatre performances, including the good intentions of *The Truth Commission*, Ben Chikha seems to wonder?

Second, the 'kinaesthetic power' of the dancing body,[10] with Chantal Loial/Saartjie Baartman confidently returning the spectator's gaze, renders an ambiguity in perception that in fact challenges the binary oppositional mechanism of the voyeuristic gaze. The expressive power of Chantal Loial/Saartjie Baartman as performative subject is overwhelmingly unsettling and cannot merely be appropriated by a voyeuristic gaze. This ambiguity in motion is in contrast with the clearcut stereotypes in and the static nature of the *tableaux vivants* in Brett Bailey's *Exhibit B*, where the rotating platform is in fact the only thing 'moving'. The dancing body of Chantal Loial not only represents the character of Saartjie Baartman as victim. Next to representing a black body on display, she also presents the joy of dancing in itself. Her ambiguous body operates 'on a variety of levels' (Fischer 1993: 30). On the one hand, this dancing body is beautiful; it offers a lush visual surface. The actress is gorgeous and can be 'appropriated by the male heterosexual look' (Fischer 1993: 30). On the other hand, the kinaesthetic power of this dancing body cannot be completely appropriated or reduced to a mere object: '(…) something more than this happens. The sequence communicates *her* desire to us, her wish to *act* in a sexual way' (Fischer 1993: 30).

Dance scholar Ramsay Burt pointed at a similar ambiguity at work in the dancing body of Josephine Baker in her so-called 'savage dances' in modernist Paris.[11] The exotic myth of Baker and her stereotypical image of naked, savage female, has been written about extensively: 'This (myth) conjures up for the white male imagination a stereotypical image of the mysterious black female as "other" – the sensual feathers that concealed her sex, the allure of her beautiful naked breasts, the erotic attraction of her rhythmically shaking buttocks' (Burt 1998: 58). The way Josephine

Baker's dancing body has been essentialised to white-defined stereotypical notions of black female sexuality and has been captured in mythical stardom has been rightfully criticised. As Burt aptly points out: 'a whole mass of ideologically over-determined discourses have been inscribed around her blackness. … Essentialising any black person, particularly a woman, runs the risk of stereotypically associating them with the body … What is lost above all is the fact that stars and their mythologies are constructed. … Her star persona was a construction and not the "real Joséphine"' (Burt 1998: 58–60). The 'real' Joséphine was in fact more heterogeneous than one could have imagined from her mythical and stereotypical image. 'Baker's image was of course not static but highly mobile', Burt observes (1998: 79). There also was 'Baker's assertion of bodily passion in dance' (hooks 1992: 14), 'the impassioned frankness of her performances' (Burt 1998: 80), her skill as a performer as far as polycentrism, polyrhythm, ephebism, and high affect juxtaposition are concerned (Gottshild in Burt 1998: 68), and also the ways in which music and the body are crucial 'to the ways in which African Americans have had access to a shared, communal memory of Africa before the Diaspora' (Burt 1998: 65). It is precisely the acknowledgement of this ambiguity and mobility that prevents the dancing body to be essentialised as 'black other', and to become a stereotypical image.

In *The Truth Commission*, Chantal Loial gives the black female 'other' an ambiguous voice, hence questioning the oppositional mechanism supporting the polarising discourse positioning 'we' versus 'them'. The mobilisation of the stereotypical image happens on a number of levels.

First, Chantal Loial is conscious of her role as a performer. She is not simply representing or impersonating Saartjie Baartman as a representative of a 'real black spectacular body'. She also demonstrates that she is a very skilful performer of her own. The spectator subsequently cannot simply 'read' the dancing body only as an image of an African woman testifying of her objectified position on stage, calling upon a long history of colonialism. We read her as a witness and, rapidly thereafter, as a performer mimicking a victim/witness on stage. This immensely powerful image, presented in the exhibition modus of a former Court House in Ghent, rendered theatrical, gives us a strong sense of a stereotypical image *as* theatre performing. As Duggan would put it: 'the reality of the event is registered in the bodies of the audience before its mimetic quality is recognized' (2012: 82). He called this 'mimesis in reverse' (2012: 82); the spectator knows the female dancer is put on stage as a 'genuine' black

woman, that she is 'part of the theatrical apparatus' (Duggan 2012: 69), but at the same time we cannot deny her performative qualities. This dancing woman-as-witness becomes 'entangled in a sticky web' (Duggan 2012: 69): between being herself, being a theatrical sign performing Sarah Baartman, and imputing the reality of the existence of other black women on display – in history as well as on the contemporary stage, including *The Truth Commission*.

Second, the theatrical modus of the truth commission has the spectator positioned in a particular way. In contrast to the distant gaze in the human zoos, the spectator in *The Truth Commission* is not only looking; he is also being looked at. While watching the dance solo, the spectator is not only very much aware of the exhibition modus at work in the performance; one also feels the eyes of the other spectators. Being a witness hence also and at the same time means '"to be witnessed" – audience to performer, performer to audience and, crucially, audience to audience' (Duggan 2012: 86).

Third, when Chantal Loial has finished her dance solo, she appears from behind the glass, steps down from the platform on which she has danced, and takes a seat among the spectators with the intention to follow the rest of the performance. She shape-shifts in other words from performer-witness into an implicated spectator-as-witness herself. Moreover, a discussion with Koen Augustijnen, choreographer of the dance solo, unfolds shortly thereafter. One of the experts, the Flemish actress Marijke Pinoye, reproaches Augustijnen for exploiting the dancer's black body in a contemporary version of the human zoo. Then, Chokri Ben Chikha, constantly present in the courthouse as a kind of master of ceremony, is blamed for doing exactly the same. We now share Loial's gaze, looking amused at the two choreographers put 'on trial'. At the same time, we also, as implicated spectators, are 'on trial' here and this has everything to do with implication: we are 'not only aware of our ontological presence in the room but also of our complicity in the actions presented' (Duggan 2012: 90). Duggan calls this viewing position the 'double being-seen-watching' that constitutes 'a basic *implication effect*': 'we enter into implicated complicity with what we are seeing and are no longer justified in objectifying ourselves as "outside" the performance event' (2012: 90)

The spectator's gaze is not a univocal voyeuristic gaze, but one full of confusion and unease. Both in *Exhibit B* and *The Truth Commission*, the visitor-spectator turns into a 'spect*actor*', a term introduced by Augusto Boal to refer to the combination of spectator and actor in one person. By

Figure 2.5. Chokri Ben Chikha and Zouzou Ben Chikha in Ghent, 2013.
Photograph by Kurt Van der Elst.

being positioned on a real space rendered theatrical, and by hence sharing the 'stage' with the performers, one feels situated in what Boal calls 'a dual reality' (2000: xxi). We exist in the scene, in the theatrical modus of an exhibition and a truth commission respectively. In *Exhibit B* the spect*actor* plays the game along the pole of the passive onlooker in uncovering the shameful truth, but we also and at the same time exist outside of it, in social reality, where similar humiliating situations towards *sans papiers* exist. In both levels of the dual reality in *Exhibit B*, however, the spectator is watching from the one binary pole of the opposition, which is from the position of the 'perpetrator' gazing at the 'other' as victim. The shame that they feel is orchestrated or geared by a 'dialectic of mimesis and reality' (Duggan 2012: 64–5).

In *The Truth Commission*, the dual reality is not geared by oppositional thinking. The entangled web between subject and object, expert and witness, fiction and reality, perpetrator and victim, generates a play of superdiversity, rather than a play of oppositions. A consequence of the unsteady viewing position that the spectator experiences is a 'mimetic shimmering' in perception that is 'a more complex circulation of tensions

than just the dialectic of mimesis and reality' (Duggan 2012: 64–5). The moments of blurred perception are so persistent that there is a fundamental collapse in the mimetic ordering of the performance. The audience no longer knows how to behave 'properly' or 'adequately'. The undecidability in perception that befalls the spectator also disrupts the mechanism of stereotypical thinking, as the founding principles of representational thinking are disrupted: identity, oppositions, analogy, and resemblance (Deleuze 2004: 174). The stereotypical image thus loses the fundamental cornerstone of representation; its construction is no longer supported by the Cartesian law of correspondence.

Truth, but not Reconciliation: From Cathartic Relief to Shock to Thought in a World-Without-Others

The moments of blurred perception also refrain from catharsis to take place. In *The Truth Commission*, there is no closure, no catharsis, and no 'settlement' of mixed emotions as is the case in a dramatic aesthetic. The result is a shock to thought in a postdramatic aesthetic and a culture thinking itself through, thinking through the mechanism of oppositional thinking itself. *The Truth Commission* for that matter introduces another sort of relationality. This relationality is not so much founded on oppositional and hierarchical thinking that is in line of the Western idea of progress, but on mutual encounter. It is a Deleuzian form of relationality in a world-without-others that is at stake here. This world-without-others urges us to not only to reconsider relationality, but also to actually engage in different relationships – 'to rethink relation – … rethink it in order to relate anew' (Thiele 2012: 56).

Deleuze and Guattari, in *A Thousand Plateaus*, used the often-cited example of the scorpion wasp and the orchid as a new form of relationality. In this form of coexistence, attention is paid to the differential. Both parties in the relationship are entangled in a relationship of mutual 'becoming', understood as an encounter with the other without losing oneself in the other or without encapsulating the other within one's own preconceived notions or goals. This metonymy of mutual encounter also applies to human beings. Deleuze and Guattari described a mutual encounter as love relationship as follows: 'a nonsubjective, living love in which each party connects with unknown tracts in the other without entering or conquering them' (2007b: 209). Less known is the way in

which Deleuze, in *The Logic of Sense*, illustrates the mutual encounter of the 'other' through the story of Robinson Crusoe, the castaway who encounters the cannibal 'Araucanian' and 'civilises' him into his subordinate 'Friday' (1990). Deleuze is less interested in the well-known imperialist book of Daniel Defoe than by the demystifying version of the French writer Michel Tournier. In *Vendredi ou les Limbes du Pacifique* (1967) Tournier dismantles the oppositional models and Enlightenment ideals underlying Friday's 'evolution' into Crusoe's subordinate. Deleuze agrees with Tournier on the point that, instead of Friday, it is Robinson Crusoe who needs to undergo a fundamental transformation in order to survive. Crusoe's development consists in questioning the comfortable beacons of the 'Western Subject' and in opening himself to the 'other', in this case Friday. Or, as Thiele writes: 'he becomes a Robinson who learns to encounter difference in a different manner, and thereby learns to live-with-others' (2012: 60). As such, an entirely different Robinsonade unfolds; 'one in which encountering the other does not necessarily imply imperialist domination of that other, but instead can lead to a process of learning an-other world' (Thiele 2012: 61).

This story is picked up by Deleuze to illustrate his concept of a world-without-others, where the 'other' cannot be conceived of as opposed to our 'Self'. This oppositional model becomes unthinkable because the ontological foundation of the 'Self' is dismantled as an imperialist construction. Moreover, it is the comfortable structure of oppositional thinking, considered to be the very foundation of our (Western) conception of history, identity, and subjectivity, that is experienced as too restrictive. As Thiele pointed out in her thinking with Deleuze: 'not so much the comfort of "my" other is gone, but most of all the comfort of structural assurance of this world itself is gone, in order to imagine – that is to think – differently' (2012: 66). Imagining a world-without-others in *The Truth Commission* similarly undermines the foundational oppositional relationship between the 'self' and the 'other'. The ontological instability of this thinking actually facilitates imagining a co-creative relationship. This co-creative relationship is experienced, in the words of Bracha L. Ettinger, as the 'co-emerging I and Non-I prior to the I versus other' (cited in Thiele 2012: 69).

Several writers, among them Édouard Glissant, Antonio Benítez-Rojo, Wilson Harris, Mohammed Dib, Adrian Johnson, and many others, believe that postcolonial studies should also move beyond oppositional thinking.

Following Achille Mbembe, the word 'postcolonial' is systematically replaced by 'postcolony':

> 'The' postcolony is, in fact, many postcolonies, and the position one holds in that place is multiple, complex, and in some cases, even contradictory. (Janz 2012: 28)

The univocal message of an anti-discourse is replaced by a complex individual experience in an equally complex constellation of ungoing collaborative practices for postcolonies. One should not be convinced of one Truth, but instead possibilities are being created for developing a perpetual dialogue with heterogeneity in a perpetual practice of becoming-postcolonial (Burns and Kaiser 2012: 13). This perpetual becoming-postcolonial also indicates that the prefix 'post' does not mean that the world in which we live in now is actually devoid of colonialism. Colonialism is intertwined with Western Enlightenment thinking, and Western thinking is still entangled with the stubborn remnants of an imperialist worldview. We need to engage with an ongoing process of unlearning imperialism in order to facilitate differential futures. This future-oriented, perpetual becoming-postcolonial does not mean that the colonial past should be forgotten either. By moving away from a fixation with the colonial past, however, differential futures can be imagined from an experimental engagement with the present: 'imagining … differential futures specific to but not specified by the colonial pasts' (Burns and Kaiser 2012: 13).

From this perspective, then, *The Truth Commission* is a highly nuanced evocation of the complex experience and the fluctuating oppositions between 'us' and 'other'. Chokri Ben Chikha's own childhood experiences, his insights into Ghent's colonial practices, his vision of Flemish migration policy, and his hope for the future are gathered in a complex constellation. The experience of the dancers and performers may be informed by a specific experience of the colonial past, but they are no longer paralysed by it. Chantal Loial's ambiguously dancing body expresses 'not a denial of racism, but the recognition that racism does not define and exhaust all the "creative" potential of race' (Janz 2012: 31). The complex constellation of past, present, and future in this ambiguously dancing body generates a shock to thought for the visitor-spectators and offers an alternative for a stuck-ness with the colonial past. The choice for a fundamental undecidability shows us a way out of the deadlock of defeatism. This dancing body seems to suggest that postcolonial discourse needs to engage with

the present in order to have a differential future. Otherwise, it will end up in nostalgic (dis)illusions.

The Truth Commission does not evolve from a catastrophical past, but, above all, from unpredictable encounters and constantly shifting linkages with social bodies, including the spectator. Rather than defending one position or one opinion, the performance is all about the exposure of the complexity within the debate itself. This generates an interesting shift from moralism to ethics and accountability. In this respect, Rick Dolphijn (2012) points to the growing interest of ethics in current postcolonial thinking. As the oppositional model between 'us' and 'them' erodes, moralism is replaced by an ethical call for accountability. This also ties in with Felix Guattari's *The Three Ecologies*, a book that is increasing in influence since its English translation. Guattari indicates how moralism is being replaced by 'the ethico-aesthetic aegis of an ecosophy' (2000: 41). Merging ecology and philosophy indicates how the environment is inextricably connected to the psychic production of subjectivity and social relations. This notion of ethical accountability is an important tool to actually breathe fresh life into postcolonial studies, moving beyond moralist messages. 'In this way, the colonial past persists within the postcolonial present not as an over-determining or specifying legacy, but as the ground from which differential futures emerge in unpredictable, unforeseeable and ever new ways' (Burns and Kaiser 2012: 15).

Notes

1 I introduce the notion of a restrictive representational memory in response to Radstone and Hodgkin's definition of 'memory regime' as 'kinds of knowledge and power that are carried, in specific times and places, by particular discourses of memory' (2003: 2).

2 In his essay 'Remembering, Repeating and Working Through' ([1914] 1958), Freud observes patients that suffer from the compulsive repetition of a traumatic event. In a process of 'acting out', they repeat the traumatic experience through certain actions that re-enact the traumatic event. For a process of acting out to become a healthy form of remembering, or a trauma 'worked through', the patients should be (made) aware of the forces of repression and resistance *in the presence* that prevent them from healing through remembering. In a therapeutic psychoanalytic setting, observing the patient's resistance to deal with the past should for that matter be a priority, even more than having the patient merely recall or consciously recollect the events of a traumatic past. See also Stalpaert, C. (2015), 'Towards an Embodied Poetics of Failure. Some Sideway Glances to Violence and Trauma in Needcompany's *Marketplace 76*', *Performance Research*, 20 (2): 56–71.

3 Duggan speaks of a 'Euro-American movement, initially coming out of studies on hysteria and neuroses … predominantly led by European figures such as Pierre Janet, Jean-Martin Charcot and Hermann Oppenheim' (2012: 16).

[4] See also Stalpaert, C. (2015), 'Towards an Embodied Poetics of Failure. Some Sideway Glances to Violence and Trauma in Needcompany's *Marketplace 76*', *Performance Research*, 20 (2): 56–71.

[5] The 'truth' is called truth function in Deleuze's thinking: 'a concept always has the truth that falls to it as a function of the conditions of its creation' (Patton 1997: 5).

[6] Verdoolaege investigates how the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission exercised power through a reconciliation-oriented discourse. She observed that particular 'power relations were created in the course of the HRV hearings' (2008: 38). She built her argument on Foucault's *procedures of restriction* and his belief that 'truths are "normalized" and it is through these normalised truths that power is exercised very effectively' (2008: 169).

[7] In 'The Body as Archive: Will to Re-Enact and the Afterlives of Dances', dance scholar André Lepecki suggests that 'a body may have always already been nothing other than an archive' (2010: 34). Lepecki focuses on the transferring of dance knowledge from one body to another in dance re-enactment. Stalpaert expanded his notion of the body-as-archive to "the corporeal memory of the performer" and "the living archive of the performer's body" which is "in perpetual modulation" (2011: 91; 95). The performer's body constantly gathers techniques, movements, and pieces of repertoire that are being stored for later use, but it also stores personal habits, tics, and the experience of the dancer's physicality and gender (ibid.). Dance scholar Susan Leigh Foster calls this the 'knowledge bone-deep in the dancer's physicality–the product of years of dedicated practice to specific aesthetic and social values' (2010: 216).

[8] Duggan also refers to the notion of 'mimetic shimmering' as 'shimmering mimesis' or 'unsteady mimesis' (2012: 63).

[9] Ben Chikha refers in this context also to the text Stalpaert, C., K. Pewny, J. Coppens, and P. Vermeulen, (2015), 'Introduction', in C. Stalpaert, K. Pewny, J. Coppens, and P. Vermeulen (eds), *Unfolding Spectatorship. Re-Evaluating the Spectator's Corporeal Engagement*, Ghent: Academia Press: 3-20.

[10] Dance scholar Susan Manning describes the expressive dance of Isadora Duncan and her contemporaries as the projection of kinaesthetic power. This power challenges the male spectator to see the female dancer as an expressive subject rather than an erotic object. 'The kinesthesia of early modern dance challenged the voyeuristic gaze', she says (Manning 1997: 163).

[11] Josephine Baker's two best known 'savage dances' are the 'banana' dance, first performed in the revue *La Folie du Jour* at the Folies-Bergère in 1926–7 and a pas de deux with Jo Alex in a *Revue nègre* performed in 1925. For this 'savage' *pas de deux* both dancers were nothing but red and blue feathers around their waists and ankles (Burt 1998: 57).

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CHAPTER 3

Youth Day Commemoration in South Africa: Forgetting through Remembering

Pedzisai Maedza

In present day South Africa, the need to remember apartheid trauma seems to be widely and publicly acknowledged. Imagining a 'new' South Africa is often said to be predicated on grappling with the memory and legacy of the 'old' South Africa. What remains contested and contentious is what aspects of this old 'persisting past' (Bevernage 2012: 5) deserve to be commemorated and or how these aspects are to be represented. Colonialism and apartheid experiences, structures, and memories as part of the state's founding legacies challenge 'the strict delineation between past and present and thereby even question the existence of these temporal dimensions as separate entities', as is highlighted in this edition's introduction (Bevernage 2012: 5). To mediate this temporal flux and to conceptually constitute a post 1994 democratic political order, events of and from the pre-1994 'past' are often selected, preserved, and deployed to give and consolidate the legitimacy of the current post-apartheid dispensation. This is often done by selecting certain historical events, and dedicating days to frame, interpret, commemorate, and remember the past.

This contribution interrogates the remembrance dynamics that surround and inform the contemporary memory of one such event out of many, which has become a global icon of apartheid brutality. That is the memory of the 16 June 1976 Soweto massacre of students who marched to protest the imposition of Afrikaans as a mandatory medium of instruction in all black segregated South African schools. The South African apartheid era and the 1976 Soweto students' massacre are part of what can be understood as a 'difficult past' (Vinitzky-Seroussi 2002: 31; Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz 1991). A 'difficult past' refers to a past that has inherent moral trauma, disputes, tensions, and conflict. Difficult pasts are events that 'many (mostly the victims) wish to remember, many (mostly the perpetrators) wish to forget, and many wish that they had never have taken place' (Teeger and Vinitzky-Seroussi 2007: 58).

The 16 June 1976 Soweto student protest and massacre are officially commemorated annually as a post-apartheid national holiday. The public holiday pays tribute to the definitive role that the youth of South Africa played in the struggle for freedom and democracy. In this contribution, I explore and trace how the memory of the student protest travelled and circulates across time and space in contemporary South Africa through visual imagery, performance, and memorialisation. To do this I position the annual Youth Day public holiday as an exercise in apartheid memorialisation and commemoration. I investigate the way Youth Day frames the memory of the 16 June 1976 student protest as a 'cultural phenomenon' and, second, as a 'form of elegy' and memorial in contemporary times (Campbell, Labbe, and Shuttleworth 2000: 8). Youth Day stands in conversation with a matrix of other public holidays used to foster and shape apartheid memory and remembrance. These include the annual Human Rights Day commemorations on 21 March, formerly known as Heroes Day or Sharpeville Day; Freedom Day on 27 April; Workers Day on 1 May; Women's Day on 9 August; Heritage Day on 24 September; and the Day of Reconciliation on 16 December. Before and during apartheid Day of Reconciliation used to be commemorated as Dingane's Day by some South Africans and as the Day of the Vow by others. Instituting these public holidays is understood as an attempt to ensure that citizens of the 'new' South Africa 'appreciate the importance of history, heritage and memory in the crafting of the present and future of this country' (Hlongwane 2008: 136).

The 16 June 1976 Soweto student protest and massacre was frozen in time through a series of photographs taken by Sam Nzima. One such photograph, showing a young schoolgirl running alongside a young man carrying a fatally injured Hector Pieterson (19 August 1963–16 June 1976) in his arms fleeing from the police, has become an iconic image of the brutalities of the apartheid regime. The image has come to symbolise and immortalise the student protests and resistance to the injustices of structural racial discrimination. I engage with this photograph through two related 'memory texts' (Kuhn 2010: 2) drawn from the 16 June 1976 Soweto student protest and massacre's thirtieth and fortieth anniversary commemorations. The first case is the public contestation and controversy that marked Don Dlanga's 2015 reworking of Sam Nzima's 1976 Soweto protest photographs. I draw on this incident to investigate the memory of the apartheid dead, the disappeared and survivors. I historicise the controversy that Don Dlanga's image stirred and analyse Sam Nzima's and

Don Dlanga's photographs as 'memory text', serving to connect private experiences and public life, personal and social memory (Kuhn 2010: 2). I position Don Dlanga's post-apartheid revision of Sam Nzima's apartheid photographs in 2015 as an exemplar of the selective remembering and memory contestations that shape contemporary South African community and national identity. I triangulate this with the images generated through an impromptu communal animation of Sam Nzima's photograph during the thirtieth anniversary of the Soweto protest in 2006 at the Youth Day commemoration as the second case study. I position these two case studies as commemorative performance practices that create affective contemporary visual and embodied encounters with the apartheid past.

By dwelling on these commemorative performance practices from the thirtieth and fortieth Youth Day anniversary commemorations, I expand the usual cases in memory studies: the monuments, museums, and renaming of places that have characterised post-apartheid South Africa's 'memory boom' in general and the 1976 Soweto uprising in particular (Lidddington and Smith 2005). This memory boom has been marked through contests over the 'physical markers of past violence and repression' (Hamber and Wilson 1999: 562). The memory boom is physically manifest in brick-and-mortar commemorations such as liberation struggle memorials, statues, and museums (Erll, Nünning, and Young 2008). These include Robben Island Museum (Cape Town); District Six Museum (Cape Town); Constitution Hill (Pretoria); Red Location Museum of Struggle (Port Elizabeth); the Sharpeville Exhibition Centre and Monument; and Freedom Park (Johannesburg) (Hlongwane 2008: 137). These are complemented by several community initiatives to erect monuments and memorials (Hlongwane 2008: 137). Following the 'performance turn' (Lazzara 2017: 14) in memory studies, this contribution dwells on embodied annual commemorations. It also follows the equally transient visual photographic images in the newspapers, posters, and banners carried at marches that complement and at times instigate the call for revisions in the physical markers of memory.

Background

The historic 16 June 1976 Soweto student protest was a culmination of a series of interrelated circumstances. At the apex of 'a long list of existing grievances, the Soweto Uprising was triggered by the apartheid

government's decision to make Afrikaans the language of instruction in all African schools' (Marschall 2006: 149). This policy shift was interpreted as an attempt by the apartheid Nationalist government to use language to further isolate black South Africans from the rest of the world by stripping away their only means of international communication. For several months in the lead up to the student protest tensions had been rising with slowdowns and class boycotts. This was compounded by the fact that few teachers were equipped to teach in Afrikaans, a language that was not only unfamiliar, but was also associated with the oppressor, leading to student grades immediately plummeting (Ndlovu 1998: 3). From the middle of May 1976, students at close to a dozen schools went on strike (Marschall 2006: 149). On 16 June, an estimated 10,000 to 15,000 students from Belle Higher Primary, Phefeni Junior Secondary, and Morris Isaacson High embarked on a march to Orlando Stadium where they intended to hold a meeting. The students sang protest songs like '*Senzeni na?*' (What Have We Done?), and waved placards with slogans such as 'Away with Afrikaans' before apartheid police intercepted the march in Moema Street.

The exact sequence of events after this police interception is unclear. This is in part due to unreliability of official apartheid police records and partly due to the panic and confusion caused by police tear gas and live bullets fired at the marching students. An important eyewitness is the late Sam Nzima. He marched with the protesting school children as a photojournalist taking pictures and talking to them. When the police arrived, Sam Nzima strapped on an armband that identified him as a member of the press and ran towards neutral ground. According to Sam Nzima, 'A guy with a stick under his arm told the schoolchildren he was giving them three minutes to disperse. The defiant children began singing *Nkosi Sikilel' Afrika [God Bless Africa]* before all hell broke loose as the man reached for his gun and began shooting and shouting *skiet [shoot]*' (Molosankwe 2013). In the melee that followed large crowds scattered in all directions, and before long the nearby Phefeni Clinic and Baragwanath Hospital were filled with youth perforated with gunshot wounds (Simbao 2007: 53). As the screaming children scattered, Sam Nzima 'saw Hector Pieterson fall down and Makhubu pick him up' (Molosankwe 2013). He adds, 'I ran to the scene and took the pictures. Our press car was the nearest vehicle there and they put him inside and took him to Phefeni Clinic. But he was certified dead on arrival' (Molosankwe 2013). An estimated twenty-three students died in the shooting spree and stampede with many more being

wounded, while some were confined to wheelchairs for life. The aftermath of violence in the months that followed in Soweto and across the country led to the loss of hundreds more lives (Welsh 2000; Ndlovu 1998).

One picture taken by Sam Nzima, who worked as a photojournalist for *The World* newspaper amid the chaos of flying bullets and crying schoolchildren, became the iconic image that thrust the 1976 Soweto protest into world headlines. An icon is understood here as a place or a symbol, 'where memory crystallises and secretes itself' (Nora 1989: 7). As an icon, Sam Nzima's photograph enables representations of the historically significant Soweto student protest, massacre, and people to be widely disseminated and recognised. Sam Nzima captured a dungaree-clad Makhubu carrying a lifeless Hector Pieterson (b. 19 August 1963–d.16 June 1976), wearing only one shoe and bleeding from the mouth. In the photograph, Antoinette Sithole, dressed in her school uniform, runs frantically, and screams hysterically beside Makhubu.

This picture has arguably come to define the 1976 Soweto protest more than any other representation. It was the third of six sequential snapshots taken by Sam Nzima with his 50mm Pentax SLR camera and is the only visual record of the student march as an event. Sam Nzima hid the film in his socks, loaded fresh film, and continued shooting. Apartheid police confiscated all the film they found on him but missed the cartridge tucked away in his sock (Molosankwe 2013). The photograph was published on the front page of *The World* newspaper on that very day under the caption, 'The schoolkid killed in today's riot in Soweto … [a]t the time of going to press … had not been identified' (Simbao 2007: 54). In response, the apartheid regime banned Sam Nzima from practising photography and banished him from Johannesburg. In 1977 *The World* newspaper was banned and closed (Finnegan 1988: 93).

Through this image Sam Nzima rescued Hector Pieterson from being a mere statistic. He was later publicly named, and his death could not be denied by the apartheid authorities. Through the photograph, Nzima memorialised and possibly immortalised Hector Pieterson. Sam Nzima's 1976 image can also be credited for iconising Hector Pieterson ahead of the other estimated twenty-three children who were slain by the apartheid police on that day. These include Hastings Ndlovu, identified as the first casualty of the 16 June 1976 massacre. Hastings Ndlovu, 'was shot (in the head) as he crossed Orlando West bridge with a group of students on the morning of June 16' (Hector Pieterson Museum 2005). Hastings Ndlovu

was possibly marked out for execution by the apartheid police as he was identified as an agitator, while Hector Pieterson was unintentionally hit by a stray bullet (Hlongwane, Ndlovu, and Mutloatse 2006: 69). The fact that it is Pieterson rather than Hastings Ndlovu who is most often publicly remembered underlines the power of this photographic image.

The centrality of Sam Nzima's photograph in the commemoration of Youth Day stems in part from it being the only existent visual record of the Soweto massacre. It is also informed by the fact that memories 'are never formless. They come to us as narratives, pictorial images, textbooks [museum, monuments] … and statues' (Wagner-Pacifici 1996: 302). Sam Nzima's photograph has been described as a 'flash-frame of memory', a phrase that describes 'those headlines defining visual images of our age that come to anchor the history of events by virtue of their exceptional quality' (Hoskins 2004: 22). Some observers have dubbed the image 'the quintessential representation of June 16' (Baines 2007: 289). Others have described it as a 'multi-vocal commemoration', holding the memory of the Soweto police massacre as 'a shared space … a shared time, or a shared text' for diverse audiences (Vinitzky-Seroussi 2002: 31).

Christian motifs have been used to explain the composition of the Sam Nzima photograph and its almost universal appeal (Marschall 2006: 156). The image's composition reminds some of the Christian iconographic tradition of the *Pieta*, with its notable influence in Western or Western oriented war memorial sculptures. The *Pieta* tradition, as exemplified in Sam Nzima's photograph, 'expresses innocence and martyrdom, yet also implies the notion of ultimate triumph' (Marschall 2006: 158). For others, Sam Nzima's image evokes the imagery of the unknown soldier, as the image enables a channelling of the emotions of a multitude of people and projects them onto one person whose suffering becomes a surrogate of the many unnamed and faceless others.

The Politics of Remembrance

Under apartheid rule the memory of the 1976 Soweto student protest and massacre was kept alive through informal annual commemorations spearheaded by anti-apartheid movements (Hlongwane 2008). Sam Nzima's image became an icon of resistance and protest in apartheid South Africa and abroad. The image was printed on anti-apartheid

posters, murals, newspapers, and magazines, and flighted in television programmes. The image was also carried on the body, as it was printed on T-shirts and wrap-around clothes that were adorned at stay-away gatherings and other commemorative events. The first memorialisation and commemoration events of the Soweto student protest were held annually across South Africa from 1977, particularly (but not exclusively) at Regina Mundi Church in Soweto (Hlongwane 2008: 142). This was done in the face of the apartheid regime's efforts to intimidate people to refrain from commemorating the day. For example, in the build-up to 16 June 1985, anniversary mounted infantry forces were stationed around Soweto and in neighbouring townships. Journalist Mandla Ndlazi, who observed the show of force, wrote:

> Since earlier this week, the soldiers and their horses have been on exercises, moving outside Soweto, Lenasia and Eldorado Park and led by a 'guide'. *Sowetan Sunday Mirror* found a herd of horses at the Protea Police Station on Wednesday. Their handlers, soldiers in uniform, were also in the yard of the police station. Brigadier G Murphy, the army commander on the Witwatersrand, said the cavalry was on a 'routine training exercise around Soweto' (Hlongwane 2008: 150).

Since 1994 the African National Congress (ANC) led government for its part formally instituted and leads the annual commemorations. In the 'new' South Africa, as in the old, 16 June 1976 is used for various ends. In 1995, the ANC government changed the name of the commemoration from Soweto Day to Youth Day and declared 16 June a public holiday. This name change was meant to incorporate youth activism from beyond Soweto but has largely only succeeded in consolidating the memory of Hector Pieterson the individual as a struggle icon (Marschall 2006: 298). Turning Youth Day into a remembrance public holiday gives the memory of the Soweto student protest official ordinance. This displaces and contests the official veil of silence that the apartheid government placed on the memory.

Today, post-apartheid Youth Day has become an officious, state spectacle in character. Youth Day as a public holiday now typically involves a fun run and musical pageantry. It is attended by the general citizenry, high-profile politicians and is often officiated by the state president. Broadly speaking, the state organises Youth Day as a public holiday, in order 'to construct memory as a unified, static and collective object' (Hamber and Wilson 1999: 1). Popular musicians are the highlight of the

day and entertain the assembled crowds through free music concerts at Orlando Stadium. The euphoric youth-centred nature of the public holiday assists in passing on apartheid memory to the younger generations.

Attaching euphoria and transcendence to the 16 June 1976 murders of the young learners by the apartheid police re-frames their deaths and attaches another purpose and meaning to their demise. Through Youth Day the post-apartheid state recasts the murder of students by apartheid police in Soweto as a 'sacrifice' in the fight for freedom (Marschall 2006: 161). The dead are removed from being mere victims of police brutality and recast as being worthy of gratitude, respect, and honour (Marschall 2006: 161). This ensures that the events of the past and the lives of those who died because of apartheid are seen in direct connection with the status quo of the present and a particular vision towards the future. Framing Youth Day as a celebration makes it difficult for any 'would-be present-day militants, if they exist, to grab hold of [its militant genesis] as a precedent and rallying point' (Christopher Lowe cited in Baines 2007: 298). Such an approach downplays and draws attention away from the militancy that the Soweto youth manifested and symbolise.

The iconic picture also circulated in the South African Truth and Reconciliation Committee. When Antoinette Sithole, became the first witness at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) hearing sessions in Soweto, she was called on to testify not only in her own stead, but also on behalf of her deceased brother Hector Pieterson. She gave her testimony in the company of Sam Nzima, the photographer who captured the last moments with her brother's life (Baines 2007: 289). We could say the apartheid regime responded to 16 June 1976 with repression while the post-apartheid state grants the day hypervisibility. These responses show that, for those in power, 'the way in which people choose to remember an event – indeed how they adjust to it – is as historically important as the event itself' (Frankel 2001: 17). While the apartheid National Party regime and the post-apartheid democratic ANC regime hold contrasting positions on the memory, their approaches show that they both believe that 'whoever controls images of the past shapes the present, and possibly the ideas of the future' (Levy 1999: 51). This shows that framing apartheid was and is 'a political practice, or a struggle over the representation of the past that will continue to be vigorously contested' (Hamber and Wilson 1999: 1).

The Arts of Remembrance

The compelling character of Sam Nzima's photo as well as its high recognition value have prompted numerous artists in South Africa and internationally to appropriate it (Marschall 2006: 158). The image has been and is subjected to repeated interpretive re-articulation by state and non-state parties. Artists working across various media and disciplines have also reworked the image to comment on contemporary political developments (Baines 2007: 296).

Fine art critic Ruth Simbao chronicles how over the last forty years Sam Nzima's image has been re-incarnated as anything, 'from documentary photograph, to protest material, commemorative stone, and museum paraphernalia to designer clothes, the fashion ramp, and site-specific artwork' (2007: 68).

The South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), for example, marked the thirtieth anniversary of the Soweto uprisings by commissioning eight documentaries on the subject (Hlongwane 2008: 138). Elsewhere I write about how on the performance front, artists like Mandla Mbotwe created *1976 Spirits* (2016), while Mamela Nyamza and Faniswa Yisa created *19-Born 76-Rebels* (2013) (Maedza 2019: 236). Mbongeni Ngema was inspired to create the musical *Sarafina!: The Sounds of Liberation (1987; 1992)*, which became a runaway Broadway and Hollywood movie success (Maedza 2019: 236). Writer Richard Attenborough was inspired by the 1976 protest and massacre to create the novel *Cry Freedom* (1987), which was later also adapted for film (Maedza 2019: 236).

Prominent among these artistic re-interpretations is Kevin Brand's 1996 temporary plastic tape reconstruction of Sam Nzima's photograph, on a wall of the Cape Town Castle, *Pietà* (Baines 2007: 296). The installation was part of the *Faultlines* project that displayed the work of thirteen artists whose work dealt with coming to terms with the apartheid past in the present. This included an exhibition entitled *Inquiries into Truth and Reconciliation*, which went on display in The Cape Town Castle in 1996. The exhibition was framed as an attempt to 'explore the relationship between history, memory and representation' (Simbao 2007: 57).

Due to space limitations, I shall not engage with this exhibition at length. It will suffice to say that Brand re-contextualises Sam Nzima's image. Brand does this by placing the image on the wall of the Cape Town Castle. The castle was staked with British and Dutch flags, thus linking

apartheid with a broader colonial history. The Cape Town Castle is a highly symbolic site of colonial and apartheid memory. It was built using enslaved labourers in the seventeenth century by the Dutch East India Company as a refuelling station for ships enroute to India. Enslaved local African inhabitants of the Cape were used to grow and supply fresh food and water supplies and wine (Simbao 2007: 57). Brand's installation was placed under one of the bastions of the Castle with the sign '*Leerdam*'. This signage placement has been interpreted as a playful engagement with the Afrikaans word '*Leer*' – a lesson, a theory, or a religious teaching. The signage assumes poignant and ironic connotations in the context of the 16 June 1976 Soweto Uprisings, which were primarily a protest about receiving lessons in Afrikaans. The use of duct tape in the installation is also highly symbolic as the material has a notorious history as an instrument of choice in the torture of anti-apartheid activists who were bound and often suffocated to death using duct tape by apartheid agents.

'Live the Dream the Youth of '76 Died For'

Don Dlanga revisited the Sam Nzima 1976 image to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of the annual Soweto protest and massacre in 2015 to mark Youth Day. He was working under commission from Channel O, a South African music channel popular with the youth and young at heart. He created a contemporaneous version of Nzima's iconic photo of 1976, which Channel O placed full-page advertisement in all major South African national newspapers, to commemorate the 2015 National Youth Day.

In Don Dlanga's design thirteen-year-old Hector Pieterson's slain body is removed and is replaced by a graduation gown and a folded certificate. The pain, fear, and anguish on the faces of the young woman and man carrying him are replaced with triumphant smiles. The run from the police in the original is re-staged as a celebratory jog in the street. The reworked image was dubbed *'Live the Dream the Youth of '76 Died For'*. The controversy and impassioned debates that greeted Don Dlanga's re-worked image show that more than forty years later, '(and in absentia), Hector Pieterson [still] enjoys the stature of the most widely known name associated with the struggle of the generation of 1976 against apartheid' (Baines 2007: 284). The high recognition value and staying power of Sam Nzima's image show that memories are embodied in visual images, sites,

and ritual re-enactments of the past, as well as in written texts (Baines 2007: 285).

A second restaging comes from the 2006 Youth Day proceedings. As part of this commemoration a march was staged in which the crowd retraced the steps of the 1976 student protesters from the Morris Isaacson School to the Hector Pieterson Memorial. This march dramaturgically reenacted the Soweto student protest by reconstituting the original marchers' route. It also served to reveal the performative and ritualistic nature of social memory (Baines 2007: 300). At this high-profile public event, Sam Nzima's photograph was depicted on banners, flyers, and T-shirts worn by participants. After the march all the dignitaries and most of the media left for the FNB Stadium where the Youth Day festivities – including a *kwaito* music concert and the president's speech – were scheduled to take place. Once the dignitaries were gone, a remarkable and spontaneous fringe performance occurred. This subaltern performance reignited Sam Nzima's photograph and was captured by some of the departing journalists (Simbao 2007: 64).

This performance involved a group of young people who spontaneously started to march around the Hector Pieterson Memorial, holding up the Youth Day posters as they sang, danced, and raised their fists. A few of them grouped together and began to animate the Sam Nzima photograph as they continued to march. A young man picked up a small boy and carried him in his arms, as if the child were the dying Hector Pieterson. An older woman dressed in a school uniform ran alongside, as if she were Hector's sister, Antoinette. Every now and then, the performers would rotate, and a different child would be picked up. The group made its way around the Hector Pieterson Memorial and went on to dance and sing outside Mbuyisa Makhubu's family home, before completing the circle around the museum. Through this impromptu march, the group not only honoured Hector Pieterson's memory, but also seemed to recognise the official commemoration's silence about the other figures in this image.

This fringe performance not only animated Sam Nzima's photograph, but crucially highlights how apartheid's disappeared continue to be shrouded in silence. The march and assembly at Mbuyisa Makhubu's family home highlighted the gap in knowledge and remembrance of those like Mbuyisa Makhubu, who carried Hector Pieterson, disappeared and whose whereabouts is still unaccounted for (Simbao 2007: 65). The exact number of the disappeared is hard to ascertain and to verify. It is estimated that more than 2,000 people were made to disappear by apartheid agents. Of

these, 477 were officially verified and recognised as missing by the TRC's Human Rights Violations Committee (Aronson 2011). The TRC also established that the apartheid regime used to withhold the bodies of executed prisoners and surviving family members were often not informed where their murdered kin were buried (Mandrup 2004: 20).

Many unidentified Pan Africanist Congress (PAC)/Poqo members lie buried in mass graves (and without funerals) at cemeteries in Mamelodi and other apartheid torture farms like *Vlakplaas* near Pretoria (Gobodo-Madikizela 2002). In some instances, the dead were thrown into rivers to be eaten by crocodiles or dismembered by detonating explosives under their piled-up corpses. A case in point being that of Stanza Bopape, who disappeared along with nineteen other youths who – according to TRC Investigations – were killed and had their bodies fed to crocodiles in the Komati River at the *Komatipoort* border with Mozambique during 1986 and 1987. These practices by the apartheid regime have been given theatrical representation through some scenes in *Ubu and the Truth Commission* (Taylor, Kentridge, and Handspring Puppet Company 1998).

An estimated fifty activists from Mamelodi Township alone were killed by apartheid agents. Not all of them disappeared. Some of the murdered had their bodies dumped in the streets (Kgalema 1999). Through the communal impromptu 2006 Youth Day ephemeral half an hour performance, the fate of the disappeared was highlighted through Mbuyisa Makhubu who served as a surrogate. The veil of silence surrounding Mbuyisa Makhubu and the memory of other disappeared ones in the 'new' South Africa was also spotlighted by Raul Makhubu during the 2006 thirtieth anniversary Youth Day commemorations. Raul Makhubu, younger brother to Mbuyisa Makhubu, staged his own one-man protest by shouting out his disappeared sibling's name with a clenched fist. Raul Makhubu also held up a placard with the cropped portrait of Mbuyisa Makhubu taken from the Sam Nzima photograph (Simbao 2007: 65). The solo protest performance was reinforced by the portrait and accompanying words, 'What happened to Mbuyisa?.'

Raul Makhubu's 2006 solo protest performance and the spontaneous re-enactment of the Sam Nzima photograph animated the two-dimensional image into an actual three-dimensional blood and bone performance. This opened space for the narratives and counter-narratives of those whose remains and stories (like Mbuyisa Makhubu's) are not often told in the Youth Day commemorations. Whereas Hector Pieterson's name is widely

known and remembered, that of Mbuyisa Makhubu is all but forgotten and shrouded with many conspiracies. These conspiracies inspired the making of the Times Media documentary, *What Happened to Mbuyisa?* (Mamdoo 1998). Raul Makhubu's loud and public evocation of Mbuyisa Makhubu's name at a public holiday that seems to confine apartheid to the past, problematises the grand narrative of the now moment as post-apartheid and as an era that has or is re-moving and moving past apartheid. Raul Makhubu's public performance resonates with Mbuyisa Makhubu's mother's presence outside the Hector Pieterson Museum, where she used to sit and sell postcards of the Nzima photograph and share her personal stories about her son, echoing Argentina's *Madra of the Plaza de Mayo* and disrupting the official silence that still shrouds the disappeared during apartheid.

Forgetting through Remembering

In memory studies, it is widely acknowledged that all memory entails and implies forgetting (Ricoeur 1999). This dialectic is captured in the circulation of Sam Nzima's iconic photo, being part of the repertoire of apartheid collective memory and remembered through Youth Day. 'By definition collective memory involves sharing, discussion, negotiation, and often conflict' (Brundage 2000: 4). As a 'building block' or mnemonic device Sam Nzima's image and its visual and performance reiterations carry the memory of the Soweto riots. The visual and performance images provide 'subliminal points of reference' that endure in memory and shape the past in the public's imagination (Baines 2007: 297).

Far from relying on an ontological documentary core, the meaning of the Sam Nzima photograph subtly changes with different uses, not destroying, but rather building upon other interpretations, creating a fecund, multilingual 'translation' or palimpsest (Simbao 2007: 68). As a cultural icon, Sam Nzima's photograph was, in the hands of anti-apartheid protesters, used as if it were an image of uncontested meaning. Small details and slightly different interpretations were in this context irrelevant, and it is for this reason that it succeeded in conveying a singular message. As Albie Sachs would say, the extraordinary power of this photograph lies precisely in its ability to expose the ambiguities and paradoxes of a particularly horrendous moment in apartheid history (Simbao 2007: 57). In post-apartheid South Africa, however, its usefulness lies less in the

realm of protest than that of commemoration. The debates spurred by the reworking of this image across time show the centrality it has assumed in the public imagination.

Read against the backdrop of a difficult history, Don Dlanga's reworking of Sam Nzima's image can be understood as a manifestation of four interconnected techniques in the generation of consensus. These are divorcing the past; legitimising the present; forgetting through remembering; and experiencing the past (Teeger and Vinitzky-Seroussi 2007: 64). Those opposed to the reworking of the image argued that Don Dlanga's image was another attempt at demilitarising and sanitising the struggle for access to education, and more gravely an attempt to divorce the past from the present. Critics of Don Dlanga's reworking of Sam Nzima's image denounced it as an attempt to re-write apartheid history and erase its trauma. Commentators denounced this reworking and reimagining as an easy way out of explaining the context of difficult events like the Soweto massacres and the apartheid era.

Some critics denounced the revision as shying away from confronting and dealing with the issues of blame, accusation, accountability, and justice for apartheid violence (Teeger and Vinitzky-Seroussi 2007). They argued that Don Dlanga's image shows that those who continue to tell the story of 16 June are beginning to allow seemingly incongruous meanings to rise to the surface. Don Dlanga's 2015 reworking divorces the (dreadful) historical apartheid past from the (hopeful) and aspirational present and future. In this aspirational present, individual effort leads to success and fulfilment. Circumstantial 'issues of race, religion, belief, prejudice, and the law', which were at play in 1976, and 'which may be as salient for examining the present as they are for understanding the past, are circumvented' (Teeger and Vinitzky-Seroussi 2007: 64). Such a reworking also resists the construction and articulation of narratives of violence and their constitutive role in the present debates and concerns for access to education and languages of instruction in the decolonisation process. The struggle to access education and other basic rights is ongoing. Student activism peaked in 2015, resulting in nationwide protests under the banner #Fees Must Fall, an offshoot of ongoing calls for decolonial education under the #Rhodes Must Fall movement (Mpofu 2017).

The second narrative that Don Dlanga's 2015 reworking underpins is in legitimising the present. Hector Pieterson has become the ultimate embodiment of the 1976 Soweto riots. Sam Nzima's image and its various

re-incantations have framed and fashioned him into a consensual hero. He has come to be the surrogate of the many unnamed young people who lost their lives in the struggle for freedom. As an icon, he is slain as a sacrificial lamb, necessary to water the tree of freedom. Through the state-sanctioned Youth Day, the anger, guilt, vengeance, or accountability that marked the commemorations in the 'old' South Africa are displaced in the new post-apartheid discourse of the politics of reconciliation, goodwill, forgiveness, and acceptance.

Don Dlanga's image can be understood as an attempt at systematic exclusion and erasure through 'marginal representation rather than total exclusion' (Teeger and Vinitzky-Seroussi 2007: 70). Effacing Hector Pieterson into a graduation gown dissolves the barbarity of his murder. This can be extended to Mbuyisa Makhubu who disappeared and possibly died and was disposed of without a funeral. Considering all this, Don Dlanga's removal of the pain and angst that marks the Sam Nzima original and that contributes to making the image iconic, can be understood as an exercise of erasure that leads to 'forgetting through remembering' (Teeger and Vinitzky-Seroussi 2007: 68). The image becomes part of the primary means of encouraging apartheid forgetting. As a mode of forgetting through remembering, Don Dlanga's image is particularly successful in that it echoes the Sam Nzima original while simultaneously foregrounding a different subjectivity. As a memory technique, forgetting through remembering means, 'Issues are presented but not explored. They are marginalised spatially or subsumed under other topics. Forgetting is effected through memory' (Teeger and Vinitzky-Seroussi 2007: 70).

The re-worked Don Dlanga image manages to conflate the aspirational version of the present and simultaneously effaces the past. In a manner of speaking, through the memory of Sam Nzima's image, apartheid can be 'experienced' but is left behind in a linear understanding of time. In this understanding of the new South Africa, the old and the past are imagined as being isolated from the present. By reworking the image, in the shell of the old, Don Dlanga's image can perform at least two feats. On one end the past is presented, and in the same breath the horror is effaced, to be replaced with beaming smiles, and celebrators' jogs. Apartheid becomes an experience that can be harmlessly experienced and survived. With smiling faces, the vitality of youth is restored and a present full and alive with possibilities is presented, while the horrors of the past are hidden and contained (Teeger and Vinitzky-Seroussi 2007: 74).

Conclusion

Youth Day as a public holiday is a fruitful node to explore in appreciating how present-day South Africa commemorates and frames the apartheid past. Youth Day provides an aperture through which we can appreciate the memory of and removal of apartheid. It can be said that Youth Day annual commemorations and the artistic interpretations of the 1976 massacres by non-state actors demonstrate that cultural agents recognise the cultural capital that Sam Nzima's image and the Soweto protest still have over the South African imaginary. Youth Day shows that memorials and public holidays do not only serve to commemorate the violent past; instead, they serve to commemorate an interpretation of the past (Marschall 2006: 165). This is because this and the other public holidays serve not only as a reminder to 'remember the past, and honour the dead, but also to shape consciousness and create group identity among those in the present' (Marschall 2006: 149).

The revisions that Sam Nzima's photo has received over the years show that it is essential to have a more nuanced understanding of how memory exclusion operates. In Sam Nzima's image, Hector Pieterson is framed as martyr, and through his death, a surrogate of all those killed by apartheid. Such a framing leads to the removing of the other subject positions in the image. By focusing on the story of Hector Pieterson and the Soweto Uprising, Youth Day implicitly renders less important the many other uprisings that took place in townships all over the country at the time, and the countless associated stories of anguish and personal tragedies. By paying public tribute to the suffering of those who were shot and killed, it obscures the pain of those who were forced to flee the country and died while in exile, or those who disappeared. Some of these 'disappeared' are visible in the same photograph, namely, the young man Mbuyisa Makhubu carrying Hector Pieterson in the photograph, whom I suggest becomes a symbolic surrogate of all those 'disappeared' by the violent past of apartheid in contemporary restaging of the iconic image.

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PART 2

Performing Trauma: Dialogical Dramaturgies of Embodiment in Transgenerational Landscapes

CHAPTER 4

‘Peeling the Wound’: Dramaturgies of Haunting on the Neo-Apartheid Stage in South Africa

Mark Fleishman

The theatres of South Africa today, whether formal (as in buildings designed for the purpose of performance) or informal (as in spaces not designed for performance but in which performance nonetheless occurs), are haunted by a violent and traumatic past, well after the supposed demise of apartheid. I use the word ‘haunted’ here in the sense in which it is used by Avery Gordon, a state in which something that is past manifests itself as a ‘seething presence’ (1997: 8). The fact that people today continue to feel haunted by this violent past of apartheid suggests that the prefix ‘post’ might be somewhat inaccurate or at least premature and that it might be more compelling to describe the current time in South Africa as ‘neo-apartheid’. Neo-apartheid can be understood as defining a situation in which ‘the constitutive line of colonialism and apartheid has survived the so-called transition from apartheid to post-apartheid in that impoverished black people remain ensnared in a zone of stasis’ (Madlingozi 2017: 125).

It is my contention that there is a particular kind of dramaturgy at work in contemporary performance in South Africa today that is aligned with this sense of hauntedness, a dramaturgy we might call ‘spectral’, echoing Jacques Derrida (1994). This chapter reflects on the ways in which young theatre makers in South Africa today engage dramaturgically with a traumatic past that remains present in their lives despite twenty-four years of supposed post-apartheid existence.[1] In particular, the chapter focuses on the work of Cape Town-based theatre-maker Mandla Mbothwe, in productions such as *Inxeba Lomphilisi* (2010) and *Did We Dance: Ukutshona Ko Mendi* (2012).[2]

For Mbothwe, the failure of the previous generation to deal adequately with the trauma of apartheid has produced an unresolved tension in the lives of young South Africans, many of whom did not directly experience

apartheid in its legal sense, but continue to experience its aftermath in a state of what political scientist Lawrence Hamilton (2011) describes as 'unfreedom' – a state in which they have attained political freedom but do not possess the means to be free, given the persistent levels of poverty, inequality, and social exclusion they experience. I would suggest, however, that this 'unfreedom' is also a result of a particular kind of melancholy (in the Freudian sense), a traumatic haunting, which continues to have a significant impact on their lives.

My focus here is on the particular dramaturgical strategies adopted by Mbothwe, which I would suggest are emblematic of his generation and those who follow in his creative footsteps. These choices run counter to the recently entrenched confessional model for dealing dramaturgically with traumatic experiences and emphasise instead the impossibility of producing a coherent or comprehensible narrative of trauma, and the use of physicality and particular modes of vocality to produce an immediate, visceral, and affective performance aesthetic to overcome perhaps as Blanchot would have it, '[t]he danger that the disaster acquire meaning rather than body' (1995: 41). I will begin the chapter by drawing on the ideas of post-Shoah theorists, such as Saul Friedlander, James E. Young, and Marianne Hirsch, to reflect on current processes of memorialisation and the growing need for forms of representation that are anti-redemptory.

After Auschwitz?

James E. Young has written some of the most important work on the history and process of memorialisation of the *Shoah*. His most recent work, however, is particularly focused on how it is possible to remember events that we have not experienced directly. He lists a number of interrelated ideas that the artists he studies (cartoonist Art Spiegelman; photographer David Levinthal; installation artists, Shimon Attie and Jochen Gerz; and architect Daniel Liebeskind) and by extension he himself, are preoccupied with. These preoccupations include the need for forms of representation that are anti-redemptory; a focus on the experience of the memory-act itself; a reflection on the void of what has been destroyed rather than on the details of the horrific destruction (Young 2000: 9).

In explicating the work of this post-Shoah generation of artists, Young explores the ways in which they are centrally concerned with

memory-work, with 'the difficult attempt to know, to imagine vicariously, and to make meaning out of experiences they never knew directly' (2000: 9). Furthermore, he draws on the distinction made by historian Saul Friedlander between 'common memory', which 'tends to restore or establish coherence, closure and possibly a redemptive stance', and 'deep memory', which 'remains essentially inarticulable and unrepresentable, that which continues to exist as unresolved trauma just beyond the reach of meaning' (Friedlander 1992: 41). Friedlander calls for a historiography that integrates both the common and the deep memory, always attempting to resist closure and to suggest alternative versions and other questions. For Young, such an integrated historiography 'gestures both to the existence of deep, inarticulable memory and its own incapacity to deliver that memory' (2000: 14). It is his contention that the artists he studies are engaged in such a project, their work foregrounding the difficulty of remembering what was not directly experienced, the experience of the intergenerational transmission of past events, and how the telling of a story in one way necessarily masks the ways in which the story can never be told – 'how common memory masks deep memory' (2000: 29).

Focusing specifically on performance, Jeanette Malkin (1999) argues that postmodernism has initiated 'a shift *in the way we remember*, and hence in the way culture, and for our purposes, the theater, represents and reenacts remembering' (4, emphasis in the original). In place of coherent narratives proceeding in a linear and ordered fashion, which she aligns with enlightenment modernism, Malkin identifies a 'postmodernist memory-theater' characterised by conflation, disruption, and repetition in which 'linearity, causality … the unified subject and world … a source (however trivial) that can be recovered through memory … are questioned and exploded' (22). In particular, she focuses on the way these productions are 'shaped through fragment, recurrence and imagistic tumult' (4). She highlights the importance in this emerging postmodern work of voice and image rather than narrative or character, of the collective rather than the individual, and the interactive over the self-sufficient, intact text.

For Malkin, the fragmented, chaotic even traumatised form of 'postmodern memory-theater' is difficult to '"read" or organize – or bind' (1999: 29), forcing the audience to engage actively with the task of remembering while at the same time refusing any easy sense of 'reconstruction, recuperation, or of a Proustian "salvationist" restoration of the past' (10). As she puts it, 'it is left to the audience to construct – or not – a future for the pasts

that appear, but do not cohere, in this theater' (35). Attention therefore has shifted from the object itself to the complex and evolving transaction between the spectator and the object (18), and it is on this transaction, with a particular audience at a particular time, that for Malkin, 'the *political* effect … of postmodern (memoried) art depends' (215, emphasis in the original).

Malkin's ideas overlap in many respects with what interests me here, but her focus is on dramatic literature. My primary objective here is to reflect on a dramaturgy that deviates from the 'textually based dramaturgy' that Malkin focuses on, with its particular Euro-American concerns and practices, in favour of a more collective and embodied process, more in tune with its location in South Africa.

After Trauma and Apartheid? – A Reflection on Time

In South Africa's transitional period there have been two contrasting perspectives regarding time and its effects relative to the traumatic aftermath of apartheid specifically and colonialism more broadly.

The first of these, which might be described as the dominant position, is built on a modernist conception of time made up of 'a "living present" and an ontologically inferior absent or distant past' (Bevernage 2012: 12). According to this conception the past has either gone completely (it is no longer to be found), or it remains but it is stuck in time and at a great remove from the present and it is getting further removed by the day. In any event the past is much less important than the present is. The present by contrast is alive, changing all the time, and though it might be full of challenges and struggles, this is where our energies should be focused. This position leads to processes of amnesty from prosecution and public forgiveness, which amounts to a kind of 'collective amnesia' (Bevernage 2012: 12) and forecloses the possibility for collective mourning. As Jankélévitch (2005) would have it: 'Everything counsels forgetting!' (17). However, this has the effect of delegitimising all experiences of ongoing anger, suffering and injustice.

The secondary position, which was not popular in the early days of the transition, but is growing in popularity today, as so-called post-apartheid dissolves into what I am suggesting is neo-apartheid, conceives of time differently. In the words of Michael Ignatieff, people in places transitioning from a violent past, as in South Africa, 'are not living in a serial order of

time but in a simultaneous one in which the past or the present are a continuous agglutinated mass of fantasia, distortions, myths and lies' (1996: 121). Those who advocate the secondary position claim that processes and policies of reconciliation (supposedly based on truth-telling) have produced a wilful process of forgetting the past catastrophe. They argue that this is unjust, as victims of human rights abuses never got their day in court nor were they compensated despite the TRC's own recommendations and the advice of eminent Africans like, for example, Wole Soyinka.[3] Furthermore, the discourse of reconciliation has not been a consistent and effective way of dealing with past trauma so as to effect closure or put the past to rest (Bevernage 2012: 12). There remains an urgent need to find practices that engage in an active way with the persistence of the past in the present lest it block the emergence of a desired future.

For proponents of the first position, those who advocate for the secondary position, though they occupy the present, live in the past. Of course, as noted before, this is predicated on a serial conception of time rather than a conception of time in which pasts, presents, and possible futures coexist. If one follows the classic psychoanalytic perspective here, Freud, for example, these people are trapped in a state of melancholia characterised by an inability to detach themselves from the lost love-object. They are suffering from a repetition-compulsion to return to the trauma over and over. Furthermore, those who hold the dominant position argue that while they recognise that challenges still remain, a compulsive return to the past or an insistence on maintaining the existence of the past in the present, is counter-productive (a) because it does not do anyone any good on a personal level (it is unhealthy), and (b) it does not productively or effectively address the immediate and persistent social and economic challenges.

The counter argument to this is, of course, that one cannot wish away the past or its consequent effects in the present – they must be given recognition and attention. This is not only about justice in the strictly juridical sense (which it is too); or financial compensation/reparation (which it is too); or even simple revenge (which it might be too). It is about the ongoing health of the nation and our abortive struggles to reach a more positive future. This begs two questions: whose health are we talking about exactly? What practices do we have at our disposal to attend to the problems we face?

On one level, the answer to the first question seems obvious – we are talking about people of a certain age in South Africa who were the direct

victims of apartheid and colonialism either as a result of singular acts of violence or broader structural violence. But can we end there? If we follow Marianne Hirsch's notion of 'postmemory' (1997), trauma becomes transferable across generations as a kind of unwanted but unavoidable inheritance. In other words, those who did not directly experience or live through traumatic experiences of violence and apartheid continue to be traumatised by them. Even more so, as it can be argued that we have shifted into a neo-apartheid era in which violence and apartheid continue to exist but are now managed by those who were at the forefront of the liberation struggle. This would expand the target group exponentially.

I would wish to argue for this latter position for at least three reasons. First, because of African conceptions of the person, not separating the individual from the community, alive or dead;[4] second, because the choice of neo-liberal economic policy in South Africa since 1994 has exacerbated the worst structural problems of the past leading to increasing inequality and social exclusion that affects young people more than any other group; and, third, because of the 'stickiness' of trauma itself – the ways in which it hangs around in space and time and affects bodies in visceral ways (Levan 2011: 81). In other words, whether or not young people today actually experienced apartheid, they continue to suffer its unremitting consequences and to be haunted by its ghosts.

A Seething Presence in the Haunted State

For sociologist Avery Gordon (1997) haunting is a state in which that which is not there, that which is past or lost or missing or simply not clearly visible manifests itself as a 'seething presence' (8). Seething in its archaic form refers to the process of boiling food in liquid. In a more contemporary sense, it suggests being filled with an intense but unexpressed rage that is often associated with images of boiling, chafing, smouldering, steaming, burning, storming, and spitting. Ghosts are the signs of that presence, the ways in which that which is absent is made apparent to us. Gordon suggests that engaging with a ghost 'is about putting life back in where only a vague memory or a bare trace was visible to those who bothered to look' (22). She goes on to say that a ghost inserts a kind of strangeness into a place that unsettles its 'propriety and property' (64), but a ghost also offers us future possibilities and a sense of hope, an opportunity to 'repair

representational mistakes' and to create a 'countermemory for the future' (22). This is because a ghost is 'pregnant with unfulfilled possibility, with the something to be done that the wavering present is demanding' and '[t]his something to be done is not a return to the past but a reckoning with its repression in the present, a reckoning with that which we have lost, but never had' (83). Gordon suggests that 'we must reckon with it [the ghost] graciously, attempting to offer it a hospitable memory *out of a concern for justice*' (64, emphasis in the original).

This idea of a 'reckoning' or 'a something to be done' brings us to the second question posed above, regarding the practices available to us to attend to our health – to effect this reckoning. Given the intractable and complex nature of haunting and its particular representational challenges, how do we 'speak *of the* ghost, indeed *to the* ghost and *with* it' (Derrida 1994: xix, italics in the original)? How do we fashion a spectral language or in our immediate case, a spectral dramaturgy? Which brings us back to art practice and in our case in particular, to performance.

Dominick LaCapra (2004) identifies a recent trend in what he calls 'testimonial art' that involves 'symbolic emulation of trauma … a means of bearing witness to, enacting, and, to some extent, working over and through trauma, whether personally experienced, transmitted from intimates, or sensed in one's larger social and cultural setting' (137). Gordon seems to lend credence to this when she reminds us that haunting traffics in the '*affective mode*' (1997: 127, emphasis in the original) and to reckon with it requires an experiential and embodied engagement, which suggests a different way of knowing, a different order of knowledge – what she describes as 'sensuous knowledge':

> Sensuous knowledge is receptive, close, perceptual, embodied incarnate … Sensuous knowledge always involves knowing and doing. Everything is in the experience with sensuous knowledge. Everything rests on not being afraid of what is happening to you. (Gordon 1997: 205)

As the examples provided by James Young above indicate, art practice has certainly been used, particularly by second generation survivors of the Shoah, to reckon with its ghosts. LaCapra suggests that such art practice operates as a means of 'working-through' as opposed to repetitively 'acting-out' as a consequence of trauma. It is his contention that literature and other forms, including performative forms like 'ritual, song and dance',

are important role-players in this process. LaCapra also makes the point that such forms of articulating/evoking experience are 'typically … non-linear' and 'allow trauma to register in … hesitations, indirections, pauses and silences' rather than in a seamless flow and that these alternative forms of articulation 'may help performatively to create openings in existence that did not exist before' (2004: 122). LaCapra is at pains to point out, however, that 'working through trauma does not imply the possibility of attaining total integration of the self, including the retrospective feat of putting together seamlessly … the riven experience of the past trauma' (2004: 118–19). It is not about redemption of the past nor about healing wounds but about generating 'counterforces to compulsive repetition (or acting-out), thereby enabling a more viable articulation of affect and cognition or representation, as well as ethical and socio-political agency, in the present and future' (119).

While LaCapra clearly makes a distinction between 'working-through' and 'acting-out', and some have criticised him on this score,[5] he in fact argues that a simple division between the two terms/processes along a trajectory from 'bad' (acting-out) to 'good' (working-through) is 'deceptive'. He suggests that the relation between the two 'should not be seen in terms of a from/to relationship in which the latter [working-through] is presented as the dialectical transcendence of the former [acting-out]' (2004: 127, note 32). It is sometimes important and necessary to make space for acting-out, and that acting-out might very well constitute a central part of the process of working-through. He argues for more attention to be paid to 'the role of empathy or even affect in general in historical understanding' (134).

What is required then are performative practices that operate in an affective mode and are able to balance between working-through and acting-out until such time as the ghosts can be properly laid to rest, or in Mbothwe's terms, 'brought home' (personal communication). Since 1994 we have seen many productions in South Africa that have attempted to engage, if not always directly than indirectly, with this condition of haunting, including: *The Dead Wait; Ubu and the Truth Commission; Nothing but the Truth; Malora; The Stories I am about to Tell; He Left Quietly; Woman in Waiting;* and *Truth in Translation*. These productions all contain an element of testimony in which characters attempt to unburden themselves of traumatic events from the past through storytelling, narrated or enacted for the audience. It can be argued that in this respect they operate in a

'confessional' mode that mimics the modus operandi of truth commissions themselves: confess (that is, speak) your truth and you will be set free on an individual psychological level or on a broader socio-juridical level whether you were a perpetrator or victim, black or white. In other words, the productions convert the stage into 'a confessional arena' (Charlton 2017: 59) even if only to signal 'theatre's failure as a site of recovery from trauma' (Charlton 2017: 62).

It is also a fact that all of the productions listed were directed by white directors, rooted in Western modes of performance practice and dramaturgy, with the exception of *Nothing but the Truth*, which was directed by John Kani, and his play is, to a large extent, on an aesthetic level at least, seemingly influenced by the conception of the dramatic championed by his long-time collaborator, Athol Fugard. My argument in what follows is that the works under scrutiny in this chapter are attempting to do something different. They originate in a different place, draw on a different repertoire of performance idioms, and through their dramaturgy, they interrupt the dominance of narrative and its confessional logics.[6]

'*Peeling the Wound*' with Mandla Mbothwe

Mandla Mbothwe grew up in the Cape Town township of Nyanga and trained to be an actor at the University of Cape Town after which he worked as a community arts activist for a number of years before joining Magnet Theatre in 2000. The two works I will focus on here were created some three years apart – the first, *Inxeba Lomphilisi [Wound of a Healer]*, in 2010 when Mbothwe was still a director at Magnet Theatre, and the second, *Did we Dance: Ukotshona ko Mendi [The Sinking of the Mendi]*, in 2012 after he had left to take up a position at the Steve Biko Foundation in Kingwilliamstown.

Inxeba Lomphilisi is one part of a four production focus on migration, undertaken by Magnet Theatre from 2006 to 2012.[7] In the production, the N2 highway that links Cape Town, in the Western Cape province, to the Eastern Cape, the traditional home of the Xhosa people, features strongly. According to a note in the published text, there have been many accidents along this highway and 'there are lots of dead bodies that have not been found and taken home to rest' (Reznek et al. 2012: 155). An old woman, the healer named in the title, has been present on this road for many years,

Figure 4.1. Faniswa Yisa in *Inxeba Lomphilisi* at Magnet Theatre, 2010.
Photograph by Hannes Thiart.

seeking out the lost spirits and trying to put them to rest in a makeshift graveyard she has constructed next to the road.

The linking of the performance to the in-between space of the highway is connected to the theme of migration and the sense of displacement that many people in South Africa live with, but it also acts as an image of the space of the present between the traumatic past of apartheid and the desired future. Mbothwe is concerned with intervening in the present, motivated by his belief that there are 'absent voices' that need to be brought back into view and that need to be given a hearing. As he puts it: 'without the stories of the "disappeared", we are not whole. Without their stories, our spiritual and traditional being is empty. *Inxeba Lomphilisi* tries to place the stories of absent voices back in the landscape' (Reznek et al. 2012: 154). As performance scholar Miki Flockemann argues, 'Mbothwe's comment that without the absent voices "we are not whole" points to the way the unresolved trauma of migrancy is seen as a pathology affecting the health of communities as well as the broader body politic' (Flockemann 2015: 43). This ties in with the second image that is central in the play: the 'wound' and the constant injunction to 'peel the wound' that flashes up on the screen repetitively throughout as part of the video

imagery. In an interview with Flockemann, Mbothwe speaks of wounds that were never healed, but simply bandaged up and left 'unattended':

> They were not cleaned, they didn't put ointment [on] and if you look at it now, today, in South Africa, that wound, that bandage is leaking. And it is time for the country to unbandage and to deal with the pain. The TRC [Truth and Reconciliation Commission] was a gesture but it never went down to the grassroots level. So it's time for us to tell those stories … (Flockemann 2015: 44)

Mbothwe is intent on tackling issues of 'unspeakability' in the sense of reclaiming voices rendered absent. He believes that there will be no future if the wounds of the past are not dealt with now. But in the other sense of the unspeakable, the sense in which the subject presents a representational challenge, Mbothwe's work is also instructive. By representational challenge I refer to the possibility that there are certain events or subjects that are resistant to representation, particularly in linguistic terms, because of their immensity and complexity. And yet events such as the Shoah and systems such as apartheid, seem to call out for representation and against forgetting or repression. In such instances forms of expression that are not discursive in nature – forms that are affective and sensuous, for example – might be put to good use, if not to represent in a definitive sense, at least to gesture towards representation in a more provisional sense.

In line with Magnet Theatre's work in general, there is a choice in *Inxeba Lomphilisi* to limit the words spoken and to use the body as a primary means of expression. Dance forms a significant part of the performance; a repetitive choreography of obsessive and desperate gestures are set against a musical score, created and sung by the company. The introduction of dance here, and in other Magnet productions, is significant in a number of ways, not least because of the focus on speaking the unspeakable. Dance performs an interruption, a cut across the language of theatre that offers a different kind of sense. In this way the sensible rather than the semantic predominates in what Nancy terms 'a syntax of feeling' (2006: 113).

But Mbothwe has developed Magnet's physical approach by also employing a densely poetic linguistic text, spoken, chanted, and sung in the Xhosa language. This is interesting because the use of indigenous languages on mainstream stages in South Africa continues to be rare.

Figure 4.2. Faniswa Yisa and chorus in *Inxeba Lomphilisi* at Magnet Theatre, 2010. Photograph by Hannes Thiart.

However, the mere use of the Xhosa language in *Inxeba Lomphilisi* is not the most interesting or unique aspect. What is significant about Mbothwe's approach is that the particular dialect used is not that spoken by urban Xhosa people, such as the young performers who make up the cast. The actual language spoken is referred to, by them, as 'deep' Xhosa and is spoken only in the rural Eastern Cape. This again creates an alienating effect that increases the sense of dislocation at the heart of the performance. This is not because the performers have lost their language, but because they are lost *within* their language. They are struggling to make sense of it and to own it, along with the urban audience they are playing to (if they are Xhosa-speaking and understand the language at all, which is not the case for most theatre-goers in South Africa).

Given the nature of the language used in the production, the register, the density of idiomatic expression that is extremely ambiguous, and the fragmented quality of the text in which bits of language are juxtaposed against one another, communication or the desire for a common understanding is not the primary objective. Rather the language attempts to generate an experience that is immediate, sensual, felt, and somatic. Furthermore, the production juxtaposes traditional practices, ceremonies,

Figure 4.3. Warona Seane and chorus of drowned soldiers in *Ukutshona ko Mendi* by Lara Foot, adapted and directed by Mandla Mbothwe at the Market Theatre, 2014. Photograph by Ruphin Coudyzer.

and rituals (mostly associated with mourning and the peaceful transition of the dead to the other world) with the technology of video imagery (an array of complex digital images of speeding vehicles on roads, illuminated Christian symbols, and suitcases and other travelling paraphernalia). This juxtaposition mirrors the almost schizophrenic temporalities of the South African urban experience.

Unlike *Inxeba*, which is an imaginative construction produced by Mbothwe and his cast, the second performance work under scrutiny here, *Did we Dance: Ukotshona ko Mendi,* is based on an actual historical event that occurred in February of 1917 during World War I. 802 members of the South African Native Labour Corps were on board of a troopship, the SS *Mendi*, being transported from Plymouth in England to Le Havre in France, when it sank in the English Channel off the Isle of Wight after being struck by another ship, the SS *Darro*. As most of the men could not swim and the number of lifeboats and life jackets was inadequate, and as the temperature of the water was extremely cold, 618 of the 802 African soldiers were drowned together with 9 white officers and 33 members of the crew. In the enquiry that followed it emerged that the captain of the

Darro had done nothing to rescue those who had ended up in the sea and that a large contingent of the soldiers, who were either too frightened to jump into the sea or were stopped from doing so by the agonised cries of their comrades already in the icy water, had remained on board while the ship sank.

One of the most enduring and powerful images that emerged from this catastrophe was a report by Reverend Wauchope Dyobha, who had accompanied the men from South Africa. He stood on deck as the ship went down and comforted the men with the following words, which form part of the text of the production:

> Be quiet and calm, my countrymen, for what is taking place is exactly what you came to do. You are going to die… but that is what you came to do… Brothers, we are drilling the death drill. I, a Xhosa, say you are my brothers, Swazis, Pondos, Basutos, we die like brothers. We are the sons of Africa. Raise your war cries, brothers, for though they made us leave our assegais in the kraal, our voices are left with our bodies. (Mbothwe 2012: n.p.)

After these words, the men took off their boots and began to dance as the ship slipped into the dark waters.

While the production *Did we Dance: Ukotshona ko Mendi* displays elements of the dramaturgical fragmentation found in *Inxeba*, there is in fact a much stronger narrative spine than in the earlier work. A non-linear narrative jumps back and forth in time so that past, present, and in some respects, future are woven together in a rich tapestry of coexistence, rather than being neatly parcelled out along a chronological and sequential timeline. While this might prove unsettling and disorientating at times for the audience, it counters the dominance of the present over the past or – to put it another way – it emphasises the presence of the past as an active force in the present time, rather than something that has passed. In fact, as Helena Grehan has argued, this unsettlement, visceral, affective, and cognitive, is an essential part of the spectator's ethical processing of any theatre work (2009: 1–8).

There are a number of scenes in the production that have a more conventional dramatic feel and are acted in a realistic manner in which characters share dialogic interactions. These kinds of scenes are nowhere to be found in the earlier production. In addition, the uniform Xhosa of the earlier work is replaced by a mixture of different Southern African

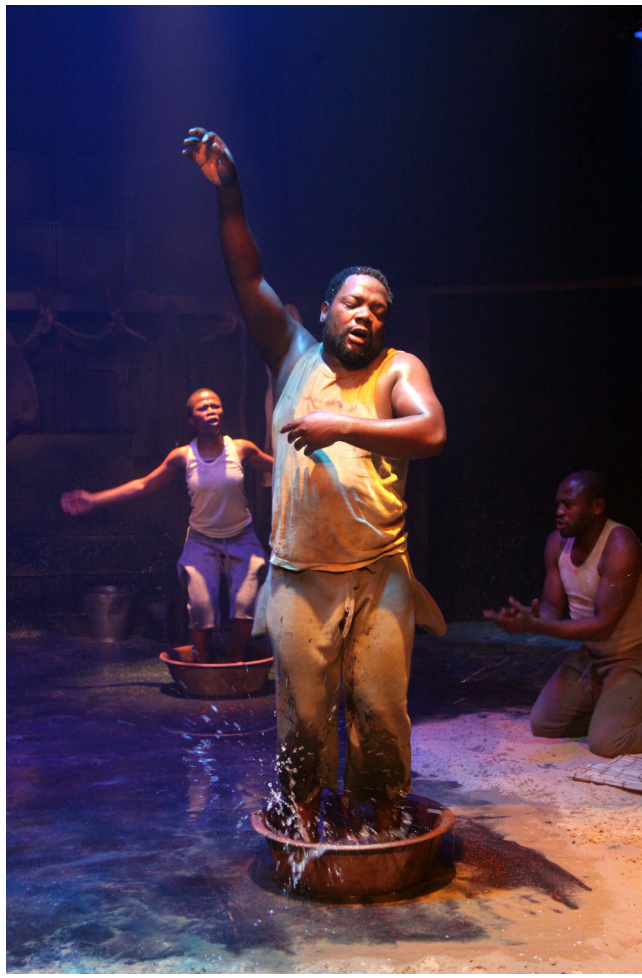

Figure 4.4. Nhlanhla Mahlangu in *Ukutshona ko Mendi* by Lara Foot, adapted and directed by Mandla Mbothwe at the Market Theatre, 2014. Photograph by Ruphin Coudyzer.

languages. English is more present in the general mix of languages utilised, even if it sometimes risks being drowned out by all the indigenous languages. These two factors result in a somewhat more accessible work. This might be because of the subject matter, the fact that it is based on an actual historical event, and that there is a desire to remain loyal to the telling of that event particularly in a context in which such historical

events have been generally occluded in the past, and out of respect to those who died when the *Mendi* sank. It might also be because Mbothwe worked freely off an original script in English written by Lara Foot, artistic director of the Baxter Theatre in Cape Town. It might also be a factor of the shift of the production to Johannesburg, a bigger city with a more diverse community who speak a range of languages and in which English is often more easily accepted as a lingua franca.

The text seems to be derived from a combination of academic historical sources and oral sources, particularly the Xhosa poem *Ukutshona Kukamendi* by SEK Mqhayi. The latter is slowly inserted, bit by bit over the course of the production, into the textual and sonic fabric of the work by an old man who seems to be a spiritual healer and who occupies a peripheral position on the edges of the main narrative line and the performance space, very seldom drawing attention to himself or becoming actively involved in the unfolding story. His words seem to fight the rapidly unfolding narrative, a fugitive, anguished counterpoint struggling to become/be present but finally finding its focused place and attention right at the end, when the old man speaks the final stanza without interruption.

Awu! Zaf'int'ezinkulu zeAfrika!
Isindiwe le nqanawa, 'de yazika,
Kwf'amakhalipha, amafa nankosi,
Agazi lithetha kwiNkosi yeeNkosi.
Ukufa kwawo kunomvuzo nomvuka
Ndinga ndingema nawo ngomhla wovuko,
Ndingqambe njengomnye osebenzileyo,
Ndikhanye njengomso oqaqambileyo.
Makuba njalo! (Mqhayi 1943)

(Awu! The finest of Africa was busy dying!
The ship couldn't carry its precious cargo,
It was echoing into the inner circles,
Their brave blood faced of Kings.
Their deaths had a purpose for all of us
How I wish I could be with them,
How I wish I could stand with them on resurrection day,
How I wish I could sparkle with them like the morning star.
Let it be so!)

Figure 4.5. *Ukutshona ko Mendi* by Lara Foot and directed by Mandla Mbothwe at the Market Theatre, 2014. Photograph by Ruphin Coudyzer.

Nevertheless, despite the healing efforts of the spiritual character, the persistence of physical and gestural images and sequences continues to disturb the narrative spine, itself interrupting and disturbing any easy meaning-making and unsettling audience response. In addition, the visceral vocal score discussed previously is present once more, particularly in the non-dialogic scenes.

Ultimately though, what links the two performance works is the presence of a woman dressed in the traditional black mourning dress

(multiples of which form a part of the set of *Ukotshona ko Mendi* and are the first elements to confront the audience on their entrance to the performance space). In both productions this woman is engaged in an extremely physical and desperate and agitated manner with a chorus of unsettled, unrooted beings who exist in a space between life and death, present and past. Furthermore, the ritualistic overtones of the productions, their use of song and chant and traditional ritual objects, and natural elements like sand and water overwhelms the communication of any narrative of wholeness and closure completely in *Inxeba Lomphilisi* and at least partially in *Ukotshona ko Mendi.*

In the final section I hope to link the role of the woman in the traditional mourning dress to, on the one hand, the particularities of the African conception of death and mourning and, on the other, to LaCapra's dialectical relation between the processes of 'working-through' and 'acting-out'.

An African Mourning Play

In 1981, at the height of the apartheid struggle, the most iconic of protest plays, *Woza Albert*, ended with the mass resurrection of struggle heroes from their graves. The tone then was triumphant and celebratory and the act of inviting the spirits of those who had passed to mingle with us in our world was not understood as problematic. The two performance works focused on here, some thirty years later, are no longer aiming at a mass resurrection, but at calming the unsettled dead and finding a way to, if not bury them per se, at least to find conciliation with them and 'to bring them home'. The celebratory tone has gone and there is 'something yet to be done' about those who have passed – a reckoning in the name of justice. In this respect, what Mbothwe has, in my opinion, created is an African version of the mourning play. Following what Idelbar Avelar suggests with reference to what he calls 'mournful literature' in post-dictatorship Latin America, this mourning play digs into the fragmented ruins to 'trigger the untimely eruption of the past' (1999: 205) in order to 'remind the present that it is a product of past catastrophe' (205).

According to Wole Soyinka 'death in most of Africa is a breach in the rhythm of life, a temporary disconnection of the deceased from the "cosmic totality"' (1995: 3). It is temporary because if those who remain

behind conduct themselves correctly, the deceased will be taken up into the ancestral realm, which is not ultimately considered as discontinuous with the realm of the living and will therefore become part of the 'cosmic totality' once more. As Victor Ukaegbu (2011) comments, in an African context death is not considered to occur at a precise moment in time that coincides with a particular biological reality. It is, rather, a period of transition that only ends when the spirit of the deceased finds its way into its new reality and when the bereaved have been prepared to return to their everyday lives. During the transitional phase, mourning is conducted not as an interior process of individual psychic realignment with the lost love-object, but as an externalised public performance that utilises culturally prescribed oral, gestural, and physical modalities to express and to show personal grief to a scrutinising and participating community.

It is clear from both performance works that a process of collective mourning has not been successfully completed and that the dead are not at peace. Hence, the productions become a kind of proxy for the steps that have been missed. While this is clearly reflected in the content of the two works, I would suggest that the specific dramaturgical choices are even more significant in this regard – the fragmentation of narrative, the turn to the body and affect, the richly complex vocality and sonic fabric that extends way beyond the verbal and that impacts the body before making cognitive sense, the way the productions unsettle the audience and fold them into the sense of ritual.

The latter point places attention squarely onto the relationship between the audience and the work. I would argue that in Mbothwe's works we, the audience, are confronted, in Levinasian terms, with the 'saying' rather than being engaged with the 'said', or at least, we witness or experience the interruption of the 'said' by a refusal to move beyond the 'saying'. According to Robert Eaglestone's reading of Levinas, ethics consists in the interruption of the said – the space in which the saying is always already incarnated – for the sake of releasing or manifesting the saying. The saying 'interrupt[s] established understandings' (Eaglestone 1997: 77) and it is the 'disruptive power' of the saying that produces the ethical response – the state of 'not being at home, the strangeness of the ineluctable call to responsibility' (177). It is my contention that Mbothwe's performances provide 'opportunities for the "saying" to rupture the "said", to refuse closure, to contradict and to mobilise the realm of the senses' (Grehan 2009: 14). Mbothwe's dramaturgical design forces us to make space for the other's saying, to allow the

otherness of the other space to remain, not to try 'to deny the alterity of the other by reducing the other to the same' (Grehan 2009: 13).

I would suggest that the nature of theatrical performance itself as embodied repetition in a public place of seeing and experiencing and feeling acts here as a kind of attempt at 'working-through' trauma in LaCapra's sense. However, this does not mean that it excludes 'acting-out' – moments in which deep-seated and unresolved anger is expressed and responsibility demanded. After watching a performance of *Ukotshona ko Mendi* at the Baxter Theatre in Cape Town a colleague approached me in the foyer and commented that while she had found it very powerful, the performance seemed very much like it was stuck in the 1980s. 'When', she asked, 'will we move beyond the anger?' I take her comment to suggest first, that she felt that the production was indeed expressing a lot of anger (that it was not attempting to bandage up the wound); second, that it seemed that the anger was aimed at her as a white woman or if it was not aimed at her, she felt implicated by it; and, third, that this anger belonged in another time, back in the 1980s. For Mbothwe, I would suggest, there is no other time, the past and the present and the desired future are all one, and while there might be small moments of celebration, there is also a lot of unresolved anger – the wound must be 'unbandaged"' and left to suppurate as a necessary step to its repair/healing.

However, I do not ultimately believe that what Mbothwe intends with this is an apocalyptic vision akin to what LaCapra critiques in Agamben: 'some hoped-for, apocalyptic future … that, through a kind of creation *ex nihilo*, will bring total renewal, salvation, or redemption' (LaCapra 1999: 706), and that 'lends itself to an elated, seemingly radical, breathlessly ecstatic discourse of the sublime' (LaCapra 2004: 166). For Mbothwe the time is indeed 'out of joint', something is indeed 'rotten in the state', and while his intervention might be considered 'untimely' by some, it is also rooted in an earnest desire to make things right for those yet to be born, for the unsettled dead and for those of us linked to them by inheritance. Untimely in the Nietzchean sense of 'acting counter to our time and thereby acting on our time and … for a benefit of a time to come' (cited in Avelar 1999: 205).

Notes

[1] At the outset I must acknowledge the privileged position I write from that is a product of the traumatic system under scrutiny here. I do not intend to speak for the pain of the other only alongside. I can really only reflect from my own position as a South African classified as white under the apartheid system and who continues to be defined in those terms today. And as a person of Jewish descent who was once of Europe, but was forced out as a consequence of discrimination and othering.

[2] Other similar instances include Mandisi Sindo's *Mari and Kana*, Cindy Makaza's *Iqhiya Emnyama*, and Qondiswa James's *Silindile*.

[3] See Soyinka, W. (1999), 'Reparations, Truth and Reconciliation', in *The Burden of Memory: The Muse of Forgiveness*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 36.

[4] See, for example: Menkiti, I. (1984), 'Person and Community in African Traditional Thought', in R. A. Wright (ed.), *African Philosophy: An Introduction*, 3rd edn, 171–81, Lanham, MD: University Press of America; or, Mbiti, J. S. (1990), *African Religions and Philosophy*, Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers.

[5] See, for example, Ann Cvetkovich (2003): She argues that the differentiation/distinction LaCapra makes 'between "working through," the successful resolution of trauma and "acting out," the repetition of trauma that does not lead to transformation … often seems tautological – good responses to trauma are cases of working through, bad ones are cases of acting out …' (434). LaCapra for his part suggests that this is in part a 'misreading' (2004: 127 note 32).

[6] While some of their aesthetic features correspond in part with the postdramatic theories of Hans-Thies Lehmann et al., I would stop short of naming these works as aesthetically postdramatic for the simple fact that it is arguable whether the place they originate from was ever dramatic in the first place. It seems to me like just another attempt to bring a non-European concept under European control: we will provide you with a language to articulate yourself.

[7] Elsewhere (Fleishman 2015, for example), I have examined the dramaturgical strategies employed in *Inxeba Lomphilisi* in some detail. Here I will simply list the key points and then compare them to the second production: *Did we Dance: Ukotshona ko Mendi*.

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CHAPTER 5

Embodied Aesthetics of Vulnerability in Post-Marikana South Africa

Marieke Breyne and Sofie de Smet

Introduction

On 16 August 2012 thirty-four Lonmin miners lost their lives at Marikana in South Africa. They were killed by the police after failed negotiations between striking miners, the Lonmin mining company, and the mining unions.

In the aftermath of his shocking event, which is now known as the Marikana massacre, numerous South African theatre makers decided to critically engage with this recent history of violence within South African society. In this chapter, we look into the two examples of contemporary performances that take the Marikana killings as their starting point, namely the site-specific performances *Mari and Kana* (2015) and *Iqhiya Emnyama* (2015), that were presented at the public arts festival *Infecting the City* 2015 in Cape Town at a remarkable distance from the Marikana area. This essay aims to offer a reflection on the particular potential of the performances *Mari and Kana* and *Iqhiya Emnyama* to question existing power systems and problematic structural injustice, at the heart of the Marikana massacre and the world we live in.

We analyse the performances' aesthetics with regard to their socio-political imperatives, and investigate how they face and challenge racial, spatial, and gender-based patterns of inequality in post-apartheid South Africa and pose a challenge to dominant narratives within society. Furthermore, we highlight the female identity of the main performers in *Mari and Kana* and *Iqhiya Emnyama* enacting alternative identities in public space as both performances put an emphasis on the ones who were left behind after the media had moved on, the commission's report was published, and the strikers went back to work: the widows of the thirty-four killed Lonmin miners.

Infecting the City: Mourning in the Company Garden

Every South African autumn Cape Town's buzzing city centre is transformed into an art scene through the annual public arts festival, *Infecting the City*. This festival is praised for its efforts to democratise art via a well-considered multifarious programme and wide-reaching audience scope. From its earliest edition in 2008, at that time organised and curated by Jay Pather and Brett Bailey, the festival invited an equal number of artists from the inner city of Cape Town and artists from the surrounding townships to participate. Only a small percentage of the festival's programme are international guests. In this respect, a significant number of performances at the festival are anchored in a contemporary South Africa, generating a critical debate among a myriad of artistic voices each year. The edition in 2015 welcomed more than 50 productions and 290 artists, including the premieres of both *Mari and Kana* and *Iqhiya Emnyama* that took place during the same evening at the heart of Cape Town in the Company Garden. On the playbill of *Infecting the City* 2015, *Mari and Kana* is announced as a journey of two young men who provisionally leave prison to attend a Xhosa ceremony around the graves of their fathers. *Mari and Kana* is a production of South African theatre maker Mandisi Sindo and his company Theatre4Change Art Project in close collaboration with the Lingua Franca Spoken Word movement, a poetry collective that aims to promote and preserve indigenous languages, based in the townships Khayelitsha and Delft respectively. Furthermore, Sindo is the artistic director of the Makukhane Art Room, the first shack theatre in Khayelitsha. In line with Sindo's theatre oeuvre (Fleishman and Pather 2014), *Mari and Kana* combines elements of traditional Xhosa ritual, contemporary dance, opera, poetry, live percussion, and visual imagery. The second performance, *Iqhiya Emnyama*, is created by Cindy Mkaza-Siboto, a director who specialises in physical theatre, storytelling, and object theatre. As a performative exploration of grief, *Iqhiya Emnyama* (Xhosa for black cloth or *doekie* in Afrikaans) draws attention to the relation between the mourning widow and the black headdress.

On the evening of the festival performances of *Mari and Kana* and *Iqhiya Emnyama*, one of the first things the audience notices is the transformation of the Company Garden into a graveyard with small white crosses. Via their inherent religious character, these crosses mark the scene of the public performance *Mari and Kana*. The expanding audience, artlovers

who showed up for the festival and passers-by (locals, tourists, beggars) dropping in, searches for a seat around an absent stage while remaining at a respectful distance from the graves. Referring to the widespread image of the graveyard at Wonderkop Koppie (the rocky hill where the strikers gathered), these white crosses install a distinctive atmosphere. Words such as 'mineworkers' and 'Marikana' are whispered throughout the gathered crowd and some people explicitly request silence. As soon as the audience has gathered around the graveyard, two musicians in working clothes start to play a repetitive tune. One does not realise the impact of the hypnotising sound until a drum briefly slips out of the musician's hand and the beat is interrupted. This haunting soundscape will last throughout the performance, strengthened by the voices of two female choir members carrying white umbrellas. Suddenly a car drives up and two policemen roughly drag two young prisoners on stage and remove their handcuffs. Meanwhile, the crowd's attention is as well drawn to two women near to the audience. Sitting with legs stretched on the gravel, with downcast eyes, these women slowly perform a dance of simple mourning gestures. They light a small fire at a cross and then walk around and pray alongside the cross. The prayer gestures enlarge and become expressive movements of despair.

The roles of mothers and sons are clarified through the interactions between the women and the men. The two sons called Mari and Kana hold their mothers during their lament while the mothers hold their sons in an attempt to bath them. In contrast to the women, the two young men also challenge each other physically through a play-fight in bare torso. Only once do they arrange themselves all in one line, alternating gestures of grief with a military mark time step. In the performance, every movement is enriched by the continuous singing of the choir. The lament is interrupted by poetry fragments and exclamations of the real names of the dead Marikana mineworkers. When the song *Vuka Mntomnyana* (Wake up Blackman) softens and the dark night falls over the Garden, the audience realises the performance is over, though the presence of the remaining white crosses and the indelible sounds maintain the performance's affect long after the applause.

After the performance *Mari and Kana*, a festival guide invites the audience, a grown crowd of people, to move on to the next performance in the Company Garden. Following a video work and a performance of two comedians, three women, almost unnoticeable, appear in the audience.

They stand out due to their long black clothes, similar to the clothes worn by the women in *Mari and Kana*. These women drag along a big mattress and slowly make their way through the crowd. The crowd, still shaking with laughter from the previous comic cabaret-show, swarms extensively and noisily around the silent women. The women, however, keep their slow pace and serene expressions, walking perfectly in line down Government Avenue. When the women meet a fourth woman with a mattress and a seated fifth performer, who plays Xhosa instruments, the audience understand that they have reached the site of the last performance of that evening, entitled *Iqhiya Emnyama*. The four women place themselves in the middle of the crowd and lay down their mattresses. The women cover themselves in black clothes and cloths and sit in frozen poses on the piled mattresses. They circle around the mattresses and use the mattresses as walls of an improvised house. Daily customs such as making a lunchbox and drinking tea are combined with abstract gestures of pain, despair, and disgust. The women sing, cry, and loudly shout out their pain. Finally, they rip off their black cloths and take off their shoes followed by a re-enactment of a protest march on the mattresses. At the end, the repeated words 'A piece of me died that night' announce a burial ritual of throwing earth on a grave, in which the performers invite the audience to participate. A prayer song is initiated, immediately responded to by the audience singing along. With this song the full-evening programme in the Company Garden ends.

In what follows, we analyse the performances' aesthetics in regard to their critical political reflections. To do so, we first aim to provide an outline of Marikana and its socio-political embedment within South African contemporary society and the global world. Indeed, although South Africa is officially classified as a middle-income and post-apartheid country, scholars have foregrounded how patterns of inequality remain distinctive products of the modestly growing economy (Marais 2011; Satgar 2012). After the end of apartheid, South Africa was integrated into the global economy primarily as a mining exporter heavily reliant on foreign capital inflows (Jacobs 2009). As part of a global economy, South Africa was also confronted with the need for flexibility in working conditions. This is reflected, for example, in the shift from direct to third party employment and from life-long towards temporary employment since the democratic transition (Bezuidenhout and Buhlungu 2011; Chinguno 2013), impacting the solidarity among union organisations and labour movements

(Alexander 2013). In South Africa, mining work particularly has become increasingly fragmented, paving the way for precarious work conditions. The precariousness of the miners' working conditions is mirrored by their poor living conditions in the informal settings where a myriad of the miners live. The informal settings are characterised by a lack of basic facilities, such as running water and electricity, and a lack of safety. The multinational Lonmin Company, connected as employer to the miners' strike at Marikana and the third largest producer of platinum in the world, acknowledged that a great number of the surrounding inhabitants of its mines live in informal settings. This is particularly the case in Rustenburg, a municipality area located 100 km from Johannesburg, the so called 'hub of the world platinum mining production' (Chinguno 2013: 641), where formal housing of the mining communities has even decreased from 47 per cent to 42 per cent from 2001 to 2007 (Chinguno 2013).

After August 2012, the above-mentioned words 'Lonmin' and 'Rustenburg' cannot be spoken without referring to the miners' strike at Marikana. The strike resulted in the largest state massacre of South African citizens since the Soweto Uprising in 1976 (Alexander et al. 2013). Although the state police gunfire was the immediate cause of the loss of thirty-four striking mineworkers on 16 August 2012, critics have fundamentally questioned the objectivity of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), the Lonmin's management (Alexander 2013), as well as the responsibility of the government in this horrific event during the strikes that preceded the massacre. The initial demand of the workers was a simple request to open up a reliable dialogue for a decent wage. Although violence was present on both sides, dominant media seemed to focus strongly on the unruly strikers portrayed and commemorated as responsible violent actors (Alexander et al. 2013). As Alexander observed: 'The consciousness of South Africans and others has been scarred by media footage that makes it seem like strikers were charging the police and defending themselves against savages' (Alexander et al. 2013: 16). This public discourse was followed by the heavy presence of military and police at Marikana while the government openly assured international investors that mining investments in South Africa are very secure (Satgar 2012). Scholars argue that the dominant public discourse strongly repudiated any comparison with analogous massacres from the apartheid era as the Soweto Uprising and Sharpeville massacre (Buitendag and Coetzer 2015) and the official narrative had a tendency to reduce the massacre to 'a tragedy' that should

simply be mourned on all sides, rather than a 'massacre' (Alexander 2013). This rhetoric seems to restrict the event to an act of nature comparable to a tornado or a hurricane (Fogel 2014). In the aftermath of Marikana 270 mineworkers were initially charged with murder. In 2015, three years after the massacre, President Zuma responded to a student's question about the use of violence as follows: 'Those people in Marikana had killed people and the police were stopping them from killing people' (Brock 2015). Even years later and after the official report of the commission was published, a dominant image of violent mineworkers and the strong focus on the clash between the police and the violent mineworkers hamper to touch upon other questions and the continuous struggle that the remaining mineworkers and the families of the dead miners undergo.

Sharing Mourning in a Co-transformed Public Space

In a first reflection, we explore how the performances *Mari and Kana* and *Iqhiya Emnyama* seem to initiate a challenge in countering these dominant narratives on Marikana in the public sphere and a 'differential distribution of grievability' (Butler 2009: 24) in public life. We reflect upon how both performances provide an opportunity for a participatory and reflective encounter between audience members, the performance site, and the performers, creating a ritual of mourning and grief in a politically burdened landscape. By the enabling of a public act of mourning, the performances seem to subvert the hierarchy of grievability. In her work, Butler shines a light on grievability as a fundamental presupposition for a life or subject that matters: 'Those who remain faceless or whose faces are presented to us as so many symbols of evil, authorize us to become senseless before those lives we have eradicated, and whose grievability is indefinitely postponed' (Butler 2004: xviii). The dominant public representation of Marikana and their miners reproduces and regulates the events in such a way that a part of the population tends to remain ungrievable. Both performances may interrogate politically induced conditions of grievability by creating a public grieving ritual that encourages audience members to bodily engage and participate in grieving with representatives of the communities involved. The widows of the Marikana miners in both performances chose to grieve the death of their husbands openly, highlighting the fraught nature of hierarchy

Figure 5.1. Azuza Radu in *Mari and Kana* by Mandisi Sindo at Infecting the City 2015 produced by the Africa Centre. Photography by Oscar O'Ryan.

in grievability. Reacting to controlled regimes of power, the widows' open grieving designates expressions of outrage. Butler (2009) allocates a strong socio-political potential in the disruptive character of the act of public mourning itself as it troubles the order and hierarchy of political authority. Both performances as public mourning rituals in the Company Garden shape such intervention into the actual debate on the Marikana massacre. Yet, we argue, that it seems that such a disruptive character is further complicated as the boundaries between reality and fiction in the performances' aesthetics are particularly blurred.

Encountering the naturalistic set-up of the crosses and the haunting soundscape, from the very start the audience in *Mari and Kana* is absorbed into the emotional journey of the performers even before their appearance. In the beginning, the dramatis personae of the dead mineworkers, the fathers of the prisoners, are the only ones present. These two static figures with white-painted faces form an immobile part of the performance's backdrop throughout the performance. Their particular presence generates a peculiar tension as these figures operate as both the spirits of the people mourned during the staged ritual and as vibrant characters on scene. This tension, climaxing in the calling out of the real names of the

lost mineworkers, seems to facilitate the audience's engagement with the intended ritual of grieving and incorporates the lack of a definitive closure of grief due to unanswered questions. Accordingly, Thompson (2009) notes that 'rather than taming the past in a strategic project, performance can maintain its difficultness, its incompleteness, in the present' (107). Similarly, in *Iqhiya Emnyama* the ritual is shaped and legitimised by an intended and literal sharing of grief. As Mkaza-Siboto elucidates in an interview: 'I wanted to orchestrate a ritual for the public to be able to participate in the mourning, because not all of us could afford to go the place of the massacre or the funeral' (Mkaza-Siboto 2015). Through the highly mediatised circulation of an image of a striking Marikana mineworker in a green blanket, the mineworkers of Marikana have been strongly associated with this item. The green blanket used in *Ighiya Emnyama* is, thus, a theatrical object that personifies the mineworkers and a highly symbolic element in the performance, which marks the performer as a mineworker. Further in the performance the blanket also transforms into the object of violence itself – as it is cut into pieces. The blanket remains visible throughout the performance, and, in this regard, the audience and the performers continue to share the focal point of their grieving. At the end of the performance, this sharing is consolidated when audience members are asked to engage in a burial ritual and throw earth on the grave portrayed by the torn green blanket.

Furthermore, performances *Mari and Kana* and *Iqhiya Emnyama* take place, above all, in a politically charged urban landscape. Both performances are presented in the Company Garden, a leisure park in the centre of Cape Town known for its impressive old trees and its authentic urban character, combining rushing businesspersons with tourists, curious squirrels, and exercising soldiers. The title 'Company Garden' entails the loaded history of the park. In short: the garden was established on behalf of the Dutch East India Company in 1652, to supply fresh food for the sailors on their long travels between the Netherlands and the Dutch East Indies. Two decades later it was reshaped into a Dutch pleasure garden, and in the late eighteenth century restyled according to Victorian sensibilities, as the British took over. Temporarily transforming a historical site such as the Company Garden into a place of performance and grieving rituals does imply a striking transformation of that site. In *Mari and Kana,* the audience encounters the widows and the spirits of miners precisely in front of the Iziko South African Museum. Although the museum is

never directly highlighted by performative interactions or technical effects, its presence is of primary importance. As the crowd watches the mourning women and hears the echoing of the real mineworkers' names, the museum remains immovably present. The museum itself is strongly associated with its exhibition of the Bushmen, the indigenous inhabitants of southern Africa, which reduced them to 'physical types' of a 'primitive race' (Davison 1998: 143). In this respect, the site of the South African Museum carries its history with it as an 'animating absence in the present' (Butler 2003: 473) and continues to embody the realm of social injustice as a third actor.

At the start of *Iqhiya Emnyama* the audience is positioned in front of the South African Parliament. 'We are literally bringing our baggage in front of the parliament, and they have to deal with it', explains director Mkaza-Siboto (2015). The audience's attention is irrevocably directed towards the government and its ambiguous position in the Marikana massacre – a position that is neither clarified nor purified by the delayed publication of the investigative report of the Inquiry Commission of Marikana. The audience may function in the site-world as the physical joints between the performance and the parliament. Consequently, they are called upon to act and respond while assuming responsibility as South African citizens and, moreover, agents of social justice. In sum, both performances deliberately stimulate the audience members to reflect on what they see, hear, and do in relationship to their experiences in the (political) world.

Sharing Mourning as Women

In the following reflections, we focus on the presence in both performances of performing women, the ones who are left behind at Marikana trying to survive and continue their lives under disastrous economic conditions. In this regard, we argue that the performances may also tackle the gendered dimensions of the Marikana massacre and could be considered as 'invented spaces' defined by Miraftab (2014: 1) as 'the spaces occupied by the grassroots that confront the authorities and the status quo, in the hope for a larger societal change'. We connect the focus of the performances on the individual bodily daily practices of women with the dismantling of the dominant, mediatised discourse of commemoration of the Marikana killings, which focused on the masculine, violent, and

tragic nature of the event. In this respect, in a first reflection, we explore the omnipresence of female vulnerability in the two performances as a nurturing process to rethink structural justice starting from a critical understanding of the concept of resilience. In a second reflection, we look into the staged mourning women, the main performers, in relation to the dominant role of widows in South African cultures as both performances may enact alternative identities in public space.

An Aesthetic of Vulnerability

In the words of a Marikana widow:

> Actually, who ordered the police to kill our husbands, was it Lonmin? Or, was it the government that signed that the police must kill our husbands? Today I am called a widow and my children are called fatherless because of the police. I blame the mine, the police and the government because they are the ones who control this country. … Our future is no more and I feel very hopeless because I do not know who will educate my children. My husband never made us suffer. He was always providing for us. The government has promised us that they will support us for three months with groceries, but they only gave us three things: 12.5 kg of mealie meal, 12.5 kg of flour and 12.5 kg of samp. That's it. (Alexander et al. 2013: 20)

This testimony illustrates the precarious conditions of the households of a Marikana widow. *Mari and Kana* and *Iqhiya Emnyama* focus specifically on this daily life struggle in the aftermath. Such a strong focus on struggle and vulnerability coalesces with a current scholarly debate in contemporary South African society that calls into question how the ubiquity of resilience in South African neoliberal state undermines the possibility of substantial transformation and an inherent re-thinking of social relationships in the ANC-guided neoliberal discourse (Marais 2011). For example, Marais (2011) denotes a profound quandary demonstrated in the contradictory fusion of Ubuntu and neoliberalism that may install 'the fetish of coping' (Marais 2011: 221). Ubuntu, as an African philosophical concept, calls for human principles of communitarianism, mutual assistance, and obligation based on the bonding sense of a shared humanity and wholeness. The concept became an indispensable symbol of identification for the new South Africa in the light of a united rainbow nation during the reconciliation discourse and even more in the post-Mandela era (Verdoolaege 2008). As respect for

human dignity, solidarity, restoration, and justice are values preached by Ubuntu, it incorporates the rudimentary conditions for community-level resilience. Marais (2011) observes that 'the home- and community-based care system, fits in the mould of coping dogma – not least in the central roles assigned to the sphere of the home (and to women within it)' (223). According to Marais, the female resilient subject in particular, active in South African society, continues to practice the oxymoron of successful coping strategies as she restores continuously 'a parlous and chronically insecure state of household "viability"' (Marais 2011: 221). International analyses have not been silent on the particularly problematic, gendered dimensions of an understanding of resilience at the level of the household carried out by women within the families. Those costs of resilience in the form of domestic labour, unpaid work, and the work of social reproduction are being 'rendered invisible and compounded over time' (Harrison 2013: 99). Critics argue that through its de-politicising effects, a narrow understanding of the concept of resilience may run the risk of undermining every expression of resistance and, hence, undermines a re-evaluation and re-conceptualisation of the given world (Bracke 2016; Mohaupt 2009). The transformative power of accepting vulnerability lies exactly in the generation of such a rethinking process as 'vulnerability suggests moral responsibilities for those in positions of power towards those who are less powerful' (Harrison 2013: 110).

With this at the backdrop, *Mari and Kana* and *Iqhiya Emnyama* as grieving rituals entail remarkable messages in gendered subtext by eliciting a reflection on the value of representing the daily life struggle of the mourning women against inhumanity and socio-economic inequality. They explicitly expunge a denial of vulnerability. Therefore, they foreground issues such as grief and loss as 'the fundamental sociality of embodied life' (Butler 2004: 28). The mourning of the mother figures in *Mari and Kana* is expressed in the choreography, physicality, and musicality. They throw their heads back and look up, turn their hand palms towards the sky, fall on their knees, bow, reach their hands towards the crosses. These everyday 'sedimented acts' of mourning reflect 'a series of acts which are renewed, revised, and consolidated through time' (Butler 1988: 523). The focus on the intensive grief and loss expressed by the women in *Mari and Kana* and *Iqhiya Emnyama* can involve such a point of departure to re-think another world and 'critically evaluate and oppose the conditions under which certain human lives are more vulnerable than others' (Butler

Figure 5.2 Azuza Radu, Thembekile and Anele Kose in *Mari and Kana* by Mandisi Sindo at Infecting the City 2015, produced by the Africa Centre. Photograph by Oscar O'Ryan.

2004: 30). In this respect, by calling for resistance to a narrow understanding of resilience, *Mari and Kana* and *Iqhiya Emnyama* re-politicise both the Marikana massacre itself and the precarious social arrangements of the mourning women that demand the responsibility and interrogation of politically infused power systems and structural arrangements. They may both provide an alternative and ambiguous approach to resilient

subjects expressed by embodied daily practices of mourning and grief. This embodied aesthetics of vulnerability in a public event that constantly shifts between a performance and a ritual moves beyond reassuring the known and familiar and 'pleads in favour of a logic of sensation that forces the spectator to think the yet unthought, to move beyond the solid ground of common sense and recognition' (Stalpaert 2015: 67).

An Aesthetic of Reconstructing Widowhood

The performances *Mari and Kana* and *Iqhiya Emnyama* choose to stage the unsettling stories of the widows of the Marikana massacre. Beyond providing a critical approach towards structural vulnerability and social inequality, the performances seem to elicit, through a focus on the individual daily practice of widows, a reflection on the value and feasibility of representing the daily life struggle of these women and the culturally stipulated aspect of their lives as widows. Globally seen, widows are often condemned to financially precarious living conditions due to 'discrimination in matters of inheritance, land and property right' (Owen 2001: 618). In addition to this economic impoverishment, scholars have argued that widows in diverse South African cultures are confronted with a cultural burden, as widowhood differs strongly from widowerhood in which widowers find themselves in a 'transient phase' while widows occupy a 'liminal status' (Ramphele 1996: 100). In contrast to widowers, widows and their 'relatively frail body' (Ramphele 1996: 103) are primarily present to give meaning to the deceased man's body. Considered as still being married to her deceased man, the widow stays in an ambiguous state characterised by impurity and negative beliefs. A widow is said to possess negative spirits and to embody the cause of her own man's death (Manala 2015). Hence, this liminal status is expressed in variable and often ritualised customs in which the widow's body is turned into a focal point. A widow is supposed to eat with one hand, to wear only one shoe, and to shave her head. She is prohibited from leaving the house and participating in public ceremonies (Ramphele 1996). Studies have explored the meaning and healing mechanisms of these customs within different stages of widowhood (Makatu, Wagner, and Ruane 2008; Nowye 2005) as they may remove bad luck or *senyama,* and facilitate the integration of the widow within the community (Manala 2015). Others have also denoted that these customs are 'deliberate uncaring, disrespectful, discriminatory, impolite

and unjust' (Manala 2015: 1). Widows feel encouraged by the internal and external support systems, yet feelings of isolation and stress due to the stigmatisation of widowhood and customs imposed by society are also strongly present (Manala 2015; Manyedi, Koen, and Greef 2003) as the following words of a South African widow exemplifies: 'I must just stay at home, it means I am in prison. I am not supposed to visit any house and I cannot talk to people' (Manyedi, Koen, and Greeff 2003: 78).

Widows of the Marikana massacre stem from diverse South African cultures, though both performances *Mari and Kana* and *Iqhiya Emnyama* choose to focus on mourning signifiers that refer to the daily life of a woman inhabiting the Xhosa culture. The black clothes and headscarves immediately define them as widows. In *Iqhiya Emnyama* the dragged mattresses, central objects in the performance, refer to the domestic space in which a widow is to stay during her mourning period. Further on, the repetitive flat handed face wiping and the constructed silent poses of the women, recalling photographs, remind the audience of the public silence these widows are supposed to maintain. In *Mari and Kana* and *Iqhiya Emnyama* the mourning women are manifestly symbolised through the customs of widowhood in Xhosa culture. Yet, through displaying a rupture within these customs, the performances seem also to further the emerging criticism of these customs and question their legitimacy. Both performances present widows who share their grief publicly in the midst of what seems their mourning period. Before, we mentioned how widows may suffer from isolation due to the stigmatisation of widowhood. This isolation of the widows heightens the feeling of imprisonment especially because of the expulsion from their own community in the name of cultural beliefs (Manyedi et al., 2003). By staging the widows in public as mature actors, *Iqhiya Emnyama* and *Mari and Kana* challenge the cultural value of separation and isolation.

Moreover, *Iqhiya Emnyama*, in particular, questions specifically the use of the black cloth. In current debates, the black cloth has been contested as a patriarchal construct of womanhood (Ngubane 2015) along with the restriction of the women to the domestic sphere. In the middle of *Iqhiya Emnyama* the widows rip off their black clothes and confidently perform the 'toyi toyi', a marching dance often performed in political protests. In this context, Mkaza-Siboto (2015) refers to the ground-breaking act of Graça Machel who spoke in public during her mourning period: 'Machel was convinced that people needed her voice. So she spoke up.

Figure 5.3. Khanyisile Mbongwa in *Iqhiya Emnyama – The Black Cloth* by Cindy Mkaza-Siboto at Infecting the City 2015, produced by the Africa Centre. Photography by Oscar O'Ryan.

This is exactly what happens in *Iqhiya Emnyama*. These women navigate in the situation in which they are present.'

The mattresses are easily interpreted by the spectator as a readable denotation of the mourning's domestic field. The performance starts with static sitting poses of the performers on the mattresses. Despite this obvious feature of the mattresses, the spectator's construction of the meaning of this object and its suggested cultural custom is destabilised as the spectator witnesses the emotionless facial expressions and robotised shifts of the performers' poses on the mattresses. The mattresses continue to represent performative objects that playfully shift meaning throughout the performance: The mattresses function as the walls of a house, as personifications of the lovers the widows dance with and make love to. But they also represent a source for rebellion visualised by running and jumping on the mattresses. As these mourning protocols are staged in multiple ways, *Iqhiya Emnyama* seems to challenge the cultural elements that identify the mourning widow. Therefore, during the performance the constructed identity of the widows is revised. As the image of the widow is dislocated and consequently defamiliarised, it can invoke 'uncomfortable parallels or fresh interpretations' (Flockeman 2013: 415).

Both performances, *Mari and Kana* and *Iqhiya Emnyama*, show revised traditional mourning customs and play with cultural expectations. Hence, they both enact alternative identities in a public space and facilitate a 'politics of recognition' in 'which the audience can recognize the humanity of the performers', more than the social construct of their widowhood (Sutherland 2015: 73). This recognition not only produces a potential effect on the personal and social identity of the performers as widows, but it also has political repercussions. Under Butler's assertion, 'for politics to take place, the body must appear' (2011: 3); these performances provide opportunities for intrinsic mutual processes of recognition between the audience and the performer and for this space to become political.

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PART 3

Artistic Voices as Embodied Testimonial Practices of Loss and Violence

CHAPTER 6

Introducing Poo-tee-weet?

Christel Stalpaert

Mekhitar Garabedian is a visual artist born in 1977 in Aleppo, Syria. Until 2021, he was affiliated with Kask – School of Arts as a post-doctoral practice-based researcher. Currently, he lives and works in Antwerp, Belgium. Just as his personal diasporic history is layered, his work vibrates with a multiplicity of references to literature, music, philosophy, and visual arts. Deploying a variety of media such as drawing, video, photography, and installations, he connects different languages, cultures, and histories.

In his contribution to this edited volume, this multiplicity finds expression in a deliberately exuberant use of citations. This citational exuberance not only refers to the inevitable collaborative constitution of knowledge, but also to the potential of quotes, carrying with them a counter-memory for the future, alongside his own works of art. Garabedian's work is created in response to the lack of an official testimonial forum reflecting on the epistemic injustice of silencing ongoing non-eventful forms of violence and trauma all over the world, and the Armenian Genocide in particular. His ghostly interventions function as gestures of care, countering erasure. His works of art voice the suffering and ongoing violations of sexism, racism, political oppression, and colonialism, and the daily fear of persecution that have been scantily covered in cultural trauma studies.

His *Library*-project is a good example of how Garabedian examines and reveals the notion of erasure, the position of the individual therein, and the development of identity in contemporary society shaped by migratory movements. He examines how the rupture caused by migration continues to determine the present and how multilingualism shapes the position and psyche of the migrant.

Library (Mesrob), 2006 combines an image of (Saint) Mesrob Mashtots, the inventor of the Armenian alphabet, with a page from Arnold Toynbee's *Armenian Atrocities, The Murder of a Nation* (published in 1915), of which all the lines but one have been erased with a black marker by the artist. The

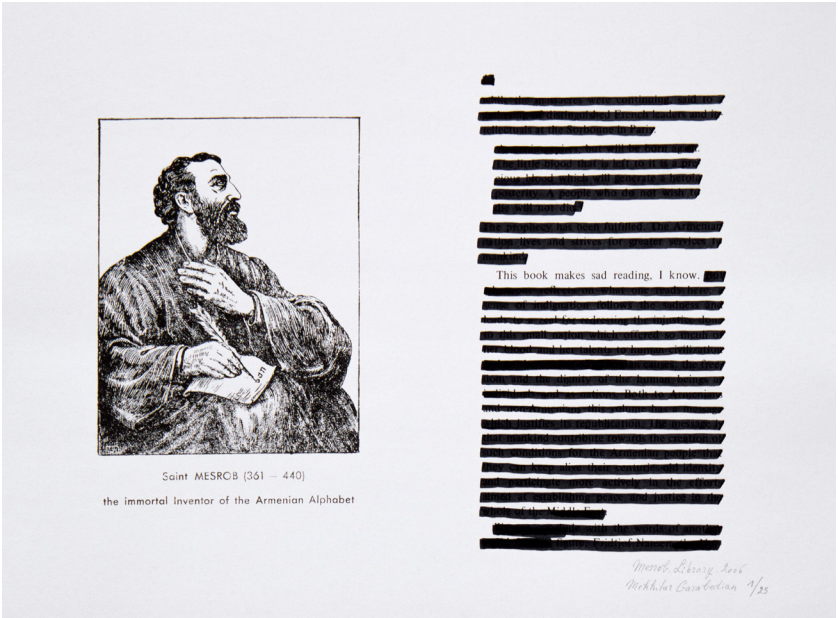

Figure 6.1. *Library (Mesrob), 2006*. Ink and marker on paper, 40 cm × 30 cm. Courtesy the artist and Baronian Gallery, Brussels. © Mekhitar Garabedian.

intertextual references in the titles of his artworks bring together the themes of language in diaspora and that of hauntology, the presence of unresolved histories in the present.

During the Venice Biennale of 2015, Garabedian participated in *Armenity*, a curatorial concept dedicating the National Pavilion of the Republic of Armenia to sixteen artists of the Armenian diaspora. For the title of the curatorial concept, curator Adelina Cüberyan von Fürstenberg was inspired by the French word *Arménité*, a notion that expresses the particular characteristics of the grandchildren of Armenian Genocide survivors. These include a state of constant flux, a diversity of self-definition, and a modern and often subjective sense of being-in-the-world.

This introduction to Garabedian's contribution also features a photograph taken from the *Armenity* exhibition. Garabedian contributed to the Armenian pavilion with, among others, a site-specific installation entitled *Untitled (Gurgen Mahari, The World is Alive, Venice), 2015*. A neon light decorates a wall of a flooded cave. It functioned as a private parking for small vaporettos used by monks of the Mekhitarist Monastery on the island of

San Lazzaro degli Armeni, Venice. The neon reads *And The World is Alive. And Van is Alive* and quotes Gurgen Mahari's novel *Burning Orchards*, which was published in 1966 and narrates the story of Van on the eve of the Armenian genocide, from approximately 1908 to May 1915. The novel was publicly condemned in Yerevan. Mahari, who was arrested by the Soviet police and stayed in Siberia from 1937 to 1947, makes Van come alive through the dialogical form of his novel, resurrecting not the historical Van, but people and things 'outside of history'. *Armenity* was being held in a setting of particular significance for the Armenian diaspora. It was on the Island of San Lazzaro, located between San Marco and the Lido and facing the Giardini of the Biennale, where the Armenian monk Mekhitar established the Mekhitarist Order in 1717. It was here that in the early nineteenth century Lord Byron studied the Armenian language. Many important works of European literature and religious texts were first translated into Armenian on this scenic island. Over its 300-year history the Monastery of San Lazzaro helped to preserve Armenia's cultural heritage. *Armenity* was awarded the Golden Lion, coinciding with the 100th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide. Garabedian's juxtaposition indicates how the Armenian diasporic identity is marked by the histories of displacement and dispossession of the Catastrophe of 1915–1916. The Catastrophe of 1915–1919 involved the systematic and radical extermination of the Armenians living in the Ottoman Empire. These acts of violence were planned and executed by the Young Turk government during World War I. The ongoingness of the Armenian trauma finds a gruesome reality in the Nagorno-Karabakh attack on 19–20 September 2023. The region of Nagorno-Karabakh is populated mainly by Armenians. The Azerbaijani military offensive against the self-proclaimed Republic of Artsakh is considered a violation of the 2020 cease-fire agreement.

Garabedian argues that the uncanny presence of the ghosts or revenants is caused by catastrophic mourning, the interdiction of mourning that is inherent to the 'genocidal will', as developed in the writings of philosopher Marc Nichanian. Echoing Tindemans' observations in this edited volume on judicial procedures and political agendas that underlie the phenomenon of truth commissions, Garabedian seems to redeem the Catastrophe from everything that tries to attach or distil meaning to and from it. For Garabedian that means liberating it *of* and *from* archives, positivist history, and other sense-making procedures. With the Catastrophe, something occurred in history that may not have occurred as a fact,

Figure 6.2 Mekhitar Garabedian. *Untitled (Gurgen Mahari, The World is Alive, Venice), 2015*. 2015, neon, 2 m × approx. 60 cm × 5 cm. Installation view, Mekhitarist Monastery of San Lazzaro degli Armeni, Venice. © Piero Demo. Courtesy the artist and Baronian Gallery, Brussels.

something occurred as the very negation of fact, something that is not presentable under the rules of knowledge, and that marks the confines wherein historical knowledge sees its competence challenged. Instead of chasing archives or histories, Garabedian welcomes the revenants or ghosts of the past in his research-based art-practice, constituting a particular mode of knowledge production that centralises thinking in ruins, fragments, and remnants.

> *And the World Is Alive. And Van Is Alive* is a neon light piece that quotes from *Burning Orchards* – a novel by Gurgen Mahari who as a child lived through the uprising and subsequent seizure of his native town of Van near Ani, before arriving in the newly-formed Republic of Armenia which, like the establishment of modern Turkey, was created artificially. Written after being exiled ten years in Siberia for his earlier writings, Mahari's novel was banned in Soviet Armenia upon its first publication in 1966, a period of national reawakening marked by massive demonstrations and the building of the first genocide memorial

complex. Censors banned the book, even forced him to rewrite it, because Mahari had depicted Van not as a glorified historical place frozen in time but a world that's very much alive, breathing through his subjective recollections of ordinary people and life, and often speaking in conflicting tenses: present, past and future. In an unexpected yet intimate setting on the island, Garabedian's piece waits to be discovered, creating a sense of awkwardness that comes from not belonging to a place, and from being outside history.

Neery Melkonian, 'Undoing Denials: Mapping a Curatorial Terrain' in *Armenity*

Poo-tee-weet?
(On Catastrophic Mourning)[1]

Mekhitar Garabedian

1. 'Le passé n'est jamais mort. Il n'est même pas passé'[2] (Godard 1993)

The Armenian diaspora is considered a 'paradigmatic', 'classical'[3] (along with the Jews) and 'victim' diaspora (along with Jews, Palestinians, Irish, and Africans), people who have survived and been displaced by catastrophe, the memories of which continue to bind them together on some level (Cohen 2003: 31). Armenian diasporic identity, around the world and for every generation since, is 'marked by the contingencies of histories of displacement and genealogies of dispossession' of the Catastrophe of 1915–16, the extermination of Armenian minorities of the Ottoman Empire (Cho 2007: 14). The Catastrophe has bound and preoccupied the personal and collective imaginations of Armenians for more than a century. In Armenian (and Jewish) diasporic experience, the communities have been forcibly scattered. The Armenians lost their land, their home, and their family. This experience of traumatic dislocation has an important, even foundational role in these diasporic communities.

In Armenian homes around the globe, the dead, the loss, and the imagined 'homeland' return, are represented on calendars, posters, in books, and songs, on such artefacts as wall tapestries, at annual remembrance ceremonies, and so on. These histories are not merely narratives of a faraway past disconnected from contemporary subjectivities and memories; they are also histories of the present. The legacies of displacement and dislocation are critical features of the present.

For Armenians, it is impossible to mourn the dead of the Catastrophe, to finally be able to bury them. I will argue that this is caused by the interdiction of mourning, which is inherent to the 'genocidal will', as developed in the writings of the French philosopher Marc Nichanian.[4] With the Catastrophe, something occurred in history that may not have occurred as fact; something occurred as the very negation of fact, something that is

not presentable under the rules of knowledge and that marks the confines wherein historical knowledge sees its competence challenged.

Nichanian's approach is, primarily, based on his extensive study of Armenian literature of the twentieth century, and has consistently led him to privilege literature over other disciplines for its treatment of the Catastrophe. The Armenian writer Zabel Essayan is a central figure in his conceptualisation of catastrophic mourning. In her novel, *Among the Ruins*, published in 1911, Essayan bears witness to the aftermath of the 1909 massacres in Adana, Cilicia. Nichanian closely considers Essayan's use of the word *ansahmaneli* in her novel to define the Catastrophe. *Sahman* means border in Armenian; the prefix *an-* in *an-sahmaneli* can be translated as 'without'. Nichanian states:

> The event is infinite, it is outside every limit; it is also not definable. No law, no speech, no definition, no limit precisely, no finitude can contain it. … The shattering of speech, of sense, and the shattering of the image come together here in a single word, in this word that qualifies the Catastrophe: *ansahmaneli.* The violence that broke out here was a violence without any assignable measure. That is why it forbids mourning. … There is mourning only where there is a measure. (Nichanian 2003: 114)

As humans, we are ultimately founded on the law of mourning. Mourning constitutes humanity and the interdiction of mourning is a denial of the human: it is inhuman. In *Le Sujet de l'histoire*, Nichanian notes: 'Il y a un lien (que nous croyions indéfectible) entre le sens et le deuil. Toute mort humaine a un sens par le deuil' (2015: 15).[5] What if this unshakable link between *sens*/meaning and mourning is undone or impossible?

Sophocles' *Antigone* insists on mourning her brother Polynices, despite Creon interdicting mourning, leaving Polynices unburied on the battlefield, and refusing to sanctify his body by holy rites. The minimal difference introduced between Oedipus' sons by the interdiction of mourning reveals the difference between human and inhuman. Antigone had the chance to rise up against an explicit interdiction. For the Armenians, however, the struggle is against an interdiction that is completely implicit, yet no less absolute. 'Même ceux qui l'ont vécue ne sont pas capables de la relater dans son intégralité. Tout le monde bégaie, soupire, pleure, ne raconte, en fin de compte, que des faits isolés,' writes Essayan (2011: 45).[6] The survivors were unable to recount the event. They stutter, certainly. What happened (to them)

remains indefinable, unnameable. As Nichanian notes: 'The Catastrophe shattered the speech that was supposed to account for it. … There remains only a speech in pieces, splinters and fragments of speech' (2003: 114, 112). For the survivors, the event remains in the present. This presence in the present of a past event is what is proper to trauma. The Catastrophe is what comes between the stricken and their speech. They are stricken in language.

The survivors could not properly bury their dead, who were massacred in unnameable ways. They lost their kin on the fields; during the deportations; from starvation and other atrocities; in the Syrian Desert; or they were violently massacred, etc. – violence without any assignable measure, beyond any measure. Only when there is a measure is meaning possible, and is mourning possible. These dead were left unburied, in places that, neither then nor today, can be visited or established as sites of mourning.[7] 'The deportations occurred in a pure non-place of death, where nothing could take place, not even death' (Nichanian 2002: 224).

The Catastrophe shatters speech, sense, and image (or language, reason, and representation) and remains beyond the limits of human comprehension, and therefore beyond the human possibility of mourning. Senseless death cannot be put into language, cannot be apprehended, and cannot be mourned. As the American writer Kurt Vonnegut notes in *Slaughterhouse-Five*, a book telling of his difficulties of writing about his survival of the bombing of Dresden, Germany:

> It is so short and jumbled and jangled, Sam, because there is nothing intelligent to say about a massacre. Everybody is supposed to be dead, to never say anything or want anything ever again. Everything is supposed to be very quiet after a massacre, and it always is, except for the birds. And what do the birds say? All there is to say about a massacre, things like *'Poo-tee-weet?'* (Vonnegut 2000: 16)

Throughout her book, Essayan wonders how to fix the Catastrophe, how to say it, when one knows that it resides in the shattering of language and that no narration can take account of it. The Catastrophe remains beyond the representable,

> beyond all possible narration (a narration supposes in any case an unshattered language, but inversely, if a narration were possible, it would not say or represent the Catastrophe), and has no name. One cannot fix it, look at it directly,

> make of it an idea or a concept, nor can one make of it an object of science or knowledge. No discipline could account for it in its essence and wholeness. There are some, Essayan says, who have before their eyes, still and always, only one scene, one moment. It is still the past event that cannot become past, linked to the extreme experience of trauma. The Catastrophe is expressed fugitively, in all its obscure fullness, in people's eyes and in the horror they reflect. The Catastrophe is the anaphoric object that passes across discourses, that never presents itself as such (as an object) for the gaze. (Nichanian 2003: 113)

The Catastrophe exceeds the terms of codifiable and calculable knowledge, of positivist knowledge. It is beyond the representable, beyond-narrative-explanations that 'make sense' of history, and it means being marked for life, and that mark is irremovable. The Catastrophe is an assault on thinking. After the Catastrophe, thinking is only structured as thinking in ruins, fragments, remnants, and marked by the untimely return of irrecoverable loss, by ghosts and *revenants*.

2. 'People don't know anything about Armenians. Even Armenians don't seem to know about Armenians' (Arlen 1976: 75)

What constitutes the Catastrophe is not the lives that will not come back, not the burned houses, not the number of dead. It is the deliberate act of violence against a collectivity, without any justice, in fact, with justice only redoubling the crime. Houses have been burned elsewhere, large numbers of lives have been taken elsewhere, and immeasurable losses have been suffered in other places. Nichanian argues that 'what is horrific, what makes collective murder a catastrophe for the victim and what makes of him someone who is stricken is the *will* to annihilation' (2003: 115). What is catastrophic for the victim is not the extermination itself, it is the *will* to extermination. What disintegrates, for generations, is having been at one time the target of a *will* to annihilation. Because the *will* to annihilation negates all meaning, and seeks to unmake the world. It is precisely this, states Nichanian, that is incomprehensible, *ansahmaneli*, 'undefinable', and that renders the Catastrophe *ansahman*, 'infinite' (2003: 115).

The survivors had to banish the event from their consciousness in order to be able to return to humanity, to be able to re-establish themselves and their community out of the remnants and ruins of what remained,

despite experiencing the unnameable. For the survivors, the atrocities were unspeakable – impossible to speak of aloud. Their speech shattered, due to their trauma, the survivors were turned into what the Libanese artist and film maker Jalal Toufic described as 'mute holes':

> The attempt by the Nazis to produce a mute hole from which no information could transpire about the final solution to exterminate all the European Jewry both succeeded even in the case of the survivors: due to their trauma, the latter became a mute hole… (Toufic 2009: 50)

The only true 'fact' of the Catastrophe is the destruction of the archive, the destruction of fact and the production of a 'mute hole'. The 'genocidal will' not only kills, exterminates, destroys lives and communities, and even the social bond, but also denies, forever. Nichanian writes: 'There is no genocide without denial. More than that: the essence of genocide is denial. Why? Because those who conceived and carried out the extermination conceived and carried out, by the same token, the elimination of every trace of their act' (Kazanjian and Nichanian 2003: 133). What makes the event catastrophic is the fact that it is denied in the very moment that it happens. The genocidal machine renders the notion or category of 'fact' perfectly null and void.[8] 'Le génocide n'est pas un fait. Ce n'est pas un fait parce que c'est la destruction même du fait, de la notion de fait, de la factualité du fait' (Nichanian 2006: 9).[9]

'The intention to eliminate, the intention to exterminate, is not catastrophic in itself. It destroys lives; it cannot destroy death. It becomes catastrophic when it destroys death, and in destroying death it destroys humanity,' argues Nichanian (Kazanjian and Nichanian 2003: 134). The 'genocidal will' destroys death, the fact of death, and the archives.[10] The essence of genocide is the destruction of the archives. An erasing of the memory of the massacre follows the massacre. In the Armenian case, as in the Jewish case, the perpetrators did not publish, nor did they leave behind any official document that would announce their intentions and their decisions. The essence of genocide is the destruction of the archives. No trace of death was to be left behind or remain, either in memory or in space. Nothing comes out of the camps. Nothing was supposed to come out of the camps. Indeed, 'L'oubli de l'extermination fait partie de l'extermination,' as film maker Jean-Luc Godard states in *Histoire(s) du cinema* (1998: 111).[11]

'Genocide is a crime that never existed, that never took place, that never occurred as an event for anyone' (Kazanjian and Nichanian 2003:

134). The perpetrator's perverse intelligence is to implicitly command the interdiction of mourning at the core of the genocidal act. The Armenians were barred from mourning.

In the moment it is being carried out, the 'genocidal will' contains, as part of its very nature, its own denial, forcing its victims to enter into the game of proof, the game decided by the executioner. 'The Catastrophe consists in this necessity to provide proof' (Kazanjian and Nichanian 2003: 134). It is this will to destroy the factuality of the fact that operates, always invisible, in the background of state negation. The 'genocidal will' denies forever, destroying humanity, the possibility of mourning, and of history – imposing an interdiction of history. 'History, here, as a discipline is perfectly powerless' (Nichanian 2002: 14).

The genocidal will cancels, at the very heart of the event, the factuality of fact. Nichanian stresses the difference between an event and a fact. He refers to the following proposition of Jean-François Lyotard: 'avec Auschwitz, quelque chose de nouveau a eu lieu dans l'histoire, qui ne peut être qu'un signe et non un fait' (1983: 92).

I quote Lyotard, in translation, in a longer passage:

> They will say that history is not made of feelings, and that it is necessary to establish the facts. But, with Auschwitz, something new has happened in history (which can only be a sign and not a fact), which is that the facts, the testimonies which bore the traces of here's and now's, the documents which indicated the sense or senses of the facts, and the names, finally the possibility of various kinds of phrases whose conjunction makes reality, all this has been destroyed as much as possible. (Lyotard 1988: 57)

Lyotard continues by demanding that the historian considers not only the reality, 'but also the meta-reality that is the destruction of reality' (Lyotard 1988: 57). Or in the words of Nichanian: to consider 'the destruction of fact, of the notion of fact, of the factuality of fact' (2009: 9).

Lyotard concludes:

> Auschwitz is the most real of realities in this respect. Its name marks the confines wherein historical knowledge sees its competence impugned. It does not follow from that that one falls into non-sense. The alternative is not: either the signification that learning [*science*] establishes, or absurdity, be it of the mystical kind (1988: 58).

As Giorgio Agamben, similarly, states: 'The aporia of Auschwitz is, indeed, the very aporia of historical knowledge: a non-coincidence between facts and truth, between verification and comprehension.' (Agamben 2002: 12). With the Catastrophe, something occurred in history that may not have occurred as fact, something occurred as the very negation of fact, something that is not presentable under the rules of knowledge and that marks the confines wherein historical knowledge sees its competence challenged. History as a discipline is absolutely ineffective, as it deals with facts, and studies their origin and consequences, but the event here is not a fact, and thus it cannot be the object of a historical approach.

3. 'Pour savoir il faut s'imaginer' (Didi-Huberman 2003: 11)[12]

In the second half of the twentieth century, the term *hay tahd*, 'the Armenian case', rose to prominence. How much recognition is enough recognition? The intense lobbying for recognition on the parts of Armenian advocacy groups in U.S. political circles, and triumphal claims to remind us today about 'the Armenian Genocide' demand great scepticism, however justified such claims might be.

What Essayan laboured to mourn as an unnameable event cannot be transformed into a 'case', as it cannot be fully understood in juridical terms. As such, Nichanian seeks to liberate the Catastrophe of everything that transforms it into an object, an instance, or a fact, of everything that gives a delusory meaning to it. The term 'Genocide' attempts to define, to lend meaning to the indefinable, and transforms the event into an object in order to proceed with its due prosecution. The unnameable consequently becomes entombed within the discursive of practices of positivist law. The fact that we, humans, are ultimately founded on the law of mourning, and the disseminating power of the Catastrophe remain strangely dismissed. Every time one speaks of recognition of the 'Genocide', one appeals to the power of the archive, one asks that the event be recognised as fact. Any discourse of recognition therefore affirms and counts on the archiving of testimony, as there is no fact without archive, and consequently no fact without archiving, without the *becoming-archive* of testimony and the functioning of testimony as proof. Time and time again, one answers the injunction of the executioner, who demands: 'Prove it.' The recognition

of genocide and the search for some form of calculable reparation cannot be the basis of the formation of a national or diasporic Armenian identity.

Each time proof is requested – and proof is constantly requested – one is again in front of the executioner; you have to give an account of your own torture, your own death under torture. The victims are forced into the game of proof, the game of the executioner who denies, 'forcing the victims, thus, to dispossess themselves of their memory and their death, of the very possibility of mourning. Memory and death are transformed immediately into an archive that should serve as proof' (Kazanjian and Nichanian 2003: 134). What is at stake here is the transformation of testimony into archive, the submitting of testimony to 'the violence of the archive itself, *as archive, as archival violence*' (Derrida 1996: 7), and so dispossessing the subject of the very possibility of mourning and of every memory that would be their own.

Nichanian's project in *La Perversion historiographique*, as Agamben's in *Remnants of Auschwitz*, is to liberate testimony from any historical use, from any attempt to read it as if it were destined to provide proof or to establish facts, to save testimony from the archive, to save memory from the *becoming-archive* of testimony. Both want to think testimony *against* and *counter to* the archive. Their thesis is that the Holocaust and the Catastrophe both represent a radical crisis of testimony. These events appear as 'the unprecedented, inconceivable historical advent of *an event without a witness*, an event which historically consists in the scheme of the literal *erasure of its witness*' (Felman 2000: 110).

Nichanian's aim is to interrogate the realist position of the historian and to underscore the necessity of thinking the category of testimony from entirely different premises than those of objective history, archives, facts, and documents – as documents are always 'instrumentalised'. Nichanian marks the limits of historiography in regard to the genocidal event. It is not for testimony to refute, to serve as proof. Evidence is not intended to request justice. That is only the instrumentalisation of evidence.

History demands archives. Historians look for proofs and facts, knowing that genocide is the destruction of (the factuality of) fact, that the essence of genocide is denial. A historian who prefers to forego this fundamental premise – that a genocidal regime sacrifices history itself on the path of its crime – implicates himself as an accessory to the perversion of history. This is what Nichanian considers the historiographic perversion.

Historians are the masters of the archives and the guardians of sense and meaning, the guarantors of facts. They ask for archives, even when they are inaccessible or non-existent, and even when all the facts are already recognised. They demand proofs while they affirm, rightly, the primacy of interpretation over the proof. 'La logique de la preuve, c'est la logique du bourreau' (Nichanian 2006: 84).[13] By demanding proof, the historians are repeating the act of the executioners. The adherents of historicism, inevitably, empathise with the victor. As Benjamin advances, *even the dead* will not be safe from the enemy, who has not ceased to be victorious (1999: 247–8). In his 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', he argues that 'universal history has no theoretical armature. Its method is additive; it musters a mass of data to fill the homogeneous, empty time' (1999: 254).

Control of the past, of which archives survive, is no small matter. Disappearance is the rule. Annihilation is the fate of whole cities, cultures, peoples; there is far more destroyed than there is preserved. In fact, in regard to the destruction of memory, there is nothing new in the case of the genocides of the twentieth century. As Nichanian writes:

> Les conquérants ont toujours détruit les archives des peuples conquis. Les colonisateurs se sont toujours débrouillés pour que les archives reflètent leur point de vue sur l'histoire et non point celui des colonisés. On a toujours converti, massacré, anéanti, en anéantissant aussi la mémoire même de la conversion et de l'anéantissement, en effaçant les monuments, les tombes, les stèles funéraires, les traces du sacré, les lieux de la vie et les lieux de la mort, du deuil. Non seulement on a supprimé les vies mais on a toujours fait en sorte, un peu partout dans le monde, que ces vies n'aient jamais été,' states Nichanian. (Nichanian 2006: 145)[14]

For Armenians today, the present remains shadowed by a past event, because the event cannot be mourned, by a loss that imbues the present, with a specific haunting, a 'postmemory', which at its core is untranslatable, for the event can only be qualified as *ansahmaneli*, beyond language, reason, representation, and archival fact. It is an event that will remain in the haunted present, as no mourning is possible. 'The event is beyond all reason, all history, certainly all memory as well. That is why the survivor cannot escape madness,' notes Nichanian (2002: 15).

Archive fever not only refers to the compulsive drive of historians to facts and proofs, it also prohibits any reflection or interpretation on the Catastrophe beyond the discourse of proof and recognition. As such,

the Catastrophe has created an absolute past; allowing only an approach of the past through the framework of propaganda war and nationalistic vision. The past can only be approached in terms of heroising, as the discourse of proof and recognition prevents any serious thinking about our own past, and our history.

The Catastrophe can only be approached indirectly. The only thing that can be done after a catastrophe is to transform it into creation. The Catastrophe cannot be said, but it can be written as literature, composed as music, transformed into art, as long as it opposes the interdiction of mourning and bears witness to the impossibility of speaking. Meaning does not emerge from history, but from fiction.

Notes

1 This essay is a thoroughly revised and abridged version of the chapter 'Diasporic Haunting' (137–73) from Garabedian's PhD in the arts: *To a Stranger from a Stranger* (Gent: ARA-Mer – Kask – School of Arts and UGent, 2015).

2 The quote, which appears as an inter-title in the film, is very probably appropriated by Godard from William Faulkner's *Requiem for a Nun* (1951). 'The past is never dead. It isn't even past.' See http://fr.wikiquote.org/wiki/William_Faulkner (accessed 11 December 2017). .

3 On the Armenian diaspora being considered a 'paradigmatic', 'classical' diaspora, see also: Safran, W. (1991), 'Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return', *Diaspora*, 1 and *Clifford*, J. (1994), '*Further Inflections*: Toward Ethnographies of the *Future*', *Cultural Anthropology*, 9 (3): *302–38*.

4 In reference to 'the interdiction of mourning', I quote the translator's note (by Jeff Fort). 'It should be mentioned that the French word *interdiction* comes from the verb *interdire*, which means to prohibit or to forbid (see the May 1968 slogan: "Il est interdit d'interdire," it is forbidden to forbid); but it can also mean, especially in the form *interdit* (which the author uses frequently and which I also translate as *interdiction*), being dumbfounded or stymied, stricken to silence, unable to respond, and so forth. Thus an "interdit" is speech (*-dit*) that comes between (*-inter*) someone and something they would do, but it is also what comes between someone and his or her own speech ("barring" speech, as I translate once below), making it impossible to know what to say, reducing one to silence. The importance of this connotation will be very clear in what follows' (Fort 2003: 120).

5 'There is a link, which we believe is unshakable, between meaning and mourning. All human death has meaning through mourning' (my translation).
Every year the remembrance of the Catastrophe is turned into a call for recognition, limiting an authentic remembrance of the Catastrophe. Since the 1960s the Armenians (in diaspora) from the Middle East, Europe, and the U.S. have been calling systematically on their own governments for recognition of the events as genocide. While many countries around the world have since recognised the genocide, the U.S. still haven't. Therefore, the Armenian diaspora in the U.S. is still very vocal and organised in their quest for recognition. The incessant iteration and reiteration of the

discursive practices of *hay tahd* offer one example of the relentlessness with which the victims still need to prove their own death.

Furthermore, in the last decades, in the U.S., Armenians are emerging as plaintiffs effectively pursuing a complete admission by or a guilty verdict against Turkish defendants for a documentable and juridically determinable crime, followed, of course, by the crude calculation of reparations.

6 'Those who lived through it are also incapable of recounting it as a whole. Everyone stammers, sighs, weeps, and can bring out only bits of pieces of the events' (Essayan 2003: 112).

7 Robert Fisk, Middle-East correspondent for *The Independent*, writes in his article, 'Dead Reckoning: Holocaust vs. holocaust', published 5 August 2000: 'In the spring of 1993, with my car keys, I slowly unearthed a set of skulls from the clay wall of a hill in northern Syria. … It took a 101-year-old Armenian woman to locate the river bed where her family were murdered in World War I. The more I dug into the hillside next to the Habur river, the more skulls slid from the earth. … Backbones, femurs, joints… There were dozens of skeletons here. … It was a place of horror' (Fisk 2006: 7).

8 On the functioning of the genocidal machine, see Marc Nichanian, 'La dénégation au cœurs du génocide', in *Rwanda, Un génocide au XXe siècle* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1995); and Yves Ternon, *Enquête sur la négation d'un génocide* (Marseille: Parenthèses, 1989).

On the functioning of the genocidal machine with its two levels, Nichanian states, 'The double level of orders: clear orders and encrypted orders; the double level of the machine of power: the normal government and the party that decides unhandedly; the double level of the killers and executors, with an official and a secret Special Organization, the latter financed with the party's funds' (Nichanian 2002: 14).

9 'Genocide is not a fact. Genocide is not a fact because it is the very destruction of fact, of the notion of fact, of the factuality of fact' (Nichanian 2009: 1).

10 Before being arrested (in 1918–19), the leaders of the Young Turks and those of the Special Organization destroyed all their archives. 'The trials of 1919 in Istanbul, conducted by Turkish military courts under pressure from British occupiers, would in fact conclude that there was "in existence a plan aiming to exterminate the Armenian people," but also that, by 1922, the issues of the official Turkish journal covering the period of the trials were going to vanish in their entirety – and with them the very minutes of those trails. … The supplements of the *Takvimi Vekayi*, the official Turkish journal, covering the period of the trails, were discovered and studied in the 1960s by an Armenian scholar who signed his work (written in Armenian) by the name Krieger (an acronym of Krikor Guerguerian). More recently, Vahakn Dadrian has finally devoted an exhaustive study to these trials, written from the juridical point of view, in the *Yale Journal of International Law* 14.2 (1989)' (Nichanian 2009: 28, 164).

11 'The forgetting of the extermination is part of the extermination' (my translation).

12 'In order to know, we must *imagine* for ourselves' (Didi-Huberman 1998: 3).

13 'The logic of proof is the logic of the murderer' (Nichanian 2009: 47).

14 'Conquerors have always destroyed the archives of conquered peoples. Colonizers have always managed so that the archives would reflect their perspective on history rather than the perspective of the colonized. One has always converted, massacred, annihilated, while also annihilating the very moment of the conversion and the annihilation, erasing the monuments, the tombs, the funerary stones, the traces of the sacred, the sites of life and the sites of death, of mourning. Not only has one erased lives but one has always acted in order that, just about anywhere in the world, these lives would never have been' (Nichanian 2009: 83–4).

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CHAPTER 7

Introducing Man on a Horse

Samah Hijawi[1]

In her practice-based research, the Jordanian/Palestinian, Brussels-based artist Samah Hijawi explores performative and collaging practices in deconstructing colonial representations of Palestine in art and popular culture. Her artistic work is guided by the question; what are 'the aesthetics of the political'? which is concerned with understanding, and finding form for the performative act of resistance in a work of art. Her contribution to this edited volume, *Man on a Horse*, is adapted from the script of her lecture performance with the same title from 2019. In this work she uses the collaging of images, artworks, histories, and personal memories to deconstruct the representations of power, as well as subjugation.

Collage Methodology

This collage methodology allows Hijawi to capture the idea of colonial violence, from the perspective of the colonised.

First, the deconstruction of the images through collage suggests a discontinuity in aesthetic forms of expression due to episodes of war and violence. It provides opportunities for a non-linear narrative structure to unfold – a structure that is closer to the experience of trauma and rupture, which often comes through a series of fragments of images and sounds, and physical sensations. Also, this bringing together of fragments of texts, images, and personal experiences, as well as theoretical voices that gather around an event, is more faithful to the logics of retelling a story from the experience of the colonised. The colonial story has a 'logical' linearity, a linearity of one event proceeding the next as recounted from the perspective of a distant observer – not from the experience of a participant in it. In the experience of being inside the event, and especially if you are experiencing violence, events are not registered chronologically. Traumatic events are not recounted fully, or in detail, as they are in history books, but are, rather, remembered and retold through painful, more personal

incidents, with many arguments, images, personal facts, anecdotes, and references that are pulled together to support the argument. From the perspective of an academic argument, or from the logics of power, these stories are often regarded as baseless. A collaged story echoes in fact the experience of rupture and discontinuity that the colonised experienced.

Second, the collage methodology also allows Hijawi to deconstruct the colonial narrative in the production of (art) images. These support the exoticisation of other places and cultures in the explorer's or traveller's experience. These images feature in history and archaeology magazines of the time and refer to the excavations of European countries around the world, from which the looting of artefacts helped to create the cultural capital of Europe. Art books, including the catalogue of The Royal Museum of Fine Arts in Brussels, as well as other art books showing Orientalist paintings, constitute a gaze of power on other people and on other landscapes or cities.

Images of Art

Man on a Horse takes the representation of Palestine in two European/Belgian artworks as the starting point.

The first artwork is a painting that hangs in the Royal Museum of Fine Arts in Brussels, by the Flemish artist Pieter Bruegel the elder, titled *Census at Bethlehem* (1546). The painting depicts a scene in a village, with a group of people in the foreground gathered around a large building, and in the middle are children and adults skating on an ice pond. In the centre foreground, the biblical figure of Joseph is leading a donkey who carries the pregnant Mary on its back. All the elements of the painting, the trees, the architecture of the houses, the way people are dressed, the people skating on an iced-over pond, and the grey tones of the snow scene are obviously Flemish, not Palestinian.

The second is a sculpture by Eugene Simonis, which is located in the public space of Place Royal in the centre of Brussels. The monument depicts the historical figure Godefroid de Bouillon. De Bouillon was born a thousand years ago in the southern region of the modern state of Belgium. He led the European armies on the first crusade, which began in 1097, to free Jerusalem from Muslim rule. His claim to fame is in the fact that one of the soldiers of his battalion was finally able to break through the walls of the city, with the result that Jerusalem fell into Christian hands in

1099 – marking the first crusade. The plaque on the monument in Brussels describes de Bouillon as 'The 1st King of Jerusalem, born in Brabant, died in Palestine in 1100'. This monument was erected in 1846, ten years after the declaration of the Belgian state and is a landmark in the formation of the Belgian identity.

As a way of shifting the story of power embedded in these two artworks, Hijawi appropriates the historical narratives of these works into her own histories and geographies. In this performance, she tells the story of a copy of the Bruegel painting hanging in her family home in Nablus, and extends the biography of Godefroid de Bouillon, arguing that Arabic sources reveal that he did not die in Palestine (as European narratives claim), but in fact fled south to the Arabian Peninsula where he joined the powerful and famous local tribe of Bani Abs.

During the performance, she cuts the image of the Bruegel's painting from the Royal Museum's catalogue and collages it alongside images and landscapes from magazines on history, archaeology, and travel, as a way of questioning the European gaze and imagination of Palestine. In her contribution to this edited volume, she combines Arab and European sources to fabulate an alternative history as a way to decolonise hegemonic narratives of victory and colonial power.

Personal and Theoretical Strategies of Knowledge Production

Hijawi deliberately incorporates personal and theoretical strategies of knowledge production in her alternative (hi)story. Drawing from ancient and contemporary writing styles the script follows non-linear structures inspired by the ancient *Hakawati* form of storytelling, as well as contemporary influential authors like Donna Haraway, Salman Rushdie, and Maggie Nelson. The book mixes philosophical theories with personal anecdotes, memories, and familial bloodlines. In this way, she is responding and speaking back to hegemonic historical narratives in a style that is inviting also non-experts to read along. In Natalie Loveless's words, Hijawi opens up the university to different 'writerly vocalities' and to different 'tangible forms as valid modes of rendering research public' (2019). Hijawi's personal, insider's perspective also allows her to overcome the academic outsider's gaze, a gaze that is described by writer and curator Irit Rogoff as 'an apparatus of investigation, verification, surveillance and cognition … to sustain the traditions of Western post-Enlightenment'.

She tries to fabricate a story of art histories – in the plural – that imagines 'world art' from a position of non-hierarchy. She tells it – in the tradition of the Hakawati – as one story with many interwoven tales. Derived from the Arabic root word Hāka, the Hakawati is described by Azzan El-Masri as both a narrative form, and a noun to describe the storyteller who would relay woven tales over several sittings in large settings such as qahwas traditional coffee shops (or in the open-air). Their tales helped to preserve Arab heritage and civilisation, not only in their content but also in their setting (Masri 2015).

The non-hierarchical, insider's perspective allows Hijawi not to talk *about* people, objects, and events, but to talk *with* and to speak *to* the persons and images that are entangled with her own (hi)stories. This also accounts for the historical figures that come alive in her story, as well as for the specialists and writers commenting on the historical events.

Reasoning and Resonating with Research Companions

Having the reader imagine the historical figures to come alive in our mind's eye, Hijawi brings in the notion of performativity. Mingling historical facts with imaginative power, the words of the Balfour Declaration of 1917 are rendered performative. She has us imagine the historical figure of Balfour reading out loud his letter that would become the Balfour Declaration after signing it, foregrounding in this way the particular role he *plays* as the British Foreign Officer.

The Balfour Declaration was a letter, issued in 1917, by the British minister of foreign affairs, Arthur James Balfour, to Lionel Walter Rothschild, member of one of the richest British bankers' families at the time. The letter was meant to be addressed to the Zionist Federation and to support the establishment of 'a national home for the Jewish people'. The Palestinian-American writer and scholar Edward Said called the Balfour Declaration 'a project set up by European superpowers on non-European territory, completely excluding the presence and wishes of the natives living on that land' (Said 2017, translation mine). Jonathan Schneer, a specialist in modern British history, also pointed it out as a key document in the Arab-Israeli conflict in his study on *The Balfour Declaration* (2012).

Rather than quoting from these writers, Hijawi has Said in dialogue with Balfour. Rather than quoting from Said's *Peace and its Discontents* (1995), his *Reflections on Exile* (2020), *Representations of the Intellectual*

(1994), or *After the Last Sky* (1986), she includes a criticality from within. As such, Said operates as a research companion, rather than a critic or a historian with the outsider's eye, bringing along evidence for the author in search for 'the truth'. Through this performative practice, Hijawi (with the help of Said) reveals the rhetorical performativity of figures featuring in a historical document, indicating that these historical documents divide the characters who have power, and speak the English language with confidence and authority… and the characters that are spoken for – who are in this case the non-Jewish communities in Palestine. The rhetorical value of the pronoun 'we' (meaning the British Government) is revealed as supporting this dividing rhetorical performativity.

The anachronism in bringing Said and Balfour together is an artistic freedom with mind-blowing effect. Hijawi's voice is carried along all the contextual references, making fantastical jumps from one story to another, is located in different histories, across different times, and in various geographies. Hijawi calls this her learning to speak with situated knowledge, following Donna Haraway's advice for stringing and storytelling for earthly survival (2016).[2] The humour does not downsize the event, but it makes the encounter all the more a human one. Weaving in and out of fact and fiction, Hijawi uses critical fabulation as a methodology to question the role of images and stories of power in the colonial (hi) story. The playfulness in the performative rendering of history opens the door for hypothetical settings to re-imagine history in a form of writing that cultural historian Saidiya Hartman refers to as critical fabulation: a writing methodology that combines historical and archival research with critical theory and fictional narrative (33).

Moving beyond Paralysing Positions of Victimhood

The playfulness in the anachronistic rhetorical performativity also overcomes the often-paralysing positions that colonial systems put in place of power and victimhood. The underlying intention is to find grounds to be critical of both coloniser and colonised. Due to the ongoing colonisation of Palestine, critique remains directed at the occupier and their supporters, but internal reflection is mostly missing. This prompted Hijawi to find a language for critique of this state of what Said describes as the frozen immobility of attitudes, a stuck-ness in the quotidian language and everyday stories that paint a utopian impression of the past (1995: 144).

The theme of the family is for that matter a means for Hijawi for internal reflection, to place herself in relation to the older generation of artists, and to take their given names, as 'fathers' of Palestinian art, literally. The relationality in a familial bloodline places her in a linage, and introduces the concept of an inheritance. By deconstructing the image of perfection painted by the older generation of Palestine, she reproduces the ongoing rupture and displacement of people from each other and from their lands. But this inheritance also reveals itself as very patriarchal. There is never a mention of the 'mothers' of (any) art, which indeed further complicates the inheritance of male hierarchy in the histories of the colonised. So, as a tribute to the many women who were, and continue to be, an active force in artistic production, and as a response to gendered narratives, her story places the female characters of herself and her (adopted) grandmother Tamam Al Akhal[3] in the centre of the story.

Notes

1 Christel Stalpaert operated as a ghostwriter to write the introduction to *Man on a Horse* on the basis of Samah Hijawi's PhD manuscript and her own observations while attending Hijawi's lecture performances. Usually, the ghostwriter disappears behind the main author and remains anonymous. Hijawi, however, insisted that the co-author-as-ghostwriter is acknowledged and credited. Both authors agreed that the writing service of Christel Stalpaert would be mentioned in an endnote to the text. Writing about Hijawi in the third-person singular adds a particular performativity to the introduction that is in line with Hijawi's practice-based research.

2 'Story Telling for Earthly Survival' is also the title of a film about Donna Haraway, directed by Fabrizio Terranova in 2016.

3 'Tamam Al-Akhal is a Palestinian artist and educator living in Jordan. Born in Jaffa, the daughter of Aref Al Akhal, in 1948, Al-Akhal left with her family to live in a refugee camp in Lebanon. She studied at the Fine Arts College in Cairo. From 1957 to 1960, she taught art at the Makassed Girls College in Beirut' (Akḥal and Ghānim 2016). Tamam is also a close family friend of Samah Hijawi, and someone she visited often over the years. She and her late husband Ismael Shammout's exhibitions in Kuwait in 1984 and 1989 were the first painting exhibitions Hijawi saw as a child.

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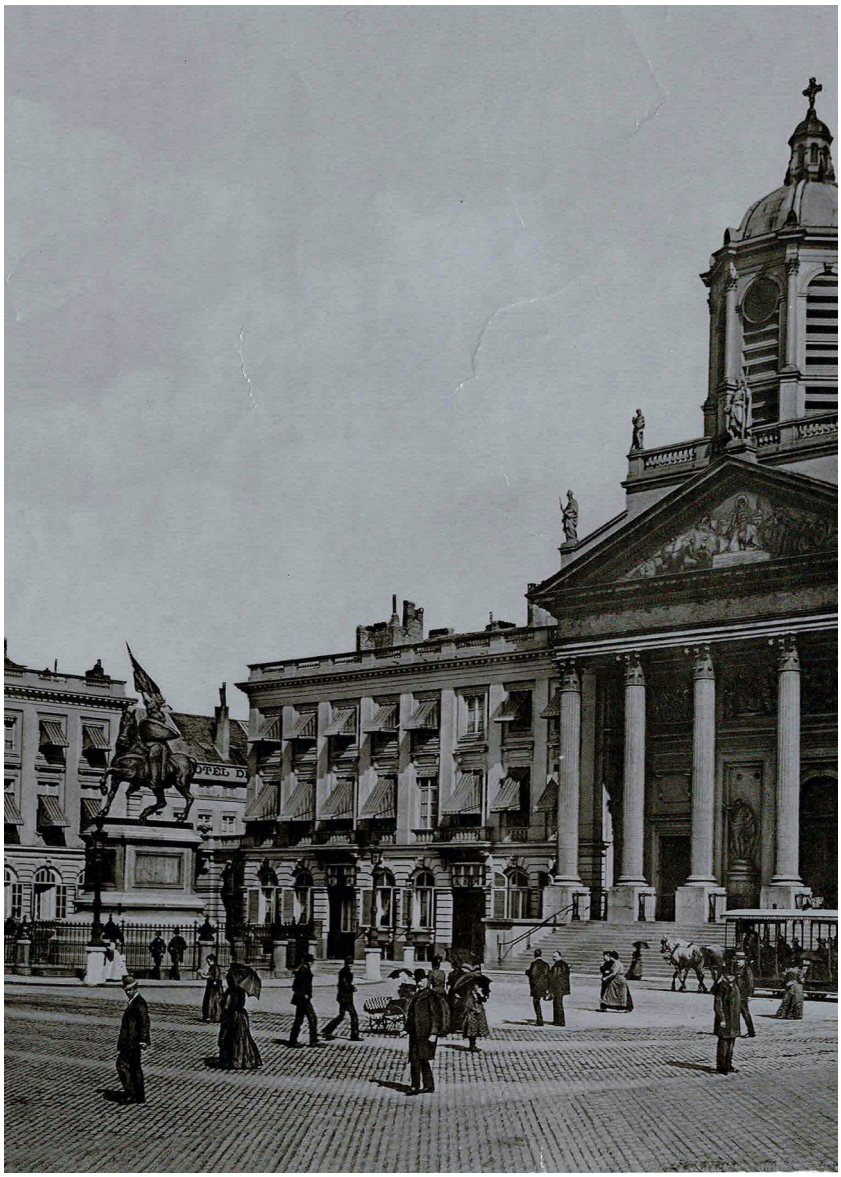
Man on a Horse[1]

Samah Hijawi

After about four years in Belgium I finally found an apartment I could see myself living in for a long period time, a place where I could make a home. The apartment is in a 1950s building on rue des Champs Elysées, in the commune of Ixelles. I tell my parents that they can proudly tell their friends that their daughter lives on one of the most famous streets in the world – if they leave out the fact that it is in Brussels rather than Paris. My friends tell me it looks like the apartment I was renting in Jordan – perhaps that is why I feel very at home in it. From my new home, a daily bicycle ride to my workspace takes me right by a monument on Place Royal in Brussels' Museum Quarter, of a man riding a horse.

Across Europe there are many monuments of men riding horses; they are a visual landmark synonymous with the notion of 'high culture' in Europe, on which capital is built, and power is maintained. I take a moment to imagine what Europe's cultural worth would be without these artworks in the public space. As I write, the sculpted hands of some of these figures are being sawn off, in a powerful gesture of protest by the children of the colonised. I consider it an action to remind us of the atrocities that the colonisers were responsible for. Meanwhile, oblivious tourists huddle for a selfie in front of these monuments, posing to upgrade their personal cultural capital, with no knowledge (or care perhaps?) of the story behind the artistic representations of power.

This particular monument on Place Royale was erected in 1848. The government of the then, recently formed Belgian state decided to erect a monument for its very own King of Jerusalem. At that time the government was looking for a hero with a grand legacy on which they could construct their newly formed national identity. Situated in the middle of the square on Place Royal, the man on the horse is overlooking the Grand Place, the historical centre of the city – a fitting location for a king. The monument is also in the middle of an important road in Brussels that forms a straight line between the colossal building of the Palace of Justice to the south, and Saint Mary's Church, in the northern part of the city.



From the way the animal is standing, it is clear that he is a stallion. He has strong muscular limbs, flared nostrils, a bewildered look in his eyes… and a fresh-out-of-bed-look mane hangs over a perfectly arched neck. Stallions are notorious for being quite fussy, and rather troublesome animals. They are constantly fidgeting and dancing around; you ask them to go forward but they want to go backwards… They bite and they kick… so *only* the b-r-a-v-e would dare ride a stallion.

And the brave man sitting in this saddle is heavily armoured. On one arm he is carrying a shield, and he is holding a flag on a long staff in the other, with a crown on his head. His chin is held-up-high, he is looking at something far beyond the distance… and the expression on his face is as if he has just-seen-a-ghost. The plate at the bottom of the monument reads:

GODEFROID DE BOUILLON
FIRST KING OF JERUSALEM 1099
BORN IN BRABANT
DIED IN PALESTINE 1100

The absurdity of a King of Jerusalem in Belgium got me started in 2017 reading Arab and European crusader histories, and the different forms of occupation and colonisation of Palestine and the surrounding region over the last 1,000 years, up to the most recent one with the formation of the state of Israel, which was born out of the Balfour Declaration. This declaration resulted from a pact made after World War I between the British and French at the turn of the 1900s. A Google search of these three words reveals that the letter, which wrote off the lives of the native people into a violent and meticulous erasure of their bodies and their history in Palestine, was merely sixty-seven words long. The year 2017 also marked the 100th commemoration of the Balfour Declaration, and people around the world were protesting both online and on the streets. Meanwhile, in academia, new research continued to build a body of literature on the ongoing mechanisms of settler colonialism. As a part of the continuum of the different forms of protest and resistance against this injustice, I want to invite you to take a few minutes to do a visual meditation. But before you continue reading, could I ask you to please make sure that your mobile phone is completely silent, so that nothing disturbs the coming few moments. And please sit back in your chair and try to relax. Read every word slowly and actively, so that they can conjure up images in your mind.

> It is a cold November day in London, in 1917. You are walking with quite a fast pace on the pavement on Downing Street, passing by people dressed in long coats with umbrellas held down tightly to shield from the wind and rain the city is notorious for.
>
> These days in London, there is a general air of agitation in the cold heart of empire.
>
> You stop just outside the large doors of a Victorian style-building. You step in, fold your umbrella and shake off the rain, then make your way across its atrium towards a wide set of stairs on your right-hand side. As you climb up the short steps of the marbled stairs you notice the enormous mural painted on the wall in front of you… A classical-style painting, depicting people sitting in the clouds, their pale pink skin tones vibrate against a crisp blue sky.

The large full bodies of the people in the painting give the impression of living an easy life in paradise.

At the top of the stairs you turn left and walk along the open corridor that has a balcony overlooking the large atrium on the ground floor. You reach the door at the end, and the sign on the front of the door reads:
The British Foreign Office.
You open the door, step inside and gently close the door behind you. At this point you will have to imagine yourself transforming from your human body, into a fly that sits on the wall – so as not to disturb the solitary movements of the man in the office.

The room is spacious and well-lit by the tall windows along one side of the room, banked on either side with heavy blue velvet curtains, drawn in the middle with sashes. At the far end is a heavy teak wooden desk furnished with a table lamp, a leather mat on the desk (that makes writing more comfortable), and a fountain pen placed in the centre-top part of the desk. The most distinct feature in the room is the wall-to-wall, floor-to-ceiling library on your left. The titles on the spines of some of the books:

The Political Life of the Queens of England
Empire
How to Plan a Crusade; Reason and Religious War in the Middle Ages
The Art of Building War Ships

In the middle are several old leather manuscripts with no titles… and next to them:

Interpretations of Hinduism, the Vedas and the Upanishads
Kipling; Road to Mandalay
The African Wanderings; with a particular Glance at the Races of Bilad āl-Sudān

On the shelf below:

Songs of the Sea; Pearl Divers of Arabia
Hand Gestures of Bengali Women and Their Children

On a separate table next to the library is a large, hand-printed volume with the title:

The Secret Maps of the British East India Trading Company

On the opposite wall there is a large painting depicting a man on a horse painted in mid-action holding a shield in one arm and a flag on a staff in the other. The inscription on the bottom of the frame (also) reads: *Godefroid de Bouillon, The 1st King of Jerusalem 1099.* Sitting to the left underneath the painting is the British Foreign Officer Sir Arthur James Balfour. On the coffee table beside him are a few books that he has picked out from his library, and on top of the pile is the letter the Balfour Declaration. Sir Balfour reaches out for the letter, and puts on his reading glasses.

(You are about to witness a performative reading that Mr. Balfour will do in private. He will now read the letter out loud with the precise intonations that will convey – to its readers on the other side of the Pacific Ocean in the United States – the political position from which the letter is written. And before the reading begins, I want to invite the writer and scholar Edward Said, who wrote the seminal book 'Orientalism', to give us some clues on the tone and the posture in which the reading of the letter is performed.)

First, *E. Said* talks about a *rhetorical performativity*: Balfour's short speech is significant for the *particular role he plays* as the British Foreign Officer. This type of performativity is best applied in the opening part of the letter.

> *Dear Lord Rothschild,*
> *I have much pleasure in conveying to you, on the behalf of His Majesty's-Government, the following declaration of sympathy…*

And then *Said* talks about how the *tone represents a variety of characters… some of these characters have power,* and they speak the English language with confidence and an air of authority… while the other characters are spoken for. This intonation of power comes through in phrases such as:

> *it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine.*

And, finally, emphasis is made on particular words, especially the words that allude to the pronoun 'we', meaning the British Government, which are used with the full weight of a distinguished man who feels that he knows all that is best:

> *His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavors to facilitate the achievement of this object.*

And as is usual for these kinds of letters, the ending comes with a touch of grace and a little humility… while still maintaining a slight tone of the upper hand:

> *I should be grateful if you would bring this declaration to the knowledge of the Zionist Federation.*
>
> *Yours sincerely,*
> *Arthur James Balfour*
>
> *The British Foreign Office*
> *November 2nd, 1917*

Mr Balfour then gets up from his armchair and walks over to his desk where he sits down, and places the paper on the leather mat as he reaches out for the pen in the pen holder. After a second or so of holding his hand up in mid-air, he sets his hand down and purposefully scribbles his signature onto the letter. He proceeds to place the pen back in the pen holder and puts the letter into the outgoing correspondences box at the far end of his desk. Then he gets up and walks back to the armchair on which he was previously sitting, adjusting his eye glasses as he picks up one of the books on the coffee table on the history of art. You catch a glimpse of the title on the front cover: 'British Orientalist Painting'. He flips through several pages, and then spends a little more time looking at the details of this particular image.

He then continues over another page or so, and then closes the book, puts it down on the floor at his feet, and picks up the next book in the pile, the cover of which reads: *Ancient Art, the Collection of the Museum of the National Gallery of Fine Arts, Brussels*. The images show mostly paintings by Flemish artists that depict religious scenes. Mr Balfour stops to consider one particular piece, which is a painting of a village scene in the deep winter snow. In the foreground are a group of people huddled around a large building on the bottom left of the

> painting. In the centre a woman wearing a blue robe is riding a donkey and a man is leading the animal towards the crowd. In the middle-ground, some children are playing in a frozen pond while other people are busy doing what looks like daily-life chores in sixteenth-century Flanders. And in the horizon a pale grey-orange sun is setting between the houses and the leafless trees.

A copy of this painting used to hang in my grandparent's house in Nablus in Palestine.

The piece hangs in the dining room along with several other paintings. Both my grandparents are artists, and they had a collection of artworks that hung in the dining room of their house in Nablus in Palestine. This room it was hanging in is sort of divided into two parts. On the left side, it is modestly furnished with a few couches – we call it 'the salon' and it is where guests are typically received. Along the three sides of this room are windows that overlook the valley and the city centre of Nablus… with mount *Girzeem* on the opposite side just across the valley. Nablus's geography is quite distinct because it is a city that was built between two very large mountains: mount *Girzeem* to the south, and mount *'Ebal* to the north. The proximity of these two mountains makes it very easy for the residents of one mount to see the lights go on and off in their neighbours' homes on the opposite side of the valley, so the game of track-your-neighbours'-movements is one of the city's most favourite games. Today the top of these mountains around Nablus and all over Palestine are dotted with illegal Israeli settlements. These settlements have a rude presence; an obtrusive, claustrophobic, oppressive violence is omnipresent, and it hangs like a shadow over people's lives.

The right part of the room has no windows, and it has a dining table in the middle that seats about ten people. This dining table has witnessed many festive lunches and family gatherings. On each wall around the dining table hangs a painting. One painting is of a bird-like animal painted from an unusual angle with four limbs that look more like frog legs than those of a bird's, and in its beak, it is holding a small branch from an olive tree. The second painting is very rich and colourful, and represents a group of women in a lush landscape. These women are sometimes sitting under a tree, or by a river, and the trees around them are from all over the world – palm trees, apple trees, banana trees … And the third painting is this one, a village scene in the snow. According to my grandmother, the two figures in the centre foreground are (the virgin) Mary, who is sitting

on the donkey when she was pregnant with the prophet Jesus, and her husband Josef, who is leading them towards the crowd of people who are registering themselves on command of the Roman Emperor of the lands at that time, Cesar of Rome.

Ever since I was young, I was subtly annoyed by this painting because in my opinion the painter had gotten it all wrong. I had visited Bethlehem several times in my childhood, and I can assure you it looks nothing like in this painting. While me and my grandmother often had very interesting discussions about art, the only time we ever argued was when we talked about this painting. Irritated and hopeless she would often try to convince me that it was an original European painting, and would chide me with animated facial gestures of large eyes, throwing her hands up in the air, and then slapping them down on her thighs: *Ya Teta! How are you going to become a good artist if you cannot appreciate the work of a famous European painter!? You must train your eyes to see and appreciate* il-jamaliyyat *(the aesthetics) of European works… otherwise forget it! You will never become a good artist.* Then one time she said *you know I will prove to you that this painting is really by an important artist… because proper works of art are signed on the back*. And she carefully brought the piece down from the wall – indeed on the back was an inscription:

Al-ti'dad fee Beit-Lahem, lil fannan Butros Al Burghol, 1566
(Census at Bethlehem, by the artist Pieter Bruegel, 1566)

That day she went on to tell me the story of how the piece ended up in our family home. I learned that in the eighteenth century this painting was exchanged between a European pilgrim and one of my great-grandfathers, for a piece of agricultural land that my family owned in Wadi Silwan, the fertile valley just outside of the city walls of Jerusalem. There are no agricultural lands inside the old city of Jerusalem, and this valley has always provided the city residents with their sustenance. According to my grandmother this European had come to do a *hajj* (a pilgrimage) to visit the holy church of the Sepulchre in Jerusalem and decided to stay, as some pilgrims did in those days. People decided to stay on for a short or a long term for several different reasons – it could be financial or health reasons, or they simply did not want to do the gruelling trip back to Europe from Palestine, a trip that was very taxing on even the most able bodies.

Over the years I tried to get more information from other members of the family – particularly the elders on the story of the painting. What I mostly wanted to know was if it was the artist himself who had exchanged this painting with my great-great-grandfather, or if it was just someone who (knowing it was a valuable piece) had carried it along with him on the journey intending to exchange or sell it as a way of financing his trip. This method of taking along valuable objects that can be sold along the way to support the costs of a pilgrimage was still practiced by people who were travelling from central Asia via Turkey, Iraq, Syria, and Jordan, on their way to Mecca in Saudi Arabia. They would make a stop in the major cities to sell carpets, woollen knit wear, wood works, and jewellery among other things, as a way to pay for the costs of their journey to Mecca.

As it goes with old family stories, the more you ask, the more contradictions start to arise. As my grandmother was not even sure which great-great-grandfather had gotten hold of the painting – if it was Aref Ahmad Mahmoud bin Mustafa Al-Hijawi, or if it was his brother Abu al-Ameen – I didn't know which side of the family I could focus on, for more specific information. Eventually, I decided for myself that in fact this whole story was just one big hoax; that someone had pulled my great-grandfather's leg into thinking it was a painting by an important artist, but in reality, it was a copy by an amateur (who could have been a resident of Jerusalem for all we knew)! Scams with fake artworks passing for originals is something that has been happening for hundreds of years, and these types of scandalous affairs were more likely to happen in our part of the world, where the value of art was not yet commodified in the way it is in Europe. So, it was safer to assume that this whole story was fabricated by my great-grandfather so that he could boost his social status by emulating himself a cultured person (as the European nobility who came to Jerusalem did), by owning a painting by a 'famous' European artist.

When in 2016 my sister Karma came to visit me in Brussels to celebrate my fortieth birthday, we went to The Royal Museum of Fine Arts in Brussels. It was the first time that I visited the museum. The museum is an interesting one as far as the interior design of its rooms is concerned. They somehow reminded me of exhibitions in governmental Jordanian institutions like the Hussein Cultural Centre, because some of the artworks were hung on panels to showcase artworks. In the Brussels Museum, the exhibition spaces were either shown in the space that surrounded a sort of balcony that opens onto the large central atrium of the building, or in adjacent rooms around it. Me and my sister were in the room dedicated to the much-celebrated Flemish master from the sixteenth century named

Pieter Bruegel who had an entire room dedicated to his work. Karma was standing in front of a medium-sized work for a while. When I joined her, she quickly asked;

> *Doesn't this painting look like the one that Teta has in her house in Nablus? Weird no? It is as if it is a copy…*

We were both silent in contemplation for a few seconds, then I said

> *You are right…. this doesn't make any sense… But it looks identical to the one we have at home…*

Karma: *You and Teta talked about this painting a lot right? What was the story again? Something about one of our great-grandfathers buying it in Jerusalem right?*

Me:

> *Yes, yes, and the story that Teta, and even other people in the family told me sort of never really added up, so I decided that actually, the painting is a fake and someone tricked them…*
> *But…*
> *but somehow… this…*
> *this, might actually change the whole story.*

I pulled out my phone and took a quick photo of the piece as I muttered… *this is so confusing… Come on. Let's go downstairs to the bookshop to see if we can find more information about this whole thing…*

As can be expected from museum shops the works of famous artists celebrated in many publications and their most famous pieces are replicated on different gift paraphernalia, and the image of this particular work was the most reproduced. We learned that both Pieter Bruegel and his son in fact go by the same name, and that both artists had made several copies of the same painting because at that time the winter landscapes were a huge success and were in high demand. This of course completely changed the legitimacy of my grandmother's story. The fact that there were several versions of the same painting produced by both artists meant that indeed one of these versions had made its way to Jerusalem with a European pilgrim, and eventually into our family home.

What confirms my grandmother's version of the story is the Arabic signature on the back of the piece: بطرس البرغل *Butros Al-Burghol*. In Arabic the translation of the name Pieter or Peter is بطرس Butrus, and the word برغل which is pronounced *būrghol* refers to a form of coarse wheat known in English as bulgor (one of the main ingredients of the much-loved eastern Mediterranean salad tabbouleh). Often, in Arabic-speaking countries the transliteration of people's names was part of the assimilation process; the names of newcomers were often Arabised to make it easier for locals to pronounce their names, and was a way of embracing the migrants into their new family. The name *Būrghol* phonetically sounds very, very close to Bruegel; and we know that people from all over the world get their family names according to their profession. We also know that the main crop that was grown across the eastern Mediterranean (which for a long time was referred to as the breadbasket of the world) is wheat. So, we can safely assume that the crop Bruegel would have cultivated would have been wheat, and that is how the transliteration of his name matched both the original as well as his new profession in Palestine.

It was only after realising this particular mode of adapting the names of foreigners that I finally found a trace of Godefroid de Bouillon in Arabic sources on crusader histories. During my initial research in Arabic sources, I assumed that I should be looking for Godefroid with the Arabic spelling of his European name, which would be something like (جودفروا دو بويون *jodferwa d booyon*). But this search did not get me very far, which didn't make any sense. As the first crusader king of the holy city of Jerusalem (who symbolically marks a great power shift between Muslim and Christian rulership over the city) his story should feature strongly in the documents from the perspective of local Arab historians of that time.

In the loss and frustration, I consulted my supervisor, Professor Xavier Luffin Dean of Arabic Literature and Translation at the University Libre du Brussels. With a half-smile he quickly responds that I *should be looking for Godefroid with his Arabic name, Jufran.* He reaches out for a book from the bookshelf (the biography of the historical poet and warrior figure in Arabia Antara Bin Shaddad) and leafs through the index to find the page where Godefroid's name is mentioned. Meanwhile he explains that *indeed people's names were Arabised when they settled in the Arabic speaking world…* He seemed quite proud that the name of the Belgian/European hero was mentioned in the biography of one of the most famous figures in the history of Arabia and the Arabic speaking worlds. As he puts the

book back on the shelf he says, *if you have an upcoming trip to London or Paris you should go to the national libraries, maybe you can find a depiction of him in the miniature painting in the ancient manuscripts of Antara Bin Shadad.* I noted at how it had not occurred to him that I might do research in an archive in the Arab world, but that he only mentioned the two major colonisers of our region, and indeed of half the world.

Before getting into the Arabic version of the history of Godefroid in Jerusalem, it is worth mentioning the European version of the story. In 1096 Godefroid and a group of noblemen responded to a call from the church of Constantinople (who in turn called on the church of Rome) to help free Jerusalem from Muslim rule. By 1098 the money was collected and the armies were gathered from different parts of northern Western Europe, and they set out on a two-year long trip across Eastern Europe, modern-day Turkey, and Syria towards Jerusalem. After many battles along the way they finally arrived there in the summer of 1099. In the meantime, the residents of Jerusalem had heard of the great European armies heading their way, and they fortified the city walls, and planned to burn all the crops and poison the water wells outside of the city, to weaken the army when it arrived. Their plan almost worked. The European armies sat outside the walls of the city of Jerusalem, in the hot summer sun, for forty days starving and dying of thirst. Then on the fortieth day (by what is considered as a miracle from God) one of the soldiers in Godefroid's battalion finally broke into the city from the northern side. The invasion continued into a three-day massacre killing of 95 per cent of the city's residents. As the army did not recognise the difference between the Christian, Muslim, and Jewish Arabs, they killed everybody. The accounts describe it as a bloodbath, with blood running up to the knees and channelling through the city like a river. After this ethnic cleansing, and some discussion as to what would be done next, the noblemen elected Godefroid to be the king of the city. What is written in European history is that in fact Godefroid refuses to be named king in the city of Jesus, and only agrees to be the guardian of the city – a minor detail that was skipped in the histories of Godefroid across Europe from then onwards.

With most of the city's residents dead, the economy of Jerusalem completely collapsed. Being home to the three monotheistic religions, the walled city's economy was either based on the religious centres – and the work needed to keep the mosque, synagogue, or church running, from the upkeep of the buildings and leading prayers or public sermons – and

the scholarly work necessary for maintaining the words of God. Alongside this, it is the religious tourism sector that provides the pilgrims of the holy sites with places to sleep, eat, and shops that supply the visitors with religious paraphernalia and memorabilia. This economy thus depended on a vibrant crafts industry – workshops of book binders, food-processors, and craft shops that produced a range of objects made from olive wood, woven tapestry, worry beads, holy water, glassware and so forth – demanded by pilgrims to take back home with them. Together, these supplied the basic necessities to support the inter-dependent industries. The European army (made up of mostly peasants and farmers) had no knowledge of these professions, or of the farming techniques of the eastern Mediterranean. This in turn crippled the city and led to a complete halt of its economy. And, to add insult to injury for the new 'King' of Jerusalem, Europe did not send any financial or logistical support, so the situation quickly deteriorated into a depressing mess. According to European sources, less than a year later Godefroid died in the nearby city of Escalon under mysterious circumstances.

The Arabic sources, however, tell a different story.

According to Arabic sources, Jufran was very keen on maintaining his legacy after all the hard work and the historical victory he had made for the Christian world. But Europe's abandonment of Jufran, and the ensuing economic crisis, jeopardised all he had worked for. He was angry and felt betrayed. On top of that, leaders of neighbouring cities were responding to the call of the Jerusalemites to free the city from Christian rule. The ensuing armies were bound to win, and this would surely mean the end of his life. Jufran was not prepared to die. He did not march all the way from Flanders across the entire of Europe to die in the hands of the Muslims. Although being a martyr for God and the Church was considered the utmost honour, yet to be encircled like a helpless sheep by a pack of wolves was not the way he wanted to go. As Jufran felt abandoned by Europe and the Church, he decided to respond with the same; he decided that if he wanted to survive, and continue doing what he envisioned for himself, he would actually have to do the unthinkable: he would have to leave his kingdom, and completely transform his life in such a way that no one in Europe could trace his footsteps. So, he devised a plan to escape.

Despite the dismal reality for the new king, word of his bravery and strong leadership travelled far and fast into the surrounding regions of Syria, Mesopotamia, and the Arabian Peninsula, including the historically

significant tribe of Banu Abs, a strong and affluent tribe in the north-central part of the peninsula. While Jufran was preparing to lead a battle in the city of Escalon south of Jerusalem, he was at the same time secretly communicating with the elders of the Banu Abs tribe, asking permission to join them, explaining that his ambition was to be a humble servant, and to fight among the most respected (and most feared) warriors of Arabia – on the condition that his true identity would remain a secret. Delighted at the proposal, the tribal leaders sent back a messenger with a letter of heartfelt welcome. And as a sign of good faith and an acceptance of their pact of secrecy, they promised to help him realise his plan, by arranging for a small group of their most trusted men to ride to Escalon at the time of his planned attack of the city, to join the battle and help fake his death. Indeed, in the early spring of 1011, as a procession buried the body of the great King Godefroid de Bouillon in Jerusalem, Jufran, wearing Bedouin attire and astride a strong Arabian mare named *Ghabra*, was riding south to join his newly adopted family, the tribe of Bani Abs.

From the Arabic documents, it seems clear that Jufran's place in the tribe was immediately welcomed, and his strength in battle celebrated. It is quite likely that there was a touch of Occidentalism in how he was perceived; a Frankish ex-king among their rank was something they could stand out with against other tribes. And as a way of ensuring Jufran's legitimacy in the tribe, Jufran was chronicled by the historians of that time, as the fearless son of Antara bin Shaddad – the infamous poet warrior.

Antara is also known for his famous (unrequited) love for Abla, who he was denied marriage. What is less know, is that Antara had other love affairs. One with a woman named Haifa, with whom he had daughter, named after her father, Unaitra. The other affair was with Miriam (who later marries King Cesar, of Rome), and together they bore a son called Jufran – a tall, fierce man, who inherited his father's darker skin tone. By writing Jufran into this story, the Bani Abs' chroniclers were both protecting Jufran's secret escape from Jerusalem, and at the same time safe-guarding the Frank's place in an Arab tribe, where back-stabbing schemes could cost a person their life in a second. And so, as the son of the most well-known figure in Arabian history, Jufran was not traceable by the Europeans, and was untouchable by the Arabs.

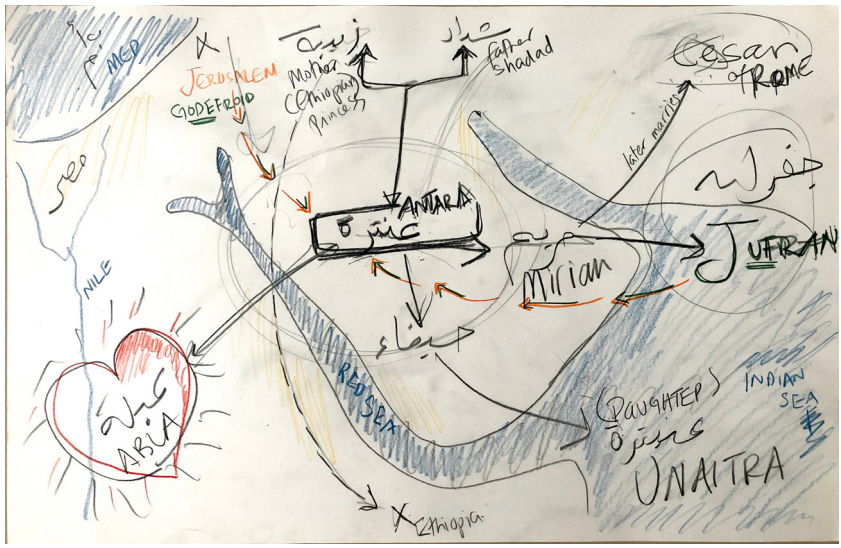

MED
JERUSALEM
GODEFROID
Mother Ethiopian Princess
father shaddad
Cesar of ROME
later married
ANTARA
عنترة
Miriam
JUFRAN
NILE
ABLA
RED SEA
(DAUGHTER)
INDIAN SEA
UNAITRA
Ethiopia

Illustration Credits

Images as they appear in sequence in the text:
'Me and The King' (2018) photograph. Courtesy of the artist.
Black and white photograph of Place Royal, undated. Courtesy of the artist.
Documentation of the performance in The Royal Museum of Fine Arts Brussels, in the Rubens room. Courtesy of the Jihane Sfeir.
'Man on a Horse' (2018) painting in oil, 105 x 148.5 mm. Courtesy of the artist.
Documentation of performance photographs in Museum M, Leuven. Credit of Robin Zenner, and Sana Ghobbeh.
Drawing of the family tree of Godefroid de Bouillon as Jufran bin Shaddad. Courtesy of the artist.

Note

[1] This article is an expanded version of a chapter in Samah Hijawi's PhD manuscript entitled *Chicken Scribbles and the Dove that Looks like a Frog*, an artistic research on collage as strategy for deconstructing representations of colonial events in Palestine's histories. The form of this article explores the performativity of the image, where image stills from performances and artistic works are visual narrative, rather than illustration. The title of this contribution is the same title as her lecture performance *Man on a Horse* (previously titled *Godefroid de Bouillon; the Bastard Son of Antara Bin-Shaddad*), which premiered in the fall 2019 in The Qattan Foundation in Ramallah, Palestine, and in *The Playground Festival* in Museum M in Leuven in Belgium. Her PhD manuscript, lecture performances, collages, and video works, constitute a PhD in the Arts that was successfully defended in public in September 2023 (Université Libré de Bruxelles, and Academie Royale Des Beaux Arts, Brussels).

CHAPTER 8

Introducing the Freshly Defeated

Sofie de Smet

As part of an interdisciplinary research project in the field of theatre studies and transcultural psychology on the role of trauma narratives in participatory refugee theatre (de Smet et al. 2024), the participatory theatre project *Tijdelijk* (translated as *Temporary*), was initiated in autumn 2017, in Belgium, in collaboration with a community centre in Brussels, the Iraqi Belgian professional theatre director, Mokhallad Rasem, and nine Syrian young adults resettled in Belgium. In *Temporary*, the nine participants and director worked towards staging a public performance, rehearsing at the heart of the Belgian capital city with the project's director, Rasem, leading the weekly four-hour-long rehearsals, which culminated in six public performances staged in Brussels and Antwerp during December 2017. Rasem structured rehearsals around the overall theme of a collective imaginative transition of an unknown old world into an unknown new world. This theme shaped the starting point of the creative process and its group discussions, role-playing games, improvisational exercises, video-recorded interviews, and movement exercises. The structuring frame of an imaginative transition was further conceptualised by the use of an ever-increasing collection of words as they appeared and reappeared within group discussions. In this way, throughout the creative process, verbal language became more and more condensed into single isolated words that stimulated bodily and silent expression. The words collected during rehearsals for *Temporary* (2017) were:

Freedom
Fear
Happy
Flight
Memory
Embrace
Dead

Love
Farewell
History
Border
Time
Loss
Gain
Loss
Animals
Birth
Life
Sleep
Shock
Scream
Sorrow
Revolution
Danger
Selfie

Participants were invited to give bodily and verbal expression to these words and to reflect upon their meanings in non-verbal collective movement exercises, in group discussions, and in individual video-taped interviews with the director. Inspired by these key words, and encouraged by the director, several participants decided to write texts, which were brought into the rehearsal space, performed, translated, and finally discussed by the group (de Smet, Nellis & Rasem 2018). All theatrical scenes and text materials used in the public performances were developed by the participants during rehearsals out of these improvisational and movement exercises. Additionally, participants were able to shape and reshape the very form of their participation on stage within the public performances at all times, and were allowed to decide whether they wanted to perform on stage or not up until one week before the premiere would take place. In the end, all participants decided to take part in the performance. As the premiere approached, the collection of created expressive verbal, choreographic, auditory, and visual material and theatrical scenes were arranged into a continuum of scenes, during which all the participants were continuously present on stage. The performance, which lasted for approximately one hour, was staged six times in two Belgian cities in

2017. Although some audience members represented the Syrian and other diasporic refugee communities, the majority of audience members were Dutch-speaking, Belgian citizens with no migration background.

'Zij die net verslagen zijn' is a result of that participatory project, in which Salloum reflects upon different refugee experiences in exile in Belgium by integrating many voices and roles. In that way, he gives voice to not only his own experiences as a refugee, but also the ones of other refugees he crossed, heard, and listened to and are often forgotten or silenced in public debates. He broadens the core impetus of participatory refugee theatre to bear withness the ephemeral context of theatre from an individual voice (Balfour 2013; Jeffers 2012) to a collective voice. Besides foregrounding society's marginalised and silenced voices (Balfour and Woodrow 2013), he also includes himself as a participant in a theatre project for refugees within his poetry text by designating himself a role. By doing so, he critically addresses and increases the awareness of the audience of the public performance, and here, the readers of this edited volume.

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The Freshly Defeated

Ayham Salloum

We are the defeated now.
No one overpowered us, not army nor faction.
Injustice itself defeated us.
We despise our language, change our names, flee from each other's sight.
A single refugee shelter brought our kind together, but a thousand communities divide us.

People judge one another in terms of power, socio-economic class, or even criminality.
But we, we judge each other on three things:
1. One's level of Dutch.
2. The duration of one's residency permit: one year, five years, or permanent.
3. Who lives closest to the city centre. Because some of us who live at the heart of the city have weak ties to the countryside, the so-called 'village folk'.

In Turkey, we are more Turkish than the Turks.
If a Turk works twelve hours a day, we work fifteen hours.
And if a Turk prays five times a day, we pray seven times.
In Greece, we arrive on the beach one morning as refugees in a rubber dinghy
and, by the same evening, return to the same beach as tourists.
In Belgium, Iyad tries to convince the teacher of his integration course that he
is more Belgian than the Belgians. But Iyad's problem is that Belgium is multilingual. Either he learns all these languages simultaneously or he learns none. Iyad is a radical; he knows of no golden mean.

We are flexible folk. Take Abu Ahmed for instance:
If it so much as sprinkles, he finds every excuse not to go to the Grand Mosque in Brussels for Friday prayers.
But let there be a hurricane on his doorstep, and you can't possibly convince that very same Abu Ahmed to stay indoors if he knows a new Syrian shawarma joint just opened.

If there is ever a heated discussion to be had about Syria with some curious Belgian, we wrap it up with the words 'such a shame' or 'what an atrocity…'
And the same discussion with some curious Arab, we wrap up even faster with a 'May God put an end to it'.
Yet we'll go on talking for a full hour about a shawarma sandwich because, frankly we have more faith in food and the role food plays than in our history and its legends.
Fuck Zenobia, when a little girl has to suffer the cold in her tent.
Fuck Ugarit, the first alphabet ever, when Abu Khalid, a man of sixty-seven, has to sit exasperated at the train station in Ghent because, unable to spell *Brussels* in Dutch, he can't buy a train ticket home.
Abu Khalid had a house back in Syria, a dog, and a vineyard, too. He exchanged all that for a studio with a plant in Schaarbeek.

Abu Omar throws a fit when we curse God, and scolds us.
Saying, 'The next one who curses, I'll hit over the head with my size-45 shoe!'
Abu Omar drinks with us. He says that a drunk friend never lies, and when he does lie, he doesn't scare you.
That is how Abu Omar thinks about God.
Is there anything more beautiful than that?

For the Syrian Christian Ilyas, coming to Europe has felt like returning to the Promised Land.
He misinterprets things, sees himself as a first-class refugee. He threatened once, after drinking too much, to revoke our residency permits if the situation in Syria ever calms down.

Osama loves Ola.
Ola is his wife, twelve years younger than him. Ola doesn't love him, but he loves her. They don't make ends meet on their living alllowance since, every few months, Osama sends 200 euros to his mother in Lebanon. He is afraid Ola might fall in love with a rich Belgian. He tells me his only hope is to win the lottery before Ola can speak good Dutch, and then laughs.

Salam graduated as a pharmacist from Damascus University in 2008.
He sits in a corner, observing, not drinking.
He's chatting to his sweetheart in the Zaatari refugee camp.
He tells her, 'I can speak Dutch now as good as any Flemish person; and I got a driver's licence; I got my ear pierced and my shoulder tattooed. But most importantly, I got a work contract with Colruyt.
I may not be in the pharmacy, but fuck my degree.
A work contract is more important than my degree.
A work contract means I can send for you.
A work contracts means I can raise my middle finger whenever some racist tells me to go back to my country because I live off tax money he paid.
A work contract means I can get citizenship, and citizenship means I can travel the world.
Citizenship means they'll no longer pull me aside at the airport to search me at passport control.
Citizenship means that, if I would have a problem on the smallest street in the most distant country, I can call the Belgian embassy up and say, "I am the Salam, the Belgian" and they will solve the problem with a simple phone call. Perhaps they'll even send the Belgian army to come rescue me.'

Iyad doesn't drink, so to steal some some attention for himself he interrupts us to say, 'You guys are boring. Let's find us some *bitches*.'
To which Abu Omar replies, "Why do you say, *bitches*? Here in Belgium we say *ladies*, or *madams*. They taught us as the shelt how, in Belgium, the social hierarchy stands like this: children, women, dogs, men.
So, when you get married, I'll get you a dog so you won't have any problems with your wife.'
Iyad laughs, but Abu Omar wonders what's so funny.

‘Here, a dog has a passport that lets it travel the world. Your silly little travel document won’t even get you into Turkey.’

Ali is not here.
I ask Mohammed, ‘Where’s Ali?’
Mohammed responds, ‘Ever since Ali started dating Kathleen, he feels too good to hang out with us. Ali stopped speaking Arabic on the bus.
Ali stopped flicking his cigarette butts onto the street; now, he carries them to the trashcan himself, and soon he’ll start carrying the whole receptacle home!
Ali dyed his hair blond. Blond hair, brown eyes, and a black beard. He looks like a traffic light. Ali used to eat kiwis with their skin! But a few months at the shelter, now you need an appointment just to see him.’

Osama interrupts Mohammed, asking me, ‘What about you, Ayham, what are you writing?’
I answer, ‘I’m involved in staging a play with some fellow refugees, but the organisation and audience are Belgian. I’m writing a text about specific words related to the piece.’
Osama: ‘Ah, what words are they?’
Me: ‘**Love**.’
Ilyas replies: ‘Love is when the smuggler in Turkey likes you so much he puts you out to sea when the waves are not too high.’
Me: ‘**History**.’
Iyad: ‘History began with Google Translate. I wouldn’t be dating my Flemish girlfriend without it.’
Me: ‘**Fear**.’
Ahmed: ‘Fear is when you get on the bus without validating your ticket.’
He laughs.
Me: “Okay, how about **escape**?’
Ahmed: ‘Escape is when your fears come true and the inspector asks for your ticket.’
Me: ‘And **hope**?’
Ahmed: ‘Hope is when the inspector doesn’t address in the end, even as you’re getting ready to flee.’
We all laugh.

Abu Ahmed interrupts us, 'You said something about a play?'
– 'Yes, a play.'
– 'Did you become an actor?'
– 'Something like that, I guess.'
– 'Earn anything from it?'
– 'No, I do it for free.'
– 'But surely any actor earns at least a living wage of 830 euros. So, how can you possibly do it for free?'
Everyone laughs.
– 'You said the audience is Belgian?'
– 'Yes, they are.'
– 'Can you tell them something for me?'
– 'Depends. What?'
– 'Tell them, first of all, *thank you*. Have you written that down yet?'
– 'Yes.'
– 'Then, *thank you* again.'
– 'Okay.'
– 'Then tell them that Abu Ahmed's daughter, Sara, drowned in the sea. Sara was a beautiful little girl, looked just like her mother. Sara used to say over and over, "But, Daddy, I don't like the sea." But Abu Ahmed thought taking Sara to the sea was the only way to protect her from certain death in Syria. By accident, Abu Ahmed killed his daughter. Sara may not have loved the sea, but Abu Ahmed did love her.
– Tell the audience that Abu Ahmed cannot forget his daughter.
– If he could ever forget her, even for a moment, he would try his best to be a good European citizen.
– But until then, perhaps you can accept us as witnesses to a country burning.
– Accept us while bearing in mind the wars you yourselves endured here.
– Accept us as the vulnerable ones in a cruel society.
– And if you cannot accept *us*, accept our children as witnesses to the mistakes we made when we left our land. A land where injustice reigned.'

Notes on Contributors

Marieke Breyne is a performer, theatre facilitator, and researcher. From 2014 to 2017 she combined her artistic work with a bilateral research project at Ghent University (BE). In this practice-based research she focused on the transformative power of the performer as a performative object through the design and monitoring of creative processes in diverse contexts such as Stellenbosch University (SA) and The School of Arts Ghent (BE). Since then – in between and after two maternal leaves – she continues her work as a freelance performing artist (a.o. Carte Blanche 2.0 and Metropolis Kopenhagen International Theatre (DK)), a facilitator of training and research events (a.o. International Gatherings of Youth in Action projects and guest seminars at Antwerp University & VUB), and host of exhibitions and artistic residencies.

Sofie de Smet is a postdoctoral researcher (FWO) affiliated to the Parenting and Special Education Research Unit (Faculty of Psychology & Educational Sciences, KU Leuven) and S:PAM (Studies in Performing Arts & Media, Ghent University) in Belgium. Her research focuses on the development and evaluation of community-based interventions in host and post-conflict societies in transcultural mental health care, the role of performance and rituals in processes of reconstruction in the aftermath of violence, and the set-up of collaborative research practices. In close dialogue with her scholarly work, Sofie works as a clinical child psychologist and family therapist at the Transcultural Trauma Care team for refugee rehabilitation at the Faculty Clinical Centre PraxisP (KU Leuven, Belgium).

Mark Fleishman is Professor of Theatre at the University of Cape Town. He is also a co-artistic director of Magnet Theatre, an independent theatre company established in 1987. He has created and directed many performance works for the company over the past thirty-seven years and is involved in development projects in urban townships and rural communities using theatre as a tool for social justice and transformation. His articles have appeared in the *South African Theatre Journal, Contemporary Theatre Review* and *Theatre Research International* as well as in numerous

edited collections. He is editor of *Performing Migrancy and Mobility in Africa: Cape of Flows* (2015) and *Making/Doing/Thinking: Methods for Performance Research (*2024). He is currently principal investigator on the project *Re-imagining Tragedy from Africa and the Global South* funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

Mekhitar Garabedian was born in Aleppo and lives and works in Antwerp. Deploying a variety of media such as drawing, video, photography, and installations, many of Mekhitar Garabedian' s works draw from his experience as an immigrant and play on the humour and poetic qualities he finds between languages, cultures, and histories. Just as his personal diasporic history is layered, his work echoes with a multiplicity of references to literature, music, philosophy, and visual arts. In 2022, he was commissioned by Middelheimmuseum/Kunst in de Stad to create a public sculpture in the Antwerp Stadspark. Previously he had solo exhibitions at BOZAR in Brussels, S.M.A.K. in Ghent, Beursschouwburg in Brussels, BE-Part in Waregem, and KIOSK in Ghent. In 2015 he was invited to present several works at the Venice Biennale in the Armenian pavilion, which was awarded with the Golden Lion. Garabedian participated in group exhibitions that were held at the New Museum in New York, Hamburger Kunsthalle, WIELS in Brussels, 5th Thessaloniki Biennial, Marta Herford, Villa Empain in Brussels, Gulbenkian Museum in Lisbon, Argos in Brussels, Haifa Biennial, BAM in Mons, M HKA in Antwerp, Drawing Room in London, Museum M in Leuven, and Kunsthaus in Dresden, among many others.

Samah Hijawi obtained her PhD in Art Practice with Université Libré de Bruxelles, and L'Academie Royale Des Beaux Arts in Brussels 2023, a research in collage as a strategy to deconstruct and critique colonial histories around Palestine. This research was driven by a question on the 'aesthetics of the political'; namely how artists translate their political ideas into aesthetic form. This question was explored in artistic, curatorial and pedagogical works. In 2022, she started a new project that explores food histories, ancient cosmologies and astrology. Previously, she collaborated with Ola El-Khalidi and Diala Khasawnih in directing *Makan Art Space* (2003–16), in Jordan. Together with Shuruq Harb and Toleen Touq she co-curated *The River has Two Banks* (2012–17). She is a tutor at DAS Theater in Amsterdam, and is a regular guest tutor in St Luca Antwerp,

KASK Gent, and ARBA-EsA in Brussels. She was an assistant professor in the Department of Art and Design at Jordan University. Her works are shown in theatres, museums and biennials around the world, and her written works have been published in/on various platforms and in print since 2007.

Evelien Jonckheere is a senior postdoctoral fellow (FWO), at Antwerp University. She investigated magic lantern projections in spectacular context as postdoctoral researcher in the B-magic project (www.B-magic.eu). Her PhD, an investigation of the tensions between the Belgian café-concert, variety theatre, and official theatre, was defended at Ghent University in 2014 and published as *Aandacht! Aandacht! Aandacht en verstrooiing in het Gentse Grand Théâtre, Café-concert en Variététheater, 1880 – 1914* (Leuven University Press, 2017). She wrote several articles and book chapters on popular entertainment and artistic practices in relation to (pseudo)science in Belgium and abroad.

Pedzisai Maedza is an Assistant Professor in Theatre, Drama and Performance Studies at University College Dublin, Ireland and Research Associate at the University of the Free State, South Africa. Prior to this he held a Newton International Fellowship at the University of Warwick, United Kingdom. He is the author of *Performing Asylum: Theatre of Testimony in South Africa* and has published several book chapters and peer-reviewed articles in internationally recognised journals on Performance, Genocide, and Cultural Memory.

Ayham Salloum is a Syrian-Belgian writer, social worker, and activist currently based in Brussels (Belgium). His prose and poems critically examine the impact of violence and war, and the social integration and discrimination of refugees and migrants within resettlement societies while emphasising the power of humour and playfulness in his writing.

Christel Stalpaert is Full Professor Performing and Media Art Studies of the Art Studies Department at Ghent University (Belgium). She is co-director of the research centre S:PAM (Studies in Performing Arts and Media). Her main areas of research are theatre, performance, dance, and media art (since 1890) at the meeting-point of philosophy. She is a member of CoDa | Cultures of Dance – Research Network for Dance

Studies, the consortium *UGent Human Rights Research Network*, and the consortium *De Stadsacademie: een collaboratorium voor Gentse duurzaamheidsvraagstukken*.

Klaas Tindemans was a teacher and researcher, now retired, at the Royal Institute for Theatre, Cinema and Sound (RITCS), at the Royal Conservatoire Brussels (KCB) and at RITCS and at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB). He was active as dramaturge with the actors' collective 'de Roovers', with BRONKS, the Brussels youth theatre, with directors Ivo van Hove, Lies Pauwels, and others. He wrote and directed two plays: *Bulger* (2006) and *Sleutelveld* (2009). For *Bulger* he received the 'Förderpreis für neue Dramatik' of the Berliner Theatertreffen, (2008). He co-edited books on David Mamet (*Willen jullie in zo'n wereld leven? David Mamet in Vlaanderen en de wereld* (VUB Press, 2005)) and on Jan Decorte (*tis of tisni. Over Jan Decorte* (ASP, 2017)). He published a collection of his essays in his book *De dramatische samenleving. Een politieke cultuurgeschiedenis* (Pelckmans Pro, 2019). The English version – *The Dramatic Society. Essays on Contemporary Performance and Political Theory* – was published in 2022 (Routledge).