

Symposium in Grahamstown, South Africa

The Psychology of Violence and Forgiveness in Today's World Theatre June 30th – July 5th , 2008

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Tolerance as a mistake

by Tiago Bartolomeu Costa

Metaphor is the Great invention of mankind, says Spanish philosopher Ortega y Gasset, since it allows us to go beyond reality and search meaning through a complex system of references. It is then our obligation to do the way back or we will never be able to translate that learning to the real life. The greatest invention is in fact the worst danger mankind as ever created, since it allows us to remain blind.

One example: Not one year had passed from September 11 when a group of tchetchenian terrorist invaded a theatre in Moscow. It took a while for the audience to be aware that the threats, the guns and the kidnappings were not part of a performance that was enhancing the true values of the nations. As the world witnessed, anxious, for the end of the presentation, dictator Putin was trying to assure us that he was doing the best he could to save it all. Later we found out that the orders he had given to the army were to kill all, not only the terrorist but also the audience. The most important was to save Russia's believes on a strong nation that does not get scared by some local attackers.

But what lead to this incapacity of recognizing violence on stage? What hasn't allowed audience to see beyond the metaphor? Was it because of the Play, that critics were saying, being shaped under the best rhetorical propaganda of the regime and by so not even being a Great drama, or was it because we no longer establish a frontier between reality and fiction?

If we consider the second answer as being the one that most easily allows us to speculate then would have to say that theatre, the venue and the concept, have evolved, in such a way that they 've became non-places.

I explain: If the theatre is, by its primer role and function, the contrary of a non-place - an idea of philosopher Marc Augé that stands as a reference in contemporary society – it is because, unlike airports, malls, or places considered as places, even if their swift use does not grant them a known or individual recognition, theatres exist through a difficult balance between signification and significant. Each act, gesture or ritual is invested by a sort of answer to society and reality. Therefore, the idea of Augé should not apply to theatres because of its possibility of creating places inside other places. But we could also say that due to the excess and flaw that characterizes the possibility of enlargement of their original function, theatres have curiously been taking the shape of non-places, transferring the concept of foyer, the most perfect embodiment of a non-place, due to the accumulation of expectations of the entrance with confirmations of the exit, to the stage.

It is in this dangerous frontier that cannibalism of fatuous entertainment begins. Theatres cannot (or should not) be a mere place of passage, endangering their anchor role in society. They cannot (or should not) accumulate shows for mere rejoicing of society's several layers, by a simple wish of fulfilling an unnecessary quotation. And they cannot (or should not) follow different fashions, more or less integrating or contemporary, by endangering the distance and analysis that characterizes the act of observation and reflection.

It is therefore the role of these places to search for an identity that puts them back in their own cities, which integrates and expands them, instead of merely being a starting point. Theatre as the world's stage, like Shakespeare said, should be seen as a provocation of unexpected encounters, and not only as an open door for legitimate solidarity. And even though that same legitimating and solidarity may occur, it should not be made for its own promotion, but only for its conduction towards the outside of the building (that is, society) and the lines it proposes. Thus, theatre should know, as a place of gathering, how to give back all discussion to society instead of trapping it indoors. It should attract all agents but indicate in this invitation that it is only a starting point, something which may be refused. Even better, which should be refused, like any other good starting point, refused for something more complex and unified without homogenizing itself. Theatre cannot be generous, it should be demanding. It should not concede but negotiate. It should not consider itself as self sufficient but rather nourish itself of what surrounds it (or grab it, if necessary).

In that sense, I believe that the best way theatre can avoid becoming a non-place is if the theatre – the venue and the concept – is willing to occupy its city beyond its own doors and to claim the attention of the audience to those same realities. It should give its credit to what stays on its margins, because it needs those margins to be able to regenerate itself. The best way theatre has to avoid becoming a non-place is through its transposition to the margins. Margins that are, at this moment, all other places where theatre should be. It is there that theatre regenerates itself.

The flow that characterizes a city, its unbalances and under achievements in its opulence and waste, its advantages and known social advances, should have a clear notion of the way a city exists in its different stages, and also how all may only be a continuous existence of a communitarian space.

Cities may or may not be places of shelter, but they have always existed with these paradoxes and have always resisted. Cities like Srebrenica, Luanda, Berlin, Teheran, Istanbul, Beirut, Lima or New York have always known how to find ways to survive inside artistic creation (when not in other areas), even when facing conflicts or lack of cultural support. This roller coaster belongs to its regenerative system and nothing is lost in the total absence or absolute decadence of a physical cultural cloth (in straight opposition to another one that is human and will always and invariably exist). On the contrary – it is in the supposed cultural bitterness (an idea so middle-bourgeoisie that is not far from a notion of artistic debarment) that one finds the fair use of things. As Homi K. Bhabha teaches us, *"When the world becomes dark because of contradictory and ambivalent opinions, aesthetics – fiction, arte, poetry, theory, metaphor – illuminates our difficult cultural and political position. At the core of aesthetic experience is the interlocutory voice of cultural expression on which human creativity and political democracy are based"* (*Ética e Estética do Globalismo: Uma perspectiva pós-colonial*, Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian/Tinta da China, 2007).

How should we then, as critics, help to balance this world of possibilities?

I would start by saying that we should not longer stand for notions like: theatre is all around us, politics is also theatre and the use of scenic jargon when referring to war events. As Slavoj Žižek puts it: "it is language itself which pushed our desires beyond proper limits, transforming it into a desire that contains the infinite elevating it into an absolute striving that cannot be satisfied". That is why we should be able to state, loud and clear, that even though it all may seem fiction, the fiction that happens on stage, ends on stage. And the fiction that happens outside of the stage, affects the stage. Of course that here I'm stating the obvious, but if we insist on a normalization of the relationships and influences of theatre and reality without saying that one gives more than the other, we will always forget that theatre is only a mirror that needs to be trespassed instead of being a mirror that only reflects.

Has Hans Thies-Lehmann puts it "the politics of theatre is a politics of perception". Meaning that there is no possibility for theatre to tell us what and how to do it. And certainly there is no possibility for theatre to teach us how to survive. If we can die on a venue, if we can be accused of false moralism while writing a play, like it happened with the Sikh author in London back in 2006 that remains with uncertain address after the violent attacks of that community, if we can be illuded with the power of criticism, then we certainly cannot expect theatre to be real. Nevertheless theatre as

political tool has always to be considered. But political because it denounces the rhetoric of the real politics. And by so, accepting metaphor as a tool, not as a final aim.

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Rape is finally a war crime: "The Purge" by Sofi Oksanen

by Matti Linnavuori

It is not easy to write a play about what is wrong in the politics of a foreign country. At least, not easy for a Finnish playwright.

English speakers act differently. They feel free to send either their troops or their playwrights to assess and control any world crisis. Possibly because Eve Ensler's "Necessary Targets" has not been performed in Finland, my favourite example is "The Pentecost" (1994) by David Edgar. It takes place in the Balkans during the various Yugoslavian wars in the early 1990's. Britain is not only a former colonial power but also a safe guardian of democracy, particularly in the 1940's when the rest of Europe succumbed to dictatorship. On the other hand, a news item from June 2008 says that Britain has overtaken the United States as the biggest arms exporting nation. Surely for the sole purpose of defending democracy... Anyhow, it seems natural for British writers to take a stand against wrong. We may not always applaud their analysis, but if it was not them, who would condemn wrong? Certainly not us Finns.

Finland lay next to the Soviet Union, where there was plenty to criticize. Human rights situation, the misuse of psychiatry, no freedom of opinion, severe restrictions on foreign travel, lack of freedom to settle in big towns, environmental disasters, etc. etc. Had we written plays which criticize e.g. apartheid, our intellectual and artistic credibility would have required that we treat the Soviet Union the same way, and that we could not do. Finland had signed a treaty of mutual friendship and cooperation with the Soviet Union in 1948, and the treaty was prolonged with spectacular presidential signing ceremonies every so often.

The Finnish relationship with the Soviet Union was far from silent, though. The vast majority of Finnish cultural workers, as the politically correct term was in the 1970's, were eager to sing praise to the Soviet peace initiatives and the Soviet harvests and what not.

A particularly sensitive issue was Estonia, a country of 1.5 million inhabitants. Estonians and Finns are closely related linguistically. Estonia and Finland are separated by the Gulf of Finland, which is at places only 80 kilometres wide. We gained our independences from Russia at the same time after the First World War. From 1918 to 1940 there was a lively exchange of ideas across the Gulf.

The Soviet Union and Nazi Germany made a non-aggression pact in 1939. In the secret addition to the pact, Germany gave the Soviet Union a free hand in Finland and the Baltic countries Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Accordingly, the Soviets demanded military bases for their use. Only Finland refused, and that led to the Winter War in 1939. The Baltic countries were occupied by the Soviet Union. Two weeks before the German attack eastwards in June 1941, the Soviets deported tens of thousands of Baltic citizens to their prison camps in Siberia. There were renewed deportations in 1949 to crush the opposition against the collective farms then being introduced to Baltic agriculture. The prisoners were gradually pardoned after Stalin's death in 1953 and many were even allowed to return to their former home towns, but dispossessed of their former homes. It was, however, impossible to share their experiences, let alone publish them till the new independence in 1991. Often even children were not aware that their family members had been taken to Siberia. Anyone caught talking about such matters was in grave danger of being imprisoned for anti-Soviet propaganda.

If you want to know more about those times, I recommend the novels of Mr Jaan Kross (1920-2007), himself a veteran of the Siberian tour. Kross accuses Britain and the United States for first encouraging the independence movement in the Baltic countries during the Second World War, and then leaving the countries helpless. Much the same happened during the first Persian Gulf War in 1991. The Kurds and Balts have similar experiences of being let down by English-speaking defenders of democracy.

Passenger traffic across the Gulf of Finland had ceased during the war in 1940. A ferryboat connection was reopened only on 1965, ending the almost total isolation of Estonia. Russification and Sovietization attempts of Estonia grew in the 1980's. Before the Second World War 97 per cent of Estonian inhabitants were ethnical Estonians, but with the massive import of Soviet work force, on the eve of the new independence only 60 per cent were Estonians, and the remaining 40 per cent people originated from various Soviet republics.

Estonians were able to catch the Finnish television signal, which made them better informed about the world than average Soviet citizens. The Soviet Union repeatedly accused Finnish broadcasters of sending propaganda intended to harm the friendly relations between our peace-loving countries. This typically Soviet phrase referred to television commercials. It was difficult for the Soviet education machine to convince Estonians about the immediate ruin of capitalism, when meat was scarce in Soviet shops but abundant in Finnish television.

No wonder then that Finns looked down on Estonians, as one does to poor relatives. This attitude continues after the renewal of Estonian independence in 1991 and has increasingly angered the Estonians. There is a counter phenomenon also, where Finnish fans of anything Estonian explain that Estonia is an ancient European cultural hub, whereas Finland has remained barbarian. They explain the Soviet period away as a temporary interruption. Correct, of course, if one's historical yardstick is long enough, but then again, surely 51 years of oppression and misery are sufficient to qualify as a national tragedy?

Ms Sofi Oksanen (born 1977) dared into this high tension terrain with her play *Puhdistus* ("The Purge") at Finnish National Theatre in Helsinki in 2007, directed by Mr Mika Myllyaho. In the spring of 2008 Ms Oksanen published a novel also titled *Puhdistus* and with much the same characters as the play.

Oksanen is the daughter of a Finnish man and an Estonian woman. Romances were not uncommon, when Finns took their expertise to building projects in Estonia during the preparations of the sailing events of the Moscow Olympics (1980).

Oksanen's debut novel was called *Stalinin lehmät* (2003, "Stalin's Cows"). Its main character, a bulimic Finnish-Estonian girl visits relatives in Soviet Estonia with her mother. The relatives and neighbours ask for consumer goods from capitalistic west. Back in Finland, the child and her mother meet Finnish prejudice. They are constantly called names: "Russians" and "prostitutes".

"The Purge" takes place in the Estonian countryside. The present is the year 1992, one year into the new independence. The past is in the 1940's and 1950's.

The story in brief now. The main character Aliide Truu is an old woman in 1992, but we meet her also as a young woman in the late 1940's and 1950's.

In the beginning, in 1992 she finds young Zara in front of her house. Zara is being chased by Pavel and Lavrenti, who are former KGB officers now employed as thugs for Russian Mafia pimps. Zara is originally from Vladivostok, the Soviet Far East, but has recently worked as a prostitute in Berlin.

Aliide is unwilling to help Zara, who claims she came by quite accidentally. In fact, Zara is the granddaughter of Aliide's sister, who was deported to the Soviet Far East in the 1940's. And not only that, but it was Aliide, who informed on her sister to the Soviet authorities. That happened because they were both in love with Hans Pekk, who was an Estonian patriot and very much opposed to the Soviet regime.

Aliide hides Hans Pekk into the underground cellar of her house for years, and to camouflage the hiding place perfectly, she marries a devout communist Martin, who knows nothing about Hans Pekk's existence, even though it is Martin's job to hunt down and destroy saboteurs. The other reason to marry is that Aliide wants to be spared from further night-time interrogations.

The play makes us not condemn Aliide but to understand her. She had no good alternatives to choose from. Let me remind you of what Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn wrote in his *Archipelago Gulag*: everyone who survives the Soviet camps has been compelled to compromise himself (or herself). As long as memories of humiliation are not dealt with, they have a tendency to repeat themselves. When at first Aliide is unwilling to tell anything to Zara, the young woman promptly forces Aliide's head into a bucketful of urine. With the same method Zara was forced into working as a prostitute.

Sofi Oksanen chose to write a play, because one of her themes is the formation of shame, and the nature of theatre is about seeing and watching, which emphasizes how shame is made visible. The power of shame comes from the fact that it is there for everyone to see. In the play, Aliide avoids the eyes of men, and when she has to go shopping, in the street she always looks down, so as not to show in her eyes the traces of torture, and not to recognize it in the eyes of other women. She is ashamed of having been tortured in the militia cellars. She says to Zara, you can never know, how many of the men whom you bump into in town are aware that you are a prostitute, that you have been humiliated in the cellars.

Organized and systematic sexual violence toward women is a common method of warfare, which Oksanen observed in the news during the Yugoslavian wars. Systematic rape is a cheap way of repression. It requires no technical equipment and it is applicable to everyone. Its effect continues far beyond the moment, because once disgraced in this way, the occupied population is unlikely to rebel. Oksanen writes that a disgraced nation is easy to govern.

Instead of writing a contemporary play about Bosnia, Oksanen chose recent Estonian history, partly because it was easier for the Finnish public to identify with our linguistic relatives. We have all been saturated with news of human rights violations, and to really make us understand the seriousness of these crimes, we must be made to identify with the victims. We must feel that the crimes could happen to us, or if not to us, then at least to our relatives.

In theatre it is commonplace to reveal that the Nazis were evil. This is correct, of course, but not much of an achievement intellectually. Compared to theatre, even James Bond movies have a more up-to-date understanding of the whereabouts of modern evil.

According to Oksanen, sexual violence as an integral part of warfare has been questionable only since the 1970's. It must be recognized as a crime against humanity, whatever the regional cultural taboos, Oksanen says. In June 2008 the United Nations Security Council included rape in its list of war crimes.

Oksanen goes on to say that peace-time attitudes toward women pave way for systematic rape during wars. In societies where rape or other physical violence toward women is tolerated or seen as acceptable or even natural, it is easier to arrange the troops for systematic rape in war-time conditions.

Only by condemning the rapists and the perpetrators of this strategy can the victims be shown respect, Oksanen writes.

In her other public statements, Oksanen has strongly disapproved the fashionable retro communism, e.g. T-shirts with hammer and sickle. She asks whether the swastika could gain similar good-humoured acceptance. In June 2008 the Lithuanian parliament forbade the use of both Nazi and Soviet symbols in public places. A similar law already exists in Latvia, but in Estonia it failed in the parliament.

Ms Imbi Paju (born 1959) made first a documentary film and then a book both titled *Torjutut muistot* ("Repressed memories"). The book was published in Finnish in 2006 and in Estonian the following year. Both tell the story of Ms Paju's mother and her twin sister, whom the Soviets sent to forced labour camp in Siberia in 1948, at the age of eighteen, accused and sentenced for conspiracy against the government.

Paju has been called a one woman Truth Commission. She says that the names and fates and experiences of the victims should be made known so that first sorrow and then understanding could be established in every individual. And that national identity cannot be built on moral blindness toward history. Still, national identity is not about taking the side of one party, only the side of human value, says Paju.

Mr Jukka Rislakki, a retired Finnish journalist now living in Latvia wrote a book *Tapaus Latvia* (2007, published in the US as "The Case for Latvia" in June, 2008), subtitled "a small nation as a target of disinformation". He analyses many of the arguments of Russian government and media and the Russian minority in Latvia about the supposed lack of civil rights of Russian speakers in the country.

Such a book about Estonia does not exist, and one review of Rislakki's book (in *Turun Sanomat* newspaper) stated that it would not be necessary, because we Finns have such an extensive knowledge about Estonia. In that respect Ms Leena Hietanen's book *Viron kylmä sota* ("The cold war of Estonia, 2008) is quite a surprise. It uses the same arguments as the Russian media. Her book introduces the concept of Estonian apartheid. She means not that an imported minority discriminates against the native majority, but the opposite: that the native population discriminates against the imported minority. Tens of thousands of former Soviet citizens now live in the Baltic countries without a citizenship of any country. They have chosen not to become Russian citizens. One can easily become an Estonian citizen, if one chooses to acquire elementary language skills.

I have no conclusion to offer. As a Finn I am reluctant to get involved in the internal politics of another country, as the evasive phrase was in the 1970's. Ms Heidi Hautala, former member of the European parliament and now MP of the green party, has suggested that Finland establish a domestic truth commission to clarify the roles of politicians during the decades when the Soviet Union exercised excessive influence in Finnish internal politics, but Ms Hautala's initiative has led nowhere, probably because much the same politicians still have the power.

In lieu of conclusion, let me just say that the Finnish National Theatre visited Estonia with Oksanen's play, and was well received. There was no talk of the Finns arrogantly giving lessons about Estonian history.

The Finnish theatre information centre has had translations made of "The Purge" into English and Russian. If interested, please write to tinfo@teatteri.org

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Forgiveness in South African Theatre

by Brent Meersman

It is dawning on South Africa that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) set up to heal the country's divisions after apartheid collapsed has ultimately failed. For the light it threw on the murky past, South Africans are indebted. But the TRC uncovered more in the way of Truth than it accomplished in Reconciliation. The impression is growing that the country has passed the window of forgiveness. Such a prospect is terrifying and one hesitates even to articulate it, as if by simply writing such a sentence invites doom. Most South Africans, especially those that wholeheartedly embraced the "Mandela vision" of the country appear now to have been living in denial.

The TRC was extraordinary in conception, setting a world precedent. Encouraged by the miracle of a peaceful transition to democracy, it too attempted to defy the history of man, which has always been a history of bloody revenge, retribution and victor's justice. Truth would set the nation free, forgiveness end the cycle of violence.

As time puts distance between the euphoria of the immediate post-apartheid period and the harsh reality of today, reconciliation is increasingly felt to be at the expense of justice, and the TRC seen as one more element in an elite compromise that has not benefited the majority.

That Mandela and De Klerk's conciliatory gestures saved everyone from civil war and chaos, from plunging the country into the anarchy of a Somalia, has lost its persuasive power. And after all those concessions, the nation is not at peace with itself or one another.

Whether it's land, equity or social commitment, the intransigence of many whites, who without any doubt benefited by *far* the most from the demise of apartheid, is partly to blame. Mandela was scrupulous about singing *Die Stem*, but most of the national team's white sportsmen still can't sing *Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika*. There is even vituperative opposition to such minor matters as a few name changes. Business never owned up to their complicity in apartheid at the TRC. Their submission was insensitive and insincere – an insulting sham. No restitution tax was paid. The Business Trust and the President's Fund were spurned and the Reconstruction and Development Programme was quickly sabotaged. The current government if not actively opposing attempts in the United States courts at corporate redress are obstructing them. The apartheid military generals and former senior politicians did no better. That some of the TRC's findings, notably around the National Party and not the ANC, were excised from the final report did not bode well.

Those who had subscribed to "and let live" are struggling to live themselves. The status quo would be tolerable if it were not for the desperation that arises from a daily struggle for survival and the life and death competition for scant resources and opportunities. An unscrupulous politician does not have to work hard to rise to power in such a climate.

There are many in the land who have not agreed to forget.

Who are among the malcontents of forgiveness? The victims of gross human rights violations who have never received sufficient compensation, while they watched as amnesty was granted to the perpetrators who did not confess fully or even lied. Others never made submissions. For this, they were neither pursued nor prosecuted, while too many members of the liberation movements were either denied amnesty and left in jail until a Presidential pardon. A belief exists among these that only those comrades who far from telling the truth, lied convincingly at the TRC, obtained amnesty.

Recent attacks on democratic institutions cast the upholders of the Constitution as protectors of white privilege or as counter-revolutionary forces. The Bill of Rights, was once referred to as the Bill of Whites by the more Stalinist elements in the liberation struggle.

Unfortunately, the time for healing gestures has been squandered. It is too late to say sorry now. Not enough was done, and a serious attempt at demonstrable action is required. As the nation faces a general election, tumultuous changes in the ruling ANC party and transition in the presidency, the situation appears precarious and the backlash is mounting.

It is against this background that one can look at the exploration of forgiveness in South African theatre. But firstly, two things need to be borne in mind regarding the nature of forgiveness. Someone may forgive another without knowing the whole truth, but forgiveness as a concept can only truly be achieved on the basis of the victim knowing the whole truth. The perpetrator must face the victim and confess all. Second, forgiveness is a public act. The victim must face the perpetrator.

In Lara Foot Newton's play *Reach* (2007) a young black man Solomon Xaba asks "Why should I care about a white woman?". He answers his own question later: "She runs through me." The 'she' he's referring to is Marion Banning, an older, white woman.

Marion is a lonely figure, still in grief for her son. He was killed in a hijacking. Details in the reporting are upsettingly familiar to South Africans. The murderers have never been brought to justice due to police incompetence and an intimidated local community. The mystery that unfolds is why Solomon has come to her home and why he has watched her secretly for months.

Through her relationship with Solomon, the despondent Marion slowly comes to life. The play charts the subtle negotiation between these two individuals from radically different backgrounds as they reach out towards each other. Solomon knows how Marion's son died. He was there. In the climax to the play he confesses all.

Marion and Solomon eventually achieve mutual affection and understanding.

The story has faint echoes in the real life incident of the murder of the American exchange student Amy Biehl in an act of random political violence in 1993. Since then the Biehl Foundation has been working in the black communities continuing the work Amy had set out to do when she met her untimely death. Her mother Linda Biehl even has on her staff her daughter's killers. She writes, "I've grown fond of these boys. I enjoy them. They're like my own kids. It may sound strange, but I tend to think there's a little bit of Amy's spirit in them."

The play was important for South Africans as it tried to reconcile the nation through the private act of forgiveness and understanding.

REwind: A Cantata (2006) by composer Philip Miller, known for his music for the Handspring Puppet Company collaborations with artist William Kentridge, commemorated 10 years of the first TRC hearings. The work was performed in Cape Town and the United States.

Miller had to defend himself against attacks that there is something ethically wrong with producing art from the pain of the testimony. "Was Picasso wrong to paint Guernica?" he asked when I interviewed him. Great art is pain; art is one of the ways humanity deals with it.

What Miller did do was talk to every one of the survivors whose recorded testimony "given in a very different context" forms part of the cantata, replayed in rhythmic repetitions. They all gave their permission, freely and gladly. Eunice Miya (a mother of one of the Guguletu 7) asked at her hearing, more than ten years before, that something be done to commemorate her son. Nothing materialized. Miller said she was glad to hear that the cantata commemorated him.

The work opens with a powerful choral version of the protest song *Siyaya*. A particularly chilling section uses apartheid interrogator Jeff Benzien's voice, methodically describing – "as if he were baking a cake" as Miller puts it – how he tortured people with the wet bag method.

The cantata concludes with a bitterly ironical piece, *Who's laughing?*, using the voice of PW Botha. Miller's idea originally came from a Chilean cantata about their national reconciliation. As it happened Augusto Pinochet, another president who got away with a brutally repressive regime and never apologized, died shortly before the first performance of *REwind*.

In *Truth in Translation* (2007), director Michael Lessac astutely chose the perspective of the interpreters for the TRC as his principle protagonists to deconstruct South Africa's response to those gruesome public hearings. Looking at "the beast" as Archbishop Tutu described it.

Using the translators provides a cunning dramatic conceit; the translators become actors, speaking words not authored by themselves. "*Traduttore, traditore*," say the Italians, meaning 'translator, traitor'. In the opening lines, the audience is challenged and the interpreters instructed not to feel and not to become emotionally overwhelmed by the testimony we will hear.

Lessac perhaps errs on the side of caution. Possibly the best indigenous debate theatre I've seen, it succeeds as a realistic recounting of how a wide range of individual South Africans struggle to come to grips with the atrocities committed under apartheid. The dialogue is pithy and provocative, but the play is a mixed success with far too many narratives, the repetitive bathos of crass humour – that of the journalist's barroom shtick, manufactured scuffles and some faux rôle playing that defies our suspension of disbelief, has a strangely dulling effect.

Yet *Truth in Translation* was a valuable contribution to South Africa's on-going soul searching. The subject matter was of such a nature that it overwhelmed the critics' numerous objections born from a more formal, aesthetic and theatrical sensibility. It would have been best staged outside of a proscenium arch. The production went on a world tour and was performed in other hot spots for reconciliation such as Northern Ireland and Rwanda.

It is vital that theatre makers confront the horrors of the past and that producers do not shrink from the obvious commercial negatives of mounting disturbing work.

Now that the TRC concluded its work and the window for forgiveness is closing, theatre may be one of the few public platforms where the process of forgiveness may persevere.

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Three Different Approaches To Psychology of Civilian Forgiveness of Governmental Violence In Contemporary Korean Theatre

By Kim Yun-Cheol (President/IATC, Professor/KNUA)

1. Introduction

In May, 1980, there occurred a brutal massacre by the government–deployed soldiers of the civilian freedom fighters in Kwangjoo, a southwestern city of Korea. Korea was then under the contingent military junta led by General, CHUND Doo-Hwan, who was elected later President by electorates he himself appointed. According to the government official announcement, two hundred or so rioters were killed, nearly two thousands were injured, in this ‘rampage’, but some NGOs still believe that much more civilians were shot, stabbed, stoned, or beaten to death in that aborted ‘revolution.’

Just two years ago in 1978, then President Park Jung-Hee was assassinated by Korean CIA director after eighteen years of authoritarian dictatorship. This general-turned-president cut dead the incipient democracy by coup d’etat and changed the constitution three times so that he could rule the country almost forever. The assassination of the strong man was a great opportunity for student and civic activists to restore democracy. Against their wish, however, the contingent military junta began to suppress people’s wish for democracy with even more violent policing under regionally applied martial law. In May 16, starting in Seoul, hundreds of thousand citizens got together in the central parts of the major cities and began to protest vehemently. The next day the cabinet meeting of the junta decided to expand the martial law throughout the country.

Kwangjoo has a long tradition of political protests in modern Korean history. KIM Dae-Jung, one of the greatest symbols for democracy in the country was born near Kwangjoo. Although he was in exile in the USA at that time, his absent presence motivated Kwangjoo citizens to fight for democracy even more fiercely. KIM Dae-Jung was a kind of equivalent figure of Nelson Mandela here. Like Mandela, Kim received Nobel Peace Prize. Like Mandela, he fought a long fight for democracy, was imprisoned for a long time, barely escaped several murder attempts, was exiled to the USA during Park Jung-Hee’s presidency, during which people in the southwestern provinces including Kwangjoo were discriminated and abused by President Park’s policy to separate Korea into two by making industrial East more privileged and agricultural West more dilapidated.

Frustrated and angered by the junta’s decree, Kwangjoo citizens and students, on May 17, armed themselves and occupied the provincial government office building to declare their war against the junta, demanding the ending of the martial law and the military rule, and the releasing of the imprisoned democracy activists. General CHUN Doo Hwan, then de facto leader of the junta did not waste time in deploying specially trained soldiers to Kwangjoo, who met severe resistance but finally quelled the ‘riot’ in ten days, killing at least two hundred civilians. And yet, the truth about who ordered the soldiers to shoot the protesting civilians has not yet been confirmed nor discovered. Even then chief martial law administrator denied that he did.

As you may easily guess, this massacre in May 1980 has become a national trauma which keeps haunting Korean people, especially the intellectuals. And many plays were written and staged to tackle this trauma. Three approaches are most frequently found among those plays that deal with the violence and forgiveness of this tragedy, a tragedy in a worldly, not dramatic, sense.

2. *Bride May*

Bride May (2000), written by HWANG Ji-Woo and directed by KIM Kwang-Lim, takes the form of theatre-within-the-theatre, beginning with Father CHANG John recollecting his memory of Kwangjoo of May, 1980, ending with him again still feeling sorry and guilty of having not been martyred twenty years ago with the helplessly killed victims. Inbetween the beginning and the end is dramatized the whole history of the Kwangjoo tragedy in chronological order. This meta-theatrical device self-evidently connects the past and the present and put the national trauma in the permanent present tense in the form of collective guilt.

The play centers on three student activists, one female and the other two male. So quite expectedly love-triangle is involved in the narrative, which in turn, reinforces the theme of love and ideology. OH Min-Jeong, the girl, is loved by both KANG Hyeok, symbolic leader of the student body and KIM Hyun-Sik, spokesman of the civilian army. She has only respect for KANG, and her love is directed toward KIM, who insists that KANG escape with OH and survive the civil war. OH returns,

however, to KIM after helping KANG safely escape the dangerous zone. The two get married in the middle of the battle. Immediately after the wedding ceremony presided over by Father CHANG, helicopters from above and tanks from the ground begin to invade the office building of the provincial government occupied by the couple and other civilians who refuse to surrender. The freedom fighters recollect one by one the most beautiful and happiest moment of their lives and die in the midst of the increasingly threatening sound of helicopters and tanks approaching.

One characteristic of the play makes its approach particular: the physical absence of the antagonists, the soldiers. They are represented only through mechanical sounds of helicopters and tanks or their public urge to surrender delivered through microphone. This way, the dramatist identifies the mechanical existence of the soldiers with Greek fate, which is uncompromising, unchangeable, callous to human misery, and above all, soulless. In another sense, Hwang does not try to dramatize the narrative in a conventional way of tragedy, making the protagonists face the antagonists, and struggle to achieve what they want with paying full price. He has no interest in the victimizers. The play is totally dedicated to the victims. Hwang, poet-turned-dramatist, has failed to make his narrative poem dramatic, but has succeeded in making his drama poetic. Theatrically speaking, his drama is not theatrical because of the absence of the antagonists. As Martin Esslin implies in his book, *An Anatomy of Drama*, theatre cannot be a good vehicle to deliver political message, because dramatists have to justify both protagonists and antagonists to make their plays effective, but Hwang does not want to do that. He uses Father CHANG as his mouthpiece. Like the father he wants to pay tribute to those heroes who died undeservingly, and renew his sense of guilt as an intellectual who did nothing to prevent the massacre. *May Bride* is a cleansing ritual for the heroic deaths and at the same time a wake-up call for the sleeping and aloof social conscience.

3. Permanent Prisoners

While *May Bride* focuses solely on the victims, *Permanent Prisoners* takes the opposite approach. Written and directed by OH Tae-Seok, the play deals mostly with perpetrators of historical violence in modern Korean society: AHN Doo-Hee who assassinated KIM Gu, the greatest nationalist politician right after the Korea's liberation from the Japanese control in 1945, which is overlapped with the assassination of President Park Jung-Hee in 1978; a twenty-two year old soldier who was deployed to suppress the Kwangju struggle for democracy, and shot a young girl to death. These two perpetrators are hospitalized in the same room in an asylum, along with a long-term serving political prisoner who was captured during his service in the Korean War for the northern communist regime. The play takes the form of a dream, in which the three patients represent three most shameful and painful landmarks of modern Korean history: AHN murdered the incipient free democracy right after the Korea's liberation from the Japanese rule; the long-term serving prisoner is the symbol of the torturous agony of the division of the country; and finally the soldier epitomizes the de facto military rule in the most recent and cruelest violent times of Korea. Using their dreams, and also their state of mental illness, the playwright transcends our logics not only in terms of time and space, but also in terms of ideology, and makes three different historical wrongs interact, emphasizing the other side of the apparent truths. OH tries to illustrate that these three are victims, too, in the sense that they were just ordered to assassinate, to shoot, and to kill. Because those superiors who ordered them to execute such violence have not been identified and punished, the dramatist seems to sympathize with these 'victims.' The soldier looks even brainwashed to keep silent to any question concerning the identities of the orderers: "I, Chang Yong-Gu, Soldier of Republic of Korea, will not answer any question other than my own identification." AHN repeats that he performed his part as ordered, and that as a soldier, he could not obey his superiors' order.

Permanent Prisoners is a dark, black comedy. It seeks reconciliation, forgiveness without attempting to get to the bottom of the truths. The playwright does not offer any more recriminating questions for those who did great wrongs to Korean history by performing unjustified, inhuman, and historically misleading violence. Rather, he asks us onlookers very acute questions whether we are free from the responsibility of that repeated historical violence. Thus he rather hurries forgiveness for and reconciliation with those undeniably tangible perpetrators of violence. This I call ideological forgiveness, which is not dramatically justified. It is imperfect forgiveness that forces only superficial, apparent, fragile reconciliation. Apparently the play ends brightly with human possibility of forgiveness and reconciliation, but actually it illustrates even more pessimistic and absurdist world because it precludes that truths are no more necessary or possible, nor knowable.

4. Peppermint Candy

The third approach is found most graphically in the movie called *Peppermint Candy*, if you allow me to include this film in this presentation on stage drama. Again it deals with the sad story of

Kwangju. Just like *Oedipus Rex*, it takes a journey from the present into the past, from the guilt to the innocence of a man called Young-Ho. Written and directed by novelist-turned-director LEE Chang-Dong, *Peppermint Candy* does not intend to recriminate soldiers, nor to make heroes of the victims. Instead he focuses on how a young soldier's involvement in the massacre corrupted and destroyed his whole life for the following twenty years. The film starts with middle-aged Young-Ho visiting the park where he went on a picnic with his first love and took a picture with her before he entered his mandatory military service. Just before he commits suicide he recollects further and further back in search of the origin of his failure.

To put the story in chronological order for your understanding, Young-Ho is deployed to Kwangju where students and civilians are fiercely protesting the government. In the middle of the civil war, he comes across with a young school girl. He tries to help her escape the battle field, but misfires his machine gun at the girl to death. From then on he gets slowly, but increasingly corrupts. Discharged from military service, he becomes a policeman, and chases and tortures student activists, like a faithful hunting dog. Some years later, he has become a womanizing businessman. His wife, too, is enjoying dangerous love affairs out of wedlock. Betrayed by his business partner and divorced by his wife, he is becoming more and more desperate. One day, he is told that his first love wants to see him before she dies. When they meet, she delivers her old camera which keeps their memory of innocent love. At the news that his old factory laborers are having a picnic, he visits the park. And he drops himself from the high railroad bridge, crying "I want to go back!!!"

Young-Ho's forced involvement in the Kwangju massacre has rekindled his inner violent nature, which, in turn, combined with his social power, corrupts and finally destroys him. LEE does not try to teach us. He just shows hyper-realistically the horrible effect of violence over its own perpetrator. Although Young-Ho desperately wants to go back to his innocent past, his life has become only a one-way road. That is why LEE chooses a railroad bridge for the hero's suicidal site. It is impossible, or at least very difficult, for a train to move backward.

Having watched this film, I found myself getting very sympathetic to the hero as if I have just seen a good production of *Macbeth* with whom we easily sympathize because he suffers so much. Because he suffers so much, we still call him tragic hero. Likewise, this modern version of bad guy, gives me katharsis with his enormous suffering and self-recognition. Although he does not achieve heroically, he pays heroically. And I am ready to forgive him and reconcile myself with him.

5. Conclusion: Reconciliation via forgiveness via truth

I believe that your honorable ex-president Mr. Nelson Mandela proposed and implemented the most dramatic formula of forgiving violence through his truth and reconciliation commission. It is reminiscent of Greek tragedy in which tragic heroes get to self-knowledge via truth and die happy with their eyes wide open, in which they reconcile with themselves through recognizing their own *hamartia*, and with the spectators as well by giving them catharsis. When we deal with historical, or factual violence and its forgiveness on stage, I think the most effective approach is, as I have tried to prove above, to return to the Greek tragedian formula. Truths should be reached first. Only then forgiveness and reconciliation could follow. I know we are living in a time when tragedy seems impossible because of the absence of heroes. But is it really true that we have no heroes with, among, and in us? Have we not justified the absence of tragedy because we hate suffering? Have we not allowed pleasure to replace justice in our value systems? Is it not the time to restore the tragic tradition in a dramatic sense to survive this horrible time of global animalism? Thank you.