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“The Climax of Reconciliation”: Transgression, Apology, Forgiveness and the Body in Conflict Resolution

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Abstract According to Charles Hauss, “[i]n the last few years, reconciliation has become one of the ‘hottest’ topics in the increasingly ‘hot’ field of conflict resolution” (2003, ¶1). However, despite the apparent interest in this “hot” academic topic (which is becoming increasingly warm in Canada as our own Truth and Reconciliation Commission commences), reconciliation studies have been dominated by Truth-based approaches. The restrictions of these approaches, which emphasize objectivity and rationality, often elide the body and the primacy of emotions in the reparative process. This essay begins a conversation on the role of the body and emotion in the study of reconciliation by engaging the work being done in the social sciences with contemporary trends in critical theory and literature. I argue that by looking at the fundamental role the body plays on the “road to reconciliation” we can devise a more vital approach to conflict resolution and the various processes that make it up.

Keywords Reconciliation · Apology · Forgiveness · Conflict resolution · Critical theory

In the last decade, reconciliation, apology, and forgiveness have become omnipresent forces in both the political and social spheres. The recent U.S. Senate approval of an apology for slavery (June 18, 2009) is perhaps the most prominent example in politics right now, while Kanye West’s apology to Taylor Swift (September 14, 2009) has dominated entertainment news. Although apology and reconciliation are certainly not new ideas, one is still led to question why there has been such a proliferation of these terms in recent years. Indeed, why has this era been labelled by critics as “The Age of Apology” (Brooks 1999b, 3)? Why do an increasing number of nation-states, such as South Africa, Australia, and most recently Canada, seem to be embracing reconciliation as a means to deal with their pasts? And why, at a time when the horrors of colonial violence are finally being brought to light, is forgiveness suddenly being labelled as “the best form of self-interest” (Tutu 1999, 31)?

To be clear, this article is a theoretical investigation into reconciliation, which I am proceeding into after the fact. I am not attempting to suggest that theory provides a strict line to be followed by practitioners, but rather that theoretical inquiries can help us think about reconciliation in new and challenging ways, thus contributing to the process as a whole. It needs to be acknowledged, however, that theorists have the luxury of traveling a path that has already been cleared by the steps of many vulnerable people working from the ground. Good theory, in my mind,

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is almost always a result of stumbling onto one of these paths and evolving one's thinking out of the unpredictable meetings, connections, and encounters to which they lead.

If we, as proponents of conflict resolution, are to accept that reconciliation has become a dominant model in national politics, however, the more pressing question might simply be: What exactly is it? How do we define reconciliation as a field? As Hizkias Assefa notes, despite the reconciliation work that is being done all over the world by activist groups, lawyers, doctors, and social scientists, when we arrive at reconciliation as a theoretical concept, "there is not even much understanding what it means" (2008, 3). On the one hand, this is simply an issue of securing an inclusive definition. According to Tristan Anne Borer, who writes specifically on the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC),

one reason the Truth and Reconciliation connection is so problematic is because there is no single meaning of the concept of reconciliation. Defining the concept has proven difficult and, despite—or perhaps because of—the proliferation of scholarship on the subject, no single agreed upon definition exists (2004, 23).

I am not convinced that defining reconciliation—confining it to a single classification—is the way we should be proceeding, but I am sensitive to Borer's point here: how do we even begin to address this important issue if we can't even agree on what we are talking about? At the same time, however, can we delimit a concept in a way that doesn't preclude alternative (or alter-native) interpretations or ignore "marginal" positions? Both questions seem equally important and unavoidable. To begin, then, we need to acknowledge that reconciliation initiates out of an impossible position: defining reconciliation is a necessary task, but the sheer proliferation of interpretation (based not just in language but in subjectivity itself) precludes this very possibility—at least in any sort of ethical sense. To quote Erik Doxtader, this impossibility creates an aporia, a time out of time: "the time of reconciliation is a time within and without a time. It is a moment when the indicators of meaning and the grounds of judgement are in radical flux" (2004, 49). Any ethical study of

reconciliation must resist the temptation to close itself off to contradiction by constructing a wall of "common sense" around itself. This is simply because this contradiction may be actually be what reconciliation is. This is not to say that reconciliation does not exist, because I will be arguing here that it does, but rather that we must handle it with the care and rigour such an important concept deserves. As Martha Minow eloquently puts it, the goal in such a delicate situation is not to "seek precision," but to open up questions and debates, which automatically necessitates a "resistance to tidiness" (1998, 4).

Perhaps the best way to begin, then, is to messy things up with a litter of questions: What is it that reconciliation attempts to do? Is it simply about neighbours being able to live together without violence? Or is it a somehow deeper process, a means of respecting and even "loving the enemy"? Can we talk about reconciliation at a national level in the same way we talk about it on an interpersonal level? What changes in reconciliation when we move from the private to the public? Is reconciliation simply the antonym of violence? Why is reconciliation so widely linked with forgiveness? And, more sceptically, should we be concerned that reconciliation is being used as a political device to maintain the status quo? Can it be used as an ideological tool against the offended party?

I have no illusions that this paper will be able to answer all of these important questions. In fact, it will probably open up more than it is able to close. However, as my title suggests, I would like to try to get at some of these issues by tracing the movements toward what Lewis B. Smedes calls "the climax of reconciliation" (1984, 18), deploying a theoretical approach to transgression, apology, forgiveness, and finally reconciliation.

My decision to take this approach is twofold. First, I would like to get away from the popular model, which links reconciliation directly to truth. The proliferation of this model can be traced back to South Africa, where banners everywhere displayed the TRC's unofficial slogan, "Truth, the road to reconciliation" (see the film *Long Night's Journey Into Day*, Reid and Hoffman 2000). The thread can then be followed through to Canada (the most contemporary commission), where the Aboriginal Healing Foundation recently published a collection

of essays entitled *From Truth to Reconciliation* (2008). Genealogically, the truth model can be traced back even further to the Nuremberg and Tokyo trials, which, as Hannah Arendt points out, allowed for the official establishment of “crime[s] against humanity” (1963, 92), which TRCs depend on so heavily. The truth developed out of this model was primarily “‘factual’ of scientific truth” (Shriver 2007, 3), insofar as it was defined by the narrow confines of the Western court procedure. While future states fashioned their own commissions out of the events at Nuremberg and Tokyo, many of them altering the process altogether for a more inclusive procedure, the residue of “the trial,” in which testimony and scientific truth are paramount, continued to hang over national and international human rights forums. Out of the Nuremberg and Tokyo trials we get: the National Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Chile 1973), the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberia (1979), the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (1998), the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission (1999), the Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2001), and Canada’s (currently ongoing) TRC, to name only some of the most prominent examples. As is evident from the titles of these commissions alone, which but for the interference of a conjunction collapse truth and reconciliation into a single term, it is taken as given that “successful journeying requires close [...] attention to the route from truth to reconciliation (Llewellyn 2008, 187). This is a model, I will argue, that needs to be challenged.

To clarify, our research here should not fall in fruitless debates on the existence of Truth. Enough convincing research has been done to illustrate that Truth, for the survivors of traumatic events, is something beyond the limits of strict analytic purview.¹ However, as a student of aboriginal liter-

atures and theory, my decision is also based on the fact that post-structuralist attacks on Truth have been identified as a means to undercut the validity of aboriginal arguments—an essential aspect of most contemporary TRCs. As the Creek critic Craig Womack puts it, “it is difficult to argue that a group faces oppression if you no longer believe the group exists because you have deconstructed its identity to death” (1999, 205). Of course, the same can be said of historical events. The wounds of a people are easily elided if we insist on debating the validity of a traumatic incident. It seems evident that if Canada—where I live and study—is to reconcile with aboriginal peoples, debating Truth is just another means of silencing native voices and distracting from their pain.

My decision to abandon Truth as the “road to reconciliation” is instead based on the fact that scientific truth, particularly in its connection to rationality and objectivity, elides the body and the primacy of emotions in the reparative process. This point is perhaps made most salient in Achmat Dangor’s (2004) *Bitter Fruit*, a text that is intimately concerned with reconciliation and the physiology of trauma. The novel’s protagonist, Silas Ali, is a member of the South African TRC, but he is also a victim of the violence that leads up to it: his wife was raped by a government official while he was held helpless and made to listen. The tension between Silas’s need to be an “objective” member of the TRC and the violence of his (repressed) emotions are at the centre of this text’s intrigue: “It was his task to ensure that everyone concerned remained objective, the TRC and its opponents, that they considered the law above all, and did not allow their emotions to sway them” (2004, 63). The basis of my enquiry here asks why we would continue to engage with a reconciliation that ignores the “irrational” and visceral pain of the human body in the way *Bitter Fruit* depicts. What does it mean to be “objective” about rape and violence, especially when those horrors have been inflicted on you and your family? Is the law and “rationality” really the best way to deal physical and emotional trauma? Reconciliation requires a warm personal interaction that embraces subjectivity and emotion, not a cold methodology that suppresses feelings behind “rationality.” As Donald Shriver argues, we need to locate a “truth that heals rather than divides” (2007, ¶5). In what follows, I would like to show how apology and forgiveness offer a more vital approach

¹ In *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, Dori Laub illustrates how truth, as it pertains to traumatic events such as the Holocaust, is a perpetually unfolding subject that emerges between two people, i.e., the analyst and the analysand: “it is the encounter and the coming together between the survivor and the listener, which makes possible something like a repossession of the act of witnessing. This joint responsibility is the source of the reemerging truth” (1992, 85). Insofar as it is never a stable entity, truth, in this sense, cannot be held up to strict scientific, or even historic, scrutiny.



Fig. 1 “The road to reconciliation”

to reconciliation that is able to contend with emotion and the body in more rigorous and intuitive ways than what the Truth model offers.

In order to orientate my approach here, I will be using a provisional set of steps laid out by the sociologist Nicholas Tavuchis in his insightful text, *Mea Culpa: A Sociology of Apology and Reconciliation* (1991). Tavuchis sees apology as the beginning of a teleological progression toward reconciliation. This teleology is something itself that needs to be questioned, but, for now, I would simply like to lay out the sequence. For Tavuchis it is only through apology, followed by forgiveness, that one can arrive at what I am identifying above as “the climax of reconciliation.” The movement is linear (see Fig. 1): “call, apology, forgiveness, and reconciliation” (1991, 22).

What I have added to this progression is the idea of transgression, which I see as the initiate to the entire process. After all, without some wrong being committed, there is no need to apologize or forgive, let alone reconcile. Tavuchis seems to take this point as given, but it bears more critical reflection. To begin with, although the question might seem slightly naïve at first, what exactly is a transgression? This seems to be a particularly important point when we are speaking about wrongdoing at the level of the state. As any number of critics have pointed out, all nations are founded on violence.² Yet despite the recent deluge of apology in the international forum, only a very small portion of this violence has been acknowledged in official admissions of guilt or reparation. How is it that some transgressions have become such a visceral part of the global imaginary, while others remain buried beneath history and state rhetoric? For example, why is the word “genocide” so readily applicable to the Holocaust or Rwanda, but so

radically stricken from Canadian discourse about the violent treatment of aboriginal people?³

Further, how is it that “the call” for reconciliation can be heard so clearly in some states, yet be so faint in others? In reality, the progression of apology, forgiveness, reconciliation can only begin when *the transgression can be heard*. This is why I object to Tavuchis’s use of “call,” as if it were simply as easy as opening one’s mouth and asking for an apology. Rhetorical, ideological, and political structures are still in place that preclude our ability to hear certain acts of violence as such. For example, as Judith Butler argues, the Israeli system operates on “the refusal to apprehend Palestinian deaths as ‘slaughter’” (2004, 14). Elizabeth Cook-Lynn points out that some of the largest daily newspapers in the United States still refuse to refer to the 1890 tragedy at Wounded Knee a “massacre”: “In South Dakota it is still publically called, one hundred years after the fact, an ‘event,’ an ‘incident,’ or an ‘affair’” (1996, 144). Indeed, it may be our very inability, or unwillingness, to bear witness to the pain and suffering of certain “subaltern” groups that precludes the state’s ability to reconcile with those who are most in need. The initial point that needs to be made, then, although I cannot develop it any further here, is that training ourselves to hear the call is a step that requires more critical focus than what the literature has allowed thus far.

Before moving on to the next step, however, we need to make one final note on transgression and its contribution to shaping reconciliation. This point may

² The most oft-cited example of this comes from Walter Benjamin, who famously declared that “there is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism” (1969, 256). However, Elizabeth Cook-Lynn states the case in perhaps a more direct, discerning way: “new societies and new nations are born from the spilling of blood of other nations” (1996, 39).

³ Frank Wright provides a compelling argument for this silence in *Northern Ireland: A Comparative Analysis* (1987). According to Wright, who follows from Rene Girard, the metropolis couches its violence toward the “ethnic frontier” in the guise of a judicial system, which the former establishes as the “winner” of historical conflict. As such, the frontier is deprived of the rational language it might use to levy its position (i.e., that the metropolis is enacting vengeance on an enemy). In my mind, the best example of this is *The Circle Game* (1997) by Roland Chrisjohn and Sherri Young, which, with reference to the United Nations’ Genocide Convention, explicitly names Canada’s residential school system as genocide. This report was commissioned by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples and submitted to that commission in 1994. However, “[i]t was rejected because of its challenging content” (Shunpiking.com 2005, 3). *The Circle Game* was then published by Theytus books in 1997. Of course, Wright’s theories have very different applications for communities in which there is no clear “victor.” The ideas I present on silence here need to be reconsidered in light of reconciliation in places such as Northern Ireland, for example.

seem rather basic, but it is also an essential element in constructing a clear picture of the topography of reconciliation in any given case. Quite simply, transgression provides the reparative movement that follows: apology, forgiveness, and reconciliation must all be built out of this foundation (which is perhaps why Doxtader questions reconciliation's ability to "exceed its 'founding' referent" [2004, 378]). Reconciliation must address *specific* wrongs. In this sense, tracing a genealogy of reconciliation across nations or communities is counterproductive to the responsible theorist's goal. While there are undoubtedly things we can learn from earlier truth commissions, reconciliation forums, and human rights trials, we cannot simply apply these models to any traumatic event. It would be like prescribing penicillin for prostate cancer. Each transgression has its own subtleties and nuances that must be treated with a particular "medicine." Not acknowledging this can be disastrous and entirely antithetical to the healing well-intentioned third parties are trying to induce.

Moving back to Tavuchis's progression, then, apology must also be built out of local contexts and traditions in order to be viable: "the singular achievement of apologetic discourse paradoxically resides in its capacity to effectively eradicate the consequences of the offense by evoking the unpredictable faculty of forgiveness" (1991, viii). I will be moving on to forgiveness shortly, but for now I would like to reflect on this essential step. To return to an earlier argument, how does apology offer a more sensitive approach to reconciliation? How does apology respond to the body and emotion in ways that Truth cannot? According to Tavuchis, who offers the most lucid criticism on this topic, the genuine apology is all about the body. Apologizing bares the offender to the victim, putting him or her in a position of extreme vulnerability: "when we apologize ... we stand naked" (1991, 18). Aaron Lazare, a medical doctor, makes a similar point, also emphasizing the role of the body in apology:

A good apology also has to make you suffer. You have to express genuine, soul-searching regret for your apology to be taken as sincere. Unless you communicate guilt, anxiety, and shame, people are going to question the depth of your remorse (1995, 43).

What the "good apology" draws attention to then, in ways in which the TRC position in *Bitter Fruit*

denies, is how the body is directly implicated in the reconciliation process. In order for apology to be effective, rather than repressing feelings of guilt, anxiety, and shame for the sake of "rationality," the subject must make these feelings intensely present. He or she must in fact perform his or her pain in a way in which the apologee can both recognize and empathize with. The language of suffering and bodily expression (crying, trembling, choking on words) thus becomes a deeply intimate way to initiate a reconciliatory discourse. This "language" may appear to be a form of apology limited to personal interaction (neither appropriate nor viable in the world of politics), but consider German Chancellor Willy Brandt's 1970 *Kniefall von Warschau* (Warsaw Genuflection), in which the politician fell to his knees in front of the monument to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. This apology was largely considered by the press as being a "sincere [act] and a sign of new intent in Polish-German relations" (Borneman 2002, 9), which led to the chancellor being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1971.

However, as soon as we begin to use words such as "express" and "communicate," as Lazare does here, we are forced to confront the possibility of performance. Indeed, according to Jacques Derrida, the decidedly modern emphasis on universal human rights (initiated by the Nuremberg Trials) has generated a "theatrical space" (1997, 29) in which apology must be played out. It is only against the concept of "crime against humanity," Derrida argues, that something like the South African TRC can take place. Of course, if apology takes place within any type of "theatre," we invite insincerity and calculation into the ceremony of culpability in which the modern state is now so heavily invested. This is a serious consideration. Who is to say I cannot perform my suffering, communicate anxiety and guilt, without actually feeling it? Actors (some better than others) do it every day. Further, am I not more likely to commit to this performance if it may contribute to amnesty (as in South Africa)⁴, save me from retribution, or simply maintain my current relationship with friends and

⁴ Unlike any other commission before it, the South African TRC offered pardons for political offences against human rights. These pardons were granted in exchange for testimony about specific events and were reviewed by an Amnesty Committee that was responsible to, but not dictated by, Tutu and the TRC.

neighbours? What makes an apology sincere? How do we identify this sincerity?

At the end of his novel *Green Grass, Running Water* (1993), Thomas King toys with this idea of apology as performance through the Cherokee figure of Coyote:

“Wait a minute,” said Ishmael. “Wait a minute. Before we begin, did anyone offer an apology?”
 “Wasn’t Coyote going to do that?” said Robinson Crusoe.
 “Apologize for what?” says Coyote.
 “In case we hurt anyone’s feelings,” said Hawkeye.
 “Oh, okay,” says Coyote. “I’m sorry.”
 “That didn’t sound very sorry, Coyote,” said the Lone Ranger. “Remember what happened the last time you rushed through a story and didn’t apologize?”
 “Yes,” said Ishmael. “Remember how far you had to run?”
 “Ooops!” says Coyote. “I am *very* sorry.”
 “That’s better,” said Hawkeye.
 “I am really *very, very* sorry,” says Coyote.
 “That’s fine,” said the Lone Ranger. “It sounds very sincere.”
 “*Sorry, sorry, sorry, sorry,*” says Coyote.
 “Okay,” said the Lone Ranger. “We believe you.”
 “Hee-hee,” says Coyote. “Hee-hee” (1993, 430, emphasis original).

There are at least two things we need to make note in this entertaining passage. First, Coyote offers two different kinds of apologies here: insincere and sincere. It is only after he is reminded of the personal suffering that occurs when one doesn’t apologize properly (“remember what happened last time...”) that he becomes “sincere.” However, the difference between the two apologies offered by the trickster seems to be strictly performative. When threatened with retribution, Coyote simply proliferates his sorries. Like a stage actor, he amplifies his “regret” so that his audience can bear witness to it, so that they can suspend their disbelief in his grief and buy into the narrative. A “sincere” apology, then, is sincere only insofar as it is received as such by the audience (i.e., the Lone Ranger stating here, “We believe you”).

The problem that arises out of a close reading of this passage, then, if we can extend its logic into a

larger context, is the validity of the “insincere” apology. Can a performance facilitate forgiveness and reconciliation? Can empty words still generate positive change? Unless we want to get caught up in more unproductive debates on scientific Truth, the answer must be yes. Again, the reasoning is twofold: first, as Tavuchis rightly points out, there is a very distinct difference between public and private apologies, which draws into question the necessity of sincerity. In the private apology, it is necessary that I communicate some sort of sincere remorse toward you, that my suffering is made plain. It is this display that (hopefully) opens up a response-ability from the other, allowing for forgiveness and reconciliation to begin. However, in public/political apology, “the major structural requirement and ultimate task ... is to put things on record, to document as a prelude to reconciliation” (Tavuchis 1991, 109). In other words, it is simply registering the apology in the symbolic that allows us to move toward the climax of reconciliation. Whether that apology is sincere or not is irrelevant. Lazare gives an example that might make this point more clear. According to this author, apologies “don’t always have to be sincere to be meaningful” (1998, 43):

Say your boss wrongfully accused you in front of the whole office. A fair reparation would require an apology—in front of the whole office. His questionable sincerity might be of secondary importance (1998, 43).

In this example, what makes the apology meaningful is that it is expressed toward a group, therefore restructuring the dynamics between victim and perpetrator. Whether this apology is a performance should not be the major point of concern. Rather, the “apology is a social transaction that involves a significant exchange of power, an exchange that is crucial for the restoration of balance and harmony” (Alter 1999, 3). In this sense, the power of apology quite literally belongs to the psychological effects it has on the people in the community (in this case the office), as opposed to any truth or sincerity it conveys.

Continuing with a “bodily” approach to reconciliation, by which I mean a methodology that looks beyond scientific Truth to see how actual minds and bodies are affected by things such as apology—as in the example above—it is at this point where reparations must be brought into the conversation. Home-

lessness, starvation, and sickness are realities of historical violence, and they need financial restitution to begin healing. Unlike Tavuchis, I am not of the opinion that apology “itself serves a reparation without requiring additional actions on the part of the transgressor” (1991, 16). If there is sincerity in apology it is in material redress for wrongs done. I am also unsympathetic to arguments that suggest that money isn’t the answer, that no amount could ever compensate for the trauma a victim has gone through. Rather, I defer to Roy L. Brooks on this point: “true, a price cannot and should not be placed on suffering. ... But when rights are ripped away, the victim or his family is entitled to compensation and much more” (1999b, 6). Suggesting that money cannot contribute to a victim’s well-being is just another way of disavowing that it is precisely capital that allows the transgressor to maintain his or her privileged position, and, in the case of imperialism, resources are the very reason why that perpetrator transgressed in the first place. As Brooks points out, both Japanese-Canadian and Japanese-American redress packages represent a major reason why these reconciliation movements were so successful.⁵

Reparation has the power to illustrate the perpetrator’s intent for change. Without it, apology is a purely ideological act, a means to paper over psychological and physical wounds and begin the process of forgetting. Ito Hideko, a member of South Korea’s House of Representatives, made this point when addressing the apology Japan offered for its use of “comfort women” during World War II. According to George Hicks, Hideko “expressed appreciation for Prime Minister Miyazawa’s apology to South Korea, but also expressed her regret for the lack of compensation to give it substance” (1999, 119). As Hideko and Hicks rightly note, reparations make apology “matter” (in both senses of the word: physical object and “importance”).

Assuming that proper apology and reparations have been offered, the next step on the “road to reconciliation” is forgiveness, one of the most fraught and overdetermined categories in Tavuchis’s series. Indeed, according to Slavoj Žižek, who in a lecture given at

Boston University directly addressed the problem of forgiving in the South African TRC, victims should *not* be attempting to forgive, but instead be trying to forget. Žižek’s concerns surround an issue we have already begun to address here: the performance of apology. According to him, the amnesty process in South Africa allowed perpetrators to confess without having to feel any remorse. Rightly, this leads him to be suspicious of the overwhelming demand to forgive put forth by Tutu and the TRC:

the model there in South Africa was “we forgive you but we will not forget it.” I think this is a very limited model. I am opposed to it. It’s a fake. First, again, it has limits: it works only at a certain level. Would you be ready to say this for Hitler or Stalin? We forgive you, dear Hitler, tell us the story of the Holocaust, we will not forget it but we will forgive. No. I think that when we are dealing with really radical crimes, I am almost tempted to propose the opposite model: I am ready to forget it, but I will never forgive you (2007, transcribed from video footage).

On the one hand, I am very sympathetic to the claims Žižek is making here. Particularly in South Africa, the demand to forgive is so powerful that it has almost eliminated choice. The title of Tutu’s book on the South African TRC process provides enough evidence to support this claim: *No Future Without Forgiveness* (1999). It as if the archbishop is insisting that we *must* forgive, we *must* exonerate our perpetrators despite the horrors of their crimes. If we do not, well, then, there is simply no future (a rather bleak calculation to say the least). Is this not entirely contrary to the very idea of what forgiveness, particularly forgiveness as a step on the road to reconciliation, is? As Martha Minow puts it, “Forgiveness is a power held by the victimized” (1998, 17). And that power consists solely in the ability to *withhold* forgiveness. By holding the power to forgive, I am granted some measure of control, but it is only in the *choice* to forgive that this control is present. Indeed, if we look at the roots of the words themselves, the tradition of forgiveness that Žižek is playing with here is caught up in a particular type of gift economy: (for)get and (for)give both being implied in the etymology. In this sense, Tutu’s imperative that one *must forgive* elides the act of giving implicit to the very word itself.

⁵ Indeed, according to Brooks, “by studying the experiences of Japanese Americans [and Japanese Canadians], we can glean important lessons about the redress of human injustices within the complex web of ... political system[s]” (1999a, 157).

On the other hand, we should not blindly endorse Žižek's own demand to forget, either. While there is a definite philosophical nuance to this claim (What does it mean to forget but not forgive? How do I withhold forgiveness for a transgression I no longer remember?), the tradition of forgetting, particularly in colonial settings, simply runs too deep. Indeed, as Cook-Lynn argues, the epidemic of forgetting is what the modern state is built on. As she astutely puts it, "new societies and new nations are born from the spilling of the blood of other nations—a fact that must be denied if a nation is to see itself as ethical" (1996, 39). In order for Canada, Australia, and the United States to see themselves as leaders in the global movement for peace and democracy, they must concurrently disavow the violence in their own histories.

Further, reconciliation without forgiveness, such as Žižek proposes, is not reconciliation at all, but coexistence. With coexistence, we are speaking simply of neighbours' ability to live together without violence. Indeed, according to Aneelah Afzali and Laura Colleton, "the minimal concept of coexistence asks only that members of such groups live together without killing each other" (2003, 3). Reconciliation, however, suggests a deeper level of living together; it is a new way of perceiving the neighbour, not simply without malice, but with trust and even friendship. This necessitates forgiveness, which "allows the person who committed the reprehensible act to begin anew, to take up another life and another activity" (Kristeva cited in Kluger 2002, 315).

In order to demonstrate the necessity of forgiveness in the reconciliation process, we need to look more closely at what this important reparative gesture entails. According to psychologist Everett L. Worthington, there are three main types of forgiveness: hollow, decision-based, and emotional. Hollow forgiveness is simply the kind that means nothing. Often, hollow forgiveness is offered in resignation, such as when an abusive partner continually badgers for it. Decision-based forgiveness is more complex. According to Worthington, decision-based forgiveness "is defined as the cognitive letting go of resentment and bitterness and need for vengeance. However, it is not always the end of emotional pain and hurt. Forgiveness here is viewed as an act of will, a choice to let go" (2006, 21). Decisional forgiveness, then, is primarily articulated in the symbolic order: it is the

signing of an agreement, the shaking of a hand, the official acceptance of an apology, even the conscious decision to forgive. However, as Worthington points out here, this type of forgiveness does not act on the level of the real, the bodily response I have toward the perpetrator: the revulsion, fear, and anger I feel every time I see him or the knot I feel in my stomach whenever I hear his name. Overcoming these feelings is what Worthington calls emotional forgiveness, which signals my ability to overcome my bodily reactions to my perpetrator, to even like and trust him. Often, emotional forgiveness is provided for by the space opened up by decision-based forgiveness.

To be clear, decisional forgiveness is the primary form evoked by TRCs. Desmond Tutu's demand that we forgive "not just once, not just seven times, but seventy times seven, without limit" (1999, 273) cannot, in any seriousness, be a demand to overcome the intense emotions and physical reactions one has toward the perpetrators of a traumatic event. Even if I could emotionally forgive those with whom I had face-to-face interactions, how can I forgive, on the same level, those whom I have never met? Or those who make no move toward offering apology? Would this not make my forgiveness less valuable to those who had sought it out or less sincere to those who might otherwise follow my lead (say, my family or community)?

Further, I can choose to forgive these people, but I cannot, as psychology has proven, choose to do away with trauma and the symptoms induced by it. Despite my willingness to "love my enemy," if such a love is indeed possible, I cannot ignore the intense physical reactions this love may induce. The state can ask its citizens to decide to forgive, but due to the extremely subjective nature of trauma and mercy itself, it can never demand emotional forgiveness from its population. By deciding to let go of my need for vengeance, for example, I take down the emotional barriers that separate me and the other, opening myself up to an experience over which I myself (let alone the state) have no control. Insofar as modern politics still practices a method of distancing, or "empathy-at-a-distance" as Edmund Burke famously put it (cited in Shriver 2007, 21), we may be forced to admit that political reconciliation and forgiveness are incompatible. One of our most difficult problems, as theorists, may then be challenging and further unpacking the ways in which forgiveness fits into a reconciliatory model.

With forgiveness we encounter what is probably the most important and problematic aspects of reconciliation, empathy, which has been built into the demand to forgive propagated by TRCs and Western psychology. As Worthington suggests, “almost every major theory of promoting forgiveness ... [including his own] has targeted empathy as a key player” (2006, 102). With empathy, “one sees the other as having acted in a way as human beings do, out of his or her own perceptions; there may even be the recognition that what he or she did is something one has done or could well do” (2006, 75). In other words, then, and this is where forgiveness becomes exceptionally problematic, *empathy is about putting oneself in the place of the perpetrator*. It is about seeing the transgression not only through a new point of view, but through the very eyes of the torturer. Following a Judeo-Christian model of suffering, victims who are asked to forgive are also asked to endure empathy. Seeing through the eye—or “I”—of an architect of violence can be a physiologically damaging event, to which the testimony of translators at the South African TRC attests: “It is difficult to interpret victim hearings ... because you use the first person all the time. I have no distance when I say ‘I’ ... it runs through me with ‘I’” (Krog 1994, 169). Tutu makes a similar point, although with less poeticism: “it was particularly rough for our interpreters because they had to speak in the first person, at one time being the victim and at another being a perpetrator” (1999, 286). As these literary tropes help to illustrate, the reciprocity of empathy, of putting myself in the place of the other and (ideally, in reconciliation) allowing him to put himself in my place, actually represents another psychological threat to the victim that purveyors of forgiveness wilfully overlook by emphasizing the “good” derived from suffering.

Aside from psychological damage, there are also a number of ethical problems that need to be carefully considered with emotional forgiveness. As Smedes puts it, “Forgiving ... is a serious risk” (1985, 171), and this becomes even more clear when we stop to examine the limits of an unconditional forgiveness like the one Tutu preaches. Is it ethically viable to forgive a mass murderer? Can we see through Hitler’s eye/I and maintain our humanity? Is attempting to make someone like Hitler or Stalin human even a project we should undertake? In *Eichmann and the Holocaust* (1963), Hannah Arendt rigorously denies

the role of empathy as a viable means for addressing genocide and the people who design it. For her, “other-oriented emotion” (Worthington’s jargon for empathy) should be sacrificed for the letter of the law: “is it conceivable that none of them [jury members at the Eichmann trial] asked himself how many of his own group would have done the same if only they had been allowed to? But is their condemnation today any less correct for that reason?” (2005, 126). In other words, for Arendt, there is a clear limit to empathy. Certain people (and Hitler always seems to provide the limit in the literature) simply cannot nor should not be forgiven, and empathetic understanding need not play any role in the carrying out of justice.

Sitting contrary to Arendt’s position, however, is a true story about forgiving a mass murderer, which can be found in Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela’s work entitled *A Human Being Died That Night* (2003). Gobodo-Madikizela, a registered psychiatrist and a member of the South African TRC, tells the story of the interviews she conducted with Eugene de Kock, a former colonel of the South African Police force during apartheid in South Africa; a man who was dubbed “prime evil” by the global media (Gobodo-Madikizela 2003, 13). Gobodo-Madikizela’s primary concern in this text is precisely the problem of empathy: “I was afraid, not of the memory of the evil schemes that were concocted in that city but of my own empathy for de Kock” (2003, 116). Indeed, one of the major tropes of the book centres on the ethics of “stepping into the shoes of a murderer through empathy” (2003, 120).

Perhaps the most important aspect of this book, then, and certainly the most often cited, comes at the moment when she, Gobodo-Madikizela, reaches out to touch de Kock’s hand in a fleeting moment of compassion. Afterward, in an instant that affects the author profoundly, de Kock tells her, “you know Pumla, that was my trigger hand you touched” (2003, 39). Following this realization, Gobodo-Madikizela experiences radical psychosomatic symptoms: for instance, she wakes up to discover that the hand that touched his is “completely numb” and she is unable to move it (2003, 40). The psychologist is also afflicted by anxiety about her moral position in relation to de Kock: “I felt guilty for having expressed even momentary sympathy and wondered if my heart crossed the moral line from compassion, which allows one to maintain a measure of distance, to actually

identifying with de Kock" (2003, 33). Of course there is something profoundly discomfiting in realizing that our lives somehow connect with an "evil" person, that the gap between self and enemy can be so startlingly small; however, what makes Gobodo-Madikizela's account so significant is that, while she recognizes her own ethical culpability in empathizing with "prime evil," she also sees it as a potential source of hope. She asks, "through our recognition of evil as a constant possibility in human experience [can we] learn to prevent it from taking over our lives" (2003, 50)? Importantly, the emphasis here is on the *recognition* of evil as part of the human condition, as opposed to a disavowal of this trait as something other than human. Gobodo-Madikizela is ready to accept the contrapuntal reading of de Kock as evil and as a human being capable of emotion. *A Human Being Died That Night* illustrates that we don't have to forget the evil a person has done in order to empathize with him or her—indeed, it is essential that we recognize and identify the person as such—but we don't have to exorcise the person from the limits of humanity either.

Gobodo-Madikizela's response to de Kock, her need to empathize with him, is what Arendt in *Eichmann and the Holocaust* dismisses as "animal pity" (2005, 46). This is precisely the kind of neo-enlightenment thinking that we need to avoid in responsible discussions of reconciliation. As I state above in relation to *Bitter Fruit*, our "animal" reactions (our involuntary bodily reactions to hurt and suffering) are at the very heart of the reconciliation problem. We need a system that is willing to address these problems head on, rather than obscuring them behind the letter of the law—even if that letter was drawn under the banner of international human rights. Gobodo-Madikizela's experience, captured in this text, provides an important example for thinking this through, drawing particular attention, in the scenes describing her somatic reactions to empathy, to the way in which the body reacts to and is implicated in the forgiving process.

And here, via transgression, apology, and forgiveness, we have finally reached the climax of reconciliation. It may seem strange to be defining what reconciliation is in this closing section when, ostensibly, this entire essay has been about what sets the conditions for it to exist. Indeed, as I hope I have illustrated, transgression, apology, and forgiveness can all be seen as necessary components of the reconcil-

iation process, which transcend the neo-enlightenment ideology of a Truth-based method, allowing the body to come more directly into question. In this sense, these components *are* reconciliation; they are an integral part of what delimits it as a field. Nonetheless, although as we have been speaking of reconciliation for the last eighteen pages, we arrive at it here, again, for some further clarification.

At this point, I want to make clear that while transgression, apology, and forgiveness are steps toward reconciliation, reconciliation itself is not teleology. While these individual moments allow us to move *toward* reconciliation, this "climax" should not be seen as a strict endpoint. As Edna McDonagh points out, the English use of "reconciliation" is taken from the Greek *katallassein* (or *diallassein*), which derives from the word "other" (*allos*). As such, reconciliation "is related to overcoming hostile otherness or estrangement" (1985, 565), the emphasis being on the *act* of relating to the other, of finding a space in which the distance between self and other can be mediated. The Sudanese word for reconciliation perhaps illustrates this act best. Here, reconciliation is an image: "sitting to talk with your enemy under a tree" (cited in Shriver 2007, 4). In sum, reconciliation is an ongoing conversation, a means of opening up communication with the other.

In order to illustrate this more clearly, I need to return to the very material conditions that make reconciliation necessary before I move on to give a somewhat more concrete definition of what it "is." On the one hand, genuine reconciliation (if there is such a thing) is a desirable and necessary goal. Without it, the cycle of violence and death we have seen and continue to see in southeastern Europe, Northern Ireland, South Africa, Rwanda, Sri Lanka, among others, can only continue. (And in this cycle of violence we must include the violence of poverty and diaspora that has been inflicted in "peaceful" countries like Canada, Australia, and the United States against aboriginal communities.) On the other hand, reconciliation, reified and passed from nation-state to nation-state as a program or methodology, risks recapitulating a certain type of colonial violence. As a program, reconciliation is normalizing, which necessitates the elision of "marginal" voices that do not fit neatly within its schematics. Indeed, Susan Dwyer points out in "Reconciliation for Realists" (1999) that this elision can occur where we least

expect it. Dwyer's contention, and I am inclined to agree with her, is that there are concerns that some aspects of the language of healing have almost become synonymous with reconciliation, insofar as they may be "merely a ruse to disguise the fact that a 'purer' type of justice cannot be realized" (1999, 1): land reforms being one of the primary examples. By setting the "program" of reconciliation as a "healing initiative" (McKay 2008, 113), for instance, we risk obfuscating voices seeking deeper levels of justice, such as land redress and punishment for those who committed the crimes. To repeat, then, we must maintain the need for achieving reconciliation, but we need to pursue this need in a way that does not foreclose the voices and politics of those who are being reconciled.

In closing, then, and following from this important point of reference, I would like to make some very tentative conclusions about what reconciliation "is" in some positive way. Identifying an idea by what it is *not* is useful (perhaps even necessary in the case of reconciliation) but also somewhat capacious and frustrating. For the sake of clarification, then, reconciliation is *not* something that can be achieved via scientific Truth, simply because this Truth suggests a reification, a single, identifiable narrative, which always already excludes alter-native voices and elides bodily reactions to such things as apology and forgiveness. What reconciliation *is*, however, is a very specific kind of speech act, an act that is performed by making an utterance. I say specific, not because it is simply a word that performs what it says (as if that were simple), but rather in that, in evoking it, *it opens up the space for reconciliation to occur*. I believe this idea is what Doxtader is also getting at in his exegesis of "The Middle Voice of 2 Corinthians" when he writes that "reconciliation occurs as the living memory of a sacrifice ... in which the causes of a past conflict are overwritten by a working faith in the gift of speech. [The] explanation is also a performance" (2004, 56).

To be clear, I am not attempting to restate a Pauline, Greco-Christian perspective here. My point is not that "saying is doing," but rather that dialogue is at the centre of reconciliation. In other words, by opening up the debate and continuing to define and redefine reconciliation, *we actually bring it into being*. Thus, when Cindy Blackstock states that "reconciliation requires not just *saying* the right thing

but *doing* the right thing" (2008, 174, emphasis original), she may be identifying a fundamental misconception about what reconciliation is. Arguably, in this instance saying *is* doing. This is not to distract from the need for material reparations that Blackstock is calling for here, but, following more from speech act theory than the doctrines of Paul, to suggest that it is perhaps the "saying" that allows for their very possibility. What this means, then, is that reconciliation must be seen as a process, as opposed to a goal, a set of conversations, contradictions, arguments, and redefinitions. Reconciliation is not something we can *achieve*, rather it is something we *enact* in our attempts to achieve it.

Unfortunately, this may be entirely contrary to the way in which "reconciliation" is currently being laid out by government officials. For example, the Canadian TRC has set up a very strict time frame in its mandate. Quite blithely, the official mandate states that "the Commission shall complete its work within five years" (see "Schedule 'N'—Mandate for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission" in Castellano et al. 2008, 420). If we are to move past goal-driven directives such as this, we must accept a fundamental paradox: with reconciliation, once we achieve the climax the goal itself is lost. The challenge will remain in how to keep this process going, while concurrently remembering that philosophical debate cannot be allowed to overshadow basic human needs and rights. By continuing to articulate the way the body is implicated in reconciliation processes and the ways in which people respond physically and emotionally to transgression, apology, and forgiveness, we can develop more responsible methodological and political approaches to address this challenge.

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