

12th General Assembly
Governing the African Public Sphere

12e Assemblée générale
Administrer l'espace public africain

12a Assembleia Geral
Governar o Espaço Público Africano

ةي عمجل ةي مومعلا ةي ناثلا رشع
حكم الفضاء العام الإفريقي

**Negotiating Nation-Building and Citizenship through the
TRC's 'Dramatic' Spheres: a Reading of Two Post –
apartheid Plays**

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Introduction

As variegated as elements in nature are, human beings have achieved a mastery of virtually all the elements as they deploy these for constructing social, economic and political advantages. This unique deployment does not merely give man the control over natural things but allow one individual to assume a more advantageous platform than the others, who at times would be entrapped in a cold war of superiority or domination as it is characteristic of man, not only to attain sovereignty but to acquire power through which some or others are consigned to the position of servitude. This goes to say, therefore, that space is one of the available devices that allow for the externalisation of the domineering nature of man through the acquisition of both power, and the lever to control those under his/her domination. The conjectures of space are as varying as the assumptions they make and the meanings they create. It then follows that the manifestations of space would be dependent on the particular signification that is targeted at one point or the other. However, it is fundamental that space, in its ontology, is characteristically depictive of the vacuum, the blank spot, centre, platform, or fulcrum, offered to an agent to function either minimally or maximally. The functionality of the agent is at the same time consequent on the nature and character of its existence. This implies that the performance of a concept, subject or object, derives from the symbiotic relationship between the physicality of the given space and the ontological configuration of the relational element. This gets a confirmation from the view of Doreen Massey (2005: 20), making reference to what is called “a long and illustrious history”, that “there is an association between the spatial and the fixation of meaning”. In another vein, Massey (ibid) holds that “representation — indeed conceptualization — has been conceived of as spatialisation”. The mention made of space at this point is important to the extent of its interrelatedness to ‘sphere’. Given the foregoing, it should be made clear that space could be characterised by both size and nature. By size we mean whether space is overt, small, cylindrical, opaque, sinuous, shallow, expansive, and etcetera, while by nature it implies that space could be simply evaluated on whether it is public or private. However, suffice to make it clear that the possibilities adducible to space, as far as its characteristics are concerned, are not limited to the above. It is significant, however, that emphasis in this paper shall be given to space in the reality of its nature to interrogate whether it is public or private, or both, or neither.

Spatialisation and Meaning Making

So much theorising has been done on space¹ as a concept. As much as a regurgitation of that would not be necessary in this circumstance, a reading of some of the manifestations shall be done so as to establish a good platform for our take-off. Space is conceived as “an open, heterogeneous, and indeterminate field”, which, like the subject, is a void to “be filled, contested, and reconfigured through contingent and partially determined social relations, practices, and meanings” (Wolfgang Natter and John Paul Jones III 1997: 149-150). In another vein Benno Werlen (1993: 1) examines these conjectures by looking at the activities of geographers in relation to space, with a group holding that it is the aim of geographers to study space while others believe that they are out “to analyse the significance of space for social processes”. This is generated in a way that underpins not just the natural responsibilities space, and objects in it, play for human presence on earth, but a secondary enhancement given to space as a form of signification and social mapping. Further to the foregoing, Rosa Ainley (1998: xiii), looking at the *Oxford Popular Dictionary* 1993 definition of space, sees space as “both actual and imagined/dramatized, with a sense of boundlessness, ‘in which all objects exist and move’”.

The teleology of object and the attendant mobility seem a utopia considering the various meaning-making negotiations such seemingly innocuous stand-point is often subjected to. As mentioned above, space would cease to be a lone agent in social constructions since the positionality of objects that coexist in, and with, it is important as it allows a classification or description of “certain order of material objects with respect to their specific dimension” (Werlen Ibid: 3). This indicates that space does not only guarantee the inscription of object, element and agent, it goes ahead to perform the function of ascription, as “space in the physical world is constituted *via* the experience of the subject’s own body through the conscious self in movement”. Put differently, therefore, space could be used to circumscribe and promote at the same time. This goes to mean that space, as well as “spatial relations may be expressed as forms of confinement, imprisonment, marginalisation, erasure, or silencing” (James McCorkle 2001: 107). It must be clarified, however, that the above nature of space is both natural as well as artificial. The naturalness of the situation is a function of the realisation that some natural elements in nature could ‘conspire’ with space to submerge, swallow, and repel, as the case may be. That sense of reality therefore leaves space as: “the

¹ For instance, Gary Bridge (2004: 61a) reechoes the contribution of Foucault’s “notion of governmentality in the discursive construction of space for politics”.

dimension of quantitative divisibility...as the dimension of plurality, discrete multiplicity” (Doreen Massey 2005: 20).

Apart from these, space can be used in classification and categorisation. This is consequent upon the ascription of value or privilege, as well as devaluation of a spatial property, at one time or the other. However, though, this classificatory differentiation is not limited to objects that share different constituents but include those that parade a high level of verisimilitude in features and behaviour. Werlen (ibid: 142) captures this when it is posited that “while every object can be defined or located spatially, regardless of its content, objects which are otherwise identical can be distinguished by their spatial location”. This explains the different politicisations of geographical space which in turn lead to attachment of values to achieve place naming and gating. Gated communities all over the world are fashioned to respond to the melting of different social groups within a society. Apart from the fact that social differentiations are done using race and skin pigmentation, social exclusions and inclusions have also been made in various social orders based on materiality. The resultant effects of these binaries have been high-toned contestations that greeted the relationships between the center and the margin. While the first strives towards sustaining the beneficial *status quo*; the latter is bent on challenging and overthrowing it.

This goes without saying, therefore, that the legitimisation of power and the resistance put against it leave space as “the physical terrain and symbolic expanse over which contestations of power take place” (Belinda Bozzoli 2004:7). The various manifestations of space identified so far instructively nudge us towards the analogous sharing that the public sphere promises. Michael Shafir (2004: 1) sees the public space as “a meaningful mirror of political competition” where (citing Andrei Pippidi 2000), “‘symbolic history’ is always entangled in the separate, but nonetheless, associate process of a ‘clash of memories’”. Perhaps, it might be important to emphasise that the only idea brought into the discourse at this stage is ‘public’, given that this paper considers words like sphere and domain interchangeable alternatives for space. However, this is not as a result of syntax and the prescriptions of synonym, but more so as a result of their replaceability in the trajectory of the discourse in the paper. Appropriately, it should be stated that a difference in such a deployment is drawn between public space and public sphere by Charles T. Goodsell (2003: 361) who holds that the first is peculiar to

Hannah Arendt,² a political and moral philosopher, while the latter is credited to the translation done on the work of the philosopher, Jurgen Habermas.

Gradation to Public Sphere; Theoretical Frame

Central to the discourse of the public sphere is the contribution made by Jurgen Habermas (1962, 1989) on the democratisation of mass communication. Countless inputs have been made following the prognosis of Habermas on the universalistic application of democratic communication in the globalising world. Although the scholarship on this discourse is enormously huge, efforts shall be made presently to sift some ideas around it and use them appropriately in the order of relevance. One of such developments is the purported replacement of hegemony by the public sphere which has been identified by Nicholas Garnham (1995), cited in Jim McGuigan (1998: 91). Although Garnham finds some aspect of the proposition which border on media and cultural studies problematic, he concurs with the fact that “hegemony...carries connotations of domination, the power of the strong over the weak, even though the winning of consent rather than crude manipulation is at stake”. The above portends a great paradox, close to the hand-in-hand coexistence of democracy and dictatorship. This is reflective of a state of servitude where coercion is not necessarily an ideal instrument.

This form of relations, no doubt, characterises most relationships at the different levels of social, political, cultural and economic dealings. It is then the case that the public sphere offers both the space for the ascription of hegemonic dictates and the militating responses of counterhegemony. McGuigan (ibid) emphasises this to the end that “the public sphere is a positive idea, a good thing... referencing a condition within which the power of the strong may be checked by that of the weak through access to...participation in political debate and decision-making”. As much as the view shared by McGuigan above is plausible, in terms of hegemonic propositions and state instrumentality to foster imaginary inclusion, it is in itself self-negating and a far cry from the truth. The self-negation inherent in it is triggered by the fact that the state, or better still, the hegemon (or its agent), is saddled with the construction of the public sphere, using state instruments and power to transform an ordinary simple space to

² According to Charles T. Goodsell (2003: 362), Arendt defines the public space as “the sphere of public action essential to democratic citizenship. It is the realm in which citizens engage in collective deliberation and in joint action on behalf of the public good”, while Habermas says the public sphere involves individuals’ private conversations and discussions that are directed on the interest of the public. Succinctly put, Goodsell believes “Arendt’s public space is primarily an arena of political action, whereas Habermas’s public sphere is essentially a medium of public communications”.

be imbued with characteristics that are suitable to its aspirations at one time or the other. Georges Benko and Ulf Strohmayr (1997: 150) support this with the fact that “hegemonic cultural practices will always attempt to fix the meaning of space”. This means that the passive placeness of space is converted through naming to achieve “social spatialization” which are the products of what Henri Lefebvre once called a particular “mode of production of space” under the control of specific groups” (Rob Shields 1997: 188). Further to this negation is the realisation that the weak, in the real sense of the word, is either particularly created by the state, (or its agent), or has his precarious situations exploited and sustained by the state for the survival of hegemony. Even when the state shows a ‘sincere’ concern in the condition of the weak, such sincerity is not allowed to debilitate the interest of the state, hegemony, and or its agents.

‘The public sphere’ is also defined by Habermas (1974: 49), cited in Colin Sparks (1998: 110) “as a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed. Access is guaranteed to all citizens”. We should be mindful of the essence of social formation that is mentioned in the view of Habermas on the public sphere. This is more so considering the fact that only a segment of the public is involved in the construction of such a space. The representation provided by such representatives could at best be taken as what obtains under democratic arrangements and not an ideal response to the yearnings of the masses that constitute a greater part of the public. Habermas proceeds that “a portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body”. This public body deploys the instrumentality of the public sphere not only to vent their thoughts on issues that affect them in relation to the state, but is set out to challenge what are conceived as excesses or a misdirection or, better still, a misapplication of the resources and instruments of the state. It might be right to argue, therefore, that “space is equally exhilarating and threatening” (Doreen Massey *ibid*: 59) to both the public body and the state. While the state attempts a firm hold on the public sphere, the liberalisation of such space notwithstanding, the public strives to assume domination of the space by offering counter-narratives to those authored by the state. This is in tandem with the notion of bell hooks’ center and the periphery relationship, where “power in the margin, constitutive outside, a peripheral power” is “poised to deconstruct any center of which it is a part”.³

³ Quoted in Wolfgang Natter and John Paul Jones III (1997: 151).

It is in the light of this that this paper shall be looking at the configuration of the public sphere done through the convocation of the TRC by the South African government, following the demise of the apartheid order. This would be done by looking at the investment of ordinary space in town and community halls⁴ with symbolic meanings of social, legal and psychological regeneration. This fits very well into the abridging of the varying “striking contrast” (Charles T. Goodsell 2003: 361) that exists between the different usages that respective disciplines put the terms into. These are “those who refer to it as the social realm of unfettered discourse of matters of public concern and those who conceive of it as a physical, public place, such as a town or urban plaza”. The paper will reveal that the state’s deployment of the public sphere to achieve its programme does not preclude the public body from externalising its thoughts and ideas on such issues, most especially the collective amnesia that is recommended by the state and the disinterest of the previously abused in doing this, but rather the desire on the part of the violated for a show of remorse by their oppressors.

This would be matched with a genuine commitment by the government to improve the lots of the previously disadvantaged people. By this token, the public sphere behaves like what Stan Allen (1998), cited in Therese Tierney (2007: 80) calls “a field condition”, which is “any formal or spatial matrix capable of unifying diverse elements while respecting the identity of each”. Succinctly put, therefore, “yet hegemony, as the process that naturalize both space and social relations, is like any form of power: never fixed or inevitable but always open to exposure, confrontation, reversal, and refusal through counterhegemonic or disidentifying practices” (Wolfgang Natter and John Paul Jones III 1997: 150). When considered from the perspective of socio-political negotiations, the public sphere is capable of manifesting what Therese Tierney (2007: 79) refers to as “outsidedness, within the mode of presencing”. The presenceness identified is depictive of the locational positionality of the state both within the public domain and outside it, while outsidedness captures the estrangement of the masses which might not necessarily be in terms of physicality.

Analysis: South African TRC, a Public Sphere?

Among other socio-political engagements done in Mda’s *The Bells of Amersfoort* and Kani’s *Nothing But the Truth*, the two play-texts make a statement about the South African Truth and

⁴ Benno Werlen (1993:174) calls these “socially constructed artefacts”.

Reconciliation Commission⁵ that was set up to look at the various violations of human personality committed in apartheid⁶ South Africa, most especially in the light of Black South Africans who were reduced “from the cradle to the grave” (Jay A. Vora and Erika Vora 2004: 302). Since the Commission requires testimonies from the violated and confession from violators, the TRC tallies with the idea of the public space shared by Carr, Francis, Rivlin, & Stone, 1992, reechoed by Charles T. Goodsell (2003: 364), as “the stage upon which the drama of communal life unfolds”. Goodsell proceeds further that “such places are seen as a social binder for current residents and a connector to the past through accumulated personal memories and showcased historical monuments”. It should be pointed out at this stage that the notion of the public space shall be construed from two important approaches. One is the various physical spatial loci⁷ that the plays parodied and the idea of art, which is the play-texts, as a configured public space where the actual world is brought to the crucible. These texts, in a way, interrogate the use of power and how they are spawned into historical-fictional narratives, thereby correlating with Elden’s (2001: 152) assessment of Foucault’s work, cited by Chris Philo (2004: 124), as “not just as a history of the present but as a mapping of the future”. This mapping done as art and literature, “give form to the remnants of these histories”, thereby coalescing into “the literary public sphere” (Luke Goode 2005: 7). While the interactions in *The Bells of Amersfoort* is directly confrontational between two major characters, Tami and Johan, through the use of the flashback technique to reenact the TRC, *Nothing But the Truth* merely presents an interrogative process through the discussions of Sipho, the major character, her daughter Thando, a teacher and an interpreter at the amnesty hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and the daughter of his exiled brother, Mandisa, who has just returned from London for the burial of her father, Themba.

Even though the two instruments of the TRC and the engagement made with it by art could be lampooned by the modernist and postmodernist for the intricacies inhered in them, the

⁵ The South African TRC, which was headed by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, started its assignment on February 1, 1996, after the approval given to it by the parliament in July 1995. President Nelson Mandela appointed seventeenth commissioners of the TRC, who, together with eleven co-opted members, formed three committees: the Human Rights Violations Committee, the Amnesty Committee, and the Reparation and Rehabilitation Committee. The TRC proceedings ended on July 31, 1998, and the final report submitted to President Nelson Mandela on October 29, 1998 (see Ruston Bharucha 2002: 362). Similar Commissions (15), according to Jay A. Vora and Erika Vora (2004: 303), were established in countries like Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Germany, the Philipines, and others. The South African TRC’s activities were carried out under three major committees: the Amnesty committee, the Human Rights Violations Committee, and the Reparation and Rehabilitation Committee (Charles Manga Fombad 2004: 196).

⁶ The system was declared a crime against humanity.

⁷ These include the “town halls, civic centers, and churches” used across the country (Jay A. Vora and Erika Vora (2004: 305).

intention of art, as much as possible, is to challenge the modernity intention of the TRC. Zygmunt Bauman, cited in David Clarke and Marcus Doel (2004: 34b), appraising the revelation got from the handlings of the Holocaust, has accused modernity for having “out-rationalized (adiaphorized) the moral impulse, unburdening individuals of moral responsibility by delegating it to a higher authority”, while he queries postmodernity for out-aestheticizing by keeping the moral impulse and sentiment at bay, but rather choosing “as its points of reference and orientation the traits and qualities possessed by or ascribed to the objects of spacing”. It would be sheer insensitivity to the nature of art if, in this case, it is vilified for aesthetic inclinations considering the fact that aesthetic elements provide the necessary instruments through which art navigates the trajectories of social materials that art interacts with in both fictional and factual worlds. As variegated as the relationship art shares with life is, and the case of South Africa being a very strong one, and with no intention to get plunged into this problematisation in this essay, it might be right to situate art momentarily within the ambit created by Joanne Sharp (2007: 275) which she has called, citing S. Lacy (1995), “a more participatory form of public art practice...new genre public art, wherein artists move to engage with communities and existing social struggles, to develop collaboration and dialogue with residents, and to employ different modes of address”.

However, though, this type of inclusivity was particularly peculiar to theatre in apartheid South Africa⁸ when it was relegated, significantly, to an instrument of resistance. Of particular analogy is the theatre for development which was almost an elongation of the communal traditional practices of theatricality. The plausibility of what art could do to both the hegemony and people on the margin is the construction of a space which is poised at “recreating community history, governed by desires to represent it for generations who might not know the origins of the place in which they were growing up” (Joanne Sharp 2007: 279). This foregoing prognosis is saying the obvious considering the intentions and the efforts of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Consequently, all truth commissions, the South African one inclusive, “seek to engage the dimension of the social and political space, a space of collective bargaining within civil society to spotlight terrible crimes and abuses, but also to animate public discussions and opinions” (Okwui Enwezor 2002: 17).

⁸ Literature in apartheid South Africa was reduced to an instrument of resistance because of the vitriolic engagements it made with the debased government and the prisms of what it stood for. Apart from deploying theatre most particularly for exposing the ills lurking around, it was used to mobilise people from both within and without to condemn it. Because this proved to be an effective instrument, some scholars have feared what literature in post-apartheid South Africa would engage with. This apprehension has been proved to be unfounded as literature in the new South Africa is still involved in the interrogation of the minimal life of the people.

Most nations all over the world, particularly post-colonies, are enmeshed in attempts to grapple with their past, as constituted in present realities, even when they should be, or and are, forward looking. Appraising the construction and reconstruction of racial inferiority by the colonizers in the ontology of the various interactions colonised nations in Africa had with the former, Chinua Achebe (1975: 70) has recommended that rather than just concentrating efforts on condemning past spoilers, people should look back and try to find out where they “went wrong, and where the rain began to beat” them. This accounts for the interest of the new South African government to memorialise the despicable past of the apartheid regime, by recognising where things went wrong, and how not to recede to such abnormality. The sudden emergence of the bridge of negotiation, following the huge human abuses and degradations that the perpetuation of the apartheid prisms and the oppositions staged against it, is minimally commendable. This amount of commendation is made necessary more so going by the fact that it was done in a sharp and rude departure from the ‘amorous’ and ‘passionate’⁹ past. Most particularly, the approach employed is analogous to Mahatman Gandhi’s experiment with *Satyagraha*, a non-violent protest strategy against racial discrimination, which he kick-started in South Africa. However, the convocation of the TRC and its subsequent activities has been criticised most severely at one point or the other as a result of what certain groups or individuals perceive as the overbearing hold of the state, most especially its deployment as an instrument of achieving state programmes and intentions. One of those intentions was the fact that the TRC was part of other measures put in place for inscribing assurances following the players’ readiness to guarantee amnesty for White apartheid leaders who were scared and threatened with the possibility of revenge after the transition into a democratic regime. Therefore, it could be argued that “the TRC was born of political compromise, like most truth commissions” (Jay A. Vora and Erika Vora 2004: 302), or what Michael Shafir (2004: 1), quoting Miklos Haraszti, calls “the handshake tradition”.

An excerpt of the final clause of the democratic South African Constitution given below succinctly captures the negotiation between the old white rulers and the new emerging black order. Inhered in this piece are several other nuances of compromises which are apparently at variance with the aspirations of individuals, most especially victims of the brutalisation of the

⁹ Both words are designative of the supremacy and purity that most of the white community was interested in.

past, who might not have access to government hoarded opportunities with which they could seek pacification for their wounds:

The adoption of this Constitution lays the secure foundation for the people of South Africa to transcend the divisions of strife of the past, which generated gross violations of human rights, the transgression of humanitarian principles in violent conflicts and a legacy of hatred, fear, guilt and revenge. These can now be addressed on the basis that there is a need for understanding but not for vengeance, a need for reparation but not for retaliation, a need for ubuntu (the African philosophy of humanism) but not for victimization. In order to advance such reconciliation and reconstruction, amnesty shall be granted in respect of acts, omissions and offences associated with political objectives and committed in the course of the past (Krog, 1998, p. vi, quoted in Jay A. Vora and Erika Vora 2004: 302).

No doubt, the above is reminiscent of an attempt to find a smooth transition from a past history of pressures, instabilities and conflicts. This transitional endeavour has been “equated with the construction of a new social environment based on the lessons learnt from experiences, leaving behind past abusive and dependent relationships and providing the basis for a more just, and equitable society” (Charles Manga Fombad 2004: 193). In spite of the *tabularasa* being sought by the dictates of this negotiated Constitution, the TRC processes, in a way, helped in inscribing some aspects of the undesirable repudiated past. However, the paradoxes occasioned by the realities of the commission and the responses to them form the platform for the contestations between the state and certain strata of the political community.

The pastness of the apartheid era in a way reminds one of the constituents of memory, which is being surrounded by different propositions, most especially the transformation and promotion of private memory to the level of collective or national memorials. Further still, these personal memories were made public through the TRC theatricality. Simply put, memory could be viewed in this wise in agreement with the view of Paul Ricoeur (2004) as an equivalent proportion of the actual event. In another vein, Alan Baddeley (1989: 51) sees memory as a system for storing information which is required “to take in the necessary information, to store it, and to retrieve it at the appropriate time”. Baddeley however adds that “memory is potentially fallible at each of these points”. Memory and the TRC share a correlative interdependence in that the latter is involved in achieving the former. For instance,

memory, just like the TRC, “serves to preserve intimations of the infinitive possibilities of such regressions of the human mind — and the dangers they spell for the harmonization goals of our world” (Wole Soyinka 2000: 23). This explains why the past is being ‘remade’ for achieving reconciliation in the present, even as wounds of past violations are being re-opened for examination most especially in the public sphere through the instrumentality of the TRC (Sarah Nuttal 1998: 75). We should, however, be reminded of the various challenges that memory is vulnerable to, mostly when issues like recollection and forgetting are involved. This explains why the past is brought to engage with the present through settlement, as against revolution, and garnished with rhetoric and narratives of how to process the future, which has been designated as nation-building.

As a result of the many literature that abound in the area of the South African TRC, efforts shall be made to limit the scope of what to be interacted with going by the need to make informed prognoses as being sought in this paper. The documentation and recording of the pains of the apartheid past were considered necessary for rebuilding the new South Africa. Kader Asmal et al (1996) have made an explicit interrogation of the TRC and come up with reasons and needs for its constitution. Starting from the putative note, quoting Willem de Klerk, that “apartheid system was darkness masquerading as light a crime against humanity”, Asmal et al posit that “in moving away from the discredited governing consciousness of the past, we will need to build a new, shared and ceaseless debated memory of the past” (9). This debate, in their view, is important in order to harness the diversity precipitated by the history of the nation and the people as well as preventing possible social, economic and political contestations. In the view, an abnegation of this responsibility would be counterproductive as Asmal et al fear that “for the new South Africa to abandon accurate remembrance in these early years of its birth would be the most cruel self-slaughter” (12). Although the idea of remembrance as muted by Asmal et al is good in itself, the fact that it must be accurate and limited to the early life of the new South Africa are contentious. This is consequent on the realisation that the act of recollection and remembering can not be accurate as the process is liable to silences, gaps, omissions, stultifications, both deliberate and inadvertent.

The implication of the above is that repressions are deliberately achieved by the agent trying to remember the past while injuries and physical as well as psychological interferences could lead to unavoidable amnesia. Asmal et al proceed to hint that the South African TRC was put in place to aid the process of reconciliation which requires “a just moral appraisal of the past”

(14), even though dealing effectively with the past “is an exercise of immense difficulty interacting in a vast network of political, emotional, ethical and logistical considerations”¹⁰. The difficulty inherent in the preceding statement is so central to the argument of this paper as actors, most especially victims of the apartheid regime giving testimonies before the Commission, reject the process as lacking the will to effectively elicit confessions from their past violators and compensate them appropriately. The compensation being sought is not purely material, but psychological as well. Tensions arising from these disaffections leave so much to be desired considering the fact that “an important goal of the commission is to act as a catalyst for swift and thorough disclosures of past horrors in order to accelerate — and so eventually end — the ready and corrosive drip of the past pathologies into the new order” (Asmal et al *ibid*: 26). One of the scathing devaluations of the TRC is that contained in the lengthy and detailed memoir that Alex Boraine put together to capture his time as the deputy chairman of the commission. In a review of the memoir done by Stuart Wilson, Boraine is said to have claimed that the TRC was able to settle scores but with the notion that “some fellow commissioners subordinated the TRC’s integrity to their short-time political interests at critical moments” (2002: 364). Succinctly put, therefore, it might be tenable to subscribe to the belief of some democratic theorists that the sponsorship of the public sphere, like that of the South African TRC, is “antithetical to the core of idea of uninhibited conversation” (Goodsell 2003: 368).

Even though the TRC smacks of the identity of an “exemplary civic theatre, a public hearing of private griefs which are absorbed into the body politic as a part of the deeper understanding of how the society arrived at its present position”, Catherine M. Cole 2004: 219, quoting William Kentridge, it has faced different levels of scathing vilifications from some quarters who see the ontology of the institution as a deliberate move to secure power and protect former perpetrators. This protection, as we have seen above in the excerpt from the constitution, was supposedly achieved in the form of amnesty. Cole (*ibid*: 221) further captures this when it is submitted that:

even though the emotions expressed during the hearings were deeply felt, the Commission was not a public reckoning. Rather it was a symbol of a compromise that,

¹⁰ Asmal et al in this second quote are quoting the court on the Act establishing the TRC.

most significantly, offered the possibility of amnesty to perpetrators who gave public disclosure.

The TRC process could, therefore, be characteristically and succinctly described, using the view of Rory Bester (2002: 164) to the effect that “the two outstanding features of the TRC process were public nature of the hearings and the ‘individualizing’ of the application for amnesty”. This seemingly and analogous sense of resentment is captured in the two play-texts being examined in this paper for the explication of the TRC as a public space. Mda’s *The Bells of Amersfoort*, among many other things that relate to torture and brutalisation under apartheid, and the subsequent exilic experience of Tami, a black South African in Holland, gives a travesty of the TRC, through a cinematic technique of segueing, as Tami is brought face-to-face with Johan, a white South African who participates in the torture of Tami back home in South Africa. Johan shares a Dutch ancestry and nurtures an attachment with Holland, where he has come to undertake a theological training. A deep contestation arises between Tami and Johan at their meeting, with the former demanding that the latter should account for his past misdeeds, while Johan insists that he has been given amnesty by the TRC. Johan predicates the possibility of obtaining amnesty, in line with the requirement of the TRC, on the need to make a full disclosure of past violations and accept responsibility for the same. Even though he starts by claiming that he was misled by the elders who painted Tami as an enemy threatening the opportunities they have created and hoarded for him, he has to assume responsibility for his actions to earn amnesty before the TRC.¹¹

Kani’s *Nothing But the Truth* also makes an interrogation of the TRC through the major character, Sipho, and his daughter, Thando, who works as an interpreter at the amnesty hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and the latter’s cousin, Mandisa, who has just returned from London to bury the cremated ashes of her late exiled father, Themba. Themba has specifically requests that his body should be buried close to those of his parents, should he die in exile. His exile life is a consequence of his involvement in the liberation movements which pitched him against the apartheid state. At the personal level, he is being haunted by the unforgiving attitude of his brother, Sipho, who is enraged by the ‘negative influence’ Themba has on his late son, Luvuyo, the suspected sexual relationship between

¹¹ Mzamo, the chairman of the fictional TRC in the play-text, who is dressed in “bishop’s maroon” to capture the signification of the actual TRC, relives the constitutional requirements for amnesty in one of his conversations with Johan: “And now you want amnesty? You know the conditions for amnesty: full disclosure and full acceptance of your guilt and, of course, a political motive for your crimes (*TBA*, 150).

him and his former wife as well as the memory of the wire toil he spoilt when they were very young. Sipho gives his idea of forgiveness at the end with a commitment to write a letter to the president on why he should not be excluded in service delivery.

The oppositionality of the spaces occupied by the victims and the victimisers allows the former to give testimonies about his/her past violations while the latter makes a full confession of his past misdemeanors. It is believed that through the confessions of the perpetrator, the violated would fully know what was responsible for their sufferings and how it was carried out. This most especially allows people who have lost relations to know how they were killed, and if possible, where they were buried.¹² However, this process is betrayed as a mere commitment to secure reconciliation even at the expense of victims who are still haunted by the memories and realities of their circumstances. For instance, this perceived lack of sensitivity from the government towards the victims is stated in the Johan's remarks below:

In any case it was not a requirement that I could only be granted amnesty if you, the victim, forgave me. So, even if you had been there, you would not have stopped the amnesty. I did what the law required. I told the truth and was granted amnesty. (TBA, 151).

This also gets some correlation in Kani's *Nothing But the Truth* in the conversations between Thando and her father, Sipho. Thando starts by expressing her frustrations at the numbness she and others at the hearings suffer while Sipho offers that the pointlessness of the process informs his decision not to attend the hearings anymore. The two characters proceed:

THANDO: The truth does come out, and at least the families get to know what happened.

SIPHO: Their version of what happened (NBT, 6).

It is apparent from the above that the victims are objectified and commodified to achieve the yearning of the state, which basically is a negotiated reconciliation for a democratic transition.

¹² So many secret graves were said to have been identified with the bones of victims removed to be given proper burial. Although this removal might at the surface be taken as a rupturing of the souls of the dead, such is however attenuated when the temporary burial sites are viewed as a prison of a sort. Therefore, the removal could be taken as a form of freedom and reintegration.

The consequence of the above is that the TRC does not offer both the victims and the perpetrators similar access to its publicness as such has been circumscribed in one way or the other, most especially to the advantage of perpetrators, and by extension, the hegemon. Other than the fact that the full disclosure being sought by the TRC is a chimera,¹³ as perpetrators are not committed to it, that does not in any way ameliorate the pains and hurt caused by the past actions. Another problematisation inhered in the process of deploying amnesty and indemnity is the realisation that what the commissions accepted as the truth can not be taken to be the absolute truth. This is going by the unwillingness of people to say the truth, and the difficulties of remembering and recall, being some of the limitation of memorialisation. Thando in Kani's *Nothing But the Truth* laments the idea of putting something, amnesty, on nothing, lies, when she declares that: "One gets confused sometimes. Especially when so many lies are told" (7). This type of pervasive and recrudescing ambiguity of truth has been encapsulated by Yadh Ben Achour (2002: 127) as "truth in the sphere of politics". The therapeutic narratological effects the stories of the victims are said to have could best be recognised as a promotion of an individual experience to the state of the collective memory of the nation. The lack of specificity, or better still, actualisation, of what should be given to the victim raises resentments such as found in the statement of Tami below:

You cannot absolve him on my behalf! I want justice! At the very least I must be compensated for what I went through. I want justice! ...You got something. You got amnesty. Even if I want to sue you for what you did to me it would be impossible, because you got amnesty. What did I get? What did the victims get for their stories? ... You and your government have forgiven each other. I am not part of that forgiveness (TBA, 151-152).

The stiff opposition shown by Tami towards Johan and the government is the best she can deploy the public sphere to attain. However passive this revulsion might sound, it is not only an incontrovertible indication of dissent but is largely an indictment on the whole process. The implication of this is that the amnesty given, the forgiveness dispensed and the

¹³ Jay A. Vora and Erika Vora (2004: 309) reechoed the fact that most perpetrators deliberately withheld the truth and told what they call "half-truths and lies". In another vein, Charles Manga Fombad (2004: 198) notes that more than 7000 applications for amnesty were submitted to the committee before the deadline, most of which came from people already in prison. Fombad further claims that members of former apartheid government displayed impunity as they argued that they did not commit any crime. Jay A. Vora and Erika Vora (2004: 319) also support this that some Afrikaners were opposed to the idea of the TRC. Specifically, P. W. Botha, former prime-minister and president of South Africa, was said to have refused to appear before the TRC.

reconciliation earned are a mere repression of realities while the surface is coated merely with cosmetics. Arguably, this form of ‘publicness’ is analogous to the configuration of bourgeois public sphere where egalitarian dialogue takes place (Goode 2005: 4, 9). Jay A. Vora and Erika Vora (2004: 305) give a hint of this display of dissent by first recognising the South African TRC as a political configuration, just like other TRCs and conclude that “the TRC was controversial and met with resentments”. The Reparation and Rehabilitation Committee was said to have recommended, in some cases, that victims of past violations should be paid R26, 000 for a period spanning six years, but the government was said to have declined because of its unpreparedness to accept “responsibility for the wrongs of its predecessor”, in spite of the argument by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the chairperson of the TRC, “that without some financial reparation, those who told their stories would feel cheated” (Charles Manga Fomdad 2004: 199).

Critically speaking, the quest for reparation and compensation by the victim would have amounted to a commodification of the bodies and pains of the victims that were violated in different manners under the apartheid regime. This goes without saying that the deployment of retributive justice wouldn’t have fetched the victim any form of compensation that would not reduce the charred cherished past to mere materiality either. It is believed that the potency of these ‘sacred’ memories would be lost the moment they are purchased for a price since every sense of guilt would be eliminated, reducing the process to that of commercial bargaining. One could argue that the best way to compensate the victims would be for the government to galvanise the process of citizenship transformation in a way that victims of past brutality would be encouraged by the sacrifice they made even as the future could also be guaranteed for all and sundry. It would then be like the case of giving their past for the sake of their present and tomorrow, since “we have seen that the process does not always really alleviate the suffering and frustration of the victims (Yadh Ben Achour 2002: 113).

In spite of the reason given above as responsible for the show of resentment by victims, it is also argued that few of the perpetrators were forgiven directly by the victims because “people felt raw, angry, upset, the more so because not many of the perpetrators had been able to show much spontaneous human emotion” (Albie Sachs 2002: 55). This should not be unexpected considering the fact that the process was precipitated purely by the urgency of the political realignment needed to wade off the acerbity of the ANC resistant movements amidst international condemnation of the apartheid regime. Like Johan, most of the unrepentant

perpetrators are either justifying their actions on non-culpability, considering that they claim to take commands from their superiors, while others like the former Premier and President, P. W. Botha, would show impunity for having acted on behalf of the state. Both the ideas of having shown remorse or not are inherently tricky since the process as well as its sincerity are difficult to gauge. More to this is the notion of the space where this takes place, because of the possibility that repentance, in the view of Yadh Ben Achour (2002: 125), “loses its authenticity when it is performed under constraints, or out of purely material interest”, as is almost the case in the South African situation. The resultant effects of this unfair attitude and the contestations they lead to is explained by Mahmood Mamdani (2000: 180-181) who posits that “the more beneficiaries appear complacent, indifferent, callous and lacking in empathy, the more victims are outraged. They feel forgiveness to be undeserved. The more they feel so, the more they demand: justice”. Mamdani concludes that “the TRC ends up fuelling the very demand it set out to displace: justice”.

While Tami in Mda’s *The Bells of Amersfoort* is mild in making her request for justice, Mandisa, the cousin to Sipho in Kani’s *Nothing But the Truth*, believes that people should be allowed to revenge the wrongs done them in the past, or at least, get the perpetrator to pay for his wrongs. She specifically queries while the perpetrators of the deaths of people like Ruth First and the wife of Joe Slovo should not be made to face the consequences. Thando, her cousin and the interpreter to the commission, believes that the South African nation is not ready to go the way of Nuremberg as the struggle for liberation is personified as the struggle for and by all. She justifies the granting of amnesty to someone like Craig Williamson to full disclosure¹⁴ which conforms to the rules and requirements of the TRC. Apart from this, Thando reminds Mandisa of individuals like Derby-Lewis, Janus Walus¹⁵ and the police who killed the Pebco 3. Thando cements her position by making reference to the forgiving spirit of Nelson Mandela who was incarcerated for 27 years at the Robben Island.

It is implicitly stated that the idea of forgiveness and the giving of amnesty are principally the project of the first democratic president of the country, Nelson Mandela, who has been promoted to the place of an icon of peace.¹⁶ Although this decision at reconciliation through restorative justice helps to halt the killings and violence that characterised the apartheid era,

¹⁴ Put in another way, it means, Sipho parodying the TRC, saying “the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth”, from where the title of the play is derived (*NBT*, 49).

¹⁵ They are said to have murdered Chris Hani. (*NBT*, 29).

¹⁶ He was jointly given a Nobel price for peace together with de Klerk.

certain individuals benefited directly from the establishment of a democratic government while others, most especially the mass of people, only had their painful memories merely displayed at the public domain. To this set of people, the TRC is in a way a reopening of the wounds of the past. The healing of the wounds might, however, be hastened by the ‘knowing’ occasioned by the confessions of the violators and the externalisation achieved through their testimonies, as well as the open identification made with them by the hired comforters and members of the commission. It is on record, for instance, that Archbishop Tutu, the chairperson of the commission cried (Albie Sachs 2002: 49).

The outcome of the negotiations done by the agents of the state and those of the victims in the public sphere constituted by the TRC is illustrated by Siphso who has the dream of becoming the Chief Librarian of the public library in Port Elizabeth. The snag of his dream is that he is believed to be too old for the position. After his lamentation that he was not considered too old in 1994 and 1999 when he voted for two democratic presidents, Nelson Mandela and Thabo Mbeki, he complains that: “...suddenly I am too old to be empowered” (*NBT*, 51). Siphso’s grouse is that some people have chosen to personalise the gains of the struggle, which they consolidate through the TRC compromise. As if reviewing the conditions that determine who should benefit from the immediate and direct dividends of the new South Africa, Siphso declares that:

I was part of the struggle. I too suffered as a black person. I went to the marches like everyone else. I might not have been detained. I might not have been on Robben Island. I did not leave this country, but I suffered too. The thousands that attended those funerals on Saturdays, that was me. The thousands that were tear gassed, sjamboked by the police, mauled by Alsatian dogs, that was me. When Bishop Tutu led thousands through the streets of white Port Elizabeth, that was me. I WAS THOSE THOUSANDS! I too deserved some recognition, didn’t I? (*NBT*, 51-52).

Siphso seems to be challenging the privileging of certain individuals like President Nelson Mandela and others who assumed ‘unrestricted’ access to the machineries of the state by reasons of their involvement in the liberation struggle.¹⁷ As a result, Siphso appears to be

¹⁷ The wrangling in the ANC after President Thabo Mbeki was recalled, and following the decision of certain members to form a splinter party, has seen such members being described as right-opportunists. This trend further casts an aspersion on the idea of transposing comradeship to leadership.

making a deconstruction of heroism and the promotion to the place of iconicity in the South African state. Apart from Nelson Mandela and others who had their unpleasant past memorialised and compensated for, Sipho is making a case for himself and other thousands who have the credentials of a charred past that would get them a place in the state platform. Although he might not be asking for a seat in Parliament or the State House, he, like Tami, nurses the expectation of a better life and being in the new South African nation.

Further to the above, Sipho evolves what he believes is his own idea and process for the deployment of amnesty by using the death of his son, Luvuyo, who gets killed as a result of his activities in the liberation struggle. Sipho claims that Luvuyo was shot by a white policeman during the administration of De Klerk. He wants the policeman to be sent to jail for some months while he awaits trial after which he would be found guilty for killing Luvuyo because he was black. His being pronounced guilty should be followed by his incarceration at St. Alban's Prison outside Port Elizabeth, where he will be subjected to the kind of experiences peculiar to murderers. One is however startled by Sipho's response to the probing of Thando on whether he will forgive the white culprit after he must have been made to undergo all these. Even though Sipho says he will be willing to consent to the policeman's amnesty, he is not prepared to forgive the erring white apartheid policeman:

SIPHO: ...It's not about me being happy or not, forgiving him or not. It's about justice. That's what it's about. So that my soul can rest. So that I can say to myself 'yes, justice has been done' (*NBT*, 54).

Sipho however plays along the trajectory of forgiveness the state is seeking for the process of reconciliation as he declares that he has forgiven his late brother, Themba, for his wrongs. He compares this with the forgiveness he extends to the white people in spite of, according to him, "what they did to us in this country..." (*NBT*, 56). The centrality of the notion of forgiveness to the responsibilities of the state and, by extension, the TRC, is quite a touchy one. Since this paper does not intend to interrogate this manifestation within the whole, it would like to reiterate the view of Mark Sanders (2007: 88), quoting Derrida that however good reconciliation and the work of mourning are, "they do not amount to forgiveness". The ideal of forgiveness in the dealings between black and white South Africans has been

constructed on the traditional dictates of *Ubuntu*,¹⁸ which more significantly paints the need for the protection of human rights.

Conclusion

It has been demonstrated from the above how art has been dually deployed to reenact a public space through the various ones constructed in the institutionalisation of Archbishop Desmond Tutu's TRC. Both the parodies of the TRC done in the two texts, and the interrogation the two play-texts have achieved as a whole, appositionally challenge the privatisation of the public sphere by the state. These two possibilities of the public sphere in the textual materials are a follow-up and, therefore, a response, if not a reaction to the actual public domain of the TRC. Even though it is apparent that the state was able to attain the reasons why the TRC public sphere was inevitable, such successes are being challenged by the previously marginalised and brutalised whose cries of anguish and disaffections constitute profound embarrassments for the hegemony. Apart from the acerbic disenchantment that this group, which is seen as constituting the majority, is showing towards the abuse of the public sphere by the government through art, other public spheres found in print and electronic media have been inundated with a show of revulsion and rejection of the state sponsored public sphere. Rather than for the South African state to believe that it has successfully reconciled groups and individuals within the mapped nation state, it might be more probable to subscribe to the opinion of Ruston Bharucha (2002: 370) that "most reconciliations are fragile, partial, and in constant need for renewal". Therefore, it could be concluded that while hegemony and its agents try to privatise the public sphere, or better still make a mere "public display" (Goode 2005: 4) of issues, the majority of the citizens would publicise it, however difficult, to mitigate the excesses of the state. We see both drama and the TRC exhibiting the fluidity, mutability and deviancy of truth as "the most illusory places in the world, where it is legitimate to lie knowingly...and yet truth matters" (Ruston Bharucha 2002: 362-363).

¹⁸ Mark Sanders (2007: 25) claims that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's report makes reference to the judgement of Judge Yvonne Mokgoro "[u] *buntu*, generally translated as 'humanness', express itself metaphorically in *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*— 'people are people through other people'".

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