group
analysis

Forgiving the Unforgivable: Mortals, Saints and Sinners

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This article is a personal reflection on the nature of the complexity called forgiveness. The article tries to avoid moralizing by situating the reflection in the social and personal context of the author. Through this route reasons are established as to why it is difficult to be a reflective citizen, and why the author is more prone to being a paralyzed citizen. The individualistic and internalist account of forgiveness is discredited, and it is argued that forgiveness is a property of the network. The article argues for the necessity of 'recognition' prior to any possibility of forgiveness, and in this work the bystander is allocated a central role.

Key words: forgiveness, reconciliation, ethics, identity, bystander, witness, recognition

Introduction

My subject is forgiveness. To avoid moralizing and lecturing others about the virtues of forgiveness, I enter the subject in the first person, through *my* struggles and predicaments thrown up *for me* by my social and personal contexts.

Socio-political Context: Paralysis

I was invited to contribute to a conference in Belgrade, Serbia, in October 2015, *Reflective Citizens: Paralyzed Citizens*.

Knowing something about the atrocities that took place against Bosnian Muslims during the last 30 to 40 years in Serbia's name, I prevaricated. But notice: I did not say atrocities committed 'by Serbia', but committed 'in Serbia's name'. The distinction is important as it helps me not to speak of Serbians in this lumpen way. To this way of thinking, all Serbians are sinners and all Bosnian Muslims are saints, or vice versa. But in trying to escape the danger of lumping all Serbians in one box, and all Bosnians in another, there is the opposite danger of erasing all differentials between the groupings under the banner of neutrality and moral equivalence, in which everyone is equally culpable.

Should I accept the invitation? My feelings were complex and similar to those I experienced when I was last invited to speak in Israel. On the one hand there was the prospect of *genuine* mutual warmth, friendship and rich exchange with friends and colleagues. On the other hand I was filled with doubts. In going, would I be tacitly condoning Israel's treatment of Palestinians? If I did not go, would I be taking a superior judgmental position in relation to my colleagues and friends—holding *them* to blame for the treatment of Palestinians?

So even as I started to think about writing this talk, I found myself immediately caught in the predicament of the conference's theme: 'Reflective Citizens: Paralyzed Citizens'. Even as I tried to begin to *reflect* I found myself *paralyzed* by doubt and anxiety.

What right did I have anyway, to condone, condemn or even comment on the how people live in countries far away from my comfortable life in the 'west' of England? What do I know of the realities of day-to-day life in Serbia, Israel or even India (where I was born and visit regularly)? For that matter, what do I really know of the day-to-day reality of the homeless man living on the streets of my picturesque rural town in Devon?

For this reason, I start with my own day-to-day ethical predicaments. My first question is this: what has the ordinary citizen to do with actions taken by the political leaders of the countries they live in?

In my case, mostly I feel that these decisions have little to do with me. I am alienated from the decision making process; often I am ignorant and apathetic regarding the larger political sphere, because I am absorbed by the every-day preoccupations of my little life.

I could equally have framed the question differently: what sense of *responsibility* do I have for actions taken by *my* country, by *my* people?

This is more difficult to answer, because I do not have a sense of *identification* with either of the candidates for the role of *my* country,

Britain and India. I do not have nationalistic feelings; and when I meet those who declare a love for their country, I feel nervous around them. The same is true of those who announce themselves as fervent believers of some kind, or as members of a favoured racialized ethnicity. And when I meet those who embody a combination of all three, I feel very nervous indeed.

I was born in India, and so *I am* Indian. I have lived in the UK since I was 12, and so *I am* British. I find a sense of home and belonging in both contexts, even whilst I am not fully identified with either of them.

But I cannot escape so easily. Despite myself I feel implicated when I hear that the Government of India is persecuting groups like Greenpeace. Greenpeace is challenging the Government's decision to allow multinationals to mine for coal in regions that will result in the destruction of communities and habitats. Greenpeace employees find themselves branded as 'anti-nationals' and arrested on spurious charges (Subramanian, 2015). When I read this, *I felt ashamed*.

But why do I feel shame, given that I am not a citizen of India? Somehow, I feel associated with these actions being perpetrated by 'my people'. But they (the Government) are by no means 'my people'. BJP, the political party currently in power is right wing and ethno-centric. The Prime Minister, Narinda Modi, has a case running against him for having allowed the murder of 1000 Muslims during rioting in 2002. Senior police officers that have testified against Modi are being intimidated by false allegations (AFP, 2015). Yet, despite the BJP not being 'my people', I nevertheless feel ashamed by association because of being Indian. I feel ashamed because at some level, I have an attachment to India, and in this sense it is indeed *my* country.

But even if I were a voting citizen of India, what would I be doing? In all likelihood very little that is different from what I am doing now: making disapproving noises. And even if I had the inclination to do something, I would be very unlikely to have the courage *to do* anything, knowing about the vindictive actions initiated by the state against those who have dared to speak out against it.

Similar things also take place in the UK. The UK government wants to allow fracking—multinationals drilling for gas deposits under our towns and nature reserves. The people living in these places are against it. Parliament has passed a law that makes it more difficult for citizens and local authorities to resist this government policy. (Vaughan, 2015). In 2014 the Conservative government passed a

'gagging law', which made it illegal for charities to criticize Government policy (Hayes, 2014). In 2012 John Buttress, a senior police officer in the Manchester Police Force exposed malpractice within the police force. This triggered a series of investigations *against him*, by *his* police force's counter-corruption unit. The law courts found him innocent of all charges. But an internal police inquiry found a way of sacking him anyway (Pidd, 2015).

Although I am outraged at the blatancy of the anti-democratic activities of both governments, I do little apart from voice the odd expletive as I read *The Daily Grumble*. In many countries like Saudi Arabia, even to make this empty gesture would be to put one's life in danger, as the authorities would consider it treason.

Clearly the UK is not such a country. I am free to say that I loathe the Conservative party for its attacks on the poor, for dismantling and selling off our social health, education and care systems to the elites; I say this fully confident that I will not be beheaded for saying so. Even so, increasingly in the UK, the authorities and institutions generally are putting in place procedures designed to control communication and silence dissenting voices. Codes of Conduct in both statutory and for-profit organizations in Britain make it a disciplinary offence for employees to say anything in public against the organization, particularly in instances when the intention is to expose unethical activity within the organization.

The Enlightenment

These conventions and norms are rolling back the freedoms that were hard won by the Enlightenment. Kant decreed that it was each individual's ethical duty to think for themselves rather than meekly comply with the pronouncements of the kings and priests. In contemporary life, the bureaucrat has replaced priest and prince to insist that we comply with their injunctions else be condemned of wrongdoing. Compliance or its lack is equated with moral right and wrong.

In this way the bureaucrat has perverted Enlightenment rationalism. Reason is being championed by mindless rule following in the same insane perverted way that the Inquisition championed the Christian value of love with hate, fear and death (Dalal, 2015). Paralysis and apathy is one way of surviving in these tyrannical contexts.

This then is something of my socio-political context, which describes some of the ways in which I feel alienated from larger

political processes. My fears and anxieties push me into becoming a *paralyzed citizen* rather than a *reflective citizen*.

Networks of Forgiveness

Very often forgiveness is alluded to in platitudes like 'forgive and forget'. But forgiveness is a work—a deep psychological and ethical work; and being a work, it is not as easily accomplished as these sorts of sanctimonious injunctions suggest.

This sort of injunction requires the work of forgiveness to be done by *the very ones who have had harm done to them*, and the persons who they are required to forgive *are the very ones who have harmed them*. This double burden does not seem very fair: *you* suffer an injury, and then *you* have to forgive the one who has caused the injury; and if you cannot manage to forgive, then it is because you are morally deficient in some way. This sort of understanding of forgiveness is individualistic as well as internalist. It is also moralistic.

Some commentators have reduced the moral and ethical complexity of forgiveness into a linear route map, moving from one stage to another to arrive at a state of forgiveness. In his Foulkes Lecture, Ivan Urlić (2004) mentions Smedes (1996) who proposes a four stage process (hurt, hate, heal, resolution), and Jean Monbourquette (1997) who has 12 steps. Urlić himself proposes his own version of a four stage process (becoming conscious of problem, developing deeper understanding of problem, working through, renouncing vengeance and making forgiving possible). Some of these formulations echo similar ones for the grief process, and in so doing are in danger of reinforcing not only the idea that the process is linear and individualistic, but also that the process can be managed and directed. It also makes it appear that as one moves to the next stage, the old one is jettisoned as the psychological work required of it has been accomplished.

But if one's understanding of human life is relational and interpersonal, then others in the interactional field will be implicated in the activity of forgiveness. Even here, at this very early stage of the exploration, there is the shadowy hint that the work of forgiveness is a property of the network—a very Foulkesian intuition. Further, I will try to show that one never quite arrives into a state of forgiveness, rather one struggles to sustain the on-going *activity of forgiving*.

Personal Context: Inadequacies

Here is a story to introduce the moral complexity called forgiveness.

Although in no way could my childhood be described as traumatic or abusive, for many years I nevertheless harboured resentments towards both my parents for the slights and hurts I experienced during my childhood. Of course this was not all I received from them, but this is what was foremost in my mind, in that state of mind.

Then one day (I must have been in my 40s), in the midst of some conversation, my mother made some passing allusion to the fact that she had been punitive towards me when I was a child. Her tone was remorseful.

In that moment my resentments towards her suddenly and surprisingly melted away. In saying whatever she said, my mother was not saying 'sorry', nor was she asking me for forgiveness. And yet, it brought about a powerful unexpected shift in me.

So if she was not saying sorry, and she was not looking for forgiveness, then what was occurring? I think her regretful tone served as some tacit form of recognition, which acted as a balm that dissolved my resentments, leaving something in me that was akin to forgiveness. I say 'akin to forgiveness' because I am not sure it was forgiveness per se, it was more a sense of something dropping away, of a tension easing.

What becomes clear through this little story, is that although the feeling of something akin to forgiveness was evoked in me, the 'victim', the work to allow the possibility of forgiveness arising in me was done by the 'perpetrator', my mother.

If the state of forgiveness is in some way a state of grace, then I was the undeserving recipient of this gift. Undeserving, because I myself had made no efforts myself to get there, it just happened to me.

The situation in regards to *my* father is different. He seems unable to engage in any such reflective process. Even whilst he uses his patriarchal power to intimidate those weaker than him, he experiences himself as the one hard done by. In this situation, there is no easy solution for me. I remain stuck with my sense of having being wronged, stuck with my grievances and resentments. With no gesture forthcoming from my father, it would seem then that it is up to me to find a way to move on and free myself from the coils of hurt and resentment.

I am now confronted by my inadequacies. Without some form of recognition from him, I find that I am unable to generate in myself a sense of forgiveness and move on. Perhaps it is only saints who have

the capacity to forgive in such circumstances when there is nothing forthcoming from the perpetrator; perhaps this capacity is beyond what mere mortals like me are capable of.

Jesus had this capacity—to forgive even whilst suffering the horror being inflicted on him by his torturers. Extraordinarily, in this moment Jesus said: 'Forgive them Father, for they know not what they do'.

I have no such saintly capacity within me. I, a mortal, seem incapable of forgiving without some recognition that I have been hurt and wronged; it seems that in order to move on I need the help of other mortals. If the one who *has been done-to* is incapable, if the one who *has done* is incapable, then the only hope left is with the third party, the bystander.

In my story, the bystanders are my siblings, other family members and friends. The attitude of some bystanders might be a baffled bewilderment, saying that they were not aware of what was going on; they cannot understand my *re-action* because they did not notice the *action*. Their attitude can be one of impatience with me: I should just get over it and stop bleating. That was then in the past and this is now. I should let go and just move on.

In the face of such negating responses, I feel despondent and profoundly alone; it evokes in me a kind of despair that is akin to something we might call depression.

In contrast, when a bystander recognizes and affirms my reality in some way, I experience relief and something eases within me. In part, this happens because I no longer feel alone with the injury. I feel relief because my experiential reality is finally affirmed; *it is recognized*. In this moment, the bystander is no longer bystander, but transformed into witness.

Curiously, despite nothing having changed in my father, the effect of the witness nevertheless shifts something in me in relation to him; curiously, in some mysterious way it enables me to 'let go' to some degree. Much of the healing effects of psychotherapy must arise exactly in this way, with therapy serving as witness to unacknowledged experience. This is a very different ethos from the one that thinks of the psychotherapy as treating a psychological disorder. Therapy as witness is the moral work of healing; therapy as treatment, is the pseudo-scientific work of curing. More and more I am inclined to think of therapy as healing rather than treatment.

In the rest of the article I will stay with the bystander—because in the main that is what we all mostly are. Many have written on the bystander, for example the social psychologist Ervin Staub (1999),

Urlić, Berger and Berman (2010), the transactional Petruska Clarkson (1993), and of course it is a major preoccupation of moral philosophy generally. However, I will not be drawing on them here, in part because my intention here is to work something out through reflecting on specific personal experiences.

The Bystander

Assume that the reality is as described by the victim rather than the self-serving denials of the perpetrator. I want to ask—in what sorts of circumstances is the bystander likely to side with the denials and revisionist histories of the perpetrator, and why?

The perpetrator's denial is driven perhaps by shame, perhaps by cynical self-preservation (no crime, therefore no punishment necessary). But why does the bystander take this stance—an alleged neutrality masquerading as objectivity, which actually sides with the oppressor (Vulliamy, 2013)?

Out of the many possible reasons, here are two. One is self-serving, the other has to do with an intense form of identification that will not allow for differentiation; fear and paralysis are integral to both.

Self-serving motivation

Self-serving motivation allows one to feel innocent even whilst one is benefiting from the actions of the perpetrators. Institutional racism, sexism and the like, work in exactly this kind of way. The individuals (say men) who prosper by virtue of the way that 'the system' is structured, are 'innocent'; they are not 'bad'; it is just that they encounter fewer structural obstacles on their progression up the hierarchy.

If the cake is divided between fewer people, then each will get more. If I am one of the lucky few, then it is in my interest not to notice the reasons as to why I end up with more than you. The situation here is not one of paralysis, but deliberate, convenient blindness, a blindness underpinned by guilt. Guilt because I saw, I gained, I did nothing.

Bystanders can also use a notion of objectivity to rationalize non-action 'everyone has done something bad, so everyone is equally to blame'. But as Vulliamy (2013) and others have pointed out, neutrality is not the same as objectivity. Staying neutral in the face of wrongdoing, requires a distortion of objectivity. In this way unethical non-involvement is disguised and presented as virtuous neutrality. These then, are versions of the self-serving motivation.

Motivation through (over-)Identification

When a group feels beleaguered and under attack for whatever reason, the result often is that the internal differentiations within the group disappear as they are forced to come together to face a common enemy. In this sort of situation where one's very existence is precarious, it becomes difficult if not impossible to expose the differing attitudes within the group to the outside world; because to do so, is to give more ammunition to the enemy. Personal survival becomes intimately linked to group survival. In such circumstances the situation is highly polarized: if you are not with us, then you are against us.

The same dynamic is found in (say) racism. In the situation where black people are vilified and marginalized, the differences between the values of Seventh Day Adventists and bankers matter little. Because the critical category through which they are all maltreated is 'black', it becomes the category that they all end up defending and protecting.

Peculiarly, in this sort of situation in which one is forced into claiming a category not necessarily of one's natural choosing, there develops nonetheless an attachment to that category. For example, the religion that I was born into is Zoroastrianism. Whilst this is meaningful to me culturally, it is not meaningful as a 'faith'. However, if it turned out that the country I lived in decided to target Zoroastrians, then my relation to that category would shift from it being at the margins of my sense of self, to it becoming my primary and perhaps my entire identity.

Norbert Elias (1994) tells us that this was the case for many Jews in Germany in the early part of the 20th-Century, and is also true for many Muslims in Bosnia, who used to identify first as Yugoslavian, then Bosnian, and then (sometimes) Muslim (Vulliamy, 2013).

The point I want to make is that in this sort of situation in which one feels *pressed* into a grouping and *oppressed* by virtue of belonging to that grouping, then it becomes difficult to speak against others in that grouping. This dynamic is not only true of the persecuted, but for different reasons it is also true for the persecutors. When faced with the disapproval and disapprobrium of the international community for what *some* of the persecutor grouping have done, *all those* identified that grouping end up feeling vilified and persecuted. In this context the possibility of naming the wrong doing becomes more difficult, for two reasons. First, because to point the finger at the wrong doers amongst the 'us', is to point the finger at one of your own,

which is taken to be betrayal (recall the Indian government calling those challenging it, as anti-nationals). Second, as a consequence of the accusation and vilification being levelled at *all of us*, the guilt for the wrong doing of some of 'us' comes to be attached to all of us (Matte-Blanco, 1988; Elias, 2009).

Although the dynamic of *blind solidarity* looks the same in both the persecuting and persecuted groupings, there is a crucial difference between them. For the persecuted grouping, blind solidarity is a matter of survival, *of life*. They have to hold together, to try not to be annihilated.

Meanwhile, the blind solidarity of the persecutor grouping is not in the service of life, but death, their own death, the death of their humanity.

I am deliberately using *grouping* rather than *group*, in order to hold open a space for the possibility that not everyone located in the persecuting grouping act as persecutors, and not everyone in the persecuted grouping is innocent. Not every Israeli, not every Jew (Pappe, 2007) holds to the Zionist belief that there has never existed a 'Palestinian People', thus enacting yet another Final Solution. Not every bearded Muslim in the UK wants to go and martyr themselves fighting for ISIS.

Many persons of this kind, located in (*but not belonging to*) a persecuting grouping, although personally innocent, might nevertheless find themselves silenced by some version of blind solidarity. This is even the case for those who were not bystanders, but took part in protest at the wrong doings that took place in their name. For example, hundreds of thousands of Serbians took to the streets in Belgrade night after night, in protest against one of their 'own people'— Milosevic and his cronies. The group analysts who took to the streets of Belgrade, had to tussle with the additional complication that numbered amongst 'my people', was a member of the Group Analytic Society, Radovan Karadžić. At his trial for war crimes in Srebrenica and Sarajevo, Karadžić said: 'I am a literary man, a group analyst and a psychiatrist' (Blair, 2012).

But the protestors, despite having protested, can nevertheless find themselves in the grip of blind solidarity, because the outside world lumps the Serbian protestors in with the very Serbian war mongers that they have been protesting against (all Serbians are sinners). Thus it might come to feel *even to them*, the protestors, that to acknowledge one of 'us' of wrong doing, is to implicate oneself through association. The intricacies of this dynamic, are

unclear to me. Somewhere in there, there must be some mix of guilt and shame that serves to paralyze.

As one Serbian colleague powerfully said: 'When my government perpetrates a horror *in my name*, then I too am made a victim'. It is very understandable then, that for some of the Belgradians who protested against Milosevic, they would be most in touch with a feeling of injustice, shock and injury that it is *they* (who were not guilty of any wrongdoing and who protested against the wrongdoers) who were being bombed by NATO forces. In this sense they are victims, and are bemused when no witness to their injury is forthcoming. When NATO is experienced as bully and foe, then other differences amongst Serbians would perhaps disappear in a form of blind solidarity. A blind solidarity so powerful, that some might be unable to stand as witness to the horrors perpetrated on Bosnian Muslims, not by them, yet, in their name.

Difficult as it is, what little hope there is in this sort of situation lies with bystanders, particularly bystanders within the persecuting group*ing*. They have the possibility of bearing witness to the carnage, and in that process not only salvage their own sense of human dignity from the mix of shame and guilt, but also potentially free others to do the same.

In this way some process of forgiveness might be precipitated. But is it forgiveness that is called for in all situations?

The Unforgivable?

Jesus said 'Forgive them Father for they do not know what they do'. But the horrors of genocides everywhere, are horrors all the more precisely because they *do know* exactly what they are doing—deliberately humiliating and raping women, callously torturing and murdering innocents. Are such deeds forgivable? Indeed would it be ethical to forgive in situations where not only *did they know*, they took *malicious pleasure* in inflicting these horrors? Should one forgive Pinochet? It does not seem right to forgive monsters for their monstrous deeds when they show no hint of remorse.

Imagine an unimaginable horror: a paedophile violating and killing your child. Would forgiveness be reasonable in such a circumstance, even if the paedophile were remorseful? To engage in any form of normal exchange with such a person, to sit at a table and talk, would surely feel like a deep betrayal of the child. What I am more likely to feel is the opposite of forgiveness—the wish for revenge.

What lies between the two, between forgiveness and vengeance? In this sort of situation to become reconciled can in itself be thought to be betrayal. All I might eventually be able to manage is a kind of resigned accommodation to the horror and 'reconciled' to living with it every day; I cannot imagine myself ever 'getting over it', and nor should I. This is *my limit* as a mortal; no doubt there are other mortals who are much bigger persons than me.

To be mortal is to accept the finitude of existence, to accept my finitude; not only to know that there is a limit to my life, but also to know that there are limits to what I am capable of. I come to think that in the mortal realm, not only is the propensity to forgive limited, *it should be limited*. I have a sense that in this mortal realm, to forgive the unforgivable would in itself be a sin.

I start to get a glimpse of the spiritual depths and the magnitude of generosity required for forgiveness. The capacity to forgive the unforgivable is perhaps only possible for saints because unlike finite mortals, they exist in the realm of the infinite. Forgiveness has nothing to do with rational calculation. Forgiveness has little to do with fiscal compensation for injuries caused. Compensations are just that, compensations; a way of making do.

In the mortal realm, wrongs can never be righted, the dead can never be brought back to life, hurts can never be undone, humpty dumpty can never be put back together again. What can the idea of justice mean in these circumstances? The closest we sometimes might come to having an experience of justice is through punishment, which is a form of inflicting pain on the perpetrator. *In this sense punishment is always vengeance*. In some circumstances, *I know* that I would have a sense of malicious satisfaction knowing that the perpetrator is being made to suffer in some way. But this sort of satisfaction, this vengeance, is also a form of compensation, as it does not and cannot make up for the wrong. In the mortal realm, this is perhaps all I can have.

The critical significance of acts of acknowledgement and recognition become clearer and clearer, as do the limitations of what these gestures might achieve. Acknowledgement and recognition help heal the wound. Without acknowledgement the wound continues to fester. If no acknowledgement is forthcoming from the perpetrator, then that burden, that duty, falls on the bystander. And to some degree, we, and I include myself in this 'we', we are all bystanders who fear to speak and transform ourselves from bystanders to witnesses.

Psychotherapy groups are powerful spaces for exactly this reason. The group process helps participants transform themselves from

bystanders to witnesses. From being passive bystanders in the group process, their own lives as well as those of others, into active participants in the group as well as life in general.

Remorse as Re-Humanization

Remorse is integral to the act of recognition; without remorse, recognition is empty of meaning. In order to inflict horrors on another human being, one has to dehumanize them. But the one who inflicts the horror has to cut off from their own humanity, and in so doing they also dehumanize themselves.

If this is so, then perhaps Jesus is right when he says of his torturers that 'they know not what they do'. Because in order to do what they do, they have had to become something other than their human selves.

According to the philosopher Raimond Gaita, remorse is the feeling that arises in the moment that we are shocked awake by our bewildered realization that it is *persons* that we have been injuring (Gaita, 2008: 34). *Remorse is a process of re-humanization.* The perpetrator's remorse transforms the perpetrator's perception of the victim from 'thing' to 'human'. But the perpetrator's remorse also transforms the victim's perception of perpetrator from 'monster' to 'human'; because in showing remorse, the perpetrator reveals something of their humanity to themselves as well as the victim, and in so doing re-humanize themselves in the eyes of both.

Remorse is an expression of deep empathy. Now, no longer human-to-thing, nor monster-to-human, nor monster-to-thing, but human-to-human, some form of reconciliation is more possible.

Nations: Remorseful Gestures of the First and Second Kind

Individuals express remorse. But countries and institutions also try to express remorse, which they do in one of two ways. One way is to make formal apologies for past actions in historical time. For example whilst in Canada the Pope apologized on behalf of the Catholic Church for the 'spiritual, cultural, emotional, physical and sexual abuse' suffered by the indigenous people of Canada at the hands of Church leaders. During the same visit the Pope intended to make the 18th-Century Catholic missionary Junipero Serra a Saint. On hearing about this intention, these self-same 'indigenous people' were outraged because 'Serra played a pivotal role in the enslavement, torture and other violent tactics perpetrated against native peoples through

the mission system' (Moore, 2015). The fact that the Pope went ahead and canonized Serra anyway shows that this kind of apology is mostly hollow and tokenistic.

On the other hand, the Australian Prime Minister's apology in 2008 to the Aboriginal Nation was experienced as heartfelt and moved many to tears (Burgess and Rennie, 2008). He apologized for the government's policy of forcefully removing Aboriginal children from their families, and placing them in 'white' settings in order to eradicate all 'native characteristics'; yet another attempt at a Final Solution.

The second way that some countries make gestures of remorse is by erecting monuments to shame. But mostly countries do the opposite of erecting monuments to shame, they erect monuments celebrating the triumphs of the nation, and memorials to their own hurts and injuries. Monuments of triumph say: 'Look at how powerful or clever or important we are'; meanwhile memorials of injury say: 'Look! Never forget—this is the hurt that has been done to us'. In the USA, the site where the Twin Towers stood being one such example and the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington mentioned by Volkan (1997) being another. In Belgrade, the buildings damaged by NATO bombs in 1999 still stand today as signifiers of the injuries suffered *by* Serbia.

Britain like most countries, is more prone to erecting monuments to its triumphs and memorials to its injuries. Last year to mark the Centenary of the First World War, two artists created a powerful memorial. They placed 900,000 ceramic poppies around the Tower of London, one for each British soldier killed. It is an appalling number. But it is a monument to 'our' dead, the British dead. If it were turned into a monument for the bigger 'us'—the allies, Indians, Australians and others—then number of poppies would increase to something like six million. And if it were truly a monument to the horrors of war for all the dead soldiers, friend and foe, then the poppies would number 10 million.

It is true that the memorial is a way of remembering those who died for us. But it is a memorial to 'our injury', *our* hurt, *our* wound. Absent, is any recognition of the injuries and hurts *we* inflicted on *them*. Our chosen trauma, trumps yours, every time (Volkan, 1997).

In discussions of genocide, the country that springs readily to most people's mind is Germany, and the Nazi project of trying to annihilate an entire people. But ironically, Germany stands out in the international community as the nation that has created a number of monuments not to its triumphs, but to its shame.

This might of course have a lot to do with the fact that Germany was defeated in the war. Victors tend to erect monuments to their triumphs and their wounds. No doubt if the Nazis had won, there would be no Holocaust Museum in Berlin.

It seems to me that it takes moral courage *for victors* to erect monuments to shame, and mostly, this courage is found wanting. In sum, the kinds of monuments that get erected by a nation gives us some indication as to what the attitudes of its leaders are towards its actions and histories; mostly humility, remorse and acknowledgement are almost entirely absent.

Conclusions

I do not have any conclusions as such, a way of tying things up neatly. I have no prescription or formula for how 'to do' forgiveness, or remorse. I have no three or seven stage route to forgiveness. All I can do is to gather up some of the topics and themes that this article has traversed.

I cautioned against racialized ideations in which we are all the same and good, and they are all the same and bad. I have also cautioned against a version of moral equivalence that confuses objectivity with neutrality; a confusion that paralyzes the bystander and prevents them becoming witness.

The cynical use of power by the elites to silence and terrorize its citizens makes it more likely that we become paralyzed citizens rather than reflective citizens. Attachments, identification and identity play a key role in how we interact with each other. Nevertheless I have also cautioned against becoming beguiled by the siren song of sentimental racialized nationalism, fed by bewitching songs of triumph and long lost glory days.

Most importantly, I have indicated that the work of forgiveness is not the work of a solitary individual, but an *emergent* property of the network in which the bystander plays a crucial role. The brutalized and bereaved need the recognition of others, of bystanders, for the injuries done to them; without that their wounds continue to fester. *We are these others*.

I have suggested that perhaps it is only saints who have the capacity to arrive into a state of forgiveness, whilst us mortals are faced with the on-going activity of forgiving—continually having to produce and sustain a sense of forgiveness, and managing this feat for only some of the time.

I have tried not to tell you what to think, and why you should think it. I have tried to write in ways that might allow for resonances with your contexts, which are constituted by injuries received, as well as injuries inflicted. I have tried not to be moralistic by focussing on *my* inadequacies and struggles rather than pointing the finger at yours.

Saints are rare, sinners plenty; mostly, we are simply mortal.

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