

Surprise and Recognition: Experiences of Being a Stranger in Familiar Places, of Being at Home in a Strange Place

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Introduction to the Discussion of the Film A Long Night's Journey into Day¹

Susanna Wright and Lindsey Nicholls' papers were read to the IAAP conference delegates who had just seen the powerful documentary *Long Night's Journey into Day*. This film, made in 2000 by Frances Reid (director) and Deborah Hoffman (co-producer alongside Frances Reid), follows the stories of four submissions made to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in South Africa. The film allows the narratives to unfold in each of the four submissions starting with the tragic murder of Amy Biehl, a white American exchange student killed in the violent political unrest by a black youth, through to the meeting between the parents of Amy Biehl and the mother of the boy responsible for her death. Each of the four narratives juxtaposes the victim and the perpetrator, from different racial and/or political divides, all seeking to understand the events of the past and know the truth of what occurred. As Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the leader of the commission said, the role of the TRC was to make an authentic place and symbolic space for all South Africans where the truth about the past could be known and forgiveness sought from the victims of those crimes. The offer of forgiveness was never explicitly required of those who heard the testimonies of their perpetrators, but was frequently given, as demonstrated in the film's final narrative, that of the mothers of seven boys killed in an ambush by police, who forgive a black policeman (an Askari) who was a member of the South Africa Police that had shot and killed these seven black youths known as the 'Gugulethu 7'.

In the words of Cynthia Ngewu, mother of a young man slain in the Gugulethu 7 incident, testifying before the TRC: 'This thing called reconciliation ... If I am understanding it correctly ... it means the perpetrator, this man who killed Christopher Piet, if it means he

¹ Reid F., (2000). *Long Night's Journey Into Day*. Distributed by Impact Video, Johannesburg, South Africa and www.newsreel.org

becomes human again, this man, so that I, so that all of us, get our humanity back ... then I agree, then I support it all' (quoted in 'Truth v. Justice: The Morality of Truth Commission', edited by Robert Rothberg and Dennis Thompson [Gobodo-Madikizela])¹

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Part I²

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Introduction

Susanna Wright is a British born Jungian analyst and works in London and I am a naturalized South African and work at a university in Cape Town. We present together here a workshop, Surprise and Recognition, to the 2007 IAAP conference in Cape Town. In thinking about how we may be viewed by the conference delegates I was reminded of a series of large group meetings which I attended during the Tavistock Institute 'Leicester' Conference in 2002 in which I felt that individuals were left with the choice of taking a position (on a topic or within a group identity) or facing being put in their place by the dominant sub-group at that time. What I thought had been lost (at the Tavistock conference) was the chance to speak without having to belong to one or other of the splinter groups that had formed during the conference.

Who, then, was I? A South African who had an insider's view of what had occurred in South Africa, a friend and colleague of Susanna who had shared the experience of a course on working with organizations and who could think about experiences in groups? Or was I one of the white perpetrators of the heinous crimes that were portrayed in the film *A Long Night's Journey into Day*, shown at the conference? What did I feel in relation to the film, and did I have any right to speak

¹ Gobodo-Madikizela, P. 'Trauma and Forgiveness' in Facilitator's Guide to film *Long Night's Journey into Day*. www.newsreel.org/guides/longnight.htm#Madikizela (accessed 16/12/08.)

² This session 'Surprise and Recognition' was divided into two presentations and a group discussion. Below I have written my response to the film *A Long Night's Journey into Day* which was read after Susanna Wright's presentation and prior to the group discussion, but for the purpose of clarity this order is reversed here. The film *A Long Night's Journey into Day* (2000) had just been shown to the Congress participants. The references I have made to my students came from the work I did at the University of Western Cape, Cape Town, 2005-2008.

³ When this paper was presented, Lindsey Nicholls was working and living in South Africa. She now works at Brunel University, London.

about my reflections to an audience which may view me as complicit in the unfolding tragedy of apartheid?

I want to talk about my experience of shame and guilt when watching that film, and how that feeling has an unbearable quality now I live in South Africa again. I would like to consider the difficulty of experiencing guilt as a white person and in a culture that would like to disavow the past in a manic wish to create a 'rainbow' nation. This new (and proud) South Africa praises personal entrepreneurship as the product of self-belief and effort and will thereby be denying the on-going inequities which defeat any real possibility of change for many people who carry the ongoing legacy of the past. As Antjie Krog (1999) states in her book *Country of my Skull*, behind the TRC (Truth and Reconciliation Commission) which sought to hear the stories of victims of the apartheid crimes and the testimonies of perpetrators was the hidden dichotomy of those who suffered and those who benefited, and these persons were not asked to testify or seek forgiveness for their complicity. In other words those who may not have actively caused physical and/or mental harm, but who by the nature of their position and (being of white) race benefited from living in this divided country, continued to do so.

Time, Place and Person

I first saw the film *A Long Night's Journey into Day* when I was living and working in London. It was 2002 and I had been invited by an English friend of mine, Rose, who held strong liberal views and who had lobbied tirelessly against apartheid during the 1980s. Rose and I became friends (in 1995) after she had come to my defence in a group of militant feminists who had heard me use the word 'coloured' and had refused to speak or interact with me. Rose realized they did not know that 'coloured' was term for a particular race group, the majority of whom lived in the Western Cape, and that was the place I had come from and was talking about. Rose had seen the film advertised and suggested we see it together. The film was screened at the Kilburn Tricycle theatre (which hosted many South African artists and cultural happenings) and from the film's opening view of Table Mountain until the final embraces of the mothers of the Gugulethu Seven, I wept. I was overwhelmed with homesickness and a longing to return to South Africa – a country I missed and, following this film, felt intensely proud of.

I had been living in London for four years, neither an immigrant nor an exile, but a health professional, initially studying psychoanalytic approaches to organizations and later psychoanalysis as a research methodology for my PhD work. What I had not realized at the time was that it was easier to watch the film living in London, feeling I

belonged in South Africa, than to watch it in South Africa while living here. It is in the following section that I would like to try and explore the reasons for this my discomfort.

A Self Imposed Exile and the Avoidance of Guilt

My return to South Africa (in 2005) after eight years away has been harsh. I have been confronted in my new workplace with certain junior colleagues who have viewed my thoughts and suggestions as an attempt to criticize or undermine their scholastic achievements (or worse still patronize and humiliate them), and by friends whose houses were bigger and whose gates and fences were higher, and my own sense of guilt at having more resources than many of the people whom I saw at street corners or who lived in informal settlements. At the same time I had a heightened sense of fear (bordering on hyper-vigilance) regarding my own personal safety, something I had not been aware of prior to my departure for the UK in 1998.

I did not feel that I could settle back into a life here, and although I attempted to engage with the activities and friendships of my past life I constantly felt as if I was visiting them, I no longer felt I belonged. The country had changed, but so had I. I found myself feeling alien to those whom I had known before or now attempted to join with – and I was weighed down by feelings of guilt and culpability towards those whom I identified as ongoing victims of the recent apartheid past. In living away from South Africa I had imagined that a great change had taken place inside the country and the racial divisions from the past, if still being marginally enacted, would be contested in lively debates and confrontations.

When I returned to South Africa and began my work at the university that had predominately 'black'¹ students, I realized that the racial divisions between people were still much in evidence; Indian students sat together, 'coloured' students sat together and black students sat together, and men (a small minority in the department I worked in) sat together. What really concerned me was that it seemed very few of my colleagues and students thought this separation was worthy of a comment or challenge. Because of my concern over this 'racial patterning' in the lecture room I initiated a classroom discussion with my predominately 'black' students. What depressed me was that six

¹ 'Black' in this context refers to all people who were not considered 'white' by the previous government, in other words the university comprised staff and students who were predominately black African, coloured, Indian and those of mixed backgrounds (e.g., parents who were coloured and Indian, or coloured and black, black and white etc). Although there is not the time or space to debate this use of the word 'black' I believe, like Swartz (2007), the damage that has been caused by the 'racializing' of identity by the past cannot be undone by the new term of 'rainbow people' or the destructive one of 'non-white'.

students in the class, who had come to South Africa from Botswana to study, said they did not feel 'black' until they came to South Africa. When I asked why that was they said they thought it was 'this apartheid' that had made people feel so bad about themselves.

Gordon Lawrence, an author of several books on social dreaming (1998, 2003) and working with organizations (1999), wrote a poem, *Exiles*, which resonates with one of two themes that I wish to address in this section of the paper. These themes are a state of self-imposed exile that can allow one to think and the notion of persecutory anxiety as an avoidance of guilt. *Exiles* (1995) tells of a state of self-imposed exile that may be needed in order to think about one's experience.

Exiles

*Some of us were born for Exile:
cleared for sheep; or
heads for dogs of war;
refugees from revolution;
programmed for extermination.*

*But some of us have Exile chosen,
to be out with those Pale paradigms
of others who are cradled in
shawled shells of comfort certain.*

*Life becomes in
seas of chaos,
typhoons of doubts,
nonces of noughts.*

*Mind holes in blind space are ours of choice,
questing neoteric echoes of our voice.*

(W. Gordon Lawrence 1979)

In this poem I think Lawrence is speaking about exile as an internally chosen state of mindfulness (rather than an imposed physical one) in which the person spurns comfort in popular opinion or a bland acceptance of cultural ways of being. This exile, he implies, is in relation to living, feeling and thinking. I have wondered if he was saying that he has chosen the life of a stoic, perhaps even a mystic where he retains a capacity for thoughtfulness in being apart from mainstream (i.e., popular) thinking.

This self-imposed exile, painfully borne, seemed to be a place where someone could think. The poem reminded me of the comfort I found (after arriving back in South Africa) in reading the autobiographical

novel *Reading Lolita in Tehran* by Azar Nafisi (2004). The author (Nafisi) describes her attempts as a teacher and academic at keeping a reflective thoughtfulness alive in her university students as Iran descended into a new form of totalitarianism during the rule of Ayatollah Khomeini. In this novel Nafisi described how she used the great works of literature (e.g., *Madame Bovary*, *The Great Gatsby* and *Invitation to a Beheading*) to encourage students to reflect on the themes within the novels in relation to their own lives. This use of the novel as a narrative provided a rich exchange of views in the classroom and created a deeper awareness of the political and personal cost of silence. This was teaching at its dialogic (i.e., interpersonal and creative) best.

I wrote on the board one of my favourite lines from the German thinker Theodor Adorno: "The highest form of morality is not to feel at home in one's own home." I explained that most great works of the imagination were meant to make you feel like a stranger in your own home. The best fiction always forced us to question what we took for granted ... I told my students I wanted them in their readings to consider in what ways these works unsettled them, made them a little uneasy, made them look around and consider the world, like Alice in Wonderland, through different eyes.

(Nafisi 2004, p. 94).

My hope was that after watching the film *A Long Night's Journey into Day*, we as a group could have created a place for thinking that allowed for such an exchange.

Guilt as Persecution – Fear as a Retaliatory Act

In an article on Faith and Forgiveness (Nicholls 2006) I tried to explore the difficulties involved in feeling guilt when it was experienced as a form of persecution – as in the Kleinian notion of the paranoid schizoid position of functioning. I hypothesized that when guilt was experienced as a persecution the person feeling guilty could become frozen in fear or could retaliate towards the 'other' who was seen as causing this guilt. My suggestion was that the 'immature' experience of guilt as a form of persecution can quickly become a form of defence against the object who is seen as 'causing' this persecutory anxiety – thus in some way justifying an attack on this object of fear – setting up a cycle of guilt, fear, attack and thereby more guilt. [I also argued that a more 'mature' experience of guilt (in the Kleinian depressive position) may provide the motivation for reparative action through showing concern for the other or in taking responsibility through acts of restitution.]

In considering some of the difficulties I had in returning to South

Africa I began to wonder, was my new hyper-vigilance regarding my personal safety an unconscious fear of the other, as a reaction to my persecutory guilt? Was the guilt I felt in relation to the circumstances of others (e.g., beggars at the gate, a domestic worker who lives in an informal settlement without electricity, a group of black university students who admit that they believe white students are superior to them) a form of self-punishment that never led to any kind of reparative action because it was stuck in a cycle of narcissistic self absorption? (Carveth 2006). Was this reflected in the wider society, or were we as South Africans encouraged to 'put the past behind us' and get on with building a new rainbow nation? (see Alexander's (2002) chapter 'The Politics of Reconciliation'). Guilt has been portrayed as a paralysing emotion and no longer relevant in negotiating the relationships of multicultural workplaces.

I had to find a way I could live in South Africa as a critical observer of my own processes, alongside being in touch with what other people were saying and feeling. Feeling guilty had become part of my self-absorption and I had lost contact with people, heightening my sense of isolation and thereby alienation. I have thought as a middle class (and white) person that there is strong media emphasis on crime which can feed the paranoid fear that arises from the difficulty in experiencing the kind of guilt that could lead to reparative actions. I have wondered if the transmission of this fear is one way that locals (insiders) induct outsiders into their society – and in so doing steer them psychologically away from talking about the past, their guilt and fear of, or faith in, the future. Perhaps the unspoken thought of white people when meeting people who are outsiders is, how can I not be judged as a perpetrator?

The Past in the Present – Denial of Damage and a Defence of Hopefulness

After returning to South Africa and teaching young undergraduate students about health care I found that at any mention I made of the past (particularly apartheid) the class would often roll their eyes towards the ceiling as if I was being boring or 'old fashioned'. I waited until there was an appropriate time to ask these students¹ why they seemed so impatient with me when I referred to the (as I termed it) recent past – they said that they felt it was 'my past' and not 'their past'. They assured me that they had not experienced apartheid and they did not see why we should spend 'so much time' looking at it – after all, they said, it was in the past. I wondered if it was my own

¹ I was fortunate to teach one class of 30 students, three different modules over a period of a year.

need to speak about my experience of the past, assuaging my sense of guilt and culpability, and even potentially using them for some unconscious act of redemption. I wondered if the past was behind us and if they were the new generation of the 'rainbow nation' ... Was this the hope I had denied myself? Then there was a very painful and unexpected revelation (for the students and myself) in a seminar I held on clinical reasoning.

The seminar was structured into some didactic teaching, a video to be used as material for small group discussions and class feedback. And so, following a brief introduction to the value of self-reflection in working with clients, I had shown a short film clip from the film *Secrets and Lies* (1996) about an interaction between a social worker (Jenny) and a client (Hortense). In the seven-minute film clip of the interview, the students saw Hortense, a youngish professional black woman, approach an adoption agency and request the details of her birth mother from a rather harassed older white social service worker. The exchange has a rushed interpersonal clumsiness (on the part of the social worker) and a feeling that Hortense was left alone with this overwhelming information; and in the final part of the interview Hortense discovers that her birth mother was white, and she asks Jenny if this could be a mistake. Jenny (who is obviously pushed for time) says 'I very much doubt it' as she rushes off.

I have used this film clip often in the past with health and social care students as a useful teaching aid to discuss therapeutic issues such as professional boundaries, empathic engagement and organizational culture. Nothing in my use of this film clip in the past (mostly to students in the UK) had prepared me for the 'black' South African students' response to the interview. When I asked what they thought of the interview, and with some prompting on my part as they seemed reluctant to say what they really thought, a black female student [Normsa¹] said it was obvious to her what was really happening in the interview. She said that the white social worker was being rude to the black client to protect the white mother from being found. Normsa added that it was also obvious to her (and she added everyone else in the room) that the reason the white mother had given the baby away (for adoption) in the first place was that she had seen the baby was black and that she wouldn't have wanted to see 'that girl' again. That, she said, was why the social worker was so rude, it was one white woman protecting the mother (also white) from being found.

I wish I could say that following that angry and painful revelation I had said something that was useful or that acknowledged the student's 'truth', but I was shocked and tears had filled my eyes, and all I said was that they all needed to see the whole film as it might give them another experience of this white mother. I said I didn't think she had given her

¹ A pseudonym

child away because she was black but because she wasn't coping, but my reassurance seemed weak and defensive.

When I had first begun teaching at the university I had experienced a seeming reluctance from students to speak in teaching periods I had arranged as seminars or debates, and I had mistaken this silence as an initial shyness by them with a new person. After the revelation about one student's interpretation of the film clip I began to feel (and see) the pain of rejection and fear of further humiliation amongst the students that seemed to dominate the classroom discussions, and I realized that I had to negotiate the silence that surrounded race in this new South African lecture room. Alexander (2002) says there are many in South Africa who would wish to put the past behind us as if to draw a line under it and move on. He believes we need to know and explore the events of the past:

As a historian and as a political activist, I do not see any other way of dealing with the past than to undertake the journey towards understanding ... only when all of us can contemplate the history of atrocious events without the urge to retaliate in some way against whoever seems to be the progeny of the perpetrator will the past recede into the past.

(p. 118)

This place we live (South Africa) is not a miracle nation, it is 'post apartheid'; it has the 'new democracy', but the deep, strong undertow of the past is present in every interaction between black and white ... how could it not be so? What hope is there in this fragile state? I have considered the concepts of hope and faith (Nicholls 2006) as words that represent the processes that underpin the Kleinian paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions of functioning. I suggested that 'hope' is essentially a paranoid-schizoid position – a dualistic state of winning or losing, being lucky or unlucky etc – but that faith relies on a deeper sense of loss and damage and with it a commitment to humanity and the possibility of change within a relationship (be it with another or a higher being). It is with this thought that I want to end with another poem.

... be still, and wait without hope
 For hope would be hope for the wrong thing; wait without love
 For love would be the wrong thing; there is yet faith
 But the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting.
 Wait without thought, for you are not ready for thought:
 So the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing.
 From the *Four Quartets*, T.S. Eliot

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Surprise and Recognition Part II

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Abstract

The paper illustrates the relevance of the film *A Long Night's Journey into Day* for ordinary life, not just as an account of the work of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The act of shutting the door on fear stirred by a stranger, to preserve a sense of being 'at home', is contrasted with the African idea of 'ubuntu', that 'a person is a person through other persons'. The dynamics of guilt and denial and their potential to reinforce divisions in an apartheid society are considered. The function of ideals in counteracting depression is illustrated from both positive and negative perspectives. What happens when ideals clash? The fixing of rigid identities, reinforced by projection and prejudice, is contrasted with the challenge of encountering and confronting the human in the other and openness to a shift of perspective.

* * *

It is my wish to encourage reflections on how *A Long Night's Journey into Day* is relevant for us all, especially those who like myself are strangers to South Africa. Its overwhelming emotional impact may tempt us to think of it as a historical account from another time, another place, or only as an account of the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. So I shall begin from my own experience, trying to show how everyday life and that moment when we all may become a victim – or an oppressor – are a hairbreadth apart. My first, very ordinary, connection is to the everyday anxiety of confronting strangers. It goes back to when I was a child.

Being 'At Home'

I grew up in the 1960s, in the north of England, at a time when people from Pakistan were migrating to work in the industry there. My mother was a teacher; she taught a group of newly arrived children. She became very interested in them, the difficulties they confronted learning a new language, adjusting to a new place. She took them out into the countryside near where we lived, brought them to our home. She taught in a junior school – but some of her pupils were growing beards. They looked more like 14 or 15 than the 10 or 11

years they admitted to. One day, when I was about 12, alone at home, I answered the door to several of the boys who had come to visit. They had walked three miles from the town to get to our house. My response was to feel afraid. As a young girl I did not have space to think of their heroic march from town, the fact that they would have another three miles to walk back, their disappointment not to find the expected welcome from my mother, the fact that they might even need a drink of water. I said my mother was not there and shut the door. I have never felt comfortable with that – but coming to terms with the experience is perhaps my starting point. I learned that when you meet the strange other, you are confronted by your own fear. You may be tempted to try and create a place free of fear and anxiety by shutting the door, shutting out the stranger.

There is surely a hope expressed in the title of this film, *A Long Night's Journey into Day* – and a reference to Tennessee Williams' play *A Long Day's Journey into Night*. His play is about everyday life, a family who are 'at home' together, apparently in a familiar place. But they use alcohol and medication to remove themselves in a passive way from the challenge of really knowing one another, bolstering their prejudices and projections. And they cannot face or recognize illness that is there. The hope in the title of this film, of a journey through night into day, is perhaps that when you meet the strange other and have the courage to confront your prejudices as well as theirs, you can become more human and allow them to become more human.

I am indebted to Antjie Krog (1998) for introducing me to the African concept of *ubuntu*. *Ubuntu* is the African philosophy that 'a person is a person through other persons'.¹ That is to say, we depend on other people's (parents, later the wider members of our communities) recognition of us to be fully human. When we recognize only aspects of another person (age, illness, sexuality, cultural difference or skin colour), we can act as if those features define them. Trying to maintain a feeling of the familiar, of being at home, we all too easily dehumanize one another.

So even in ordinary life, we have to be careful; the difference of another can leave us feeling quite paranoid. The film *A Long Night's Journey into Day*, however, does not deal with ordinary life. As Sizwe Makana says, 'At that time, everyone can do anything to anyone'. At that time, the time when these acts of violence occurred, apartheid was being enforced with increasing severity. Resistance to it was becoming angrier, more organized, more violent. People were being pushed into extreme positions. Being 'at home' for some came at a high cost to others.

When Sharon Whelmegod's sister died in the Magoo's bar bomb planted by Robert McBride. Sharon says, 'Until the death of my sister

¹ Antjie Krog, p. 344.

we never felt any fear living in this country. We lived in this white suburb, which was a cocoon'. The Commissioner, Mary Burton, says that although not actively an oppressor, she had benefited from the apartheid oppression. Perhaps Sharon did not know about the violation of others' human rights at that time. Is the rage we see on her face an outrage at the shattering of her worldview – at the destruction, with her sister's life, of a 'familiar place'? She is met by a cool response from the bomber, Robert McBride. He apologizes for causing the death of her loved one, but adds that he has already served a sentence longer than any apartheid minister has served. He has served life in a country where he could not feel at home.

Guilt, Paralysis, Denial

Does either victim or perpetrator of the Magoo's bar bombing feel guilt at what was done to the 'other'? If we learn more about the other's perspective, how does that change things for us? A letter written by an Afrikaner that was read out at one of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's hearings suggests that for some people, greater knowledge really does change things:¹

Then I cry over what has happened, even though I cannot change anything. Then I look inside myself to understand how it is possible that no one knew, how it is possible that so few did something about it, how it is possible that often I also just looked on. Then I wonder how it is possible to live with this inner guilt and shame ... I don't know what to say, I don't know what to do, I ask you to forgive me for this – I am sorry about all the pain and heartache. It isn't easy to say this, I say it with a heart that is broken and tears in my eyes ...

In describing the response of whites to the accounts of atrocities told at these hearings, Nomofundo Walaza, a clinical psychologist, says,² 'Guilt is such a useless thing ... Guilt immobilizes you. "I am guilty – so what can I do?"' Nomofundo says, 'I prefer shame. Because when you feel shame about something, you really want to change it, because it's not comfortable to sit with shame'.

Guilt, perhaps, links with the paralysing inertia I experienced when I began to write this paper. An uncomfortable awareness that we can condone wrong done to another, treat them as a stranger in our familiar place. Guilt, perhaps, can even reinforce divisions between one group and another. When the dominance of one group becomes politically enshrined, institutionalized, it is easy to be left feeling, 'What can I do?' We cannot change the prevailing culture. Easier to turn away from what makes us feel bad about ourselves, in denial,

¹ Antjie Krog, p. 62.

² Ibid., p. 213.

evicting doubt. Easier to cocoon ourselves – like Sharon – from painful awareness and collude with the split between communities.

At a time like that, when a society becomes distorted by anxiety, hatred and denial, the clashing opposites may squeeze people into polarized roles. Particularly if their social role represents authority, control. In the account of the killing and burning of the Cradock, the policeman Eric Taylor is portrayed not as the face of evil. He is shown as a family man, someone who tried to do his duty and what he perceived to be right. But he resorted to emotional denial, self-deception and justification to continue in role. He says, 'Apartheid was part of the government at that time' and, 'I felt that this justified the work that we were doing'. He explains that his Christianity was in conflict with Matthew Goniwe's communism, which Taylor says is linked with 'atheism'. This stance is rubbished in the film: we see Taylor attending his Christian church service, and the widow of his victim attending a church service in her own community. What Taylor does not say, but perhaps feels, is that his role was to do 'the dirty work' on behalf of the white community. We are left wondering if those whose authority he respected made cynical use of his ideals.

Ideals

At the opposite pole, the film sketches how Matthew Goniwe's role as a teacher led him to focus on communist ideals and idealism. He tried to give his community hope and strength to resist the oppressive policing of apartheid. Nomonde Calata describes how, at that time, the young people were well behaved, disciplined. They were being educated in ideals that added value to their identity, becoming a group that supported one another against oppression. Their shared ideals counteracted depression within their community. Matthew's ideals survived him and were a comfort to his wife Nyameka: she describes with pride on his behalf the huge numbers at the funeral of the Cradock 4, saying, 'It was just in defiance. It was just a statement to the government that there's nothing you'll be able to control any more'. She knew that their deaths had rocked the country when a state of emergency was declared.

Something of what her husband's life stood for was left behind.

Shared ideals also comforted Amy Biehl's parents in their loss. For her parents, stubborn solidarity with Amy's human ideals was a way to hold on to something of her. They could hold onto feeling proud of her life. As her mother says, 'You have no concept until something happens how you would react. In this case, because of what Amy was doing and how she was talking about it, this is how we have reacted'.

It was Amy's activism against apartheid that took her to the black township where she was killed by a crowd of angry black youths.

Perhaps naïvely, she behaved as if her friendly intentions would be recognized – as if she were at home among strangers. Perhaps as a stranger to South Africa she felt as much at home there as among the minority whites. But her colour made her identifiably a stranger – different from those whose home the township was. Mongezi Manquina says he saw her simply as a white settler, another oppressor. Drawing on his ideal of black solidarity, and still raw from the recent killing of his friend by a white policeman, Mongezi asked the crowd for a weapon. At that time, in his mind, *ubuntu* was only for blacks. Her parents, for whom Amy was fully a person, say that she was killed in ignorance of the person she was and what she stood for – without the opportunity for dialogue. When he hears about the person, Mongezi admits that he has ‘beaten someone who should not have been beaten’.

But Mongezi and his cousin Nelizwa Sohlatsu remain shocked that Amy’s parents can ‘reconcile within themselves’ her loss, that they do not oppose amnesty, that they even ask to meet the family of her killer. Perhaps he cannot get his mind round her parents clinging to an ideal that seems to him weak. Perhaps in his mind one ideal overcomes another. Perhaps understandably, having grown up in a world where he is so disadvantaged just because he is black, he lives in a world where if you are not strong, enemies triumph. He may be in company with those who asked,¹ ‘Has the Truth Commission become the last empire of naïve righteousness and impossible dreams?’

Identity

We cannot overlook Mongezi’s view that a group may use force and power to try and create a place of safety, as if the strangeness of another can be limited, subdued, defined. The fantasy is, I suppose, that then there is no need to confront and meet the fear, the strange other. But in fact, because the other then becomes only the recipient of projections, of unwanted aspects of ourselves, fear on the one side and rage on the other widen the divide. Identities become distorted and fixed at polarized opposites. I find it understandable that Robert McBride and many other young black and coloured men were in a rage that their skin colour should be the defining factor in their identity (and not defined by them): of who they were and of who they could be. The description of himself Robert McBride found most insulting was ‘non-white’ – a term that suggested his identity could only be what whites were not and did not want to be. Antjie Krog quotes a psychologist² who says of the apartheid regime, ‘All black people did pay a price’, and, ‘What happened to your next-door neighbour and in your area affected you – you lived in a constant vibration of fear and

¹ Antjie Krog, p. 169.

² Antjie Krog, p. 214.

insecurity, of being utterly deprived in all kinds of ways, of knowing you could never develop your full potential'.

Perhaps the ideal that black people stand together, voiced in the film – at the funerals of the Cradock, in the disgust of the mothers of the Gugulethu 7 that a black policeman had betrayed his own people – is also an appeal to power, to the power of numbers, to reverse the apartheid dynamic. A way to turn around a system that had disadvantaged black people, into the advantage of a social mass that can insist 'this is our home' and threaten the white minority, estrange them from their familiar place.

Ubuntu

The film suggests to me that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's approach tried to offer an alternative to the bid for power. In facing perpetrators with their victims, it encouraged people to withdraw projections, to admit a different perspective, to see the human, the person in the other, and to acknowledge depression and grief. *Ubuntu*. At close quarters, it is much more difficult to deny, to limit awareness of another's perspective, their 'personhood'. The encounter educates, confronts and challenges splitting. It increases the chance that the 'other' can be accepted as a person despite difference.

Reference

Krog, Antjie (1998), *Country of my Skull*. New York: Three Rivers Press.