

Tutu in Memory, Tutu on Memory

Strategies of Remembering

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Abstract

This essay profiles the strategies and (theological) tactics used by Desmond Tutu in the management of painful memory in his own personal life, in his various leadership roles in church and society as well as in his role as chairperson of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission. To contextualise Tutu's work, we refer, amongst others, to the work of Elie Wiesel, Don Mattera and Leonard Cohen. The essay provides a profile of the ways in which Tutu is remembered as well as the approaches Tutu himself uses in his own acts of remembering. The latter include the importance of childhood memories, the anchoring of memory in familial and parental relationships, a keen awareness of the socio-economic conditions, the valorisation of childhood church experiences, the privileging of the Bible, the leveraging of Ubuntu, making forgiveness the main lens through which to look into the past as well as the maintenance of a hermeneutic that suggests that God is historically on the side of the weak.²

1. Memory as Weapon

In the conclusion to his memoir on the Apartheid-era destruction of Sophiatown and the brutal removal of its black inhabitants, Don Mattera paints a picture of a township that was left "buried deep under the weight and power of the tin gods whose bulldozers" decimated hopes and dreams, leaving in their wake, the "dust of defeat". But that is not the last picture he leaves his readers with. In a sudden change of mood, Mattera switches to defiance, saying, there is "nothing that memory cannot reach or touch or call back" for "memory is a weapon" that can grasp "that place where laws and guns cannot reach" so he reckoned "it was only a matter of time and Sophiatown would be reborn" (Mattera, 2009, p. 152).

Mattera would probably be the first to admit that memory does not offer complete salvation. In a seemingly discordant and hanging last sentence of the book – a sentence that leaves the reader begging for more, Mattera acknowledges that, with the destruction of his Sophiatown, "the world became alien and I felt lost" (Mattera, 2009, p. 152). In that manner, at least, Mattera acknowledges the gulf

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² An earlier version of the paper will be published as a chapter of a book focusing on the national memorial site outside Pretoria, called Freedom Park. The book will be edited by Gessler Muxe Nkondo.

that lies between reality and memory, hopes and present circumstances, the past remembered and the future desired.

If memory is a weapon, as Don Mattera suggests, then memory must necessarily be kept sharpened, ready to be wielded, in warning, in attack or in defense. If memory is a weapon, it is, by definition able to wound, even to wound fatally. Whom the weapon wounds, is function of size, number, potency of weapons as well as the prowess and tactics with which weapons are deployed. All of these dangerous possibilities notwithstanding, without memory, not even the most minimalist view of salvation would be conceivable. It is mainly in this sense that Don Mattera considers memory as weapon. In this way, the physical destruction of Sophiatown did not translate and should not be allowed to translate into either a permanent deletion or a complete banishment of Sophiatown from history and memory. Hence Mattera could insist that, 'it was only a matter of time before Sophiatown would be reborn' (Mattera, 2009, p.152).

Not only was Sophiatown and similar townships reborn in the memories of Don Mattera (2009) Eския Mphahlele (1959) and Bloke Modisane (1963), Sophiatown was reborn in the defiance campaign of the 1950s, the subversive activities of the liberation movements underground, the students uprising of 1976, the Black Consciousness Movement as well as the activism of Desmond Tutu, Beyers Naude, Allan Boesak and the United Democratic Front generation of the 1970s and 80s. Sophiatown was reborn too, when Nelson Mandela became the first democratically elected president of South Africa in 1994.

Two years after Desmond Tutu was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, Ellie Wiesel was awarded the same prize. Amongst many other things they share in common, both men are memory warriors. We are blessed to still have the former in our midst. Wiesel passed away in 2016 (Maluleke, 2016), but he left a rich legacy as a memory warrior. His Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech (Wiesel, 1986) is most instructive in this regard.

Typically, the Wiesel acceptance speech opens with an anecdote of a Hasidic legend about an impatient rabbi who artificially attempted to hasten the return of the Messiah. As a result, the rabbi was punished and banished to a distant island, with only one servant as his companion. The punishment also included a complete loss of memory, for both the rabbi and his servant. They spent most of their time weeping because of their great tragedy. But one day, the servant discovered that having forgotten everything, he still remembered one thing, namely; the alphabet. So the two of them started reciting the alphabet repeatedly, "again, each time more vigorously, more fervently; until, ultimately, the Besht regained his powers, having regained his memory" (Wiesel, 1986).

For Wiesel (1986), "it is memory that will save humanity". Wiesel also posits a dialectical relationship between hope and memory, and between the past and the

future. In his recollection of life in Auschwitz, the Nazi concentration camp from which he was liberated, Wiesel noted the frequency with which the concentration camp inmates were encouraged and encouraged one another to forget. But Wiesel insists that without memory, even painful memory, there is no salvation for either the individual or nations of the world.

Memory is a power no less powerful and pervasive than love. What does it mean to remember? It is to live in more than one world, to prevent the past from fading and to call upon the future to illuminate it. To remember is to revive the fragments of existence, to rescue lost beings, to cast harsh light on faces and events, to drive back the sands of time, . . . to combat oblivion and reject death (Wiesel, 1996, p. 150).

To remember is therefore not a passive activity. It is an active choice of vision and a deliberate intervention. Like Wiesel, Tutu is a warrior of memory, who refuses to forget Apartheid. But he also refuses to allow Apartheid to take over all his memory of the past. Both men are steeped in religions at whose centre is the practice of remembrance. “To be Jewish is to remember (Wiesel, 1990, p. 9)”, said Wiesel. Since it is recorded in the New Testament that Jesus prescribed specific remembrance rituals, “Christianity too can rightly be described as a memory religion (Vosloo, 2017, p. 5)”. Highlighted in Wiesel’s anecdote about the wayward rabbi who consequently lost all memory, is the relationship between memory and forgetting. To speak of memory is therefore not to speak about the ability or the necessity to remember everything – that might be too painful a burden to bear. Some things must necessarily be forgotten. Even God chooses to forget human sins in the act of forgiving. Forgetting is especially useful in instances where powerful people and institutions seek to manipulate and to control memory along particular directions. In other words, memory, like its cousin, history, can be abused or simply be mistaken (Krog, et al., 2009).

Many scholars have observed that colonialism did not only involve the take over of land and people, it was also a usurpation of history. The battle to get the land back is therefore only half of the fight. The other half, and in some ways the trickier battle, is the retrieval and correction of history (Chigumadzi, 2018; Kurgan, 2018). It is therefore not merely the act of remembering what matters. What we are willing, able, allowed or made to remember matters. It matters what we choose to remember as well as what we choose to forget.

2. How Tutu is Memorialised So Far

I was with Desmond Tutu in Oslo, Norway, when he received the Nobel Peace Prize. And I was with him when he met and was hosted by the highest government authorities in both Norway and Sweden. As we moved from one reception to another

in both countries I could not avoid the thought that in his own country this man did not receive even the courtesy of a congratulations from the government. Even 'liberal' institutions like universities in the country have not given him the honour he deserves (Gqubule, 1986).

In awarding the Peace Prize in 1984, the Nobel Committee "attached much importance to Desmond Tutu's role as a unifying leader figure ... in the non-violent struggle in which black and white South Africans unite[d] to bring their country out of conflict and crisis" (Hulley, et al., 1996, p. 25). This was clearly an internationalist view of Desmond Tutu at the time. Back home, the reality was more akin to the picture painted by Gqubule above. In September 1981, Allan Boesak comforted Tutu after the government had taken away his passport by saying, "prophets are not honoured in their own land, but a nation that cannot respond to such a love has set fire to its own future" (Boesak, 2006, p. 59).

And yet it was still amazing that "this small man from Soweto" (Ndungane, 1996, p. 71) who was hated "without a cause" (Gqubule, 1986, p. 36) ended up being counted among the thirteen Nobel Peace laureates of African Descent (Adebajo, 2014). In time, the list of honours which Desmond Tutu has received from all over the world became rather long. Clearly Tutu has become a global citizen and in many ways a global icon, recognised for his principled and peaceful opposition to the Apartheid system, racism, patriarchy and oppression across the world.

'Desmond Tutu' is also the name of a football player, a goalkeeper, who currently plays for Henderson Eels FC in the Solomon Islands (Wikipedia, n.d.). He is also currently in the Solomon Islands' national soccer team. Desmond and the Tutus, is a Pretoria rock band formed in 2005, comprising four white youngsters – Shane Durrant, Craig Durrant, Douglas Bouwer and Nicholas Dinnie (Okay Africa, n.d.). One year later, in 2006, a group of third-year B.Sc. (Architecture) students at the University of Pretoria built a model that is today the Desmond and Leah Tutu Bridge – a pedestrian bridge linking two Anglican schools in Johannesburg, St Johns College (for boys) and Roedean School (for girls) (University of Pretoria, n.d.). *The Arch for the Arch* is a precinct at the heart of Cape Town City, that was built in honour of Emeritus Archbishop Desmond Tutu, on the occasion of his 86th birthday in 2017 (Brand South Africa, n.d.).

In 1986, jazz maestro, Miles Davis released his slow-jamming and intoxicating single titled, Tutu, in an album, also named after Desmond Tutu (Davies, 1986). Two years later, in 1988, the Guyanese-British singer produced his chart-topping single 'Give me Hope Joanna'. In the catchy lyrics of that anti-Apartheid song, Grant makes reference to "the preacher who works for Jesus, the Archbishop who's a peaceful man, [who] together say that the freedom fighters, will overcome the

very strong..." (Grant, 1988). In 2018, Rob Gess (South African) and Per Ahlberg (Swedish) discovered an ancient four-legged fish species and named it after Desmond Tutu because they thought that "these tetrapods led the way from these rather anoxic swamps out into the sunshine ...a metaphor for what Desmond Tutu had done" (Business Insider, n.d.). One of the most touching honours which Tutu has ever received came later in 2006 when a group of primary school kids from Fellview Primary in Wigton, UK, wrote a letter of gratitude to him, signed by each of them. In this overly enthusiastic appreciation of the man, the children described him, amongst others, as generous, mindful, caring, honest, polite and a good listener (Crawford-Browne, 2006).

The kids of Wigton are not alone in their positive assessment of 'Desmond Tutu, Archbishop of the world' (Maluleke, 2015). He has also been described as "a performer" who "played out his career centre stage, on the pulpit and in the streets" (Isaacson, 2014) and as being "tough and compassionate" (Vicencio, 1996), a proponent of Ubuntu (Ndungane, 1996b) and someone who embodied the identities of being "African and Anglican" (Hodgson, 1996). His legendary "sense of humour and a near explosive laughter" (Mogoba, 1986, p. 24) goes back to his youth and to his time as a student of the Pretoria Bantu Normal College. He has also been described as "an academic of no mean repute", for whom, "the emergence of African theology wasn't going to mean a sentimental nostalgic trip to the African's past, but a rediscovery of his roots, so as to be able to stand firm in the present" (Dwane, 1986, p. 20). Nothing seems to have mattered more to Desmond Tutu than "the restoration of the dignity of the African person" (Ndungane, 1996, p. 71) a project he pursued with "almost reckless courage" (Ndungane, 2006). The foregoing assessments merge a depiction of Tutu, not only as a stage performer, but as a solid academic and as someone who was in touch with his African roots, a fighter for the restoration of the human dignity of African people. Tutu's quest for the restoration of the human dignity of both the oppressed, such as Africans and the oppressor, primarily through his appropriation of Ubuntu philosophy (Battle, 1997), must be counted as one of his memory strategies.

Few leaders inside South Africa dominated the 1980s like Desmond Tutu did. Together with the South African Council of Churches, Tutu was at the centre of the costly battle of wills between the Apartheid regime and those who resisted it. In August 1989, Desmond and Leah Tutu received a rare hand-written letter from none other than the prisoner, Nelson Mandela himself. In it, Nelson Mandela pays them such delightful backhanded compliments!

You are so busy travelling in and out of the country that few people would expect you to find time for other people's hopes and despairs, dreams and frustrations,

joys and celebrations; yet this is one of the roles you play so well. Many thanks for the flowers and good wishes (Mandela, 2006).

And yet, for Nelson Mandela, what was most characteristic of Desmond Tutu was “his readiness to take unpopular positions without fear” (Mandela, 2003, p. 493). Mandela would know this well, for within a year of his presidency of the country, in September 1994, he and Desmond Tutu disagreed publicly, over the considerable salary increases for members of the cabinet. “They stopped the gravy train long enough for them to get on it”, Tutu said (United Press International, 1994). Mandela retaliated by calling Tutu a populist.

Zooming in on the human, compassionate and accessible nature of Tutu, Charles Villa Vicencio described him as someone who “carries all the pomp, ceremony and lavishness associated with high church episcopacy with aplomb, distinction and even a sense of regality. Yet he is also a man of the people, a simple parish priest and a son of the soil of Africa” (Vicencio, 1986, p. 6).

But perhaps it is the simplicity and vulnerability of the man that really sets him apart and makes him such an authentic human being. In “as much as he enjoyed laughing, he also wanted to be loved, to be appreciated, to be given warmth in return” (Mazibuko, 1986, p. 17). It must have pained him therefore that in his prime, he was a prophet without much honour in his own country. In as much as Tutu tried his best to exorcise hopelessness and defeat from his memory of the past, certain wounds have remained stubbornly. Therein lies the roots of his self-understanding as a wounded healer with an ability to cry, even publicly.

3. How Tutu Remembers

Almost all the biographers (Allen, 2006; Du Boulay, 1988; Gish, 2004) of Desmond Tutu make special and specific note of his childhood and the significance of that formative period in his life. The consensus among his biographers – at least two of whom held many in-depth interviews with Tutu - is indicative of the importance Tutu himself attaches to this period of his life. This then is the first observable tactic of how Tutu deals with memory – he puts a high and specific premium on specific childhood experiences. Such childhood memories include his near-death (or narrow-escapes) as a child, the socio-political difficulties his parents faced, violent gender relations exemplified between his parents, the general conditions in which black people lived, race and ethnic relations in South Africa, as well as the place of South Africa in the world. As a teenager, Tutu fell sick with tuberculosis. With the assistance of Bishop Trevor Huddleston – whom Tutu credited with having “single-handedly made Apartheid a world issue” (Sparks & Tutu, 2011 p.27) – and other Anglican priests such as Zachariah Sekgaphane and Father Raymond Raynes,

he ended up in the men's ward at the Rietfontein tuberculosis hospital in Johannesburg, where he stayed for twenty months.

I was in the bathroom coughing up blood. It was not just coming in isolated drops. I was haemorrhaging. The blood was coming like a flow. I knew what this signalled. The doctors knew it, too. "Your young friend is not going to make it", they had told Trevor Huddleston. They didn't have to tell me. I had seen it before. I knew. In the short shuddering breaths between coughs I spoke to God: Well, God, if I am going to die it's OK. And if not, that's OK too (Tutu & Tutu, 2010, p.159).

This anecdotal story, told by Tutu himself, is combined, three great influences in Tutu's memory strategy, namely; the anchor of his childhood, the pivotal role of the church and the child-like reliance on God as the final arbiter. "I hadn't given myself up to death. I had just allowed myself to rest in God's presence, and I was at peace", he concludes (Tutu & Tutu 2010, p.160).

Desmond Tutu never missed an opportunity to reminisce about 'how he had built his own toy cars with discarded boot-polish tins and scraps of wire ... [or] Christmas holidays in his grandmother's crowded home in Stirtonville, on the East Rand, with its single water tap shared by three families ...' (Isaacson, 2014, p. 142). Part of the power of Tutu's recollections lies in his unrelenting search for both the normal and the genuinely human in the rather abnormal and inhuman conditions in which he and other black kids lived out their childhood. This way of remembering the past was clearly an important component of his memory arsenal. It was perhaps for this reason that it "never occurred to him that his family was poor" (Isaacson, 2014). In their letter to him, the primary school children from Wigton, UK surmised that Tutu had had a happy childhood, probably because in much of his reminiscing, he projected a largely happy childhood. But his was not a carefree childhood.

Nor was Tutu romantic in his view of the dire conditions, both of his youth and his adult years. Few understood the levels of poverty in South Africa better than Desmond Tutu. He recalls a conversation he had with a little girl whose family had been uprooted and moved to a so-called 'resettlement camp' who told him her family was so poor, 'we drink water to fill our stomach' (Tutu, 1982, p.108).

At Duduza township in July 1985, Tutu, at great personal risk, prevented the killing of someone suspected of being a police spy, when "without pausing to think, I waded into the middle of the angry mob" (Tutu & Tutu, 2010b, p. 2). Given his astute awareness of the poverty and violence around him, and given his palpably felt sense of connection to God, Tutu is nevertheless deliberate, tactical, discriminating and nuanced when he evokes his childhood memories. Whereas

“the Tutus’ house had no electricity [and] the Tutus and their neighbours were poor” (Gish, 2004, p. 7), Tutu does not allow poverty to become the only perspective that informs his boyhood memories set in black townships of Apartheid South Africa. For him to have been “once accosted by a police officer who suspected he was a homeless beggar” (Gish, 2004b, p. 7), means Tutu did not look like a rich spoiled kid. The Tutus just about made ends meet. To supplement his income, Tutu’s father, ZZ Tutu, “fished in a nearby stream to supplement the family’s food and earned extra money by taking photographs at local weddings, often being paid with eggs, chickens or piglets” (Gish, 2004, p. 23) and also “took work as a delivery boy at a bottle store in Boksburg to earn extra money” (Tutu & Tutu, 2010, p. 39). Therefore, Tutu was not unaware that he was born of “a dispossessed and criminalized people [then] living on the fringes of an expanding white world” (Maluleke, 2015, p. 583).

Keenly aware of his own vulnerability to the ruthless system of Apartheid as well as its pervasive effects on the lives of Black South Africans at that time, Tutu is nevertheless determined not to yield all decisive and interpretative power to the Apartheid system in his own recollections of his childhood. That is yet another strategy he employs to confront his memory of the past.

Another strategy Tutu employs is to anchor his memories of the past firmly and truthfully in his familial relationships, especially his relationship with his parents. In this regard, he seemingly holds the deepest and fondest memories of his mother, of whom he thinks and reminisces often. “My mother was a washerwoman and I went with her to her white madam, . . . she died the year I got the Nobel Peace Prize (Krog, 1998, p. 157).

It was because of his love for his mother and his awareness of her love for him that it greatly hurt Tutu when he “as a young boy, had to watch helplessly as my father verbally and physically abused my mother” (Tutu & Tutu, 2014, p. 16). How does Tutu deal with such memories? By not dwelling on them, he says, because, “if I dwell in those memories, I can feel myself wanting to hurt my father back in the same ways he hurt my mother” (Tutu & Tutu, 2014b, p. 16). And yet Tutu is keenly aware of the crucial role played by his father ZZ Tutu in ensuring that he secures a childhood as was possible in those days. “I loved my father very much, and while his temper pained me greatly, there was so much about him that was loving, wise and witty” (Tutu & Tutu, 2014, p. 193-94). Tutu has battled to forgive himself for the missed final opportunity to speak with his father.

My father said he wanted to talk. . . . I told my father I was tired and had a headache. “We’ll talk tomorrow, in the morning”, I said. . . . The next morning my niece came to wake us with the news: my father was dead. (Tutu & Tutu, 2014, p. 193)

Elie Wiesel had even more intense feelings of guilt in relation to his father. He remembered the night the Nazis slaughtered his father in Auschwitz. He could hear his father crying out, “Eliezer, my son, come here . . . I want to tell you something . . . Only to you . . . Come, don’t leave me alone, Eliezer” (Wiesel, 2006, p.xi)”. But Elie was too scared to respond to desperate cries of his father, for he feared for his own life. He could never forgive himself or forgive “the world for having pushed me against the wall” (Wiesel 2006, p.xi). One way in which Wiesel sought forgiveness was through his life-long revolt against indifference and against historical amnesia.

For Desmond Tutu, forgiveness was the only way to deal with the painful past, both in his own personal life and in the history of his country. Tutu’s conception of forgiveness is both a diachronic and a synchronic memory strategy. This must be added to his repertoire of how to remember. Tutu would not take the risk of looking back into that dark past or venturing into the future without the lens of forgiveness. In that sense, he exemplifies with his own life that there is “no future without forgiveness” (Tutu, 1999), no past without forgiveness³ and no present without it (Tutu & Tutu, 2010). As a tool that undergirds memory, for Tutu, forgiveness is not a luxury, a weakness, a way of forgetting or a subversion of justice (Tutu & Tutu, 2014, p. 31-43). But in order for memory to be managed constructively through forgiveness, there is a need to face the truth unflinchingly. That, in short, is Tutu’s macro strategy for dealing with not only the past memories, but of dealing with future memories, under construction.

While memory tends to refer to the mind pictures we hold from the past, memory can only be exercised from a particular vantage point in the present. In other words, the present is the lens through which we look back, recall and create memories. Memory is also how we envision a future. To the extent that we remember the past truthfully and yet forgivingly, to that extent we also ‘remember’ an imagined, desired or dreaded future. More importantly, the past, the present and the future are not static. They are dynamic and always in conversation, constantly influencing and conditioning one another. From an early age, Tutu seems to have developed a vision-memory of ‘another country’ – a different and better country. He had a vision of that country, when at the age of nine he “was standing with my mother as a white priest in a long cassock and a big hat swept past, and he doffed his hat to my mother . . . that really shook me (Tutu, 2014, p. 131)”. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission also offered Tutu a peek into a future, at whose feet he felt he could “do no more than lay . . . the small wisdoms we have been able to garner out of our present experience” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission Volume One, 1998, p. 4).

³ This is the overwhelming sentiment of the book of Desmond and Mpho Tutu. 2010. *Made for Goodness and Why This makes All the Difference*. New York: Harper Collins.

Two final Tutu stratagems for the management of painful memory relate to his reliance on the Bible and his utter dependence on God. Well-versed in the African and Black Theology debates about the worrisome place of the Bible in colonial Christianity (Tutu, 2011), Tutu nevertheless insisted that the Bible was capable of helping the colonised regain their freedom (Tutu, 2014). Convinced of this, Tutu proceeded to proclaim that the Bible reveals a God who takes sides with the poor, the oppressed and the marginalised. With this hermeneutic of subversiveness in terms of which God is partisan in favour of the weak, Tutu read the history of the Bible, the past, the present and the future. Similarly, Tutu's penchant for allowing himself to "rest in God's presence" (Tutu, 2010, p.160) defines another crucial strategy. But this strategy must be balanced out with Tutu's responsiveness to what he calls "God-pressure ...a feeling of being compelled to act, even against the voice of reason" (Tutu & Tutu, 2010, p. 170). In this regard, the dictates of 'God pressure' always trump both reason and conscience. Accordingly, Tutu rebuked the Apartheid government saying, "you are not God. You may be powerful, perhaps even very powerful, but you are not God" (Tutu, 2013, p.155). Tutu's sense of being attuned with God may also date back to his childhood. As a youngster, Tutu recalls "a kind of vision in which the Devil was trying to pull me ... I had a clear understanding that someone remonstrated with the Devil and God said, 'This is my child' (Tutu 2014, p.126)".

4. Tutu and/in the TRC

O gather up the brokenness
 And bring it to me now
 ... The splinters that you carry
 The cross you left behind
 Come healing of the body
 Come healing of the mind (Cohen, 2012)

In some of his songs, the Canadian poet, writer and singer, Leonard Cohen, espoused a comprehensive and Tutu-like vision of both brokenness and healing. For him, the wounds of brokenness and the scope of healing encompasses, body, limb, mind, spirit and the hills. For this reason, he proclaims that "from this broken hill/ all your praises they shall ring/if it be your will/to let me sing" (Cohen, 1984).

The TRC brought Tutu face-to-face with the utter brokenness of his country and showed him the depth of his own woundedness as well as the scope of healing that was needed. In the middle of his term as chairperson of the TRC, Desmond Tutu fell ill. Cancer was suspected. As he lay in hospital for tests, concerned journalists assigned to cover the TRC process visited him.

And here he lies, smaller than I remember ... He looks so worn. And grey. My whole face suddenly awash with tears. We cannot finish what we have started without this man. The cameras click away (Krog, 1998, p. 154).

And yet in her TRC memoir, Antjie Krog's (Krog, 1998) makes a concerted effort to focus more on those who gave testimony rather than on that commission and the commissioners. After all, Mandela himself, during the commissioning of the TRC in February 1996, had said that the key stakeholder in the work of the commission "is not the politician or the Commission, but the victim" (Mandela, 2003, p. 131).

Accordingly, for Krog, it was the cry of Nomonde Calata, during her testimony about the arrest, disappearance, torture and the brutal and barbarous killing of her husband, Fort Calata, one of the Cradock Four (Fort Calata, Matthew Goniwe, Sparrow Mkhonto and Sicelo Mhlauli) that really signalled the beginning of the TRC. Calata broke down and issued a piercing scream "... the signature tune, the definitive moment, the ultimate sound of what the process is about. She was wearing this vivid orange-red dress, and she threw herself backwards and that sound ... that sound ... it will haunt me forever" (Krog, 1998, p. 42). If the cry of Nomonde Calata at the TRC was heart-rending, so is the recent grievance of Fort Calata's children, more than thirty years since their father was killed, about some of the ways in which, in their opinion, the memory of their father continues to be dishonoured (Calata & Calata, 2018).

Part of the problem which confronted the TRC was not merely the toll taken by the painful memories that were revisited in the hearings, but also the vastness and mysteriousness of memory (Derrida, 1996) as a human archive. It is therefore tempting for people to avoid unlocking the vast archives of memory. Sometimes the very instrument, that is the TRC, seemed to buckle under the deluge of the pain unleashed by memory (Krog, et al., 2009). If Nomonde Calata's cry epitomised the pain brought on by memory, equally emblematic was Tutu's own weeping, as he covered his face and fell flat on the table while listening to Singqowakana Ernest Malgas detailing the methods of torture that he was subjected to (South African History Archive, n.d.).

Upon receiving the five volumes of the TRC report in Pretoria on the 20th October 1998, Nelson Mandela noted that, "the report ... today becomes the property of our nation" (Mandela, 2003, p. 136) and through it, "... we are extricating ourselves from a system that insulted our common humanity" (Mandela, 2003, p. 135). For his part, Tutu regarded the five volumes of the TRC report, "the commission's greatest legacy" (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 1998, p. 2). For fellow Nobel Laureate, Nadine Gordimer, the TRC was "Desmond Tutu's supreme achievement so far" (Gordimer, 2006, p. 113).

While acknowledging the difficulties that came with truth-telling and the unleashing of painful memories, Tutu insisted that it was incumbent upon the TRC not “to allow the present generation of South Africans to grow gently into the harsh realities of the past . . . there can be no healing without truth” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 1998, p. 4). In the foreword to the TRC report, Desmond Tutu spends considerable time and space dealing with ‘criticisms and challenges’. Among the criticisms and allegations that seem to have stung Tutu most, were the following: that the amnesty process encouraged impunity, the commission members were politically aligned and biased, that the commission had been too conciliatory towards the likes of PW Botha and that the commission was too lenient on the thirty-seven ANC leaders who were granted ‘blanket amnesty’. Tutu responds to all these with characteristic robustness.

Recently Tutu has been criticised by some young black South Africans who were not yet born in 1994. They charge that the “rainbow nation is simply an emotional ploy to garner support for a South Africa whose foundations are based on whiteness” (Chikane, 2018, p.5).

Ironically, Tutu seems to have anticipated this criticism in his recognition that largely, the TRC was snubbed by white leaders:

...the greatest sadness that we have encountered in the Commission has been the reluctance of white leaders to urge their followers to respond to the remarkable generosity of spirit shown by the victims. This reluctance, indeed this hostility, to the Commission, has been like spitting in the face of the victims (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 1998, p. 17).

Part of the reason Tutu was so stung by the ‘snub’ the TRC received from ‘white leaders’ is because in terms of his theology, only when we afford ourselves the opportunity to delve into the painful past from the perspectives of truth and forgiveness can healing become a tangible possibility.

5. In Lieu of a Conclusion

If memory is a weapon, it is a multiple-edged sword without a handle. Those who dare to use it will necessarily be wounded by it in the process. Nowhere is this better demonstrated than in the life and work of Desmond Tutu. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the South African quest for national healing – a quest that continues and is perhaps never-ending. It is tempting to choose the path of collective amnesia in the belief that such a path could bring peace and prevent pain and anger. What Desmond Tutu has demonstrated, in his own personal life and in his role as chairperson of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, is that there is no future without forgiveness and no forgiveness without the truth.

Having looked the beast of the past in the eye, having asked and received forgiveness and having made amends, let us shut the door on the past – not in order to forget it but in order not to allow it to imprison us. let us move into the glorious future of a new kind of society where people count, not because of biological irrelevancies or other extraneous attributes, but because they are persons of infinite worth created in the image of God (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 1998, p. 22).

In this essay, we have provided a profile of the strategies and tactics used by Desmond Tutu in the management of painful memory. To this end, we have demonstrated how the lens of forgiveness is key to understanding Tutu's view of the past, the present and the future. His childhood memories, especially those involving his parents and the church, are an important handle in his navigation of memory. In all these, Tutu privileges his own Biblical hermeneutics, in terms of which the Bible is viewed essentially as a subversive text, as well as his own historical hermeneutic, in terms of which God always takes the side of the weak.

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