Truth, Reconciliation, and the Fragility of Heroic Activism

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Abstract

This article deals with the impact of personality on social change and its further impact upon processes of democratization in situations of transitional justice. The essay explores the concepts of truth, reconciliation and change, as these interrelate with the fragility of heroic activism. The persons involved are actual. The author of the piece is a participant observer. The specific setting is South Africa during the height of the resistance to apartheid in the 1960s.

KEYWORDS: Political psychology, heroic activist, literature, history, human rights

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Introduction

This article deals in part with matters of personal experience in political environments of extreme conflict where political activism is ubiquitous. The heroic ego as an activist is often an important figure during intense social and political conflict. This essay explores the interplay between conflict, activism, and the heroic ego from an interdisciplinary perspective, touching on matters of biography, literature, history, and human rights. There is a concern, which many professionals confront, that professionalism not be an impermeable character-armor which insulates it from the practical experience of working with human beings under stress and experiencing the volatile emotions and sentiments of political conflict which impact upon personal responsibility, professional identity, and fundamental integrity. The theme of truth and reconciliation is a widely experienced political matter developed in situations of extreme conflict where the prospect of winning and losing is indeterminate. It posits the idea that leaders and activists, vigorously asserting the values of change or reaction, must confront the possibility that some change is inevitable, but not the way the way those who claim change imagine it. Similarly, those who defend reaction have to accept the fact that reaction cannot endure without some change, but precisely what that change is and how much reaction endures also remains problematic. Those leaders who are deeply active in these forms of struggle, which may be very lethal, are often seen as heroic promoters of change and progressivism or heroic defenders of reaction and the status quo. In each case the activists are power-centered personalities and represent, so to speak, the activist’s possibly heroic ego.

A careful examination of many heroic leaders discloses flaws and disappointments. At times, historians have difficulty sorting out real fact from manufactured fact. Modern efforts to understand the political psychology of the heroic activist may be seen as a cynical exercise in deconstructing the myth of heroism itself. What is accepted is that the heroic activist is often identified with the power-conditioned personality. In short, some personality types are drawn to power for complex personal and psychoanalytical reasons. This suggests an innate skepticism of political heroism. Harold Lasswell’s classical description of the political personality is described as implicating the private motives of the actor, which are displaced on public objects, and which the actor rationalizes as being in the public interest.¹ There can be, perhaps, no more skeptical appraisal of the activist grappling heroically in arenas of conflict to secure the values of the public interest. The clincher is that the actor is apparently fundamentally driven by private motives. The fact that private motives may in fact be using public objects for purposes which may be highly subjective is made even more problematic by the inevitable process of covering up those motives by rationalizations in the “public interest.” To expose these kinds of psychoanalytical truths certainly puts a damper on situations as crass as the cult of the celebrity, but also raises the specter of skepticism with regard to ostensibly heroic action which we see as truthful and altruistic. The harder the truth, the tougher will be the capacity for reconciliation. Activist

Notions of Truth and Disclosure

In *Granta 78: Bad Company*, a recent volume of an English literary journal, the British intellectual class was treated to an odd, but nonetheless interesting version of a claim from an ostensibly heroic ego, to “truth” and hopeful “reconciliation” from a major South African political activist. This interesting version of heroism, truth, and the reconciliation process is indicated in the publication of the remorseful confessions of the South African political activist, Adrian Leftwich. Leftwich was a leading organizer in the African Resistance Movement (ARM) in the early 1960’s in South Africa. The ARM seemed to make its presence known at precisely the time of the arrest of the major African National Congress (ANC) leadership. The organization apparently succeeded in a number of operations of bloodless sabotage. However, one of its operations led to the death of an elderly woman (from myocardial complications). She was, in fact, far from the site of the bomb blast.

One of the ARM’s operatives (John Harris, a school teacher) was subsequently arrested, convicted, sentenced to death, and executed. Leftwich, who was a significant figure in the ARM, was arrested and, with unseemly haste, disclosed information to the security police. Leftwich, the heroic activist, had a deeply fragile psychological interior. This resulted in the arrest, trial, conviction, and sentencing of a number of ARM operatives, many of whom had been recruited by Leftwich. After giving evidence against his former compatriots, Leftwich was released by the South African authorities. During the trial, the judge described him in zoological terms: *genus ratus*.

Upon his release, Leftwich left South Africa for England, where he established himself as an academic in political studies. He continues in that position today. Since his departure, South Africa’s transformation has brought political adversaries together in a common political society. To sustain this kind of society, some form of accounting for the past and some form of forgiveness seemed to be part of the new ideological and political order of the transformed South Africa. In Leftwich’s narrative, *I Gave the Names*, he tells us that “it has taken me a long time to look at what happened and try to come to terms with it…but now that the obscenity of apartheid has been formally buried, perhaps it is time to do so.” Leftwich, the heroic activist, is then a good candidate for the testing of political truth, reconciliation, and precedece.

The ideological justifications for such concepts as “political truth,” “reconciliation,” and “heroism” seem to carry an assumption of moral simplicity. The moral simplicity of disclosure, it is thought, permits a society to move forward by conspicuously displaying a new spirit of cooperative understanding and political accommodation, based in part on the truth of disclosure. In practice, however, these transformational processes are problematic and like all moral experience, they are often fraught with ambiguity, paradox, and a sense
that a morally absolute agenda of transformation is unattainable. What I find interesting about confession, forgiveness, and the possibility of political renewal is that each involves a complex of individual and often highly personalized moral assessments and accommodations within the larger political culture of society. Often, these assessments and accommodations are replete with the most visceral emotive symbols borne of political experience. It is out of these experiences that large-scale, collective judgments of significant moral import emerge, which must ostensibly sustain a better political future for the affected society. However, the public narratives of these experiences do tell us a great deal about the personal frailties of individuals in arenas of social conflict. These stories also give us a rare but realistic view of the inner workings of political and social relations, including their capacity to reach the raw depth of moral failure.

Mr. Leftwich’s story is a disclosure. It is a complex and interesting account of personal morality implicating large-scale political and social values. Indeed, the Leftwich tale implicates latent claims of both private and collective, morality and their effects on betrayers, victims, and victimizers. Perhaps we might learn more from the Leftwich experience by drawing on some further insights into his conduct and character from people—like me—who were directly involved in anti-apartheid activities in South Africa in the 1960’s. We remain interested in the broader lessons that may be drawn from the strengths and weaknesses of political activism, particularly regarding the depth, or lack of it, of political and moral convictions, and the critical moral foundations for defensible political transformation. This article then touches on matters that are personal and also matters that affect the more general, moral climate of the transformation of South Africa in particular. We also examine the comparative experience of other cultures which have worked on the problem of overcoming lethal violent conflict and the change toward political orders that are sensitive to the principles of human dignity and moral sensibility.

**Literary Precedents and Leftwich**

Before I discuss my personal relationship with Leftwich, it may be useful to look more generally at the concept of “truth” in issues of political transformation. Since I am a lawyer, I know that a central function of practical lawyering is the search for the truth. Lawyers confidently proclaim the truth or falsity of evidence garnered from the rituals and practices of legal drama. Unfortunately, most lawyers know that a legal truth can only approximate the real truth and indeed, a legal truth might be a social untruth. The procedures for establishing legal truths may vary with the skill of the advocates, the brainpower (or lack of it) of the judge, the frailty of jurors, and the theatrical abilities of witnesses. These factors suggest that the public policies based on legal truths may themselves be quite fragile. I am therefore uncertain whether another form of truth might be at all illuminating in understanding the nature of truths that emerge from betrayers or those actively involved as agents of torture or repression.

Important experiments with “truth” in classical literature have generated universal appeal, although precisely how literature reproduces the creative version of the truth is often a matter of literary insight and criticism at its sharpest. From the point of view of a poet, Yeats stresses the problem of knowing truth because of the difficulty of sorting out
“the dancer from the dance” (“Among School Children”). This implies a recognition of the imperfections of experience (dancers) from the ideals—the ideal dance. I would suggest that understanding the relationship between the dancer and the dance is a central challenge and insight into the business of finding the durable “universal” truth, Yeats’ “golden bird.” Shakespearean scholars often see in Macbeth a detailed study of the truth of the pathology of authoritarianism. Hamlet’s own confrontation of right and wrong fractures the human personality and generates such self-absorption that one wonders whether there is a latent narcissism that ultimately obscures the critical assessment of the truth of right conduct.

In Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar, Cassius tells Brutus that as responsible statesmen, they are flawed: “The fault dear Brutus is not in our stars, but in ourselves, that we are underlings.” Shakespeare seems to be neither a determinist or an astrologer. What moved Cassius to inspire a conspiracy to kill Caesar? Was it an act of heroism? Was it a matter of heroic activism? Or was he moved by more base motives, such as personal envy or jealousy? Is Shakespeare really trying to suggest that Cassius as the conspirator and activist may in part be moved by an heroic ego, but perhaps the sense of heroic activism was insufficiently strong or possibly frail, so it could not resist the temptations of baser human motives and opportunism. Cassius’ success in his talk with Brutus brings Brutus into the conspiracy. Brutus expresses his heroic activism as a form of sacrifice. There is remorse for having to kill Caesar, but Caesar’s ambition contained the seed of political tyranny, and Caesar had to be sacrificed. Antony, Caesar’s close friend, declares Brutus to be the noblest of the conspirators and suggests to the crowd that only he acted from genuine heroic motives. He was a noble, if mistaken, heroic activist. In our own, post-modern age, we may well question whether Caesar’s ambition was really ambition, or as Antony says, the ambition to establish tyranny should have been made of sterner stuff. If Brutus’ reasons for killing Caesar are not quite heroic, and not quite base, was Brutus himself a victim of an exaggerated heroic ego? And was the killing of Caesar an act of misplaced heroic activism?

The truths of this kind give us insight into the psychological inner workings and the turmoil of human beings grappling with the moral dilemmas and responsibilities which they confront from time to time. Shakespeare’s genius is the mastery of human complexity, which seems to transcend any form of historic or cultural particularity. A leading international lawyer draws a similar conclusion with the clash of values in defining the future of international law. One of the central issues for a defensible for a international lawyer role, says Professor Falk, is the management of complexity.

In contemporary literature, there is an interesting struggle with a certain kind of essential psycho-sociological truth believed to be embedded in human nature. For example, in Conrad’s novel, Heart of Darkness, Marlowe discovers a critical truth about human beings, but realizes that it is virtually impossible to effectively make it meaningful as a message to the larger community. Marlowe, of course, discovered the particular truth in Africa (the Congo to be precise). The truth that Marlowe discovered he received from Kurtz, a man who went to Africa to bring the benefit of civilization to the “natives.” The truth that emerges is embedded in the nature of Kurtz’s descent into his own heart of darkness; he believes that the “natives” are brutes and ought to be exterminated. There is a complex relationship between Kurtz and his victims, although his victims rarely seem to
emerge as human beings. They come through as a sort of abstraction. As Kurtz and Marlowe make their way out of the jungle, the truth becomes clearer to Marlowe, the not quite disengaged observer. Kurtz gives a damning self-appraisal. Perhaps in this context, there is a loose analogy between *Granta* and Marlowe and another between Kurtz and Leftwich.

Let us briefly explore the vague parallels between *Granta* and Marlowe on the one hand and Kurtz and Leftwich on the other. Leftwich speaks to *Granta* about his betrayal of friends and his weakness as a political leader under pressure. *Granta* is obviously the medium and the question is, exactly who is Leftwich addressing through *Granta*? Is he addressing himself? Is the message essentially designed for Leftwich to come to terms with himself? Does he confess to achieve some form of hubris? Is he addressing some particular audience out there, and if so for what purpose? Is he being didactic or is he searching for sympathy? Is he providing a deeper insight of universal import, touching on the fragility of the generalized heroic ego? When Kurtz, in his delirium, gives his famous judgment of himself, “Oh, the horror! The horror!”, who exactly is he addressing? Is he addressing himself? Is this an overt signal of internal turmoil, touching the unconscious, the ego, and the super-ego? Is he giving a message to Marlowe (the medium)? Perhaps Marlowe may understood to represent a priest-confessor figure? Or is Kurtz really addressing God? In this latter sense, Kurtz might be seen to recognize that his human frailty is universalizable; there is a universal heart of darkness. Indeed, one might consider whether Kurtz’s famous lines suggest that he is talking about himself and us, or he is he talking for himself and us. There is, of course, political irony in the pronouncement of Kurtz’s demise. It is the other—one of Kurtz’s brutes who makes the telling statement: “Mr. Kurtz, he dead.” Mr. Leftwich is not dead; he is, of course, alive.

It should be parenthetically noted that the medium (*Granta*) acknowledges editorially in running this particular issue, that it sought to experience human conduct implicating “the lowest of the low.” It may be that using a journal of literary import in this way permits us to understand more adequately the depths of human skullduggery. This may be a function shared in some degree by the institutionalization of truth and reconciliation processes in the political and legal sphere. This aside, ought not of course to obscure the nature of the conduct of Leftwich.

Comparing Mr. Leftwich to one of the key characters in *Heart of Darkness*, it may be obvious that Mr. Leftwich is no Kurtz. It cannot be said that his experiment with the truth in *Granta* captures the sense of heroism or depth of self-appraisal of those two words Conrad put in the mouth of Kurtz. I think that one does get a sense that Leftwich is aware of the price of his own weakness for himself, that is, for his ego. It does seem, however, that those he betrayed seem like Kurtz’s victims, vague abstractions of the other. Perhaps Leftwich’s victims were analogous to Kurtz’s brutes and were, in some degree, expendable. Truth, in awareness and moral sensibility, are indeed difficult matters and literature, like law, can only scratch the surface of the heart of darkness. It cannot often tell us how dark the heart actually is and what shades of light, however modest, might redeem it.

The Leftwich confession falls short of a coherent claim to forgiveness based on full disclosure. His remembering is selective and does not seem to be the credible truth necessary for political reconciliation and forgiveness. It ought not, however, to be
forgotten that in an age of “catastrophe” and “mega-death,” the search for a political and moral formula to end lethal, high-intensity conflicts and to politically transform society to secure peace and enhance rule of law restraints on the abuse or misuse of power is both difficult and necessary. Leftwich’s confession is rooted in the conflicts to transform South Africa and to oppose apartheid. There are lessons to be drawn from the South African transformation, in particular about the nature of truth, political morality, and personal responsibility, and more importantly, the exposure of the belly of the beast from the “inside.” These are not abstract matters for many of us who were involved in the struggle to end apartheid. Often, opposition to apartheid led us to support other causes and victims only remotely related to the South African conflict. The rejection of apartheid required some articulate sense of moral and political responsibility, the rejection of apartheid by its opponents and their willingness to challenge it and risk their lives and well being for it is the stuff of heroism. However, it carries the risk of human fragility, as well as the important concern that one must account at the end of the day, as Kurtz did for one’s own heart of darkness.

Mr. Leftwich’s confession is part of the story of South Africa’s descending trail to the status of a police state is often tied to the Sharpeville Massacre of 1960. After Sharpeville, the state began to enact laws which permitted extended, and later, unlimited periods of detention of enemies or potential enemies of the regime. The detention laws were packaged as merely temporary derogations from the rule of law. Soon, however, the temporary became a permanent form of governance. The human side was obvious to all. Even if one intentionally did not want to come to terms with the truth, one could not sustain a credible claim to ignorance. Leftwich’s story gives a personalized view of events implicated in the struggle against apartheid that can, at times, be quite abstract and obscure the human dimension with all of its strengths, frailties, and disappointments. When and how one is personally affected by the instances of tragedy is often a random experience and is not necessarily part of a coherent historical narrative.

Many years after the mysterious murder of a close friend, Griffiths Mxenge, I happened to be reading a book in the Netherlands titled, *Inside the Belly of the Beast*. The book contained direct confessions of death squad operatives and, in particular and in great specificity, the murder of Mxenge. The narrative indicated the kinds of knives used, the techniques employed to plunge these knives into a victim’s body, and the twisting and thrusting of the knife to destroy the victim’s organs and sever the spinal column: all described in graphic detail. I knew that Mxenge had been murdered approximately six months after we renewed our friendship (I had been in exile for some twenty years). I also knew that his wife, Victoria, had been murdered as well. However, the actual details of his execution left me numb. I vividly imagined the horrific circumstances of Mxenge’s death with incessant recollections of the fact that my friend was a compassionate man incapable of malice, a man of incredible generosity and sensibility. To have read the clinical details of his execution and to know the fate of a college roommate, compatriot, and friend has left me with haunting memories and has tested the subjective limits of truth and forgiveness on my part.

Perhaps it is the nature of personality to idealize good relationships and bonds of affective solidarity. This comes at a price when etched in to memory and consciousness
there is the image of brutality in extreme form. It is in quiet moments that tranquility is easily disturbed by symbols of atrocity, stored in an unforgiving memory. It is said that we humans possess our thoughts. I suspect that our thoughts, which are often experienced as signs and symbols, possess us. I was also troubled by the fact that the vivid and particularized version of the truth seemed almost to have a certain indecency, at least as truth in this form. In short, I was not only troubled by the detail of his execution, I was also disquieted that the clinical detail embodied in the form of reporting the truth might itself disparage the memory and the dignity of my friend. Are the details associated with the truth as clinical as those associated with the brutal execution of a friend? Is this form of truth worth publishing? Perhaps there is a point where the real truth in its unvarnished detail might corrupt moral experience. Do stories like this sell books or teach moral lessons, or is such a distinction at all possible?

In the mid-1990’s, I happened to be in Cape Town when a security police operative was giving testimony before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The particular security police operative was a Mr. Benzion. The man had a reputation as a champion torturer, a man who was sure to break any victim. Mr. Benzion never had the experience of an unbroken victim. Indeed, Mr. Benzion was called in when other torturers failed to break the victim. Thirty minutes was all that he apparently required. How did Mr. Benzion know that his victim was close to breaking under torture? When the victim lost bowel control, the point at which the mind loses all control over the body (the victim was usually naked), is apparently the optimal point to get the victim to disclose the sought after information. This is pretty disgusting “truth.” Should we be satisfied with a generalized statement of the truth and secure a sense of public decency and rather than a version that is possibly obscene? As will be evident, the problems of truth and reconciliation are complex and even the forms of communication implicate subliminal values that compromise decency while enhancing the “truth,” private and public growth is an incredibly difficult thing. Let us return to the Leftwich Granta version of truth, betrayal, and reconciliation.

I am uncertain why Leftwich chose to make his confession—or perhaps the correct phrase should be his second confession—in a literary journal, the target audience of which is only remotely interested in the specific nature of the process that led to the transformation of South Africa. Indeed, Leftwich could have chosen a more effective forum to discuss the specific problems of assigning responsibility for grave human rights violations and finding a mechanism to provide justice for the victims or their surviving relatives. This kind of initiative might have made an important contribution to the transformation of South Africa, which would allow political enemies to live together in a state with common national boundaries. Perhaps it would have been prudent for Leftwich to target his remarks directly at the political society which most influenced his conduct. Had he done that, it would have required him to have at least given a written submission to the TRC. He would have been in no danger of being prosecuted or forced to apply for amnesty. The Nationalist Party had already given him amnesty in the early 1960’s. His testimony about the ARM and his role in it would have added greatly to enlarging the stock of historical truth about the role and contribution of certain liberal intellectuals to the struggle against apartheid.
Interactions with Leftwich

When I met Leftwich, in early 1962, he was serving as president of the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS). He later became an apparently critical operative in an organization called the African Resistance Movement. He came to the University of Fort Hare to line up support for NUSAS among the black students of South Africa. Fort Hare was principally a university for blacks. NUSAS had been banned from Fort Hare and membership in NUSAS by Fort Hare students was prohibited and could have resulted in expulsion from the university. Leftwich visited Fort Hare with the vice president of NUSAS, C.J. “Jonty” Driver. It took a great deal of courage for the NUSAS leadership to run the gauntlet of Security Branch operatives, police cordons, and the vast array of security police spies. With the ANC under severe pressure and its leaders underground—later to be arrested in Rivonia—the NUSAS initiative was important to the situation at Fort Hare because it permitted the student leadership to reconnect with forces committed to the broader struggle against apartheid. By the time Driver became president of NUSAS, the union itself became a target of government harassment and intimidation. Leftwich’s role in moving NUSAS to the left was a significant move in opposition to South African apartheid in the early 1960’s. Indeed, then Minster of Justice, John Vorster, described NUSAS as a “cancer” which he sought to remove from South Africa’s body politic.

From 1962 to 1963, I gravitated to a leadership position on the Fort Hare campus. I also was inducted into the ANC, which was a very dangerous undertaking at the time because the ANC was a banned organization and proof of membership carried a sentence of three years at hard labor. I also worked closely with NUSAS and served as the NUSAS link with the Fort Hare resistance. Among the leading figures in the Fort Hare resistance were Griffiths Mxenge, Templeton Mdlalana, Steven Gawe, Seretse Choabi, and Chris Hani. Again, Mxenge was later brutally murdered, Choabi died in exile, and Chris Hani, an earlier leader of the ANC at Fort Hare was later murdered during the period of transition in 1993.

The first time I heard that a new and more determined resistance organization was being created was at the annual congress of NUSAS in June of 1963. The conference was held on the campus of the University of Witwatersand in Johannesburg. I had been involved in producing a controversial resolution to the congress of NUSAS. A meeting of the heads of commonwealth universities was being planned and was to be held in London. South African university heads had been invited to attend. Since 1960, South African universities were officially, that is, by state mandate, racially segregated pursuant to an act ironically styled, “The Extension of University Education Act.” I drafted a resolution stating that the NUSAS condemned the presence of South African University heads at the commonwealth conference in London on the basis that they represented universities that were racially segregated and, hence, fell short of the concept of a proper university. The resolution was circulated and, because of its controversial nature, created a significant cadre of opponents within NUSAS. I was also able to secure the support for this resolution of Gavin Williams, who was the representative to NUSAS from Stellenbosch University. The merger of Stellenbosch and Fort Hare certainly raised eyebrows in liberal circles. Williams
and I were type-cast as a kind of left-wing cabal in NUSAS. Spike Dekeller approached both Gavin and me during one of the plenary sessions. Dekeller indicated that a new organization was being created and that it might interest us. I cannot say that there was an explicit effort to recruit us, but the communication was sufficiently clear in the climate of the time that we expected some sort of follow-up. It turned out that Dekeller was a member of the ARM. When it fell apart, he was arrested and sentenced to a term of imprisonment. In the meanwhile, our concerns for the validation of apartheid in the British Commonwealth and other arenas of high education consumed a great deal of our political efforts. Frankly, I forgot about the Dekeller approach until recently reminded of it by Gavin Williams, who is currently a politics Don in St. Peter’s College, Oxford. Our motion was tabled and no further action was taken on it. I returned to Fort Hare later that month.

Between July and November of 1963, the situation at Fort Hare had become critical. The security police were virtually camping in the university, vast numbers of students and some faculty were detained, and often, detention included beatings and torture. My private concerns were tied to the fact that I was a member of the ANC and tied to a cell. If cell members broke, I would be arrested. I was less worried about NUSAS, which in some ways was a cover. NUSAS was not banned, although it was prohibited on the Fort Hare campus. My real concern was the fact that I was writing up reports on detentions, beatings, and torture and other activities of the security police, often identifying the security operatives by name. I had worked on a scheme in which I assumed the name of John Delaney and sent my reports to the editor of the Evening Post (the newspaper with the largest circulation then in South Africa). The editor of the Evening Post was the courageous John Sutherland. Sutherland’s nom de plume was Mrs. van de Merwe. I would write to Mrs. van de Merwe under the name of John Delaney and send the stuff to a post office box in King William’s Town. The reports would appear in the Evening Post. The security police were infuriated that the outside world could get the details of what they were doing at Fort Hare. I knew this because one of the students who had been severely beaten had been questioned persistently because they were searching for the person who was getting the embarrassing information of police repression out to the press. Because I was in the business of trying both to survive physically and, somehow or other, to take seriously the final examinations for my degree, I had completely forgotten about the Dekeller approach or the new organization which he hinted was being created.

Templeton Mdlalana and I were invited to the NUSAS executive meeting in Cape Town in December 1963. It was a difficult trip for us and on one occasion, Mdlalana was almost put off the train by a racist conductor. At a party organized in the home of Libby Robb, Mdlalana and I met a number of figures in the South African Liberal Party, including the past Chief Justice of South Africa, Centlivres, as well as the distinguished liberal author Alan Paton. Leftwich was by now only a shadowy presence in NUSAS, but he came to the party and cornered Mdlalana and me. The initial point he made was unpromising. He said that the elegant home of the Robbs was something that would not be tolerated in the “new” South Africa. In fact, he thought that the house would make a nice kindergarten for underprivileged children. This was so transparent that both Mdlalana and I were offended. It was not only a slight at our intellect, but it was also a thoroughly ungracious way for a guest to comport himself in the home of his host. Leftwich then left to refresh his drink,
comforted by the knowledge that he had given us the kind of bait that only an unthinking 
person would swallow. While he was away, we discussed the fact that Leftwich never 
failed to impress us with his shallowness and lack of credibility. When Leftwich returned, 
having given us time to swallow the bait, he said that he was in need of compatriots who 
were serious about changing South Africa. He mentioned that he believed Mdlalana and I 
to be the kind of activists who would fit very neatly into the serious organization that he 
and his other colleagues were in the process of creating. Since we did not trust Leftwich, 
we simply told him the truth; we were affiliated with another serious organization and 
could not be involved in his operation.

I remember that Adrian’s face could become flushed at the slightest provocation. 
His attempted seduction had failed and he turned to leave with a defiant disdain of mortals 
less committed than he. His face, as expected, flushed with color. I heard from another 
individual at the party who was associated with NUSAS (his name escapes me) that 
Leftwich was busily telling others that Nagan and Mdlalana were somewhat gutless and 
uncommitted. In retrospect, I imagine that his visceral dislike of me must have saved my 
life, for I was not an immediate target of the South African Special Branch. Many of my 
friends were not so fortunate. Sadly, Leftwich, who was a chief recruiter, seduced some of 
them. Despite his involvement in the ARM, the narrative cannot begin and end with the 
tragic story of Mr. Leftwich’s personal remorse. Leftwich’s character is certainly more 
complicated in the context of the struggle than in the context of his post-struggle remorse.

With regard to Mr. Leftwich’s political personality, there are cues about his political 
motives, his manipulation of public objects of struggle, and the almost bombastic 
justifications that he sought to express through his exuberant volubility. For example, 
Leftwich acknowledged that what drove him was his desire to compete with those he 
viewed as competition in the leadership and intellectual sphere. In fact, he stated that he “tried to be superior to other men with whom [he] felt himself to be in competition.” We 
might describe these insights as representing his private motives in the political sphere. He 
displaced these motives in the form of a radical new liberalism sympathetic to African 
socialism, but somehow rooted in classical liberal values. When it came to expression of 
these views in the political sphere, Leftwich admitted that he was given to bombast. For 
example, this is what he wrote regarding the African Resistance Movement: “ARM does 
not only talk, ARM acts...ARM would prefer to avoid bloodshed and terrorism...but let it 
be known that if we are forced to respond to personal violence, we shall do so.” The fact 
that so many of us had reservations about him because of the transparency of his political 
views is something he himself might have sensed. This could explain his drift to the left 
and to a style of rhetoric which might be called radical bombast.

Many questions remain unanswered and Leftwich could certainly have given us a 
clearer account of the identities of those who inspired the ARM, their sources of funding,

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2 It is acknowledged that the history of the ARM cannot be effectively explored without appreciating the role 
of the non-communist left, and the progressive liberals in South Africa. The ARM seems to have been an 
outgrowth or mutation of an organization known as the National Committee of Liberation (NCL). Two of its 
key operatives, Monty and Myrtle Berman, were communists who were expelled from the SACP. They and 
other progressives began organizing an alternative left-oriented non-communist opposition group with 
connections to black leaders who were critical of the ANC. It should be noted that a person on the left 
expelled from the communist movement would have virtually no political future in the South African struggle
who smuggled arms into South Africa, who directed the training, the nature of the ARM’s political platform, objectives, and more. Indeed, one of the mysterious figures whose name was consistently connected with the ARM was a figure named Watson. Watson was apparently of quintessentially British stock and, I was told, spoke in the style of the British upper class, as he frequently sidled his words through his teeth. I had also heard that it was Watson who provided the technical training to ARM operatives in the use of explosive devices and that the funding for this training came from Watson’s sources.

It is disputed among exiles whether Watson left South Africa immediately before Leftwich’s arrest, or shortly thereafter. My recollection from colleagues at the time, which has been supported by Templeton Mdlalana, is that we heard that Watson left South Africa just prior to Leftwich’s arrest. If this can be substantiated, then the official story that the liberals involved in the ARM were a group of bumbling, stupid, incompetent pseudo-revolutionaries being manipulated by a foreign intelligence operative would gain some credence. If Watson left shortly after Leftwich’s arrest, that assertion is weakened, although leaving after Leftwich’s arrest would provide a better cover for an intelligence operative than leaving prior to his arrest. This is still a point of controversy.

The fact that Leftwich had all the incriminating evidence so easily accessible to even the most routine Security Branch investigation itself raises interesting questions about whether a man of Leftwich’s obvious intelligence could be so stupid. Perhaps there was a deep psychological need in Leftwich to experience the thrill of betrayal, or perhaps there is a simple explanation which might emerge if there were a full and proper disclosure of the truth.

One can only speculate about the vague trails and personalities implicated in the ARM fiasco. It is possible that with the ANC and the PAC on the ropes, and the knowledge that the liberal youth of South Africa could be a serious force in giving some coherence to the opposition to apartheid, that in the estimation of external powers, these misguided liberals were probably expendable. The question is, could the supply of clandestine materials to the ARM be done purely as a domestic operation by a few liberal

and it was therefore important for people who felt they could make a contribution to the freedom struggle to find some alternative means to express themselves. It is interesting that their struggle to formulate a marriage of European progressivism, liberalism, and African socialism has found some significant place in the ideology and constitution of the transformed South African state.

3 There are disputes about the sources of some of the funding of the ARM. P. Swanepoel, author of The CIA in South Africa (pp. 98-107), believes this funding came from Western intelligence sources. Geoffrey Bing, author of Reap the Whirlwind: An Account of Kwame Nkruma’s Ghana from 1950 to 1966 (MacGibbon and Kee, London, 1968, pg. 402), wrote, “I know personally of a case where some 50,000 pounds was paid to an individual to arrange for the escape from South Africa of political leaders on the run.” It is possible that direct and indirect funding could have come from multiple sources, including intelligence sources.

4 Watson still seems to remain a mystery figure. He was a British military figure. He apparently was registered as an undergraduate at the University of Cape Town when he became involved in the ARM. According to an archivist, “Watson apparently had fantasies about being the Lawrence of South Africa...his rooms were adorned with a number of posters of his hero...[and] he also had a strong penchant for violence which might kill.” Watson seems to have been trained in the use of arms and explosives. It hardly seems that we can explain away his role as that of a well-trained British military figure with a strong desire for an undergraduate education, a Lawrence of Arabia complex, and a desire to free the black people of South Africa.
students and intellectuals? It seems to me that this could not have been done without some form of external influence, and the search for external influences poses yet another question: was Watson—or whatever his real identity—an operative of Western or British intelligence? Leftwich could have been more forthcoming about the answers to these questions. If the Western or British liberal establishments betrayed the youth of the South African liberal establishment, surely some truth and reconciliation is required not only in South Africa, but also in the West, including the United Kingdom.

That Western intelligence was deeply implicated in the South African struggle is not surprising. We know, for example, that credible evidence exists that Nelson Mandela himself was betrayed to the Special Branch by the CIA. Although the CIA has not admitted this, it has resolutely refused to comment one way or the other when highly respected American journalists have put queries to it. Those journalists would not have engaged in this line of inquiry had they not reasonably believed that U.S. intelligence worked more closely with South African Intelligence operatives than the extent to which U.S. officials have admitted. Moreover, during the Reagan Administration, Reagan CIA Chief Casey spent vast amounts of time in Pretoria. Indeed, the link between the U.S. government and the apartheid establishment paradoxically accelerated the passage of the American sanctions bill in 1986. Unfortunately, using *Granta* as a forum for Leftwich’s version of the truth raises the question of how much truth was ultimately omitted from the exercise. The old common lawyers had an expression they used when a litigant would plead a statement that was technically true, but contextually false. Apparently, Leftwich seems to have given us what these common lawyers call a “negative pregnant.” I suspect that his search for forgiveness will continue to be elusive while the full narrative remains undisclosed.

**Political Transformation**

Leftwich’s story, in its personal form, is also part of the story of the victories and the failures in the transformation of South Africa to a democratic state. But, it is, in a larger sense, a particularized narrative of a more inclusive global movement confronting the problems, the prospects, the victories, and the tragedies that accompany the transformation of states involved in patterns of lethal, violent political conflict. It would, therefore, be of value if the story of Leftwich and the ARM were put into the larger perspective of the struggle for transformation, for truth, and reconciliation not only in South Africa, but also in the larger scale of things.

Escalating patterns of lethal and violent political conflict preceded the transformation of South Africa from a racial oligarchy to a democratic, rule of law-

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*5 In 1967, the American journal, *Ramparts*, disclosed that the CIA discretely funded the United States National Students Association (USNSA). USNSA certainly provided assistance to NUSAS during the time of Leftwich’s presidency. It is now generally known that the international student movement of the time was also heavily funded and infiltrated by intelligence agencies of the Cold War hegemons. The CIA and other Western intelligence groups probably funded the International Student Conference (ISC). The KGB and other communist intelligence groups probably funded the International Union of Students (IUS). In short, the Cold War produced an expanded role for intelligence functions into the heart of civil society.*
governed state. In this South Africa’s transformation was not unique. Other states also had experienced high intensity patterns of violent political conflict and found mechanisms for transformation from the culture of violence to the promise of an improved political future. The impact of violent social conflict on social process suggests four realistic possibilities: The first is that the conflict continues, gets worse, each new “incident” becomes a new cause for continued escalating violence (seemingly endless conflict such as Israel-Palestine). The second is that the conflict diminishes because of the destruction of human and material resources, a kind of mutually secured destruction (failed states, Somalia, Sierra Leone). The third is that one side wins and the other loses (this happens, though not frequently). The new order may be “worse” or “better.” The fourth is that no clear winner is declared, but continuance involves losses for those who politically benefited from the conflict. Various forms of “accounting” are part of the elements of transformation to something else, hopefully democracy. It is this fourth option that has been used in different cultural and regional contacts (such as Latin America, Eastern Europe) with success, but not of the unqualified variety.

South Africa has experienced what many independent commentators call a “miracle” of transformation. Perhaps the hand of divine providence had a part to play in South Africa’s transformation into democracy, but the hand of “man” was also critical. It may be useful to briefly assay the context of conflict in South Africa leading to the processes of transformation.

South Africa experienced escalating patterns of resistance to the apartheid state and a correspondingly increased reaction by the state to the demands of resistance movements such as the ANC. By the 1960’s a police state had been rapidly created and the arsenal of weapons of repression became an intrinsic part of the legal and political culture of apartheid. Apartheid thus evolved into a process of racial domination and political subjugation of all “non-white” (i.e. “black”) peoples. The policy and practice was supported by the power of a contemporary “garrison” state. By the 1980’s the national security state was integrating vast institutions of white society, and certain Civil Cooperation Bureaus had been created to totally mobilize white society against the threatened black onslaught. The practical effects on society were widespread repression, murder, gross human rights violations and the emergence of shadowy death squads. South Africa also developed a nuclear arsenal and there is evidence of experimentation with lethal chemical weapons, some of which were to solve the racial problem with injections into blacks, making them lose their pigmentation and become “white.”

In the view of critical commentators, South Africa represented the potential worse case scenario of “ethnic conflict.” This view anticipated enhanced levels of high intensity, violent conflict and correspondingly, a depreciation of human rights and humanitarian values. The liberation movements resisted this classification and insisted that the enemy was not the “white” race but rather the proponents and managers of the apartheid State.

As President P.W. Botha constructed the architecture of the new national security state to confront what he called the “total onslaught,” intelligence and military operatives inside the state saw these moves as high cost postponements of the inevitable conflict between black and white, unless another approach could be found. Afrikaner intellectuals were coming to the same conclusion. The emergence of glasnost and perestroika in the
USSR and the U.S. sanctions against South Africa certainly encouraged these perspectives. Belatedly, Afrikaner authorities found Mandela, who was still in custody, to be not an ogre, but a man of integrity, a non-racist, and a man of honor. A process of complex and difficult negotiations followed and was helped considerably by releasing the tensions and fears of the cold war as well as the aid of international and, later, U.S. economic sanctions. These negotiations did not constrain conflict, and death squad and mass murder atrocities continued. Thus negotiations to a new political order were from the outset complicated, since the old regime would want to limit its exposure and responsibility for the shameful past including death squad activity. It is probably true that a negotiated transfer to a new political order could not have happened without some form of negotiated “amnesty” and some recognition of the claims for justice about the past.

The central fact concerning the transformation of South Africa is that historically the anti-apartheid movement was always prepared to negotiate the transformation of South Africa to a state of normal political development identified with democratic rule of law inspired values. Notwithstanding the escalating scale of the conflict between the defenders of apartheid and its opponents, a significant element of the anti-apartheid leadership was distributed between those still in prison and those on the outside. For example, there was Mandela and the other Robben Island prisoners, the newly emerging leadership loosely identified with the Mass Democratic Movement, the UDF and the labor movement, and of course, the leadership in exile, which was charged with the campaign of national liberation by force if necessary. The fact that Mandela was in the custody of the Pretoria authorities in effect meant that the Afrikaners always had a channel of communication to Mandela and to the other imprisoned ANC leaders. They could as well have communicated more effectively should they have chosen to do so with the democratic and labor movements internally. It would seem that these channels of communication were useful in keeping the option of a negotiated solution to the problem at least a possibility, although in the early 1980's, this seemed to be fairly remote.

The democracy movement in Latin America had a great deal of influence on the thinking about political transformations in states and contexts in which there was high intensity conflict and correspondingly significant levels of human rights and humanitarian deprivations. It is possible that the experimentation in Latin America with finding a balance between the problem of a power stalemate and the need for transformation in fact sharpened the perception that authoritarians who exercised power brutally would not yield their power unless they were granted some form of immunity from accountability if they conceded the claims of their democratic opponents. On the other hand, democrats committed to the restraints of the rule of law would have difficulty validating democracy if there were to be clear immunity, and the concession of non-accountability for the heinous acts of the prior regime. Thus, different formulae were presented and discussed to facilitate processes of peaceful transformation and the extent to which some form of amnesty might be given in order to create a new political order based on democratic principles and the rule of law.

In many ways, Latin America became the testing ground for human rights and human dignity as Cold War-inspired policies and interventions drove nations and peoples to unprecedented depths of depravity. The generals who controlled Guatemala were in fact
engaged in a war against the indigenous Indians. Hundreds of thousands were killed. Conservative diplomats often viewed the Guatemalan military as the worst of the worst. Forms of human depravity included immersing people, naked, into baths of human excrement. In El Salvador, the military orchestrated the rape and murder of a number of Catholic nuns, who were executed in cold blood. In Nicaragua, the state produced a famous torturer, who gained distinction as an expert in the blowtorch method of interrogation. The man would use a blowtorch on the victim and skillfully stop at the precise moment to prevent the victim from passing out. Other parts of Latin America specialized in undermining efforts to abolish the death penalty with extra-judicial executions. Still other countries created new forms of human rights violations, as the concept of a “disappearance” became a recognized violation of human rights. In parts of Latin America, victims were drugged, taken onto helicopters, had their bellies slit, and were dropped into the ocean. Human rights organizations agonized about how much truth the concerned public could take. In some parts of Latin America, the relatives of the disappeared are still demanding a public reckoning for those disappeared as a minimal measure of justice.

The Latin American experience with truth and reconciliation seems to suffer from several drawbacks and questions have arisen as to whether the mechanisms created in various states to facilitate transition did not undermine the legitimacy of the successor democratic regimes and did not sacrifice too much truth in order to secure a speedy transformation. It appears that most forms of transition in Latin America were top-down models because these models were crafted by the elites and counter-elites involved in the struggle to transform or prevent the transformation of those societies. Had the question of immunity been a matter of popular referendum, there might have been difficulty in securing the consent or ratification of the victims to the forms of amnesty that were ultimately employed. On the other hand, if the legitimacy of the process of creating democracy was somewhat tarnished, it could also be said that the dread of continued social conflict was certainly an influence on Latin American amnesty procedures.

Both internal and external evaluators critically reviewed the procedures used in the Latin American context. For example, the Argentinean Truth Commission had only weak powers to persuade the armed and security forces to come forward with the necessary information and evidence. Those forces were very reluctant to cooperate with the commission and often refused to reply to written questions or permit inspections of military facilities. Among the drawbacks was the decision to exclude the names of those who were responsible directly or indirectly for gross human rights violations in the commission’s report. Rather, the commission submitted a list of names in confidence to President Alfonsin. It was then left to him to determine what further action, if any, the government would undertake. In fact, no action was taken, notwithstanding that the list of names was leaked to the press, and those names soon became public knowledge. In general, the Latin American experiment seemed to have been a top-down affair because its structure and process was the product of a small group of leaders and negotiators which lacked the

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validating imprimatur of a widespread civil society public discourse. Its other weaknesses included fixed time limits, weak powers for compelling witnesses, and the divorce of truth from specific individual responsibility. In many instances this suggested that the concept of truth was weak, but the reconciliation basis (such as it was for reconstituting the state) was strongly emphasized. At the end of the day, the critical question is, did enough truth emerge to assign personal responsibility so that amnesty would be rationally tied to actual perpetrators and thus represent an accurate form of historical accountability? These weaknesses and others generated more searching analysis and discussion of the nature and the form of the truth and reconciliation process for proceeding to a post-apartheid democracy.

The Truth and Reconciliation Process in South Africa

On July 19, 1995, the Parliament created by the interim constitution of South Africa created the legislation for a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), which included committees on human rights violations, amnesty, and reparation and rehabilitation. While the TRC process in South Africa cannot be seen as unqualified success (for reasons that will discussed below), it seems to be a significant improvement on the experience in Latin America and other contexts. This is not to say that the South Africans did not learn a great deal from these experiments in peace, justice and transformation. They also learned to avoid some of the more glaring weaknesses associated with other forms of truth and reconciliation. Most importantly, a salient element in the process of creating the TRC was that it originated in a democratically elected parliament. Additionally, there was significant international and national consultation and extensive public debate in the opinion-forming institutions of the country. Thus, the process, whatever its technical shortcomings, obtained a strong imprimatur of legitimacy. In short, the South African experience was significantly different to others in the sense that it seemed to be more of a bottom up process. In other words, included in the universe of lawmakers were the voters, many of whom had been victims of apartheid repression. The goals of the TRC Act included the dimension of public discourse as one of the indicators of the legitimacy of the Act.

The Act was also sensitive to the broader contexts within which leaders of the political culture of violence associated with apartheid were negotiating with the political culture of resistance about the very processes of apartheid depredations. These processes were obviously structured in terms of a negotiating framework in which there would be no absolutism, but rather a series of compromises about important values. The discourse also took place with a concern for fundamental ideas of justice as well as the mandate of international law. In addition, the leadership of anti-apartheid interests came with high standards of ethical and religious commitment. At the practical level, the entire exercise was to further and “to achieve unity and morally acceptable reconciliation, . . . [It was] necessary that the truth about gross violations of human rights . . . be: established by an official investigation unit using fair procedures; fully and unreservedly acknowledged by the perpetrators; made known to the public, together with the identity of the planners, perpetrators, and victims.”
One of the central challenges posed by the TRC process was the question of whether, in substituting the technique of the TRC for the technique of formal criminal prosecution, one is in effect sacrificing the integrity of justice and the foundation of the rule of law since there are limits to the amount of truth that can be garnered from the ordinary prosecutorial process. By formulating the issues in a narrow criminal law paradigm, the truth may emerge but in such a contested way that it may actually distort an effective narrative which necessary for the public’s appreciation of a holistic and realistic sense of the past and of the allocation of responsibility for it. Indeed, this issue came before the Constitutional Court of South Africa when the TRC was challenged by victims and survivors on the basis that it not only violated the South African Constitution, but also violated the peremptory principles of international law. In a sense, the committee on human rights violations could secure a complete record from an alleged perpetrator of human rights abuses of his involvement in the violations. If a person’s story were complete, then he could apply for amnesty if he could prove that the activity in question was done with a political motive. The standard might indeed be a real one. The question, however, was whether granting an amnesty (whatever standard is adopted) is a violation of jus cogens principles of international human rights and humanitarian law. The South African Constitutional Court held that the principle of necessity in effect permitted an avoidance of the ostensible mandate of international law. In an article which the author published, he provided a defense of the South African Constitutional Court’s decision on a broader juridical basis. This basis simply acknowledged that the right to peace and the right to self-determination were peremptory principles of international law and the right to democracy, which is conceptually related to the principle of self-determination, also carries a strong human rights juridical pedigree. These rights had to be balanced against the rights compromised by the perpetrators of grave violations of humanitarian law. In effect, the task of the court was to mediate between two compelling normative priorities in international law. The author suggested that a broader view of sanctions would demonstrate that there were multiple rational sanctioning objectives that were being secured by the TRC process and that the process was therefore a reasonable response to the accommodation of ostensibly conflicting basic values in international law.

The TRC process in South Africa is not without its limitations. As extensive as the TRC revelations were, the government destroyed a great deal of the documentation that had recorded the depravity that drove the apartheid State. Sadly, even documentation that had been in the possession of Judge Goldstone relating to the death squads has somehow disappeared while in the learned Judge’s custody. Judge Goldstone apparently assumed that the government would be unhappy about securing the documents relating to intelligence depravities on the basis that it would constitute an inappropriate “fishing expedition.” According to recent authorities reviewing the work of the Goldstone investigators:

The Goldstone investigators had blundered in on what was a large part of the motor and memory of the machine of apartheid repression. South Africa, certainly in the last decade of apartheid rule, had been a military, not a police-run state. Yet, until what became known as the “Goldstone raid,” there had never been any public mention of a unit bearing the clumsy DCC title, let alone the fact that it housed
tens of thousands of files.”

Secure in its secrecy, the DCC had apparently not destroyed the records of deeds done, operations underway, authorizations given, payments made and the lists of names of assassins, blackmailers, collaborators and current or potential “targets.” Lawyer Torie Pretorius was at the head of the unit that stumbled on the DCC headquarters. He telephoned Richard Goldstone to report that the unit was inside what was apparently a major clandestine department of Military Intelligence. What should they do? While Goldstone realized the importance of the find, he was also aware of the conditions at the time. He was not about to rock any boats or cause any undue disturbance.

Since the investigation that had led Pretorius and his unit to the DCC headquarters concerned only a former policeman and freelance assassin, Ferdi Barnard. Richard Goldstone restricted inquiries to that subject. “I had no doubt that our presence would not be tolerated for very long,” he noted later. Adopting a nice, legalistic response, he decreed that the powers given to him by the De Klerk government did not allow him to indulge in “a fishing expedition.” It would, he felt, have been “a misuse of those powers and could have been interdicted by a court.”

So, Torie Pretorius requested any files the DCC might hold relating to Ferdi Barnard. Three files were produced and transferred to Goldstone’s office. The filing cabinets and the computer disks in the DCC office were left untouched and unexamined. They promptly disappeared. “I don’t know what happened to them.” Goldstone noted blithely several years later. 7

Unfortunately, another weakness of the TRC process is the claim by judges that testifying before the committee would compromise the independence of the judiciary. Since apartheid law was one of the pillars of the system of repression, the issue of judicial amnesia looms large in the public mind, and the truth about the role of law in the apartheid State remains unexplored. Additionally, the TRC was not able to bring in high-level government officials and compel their testimony. This, too, may test the ultimate efficacy of the truth generated by the commission. Additionally, the members of the notorious secret society, the Broederbond Society, were not compelled to testify before the Committee. A great deal of the history of apartheid’s repressive policies and practices cannot be objectively determined since the Broederbond was a shadow government behind the Nationalist Party.

Notwithstanding these limitations, the procedure in effect encouraged people to come forward and give their personal story. This resulted in a rush to the committee from lower level apartheid operatives. Indeed, a great deal of disgusting South African history was put before the public, often under the full glare of TV lights and a national audience captivated by what could be done in the name of governmental authority while reaching such abysmal levels of depravity. Overall, the South African process was more comprehensive and more thought through than its predecessors and it played an important role in accommodating the critical values necessary for the transformation and

7 See generally TERRY BELL AND DUMISA NTSEBEZA, UNFINISHED BUSINESS: SOUTH AFRICA, APARTHEID AND TRUTH (2001)
legitimization of democracy. The longer-term effect of the process still has to be understood.

**Conclusion**

The lessons that emerge from the South African experience should not be forgotten. The South African conflict was of such high intensity that took an enormous toll on the South African population. It was a conflict with all the nasty potential of a protracted, indefinite race war. The apartheid State had marshaled a massive arsenal of conventional weapons, as well as weapons of mass destruction. It had reorganized the State into the model of a classical national security state. It created parallel institutions of repression that connected the State to multiple levels of civil society. In particular, it created so-called civil cooperation bureaus whose function was to make the working of a national security state under permanent emergency strictures more complete and effective. The prospects for a political solution, much less a transformation to the rule of the majority, were very grim indeed. It therefore is a tribute to the tenacity and will of political leadership and the emergence of a peace consciousness that permitted the parties to retreat from the possibility of a racial holocaust by constructing a new South Africa based on freedom, justice, and equity.

The TRC scheme was mandated by the interim constitution. It crafted sub-silencio an ideology of forgiveness and reconciliation. Whether these ideologies have compromised liberation ideologies or obscured international legal standards is still a matter of controversy as are other matters about its timing, process, and objectives. Was it a success or a failure? What did it accomplish? Was it a vindication or a weakening of international legal order? Does it hold deeper lessons for understanding the complex interdependence between peace and essential dignity? Indeed, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights makes the central point in its preamble that it is essential “if man is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that human rights should be protected by the rule of law[.]”

The TRC was a political creation. Its human dimension does not mean that truth is absolute truth or that reconciliation is absolute. It is rather a concession to political truth and practical accommodation. Like all human institutions, its collective meaning cannot be absolute and, indeed, the fringes of its truth will be ambiguous, uneasy compromises with things we know to be distasteful. The question is, how does an individual like Leftwich fit within this framework of practical truth and accommodation. Perhaps there is further insight from Conrad in his insightful description of European gunboat diplomacy in Africa. A European warship is engaged in the futile exercise of “firing into a continent.” Its effect is captured in two riveting words: “pop, pop.” Perhaps, it is Conrad who has given us the ultimate comment on the ARM fiasco. On the personal level, the moral appraisal of Leftwich, however distasteful a betrayer may be, cannot fit into Conrad’s notion that the heavens do not fall for such a trifle. Indeed, the challenge of the being and becoming of our moral sensibility is to not only confront our own heart of darkness, but to transcend it. In this respect, Leftwich’s “confession” leaves a great deal to be desired. Leftwich’s selective
and censored version of the truth seems to make him a less promising candidate for political accommodation. Perhaps living in England does not mandate an obligation or sense of importance to accommodate or reconcile with his South African past. There is, however, a deeper weakness of character which Leftwich fails to scrutinize. This omission seems to tragically strengthen the depth of his moral failure. Leftwich, the dancer, has apparently not figured out the dance.

Activism is critical for change. But it is also vitally important that activists themselves consider the Socratic maxim, know thyself. Activism may be far more tempered and more constructive should such a caution be taken seriously. The ego in Freudian terms mediates between powerful unconscious drives as well as the drives which form the super-ego, or the sense of altruism. Personality thus is complex and heroic egos are similarly complex and often unpredictable.

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Biographical Particulars: Professor Nagan is a long-standing anti-apartheid activist and human rights worker. He was actively involved in the struggle against apartheid in South Africa. He was forced into exile and escaped the reach of the special branch, an escape that saved his life. He worked in exile for the rights of prisoners in South Africa (e.g. the Sharpeville Six) and was very active in the movement to exclude South Africa from international sports and supported as well economic sanctions against South Africa. He served as Chair of the Board of Amnesty International (USA). His citizenship was recently restored and he is actively involved in academic work in South Africa. He is an honorary Professor at the University of Cape Town, was a Visiting Fellow at Brasenose College, Oxford [2002-2003]. He is currently Sam T. Dell Research Scholar Professor of Law, Director, Institute for Human Rights, Peace, and Development. He is a Fellow of the World Academy of Art and Science, and Fellow of the Royal Society of the Arts. Professor Nagan has published widely on international law matters including issues of transformational justice and democracy.