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Editorial

The digital world and social networking are replacing long-cherished face to face relations. Perhaps religious models of communication and dialogue can provide valuable insights into human relationships and help overcome the challenge of isolation. This issue of *JMJ* explores this possibility, urging fraternal communication with the 'Other,' beyond barriers of religion, gender, class, and race.

Such openness and communal sharing has been thwarted in the modern world, where an atomized individualism undermines true dialogue (Latar) and the 'prophetic dialogue' (Kelleher) sought by Vatican II. An imaginative dialogue, which begins with a sharing of stories (Kearney), and integrates religious-cultural diversity (G. J. de Paiva) may dispel the entrenched prejudice that still hampers the quest for peace, justice, equality, and solidarity.

'Why do we bother?' John Yamamoto-Wilson would ask. Amid daily repeated patterns such as commuting from home to work, do people find meaning and purpose in their lives? A secular answer could focus on 'acts of kindness and of love' that light up our identity and the preciousness of our lives. Likewise, amid the decline of religious practice in many places, piety is resurgent in a more secular form, at the level of bedrock human feelings of compassion or mourning. The Church today might learn to tune in to these deep reserves of piety in our society (Cotter).

The Eucharist is our central celebration of fraternity, communication, and dialogue—or should be. Thomas O'Loughlin seeks to renew eucharistic awareness by regrounding it in the basic emphases of Paul on the shared loaf and the shared cup. This sacrament makes the Church a powerhouse of the healing dialogue that is so urgently needed in a world still riven by injustice and hatred, and in which hallowed democratic institutions are under siege.

Vatican II's new vision of the Church as missionary, acted out in different styles by John XXIII, Paul VI, and John Paul II (Kroeger), has been given a new breadth in Pope Francis's warm personal outreach to people of all conditions, right where they are. In his new apostolic exhortation, *Gaudete et Exsultate* (Rejoice and be Glad), he urges that the striving for holiness, grounded in prayer and discernment, must also entail building up the Kingdom through social action and care for the voiceless. This again is an antidote to prevalent individualism, selfishness, ideology, discrimination, and sectarianism. It is echoed perfectly in Mary McAleese's concern for inclusion and innovative discernment in the patriarchal Church, as well as in Christian

Mukadi's account of the transformative mission of the Church in the socio-political crisis we face in the Congo.

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Richard Kearney

The Healing Power of Stories

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One of the most difficult forms of dialogue is that between enemies or former enemies. To break deadlocks of bitterness and mistrust people need to re-imagine their histories and their relationships. In this process the act of telling stories and listening to them can have crucial significance. Here I would like to recount some striking examples of the power of narrative which I encountered in Ireland and in South Africa.

Transformative Tales

In the 1980s, at the height of 'the Troubles' in Northern Ireland, I was invited as a young professor of philosophy to come to Derry, a city divided by war, to moderate a workshop between republican and loyalist prisoners. During the workshop, one of the IRA prisoners told of how one night he was asleep in his bed when a loyalist gang broke into the house, bound, gagged and blindfolded him, threw him into the boot of a car, and drove him to a barn outside Derry.

Strapped to a chair and about to be shot, he asked if he could smoke a last cigarette. His captor consented and offered him one. And as he smoked the cigarette—very slowly—he told the story of how he had become involved in republican violence: how his grandfather had been brutally murdered by the British armed forces, how his father had been incarcerated and tortured, how his mother had become an alcoholic and suffered a nervous breakdown, how his brother had been knee-capped and maimed for the rest of his life.... And he went on until he finished his cigarette. Then waited for the gun to go off.

But it didn't. There was no sound. No movement. He waited for five minutes, ten minutes, fifteen minutes, twenty minutes—nothing. Eventually, he managed to free himself and looked around. There was nobody there; the barn was empty. He walked home.

When the IRA prisoner finished sharing this in the workshop I was chairing, another man, a loyalist paramilitary prisoner, stood up at the back of the hall and said, 'I was the assassin who gave you that cigarette. And I *would* have shot you. But I couldn't shoot you because, when I heard your story, I realized it was *my* story.' I was very struck by how this basic act of narrative imagination could trigger a transfer of empathy between these two sworn enemies, leading eventually to reconciliation.

A second story that inspired me goes back to 1492 when a terrible civil war was raging in Ireland and the Earl of Kildare, Gearóid Mór FitzGerald, hunted and eventually besieged James Butler, Earl of Ormond, in St Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin. At one point FitzGerald realized, 'It can't go on, this vicious cycle of blood-letting must end.' He asked his adversary, Butler, to open a hole in the door and announced: 'I'm going to remove my armor and stretch my arm through the gap. You can cut it off or shake my hand. If you cut it off, war continues; if you shake my hand, war ends.' FitzGerald 'chanced his arm,' as the saying went. Butler shook his hand and peace happened.

These two stories tell of transformative acts, of enemies becoming friends, of strangers becoming guests.

The Guestbook project which I founded to promote such transformation now operates as an international non-profit organization devoted to the fostering of peace stories through the work of empathic imagination. It straddles divides of religion, class, and culture throughout the world. Examples to date include young Turks and Armenians sharing forbidden histories, Israelis and Palestinians exchanging symbols (hijab and Star of David), Ulster Protestants and Catholics switching school uniforms, Congolese and Rwandans confiding traumas, Bangalore Muslims and Hindus performing rituals, Koreans and Japanese trading memories and dreams. Crossing borders of heart and mind these youths dare *re-make* history by imagining otherwise. They give a future to the past by transforming deep legacies of trans-generational hurt into narrative forms of healing. The aim of Guestbook is to empower young people to make bold leaps of imagination towards impossible possibilities of peace. (For the wide reach of the project see the essays collected in Kearney/Taylor and Kearney/Semonovich.)

South African Stories

My philosophical work with the Guestbook project finally brought me to South Africa. In May 2017, I flew to Johannesburg at the invitation of Professors Daniël Veldsman and Robert Vosloo and was privileged to engage in conversation with philosophers of religion and local pioneers of peace. The visit featured a memorable exchange with South African peace activists and scholars, Wilhelm Verwoerd who had worked as director of the Irish Peace center in Glenree, Co Wicklow (bringing together former belligerents from Ulster and South Africa) and Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela who served on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in the 1990s and since. One story related by Pumla—and recorded in her book *A Human Being Died That Night: A South African Woman Confronts the Legacy of Apartheid*—reminded me of the Irish legend of 'chancing your arm,' though this time it was a case of 'chancing your hand.' It is an episode which recalls the 'handshake' as the first gesture of civilization, epitomized in the great peace breakthroughs of history by people bold enough to dare the impossible and shake the hand of the sworn adversary: think of Mandela and de Klerk, John Hume and Gerry Adams, Begin and Sadat, Gandhi and Mountbatten.

Pumla resolved, during a sensitive moment in the reconciliation process, to meet Eugene de Kock, a brutal apartheid executioner known popularly as 'Prime Evil', then imprisoned. She bore no illusions: 'De Kock had not just given apartheid's murderous evil a name. He had *become* that evil' (2003:6). Pumla was prompted to meet with this notorious assassin after she heard a widow of one of his victims express a willingness to forgive him after witnessing his testimony to the TRC in September 1997. 'I would like to hold him by the hand,' the widow had said, 'and show him that there is a future, and that he can still change' (14-15). Pumla interpreted this widow's readiness to reach out to her husband's murderer as an astonishing,

almost impossible, act of empathy, for she was not only shedding tears for the loss of her own executed spouse but for the loss of De Kock's moral humanity. For Pumla this raised the crucial question: 'Was de Kock deserving of the forgiveness shown to him?... Was evil intrinsic to de Kock, and forgiveness wasted on him?' (15).

Robert Vosloo, who convened the colloquy between myself and Pumla at Stellenbosch University in 2017, offers this lucid analysis of the moral dilemma involved in Pumla's meeting with De Kock:

What Pumla drew from this enigmatic gesture of pardon between the widow and De Kock was that a remorseful apology can contribute to the vocabulary of forgiveness in the context of evil. She is aware of the asymmetrical relationship between the admission of guilt and the word of forgiveness, and that the request for forgiveness can have an empty ring to it, adding insult to injury. However, the power and significance of an apology lies in its ability 'to *perform* and to transcend the apologetic words.' (2018; citing Godoba-Madikizela 2002:13)

The emphasis on embodied 'performance' is key here for the basic reason that 'empathy is what enables us to recognize another's pain, even in the midst of tragedy, because pain cannot be evil. Empathy deepens our humanity.... When perpetrators apologize and experience the pain of remorse, showing contrition, they are *acting as human beings*' (2002:20). During her encounter with De Kock in prison, Pumla was moved by De Kock's tears as he confessed not only his regret at murdering the widow's husband but his desire to undo the wrong: 'I wish there was a way of bringing the (body) back alive. I wish I could say, "Here (is) your husband," he said, stretching out his arms as if bearing an invisible body, his hands trembling, his mouth quivering, "but unfortunately... I have to live with it"' (2003:32).

And then the impossible happened, the unthinkable act of embodied empathy was enacted in a moment of carnal transference. Almost unbeknownst to herself, Pumla found herself reaching out her hand towards his, only to find it was 'clenched, cold and rigid.' Reflecting on this afterward, she observed: 'This made me recoil for a moment and to recast my act of reaching out as something incompatible with the circumstances of an encounter with a person who not too long ago used these same hands, this same voice, to authorize and initiate unspeakable acts of malice against people very much like myself' (32).

As Vosloo notes, this unsettling encounter with De Kock left Gobodo-Madikizela with a sense of guilt for having expressed some empathy. She wondered if she had not 'crossed the moral line from compassion, which allows some measure of distance, to actually identifying with De Kock' (2003:33). The encounter also had an impact on De Kock himself, who confessed during one of their later meetings: 'You know, Pumla, that was my trigger hand you touched' (39). This chillingly candid admission left Gobodo-Madikizela with a mixture of feelings. She felt vulnerable, angry, and invaded, yet she realized that De Kock's statement might carry another underlying subtext:

My action may well have been the first time a black person touched him out of compassion. He had previously met black people only as enemies, across the barrel of a gun or, for those who were on his side of the firing line, as comrades in murder. Perhaps de Kock *recognized my touch as a kind of threshold crossing*, a new experience for him. (42; my emphasis)

Such liminal crossing was far from easy. Pumla was deeply aware of the complex contradictions involved in touching the 'trigger hand'; but in that moment of carnal empathy she did not withdraw her hand. She made a wager on the impossible possibility of a shared humanity. 'His world was a cold world,' she realized, 'where eyes of death stared accusingly

at him, a world littered with corpses and graves.... But for all the horrific singularity of his acts, de Kock was a desperate soul seeking to affirm to himself that he was still part of the human universe' (39).

What is so revealing about this 'trigger hand' episode is, I submit, that it was Pumla's carnal experience of De Kock's remorse which reciprocally triggered her ability to acknowledge his humanity (67-8). That momentary gesture of pardon—or grace?—worked, it seems, because both De Kock's remorse and Pumla's empathy were *carnally performed* rather than *conceptually calculated*. It was less about cognition than recognition, less about sense than sensibility. 'A genuine apology,' as Pumla subsequently observed,

focuses on the feelings of the other rather than on how the one who is apologizing is going to benefit in the end. It seeks to acknowledge full responsibility for the act, and does not use self-serving language to justify the behavior of the person asking forgiveness. It must communicate, convey, and *perform* as a "speech act" that expresses a desire to right the relationship damaged through the action of the apologizer. (98-9)

In short, the act of double performativity embodied a dual recognition of common humanity between self and stranger, forgiver and executioner, saint and monster (the terms are mine). Or as Pumla herself put it: 'When remorse is triggered in the moment of witnessing... the perpetrator recognizes the other as a fellow human being. At the same time, the victim, too, recognizes the face of the perpetrator not as that of a "monster" who committed terrible deeds, but as the face with enough humanity to feel remorse' (2008:176-7). Such moments of forgiveness—to the extent that they are humanly possible (which is perhaps why Ricoeur calls them 'miraculous')—lie in the search 'not for the things that separate us—but for something common among us fellow human beings, the compassion and empathy that bind our human identity' (2014:1).

So why, we ask again, the importance of the hands? Triggering or counter-triggering, acting or suffering, criminal or forgiving? I think what most struck me about Pumla's account was the witness to a form of wisdom which operates at the level of the body, a discerning sensibility which functions at the level of skin and flesh, nerve endings and sinews, complexion and touch, while knowing. This is a knowing without knowing, a form of tact within contact, of savvy as *savoir* in the original sense of tasting and testing (from *savourer-sapere-sapientia*). This original wisdom operates in the three senses of *sense*—sensation, orientation, and meaning—and it is at this level that the primal scenes of openness to the radical Other or Stranger first occurred.

One could recall Abraham and Sarah turning hostility into hospitality by extending empathy to the three strangers in the tent at Mamre (Genesis 18), offering them food rather than the sword. Or the scene in Homer where the nurse Euryclea welcomes Odysseus, the disguised beggar, home to Ithaca by touching the childhood scar (*trauma*) on his thigh. Or the scene in Ovid where Baucus and Philemon welcome Hermes the masked stranger to their house and give him all the food they have. Or Jesus welcoming his disciples at the Last Supper or at the inn at Emmaus. These classic and biblical scenes of radical hospitality feature hands offering nourishment or pardon with a healing touch (almost all Jesus's cures, for example, worked through a touch of the hand).

One finds similar instances of healing and hosting throughout the history of art and literature, right down to the table scenes between Jean-Valjean and Monseigneur Myriel in *Les Misérables* or between Babette and her townsfolk in *Babette's Feast*. All these scriptural and literary scenes, like the iconic political handshakes cited, testify to a common power of savvy and tact, of flair and taste, preexisting our conceptual reflective consciousness: an

embodied navigation between enemy and friend, hostage and host, often miraculously turning the former into the latter.

Commenting on one of Pumla's exchanges during the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Archbishop Desmond Tutu says: 'We should all be deeply humbled by what we've heard.... Now we've got to turn our backs on this awful past and say: life is for living' (cited, Krog, 30). 'After such knowledge, what forgiveness?' asks T. S. Eliot. And we might add, in the spirit of Tutu and Pumla: 'After such forgiveness, what knowledge?' And if there *is* knowledge, what do we do with it? Do we go on remembering, working through wounds, setting the record, or do we decide to forgive and forget? This is a key problem not only for the TRC in South Africa but for all other truth tribunals and memorials in post-traumatic communities throughout the world.

It has been a real question, on a smaller scale, for my own performative therapy work with Sheila Gallagher, both in Guestbook's 'Exchanging Stories in Northern Ireland' and in our other recent multi-media performance, *Twinsome Minds*, an act of double remembrance regarding the historical traumas of 1916 (those sacrificed in the Dublin Easter Rising and on the World War I battlefields of Flanders and France). Complex and challenging questions of memory and forgetting confront us here. Story often comes up against history and has to rub it against the grain if we are to revisit and retell hidden sufferings. Genuine remembrance goes beneath the Grand Narratives of Official History to identify hidden or neglected 'micro-narratives'—stories which turn 'backward memory' (addicted to repetition compulsion) into 'forward memory' (alert to unfulfilled possibilities of the past). Or to use Freud's term: we need a working-through of pain (*Durcharbeitung*) which turns 'melancholy' into 'mourning.' Such work involves a process of therapeutic anamnesis—while always mindful that 'amnesty is never amnesia' (Ricoeur). We must remember rightly before we can rightly forget. We must pay our 'debt to the dead' before we can live again, through cathartic imagination.

I suspect it is no accident that one the most powerful testimonies to the traumas of Apartheid—*Country of My Skull*—was written by a South African poet, Antjie Krog. And I am also reminded here of Atom Egoyan's extraordinary testament to the Armenian genocide in his film *Ararat*, along with the countless writers, artists, and film makers who have kept the memory of the Holocaust alive—Amos Oz, Paul Celan, Claude Lanzmann, Steven Spielberg, Art Spiegelman, Jorge Semprún—all observing Primo Levi's plea to 'keep retelling the story of Auschwitz so that it can never happen again.' But we must also honor Adorno's troubling remark: 'To write a poem after Auschwitz is barbaric.' There are limits to narrative imagination, and silence is sometimes the best response to horror.

Yet one cannot deny the indefatigable call of healing. History needs story to bring the past to life again, so that we can 'feel what wretches feel,' empathize with the pain of the persecuted and be 'struck' by the terror of it all. Or to cite Aristotle's *Poetics*, we often need a narrative plot (*muthos-mimesis*) to reconfigure past sufferings into a meaningful act of *katharsis*. Otherwise there would be no purgation, no reckoning, no release—just a bare chronicle of facts: irresistible fatality. Story and history need each other for unspeakable wounds to become visible scars—for archive to become art. In sum, a poetics of imagining is necessary for inexperienced experience to be *re-experienced*, again and again.

After my encounters with such remarkable peacemakers as Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, Wilhelm Verwoerd, and Yolande Steenkamp, I feel emboldened to re-engage the daunting task of changing pain into peace. A double work of heart and hand: striving to give a future to the past through narratives of healing and gestures of touch.

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