

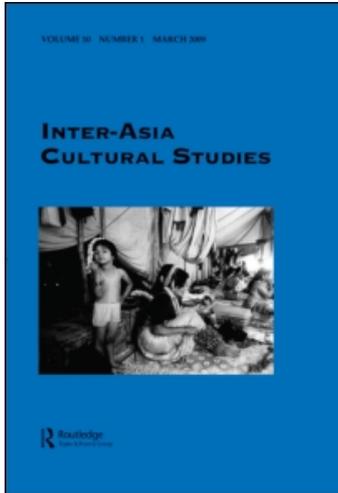
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In the ruins of truth: the work of melancholia and acts of memory

Pradeep JEGANATHAN

ABSTRACT *This paper seeks to problematize and render inadequate the 'truth' of Truth Commissions, which have proliferated globally. It does so by questioning the relationship of 'truth' to 'testimony' by offering a critical account of their relationship to 'trauma,' on the one hand and by questioning the location of 'testimony' in relation to 'resistance,' on the other hand. Moving away from this 'psychologistic register,' the paper rehearses a re-reading of Freud, which attempts to question the sharp distinction between mourning and melancholia, in his 1917 essay. Given this, a complex, psychoanalytic subject is constructed, whose psychic and social 'work of melancholia,' and 'acts of memory,' cannot be straightforwardly rendered in testimony or recollection, and is unavailable for nationalist appropriation. Empirical material is drawn from field work in Eastern Sri Lanka, on the after life multiple massacres that took place in the early 1990s, and is juxtaposed with Commissions of Inquiry into these events in the late 1990s.*

KEYWORDS: mourning, melancholia, memory, Freud, war, violence, massacres, Truth Commissions, trauma, Sri Lanka, Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim

The problem of truth

This is a work of criticism that seeks to examine, and suggest a certain inadequacy in the 'truth' that is produced by Truth Commissions and their allied and parallel apparatuses, which have thrived, and continue to proliferate globally. The presence of such commissions has been felt in Sri Lanka, where I am located, and fresh demands for new commissions are constantly made by international human rights groups, foreign governments, and some Sri Lankan NGOs. In this paper I seek to raise questions about these calls by problematizing the dominant, well-understood formulations of concepts that undergird this notion of 'truth': the 'traumatized subject' and some practices of that subject, such as 'testimony' and 'memory.' It is these categories, together with a construction of a 'post-traumatic' state, that in articulation make this conception of 'truth.'¹

I should note also that this paper is part of a longer project, in which I have been groping towards a conceptual field that is adequate to the life worlds of those who live on in the wake of grotesque violence, atrocities and 'bad death.' The central element in this conceptual field is the deliberately impossible juxtaposition, 'the work of melancholia' (Jeganathan n.d.).² This paper then also attempts to position the conception of 'work' in the formulation 'work of melancholia' in relation to better understood categories such as agency or resistance that might be used, in a more conventional work, to understand the practices of the 'traumatized' such as 'testimony' or 'memory.' Doing this will also aid me in my central task, unmaking the 'truth' of Truth Commissions.

Nevertheless, this is not an ethnographic account, in any well understood sense, of 'traumatized subjects,' or communities, or the testimonies or memories of such subjects or communities, and I do not present it as a contribution to anthropological knowledge on

these matters as such. I shall, however, given advanced disciplinary training in anthropology and contributions made in earlier work, work some of my arguments through strands of anthropological knowledge as I clarify my critique. As such, this work may be also positioned, in part, as a critique of anthropology.

The 'traumatized subject'

What are the characteristics of 'trauma,' the 'traumatized' subject, and its associated categories of 'testimony' and 'witnessing,' as they have emerged as objects of disciplinary inquiry and governmental knowledge in recent years? For example, it is certainly clear that there is – and has been widespread – scholarly, foundation/granting agency, NGO and governmental interest in 'trauma' and its aftermath in recent years, and many conferences and volumes have analyzed the large number of fully functional Truth Commissions, designed to hear or curate the testimony of the traumatized globally.

But indeed, the emergence of 'trauma' and the 'traumatic subject,' who then 'testifies,' in both popular and disciplinary fields, has been noted independent of 'Truth Commissions.' What are some of the characteristics of this emergence? I find Hal Foster's analysis useful, as a point of entry: '... in therapy culture, talk shows and memoir-mongering, trauma is treated as an event that guarantees the subject, and in this *psychologistic* register the subject, however disturbed, rushes back, as survivor, witness, testifier' (Foster 1996: 123–124; emphasis in original). I draw attention here to two aspect of Foster's characterization before I go further. First, there is the claim of the psychologism of subject, which I take to mean an intact and holistically conceptualized psyche, which, importantly, does not have a significant unconscious. Second, the relation of this subject to speech, as in a 'testifying' subject. In Foster's description, the testimony of the 'traumatized' subject in popular fields, allows access to a psyche, taken in a psychologistic sense, as opposed to a psychoanalytic sense.

Foster continues: '[the traumatized subject] ... has absolute authority, for one cannot challenge the trauma of another: one can only believe it or identify with it or not' (Foster 1996: 124). This, then, is the authority that makes the truth of testimony in the kind of popular culture Foster is describing.³ In fact, I would suggest that the same relationship holds between the testimony of the traumatized and truth in more formal contexts, a suggestion I will expand on with examples below. Beforehand, however, I will make a sketchy but perhaps suggestive genealogy of this now self-evident linkage between traumatic testimony and truth.

To do this, let us consider two substantial scholarly accounts that work through two triangulations; truth, pain and testimony, and truth, experience and testimony. Talal Asad, in his consideration of 'Pain and truth' in medieval judicial torture, argues that 'pain' is applied in well-delineated ways that control and regulate that application in the aid of the production of a confession (Asad 1999). This confession itself, Asad shows, must be in some way valid outside the application of pain: the tortured must produce the confession in court, while not subject to pain, or is led away for more torture. The theory of the matter, then, is this: pain applied to the body reconstitutes the body in some way allowing for a truthful confession. This reconstitution must persist for some time after the moment of the application of pain; it cannot be, simply, contingently available at that moment (this is to be clearly distinguished from re-form, however, which seeks lasting, long term transformation of the person). The main point I take away, in the context of this argument is the central early modern relationship between pain (trauma) and confession (testimony).

The second triangulation is of truth, experience and testimony. The work of critical historians of early modern European experimental science (Daston 1995; Dear 1995), and, in particular for my argument here, Steven Shapin's work on Robert Boyle, has shown an

emergent triangulation of truth, trust and testimony, in the securing of experiential evidence as 'matters of fact' during this period (Shapin 1995). As is well known, in a prior, pre-modern or if you like Aristotelian epistemological frame, it was common experience which stood as security for 'matters of fact,' the emergence of particular experience, and therefore, 'experiment' as security for 'fact' was dependent upon a transformation of this framework.⁴ It is Shapin's argument that a paradigmatic figure such as Boyle's testimony emerged as trustworthy in the framework of the Royal Society because of particular dispositions that inhered in his practice, and embodiment of these dispositions in the experience of the experiment. Unlike in pre-modern times, early modern and modern truths are made from (unique) personal experiences (experiments, if the knowledge is to be 'scientific'), of person(s) who have particular dispositions.

Now I wish to suggest that an intertwining of these two triangulations gives us the taken-for-granted authority, or truth claim, of the testimony of the traumatized subject, which Foster and others have pointed to. It is the experience of the pain, which leads to trauma, which secures the trustworthiness of the testimony of the traumatized subject, in everyday common sense. It may be a startling or provocative argument, but it seems, increasingly, we do expect the 'traumatized subject' to speak, and we expect the trustworthiness of her testimony to be secured by her trauma.⁵

Regardless, let me go on in my examination of characteristics of 'trauma' and 'testimony,' and move from popular culture to serious scholarly discourse. Now Ruth Leys' recent genealogy provides us with a most complex and sophisticated account of 'trauma,' which is in turn a map of other such accounts (Leys 2000). I cannot evaluate her considerable work here, and as such, I should underline strongly that I make no critical claim in general about scholarship on trauma. There are, nevertheless, in the serious disciplinary literatures on trauma and testimony, several kinds of arguments and accounts that seem to have a remarkable relationship at one level to the kind of popular construction of the 'traumatic' and 'traumatized' that Foster's account speaks to, and at another level, with that familiar object of anthropological and historical inquiry, the 'resisting subject.' To make these connections clearer, I will critically read a couple of such accounts below.

Political targets and locations

In this regard, let me first consider Dori Laub's essay 'Truth and testimony,' which is concerned exclusively with holocaust testimony, which appears in a volume edited by Cathy Caruth that has been noted as marking an important position in recent accounts of trauma (Laub 1995).⁶ Here Laub writes: 'the survivor did not only need to survive so that they could tell their stories; they also needed to tell their stories in order to survive' (Laub 1995: 63). There is here a double link, or a 'dialogic' relationship that Laub constructs between surviving and telling, or trauma and truth. One is needed in the face of the other; the telling of these stories becomes a 'struggle,' which may be hard, but must be gone through, until the story is told, and a certain truth is excavated. 'There is,' he goes on, 'in each survivor, an imperative need to tell and thus come to know one's story, unimpeded by ghosts from the past against which one has to protect oneself. One has to know one's buried truth in order to be able live one life' (Laub 1995: 63). I am struck here by a kind of simplicity that seems to undergird Laub's notion of 'life,' that cannot be lived, as such, without the finding and telling of a buried 'truth.' But I'm also taken aback by the universalizing, in his voice, of this supposed 'struggle' to 'tell.' There is an analogy to be made, then, between Laub's testifying subject and the 'resisting subject' I alluded to earlier, in the common concept of struggle. Of course in Laub, the 'struggle' may be largely an internal one, but one that entails an overcoming, of some sort. I cannot agree with such universalizations.

My second critical reading is Ana Douglass' re-articulation of the celebrated account of Guatemalan activist Rigoberta Menchu, in the face of accusations of untruthfulness (Douglass 2003). While Menchu's testimony had been largely taken as 'true,' new accusations by David Sole render that account suspect for some. Douglass' argument that what is true is in Menchu's testimony, in the claim of her politics upon us, not the contents itself. To do this, Douglass provides us with a parallel history of atrocities in Guatemala, and makes clear that she and Menchu share a political project and share 'political targets.'⁷ For Douglass, the political question, as for Laub, one might add, is already closed, in as much as the political targets that need to be attacked are self evident: what is needed is an effective 'struggle' to testify or an effective 'strategy' of testimony, which makes the testimony heard.

I must hasten to add, I find myself in political agreement with Laub and Menchu, first on the importance of holocaust testimony, in the face of its denial by some, and with also the importance of testimony about atrocities perpetrated against the indigenous people of Guatemala that have been well buried by dominant US discourses. Nevertheless, I wish to distinguish my own understanding of 'post traumatic' testimony and truth from that which they produce from these undoubtedly laudable politicized accounts. I do so because I do not wish to locate my work in a given political narrative which has worked out in advance its political direction and targets. The politics of my work in this paper, and the larger project of which it is a part, is not self-evident to me, even though I have a sense of my own location.

I write from a postnational location, the uncomfortable home of 'a nation that never was, and never will be.' I write as a national, who does not celebrate the possibilities of his nation or its eventual becoming, who is unpersuaded by the vision of a heroic utopia that is nationalism's call, and who has only uncertain and unstable knowledge of the descent of national life into a grotesque world that has become 'ordinary.' Location, formulated in this way, does not, of course, amount to a political project, as such, but it does signal a suspicion of the nation and nationalism, and of course by extension, disgust with imperialism.⁸

Testimony, resistance, agency

If one were to turn to anthropological disciplinarity, there is, I would suggest, an analogy to be made between the construction of 'testimony' (after trauma) in the current period, and 'resistance' in a previous area. In recollecting that prior era, I would take Jean Comaroff's invocation, in italics, of Nadine Gordimer's sentence 'there are many forms of resistance not recognized in orthodox revolutionary strategy' as the epigraph of her book, as quite paradigmatic (Comaroff 1989). At the time, of course, it is important to remember that meta-political narratives of revolution were indeed persuasive to radical or leftist scholars in the academy; the ANC itself was seen as leftist and many states had been founded on revolution. The point of moves like Comaroff's, which I was most sympathetic to as a student, was not so much to argue that unorthodox forms of resistance would lead to the undoing of structures of power, as Lila Abu-Lughod suggests in her own self critical essay on resistance (Abu-Lughod 1990), but to underline that unorthodox forms of resistance could be seen as allied with, and operating against the same political targets as 'revolutionary' strategies. This concern of politicizing some forms of practice as resistance was, of course, allied theoretically with an argument about 'agency.' It is this notion of agency that has continued to persist, even after the breakdown of the meta-political narrative of revolution (socialist or nationalist) that gave 'resistance' its self-evident politics.

Two anthropologists, Talal Asad and Saba Mahmood, separated by a generation but linked by cross citation, have sought in a set of crucial interventions to unmake the taken-for-granted undergirding that agency gives resistance (Asad 1996, 2003; Mahmood 2001). 'The tendency to romanticize resistance comes,' Asad writes, referring to Abu-Lughod's

essay (1990) by that name, ‘from a metaphysical question to which “agency” is the response: given the essential freedom, or the natural sovereignty of the human subject, and given too its own desires and interests, what should human beings do to realize freedom, empower themselves, and choose pleasure?’ (Asad 2003: 71). It is this naturalized, taken as self-evident, path of ‘increasing self empowerment and decreasing pain’ that Asad seeks to delink from ‘agency’ (Asad 2003: 71). Additionally, Asad attempts to delink other categories that have attached in a self evident way to agency. ‘Consciousness,’ which he notes ‘has a specific Western genealogy, partly rooted in the Christian concept of “conscience”’ (Asad 1996: 264–265), is one, as is ‘responsibility’ (Asad 2003: 92–94). It seems clear also that, for Asad, agency can be ‘moral actions’ that are practiced within a Maussian *habitus*, which is not pleasure seeking, empowering or transforming. But his effort is primarily to unmake a previously naturalized conception of agency, and I turn to Mahmood’s work, which he cites, to clarify in full positivity what this critique yields. In her clear and thoughtful essay on the subject, Mahmood says that ‘agency’ can be understood as ‘...a capacity for action that specific relations of subordination create and enable’ (Mahmood 2001: 210). And she goes on to illustrate this with a very fine example that resonates at once with what might be called the cosmopolitan common sense of a Euro-American scholarly audience, that of a virtuoso pianist in the making. ‘Agency’ here is learning the art, as it were, of playing with mastery, and to do this, some docility is required – and I am reminded of the concept of ‘teacherability’ which is one that good graduate students are thought to possess in the academy. This docility, and I hope I am thinking with Mahmood here when I add teacherability as a parallel to her conception of docility, should not be taken in the sense of ‘passivity’ she suggests, but rather ‘that of struggle, effort, exertion and achievement’ (Mahmood 2001: 210).

Now there is, in my reading at least, more than one conception of ‘agency’ in this article of Mahmood’s, and I shall return to another subtle distinction I see in her usage later in this paper, but at this point I wish to draw a distinction between the conception of agency delineated above, and my conception of ‘work’ in the construct ‘work of melancholia’ that is central to the larger project, of which this paper is a part.

Again, this is discussed at greater length later; here, let me mark one aspect of the substance of two distinctions I wish to draw between this conception of agency and my conception of ‘work.’ First, I wish to draw a distinction between ‘struggle, effort, exertion and achievement’ and their synonyms in relation to, for example, the practice of testimony. To draw those conceptions any closer would be to risk returning to Laub’s account of the struggle to testify all over again.

The other distinction I wish to draw between Mahmood’s conception of agency and Asad’s implied reconstruction of it is the location of ‘agency’ in a habitus of virtues, be that habitus derived from Aristotle (Mahmood) or Mauss (Asad). The kind of ‘work’ I have in mind should not be thought of as existing in a habitus of virtues; at times, it palpably does not.⁹ Once again, it is my claim that from within the logic of my project, I do not imagine the ‘work of melancholia’ as a ‘struggle’ or ‘achievement’ on the one hand, or part of a habitus of virtues on the other. As I have been trying to make clear, what I am trying to move away from is, firstly, the self-evident authority of the truth claim of the testimony of the traumatized (that I identified through Foster, and critiqued with recourse to Asad and Shapin) and second the location of such testimony in a political narrative that has a defined political direction and targets, in a *a priori* fashion, which I identified in Douglass and to some extent in Laub, and critiqued, partially, with recourse to Asad and Mahmood’s interrogation of resistance and agency.

This clearing away does not, of course, present what I might mean by ‘work’ in the construction ‘work of melancholia’ in any positive way, but it may go some way in delineating what it is not. I shall, as promised, return again to these ideas at the end of this paper.

Massacres in Eastern Sri Lanka

The *Final Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Involuntary Removal or Disappearance of Persons in the Northern and Eastern Provinces* (of Sri Lanka), which was printed by order of the Government of Sri Lanka in September 1997, is the seventh parliamentary seasonal paper of that year. The report of this commission joins a series of interlocking and sequential reports of commissions of inquiry that were established after democratic regime change in 1994. The new president, Chandrika Kumaratunga, charged the commissioners in this particular case with inquiring and gathering evidence on disappearances in the two said provinces after 1 January, 1988. They were also charged with recommending prosecutions.

While the operations of this, and other similar commissions were and are complex, I will not address the mechanics of the commissions of inquiry in depth here. Given my concern with the kind of 'truth' that commissions such as this produce, in a larger sense, I will focus on testimony, and its possibilities and the memorializations that happen in the wake of the commission. Specifically, I will focus on two massacres: one that catalyzed testimony before the commission, and another, which was almost simultaneous with the first, that did not.

I should attempt, before I do so, to frame in some basic way ongoing violence in Sri Lanka, so that it is intelligible to the reader who feels they needs 'background.' I find this difficult, because I have difficulty with nearly all the categories that can be used in such explications.¹⁰ In my day-to-day life, I try to understand the ongoing violence as the product of three assertive and combative nations that have emerged in the territory of the island formally called Ceylon¹¹ over the last two centuries. Each, Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim, wish like all national communities to make universal claims upon the world, in their own particular way. In the Eastern province of Sri Lanka, from where the concrete examples in this paper are taken, the organic nations at war are Tamil and Muslim, while the Sinhala nation takes on the role of an imperial master, practicing divide and rule.

Memorialization after massacre and testimony

Section 3.7 of the report, which is about 2 and 3/4 pages long, is an account of what is now called the Sathurukondan massacre. The report establishes that a group of Tamil people were killed in the massacre, allegedly by the Sri Lankan Army, which comprises of mostly Sinhala soldiers, but there is little clear evidence of the exact identity of the perpetrators. The commission reports that 184 died in the massacre, which by all accounts took place inside the Army camp at Sathurukondan, a small dusty village about 15 km north of Batticaloa town, and that one man, Kandasamy Krishnakumar, survived. He, and another 62 people, testified before the commission on this matter. The commission reports in another section on who the deceased were, but then moves on, as it must, to other massacres.

The details of the Sathurukondan massacre are, however, far better accounted for in the commission report than any other massacre because of the work of an American cultural anthropologist, who did extensive field work in the area in the years just after the event. Patricia Lawrence, whose doctoral field work in the east overlapped chronologically with my doctoral fieldwork in the south of Sri Lanka, sent a letter to the commission when it was appointed, delineating, in far better detail than the commission does, the intricacies of this particular event, which she had spent some time going into. The commission obviously welcomed her intervention and her entire memorandum is included as an annexure in the final report.

It is through Lawrence's submission that the commission, and by extension we, learn that there had been news of a massacre of Muslims by the LTTE in Eravur a few days prior, that nearly all the adult males had left, fearing reprisals, and that on the day of the event

itself, armed men, believed to have been Sri Lanka army commandos, had ordered or requested the remaining inhabitants of the four villages to gather in the army camp at Sathurukondan. Not even Lawrence can really tell us why, or what exactly happened after, except to document that of 184 people killed, 69 were below the age of 12, and 16 were above the age of 70. Most of the others were women. She recounts difficult and ultimately failed attempts on the part of Batticoloa citizens' human rights groups to find forensic evidence of the massacre, and then ends, significantly I suggest, with a call for its memorialization. Lawrence, who in her professional writings has been concerned with oracular figures that can mediate between the dead, the living, and the gods, ends her submissions to the commission with these words:

May the grace of Sathurukondan Kannakiyamman/Pattiyamman be with you in the course of your responsibilities as a Commission of Inquiry ... Perhaps the government of Sri Lanka would consider placing a memorial to those who lost their lives by the lotus tank of this Amman Temple. The idea of such a memorial has been conceived by the people there, but it remains only a wish. (Government of Sri Lanka 1997: 310)

Twelve years after the massacre, and five years after the commission report was published, that is in September 2002, after the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (CHA) had been signed between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the Government of Sri Lanka (GOSL), a memorial was indeed built to the dead of the massacre by the LTTE.¹² That organization, being rather more secular than the American anthropologist, made no acknowledgment of the power of the Amman in its modest structure, but did include these words on the plaque.

On the 9th of September 1990 at Sathurukondan ... mass killing of 186 Tamil inhabitants took place. This memorial was erected on the 12th Anniversary of that event.

Note the slightly different numeral on the plaque, 186, as opposed to 184 in the anthropologist's account as well as the commission's. On trying to investigate this small puzzle, I found that while even semi-official LTTE websites, such as the news service Tamilnet.com, stay with the number 184, some local accounts persist with 186 because two of the women killed were pregnant. The point is not really the numbers at all, but that there is a number. It is for me an almost unbearably sad truth that a massacre is not a massacre without a number attached to it, verified somehow by trustworthy 'testimony' enabled by 'trauma.' For without such testimony, heard by the commission, appointed by the government of Sri Lanka – or had it been appointed by the LTTE in its efforts to rule, or heard by the socio-cultural anthropologist in her efforts to interpret and understand – there would be no number that could be repeated, remembered and written down. The event itself might blur, as an event, into the dozens of other massacres that eastern Sri Lanka, and indeed the country at large, is marked with.

The memorial at Sathurukondan is the site each year of a small, secular nationalist ceremony which may include local LTTE politicians and military leaders, and in its official form at least, it is not only a memorial for those who died, but a reminder, to me at least, of the imbrications of cultural anthropology and nationalism, unintended and unaided, by its practitioners, given Lawrences' desire for a memorial and of course the nationalist logic of the LTTE.

It is harder to work out the unofficial life of this memorial; but even though it sits in the middle of a dusty, sandy road, it is hardly an organic part, in my view, of the communities that surround it. Inhabitants of the area do have a relationship with the place however, and several people have told me that, as they walk past, they recall a loved one who died.

Finally, what I wish to draw out here is the intertwining of testimony with memorializing. In the logic of the Sathurukondan massacre, it is the very existence of the commission

that allows for testimony to emerge in a somewhat coherent way, and is a condition of possibility of the massacre's formal memorialization with, importantly, it seems, a record of the number of the dead.

Memorialization of massacre without testimony

I now move to another event that took place a little more than a month before the first, around 20 km south of Sathurukondan along the eastern coast of Sri Lanka.

At 8:15 pm on the 3rd of August 1990, 30 LTTE cadres simultaneously attacked, after dividing into two groups, the Meera Jumma and Hussainiya Thakkiya mosques at Kattankudy; 103 Muslim men and boys were killed, another 70 or so were injured.

Ismail Majeed was 21 at the time; he survived the massacre. I got to know him through my research associate, a Batticoola resident, while doing field work for a large research project, which I directed between 2002–2004, on the aftermath of war.

Majeed went to the mosque that day, with his brother-in-law, as was his usual habit. He was standing in the third row of the mosque, among hundreds of others. Kathankuddy is densely populated, and this particular mosque serves rows of houses that adjoin it. Suddenly, that day, Majeed heard gun shots; he cried out and fell to the ground. There was more shooting, and then all was quiet, except for the cries of the wounded. He himself was shot in the legs, was hospitalized and received treatment for two more years. Even when in hospital he feared for his life. He still has some difficulty walking. Ismail Majeed lost his brother, father and 20 other male relatives in the massacre.

Nearly every house, clustered in rows along the road by the mosque, lost a male in the massacre. The bodies of victims lie buried by the mosque. The mosque has not been repaired and bullet holes in the long wall remain as an extraordinary visceral memorial to those who perished; on another wall are their names and ages, memorialized as *Shahids*, martyrs who fell for the faith.

The enclosed space of the mosque, and the continuing control of its space that the community had, and continues to have, makes its own institution of truth. Here, there is no separation of the 'report' of what happened and its memorialization. While other LTTE inspired atrocities are testified to before the Commission, this one is not. Its truth, it would seem, was apparent, as delineated by the names of the *Shahids* on the wall. This is worth dwelling over for a moment because the relationship between the truth of the commission and the memorialization of the massacre is different from Sathurukondan. The proximate answer lies in the logic of the massacre itself; self-contained in the mosque, which is part of the community, as opposed to a LTTE or Army camp, and therefore self-evident, its 'truth' did not have to 'proven' by testimony before a commission to be known; its site, still in existence, becomes its own memorial.

Regardless of formal testimony, what then emerges in both instances is the 'truth' of the massacre. The memorials are, in one sense, the necessary and politicized truths that emerge, through testimony before the commission in the first instance, and by sheer weight of already existing incontrovertible evidence on the other. Both these truths can be, and have been, it is easily argued, read back by the communities concerned into their respective nationalisms, Tamil and Muslim. Hence, the involvement of the LTTE, an extreme Tamil nationalist organization, and its ideological apparatus in the memorialization of Sathurukondan, and the invocation of the scared martyrdom in the appellation *Shahid* in Kattankudy. If one were to understand nationalism as a manifestation of resistance, as it has been understood before, certainly with reason and merit, then in these instances, testimony and resistance would intertwine.

It is this kind of intertwining, always available it seems to me, in the analytic field, that I have been wary of, and so pressed my reader to attend to a set of precautionary readings

beforehand. I did so, not because I have an *a priori* argument against the concepts of resistance or agency critiqued and then reconstructed by Mahmood and Asad, or otherwise, but because I want to foreground a set of practices of living that do not fit within that rubric. As I do so, it becomes clear to me that the dominant 'truth' that emerges in the shape of these memorials in the wake of testimony is a difficult one. I suggest it is a particular, partial truth and I wish to provincialize it, because I wish to make a space for a life world that is not nationalist. As I have indicated before, this is the location of my critique, which I have called 'postnational.'

To give this critique more shape, I shall sketch out in the final two sections a different account of grief and memory. One of the problems I set myself, within the descriptive terrain that I have mapped out in this paper, is understanding how a life world, centered on the interior space of the mosque at Kattankudy, can be understood without reducing it to nationalisms' claim.¹³ Since Muslim men pray five times a day, and since, in this small city, those who pray in this mosque are survivors of the massacre or, if they were born after, lost close relatives in the massacre, or both, the question intensifies. To examine this question, I detour through what I take to be dominant understandings of the relationships of memory to mourning, given Memorials and Truth Commissions, attempting to produce a different reading.

Naming and touching the dead

The writing of proper names within the space of memorials is often associated with its most celebrated, but somewhat recent incarnation – Maya Lin's Vietnam memorial on the mall in Washington – but it is much older practice, going back to the memorials of the First World War, built for example on the battle fields of France, designed by the renowned Imperial Architect, Edward Lutyens (Trumpener 2000). Names are a kind of truth, a secure truth that underlines the reality of the death. It is also the flip side of the complex logic that makes up enumeration in modern governmentalities: individuation. It is the same logic of the identity card; there are millions of them but each has a different name. This point is concretized when one considers Chris Burden's 'The Other Vietnam Memorial,' which attempts, in the words of one patriotic American commentator, 'to create a bitter send up of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall' (Tatum 1996: 638) by inscribing the names of three million Vietnamese who were killed in the war. Except Burden didn't have the names; no one did. So 'he took a catalogue that contained four thousand Vietnamese names, transformed them into verbal integers, and designed a computer generated permutation of them' (Tatum 1996: 638). And got 3 million names. Names, it would seem, are important as an artifact of the truth of death in the logic of memorials.

In what is undoubtedly an important and influential work on war memorials, Jay Winter (1995) considers the relationship of names of the dead in 'great war' memorials to visitors to these memorials. In what I take to be a theoretical exegesis, at the end of the chapter 'On War Memorials and the Mourning Process,' Winter writes that there is considerable photographic evidence from the period after the war of 'mourners' touching the names of the dead in memorials all over Europe. He suggests that these 'gestures' can be understood with recourse to Sigmund Freud's classic 1917 essay 'Mourning and Melancholia.'¹⁴ Both his reading of Freud's essay, and the relation which Winter constructs between 'mourning' and 'memory,' is an important point of reference for my argument, since it contains in condensed form a dominant reading of the relationship between these terms, which in turn illuminates a kind of reading that I wish to set aside. In Winter's reading of Freud there are two kinds of 'bereavement': '[f]or some people the burden of bereavement is bearable; for others, it is crushing. The latter, Freud termed "melancholic"' (Winter 1995: 113–115). He then suggests, continuing to follow Freud in the

logic of his argument: '...that the reading of names of the fallen, and the touching of those statues or those names were means of avoiding crushing melancholia, of passing through mourning, of separating from the dead and beginning to live again' (Winter 1995: 113–115). Winter here presents us with a binary distinction culled from his reading of Freud, which seems to link 'gestures,' such as touching names, with what is called normal mourning, or at least the avoidance of melancholia. I shall return to this distinction in a moment – but I note now the link Winter draws between these gestures and memory: 'Ritual here is a means of forgetting, as much as commemoration, and war memorials, with their material representations of names and losses, are there to *help in the necessary art of forgetting*' (Winter 1995: 115, emphasis added). Normal mourning, in Winter's reading of Freud, leads to recovery – what he calls 'beginning to live again' – which is simultaneous with 'forgetting.' This should be a startling position, since superficially at least, and certainly etymologically, one would be justified in thinking that memorials are about recollection, not forgetting.

But Winter's account of the dominant understanding of the work that memorials ought to do, to normalize social life, is quite correct – memorials should be places, given a normalized reading of Freud, where we forget the dead, and recall them in ways very different from the way we knew them in life. It is my suggestion that Truth Commissions are often cast in the role of accomplices in this normalization, of cultivating the art of forgetting, and of course remembering again, something else afresh. This may be clearer when statements like Timothy Garton Ash's preface to a collection of essays on the plethora of proliferating Truth Commissions, which I mentioned earlier, is considered. Here, Ash's remarks are meant to orient the reader to a critical discussion of no less than 21 different Truth Commissions that are to follow. Right on the first page is a succinct statement, in a quasi-anthropological dialogic, that suggests a judicious combination of 'remembering' and 'forgetting' is needed to 'go on.'

'Do you want to remember or forget?' I [Garton Ash] asked the Rwandan government official in late 1995, just a year after the genocide in that country had left over 500,000 dead...

'We must remember what happened to keep it from happening again,' he said slowly. [The man has lost 17 relatives in the genocide.] 'But we must forget the feelings and emotions that go with it. It is only by forgetting, that we are able to go on.'

...I realized there was no other answer to my question. One must remember, but one must always very much want to forget. (Ash 2001: 1)¹⁵

The only difference, really, between Winter's logic, culled from his reading of Freud, and Garton Ash's, is the self will that Ash introduces: 'one must very much want to forget,' as opposed to the socially (governmentally) catalyzed '*help with the art of forgetting*' in Winter.¹⁶ But willed or unconscious and socially produced, as in Winter's reading, it is 'remembering' (memorializing, commissioning) combined with forgetting that, in the dominant reading, does the necessary work of normalization.

Below, I present a concatenated version of the moves I make in reading Freud, suggesting a more complex relationship between mourning and melancholia on the one hand, and memory and forgetting on the other. As such, I am able to offer a different view from that of Winter or Gorton Ash on these relationships and point to ways in which the life world of the mosque at Kattankudy can be reimagined.

The work of melancholia

In the longer work that I have already referred to (Jeganathan n.d.), I offer a re-reading of Freud that attempts to question the sharp distinction between mourning and melancholia,

and that structures dominant readings, such as Jay Winter's one above. In the course of this reading, I make several moves, some of which I delineate below.

The first move is to take seriously Freud's invocation of Shakespeare's Hamlet, the only proper name used in the text, as a melancholic. This incision in the text allows a full consideration of the figure of Hamlet, as addressed by Greenblatt and others,¹⁷ a move to the socio-historical terrain of Elizabethan England, and a consideration of Jennifer Radden's point that 'Melancholy and Melancholia' are terms that are indeed quite different conceptually (Radden 1987). This prizes apart Freud's text even further, questioning fundamentally the logic of the sharp distinction, even in his own terms.

In a second set of moves, I juxtapose Freud's *The Ego and Id* (1960[1923]) with the first text, taking seriously his own suggestion that he did not, in this earlier exploration of the question, appreciate the full significance of 'melancholia', its frequency and typicality. I am aided in the reading of both texts by Judith Butler's reading of Freud, which argues firstly that he is not true to the logic of his own terms, and that the temporal logic of his terms lead to their own undoing in the first text, a logical instability that can be rectified by attention to the second (Butler 2000).

It is given these moves that I am able to construct the idea of 'work of melancholia,' as a concept that attempts to capture some of the psychic and social acts that are part of the lives of those who grieve without 'recovery,' those who have incorporated their identification of the lost object within themselves, unlike the paradigmatic normal mourner who can 'work' away or out of the identifications with the lost object.

This construction is somewhat analytically delicate. On the one hand, in Freud, 'work' is used in the sense of 'working through' in analysis in a sense of psychic work. While Ricour has argued that this conception of work can be used, in an analytically analogous way, in the social world to understand the logic of symbols and meaning, that is not the sense in which 'work' in the social sense is used here. Rather it is taken from Freud's account of the melancholic's ego which, he argues, shows a continuous and constant movement between the outside world, and the interior world, between refusal of loss of the object in the social world, and the incorporation of that lost object in the interior self (Ricour 1970: 159–177). That movement of ego, between attachments, is a movement of 'work' between the social and psychic. I am indebted here, as I have said, to Butler's close reading of Freud, which brings her to this statement: 'Melancholia is a rebellion that has been put down or crushed ... Yet it is not a static affair; it continues as a kind of "work" that takes place by deflection ... the "agency" of the melancholic is at once both a psychic and social instrument' (Butler 2000: 190).

But this also brings me to an aspect of Butler's own construction that I wish to differ from. To do so, let me offer here, as a first example, the kind of bodily movement that Winters marked as a 'gesture' in the passage quoted earlier, as a 'work of melancholia,' given that we do not read the 'gesture' itself as part of a process that secures 'normal mourning,' as opposed to a different state of grief. Given an example such as the movement of one's hand to touch a name, I am wary of marking it as 'agentive,' and so depart from Butler's notion of 'critical agency.' Similarly then, I think of this kind of work as conceptually separate from 'struggles' to testify or achieve and I do not, importantly, see the 'work of melancholia' as embedded in a habitus of virtues. That does not mean, of course, that the social life of one who lives with melancholia would not, necessarily, be bereft of struggles or achievements, virtues or even heroic agency, but it does mean that it most certainly need not. It is here that I want to visit yet another kind of 'work,' taken from Veena Das' writings, which Mahmood invokes as an inspiration before her ethnographic descriptions and analysis of two examples of what she has called 'docile agency' (Mahmood 2001: 217). While I do agree with Mahmood that one of Veena Das' important moves in that paper is to revalue Asha's (a survivor of the partition of India) 'passivity' as compared to Antigone's dramatic

defiance, I would suggest that her reading of Asha's 'doing little things' as not one of 'passive submission ... but of active engagement' (Mahmood 2001: 217) has to be located in relation to Das' central concerns with the 'everyday' and its relationship to the 'ordinary' and its interruptions, not within arguments about agency.¹⁸ In fact, in closing this set of engagements, I would say that, for me, the question is not one of 'resistance' versus 'compliance' or 'agentive' versus 'non-agentive' at all, but rather a more basic understanding of the texture of the lived lives of melancholics.

It would be important then, given this quest for understanding, in general, and the concerns of this paper in particular, to begin to fashion some kind of understanding of the relationship between the 'work of melancholia' and memory. I turn to this next.

Acts of memory

In a paper published in 1914, 'Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through' (RRWT), that is usually not juxtaposed with his 1917 paper, Freud considered what we might well understand as a parallel set of terms to mourning and melancholia (Freud 1958b). Aided here by Paul Ricour's very recent juxtaposition of the two texts, I will try to formulate a relationship between memory and 'work of melancholia' (Ricour 2004: 69–80, *passim*). It is possible to read RRWT as setting up a juxtaposition with what is 'remembered' and what is not. What is not remembered is understood in analysis as 'repeating' or 'acting out,' which can be simple or complex acts in the world, and which have a relationship to memories that are repressed.

[W]e may say that the patient does not remember [W] anything of what he has forgotten and repressed, but *acts* it out. He reproduces it, not as a memory but as an action; he *repeats* it, without of course, knowing that he is repeating it. (Freud 1958b: 150, emphasis in original)

I am struck, of course, by a parallel formulation of the 1917 text, that a melancholic does not know, precisely, what has been lost in the lost object, but only that it has been lost. Following, to some extent, Ricour's recent reading then, I think it is plausible to propose a juxtaposition on the one hand between the work of mourning and the work of remembering, and melancholia and repetition/acting out on the other. If such a juxtaposition were thought through in relation, then, to the blurred boundary of 'work' in relation to melancholia, as I have proposed, then such a boundary could be blurred, in turn, in relation to 'repeating' or 'acting out' as well. As such, 'the work of melancholia' could include 'acts of memory,' as it were: 'actions' that are reproducing what is forgotten and repressed, which are distinct from the 'work of recollection.' This then might be a richer way of understanding the touching of the names of dead on a memorial, or praying within a mosque that is the marked site of a massacre that one has lived through.

It is my submission that the life worlds of those who have survived extreme violations are not coherent, morally settled or calm ones; they are filled with demons, betrayals and cowardice, that may never be explicitly remembered or may flash through memory in different moments, or only be dreamt. Glimmers of such accounts emerge in fieldwork, but they rarely – given the very nature of that encounter, and of course, repression itself – go beyond a glimmer. These are memories that can hardly be thought, that can hardly be remembered, and never really memorialized, because they are horrible. This is not a point easily made or easily conveyed, but in my 'experience' – which I take to be a transaction between disciplinary experience and personal experience – it is clear (Jeganathan 2005).

This is often the life world of a 'traumatized subject.' It is possible, I have suggested, to grapple with such a subject's inhabitation of the world through the construct of the 'work of melancholia.' In the landscape of this world, I submit, are 'the ruins of truths' so carefully recorded, secured and stabilized by Truth Commissions and attendant memorials.

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Notes

1. As an aside, my argument is not really concerned at all with claims that the truth of such commissions are warped, because of issues with their protocols, terms of reference or the definitions of crimes. Such arguments, however, are undoubtedly important: see, for example, Mahmood Mamdani (2000).
2. This has been presented as an evolving account in the ongoing seminar, 'Signs of Crisis,' at the Department of Anthropology, Harvard University, in October 2003; as the keynote address to the Institute of Postcolonial Studies, University of Munich in June 2004; and at a meeting of the postnational collective, held at the Institute for Economic Growth, Delhi in July 2005, and at the Friday Colloquium, Department of Sociology, Delhi School of Economics, in September, 2006.
3. There are additional, and even more recent observations, that can be adduced here. For example, Ruth Leys notes a similar trend as she sets the terms of her magisterial genealogy of trauma, characterizing Paula Jones' (attorney's) invocation of Jones' supposed trauma, in an attempt to secure the truthfulness of her testimony against William J. Clinton as constructing 'trauma' as 'debasement currency' (Leys 2000: 2).
4. I think this can be taken for granted, without argument. But see Steven Shapin's *The Scientific Revolution* (1996: 52–4), for an accessible account of this shift in understandings of what 'experiences' produce 'truth.'
5. I am suggesting that this is a genealogy of the condition of possibility of the 'truth' of 'traumatized' testimony, not a necessarily causal link.
6. On the importance of Caruth, and a critique, see Leys (2000: 266–297).
7. I owe this concept to David Scott from multiple conversations.
8. For an elaboration, see Jeganathan (2009). There is a remarkable intersection between this argument about location in Sri Lanka, and Kuan-Hsing Chen's formulation of Taiwan as a 'melancholy (yu-men)' and 'anxious home,' which I only read recently. See Kuan-Hsing Chen (2002: 246).
9. Mahmood does not, to her great credit, universalize her conception of agency, and the distance I mark here does not, I should underline, constitute a critique of her work in general.
10. I have invited the willing reader to share in my difficulties in a previous essay: 'Disco-very: anthropology, nationalist thought, Thamotheerampillai Shanaathanan, and an uncertain descent into the ordinary' (Jeganathan 2004).
11. 'Sri Lanka' itself is a curious proper name that marks the triumph of a particular nationalist politics. Ceylon is a colonial name, the loss of which has never been fully understood.
12. GOSL and LTTE returned to war in earnest in 2006, and by the end of May 2009, GOSL had destroyed the LTTE's conventional military capacity. The ethnographic landscape is described as during field work.
13. What might be called the 'rise' of Muslim nationalism in Eastern Sri Lanka has attracted growing scholarly attention. See for example, M.A. Nahuman's *Sri Lankan Muslims* (2007) and Denis Macgilvray's *Crucible of Conflict* (2008), which is a product of a venerable Euro-American anthropological tradition that goes back to Edmund Leach and Nur Yalman.
14. Winter's citation is to Sigmund Freud, 'Mourning and melancholia,' in *Collected Papers* (Freud 1950). I use the text from the *Standard Edition* (Freud 1958a).
15. This seems to be a well received view. For example, Garton Ash's preface is quoted approvingly by Kimberly Lanegran (2005: 116) and her own offering seems to echo his: 'Selective forgetting is often necessary if victimized individuals or societies are to free themselves from their pasts and move into the future' (Lanegran 2005: 113).
16. The link between 'mourning' and 'forgetting' has attracted the attention of critical scholars in other contexts. See – for sensitive and theoretically acute accounts, which point to governmentally catalyzed 'forgetting' of a massive 1948 massacre in Korea – Kim (2000); and Kuan-Hsing Chen on the 'im/possible' 'reconciliation' of the great lived national narratives of Taiwan, those of the Cold-War and Colonization, given 'repressed historical memory' (Chen 2002: 240).

17. See, for example, Stephen Greenblatt (2004: 288–322).
18. Mahmood's citations are to a mss. copy of Das' paper, 'The act of witnessing.' This paper has now been published twice, in two versions; my citation is to the second, in Das' *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary* (2007: 68); the passage cited by Mahmood seems intact. Das' conception of the 'ordinary' is influenced by Wittgenstein and Cavell, and is described in her words as such: 'I [locate] ... the unknowability of the world and hence one's self in it in the *ordinary* – for instance in interactions around witchcraft accusations among the Azande that interrupt the ordinary but are still part of the everyday' (Das 2007: 7, emphasis in original).

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