

ON HISTORICAL INJUSTICE AND THE ART OF FORGETTING¹

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ABSTRACT

This article asks whether it is responsible to introduce and/or cultivate the language of forgetting against the backdrop of South Africa's colonial and apartheid past. In writings originating from contexts permeated by memories of historical injustice, the call, and more specifically the duty, to remember and the implied need to fight against forgetting are rightfully emphasised. But how are we to evaluate what some scholars see as a discursive shift from 'memory' to 'forgetting' in memory studies? With this question in mind, this article first considers some possible arguments for giving greater prominence to the notion of forgetting in our memory discourse. This is followed by a section that reiterates the 'critique of forgetting', drawing also on some examples from 20th century South African political and church history. In the final section, the article considers, in conversation with Paul Ricoeur, whether we should view the relationship between an art of memory and an art of forgetting as symmetrical or asymmetrical.

Keywords: memory, forgetting, justice, Ricoeur

THE ART OF MEMORY

Around 500 B.C.E. in Greece, or so the story goes, a celebration was held to honour a boxer named Skopas. The poet Simonides of Keos was asked to deliver an ode to commemorate the athlete's victory. Skopas was not pleased with Simonides' speech, though, since he only devoted one third of the speech to praising him, while the other two thirds celebrated the twin divinities Castor and Pollux. Skopas therefore felt that Simonides deserved only one third of the honorarium. After delivering his song of praise, Simonides was unexpectedly called outside by a messenger, who said that two young men were waiting for him there. At the moment when Simonides exited the banquet hall, the roof of the building suddenly collapsed and the host and all his guests were killed and buried in the rubble.

The Latin rhetoricians Cicero and Quintilian offer a continuation of this story by noting that after the catastrophe the relatives tried to identify their loved ones, but without any success, as the corpses had been disfigured beyond recognition. Simonides, however, was able to reconstruct the building in his mind and remembered the places

where everybody sat. Because of Simonides' pictorial memory he was able to identify the victims on the basis of their location in the banquet hall. Hence the name of Simonides is often associated – together with this founding myth that links memory to 'places' (Greek *topoi*, Latin *loci*) – with the so-called art of memory (*ars memoriae*). As Harald Weinrich, on whose account of the story I draw here, has noted in his impressive book *Lethe: The art and critique of forgetting*: 'In the ancient and medieval art of memory... memory is fundamentally spatialized' (Weinrich 2004: 10).

This 'art of memory' has captivated people throughout the ages and we have fascinating descriptions of how it has functioned from, for instance, the time of the ancient Greeks until the Renaissance. Francis Yates's book *The art of memory* is a classic work in this regard, and it traces how a memory system (that linked memory to 'places') passed from the Greeks and the Romans into the European tradition, and particularly how it took form during the Renaissance in the thought of Giordano Bruno (Yates 1992; cf. Samuel 1994: xii–xi). And a recent bestselling book by Joshua Foer entitled *Moonwalking with Einstein: The art and science of remembering everything* offers a modern-day investigation into our capacity to remember (Foer 2011).

We also find vestiges of the spatialised art of memory in Augustine's famous engagement with memory in *The confessions* (10.8.12). Augustine writes, for instance, about the 'vast mansions of memory, where are treasured innumerable images',² as well as about the ability of memory to bring things to the surface when they are summoned: 'The huge repository of the memory, with its secret and unimaginable caverns, welcomes and keeps all these things, to be recalled and brought out for use when needed' (Augustine 1997: 244, 245). Therefore Augustine marvels: 'This faculty of memory is a great one, O my God, exceedingly great, a vast, infinite recess. Who can plumb its depth?' (Augustine 1997: 246). Augustine even marvels at the fact that one can remember that one has forgotten something.

In Augustine, therefore, something of the spirit of the ancient art of memory is recognisable, albeit that he develops his views on memory in theological language. In this article I would like to focus not so much on the art of memory (*ars memoriae*), but rather ask heuristically with scholars like Harald Weinrich and Paul Ricoeur whether we can or should also speak of an art of forgetting (*ars oblivionis*).³ At the outset of such an undertaking I want to emphasise the importance of not placing this question, and the discursive world that it opens up, merely on an abstract level where it is dislocated from specific historical and social contexts. Therefore this article will consider the question of whether it is responsible to introduce and/or cultivate the language of forgetting against the backdrop of the discourses on what a responsible engagement with South Africa's colonial and apartheid past entails.

Any attempt to create space for positive claims regarding the art of forgetting should also take into account the moral and religious significance of memory. In writings originating from contexts permeated by memories of historical injustice, the call, and more specifically the duty, to remember and the implied need to fight against forgetting are rightfully emphasised.

The plea for an ‘art of forgetting’ should also take into account that memory is a powerful religious concept, and religions like Judaism and Christianity are often described as ‘memory religions’ in light of the way these religions are ‘bound by rituals of commemorations’. (cf. Signer 2001: ix). In his classic book *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* Yosef Yerushalmi summarises the centrality of memory for Judaism:

Ancient Israel knows what God has done in history. And if that is so, then memory has become crucial to its faith and, ultimately, to its very existence. Only in Israel and nowhere else is the injunction to remember felt as a religious imperative to an entire people. Its reverberations are everywhere, but they reach a crescendo in the Deuteronomic history and the prophets. ‘Remember the days of old, consider the years of ages past’ (Dt 32:7). ‘Remember these things, O Jacob, for you, O Israel, are my servant; I have fashioned you, you are my servant; O Israel, never forget Me’ (Is 44:21). ‘Remember what Amalek did to you’ (Dt 25:17). ‘O My people remember now what Balak king of Moab plotted against you’ (Mi 6:5). And with hammering insistence: Remember that you were a slave in Egypt...(Yerushalmi 1996: 9, 10).

Or in the words of the Holocaust survivor and Nobel Peace Prize winner Elie Wiesel: ‘Remember...No other Biblical Commandment is as persistent. Jews live and grow under the sign of memory...To be Jewish is to remember – to claim our right to memory as well as our duty to keep it alive’ (Wiesel 1990: 9, 10).

Given Christianity’s Jewish roots it is not surprising that the concept of memory also lies at the heart of the Christian tradition. In Luke 22: 19 we read that Jesus took a loaf of bread, broke it and gave it to the apostles, saying in the context of this Passover meal on the night that he was betrayed: ‘This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ Throughout the ages Christians have celebrated the Lord’s Supper as a meal of remembrance, recalling the passion of their risen and living Lord. Memory is thus a central theological notion in Christianity, and Christianity too can rightly be described as a memory religion, as is evident in its forms of worship (Cf. Marksches and Wolf 2010: 15).

Given the fact that memory is such a central ethical and religious concept, one might rightly ask whether we can speak – also with theological integrity – of an art or even a duty of forgetting. One reason why it is nevertheless important to consider this question in our academic discourse has to do with the fact that some scholars have called attention to a growing emphasis in memory studies on the notion of forgetting. Anne Whitehead, for instance, mentions how the proliferation of scenes of public repentance, forgiveness, apology, or confession, as well as the institution of a number of Truth Commissions, has led to a growing public interest in restorative justice and the need to promote healing and reconciliation in post-conflict contexts. These developments ‘suggest that a discursive shift is beginning to take place from memory to forgetting’ (Whitehead 2009: 154). Given the possibility of such a discursive shift, the need for a responsible discourse on forgetting – also in the South African context – seems to be of paramount importance. With this in mind, this article first considers some possible arguments for giving greater prominence to the notion of forgetting in our memory discourse. This is followed by

a section that reiterates the ‘critique of forgetting’, drawing also on some examples from twentieth-century South African political and church history. In the final section I consider, in conversation with Paul Ricoeur, whether we should view the relationship between an art of memory and an art of forgetting as symmetrical or asymmetrical.

THE ART OF FORGETTING?

Given the powerful moral and theological claims that can be made as part of an ode to memory, the odds seem to be against any attempt to speak responsibly of an ‘art of forgetting’.⁴ Yet there also exists something like a cultural history of forgetting, outlined so brilliantly by Harald Weinrich in his book *Lethe: The art and critique of forgetting*. Among the Greeks, Lethe is the goddess opposed to the goddess of memory and mother of the muses, Mnemosyne. But above all Lethe is the name of an underworld river that confers forgetfulness on the souls of the dead. In these soft-flowing waters ‘the hard contours of the remembrance of reality are dissolved and, so to speak, *liquidated*’ (Weinrich 2004:6). Forgetting, symbolised by Lethe, the meandering stream of forgetfulness, is the subject of Weinrich’s book and in the genealogy that he offers – which draws on a wide array of poets, writers and scholars – the close proximity of the concepts of memory and forgetting is clear from the outset.

In some sense one can say that the plea for memory is only possible because of the reality of forgetting. Forgetting is inevitable and therefore memory and forgetting are tightly interwoven. The novelist Milan Kundera even writes: ‘Remembering is not the negative of forgetting. Remembering is a form of forgetting’ (Kundera 1995: 128). And in his impressive and extensive book *Memory, history, forgetting* Paul Ricoeur not only discusses the intricate relation between memory and history, but also places this discussion within the broader context of the need for hermeneutical reflection on our vulnerable historical condition, a condition that includes the reality of forgetting (cf. Ricoeur 2004). Because we are ‘timeful’ beings, we forget. This is part of what Ricoeur calls elsewhere ‘the sorrow of finitude’ (Ricoeur 1966: 447–448; 2004: 440). With the passage of time and the reality of aging, our memories fade or become distorted. Forgetting therefore challenges the reliability of memory,⁵ albeit that the significant role of memory (and history) should not be disregarded in the light of the vulnerability of our historical condition. The important point is that the phenomenon of forgetting is part and parcel of any engagement with the equivocal and slippery notion of memory, and that ‘memory defines itself, at least in the first instance, as a struggle against forgetting’ (Ricoeur 2004: 413). But one can also further ask whether forgetting is in every aspect the enemy of memory, and whether memory must not enter into some kind of negotiation process with forgetting, ‘groping to find the right measure in its balance with forgetting’ (Ricoeur 2004: 413).

If we do not view forgetting merely as the enemy of memory, can and should we make a plea for a positive affirmation of the notion of forgetting in our moral and theological discourse? And if so, in what way can we speak of an art of forgetting

alongside an art of memory? Can we even speak of a duty to forget in a similar way that we speak of a duty to remember?

Several arguments, I think, can be put forward in defence of ‘an art of forgetting’. A first possible response against a total demonisation of forgetting could be to call attention to the fact that our lives would be unbearable if we were to remember everything. We know the stories of persons who have lost their memory and how they had to painfully reconstruct everything, or of people who remembered selectively, like the book dealer from Milan who only remembered what he read in books in Umberto Eco’s wonderful novel *The mysterious flame of Queen Loana* (Eco 2005). But the literary imagination also produced works such as Jorge Luis Borges’ enigmatic short story ‘Funes the Memorious’ (*Funes el memorioso*). Funes’ problem was not that he forgot things, but rather that he did not forget anything; his memory was infallible, storing everything. Hence Funes’s remark: ‘My memory, sir, is like a garbage heap’ (Borges 1962: 92). It was therefore very difficult for him to sleep, given all the memories in his head. Towards the end of the story, we read the following about Funes:

With no effort, he had learned English, French, Portuguese and Latin. I suspect, however, that he was not very capable of thought. To think is to forget differences, generalize, make abstractions. In the teeming world of Funes, there were only details, almost immediate in their presence (Borges 1962: 94).

To remember everything will indeed make life unbearable and one can rightly argue that there is some grace in forgetting. Therefore one can argue that forgetting is not only unavoidable, but also, in some sense at least, desirable. In his famous essay *On the uses and disadvantages of history for life* (1874) Friedrich Nietzsche too considers the extreme example of a man who did not possess the power of forgetting. Such a man, argues Nietzsche, would lose himself in the stream of becoming and will not be able to act. Therefore Nietzsche remarks: ‘Forgetting is essential to action of any kind, just as not only light but also darkness too is essential for the life of anything organic’ (1983: 62). In this essay Nietzsche targets the historicism of his day, and makes a claim for the value of living ‘unhistorically’, that is, unburdened by the pressures of the past: ‘Man... braces himself against the great and ever greater pressure of the past: it pushes him down or bends him sideways, it encumbers his step as a dark, invisible burden’ (1983: 61). For Nietzsche it is possible to live almost without memory (he uses the example of grazing cattle in this regard), but that it is impossible to live without forgetting. Therefore his claim: ‘there is a degree of sleeplessness, of rumination, of historical sense, which is harmful and ultimately fatal to the living thing, whether this living thing be a man or a people or a culture’ (1983: 62). For Nietzsche the unhistorical and the historical are necessary in equal measure to ensure the health (and happiness) of an individual, a people, and a culture.

A first possible argument in favour of forgetting thus relates to the fact that too much memory of the past will make life unbearable, and that it will have an unhealthy impact

on our life and happiness. A second possible argument in defence of a more positive assessment of forgetting relates to some abuses of memory in the light of experiences of trauma. Much has been written on the relationship between memory and trauma, and on the need to work through what Ricoeur has called blocked or wounded memory.⁶ Through a healthy therapeutic engagement with our memories, we can experience some healing of our memories. In addition, one can also argue that memory protects victims from further violence. In his book *The end of memory: Remembering rightly in a violent world* Miroslav Volf quotes the remark by Elie Wiesel that the memory of evil will serve as a shield against evil, and that the memory of death will serve as a shield against death. By exposing evil (through memory) one can deter its perpetration. But Volf also highlights that even this protective function of memory can become problematic:

As victims seek to protect themselves they are not immune to becoming perpetrators...The memory of their own persecution makes them see dangers lurking even where there are none; it leads them to exaggerate dangers that do exist and overreact with excessive violence or inappropriate preventive measures so as to ensure their own safety. Victims will often *become* perpetrators *on account of* their memories. It is *because they remember* past victimization that they feel justified in committing present violence...So easily does the protective shield of memory morph into the sword of violence (Volf 2006: 32, 33).

The memories of trauma and pain, one can therefore say, are not always on the side of peace and protection, but can also motivate aggressive and violent acts of retaliation and release new oppressive forces. Some may argue that this possibility points towards the need for some form of forgetting to counter destructive memory.

A third possible argument in defence of forgetting relates specifically to the abuses of memory that have created manipulative forms of commemoration and memorialisation, leading some theorists to bemoan that fact that we are not only suffering from too little memory but also from too much memory. In the *Preface to Memory, history, forgetting* Ricoeur noted that one of his reasons for writing the book had to do with the fact that he was troubled 'by the unsettling spectacle offered by an excess of memory here, and an excess of forgetting elsewhere, to say nothing of the influence of commemorations and abuses of memory – and of forgetting' (2004: xv). And indeed it seems to be the case that we are suffering in our modern world from either too much memory or too little memory. Maybe we can say more accurately that the problem is not simply that there is too much memory, 'but that there is too much memory of the wrong sort' (Bluhstein 2008: 17). Memory is not only selective, but it is often manipulated in the light of projects of identity construction and power consolidation or accumulation, often without the necessary sensitivity to ideological distortions. Memorials and commemorations are also often highly contested events and spaces. It can be argued that these expressions of memory fuel polarisation and should therefore have been minimised. In addition, the argument can also be put forward that our current cultural capitalistic consumer-driven context is more conducive to amnesia than memory. As Paul Connerton has argued persuasively in his book *How modernity forgets*:

The increased scale of human settlement, the production of speed, and the repeated intentional destruction of the built environment, generated a diffuse yet all-encompassing and powerful cultural amnesia and they are in their turn generated by the capitalist process of production. Modernity...produces cultural amnesia not by accident but intrinsically and necessarily. Forgetting is built into the capitalist process of production itself, incorporated in the bodily experience of life-spaces (2009: 125).

The cultural air that we breathe, one can say, strengthens habits of forgetting, and perhaps, some might say, it is better to embrace this reality in order to prosper in our fast-paced consumerist society, and not allow habits of memory to slow us down and leave us less relevant and effective in the present world with its specific demands and opportunities.

One can also argue, fourthly, that it is possible to construct a theological argument as part of the plea for a more affirmative attitude towards forgetting. What about ‘forgive and forget’? Don’t we read in the Bible, in Jeremiah 31: 34, that the Lord declares: ‘For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more’? And one can indeed recall many examples from the Jewish and Christian tradition that seem to affirm that complete forgiveness involves some sense of forgetting.⁷ It should be noted, though, that attempts to draw on the Jewish and Christian tradition to make some sort of link between forgiveness and forgetting is not unproblematic and that the statement ‘forgive and forget’ is often contested (cf. Hauerwas 2000: 139–144).

THE CRITIQUE OF FORGETTING

It is possible, therefore, to make an argument (even a moral and theological argument) for the notion of forgetting in our discourse about a responsible engagement with the past. However, these attempts will, and – in my view – should, always be heard against the backdrop of the voices that critique the language of forgetting.

I have already referred to the strong appeal that we have a duty to remember in the light of experiences of historical injustices. Within the context of, for instance, the horror of the Holocaust or the brutality of apartheid, the language of forgetting seems to be irresponsible and dangerous. Forgetting is equated not with healing, but with death. Therefore Elie Wiesel writes in his autobiography *All rivers run to the sea*:

Memory is a passion no less powerful than love. What does it mean to remember? It is to live in more than one world, to prevent the past from fading and to call upon the future to illuminate it. It is to revive fragments of existence, to rescue lost beings, to cast harsh light on faces and events, to drive back the sands that cover the surface of things, to combat oblivion and to reject death (1994: 150).

In post-apartheid South Africa there is also a proliferation of works that engage directly or indirectly with the notion of memory, often with reference to the work of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Again the plea is often, though not always exclusively, on the duty or imperative to remember the past.

The duty to remember, and even not to ‘forgive and forget’, also resonates in some Afrikaner literature, sermons and speeches that took shape in the aftermath of the Anglo-Boer War (or the South African War). One is reminded in this regard of the Afrikaans poet Totius’ famous poem *Vergewe en vergeet* (‘Forgive and forget’). Or let me quote from a sermon by Reverend C. R. Kotzé, a ‘liberation *volk*-theologian’ who was wounded during the war and was a prisoner of war on St. Helena. Some of his sermons have been collected in a book entitled *Die Bybel en ons volkstryd* (*The Bible and our people’s struggle*). A title of one of these sermons even has a post-colonial ring to it: ‘*God maak die nasies en die Duiwel die empire*’ (‘God creates the nations, and the Devil creates the empire’). And in 1946, in the context of the growing Afrikaner nationalism, he delivered a sermon that was also broadcast on the radio, with the title *Vra na die ou paaie* (‘Ask for the ancient paths’), with Jeremiah 6: 16 as focus text. In this context he makes a plea for memory:

But exactly because we want to look forward, we ought sometimes to look back! The highest building must have its foundations. The tree cannot live without its roots. The nation cannot exist without its history. To forgive and forget is folly. It is pagan language. God is love and he does not forgive if there is no remorse and confession. And no people (*volk*), no Christian, dare to forget, ever... If you want to go forward in a healthy and strong way, then you must look back into history. Ask for the ancient paths (Kotzé 1955: 78, 79, my translation).

In a collection of sermons of Reverend G. J. J. Boshoff (published in 1959) we find similar ideas. One of the sermons is on *Die Afrikaner mag nooit vergeet nie!* (‘The Afrikaner may never forget’). This sermon was preached on 10 October 1957 at the Turffonteinse Konsentrasiekampkerkhof after Oumatjie Stofberg unveiled the restored monument after it had been vandalised:

On this place we forget nothing or nobody. Not our God. Not our friend. Not our enemy... A people (*volk*) that has had concentration camps may never forget. On these graves the grass of forgetfulness never grows. Sadly, however, there are Afrikaners who want to forget so easily that they replace the grass with khaki bush (Boshoff 1959: 107, 108, my translation).

These sermons illustrate the resistance to the language of ‘forgive and forget’ in some Afrikaner church circles. In addition, we see how the South African War and the concentration camps functioned as ‘sites of memory’ (*lieux de mémoire*),⁸ and that these acts of memory became part of specific constructions of the past.

These few sermon illustrations remind us that the call to remember (and the critique of forgetting) is not just about reconstructing the past faithfully, but that it functions in a certain way to construct identity in the present. Also in more recent discourse on memory, in the wake of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, attention is often called to the way in which memory is negotiated and produced in South Africa.⁹ On the one hand, there is a critique of forgetting (especially of forgetting the pain and suffering caused to the victims), while on the other hand, there is also a sense, in some circles at

least, of the complexity and contestation involved in claiming or reclaiming memory. Verne Harris puts it well in a chapter on ‘Contesting, remembering and forgetting: The archive of South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission’, republished in his book *Archives and justice: A South African perspective*:

Memory is never a faithful reflection of process, of ‘reality’. It is shaped, reshaped, figured, configured by the dance of imagination. So that beyond the dynamics of remembering and forgetting, a more profound characterization of struggles represented in social memory is one of narrative against narrative, story against story (Harris 2007: 289).¹⁰

The important point is that we should be aware of the complex dynamics of processes of remembering and forgetting, and that we should even guard against treating memory and forgetting as binary oppositions. Yet, the questions still linger: How are we to view the relationship between memory and forgetting? Is this relationship symmetrical or asymmetrical? And can we speak with integrity of a duty to forget?

TOWARDS A CULTURE OF JUST MEMORY

In the Introduction to this article I referred to the ‘art of memory’ (*ars memoriae*) and asked the question whether one can also speak of a comparable art of forgetting (*ars oblivionis*). If one takes the art of forgetting in its strict sense, as a type of (letha) technique, this art would have to rest, as Paul Ricoeur has noted, ‘on a rhetoric of extinction...the contrary of making an archive’ (2004: 504). But this would be a barbarous dream. Ricoeur, makes, however, some space for forgetting, but for him an *ars oblivionis* (understood in a broader sense) could not constitute an order distinct from memory. ‘It can only arrange itself under the optative mood of a happy memory. It would simply add a gracious note to the work of memory and the work of mourning’ (2004: 505). This emphasis is, in my view, very important. Put differently: an art of forgetting – if it is to find its rightful place in our discourse – *can only find its place on the other side of a critique of forgetting and in close proximity to memory*. It is therefore the argument of this article that the language of forgetting should be used with the necessary reserve. Yet one should also be attentive to the possible harmful ideological impulses that can hide in a categorical rejection of any attempt to carve out space for a qualified defence of forgetting in all its ambiguity and complexity. Dirkie Smit, writing from a theological perspective with the Christian tradition in mind, puts it well:

And perhaps the Christian tradition can remind societies that ‘*forgetting*’ is an ambiguous matter. There is indeed a *Christian instruction not to forget*. The Christian church depends upon this, for many reasons. One is that we must learn from the past, so that it ‘will never happen again’. Yet there is *also a Christian instruction to forget*. Forgetting can also be a moral activity. The wonder of the message of the gospel for Christians is precisely that God removes our sins from us as far as the east is removed from the west and never thinks of them. It is one thing to say: we forgive, but we cannot forget. It is another to say: we forgive, but we shall never, we may never, we never wish to, we will never forget. The Christian tradition is ultimately based on

the trust that God-in-Christ does not speak to the world like that, and calls us to speak and live accordingly (Smit 1996: 116).

We should indeed affirm that forgetting can be a moral activity and that we should guard against a fanatical anti-forgetting stance that keep us captives of the past and robs memory of a future. This notwithstanding, I would nevertheless like to argue, with Paul Ricoeur, that there is not strict symmetry between the art of memory and the art of forgetting, and that the duty to remember and the duty to forget are not comparable, since ‘the duty to remember is a duty to teach, whereas the duty to forget is the duty to go beyond anger and hatred’ (Kearney & Dooley 199: 5–11). The challenge is to find a way between witnessing to the past through memory and some form of reconciling forgetting.¹¹

Ricoeur does leave some space for forgetting, but in the process he not only affirms the inseparable tie between memory and forgetting, but also the bond between these notions and justice:

Both memory and forgetting do, however, contribute in their respective ways to what Hannah Arendt called the continuation of action. It is necessary for the continuation of action that we retain the traces of events, that we be reconciled with the past, and that we divest ourselves of anger and hatred. Once again, justice is the horizon of both processes. Let us conclude by saying that at this point in our history we have to deal with the problem of evolving a culture of just memory (Kearney & Dooley 1999: 11).

In a culture of ‘just memory’ the emphasis should be on the duty to remember. The rhetoric of forgetting can have harmful consequences in contexts permeated with memories of historical injustice, and it might be more prudent to opt against the use of ‘forgetting’ in our discourse, or when we use it, to use it with the necessary nuance and differentiation. The language of ‘forgetting’ cannot be used as an alibi to forget or erase the past, since the past remains in the present; it can only be used and claimed with the healing motive of lifting the weight or the burden of the past.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Versions of this article was read at the Joint Conference of Academic Societies in the Fields of Religion and Theology held from 18–22 June 2012 in Pietermaritzburg, as well as at a conference that took place from 18–22 June 2013 at the Humboldt University in Berlin.
- 2 Quotations from Augustine are taken from the translation of Mary Boulding (1997).
- 3 Weinrich also calls attention to an anecdote, recounted by Cicero (*De Oratore* 2.86.352–354), of a meeting between Simonides and Themistocles in which the former offered to teach the latter the art of memory so that he might be able to remember everything. According to one version of the story, Themistocles replied ‘that he was not interested in the art of memory (*ars memoriae*) but rather was interested in the art of forgetting (*ars oblivionis*)’ (Weinrich 2004: 11).
- 4 For the sake of greater conceptual clarity, I can mention that this article uses the concept ‘the art of forgetting’ not merely in its narrow sense as a strict corollary to ‘an art of memory’ understood as a memory technique. The notion of an *ars memoriae* is often situated within the context of

- memorialisation (or what some scholars call artificial memory). We train our memories through techniques (such as linking memory to ‘places’) to remember things. This ‘art of memory’ suggests something of a voluntary control over our memory, but memory (as a multifaceted concept) is of course about more than this form of technique. In this article I will use the notion of an ‘art of memory’, as well as the concomitant notion of an ‘art of forgetting’, often more broadly than just in this technical sense. This paper also uses the notion of an ‘art of forgetting’ in a wider metaphorical sense as shorthand for a responsible integration of the notion of forgetting into our memory discourse.
- 5 Ricoeur writes: ‘Forgetting is the challenge par excellence put to memory’s aim of reliability’ (2004:414). However, Ricoeur also notes that ‘many memories, perhaps among the most precious, childhood memories, have not been definitely erased but simply rendered inaccessible, unavailable, which makes us say that one forgets less than one thinks or fears’ (2004: 416).
 - 6 Cf. Ricoeur 2004: 69–80. For some important perspectives on the relationship between memory and trauma engaging South African contexts, see also the essays by an interdisciplinary team of scholars collected in Goboda-Madikizela and Van der Merwe (2009). As the Preface notes, this collection ‘explores the relation between trauma and memory, and the complex, interconnected issues of trauma and narrative (testimonial and literary). It examines transgenerational trauma, memory as the basis for dialogue and reconciliation in divided societies, memorialisation and the changing role of memory in the aftermath of mass trauma, mourning and the potential of forgiveness to heal the enduring effects of mass trauma’ (2009: xi).
 - 7 Miroslav Volf (2006: 132–135) offers a sampling from the Jewish and Christian tradition in this regard, drawing in the process on Bible texts such as Jeremiah 31:34 and Psalm 51:9, as well as statements from Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine, John Calvin, Karl Rahner and Karl Barth.
 - 8 See Nora (1984–1992). For a translated text that gives a good description of Nora’s project, see Nora (1989).
 - 9 See, for instance, Nuttall and Coetzee (1998); Botman and Peterson (1996) and Diawara, Lategan & Rösen (2010).
 - 10 Harris writes further about the TRC archive: ‘This space, as with all archives, is always already one in which dynamics of remembering, forgetting, and imagining are at play. My argument is that this space should be made hospitable to contestation and that we should all be vigilant against impulses in it and around it to amnesia, erasure, secreting, and control’ (2007: 291).
 - 11 Cf. Liebsch (2010). See especially Liebsch’s essay ‘Bezeugte Vergangenheit oder versöhnendes Vergessen? Fruchtbarkeit und Fragwürdigkeit von Ricoeurs Rehabilitierung eines philosophischen Geschichtsdenkens’ (2010: 23–58), as well as Inga Römer’s essay ‘Eskapistisches Vergessen? Der Optativ des glücklichen Gedächtnisses bei Paul Ricoeur’ (2010: 292–310).

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