The Weathered Corrugations of His Face: A Performative Reflection on Nelson Mandela, Self, and the Call for Racial (Un)Becoming

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Abstract: On the occasion of the first anniversary of the death of Nelson Rolihlahla MANDELA, this self-exploratory narrative study utilizes a Butlerian performative theoretical framework to both uncover discursively regulated social practices as generative of raced identity ensconced in *belonging*, and the undoing of such identity through the redeployment of social practices predicated instead on a *Weltanschauung* of *becoming*. While the accountable subject of autoethnographic work is concomitantly problematized, fluid subjectivity is itself demonstrated as crucial to historical accountability. A resultant appeal for white South Africans to actively begin the work of defamiliarizing themselves with the sanitized dominant popular culture representation of the *peace icon*, this research ultimately calls for new existential reflection upon the *face* of Nelson MANDELA so as to begin uncovering its deeper historical significance, contemporary relevance, and the future ethical imperative it demands of those who come from a liminal position of, as J.M. COETZEE once wrote, "no longer European, not yet African" (1988, p.11). In short, it is argued that white South Africans need to move from a condition of *belonging* predicated on raced identity to one of transracial—and even interracial—African *becoming*.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction

Black footsteps cautiously trekking over white land—like the letters on this page. I was structured to *read* humans—to decode melanin—this way, too. A dualism of Calvinist proportions born from gun smoke at the Battle of Blood River (1838) where a covenant between white skin and the Almighty supposedly secured victory for a laager—or encampment—of 464 white settlers over a bloodthirsty throng of around 15,000 Zulu warriors—or so at least the story was told to us as children. The land was *ours* through divine predestination and we lived on it as a *white* light on a dark continent. *Europeans*—as we called ourselves—in Africa. Back then I felt part of something remarkable, even as a child. Our military troops defending the borders and keeping order in the violent black townships, our rugby team being excluded from the international arena, the beautiful, blistered landscape of our South African *platteland*, and our *flag* and anthem: insignia of

the fatherland in victory; wounds of the motherland in defeat. Daily as I walked, I saw, and what I saw I accepted as part of a pale skin experience that would also simultaneously come to shroud my worldview and auto-police my language and desire. However, at other times I recognized the veiled partition that separated the worlds of our color charged skins. Here, I came to be fascinated as much by the black faces peering out from the back windows of yellow SAP (South African Police) vans as by the authority of the uniforms of the white men seated in the front. And then, just before I turned thirteen, things changed. Ultimately, the implosion of structured privilege is the destruction of the illusion of a stable identity. [1]

On the afternoon of Sunday, February 11, 1990, a face emerged from the Atlantic horizon. A face with skin—dark, weathered skin—whose eyes spoke. This face assuaged our fears of a racial apocalypse—a reality that appeared inevitable at one point. In fact, quite unlike Walter BENJAMIN's (2005 [1974]) forlorn "Angel of History," Nelson MANDELA disrupted the flow of volatile and divisive semiotic (under)currents that emerged from South Africa's painful and wounded past. Now, in the shadow of his death, this exploratory narrative (CLANDININ, 2006; STEBBINS, 2001)—part auto-ethnography (DENZIN, 2013; ELLIS & BOCHNER, 2000)—seeks to both problematize my experiences, inner conflicts, contradictions, and desires of being a white, male, post-Apartheid South African as well as locate the possibility for the development of a transracial relationality rooted in the memory of Nelson MANDELA. Building on MAGUIRE's (2006) Bakhtinian dialogic theorization of autoethnography as the act of authoring as a creative answerability/responsibility that views a self as answerable not only to the social environment but also for the authoring of its responses, this study attempts to locate both the social as constitutive of "I" and "I" as constitutive of the social *ad infinitum*. Here, a Butlerian theoretical framework (BUTLER, 1990, 1993, 2004a, 2005) of performativity will be mapped over those social practices that have historically come to manufacture modes of raced identity and affiliation. While contemporary South African whiteness, post-1994, has been exorcized from its most graphic and evident racist features, it still largely exists as a cynical undercurrent that surfaces in discourse around *braaivleis* (barbecue) fires (VERWEY & QUAYLE, 2012) and in the media (STEYN, 2004; STEYN & FOSTER, 2008). Although BUTLER's (1990, 1993, 2004a, 2005) explication of the theory of performativity primarily occurs in relation to gender, it is quintessentially a theory of identity so that it can be creatively mapped over any affiliation-based configuration of the social, including race (see EHLERS, 2006). [2]

Ultimately, this study tenders that those who still find themselves in the nomadic position of "no longer European, not yet African" (COETZEE, 1988, p.11; see MATTHEWS, 2011; STEYN, 2001; VICE, 2010) behold the trajectories of what they have been called on to *become* within the weathered corrugations of the vulnerable *face* (LEVINAS, 1998) of Madiba—the clan name of MANDELA. However, contingent on such *becoming* (DELEUZE & GUATTARI, 1987) rests an ethical imperative for white South Africans to first *defamiliarize* (SHKLOVSKY, 1965 [1917]) the face of Nelson Rolihlahla MANDELA since, I will argue, we have become overfamiliar with his face, turning him into an icon (but only *him* hinting that many still view MANDELA as an exception to blackness). He is the *pariah* we

reframed as *messiah*. Yet, we need to look again and see his flesh—the vulnerable flesh of a face that continues to speak, *post mortem*. [3]

In the sections that follow, the notion of a reflexive, historical, accountable subject will be problematized prior to wrestling with the existential consequences of the experience of liminal identity positioning through narrative exploration. Later, an appropriate ethical response to the liminal experience of post-1994 South African whiteness will be sought through mapping an ethical reading of face over the historical person and legacy of Nelson MANDELA. [4]

2. The Problem of the Accountable Subject and Historical Accountability

In her work "Giving an Account of Oneself," Judith BUTLER (2005) problematizes both the idea of an independent, unitary subject and the supposed ability of such a subject to completely, coherently, and consistently narrate its origins. Instead, the subject is socially constituted so that whatever account it attempts to give of itself always simultaneously is in response to a prior set of social norms, conditions, and relations (p.8, p.21). In this sense we are never fully *free* to give an account of ourselves but instead do so relative to the social obligations and contexts within which we attempt to speak. For instance, I speak as a young white male in an age where a display of explicit racist behavior is out of vogue and in which the myth of a "post-racial" society predominates. Consequently, I am able to draw on certain socially constituted "freedoms"—denied to others—relative to my privileged positioning within a society (I currently live and study in the USA) where white heterosexual masculinity itself is regarded as normative while simultaneously also being somewhat constrained by contemporary society's ongoing denial that the racism now circulating its institutional veins is covert. [5]

Furthermore, on the basis of being socially constituted subjects, our social accounts are only ever partial since the very complexity of social constitution implies that our lives are an assemblage of that for which we often can devise no definitive story (p.40)—those events that constituted us, more often than not unconsciously, and yet at which we often were never present and over which we consequently exercised no direct control. So, what does it mean then to give an account of oneself? For one, it is not equivalent to merely telling a story or sharing an anecdote. Instead, to give an account of oneself is to recognize that the referent "I" has a causal relation to the suffering of others so that responsibility for one's actions is assumed through the very attempt to narrate (p.12). Of course, here objections that the absence of a humanist, Cartesian subject is tantamount to the ultimate loss of moral agency and accountability are quelled since our social constitution does not imply that we need to take up responsibility *per se*—it demands that we are already responsible as beings who are social and, by implication, relationally both mutually constituted and constituting. It is also, as it were, that we become responsible for events over which we had no control in the immediate moment that we recognize both these and our place in these, and ultimately recognize how the historical tides into which one often was often inadvertently swept up and in which one exercised a

performative, reproducing role have exerted gravity upon the life trajectories of others who suffered as a consequence. In other words, while "I" did not own a slave, lynch a black man, write Apartheid laws into the constitution, or devastate the corpses of murdered anti-Apartheid activists, I become responsible in the immediate moment that I become aware of the reality that I enjoyed human privileges at the expense of others who suffered humiliation and dehumanization. Hence, the awareness of an indirect culpability that secured direct privilege steers me towards the recognition of my responsibility. *To give an account of oneself in this regard is merely to make such recognition public.* Admittedly though, once again, the historical recognition that informs my account of self will itself be partial and incomplete since I am bound to speak in a discourse that is not the same as the time of my life (p.35) while simultaneously using a narrative structure superseded by a socially regulated structure of address (p.38). This inability of me to give an authoritative account of myself relative to the complex historical background from which I have emerged means that I am unable to provide a satisfactory explanation of my life or capture my identity in words, and that I am also sure to fail whenever I attempt to do so. For instance, that I reference Apartheid as an important constitutive historical component threaded throughout the subsequent permutations of my identity does not imply that I fully understand the dynamics behind the interplay between an ideology of white supremacy and identity. Yet, as BUTLER (pp.42-43) reminds us, such failed account is ultimately authentic in that the question of my being and becoming comes to be left open-ended. This is also true of those who attempt to give an account of themselves to me—I can never fully know them or the contextual fragments from which their accounts have been constructed. I can only, at best, respond by listening intently without expecting closure. Once again, it is this failure to narrate fully—this foreignness to ourselves—that indicates the way in which we are, from the start, ethically implicated in the lives of others. [6]

Additionally, giving an account of oneself is a kind of action that in turn implicates it as a means towards performing identity. BUTLER writes: "identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (1990, p.34). Hence, narration is not the expression of a prior identity but rather productive of it. And, precisely at this point my vulnerability comes to be exposed. The account I give is inextricably tied up with the identity it co-produces so that the acceptance or rejection of an account is tantamount to the acceptance or rejection of an identity as well: "no one can hear this; this one will surely understand this; I will be refused here, misunderstood there, judged, dismissed, accepted, or embraced" (BUTLER, 2005, p.67). My account will work upon an audience and their response, in turn, will work upon my identity and the forms of my future accountability. This vulnerability *is* the means through which I become human.

> "[W]e must recognize that ethics requires us to risk ourselves precisely at moments of unknowingness, when what forms us diverges from what lies before us, when our willingness to become undone in relation to others constitutes our chance of becoming human. To be undone by another is a primary necessity, an anguish, to be sure, but also a chance—to be addressed, claimed, bound to what is not me, but also

to be moved, to be prompted to act, to address myself elsewhere, and so to vacate the self-sufficient 'I' as a kind of possession" (p.136). [7]

In giving an account, as I will attempt to do hereafter—while admittedly not able to exercise control over how I will be received—I acknowledge a degree of agency over the uncertain course of my human becoming. While recognition of such becoming may be constrained by the coercive effects of a particular *regime of truth* (FOUCAULT, 1995), the potential for recognition is not foreclosed. As BUTLER points out: "sometimes calling into question the regime of truth by which my own truth is established is motivated by the desire to recognize another or be recognized by one" (2005, p.24). Hence, the very regime of truth that threatens me with unrecognizability constitutes the very possibility of my becoming something other—of potentially experiencing a reconfiguration of social relationships in which I had not participated before. "For those who are still looking to become possible, possibility is a necessity" (BUTLER, 2004a, p.31). [8]

3. Giving an Account of "(My)Self" Circa 2014

Even on the best days my academic peers have leveled the accusation on me that I place too much weight on *structure*, and here in particular I am referring to the idea that the social—as a systemic linguistic and cultural construct—is heavily structured and that such structure ultimately troubles the unbounded exercise of agency. Too BOURDIEU; too old-FOUCAULT, they remark. I agree with them. One cannot be a white South African male—who is old enough to remember the structure of compulsory military cadet training in public school and on *veld school* [bush school] trips as well as young enough to remember being left highly impressed upon first perceiving the way in which the South African rap/rave crew, Die Antwoord, *fuck* with structures in their music videos—and not be all too aware of the reality of structure. I was born into a preexisting social field that began structuring my identity as a *racial* identity long before I could ever speak (*a racial pejorative*) the way we used to say it in Bloemfontein and the southern suburbs of Johannesburg. Here we believed things like: *If blacks ever revolt they are going to slit our throats. Selina, our black housemaid, is so kind and humble and so different from other blacks who don't appreciate anything. It's good when a cop dishes out a good sjamboking* [akin to *whipping*]—*he obviously deserved it.* This was *life as it is* back then. [9]

BOURDIEU (1990, 1991) writes of a *habitus*—a set of durable, inculcated, unconscious dispositions—that comes to structure social action *en masse* through the daily reproduction of *life as it is*. Such habitus remains invisible to the subject since it is ontologically concealed through the reiteration of social practices on a large scale via linguistic and cultural socialization and interaction.

> "The habitus is a set of dispositions which incline agents to act and react in certain ways. The dispositions generate practices, perceptions and attitudes which are 'regular' without being consciously co-ordinated or governed by any 'rule' ... The dispositions produced thereby are also structured in the sense that they unavoidably

reflect the social conditions within which they were acquired" (BOURDIEU, 1991, p.12). [10]

Here, *the social conditions within which they* (dispositions) *were acquired* should be understood as arising from a cultural process of *inculcation* (ibid.)—the means whereby an idea is impressed upon the mind of the subject through frequent reinforcement. The effect of *inculcation*—and the symbolic violence/domination which often arises from it (pp.51-52)—is however not a given either. Rather,

"The 'choices' of the habitus ... are accomplished without consciousness or constraint, by virtue of the dispositions which, although they are unquestionably the product of social determinisms, are also constituted outside the spheres of consciousness and constraint. The propensity to reduce the search for causes to a search for responsibilities makes it impossible to see that intimidation, a symbolic violence which is not aware of what it is ... can only be exerted on a person predisposed (in his [her] habitus) to feel it, whereas others will ignore it" (p.51). [11]

BOURDIEU adds that these social conditions of production, which eventually dictate the dominant social structure, operate through the power of suggestion which is exerted through things and persons. Instead of telling the subject what it must do, these social conditions of production tell the subject *what it is*, leading the subject to become "what he [she] has to be" (p.52). The *suggestion* itself, in turn, need not be deliberate or uttered making it all the more absolute and undisputed for not having to be stated. And yet, the ideological nature of this institutionalized means of mass inculcation should not be conceived of as being something abstract—it is rooted in the material. Here, it should be remembered that people embody ideology and are the material means whereby ideology comes to be performed/enacted through the very script of ideology. [12]

Perhaps, then, the social equation of *structure* figures so heavily upon me—the daily consciousness of my thought and emotion—precisely because I have been unable to extract myself as it were from the very paradigm that so appalls me: the paradigm of the *old* South Africa. Too young—by one year—at the time of the tumultuous political transition to have cast a vote either *for* or *against*, and old enough so as to be all too aware of that inculcated signifier I feel as much recognized by as mysteriously through which I appear so recognizable to myself: *white*. Of course, here, I am certainly not framing myself as *victim*. Rather, I stand as one uncertain of how to strip myself of that pale signifier (white skin) for which there ultimately should not exist an ontological signified (privilege predicated on phenotype) . The representational category of race is, after all, largely a social construction borne of rapacious historical efficacy—one reinforced through the action-oriented mechanisms of subjective performativity. And yet, to merely pass off the tenacious reoccurrence of race as "institutional" is to ignore that the institutional is generated through daily subjective participation in structures that produce the illusion of a coherent identity—a sense of *belonging* that does not require a *becoming*. In this sense, *race is deeply personal*. One does not simply *undo* race, for even if one were to break with racist habit and articulation, one is still recognized as being *of* a race. And to adopt a DELEUZO-GUATTAREAN

(1987) stance that calls for abandoning the signifier does not resolve the tension that for a large number of people *belonging* to the realm of signification trumps the unsettling identity crisis that *becoming* inevitably requires. For this very reason it is easier for our privileged societies to falsely console themselves with the idea of the "post-racial" rather than to face up to the reality that privileging structure and privileged subject are now fully grafted into one another. For this very reason I find myself caught in the midst of a paradox, unable to abandon the material urgency of race while simultaneously aware that to speak of race is to reproduce it as an exclusionary category. [13]

Race, as it were, is the ideational means whereby the material difference of skin comes to be imbued with identity significations of differing values. These values, in turn, have been used to justify oppression, secure privilege, and reproduce socio-economic rapacity. *Evil*. Of course, to inquire as to *how* this happens is to better understand *why* it happens (and not *vice versa* as ontology-saturated representational approaches may posit). Here, evil should not be thought of as some mystical, paranormal force residing *within*. Neither should it exclusively be conceived as being an extreme and intentional social action of a tyrannical kind that strictly causes egregious harm. Rather, evil in its most pervasive, unobtrusive, and socially transmitted form is *structural*. Here, the structural connotation refers to an evil which is not necessarily self-consciously created or administered, and which "comes over time to be interconnected with other practices in ways not specifically intended and then, owing to those connections, has consequences not specifically intended" (CARD, 2010, p.69). Furthermore, here, *structure* is systemic in that the integrated whole of diverse social components which function through action recreate not so much through willpower and cognitive deliberation, but more via "embodied and environmental affordances, dispositions and habits" (ANDERSON & HARRISON, 2010, p.7). By this definition, all who participate in social structures that proliferate suffering themselves come to reproduce evil through the reiterative character of social practice. [14]

I wonder: Why, on the twentieth anniversary of South Africa's remarkable transition to black majority governance, do I still feel so bounded by an ideational structure like *white*? Why do I still feel that—as much as I attempt to establish deep relationships with *them*—black people secretly think of me as an ignorant *cracker* who simply doesn't cut it? Why recently—at the African American party in New York City where I was the only white male present—did I tense up when I saw what I perceived to be black men ogling my Asian wife? In hindsight I am certain that early childhood conditioning may have had more to do with this than actual threat. Could it be that my mind engineered threat by auto-generating fear from the black skin that surrounded me? [15]

I also wonder if I can rightfully call myself an *African*? Whereas some argue that this is just a word, albeit a word that refers to a host of contesting representational connotations, for me it is an important word. Even the nomad and the vagabond—resting their heads on a rock or a log in the blackest night of a strange land—find solace in the thought of their roots. To know that you had a beginning and that your beginning is recognized is an existential yearning.

Unfortunately, for me "South Africa" connotes a geographic space cordoned off by a number of porous (thankfully so) national boundaries and I'm rather cynical about what should constitute a "true" South African. The word *African*, on the other hand, to me, feels like a bond I share. Africa is also a *place*—a place I associate with the rich smell of the soil, the feeling of being washed clean by the sun, the taste of Karoo lamb, the sound of the rolling thunder before the rain, and the sight—now catalogued in memory—of all those I love. Could it be that my desire to be (self-)recognized as *African* is itself an unconscious means of attempting to overcompensate for the social identity category *European*—a synonym for *white* in Apartheid-era South Africa—into which I was grouped the day my birth certificate was issued? Or is there a more profound dynamic at play? [16]

It is as if my concern with whether or not I am *African* is itself symptomatic of my liminal movement from static *belonging* to fluid *becoming*. Of course, in context to undoing myself from a race-based identity foundation of *belonging*, I refuse to wallow in the pit of "white guilt" which itself is a form of bad conscience. I've experienced deep guilt and shame, yet such emotions also ultimately tend to incapacitate active participation in practices enabling of restitution and reconciliation. According to BUTLER, "[b]ad conscience is a form of negative narcissism ... And, being a form of narcissism, it recoils from the other, from impressionability, susceptibility, and vulnerability" (2005, pp.99-100). However, what is this *becoming* I speak of? Possessing no blueprint, I ultimately perplex over what I am being called on to *become*. After all, the eyes of Nelson MANDELA are certainly calling on us to *become*. His are not eyes like those defaced in media interviews when the face is partially obscured—blanked out. Here, the face comes to be stripped of a referent subject so that it speaks for all and to all. Instead, his are eyes that—through their very recognisability—speak from one heart to another. These are eyes that recognize me and call to me. Consequently, I now turn to his face again in order to better understand what it is I *further need to become*. [17]

4. Nelson MANDELA and the Ethics of Face

In an opinion editorial entitled "We Twisted King's Dream, So We Live With His Nightmare," Tim WISE (2011) writes of the sanitization and compartmentalization of the radical message of Martin Luther KING within the contemporary USA to the extent that his original non-violent message has now become hardly recognizable from "the banal parental reminder that we should 'use our words' to resolve conflicts, rather than our fists" (§7). I fear that—over the course of the last two decades—the same representational cancer of over-familiarization (a misrecognition) has been chewing away at our understanding of the pressing message of Nelson MANDELA. The death of Nelson MANDELA in 2013 was greeted with expected sentimental eulogies and affectionate accolades. We heard—among others—of the *man of peace*, the *great world leader*, and the *one who brought a nation together*. In his memory, words were exchanged: forgiveness, reconciliation, freedom, and equality. And we saw his face again— broadcast around the world—over and over again. Yet, I wonder if we really

recognized his face? Or, to put it differently, is the face we saw the face that needs to be recognized? [18]

When I was a child a friend who came to visit once pointed to an oil painting on the wall of a passageway in our house and remarked that he really liked it. I had never really been aware of that painting before—it had always just "been" there. Later I needed to remove the painting from its normative surrounding—the wall—and stand it upright on a bench in the living room. Here, in the sunlight, I could view it again and come to appreciate its deeper significance. *A Cape fisherman mending his nets against the backdrop of a rustic West Coast fishing village.* Russian Formalist critic, Victor SHKLOVSKY (1965 [1917]), describes the means whereby daily contact with a *phenomenon*—habitualization—destroys our conscious perception of it. We come to take things for granted, as it were. He writes: "Habitualization devours works, clothes, furniture, one's wife, and the fear of war" (p.12). What is required is that a phenomenon be viewed outside of its "normal" context—that it undergoes *defamiliarization*: "It may be that only through an experience of the other under conditions of suspended judgment do we finally become capable of an ethical reflection on the humanity of the other" (BUTLER, 2005, p.45). Is it not that the face of Nelson MANDELA has been habitualized through the countless times we have seen it in conjunction with the *good black man who was imprisoned for 27 years and never took revenge* narrative of popular media discourse? What will we see if we view this face outside of its *normal* sanitized media and public discourse contexts? Of course, such attempt to *see* does not presuppose that there is a single message—only that the single normative message we have become over-familiarized with is not the *only* message. [19]

Between 1963 and 1964, Nelson MANDELA was one among ten leaders within the revolutionary African National Congress (ANC) to be indicted and arraigned for charges relating to acts of sabotage. In a subsequent speech given at his trial he stated:

> "During my lifetime I have dedicated myself to this struggle of the African people. I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die."[1] [20]

Contrary to the popular, abstract contemporary narrative that depicts MANDELA as a pacifist icon, it needs to be remembered that the words *I am prepared to die* were directly related to his participation in armed struggle. MANDELA's political worldview radically intersected with the materiality of both the embodied oppressor and oppressive structures and to ignore this is to deny both the material pervasiveness of oppressive structures in our contemporary societies and the need for material engagement and reform. [21]

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1   Nelson MANDELA's statement from the dock at the opening of the defense case in the Rivonia Trial, see http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?id=3430, §103 [Accessed: July 20, 2014].

MANDELA would begin his presidential inauguration speech—thirty years later—by paying homage to a white female Afrikaner poet, Ingrid JONKER, who wrote in the 1960s. Later, in the same speech, MANDELA would speak about the need for a commitment to pursue: "[T]he goals of freedom from want, freedom from hunger, freedom from deprivation, freedom from ignorance, freedom from suppression and freedom from fear."[2] [22]

He tied these freedoms, in turn, to the very meaning of "human dignity" (ibid.). Twenty years on, it is not sufficient to reflect on MANDELA with nostalgia if we don't also reckon with what it means that we call him *Tata weSizwe*—father of the nation. South Africa is not a complete, whole nation. It is a nation in the infancy of its becoming, and the fact that poverty, hunger, deprivation, ignorance, suppression, and fear still constitute the daily lived realities of millions of South Africans—the overwhelming majority of them black—attests to this claim. Clearly the ruling party has lost its way. However, the obsession that exists among many white South Africans, and in which they talk endlessly, about the corruption, embezzlement, and nepotism of the governing ANC detracts from a more important set of concerns. Have we as white South Africans truly reckoned with the patience and generosity with which we have been treated? Do we ever ask what the aftermath of political transition has cost us relative to the price in blood that so many paid during the struggle against white domination? Will we ever be bothered by the thought of what we need to give back in return, and if so, not only out of a sense of gratitude but out of a genuine desire for restitution? Undeniably, we have been shown much kindness. [23]

On June 24, 1995, MANDELA demonstrated kindness as an ethical value (LEVINAS, 1998) to the world. Defying opposition among the majority of black South Africans to the overwhelmingly white South African rugby team who had qualified for the Rugby World Cup final against New Zeeland, Nelson MANDELA wore the hated and much maligned Springbok rugby jersey—itself a dominant icon of Apartheid oppression—to the match [the #6 captain's jersey of Francois PIENAAR] fully aware that the pale South Africans were the clear underdogs. All too often we have viewed this as a kind, heartwarming gesture without recognizing the profound political risk he took in the attempt to further integrate white South Africans into the extremely difficult task of political transformation. Of course, close scrutiny of Nelson MANDELA's political past reveals a legacy pervaded with a number of incredible risks in moments of seeming isolation. Such was the courage and the bravery of the man—a true captain. South Africa won that day and his face radiated jubilantly as he handed the cup over to the South African team at the post-match ceremony. [24]

And yet, at the forefront of every word and action that we have come to associate with MANDELA is his *face*—a remarkable face. Its weathered corrugations speak of the fragility and precariousness of human life. However, it was not always

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2   State of the Nation Address 1994—MANDELA,
    http://www.nelsonmandela.org/omalley/index.php/site/q/03lv02424/04lv03370/05lv03427.htm,
    §20 [Accessed: July 20, 2014].

recognized as a human face. While it was illegal under Apartheid to possess an image of Nelson MANDELA, it was more significantly a *black* face. BUTLER writes:

> "But given how contested the visual representation of the 'human' is, it would appear that our capacity to respond to a face as a human face is conditioned and mediated by frames of reference that are variably humanizing and dehumanizing" (2005, p.29). [25]

Perhaps, then, the most profound insight into the meaning of MANDELA's face comes through reflecting upon his conduct at a time when he either was being defaced by us through isolation upon Robben Island or where his face was being framed as a catachresis: *terrorist*. Ultimately it was not us who responded to his face. It was he—the brutalized and oppressed—who recognized the *human* in our faces; who saw vulnerability beyond our brutality; *he who turned his face towards us*, so to speak. BUTLER, discussing LEVINAS' ethics of the face (not exclusively a human face [2004b, p.xviii]), writes:

> "To respond to the face, to understand its meaning, means to be awake to what is precarious in another life or, rather, the precariousness of life itself. This cannot be an awakeness, to use his word, to my own life, and then an extrapolation from an understanding of my own precariousness to an understanding of another's precarious life. It has to be an understanding of the precariousness of the Other. This is what makes the face belong to the sphere of ethics. Levinas writes, "the face of the other in its precariousness and defenselessness, is for me at once the temptation to kill and the call to peace, the 'You shall not kill' " (p.134). [26]

However, here it is necessary to underscore—perhaps contrary to the original reasoning of LEVINAS—that the *face* does not possess an ontological relationship to the reaction of non-violence. Such a view would, at its most basic level, be historically untenable since the face has often been used as a resource for the generation of social angst and mass hatred. Instead, the face of the other —"that for which no words really work" (BUTLER, 2004b, p.134)—addresses me, makes an ethical demand upon me relative to a relation I cannot disavow, and ultimately leaves me with responsibility for the ethical nature of my response— one which hopefully, though not guaranteed, will lead to me to question, "who are you?". BUTLER states:

> "[W]e are, from the start, given over to the other, one in which we are, from the start, even prior to individuation itself, and by virtue of our embodiment, given over to an other: this makes us vulnerable to violence, but also to another range of touch, a range that includes the eradication of our being at the one end, and the physical support for our lives, at the other" (p.23). [27]

Ultimately, Rolihlahla (which means *The Shaker of Trees* or *Trouble Maker*) MANDELA needs to be remembered as the human face who—in spite of our attempted dehumanization of him—recognized humanity in our guilty, pale faces, and the sheer weight of this accomplishment should not be underestimated. Commenting on the tenuous nature of agency, BUTLER writes:

"The norm does not produce the subject as its necessary effect, nor is the subject fully free to disregard the norm that inaugurates its reflexivity; one invariably struggles with conditions of one's own life that one could not have chosen. If there is an operation of agency or, indeed, freedom in this struggle, it takes place in the context of an enabling and limiting field of constraint. This ethical agency is neither fully determined nor radically free. Its struggle or primary dilemma is to be produced by a world, even as one must produce oneself in some way" (2005, p.19). [28]

In spite of *conditions of his life that he had not chosen*, Nelson MANDELA produced a remarkable legacy that was as much about beginning the work of liberating white people from a deeply embedded psyche of fear as about liberating black people from the material oppression and identity violence wrought against them. To us, he asked: *who are you?* [29]

5. Conclusion

Ever since that afternoon in the summer of 1990—Nelson MANDELA's release from captivity—I have been struggling to reconstitute my racial and national identity assemblages into something coherent. While I doubt such coherence to be possible (as discussed in a previous section), I do value its aspirational utility. I have moved from a position of shame sprouting from the daily profound realization of all I was blind to for so long—the dehumanization of an entire population at the expense of my privilege and the social practices I daily enacted which, in turn, reproduced ongoing identity violence—towards a position welcoming of uncertainty relating to what I am being called on to *[un]become*. And it is here that I have recently encountered an *ethics of the face* in Nelson MANDELA through his foundational recognition of the humanity of my face. The task at hand now is to reciprocate by continuing his work—a work that is just as relevant today in a supposedly mythical "post-racial" era as it was during the Apartheid years. Consequently, I desire to continue dismantling the remaining structural edifices and artifices inside and, hopefully, use the rubble from these to *throw bricks* (another Apartheid analogy referring to trouble in the black townships) at the unspoken social ideology of *white is right*, and here I mean troubling both my own whiteness as both the adjective of being considered the norm as well as the noun which ties me down by association to a fixed representational position on a socio-political continuum. Ultimately, I believe, from the ongoing shattering of being new forms of *becoming* will continue to take form. Not as structure but as *relationship*. And to this he has called me—his eyes continue to call us—so that now I understand: *I am becoming African.* [30]

However, as PRAH (2008, §31) reasons in context to *becoming* African:

"It has nothing to do with colour, but all to do, to varying degrees, with cultural integration ... It is not possible to be African, whilst one looks down on Africans, maintains caste-like relations with Africans and refuses to mix with Africans." [31]

Hence, what is ultimately being required of the descendants of the white settlers is a commitment to bringing about the cessation of the pretentious affiliation with

European and undoing its related accrued privilege through the confession, critique, betrayal, and ultimate abolition (HESSE, 2013) of an identity that clings to past ways of thinking and behaving. Such commitment implies more than a reorientation of self-identification—it requires a vital reconfiguration of those social practices through which the mirage of a stable identity has been performed (BUTLER, 1990, 1993). Only through such work will timeless Africa fully draw us into her great being (L'ANGE, 2005, p.503). [32]

In closing, I choose to end in honor and respect of a man who called me towards greater *becoming*, I end with an epitaph:

Nelson Rolihlahla MANDELA. 1918—*a beautiful, weathered face*—2013. [33]

Acknowledgments

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